



Research Article

Beyond "Special Interest": Reconciling Historical Claims, Territorial Rights, and Political Economy of Urban Governance in Finfinnee/Addis Ababa

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Abstract

The intersection of municipal governance, state-building, and regional territorial rights in multinational federations frequently generates deep institutional, spatial, and political-economic friction. In Ethiopia, this friction is rooted in 19th-century imperial state expansion, which initiated the systematic displacement of indigenous Tulema Oromo communities to establish the garrison town (katama) at Finfinnee (Addis Ababa). Today, under Article 49 of the 1995 FDRE Constitution, Finfinnee/Addis Ababa occupies a precarious dual constitutional status: operating simultaneously as an autonomous, self-governing federal seat and the legal capital of Oromia Regional State. While Article 49(5) mandates that Oromia's "special interest" regarding administrative services, resource utilization, and joint infrastructure shall be respected, decades of legislative inaction and uncoordinated peri-urban spatial expansion have exacerbated regional anxieties over territorial integrity, uncompensated land dispossession, and cultural erasure. Drawing on qualitative empirical data—including in-depth interviews with 50 key informants, consisting of political actors, scholars, and community leaders analyzed through the Position, Interest, and Need (PIN) framework—this study investigates the political economy of urban governance through the analytical lenses of land tenure, metabolic resource extraction, and jurisdictional duality. Findings reveal a fundamental structural polarization between federalist priorities of civic multi-ethnic municipal self-rule and regional demands for constitutional restitution, indigenous spatial rights, and territorial integrity. The capital's metabolic dependence on Oromia's natural ecosystems (such as water supply reservoirs), alongside the export of negative environmental externalities (such as municipal waste), creates severe socio-economic asymmetries. Moving beyond zero-sum legalistic debates, this article evaluates actionable policy frameworks to reconcile historical grievances with inclusive urban citizenship. To resolve these structural tensions, the study proposes concrete institutional mechanisms: transitioning from the vague "special interest" clause to a formal shared jurisdictional governance model; enacting statutory anti-displacement land protections and joint spatial master-planning protocols; establishing transparent fiscal equity mechanisms (including Payment for Ecosystem Services and land-lease restitution funds); and embedding functional linguistic rights and official dual-naming conventions (Finfinnee/Addis Ababa) within municipal administration.

Keywords

Finfinnee/Addis Ababa, Urban Governance, Political Economy, Article 49(5), Land Dispossession, Tulema Oromo, Spatial Rights, Symbolic Restitution

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context and Global Perspectives

The intersection of municipal governance, state-building, and regional territorial rights frequently generates acute institutional, spatial, and socio-economic friction [6]. In federal and multi-ethnic polities, capital cities often operate as contested arenas where competing visions of national unity, local autonomy, and historical justice collide [22]. Globally, dual naming conventions and jurisdictional ambiguities—seen in complex urban dynamics like Brussels/Brussel or Nicosia/Lefkoşa—arise when distinct linguistic, ethnic, or subnational communities assert overlapping historical claims over a single urban space [9]. In such contexts, urban spaces are not merely administrative hubs or neutral engines of economic growth; they are deeply layered socio-spatial constructs shaped by historical power relations, land expropriation, and institutional design [26].

Rapid urbanization across the Global South has further transformed capital cities into major arenas for political and economic struggle [44]. Where municipal boundaries expand into surrounding rural hinterlands, urban governance ceases to be a mere administrative function; it becomes a core arena of political economy-shaping who extracts value from land, who bears the externalities of growth, and who holds sovereign jurisdiction [23].

1.2. The Historical and Spatial Context of Finfinnee/Addis Ababa

In Ethiopia, this spatial political economy finds its most contentious expression in the capital, Finfinnee (Addis Ababa). The contemporary conflict over the city's governance and legal status is rooted in nineteenth-century imperial state expansion [28]. The establishment of a central garrison town (*katama*) at Finfinnee by the imperial regime initiated the systematic displacement and dispossession of indigenous Tulema Oromo clans—most notably the Gulallee, Galaan, and Ekka [7, 21]. This historical foundation established a pattern of structural asymmetry: the rapid spatial and economic expansion of the urban core—growing historically from a compact core of 21,000 hectares to over 54,000 hectares—occurred through the marginalization of its surrounding rural and indigenous hinterland, disrupting traditional socio-spatial structures and land tenure systems [42, 40].

Under the current federal arrangement established by the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), Finfinnee/Addis Ababa occupies a precarious dual constitutional position [19]. Pursuant to Article 49, the city serves simultaneously as an autonomous, self-governing federal seat accountable to the central government and as the official legal capital of the Oromia Regional State [1]. Recognizing the historical and geographical reality of the city's location within Oromia, Article 49(5) formally mandates that

Oromia's "special interest" regarding administrative services, resource utilization, and joint infrastructure shall be respected and determined by law [19, 34].

However, nearly three decades after the constitution's ratification, the failure to fully operationalize or legally define this "special interest" has left core historical grievances unresolved [30]. Instead, uncoordinated peri-urban spatial expansion, unregulated land conversion, and fiscal extraction have exacerbated regional anxieties over territorial integrity and cultural erasure [20]. At the core of this impasse lies a profound historical grievance that views Article 49(5) and territorial claims as a non-negotiable historical remedy for past disinheritance [8].

1.3. Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Article 49(5)

1.3.1. Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, the "Special Interest" (ልዩ ጥቅም) framework represents a constitutional recognition of subnational spatial equity, historical attachment, and territorial interdependency within a multinational federal system [24]. It is anchored in two complementary paradigms:

- 1) *The Restorative Spatial Justice Paradigm*: Views "Special Interest" as a non-negotiable legal acknowledgment of historical grievances surrounding the founding and historical expansion of Addis Ababa (Finfinnee) [39]. It conceptualizes the city not as a neutral void isolated from its geographic surroundings, but as an entity anchored within the historic territory of Oromia, seeking to remediate the historical displacement of peri-urban indigenous communities, uncompensated land expropriation, and the symbolic/linguistic marginalization of Afaan Oromo within its historical geography [41].
- 2) *The Intergovernmental Metropolitan Interdependence Paradigm*: From a political economy perspective, defines "Special Interest" as an intergovernmental corrective mechanism [38]. Because a high-density capital city relies entirely on its surrounding region for ecological survival (water supply, raw materials, waste disposal, agricultural food security, and suburban transit corridors), the city generates massive negative externalities for the host region while concentrating economic rents within municipal borders [18]. Conceptualizing "Special Interest" means recognizing that the host state is entitled to structural reciprocity and joint governance over shared urban-rural dynamics [10, 37].

1.3.2. Operational Framework

Operationally, Article 49(5) encompasses four measurable institutional pillars required to translate abstract constitutional rights into concrete policy arrangements [8, 41]:

- 1) *Fiscal and Resource Reciprocity*: Addresses long-standing economic imbalances through legally binding financial and environmental transfer mechanisms, including Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), utility revenue sharing, and joint tax-yielding formulas [45].
- 2) *Spatial and Land Governance*: Restores order to peri-urban growth through statutory prohibitions on unilateral municipal annexation, land-for-land restitution, and mandatory joint spatial master-planning protocols [29].
- 3) *Administrative and Service Equity*: Ensures public institutions reflect regional demographics by offering municipal services in Afaan Oromo, providing seats for host-state delegates on city administrative boards, and guaranteeing operational protection for regional institutions located inside the city [1].
- 4) *Cultural and Symbolic Parity*: Institutionalizes spatial heritage through official dual-naming conventions (Finfinnee / Addis Ababa), public funding, and legal protection for indigenous historical sites [36].

1.4. Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional provisions, the legal and institutional relationship between Addis Ababa (Finfinnee) and the Oromia Regional State remains an active source of political tension, administrative friction, and institutional instability [30]. At the core of this ongoing impasse lies a complex confluence of three deeply unresolved dimensions:

- 1) *Territorial and Jurisdictional Duality*: Creates systemic tension between viewing Addis Ababa as an autonomous federal capital versus recognizing Finfinnee as an integral territorial part of Oromia [20].
- 2) *Interpretive Ambiguity of Article 49(5)*: Its reliance on the undefined term "special interest" fails to provide clear administrative authority to Oromia while simultaneously leaving historical ownership claims dissatisfied, fostering perpetual legal contests [8, 34].
- 3) *Socio-Economic and Environmental Asymmetries*: The capital continuously draws on surrounding Oromia lands for vital resources like fresh water and uses adjacent areas for waste disposal, leaving local agricultural communities to bear the heavy costs of displacement and lost livelihoods without receiving reciprocal fiscal or administrative compensation [40,42].

1.5. Research Objectives

- 1) *Primary Objective*: To critically examine the competing political, legal, and institutional claims surrounding the status of Addis Ababa (Finfinnee) and articulate viable governance options that reconcile Oromia's regional claims with multi-ethnic urban citizenship.
- 2) *Specific Objectives*:
 - a) To identify and map the polarized stakeholder positions

- regarding federal accountability versus regional ownership using the PIN (Position, Interest, Need) framework.
- b) To evaluate the legal and constitutional limits of Article 49(5) of the FDRE Constitution and explore options for transitioning from "special interest" to "joint governance."
- c) To analyze practical administrative, fiscal, and boundary friction points like water supply, waste dumping, police professionalization, and legislative representation.
- d) To propose institutional compromise models such as dual naming, joint commissions, and representation thresholds for long-term stability.

1.6. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, policy-oriented research design to decode complex constitutional and political positions.

Primary Data Collection

- 1) *In-Depth Qualitative Interviews & Key Informant Consultations*: Data were gathered from primary interview sessions involving 50 key informants, including political actors, scholars, and community leaders.
- 2) *Analytic Framework*: The qualitative raw data were processed using the PIN (*Position, Interest, and Need*) analytical framework to unearth hidden motivations behind explicit legal demands, distinguishing the surface *Position* of "territorial ownership" from the underlying *Need* for "protection against displacement and security".

Secondary Data Collection

- 1) *Constitutional & Legal Analysis*: Comprehensive review of relevant legal instruments, including the FDRE Constitution (specifically Article 49), the Oromia Regional State Constitution, municipal charters, and federal legal enactments.
- 2) *Documentary & Literature Review*: Secondary academic literature on federal city governance, peri-urban land rights, public interest law, and comparative federalism practices regarding subnational capital cities.

2. Theoretical & Global Context: Capital City Governance in Multi-Ethnic Federations

Capital cities in federal systems are rarely neutral administrative spaces; they are intense sites of spatial political economy, symbolic contestation, and jurisdictional friction [6, 22]. In multi-ethnic, multinational, or post-colonial federations, the choice of how to govern the capital reflects fundamental trade-offs between central state consolidation, local municipal democracy, and regional or indigenous territorial integrity [9, 35].

2.1. Models of Capital City Jurisdiction in Federal Systems

Comparative federalism literature generally categorizes capital city governance into three distinct structural arrangements, each generating unique political dynamics [25, 35, 46]:

- 1) *The Federal District Model (Neutralized Space)*: Exemplified by Washington, D. C., Brasília, and Canberra, this model removes the capital from regional jurisdiction entirely, placing it under direct federal oversight to ensure political neutrality and central security [25]. However, as scholars of urban governance note, this model often disenfranchises local residents by carving out an enclave where municipal self-rule is subordinated to national interests [16, 46].
- 2) *The City-State Model (Equal Constituent Unit)*: Exemplified by Berlin, Vienna, and Brussels, the capital operates as an autonomous, full-fledged constituent unit of the federation with state-level rights [35]. While this maximizes local democratic accountability, in multinational contexts—such as Brussels—it frequently heightens inter-group competition over language rights, fiscal redistributions, and territorial boundaries between surrounding regional hinterlands and the urban core [5, 9].
- 3) *The Enclave / Dual-Status Model (Capital within a Regional Host)*: Exemplified by Bern (located within the Canton of Bern) or Pretoria (Gauteng Province), the capital remains physically and legally embedded within a host state or province [35]. This arrangement requires complex intergovernmental agreements to balance municipal operations, federal seat functions, and regional host rights [38]. Finfinnee/Addis Ababa represents a hyper-politicized variation of this model, where the host entity (Oromia Regional State) asserts deep indigenous and territorial claims over an urban enclave that simultaneously serves as an autonomous federal seat [2, 34].

2.2. Spatial Extraction, Dispossession, and Peri-Urban Friction

Urban political economy highlights that cities expand not in a vacuum, but through spatial extraction—drawing land, water, labor, and ecological capital from surrounding rural peripheries [4, 26]. In post-colonial and multinational states, this spatial expansion frequently intersects with ethnic and indigenous dispossession [33, 43].

When imperial or state-led modernization drives urban growth, the peripheral land converted for municipal infrastructure, commercial real estate, and industrial parks is rarely empty space [23, 44]. Instead, it is typically the ancestral domain of indigenous agrarian or pastoralist communities [7]. As critical geographers argue, peri-urban expansion under unilateral state eminent domain functions as a form of spatial displacement: traditional land tenure systems are dismantled, rural farmers are uncompensated or under-compensated, and indigenous cultural landscapes are

erased by speculative land markets [39, 42]. Consequently, peri-urban borders become volatile zones of structural violence and territorial resistance [11, 14, 20].

2.3. Dual Endonyms, Symbolic Restitution, and Indigenous Urban Rights

In multinational federations marked by historical conquest or linguistic division, urban nomenclature and spatial symbols are primary battlegrounds for political recognition [36]. Cities with dual titles, dual endonyms, or co-official designations—such as Brussels/Brussel (Belgium), Donostia / San Sebastián (Spain - Basque Country), Pretoria / Tshwane (South Africa), Derry / Londonderry (Northern Ireland, UK), Montreal/Ti-ohtia:ke, Biel / Bienne (Switzerland), or Derry/Londonderry—embody overlapping historical narratives [3, 32].

- 1) *Symbolic Parity vs. Erasure*: Toponymy (place naming) is an exercise of state power [3]. Renaming indigenous spaces imposes a singular narrative of national state-building while marginalizing local memory [36]. Conversely, restoring indigenous endonyms (e. g., Finfinnee) alongside official names functions as a mechanism of symbolic restitution, signalling that urban space belongs to its historical inhabitants as much as its modern migrants [3, 12, 27].
- 2) *Functional Linguistic Rights*: Beyond signage, modern federal theory emphasizes functional inclusion—ensuring that the indigenous or regional language of the surrounding host territory possesses official, operational status within municipal administration, public service delivery, and primary education [5, 31].

2.4. Positioning the Finfinnee/Addis Ababa Dynamic

The legal ambiguity of Article 49(5) in the FDRE Constitution—which acknowledges Oromia's "special interest" without defining its institutional or jurisdictional limits—reflects an unresolved tension between two competing models of federalism: a civic-territorial model prioritizing individual resident citizenship and federal seat autonomy, versus a multinational-restitutive model prioritizing indigenous territorial rights, historical redress, and regional sovereignty [1, 24]. Reconciling these models requires moving beyond binary zero-sum framing toward institutional designs that combine municipal self-rule with joint regional jurisdiction and socio-spatial restitution [2, 8].

2.5. Institutional Ambiguity and Political Failure: Critiquing Article 49(5) of the FDRE Constitution

The post-1991 restructuring of Ethiopia into a multinational federation under the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) sought to address long-standing national questions and historical asymmetries [34]. However, the

institutional architecture designed to resolve the status of Finfinnee/Addis Ababa instead embedded a fundamental legal and political contradiction at the heart of the federal state [30, 41].

2.5.1. The Dual Constitutional Status and Article 49 Framework

Article 49 of the FDRE Constitution constructs a bifurcated status for the city (FDRE Constitution, 1995). Under Article 49(1) and 49(2), Addis Ababa is designated as the seat of the Federal Government, granted self-governance autonomy, and made accountable directly to the Federal Government (FDRE Constitution, 1995; [1]. Concurrently, Article 49(5) explicitly recognizes the geographic, historical, and socio-economic reality of the city's location within the host state, declaring:

"The special interest of the State of Oromia in Addis Ababa, regarding the provision of services or the utilization of resources or administrative matters arising from the presence of the City of Addis Ababa within the territory of the State of Oromia, shall be respected. Particulars shall be determined by law." (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Art. 49(5))

This provision was intended as a constitutional compromise: balancing the functional necessity of a neutral federal capital with the historical claims and territorial sovereignty of the Oromia Regional State [2, 34].

2.5.2. The Mechanics of Ambiguity: Legislative Inaction and Executive Neglect

Despite the explicit constitutional mandate that the "particulars shall be determined by law," successive federal administrations failed for decades to pass the enabling legislation required to operationalize "special interest" [8, 41]. This institutional inertia created severe structural vulnerabilities:

- 1) *Legal Vagueness*: The Constitution left core concepts—such as "special interest," "joint administrative matters," and "utilization of resources"—completely undefined [34]. Without statutory clarity, the clause remained a symbolic declaration rather than an actionable legal entitlement [8].
- 2) *Unilateral Spatial Governance*: In the absence of a joint regulatory framework, the Addis Ababa City Administration operated as a de facto state within a state, expanding its municipal master plans, extracting water and ecological resources from surrounding Oromia zones, and dumping municipal waste into Oromo farming communities without intergovernmental consultation or compensation [13, 15, 20, 40].
- 3) *Jurisdictional Vacuum*: The lack of statutory mechanisms prevented Oromia from exercising legitimate oversight over joint infrastructure, land conversion along border areas, or the cultural and linguistic rights of Oromo residents within the municipal boundary [8, 41].

2.5.3. Political Failures and Mass Mobilization

The failure to legally settle Article 49(5) transformed a legal

ambiguity into an explosive political crisis [20]. The friction culminated in 2014 with the unveiling of the controversial Addis Ababa and Oromia Special Zone Integrated Master Plan [20]. Interpreted by Oromo communities as an unconstitutional, predatory land-grab designed to expand municipal boundaries by over 1.1 million hectares and split Oromia into two non-contiguous territories, the Master Plan triggered widespread popular resistance known as the Oromo Protests [20, 42].

The political failure of Article 49(5) can be synthesized across three dimensions of institutional failure in federal capital governance:

- 1) *Jurisdictional Failure*: Stems from a complete absence of joint boundary management and integrated spatial planning bodies between the federal municipal government and Oromia Regional State [2]. Without formalized collaborative planning institutions, the administrative dynamic has manifested as unilateral, predatory peri-urban expansion into surrounding agrarian communities, triggering chronic border disputes, territorial friction, and land tenure insecurity along the urban-rural frontier [20, 42].
- 2) *Economic Failure*: Defined by the total lack of statutory revenue-sharing formulas, inter-governmental tax transfer systems, or standardized resource compensation rates [8, 38]. The political impact of this institutional gap is a structural net extraction of wealth, land, and natural resources—such as water supply and agricultural real estate—from Oromia to fund municipal infrastructure and elite commercial development without equitable compensation or reinvestment in the affected regional communities [15, 23, 40].
- 3) *Socio-Cultural Failure*: Reflects the institutional refusal to guarantee working-language rights for Afaan Oromo speakers or implement official dual-naming conventions across municipal public services, administrative records, and local courts [3, 34]. This institutional neglect results in the continued systemic marginalization of Oromo language, cultural identity, and historical spatial heritage within a city that simultaneously functions as their regional capital and ancestral homeland [7, 11, 12, 41].

2.5.4. The Limits of Delayed Legislation

Even when legislative efforts were eventually drafted in subsequent political transitions, they routinely faced deep polarization [8]. Civic-territorial factions condemned any concession to Oromia as an unconstitutional erosion of resident citizenship rights, while Oromo political movements rejected top-down draft laws as inadequate attempts to dilute genuine joint sovereignty into mere administrative hand-outs [8, 41].

Ultimately, Article 49(5) stands as a classic case of deferred constitutionalism [17]. By delaying the statutory definition of Oromia's rights in Finfinnee/Addis Ababa, the federal state allowed historical grievances to compound with modern peri-urban land expropriation, rendering the original legal framework functionally obsolete and demanding structural reform [20, 34].

3. Empirical Findings

3.1. Metropolitan Governance and Institutional Models

Qualitative data reveals that the current *de facto* governance model of Addis Ababa (Finfinnee) operates under deep institutional tension among national neutrality, municipal self-governance, and historic regional claims. Participants emphasized that the historical absence of a joint governance structure risks ignoring surrounding regional dynamics, exacerbating unresolved indigenous rights, and fueling administrative friction with the enclosing Oromia region. The current metropolitan governance impasse stems from two opposing forces colliding at a critical institutional friction point. On one side are Oromia's territorial and restitution claims, rooted in addressing the historical displacement of the Tulema Oromo, securing cultural and linguistic sovereignty, and enforcing constitutional recognition under Article 49(5). On the other side are metropolitan accumulation dynamics, driven by unchecked spatial sprawl, the unilateral conversion of agrarian land, and uncompensated natural resource extraction. These dual pressures converge directly upon the city's contested dual status and the ambiguities of Article 49(5), creating a severe structural bottleneck. Resolving this institutional friction requires transitioning away from zero-sum demands toward a structural compromise defined by a shared and joint governance model.

Participant 1 reported that "Recognising Finfinnee as capital city is correctly speaking and writing empirical reality. It is admitting the reality; if not recognised, nothing will happen; the de facto will continue."

Analysis of stakeholder perspectives illustrates two primary conceptual trajectories for resolving this structural impasse:

- 1) *Territorial Restitution and Integration Model*: Formally recognizes Finfinnee as an integral territorial component of Oromia to address historical Oromo identity, territorial claims, and Tulema Oromo heritage. Proponents argue this directly resolves historical grievances, eliminates boundary expansion disputes, integrates municipal service delivery with the surrounding Shaggar urban cluster, and mitigates urban-rural armed friction. Participant 5 reported that "*Accountable to Oromia due to past displacement of Tulema Oromos, expansion... Finfinnee expanded from 21,000 hectares to 54,000 hectares, displacing many farmers.*" And participant 6 reported that "What matters is land... Finfinnee is Oromoland, so recognition is the reality."
- 2) *Dual-Capital Shared Governance and Decentralization Model*: Offers a compromise framework that establishes a joint governance structure acknowledging Addis Ababa as both the federal seat and the Oromia regional capital. Alternatively, this perspective proposes decentralizing federal functions altogether by establishing multi-city federal administrative clusters across the country as

a long-term urban governance solution for Ethiopia.

3.2. Intergovernmental Relations and the Constitutional Dilemma of Article 49(5)

Participants engaged in heated debate regarding Article 49(5) of the FDRE Constitution. One perspective demands the immediate operationalization of Oromia's constitutional rights regarding joint administration, resource protection, and identity preservation. Conversely, an alternative perspective advocates replacing the ambiguous "special interest" terminology with a formal "shared governance" framework to prevent institutionalized inequality between urban residents and the host region.

Participant 2 mentioned that "Article 49/5, geographical and located within Oromia, needs recognition of capital city... FDRE constitution should recognise linkage and capital city of Oromia in Article 49.5 so that it can be amended to recognise capital city, so Oromia Capital city should get guarantee so to address Oromia and Oromo claims."

3.2.1. Metabolic Interdependence and Resource Extraction

There is a strong consensus among interviewees that Addis Ababa depends fundamentally on Oromia's natural ecosystems for its metabolic survival. Major reservoirs providing clean drinking water (such as Gefersa and Legedadi), raw construction aggregates, and power transmission corridors are located entirely within Oromia's territorial jurisdiction. Conversely, the capital's solid and liquid waste disposal sites have historically spilled into surrounding peri-urban Oromia *kebeles* without formal intergovernmental compensation or environmental safeguards.

This creates a critical political-economic asymmetry: Addis Ababa extracts ecosystem services and exports negative environmental externalities, while peri-urban Oromo communities bear the ecological costs without direct fiscal yields or institutional governance over resource allocation.

3.2.2. Fiscal Mechanisms and Shared Economics

To resolve these asymmetries, participants emphasized the urgent need for legally binding contracts, joint development authorities, and fair municipal compensation frameworks. Specific financial mechanisms proposed by interviewees include:

- 1) *Ecological Compensation Funds*: Institutionalizing Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and funneling a statutory percentage of municipal water and utility fees collected in Addis Ababa directly into an Oromia Peri-Urban Infrastructure Fund.
- 2) *Tulema Oromo Restitution Grants*: Allocating a fixed percentage of municipal land-lease revenues to a dedicated institutional fund to compensate dispossessed

farming families, fund alternative livelihoods, and construct affordable housing. Participant 3 reported that “*Recognising Addis Ababa as capital city of Oromia is fixing the basic problem of our stability or addressing Oromo’s question.*”

- 3) *Joint Revenue Sharing*: Establishing joint tax-yielding formulas for industrial zones and commercial corridors situated along the border of Addis Ababa and the Shaggar region.

3.3. Law Enforcement, Judicial Systems, and Operational Jurisdictions

Jurisdictional overlap along the urban-rural interface creates severe administrative fragmentation in public safety and judicial administration. In peri-urban transition zones, operational ambiguity persists over whether municipal or Oromia regional courts hold jurisdiction over civil land disputes, tax liabilities, and commercial transactions. Similarly, law enforcement is divided among the Federal Police, Addis Ababa City Police, and Oromia Regional Police. Without coordinated statutory frameworks, this operational dualism creates jurisdictional grey zones, enforcement overreach, and delayed justice.

Interviewees called for establishing a joint, professionalized, and politically neutral police framework governed by shared operational standards. To streamline judicial oversight, participants advocated for integrated, transparent court systems accountable to a joint authority, including specialized joint tribunals and dedicated benches for women's and children's rights to arbitrate cross-boundary land disputes.

3.4. Spatial Governance: Boundaries, Land Expropriation, and Toponymy

Unregulated urban sprawl and the absence of mutually agreed, empirically delineated municipal boundaries remain primary drivers of regional instability. The rapid conversion of peri-urban agricultural land into high-value urban real estate, industrial parks, and state housing projects (such as condominium developments) has historically led to the ongoing displacement of rural Oromo farmers. Because municipal governments rely heavily on land-lease revenues to finance urban infrastructure while dispossessed landholders receive minimal one-time compensation, urban expansion functions as a mechanism for spatial rent extraction. Interviewees called for a sharp division through fixed, legally enforced boundaries to prevent further encroachment onto Oromo agricultural land.

Spatial governance is deeply bound to symbolic representation and cultural sovereignty. Participants highlighted the contestation surrounding nomenclature and historic preservation: Debates surrounding urban toponymy reflect two primary, competing approaches to spatial identity and

public memory within the capital. On one hand, the Indigenous Restorative Paradigm seeks to address historical spatial erasure by replacing regime-era titles with original indigenous names—such as restoring Yeka to Eka—and establishing equal, co-official status for the city's title as “Addis Ababa / Finfinnee.” Conversely, the Historical Continuity Paradigm advocates for retaining existing municipal titles and regime-era names, arguing that preserving historical continuity is essential for maintaining neutral, inclusive public spaces for all urban residents.

3.5. Language Policies, Cultural Heritage, and Historical Justice

3.5.1. Multi-Lingual Administrative Frameworks

Language policy within municipal administration represents a major focal point for administrative accessibility and civil rights. Although Afaan Oromo is the official working language of Oromia and the primary language for millions of peri-urban residents entering the capital for commerce, healthcare, and administrative services, municipal government functions have operated predominantly in Amharic. Interviewees argued that adopting Afaan Oromo as a co-working language within the Addis Ababa City Administration is a vital constitutional right, ensuring non-discriminatory access to public services, legal proceedings, and civil employment. Some participants further suggested expanding this into a broader multi-lingual framework incorporating major national languages (Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Tigrinya, Somali, Afar) and international languages to accommodate diplomatic needs.

3.5.2. Institutionalizing Historical Heritage and Memory

Beyond linguistic rights, participants stressed that the physical footprint of indigenous Oromo heritage within the metropolitan space requires structural restoration. Decades of rapid urbanization have led to the destruction or marginalization of historical Oromo ritual sites, traditional *Irreecha* celebration grounds, and *Gadaa* assembly venues (*Caffee*). Interviewees called for designating protected cultural zones, dedicated heritage restoration funds, and formally incorporating indigenous history into urban master plans and public education.

3.5.3. Truth, Restorative Justice, and Constitutional Consensus

A foundational insight from interviewees is that establishing a lasting constitutional consensus requires recognizing the city's history with truth and clarity. Before the modern city was founded, contemporary Finfinnee/Addis Ababa was established on land inhabited by Oromo populations, specifically the Tulema Oromo clans (including the Gulallee, Ekka, and Galaan). The establishment and expansion of the city involved systematic displacement, land expropriation, and the disruption of indigenous land-use systems.

Participants underscored that while denying this history is factually incorrect, utilizing it as a pretext to strip current city residents of their democratic rights or inflict new harms is equally unjust. Therefore, historical justice requires:

- 1) *Explicit Historical Acknowledgment*: Formally recognizing past harms, displacements, and land expropriations suffered by the Tulema Oromo, while systematically incorporating their historical contributions into education, culture, and public institutions.
- 2) *Restorative Measures*: Providing fair financial compensation, returning replacement land or housing, establishing community development funds, and guaranteeing equitable participation in future urban development.
- 3) *Guaranteed Citizenship and Equal Rights*: Ensuring that historical restitution operates alongside full municipal self-governance and equal civic rights for all non-Oromo urban residents.

3.5.4. Shared Representation and Constitutional Synthesis

To bridge the gap between regional claims and urban self-rule, proponents grounded in Article 49(5) argue that Oromia's status as regional sovereign warrants structural representation—such as allocating at least 50% of the seats in the city legislative council to represent Oromia's interests.

Participant 7 mentioned that *“In the shared rule, Oromia needs to have 50-plus seats in the Addis Ababa parliament... 50 plus Oromo representatives in Addis Ababa Legislative body, constitutional recognition, Finfinnee recognition.”*

Ultimately, the primary constitutional dilemma is not choosing between democratic municipal self-rule and respecting Oromia's regional rights, as both principles are enshrined in Article 49. Rather, the challenge lies in amending the constitutional framework to recognize Finfinnee/Addis Ababa simultaneously as:

- 1) The seat of the Federal Government of Ethiopia;
- 2) A self-governing city whose residents democratically elect their local municipal administration;
- 3) Integral territory of Oromia due to its geographic location, serving as Oromia's regional capital; and
- 4) A metropolitan area where Oromia's constitutionally protected legal rights are fully operationalized through a Joint Oromia–Finfinnee Authority.

Participant 4 mentioned that *“Regional Sovereignty: ‘Federal government shall not intervene into region government sovereignty; rather automatically recognise the decision of the region, including the capital city, by considering the geographical and relevant reasons.’”*

3.6. Political Economy of Urban Governance

To address these interconnected challenges, the political economy of urban governance framework synthesizes core focus areas with concrete technical and administrative mechanisms designed for long-term stability.

First, to resolve governance architecture tensions between federal autonomy, municipal self-rule, and regional sovereignty, the model transitions from the vague concept of “special interest” to a statutory Shared and Joint Governance Framework, anchored by a constitutional Joint Oromia–Finfinnee Body that directly oversees integrated urban planning, shared infrastructure, and cross-boundary revenue distribution. Participant 8 reported that *“Resource Exploitation without Compensation is very critical; Addis Ababa get clean water from Oromia and dump waste on the Oromia so why we forget Oromia's interest?”*

Second, addressing fiscal and resource equity issues—specifically uncompensated ecosystem extraction like water and construction aggregates, alongside waste spilling into surrounding territories—requires establishing an Ecological Compensation Fund financed by municipal utility fees, creating a Tulema Oromo Land Restitution Fund funded through a dedicated quota of municipal land-lease revenues, and adopting joint tax-yield formulas for border industrial zones. Participant 9 mentioned that *“Administrative and Fiscal Reciprocity are inseparable; special interest will be replaced by shared governance, recognition to Oromia regarding Article 49/5 Addis Ababa is not only located within Oromia but also capital city of Oromia... joint governance includes administrative issues such as fiscal and joint issues.”*

Third, to eliminate jurisdictional grey zones and fragmented law enforcement along regional boundaries, the framework enacts a Joint Public Safety Protocol coordinating Federal, Municipal, and Oromia Regional Police forces, while creating specialized Joint Border Tribunals to fairly arbitrate civil land disputes and safeguard civil rights.

Finally, reversing the historical marginalization of indigenous culture demands adopting Afaan Oromo as a co-working language within the municipal administration, legalizing dual co-official naming as Addis Ababa / Finfinnee while restoring indigenous clan titles, and designating protected cultural zones for historical *Irreecha* celebration grounds and *sacred sites*.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Synthesis of the Argument and Findings

The intersection of municipal governance, state-building, and subnational territorial rights in federal states frequently generates deep institutional, spatial, and socio-economic friction. In Ethiopia, the political economy of urban governance surrounding Finfinnee/Addis Ababa demonstrates that metropolitan administration cannot be decoupled from subnational territorial justice, ecological interdependence, and historical restitution. The contemporary conflict over the city's status represents a direct continuation of historical fractures rooted in nineteenth-century imperial expansion, which established a central garrison town (*katama*) through the systematic displacement of indigenous Tulema Oromo clans (including the

Gulallee, Galaan, and Ekka) and the uncompensated expropriation of their ancestral land.

Today, the dual constitutional arrangement under Article 49 of the 1995 FDRE Constitution—which establishes the city simultaneously as an autonomous, self-governing federal seat and the capital of the Oromia Regional State—remains an active source of administrative volatility. Empirical findings derived from key stakeholder consultations and analyzed through the Position, Interest, and Need (PIN) framework demonstrate that the status quo is increasingly untenable. The core problem lies in three unresolved dimensions:

- 1) *Territorial versus Jurisdictional Duality*: The unresolved legal tension between Addis Ababa as a multi-ethnic federal enclave and Finfinnee as an integral territorial component of Oromia.
- 2) *Interpretative Ambiguity of Article 49(5)*: The reliance on the vague concept of "special interest" (ልዩ ጥቅም), which neither grants clear administrative authority to Oromia nor satisfies claims of historical ownership, fostering perpetual legal contests.
- 3) *Socio-Economic and Environmental Asymmetries*: A metabolic asymmetry wherein the rapidly expanding capital extracts vital ecosystem services (such as potable water and construction aggregates) from surrounding Oromia lands and exports negative environmental externalities (such as unmitigated waste disposal) without providing reciprocal fiscal yields or structural governance rights to dispossessed farming communities.

4.2. Moving Beyond Zero-Sum Paradigms

The empirical data reveals a stark ideological polarization between two primary frameworks: the *Federal Territory Paradigm*, which prioritizes resident-focused, multi-ethnic self-rule and federal accountability, and the *Oromia Ownership Paradigm*, which demands explicit constitutional recognition of Oromia's territorial sovereignty, historical restitution, and guaranteed legislative representation (including proposals for a 50%+ seat allocation in the city council).

Attempting to enforce absolute regional ownership risks disenfranchising the city's diverse, multi-ethnic urban citizenry. Conversely, insisting on absolute federal territorial detachment ignores deep-seated historical grievances, cultural rights, and ecological realities. Sustainable peace and institutional stability depend on moving away from these zero-sum territorial claims toward an institutional model grounded in shared rule, mutual economic benefit, and constitutional clarity.

4.3. Transitioning to Cooperative Federalism

Reimagining the political economy of Finfinnee/Addis Ababa requires a paradigm shift away from a zero-sum imperial and federal divide toward an institutional framework of coop-

erative urban federalism. Historically, the relationship between the central government and the surrounding regional state has been defined by unilateral urban annexation, reliance on the constitutionally ambiguous "special interest" clause, uncompensated resource extraction from peri-urban farming communities, and monolingual administrative hegemony.

Under the proposed cooperative model, these zero-sum dynamics are replaced by structured legal and governance mechanisms. Unilateral expansion gives way to fixed, legally enforced municipal boundaries negotiated through inter-governmental consensus. The vague mandate of "special interest" is superseded by a statutory "shared governance" framework that formalizes administrative collaboration across regional and municipal borders. Uncompensated resource exploitation is remediated through binding ecological compensation schemes, equitable tax-sharing, and structural land restitution for displaced farmers. Finally, monolingual hegemony is dismantled by granting co-official language status to Afaan Oromo alongside Amharic and establishing official dual-naming conventions (*Addis Ababa / Finfinnee*) across all civic registries—ensuring that the capital functions as an inclusive, co-managed hub for all citizens.

5. Recommendations

The findings demonstrate that the political economy of Finfinnee/Addis Ababa cannot be resolved through zero-sum claims of absolute federal enclavement or exclusive regional sovereignty. Transforming the status of the capital from a point of chronic constitutional friction into a functional model of cooperative urban federalism requires a structured, multi-tiered reform package.

5.1. Reform Framework Across Five Operational Pillars

The structural transformation of Finfinnee/Addis Ababa relies on five core pillars of constitutional and policy reform designed to transition the capital into a functional model of cooperative federalism. The Constitutional and Jurisdictional pillar centers on amending Article 49(5) of the FDRE Constitution to replace the ambiguous "special interest" clause with a precise framework based on shared governance, formally recognizing the city's dual status as both the federal seat and the institutional capital of Oromia Regional State while establishing fixed, legally binding municipal boundaries. To manage cross-boundary affairs, the Institutional and Shared Governance pillar mandates a three-tiered joint administrative commission to oversee spatial planning, supported by fiscal transfer mechanisms like Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and equitable tax-sharing models for border industrial corridors.

Socio-cultural and practical inclusivity are driven by the *Symbolic, Cultural, and Linguistic* pillar, which standardizes an official dual-naming convention (*Addis Ababa / Finfinnee*),

establishes Afaan Oromo as a co-working language within the municipal public service, and protects indigenous historical sites. Concurrently, the *Security and Land Protection* pillar reforms local law enforcement into a professional, multi-ethnic municipal police force stripped of political alignment while enacting strict statutory bans on uncompensated peri-urban land expropriation to ensure market-value restitution and sustainable livelihoods for farming communities. Finally, the *Joint Mediation* pillar institutionalizes a balanced inter-governmental dispute resolution council, ensuring that regional rights and inter-governmental interests are co-managed without compromising the civic rights or democratic representation of the city's residents.

Pillar 1: Constitutional and Jurisdictional Reform (Article 49 Revision)

- 1) *Reinterpretation of Constitutional Terminology*: Amend Article 49(5) of the FDRE Constitution to replace the ambiguous phrase "special interest" (ልዩ ጥቅም) with a precise statutory framework centered on *Shared Interest, Coexistence, and Joint Governance*.
- 2) *Dual Capital Recognition*: Explicitly recognize Finfinnee as the institutional capital of Oromia Regional State within the federal constitution while preserving the city's administrative autonomy, self-governance, and municipal functionality as the seat of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
- 3) *Boundary Delineation and Judicial Clarity*: Enact fixed, legally binding municipal boundaries negotiated through inter-governmental agreements to halt uncoordinated urban sprawl, protecting surrounding rural agricultural communities from arbitrary annexation while establishing specialized Joint Border Tribunals to resolve cross-boundary civil and land disputes.

Pillar 2: Institutional Governance and Joint Commissions

- 1) *Three-Tiered Joint Administrative Commission*: Mandate by law a permanent inter-governmental body comprising delegates from the Federal Government, Oromia Regional State, and the Addis Ababa City Administration to co-manage cross-boundary affairs, including land use, infrastructure, and public health.
- 2) *Fiscal Compensation for Ecosystem Services*: Institutionalize binding fiscal transfer mechanisms-such as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)-to compensate Oromia for vital utility inputs (e. g., water catchment protection from Gefersa and Legedadi) and environmental externalities (e. g., municipal solid waste management).
- 3) *Equitable Revenue-Sharing Frameworks*: Replace arbitrary subsidies with statutory tax-sharing formulas for industrial parks, commercial corridors, and infrastructure projects operating along the municipal-regional border.

Pillar 3: Symbolic, Cultural, and Linguistic Inclusivity

- 1) *Official Dual-Naming Policy*: Standardize the dual-nam-

ing convention-*Addis Ababa / Finfinnee*-across all federal registries, municipal mapping, public signages, and legal registries.

- 2) *Linguistic Parity*: Adopt Afaan Oromo alongside Amharic as a co-working language within the municipal public service to guarantee non-discriminatory access to public administration, legal proceedings, and civil services for Oromo residents.
- 3) *Historical and Institutional Neutrality*: Preserve public institutions through inclusive civic policies, protecting indigenous cultural sites (such as *Irreecha* celebration grounds and historical sacred sites) while ensuring historical monuments, museums, and place-name restorations are guided by objective, research-backed historical panels rather than unilateral political agendas.

Pillar 4: Security Reform and Peri-Urban Land Protection

- 1) *Professionalized Municipal Security*: Reform local law enforcement into an integrated, meritocratic, and jointly tiered police force.
- 2) *Statutory Ban on Uncompensated Expropriation*: Enact legislation strictly prohibiting the uncompensated eviction of peri-urban farming communities. Public infrastructure projects must guarantee market-value equity, structural land restitution, and long-term socio-economic safety nets.

Pillar 5: Balanced Inter-Governmental Representation

Structured Dispute Resolution Mechanisms: Establish an inter-governmental mediation council to resolve representation and capital-planning disputes, ensuring Oromia's core strategic and territorial interests are institutionalized without undermining the democratic electoral rights of the city's multi-ethnic electorate.

5.2. Stakeholder Perspectives and Compromises

Reconciling the competing political, historical, environmental, and administrative claims over Finfinnee/Addis Ababa requires bridging divergent stakeholder perspectives into balanced, actionable policy resolutions.

- 1) *Federal and Non-Oromo Civic Perspective*: This viewpoint maintains that the capital must remain an autonomous, multi-ethnic federal seat directly accountable to federal authority, rejecting exclusive regional jurisdiction. Driven by the need to protect non-Oromo residents against political subordination and safeguard equal civic citizenship, this position is reconciled through the Dual-Status Model. This framework retains municipal self-governance and federal seat functions while formally recognizing the city as the institutional capital of Oromia Regional State within its boundaries.
- 2) *Oromia and Historical Claims*: Proponents assert that Finfinnee is ancestral Oromo land, calling for full regional authority or explicit ownership. Rooted in an urgent need for security against peri-urban land expropriation, restitution

for past displacement, and an end to cultural-linguistic denial, this perspective is addressed by the *Shared Governance Model*. This resolution replaces ambiguous constitutional concepts with joint administrative commissions, adopts Afaan Oromo as a co-working municipal language, and enacts statutory land restitution guarantees.

- 3) *Resource Interdependence*: This dimension addresses chronic friction over unilateral resource extraction without compensation, particularly regarding rural water supplies and municipal waste disposal. Balancing the city's requirement for a sustainable utility supply with adjacent communities' need for fair environmental compensation, the *Ecosystem Service Compensation* resolution enacts statutory utility transfer fees, mandates joint watershed management, and establishes co-managed landfill protocols.
- 4) *Security and Administration*: Governance concerns stem from fears of politicized or single-group dominance within local administration and security forces. Fulfilling the universal mandate for public safety, equal legal protection, and administrative neutrality, the *Integrated Police Framework* creates a professional, multi-ethnic municipal security apparatus operating under joint inter-governmental oversight to ensure impartiality across all urban sub-cities.

Abbreviations

FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
ORCID	Open Researcher and Contributor ID
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
PIN	Position, Interest, Need (Analytical Framework)

Author Contributions

Efa Tadesse Debele: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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