



Does Ethnic Federalism imperative for Ethiopia? A critical Analysis

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Abstract

One of the core principles instituted by the post-1991 government in Ethiopia that took power after a successful armed struggle was ethnic-based federalism, informed by a neo-Leninist political model called revolutionary democracy. The objective of this study is to analysis whether ethnic federalism is important for Ethiopia or not. The study used a qualitative approach. Interview was the main primary data collection method. The result of the study shows that there are competing claims, for and against federalism. The government architected the ethnic federalism system in which the country was divided into nine administrative constituents and two self-administrative cities with a full recognition of self-administration up to the right to secession. However, the practical implementation of the ethnic federalism system with the right to secession was not the right choice. Contradicting to its establishing goal, it generated and regenerated conflicts from the national to the lower local level of governance. Thus, ethnic conflicts prevailing in Ethiopia may be caused by such technicality problems and the ethnic federal arrangement in Ethiopia needs an urgent reconsideration before the case moves to the worst scenario.

Keyword: *Ethnic; Federalism; Ethiopia; Analysis; Important; Constitution; FDRE*

Introduction

Ethiopia has great ethnic diversity with 84 ethnic groups. Ethiopia is the 12th in the world and the 2nd African populous country (World Atlas (2018) Ethiopia). World Population Review (2018) 2018 World Population by Country indicated that the total population of Ethiopia is more than 107 million. It has more than 80 ethnic groups with its own distinct traditions, culture, and language. According to CIA World Factbook (2018) Ethiopia: People and Society, Oromo constituted 34.4%, Amhara (Amara) 27%, Somali (Somalia) 6.2%, Tigray (Tigrinya) 6.1%, Sidama 4%, Gurage 2.5%, Welaita 2.3%, Hadiya 1.7%, Afar (Afar) 1.7%, Gamo 1.5%, Gedeo 1.3%, Silte 1.3%, Kefficho 1.2%, others constituted 8.8% of the total population. Ethiopia is characterized by great linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. it is home to more than 80 ethnic communities with different languages(Tewfik, 2010:6). Twelve of these ethnic groups have a population of half a million or more, out of a population of 53 million in 1994. The two major ethnic groups (the Oromo and the Amhara) constitute over 62 percent of the population. The third largest ethnic group, the Tigray, the three ethnic groups constitute more than two-thirds of the population. In 1994, four other ethnic groups, namely, Somali, Gurage, Sidama, and Welaita, had a population of over one million. The seven largest ethnic groups comprise 84.5 percent of the country's population. Five ethnic groups (Afar,



Hadiya, Gamo, Gedeo, and Keffa) had populations between 599,000 and 1,000,000. The twelve largest ethnic groups constitute almost 92 percent of the population (Habtu, 2003:9). Fourteen ethnic groups had populations between 100,000 and 500,000, while twenty-eight ethnic groups had a population of between 10,000 and 100,000. Twenty-three ethnic groups had a population of less than 10,000 each in 1994.¹ For the most part, each ethnic group has its own language.

In 1991, following the collapse of military rule, Ethiopia established a federal system creating largely ethnic-based territorial units and gave them the right to secession according to FDRE constitution article 39(1) Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession. The current regime in Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism and redesigned the country along ethnic lines as soon as it took political power in 1991 (Taye, 2016:1). Supporters of ethnic federalism point out that it has maintained the unity of the Ethiopian peoples and the territorial integrity of the state, while providing full recognition to the principle of ethnic equality. It is important to examine objectively whether ethnic federalism is a viable way of resolving conflict between ethno nationalism and state nationalism. Now that the ethnic federal experiment is more than a decade old, it is possible to make a tentative evaluation of its performance. Opponents of ethnic federalism fear that it invites ethnic conflict and risks state disintegration. The Ethiopian state, they worry, may face the same fate as the USSR and Yugoslavia.² Others, of an ethno nationalist persuasion, doubt the government's real commitment to self-determination; they support the ethnic federal constitution per se, but claim that it has not been put into practice.³ To many critics, the federal state is a de facto one-party state in which ethnic organizations are mere satellites of one ethnic organization, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (hereafter referred to as TPLF), the leading unit in the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (hereafter referred to as EPRDF). Finally, those who consider Ethiopia to be a colonial empire see the federal exercise as yet another colonial trick, and advocate "decolonization."

Generally speaking, the set-up of federations is either on the basis of identity (ethnic) or territory (geography) depending on the objective realities and elite's subjective decision to address the concerns of societies. However, there are plenty of debates with regards to the model of Ethiopian federalism. In the first place, there is the fear that it invites ethnic conflict and risks of state disintegration. The worry in this view is that Ethiopia may face the fate of the USSR and Yugoslavia. The second view asserts that Ethiopia is a colonial empire (Assefa Jalata, 2009). Due to this, it sees the federal exercise as yet another colonial trick than emancipating nations, nationalities and peoples from the past injustices and oppression.

The third and the last is the view of that argues that the ethno-federal arrangement has maintained the unity of the Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples on one hand and the territorial integrity of the state on the other. This is the position of the ethno nationalists and practitioner politicians. The view provides full recognition to the principle of ethnic self-determination (Alem, 2005: 313-314). Kassa Tekleberhan, (2010: 12), who although recognizes the existing controversies, posits the relevance of ethnic-based federal arrangement stating, "If I don't want my wife to divorce me, I have to work on our relationship and the same is true for her; and this holds true for nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia." As Assefa (2006) puts, identity based federal approach has been regarded as the only ideal type for post 1991 Ethiopian state. (Working & Online, 2017:7)

Ethiopia's recent political record thus shows mixed results, with positive elements but also an increasingly authoritarian governance model recalling the features of the country's traditional hierarchical

¹ See FDRE Central Statistical Authority, *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Results at Country Level Volume II Analytical Report*. (Addis Ababa: CSA, June 1999), 41-43.

² Solomon Gashaw, "Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia," *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism*, ed. Crawford Young (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 138-157.

³ Mohammed Hassen, "Ethiopia's Missed Opportunities for Peaceful Democratization Process," paper presented at the 37th annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Toronto, 1994.



and autocratic political culture. This may produce more debate on the need for ‘adjusting the experiment’ (Abbink, 2012:2). Ethnic groups in their guises of “nations, nationalities and peoples” are formally recognized and have been exercising rights of political representation and cultural and language development over the past 20 years. But how these are to be reconciled and what scope they can have still remains unclear, especially within the new economic dynamics. Economic upsurge is in full swing and has seen successes. But these do neither “compensate” for the socio-political problems nor guarantee stability. At present there still are constraints and dilemmas in the field of ethnicity and citizenship (Abbink, 2012:17).

Firstly, Ethiopia has gone further in promoting ethnic diversity. The return to ethnic politics from unitary past was exceptional in Africa and presented by some EPRDF official and scholars as a magic formula that can solve all the political ills of Ethiopia. Scholars advocating the Ethiopian ethnic federal system contend that it would help to end ethno-national conflicts and accommodate ethnic diversity (Salih & Markakis, 1998; Alemseged, 2004; Mengisteab, 1997; Young, 1998). In this regard, Meles Zenawi⁴ stated that:

From a purely legal point of view, what we were trying to do was to stop the war, and start the process of peaceful competition [...]. The key cause of the war all over the country was the issue of nationalities. Any solution that did not address them did not address the issue of peace and war [...]. People were fighting for the right to use their language, to use their culture, to administer themselves. So without guaranteeing these rights it was not possible to stop the war, or prevent another one (Vaughan, 2003).

Advocates of ethnic federal system share the above argument of Melese Zenawi. For instance, using a normative phrase, Kidane Mengisteab has described ethnic federal system as ‘Ethiopia’s novel ethnic policy’ (1999:22). However, as most of these scholarly studies were conducted within the first decade after the adoption of the federal system in 1995, it was too early to make sound evidence based judgments (Halabo, 2016:12). Ethiopia needs a sound constitution that adequately protects democracy and individual rights (Twibell, 1999:3).

Therefore, the main objective of this article is to check whether ethnic federalism is important for Ethiopia in keeping the unity and integrity of the whole society and clarifying the co and pro arguer of ethnic federalism.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a qualitative approach as this method enables us to comprehend issues, questions or problems by providing rich and holistic information. Qualitative data were collected primarily from the experts and instructors of federalism from federal government ,HPR(2) and HF(2), and from 25 instructors from five universities (Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Mekelle, Bahirdar and Wachemo University) the universities are selected due to the prevalence of instructors who specialized in Federalism, Firsthand information data were collected primarily from the Oromia, the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples and the Tigray National Regional State Governments. The offices of the individual regions including the House Speaker’s Office, the President’s Office and the Public Relations Office were contacted for interviews.

⁴ The late premier of Ethiopia from 1991-2012 and the leader of the EPRDF



Data Type and Data Sources

The study employed both primary and secondary data. This broadening of data sources helped to reach effective and sound conclusions. And also helps maintain a higher degree of confidence in the data that would further help to establish the validity of the research findings. Accordingly, primary data sources were collected using interview from regional and federal government authorities. Moreover, opposition parties, expert and ordinary people opinion were collected through interview to come up with a balanced data. In order to triangulate the results of the primary data, secondary sources from relevant institutions, and academic journals, conference proceedings were utilized.

Methods of Data Collection

Interview Data

Interview method was the main instrument in the data collection process. The interview was conducted from March to June 2019. The interview was a face to face direct talk with persons from Addis Ababa (the federal capital and the regional capital of Ethiopia), Mekelle, in Tigray and Hawassa in the SNNPRS. The interviewees were as mentioned previously: government officials, opposition members, experts and ordinary citizens, and this study hoped to contact regional presidents or deputy presidents; however, the attempt to contact them was unsuccessful. The interview data was handwriting taken note as we were not allowed tape recording machine.

Document Analysis

Public documents in the form of conferences, newspapers, official records, publications, and audio-video were utilized in this study. In addition, secondary data in the form of books, journals, articles, periodicals, archival sources, reputable internet sources and other relevant sources were collected until sufficient data were obtained to support the primary data.

Conceptualizing Federalism and Ethnic Federalism

According to the words of Prof. Jovan Đorđević, “the word federalism stems from the word foedus, foederis and means a union and collaboration for the purpose of achieving common goals by per se autonomous and independent subjects and individualities”⁵This term denotes a contract, an alliance, while federalism is meant to be a formation of a union and a voluntary association of different territorial unions of people within the scope of a state, or between several states and political unities for different purposes. Following Littré, federalism, that had come into vogue, especially in France, stems from the Verb fidere which translated means "to trust", “to trust in”. This is why in those days, meaning by the end of the 19th century, three crucial works dealing with the federal organization of states had been published in French. Till then, the French had paid very little attention to federalism or did not take it into account. The French spirit probably take a contrarian stands towards this form of state organization, in contrast to the Germans who are very much addicted to federalism. The psychology of the French people itself tends to unitarianism, particularly as one may see an expression of national strength and unity in it (Bataveljić, 2012).

⁵ Đorđević, J.: Federalizam, Politička enciklopedija [Federalism, Political encyclopedia], Belgrade, 1975, p. 273.

Federalism primarily is in a close connection with the subsidiarity principle. As a result, a typical kind of social and state structure appears, from below upwards, in the form of a structure of smaller and larger, up to the biggest unity. "Federalism"⁶ means a well-regulated system in which a large number of particular states having equal rights unite to a "free union", under protection of their state individuality in a common political acting⁷. The basic elements of federalism originate from its very conceptions or definitions. In this respect, offering the conceptions or definitions of the three immense figures in defined federalism in the following ways. William Riker defined federalism as an arrangement where the "(1) two levels of government rule the same land and people, (2) each level has at least one area of action in which it is autonomous, and (3) there is some guarantee ... of the autonomy of each government in its own sphere."⁸ Daniel Elazar defined federalism simply as "self-rule plus shared rule" in a polity.⁹ Ronald Watts, like Elazar, defined federalism as "the advocacy of multi-tiered government combining elements of shared-rule and regional self-rule."¹⁰

From these definitions and the scholarship on federalism,¹¹ we can draw the following fundamental elements: federalism at a minimum requires (a) at least two tiers of government endowed with a sovereign power on some matters, (b) a non-unilateral amendable supreme written constitution with horizontal and vertical division of power, (c) representation mechanisms of self-rule and shared rule, and (d) an umpire.¹² Another scholar Bataveljić (2012) define federalism in its broadest sense marks a "multi-layer or pluralistic concept of social and political life".

Debate on Ethnic Federalism

Ethiopia takes a special place in the contemporary African politics by adopting an ethnic-based federal system and ethnic right to self-determination up to secession by a political regime that came to power after hard won victory over the military socialist regime in 1991 (Halabo, 2016:1).

Ethiopia's peculiar nature of federalism has been praised and condemned. Some see it as the only viable option for the integrity of the Ethiopian state and society. Others posit that it exacerbates and ignites identity politics, hence, would lead to further disintegration comparing with the failed federal states in the fall of 1990s (Working & Online, 2017:5). In order to validate their arguments for and against it, there are two competing propositions: one to fill the gaps that the ethnic federalism unveils while the other is taken as to rescue it. Understanding the relevance of territory-identity centered federal structure, some practitioners and scholars propose non-territorial/personal federalism as a complementary to ethnic-federalism. The proposition is to bridge some kinds of limitations and risks of using ethno-territoriality approach for accommodation of diversity to meet the interest of the dispersed minorities. On the other side, geographic federalism is proposed that needs restructuring the territorial units of the Ethiopian federation regardless of emphasis on ethnic composition attached to specific territory (Working & Online, 2017:5-6).

⁶ Püttner, Günter: Elemente des Föderalismus in der Verfassung des Deutschen Reichs vom 16. April 1871 – Föderalismus, light? [Elements of federalism in the constitution of the German Empire of April 16th 1871 – Federalism light?], Eberhard – Karls University of Tübingen, summer term 2000, Seminar "Topical problems of federalism", p. 2.

⁷ Hesse, Konrad: Grundzüge des Verfassungsrechts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Basics of the constitutional law of the FR of Germany], 13. ed., Karlsruhe 1982.

⁸ William H Riker, Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance (Little, Brown, 1964) at 11.

⁹ Daniel J Elazar, Exploring Federalism (University of Alabama Press, 1987) at 12.

¹⁰ Ronald Watts, Comparing Federal Systems (3rd ed, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008) at 8.

¹¹ Thomas O Hueglin and Alan Fenna, Comparative Federalism: A Systematic Inquiry (2nd ed, University of Toronto Press, 2015) at 31–36.

¹² Watts, supra note 6 at 9.



Interview (01) with the federalism experts indicated that, Ethiopian federalism framework did not have an establishment to manage intergovernmental relations. Consequently, there ought to be a foundation that controls intergovernmental relations, since, when there is strife of the law or a disarray of practices or other applicable issues, this establishment will serve to manage the issue, appropriately, helpful federalism can work appropriately in the bureaucratic arrangement of the country. Now it is high time to learn a lesson from the failed ethno-federations of former Yugoslavia, the USSR, and Czechoslovakia where ethnic politics somehow accounted for the dissolution of the federation. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a clear “ethno-federation”, which embraced the rights of self-determination and secession in order to accommodate ethnic diversity (Watts, 1966). Similarly, Abbink (2012:3) in 1991 Ethiopia accommodated ethnicity as a formal political element in the new state order. This makes the country relatively unique in Africa, where ethnic relations may be an obvious factor in national politics but not in any recognized form. If we look at Kenya, we see that every election is determined by a subtext of ethnicity, locally called “tribalism”, and that virtually all parties have an over-whelming although not exclusive ethnic basis, but formal ethnic parties are not allowed. In Ethiopia they are the norm. Ethiopia’s. Likewise Taye (2016:3) the South African constitution-makers rejected the claims of certain ethnic groups to self-governing status on the basis of their distinctive ethnic identity whereas the organisation of the Ethiopian state is founded upon ethnic federalism, which uses ethnic groups as units of self-government (Alemante 2003:78). Territorial structure of Swiss federalism discourages the development of ethno-nationalism across language community lines (Alemante 2003:101). Similarly, the Ghanaian Constitution (Article 55:4) strictly prohibits any political party organized on the basis of ethnic identity.

There seems to be sufficient justification for the fulfillment of the prediction of Proudhon that the twentieth century would be distinguished by the marked development of federalism. “This is an age of federalism.”¹³ In the second half of the twentieth century, more than half of the land mass of the world is under system of governments which may be called, more or less, federal. This popularity of enlarging governments which is the consequence of rapid technological change. “Each advance in the technology of transportation makes it possible to rule a larger area.”¹⁴

Ethnic federalism institutionalized ethnic groups as fundamental constituents of the state. It established them as social categories sharply distinct from the overarching category of citizenship.¹⁵ Many citizens are worried that it might lead to the demise of the state altogether.

Interview 05 says that

This is the terrible essence of Ethiopia's ethnic-federalism, a politically-sanctioned racial segregation style partition of land to isolate individuals dependent on clan. It is a perilous analysis made and standardized by previous TPLF Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

Thus far, there is no evidence that new ethnic nationalisms have emerged in Ethiopia as a consequence of ethnic federalism, as they did in the former USSR.¹⁶ But it is too early to entirely (Habtu, 2003:24). The federal constitutions of the USSR and Yugoslavia provided for secession, and both collapsed eventually, the collapse attributed, quite rightly, far more to communism than to the secession provision.

¹³ Ricker, William H., *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance*, Little Brown and Company., Boston, 1964, P.1.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, P. 2.

¹⁵ Valerie Bunce wrote that in their federal systems, communist regimes designed "virtually all the building blocks that are necessary for the rise of nationalist movements and the formation of states." Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 49.

¹⁶ Negative ramifications of ethnic federalism, notably the brutal murder of many Amhara in Oromo areas did cause the creation of the All-Amhara Peoples Organization, perhaps indicating the reluctant emergence of Amhara ethnic nationalism. Even then, it is not an ethnic nationalism aimed at state disintegration.



But while Communist Parties controlled the politics of ethnic autonomy, there is no Communist Party in Ethiopia. Perhaps the ruling party (EPRDF) plays a functionally equivalent role (Habtu, 2003:24).

Interview 14

[.....] but away from the eyes of the international community, ethnic conflicts are heating up again in every rural area. Even the United States Embassy in Addis Ababa announced its concern with ‘troubling reports of ethnic violence and the large-scale displacement of people.’ This is a big deal, because it takes a lot for Western governments to admit problems facing their darling ally in Addis Ababa. A few dozen Ethiopians dead is usually not a big deal for the West.

What happened in Ethiopia for the last 28 years was worse. The government constructed “sub-ethnic identities” like “oppressor and oppressed”, “favored and disfavored”, and widened the crack among ethnic groups. Terms like “chauvinism”, “narrow-minded”, “rent seeker”, etc. became the fashion of the government; all government officials from the higher federal level to the lower kebele level chanted these words, no matter what the reality uttered. “Chauvinism” was entitled mostly with the Amhara, and “narrow-minded” with Oromos, in a slight extent with Tigrians. If you are Amhara and deviated from the government in any matter, you will be registered under the vocabulary of “chauvinist”, if you are Oromo, you will be listed under “narrow-minded”. The political situation of the country went worse and worse. Government official’s daily chant about prevention of the so-called “rent seeking”, but corruption became a formal law enforcement machinery (Ethiopia Human Right Commission). The same thing applies to “chauvinist and narrow-minded”, despite they were the center and machinery of “chauvinism and myopism”, they spoke aloud as they were struggling against the alleged “chauvinist and narrow-minded”(Teshome Birru, 2018:4)

Interview 09

It will deteriorate as progressively ethnic elites ascend and get eager with the unforgiving reality that ethnic-federalism on paper is unreasonable and unrealistic on the ground. Much the same as Rwanda's innate warlords, the Ethiopian "activists" and savvy people speaking to different clans have worked up the nation more than ever. Be that as it may, dissimilar to in Rwanda, most inborn elites with "ethnic plans" are frequently western-based and taught: and they use web and online networking; not radio or walkie-talkies. For instance, innate elites like Tekle Yeshaw, Jawar Mohammed, Tsegaye Ararssa and others have gotten frank about the disappointments of TPLF's ethnic based organization. The enormous issue is these innate elites don't need liberal vote based system, and they don't contradict tribalism; they really want more of it. All these ethnic elites share one thing in mutual with previous tyrant Meles Zenawi: the distressingly wrong concept that every portion of land in Ethiopia is entirely owned by one ethnicity.

The country was severely beaten by a frequent wave of conflicts. Recently ACAPS (2017) categorized Ethiopia under the group of Iraq, Nigeria, Palestine, Sudan, and Syria and stated that conflict was severed. The prospects and destiny of the country are at crossroad, and its future existence was unpredictable. ACAPS (2017) indicated that violence and insecurity will likely to deteriorate in Ethiopia, like what were happened and happening in Afghanistan, DRC, Libya, Mali, Somalia, and Syria. The political situation of the country worsens from time to time(Teshome Birru, 2018:5).

Interview 05

[.....] this perilous idea is one reason some Oromo understudies ascended against the regular extension of an assorted metropolitan city like Addis Ababa. All things considered, assorted variety, globalization, urbanization and multiculturalism are a danger to the restricted ethnocentric perspectives of innate elites.



Seen from the perspectives of South Africa's and Nigeria's federal structures, Ethiopia's federal arrangement is highly ethnocentric. Implementing the federal system of government on the idea of ethno-nationalism, as shown in Ethiopia, could worsen matters. To put the idea more precisely, ethno-nationalism, a belief claiming the distinctiveness of a particular people and their right to self-rule in their homeland, will exacerbate community clashes into clashes of tribalism (Taye, 2016:3).

According to Aalen (2006:2) without the idea of common citizenship, self-determination for ethnic groups is likely turned into claims of secession and finally leads to disintegration of federal states.¹⁷ In order to prevent ethnically based self-rule from leading to parochialism and fragmentation, space must also be given to the development of an overarching identity in addition to the ethnic one.¹⁸

Why the Government of Ethiopia Install Ethnic Federalism?

Why TPLF choose the ethnic road? Three crucial objective conditions which TPLF faced necessitated its strategic choice. The three reasons behind the adoption of ethnic federalism according to Samatar (2009:5).

First, TPLF needed to gain some degree of legitimacy for the new regime with non-Tigray populations. Establishing ethnic provinces seemed the most visible route to accomplish this goal since it dovetailed with the party's ethnic orientation. Second, the party's leadership appreciated the depth of injustice visited on non-Amhara populations. Consequently, it was predisposed to experiment with a political system that could have immediate resonance with various ethnic groups, but which could also focus attention away from the centre during those crucial early days of the transition. Finally and most significantly, TPLF came to power through the barrel of the gun and like all such organisations desired to maintain itself in power at whatever cost. Senior party strategists considered the establishment of ethnic regions as a vehicle to engage ethnic leaders in ways that would reduce their challenge to TPLF dominance at the national level.

The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia starts with the words: "We the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia." This phrase indicates that all the ethnic groups as collectivities, rather than individual citizens are, in principle, the authors of the constitution. Thus, Ethiopia's ethnic federalism is federalism based on ethnic communities¹⁹ as the constituent units and foundations of the federal state.²⁰ The Preamble is not the most comprehensive list of Ethiopia's goals. It does, however, protect human rights and freedoms, promote economic development, equal treatment for all ethnic groups, and democracy. The question of Ethiopia's "true" goals is debatable, but it is enough to evaluate the Constitution to determine whether its execution furthers the goals listed therein (Twibell, 1999:11).

According to Habtu, (2003:17) although Ethiopia is a multiethnic state, the preamble affirms that the Ethiopian peoples, "in full and free exercise of [their] right to self-determination" strongly commit themselves to build one political community and one economic community based on their common interests,

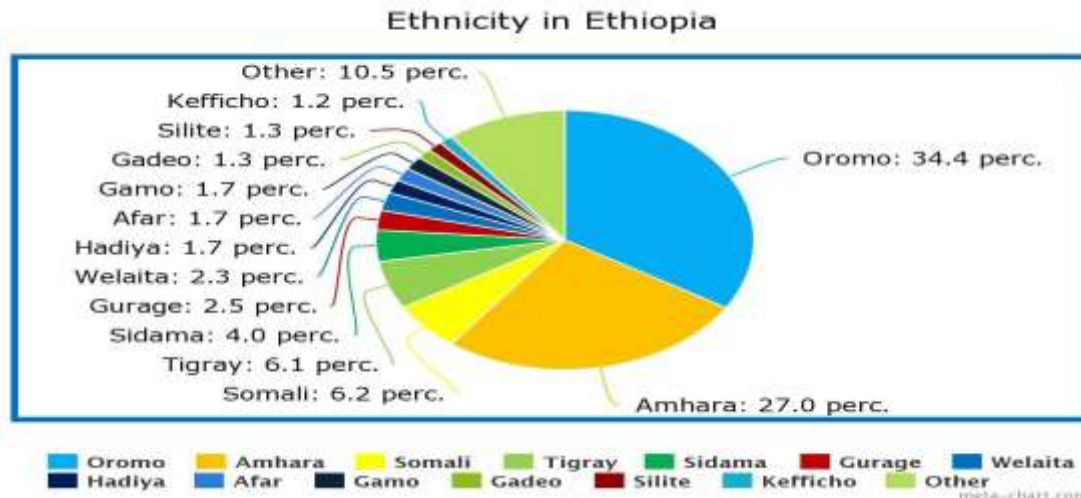
¹⁷ See R. Braubock, 'Why Stay Together? A Pluralist Approach to Secession and Federation' in W. Kymlicka and W. Normann (eds.), *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).

¹⁸ See Y. Ghai, *Autonomy and Ethnicity: Negotiating Competing Claims in Multi-Ethnic States*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Society (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2000) and G. Smith, 'Sustainable Federation, Democratisation and Distributive Justice', in W. Norman and W. Kymlicka *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).

¹⁹ According to Smith, an ethnic community (ethnie) "is a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural element; a link with a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity." Anthony D. Smith, "The Ethnic Sources of Nationalism," *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, ed. Michael Brown (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 28-29.

²⁰ Ethnicity has been emphasized at the risk of undermining the concept of citizenship. For example, Addis Ababa is a federal city. But official identification requires ethnic identification, although the latter is irrelevant in a federal city

common outlook, and common destiny. These clauses were inserted in the preamble, after a long debate, in order to underscore the need for political and economic unity among the constituent ethnic groups and regions.²¹



According to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, there are 79 political parties registered under Proclamation No573/2008. Of these, only 29% have country-wide (national) identity whereas 71% are regional parties that are organized around ethnic (Abate, 2008).

Interview 15 “I strongly advocate for democracy, the rule of law, and presence of alternative voices, but when it comes to ethnic-based political parties, I do have serious reservations. I rather claim that practicing ethnic politics is not the right strategy to fight injustices and to bring genuine democracy”

One, such political fabric bears no fruits so far. Ethnic politics has been on the horizon since 1991. Political parties proliferated over the years since then. But their contribution to ‘fighting’ injustices is nearly unnoticeable. The reason is not only because the ruling party is systematically narrowing down the playing field but also because of the divided and symbolic nature of the opposition. The opposition is itself seriously divided along ethnic lines and some even see each other as potential threats. Ethnic political parties have a problem going beyond their own localities (Abate, 2008).

Two, forming ethnic parties is thus limiting, both physically and psychologically. The parties are known only to their respective ethnic groups and to the Electoral Board. The Oromo-based parties, for instance, hardly work in Northern Ethiopia. All the promotion and campaigning is done within their own localities only. They could not compete or win members, resources and names elsewhere within the country. They are thinking within their own boxes. If the opposition really care about and for Ethiopian politics, they must think and act out of their boxes- their ethnicity. Ethiopia is much more than the sum of all the political parties and ethnic groups.

Ethnic federalism has been exploited to plant division among ethnic groups so as to institutionalize and facilitate rule by the TPLF and other politically affiliated groups, representing a small proportion of the

²¹ Interview with Kifle Wodajo, Chairman of the Constitutional Commission, summer 2001

²² <https://www.habeshatimes.com/7-things-people-imagine-when-you-say-you-are-from-ethiopia/ethnicity-ethiopia/>



population. Under the cover of ethnic federalism, the “divide and rule strategy” of the TPLF/EPRDF regime, weaken interregional and interethnic cooperation, and exacerbate conflict (Teshome et al., 2008:49).

The history of state formation in Ethiopia is a source of profound, even bitter contention. At one extreme, pan-Ethiopian nationalists contend that the state is some 3,000 years old. According to this perspective, well represented by Gashaw, the Ethiopian state has existed for millennia, forging a distinct national identity. Ethiopian nationalism is a historically verifiable reality, not a myth. It has successfully countered ethnic and regional challenges. The assimilation of periphery cultures into Amhara or Amhara/Tigray core culture made the creation of the Ethiopian nation possible.²³ From this perspective, Ethiopia is the melting pot par excellence.²⁴ Its image is one of Ethiopia as a nation-state.

Interview 08

One thing is without a doubt; when inborn killings begin, they can rapidly gain out of power. As we saw it in Somalia, even warlords got weak to stop the cycle of wars. Furthermore, Ethiopia's Facebook warriors and instigators will have even less capacity to stop future clashes. The perpetual cycle of retribution viciousness tends to take on its very own existence.

At the other extreme, ethnonationalist groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) claim that Abyssinia (central and northern Ethiopia, the historic core of Ethiopian polity) colonized roughly half the territories and peoples to form a colonial empire-state in the last quarter of the 19th century.²⁵ From the ethnonationalist vantage point, Ethiopia is a colonial empire that needs to undergo decolonization where “ethnonational” colonies become independent states.²⁶ Its image is one of Ethiopia as a colonial-state.²⁷

In Ethiopia, the role of ethnic federalism as a way to check and balance power is insignificant. The subsequent fraudulent elections and political, military and economic advantage of TPLF and other EPRDF coalition parties over opposition parties contribute to the existing weak political and democratic institutions supposed to underpin the separation of powers and to control the activities of the executive bodies and the interventions of the federal government in the affairs of the regional states. The right of opposition parties to control the approval of decisions violating their ethnic group is almost nil at all levels of government, federal, regional, and zonal. The rights of minority groups are not protected. The 1994 EPRDF constitution, the backbone of ethnic federalism, does not allow veto power for the minority representatives within or across parties. The checks and balance system among different state organs is weak and much power is vested in the hands of executive organs. Such constitutional deficiencies provide favorable conditions for the ruling party to act above the constitution and suppress democratic principles, thus causing the discrimination, conflict and underdevelopment of certain communities (Teshome et al., 2008:52).

²³ According to Gashaw: “The Ethiopian ruling classes cannot be identified with a particular ethnic group. They are a multi-ethnic group whose only common factors are that they are Christians, Amharic speakers, and claim lineage to the Solomonic line” Solomon Gashaw, 142, emphasis added).

²⁴ “The central theme of Ethiopian history ... has been the maintenance of a culture core which has adapted itself to the exigencies of time and place, assimilating diverse people.” Zewde Gabre Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

²⁵ Reflecting OLF views, Herbert S. Lewis maintains that “the modern empire was created only during the last 110 years as a result of the rapid southward military expansion of the Amhara rulers of Shoa.” Herbert S. Lewis, “Ethnicity in Ethiopia: The View from Below (and from the South, East, and West).” 158–178 in Crawford Young (ed.), *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 160.

²⁶ Asafa Jalata, 1998.

²⁷ Straddling the two polar viewpoints is one that makes a distinction between the ancient Abyssinian state of two or three millennia and the modern state of Ethiopia emerging in the second half of the 19th century (See Markakis, “Ethnic Conflict in Pre-Federal Ethiopia,” paper submitted to the 1st National Conference on Federalism, Conflict and Peace Building, May 5-7, 2003, Addis Ababa, p. 1). But this distinction does not suggest a way of bridging the two periods or states, nor does it explain the continuity/discontinuity apparently suggested.



Seen at the surface, there seems not to be a problem in practicing politics along ethnic lines. There are several people who even argue that such model of politics allows grass- roots-level participation and is an expression of improved democratic governance, equality, social inclusion, and political consciousness. Theoretically and potentially, this argument seems to hold some water.(Abate, 2008:2)

The declared objective of the framers of ethnic federalism was to transform the empire-state into a democratic state of ethnic pluralism²⁸ in order to ensure that no ethnic community would find it necessary or desirable to secede. Similarly Andreas (2010:43) as cited in (Working & Online, 2017:6)strongly argues that federalism has enabled Ethiopia in two folds; first, it survived the country from further disintegration and secondly it established a legitimate political authority in the history of the country. He continues that by this time nations, nationalities, and peoples are persuaded not to re- nounce Ethiopia but instead to join together to form a legitimate political order for peaceful mutual cooperation (Ibid). Ethiopia followed a new state building strategy focusing on two things: protecting the identity and rights of nations, nationalities and peoples and ensuring the unity of the Ethiopian state. Clapham (2013) sees the Ethiopian ethnic federalism as a potential to state building. He argues that federalism has served its historic mission in rectifying the deep-seated imbalances among the peoples. As a result of this, the post 1991 system has promised to dismantle inequality between peoples of the embodying state and those who forcibly been incorporated into it.

One of the ways Ethiopia's federalism differs from the other corporate pluralist states, however, is in its allowance for the right of secession. The constitutional marrying of political pluralism and the right of secession makes Ethiopia's ethnic federalism unique(Habtu, 2003:9).

The past "victim mentality" and the "revisionism ambition" deconstructed the long lasted status quo of "living with tolerance", dragged the country into a vicious circle of Ethnic based conflicts, and clashes from the lower local level to the higher national level. It built mistrust and distrust among the different Ethnic groups who lived for centuries together with a "colorful tolerance". In times of disagreement between ethnic groups, the appeal to the idea of an overall citizenship may prevent the convict from escalating into open ethnic fighting. The maintenance of the idea of an overall citizenship is however dependent on the existence of a state perceived to be neutral [24-27]. However, in Ethiopia, there was no overall citizenship and the government was not neutral. The shared and superordinate values of the country dramatically eroded, and the issue of self-determination for national groups became one of the major conflict line in the country (Teshome Birru, 2018:4).Among the experts of federalism interview 04 stated that

[...] federalism is not the only factor that impacts conflict; there are also a number of noticeable modalities that should be taken into account along with federalism such as the nature of federalism (such as territorial, multi- national and ethnic), the forms of federalism (symmetric or asymmetric/ congruent or incongruent), the socio-cultural set-up of the society, the degree of autonomy (given for sub-national government), the gravity of the regime's totalitarian institutional structures, and the like.

The situation went worse, especially at the local level. According to Gudina (2001) ethnic federalism exacerbated and regenerated conflicts especially at the local level. Almost all ethnic groups cultivated ethnic nationality than state nationality, within the country there was a development of secession, which further led to competition for land, which regenerated to boundary conflict. Lovise Aalen stated that Ethiopia's policy of ethnic regionalization led to the emergence of inter-regional boundary conflicts. Conflicts, horizontally among ethnic groups, and vertical clashes with the government securities were prevalent Taye BA (2017). The normative base for ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is undoubtedly connected

²⁸ Some Ethiopianist scholars see democracy and ethnic federalism as mutually exclusive. See, for example, Theodore M. Vestal, *Ethiopia: A Post-Cold War African State* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 207. Brietzke, however, characterizes the experiment as "an ethnicized attempt at a democratization" (1).



with ideology of the TPLF. With its triple radical and pioneering approaches: federalism, ethnicity and principle of self-determination, Ethiopia has gone further than any other African states and further than almost any state worldwide (Halabo, 2016:1). Political parties, which assumed to contribute for the development of democracy and likely take power, should not agitate inequality and discrimination based on ethnicity for mere political profit, instead they should define themselves through sound political, economic and social policies for the benefit of diverse ethnic groups (ANTENEH, 2014:108).

Conclusion Remark

All in all, when considering Ethiopia's ethnic-based federalism one can speak of a mixed picture, with great threat but also some achievements. The FDRE constitution Article(1) Any Ethiopian or foreign national lawfully in Ethiopia has, within the national territory, the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence, as well as the freedom to leave the country at any time he wishes to (Constitution, 1995) yet many people are displaced due to ethnic conflict and can't live outside 'their' own region. Several scholar and international organization indicate the main reason as ethnic federalism in Ethiopian installed by TPLF. The constitution thus misses an opportunity to respond to ethnic concerns without freezing ethnicity as an exclusive political identity. Even though Ethiopia implemented Ethnic Federalism for the last 28 years, it remains entangled in ethnic strife and bloody conflicts which lead to conclude that the implementation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is problematic and ineffective that puts a big challenge on the nation's unity in diversity. It will be a "liability" in Ethiopia, rather than being an "asset", since it generate and regenerate conflicts all over the country (Teshome Birru, 2018:5). Ethnic cultural (or even political) awareness, which is inherent in human beings as social animals, should not be confused with ethnocentric political consciousness (Abegaz, 2015:3).

The leadership since 1991 institutionalized ethnic federalism as a matter of ideological orientation and political necessity and as a way of resolving conflict between ethnonationalism and the state. The fact that most ethnic groups appear willing to live within the framework of the federal system is, in part, an achievement of ethnic federalism. Thus far, ethnic federalism has undercut the drive for secession by largely removing manifest aspects of ethnic oppression (e.g., language use) that would have served as a rallying cause for ethnonationalist organizations. Through its cultural pluralist and political autonomy policies, ethnic federalism has contributed to state maintenance.

The experiment of Ethnic Federalism was completely failed especially as a means of quelling of ethnic-based conflicts and cheering democracy to the people. Rather the curse of ethnic federalism with its implementation failure drove the country to the mid of the ocean without a tideland. Ethiopia is now like a boat slowly sinking down which led to a wave of insecurity and instability for the Horn of Africa in particular and the whole Africa and world in general.

The new regime must take into account ethnic differences, if only because these have surfaced as important to Ethiopians (Ehrlich, 1999:3), but do so in a way that will preserve and strengthen the unity of Ethiopia, allowing for decentralization and ethnic tolerance while developing a distinct civil society for the entire state based in the central regime.²⁹ Ethnic federalism seems to be a good solution only if it is applied moderately, in an atmosphere of democratic political culture, mutual tolerance, and the sincere wish to live together in peace with other ethnic groups.

²⁹ James C. N. Paul, Human Rights and the Structure of Security Forces in Constitutional Orders: The Case of Ethiopia, 3 WM. & MARY L. REV. 235, 242 (1994).



Recommendation

Democratic federal system has to address three inherent problems of nation-states. First, the nation-states deny people-hood to ethno-culturally diverse peoples within their territory; second, nation-states link citizenship and nationality together; third, nation-states pursue the idea of creating culturally homogenous societies. The reality, however, shows that only tiny proportion of world's distinctive religious, linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups have formed their own states (Ibid). Hence, a solution is accommodating diversity within the territory of democratic federal state. Though it may be precise to state that the main principles of federalism have few ideological shortcomings, it may be that technicality issues (types and forms) may hamper the imposed federal system in Ethiopia. Thus, ethnic conflicts prevailing in Ethiopia may be caused by such technicality problems and the ethnic federal arrangement in Ethiopia needs an urgent reconsideration before the case moves to the worst scenario. In the short run, the viability and stability of the infant political system is dependent on its flexibility and adaptability. In the long run, the success of ethnic federalism will be contingent, in good measure, on a more balanced share of power between the three major ethnic groups, the Oromo, the Amhara and the Tigray. All three ethnic groups not only need to work out a mutual accommodation, they also need, in turn, to support pluralist policies and practices vis-à-vis all ethnic groups in the country.

In Ethiopia, federal democratic governance is not an issue to be brought to the table and discuss on it. Ethiopia is home to more than 80 ethnic group; multi-religious; highly divided societies; rough (problematic) state-society and intra-society relations; undemocratic and very centralized political culture; land of poverty; violent conflict prone country; encircled by volatile states, etc. in addition to these realities, federal governance is becoming a viable approach as it combines two basic elements: shared-rule and self-rule (when one is preferred over the other both have the potential either to encourage and discourage decentralization or centralization). Ethiopia's. The genuine work of building exhaustive, self-ruling and all the more just society that places ethnicity in its place and expands on tending to shared difficulties and issues needs to start right away. Helpful work on shared traits between populace bunches as opposed to utilizing contrast and division is required i.e., another brain research of trust and participation to amplify the potential and satisfy a definitive points of the federation. Hence the conventional may be fit with the new. Proceeded with field look into on Ethiopia's ethnic gatherings and people groups, both by government bodies and free researchers, can add to the further understanding.

Acronyms

EPRDF- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FDRE Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
HF- House of Federation
HPR-House of Peoples Representative
SNNPR Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Region
TGE Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF Tigray Peoples Liberation Front

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