

The Edge of Ethnic Federalism, Prospects and Glooms in the Post-1991 Ethiopia

Abrham Meareg (MA)

Department of Civics and Ethics, College of Social Science and Humanities, Assosa University, P. O. Box 18
Ethiopia

Abstract

Since EPRDF seized power following grave bloodsheds of civil war, in 1991, 'ethnicity' institutes as a cornerstone to enjoy greater political, legal, political economy, and structural space by putting an end to the centralized system of administration. During the early 1990s, numerous political faction groups triggered and pattered by 'socialism thought' were considering 'ethnic' based federalism as a magic bullet to bring the long civil war to an end and save the nation of collapse. In the other side of the story, however, since the onset there was/is unfold doubt about the wisdom of giving greater political space to 'ethnicity'. On top, there was/is a debate about the continuing nature, form, and the role of it in the nation's political discourse. This paper inquires, the two divergent roles, i.e. threats and prospects, ethnic based federalism in the contemporary Ethiopian politics. In addition, I attempt to assess the basic arguments proposed by various state and non-state actors; interest groups, academicians, politicians, national, and ethno-national groups from in and out point of views. In the prospects side, it glorified as a means to bridge out inclusive politics, development, democracy, and brotherhood among multi-cultural people of the country. From the other opposite side, the continued emphasis on ethnic politics coupled with limited democratic practice, disintegration, a state of fear, barbarian politics, vacuum national consensus, political corruption, and pointless social classifications. Furthermore, it indicates the centrality of ethnicity in shaping state-society relations and governance pattern in contemporary Ethiopia. Consequently, the paper attempted to evaluate the ramifications of a growing trend of ethnic entrepreneurship and ethnic-centered politics in the nation. Finally, the paper concludes and forward recommends for cope out mechanisms of the stated problems.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Politics, Ethnic Entrepreneurship, Nation Building, Political parties

1. Introduction

This review paper is organized into six main sections. The first section is about the concepts of federalism and its' multiple interpretations. In the second section, the paper aimed to emphasizes the profound political space provided to ethnicity in Ethiopian political history. The third part, assess the prospects of ethnic-federalism as a force for integration of Ethiopia. And, the fourth part sees ethno-centric federalism as a bloom with several shreds of evidences. The fifth section forwards a conclusion remarks. The last section is the recommendation part.

The concept of 'ethnicity' has a strong link with concepts like nation, nationalism, and race. In addition, it includes concepts of ethnic group, ethno-nationalism, and identity. Works of literatures provide on each of these various concepts, interpretations and multiple approaches. Moreover, there is a greater degree of overlap and intersection among the various literature dealing with the topics. Ethnicity is about ethnic group/s, although there are different ways of defining and understanding an ethnic group. For the sake of this paper, I will start with the approaches that explain ethnicity.

As ethnic group in primordial lines refers is a collectivity within larger society which has real or imagined common ancestry, memories of shared historical past, and a cultural focus upon one or more common elements in which distinguish the members of the group from other members of the society. These identifiable features may include the area of origin, language, religion, kinship pattern, and physical appearance (Malesevic, 2006: 20).

The construct, ethnic identity, can best be understood through an examination of its etymological origins. The term *ethnic* has Latin and Greek origins *ethnicus* and *ethnikas* both meaning nation. *Ethos*, in Greek, means custom, disposition or trait. *Ethnikas* and *ethos* took together, therefore, can mean a band of people (nation) living together who share and acknowledge common customs (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 620).

In history of the world, state (re) (de) structuring has been a globe's day to day inevitable story. These are movements intended to re (de) organize the structure of the state in reaction to demands of communities for recognition of their identities and increased participation in the political realm. Beyond epistemological understanding, 'ethnicity' in the third world is hotly-contested, politically hijacked, and controversial topic. Multiple and blared interpretations of ethnicity and issues that revolve around it are common to see. Therefore, this section attempts to locate the most plausible approaches and definitions of ethnicity in order to make an informed analysis of the topic in context.

Academically, there are three major approaches to defining ethnicity. They are primordial,

constructivist and instrumentalist. All of these approaches are important to comprehend the place. To start with, the primordial approach that identifies ethnicity in terms of ‘differences in language, religion, or culture’ (Nagel, 2000:110) helps us to understand how people identify themselves.

The constructivist approach, see ethnicity “as an evolving concept in which, over time and space, economic, political, and religious emerge with specific configurations that may be labeled ethnic” (Rudolph, 2006:5). This approach helps to understand the historical evolution and the presences of interaction among the different ethnic groups that make up a state.

The third approach, constructionist approach, enables us to understand how ethnic groups develop a political identity in Ethiopia. The approach “explains ethnic mobilization and conflict at some point in time in any area of the contemporary multiethnic world” (Ibid). Ethnicity is in general, the aspect of ethnic group’s primordial, historical and political aspirations.

Specifically, a nation or nation-state, here, refers “named human population occupying an historic territory and shaping common myths and memories, a public, culture, and common laws and customs of all members” (Malesevic, 2006). The different ethnic groups that make up the nation may have different level of belongingness in the multi -ethnic nation-state. This sense of belongingness is known as nationalism. According to Encyclopedia of Governance (2007: 589), nationalism refers to a sense of belonging to a nation that may include many different ethnic, religious, linguistic and other minority groups.

2. Federalism, Ethnicity, and Modern Ethiopian Politics

The broader understanding of the ethnicity issue requires a brief elaboration about the ‘nation-formation’ process. How the nation building process unfolded, bear multiple interpretation of Ethiopian history. These diverse interpretations of history have connotation in the current remaking of Ethiopia as a nation. Historically, under modern state formation process in Ethiopian history, Emperor Tewodros II was committed enough to end historically recorded as "the dark age" "Era of Judges," "Era of the Princes," "Age of Princes," or locally known as መሥሪ ሙሳፍንት '*zamana masāfint*', and introducing modernization, centralization, and unification.

Emperor Yohannis IV (1872-1889) followed the nation building process pioneered by Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868). Unlike the former which was characterized by centralization of autonomy, in the time of Yohannis IV, the old version of federalism was implemented. Even though the Emperor was originated from Northern Ethiopia, the today's Tigray, he was used Amaharic as the national language. Most importantly, he was nominating numerous province administrators under the entitlement of '*kings*' e.g.:- Minilik King of Shewa Wag Shum Gobeze King of Lasta, and Teklehaymanot king of Gojjam, etc. himself and '*king of the king*' as Yohannis IV King of the Kings of Ethiopia’.

Even though Ethiopian history was/is dominated by controversies, in the modern nation-state of the country acquired its present shape at the last decade of the 19th century during Emperor Menilik II (Messay, 2006).

Emperor Haile Selassie, who took the throne after the somewhat brief reign of Lij Iyasu, the grandson of Menelik who ruled the country from 1911-1916 dominated much of the 20th century history of the Ethiopia. Until October 1935 marked the second Italian occupation, the old Ethiopian version of federalism was practiced in Ethiopia, in different forms and shapes. Historically, Ethiopian monarchs, consciously or unconsciously they were practicing federalism in different periods, in the multi-cultural nation-state.

Most significantly, since the 1960s¹, the query of self-administration, ethnicity, and class becomes the major preoccupation in Ethiopian politics an organized manner. The different successive regimes attempted to address the ‘ethnicity question’.

As the well-known political analyst Dr. Merera (2006) puts, the different political parties since the time of Ethiopian Student Movement curved their political program based on their peculiar interpretation of the Ethiopian history. Particularly on events that gave birth to modern Ethiopia and in the solution, they propose for the country’s contemporary problem. He identified three major interpretation of Ethiopian political history based on ethnicity as propagated by the elites of different self-claimed ethnic groups. These are reunification thesis, expansion thesis, and colonial thesis.

During the 1960s the concepts of self-administration, succession, ethnic-operation, and land ownership were dominating the political arena. Predominantly, the thoughts of Marxism and socialism were the hub of public revolutes, students’ demonstration and militants. Due to this fact, without knowing in a detailed understanding of the thoughts, the political elites mainstream the thought as '*one fit for all approach*' and Ethiopia as a nation become a self-declared socialist state in time of Derg regime (the military government).

Up to 1974, in the modern history of Ethiopia, the successive monarchical rulers, from Tewodros II to Haile Sellasie I (the last Solomonic King), seem to pushing for the reunification thesis. Hence, their major

¹ The decade marks the beginning of strong urban popular opposition spearheaded by the Ethiopian students of, today, Addis Ababa University

mechanism of responding to the 'ethnic' and self-administration question was empowering local authorities, marriage, and suppressions (Ibid: 120-126)

In 1991, ethnic-nationalist and ethnic-territorialism insurgencies dominantly from the north successful toppled down the military regime. In 1991, ethnic centered political groups from the major ethnic groups (Tigray, Oromo, Amhara, and SNNP) as winner side led's ethnic coalition Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front.

The EPRDF puts political structure and ratifies the constitution that grants primacy to address the 'ethnicity question' in Ethiopia. Since 1991, ethnic politics dominates almost the entire political environment in the nation-state. Currently, (not) knowing the innermost essence of 'ethnicity', now a days it becomes the center of state-society relations, political space and governance pattern in Ethiopia (Teshome W. and Záhořík J., 2008).

As it is stated under the FDRE Constitution which ratified in 1995 that is over used and devoted to address the 'question of ethnicity'. Under the preamble of the supreme law it avowed with the clause "We the nation¹, nationality² and people³" making ethnic groups owners of the state of Ethiopia. As Emezat (2008) explains, "Ethiopian citizens are first categorized in their different ethno-linguistic groupings and then these groupings come together as authors of and beneficiaries from, the Constitution...".

Generally speaking, post 1991, was landmarked for the first time in state history that government policy formally recognized ethnicity as a fundamental instrument to defend the rights of ethnic groups, as a remedy to the biases of the past, and common political denominator.

3. Ethnic Federalism: As a Prospect

In different studies, federalism is conceptualized as a theory which aims at balancing political autonomy and unification appeal to multi-ethnic states as a means of managing their diversity. Empirically, several countries had experimented and still are testing federalism option and other forms of territorial autonomy in order to contain ethno-linguistic group and to reduce inter-ethnic tension and conflict (Assefa, 2006).

As Different scholars forwarded, federalism as an alternative method for a multi-ethnic nation which can be used as a way out for countries conflict and tension. In most federalism based studies, the system is taken as an answer for governing deeply divided multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-religious countries (Ibid).

Practically, Ethiopia is home for more than 80 multicultural people, in which named as a 'museum of peoples'. Unfortunately, the absence of a proper mechanism of addressing diversity in terms of (political ideology, culture, thought, strategic/particular needs, and/or, history) resulted in a protracted based civil war triggered by ethnic stereotypes political factions. Due to this fact, the savage wars resulted countless life loses left the country with fragile nation building process.

After the overthrow of the military government, in post 1991, cornerstone diversity as an asset resulted for enforcement of ethnic-federalism as state structure. The regional entities that make up the nation-state are divided along ethnic lines. The ethnic-federal structure was set up to achieve mainly the 'national cohesion' and 'accommodate [of] the ethnic diversity. In which intended to decentralize power and resolve the nationalities question by accommodating the country's various ethno-linguistic groups. Accordingly, the constitution that came into effect in 1995 established federation made up of nine ethno-linguistically divided regional states. The nine regional states are Afar, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambella, Harari, Oromia, Somali, Tigray, and the SNNPRs.

Explicitly, the federal constitution Art. (39) Gives all ethnic-linguistic communities the right to protect and promote their culture language and historical heritage through self government. It assumes that every community has its own territory and confers the right to "a full measure of self-government which gives the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits.

These days, the federal system is profoundly capable of showing how much ethnicity determines the state-society relations and governance pattern in Ethiopia. From the preamble of the constitutional (the 1995) we can learn that provisions and the structure of the current Ethiopian state by many standards encompass the ideal system to address the question of ethnicity and to balance the imbalance the historical relationships of 'nation, nationality, and people.

Additionally, Art. (39) Of the federal constitution gives self-determination that extends up to secession for every ethnic group. In other words, the state's major duty is to serve the ethno-linguistic groups'. In the present Ethiopian Constitution model, ethnic communities are the ultimate agents and bearers of rights. The

¹ A nation, in the FDRE Constitution does not specify the meanings but other documents, refers ethnic group as a group of people who have a primordial commonality and are found relatively in higher(demography and economic) status than nationalities.

² Nationalities refer an ethnic group with primordial features but found relatively in lower economic status than nation. The meaning of these two terms is easy to understand when one see how the terms are used in regional state constitutions.

³ See Emezt H. Mengesha, the people refers *demos*, *more than one demos (people) constituting Ethiopia*.

constitution also allocated territories along ethnic lines. In addition, it establishes regional states based on such identity and provided the different ethnic groups a territorial possession.

Due to this fact, except few political parties and civic unions, political organization in Ethiopia today is mainly founded along ethnic line. Pro-ethnic federalists believed to be organized and established along ethnic line. Such constitutional inclusion and integration can go with the principles International and regional legal instruments that states are obligated to enforce social, economic and political justice among and between the people/ citizens.

The UDHR, Art. 21(1 &2) and Article 25, of ICCPR, which explicitly stated that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives and the principles of everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.

In line with the right to economic development as human rights affirmed under Art. 8, Declaration on the Right to Development, 1986 General Assembly resolution 41/128 discuss that states should undertake, at the national level, all necessary measures for the realization of the right to development and ensure, equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income.

Academically speaking, as a prospect of ethnic-centered federalism in Ethiopia, it provides opportunity to past time marginalized and minorities to unite into a powerful state without losing their identity, being assimilated, and separate existence. To keep the political balance, since it combines the twin advantages of national unity and local independence, a federation in Ethiopia becomes valuable to Ethiopia which is vast population and with historical, cultural, ethnical, and linguistic diversities.

Efficient and satisfactory administration of government may happen when the government is carried out closer to the people who are affected and when those with local knowledge are involved in making the decisions. And this enables high local participation of the people (Assefa F., 2006).

As Assefa perceives opportunities of the present federalism, he recognized it as a tool of wider option for conflict management, be it economic, political or structural. Multiple layers of government provide alternative means for dealing with problems. In addition, he argues that conflict of one form or another is often inherent to federalism, in the process of trying to accommodate diversity.

Democratically evaluating, the sub-national government are also often seen as laboratories of democracy or centers of experimentation where new ideas can be tried out, and if they are seen to work and be popular in one locality, it can then be applied on a national basis later.

Unlike to Unitary state structure experience of the nation, the federalism system in Ethiopia can take some of the administrative burdens from central government. In modern state building, there are so many demands made on national government to solve society's problems and to respond to all sorts of issues that there is a danger that its desire to act exceeds its capacity for effective delivery, so it suffers from the so called 'administrative overload'.

The above premises is supported by, David Turton, (2006) that the essence of decentralization characterized by sharing of power among/between federal and local autonomy (regional governments) can help to check the opportunity for a tyranny to develop at the national level. As a result it prevents national governments not to encroach or trump individual liberties. The concentration of power at the national level alone is seen as dangerous. This is best expressed in Lord Acton's aphorism that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. So power needs to be devolved to the sub-national levels. As a result, the government can maintain the balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces with in the country.

As prospect, the above academic and political elites convinced that due to ethnic federalism there is high degree of socio-economic and political consensus among multiethnic nation-states. Along with, the newly installed political paradigm, as merely copout mechanism for the past, present, and future (if any) oppression, assimilation, undemocratic act/government/ against the people. Furthermore, pro-ethnic groups considering the 21st century Ethiopia is fundamentally depend on how ethnic groups are managed in the given political community, in which determines the role of ethnicity as a force for integration or apocalypse.

In terms of organized politics, many ethnic based political parties promote the integration agenda as the most important element to reduce ethnic tension and build a healthy state-society relation in Ethiopia.

Although, both the present regime and political parties are trying to address the ethnic question, they promote different discourses. This created a tension between the incumbent and the various political parties that opposed Article 39¹ and further exacerbation of the nation's problems. However, the different ethnic groups' belief on greater integration and aspiration to realize it shows the possibility of ethnicity adding to the cause of integration.

Different ethnic groups promote integration for various purposes. For instance, representatives of

¹ Article 39 that gives the right to self-determination to ethnic groups up to secession is the culmination the right provided in the FDRE Constitution.

smaller ethnic groups the regional states promote integration in order to address their ethnic groups' security, to keep their 'identity' from assimilation, and socio-economic needs. Ethnicity, here plays a major role of mobilization towards the promotion of integration that can contribute to peaceful nation-building process. Ethnicity can help mobilize groups to achieve a common national agenda with the principles of 'unity with diversity' exemplified by the sugary test of fruit-punch.

Most of Ethiopia's ethnic based political parties promote 'ethno-cultural segmentation' and 'ethno class-segmentation'. Both aspire for integration of the nation but demand for improved status for their respective ethnic groups. Some demand a better status for their ethnic group, because they perceive themselves as lower status because of the past or present actions of the dominant group(s). Others call for respect for their culture. Some may demand both ethnic-cultural and ethnic-class rights. However, in both cases, the ethnicity aspect has links to integration and real unification. (Merera: 2006).

To generalize (Beissinger, 2008:85), scholars and politicians perceive ethnic based governance in multi-cultural countries as a preferable system and safest way of administration. Thus, ethnic diversity has no inherent linkage to disintegration of state, by mentioning many nations with diverse ethnic groups live in peace, under umbrella of ethno-federalism.

4. Ethnic Federalism: As a Gloom

From polarized point of views, however, there are citizens, academic, and political elites in which deviate with the concept of 'ethnicity' and feel the system of ethno-federalism as a doom and means for disintegration for the country. In this section, the following discussion demonstrates the today Ethiopia as in state of fear, turn in to wasteland, erratic politics, and deadlock democratization process.

As a claim, there is a accusations against the ruling party that the government is successful in naturalizing ethnic resistant groups and people, by engaging divergent political parties and assimilations. As it is stated under (Abdullahi, 2007:556 and Cohen, 1995:157) there are accusations and claims that the regime (Institutionally, ethno-centrism considered to be brain child of FDRE) is attempting to address the issue of ethnicity through politico-legal means. In fact, the incumbent claims its main goal is to answer the ethnicity question that has been ravaging the nation for long. Nevertheless, the presence of armed groups pursuing ethnic agenda denotes shows the persistence of fundamental problems related to the politics and thoughts of ethnicity in Ethiopia.

Since, the establishment of the current ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, which is overweighed on ethnicity, language affiliation, and identity; ethnicity becomes the primarily accepted form of political organization. In line with this, various ethnic groups in Ethiopia are organizing and struggling (legally or not) for a different degree of political space and autonomy, which is a manifestation of instrumentalist approach.

There are group of elites who are convinced that increased sense of nationalism by different ethnic groups to the nation would facilitate for the greater integration of the nation. Whereas reduced sense of nationalism could lead to the disintegration of the nation. In reverse, there are a few people who perceive referring ethno-nationalism as a loyalty toward particular ethnic group that "usually lead to demands for self-determination" (Rudolph: 2006). In contrary, ethno-regionalism considered as has no secessionist goal, but include demands for greater output, authority and attention from the nation.

In addition, as Ryan, (2005) groups in multi- ethnic nations like Ethiopia are in a constant state of competition to control political power and space. Public manipulation of demagogues or real social injustice might couple with an economic crisis and institutional fatigue as well as historical experience could lead a group to demand greater autonomy or secession. If the other ethnic groups in the nation do not allow the group to secede, a civil war probably may erupt. Leading to what is today seen around the world called ethnic conflict.

In which ethnic tension and ethnic conflicts are on the rise since the end of the Cold War. Although, ethnic tensions and conflicts are found all over the world, their impact vary in scope, urgency, intensity and visibility (ibid).

Honest questions, critics rose against the essence of ethnic-federalism that circled in the incumbent's ethnicity management strategies. Explicitly, (1) beside the political interrelations and self-claiming, In Ethiopia, is there any group of people which fulfills to be named as nation and nationality? (2) Historically, was there ethnic oppression vs. class exploitations? (3) If there was ethnic oppression, who exploits who? (4) Inherent weakness associated with ethnic-federalism and some provisions in the 1995 constitution, and (5) the lack of genuine implementation of the main provisions of the constitution and ethno-federal structural requirements.

As ethnic-federalism directs "a federal political system, in which, component territorial governance units are invested with ethnic content" (Hale, 2008:294). Some scholars argue the presence of an inherent systemic relation between ethnic-federalism and secessionism. They assert, the center-region separation of authority intrinsic to ethno federalism is logically linked to secessionism.

The claims are outsourced from the thought that ethno-federalism creates a geographical and political space, nurtures ethnic consciousness, and allocates institutionally defined resources to elites in the ethnically

defined regions. Moreover, Kidane, (2004) perceiving state structure as wrong for the state to allow itself to become a testing ground for social experimentation.

Emezat (2008: 175) identified two major threats and weakness of ethnic-federalism from Ethiopian context. The criticisms are geared that the political thought has the danger of freezing and institutionally entrenching existing ethnic divisions and creates the thinking of leaders with local identity vs. leaders with a passport. Along with, it has also excluded minorities (language, ethnic, individuals, and individuals with neutralized ethnic views) within the regional states.

In addition (Alemsegede, 2004 and Kidane, 2001) despite the extended provisions provided in the constitution and a visible delegation of cultural power to ethnic groups, the gap between state and society remains wide in Ethiopia. They criticized the FDRE new arrangement as did not eliminated ethnic mobilization and ethnic conflict in the country, which signifies the continuation of the challenges to the process of nation building in Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, the absence of a genuine effort to address ethnic-cultural and ethnic-class demands might lead to the old cycle of civil war in the nation. Although, Ethiopia today is much better in addressing a large number of ethnic-cultural demands the country remains in political terms highly centralized (Joireman and Szayna, 2000).

Additionally, ethnicity becomes a volatile issue when attached to economic and political demands. This is mainly the case in Ethiopia as Lubo (2012) argue contemporary Ethiopia have developed ethnic prejudices and stereotypes that lead them to generalize that ethnic conflict arises solely from ethnic differences or ethnic antagonism. In a similar vein, Merera (2007) argues, “ethnicity has got a propensity to lead to conflict when it is suppressed by the state and a propensity to lead to conflict in the event of democratization the state and society”.

There is also a growing fear of conflict transformation because of ethnic-federalism. The system has a tendency to transform minor incidents between and among different groups into a conflict Intra/Inter-regional state representing different ethnic groups (Assefa, 2006: 136).

Thus, there is a bulk of literature¹ that explains the absence of implementing the constitutional provisions set to address the requests of self-administration and recognition of ethnicity. These arguments stated that in the capability of the ethnic-federal structure and constitutional provisional to address the ethnicity question in the nation.

However, they express doubt on the integration process because of the absence of genuine implementation on the side of the ruling party. The lack of democratization and constitutionalism beyond rhetoric in Ethiopia is described to contribute to the fragile and unpredictable nation building process (Ibid).

Generally speaking, even though some pro-ethnic politicians and academicians have seen ethnic-federalism as a means of harmonizing ethnic claims in Ethiopia, there are millions of people living in the state of fears and anonymity towards the political thought.

Practically in recent years, due to the direct and indirect uninvited defects of the system, there are popular uprisings, adventure killings, civil disobedience, resulted/resulting gravity consequences. Due to this fact, the government declared the State of Emergence as constitutional granted under Art. (93) sub (a) which stated that *'the Council of Ministers shall have the power to decree a state of emergency in the cases of an external invasion, a breakdown of law and order which endangers the constitutional order and which cannot be controlled by the regular law enforcement agencies'*.

Significantly, the engineering of ethnic federalism results in duplication of governmental organization, criticized by making administration more complicated and inefficient. Particularly, the system exist the danger of possible conflict of jurisdiction between the national and state governments. Empirically, in 2016 due to differences of the Amharan, Oromia, Tigray, some parts of South Nation Nationality and People Regional Governments (major ethnic groups in Ethiopia), over bordered (administrative lines) and self-administration (recognition) triggered conflicts leads to wide civil conflicts, uprising, and exodus in different provinces.

The above de-facto based on the rationality of the only means to gain power in the system is having a difference. And, if someone wants to hold power, he/she/they should give overweight on having a difference and divergent history. The contemporary Ethiopian Poet Mr. Bewket Siyum trying to illustrate how the essence of Ethiopian federalism contradicts with the concepts of human nature and universalism by his poem as follows:-

‘ከአገር ጫፍ እስከጫፍ በጥላህ ከልላህ፤
ተራራው የኔ ነው ለምን ትለኛለህ፤
ወንዙ ድርሻዬ ነው ለምን ትለኛለህ፤
እንኩዋንስ ማሬቱ አንተም ያንተ አይደለህ.....፤’ (የመፅሐተኛው ኑዛዜ)::

¹ See Merera (2007); Abbink J. (2006).Discomfiture of Democracy? The 2005 Election Crisis In Ethiopia and Its Aftermath *African Affairs*, 105/419, 173–199; Tesfaye Aaron(Summer/Fall 2005-2006). Identity Politics, Citizenship, and Democratization in Ethiopia. *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 2, 55-73; and others.

In addition, critics against the thoughts are emanated from ethnic federalism by default resulted in a twilight zone among and between citizens. Thus, potentially becomes a source of political corruption, unpredictable politics, and complexity of administration. Critically evaluating the thought, it weakening centers power, pressure for greater autonomy particularly when the sub-national units boundaries coincide with ethnic and cultural identities, can exacerbate divisions in society, leading to increased conflict, and eventually fragmentation.

The above analysis can be supported by Cederman (2010) that ethnic-federalism created a wide gulf between state-and-society in Ethiopia. The nation-state in Ethiopia resembles “an institution that is captured to different degrees by representatives of particular ethnic communities...”. On one hand, this enables citizens to develop a dual competing identity and association between ethnic and national identity. The above reviewer's though rationalized is in Ethiopia where the nation building process is at its initial stage and the weak nation-state, the ethnic-nationalist groups will get a greater momentum to agitate their respective ethnic groups towards secession. In turn, this trend perhaps may result to hijack in the dismemberment of the nation by triggering a chain effect.

The other threat of ethnocentrism can be reflected on constitutional provisions such as ‘*amending past misdeeds*’ is giving a broader room for a multiple revisionist interpretations of Ethiopian history. This leads also the various ethnic groups to pursue different discourses. This pointless blaming the past legacy (blame shifting) is trapping hardly the today national building process. The above character assassination habit directly or indirectly affects the national concussions towards the future. In fact, there is an Ethiopian proverb in which excellently picturing the existing political premise lacks cognitive discourses.

‘አኔ ከተፈጠርኩ፣ አልጠግሁም ጠጂ፣
አባቴ በጠግው፣ ያዞረኛል እንጂ፣’

Comparatively, the present system (federalism) and the FDRE Constitution are major departures from the preexisting system at least ideally. It considers ethnicity as no other in the history of Ethiopia. Some may argue, the extensive rights provided to ethnic groups might lead to the dismemberment of the nation.

However, from ethnic groups’ side, it perhaps is the reason for coexistence of ethnic majorities with minorities. Nevertheless, the ethnic questions remains still a contentious issue in Ethiopia, because addressing the issues of ethnicity requires a genuine implementation of the promises made on paper.

By calculating short and long run nation's risks, there are people who are convinced that deep-rooted sense of localism (ethnic-regionalism) in alarming rate may consequences immortal walk towards disintegration. At the de-facto, unresolved 'ethnic identity claims' turmoil by ethnic-centered political parties, zero political accountability, and historically stereotyped colonial thesis elites the country’s peace is becoming short-lived.

In regards to historical claims of cultural assimilations and intra-colonial sprits, as a good opportunity today in Ethiopia there is no national language, in which Amharic is reserved as only a working language at the federal level under FDRE constitution Art. (5) and the 2003 nationality law. In which mastermind of ethnic-federalism in the country claims it as a golden chance to grant equal recognition and promote to all languages.

In the other side of the story, however, it is determinant in what way the above multilingual rights are perceived, mainstream, and utilized at the grassroots. As a matter of fact, in loud and clear that the above recognition is distorted under public institutions (schools, higher education and public services) and legal units in which localism hijacked the national identify.

Using the above as a base, (Berhanu, 2007 and Messay, 2003:182) argues, that ‘the tendency of ethnic politics to harbor a separatist sprite by identifying the nation with the ethnic group. Rivalry, among the different ethnic groups that make up the Ethiopia nation, threatens the very existence of the state, in which underweighted values of state existences’.

Generally, the other basic critics generated from the Ethiopian ethnic based federalism allow territory for the different ethnic groups. The EFDRE constitution makes nations and nationalities as the sole owners of the territories. Thus, reducing internal mobility and rising exclusion of some groups that has been playing a crucial role of hosting the integration process under the pretext of self-administration. In which continued absence of democratic culture and growing global sympathy toward ethno-linguistic groups’ demand hasten the waning of Ethiopian nationalism at lease.

5. Conclusion

As the paper pointed toward, the topic of 'ethnicity' largely determines the society-society, state-society relations, and governance pattern in today’s Ethiopia. The constitution, the state structure, the political organization, legal system, the political-economy, and the party system are in a way designed to address and revolve around ethnicity. Nevertheless, the national quest to address the ethnicity question continues to pose a challenge and considered as 'the third world phenomenon' and old fashioned way of political resistance in the 1960s of Ethiopia. The present ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is created according to its proponents, particularly to address the question of ethnicity and halt ethnic conflict in the multi-layered nation. As a bloom, however, others doubt the

wisdom of ethnic federalism integrating capability and suspect giving greater attention to ethnicity might rather lead to the disintegration of the nation.

A combination of an inherent systemic link between ethno-federalism and secession; slow democratization process and the contemporary international trend will contribute for the dismemberment of the state in the future.

Despite such an effort to nurture ethnicity, the nation is still experiencing a raging debate about ethnicity and issues that revolve around it. So, why ethnicity continue to pose a threat to the nation? Is it going to lead the country towards unification or dissolution? These are the most important inquires this paper attempts to address.

6. Recommendations

As a recommendation, to avoid ethnic conflicts the state should take comprehensive measures that include restructuring the state structure. To make it practical, there should be bold action on inter-sector approach in (re-) negotiation of inter-cultural relationships.

It is loud and clear that the map of recognition to the nation, nationality, and people in Ethiopia in general used to bring peace, development, and the right to self-administration. However, the power map of ethnicity and identity has now become a superfluous intrusion. By cancelling the state sponsored political vacuum corruption, rent-seekers, and ethnic interpreters that potentiality damages the coexistence of multiethnic societies.

As a result, a long-term national policy, state and non-state stakeholders should work to narrow polarized interests in different faction groups to work for common goals and neutralize the venom of ethnicity. Particularly, political engineers of the nation should create fertile ground for citizens decline to be categorized in ethnic groups and/or founded multi-ethnic family. Furthermore, the masterminds of the existing state structure should introduce non-ethnic middle ground or buffer zone for citizens.

To make it practical, I suggest the political engineers of the nation that they have to recognize (politically and culturally) to each other from their bottom of the heart with a real fraternity. There should be inclusive room to accommodate natural and socialized diversities; however, having a difference should not be a way to get political power.

To put it in another word, as long as Ethiopia is home of diversities, without recognizing differences (culture, thoughts, history, politics, and dogma etc) it will be fake patriotism. Instead of old fashioned politics, thought, there should be a third way of seeing the national building in which the only means to get tomorrow's strong and sustainable nation is spot on real democracy and deep rooted democratic institutions.

In this regard, putting a wrong flag, fabricating, and magnifying differences, and seeding hatred in the new generation by state, and non-state actors should be banded. Finally, whenever there are any political shocks in inter/intra areas of the country, besides the sound bits, the stakeholders should give an absolute precedence for the existent of the state, with political inclusiveness, they have to work for center of gravity of shock absorber unification.

References

- Abbink, J. (2006)..Discomfiture of Democracy? The 2005 Election Crisis in Ethiopia and Its Aftermath, *African Affairs*, 105/419. pp 173–199.
- Abdullahi, Abdi M. (2007). The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): The Dilemma of its Struggle in Ethiopia. *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 34(113).pp 556-562.
- Alemseged Abbay (2004). Diversity and State-Building in Ethiopia. *African Affairs*, 103/413.pp 593-614.
- Assefa Fiseha (2006). Theory versus Practice in the Implementation of Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism. In David Turton (ed.), *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience on Comparative Perspective* (pp 131-164). Addis Ababa: AAU press.
- Assefa Fiseha(2006): Federalism and the accommodation of diversity in Ethiopia. A comparative study (Nijmegen/ Netherlands: Wolf Legal publisher) p.237
- Bates, Robert H.(2008). The Logic of State Failure: Learning from Late-Century Africa. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*,25.pp 297-314.
- Berhanu Gutema Balcha (2007). Restructuring State and Society: Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia. SPIRT PhD Series Thesis no. 8. Denmark: SPRIT- Doctoral Program Aalborg University. (<http://sprit.ihis.aau.uk>)
- Beissinger, Mark R. (2008). A New Look at Ethnicity and Democratization. *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 19, Number 3. pp. 85-97.
- Cederman, Lars-Erik; Andreas Wimmer and Brian Min (2010). Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis. *World Politics*, Volume 62, Number 1. pp. 87-119.
- Cohen, John M.(1995). "Ethnic Federalism" in Ethiopia. *North East African Studies*, vol.2 (2). pp 157-188.
- David Turton, 2006: Introduction in David Turton (ed), *Ethnic Federalism. The Ethiopian experience in comparative perspective* Eastern African Studies, AAU Press, AddisAbaba p.10-30.

- Emezat H. Mengesha (2008). Federalism and Accommodation of Ethnic Diversity in Africa: The Ethiopian Experience. In *Ethnicity, Human Rights, and Constitutionalism in Africa. The Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists*, pp 157-180.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution, 1995.
- Hale, Henry E. (2008). The Double-Edge Sword of Ethnofederalism: Ukraine and USSR in Comparative Perspective. *Comparative Politics*, vol 40(3). pp 293-312.
- Joireman, Sandra F. and Thomas S. Szayna. (2000). "The Ethiopian Prospective Case." In *Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict: Application of a Process Model*, Thomas S. Szayna, ed. Santa Monica, CA: RAND. pp 193-233.
- Kidane Mengisteab (2001). Ethiopian- Based Federalism: 10 Years after. *African Issues*, vol.29(1/2). pp 20-25.
- Lubo Teferi (2012). The post 1991 'inter-ethnic' conflicts in Ethiopia: An investigation. *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution* Vol. 4(4). pp. 62-69.
- _____ (2007). Nationalism. In Mark Bevir (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Governance*. University of California, Berkeley: Sage publication. pp.589.
- Malesevic, Sinisa (2006). Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Merera Gudina (2006). Contradictory Interpretation of Ethiopian History: the Need for a New Consensus. In David Turton (ed.), *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience on Comparative Perspective* (pp 119-130). Addis Ababa: AAU press.
- Merera Gudina (2007). Ethnicity, Democratization and Decentralization in Ethiopia: The Case of Oromia. *East African Social Science Research Review*, vol 23(1). pp 81-106.
- Messay Kebede (2003). From Marxism- Leninism to Ethnicity: The Sideslips of Ethiopian Elitism. *Northeast African Studies*, vol 10(2). pp 163-186.
- Messy Kebede (2006). Gebrehiwot Baykedagn, Eurocentrism, and the Decentering of Ethiopia. *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 36(6).pp 815-832.
- Nagel,Joane (2000). Ethnicity and Sexuality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26. pp.107-33.
- Rudolph, Joseph (2006). Politics and Ethnicity: A comparative study. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ryan, Stephen (2005). Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict. In Little, Richard; Brain White and Michael Smith (ed.), *Issues in World Politics* (3rded.) (pp137-154).New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Simpson, J. A., & Weiner, E. S. (1989). *The Oxford English dictionary* (2nd ed., Vol. VII). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Teshome, W. and Záhorkík, J. (2008) "Federalism in Africa: The case of Ethnic-based Federalism in Ethiopia", *International Journal of Human Sciences*.
- The International Convention on Civil & Political Rights (ICCPR), (1966).
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), (1948).