When Theory Misses History

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State and Economic Development in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia

by Aaron Tesfaye

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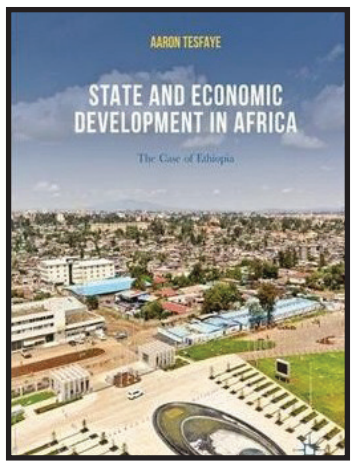
As the latest addition to the literature on the Ethiopian developmental state, published mainly in the context of the political crisis that has been currently shaking the country, any reader of (Ethiopian) political economy would benefit from reading this book. The Ethiopian developmental state and its 'impressive' achievement is the central subject matter of Aaron Tesfaye's book. Conceptualizing economic development broadly as a process of transforming not only the economic sector but also the social and the political structure of a country, the author explores this transformation process anchoring his analysis on the role of the Ethiopian state. Defining the developmental state by its ideology and structural autonomy from society, Aaron sets the major problematique of the book - the history of successful developmental states in Africa - in order to debunk the Afro-pessimist representation of African states as collapsed and too weak to be agents of development. Indeed, using the success stories of Botswana and the emerging success of Ethiopia as evidence, the author debunks the pessimist representation of African states. It is the empirical record of economic growth measured in GDP and the impressive performance in achieving Millennium Development Goals and self-proclaimed emulation project of 'developmental' state by Ethiopian leaders, acclaimed by scholars and international aid agencies alike, that constitute the rationale of Aaron's book.

The book is divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter presents the historical, theoretical and conceptual context of the politics of development in East Asia, Latin America and Africa. The chapter is divided into two broad sections. In the first section, the author gives a history of the current Ethiopian developmental state. Aaron argues that in embracing the idea of the developmental state, the incumbent party, the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) was inspired by the 'East Asian Miracle'. The party had to adjust to the post-cold war world order and the developmental state with one dominant party system was an ideology proximate to its old socialist creed.

The author commends EPRDF for transforming not only the economy but also the political structure of Ethiopia. The EPRDF's success is described against a backdrop of the oldest 'predatory' political economy in the continent. The author defines the historical Ethiopian state as an 'indigenous institution' (i.e. non-colonial), an exception to the general picture of African states (p. 42). However, this 'indigenous state' was also a predatory state where 'its elites disdained formal economic activity for millennia and instead were engaged for the most part in war-making to acquire wealth or in pious religious activity' (p. 1). He argues that 'the twin pursuits of war and piety discouraged the emergence of a market that would have liberated the factors of production and led to political and economic development' (p. 1). If war were made for the accumulation of wealth, as the author argues, would this particular war not be an economic enterprise? What is development, if not accumulation of wealth in a capitalist sense? Without offering an in-depth historical study, the author makes bold generalizations about the pre-modern Ethiopian state as a warrior state; even though it was a strong state, it lacked the will and the ideology of development.

It is only with 'the insertion of Ethiopia into world capitalist economy' that Ethiopian political elites became a 'modernizing' force committed to bureaucratization, centralization and consolidation of the power of the state, abandoning the age-old mission of making wars for wealth and religion (p. 1). Despite the emergence of modernizing monarchs in the nineteenth century, the true development agent for Aaron is the incumbent party, EPRDF. Development, which is also defined as a technical process, is conceived as a survival issue for Ethiopia because Ethiopia is surrounded by 'failed and failing states' (p. 7). The author thus defines the African past as devoid of developmental imagination before the incorporation into capitalist world. He also relies on the categories, assumptions and pessimist representations of African states as collapsing states to justify the exceptional mission of the contemporary Ethiopian state. In so doing, he slides into the core weakness of the Afro-pessimism that the author had set out to debunk.



The second section of the first chapter presents the theoretical framework of the work; it is anchored on the comparative analysis of the state and the politics of development in the global south. The author presents an extensive theoretical and conceptual discussion on the historical role of the state in transforming society and achieving development through the launching of a successful policy and strategy of industrialization. Without considering the experience of the West, the author has situated the study in the global south taking the exceptional success stories of East Asian 'tigers' as a model to be emulated. He argues that in spite of the misrepresentation of the global south in the development literature, 'the East Asians have clearly demonstrated in their march from the periphery that development is possible, albeit, via authoritative allocation' (p. vii). The choice of the subject matter and the historical case studies are thus a political decision.

One of the positive aspects of the theoretical chapter is that the author analyzes the debate on developmental trajectories by considering the historical differences of Asian, Latin America and African states. According to the author, the presence of Japan as a model to be emulated and trigger a sort of domino effect is a unique geographical condition that animated the exceptional trajectory of the East Asian states. However, Aaron did not give any explanation as to how the Japan development track is different from the western model apart from describing it as a late development economy located in Asia. Similarly, in addition to the role of the political elites, Aaron considers the role of foreign colonial powers and cold war intervention as contributing factors. In the South Korean case, for example, in addition to the Japanese colonial intervention, the US also played a key role in its economic transformation.

It was with this structural legacy that the Korean leadership managed to play its role in launching the developmental state. In other words, the developmental state should be viewed as a Hobbesian leviathan state insulated from civil society. The state should also be governed by an elite pact committed to national development. In other words, development should be the ruling hegemonic ideology.

Such theorization and conceptualization have nevertheless two critical problems. First, the above elements of the developmental state are only internal elements of the state; they are insulated from historical, structural and contingent factors, mainly in the global capitalist world. In other words, while the author handpicked and appropriated features of the developmental state mainly from the East Asian experience to develop a theory, he eschews structural and historical factors. For example, the role of the colonial and post-cold war intervention, which conditioned the East Asian historical experience, are absent from the theoretical construct. What is the value of discussing history if it is not used in constructing theory?

Secondly this theorizing on the universal nature of the developmental state through partial selection of historical factors is done while citing the work of, among others, Claude Ake, who argued that the developmental trajectory of a nation is particular and contingent on the historical socio-political and geopolitical factors of each state. Instead of theorizing from the considered historical experience of the three continents, East Asia is presented as the theoretical basis for analysing African and Latin America history. Like many studies of the developmental state, the theorization and conceptualization of the developmental state is represented and articulated as an imported model from the successful East Asian countries. This representation and articulation, therefore, presupposes the repetition of the history of Asian Tigers' miracle and 'the awakening of Asia' in the miracle and the awakening of African lions and giants. In the historiography of developmental states, scholars often try to construct a 'modular' development trajectory focusing on one or few features of these states, such as the central agency in Japan, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI),[1] governing the market in South Korea,[2] the late industrialization of Taiwan,[3] embedded autonomy,[4] the structure and ideology nexus,[5] not to mention those who explained the success of industrialization through the cultural thesis and the free market variable. Aaron's work is not free from such trend of abstracting a theory from one historical instance to impose on another region as a measure of historical progress.

Indeed, Aaron's work falls short of studying the developmental state in Latin America or Africa on its own terms and within its own historicity. For example, instead of developing an alternative theory of a developmental state grounded on the historical experience of Latin American states such as that of Brazil, the author regards the Korean model as a missed opportunity in Latin America. However, Botswana became another Southern Korea in Africa fulfilling the conditions of the developmental state model. Similar to the South Korean State, the state of Botswana was 'well insulated' and enjoyed 'relative autonomy', had built a 'competent bureaucracy' and its leaders were 'united and disciplined' with a clear developmental ideology (p. 29). Again, given the particular historical trajectory of Botswana, no possible theorization of the developmental state was made except for the projection of South Korean history onto the African and Latin American continents to appraise the performance of states.

It is in the second chapter that the author discusses the state and development in Ethiopia. In discussing the history of the Ethiopian state, the author underlines its exceptional trajectory compared to other African states as an indigenous state and one that was never colonized. Historically, according to the author, the indigenous Ethiopian state was feudal, with a 'rigid class' comparable to 'caste system' (p. 40). It was a predator state that used force to extract resources and ensure its rule; its sought legitimacy by deploying the divine rights of kings as an ideology. Hence political authority was 'essentially unstable and dysfunctional' (p. 40) though the state was comparable to a Hobbesian leviathan state that ensured order through the point of the sword. Therefore, in this predatory

condition, instability and dysfunctional features made production non-existent and development impossible. Even Emperor Menelik II, who is considered by the author as 'the architect of the centralized Ethiopian state' (p. 43), is at the same time criticized for not emulating the Japanese model.

The author traced the imagination of development as an ideology to the early twentieth century intellectuals known in Ethiopian historiography as the 'Pioneers' and the 'Japanizers.[6] He characterises them as the only 'true ideologues of modernization and economic development' (p. 59). Though most of these intellectuals emerged in the post-Menelik period, the author anachronistically questions why the idea of development did not take root in that period. Further, the author did not adequately trace the influence of the intellectuals, both the pioneers and the second-generation intellectuals, on state ideology and policy.

Emperor Haile Selassie I, who patronised these intellectuals, is described as 'a cautious modernizer, not a visionary leader' (p. 46). Such a bold assertion would have been enriched if the monarch's relation with the intellectuals concerning Ethiopia's development was part of the historical analysis. What was the difference, at least at the ideological level, between the modernizing emperors and the 'Japanizers'? How did this ideology of leaders and intellectuals contribute historically to the emergence of a developmental state in post-1991 Ethiopia? How was modernization or development negotiated with the old ideology of religion and religiosity in Ethiopia? While tracing the history of the 'indigenous' state, it would have been illuminating if the author explored the dynamics and evolution of state ideology, mainly with the emergence of modernizing emperors. How does a predatory state committed to war and religion become a modernizing state in the nineteenth century?

Despite the emergence of the modernizing emperors, the state has to wait till the late twentieth century to find a new 'consensual parameter' to 'cage conflict' and transform the predatory politics into the re-building of political institutions and new social action (p. 40). For the author, such an opportunity was lost in 1974 when the military regime took over. This regime neither caged conflict nor achieved national development. The Ethiopian federal structure which emerged after 1991 is considered by the author as the only successful 'consensual parameter' opening the structure for new social action, to 'cage conflict' and to achieve development. This new consensus is the decentralization of the state structure combined with re-centralizing using the EPRDF's party structure, and the practice of democratic centralism and fiscal decentralization. It is this complex state re-structuring that facilitates the emergence of the Ethiopian developmental state, measured both in terms of ideology and state structure. The author argues that, unlike its predecessors, the post-1991 regime was characterized by a leadership pact based on a national developmental ideology. Structurally, the EPRDF regime is not only autonomous but it is also able to mobilize civil society towards political and economic development; the author seems oblivious to the post-2005 trend towards the de-mobilization of civil society and the narrowing of political space. Moreover, while the developmental state was not publicly articulated before 2001 either as party ideology or state policy, the author traces the Ethiopian development state and its ideology to the beginning of the federal structure and revolutionary democracy in 1991. This strikes one as a case of writing history backwards.

In the third chapter, using the theory of the developmental state, more precisely its autonomous institutional capacity and cohesiveness to implement a developmental vision, the author explores the performance of the Ethiopian developmental state. Operationalizing the concept of structure as the institutional capacity of the state, the author explores the historical evolution of bureaucracy and its efficiency from the *ancien* and military regimes to the contemporary EPRDF regime. In the federal arrangement, notwithstanding the amplified principle of self-determination and self-government, the central state has been able to make the regional and local states dependent through a strong party structure and democratic centralism, as well as using its fiscal resources. This capacity of the central state is considered a necessary condition of the developmental state as it is dependent on the party structure. The proliferation of institutional, legal and financial institutions is described as a progressive step without questioning the wider politics and context of institution making.

All the dynamic innovation of institutions is seen as far as the author is concerned as a step forward for the implementation of national development policies and/or as means to check patron-client relations or centrifugal tendencies. Institutions are not seen as an arena of contestation and negotiation; rather, they are conceived as supra-political apparatus and extended organ of the developmental leviathan. While the building of creeping bureaucracy and centralization process was criticized for being dysfunctional mainly because of the interventionist tendencies of both the emperor and later the military leaders, the author refrains from critiquing the post-1991 bureaucracy at least to the degree of the EPRDF regime's own self-criticism. Instead, the author has chosen to chronicle the incremental institutional reform as a progressive step towards building the policy implementing capacity of the state. For example, the establishment of anti-corruption commissions and civil service reforms are chronicled as institutional progress without interrogating the politics and the limitation of such institutional change. The bold critical stance exhibited in discussing the previous regimes' performances shifts into a celebratory, if not apologetic, narrative when it comes to the EPRDF regime.

Chapter four is entitled 'Economic Policy and Performance', and the author presents a general overview of Ethiopia's economic policy and performance since 1991. Similar to the previous chapter, the author chronicles the different policies and their evolution focusing on what is known as the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). Moreover, the chapter gives substantial space to a discussion of the evolution from Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) to the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) as well as the 'impressive' growth record so much lauded by international development agencies. A reader would wonder about the intellectual contribution of this chapter given that the author chooses to merely describe the economic policy and the headline story of 'impressive' growth record. The author presents economic policymaking and implementation as apolitical processes, ignoring the theoretical and historical discussion of policy implementation in the history of different developmental states. In the same manner, the author does not critically engage the performance of the economy, particularly in addressing structural poverty, which is manifested among other things by the human development index, according to which Ethiopia holds the bottom position in comparison to other sub-Saharan states. Without interrogating the GDP growth record, the author chooses to reproduce the discourse of the impressive growth record as a manifestation of the success of the policy and its implementation.

Development policy in Ethiopia and Globalization' is the problematique of the fifth chapter in which the author shows how the industrial policy of Ethiopia, instead of import substitution and protection of infant local manufacturing, deliberately aimed at exposing the manufacturing industry to global competition to realize an export-oriented manufacturing sector. As far as the author is concerned, private capital is at the center of industrial policy of achieving industrial transformation through making agriculture an engine of economic development. In other words, the agrarian surplus is considered as a source of capital for investment in industries. However, Ethiopia's manufacturing industry, as in many late developing countries, is primarily light industry, i.e. producing food, beverages and textiles. These enterprises are owned by micro and small holders while state, political parties and foreign investors play an active role by owning a considerable chunk of medium scale and emerging large scale manufacturing industries. The author anchors his analysis on the performance of the leather industry. In so doing, he documents how the state promoted the industry through legal and institutional mechanisms, such as establishing a special agency for regulating it. Such institutional intervention is considered as an example of Ethiopia's successful emulation of the East Asian model of the developmental state.

The author describes the ruling party's ownership of manufacturing industries in the name of endowment. However, the author refrains from discussing the implication of the ruling party's involvement in business for the economy and political dynamics of the country. Different authors have considered the party's businesses as a factor in analyzing the Ethiopian developmental state. Some have dubbed the Ethiopian case as developmental neo-patrimonialism, by re-conceptualizing the concept of neo-patrimonialism from cultural pathology to a social asset that can be used to meet a developmental end.[7] The endowment factor is seen as one strategy through which rent is successfully managed for the long-term national objective. However, except for the passing remark on the similarities between EFFORT, a TPLF-owned business conglomerate, and the South Korean company *Chaebols*, Aaron remains silent. What is the place of an ethnic-based party and business on the Ethiopian federal developmental state? How can one discuss the autonomy of the state while political parties own large businesses in the country? Do parties, like the state, play a leviathan role insulated from societal division and contract? Are political parties supra-social entities?

In the last chapter, which is the conclusion, the author summarizes each chapter in detail and devotes only a paragraph to conclude the study. Aaron appreciates the twenty-year performance of the Ethiopian federal state, given the fact that Ethiopia is located in a volatile region with internal politics of nationalisms and sectarian contestations. However, the recent political crisis and unrest in Ethiopia, the author argues, is due to poor governance, corruption, patron-client relationship and lack of voice of the civil society and opposition parties in general, and the absence of inclusive politics. Yet all these political problems lie at the heart of the federal structure and party system in Ethiopia. They did not just pop up in 2015 and 2016 to ignite the unprecedented political crisis in the country. Since the author excludes from his analysis the political impact of revolutionary democracy, one dominant party system and the involvement of party in business, the lack of check and balance and separation of power within the organs of government, the study fails to explain the political crisis.

The fundamental puzzle is: how is it that Ethiopia, with an 'impressive growth record', a celebrated institutional capacity to formulate and implement policy, faces such a serious political crisis? How did the new 'consensual parameter', which the author argues managed to 'cage conflict' in Ethiopia, fail to regulate conflict and ensure peace and stability? The author has documented how democracy was absent in the takeoff stage in both the Western and East Asian historical experience. Both regions evolved in different temporal and spatial contexts, which makes the author's argument of history by analogy appear less plausible. Bringing back the political and the democracy factor, or as the author prescribe the politics of inclusion, into historical analysis might help explain the political crisis in Ethiopia today. Unfortunately, this book says little about the emerging political crisis in the country.

To conclude, the book raises timely and relevant questions concerning the politics of development and the role of the state in the global south in general and in Ethiopia in particular. The author must be commended for this scholarly contribution to the study of the developmental state presented from an optimistic perspective. It is a recommended book for readers, students and scholars alike interested in the political economy of Ethiopia and the continent at large.

Notes

1. Chalmers Johnson, 1982, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy 1925-1975,* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
2. Robert Wade, 2004, *Governing the Market*, London: Princeton university .
3. Alice H Amsden, 1989, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*, New York: Oxford University press.
4. Peter B Evans, 1995, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
5. Thandika Mkandawire, May 2001, 'Thinking about Developmental State in Africa,' *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 25: 3, 289-313; Meles Zenawi, 2012, 'States and Markets: Neoliberal Limitations and the Case for a Developmental State,' in Akbar Norman, Kwesi Botchewy, Howard Stein and Joseph Stiglitz, *Good Growth and Governance in Africa*, Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press .
6. See Bahru Zewde, 2002, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century,* London: James Currey; Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press; and Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.
7. Tim Kelsall, 2013, *Business, Politics, and the State in Africa: Challenging the Orthodoxies on Growth and Transformation*, London: Zed Books.

'From Badge of Honour to Unbearable Burden'

Bahru Zewde

The Eritrean National Service: Servitude for 'the Common Good' & the Youth Exodus

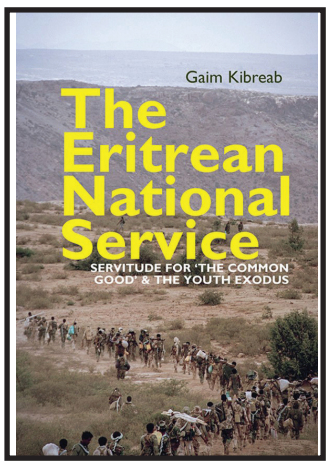
by Gaim Kibreab

James Currey, 2017, 215 pages, ISBN hb: 978-1-84701-160-2

In May 2016, global attention was gripped by the sight of hundreds of corpses washed ashore on the northern coast of the Mediterranean. About 450 of these bodies belonged to Eritreans who had undertaken the perilous journey across the Mediterranean from the Libyan coast. They had trusted their fate to boats that were hardly seaworthy in the hope of reaching Europe and finding asylum. This was not the first of such incidents; nor was it to be the last. Few people could fathom the reason why the victims would resort to such desperate measures, courting almost certain death, rather than remain in their own country. The book under review provides the answer in eloquent fashion. At the root of this exodus of Eritrean youth is the most heinous form of 'national service' that the world has ever seem. Initiated to inculcate the values of the liberation struggle to the Eritrean youth, the institution has degenerated into a regime of veritable servitude costing each conscript up to two decades of his/her life.

It is to escape this bondage that so many Eritreans have 'voted with their feet', as it were. The world witnesses only the terminal stage of their tragic odyssey. Little noticed and recorded is the no less perilous journey to Libya. The migrants had to cross the Eritrean border to Ethiopia or the Sudan, eluding the soldiers instructed to shoot to kill (unless the migrants had managed to bribe their way) and face the hazards of traffickers and scorpions to cross the Sahara desert. Most ended up in detention lasting many years in Libyan prisons, subjected to the extortions and harassments of their captors. Nor is arrival in Europe or the Middle East a guarantee to a new life. The quest for asylum is a protracted and not always successful process. Israel, a country that started as a sanctuary for Jewish refugees, has been the most stringent in granting asylum; out of 36,000 Eritrean refugees who have arrived, only 1,950 have been screened to file asylum applications and only two of these have been accepted! Not only has Israel erected a wall in the Sinai to stem the tide of refugees, but it is preparing to deport thousands of Eritreans to an unspecified African country at the time of writing.

Not all Eritreans took the tortuous path to safety. A few – a tiny minority, admittedly – were fortunate enough to exit the country legally. This included Eritrean sportsmen competing in global and regional events, notably football teams featuring in African championships. Almost invariably, members of these teams sought asylum in the host country after the end of the tournaments. The most dramatic case in this regard was that of the flag-bearer of the Eritrean team competing in the 2012 London Olympics, who sought asylum in England at the conclusion of the Games.



Drawing on interviews with refugees who had survived the treacherous journey, the rich data that is available online, the utterances of the architect of the odious system, the Eritrean president Isaias Afeworki, documents of human rights advocacy groups (notably Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch), as well as the secondary literature, Gaim Kibreab has given us a comprehensive and nuanced study of the problem. As he himself confesses at the outset, the methodological challenges of conducting such an investigation are little short of daunting. Field research under the autocratic system that has prevailed in the country is unthinkable. Conversely, the large number of Eritreans who have been forced to flee their country and seek abode in Europe and elsewhere has provided the author a large pool of potential informants. In view of the difficulty of using a random sampling method for refugees spread out across eighty-five countries, the author has been forced to adopt a snowball sampling method, selecting his respondents through a system of chain referral.

National (mostly military) service is not new; nor is it unique to Eritrea. And the author gives a detailed discussion of the origins of the idea of national service, drawing on the writings, among others, of the Enlightenment philosophers Montesquieu and Rousseau. He also discusses the arguments for and against national service. Within the African context, he cites the experience of countries like Nigeria and Ethiopia, even if this reviewer detects a misreading of the objective of the latter case. The Ethiopian National Service was introduced in the 1980s to withstand the insurgency in the northern part of the country, not 'to pay back the taxpayer who footed the bill for university education' (p. 34). That rationale pertains more to the Ethiopian University Service (EUS) that was operative in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In a way, though, these discussions strike one as manifestly academic, as the Eritrean National Service (ENS) defies the norm. As the author underscores it in emphatic fashion, what makes ENS so unique is its indeterminate nature, with conscripts being forced to serve for up to twenty years or more. Its magnitude is as striking as its open-ended nature. A total of half a million Eritreans (or 10 % of the population) have been mobilized for the purpose over a period of twenty years. Nor has this been confined to the youth. Men up to the age of seventy and women up to the age of sixty are liable to be drafted into the militia. The net effect of this exercise is not only the subjection of citizens to eternal bondage but also the militarisation of society. The author draws parallels with the feudal institution of *posse comitatus*, which imposed compulsory military service on citizens. Given the fact that ENS degenerated into universal conscription of labour, it is probably more akin to *corvée*.

Such an onerous system was instituted against the advice of a working group that the president had set up soon after the attainment of independence in 1991. The group, composed of professional military officers, had recommended a structure tailored to the country's size and resources. The emphasis was on professionalism and institutionalisation, on quality rather than quantity. The president overrode these professional recommendations to institute a regime of mass mobilization. He did this partly to prepare the country for the war with his southern neighbour (Ethiopia) that he deemed inevitable and partly to enhance his personal grip on power; the two phenomena were in fact interrelated. As one of the respondents to the author's questionnaire asserted, 'without the ENS, there would have been no border war with Ethiopia' (p. 47). Not only did ENS precipitate the 1998-2000 war between the two countries but the debacle that Eritrea suffered in the course of the war amply demonstrated the failure of the institution to create an efficient fighting force. In the words of another respondent, '*It is not possible to build a country's military power and fighting capability on the basis of slavery'* (p. 60, emphasis in the original).

The legal framework for the national service was first laid in 1991, even before