CONTESTED URBAN SPACES IN ETHIOPIA:

A SYNTHESIS OF CASE STUDIES IN DIRE DAWA, HAWASSA AND HOSANNA

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SUMMARY

- Studying urban contestations in Ethiopia's secondary cities can help us understand how the urban centres outside of Addis Ababa are evolving during an ongoing period of significant socio-economic and political change.
- Ethiopia's urban centres are the location of ongoing political conflicts, economic instability and socio-cultural ruptures. This synthesis report uses a set of comparative case studies to identify and examine political, economic, social and ideological contestation in three urban centres: Dire Dawa, Hawassa and Hosanna.
- Dire Dawa and Hawassa are often celebrated as 'melting pots' of tolerant diversity and cosmopolitanism. The post-2018 period, however, tells a different story. Both experienced heightened tension and violence relating to ethnolinguistic and religious identities.
- Hosanna provides a different insight as the majority of the population are from the Hadiya ethnolinguistic and sociocultural group, and so Hadiya clan identities are salient. The flow of remittances from the Hadiya diaspora, mainly in South Africa, has been a primary factor in shaping contestation in Hosanna.
- The report is based on a comparative analysis framework that has two strands. The first synthesized the economic and political dynamics from the case studies. The key elements in this are domestic and international migration, access to resources and opportunities and the politics of recognition and representation.
- The second strand synthesized the social and ideological aspects, which are often influenced by historical relations between communities. The critical elements identified include contestation over public spaces and events, language and religion.
- The two strands are connected to some of the overarching structural challenges that Ethiopia faces. The identified common features illustrate how national political processes or socioeconomic trends shape particular contestation.
- The contested legacy of Ethiopian state-making generates competing narratives and interpretations of political, economic and socio-cultural relations among communities. Political elites in the three urban centres then use these competing understandings for mobilization, which can become violent.
- As with other urban centres in Ethiopia, over the last decade the case studies have had growing populations with increased access to education and information and

communication technologies combined with a shortage of good jobs. This has created social pressures.

- In addition, Ethiopia has a large youth cohort, which brings young people to the forefront of urban contestation. The studies show young people's role both as the mobilizers of identity-based movements and the instrumentalized foot soldiers of political elites. They have at times been the perpetrators and also the victims of violence.

INTRODUCTION

This report synthesizes the findings of three studies about urban contestation in Dire Dawa, Hawassa and Hosanna.[1] Each centre has unique features that contribute to the nature of the contestation. Yet several important factors related to national dynamics and the history of Ethiopian state-making also contribute to common challenges. All the features fuelling urban contestation are analysed through a framework that examines economic, political, social and ideological aspects. The report provides a comparative understanding of contestation in Dire Dawa, Hawassa and Hosanna, and then makes policy recommendations for conflict prevention and resolution.

Contemporary urban dynamics in Ethiopia have two primary demographic features: Compared to most other African countries, Ethiopia is not very urbanized, with only an estimated 23 per cent of the population living in towns and cities, around half the continental average. Ethiopia's urbanization rate, however, is one of the highest, at close to 5 per cent a year. Factors contributing to this include high rates of birth and rural-urban migration, as well as the reclassification of villages as part of urban areas, though their contributions are not equal. For example, rural-urban migration is expected to contribute up to 43 per cent of urban population growth in 2032, which is higher than the impact of the birth rate.[2]

Urban dynamics in Ethiopia, Africa's second-most populous country, have several characteristics that contribute to its unique features. Compared to other African countries, the fact Ethiopia was not colonized and the socioeconomic and political processes associated with state-making have had a significant impact. Dire Dawa, along with Harar, is one of the few towns and cities in Ethiopia where the legacy of a foreign power, France, is visible. The Ethio-Djibouti railway, established at the beginning of the twentieth century, also has a significant role.

Most Ethiopian urban centres are the outcomes of power struggles during state-making, which

1   Bereket Diriba, 'Urban Contestation in Dire Dawa City', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2025. https://riftvalley.net/publication/urban-contestation-in-dire-dawa-city/; Eyob Balcha Gebremariam and Robel Mulat, 'Dominant Patterns and Dynamics of Urban Contestation in Hawassa', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2025. https://riftvalley.net/publication/dominant-patterns-and-dynamics-of-urban-contestation-in-hawassa/; Dereje Feyissa and Fana Gebresenbet, with Abreham Abebe, 'Hosanna: From Garrison Town to Remittance-Animated Regional Hub', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2025. https://riftvalley.net/publication/hosanna-from-garrison-town-to-remittance-animated-regional-hub/. Unless otherwise referenced, empirical evidence for claims in this synthesis is drawn from the case studies.

2   World Bank Group, *Ethiopia Urbanization Review: Urban Institutions for a Middle-Income Ethiopia*, Washington DC: World Bank, 2015.

involved multi-layered contestation. These include ethnolinguistic, sociocultural and religious marginalization and dominance by the Ethiopian state as it expanded from central and northern highlands to southern, southeastern and western regions of present-day Ethiopia. National political, economic and institutional arrangements also exhibit the legacies of the state-making process. Some observers argue that a key feature of Ethiopia's political economy is that economic power stems more from the south and political power from the centre and north.[3]

Most southern regions became Ethiopian through a combination of conquest, forced assimilation and cultural marginalization. As a result, the urban centres that emerged continue to display the impact of this violent incorporation. Today's elite mobilization is shaped by structural features, such as natural resource endowments, and by the political, economic and socio-cultural relations that were established to serve the state. The 1994 constitution's institutionalization of political differences and contestation relating to self-determination also spring from these structural and historical processes.

Hawassa and Hosanna demonstrate the prominent role that Ethiopian state-making played in the emergence of urban centres and the dynamics of contestation within them. Hawassa was established in 1959 upon Emperor Haile Selassie I's order. Establishing the city included members of the royal family and their auxiliaries appropriating vast tracts of land at the expense of local communities. Similarly, Hosanna was a garrison town serving the military and other priorities of Ethiopian rulers in the early twentieth century.

The analytical lens adopted to synthesize the three reports focuses on economic, political, social and ideological aspects of urban contestation. Disaggregating the dynamics of contestation in urban areas along these analytical lines helps explain intertwined processes. The primary purpose of the framework is to foreground certain aspects of contestation in explaining the role of various phenomena. In some cases, economic and political aspects of contestation might be more prominent than social and ideological aspects, and vice versa. In the empirical context, these four aspects are intertwined and interdependent; the reality on the ground is more complex than suggested by the analytical distinctions. It is, however, equally important to understand their features and impact in different contexts.

For example, in the case of Hawassa, the introduction of the Sidama language, *Sidammu Afoo*, has economic, political, social and ideological manifestations. Economically, it provides new opportunities for its speakers while restricting others' access to employment. Politically, introducing their mother tongue as the new region's official working language is a success for the Sidama elite. Socially, the fact of it becoming the official working language of the region is a source of pride for Sidama people. Ideologically, it is an important development in the struggle for the protection and promotion of the ethnolinguistic and sociocultural identity of the Sidama, not least as the sidelining of their language was one aspect of past marginalization.

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3   Christopher Clapham, 'The Political Economy of Ethiopia from the Imperial Period to the Present', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ethiopian Economy*, eds. Fantu Cheru, Christopher Cramer and Arkebe Oqubay, Oxford Academic, 11 February 2019.

COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS INTO ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF CONTESTATION

This synthesis focuses on how economic and political dynamics shape urban contestation in Dire Dawa, Hawassa and Hosanna. It looks at movement for economic reasons, competition for access to resources and opportunities and the politics of recognition and representation.

DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Historical and contemporary migration patterns shape urban contestation in each case study. The Hosanna case differs from the others because international migration is more prominent than domestic movement. The significant migration of Hadiya people to South Africa and the resulting flow of remittances altered the political and economic dynamics of Hosanna. In Dire Dawa and Hawassa, domestic migration is linked with mega infrastructure projects that created economic opportunities and so increased the cities' attractiveness for workers.

At least three major international migration-related trends have been observed in Hosanna. The first is the emergence of the Hadiya community as a dominant economic player in Hosanna and the reclaiming of the central commercial district. The financial advantage of Hadiya families due to remittances led to the emergence of a new economic elite, a trend that reversed the marginalization of Hadiya that occurred after Hosanna's foundation. The second trend is the peri-urbanization process of farmers selling land on the outskirts to buyers using remittances to make attractive offers. Often, the farmers use the money to establish businesses or finance the migration of relatives to South Africa; sometimes they are able to do both. Yet for many farmers, these investments do not work out and after a few years they have little or no money left. The third is a high rate of rural-urban movement as migrants invest in moving their families from surrounding rural kebeles, assuming they will receive better basic services such as electricity and water.

In Dire Dawa's case, domestic migration plays a role in shaping urban contestation in two ways. First, the revived railway station, recently established industry zone and free trade economic zone have become magnets for migrant labour arriving from the adjacent Oromia and Harari regions. This creates discontent among Dire Dawa residents since most white-collar jobs are assigned to migrants. As the federal government initiated the mega projects, the city administration has a limited role in employment decisions. In contrast, less rewarding blue-collar jobs are mainly

assigned to residents. The second feature is associated with informal settlements and security issues. Most respondents associated the expansion of informal settlements on the outskirts and the increase of drug abuse and crime with the high rate of migration.

In the case of Hawassa, Hawassa Industrial Park (HIP) is the primary factor for increased rural-urban migration, which gives the city a rate of urbanization above the national average. In addition to HIP, other infrastructure developments that encourage migration include the dry port, airport and higher education and training institutions. The limited capacity of the municipality to provide urban services and land and housing, as well as an increase in theft and land-related corruption, are linked to the high migration rate.

ACCESS TO ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Access to resources and opportunities is the other key aspect of urban contestation in the economic and political sphere.

In Dire Dawa, despite the promise of new mega projects backed by the federal government, the number of managerial and skilled jobs made available to Dire Dawa residents has been minimal. Since most projects are in the city's outskirts, urban job-seekers with limited finances have struggled to access them and they have had limited impact on small and medium-sized businesses that are mostly based in the centre. The concentration of the projects in the city's east where the main hospital and university are located is also critical. The eastern part of the city borders Somali region's Shinile zone, which gives Dire Dawa's Somali elites an advantage in the contestation with their Oromo counterparts. Contestation is linked to the city's attractiveness to migrant labour. Most migrants are young, have little support in Dire Dawa and are exposed to challenges such as drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, petty crime and abuse. The city administration categorizes them as security risks, policing them and even forcefully removing some from Dire Dawa, though many return.

In Hawassa, resource contestation is primarily shaped by HIP, which increased the intensity of migration to Hawassa. The massive influx of labour increased the demand for housing and land. Since the city municipality has limited institutional, human and technical capacity to provide adequate services, access to resources is often facilitated through informal channels. Such loopholes allow brokers to flourish as crucial players in shaping the dynamics of contestation for economic resources and opportunities. Government employment is another economic opportunity. In Hawassa, however, it is restricted to people who can speak *Sidammu Afoo*, which excludes many migrants and some residents. The new language policy, rational in the context of the Sidama struggle for self-determination, benefits *Sidammu Afoo* speakers with the requisite qualifications and experience.

In Hosanna, remittances from the large Hadiya diaspora in South Africa are key, and flow into high-end real estate, mixed-use buildings and hotels. The two dominant features are gentrification and peri-urbanization. Gentrification involved new Hadiya economic elites

buying land in central Hosanna and other prime locations from families that have lived in the centre for multiple generations. Transactions often occur through negotiations facilitated by brokers. Some Hadiya elites see it as the Hadiya people reclaiming the town. Peri-urbanization occurs when newly enriched residents buy land from farmers on the outskirts. The sellers often believe the generous offers will transform their livelihoods. In reality, the transactions create a landless and economically struggling rural community and an expanded town, making urban settlement patterns scattered and less systematic.

POLITICAL RECOGNITION AND REPRESENTATION

In all three case studies, urban centres were hubs for political demands for more recognition and representation, often articulated along ethnolinguistic, sociocultural and religious lines. Sub-ethnic identities at the clan level and rural-urban divisions are also salient.

In Dire Dawa, such contestation have three layers. The first is shaped by the politics of ethnicity. Dire Dawa's sociocultural and demographic composition, geographic location bordering two ethnically defined regions and its status as a federal city are the most important factors. Elites that claim to represent the Somali and Oromo groups compete to control Dire Dawa. The contestation is apparent at every tier of government and in domains such as access to land and housing, settlement patterns and the use of public spaces. Oromo and Somali elites have an informal power-sharing arrangement in Dire Dawa city council known as 40-40-20. This means that 80 per cent of the 185 council seats are equally divided among Oromo and Somali representatives, with the remaining 20 per cent shared among other groups. Similarly, the city appoints its mayor from the Oromo or Somali community, rotating every five years. This power-sharing has contributed to a relatively peaceful relationship. Still, some Oromos claim that their demographic dominance in Dire Dawa should be reflected in the power-sharing agreement. Other groups in the city also feel they are not adequately represented in the city's formal decision-making institutions.

The second layer of contestation in Dire Dawa is the rural-urban divide. According to a 2021 survey, Dire Dawa's urban population is 64 per cent and rural population 36 per cent. Yet the reverse is the case in the council where 62 per cent of the seats are rural.[4] The result is urban residents' discontent at their under-representation.

The third layer is religion. Although it remains true that religious tolerance is the norm in Dire Dawa, occasional incidents create conflict. As in many places across the country, the post-2018 period of political turmoil sparked some religion-based violence between Muslims and Christians. One triggering factor was the attack on mosques in Mota in Amhara region. The resulting conflict in Dire Dawa, however, did minimal damage to the city's fabric of religious tolerance.

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4   Ethiopia Statistics Service, 'Statistical Report on the 2021 Labour Force and Migration Survey', Statistical Bulletin, 588, December 2021, Addis Ababa.

In Hawassa, the politics of recognition and representation have been at the centre of vertical and horizontal contestation. Sidama elites mobilized their constituency with the claim that Hawassa is 'Sidama land'. Such framing articulated demands for recognition and representation in line with constitutionally guaranteed rights for self-determination. The decades-old struggle by the Sidama Liberation Movement and other Sidama elites within the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) structure was about securing recognition of the Sidama in the form of a self-administered region and shaped Sidama elites' interaction with other elites in the south.

The horizontal contestation in Hawassa manifested through issues including language, public events, control over public spaces and monuments and religious rivalries are also linked to the politics of recognition and representation. The codification of *Sidammu Afoo* as the working language of Sidama region is a way of placing the Sidama identity into the operations of the new regional government. The construction of the *Sumuda* monument in the middle of the city, just in front of the St. Gabriel Orthodox church, is another move to claim ownership. Other spaces of horizontal contestation, such as sporting and religious events and access to economic opportunities, are also ways in which the Sidama demanded more representation.

The politics of recognition and representation in Hosanna has two dominant manifestations. The first is shaped by the economic power the Hadiya community accrued from the remittances flowing from the diaspora, mainly in South Africa. Reclaiming Hadiya's central business district and other key spaces tilted the balance of power in the town towards Hadiya elites. The peaceful process of 'Hadiyaization' primarily involves transferring land and properties from non-Hadiya owners in the town centre to Hadiya. The Hadiya elite can then dictate business activities and cultural and religious practices.

The second aspect related to the reconfiguration of Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) and the emergence of Central Ethiopia Regional State (CERS).[5] Its establishment facilitated competition among political elites who claimed to represent different groups. Hadiya elites demanded Hosanna be their power centre within a new region, mainly in contestation with Gurage elites. Wisely, there was a decision to avoid the concentration of power in one city in what is a multi-ethnic region. As a result, Hosanna became the regional presidency seat and the competing town, Wolkite, became the seat of the regional council.

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5   See Asebe Regassa Debelo and Yacob Cheka Hidoto, 'New Cluster Regions and Distributive Struggles in Southern Ethiopia: Boundary conflicts in the Zeyse–Gamo and Kabena–Gurage borderlands', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2024. https://riftvalley.net/publication/new-cluster-regions-and-distributive-struggles-in-southern-ethiopia-boundary-conflicts-in-the-zeyse-gamo-and-kabena-gurage-borderlands/.

COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS INTO SOCIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CONTESTATION

The three urban centres exhibited intertwined social and ideological contestation in various spaces involving multiple actors. Three types appeared most in the case studies, and understanding the interplay between them can help capture the dynamics within each centre. They are contestation over public spaces and events, language and religion. While all are interdependent, making an analytical distinction between them allows for more in-depth and nuanced discussion.

PUBLIC SPACES AND EVENTS

Contestation around public spaces and events are about a group demonstrating ownership and dominance over other communities. Historical and contemporary power relations between groups dictate the contestation's intensity.

In Dire Dawa, the contestation is part of the political rivalry between Oromo and Somali elites and the communities they claim to represent. An example is when the incumbent administration decided to change the name of the Millennium Park to Ali Birra Park. Several observers agreed with the decision to honour the legendary Oromo artist born in Dire Dawa, yet commentators from non-Oromo communities interpreted it as a move to assert the dominance of Oromo culture in the city. In another context, some Oromos expressed discontent that features of Oromo culture and identity are being erased. For example, some *Afaan Oromo* kebele names were changed to numeric labelling. Given tension among communities, such decisions can fuel perceptions of discrimination.

Ethno-religious contestation are exacerbated by the creation of homogenous neighbourhoods. This occurs in part when targeted attacks force communities to move to less diverse neighbourhoods where one ethnic or religious group is predominant. The strong sense of belongingness and othering created facilitates the escalation of interpersonal conflict to an inter-communal level. The best example of this is violence at football games that escalate into inter-communal conflict. Competitions that involve teams from different neighbourhoods often cause such tensions. For example, the police are alert when Sidama Buna and Wolayta Dicha play, as targeted attacks and civil conflict have occurred on several occasions.

In Hawassa, contestation for public spaces has both ethnic and religious elements. St. Gabriel

church, which occupies a central space in the city centre, competes with the *Sumuda* monument built by the Sidama-dominated city administration. The owner of St. Gabriel, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, is often viewed by Sidama elites as a key actor in the past subjugation that the Sidama experienced. As a result, both the building and religious events that attract large gatherings, as well as the use of the pre-federal era national flag, are seen as a threat to Sidama autonomy and identity.

Many Sidama see the *Sumuda* monument, inaugurated in 2011, as the city's most significant landmark as it represents Sidama culture and values. The design contains an *enset* (false banana) leaf, a staple food of the Sidama. The monument is also adorned with paintings that show sociocultural features of the community. The political significance of the location is that it can be interpreted as reclaiming the centre from the Orthodox Church. The monument embodies the Sidama nationalist ideology, a victory of defining the city in the Sidama image while pursuing self-administration.

In the case of Hosanna, contestation over public spaces and events have been significantly shaped by the legacy of sociocultural, linguistic and religious subjugation. The contested historical relations between the Hadiya and the Ethiopian state stem in part from latter's strong connections to the Amhara identity. The Orthodox Church, in particular, is interpreted as a key part of the continued dominance of Amhara culture, language and religion. Hence, contestation over public spaces and during public events such as *Meskel* and *Timket* are tied to ethnolinguistic and sociocultural identity.

One aspect of contestation over social and ideological issues in Hosanna is disassociation from the cultural and religious practices of the Orthodox Church as a way of asserting the Hadiya identity. An example is the celebration of what used to be called *Yahude-Masqala*. *Yahude* is Hadiya's annual Thanksgiving celebration. *Meskel*, on the other hand, is a celebration by the Orthodox church to commemorate the founding of the true cross. Both occur in the middle of September. Hadiya leaders argue that cultural assimilation is the primary purpose of combining the events. As a result, Hadiya ethnonationalists typically advocate celebrating *Yahude* independently as part of strengthening the Hadiya identity and community.

The assertion of Hadiya identity can also be seen in reclaiming public spaces in Hosanna and making them symbolic representations of the community. An example is the case of *Gofer Meda/Hadiyy Nefera* and the contestation over access to this open space between the Orthodox Church and Hadiya youth leaders. The Orthodox Church has increased its presence in Hosanna by building St. Michael church and by holding celebrations of *Meskel* and *Timket*. When church leaders asked to have a presence in what they call *Gofer Meda*, several Hadiya leaders protested, and moved to rename it *Hadiyy Nefera*, 'the lung of Hadiya'.

Contestation over social and ideological issues in Hosanna is often linked with religion. A significant majority of Hadiya are Protestants, which adds at least two layers to the above contestation over public spaces and events. On the one hand, Hadiya leaders who seek to

celebrate *Yahude* by disassociating it from *Meskel* celebrations are condemned by Protestants for promoting practices that are labelled 'unchristian'. This criticism from religious leaders creates a contradiction between ethnolinguistic and cultural identity (Hadiya) and religious identity (Protestant). On the other hand, some Protestant leaders of the local administration attempted to provide land on *Gofer Meda*/*Hadiyy Nefera* to a famous Protestant pastor for a church and youth centre. Yet Hadiya youth leaders rebuffed the effort to control Hosanna's most precious open space, which they continue to call *Hadiyy Nefera*.

LANGUAGE

Language is another key forum for social and ideological contestation. In Dire Dawa, Amharic is the city administration's working language. Most of Dire Dawa's rural and urban residents, however, speak *Afaan Oromo*. This understandably created a sense of exclusion among *Afaan Oromo* speakers who have to use translators to access government services.

In the case of Hawassa, the success of Sidama elites in establishing Sidama region led to the introduction of *Sidammu Afoo*. The new official language replaced Amharic, which was the working language of SNNPRS when Hawassa served as the regional capital. By introducing *Sidammu Afoo*, Sidama elites are asserting the sociocultural identity of their community both in Hawasaa and in the operations of the regional government. But unless the shift from Amharic is carefully handled, it could cause a new form of marginalization for non-*Sidammu Afoo* speakers. In Hosanna, Hadiya Zonal Administration introduced *Hadiyyisa* as a working language in 2015. Yet the political will and operational mechanisms are inadequate for effective implementation of the new language policy. As a result, Amharic continues to be widely used in Hosanna. Despite the increasing ethnonationalist sentiment among Hadiya, it will take some time to for *Hadiyyisa* to become routinely used in the zonal administration's operations. This is especially the case given a context where Hosanna is the seat of the CERS presidency, as Amharic is the common language among the various communities in the region.

RELIGION

All case studies featured inter-religious contestation. In Dire Dawa, most occurs between the dominant Muslim and Christian communities. The post-2018 period of multiple crises in Ethiopia cast a shadow over Dire Dawa's history of peaceful religious co-existence.[6] The possibilities of further religious conflict are less due to fundamentalism or sectarianism and more due to proxy factors such as high youth unemployment and inter-communal tension, mainly between Oromo, Somali and Amhara elites, which can lead to religious conflict.

Both Hawassa and Hosanna have a predominantly Protestant population. Contestation over

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6   Kedir Jemal, 'Religion and Conflict in Dire Dawa: Intercommunal tensions and opportunities for peace', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2023. https://riftvalley.net/publication/religion-and-conflict-in-dire-dawa-intercommunal-tensions-and-opportunities-for-peace/.

religious issues in Hawassa and Hosanna are linked with the history of Ethiopian state-making that confirmed Orthodox Christianity as a dominant religion. Sidama and Hadiya ethnonationalists see the Orthodox Church not only as a religious institution but also as one component of the power structure that marginalized their communities. As a result, Orthodox public events can cause tensions because of the perceived imposition of Amhara culture via religion celebrations. Such contestation in Hawassa and Hosanna are equally religious and ethnocultural, such as the competition between St. Gabriel church and the *Sumuda* monument. Similarly, the Hadiya youth leaders' campaign to prevent an Orthodox presence in *Gofer Meda/ Hadiyy Nefera* is a socio-cultural movement that relates to religious affairs.

KEY FINDINGS

COMMON FEATURES

Despite the geographic, historical, political and socioeconomic variations among the case study urban centres, some dominant common features shaping the contestation can be observed.

Historical legacy: All three studies show that the legacy of the Ethiopian state-making project remains an important factor. Different groups' interpretations of the process generate multiple narratives and counter-narratives. These competing interpretations often serve as the basis for articulating political, economic and sociocultural demands. The state is often associated with the Amhara identity, language and culture, including the Orthodox Church. As a result, mobilization by demographically dominant elites in the three urban centres target perceived and actual Amhara dominance. Efforts to promote self-administration and self-determination also on multiple fronts and in different forms. The Sidama elite used the federal constitution to achieve their political goal of regional autonomy. Hadiya elites, however, used remittances to reclaim Hosanna's centre. In Dire Dawa, Oromo and Somali elites strategized to secure their dominance against each other and against perceived Amhara supremacy.

The studies suggest that the contested history of state-making will remain a driving factor of urban contestation. The most violent forms of contestation occur when political elites have the upper hand in interpreting the contested history of inter-communal relations and propagating narratives that favour their political goals.

Mobilization of young people: The demographic dominance of young people in Ethiopia is visible in urban centres' socio-economic and political landscape. Since the majority of young people are growing up in tense, contested urban environments, they become both active agents and targets of violence. As a result, the political turmoil across Ethiopia, both before and after the 2018 turning point, brought young people to the foreground.

All ethnic political movements labelled their young agitators in their native languages. This serves to create a sense of shared identity and belongingness. Q*eerroo* for the Oromo, *Ejetto* for the Sidama, *Kebera* for the Hadiya and *Fano/Satenaw* for the Amhara were actors of contestation in the three urban centres. The mobilization of young people by ethnonationalist elites helped to apply pressure on political opponents and generate popular legitimacy for their demands. Other salient issues include Ethiopia's high rates of urbanization; rural-urban migration and unemployment; increased access to education, information and communication technologies; and the flourishing of digital media platforms. These factors played their part in enabling ethnicized mobilization of young people in urban centres.

SPECIFIC FEATURES

Each studied centre has unique features that affect the actors, spaces, patterns and dynamics of urban contestation. A deeper understanding of the salience of these features might help efforts to redress the negative impacts of violent contestation through policy and legal interventions.

Dire Dawa: In the case of Dire Dawa, two features stand out. First, Dire Dawa is located near the international borders with Djibouti, Somalia and Somaliland. This impacts the city's economic, political, social and ideological structures. Its proximity to other countries makes it an attractive destination for international migrants. The dominance of legal and illegal cross-border trade, the nature and dynamics of the service sector, the railway infrastructure and the recently established industry park and free trade economic zone are also linked with the city's closeness to international borders. The economic activities derived from Dire Dawa's location impact the nature and intensity of its political contestation.

Dire Dawa's cultural and ideological aspects are also shaped by its proximity to Djibouti, Somalia and Somaliland. In these countries, clan-based activities dominate. The effect of this mobilization is visible in Dire Dawa, such as the presence of the *Ugaz* traditional leadership structure among the Somali communities. These cultural and ideological institutions affect the orientations and practices of policy-makers in Dire Dawa, the emergence of spaces for urban contestation and the dominant patterns and dynamics. Hence, any efforts to redress the negative impacts of urban contestation should consider the implications of policies and decisions in Dire Dawa in relation to the Horn of Africa region.

Dire Dawa's second important unique feature is the role of Oromia and Somali regions. Both have strong claims regarding Dire Dawa, and their own internal politics have an impact on urban contestation in the city. Factors such as the 40-40-20 power-sharing arrangement, the competition over language and the location of key infrastructure are influenced by the regions' political elites' rivalries and ownership claims.

Hawassa: Concerning Hawassa, the unique feature of the city in the study of urban contestation is the national implications of the movement to claim Hawassa as 'Sidama land'. The vertical and horizontal contestation of pursuing this led to the first referendum establishing a new regional state held under the 1995 federal constitution. The spillover also led to the creation of three other regional states, the Central, South and South-West Ethiopia regions.

The Hawassa case shows the intertwined nature of various layers of urban contestation. They include ethnolinguistic and sociocultural identities, contested historical relations and competing interpretations of histories and contemporary political and economic processes that shape the distribution of economic rents and political power. The federal constitution answered some historical questions but overlooked others, such as the Sidama demand. The Hawassa case demonstrated these gaps, the political manoeuvres of actors at various levels and the consequences of putting the constitution to the test.

Hosanna: One of Hosanna's unique features in understanding urban contestation is the relative ethnic homogeneity of the town. The dominance of the Hadiya reduced the possibility of inter-ethnic conflict, leading to a relatively peaceful processes of change. This does not mean, however, that the contestation are free of identity politics. Claims of land ownership and resources between the Lemo and Soro clans of the Hadiya are prominent, although relatively peaceful, in part due to the Hadiya's internal conflict-resolution mechanisms.

The impact of remittances is the other unique feature of the Hosanna study. The flow of money from international migrants has changed the political, economic and cultural aspects of the Hadiya community and Hosanna. Access and control of the central locations of the town, the ownership and distribution of land, the dynamics of rural-urban migration and the patterns of urbanization, the architectural landscape of the town and the values attached to social practices such as weddings and funerals have been fundamentally changed by the flows.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The three case studies present deep and extensive explanations of urban contestation in Ethiopia outside of Addis Ababa. The historically informed and empirically grounded analysis identified diverse actors and spaces of contestation in the urban centres and intertwined patterns and dynamics in the economic, political, social and ideological spheres. Social and public policies and legal frameworks that attempt to address the negative implications of the high rates of urbanization in Ethiopia will benefit massively if they take the insights in the study reports carefully.

POLICY CONTEXT

Complexity, stemming in part from multilayered intergroup relations both past and present, is a feature of urban contestation in Ethiopia. All efforts to address urban issues should therefore consider this.

- An overarching feature is the contested legacy of the state-making project and competing narratives and interpretations of it, especially by elites. These are intertwined and manifest in various spheres:
- In the economic sphere, there is contestation over access to land, other natural resources, capital and jobs.
- In the political sphere, there are demands for recognition and increased administrative autonomy. These are made through moves including ownership claims over spaces and campaigns for greater representation in decision-making bodies.
- In the social sphere, there are contestations over the right to engage in cultural practices and the use of languages.
- In the ideological sphere, there are demands for free expression of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, in particular at public gatherings.

Domestic and international migration impact urban contestation in various ways. For example:

- Dire Dawa and Hawassa's attractiveness to migrant workers should be at the centre of urban policy.
- Hosanna is a major source of Ethiopian migration to South Africa. The impact of remittances on the town and its surroundings' political, social and economic dynamics are considerable.
- Achieving more equitable access to economic resources and opportunities in urban centres requires the recognition of migration patterns, spatial aspects within urban areas and potential barriers such as language and skill differences.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Understanding the complexity, the impact of migration and the connections between the various spheres of contestation is a prerequisite for any successful intervention.

- Awareness of the social and ideological roots of contestation can inform a more nuanced approach to policy-making. Inadequate recognition of such complexities, or narrow interpretations of historical and contemporary inter-community relations, might trigger more violence and disruption in urban centres.

- The politics of recognition and representation is often a key factor in violent urban confrontations. This means that historical relations that sustain exclusion need to be reversed in order to design more inclusive environments.

- Efforts to redress past exclusions should not, however, act as new forms of exclusion. For example, the 40-40-20 arrangement in Dire Dawa and the introduction of the *Sidammu Affo* language in Hawassa are responses to past discrimination, but it is vital to address those policies' limitations. In any case, efforts to redress historically unjust relations among communities should strive to not create new grounds for violent contestation.

- Working towards multilingual provision of government services in diverse centres such as Dire Dawa would help with inclusion and promoting social cohesion.

- Efforts to redress the challenges of youth mobilization need to consider the role of elites, the narratives of mobilization and the broader context within which violent contestation occur.

- A way to try and ensure peaceful and flourishing urban centres could be inter-communal dialogue. Other social actors, such as community groups and civil societies in urban centres, trade unions and professional associations should organize to create these forums. The politicizing of differences can be counterbalanced with actively engaged community-based movements promoting inclusiveness and inter-community dialogue.