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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Political

Science

Master's Thesis

2024 **Zhan Zekai**

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Department of Geopolitics

Studies

First Italo-Ethiopian War and and state building in Ethiopia under Menelik

Master's Thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study, scientific purposes and AI use.

In Prague on 08/07/2025. Zhan Zekai

References

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the extent to which the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1895–1896) contributed to Ethiopia's state-building process during the reign of Emperor Menelik II. Using Charles Tilly's theory of war-driven state building as the primary analytical framework, it examines how warfare influenced three critical dimensions of state capacity: taxation, military and bureaucratic development, and national cohesion with narrative. The study argues that the almost-two-year war catalyzed further institutional transformations and identity development of Ethiopia. Wartime fiscal mobilization intensified extractive taxation and expanded Ethiopia's resource base, especially through territory annexations. Military victory at this war marked a turning point in professionalizing the army and modernizing bureaucracy, despite continued reliance on coercive mechanisms and regional elites. The war also temporarily unified the multiethnic empire, fostering a national identity though with grievance of minority.

However, the thesis confirms that these developments were shaped not solely by this war but also by the cumulative legacy of prior state centralization efforts under Emperors Tewodros II and Yohannes IV. The study highlights both the empowering and destabilizing effects of war: while warfare accelerated state formation, it also entrenched ethnic hierarchies, coercive extraction, and exclusionary nation-building. Ultimately, the research affirms Tilly's proposition that "war made the state," yet it also emphasizes the limitations of applying Eurocentric theories in African contexts. The thesis calls for further research on the long-term interplay between external threats, coercion, and legitimacy in non-Western trajectories of state development.

Abstrakt

Tato práce zkoumá, do jaké míry přispěla první italsko-etiopská válka (1895–1896) k procesu budování státu Etiopie za vlády císaře Menelika II. S využitím teorie válečného stavění státu Charlese Tillyho jako primárního analytického rámce zkoumá, jak válka ovlivnila tři kritické dimenze státní kapacity: zdanění, vojenský a byrokratický rozvoj a národní soudržnost s

příběhem. Studie tvrdí, že téměř dvouletá válka katalyzovala další institucionální transformace a rozvoj identity Etiopie. Válečná fiskální mobilizace zintenzívnila extraktivní zdanění a rozšířila zdrojovou základnu Etiopie, zejména prostřednictvím anexií území. Vojenské vítězství v této válce znamenalo obrat v profesionalizaci armády a modernizaci byrokracie, navzdory pokračujícímu spoléhání na donucovací mechanismy a regionální elity. Válka také dočasně sjednotila multietnickou říši a podporovala národní identitu s stížností menšin.

Teze však potvrzuje, že tento vývoj byl formován nejen touto válkou, ale také kumulativním dědictvím předchozích snah o centralizaci státu za císařů Tewodrose II. a Johannesa IV. Studie zdůrazňuje jak posilující, tak destabilizující účinky války: zatímco válka urychlila tvorbu státu, také zakořenila etnické hierarchie, nucenou extrakci a vylučující budování národa. Výzkum nakonec potvrzuje Tillyho tvrzení, že „válka vytvořila stát“, ale také zdůrazňuje omezení uplatňování eurocentrických teorií v afrických kontextech. Diplomová práce vyzývá k dalšímu výzkumu dlouhodobé interakce mezi vnějšími hrozbami, donucením a legitimitou v nezápadních trajektoriách rozvoje státu.

Keywords

War making, state building, interstate war, Ethiopia, tax extraction, military, national cohesion

Klíčová slova

Válka, budování státu, mezistátní válka, Etiopie, daňové získávání, vojenská, národní soudržnost

Title

First Italo-Ethiopian War and state building in Ethiopia under Menelik

Název

První italsko-etiopská válka a státní budova v Etiopii pod Menelikem

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Table of Contents

Introduction

As a major power in the African region, Ethiopia's importance in geopolitics is self-evident for Western countries like the Czech Republic and big power from the East such as China.

This thesis will take Ethiopia as a case study to explore its unique role as a model for state building and the formation of national identity in African warfare since it is the only Africa's state with its own effort that had not been colonized in colonization period of time. The research will focus on an event of significant importance for the development of modern Ethiopian - the First Italo-Ethiopian War. This was a war between the Italian army and multiple Ethiopian ethnic armed forces, and the victorious forces were collectively referred to as the 'Ethiopian people'.

Undoubtedly, Ethiopia is a state with a unique history. It is located in the Horn of Africa and is one of only two countries on the continent that has never been systematically colonized[1] (Fitzsimmons 2017). Against the backdrop of almost all African countries becoming European colonies, the Ethiopian people stubbornly maintained their national independence. On March 1, 1896, in Adwa, an important trading town in the northern part of Tigre Province, the Ethiopian army, led by King Menelik II, engaged in a fierce war with the Italian army. The Ethiopian people completely defeated the Italian army, forcing them to sign a peace treaty, and this victory shocked the world (Haile, G. 1986). Ethiopia maintained its independence during the Western colonial movement, making it a suitable case for the study of war making and state building.

However, Africa is often overlooked in academic literature on state building and nation integration, as people assume that African countries are products of colonialism, as if they were 'fully' born after the end of colonial rule (Herbst 2000:20). Robert Jackson has called these 'quasi states'—states with the internationally recognized juridical trappings of sovereign statehood, but which lack the features expected elsewhere in a state (Robert Jackson 1987). In contrast, research

[1] The other is Liberia. But it was under the protection of America.

on early war making and state building in Western Europe is more abundant. One widely cited viewpoint is the crucial role of war in state building. As Charles Tilly summarized, 'War makes the state, and the state makes war (Tilly 1985: 183).

This thesis focuses on how the empire of Ethiopia uses the invasion of Italy as a tool for state building. Specifically, my question is: why does the First Italo-Ethiopian War have such strong instrumental value for Ethiopia's state building and ethnic identity building?

To answer this question, this thesis assumes that Ethiopia's taxation extraction, military capability and other bureaucratic bodies, and national cohesion have all developed correspondingly during the war. Government taxation is considered a fundamental ability of a country (Margaret Levi 1988). In some failed African countries that are defined as *de jure* state[2] or black spot[3], the government's control over resources within its territory is insufficient, resulting in low taxation capacity and constraining the development of bureaucratic organizations including military in the countries; And this is often due to the fact that in the early stages of state building, the government's military capabilities were insufficient to support the state's violent monopoly (Jeffrey Herbst 1990; Charles Tilly 1990); Like many emerging countries, the ability to develop a unified identity is seen as the core of national legitimacy in the process of state building (Herbst 1990). Successful wars or revolutions are often used as symbols of national unity and an important cornerstone for new governments to gain legitimacy and recognition.

As for Ethiopia, the First Italo-Ethiopian War undoubtedly played a significant role in national cohesion. In addition to the legacy of the First Italo-Ethiopian War, the historical status of Menelik II himself also had a significant impact on the Ethiopian national consciousness. He is regarded by many as the father of modern Ethiopia (Marcus 1975; Zewde 2001; Milkias 2011). Therefore, this study will focus on analyzing how Ethiopia under Menelik's rule utilized the First Italo-Ethiopian War to promote state building and the development of national cohesion in Ethiopia.

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[2] Under the Cochran, C. L. (1968), "The extension of "full recognition" indicates the traditional concept of "de jure recognition," while de facto authority describes the type of power the government enjoyed."

[3] Under the Robert Bunker and John Sullivan (2003:45), "the existence and emergence of areas that are not only outside of effective state control, but in fact ''have the potential to pose a significant challenge to the modern nation-state and its institutions."

Currently, there are interstate wars that threaten regional and even international security and stability[4]. The Russia Invasion of UKrainian, the Israeli Palestinian War, the Israel Iran War, and others demonstrate that war remains a core theme in international relations and geopolitics. The current conflicts in Ethiopia are frequent as well, especially between government forces and the Tigray and Oromo ethnic groups[5]. In 2018, after the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali took office, Ethiopia adopted a policy of marginalization towards non Amhara ethnic groups and non interest groups with a trend abandoning the ethnic federation[6]. Ethiopia has been in turmoil, with various protest groups demanding recognition of their rights, autonomy, and even independence in some cases. It is in this political environment that I hope this study can explore effective ways of state building and the development of national cohesion by reviewing the performance of the Ethiopian people in the First Italo-Ethiopian War[7]. As an Ethiopian proverb goes, a person who cannot draw sustenance from history is like a tree in a dry soil, which has to be watered every day (Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia 2008). To choose and build a future all Ethiopians and indeed all Africans need to know their past, not because the past determines the future, but rather because it can disclose the various options for the future that it points toward.

Compared with large sample statistical analysis, this thesis uses case studies as a methodological approach, which provide 'a better opportunity to gain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation', that is, in an ideal state, researchers can even 'see' the interaction between independent and dependent variables (David Collier, James Mahoney and Jason Seawright 2004). The emphasis on results over processes is the result of the extensive use of statistical tools in the advancement of research guidelines. Case studies allow us to track in more detail the impact of war and preparedness on the construction of the Ethiopian state, and attempt

[4] Under Saul Cohen (2003), "Postcolonial Africa has experienced many efforts to break up existing states or to forge unions among them. Separation has often led to bitter warfare, heavy loss of life, devastation of the countryside and cities, and massive flows of refugees."

[5] Information is available in this link: https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ethiopia.

[6] The Abiy administration's still-unformed position on ethnic federalism will have enormous bearing on relations among Ethiopia's different communities and is therefore a source of both intense interest and brewing tension. please refer to, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/269-managing-ethiopias-unsettled-transition.

[7] I spent my life in Ethiopia for one year during the period of global pandemic and civil war of Ethiopia, I have friends over there. In this case, Ethiopia is not just a state in the Horn of Africa but also a collection of memory.

to extract the causal mechanisms of their effects on the dependent variable by independent variable, war making. At the same time, the thesis also benefits from Anderson's imagined community that played the role in mobilization of state building (1983).

This thesis first introduces core terms and related concepts, including state, power, state building, nation, war, etc. Subsequently, the thesis reviews relevant academic literature and expand on the theoretical and methodological sections. In next chapter, it is an introduction to the background of Ethiopia. The three analysis chapters separately analyzed the possible development of taxation extraction, military and other bureaucratic bodies, and national cohesion. The final chapter is a summary of the above analysis.

This study investigates the transformative relationship between armed conflict and state building, employing war as the independent variable and state capacity as the dependent variable. To empirically assess the First Italo-Ethiopian War's (1896) impact on Ethiopian state-building, the analysis focuses on three critical dimensions: tax extraction, military and other relevant bureaucracy bodies, and national Cohesion. In the following chapter, the author will first explain the relationship between war making and state building in predatory theory of Charles Tilly.

1.Terminology and Conceptual Framework

Initially, it is essential to introduce the foundational concepts upon which this thesis is constructed and elucidate the key terminology utilized. This chapter aims to offer readers an outline of perspectives and definitions, emphasizing state, nation, sovereignty, power, state building, international war. Once the primary terms employed in this thesis are clarified, attention is directed towards exploring the pertinent academic ideas associated with the thesis topic. Providing fundamental definitions of these concepts is essential to eliminate any uncertainty in our comprehension of them. A lack of consensus could impede meaningful discussions on our study.

The research question of this thesis is To what extent did the First Italo-Ethiopian War promote Ethiopia(a war-intensive empire)'s further state building by affecting its taxation capacity, military capability and bureaucratic bodies, and national cohesion with war narrative?

1.1 State

Since the states are the study object, it is necessary to analyze this term in the first place. It is generally assumed that since the peace of Westphalia in 1648, states have been the key actors in Europe and the ultimate and supreme sources of power in their territories (Russett 1981).

The state definition in Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of State signed in 1933 defines it as a person of international law should possess four qualifications, a permanent population, a defined territory, government, and capacity to enter into relations with the other states[8].

Stephen D. Krasner (2001) identifies sovereign state each has exclusive authority within its own geographic boundaries. Based on the criteria of predominant territorial control by the authority, and international recognition, as Bartosz H. Stanislawski (2008) pointed out, states anomalies include as-if state, almost-states, black spot. For the state, the domestic authority has full control over its territory and gain full international recognition. As-if state, also could be deemed as de jure state, is the state that has the capability of fully control over territory is at absence. On the contrary, almost-state, the de facto state, refers to the state has not gained international recognition but its authority is capable to function as government. Black spot, however, lack both of the criteria. For the purpose of our study, state that controls its territory and gains international recognition are useful for our study.

In 'Sovereign States and Their Competitors' by Spruyt (1994), the author proposed a classification of political entities based on two dimensions: internal sovereignty and territorial division. A defining characteristic of a sovereign state is its control over violence and justice within its boundaries, as well as clearly defined borders. In our

[8] Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. (1933, December 26). United Nations Treaty Series, 165, 19. (Entered into force December 26, 1934). Article 8 reaffirmed by Protocol, December 23, 1936. Please see, https://www.ilsa.org/Jessup/Jessup15/Montevideo%20Convention.pdf.

work, internal sovereignty and territorial division, which could be gained and maintained by power, are key components.

Another analysis on types of the state could be based on historical development. In lens of this, our world is separated into three phrase, the pre modern, the modern, and the post modern in coexistence simultaneously, representing their own features respectively, chaotic anarchy, Westphalia state system, and durable disorder, in accordance with R. Cooper (1996). According to Bohumil Dobos (2020), the modern state is a classical state in a Westphalia system and is intimately connected to the institution of sovereignty. He further claims that, modern state is attempting to protect its entire territorial sovereignty by leaning towards authoritarianism and distancing itself from some form of globalization (politics, culture, etc.).

1.2 Nation

Nations are intangible, self-defined, and consist of ‘a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it, in the subconscious conviction of its members, from all other people in a most vital way’ (Connor 1978: 300–301). A popular definition in international relations of a nation is that it consists of ‘a social group which shares a common ideology, common institutions and customs, and a sense of homogenetry.’ The group may have a sense of belonging to a particular

territory(Connor 1978: 301–304). The First Italo-Ethiopian War was a stimulus to foster a sense of belonging, or ‘our people,’ allowing people to work together to protect ‘their land’ from enemy colonization.

1.3 Sovereignty

In practice, the concept of sovereignty has been employed with considerable variability across contexts. Rather than attempting an exhaustive catalog of its meanings, this study focuses on operationalizing definitions most pertinent to our analytical framework.

Stephen D. Krasner (1994) identifies four features of sovereignty: cross-border management, internal authority structures for effective regulation, non-intervention,

and mutual recognition. There are two points needed to be examined in details. Firstly, it is important to highlight two key aspects of domestic sovereignty: the acceptance or acknowledgment of a designated authority structure, and the level of control that officials are able to exert, which can vary significantly among different states. Secondly, non-intervention amounts to rulers should not intervene in or judge domestic affairs in other states. However, we must point out that it is not always the case. If one state intervenes in another state, we pose that this is a good scenario to examine the effectiveness of predatory theory, expecting whether the latter has its capacity to extract taxes and resources, mobilize the masses for conscription and unity, and affiliated government bodies to influence the outcome of state building.

The concepts of positive and negative sovereignty, as outlined by Robert H. Jackson in his work 'Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World' (1991), offer a valuable framework for examining state functionality and legitimacy. Positive sovereignty, on the one hand, pertains to a state's internal ability to govern effectively, maintain control over its territory, and carry out vital functions like providing services and ensuring security. On the other hand, negative sovereignty focuses on a state's legal recognition by the global community, irrespective of its internal governance capabilities. The concepts of positive sovereignty and negative sovereignty reflect the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of state building respectively.

In sum, the conceptions related to internal authority structures for effective regulation/ internal capabilities/ controls, and non-intervention are useful for our work.

1.4 Power

Saul Bernard Cohen (1996), in his seminal work Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations, introduced the concept of the Hierarchical Order of Powers, which categorizes states and regions based on their geopolitical influence and role in the global system. Among five hierarchy orders, there are two relate to our study directly. At the pinnacle are core states, distinguished by their developed economies, robust military prowess, and worldwide impact, acting as key players in the global order (e.g., the United States and China). Below them are secondary powers, possessing substantial regional sway and frequently aligning with core states for strategic benefits (e.g., India). The remaining are shatter belt region, maritime power,

continental power, and gateway region. This notion acknowledges the uneven distribution of power and resources among states and regions. The hierarchy is fluid and subject to change based on shifts in economic strength, technological progress, or political partnerships. Menelik's consolidation of power in Shwa and subsequent success in resisting foreign invasion marked Ethiopia's ascent within Cohen's hierarchy of state capacity, demonstrating enhanced institutional centralization and geopolitical resilience. Starting from this power hierarchy, we believe a linear timeline study that covered periods from prewar to postwar contributes to power fluctuation that reflects different power levels in this hierarchy.

For some, a state's capacity is measured by its ability to influence and control the perceptions of others (MacMillan 1978). Along these same lines, the cohesiveness of society can affect the state's level of capacity. 'Since groups can be mobilized by persuasion as well as coercion, it should be possible to bring and keep members together voluntarily' (March and Olsen 1989: 12). Since rituals and symbols create a sense of community which helps unify society and thus, also increase legitimacy, those states with the ability to build a cohesive society also, subsequently, have the most institutional capacity (Desch 1996: 256).

Joseph Nye (2004) also comes out with the similar idea. He mentions that soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. While the behaviors of hard power include command, coercion, and inducement with the most likely resources of force, payments, sanctions, and bribes, the behaviors of soft power include agenda setting, attraction, co-option with the most likely resources of institutions, values, culture, and policies. While coercion enables states to enforce resource extraction, nationalist narratives and persuasion enhance societal legitimacy, rendering taxation more efficient by transforming it from imposed obligation to collective duty.

Leadership goes beyond simply giving orders; it also entails setting a positive example and inspiring others to follow suit. It relies on creating a rapport that is welcoming and appealing enough for a community to willingly collaborate towards common goals. When someone's actions are influenced by a visible yet intangible allure, it signifies the presence of soft power at play.

The examination above reveals various viewpoints on power. Authors such as Cohen emphasize international state hierarchies determined by their overall capabilities, mirroring capacity comparison, while Joseph Nye delves into the differences between soft and hard power that suggest the significance of values of the former.

1.5 State building

S. Dinnen(2013) outlines three fundamental components of state formation: (1) establishing effective governance institutions, (2) providing essential public goods and infrastructure, and (3) promoting socio-cultural cohesion. Central to these pillars is fiscal capacity, which Jean Bodin famously termed 'the nerve of the state' (WA Dunning 1896). This view is reinforced by Douglass North's observation that a state's territorial control is intrinsically linked to its taxation capabilities (J Faundez 2016). In practice, scholars often use tax collection efficiency as a proxy for measuring state capacity, as it reflects both institutional reach and societal compliance.

State building can be conceptualized along a spectrum. The broad definition encompasses the comprehensive process through which political elites develop institutional strength, organizational frameworks, and legitimacy—a scope that subsumes both administrative construction and nation building. In contrast, the narrow definition focuses specifically on establishing bureaucratic and coercive state apparatuses. Historically, these two dimensions have been mutually reinforcing: robust administrative structures facilitate national integration, while societal cohesion strengthens institutional effectiveness. This interplay underscores why state and nation building are often empirically inseparable.

1.6 Conflict

Conflict definition is interrelated with competition, interest, power, and perception. Morgenthau (1948) posits that even when men do not possess arms or weapons of violence, they would engage in conflict, with their fists. Contrarily, Coser (1998) argues that conflict is a struggle between competing parties for limited status, power, and resources with the intention of harming or eliminating their opposition. In

agreement, Folarin (2015) states that the surrounding of the society with other human beings brings up issues of disagreement, clash of interests, which would commonly lead to confrontations or disagreement, thus creating a community of men and women, who succumb to conflicting behaviour and disagreement.

In his book 'Man, State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis', Waltz (1959) argues that people can seek answers to the main root causes of war from political philosophy, and can be classified under three headings: those related to human nature, those related to the internal structure of the state, and those related to the state system- anarchy. Clausewitz said, 'War is just another form of continuation of politics'[9], meaning that international conflicts are not just military struggles, but also political struggles. Therefore, internal flaws within a country are the root cause of wars between nations. The internal structure of a country not only determines the form and use of military power, but also generally determines its external behavior. In most cases, war also promotes unity within each participating country.

2.Literature review- Predatory theory of war making

The predatory theory, serves as the principal framework for understanding war making and state building. The predatory theory enjoys broad support across economics, sociology, and political science (North, 1981; Levi, 1981; Tilly, 1992). The theory maintains that the state acts as an instrument of dominant groups or classes, primarily functioning to extract resources from the broader population under its jurisdiction. While state-building encompasses multiple dimensions, its fundamental purpose involves state penetration into society for resource extraction. Consequently, taxation and resource extraction represent essential prerequisites for achieving other state objectives. The predatory theory to state formation consistently examines how both internal and external competition affects rulers' capacity to control territories and populations for conquest purposes. Within this field, Tilly's methodological contributions (1975, 1985, 1992) have been particularly influential in international relations scholarship. Tilly (1985:182) identifies four critical activities in state-building: firstly, war-making (eliminating external threats); secondly, state-

[9] Clausewitz: War as Politics by other Means. https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/clausewitz-war-as-politics-by-other-means.

making (neutralizing internal opposition); thirdly, protection (securing allies); and fourthly, resource extraction (funding the preceding activities).

Specifically, Tilly set the national capacity measurement indicator as fiscal extraction capacity in his research. Tilly (1985:180) identifies warfare as the primary driver of fiscal expansion within his model. States engaged in external conflicts experience sustained growth in taxation and debt, with minimal subsequent reduction. Peacock and Wiseman (1961) term this phenomenon the 'displacement effect', while other scholars describe the persistent increase in revenue, expenditure, and debt as the 'ratchet effect'. Three mechanisms explain this pattern: first, wars increase taxpayer tolerance for higher burdens as citizens prioritize security; second, conflicts create opportunities for tax system reforms to boost revenue; third, escalating military technology costs compel rulers to intensify extraction, resulting in bureaucratic expansion. These dynamics collectively demonstrate war's dual role as both a catalyst for state development and a mechanism for institutional growth.

Similarly, some scholars examining the nexus between fiscal capacity and state-building emphasize that resource extraction serves as the linchpin for institutional development. Michael Barnett confirms that the fiscal crisis explanation for failed state-building aligns with predatory theory's causal framework, which emphasizes how resource constraints undermine a state's capacity to sustain military and institutional development if the extractive capacity fails (1992). As Kisangani (2014: 2) notes, extracting revenues is essential not only for strengthening state capacity but also for creating robust administrative structures. Thies (2009: 625) expands this view, demonstrating how centralized revenue collection fosters both national identity and the formal/informal institutions characteristic of modern states. Jüde (2021) introduces a critical qualification through comparative analysis of armed movements in the Global South. His research reveals that conflict generates durable state institutions only when combatants directly extract resources to sustain their operations. Movements reliant on alternative economic strategies—such as foreign patronage or looting—fail to produce comparable institutional legacies.

The European experience shows lords engaging in effective war making to become dominant in a given territory (Tilly 1985). War making entails securing human and material capital, which leads to extractive means to secure resources needed to wage

war. Securing successful extractive means of creating violence entailed 'elimination, neutralization, or cooptation of the great lord's local rivals', leading to the process of state-making (Tilly 1985: 183). State structures—such as military organizations, war industries, and schools—also become part of the war making and state building process. To sustain the state apparatus, agents of the state ally with different social classes, particularly the ruling class. The processes of war making, state making, protection, and extraction converge to develop a centralized state apparatus.

The Tilly framework exhibits three defining features: First, it conceptualizes nation-states as unintended byproducts of warfare rather than deliberate political projects. Second, its materialist definition of state-building focuses narrowly on institutional capacity, particularly fiscal extraction—an approach later scholars operationalized empirically, with Stein, Barnett, Taylor and Botea's work highlighting ethnic identity formation. Third, while Tilly emphasized the co-evolution of war, resource extraction, and capital accumulation in European state formation, subsequent research has shifted toward examining war as a conditional variable that constrains (rather than uniformly drives) institutional development.

Tilly is not the only one that argues predatory theory explains state formation. Huntington confirms that the prevalence of war directly promoted political modernization. Competition forced the monarchs to build their military strength. The creation of military strength required national unity…, the expansion of armies and bureaucracies, and a major increase in state revenues. … War was the great stimulus to state building (Huntington 1968). Thomas Ertman agrees that 'the territorial state triumphed over other possible political forms [of rule] because of the superior fighting ability which it derived from access to both urban capital and coercive authority over peasant taxpayers and army recruits' (Ertman 1997: 4). Thus, the stronger the state, the more efficient it is at extracting capital (Acemoglu 2005), and thus, the more successful it is at waging war (Glete 2002). Laura D. Young's finding by using panel data and multinomial logistic regression confirms predatory theory that war creates a powerful incentive to find the most efficient way to structure a state (2022).

Several scholars have adapted this theoretical framework to examine developing nations, testing its validity beyond the European context. Their research suggests that contemporary state formation in the Global South parallels early modern European

experiences, particularly regarding how internal and external competition shapes power consolidation. Cohen, Brown, and Organski (1981) demonstrate that emerging centralized states generate escalating resource demands—essential for nation-building and governance—which inevitably clash with existing subnational rights and obligations. This friction provokes institutional conflicts mirroring those of Europe's formative state-building era, revealing structural similarities across historical and geographical contexts. Kirby and Ward (1991) maintain that while operational scales differ, Tilly's state formation processes apply equally to Africa and Europe. Hui (2017) counters Eurocentric skepticism through historical analysis. Her research on China's Warring States period (453–221 BCE) and subsequent imperial eras reveals parallel patterns of war-driven institutional development, challenging the notion that predatory theory remains confined to European contexts.

While fiscal extraction capacity constitutes a critical mechanism linking war to state-building, it alone cannot fully explain shifts in Ethiopia's national power following the Adwa conflict. Although Tilly's framework prioritizes material foundations of state building, an exclusive focus on taxation overlooks war's most immediate institutional consequence: military preparedness. Robust defense capabilities serve as the bedrock of national security, enabling states to project power, secure resources, legitimize authority, and enforce coercion. To withstand external threats, states must pursue parallel strengthening of both fiscal and military capacities—the latter being indispensable for translating economic resources into sustainable security. During the First Italo-Ethiopian War, Ethiopia's military capabilities constantly changed due to military pressure from Italy.

Second, some scholars have enriched state-building theory by incorporating national construction as an analytical variable. Several scholars have specifically examined national cohesion as a critical prerequisite for effective state-building, highlighting how pre-existing societal bonds mediate war's transformative potential. 10Stein challenges the common belief that war or external threats inherently increase national unity, arguing that this only occurs under specific conditions. The most critical factor is that all group members must perceive the conflict as an existential threat to the entire collectivity. Additionally, four key conditions must be met: the group must have existed prior to the threat, members must believe the threat affects the whole

group, they must see the threat as external (coming from outside the group), and individuals must be unable to escape the threat—only collective cooperation can mitigate it (1976). Barnett (1992, 1995) argues that war and external threats serve as dual catalysts: they not only drive state penetration and social control but also foster collective identity by strengthening 'we-group' consciousness and national solidarity. Taylor and Botea (2008: 28) qualify this view, emphasizing that wars yield state-building effects only when waged by already cohesive communities. Historically, resource extraction relied on a balance of coercion and consent. Rulers bargaining for taxes made concessions to societal groups, inadvertently forging state-society linkages. As Finer (1975: 96–97) demonstrate, the 19th century's unprecedented military mobilization depended critically on nationalism's persuasive power—without this ideological glue, large-scale recruitment and provisioning would have been unattainable. During the First Italo-Ethiopian War, the Ethiopian people demonstrated a stronger sense of national identity than during non war periods.

In conclusion, Tilly's theory has fundamentally shaped modern scholarship by establishing a clear causal mechanism for European state formation, subsequently inspiring numerous derivative models. Later scholars have both applied his framework to diverse contexts—including Latin America, Africa, the United States, ancient China, Israel, and Egypt—and refined it through conceptual expansions (redefining war's scope) and incorporations of mediating variables between warfare and state capacity.

There is no inherent causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables in the concept of "war making and state building." Instead, this relationship is mediated through two critical links: war perception and war preparation. Perception, as a human-constructed tool, plays a pivotal role—mirroring Benedict Anderson's argument on imagined national communities (1983). In Anderson's view, nation is not a primordial fact but a modern construct, emerging from transformative shifts in human consciousness during modernity. Similarly, a state's perception of war is shaped by discourse rather than inherited.

Carl Schmitt also emphasized that not all wars are objectively real; many are rooted in perceptual reasoning. The perception of war, while subjective, is nonetheless an enduring and vital element of modern statehood—stemming from humanity's inherent

insecurity and constant search for safety (1932). Thus, war perception should not be dismissed as a mere illusion but understood as a subjective interpretation of real environmental shifts. Moreover, this perception shapes how individuals and societies understand their social existence. It is conveyed through collective imagery, narratives, and myths, fostering a shared foundation for social practices and national identity.

Czech scholar, Kazharski expresses a similar view, noting that narrative can alter shared realities and trigger specific political responses. From a constructivist perspective, ideas, norms, and cultural frameworks are instrumental in shaping both political discourse and perceived threats (2018). Hence, securitization is not limited to objective military or political conditions but includes social, economic, and environmental dimensions, all of which are socially constructed and expressed through war perception. Ultimately, human action is determined not only by objective reality but also by the way threats are collectively interpreted within a specific context.

More concretely, war memories and subjective evaluations of international affairs underpin the formation of war perception. Historical conflicts provide cognitive templates that inform current threat assessments and strategic planning. When war becomes a lived experience, both national leaders and the public develop lasting memories of it. These memories link past and present, helping societies evaluate potential conflict scenarios, assess risks, gauge national strength, and anticipate consequences. The rise of violence, therefore, is not merely a response to material threats but also a reflection of subjective interpretations and strategic calculations.

Within Charles Tilly's theory of war making and state building, war perception acts as a critical precondition, clarifying the internal logic of the causal mechanism. It influences key elements of state capacity, including taxation, military organization, bureaucratic development, and social cohesion. If a state misjudges the likelihood or nature of war, fails to assess the balance of power, or inadequately prepares militarily, it may undermine its ability to mobilize fiscal resources, generate popular support, or sustain its war efforts. Consequently, war perception not only reinforces Tilly's core proposition—that war makes states—but may also disrupt the presumed causal link between war and state-building if the perception fails to align with reality. War

perception therefore shall be deemed as a controlled variable for our study. Through literature research, we could find ample examples of political elites' perceptions about the war being related to the development of the predatory theory of Tilly. In the following chapter, perception about war by Menelik and other political elites such as the empress will be mentioned.

3.Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This master's thesis focuses on the causal mechanism of war making and state building, which will be reflected through three dependent variables—taxation capacity, military capacity and other bureaucratic bodies, and national cohesion (with an emphasis on war perception and narrative)—aiming to conduct a process tracing analysis of the First Italo-Ethiopian War within the time range before, during, and after the First Italo-Ethiopian War under Menelik's rule (1896-1913). The thesis proposes three basic hypotheses. The value of its research lies in the use of process tracing to cover war preparation and the subsequent effects of war building, with involvement of war perception and narrative, rather than just focusing on the effects during war. At the same time, national cohesion as the dependent variable is also included in the discussion. Previous studies have heavily tilted the dependent variable towards national capacity, with insufficient emphasis on the broad national construction of cohesion. This thesis attempts to address these three shortcomings by adding national cohesion as another dependent variable, using war perception and narrative as a precondition, and applying process tracking.

At the ontological level, this thesis adopts the 'utility maximization or rational decision-making', which assumes that states or individuals act in their own self-interest and seek to maximize their utility, which is often associated with achieving their goals, minimizing costs, or maximizing benefits (Keohane 1984). Under this premise, the state is not a purely structural product or cultural construction, but the result gradually shaped by political entities through strategic choices in a specific historical context. Therefore, this thesis regards war as an important strategic tool adopted by a country based on cost-benefit evaluation in the process of achieving survival, security, and legitimacy goals. Especially in the historical context of Africa before decolonization, war was not only an extension of power competition, but also

one of the institutionalized paths for building national capacity and integrating national identity (Herbst 1990).

Although Tilly believed that a country is an unconscious product of war and conflict; However, the author of this thesis believes that based on the logic of realism, the core interest of rulers and their people is survival. In the face of war, their motivation is to use all available resources to protect their own interests, and in this process, the embryonic form of the state is born. That is to say, the emergence of the state as a political form is contingent, but human survival motivation and the ability to enhance matching capabilities based on it have agency.

In the case of the First Italo-Ethiopian War, this thesis argues that Menelik II and his regime, as rational actors, actively chose to use military means to consolidate the central government, expand national control, and shape a unified collective identity of 'Ethiopian people' based on considerations of the international geopolitical landscape, military mobilization resources, and national identity. This rational action logic provides an observable and interpretable analytical basis for the causal mechanism between war and state construction.

The thesis revolves around the following research question: To what extent did the First Italo-Ethiopian War promote Ethiopia's state building by affecting its taxation capacity, military capability and bureaucratic bodies, and national cohesion?

Firstly, this thesis assumes that the First Italo-Ethiopian War has to some extent promoted the institutionalization of Ethiopia's fiscal system, manifested in the improvement of the central government's tax collection capacity. In the process of war mobilization, the state has to strengthen its control over local resources and establish a more systematic taxation mechanism in order to obtain materials, raise military salaries, and organize logistics. After the victory of the war, in order to consolidate the achievements and expand the boundaries of national power, the central government continued to optimize the fiscal collection methods in border areas, and in this process, formed an effective infiltration capacity into grassroots society. Therefore, the First Italo-Ethiopian War is considered an important opportunity to promote the institutionalization of Ethiopia's fiscal absorption mechanism. Considering the economic situation of Ethiopia as an agricultural country

and Africa as a source of slave exports, this thesis assumes that the main sources of taxation are agricultural taxes, land taxes and slave taxes.

Secondly, this thesis assumes that the First Italo-Ethiopian War significantly enhanced the military capabilities and improved the development of other bureaucratic bodies. Faced with the well-equipped Italian colonial army, Ethiopia had to mobilize a large army and purchase modern weapons, which prompted its originally scattered lord armed forces to transform into a more unified and efficient standing army system. After the war, the country drew on the experience of wartime mobilization, continued to promote the regularization of the military, and introduced foreign military advisors to promote the modernization of the military system. The proposal of this hypothesis was inspired by R.A. Caulk's research on Firearms and Princely Power in Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century (1978) and Richard Pankhurst's research on Guns in Ethiopia (1965), in which they demonstrated the Ethiopian monarch's concern for military equipment. For guaranteeing the normal operation of military, education system for commander elite, logistic for good transportation, hospital for the wounded etc. could be developed accordingly.

Finally, considering that Italy, as an industrialized country, has overwhelming advantages over Ethiopia in terms of weapons and equipment, tax sources, etc., Ethiopian rulers and various ethnic groups can only win the war by demonstrating strong national cohesion, and this image of jointly resisting aggression after the war shapes national identity. At the same time, military mobilization and nationwide taxation cannot be separated from the wisdom of leaders. This thesis assumes that the threat perception of leaders is imposed on the people through discourse, thereby promoting national cohesion and enhancing the causal mechanism of war making and state building. This hypothesis is mainly based on Benedict Anderson's research in Imagined Community (1983).

In terms of research method, this thesis adopts the method of historical analysis, using traditional historical research methods to sort out the history of the First Italo-Ethiopian War and Menelik, in order to analyze how the war had an impact on the state building of Ethiopia. Secondly, this thesis adopts the process tracking method for case study, focusing on the changes in Ethiopia's state building capacity pre, during, and after the First Italo-Ethiopian War, and testing predatory theory of Charles Tilly.

4.Ethiopia Context

4.1The kings of Ethiopia since the end of Princes

Ethiopia is a peculiarity among African states. As the sole indigenous African state to survive through the colonial period, Ethiopia is by a long way the oldest and most authoritative state that the Horn of Africa has produced (Zewde 2002). It has an authentic history of some 2,000 years, and has been able to maintain some (albeit varying) central control over a territory of hundreds of miles in extent, despite an extremely rugged topography and extremely limited technology. Mentioning the history in this thesis in details would be beyond the scope of this thesis, therefore in the following sector, the history of Ethiopia covers the history since the end of Princes period (the anarchy period) due to the coming into power of Tewodros. When we start to talk about the 19th centuries of Ethiopia, three kingdoms can hardly be avoided. Taking domination as a clue, the state-building situation would be unveiled.

The era of Prince came to the end by a provincial governor named Kassa who overthrow the then regime and got himself crowned as emperor and took the throne name of Tewodros II (Darkwah, Kofi 1970). He centralized the state territory, ended the status quo of anarchy, set the orthodox church of Ethiopia as the singular faith, and revolutionized social and economic life of the population domestically (Darkwah, Kofi 1970). Internationally, he manipulated the adversary relationships of the colonization powers to strengthen itself. For a hundred year, for the first time, the control of the state had been handed over from Oromo rulers from the South to Amhara and Tigrean nobility (Darkwah, Kofi 1970).

Tewodros claimed recognition from the Church and several kingdoms, thereby elevating himself to the title of ‘King of Kings’ (Negus Nagast). As a reformer, he sought to forge alliances with European powers in order to preserve his Christian empire and defend it against non-Christian threats (Joseph 2020). Through invoking the collective national memory of the Solomonic lineage and mobilizing the unifying force of Christianity, he further enhanced Ethiopia’s national cohesion.

Tewodros also sought to modernize his country. Though his efforts ultimately ended in failure, his attempts at military technological innovation secured his legacy as Ethiopia's first revolutionary hero (Christopher Clapham 2006).

Tewodros II undertook efforts to establish a disciplined and well-organized imperial army. By simultaneously acquiring artillery, he appeared intent on overcoming the natural defensive advantages provided by Ethiopia's many flat-topped mountain ranges (Caulk 1972). Aside from early tactical innovations—such as surprise attacks and forced marches with little or no baggage—his military under most of his reign became primarily known for its sheer size. At the height of his power around 1860, the emperor's army remained immense (Caulk 1972) to make up for the deficiency of insufficient imported military equipment. Upon ascending to the throne, he appointed a British advisor to train his soldiers. However, the trainees resisted the tedious nature of European drills, leading to the failure of the program. Nevertheless, Tewodros eventually succeeded in compelling his missionary artisans to manufacture artillery, producing an impressive stock of heavy guns after 1861 (Crummey 1969). In terms of firearms acquisition, on November 25, 1857, he requested the British to supply 200 to 300 guns to replace outdated weaponry—a proposal that was declined due to British concerns over deteriorating relations with the Ottoman Empire. Earlier, in 1855, he maintained cordial relations with Western missionaries, who provided him with both a Bible and firearms. By 1858, he had also introduced firearms manufacturers and relevant production machinery into the empire (Caulk 1972).

Despite his attempts to reform military discipline and improve salary payments, Tewodros II's forces retained a predatory nature, and civil-military relations remained strained. Notably, Tewodros billeted his troops among the civilian population and relied on plundering resistant regions to supply his undernourished, injured, and often avaricious soldiers. These tensions in military-civilian relations persisted into the reign of Yohannes IV (Fusella).

Having positive state building achievements, as a notorious dictator, he lost the support of the masses when he was in power due to his cruel and inhuman acts, and ultimately such frustration had been ignited and transformed into a nationwide revolt against him. Since Englishmen had been put into prison by him, the diplomatic

relations between Ethiopia and the West deteriorated in the end, which cased him to death (Sven Rubenson 1966).

Regarding state building in this time, in terms of military, my last argumentation about him would be, while he eventually dealt with the domestic adversaries by the importation of Western weaponization, which is a key component to decisively win the war, the evaluation about war-driven state building in this time could be threefold. On the one hand, the real military performance of its own was tested on limited since the shortage of similar rivalries especially when it considered that the domestic counterparts from other provinces at that time had left-behind military capacities that were prohibited from weapon import; on the other hand, due to the nature of 'civil war', the effect of external invaders on the state making also is missing, leading to the stickness of one nation remains a doubt. This could be explained from the above-mentioned revolts against the emperor across the nation. Secondly, another point would be troops organized by him did win the civil conflicts, however, since the absorption of those from other provincial territories of the empire who had been defeated and had not been sentence to death, the combination of both of them could cripple the whole military power of the then regime, which takes times to upgrade the later into advanced level capable to compete with the external enemies. So in this case, when it comes to the predatory theory of Charles Tilly, the war-driven state making in terms of military effectiveness is problematic let alone national unity.

In terms of taxation, the Maria Theresa dollar appears to have enjoyed wide circulation in Ethiopia, which may have contributed to a gradual increase in Emperor Tewodros's monetary revenue, despite generations of warfare (Pankhurst 1968). Tax collection from remote provinces remained challenging and, in some cases, could only be enforced through the dispatch of armed expeditions. As a result of Tewodros's efforts, the province of Shoa—at least temporarily incorporated into his empire—paid tribute to him on at least one occasion. Northern provinces that Tewodros visited personally were also required to pay taxes directly to him (Kolmodin). Tewodros further engaged with the chief of Gallabat, compelling him to pay tribute to Ethiopia rather than Egypt—although these payments may have ceased following Tewodros's death (Pankhurst 1968). His tax-related initiatives included expanding the geographical scope of taxation, increasing the overall tax burden to

finance the state, cultivating public awareness of tax obligations, and establishing additional administrative structures for tax collection.

By the latter part of his reign, however, Emperor Tewodros's revenue was insufficient to meet either his administrative needs or the demands of his large standing army. Despite efforts to create a formal payment system, the army continued to ravage the countryside to sustain itself (Pankhurst 1968). Nevertheless, these acts of territorial incorporation and fiscal extraction contributed to the consolidation of centralized authority. His eventual deterioration of relations with the British and betrayal by Yohannes led to his suicide at the Battle of Magdala. Though he did not achieve full national unification, his efforts to restore the empire strengthened Ethiopian nationalist consciousness and revived traditional practices regarded by Ethiopians as central to their identity.

While his suicide forced by British in 1868 brought his reform and modernization to the sudden end, he set an good example for future successors such as Yohannes and Menelik to build up theirs state and national identity (Kofi 1970)[10].

Having assessed Tewodros's state-building efforts through the lens of military , tax and national cohesion, we now turn to evaluating Yohannes's in the same way briefly.

In 1871, Yohannes IV overthrew the transitive regime since the death of Tewodros and took power (Zewde Gebre-Sellassie 1975). Yohannes faced two problems in his life, making the Imperial authority supreme at home and defending the unity, integrity and independence of his empire against encroachment from foreign powers. For the purpose of tackling multi challenges, since he must perceive that the foreign powers are his top priority, for domestic rivalries, he made concession by giving limited autonomy to the provincial rulers from Shoa, Gojjam and Kaffa as long as they recognized him as their overlord and paid him regular tribute (Kofi Darkwah 1970). For this reason, he never really had a free hand to deal more firmly with his recalcitrant counterparts at home.

[10] His major achievements include the defeat of the Galla and bringing the Amhara and Tigrean back under the control of the empire, and an attempt at modern technology reform.

For example, in 1875, Yohannes regulated his relations with Menelik by an agreement by which Menelik acknowledged him as his overlord and agreed to pay him tribute. Yohannes forced Menelik to settle his differences with Menliek in a 'treaty' made on March 20, 1878 at Litche, after three year since the signing of first agreement in between (Rubenson 1976). In 1889, Yohannes was killed in war against the Sudanese Mahdists, Menelik II of Shoa at that time, did not send reinforcements—likely due to their political tensions and Menelik's own ambitions for the throne (Marcus 1994). Swiftly, the imperial crown thus passed into the hands of Menelik of Shoa who became emperor Menelik II (Tafla 1975). From this perspective, though with signing of two agreements of concessions with other rulers, Yohannes failed to fully leverage Ethiopia's external conflicts to unify the fractious regional elites and forge a cohesive national identity, missing the opportunity to use wars against foreign invaders as a rallying point for political consolidation. And it was the external threats which would lead to the demise of his rule.

In terms of acquiring military equipment, Yohannes held a clear advantage over Tewodros. His first foreign arms supplier was Britain, which supported him in opposing Tewodros. In return, Yohannes received six mortars, 200 rounds of ammunition, six howitzers with 50 shells each, 725 muskets with bayonets, 130 rifles, 354,230 rounds of small arms ammunition, 28 barrels of gunpowder, 585,480 percussion caps, numerous horses and mules, as well as a significant quantity of surplus supplies (Pankhurst 1965). During his conflict with Egypt, Yohannes seized approximately 20,000 Remington rifles—considered among the most advanced firearms of the time—alongside a large quantity of artillery, including 25 to 30 cannons, as well as many horses, mules, camels, and food supplies (Pankhurst 1965). These developments in military capability occurred in less than a decade.

Externally, Yohannes primarily faced invasions from Egypt and Sudan throughout his reign. He successfully repelled Egyptian forces in two major battles in 1875 and 1876 (Joseph 2020). Beginning in 1882, Mahdist Sudanese forces launched incursions into western Ethiopia, threatening border security (Kofi). Although Yohannes defeated the Mahdist army at the Battle of Kufit in 1885 (Joseph 2020), hostilities continued for several years. These conflicts with two formidable neighbors consumed much of

Yohannes's resources and ultimately contributed to his demise. Nevertheless, his military efforts significantly weakened both neighboring adversaries, safeguarded Ethiopian territorial unity, and reinforced the centralization of power. As Charles Tilly claims, warfare enables states to extract taxes, levy tribute from local chieftains, and foster national cohesion. In this light, Yohannes's victories laid a crucial foundation for Menelik II's subsequent triumph in the First Italo-Ethiopian War.

Regarding taxation, Emperor Yohannes IV was almost certainly wealthier than any of his predecessors. According to Douin's findings based on Egyptian sources, in 1868, while still ruler of Tigray alone, Yohannes raised $20,000 through a per capita tax of $2. After assuming the imperial throne, his revenue is believed to have increased substantially (Pankhurst 1968).

In sum, the state-building endeavors of Tewodros II and Yohannes IV, though with disadvantages, created the administrative and military scaffolding that enabled Menelik II to consolidate power and resist Italian colonization effectively. While Tewodros initiated reforms in military and taxation practices, Yohannes institutionalized them and used foreign threats to strengthen national unity and military preparedness. These developments aligned with Charles Tilly's theory of war-driven state formation, as warfare under both emperors necessitated resource extraction, bureaucratic organization, and legitimacy-building efforts.

By the time Menelik II assumed power, he inherited a semi-centralized empire with enriched experience in warfare, tributary politics, and rudimentary fiscal extraction. The victories of his predecessors, as well as their failures, equipped him with both the institutional memory and the infrastructural tools to wage the First Italo-Ethiopian War successfully. In this sense, Menelik's achievements rested on a layered foundation of earlier imperial centralization, forged in the crucible of conflict.

During the second half of the century, after the end of the status of independent rules of the provinces in the empire, the position of the emperor and state centralization

improved gradually, until by the end of the century when Menelik took power, the central government commanded respect and obedience throughout the length and breadth of the empire (Kofi Darkwah 1970).

4.2Menelik period

In Milkias book, the First Italo-Ethiopian War, he mentioned that, Dejazmach Zewde identifies three phases in Menelik's foreign policy. From 1865 to 1878, Menelik was more interested, he argues, in consolidating his rule over Showa and the surrounding areas, and from 1878 to 1889, in managing his relations with Emperor Yohannes while biding his time for the crown[11] (Milkias 2005). From 1889 to 1896, by contrast, a discontinuity in Menelik's foreign policy had been categorized aiming at defending his enlarged empire, giving him a prefect example to be studied in Tilly's theory since his efforts on domestic unity and Italian annihilation. The details about Menelik would be discussed in following chapters.

4.3Overall picture of military, army-civil relations, economy

When it comes to the finance, the belligerent armies' exploitation on mass shall be a significant characteristic in ancient Ethiopia history. With the absence of taxation, for instance, armies in ancient Ethiopia usually have been predators living off their lord's other subjects while raiding his enemies for booty. Emperor Ezana of Ale sum (c. 325 A.D.) that his several armies had taken thousands of head of cattle and pack animals from people who had massacred trading caravans. Ezana's punitive expedition captured and may have enslaved those whom they did not kill for continuous resource extraction (Caulk 1978). In the later thirteenth century, specific groups of the emperor's taxpayers were assigned to regiments to supply porterage, pasture pack animals, care for tents, and help with victualing. Taxes in kind as well as plunder paid for the regular army's upkeep (Caulk 1978). In the era of Christian empire's revival (1769-1855), though alternative of financial source for military had been provided, the brutality that armed men exploited farmers and traders and against priests and monasteries was prevailing phenomenon (Caulk 1978).

[11] This original content was presented by Paulos Milkias in his book, the First Italo-Ethiopian War, cited from Dejazmach Zewde, but without the presentation of the citation source. The author of this thesis tried to search for the citation but failed.

Although relations between the civilian population and the armed forces improved after the end of Prince, the root causes of the tension remained partially unaddressed as mentioned above. Emperor Tewodros (1855–68) attempted to reform Ethiopia's armed bands but failed to address the systemic issue of unpaid armies, which instead reinforced autocratic rule and intensified the exploitation of the peasantry (Caulk 1978). Similarly, Emperor Yohannes (1872–89) did little to curb the abuses of soldiers billeted among the Christian farming population, allowing their predatory practices to persist unchecked. The progressive intellectual, Afewerq Gebre Iyesus lamented that under Yohannes, 'the people of Ethiopia were the slaves of soldiers'—a view corroborated by ample evidence from contemporary observers (Pankhurst 1961).

Poor economic conditions could also become a setback to tax extraction. Long-distance trade grew considerably in the century before the Italian occupation, but most of the country's wealth was in a near-subsistence agriculture based on the cultivation of grains and the raising of livestock (Crummey, D., & Sishagne, S. 1991). Military recruitment edicts openly framed southern expansionist campaigns as opportunities for acquiring 'glory, plunder, and captives' (A. K. Boulatovich. 1902).

4.4History engagement with foreigners

In this part, we would unveil the situation of foreigner involvement in Ethiopia. The main active actors in 19th centuries would be those from neighbour states such as Sultan, Egypt, and colonized powers such as UK, France, Italy, Russia and Turkey. The overall picture in their complicate relations could be summed up as one actor manipulates another for power projection. Building on this introduction, our focus now shifts to Ethiopia's historical relations with European powers—not only because the West posed the gravest existential threat during the 'Scramble for Africa', but also because Ethiopia uniquely resisted conquering while defeating neighboring regional powers in multiple conflicts.During the first half of the nineteenth century, Ethiopia attracted visits from British, French, German, and Italian nationals - including explorers, missionaries, naval officers, traders, and adventurers. Several regional Ethiopian rulers actively patronized these European visitors, hoping to establish friendly relations with their home countries. However, these interactions largely failed

to produce substantial diplomatic results beyond facilitating limited firearms acquisitions from Europe (Zewde 2002). The most promising early connection emerged with Britain. In 1848, the British government appointed its first consul stationed at Massawa, following an initial diplomatic mission three years earlier aimed at establishing bilateral relations. However, British engagement waned after 1868 due to tensions with Emperor Tewodros II, only to be revived in the 1890s when geopolitical interests in the region intensified (Prouty 1986).

During the 13th century, French missionaries and explorers demonstrated a keen interest in Ethiopia and were actively engaged in the region. However, despite multiple attempts to establish formal connections, their efforts lacked substantial official support from France and remained largely confined to individual initiatives.

On the contrary, Italy emerged as the European power wielding the most significant influence over Ethiopian affairs in the 19th century. During the second quarter of the century, Italian missionaries established a presence in Tigray and present-day Eritrea. Following their expulsion from northern regions, many relocated to the Oromo territories south of Gojjam and into southern Shoa, where they maintained operations until Emperor Yohannes IV's political pressure ultimately compelled their withdrawal in the late 1870s and early 1880s (Zewde 2002).

It was in Menelik's Shoa however, that the Italians were most active. From 1868 when the missionary Massaja arrived in Shoa a steady stream of Italian nationals of all types - traders, explorers, adventurers, doctors, artisans, engineers came into the kingdom. Some of them took service with the king and a number of them accompanied him in his campaigns of conquest. They travelled up and down the kingdom and their reports constitute a valuable source of historical information. Learned and commercial societies in Italy as well as the Italian government showed an interest in the activities of their nationals in Shoa and from 1882 the government of Italy appointed an official representative in Shoa. The ambassador, Pietro Antonelli, worked hard to establish a commercial and a firm diplomatic relations between the two kingdoms for penetration of Ethiopia (Kofi 1970).

Italy occupation of Massawa in I885 and its gradual occupation inland towards Tigre caught the attention of Yohannes, who asked the former to clarify their intentions with

regards to the Ethiopia's provinces. With pacified promise, they by contrast continued to push inward gradually. Though in a skirmish which took place in January I887 at Dogaii area resulting in an Italian force was massacred which halted the Italian advance, since the death of emperor Yohannes and especially in the political vacuum, the Italian still posed a very great threat to the territorial integrity of the empire (Rubenson 1976).

4.5Wuchale treaty

The conflict was intensified due to the imposition of the Wuchale treaty by Italy on Ethiopia and its aftermath. 8Not long after Menelik had succeeded Yohannes as emperor in March 1889 he came to terms with the Italians in a treaty signed on May 2 at Wuchale (Marcus 1994). 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 Menelik, as he greatly enhanced his standing within Ethiopia as the strongest Kingdom, and most worthy successor to Yohannes (Marcus 1994). Clause seventeen of this treaty was interpreted by the Italians to mean that they had acquired protectorate rights over the whole of Ethiopia. The misunderstanding which arose between the two parties over this clause coupled with the continued penetration of the Italians beyond the limits set by other clauses of the treaty of Wuchale led, after the failure of the many attempts at peaceful settlement, to a series of skirmishes which culminated in a one-year-and-ten-month war fought from 13 January 1895 to 23 October 1896 in which the Italians were routed.

Tensions with Italy erupted shortly after Menelik II's denouncement and unilateral termination of agreement in 1893, with Italian forces advancing beyond agreed territorial boundaries within a year (Marcus 1994). While the Treaty of Wuchale's thesis III had clearly delineated mutual borders, the emperor's preoccupation with consolidating his newly inherited empire and attempt to stand firm on this issue and continued to remain close relations with other Europe's powers on its own created an opportunity for Italian expansion. Exploiting this situation, Italian troops systematically occupied strategic Ethiopian settlements before unilaterally annexing these territories to their burgeoning colonial domain.

As a late comer for the Scramble of Africa, 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. The negotiations must be considered ended and each of us remains free in his action. In a display of integrity rare among belligerent nations, Menelik paid back the loan incurred under the treaty with three times the stipulated interest. He kept the military equipment, however, and sought to rally the nation against a foreign invader (Marcus 1994). With this, the relationship between the two was severed, and the stage was set for war.

Table

The following are the twelve battles that occurred in Ethiopia, 1868-1896 (Pankhurst, Richard 1901).

Battle Sites	Adversary	Month/Year
Maqdala	British	April 1868
Gundet	Egypt	November 1875
Gura	Egypt	March 1876
Kufit	Dervish	September
Dogali	Italians	January 1887
Gondar	Dervish	April 1887
Wagera	Dervish	August 1888
Gallabat	Dervish	March 1889
Coatit	Italians	January 1895
Senafe	Italians	January 1895
Amba Alaghe	Italians	Dec.1895-Jan.1896
Adwa	Italians	March

Tax extraction

Before the war

To properly analyze the nature of taxation under Emperor Menelik II prior to the outbreak of the First Italo-Ethiopian War, one must first consider the broader context of Ethiopia's social organization, particularly its capacity for hierarchical mobility, its deeply ingrained martial culture, and its land-based taxation framework. These factors collectively shaped the mechanisms through which the state extracted resources and maintained military strength.

At the heart of this system was a competitive aristocracy whose status and influence were closely tied to their service to the emperor. According to historian Tadesse Tamrat, the emperor required two essential services from regional nobles: first, the efficient collection and delivery of tributes (taxes in kind or labor) generated within their jurisdiction; second, their ability and willingness to mobilize troops during times of national crisis (Tadesse Tamrat 1972). While the nobility possessed some degree of autonomy, their privileges were not independent of imperial control—they did not form a parallel authority but were rather extensions of the emperor's power. Their authority rested on conditional rights granted by the emperor, most importantly the right to collect tribute from the local populace. They held rist land as members of a lineage community, but their role as tribute collectors—rather than autonomous rulers—meant they had to continually demonstrate loyalty and effectiveness to retain imperial favor. This structure fostered a fluid and dynamic political environment, rather than a rigidly inherited aristocracy. In such a context, nobles were incentivized to actively engage in tax collection not only to fulfill their obligations to the crown but also to strengthen their social positions and secure influence among the peasantry. Ultimately, taxation functioned as a critical tool for consolidating power, reinforcing military culture, and maintaining a decentralized but interdependent social order.

Ethiopia's remarkable political endurance, even in the face of repeated external threats and internal fragmentation, can be partly attributed to its unique land tenure system. One central feature of this system was the concept of *rist*, a communal right to land based on descent from a common ancestor. Land held under *rist* was subject to taxation, and those who held such land were known as *gebar*—individuals obligated to pay tribute to their overlords (John M. Cohen and Dov Weintraub 1975). Parallel to this was the *gult* system, which did not confer ownership of land per se, but rather granted the right to collect taxes and labor services from the land and its occupants (John Markakis 1990). The *gult* right was typically bestowed by the emperor as a

reward for loyal service, particularly military support (John M. Cohen and Dov Weintraub 1975). Thus, even though those who held *gult* rights enjoyed privileges, their status remained fundamentally dependent on imperial authority, ensuring that the emperor retained overarching control.

The strategic objective behind granting *gult* was fundamentally military in nature. It served as a reward for past military service and as a mechanism to ensure continued readiness for future campaigns. Failure to fulfill military obligations could result in the revocation of the grant, reinforcing the principle that privilege was conditional upon service. This system naturally attracted individuals with strong martial ambitions, helping to cultivate a class of militarized elites whose fortunes were tied to the success of imperial campaigns. As a result, the *gult* system not only fostered loyalty to the throne but also significantly boosted the empire's capacity to wage war. It contributed to the creation of a warrior class whose livelihoods and status were directly linked to the empire's ability to project power and extract resources.

Moreover, the *gult* system was instrumental in explaining one of the key features of Ethiopia's military success during the Menelik era: its ability to raise and mobilize large armies. This system effectively established a decentralized yet efficient recruitment network, wherein regional leaders, in return for their share of tax revenues, mobilized local followers for military campaigns. These mobilization networks were essential for the empire's preferred warfare strategy—encirclement and overwhelming force. By allowing regional leaders to retain a portion of state taxes, the emperor created a complex web of incentives and obligations that bound local elites to the imperial center and enabled rapid military mobilization when needed.

The practice of granting tax collection rights also served an important administrative and expansionist purpose. Rather than relying on sporadic raids to extract wealth from neighboring territories—a method common in earlier times—the empire increasingly shifted toward integrating conquered populations into a formal system of governance and taxation (Messay 2023). The extension of *gult* rights into newly acquired

territories institutionalized this process: as new lands were incorporated, new *gult* rights were granted, creating incentives for further conquests and reinforcing imperial authority. This marked a significant departure from looting-based expansion, indicating a shift toward bureaucratic incorporation and long-term control.

Finally, this system of hierarchical exchange fostered a sense of mutual dependency between the ruling elite of the empire and their provincial subordinates. Rather than setting up a binary of exploiters and exploited, it created reciprocal relationships in which both parties sought to maximize benefits from their positions within the social order. Provincial subordinates who demonstrated military service or political loyalty could be rewarded with upward mobility, such as promotions to administrative posts or preferential treatment in land disputes. In this way, the demand for manpower in warfare not only solidified elite control but also provided avenues—however limited—for social advancement. Consequently, the Ethiopian imperial system under Menelik was stitched together by a dense web of mutual obligations, where taxation and military service served as both instruments of coercion and tools of social integration.

Taxation stands as a foundational pillar in the process of state building, particularly in its role of facilitating resource extraction and capital accumulation (Tilly 1992). For Emperor Menelik II, expanding the empire's fiscal capacity meant both enlarging the territorial boundaries of the state and institutionalizing mechanisms to ensure consistent and efficient tax collection. As Ethiopia's frontiers expanded—especially into the southern regions—so too did the scope of its taxation regime. These newly annexed territories provided fresh sources of revenue, which proved crucial in financing the military buildup necessary to resist Italian aggression, culminating in the First Italo-Ethiopian War. Furthermore, the incorporation of Harar, a key northern trade hub, into imperial control was strategically significant not only for enabling the flow of imported weaponry but also for its contribution to commercial taxation and economic development (Aregay 1997). Menelik established a dedicated tax bureau in Harar to systematically collect various forms of levies, ranging from agricultural taxes to trade tariffs and property dues (Abdulmalik 2017). Notably, inhabitants of the newly integrated southern provinces faced a comparatively heavier land tax burden,

reflecting both their peripheral status and the state's effort to quickly extract resources from these regions. The types of taxes in effect during Menelik's reign were diverse, encompassing levies on agricultural produce, slaves, imported firearms, and general commercial activity (Crummey 2000).

One of Menelik's notable achievements was his implementation of tax reforms that aimed to balance the needs of the state with the socioeconomic realities of the time. These reforms were especially focused on improving the conditions of soldiers and resolving the inherent conflict between military demands and agricultural production. Historically, the tax burden on the peasantry—*gabbar*—was immense. Peasants were required to surrender a substantial portion of their harvest, typically ranging from one-quarter (*erbo*) to one-third (*sisso*), as tribute (*gibr*) to their landlords. In addition to this, Menelik introduced the *asrat*, a tithe equal to one-tenth of the produce, in 1892. The peasants were also expected to provide supplemental goods, such as honey and meat, to their landlords (John Markakis 2011). Aware of the unsustainable strain this system placed on agriculture—especially as tens of thousands of professional soldiers required sustenance—Menelik and his advisers instituted a system of public granaries to support the military. These storehouses, distributed across the provinces, were intended to supply the army without further impoverishing the rural population. To complement this initiative, Menelik introduced a system of military stipends: soldiers received a portion of the collected taxes, along with clothing and a nominal cash salary. While rank-and-file troops found this arrangement acceptable, senior officers and commanders often demanded additional compensation to reflect their higher status and responsibilities (Tegenu 1998).

As Menelik prepared to confront the Italian invasion in the mid-1890s, he instituted extraordinary taxation measures to finance the acquisition of modern weaponry and other war materials. According to Conti Rossini, Menelik mandated a special levy on the rural population, requiring payments based on their agricultural and labor resources: one dollar per ox, horse, or donkey used for plowing; one dollar for every four hired laborers; two dollars for individuals owning land but no oxen; and four dollars from each *gult* landholder. Though this emergency tax was applied across the empire, the province of Tigré was initially exempted, likely to prevent unrest in a region where military operations were about to intensify (C. Conti Rossini 1935).

However, during the military campaign of 1895–1896, Tigré was eventually subjected to heavy taxation, reportedly amounting to half of the local crop yields. Ras Alula, a key military figure, pledged to deliver 1,000 *dawulas* of grain from Temben to the emperor, highlighting the scale of resource mobilization at the time (C. Conti Rossini 1935).

Beyond land and weaponry taxes, the imperial taxation system also extended to the collection of in-kind tributes, primarily agricultural and animal products. Chiefs from various regions were tasked with supplying Menelik's court with goods such as livestock, butter, honey, coffee, pepper, and cotton textiles, along with prestige items like lion skins, horses, and mules for military use. In fact, regional nobles—including kings (*Negus*), *Rases*, and *Dajazmachs*—often competed to deliver larger and more impressive tributes than their peers, hoping to demonstrate loyalty and win imperial favor. Some leaders even went so far as to offer their entire revenue collection to Menelik, entrusting him to redistribute only what was necessary for their personal needs and those of their soldiers (Michel 1900). This performative generosity was a strategic gesture aimed at strengthening their standing at court and securing long-term patronage due to the *gult* system we mentioned above and the power centralization of Menelik.

Despite Menelik's 1892 tax reforms, the fundamental status of the peasantry remained largely unchanged. The *gebbar* remained tied to their assigned landlords and had little recourse to contest their obligations. They were neither exempt from military service nor free to leave the authority of their designated tax collector (Caulk 1978). Over time, however, the empire's tax base was broadened by the addition of tributes from regions outside of Shoa. For example, the province of Jimma, incorporated into the empire in 1881, was compelled to pay annual tributes. Initially, these were modest, but they increased over time. In 1885, explorer Franzoj reported that the ruler of Jimma, Abba Jifar, presented Menelik with thirty elephant tusks, thirty horns of civet musk, thirty mules, sixty horses, one hundred jars of honey, one hundred sacks of coffee, twenty animal skins, and a monetary sum. In 1886, Abba Jifar even made a personal journey to Menelik's court in Shoa, bringing additional gifts including wax torches, which were ceremoniously placed near the emperor's throne (Gäbrä Sellasé 1886). While the First Italo-Ethiopian War occurred in 1896, the preceding decades of

civil conflicts, territorial expansion, and mounting international encirclement had already transformed Ethiopia into a fiscal-military state.

In the broader context of the empire's conflict with Italy, the role of taxation was critical. To finance the importation of an estimated 100,000 modern carbines, Menelik imposed targeted taxes to generate the required funds (Markakis 2011: 92). As Marcus notes, this fiscal strategy achieved more than just military objectives—it also linked the imperial government to the commercial and social dynamics of provincial economies (Marcus 1995: 3). The state's involvement in regional trade, taxation, and governance helped to consolidate a national economy and strengthened Menelik's authority. Thus, the war against Italy, and the tax regime that underpinned it, became catalysts for both military modernization and the institutional deepening of the Ethiopian state.

In addition to formal taxation and the requisition of physical goods, the slave trade constituted a significant and often overlooked avenue of resource extraction under Emperor Menelik II. Not only did slave labor underpin parts of the imperial economy, but the act of slave trading itself was subject to taxation, thereby becoming an important financial mechanism to support the expansion of Ethiopia's military and bureaucratic apparatus. Historical accounts describe Menelik as "Ethiopia's greatest slave entrepreneur" (Marcus 1995: 73), a title that underscores both the scale and systemic nature of slave-based economic activity during his reign. Menelik and his wife are said to have personally owned as many as 70,000 slaves (Markakis 2011: 97), and this pattern was replicated among local elites, many of whom acted as intermediaries on behalf of the state. Slaves, along with high-value goods from the south-west such as ivory, coffee, and civet, were traded with European merchants in exchange for modern firearms and military supplies for preparation of war.

Faced with the imminent threat of Italian invasion and other regional power struggles, Menelik intensified his imperial campaigns in the southern regions of Ethiopia. This military expansion was not only a strategic move to consolidate national territory but also a calculated effort to secure new sources of income for sustaining military growth significantly. Unlike his predecessors—Tewodros, whose authority remained circumscribed in southern territories where people on the periphery pledged their allegiance to Egypt; and Yohannes, who relied on agreements with local chiefs rather

than direct control—Menelik adopted a policy of aggressive military conquest. For the first time in Ethiopian history, the empire was unified through force, allowing Menelik to establish direct administrative and fiscal control over newly subjugated populations. This enabled the full incorporation of these regions into the imperial taxation network and provided a steady stream of resources needed to pay soldiers and maintain state operations (Markakis 2011: 97). To exploit the wealth of these conquered territories, Menelik enlisted the support of Italian and French speculators, scientists, and missionaries who organized caravans from Shoa to the coast. These expeditions transported goods such as gold, ivory, hides, coffee, civet, spices, and furs —all seized from the southern provinces—to coastal trading ports, where they were exchanged for money and weaponry (Pankhurst 1965). The revenues generated from this trade cycle significantly expanded the state's fiscal and military capabilities, contributing to the steady accumulation of firepower in anticipation of conflict with Italy.

Beyond the southern conquests, Menelik also drew heavily on the economic potential of Harar, a northwestern province that he had annexed into the empire. Harar had long held strategic and economic significance due to its well-established systems of trade and commercial agriculture, particularly in the export of coffee (Caulk 1971). By integrating Harar into his realm, Menelik gained access to a region capable of generating consistent cash flow, which could be used to purchase arms and support state expansion. Following its annexation, Menelik instituted a range of taxes in Harar —including levies on agriculture, real estate, and livestock—and created specialized government departments and official roles to ensure tax collection was standardized and bureaucratically managed (Caulk 1971). Harar also maintained a functioning customs house, which became a regular source of revenue for Menelik's regime (Caulk 1971). Religious tithes such as *asrat* (a tenth of grain) continued to be collected through district administrators in Gultua, and taxes on immovable property were systematized through longstanding practices of property authentication and registration (Abdulmalik 2017).

Taxation in Harar was implemented through a multi-tiered administrative system. Each livestock owner was required to pay a tax of one *Birr (*currency*)* per animal tail, and a similar rate was imposed on groups of ten sheep or goats. Tax enforcement was

managed by officials including *yashalqa* (majors), *malkanga* (owners of *gabar* or tribute rights), and *garad* (village-level chiefs) (Abdulmalik 2017). Menelik ensured tax compliance through a dual system: religious oaths taken on holy texts and institutional oversight (Abdulmalik 2017). In the Emirate of Harar, the *Amir* stood at the top of the taxation hierarchy, supported by five senior tax advisers called *Bari Malaq* or *Bari Goyta*, who operated as customs officers at key market gates (*Bari*) where merchants were taxed on their goods. Beneath them, local tax enforcement fell to *malak* (quarter-level chiefs), *garad* (village-level chiefs), and *damin* (chiefs overseeing multiple villages) (Yusuf 1960). This layered governance structure allowed for comprehensive tax collection and deeper state penetration into Harar's economic life. 10The fiscal administration under Menelik II demonstrated marked improvements when contrasted with the chaotic taxation practices of the Tewodros era -- Contemporary accounts from the French consular agent at Massawa document how Tewodros's regime suffered from unsystematic and disorganized tax collection, where multiple officials would extract overlapping levies from the same vulnerable subjects (Douin).

Following his imperial coronation in 1889, Menelik II undoubtedly became the most financially resplendent sovereign in Ethiopia's recorded history. This economic growth was in part the result of Menelik's control over newly conquered, resource-rich provinces (Gabra Sellase 1963). His strong fiscal position enabled him to import weapons on a scale never before seen in Ethiopia. The costs were staggering—according to Rimbaud, even the least expensive rifles in the 1880s were priced at 40 francs apiece, meaning that a shipment of 25,000 rifles alone would have cost roughly a million francs or $250,000 (Pankhurst 1971). And that figure excludes the cost of ammunition, which Menelik also acquired in significant quantities. Some of these weapons were received as diplomatic gifts, but the majority were purchased outright, reflecting the seriousness with which Menelik approached military modernization.

Considering that prolonged rivalries often transform into militarized struggles over time, it is reasonable to interpret the intensification of tax extraction under Menelik as a rational response to ongoing external threats. In the decades leading up to the First Italo-Ethiopian War, Ethiopia had faced multiple forms of aggression: civil wars among rival provincial lords, border pressure from Egypt and Sudan, and the

geopolitical meddling of European powers such as Italy, France, and Britain. These layered challenges served as continuous catalysts for state consolidation and extractive expansion. The threat posed by Italy in particular, culminating in the Adwa campaign, necessitated a comprehensive strategy that fused military preparedness with economic mobilization. In this context, Menelik's aggressive tax policies and territorial expansion were not just wartime necessities—they became structural features of a state built in the crucible of war.

Facing both internal rivalries and the external threat of Italian invasion, Menelik mobilized Ethiopia's social, military, and administrative resources to construct a mutually reinforcing cycle of war-making and resource extraction. The gult system—granting tax rights in exchange for military service—was central to this dynamic. It incentivized local elites to actively extract tribute while reinforcing their loyalty to the imperial center. This structure not only strengthened the empire's capacity to mobilize massive armies but also laid the foundation for bureaucratic expansion and territorial integration.

In particular, during the lead-up to the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1896), the looming threat of foreign invasion legitimized emergency tax policies. These included levies on oxen, land, and laborers, extended to newly conquered southern provinces and trade hubs like Harar, where specialized taxation institutions were established. The expansion of fiscal capacity enabled Menelik to import weaponry, develop supply chains, and maintain a standing army capable of defeating a European power. Thus, war not only justified unprecedented extractive initiatives but also catalyzed the institutional and military strengthening of the Ethiopian state.

However, this war-driven model of extraction came with serious drawbacks. First, the tax burden on the peasantry was overwhelming. Peasants were required to surrender up to one-third of their produce, provide labor services, and deliver a wide range of goods. These burdens were particularly heavy in the southern provinces, where newly incorporated populations bore higher taxes than their northern counterparts. This geographic and socio-economic inequality ultimately undermined efforts at nation-building by exacerbating division and resentment, rather than fostering a unified national identity.

Second, although the gult system created an interdependent relationship between central and local authorities, it also empowered local elites to exploit their territories with minimal oversight. This led to a predatory governance structure in which military elites extracted resources to serve their interests, often at the expense of broader social legitimacy. While effective in enhancing short-term state capacity, this elite-centric governance lacked institutional inclusiveness and long-term political stability.

Moreover, the system was inherently expansionist. The need to sustain imperial finances and military upkeep incentivized continuous territorial conquest. This "conquest–extraction–maintenance" cycle facilitated imperial expansion but also laid the groundwork for future ethnic tensions and localized resistance—especially in areas where imperial rule was viewed as exploitative and alien.

Socially, while Ethiopia allowed for limited social mobility through military success, the land tenure system blocked most peasants from upward advancement. Although the threat of war led to improvements in taxation and some redistribution policies, the burdens remained highly asymmetrical. Contrary to Tilly's idea that taxation can foster citizenship through negotiation between ruler and ruled, Ethiopia's tax regime remained a top-down mechanism of coercion, lacking reciprocal civic legitimacy.

In sum, Menelik II's war-driven state-building project confirms Charles Tilly's core insight: war can indeed make states by boosting extractive capacities. However, the Ethiopian case also exposes the limits of this approach. State-building rooted in coercion and elite militarization risks long-term fragility, exclusion, and weakened legitimacy—outcomes that continue to shape Ethiopia's socio-political landscape today.

Military and other bureaucratic developments

Before the war: Martial Spirit and Social Structure

Before delving further into Ethiopia's military preparedness, it is essential to understand the underlying spirit that shaped its military prowess and the societal conditions that gave rise to it. In Ethiopia, warfare was deeply intertwined with social

status and material interests, serving not only as a means of national defense but also as a mechanism for defining social hierarchy and mobility.

The Spirit of Martial Culture

As discussed in the previous chapter, a leader's performance in war was a fundamental determinant of their authority. This martial performance influenced the loyalty of their followers, effectively making warfare a measure of the strength of political bonds. In this context, military valor was not merely a tool of conquest—it was a central pillar of legitimacy and leadership. The fighting spirit of Ethiopian society stemmed from a system that directly linked one's social position and access to material rewards with success in warfare. In elevating martial values as the primary path to social advancement, Ethiopian society cultivated a leadership class hardened by conflict and fueled the ambitions of capable individuals.

This phenomenon, which the scholar Margery Perham described as a "tough-man system," was underpinned by a social consensus: status was not determined by birth or subservience, but by one's courage and accomplishments on the war (Margery Perham 1948). War thus functioned as both a crucible of leadership and a ladder for upward mobility.

The Persistence of Feudal Military Institutions

Historically, war leaders and their bands of professional warriors have played critical roles in the formative stages of feudal societies across the world. In regions like Western Europe and Japan, these figures gradually evolved into aristocratic families and noble lineages, while their warriors became part of the lesser nobility or formed the foundation of merchant and artisan classes (Charles D. Sheldon. 1958).

Ethiopia, however, presents a distinctive case. Unlike the gradual transformation seen elsewhere, the military institutions associated with early feudalism in Ethiopia persisted—largely unchanged—for centuries (Merid 1997). This continuity of martial structure preserved the prominence of warrior elites well into the modern era, reinforcing the societal norm that power was to be earned through combat rather than inherited through lineage.

Warfare and National Survival in the 19th Century

In the final quarter of the 19th century, Ethiopia was repeatedly compelled to defend its sovereignty in a series of conflicts against foreign invaders—including the Egyptians, Mahdists, and Italians. These successive wars elevated the role of the military from a traditional institution to a cornerstone of national survival.

The centrality of military identity is further evidenced in diplomatic correspondence. Both Emperor Yohannes IV (d. 1889) and Emperor Menelik II (d. 1913), when replying to letters from European leaders inquiring about the welfare of the Ethiopian people, would respond by affirming the health and readiness of their armies (Rubenson 1994). This tendency to equate the nation's well-being with its military strength underscores how deeply embedded martial values were in Ethiopia's political culture.

Experience, training, and organization

In the following parts of this section, I will explore several crucial elements that contributed to the development of Ethiopia's military capabilities prior to the outbreak of the First Italo-Ethiopian War. These include the importation of foreign weaponry, practical combat experience, military training, and structural organization. By examining these components, we can better understand how Ethiopia achieved its remarkable military success against the Italian invasion.

One particularly important factor behind the military expansion of Ethiopia's provinces was the importation of advanced European firearms. From the early decades of the 19th century, there was a continuous and increasing influx of firearms into the country. By the 1880s, Ethiopia had become the most well-armed state among sub-Saharan African nations (Pankhurst 1968).

Within Ethiopia, the province of Shoa stood out as particularly well-equipped. According to historical research, Shoa possessed approximately 8,900 matchlock guns in 1808 (Pankhurst 1968). In contrast, Tigre and other northern and central provinces had acquired fewer than 2,000 matchlocks by 1830 (Kofi Darkwah 1970). During the era of Prince, Menelik's Shoa remained relatively stable and was not significantly

affected by the civil wars that plagued other regions. As a result, the province was able to retain and accumulate firearms rather than expend them in internal conflict. From 1865 to 1889, under Menelik's rule, Shoa pursued a deliberate and strategic policy of weapons acquisition. Thousands of firearms were imported during this period, particularly from Italy and through French private traders (Kofi Darkwah 1970).

Substantial evidence exists to demonstrate the scale and regularity of Ethiopia's arms procurement in this period. In the 1890s, Menelik was able to spend even more on military equipment than he had in the 1880s. For instance, in the summer of 1890, a French businessman named Chefneux supplied Menelik with ten quick-firing rifles. The following year, in 1891, Russian Lieutenant Vasili Mashkov personally delivered 10,000 rifles to Menelik as a gift from the Russian government (Pankhurst 1965). These efforts were part of a sustained campaign to bolster Ethiopia's military preparedness, especially as Italy's colonial ambitions in the Horn of Africa grew increasingly evident.

To secure and facilitate the safe passage of imported weapons, Menelik moved to occupy the strategically important city-state of Harar. By May 1891, an Italian journalist reported that Harar had become a critical hub in the arms trade (Pankhurst 1965) due to its commercial networks, geopolitical position, and strategic location. These advantages made it ideal for the acquisition and logistical distribution of weapons. While the official justification for annexing Harar often emphasized national unification, the material benefits associated with control over such a vital trade center were equally significant.

On the eve of war, Ethiopia's firepower had increased dramatically. Weapons continued to flow into the country in large numbers. In January 1895, Italian intelligence reported that Alfred Ilg, Menelik's Swiss advisor, was actively purchasing arms in Paris. In a letter allegedly written by Menelik himself, he instructed Ilg: *"Immediately give me 5,000 rounds of ammunition, and you may bring as much additional ammunition as you are able to carry* (Pankhurst 1965)*."*

Menelik also adeptly took advantage of the geopolitical rivalry between France and Italy. At that time, France had colonized parts of Somalia and considered the Horn of

Africa to fall within its sphere of influence. Italy's entry into the so-called 'Scramble for Africa' project disrupted France's interests in the region, creating a context of strategic competition between the two European powers (Pankhurst 1965). Menelik exploited this rivalry by obtaining weapons from both countries.

In an ironic twist, even as tensions rose between Italy and Ethiopia, the Italian government itself contributed to Menelik's growing arsenal. In early 1893, shortly before diplomatic relations between the two countries broke down entirely, Italy supplied Menelik with an additional two million bullets (Pankhurst 1965). By July 1894, the Italian magazine La Nazione reported that Menelik was continuing to modernize his army and had recently obtained 2,000 Gras rifles from France, with plans for further acquisitions (Pankhurst 1965).

At around the same time, American observer Donaldson Smith commented on the extensive distribution of modern firearms among the Ethiopian population. He noted the prevalence of Remingtons and French breech-loading rifles, and famously remarked, *"Any country attacking them would be extremely busy* (Pankhurst 1965)*."*

Although it is difficult to place a precise monetary value on these arms imports, the scale is evident. By 1894, it is estimated that Menelik possessed around 54,000 rifles. Using valuation methods, this stockpile would have been worth at least 2,160,000 francs, or nearly one million U.S. dollars. In addition, the Emperor was thought to possess approximately five million cartridges, with each estimated to cost about one-twentieth of a dollar, amounting to a total value of roughly $250,000 (Pankhurst 1965).

Despite being fully aware of Italy's expansionist intentions, Menelik and his close circle of elites did not publicly denounce Italy or jeopardize diplomatic relations immediately (Pankhurst 1965). Instead, Menelik maintained his usual approach and continued to request arms from Italy in quantities comparable to those sought from other European powers. This reflects Menelik's characteristic patience and strategic foresight. During his time as King of Shoa, he had already demonstrated a pragmatic approach when Emperor Yohannes IV forced him to sign a series of concessionary treaties. Recognizing the military imbalance at the time, Menelik calculated the consequences and signed these treaties to protect his province's interests and adopted

a low-profile stance (Kofi 1970)—only to assert himself more forcefully once his own strength had grown. 17Another case is when Britain's arms embargo on Ethiopia, both France and Italy permitted the import of advanced firearms (Markakis 2011).

By skillfully exploiting the rivalries among European colonial powers, Abyssinian leaders were able to acquire modern weapons and ammunition.

Archival sources show that even after the signing of the Treaty of Wuchale, Italy continued to arm Menelik. Later that same year, Ras Makonnen, the Emperor's cousin, traveled to Rome and received on Ethiopia's behalf a significant gift from King Umberto Italy: 39,000 rifles and 28 cannons (Pankhurst 1965). This support would later be remembered with irony and scorn. A popular Ethiopian song composed after the Italian invasion satirized Italy's misjudgment with the following lyrics:

"What kind of fools are the men of the country of the Europeans! Having themselves made the instruments of their death, they presented them to us. With the Wetterley which they brought, with the munitions they brought, Menelik roasted and crackled this barley from overseas (Pankhurst 1965)*."*

After nearly three decades of systematic arms procurement—beginning in the era of Shoa and culminating in the years leading up to the First Italo-Ethiopian War—Menelik had amassed a powerful and well-equipped military force. Far from being ill-prepared, Ethiopia entered the conflict with considerable firepower, outnumbering Italian forces in rifles by a wide margin. During the First Italo-Ethiopian War, estimates of the Ethiopian army's strength varied, but most accounts agree that it was immense. Menelik is believed to have mobilized Ethiopia's force of 100,000 men (80,000 with rifles, 9,000 cavalry, and 42 artillery batteries) with remaining Ethiopian troops carrying diverse arms from swords to spears to annihilate Italy's 20,000-strong army (Markakis 2011: 3), which demonstrating that this was no 'primitive' warfare but organized state resistance: 'Unlike the rest of the continent, European imperialism met its match in this corner of Africa' (Markakis 2011: 3). In stark contrast, the Italian forces could field only 14,519 rifles, 56 cannons, and no cavalry (Pankhurst 1965). Apart from a marginal advantage in heavy artillery, the Italians were decisively outmatched in nearly every aspect of the conflict.

Now we need to answer an important question that influences the final outcome of the effectiveness of prewar military power, which is, did the importation of military equipment by Ethiopian Emperor Menelik weaken the state's military strength? It did not radically. On the contrary, it reflected strategic foresight, institutional capacity, and national determination. First, the acquisition of arms was not a passive response to external threats, but a deliberate and proactive move rooted in Ethiopia's internal drive to unify the state, prepare for colonial confrontation, and reinforce a martial ethos. Rather than relying solely on foreign assistance, Menelik actively pursued weapons procurement as a sovereign decision, revealing the state's initiative in shaping its own defense trajectory. Second, Menelik skillfully exploited the rivalries between European powers—particularly Italy and France—to obtain weapons, demonstrating strategic acumen in foreign relations. This pragmatic diplomacy allowed Ethiopia to secure arms without being fully dependent on any one colonial actor. Such maneuvering underscored the political intelligence of Ethiopia's military leadership, which was able to manipulate the geopolitical landscape to its own advantage. Third, the state's capacity to procure arms on a large scale also reveals its internal administrative strength. Moreover, the Ethiopian military's understanding of modern technology was unusually advanced for an African power of the period. The types, volume, and variety of weapons imported, the careful coordination of transportation routes, and the timing of pre-war stockpiling all reflect a well-informed military leadership. This technological awareness stood in stark contrast to colonial narratives that stereotyped African armies as primitive or disorganized. Importantly, Ethiopia's refusal to rely on mercenary forces—despite having the capacity to do so—speaks volumes about its military culture. Unlike Italy, which employed large numbers of Eritrean askaris during the war, Menelik's Ethiopia prioritized cultivating its own national army. Emphasis was placed on training troops familiar with local terrain, mastering war tactics, learning weapon use, and building cohesion and morale —all of which contributed to military effectiveness beyond mere firepower itself. Finally, Ethiopia's defense preparations were not wholly reliant on imports. Historical records confirm domestic arms production as well—for instance, Emperor Tewodros had earlier succeeded in manufacturing artillery (Caulk 1972; Pankhurst 1965), and Menelik's regime produced some gunpowder though at limited scale (Zaghi Carlo)[12].

[12] Only a cartridge dactory was opened and a new powder mill built.

This further highlights Ethiopia's ability to develop indigenous military capacity alongside external procurement. In sum, Menelik's arms acquisitions reinforced, rather than weakened, Ethiopia's military power by blending foreign diplomacy, internal institution-building, and a strong national defense ethos.

Following the discussion on imported weaponry, this section turns to examine Ethiopia's practical military experience, training initiatives, and organizational structure.

From the time Menelik II became ruler of Shoa in 1865, he embarked on a systematic campaign of territorial expansion that would lay the foundations for modern Ethiopia (Kofi 1970). His early conquests began with campaigns against the Oromo, culminating in the Battle of Embabo in 1882, where his forces achieved a decisive victory and absorbed the region into the expanding Shoan domain (Hassen 1994). Between 1875 and 1898, Menelik extended imperial control over large swathes of southern Ethiopia (Pankhurst 1968), including Kaffa, Jimma, Wallaga, Arusi, Harar, Ogaden, Bale, Sidamo, and Beni-Shangul (Perham 1969). By the time he was crowned emperor in 1889, Menelik had more than doubled the size of his kingdom, incorporating the southwestern monarchies of Guma, Ghera, Goma, Limmu-Ennarea, and Jimma Kaka, as well as regions such as Gurage, Arusi, and the strategically vital city-state of Harar (Kofi 1970). This expansion marked the transformation of a regional polity into a multi-ethnic empire and set the stage for the modern Ethiopian state.

Alongside territorial conquest, Menelik focused intently on military modernization. Beginning in 1877, he enlisted three Swiss advisors to train Ethiopian craftsmen in arms manufacturing. The most influential among them, Alfred Ilg, became Menelik's chief advisor for over two decades. Under his guidance, Ethiopia achieved a remarkable milestone—domestic rifle production using indigenous resources and local labor[13]. This initiative allowed Ethiopian workers to acquire the technical skills needed to manufacture firearms independently, a capability that proved crucial during major conflicts such as the First Italo-Ethiopian War. Menelik's practical experience in warfare—gained through years of sustained regional campaigns—also contributed

[13] Please refer to this link, https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-politics/life-of-a-swiss-who-engineered-change-in-ethiopia/3898064.

to the development of a capable, experienced military. These repeated engagements cultivated a core of veteran soldiers, war-tested commanders, and a refined strategic doctrine rooted in mobility, adaptability, and logistical coordination.

Equally important to Ethiopia's military development was Menelik's ability to unify domestic rivals. Through strategic negotiation and consensus-building, he forged alliances with powerful regional figures such as Ras Mengesha, Dejazmach Araya, and Ras Aregawi. According to Paulos Milkias, Menelik's success lay in his patience and tact: rather than alienating potential rivals, he created overlapping areas of interest and mutual benefit (Paulos Milkias 2005). This coalition-building enabled him to neutralize Italy's attempts to exploit internal divisions, thereby maintaining a unified national front. Menelik's political skills not only bolstered military recruitment and cohesion but also reinforced the legitimacy of central rule, contributing to a more integrated and resilient imperial administration.

Underlying Ethiopia's war effectiveness was a deeply rooted organizational structure inherited from earlier imperial traditions. The Ethiopian state maintained a dual civil-military hierarchy in which rank and function were tightly linked. Commanders held titles in Menelik period of time, such as ras (general), fitawrari (vanguard commander), kenyazmatch (right-flank commander), and grazmatch (left-flank commander) (John Markakis 2011), with many entrusted to govern provinces after proving themselves in war (Keller 1988: 38). This system promoted meritocracy, where war performance directly translated into administrative authority, ensuring that loyalty and competence were rewarded. This institutional coherence allowed the Ethiopian state to mobilize large armies, enforce taxation, and maintain political order across a vast and diverse empire.

The case of Ethiopia under Menelik II illustrates key aspects of Charles Tilly's theory of state formation, particularly his idea that "war made the state, and the state made war." Menelik's use of warfare as a tool for expansion, resource extraction, and internal consolidation reflects Tilly's predatory model, where the pursuit of coercive capacity leads to state development. Through conquest, Menelik absorbed new populations, extended imperial taxation, and secured access to labor and military manpower. The production of weapons domestically and the creation of training programs reflect Tilly's view that war forces rulers to build bureaucratic and technical

institutions. The integration of military and administrative functions also aligns with Tilly's notion that war-making encourages the institutional centralization necessary for sustained governance. Crucially, Menelik's success in unifying Ethiopia's regional factions into a centralized imperial structure demonstrates how internal pacification and external defense co-evolve—a central claim of Tilly's work.

In sum, the development of Ethiopia's military strength under Menelik II was not an isolated project but part of a broader state-building effort. Practical war experience, a coherent hierarchical structure, and diplomatic negotiation contributed to a formidable war-making apparatus that enabled Ethiopia not only to defend itself against colonial incursions but also to consolidate internal sovereignty.

During the war

While we have already analyzed Ethiopia's military capabilities prior to the war, it remains essential to evaluate the extent to which these resources were effectively employed in wartime. This section seeks to explore this issue.

In 1896, Emperor Menelik II led Ethiopian forces to a historic victory at the First Italo-Ethiopian War, decisively defeating an invading Italian army. This remarkable success was made possible by Ethiopia's ability to mobilize a massive and diverse fighting force. Estimates vary, but most sources agree that Menelik assembled between 90,000 and 120,000 troops (Rubenson 1976; Marcus 1975). Of these, approximately 80,000 were equipped with rifles, supported by 8,600 cavalrymen, 42 artillery and machine gun batteries, and nearly 20,000 lancers, spearmen, and swordsmen (Milkias 2005). The latter, although bearing traditional weapons, were ready to arm themselves with rifles taken from fallen comrades—a tactic that ensured sustained firepower during the war (Rubenson 1976; Marcus 1975).

Despite disparities in weaponry, Ethiopia's military capacity was formidable. The army's rifles, though mostly outdated European models—such as Remingtons, Martini-Henrys, Fusil Gras, Berdans, Mausers, Lebels, and Wetterlis—were substantial in number, totaling roughly 70,000 (Milkias 2005). Interestingly, 2,000 troops under Ras Sebhat and Dejazmach Hagos wielded Italian-issued rifles, having defected from enemy ranks (Milkias 2005). The bulk of these weapons had been

procured through years of arms trading, diplomatic maneuvering, and gifts from European powers. Menelik's victory, as some historians argue, was largely the result of combining imported modern weaponry with Ethiopia's pre-existing capacity for mass mobilization and military organization (Marcus 1995; Markakis 2011).

One of the most impressive aspects of Menelik's military strategy was the inclusion and integration of newly incorporated populations, particularly the Oromo. Although their incorporation into the empire had occurred only shortly before hostilities with Italy intensified, Menelik effectively neutralized potential dissent by appointing Oromo generals and co-opting regional elites into the imperial system. Oromo leaders such as Ras Gobana and other high-ranking officers played critical roles in the campaign, and their participation in the First Italo-Ethiopian War reflected Menelik's inclusive strategy (Markakis 2011). He promoted diverse ethnic elites—including Oromo and Tigrayan ministers—into positions of authority, helping to foster loyalty and national cohesion during a time of existential threat from Italy (Markakis 2011).

The tactical use of the forces at Adwa showcased Ethiopia's advanced understanding of war dynamics. First-hand accounts from observers such as Augustus Wylde describe the Ethiopian soldiers as highly effective combatants, demonstrating sharpshooting accuracy, rapid maneuverability, and exceptional coordination under pressure (Augustus Wylde 1901). Ethiopian light infantry moved at speeds reportedly four times faster than their European counterparts. Their ability to execute swift encirclements and flanking attacks was critical in overwhelming the Italian positions (Augustus Wylde 1901). Not only were Ethiopian troops well-armed and well-led—they were also courageous, mobile, and tactically astute.

As the war unfolded, Ethiopian forces adopted a bold and highly effective close-combat strategy. Skirmishers harassed Italian lines while the main body advanced using natural cover. Once close enough, they discarded their rifles, drew traditional weapons, and launched into ferocious hand-to-hand combat. Shield-bearing fighters targeted the heads and throats of their enemies, while mounted infantry hurled spears from the rear, breaking Italian ranks. This brutal, direct engagement destabilized Italian formations, leading to a breakdown in cohesion and morale. Women and farmers, as main noncombatants at the frontier of the war, also played a vital role in

defeating the Italians, which we will explore in detail in the next chapter from the perspective of national cohesion (Milkias 2005).

By 11 a.m., Ethiopian sharpshooters positioned on the surrounding highlands had inflicted devastating casualties. General Albertone's forces were the first to collapse under the combined weight of sustained fire and encirclement (Achille Bizzoni 1897). Communication between Italian divisions broke down entirely—messages were lost, delayed, or misinterpreted—rendering coordination impossible (Milkias 2005). The reserve forces, caught in the chaos, were scattered and overrun. In the final stages of the war, General Giuseppe Dabormida—unaware that the front lines had already fallen—led a desperate retreat, also met a tragic end by being killed along with his men. As eyewitnesses recounted, "the Abyssinians, wild with enthusiasm, redoubled their fire, and then rushed in upon them, reckless of losses or death" (Berkeley 1902).

The Ethiopian victory at Adwa was not merely a product of numerical superiority or luck—it reflected a high level of military effectiveness rooted in practical experience, strategic planning, and institutional strength. Menelik's forces demonstrated sophisticated logistical coordination, efficient use of outdated but reliable weapons, and the ability to integrate newly conquered regions into the national defense structure. Ethiopia's military effectiveness also relied on the blending of traditional combat practices with modern firearms, creating a hybrid warfare model uniquely adapted to its terrain and societal context. Most importantly, this effectiveness stemmed from a state apparatus capable of organizing, supplying, and motivating tens of thousands of soldiers across vast and diverse regions. In Tilly's terms, this was a state that "made war" not only to defend itself but to consolidate and legitimize its rule—thereby reinforcing the mutual reinforcement between military capacity and state-building.

After the war

The decade following the First Italo-Ethiopian War marked the peak of Emperor Menelik II's domestic authority and international prestige. By 1898, Ethiopia's territorial expansion and the foundational consolidation of a modern imperial state had largely been completed. Internally, challenges to Menelik's rule were minimal—significantly less formidable than those faced by his predecessors. Externally, his

decisive victory over Italy garnered widespread acclaim, with some foreign observers even likening him to Bismarck (Berkeley 1964). This diplomatic momentum culminated in the signing of a peace treaty in Addis Ababa on October 26, 1896 (Milkias 2005), which formally annulled the Treaty of Wuchale and confirmed Italy's recognition of Ethiopia's full sovereignty.

In next section, I would examine the impact of the Adwa victory on the formation of Ethiopia's modern bureaucratic institutions—most notably the military—highlighting the establishment of a standing army, the indirect governance of provincial territories, and the political consolidation achieved through aristocratic intermarriage. The evolution of these institutions created new demands for skilled personnel, prompting the foundation of modern schools, the introduction of foreign instructors and missionaries, and the sponsorship of overseas education. The emergence of this educated elite provided crucial intellectual support for Ethiopia's future development and laid the groundwork for reformist movements. These reformers advocated for the abolition of slavery, transformation of the land tenure system, and the liberalization of thought—seeking to translate the military triumph at Adwa into tangible social and economic progress, rather than allowing it to become a source of complacency.

Moreover, the victory opened new avenues for economic growth, trade, and the export of local products. The early political and military elites transitioned smoothly into the commercial sector, thereby maintaining their control over the country's economic foundations.

The construction of a modern Ethiopian army was driven by the urgent security challenges posed by imperial encroachments. By the turn of the twentieth century, Menelik II had assembled a formidable force comprising approximately 600,000 riflemen alongside countless traditionally armed warriors (Keller 1988: 37). Even before his formal ascension to the imperial throne, Menelik had already begun inviting foreign military experts—predominantly from France and Russia—to train his forces in the use of modern weaponry (Keller 1988: 37). Notable among these advisors were Pottier, M. Carrère, Zwiaguine, and Nicolai Stepanovitch Leontieff, who were engaged not only in military instruction but also in mapping tribal regions and directing campaigns in the southwestern frontiers prior to the First Italo-Ethiopian War (Pankhurst 1968: 562; Waugh 1936: 22). Under Menelik's leadership, two

crucial innovations marked Ethiopia's path toward state formation: the creation of a standing army and the introduction of a formalized salary system for soldiers (Keller 1988: 38). Nonetheless, despite efforts to restructure the military along European lines, traditional organizational patterns continued to exert a strong influence (Keller 1988: 38).

Although the victory at Adwa contributed to the development state building, Menelik faced the ongoing task of maintaining it. This postwar state building process mirrored the long term impact of war making. Much like early modern European monarchs who depended on regional nobility, Menelik co-opted local elites—known as balabbats—to serve as intermediaries between the imperial center and the peripheral regions (Crummey 2000: 225). Subordinate to the neftegna, emperor of Menelik, these local leaders played a key role in governance: they were tasked with resource extraction, tax collection, conflict mediation, and the enforcement of imperial law (Markakis 2011: 110). As Markakis observes, empires typically maintained existing regional power structures while cultivating new loyalists 'whose fate depended on that of the crown' (Markakis 2011: 110). In exchange for their services, balabbats were granted land and a 10% share of collected taxes, enabling them to ascend the social hierarchy and reinforcing Abyssinian dominance through a strategy that blended coercion with co-optation (Markakis 1973: 364).

The expansion of Ethiopia's administrative apparatus in the early 20th century—marked by the establishment of various governmental departments and customs institutions—created an urgent need for a trained bureaucratic class. In response, Menelik II founded the country's first modern school in 1908. The institution was staffed primarily by Coptic Orthodox Egyptian instructors, with French serving as the primary language of instruction, a practice that continued until English replaced it following the British occupation in 1941. After 1912, France further deepened its cultural footprint in Ethiopia by establishing Alliance Française schools in key urban centers such as Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa. The Tafari Makonnen School, founded by Tafari Makonnen (last Emperor Haile Selassie) in 1925, operated entirely in French and prepared students for official French government examinations, though Ethiopian supervisors were also appointed to oversee its administration. In 1930, the Ministry of Education was formally separated from church oversight, signaling a

major institutional shift. In the years that followed, the government expanded secular education by founding new schools across the country (Markaki 2011).

With comparison between Theodore II's education effort who limited to train Ethiopian youth in the area of weapons production and usage (Anno 2022), and those of what Menelik effort in education, we could clearly figure out how the international conflict, the preparation of counter invasion and war perception promote the development of education with the aim of nation modernization. Below examples vividly demonstrate developmental features of education in Menelik period of time, from which an lineal progress could be discovered.

Menelik II was a pioneering advocate of expanding access to education beyond the traditional aristocratic elite. He firmly believed that national progress beyond military was contingent upon the cultivation of an educated populace (Anno 2022). As a result, he initiated significant reforms to broaden educational opportunities. Notably, Menelik introduced co-education in Ethiopia's earliest modern schools and promoted the view that education and religion should remain distinct—though not in the strict sense of church-state separation—only until 1930, education was separated from church; but Menelik did a good start. He explicitly instructed French missionary teachers not to include religious instruction in the school curriculum (Ghelawdewos 2006).

In his efforts to modernize Ethiopia through education, Menelik also sought to challenge deep-rooted social prejudices toward manual labor. He issued a public proclamation affirming the dignity of labor, stating: "*They are not insulted for their profession. You who insult people, who use farm tools, turn my country barren. Insults to these people insult me, and those who do it will be imprisoned one year"* (Chris Prouty 1986). This decree reflected his desire to reframe manual work as honorable and essential to national development.

Recognizing the resistance of some families—who were reluctant to sacrifice their children's labor for schooling—Menelik imposed penalties on parents who withheld their children from education (Anno 2022). At the same time, he sought to maintain ties with the influential Coptic clergy by sponsoring the construction of new churches and the restoration of older ones (Anno 2022). Menelik envisioned education as a

synthesis of tradition and innovation, aiming to modernize Ethiopia while remaining grounded in its cultural and religious heritage.

The emergence of a modern-educated Ethiopian intelligentsia marked a significant shift in the country's socio-political landscape. These individuals were not only trained in clerical and accounting functions but also became outspoken critics of Ethiopia's stagnation and underdevelopment. Though not yet formally organized, they constituted a fervent reformist force. Often referred to by scholars as the 'Young Ethiopians', this early cohort laid the intellectual groundwork for the radical student movements that would arise in the 1960s and 1970s (Bahru Zewde 1991).

Their education was made possible through support from various sources since the success of First Italo-Ethiopian War, including the Europe's Church, governments of France, and Russia. Many of them had oversea experiences of study and returned with new ideas and skills. For instance, Gezaw and Dagne received medical training and assisted Menelik II in founding a hospital in 1910; Tekle Hawaryat Tekle Mariam would later go on to draft the 1931 Ethiopian Constitution. Collectively, this generation of intellectuals, shaped by foreign education and international experience, became a critical voice against the complacency that followed Ethiopia's victory at Adwa (Bahru Zewde 1991).

They advocated a series of comprehensive reforms aimed at translating political independence into tangible socioeconomic progress. Their proposals included the implementation of a standardized taxation system, the introduction of religious freedom, revisions to the traditional legal code Fetha Nagast, simplification of the complex Amharic script, unification of the customs system, and reforms to the military and currency systems. However, two issues were deemed most urgent: the abolition of the exploitative gabbar-gult system(the taxpayer stick to land and the tax collector on behalf of emperor) and the expansion of education (Bahru Zewde 1991).

The structure and characteristics of Ethiopian trade in the early 20th century were also directly shaped by the geopolitical landscape following the First Italo-Ethiopian War. Ethiopia's continued independence, coupled with its geographical proximity to European colonial territories, prompted external imperial powers to pursue commercial penetration strategies in the Ethiopian "hinterland." For example, Britain

sought to redirect trade from southwestern Ethiopia toward Sudan via Gambela—a port leased from Menelik II after the 1902 Anglo-Egyptian boundary agreement. British influence also extended into southern Ethiopia and the Harar region from British East Africa and British Somaliland, accompanied by the establishment of consulates in Harar and other strategic locations. During this period, *"missionaries, technicians, businessmen, geographers—Europeans of many nationalities and professions—began entering the area"* (Holcomb & Sisai 1990: 92).

Domestically, Ethiopian commerce remained largely localized, with indigenous merchants engaging in internal trade. Meanwhile, the ruling elite gradually transitioned from militaristic endeavors to commercial enterprise, forging profitable alliances with foreign traders. Emperor Menelik II provided loans to Indian merchants, while Empress Taytu founded Addis Ababa's first hotel and explored the establishment of a national bank (Bahru Zewde 1991).

However, for the ruling elite, tariff revenues emerged as the most appealing economic instrument. Former merchants, such as the naggadras, ascended to prominent fiscal positions within the state apparatus, gaining unprecedented administrative power. In 1907, Menelik II founded the Ministry of Commerce and Customs, aiming to systematize tariff collection and boost state revenue (Bahru Zewde 1991). The ministry was structured into five departments, with two dedicated specifically to customs affairs, underscoring the growing importance of regulated international trade to Ethiopia's early modern statecraft since gaining independence from the First Italo-Ethiopian War (Bahru Zewde 1991).

One of the most prominent European advisors to Emperor Menelik II was the Swiss engineer Alfred Ilg, widely regarded as his "best-known foreign advisor" (Rubenson 1976: 19). Ilg collaborated with the French entrepreneur Léon Chefneux in founding the company responsible for constructing the railway connecting Addis Ababa to Djibouti (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990: 126). The railway project, a landmark of imperial modernization, was the result of close cooperation between the emperor and various foreign experts (Pankhurst 1968: 304–306).

The Italians residing in the Italian area of Addis Ababa were well treated and assigned to work on road and bridge construction projects (Bahru Zewde 1991), which played a

substantial role in the development of the state infrastructure. These infrastructure projects were instrumental in facilitating the extraction of resources from distant provinces, thereby reinforcing the feasibility and durability of a centralized Ethiopian state (Keller 1988: 41). Advances in communication technologies allowed the emperor to restore rapid links with the external world while also streamlining internal governance and the dissemination of official information (Marcus 1975: 200). Roads, in particular, were essential for the mobilization of troops and administrators and served as key channels for the movement of capital and enslaved individuals whose labor underpinned imperial revenue generation (Keller 1988: 41).

In addition, Menelik II was the first Ethiopian monarch to establish a centralized government organized around a cabinet system with designated ministries. On October 25, 1907, he created a cabinet composed of nine ministers. Afterward, Iyasu began to exercise political authority under the supervision of the Council of Ministers (Ghelawdewos 2006). In a structure resembling European cabinet models, the emperor appointed ministers to oversee nine key domains: justice, war, interior, commerce and foreign affairs, finance, agriculture, public works, the imperial court, and the office of the pen (Ghelawdewos 2006). This move represented a major institutional innovation aimed at consolidating imperial governance and ensuring continuity amid rising external and internal pressures.

In summary, the evolution of the Ethiopian state under Emperor Menelik II broadly conforms to Charles Tilly's theory that "war made the state, and the state made war." The looming threat of imperial encroachment and the imperatives of internal consolidation after the victory at Adwa stimulated significant state-building efforts. Menelik institutionalized a standing army, introduced salary-based military service though generating limited effect, and employed foreign advisors to professionalize Ethiopia's armed forces. Bureaucratically, the establishment of a cabinet government in 1907 marked a critical move toward a modern centralized administration. Simultaneously, the expansion of infrastructural projects such as railways, postal systems, and customs administration improved the state's extractive and coordinative capacity, while also reinforcing the sovereign's legitimacy. The post-Adwa context also facilitated the emergence of a reformist intelligentsia, often trained abroad or through missionary support, who advocated for legal codification, tax reform, and

modernization of education—demonstrating that the pressures of war catalyzed both administrative development and ideological innovation. In these respects, Ethiopia during this period reflects many of the central dynamics theorized by Tilly's, including the linkages among coercion, capital extraction, and the institutional consolidation of state power.

Despite these convergences, the Ethiopian case also deviates from key assumptions of Tilly's theory. First, the expansion of state capacity was only partially institutionalized; instead of creating a stable bureaucratic apparatus based on legal-rational authority, Menelik's regime relied heavily on patrimonial networks, military settler rule (naftagna), and indirect governance through co-opted local elites (balabbats). Tax were partly extraction through slave, free labor, tribute of provincial rulers, good stuffs, land exploitation. Second, the consolidation of legitimacy was uneven and exclusionary. While the imperial center projected an image of modern sovereignty, the southern and western peripheries were integrated through violent conquest and enforced cultural assimilation, with limited regard for social consent or inclusivity. Third, the reformist intelligentsia lacked institutional platforms to effect sustained change and remained dependent on royal patronage, limiting their capacity to transform the state from within. Finally, practices such as large-scale slave raiding and land expropriation in the south highlight the persistence of predatory governance, undercutting the normative claim that warfare necessarily produces legitimate and responsive states. Thus, while the Ethiopian experience partially reflects Tilly's theory, it also underscores the enduring tension between coercive consolidation and inclusive legitimacy in the state-building process.

National Cohesion

Before the war

Ethiopia, as a historically multi-ethnic empire, faced inherent challenges to national cohesion in the years leading up to the First Italo-Ethiopian War. Prior to the conflict, Emperor Menelik II expanded the empire through the military annexation of numerous provinces. This expansion, often marked by violence, forced assimilation, oppressive land tenure systems, and exploitative taxation that had burdened the

Ethiopian people for generations, raised serious concerns regarding the viability of national unity. Nonetheless, Menelik's leadership proved critical. He effectively harnessed his personal charisma and political persuasion to unify diverse ethnic groups, regional leaders, and social sectors. In the face of an external threat, Menelik's ability to galvanize support across ethnic and provincial lines helped catalyze the emergence of a collective national identity—an evolving consciousness of being "Ethiopian"—particularly during the war itself.

While war can provide a legitimate justification for taxation and military expansion, the ultimate success of state-building efforts depends on the effective coordination and mobilization of resources. The public's interpretation of the threat posed by external enemies, their imagination of the benefits of victory, and their perceived necessity to unite and resist all hinge on the rhetorical strategies of political elites. Therefore, even before war breaks out, the capacity to communicate risk, interpret unfolding events, and shape popular sentiment is vital. The political construction of war through language—its framing, urgency, and stakes—is intangible but crucial, just like national cohesion itself. For this reason, this analysis places linguistic discourse at the center of national unity and state-building, especially as catalyzed by the threat of foreign invasion.

Given Ethiopia's large and diverse population, Menelik's political outreach likely began with provincial elites. As previously discussed, both Menelik and his predecessor Yohannes employed systems of indirect rule to manage the empire's far-flung provinces. Thus, building consensus and loyalty among the country's political elite was a necessary first step in any national war mobilization. In this context, Queen Taitu emerged as an influential figure whose personal resolve and unwavering defiance in the face of foreign aggression provided an inspirational model of patriotic leadership. Her strength and conviction played a key role in reinforcing elite solidarity.

Taitu's active role in Ethiopia's diplomatic affairs became especially prominent following the revelation of the Italian version of thesis XVII of the 1889 Treaty of Wuchale, which illegitimately claimed Ethiopia as an Italian protectorate (Minale). As Prouty observes, Taitu was more skeptical than Menelik about the intentions of foreign diplomats in Addis Ababa and did not share her husband's enthusiasm for

European innovations (Minale). Her suspicions, widely corroborated by oral tradition, positioned her as a staunch defender of Ethiopian sovereignty (Pankhurst 1996).

Upon discovering that the treaty had effectively reduced Ethiopia to a colonial vassal of Italy, Taitu refused to compromise. Her response exemplified the courage and political integrity of a leader determined to safeguard national sovereignty. Through her bold rhetoric and strategic actions, she bolstered elite unity and patriotism. She reminded her husband of the treaty's humiliation, publicly condemned Italian envoys, warned of the dangers of appeasement, and firmly criticized Ethiopian officials involved in the treaty's misinterpretation. For example, she rebuked the treaty's translator, Grazmach Yosseph, and questioned Aleqa Atme's role in the affair. More significantly, she denounced Menelik's willingness to compromise by invoking the legacy of Emperor Yohannes IV, stating: *"King John never wanted to cede an inch of territory… he died for this, and you after such an example, wish to sell your country? Who will [want to] write your history?"* (Marcus 1975). Emphasizing her own determination, she declared: *"I am a woman and I do not love war, but rather than accepting this [thesis XVII], I prefer war"* (Marcus 1975). To regional leaders, she issued a powerful warning: *"Yield nothing, what you give away today will be a future ladder against your fortress and tomorrow the Italians will come up it into your domains. If you must lose lands, lose them at least with your strong right arms"* (Greenfield 1965).

These pronouncements were made in the early-to-mid 1890s and during the First Italo-Ethiopian War itself on March 1, 1896. Not only did Empress Taitu accompany the imperial army with her own contingent, but she also played a vital role in rallying demoralized soldiers and restoring morale on the war. Her contributions extended beyond symbolic value—they actively reinforced national unity at a critical moment in Ethiopia's struggle for survival.

In contrast, Menelik strategically used religion as a unifying force, framing the anti-colonial struggle as a divine mission. By emphasizing Ethiopia's Orthodox Christian identity and portraying foreign invaders as a threat to both faith and homeland, he cultivated a shared sense of "us" among Ethiopia's diverse populations. In an 1891 appeal to the Queen of England, he stated: *"If distant powers seek to partition Africa, I will never remain passive… Since the Almighty has protected Ethiopia until now, I*

firmly believe God will continue to bless and expand her (Guan & Fang 1995).*"* In 1893, he declared, *"Ethiopia places her trust in no one—she lifts her hands only to God* (Guan & Fang 1995).*"* In 1894, Menelik issued a covert imperial-wide call to arms, urging even the most remote villages to send recruits for military training. He warned: *"Enemies have now come upon us to ruin the country and to change our religion… With the help of God, I will not deliver up my country to them* (Guan & Fang 1995).*"*

By September 1895, his public proclamation struck a decisive tone: "Foreign invaders have crossed our sacred borders, threatening both our faith and homeland… Let all able-bodied citizens join this sacred struggle—none may remain idle when the motherland calls (Beide)." This moral call to arms resonated powerfully. One popular song captured the sentiment: "The bite of a black serpent may heal, but the white serpent's venom brings irrevocable doom (Beide)"—a metaphorical warning against colonial domination. Menelik also pointed to the tragic fate of other African nations under colonial rule, reinforcing the urgency of Ethiopia's defense.

Through a combination of stirring declarations, religious appeals, and political incentives—such as military bonus and social mobility—Menelik helped elevate national cohesion to unprecedented levels. All sectors of society participated in the war effort. Citizens contributed food, silver, and other supplies, while Empress Taitu personally donated her gold, jewelry, and valuables (Chen & Liao 2000). The government quickly raised 2 million lire through an emergency tax—one silver dollar per two cattle—which was used to repay Italian debts and procure vital weapons (Chen & Liao 2000).

Meanwhile, Italy employed various strategies to undermine Ethiopia's unity, including covert plans to incite internal rebellion. Ethiopia's history had long been characterized by elite rivalries, regional conflicts, and fragmentation. As Rubenson writes, *"Rivalry and disunity… were prevalent facts in the shaping of Ethiopian politics* (Sven Rubenson 1976).*"* Yet the political elite, aware of these vulnerabilities, set aside internal divisions and stood united in the face of external aggression. Their internal solidarity, combined with preemptive military mobilization and the widespread dissemination of nationalist rhetoric, fostered cohesion across all layers of Ethiopian society—from nobles to commoners.

This internal cohesion was further strengthened by early military preparations and an empire-wide mobilization, framed and fueled by an overarching narrative of national unity and shared destiny. These efforts resulted in a rare convergence of all segments of Ethiopian society—from aristocrats to provincial leaders to common citizens—under a singular national cause. By rallying the majority of regional elites and ordinary people alike against a common external enemy, Emperor Menelik was not only defending Ethiopian sovereignty, but also laying the foundation for the concept of a centralized national government as the embodiment of collective identity and unity.

Ultimately, the triumph at Adwa did more than repel a colonial invasion. It acted as a catalyst for the creation of a modern Ethiopian empire-state, where the ideals of centralized authority, national cohesion, and shared purpose gained lasting political and symbolic significance.

During the war

Across class boundaries, individuals from different ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds came together in the national struggle against the Italian invasion. The process of war preparation and the unfolding of the war itself catalyzed the emergence of unprecedented national cohesion. Among the groups that significantly embodied this unity were women—ranging from court ladies and royal attendants to slaves, wives and concubines of officials and soldiers, and minstrels—representing a wide range of social positions and ages. In what follows, we focus specifically on how this diverse group of women exemplified national cohesion under the pressures of war.

The Adwa campaign mobilized thousands of women camp-followers who demonstrated remarkable bravery and resolve. At the forefront of these women stood Empress Taitu herself, whose leadership epitomized the deepened sense of national solidarity brought about by the war. Although these dynamics could also be analyzed in the context of military mobilization and logistical support, they are discussed here

from the perspective of collective resilience and cohesion, fulfilling the broader criteria of national unity.

Despite lacking modern military equipment, these women—as well as many non-combatant men—were armed with traditional weapons like spears, shields, and swords and stood ready to engage in combat if necessary. Their presence on the war underscored the triumph of narrative-driven courage and national unity over fear, physical frailty, and outdated resources. According to Berkeley, approximately 30,000 non-combatant followers accompanied the army (Berkeley 1969, 156–57). *"It is not an army [but] an invasion, the transplanting of the whole people."* Major Salsa, who visited Menelik's court after the war, reported that the Ethiopian forces included 130,000 combatants and an additional 60,000 to 70,000 servants—both men and women (Tekle Tsadiq 1983 E.C., 266–67). Italian General Baratieri estimated the number of camp-followers at around 40,000 (Berkley 1969, 157). The widespread civilian participation, especially by women, attests not only to the strength of grassroots mobilization but also to the Ethiopian state's remarkable organizational capacity in the face of national crisis.

From the beginning of the campaign—through marches, encampments, and on the war—women carried out a wide array of essential duties. Their initial responsibility upon departing from their homes was transporting a variety of household and cooking implements: pots for brewing tej and tella, pans for baking bread, utensils for preparing wat (stew), flour mills, jars of honey, drinking horns, and other fragile items unsuited for animal transport. (Wylde 1901, 105; Gebre Selassie 1959 E.C., 229). The scale of their contribution to logistical transport was immense, yet it also proved to be the most physically demanding task. The journey from the capital stretched over 800 kilometers, often along treacherous terrain crowded with men and livestock, winding up and down mountainous paths under harsh climatic conditions (Gebre Selassie 1959 E.C., 255; Pankhurst 1990b, 260; Tekle Tsadiq 1983 E.C., 266-67). Without access to modern hiking or mountaineering gear, women sometimes had to crawl on all fours with heavy burdens strapped to their shoulders or waists (Berkeley 1969). Italian prisoners captured after the First Italo-Ethiopian War confessed they were unable to match the Ethiopian army's endurance, as the latter maintained an unbroken

pace until reaching their designated campsites-- typically marched 10 to 20 miles per day (Berkeley 1969, 48).

In essence, the roles of Ethiopian women were clearly defined and vital: they were chiefly responsible for logistical operations, including the preparation of food, securing water sources, and transporting military equipment. The long and arduous journey imposed extreme physical demands—not only on trained male soldiers, but even more so on non-military women burdened with equipment and limited physical strength. Yet, despite these conditions, Ethiopian women displayed extraordinary resilience, endurance, discipline, and unity. Confronted with national peril, they rose to the occasion with courage and solidarity, symbolizing the depth of national cohesion forged by the war (Markakis 2011).

In addition to these roles, women also took on a range of technical and physical responsibilities: they cleared roadblocks, dug trenches, constructed fortifications, tended to the wounded, distributed weapons, gathered intelligence, and disrupted enemy communication lines; Alongside their male counterparts, women also guarded supplies, ammunition, livestock, and prisoners at both the central camp and surrounding areas (Paulos 1986 E.C., 177; Gizaw 1956 E.C., 99; Gebre Selassie 1959 E.C., 265; Tadesse 1988 E.C., 95). These activities further highlight the integral role of women in sustaining the Ethiopian war effort—not merely as supporters behind the scenes, but as active agents of national defense and unity.

Under the looming threat of war, which endangered both individual lives and national survival, Ethiopian women played critical roles in wartime intelligence gathering, often motivated by the encouragement of Empress Taytu and other non-combatant women. Despite the potential dangers of exposure, many women used personal wisdom and strategic ingenuity to contribute meaningfully to the war effort. According to Wylde, “many of the women who had free access to the Italian camp were actually spies working for Menelik. They were extensively utilized to gather intelligence and were able to secure employment within officers’ households, even accompanying the troops on their marches” (1901, 102–103). Some women went even further, engaging directly in combat by taking up rifles left behind by fallen soldiers. The women of Adigrat, for instance, reportedly harassed Italian forces and severed telegraph lines by grinding them between two stones (Prouty 1986, 153).

Other women played vital roles in unifying fragmented Ethiopian units, climbing to hilltops to observe troop movements and signaling from afar to coordinate operations.

Additionally, women became a moral force throughout the campaign. As the troops marched, they were often accompanied by songs, laughter, and spirited displays that boosted morale. *"They sang, laughed, and frolicked as though attending a festival,"* wrote Antonelli (Teferi 1971, 142–143; Tekle Tsadiq 1983 E.C., 22–27). At the First Italo-Ethiopian War itself, women rallied the fighters through powerful war cries and chants. It was not uncommon for women to shout chilling exhortations such as *"Kill! Kill! The brave man will bring me a trophy"* (Prouty 1986, 157). When some soldiers hesitated on the war, Empress Taytu is said to have shouted with all her strength, *"Courage! Victory is ours! Strike!"* Her cry reinvigorated the troops, who, inspired by a woman's courage, could not flee and returned to the fight (Gebre Selassie 1959 E.C., 266; translated by Prouty 1986, 156–157). These accounts highlight how war catalyzed women's deep sense of identity and patriotism, allowing them to disregard personal danger, outdated equipment, and harsh war conditions in the defense of their nation.

Not only women but also the local populations in Adwa and its surrounding areas actively participated in intelligence work. Menelik had widespread grassroots support, especially as the Italian colonial policy of land expropriation and racial discrimination intensified Ethiopian patriotism. Local villagers willingly guided Ethiopian forces along strategic paths and reported enemy movements (Minale). Simultaneously, they misled Italian troops by providing false maps and misinformation. According to Berkeley, Ethiopian spies included both men and women and *"moved freely to and from the Italian camp, which had already fallen into disarray in the weeks preceding Adwa"* (1969, 253). During the war, a notable example emerged when an Ethiopian volunteered to guide Italian troops—yet his true mission was to lead them into a pre-arranged Ethiopian trap; Even when offered rewards by the Italians, he firmly refused, remaining steadfast in his loyalty (Jonas, R. 2011).

This national cohesion not only showcased the bravery and intelligence of ordinary women but also underscored Empress Taytu's strategic military talent. One of her critical proposals was to cut off the Italians' water supply by encircling them. In the early hours of January 9, 1896, a contingent of 900 men from Taytu's camp infiltrated

the ravine in accordance with her plan, braving numerous hazards; There, they built barricades for protection and maintained their position for two weeks, enduring constant fighting. Throughout, Empress Taytu personally ensured their supplies of food and water (Gebre Selassie 1959 E.C., 247). Eventually, this shortage of water compelled the Italian soldiers to surrender unconditionally and abandon their fort on January 21, 1896.

The First Italo-Ethiopian War reflected not only Ethiopia's military might but also its extraordinary organizational strength and national unity. Diverse provincial forces joined the campaign, including Negus Tekle Haimanot's Gojame Amhara infantry and cavalry; Ras Makonnen's mixed Amhara-Oromo-Gurage troops from Harar; Ras Mikael's Wallo cavalry; Tigrayan units led by Ras Mengesha and Ras Alula; Menelik's elite Mehal Sefari (predominantly Amhara, Oromo, and Gurage); Empress Taytu's Yejju warriors; Ras Wolle's Amhara soldiers from Gondar; Wagshum Gwangul's Agaw fighters; Dejazmach Bashir's contingent; and Wallaga's Oromo cavalry (Paulos Milkias 2005). A notable contribution also came from Azabo Rayya Oromo defectors who left the Italian side to fight under Ras Alula and Ras Mengesha Yohannes, the son of the late Emperor Yohannes IV (Paulos Milkias 2005).

As eyewitness Berkeley wrote: *"Every tukul and village in every remote glen of Ethiopia sent out warriors in response to the war drum"* (1969, 155). Adwa was a true example of nationwide mobilization, not merely driven by professional combatants but by the active participation of civilians from across all segments of society. The campaign was sustained by a highly organized logistical system: the Gindebel unit, 7,000–8,000 strong, managed food supplies and equipment; the Chagn and Quami units transported goods for high-ranking officers; the Desta unit erected camp structures, including the imperial tents; the Wore Genu unit was in charge of livestock; and the Satin Chagn unit—numbering around 4,000 and fully armed—escorted provisions and materials, many of which came from the Jimma region (Paulos Milkias 2005). The camp layout, centered around imperial tents, reflected traditional organization and hierarchy (Gabre-Selassie).

These diverse regional forces were strategically distributed across Ethiopia's varied topography—occupying highlands, lowlands, ridges, and central zones—in a cruciform defensive formation that allowed them to respond to threats from any

direction (John Markakis 2011). Reserve troops were carefully positioned to execute ambushes and provide mutual reinforcement (John Markakis 2011). Their tactical adaptability and disciplined coordination, forged through prior combat experience and survival instinct, allowed Ethiopian forces to scale mountains under harsh weather conditions, remain on alert during war lulls, and use natural features like riverbanks and ridges for effective training. This coordinated structure not only strengthened war effectiveness but also contributed to the development of a more centralized and cohesive state.

Emperor Menelik II and Empress Taytu Betul, accompanied by high-ranking regional leaders (Rases), established their headquarters at the Church of Ide-Gerima. From this secure yet central position, they occasionally moved forward to inspire troops and issue direct orders, but primarily coordinated war operations from the rear (Paulos Milkias 2005). This strategic positioning enabled them to maintain command while ensuring safety, while the flexible structure of the frontline allowed rapid decision-making under fast-changing combat conditions.

On the war, spiritual leaders were also visibly engaged. Monks, priests, and nuns could be seen donning sheepskin coats or straw hats, praying fervently, encouraging fatigued soldiers, and invoking divine intervention. They urged the troops never to abandon their posts until victory was achieved (Gabre-Selassie).

Ultimately, the First Italo-Ethiopian War became the embodiment of Ethiopia's national spirit—a form of total national participation that transcended social class, region, religion, and age; Even the clergy played critical roles, spiritually fortifying the soldiers (Gabre-Selassie). According to historian Gabre-Selassie, this massive collective action was more than a military triumph; it symbolized deep national identity and solidarity. The Zemecha tradition, deeply embedded in Ethiopian culture, served both as a moral bond among citizens and as a cathartic expression of national duty. This tradition remains a vital component of Ethiopia's national consciousness, highlighting how the victory at Adwa was not merely a war success but a lasting testament to collective will, cohesion, and organizational capacity—a legacy that continues to shape the country's development to this day (Gabre-Selassie).

After the war

For dominant groups such as the Amhara and Tigray, the victory at the First Italo-Ethiopian War significantly enhanced their sense of collective identity. The triumph produced profound psychological rewards—Ethiopians basked in national pride, a renewed sense of independence, and, according to some observers, even a sense of superiority over other African populations who had been subjected to colonial humiliation (Teshale Tibebu 1996). This post-Adwa spirit cultivated a distinctive Ethiopian worldview and instilled a lasting confidence in the national psyche. Over time, this elevated consciousness would become a driving force in state-building efforts, particularly in the formation of military and bureaucratic institutions, as previously discussed.

However, for the groups that had been heavily exploited during the war—whose resources and manpower were mobilized to maximize the empire's chance of victory and to strengthen state-building—the postwar period did not bring inclusion. Instead, they remained largely marginalized even after the war had ended.

Following the defeat of the Italians, Emperor Menelik finally had the opportunity to address domestic challenges. While Menelik had expanded the empire through the colonization of the south, he also recognized that achieving genuine national unity would be difficult. Allegiance from the newly conquered southern populations was not guaranteed—especially in the absence of an external threat. This posed a critical question: how could long-term centralization of power and stability be ensured? Menelik acknowledged the importance of national construction, but instead of adopting a more inclusive or reformist approach, he largely relied on the same coercive methods used in the prewar period.

In the southern provinces, exploitation continued unabated. These regions were mined for natural resources, subjected to slave raids, tributes, and heavy taxation. At the same time, local cultures and traditions were relegated to a subordinate status (Tilahune, Hawi 2016). For the conquered peoples of the south, participation in the political and social life of the emerging Ethiopian state was only possible under strict conditions: adopting Amharic—the lingua franca of Menelik's empire—and converting to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity (Marcus 1995: 2). As Marcus (1995: 2) notes, this process of assimilation was tightly controlled. He (1966: 275) also observed that *"when the Chiefs left their provinces [in newly conquered Galla lands],*

they were followed by clerics transporting the Tabot [Ark], sacred objects and bells. In all places where pagans once worshipped, a church was constructed." Furthermore, Menelik systematically imposed Amharic names in order to reinforce Abyssinian dominance and cultural hegemony.

Education policy during Menelik's reign further entrenched inequality. No schools were established to educate Oromo populations or other southern groups (Daniel Gemtessa 2014). The only formal school—the Menelik School—was located in the capital and reserved for the emperor's own ethnic group. There was no real effort to develop mass media or implement education as a means of cultivating a shared national identity. Instead, attempts at nation-building remained limited to aggressive Christianization and the forceful erasure of alternative belief systems (Daniel Gemtessa 2014). Cultural and linguistic standardization was achieved through coercion: Amharic was declared the sole official language, and other languages and cultural expressions were systematically suppressed or erased.

In cases where northern soldiers fathered children with southern women, the children were often raised by the soldier's northern wife in accordance with Abyssinian cultural values (Marcus 1975: 194). This policy of assimilation also elevated the status of some Oromo women through their roles as mistresses of northern elites (Marcus 1975: 194). State-led population transfers further enforced this integrationist policy—northerners were resettled in the south, and southern individuals were sometimes relocated north (Daniel Gemtessa 2014). Such initiatives aimed to overwrite the distinct historical and cultural identities of conquered communities by forcing them into the broader Ethiopian national narrative, which was defined exclusively by Abyssinian traditions.

Marginalization was not limited to the southern provinces. The Tigrayan population also experienced exclusion, particularly as a result of Menelik's strategic neglect of the northern regions. This decision ultimately severed Ethiopia's access to the sea, a loss that fostered a sense of betrayal among Tigrayans and contributed to growing minority grievances—grievances that would later evolve into secessionist sentiments. Although the immediate fallout did not culminate in political collapse—thanks in part to Menelik's military strength—these unresolved traumas deeply undermined the legitimacy of the state-building project. While temporarily suppressed, these tensions

laid the groundwork for enduring instability that would resurface in later years (Paulos Milkias 2005).

According to Charles Tilly's predatory theory of war making and state building, the development of national cohesion before, during, and after the First Italo-Ethiopian War can be assessed through two key dimensions: first, the enhancement of centralization and state capacity; and second, the legitimacy and social integration embodied in the extension of citizenship rights. These dimensions serve as fundamental indicators in the construction of a war-driven state making.

From the perspective of state capacity, Ethiopia's experience closely aligns with Tilly's theoretical framework. Prior to the conflict, faced with a multi-ethnic society marked by fragmented loyalties, Menelik effectively consolidated diverse provincial forces at the center by co-opting local political elites, employing religion as a unifying force, and leveraging the imminent threat of foreign invasion. This mobilization intensified during the war, as troops from various regions were integrated into a large-scale, cross-regional military force under imperial command, demonstrating the central government's ability to coordinate and unify complex regional structures. Additionally, the empire exhibited a relatively sophisticated military bureaucracy, evident in logistics units in strategic deployment and command systems. After the war, the central authority further extended its direct control over border areas through policies of linguistic assimilation, religious propagation, and population resettlement, thereby fostering centralized state development along the classic "war promotes state-building" trajectory.

However, when examining national legitimacy and social integration, Ethiopia reveals a pronounced structural imbalance. While the war indeed fostered widespread national solidarity—uniting nobles, soldiers, women, and religious figures alike in a shared ethos of collective participation and sacrifice—this legitimacy remained largely emotional and symbolic, lacking durable institutional foundations. Elite figures such as Queen Taitu successfully galvanized upper-class consensus through assertive diplomacy and inspirational rhetoric, while the broader populace was incorporated into war narratives grounded in religion and national survival. Yet, postwar realities for the subjugated southern ethnic groups were starkly different: despite their contributions of manpower and resources, they were denied meaningful

citizenship rights. Their languages, religions, and cultures faced forced assimilation, political participation was restricted, and access to education and media was severely limited, with their identities subsumed under an Amhara-centric national discourse. Although this discontent did not immediately lead to fragmentation in Menelik's period of time, it sowed the seeds for future ethnic tensions and legitimacy crises.

In conclusion, Ethiopia's war-driven national cohesion exemplifies Tilly's war-state logic in terms of state capacity building, yet it exposes significant shortcomings in achieving comprehensive legitimacy and social inclusion. The resulting legitimacy is characterized by hierarchical and regionally fragmented patterns, which have become a historical root of the enduring tensions between the central government and peripheral regions throughout the state's subsequent development.

Conclusion

The First Italo-Ethiopian War (1896) served as a pivotal catalyst for Ethiopia's state-building process under Emperor Menelik II, significantly enhancing the state's capacity across three critical dimensions: taxation, military capability and bureaucratic development, and national cohesion. By repelling Italian colonization, the war not only preserved Ethiopia's sovereignty but also accelerated institutional reforms that consolidated central authority, expanded resource extraction, and fostered a nascent national identity. However, while the conflict propelled state formation in the short term, its long-term legacy was marked by contradictions—centralization coexisted with exclusion, and military triumph masked enduring ethnic fractures.

Taxation Capacity: War as a Driver of Fiscal Centralization

The First Italo-Ethiopian War necessitated unprecedented resource mobilization, transforming Ethiopia's taxation system into a more centralized and extractive apparatus. Menelik's prewar reforms—such as the asrat (tithe) and emergency levies on livestock and land—were intensified to fund arms imports and supply the army. The annexation of southern territories (e.g., Harar) and others expanded the tax base, while the gult system incentivized regional elites to collect tribute in exchange for military service. Postwar, these mechanisms institutionalized state penetration into local economies, albeit at the cost of exploitation from peasant, slave, and periphery's

citizen. As Tilly's predatory theory predicts, war compelled fiscal innovation, but Ethiopia's reliance on coercive extraction(with the shortage of compromise and negotiation) undermined long-term legitimacy though external threat legitimizes this process in the short time.

Military Capability and ureaucratic Bodies

The war's demands catalyzed Ethiopia's military modernization. Menelik's prewar arms imports and domestic production efforts though at small scale, though facing arm embargo and enemy encirclement, coupled with combat experiences, tactical adaptations, and morale, enabled victory at Adwa. Postwar, the establishment of a standing army and salary system marked a shift from feudal levies to professionalized forces. Foreign advisors (e.g., French and Russian officers) were retained to train troops, while infrastructure projects (e.g., railways) improved logistics. Yet, the military's reliance on ethnic elites and persistent regional loyalties revealed limits to centralized control, foreshadowing future tensions.

The war spurred bureaucratic development, notably in education and governance. Menelik founded secular schools to train administrators, separated the Ministry of Education from church oversight, and created a cabinet system mirroring European models. However, these institutions remained elitist, excluding non-Amhara groups and prioritizing state control over inclusive governance. The postwar state's capacity to project power grew, but its legitimacy was uneven, relying on coercion rather than participatory citizenship.

National Cohesion: Unity in War, Fragmentation in Peace

Adwa's victory forged a powerful national identity. Menelik and Empress Taytu mobilized diverse ethnic groups through rhetoric narrative and elite cohesion. Women and non-combatants played critical roles in logistics and morale, symbolizing collective sacrifice. However, postwar policies—such as forced Amharization, land dispossession, and marginalization of southern and Tigrayan populations—eroded this unity. The state's exclusionary nation-building sowed ethnic grievances that resurfaced in later conflicts, illustrating Tilly's caveat that war-making without inclusive legitimacy risks instability.

Final Assessment

The First Italo-Ethiopian War was instrumental in propelling Ethiopia toward modern statehood, validating Tilly's thesis that "war made the state." It expanded fiscal and military capacity, centralized authority, and momentarily unified disparate groups against a common enemy. Yet, the state's reliance on coercive extraction, ethnic hierarchy, and cultural assimilation ultimately limited its transformative potential. Ethiopia's post-Adwa trajectory thus reflects both the strengths and pitfalls of war-driven state building: rapid institutional development paired with enduring fragility. As contemporary Ethiopia grapples with ethnic federalism and civil strife, the lessons of Adwa underscore the necessity of balancing centralization with inclusive nation-building—a challenge Menelik's empire could not fully resolve.

Beside that, my study of this thesis also found some interesting outcomes and require further study:

1. The enhancement of state capacity was sufficient to secure victory against foreign invasions. This success can be attributed to the unifying effect of a common external threat, war-driven narratives, and an acute sense of national crisis, which compelled diverse groups to prioritize short-term survival. However, the absence of institutionalized legitimacy hindered the long-term consolidation of state-building achievements. Our study exclusively examines the efficacy of war-driven state building under Emperor Menelik's reign, wherein a series of coercive measures attenuated Tilly's causal mechanisms linking warfare to state building in post Menelik period. This limitation necessitates further scholarly inquiry.

2. The state's capacity to extract taxes partially supports Tilly's assertion that war fosters the development of fiscal and bureaucratic institutions. Nonetheless, the heavy reliance on slave levies, land taxes, and peasant taxation—particularly targeting southern populations—undermined national legitimacy and deepened social divisions. The war narrative and the immediacy of existential threats temporarily obscured these deep-seated grievances. This compels us to interrogate the extent to which external threat and nationalist narratives may legitimize or obscure heavy extractive taxation

exploitation, thereby paradoxically facilitating state-building processes. This also require further examination.

3. Among various dimensions of state capacity enhanced by war, military capabilities saw the most significant development. High morale, improved organizational structure, strategic command, and diplomatic skill—especially in securing arms through foreign diplomacy—compensated for Ethiopia's limited domestic arms production. Notably, this analysis focuses solely on state formation under Emperor Menelik and excludes the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, which marked a confrontation between agrarian and industrial civilizations. Unlike the earlier war, this later conflict failed to stimulate domestic military-industrial development, leading to a collapse of state-building efforts. This observation draws our attention to the fact that varying configurations of sub-variables within military capability—such as morale, training, strategy, tactics, numerical strength, and armaments—may differentially influence both war outcomes and state-building trajectories. This critical nexus warrants further systematic study.

Limitation

It must be noted that while the transformative causal mechanism of Tilly's predatory theory is most effective when states are subjected to sustained external threats, the timeframe examined in this thesis spans from Menelik II's consolidation of power in 1896 to his death in 1913, with a specific focus on the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1895–1896). The central aim of this study is to assess the applicability and effectiveness of Tilly's further causal mechanism during the Menelik era, within the broader historical background shaped by the succession of wars following the end of the Era of the Princes.

Crucially, the First Italo-Ethiopian War occurred in Ethiopia, which is by no means a peaceful land in history. By the time of the Italian invasion, Menelik and his contemporaries had already benefited from the gradual, generational process of state-building, forged through numerous prior skirmishes, conflicts, and wars. These earlier confrontations—particularly under Emperors Tewodros II and Yohannes IV—had already fostered important elements of centralized state capacity and national cohesion. While this thesis primarily investigates the impact of war under Menelik's

leadership, it acknowledges that key aspects of institutional development and identity formation were achieved in earlier periods.

However, this acknowledgment does not seek to diminish the importance of pre-Menelik contributions. Rather, the thesis provides a concise review of the state-building efforts undertaken since the end of the Era of Princes, demonstrating how these prior experiences laid the groundwork for Menelik's own consolidation of power. Using Tilly's predatory theory as the analytical lens, in one chapter the author specifically examines how warfare contributed to the development of taxation capacity, military and bureaucratic institutions, and national cohesion under previous rulers, ultimately enabling a more robust state structure under Menelik II. This focus also highlights potential avenues for future research, particularly regarding the long-term cumulative effects of conflict on the formation of the modern Ethiopian state.

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