Ethnic conflict in Ethiopia: Federalism as a cause and solution

El conflicto étnico en Etiopía: El federalismo como causa y solución
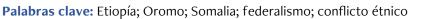
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ABSTRACT

Adopted in 1991, ethnic federalism indeed paved the way for the recognition, accommodation, and institutionalization of ethnocultural diversity for the first time in the country's history since its modern existence. What is equally important is, the practice of ethnic federalism complicated state-society and inter-group relationships creating a favorable environment for ethnic confrontation and conflict to take place in the country threatening national unity, eroded century-old values of coexistence, a hard ethnic boundary where administrative boundaries are served as political and ethnic differentiators like the Oromo and Somali conflict over contested boundaries. Territorial recognition, and institutionalization of ethnicity gave room for the emergence of 'ethnic like and ethnic others' thinking, made minorities in different regions victims of politics and failed to provide sound accommodation mechanisms from them, severely restricted people's constitutional rights including the right to mobility and right to work, created room for the re-emergence of secessionist tendency. Hence, ethnic federalism while solving old problems of ethnic inequality and injustice; has created new problems of ethnic tensions and conflict across Ethiopia. It is the purpose of this study to investigate how and why federalism is being considered as the source of ethnic conflicts in the Ethiopian context. The study adopted a qualitative comparative approach while FGDs and key informant interviews were used to gather data. The finding of the study shows that though multinational federation plays an irreplaceable role to accommodate and institutionalize ethnocultural diversity, the notion and implementation of federalism instigate ethnic conflict in the Ethiopian context.

Keywords: Ethiopia; Oromo; Somali; federalism; ethnic conflict

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RESUMEN

Adoptado en 1991, el federalismo étnico allanó el camino para el reconocimiento, la acomodación y la institucionalización de la diversidad etnocultural por primera vez en la historia del país desde su existencia moderna. Lo que es igualmente importante es que la práctica del federalismo étnico complicó las relaciones entre el Estado y la sociedad y entre los grupos, creando un entorno favorable para que se produjeran enfrentamientos y conflictos étnicos en el país que amenazaban la unidad nacional, erosionaban los valores centenarios de la coexistencia y establecían una frontera étnica dura en la que los límites administrativos servían de diferenciadores políticos y étnicos, como en el caso del conflicto entre los oromos y los somalíes por las fronteras disputadas. El reconocimiento territorial y la institucionalización de la etnicidad dieron lugar a la aparición del pensamiento "étnico como y étnico como otros", convirtieron a las minorías de las diferentes regiones en víctimas de la política y no proporcionaron mecanismos sólidos de adaptación, restringieron gravemente los derechos constitucionales de las personas, incluido el derecho a la movilidad y el derecho al trabajo, y crearon un espacio para el resurgimiento de la tendencia secesionista. Por lo tanto, el federalismo étnico, aunque resuelve los viejos problemas de desigualdad e injusticia étnica, ha creado nuevos problemas de tensiones y conflictos étnicos en toda Etiopía. El propósito de este estudio es investigar cómo y por qué el federalismo se considera fuente de conflictos étnicos en el contexto etíope. El estudio adoptó un enfoque comparativo cualitativo, mientras que para la recopilación de datos se utilizaron FGD y entrevistas a informantes clave. Las conclusiones del estudio muestran que, aunque la federación multinacional desempeña un papel insustituible para acomodar e institucionalizar la diversidad etnocultural, la noción y la aplicación del federalismo instigan el conflicto étnico en el contexto etíope.

Palabras clave: Etiopía; Oromo; Somalia; federalismo; conflicto étnico

1. General background and structural framework

Ethiopia is an ancient multi-ethnic state and its people have migrated from one area to another, intermarrying; intermingling in all levels of activities, and sharing a sense of cultural and political unity live together for thousands of years (Devine, 1972). As a multi-ethnic society endowed with diverse values and assets, Ethiopians are able to transcend ethno-cultural and linguistic differences and used such diverse values to enhance social coexistence and social cohesion. However, due to socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental reasons it is also common to see ethnic based conflict and disputes among Ethiopians. According to Shale (2004), ethnic conflict meant a conflict fundamentally caused by identity, resources, and borders/territories between two or more ethnic groups. In this study an ethnic conflict, following Michael Brown (1993:5), conceptualized as a dispute about important political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities.

In the 19th century, emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia embarked on an aggressive, at times brutal, westward, eastward, and southward expansion, subjugating and incorporating the different small kingdoms and communities of many ethnic groups including Oromo, Sidama, Gurage, Wolayta, Somali, Kaffa, and other groups (Donham & James, 2002). Since then, for about more than a century various successive governments had ignored and/or failed to provide political and legal protection to the inherent multicultural and multilingual realities of the nation. In effect, ethnicity and ethnic politics became an important phenomenon of the Ethiopian state. Throughout its modern existence, ethnic politics is one of the main reasons for internal instability leading to conflicts which are often conceived as conflicts among ethnic groups. Ethnic conflict constitutes a dominant challenge to national, regional, and international peace and security.

Historically, concerning people and the nationality question, three approaches has been adopted by the successive political system in the history of modern Ethiopia (Clapham, 2009). First, like the French Model, the imperial government of Haile-Selassie had adopted a policy of assimilation with the view to create a homogenous society more or less like Amharic-speaking, Orthodox Christians, under centralized administration (Eshete, 2003).When the imperial regime failed to address the question of ethnic identity and suppressed the 'national question,' forcefully removed from power by the collective efforts of Ethiopian in the 1974 revolution, which is also marked as the end of the Solomonic Dynasty in Ethiopia. Second, following the collapse of the imperial regime, in 1974 the Derg regime of Mengistu Haile-Mariam came into existence with its version of Ethiopia and embarked on a nation-building project on the notion of revolutionary military nationalism called Ityopia Tikdem (Ethiopia first).The socialist government has continued the legacy of the imperial old model of nation building (Abebe, 2014).The consequence of suppressing ethnicity in the country had led to the birth of militant ethnic nationalism; the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF); the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and others. As a consequence, civil war had erupted between the central government (military regime) and ethno-nationalist movements for almost two decades. Third, TPLF dominated Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which ended the rule of the military socialist government in 1991, has adopted ethnic federalism as a third approach to institutionally

accommodate and constitutionally recognize the issue of nationalities in Ethiopia.

There are various argumentations involving the features and characteristics of the Ethiopian federation. Andreas Eshete (2003, p. 161) contends that the "bargain that led to the formation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia was offered by a revolutionary overthrow of a unitary state". From this, he came up with a conclusion that the Ethiopian federation is the outcome of the coming together of nations, nationalities, and peoples' of the country who freely agreed to restructure their shared polity on a new basis (2003, p. 161). In contrast to this, scholars like Assefa Fisshea (2006) argued that the Ethiopian federation came into existence following Stepan's model of holding together federation. Apart from this, Edmond Keller (2002, p. 24) uniquely noticed that "ethnic federalism in Ethiopia began in 1991 as 'holding together' but since 1992 receded into a 'putting together' type due to the monopolization of the political landscape by the EPRDF". The debates and the controversies surrounding the Ethiopian federalism are not yet overdue to bundles of legitimate questions over the way and procedures used to establish the post-1991 political order in the country. There are significant categories of people, on the one hand arguing that the process and procedure that led to the adoption of the federal political system in Ethiopia lacks democratic content and in effect, imposed by EPRDF with little or no participation from opposition political forces and even the larger public and on the other hand, arguments are claiming that the Ethiopian federation is the result of the free will and agreement of the country's various ethnic groups.

In general, while solving old problems of ethnic inequality and injustice, ethnic federalism has created new problems of ethnic tensions and conflict across Ethiopia. With its own limitations and defections, multinational federation in countries like Ethiopia plays an irreplaceable role to accommodate and institutionalize ethno cultural diversity. It is true that ethnic federalism in Ethiopia played a vital role in minority protection and allowed the 'self and shared' governance system in the country. Parallel to this, it has also generated local-based ethnic conflict and reignited armed based ethno nationalist and separatist groups in the country. Almost all regions and city administrations have experienced ethnic-based conflict since the reorganization of the state along ethnic lines. This paper has carried out deep investigation and analysis on how and why federal restructuring is breeding ethnic tensions and conflict in Ethiopia taking Oromia and Somali regional states as a cased study.

Statement of the problem

Since 1991 Ethiopia has made a paradigm shift favoring federalism against the centralized hierarchical power to radically respond to the problem of diversity and better recognize and accommodate the country's ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity. Though federal arrangement is the right form of government given Ethiopia's ethno-cultural diversity & historical contradictions and geographic size, the conception of federalism and the way it has been implemented in the last three decades overlooks commonly held shared values, belief systems & century of harmonious coexistence and universal principles. As a result, the adoption of ethnic federalism as a diagnosis and response to Ethiopia's century-long divisions between nationalities and history of exploitation has created further challenges at various levels in the

country.

The first challenge is the question of the relationship between the Ethiopian state and nationalities, i.e. the problem of balancing and reconciling dual identity; belonging to a particular nationality, and belonging to the Ethiopian state. Whereas in the past, a great many Ethiopians had mixed identities, being descended from different groups, under the new structure they have to identify themselves as belonging to one group or another. In contemporary Ethiopia, to participate in the Ethiopian political life individual citizens must first identify themselves as being a member of a given ethnic group (Somali, Oromo, Amhara, Sidama and others.), implying that individual citizens cannot simply be considered as Ethiopians rather they belong to the state because of their prior membership of a particular nationality. Hence, the construction and re-construction of ethnic identity in the post 1991 Ethiopia have led to the emergence and re-emergence of new local based fragmented identity with no sign of ending which not only impacts cultural coexistence and harmony between ethnic groups but also the integrity of the Ethiopian state.

The second challenge is the question of ethnic groups' relationship. For instance, when one looks at the ethnic boundary demarcation, territories that are historically shared between and commonly administered by the Somali and Oromo are now arranged under a fixed boundary between one group and the other. It is with this framework that citizens' access to resources, political power, and local governance can be dealt with which can easily create conflicts that did not exist before since ethnicity made the basis for governance.

The third challenge is the new political economy order not only raised a question on the relationship between nationalities as depicted above but also affected relationships between different people and groups of the same nationality. This is particularly true for the Oromo and Somali nationalities that are so varied and have so many clans within themselves. This has led to power divides; which Oromo clan is governing the Oromia region and/ or which Somali clan is governing the Somali regional state, leading to the divisive question of which clan holds power and how it is used which in the past never existed (Clapham, 2009).

Consequently, since its conception and implementation, ethnic federalism criticized for posing a critical challenge for century-old societal peaceful coexistence and the territorial integrity of the state. Particularly, the drawing of boundaries along the ethnic line has resulted in the intertwining of ethnicity, territory, and intra-federal boundaries (Clapham, 1998) and led to the generation of violent conflicts among various ethnic groups and almost in all border areas of regional states (Kefale, 2013). Consequently, the following landmark ethnic-based conflicts has occurred in the post-1991 Ethiopia: the Silte-Gurage conflict, the Wagagoda language conflict, the Sheko-Megengir conflict, the AnuakNuer conflict, the Berta-Gumuz conflict, and the GedeoGuji conflict, the Oromo-Amhara conflict, the Afar-Somali (Issa clan) conflict, and the Oromo-Somali conflict (Mengistu, 2015; Tadesse & Gelaw, 2013; ICG, 2009).

The Oromo and the Somali regional administrations, selected as sites for the present study given their history of interactions and interdependency. Historically, Somalis and Oromo have a long tradition of co-existence and strong socio-cultural integrations as well as antagonistic relationships and intermittent conflicts (Abdulahi, 2005). However, the nature, behaviors,

and trends of conflict are becoming complex and dynamic with huge repercussions after the introduction of ethnic federalism. Consequently, ethnic conflict constitutes a dominant challenge to national, regional, and local peace, security, and development. This particular study, therefore, carried out wider investigations and analysis involving live experiences from local communities, local and national experts in understanding how and why the current ethnic federalism and its constitution has created ethnic tensions and conflict in the country while taking the Oromia and Somali regional states administrative border as (Oromia Me'aso & Somali Me'aso (Mullu) and Babile & Bobas districts) as a case study.

Objective of the study

Investigating how and why federalism considered as the source of ethnic conflicts in the Ethiopian context and suggest ways of improvements/reforms in the current political-economic system to the end promote ethnic tolerance, peace, and development in the two regions as well as in the country.

Research questions

How the introduction of ethnic federalism impacted ethnic relations in the country and between the Oromo and Somali ethnic groups? Why ethnic federalism treated as a source of ethnic trouble and conflict? How ethnic-based administrations cause ethnic conflicts/boundary disputes between communities?

What can be proposed as a solution to ethnic troubles/conflicts that are emerged due to the introduction of ethnic federalism? Why identity based conflict and border dispute shows no sign of ending in the federation? How the current federal arrangement should address ethnic tensions and conflicts? Describe the strength and weaknesses of Ethiopian federalism? What improvements/reforms should be made to the current system?

2. Research methodology and analysis

The study employed a qualitative comparative research design. The overall purpose of the study determines the type of research approach that going to be adopted. Hence, this approach to research was chosen given the purpose of the study which aims to investigate and establish answer to the 'why and how' of the phenomenon in questions. In the study, qualitative types of data are used which is collected through focus group discussion and key informant interview. The paper utilized both data sources i.e., primary sources like local displaced people, local cultural and community leaders, local and federal experts and secondary sources like research journals, internet articles, books and relevant reports and policy documents. In the study, ethnic conflict treated as dependent variable while ethnic federalism as independent variable. Purposive sampling was used to realize research objective. With regard to data analysis, the study employed qualitative (content, narrative, and qualitative comparative analysis -case-oriented understanding) methods of data analysis and interpretation.

2.1 Theoretical argumentation and practical lesson on federalism and ethnic conflict

Analysis of the international trend reveals that despite the terrible experiences of interethnic

conflicts and disintegration in the former Yugoslavia and USSR federations, federalism is popular in the contemporary states with complex cultural & linguistic diversity and large territories to use autonomy and federal arrangements as a way of accommodating ethno-cultural diversity and thereby managing ethnic conflicts. Despite the persistent debate over federalism as a way of managing ethnic conflicts, such arrangements play a pragmatic compromise between diversity and unity and have the capacity to provide a balance between 'self-rule and shared rule' (Elazar, 1987; Watts, 1998). However, observation from the experiences of various federations across the world reveals two things; first 'the capacity of federalism and other instruments deployed to manage conflicts can't be defined and measured in terms of eradicating social conflict (Gagnon, 1993, p. 18). Secondly, the success or failure of federations in managing conflicts hang on contextual factors such as democracy, rule of law, institutional design, and others (Watts, 1998). This leads us to the discussion on the global debates on multi-ethnic federalism which indeed demonstrate two broad contending perspectives: First, federalism as a stabilizing instrument in managing ethnic conflicts (Gurr, 1995; Kimenyi, 1998; Linz & Stepan, 1996). This group claims that the peace and stability that we see in the established democracy like the USA, Switzerland, Canada, and Australia are often attributed to federalism and its subsequent political decentralization. To put it explicitly, power-sharing with subunits have played a vital role in self-autonomy and administration at the lower level of government to the end guaranteeing regional stability. Similarly, among the world's evolving democracy and a federation in the making, India's federalism which helped manage ethnic diversity through territorial accommodation praised for its success in achieving relative political order and stability within its border (Bhattacharyya, 2010). Second, federalism exacerbates ethnic conflict in multi-ethnic states (Basta and Fleiner, 2000; Cornell, 2002; Nordlinger,1972; Snyder, 2000). This group holds optimistic perspectives on federalism. Scholars like Gagnon (2001) and Teshome and Záhořík (2008) argue that ethnic federalism exacerbates ethnic conflict, facilitates secession leading to the disintegration of multi-ethnic states. The global experiences on federalism reveal that ethnic federalism firmly works to strengthen centrifugal forces while weakening centripetal forces as what was observed in the former the Soviet Union (1991), Yugoslavia (1991), and Czechoslovakia (1993) where multi-ethnic federations practically failed to stop disintegration (Bhattacharyya, 2010).

In Ethiopia existed studies reveal mixed signaled on these issues. On the one hand, scholars like Tewfik, 2010; Alem, 2003; Alemseged, 2004; Eshete, 2003; Mengisteab, 1997; Young, 1998 defended ethnic federalism as a noble decision curing ethnic contradiction and transforming ethnic tensions into cooperation by transforming the empire-state into a democratic state while mentioning points described here above. According to them, 1995 FDRE constitution has become the political as well as the legal foundation for handling inter-ethnic conflictual problems. According to Mammo and Papadopoulos (2004), this right became the principle from which the principal policies for the government of the country were built. In effect, a double process occurred at the same time: the ethnicization of the political culture and the politicization of ethnic identity as the primary vehicle for claims and entitlements to economic resources and political power (Mammo & Papadopoulos, 2004). On the other hand, others like Abbink, 2006; Asnake, 2002, 2010, 2013; Asafa, 1993; Temesgen, 2015, Lyons, 1996 claimed that ethnic

federalism challenged societal coexistence while localizing localized violent conflicts involving several ethnic-based territorial identities and an increased secessionist tendency among ethnic-based armed groups like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Many people, scholars, politicians, and even the common public, perceived that the federal structure is responsible for many communal and identity conflicts. It is the objective of this study to shed some light on those facts.

3. Results and Discussion

Though federal arrangement is the right form of government given Ethiopia's ethno-cultural diversity & historical contradictions and geographic size, the conception of federalism and the way it has been implemented in the last three decades overlooks commonly held shared values, belief systems & century of harmonious coexistence and universal principles.

In the pre-federal state, various leaders of the country had overlooked diversity and even attempted to eliminate ethno cultural diversity with the view to build a homogenized society. It is only in this federal system that minority groups' culture, language and way of life is recognized and promoted to ensure harmony within the society. The institutionalization of ethnic federalism helped marginalized ethnic groups to have representation at the federal and regional levels of government (Alem 2003; Andreas 2003; Assefa 2007) which paved the way to building a multi-cultural and lingual state. Further, the current system encourage minority ethnic groups to establish their self-government which assures their collective security & development and above all increases their self-identification with the state In effect, in the last two decades Ethiopia is able to achieve relative political order and stability within its border.

Though federalism helped the preservation and development of minority identities including language and culture, it failed to establish peaceful and harmonious inter-ethnic relationships. The political economy under the TPLF dominated EPRDF was built merely along divisive lines of ethnicity, language, culture, religion, region and other differences. Further, the TPLF nationalist were not truly committed to address the 'question of nationality' by adopted genuine federalism and multi-party democracy but rather they designed the system to reverse the so called 'the Amhara domination' which they saw the fundamental reason behind the problem in the Ethiopian society (Aalen, 2002).

It is true that federalism is a pragmatic compromise between diversity and unity as well as self-rule and shared-rule, the practice of federalism in the Ethiopian case reflects a different experience. On the one hand the system failed to reconcile the persistence tension between the management of ethno cultural diversity and the promotion of national unity. On the other hand, due to the principle of 'democratic centralism it failed to balance self-rule and shared rule affecting the trust between regional authorities and elites at the center which is vital in managing political conflicts within the state. The Ethiopian federal system in the last three decades operated in one dominant-party-under EPRDF- that control the state with 'iron and fist" by paralyzing various political parties. The one-party rule which is defined by narrow ethnic alliances coupled with the undemocratic nature of the system created favorable ground for ethnic conflict to emerge among various groups and between the central governments and

various ethnic based armed movements; OLF, ONLF… and others. Consequently, the adoption of ethnic federalism as a diagnosis and response to Ethiopia's century-long divisions between nationalities and history of exploitation has created further challenges at various levels in the country. For instance, the federal restructuring which assumes ethnic identities to be delimited within their fixed boundaries which actually contradicts not only the very nature of livelihood which relies on mobile and flexible resource tenure depending on seasonal variation but also attaches primordial fixed identity with territory which violates the historic mix and flexibilities of group identity attributes, as discovered in the Somali-Oromo dual identity case.

The following section discusses and analyzes how and why the notion and implementation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia by itself is the major source of ethnic conflicts including the Oromo-Somali conflict. This is justified by the following factors:

4. The restructuring of administration merely along ethnic lines goes against the realities of the region.

As discussed throughout this study, Oromo and Somali share a lot in common than things/ issues that separate them. The socio-cultural and economic set-up of the Oromo and Somali communities who live along the shared border are so intermingled in terms of language, identity, religion and economic activities. These exiting realities cannot afford and entertain a federal model that is designed along mere ethnic lines. However, state restructuring since 1991 has taken only ethnic dimension whole overlooking crosscutting values and norms; though the constitution states state restructuring could be carried out along different criterions including settlement patterns and will of people. The restructuring of administration along mere ethnic identity was disadvantageous for both the Oromo and Somali communities who live along the shared boarder of the two regions since they often identify themselves with dual i.e., Oromo-Somali identities. In this regard, Aalen has pointed out that ethnic federalism in Ethiopia assumes primordial and unchanging notions of group identities, which actually goes against the social realities on the ground where people are intermingled (Aalen, 2006). It is true that Ethiopians are so intertwined due to a long history of mobility, internal migration and voluntarily & force settlement and in effect, it is hard to draw and impose fixed ethnic boundary among and between communities.

The focus group discussion with local elders from both groups revealed that:

> Somali-Oromo brotherliness was disrupted when the new state structure imposed fixed ethno-linguistic boundaries on the population though people along the shared border have joint Somali-Oromo identity. The demarcation has took only ethnic dimension leaving aside other variables like close linguistic affinity and bilingualism, geographical setting, economic interdependence and business relationships, common vision and destiny, shared socio-cultural practices including intermarriage and customary institutions which are all helpful to reduce conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence to the end building sustainable society. However, these have disrupted due to the changing political and administrative structure at macro and micro level forcing people to choose either the Somali identity or the Oromo identity. In effect, this has promoted ethnic differences while building ethnic antagonism within the community leading to ethnic tension and conflict in the region (Anonymous source 1).

Key informants from the Hose of Federation and Ministry of Peace reflected that:

> …people along the shared border of Somali and Oromia regional state do not owned territories exclusively but rather historically it belongs to both groups. The new state structure, however, dramatically challenged and drastically changed this situation by drawing rigid ethnic boundary, politicizing ethnicity, and created competing ethnic groups, who struggle for resource control, administrative and political legitimacy and territorial dominance, in the study area. Territorializing boundaries along mere ethnic lines not only affected inter-ethnic relations by creating ethnic tensions and conflicts between majority and minority in disputed areas which are delimited to either region but also ignited boundary dispute between the two neighboring regions. Thus, the federal rearrangement introduced since 1992 has changed the face of the Oromo-Somali conflicts from resource competition to administrative boundary issues (Anonymous source 2).

The findings of this study support the works of various scholars on the issue of federalism and ethnic conflict. The new state arrangement complicated ethnic relations and gave existing ethnic conflict new shapes and paradigm (Tadesse & Gelaw, 2013); created competing ethnic groups for resource dominations (Abbink, 2006); politicized ethnicity, reconfigured clan & ethnic relations and rise of boundary dispute between states in the federation (Kefale, 2013) and above all the federal model in the Ethiopian has localized ethnic conflict (Abbink, 2006).

5. Unclear administration boundary along the shared boarders

It is unfortunate that neither the 1992 proclamation nor the 1995 FDRE constitution nor any other law said anything about how the administrative boundaries should be demarcated. There is unclear administration boundary along the shared boarder which contributes to the conflict between the two ethnic communities. Disagreements over exactly where the Oromia-Somali border should lie have resulted in several referenda including the 2004 in which Oromia won about 80% of the disputed areas, but implementation and full demarcation has never occurred, which fundamentally contributed to the ongoing conflict along the shared border (Liban, 2006). Thus, the introduction of ethnic based federalism has left communities with unclear loosely defined boundaries. If boundaries are not clearly delineated then communities would have the same claim over the same land since historically those disputed areas are not exclusively possessed by either parties or they were no man's land like buffer zone areas.

According to local key informants from both groups:

> …inter-regional boundaries that divide the Somali region from its neighbors (Oromia and Afar) are loosely defined and in effect, ethnic tensions and conflicts are become recurrent in the region. The new federal arrangement created fertile ground for the emergence of competing ethnic groups which coupled with poorly defined boundaries have complicated not only inter-ethnic relations but also transformed resource conflicts between clans/ethnic groups into boundary and territorial conflict between member states. Further, the process of inter-regional boundary making-the 1992 border demarcation and the 2004 political referendum-were not participatory and not considered fair and just by both parties hindering the full implementation and demarcation of boundary between the two regions. Moreover, the system confused and blurred the difference between administration boundary and political boarder and in effect administrative boundary is

viewed as a political and ethnic differentiator between two largest regions. It indeed has complicated the nature, intensity, scope and consequences of ethnic tension and conflict in the shared border areas where the two ethnic groups reside (Anonymous source 3).

Likewise, key informants from the House of Federation and the Ministry of Peace pointed out that:

> The absence of clear administrative boundary is the root cause of Oromo-Somali conflict. Both groups have claims and counter claims over the same land which made the demarcation process challenging. This has complicated the nature, intensity, scope and consequences of ethnic tension and conflict in the study area. It is also important to remind that in the new Ethiopia boundaries are not mere administrative issues rather it has great symbolic power-tied to identity and in effect it is a political and ethnic differentiator between the two largest regions in the country. These circumstances have crated ethnic dichotomy, ethnic 'likes' and ethnic 'others' resulting in mass death and displacement on the part of the ethnic 'others'. This is exactly what characterizes the current Oromo-Somali conflict in the sense that Oromo are displaced from the disputed districts because they are living on the Ethiopian Somali territory and vice versa. Further, the process of inter-regional boundary making was linked with identity shift of the clan. In connection with this it is common to observed shift of identity among the political elites in the two regions. Political elites in the two regions are opportunist changing their identity on the basis of the opportunities provided by either the Ethiopian Somali or Oromia region. The process is not peaceful rather conducted by igniting conflict amongst the different clan in the region. In effect loss of life, human and animal and displacement is common in the region (Anonymous source 2).

The result of this is consistent with the findings of Asnake (2013) and Hagmann & Abbink (2011) who claimed that the ill-defined nature of boundaries following ethnic federalism has transformed existing resource conflict into boundary and territorial conflict between neighboring communities like the Oromo and Somali dispute.

6. Majority versus minority and titular versus settler problem

Ethiopia is a multi-cultural state where its people are so intertwined due to a long history of mobility, internal migration and voluntarily & force settlement. In the pre-1991 political arrangement, individuals/groups migrated and settled in the different parts of the country for various reasons had established permanent, share economic and political resources, participate in policy/decision making process and enjoy the fruits of development regardless of their ethno-linguistic and cultural background. However, the situation was not persisted after the introduction of ethnic based federalism. The 1994/5 FDRE constitution, which guarantees nations, nationalities and people the right to self-administration and up to secession, and regional constitution has also tide regional economic and political power to group's originality to certain areas. The reconfiguration of the state along mere ethnic line created ethnic dichotomy within the same region in the form of majority versus minority, titular versus settler or native versus non-native problem in different parts of the country. This has different implications for

different groups assigned in those categories. For instance, groups who considered as 'native' have preferential treatment and privileges (like to own the land and its administration with full-fledged rights) unlike their non-native counter parts (do not possess such rights but just allowed to work and live). Similarly, group who came later and settled in a particular areas were considered as 'settler' and in effect, do not have representation at local, regional and national level while people who claimed originality to the area called 'titular', entitled to local/regional political-economic ownership. This is where ethnic antagonism takes roots in a society. For instance, ethnic tensions and conflicts due to the aforementioned dichotomy and the EPRDF political ideology and governance system has rocked/rocking regions like the Southern Nations, Nationalities and people regional state (hereafter, SNNPRS), Benishangual Gumuz regional state (hereafter, BGRS), Somali, Tigray and Oromia regional state.

The Somali and Oromo who live along the shared border are almost similar in terms of socio-cultural elements, religion, language, economy. Prior to 1991 they both administered under common institution (formal and Informal). In the post 1991 state structuring, communities along the shared border are delimited either to the Somali regional state or Oromia regional state. Regional constitutions, following the federal constitution, defined regions' ownership and political authority to ethnic major and ethnic minors do not possess such entitlement though the areas now administer exclusively by either ethnic groups belong to both groups. However, both ethnic groups who live within the boundaries of the larger ethnic groups are marginalized and discriminated.

Though there are areas/districts that the Somali and Oromo lives with no significant numerical difference, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is rampant and access to and control over resources are limited to the seemingly major groups which forces the seemingly minors groups to fight against unfair distribution of scare resources and political authority. For instance, based on the 2004/5 referendum result districts like Babile (Babile kebele 01) 2263 have voted for Oromia Region while 1443 for the Somali region but 2556 were not voted for either region and in Gursum (Alidyi kebele) 229 voters had voted for Oromia region while 214 for Somali region but 89 were not voted and it is in these circumstances that both Kebeles were given to the Oromia regional state where local administration assumed exclusive ownership by the Oromo ethnic groups. Similarly, in JIgjiga Wereda/district (Hriro kebele) 197 voters have voted for Oromia region while 218 for Somali region but 42 people were not voted and with such insignificant difference of voting plus such number of non-voting people that the kebele was given to the Somali regions and local administration assumed only Somali ethnic group (EEC, 2004/5).

Key informants from House of Federation and Ministry of peace have claimed that ethnic major and ethnic minor problems in the Ethiopian federation emanates from the federal and regional constitutions and the EPRDF's governance system. They further asserted that:

> ...following the creations of regions along ethnic line and associated with exclusive definition related to region's ownership and political authority, regional constitutions defined respective territory as belongs to groups who considered 'original' and ethnic major and thereby limited political and economic entitlement to those groups. Neither the federal constitution/proclamation nor the regional constitutions/state laws say anything

about how regions should accommodate ethnic minors in their region. This left ethnic minors in a position of despair and targets of mal treatment like unfair access to public institution and services. Further, there is systemic racism and discrimination against the so called 'non-natives' and above all crimes including ethnic cleansing, barbaric attacks, mas killing, displacement and destruction are common against minority ethnic groups who are living in other regions. The conflict between ethnic major and minor in the same region will continue unless inclusive governance takes effect (Anonymous source 2).

The focus group discussion with displaced Oromo and Somali groups has also revealed that:

Oromo and Somali communities have lived in those disputed areas for centuries and neither group entitled to exclusively ownership. However, identity based attacks was common in the post 1991 state structuring which made groups minor and major in the same territory though the land belongs to both. The Oromo forces the Somali to leave their land and vice versa. Currently there are around 800,000 people displaced from both ethnic groups apart from the death and destruction of properties. This is due to the fact that the one attacks the other on the basis of identity telling that Somali should leave the area and go back to their original vicinity and vice versa though politicians and elites are behind the mobilization. However, the truth of the matter is that both group's generational ancestors were belonging to same place where the current populations are living. Therefore, currently both groups are become refuge in the camp and the federal and regional government must find a permanent solution to the recurrent nature of Oromo-Somali conflict (Anonymous source 4).

7. Ethnic politicization

The political economy which organized alone the ethnic line has paved the way for elites in the country to take the advantage of exploiting the cultures, values, and practices of ethnic groups and thereby mobilize the same to realize their private dream of controlling political power and economic resources. Observation shows that ethnic elites in different parts of the country have succeeded in building their private life at the cost of the well-being of their ethnic groups while diverting public resources in favor of their gain. However, at the time when the political elites removed from power due to mismanagement and incompetence then they inform and equip their ethnic followers with false and wrong information as if the group ignored, mistreated and misrepresented in different level of administration. In this way they mobilize their particular ethnic groups and thereby incite conflict with other ethnic groups who coexisted with them for many years. Ethnic politicization often linked with political and economic resource benefits. That is why it is common to observed shift of identity among the Oromo and Somali political elites on the basis of the opportunities provided by either of the two regions.

As revealed in the focus group discussions with both groups:

...Elites and political bodies primarily driven by their interest and do not bother about community benefits. They are the only one who benefits from conflict the ongoing conflict. Sometimes they even switch their identity just for the mere purpose of satisfying their economic and political goals. For instance, at a time the Oromia region provides them a political position then they mobilize their ethnic group/clan to join the Oromia region and vice versa which often are not peaceful rather conducted in a way that triggers mistrust, tensions and conflict among and between clans and ethnic groups (Anonymous source 1).

From this one can infer that ethnic conflict in the region is elite-driven, rather than people to people confrontations. Political elites mobilize their ethnic base to realize their self-centered interest and sometimes the interest of their ethnic base which often conducted against others collective and individual interest. The Somali-Oromo conflict has to be understood in this context.

8. Mega ethnic syndrome within the society

In sharp contrast with past efforts of constructing Ethiopian identity, which puts aside ethnic identity, the new political arrangement since 1991 exclusively focused on the construction and promotion of ethnic identity at the cost of common values and norms that the society shares as an Ethiopian. Instead of bringing communities/identities together and working on what people have in common as a society, the system actively engaged in manipulating existing lingo-cultural difference. As a result, groups began to build their identity and values in a way that threaten the existence and identity of others.

In the last 27 years the young generation are grew and educated in the currently implementing ethnic based political system where they made to see the world only from their ethnic identity point of views. This created widespread mindset problem in relation to the perception, understanding and facts of their ethnic background vis-à-vis others. For instance, it is common to hear from the public that 'when someone assigned to a government position/political power asking questions like from which ethnic group/local area is he/she from, instead of questioning the professional and ethical qualities, experiences that the individual has' (Anonymous source 2) as revealed in the key informant interview. In the same token, "when someone has caught because of his/her alleged crime including corruption it is common to blame the government in that the individual held because he/she belongs to our ethnic group" (Anonymous source 2).

Consequently, the system has done much to make citizens think ethnically while less effort has been exerted to promote their Ethiopian identity. This has created a favorable ground for the ethnic elites to mobilize the young generation instrumentally to use them for their power dream and capital accumulation. For instance, when one ethnic Somali gets in personal conflict due to different reason with his/her counter Oromo background or vice versa then the political elites twist the story and portray as if it happened between the two Ethnic groups on the basis of ethnic antagonism. However, the truth of the matter is that they simply appeared as ethnic conflicts just because they happened to bear the names of participant ethnic groups. Then the personal conflict takes ethnic form causing much devastation on both sides.

9. Concluding Remarks

Ethiopia is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual state. Paradoxically, since its modern existence, the various political system of the country has been overlooked these realities. However, since 1991 for about the last three decades Ethiopia has been implementing an ethno-linguistic federal politico-legal arrangement with the view to rectify past injustices in ethnic relations to the end realize one political-economic community. Though ethnic federalism paved the way for the celebration of minority groups' ethno-cultural values and helped the same to enjoy self-autonomy/administration, the system accused of poisoning ethnic relation and breeding

ethnic mistrust, hostilities and hatred among and between different ethnic groups. Despite the rationality of the federal administration in managing the complex ethno linguistic diversity of the country and reducing conflicts, the notion and implementation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia has led to the birth of new challenges i.e., ethnic competition and conflicts as well as political polarization across the federation. Therefore, this study reveals that the practice of federalism in Ethiopia has left unclear administration boundary, overlooked cross cutting variables, created majority versus minority and titular versus settler problem, politicized ethnicity by transformed cultural communities into political communities, produced mega ethnic syndrome within the Ethiopian society. The study also reflects that the contemporary ethnic troubles and conflicts in Ethiopia are structural and the solution must be structural too. Therefore, the mere adoption of federalism doesn't guarantee effective accommodation and ethnic harmony and coexistence, rather it has to be integrated and implemented long with democracy, good governance, rule of law while reflecting the existing realities of the Ethiopian state.

Recommendations: Holding national dialogue

Federalism in Ethiopia must be the product of bargaining involving diverse interests and parties in the nation. However, the federal system and its constitution designed dominantly to address demands of ethno-nationalist forces and overlooked the interest and needs of Ethio-nationalist forces. The later groups were not well represented in the process of installing the system. This urges the need to hold open democratic national dialogue, consultation, and negotiation among and between various groups and community representatives on the spectrum about fundamental questions that revolves around the Ethiopian state which guarantees the foundation for democratic politics in the country. Further, carrying out political referendum on the constitution and its federal system is paramount importance so as to win national consensus. This would play a major role to ease the increasing ethnic tension and political crisis to the end building sustainable peace across the country. Therefore, the type of multi-national federation and its constitution (both regional and national) should reflect unity in diversity and strong system, supported by the constitution and other proclamation, must be designed at local level to protect minority rights; ultimately to stop the current trends of ethnic identity-based attacks and killings against minority groups.

Re-structuring the federal system

The current federal system only takes into account ethnic lines while overlooking commonly shared value system and cross-cutting variables. Since the problem is structural, the political-economy of the state has to be restructured in accordance with realities on the ground, long term societal security and development needs in the manner that would reduce ethnic tension and troubles in the country. Communities like Somali and Oromo share a lot common values than issues that separate them and in effect, reorganizing administrative territory taking into account cross cutting values and variables is necessary, where people along the shared border often identify themselves with dual identity.

Creating inclusive governance

Ethnic federalism might fit in areas where there is an ethnic concentration, but doesn't work in areas that characterize ethno-cultural diversity. In such areas there is a need to establish an

inclusive local administration and create inclusive governance that would represent the needs and interest of different ethnic groups. People living along the Somali and Oromia regional states have dual identity and had been under dual administration. In contrary to this, the current ethnic administration assigned exclusive ownership of those disputed areas either to the Somali or the Oromia regional state which ignited conflict between the two regions. Territories along the shared border has to be under joint Somali-Oromo administration and both language Af-Somali and Afan Oromo has to be part of the working language of the area and medium of instruction in the education system. Further, steps must be taken to depoliticized ethnicity and law and policy must be designed to harmonize national and ethnic identity. Here, emphasis must be given to creating common institutions to deal with cultural and linguistic issues and enacting policies/proclamations that assure the depoliticizing of ethnicity in business activities, government services and political party formation. Since, federalism alone cannot bring peace and stability; it must be implemented along with democracy and good governance, particularly due emphasis must be given to the creation of accountable and democratic authorities and leadership at local level of government.

Promote open political system

Effective federal system operates in a multi-party and decentralized framework. Currently, Ethiopia is a one-party state though various parties exist nominally. The domination of one-party system both at regions and federal level has empowered informal way of policy and decision making through party channels which in turn prompted patron-client political economy while breeding rampant corruption the country. There is a need to build formal state structure in the country in order to sustainably address fundamental issues in the country including ethnic problems. Though decentralization in Ethiopia launched with the view to ensure good governance through community participation, it ended up in empowering rent seeking and corrupt political elite at local level. This urges the need to create open and genuinely decentralized system which allows ethno-political conflict to be openly expressed, formulated, processed and managed in a sustainable manner through various institutional outlets.

Promote development, infrastructure and market linkage between the two regions

Creating development opportunities to communities along the shared border of the two region is paramount important to ensure sustainable peace and security in the region. Both regions have to work together and trust each other which would pave the way to plan and execute development activities, infrastructural development plans and work for market integrations to expand economic opportunities for people along the share areas. Currently there are efforts that the two regions are undertaking. But lesson must be learned from past unsuccessful efforts which was basically limited to the top management and regional leadership and overlooked local engagement and the active role of local governance. Observation shows that, this time to it seems that the two regional administrations are working only on at the top regional leadership level but every efforts of peace building and development activities must take into account local participation and the engagement of the whole structure from region down to kebele to ensure sustainability. Unlike previous administration's attempt, which was a top-down approach,

current effort must adopt both top-down and bottom-up approach involving the community, who are affected by the conflict most, and local government and party officials, who are often perceived as the source of the problem (conflict) and need to be part of the solution of peace building efforts.

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