

## BOOK REVIEW

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2026 | PAGES 1-4

## The Emerging Democratic Developmental State in Post-1991 Ethiopia: A Book Review

| BOOK UNDER REVIEW                                                                                                                                                                          | REVIEWER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <p><b>Author:</b> Solomon Gebreyohans Gebru<br/><b>Publisher:</b> LAP Lambert Academic Publishing<br/><b>Year and extent:</b> 2017; 236 pp.<br/><b>ISBN:</b> 3330052503; 9783330052505</p> | <p><b>Fesseha Mulu Gebremariam</b> <br/>Department of Civics and Ethics Studies, Jimma<br/>University, Ethiopia<br/>P.O. Box 378, Jimma University, Ethiopia</p> |

### ABSTRACT

This (book) review focuses on the justifications, successes, and challenges of Ethiopia's adoption of democratic developmental state ideology. The book, largely employed secondary sources, adopted exploratory and clinical research designs to assess the achievements and challenges Ethiopia has faced in executing the adopted developmental state political economy in Ethiopia's context. It begins by justifying the need for adopting a new political and economic ideology by showing the failure of neo-liberalism to help developing countries like Ethiopia reduce poverty, transform its at-large backward agrarian economy, and maintain peace sustainably. The author found out that the ideology as the best paradigm to realize "renaissance" of Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. Besides, it addresses the major successes the country has achieved so far following the adoption of this ideology in reducing poverty; providing health care and education to citizens; creating employment opportunity for the youth; providing affordable housing supply to the poor urban dwellers, and sustainably maintain peace and security of the state etc. Despite the book being significant in showing how Ethiopia is practicing the ideology, it failed to show that adopting the ideology reduces the autonomy of regional states, and by structure, constitutionally speaking, in principle, a developmental state best suits unitary states, thus contradicting federalism.

**Keywords:** *Autonomy • Democratic developmental state • Multiethnic • Neo-liberalism • Renaissance*



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### How to Cite:

Gebremariam, F. M. (2026). The emerging democratic developmental state in post-1991 Ethiopia: A book review [Review of the book the emerging democratic developmental state in post-1991 Ethiopia, by S. G. Gebru]. *African Journal of International Relations*, 1, 1–4.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Solomon Gebreyohans Gebru is a senior lecturer at the Department of Political Science and Strategic Studies (PSSS), College of Law and Governance (CLG), Mekelle University (MU), Ethiopia. As his CV shows, he has published three articles and two books on federalism, politics, and development. The book entitled “*The Emerging Democratic Developmental State in Post-1991 Ethiopia*” is the second book published in the name of Solomon Gebreyohanes Gebru, recently in 2017. The book has six chapters and is, therefore, the focus of this review. It is written in memory of the late, long-serving Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who first served as President of the Transitional Government (TG) from 1991-1995, and later as Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia from 1995 until his death in 2012.

## 2. REVIEW

In post WWII, developing countries of the global south were forced to adopt Western (developed-industrialized global north), political and economic ideologies that call for a free-market economic system where the government shall make no or little intervention in the market as the only way to economic development (Daba & Mulu, 2017), and get financial aid. The West implements its policies and strategies under various programs. Among others: the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), the most common and widely applied programme across developing countries in the 1990s and early 2000s via the Bretton Woods financial institutions of the West, namely the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), to mainly help least developed countries reduce poverty (P.8).

Ethiopia is one of the countries that adopted neo-liberal economic and political ideology in exchange for Western financial aid (Gebretensae, 2015). However, after two decades of fruitless adoption and execution of neo-liberalism that failed to reduce the level of poverty in Ethiopia (Daba & Mulu, 2017: 109), and the successful economic history of the Asian Tigers (P. 9), it forced the government to adopt a democratic developmental state as a leading economic and political ideology in the context of Ethiopia (P. 190). It is, therefore, in the early 2000s, under the leadership of late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) made a U-turn in its political economy ideology (P. 153). Unlike the Asian Tigers, which achieved sustainable economic development under undemocratic leadership, the government of Ethiopia believes that democracy is essential to the country's very existence (Mulu & Daba, 2017). Poverty also threatens the peace and existence of the state and its citizens. Thus, economic development and democracy are equally important for Ethiopia and its people. In other words, this ideology (i.e., democratic developmental state) indicates that “*in the context of Ethiopia, economic development and democracy are inseparable objectives that should be achieved simultaneously (P. 153)*” and in the absence of either or both, it is hard to sustain the country as a country (Mulu & Daba, 2017).

Based on a historical, theoretical and empirical basis, Ethiopia’s officials used to argue that Democratic Developmental State (DDS), not neoliberalism, is the only way to realize Africa’s renaissance in general and Ethiopia in particular (P. 13). Unlike neoliberalism, Developmental State is characterized by the existence of two active actors in the market: the state and the private sector (Daba & Mulu, 2017). The state “plays a central role in macro planning...while [the private sector] engages in production to combat market failure from failures of the state (Abebe, 2018; Daba & Mulu, 2017). Under neoliberalism, the government is expected to intervene minimally in the market, whereas under a developmental state, the government is a crucial actor in the market. In the absence of either actor, there is what is called “market failure” (Daba and Mulu, 2017). However, the author distinguishes two contradictory claims (i.e., optimistic and pessimistic views) on the rationale for adopting a developmental state in Ethiopia (P. 50).

Those who are in favor of the optimistic view claim that, internally, given the level of poverty in Ethiopia, and, externally, the country's too much dependence on foreign aid and the successful economic history of the Asian Tigers in the past decades, a developmental state is the best paradigm to realize the fastest economic growth. On the other hand, those who argue in favor of pessimistic view claim that developmental state is a means for the ruling EPRDF (which is in power since 1991) to legitimize its thrust

to remain in "power and to the establishment of a one-party hegemony" for a long period of time (P.51). Despite these debates, Ethiopia needs to change its bad history of poverty/famine, civil war, transform its agrarian economy and backwardness, and DS is the best paradigm to do so argues the writer of the reviewed book (P. 53). Despite these contrary views, Solomon Gebreyohans Gebru argued that following the adoption of this new ideology, Ethiopia is on the right path of economic development. It (Ethiopia) has become "one of the world's fastest growing [non-oil producing] economies (P. 72). These days, Ethiopia becomes a headline for various development projects like Ethio-Djibouti railway, Addis Ababa City light railway, Gilgil Gibe III hydroelectric dams, Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), and number of industrial parks (P. 78), unlike its bad history of poverty, famine, and civil war.

Despite there are some success stories, Ethiopia is struggling with what is called by the author as "societal evils" (P. 88), like "corruption, rent-seeking and lack of good governance" (P. 87), that are challenging the state not to meet its socio-economic objectives, and make citizens to come to the streets and react violently in recent years, specially, in Oromia and Amhara Regional states (Daba and Mulu, 2017). Besides, according to the author, a Developmental State (DS) needs Autonomous and Effective Bureaucracy (P. 106), continuous building of human and institutional capacity (P. 136), and this is almost non-existent in Ethiopia where officials are assigned to posts not due to merits, but party affiliation (Matfess, 2015). In the fourth chapter of the reviewed book, the author assessed key achievements the country experiences in education and health, housing sectors (Pp. 138-146).

Solomon Gebreyohans Gebru, in the fifth chapter, examined "if there are policies and legal frameworks as well as institutional arrangements that would enable the emerging Ethiopian DS [Developmental State] to operate under democratic governance, [and] whether the emerging Ethiopian DS [Developmental State] has been operating within the framework of democratic governance in practical terms (P. 153). In the last chapter, the author strongly argued that "economic development and democracy can be (and should be) pursued simultaneously" (p. 185). In developing countries like Ethiopia, which are still largely agrarian, a DDS [Democratic Developmental State] helps facilitate economic growth and transform their economies (P. 185). Finally, the author of the book recommends that despite the government "has been investing a lot of capital on human capability in areas of education, health and housing" (P. 206), the quality of these services has been compromised, which the author calls "a great mistake." Besides, continuous discussion with opposition political parties, protection of civil and political rights of citizens, tackling weak capacity of the institutions of democracy like [Ethiopia Electoral Board, Human Rights Commission, Federal Ethics, and Anti-corruption Commission, The Office of Ombudsman etc...] is direly needed (P. 207).

Solomon Gebreyohans Gebru's book on Democratic Developmental State (DDS) and economic development in Ethiopia is valuable and highly recommendable for interested readers. Generally, the author has met his goal by assessing a broader conceptual, theoretical, and empirical framework on the subject matter. The main contribution of this book lies in the fact that the sound argument: democratic developmental state is the best and right paradigm that would help Ethiopia to reduce poverty, transform its agrarian economy and improve the well-being of its citizens' in a meaningful way, thus, the book should be recommended to all who are interested in Developmental state in general, and to those who want to have empirical knowledge on the practices and achievements of Ethiopia's democratic developmental state in particular. However, the book would be complete if it examined the role of Ethiopia's democratic developmental state in national integration.

Many scholars and opposition politicians argue that Article 39(1) of the 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution, which states: "Every Nation, Nationality, and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession," is a threat. In other words, ethnic federalism in general and this sub-article, in particular, would have a devastating effect, and one day that would disintegrate the country. Since it makes citizens identify themselves not as Ethiopians first, but as members of a certain ethnic group, and makes them think they would establish their own independent

sovereign state rather than remain part of Ethiopia. But as Mulu and Daba (2017) argued, it is not Article 39(1) of the FDRE constitution that threatens Ethiopia's existence, but poverty.

A developmental state mainly aims to achieve economic objectives. Thus, if poverty is reduced and democratic rule exists, Ethiopia would be sustainable, with no threat (Ibid). Furthermore, the book failed to address the constitutional legitimacy of the adopted ideology. According to Daba and Mulu (2017), the adoption of this ideology is entirely unconstitutional and contrary to the state structure. Since, naturally, this ideology makes the central government stronger and highly interventionist, “regional governments would, rather, under a visible shadow the central government, and would, therefore, merely serve as agents of the federal government, and their autonomy would be degraded significantly.”

### 3. CONCLUSION

The book is original, one of the best available books that discuss the nature, rationale, achievements, and challenges of Ethiopia's democratic developmental state ideology and practices on a theoretical and empirical basis in detail and would serve as a reference book in higher education. Besides, the book offers a valuable lesson on how the ideology would be implemented in other multiethnic countries like Ethiopia; that is why it is read with great pleasure.

### DECLARATIONS AND AUTHOR INFORMATION

#### Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest of any form regarding this work, and is, thus, his (own) original work done independently. Besides, all sources and materials used for sake of this book review have been duly acknowledged.

#### Reviewer biography

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