

Full Length Research

Ethnic Federalism and Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia

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After the demise of the Dergue regime, Ethiopia has commenced ethnic federalism to address ethno-national conflicts and maintain national unity. In spite of such novel rationale of the federalization, new trends of ethnic conflicts are emerging and becoming political hot spots in many parts of the country. Cognizant of such a fact, this study sought to investigate the influence of ethnic federalism on ethnic conflicts in the post-1991 Ethiopian. Hence, the study employed qualitative case study design relying primary and secondary sources of data. Purposive sampling strategy used to select key informants. Thematic analysis used to analyze the data collected from primary and secondary sources. Consequently, the finding revealed that politicization of ethnic identity, de-emphasis of national unity and identity based intra-boundary demarcation intensified ethnic conflicts following ethnic based federalization. The main conclusion drawn from the finding is the recognition of ethnic identity as an overarching socio-economic and political basis paved venue for ethnic elites to maneuver identity for socio-economic and political motives.

Keywords: ethnic federalism, ethnic elite, ethnic group, ethnicity

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INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is the home for different ethnic groups having their own language and culture. Irrespective of such differences, the state building project has been characterized by power centralization (Markakis, 1989; Semahegn, 2012) which did not considered political pluralism and multiculturalism. The centralization project and unitary state structure continued till the Dergue regime. Yet, Dergue moved one-step forward and established institute of nationality studies to provide governmental recognition for ethnic groups (Aalen, 2006; Markakis, 1989). In fact, ethnic identity got momentum in the students' movement when they boomed the issue of nationalities under the banner of national questions (Asebe, 2012; Bahru, 2014; Merera, 2004; Temesgen, 2016). Motivated by Stalinist notion of self-determination, students demanded an end to national oppression

(Semahegn, 2012; Young, 1998). As a result, they played pivotal role behind the development of the current ethnicity and ethnic politics albeit they were pan-Ethiopianists.

Dergue attempted to address national questions (Keller, 2005) and the issue of ethnic groups (Young, 1998), but neither had it resolved the questions nor its measure satisfied the demands of ethnic groups (Hashim, 2010; Merera, 2003; Muhabie, 2015b; Semahegn, 2012). Remarkably, the military regime never understood the social intricacies and complexities of the society (Merera, 2003). This reinforced ethno-national movements (Aalen, 2002; Muhabie, 2015b) which finally sealed the fate of the regime itself. Consequently, the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power and ethnic based federalism is

formally introduced. The new regime recognized ethnicity as fundamental criterion for socio-economic mobilization and political organization. According to Aalen (2002, 2006) and Abbink (1995), the rationale behind the inauguration of ethnic federalism is to end the assumed 'Amhara dominated regime' and to give ethnic groups equal right in the state apparatus. Noticeably, the federal system is driven to find appropriate state structure that could be used as a tool to manage complex ethno-linguistic diversities. By and large, maintaining national unity and promoting democratic political system remained the overarching theoretical goals of the federalization.

In Ethiopia, ethnic tensions and unrests are not scarce in the post-1991 period. Particularly, since recently, the scale and extent of ethnic conflicts are increasing alarmingly. Ethnic based violence, evictions and instabilities are becoming common scenario that pushed the state to the edge of ethnic strife. Furthermore, intermittent conflicts are expanding and societies that did not have conflictive history are experiencing ethnic clashes. In spite of the reality on the ground, the existing ethno-federal arrangement is supposed to be panacea for ethnic conflicts. In this regard, some argued that the ethno-federal system has reduced ethnic turmoil and ensured relative peace (Cohen, 1995; Hashm, 2010; Paulos, 2007; Tronvoll, 2008; Smith, 2007). In contrary, other scholars (Alem, 2005; Siraw, 2015; Asnake, 2010; Muhabie, 2015; Tache and Oba, 2009) argued that the federal system has accentuated ethnic tension and unrests throughout the country. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to investigate the influence of ethnic federalism on ethnic conflicts and validating the existing theoretical paradox empirically.

Ethnic Federalism and Ethnic Conflicts

Federalism is seen as a political strategy to accommodate ethnic pluralism, national unity and conflict management. Regardless of its critics as an impetus to ethnic tensions and unrests (Brancati, 2006; Erk and Anderson, 2010; Kymlika, 2006; Tsegaye, 2010; Wondweson and Záhořík, 2008), federalism is considered as a compromise between divergent ethno-national, linguistic and cultural groups to harmonize their claim (Assefa, 2006; Beken, 2013; Dosenrode, 2007; Semahegn, 2014; Suberu, 2006; Turton, 2006). To this end, federalism could maintain unity with diversity through the philosophy of self-rule and shared-rule. Cognizant of such a rationale, many African countries adopted federalism in the post-colonial era as a leeway to ethnic complexities though the problems remained intact. Likewise, in 1991, Ethiopia has launched ethnic based federalism as a therapy to ethnic issues. Interestingly, mitigating perennial ethnic conflict (Cohen, 1995; Kidane, 2001; Tronvoll, 2008) and maintaining national unity (Alemseged, 2004; Assefa, 2006; Desalegn, 2014) are

among the topical promise of the Ethiopian federalization. However, ethnic conflicts and unrests are not as scarce as envisioned. Ironically, the ethnic based federal arrangement has come up with old and new political predicaments.

The Politicization of Ethnicity

As mentioned above, after the demise of Dergue regime in 1991, EPRDF instilled federalism officially as a remedy to power concentration and ethnic tension. Since then, ethnic federalism has employed as a key organizing principle and functioning of the state. Consequently, the state is reorganized into nine administrative regions delimited chiefly on the basis of ethno-linguistic criteria. Not surprisingly, the federal system launched to accommodate ethnic groups' cultural, linguistic and political claim ends in formalizing ethnicity in the political arena of the country (Aklilu, 2006; Alemante, 2003; Kymlika, 2006). Hence, the ethno-federal experiment has come up with its own economic, social and political repercussions.

The current system is ethno-centered: regions, power, party and privilege are all ethnic based. Beyond respecting, the system gave political meaning to identity and manipulated it for power and other benefits. The problem is not respecting identity; however, the problem is that the federal system has created politicized identity and ethnic nationalism. Things are observed through the lens of ethnicity and ethnic identity becomes political instrument. This opened the room for ethnic elites and politicians to trigger conflicts. Politicians and local elites manipulate ethnicity and trade-off it for different purpose (K11¹, 28 February 2018).

In the same fashion, K12² added that "ethnic identity becomes key principle of the federal system. Since the focus of the federal system is ethnic identity, local/regional citizenship is required for political participation and enjoyment of rights" (28 March 2018). Ethnicity becomes an overarching organizing principle in the post-1991 Ethiopian politics. Ethnic identity becomes key legal instrument behind entitlement, representation and organization (Asnake, 2010; K12, 28 February 2018). It has observed in party formation, political mobilization, (Abbink, 1997; Bakalu, 2017; Ishiyama, 2010; Joireman, 1997), functioning of the government and even in the military (Ismagilova, 2004; Temesgen, 2016). As soon as EPRDF assumed state power, unprecedented emphasis

¹ A key informant from the institute of federal studies

² Key informant from Addis Ababa university, department of political science and international relations

has given to ethnicity (Semahagn, 2012) and made it the corner stone for major policy initiatives, political issues, economic matters, and even educational and cultural domains (Abbink, 2011; Merera, 2004; Záhořík, 2011). Economic, social and political issues are continuously shaped and reshaped in line with the principle of ethnicity.

Irrespective of historical validity, ethno-linguistic identity is used as a basic criterion to regional and ethnic group demarcation (Abbink, 2006; Alem, 2004; Asnake, 2010; Assefa, 2012; Daniel, 2003; Merera, 2004). The people that lived together for years in towns, cities and villages peacefully regardless of cultural differences are separated by ethnic map (Walle, 1993). Here, Bekalu (2017) stated that the politicization of ethnicity cultivated deep ethnic division and culture of mistrust. And this becomes an intrusion for the peaceful coexistence of people that lived together. In other words, the ethnic categorization created the sense of 'we' versus 'them' (Abbink, 2011; Asebe, 2012; KI2 and KI3³, 28 February 2018) in the existed ethnic relations. This is related with Abbink's (1995) idea that the ethnic based federal arrangement magnified and politicized ethnic differences among the people that lived together in harmony. The overstretch and politicization of ethnicity breed mistrust in places of amicable relations which exacerbated ethnic tensions and unrests in many parts of the country.

The ethno-federal system has created ethnic based elites and politicians (Abbink, 2006; Kymlika, 2006; Merera, 2004; KI1, 28 Feb. 2018) in which they mobilize ethnic groups to achieve economic, social and political ends under the banner of ethnic identity (KI2, KI3, 28 February 2018). Because, as Alemante (2003) stated the federal system encouraged elites to view themselves as an agent of their ethnic group. Because the legal institutionalization of ethnicity gave elites opportunity to achieve certain goals (Ismagilova, 2004; Merera, 2004; KI1, 28 February 2018). In this regard, Ishiyama (2010) stated that elites used ethnicity as short cut to political mobilization and socio-economic privileges. Elites mobilized their ethnic group and manipulated ethnic identity to meet implicit and explicit personal and collective motives. Ethnic elites reinterpret past historical incidents in a manner that could give meaning in the context of their ethnic groups' socio-economic and political interests. Using wrong history, elites abjured mutual alliance, togetherness and common values; magnified long dated wars and oppressions, and disband bridges that intertwined Ethiopians (Tewodros, 2014). Adjusting themselves with ethnic cleavages, they become main actors of boundary, identity and resource conflicts. For instance, in Gedeo-Guji, Oromo-Somali, Amhara-Kimant and Amhara-Afar conflicts ethnic elites played

considerable role using the politicization of ethnic identity as an adjustable tool. Thus, it is likely that the politicization of ethnicity and its byproduct, ethnic elites, are factors that make ethnic conflicts to prop up here and there.

Ethnic Federalism: A Move to National Unity?

The data collected from government officials and scholars revealed contradicting result. According to government interviewees, the current ethno-federal system is contributing a lot for national unity and togetherness. The federal system gave opportunity for nations and nationalities to participate on national issues equally. In line with this, an interviewee from House of Federation described the contribution of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism on national unity as:

The federal system is a device for national unity. In 1991, there were around 17 groups that needed secession. The names of all were 'liberation front' with the purpose of secession. All these (17) groups wanted to secede and to form their own independent state. However, the commencement of federalism as an option saved the country from the brink of disintegration. The federal system enabled these entire groups to leave out their goal and to be together while maintaining the unity of the country (HF⁴, 28 February 2018).

The federal system introduced self-rule and shared-rule philosophy (MFA⁵, 01 March 2018) which is seen as a panacea that prevented the state from the brink of disintegration (Alemseged, 2004; Assefa, 2006; Smith, 2007; Turton, 2006). The system averted the risk of dismemberment and played irreplaceable role in creating one economic and political community (Turton, 2006; Hashim, 2010). Wondyrad (2017), columnist of *Addis Zemen* newspaper sated that the federal system put the state at a solid base of unity and healed the wounds of nations, nationalities and peoples. Desalegn (2014) on his part acknowledges the federal system as a "God sent" opportunity for ethnic groups to live together in harmony. Yet, official data confessed that there are some problems emanating from misunderstanding of the federal system and the constitution. Precedence is given to ethnic identity, a lot has not been done on national unity and such moves are increasing ethnic nationalism (HF, 28 February 2018).

On the other hand, the data obtained from scholars revealed that the ethno-federal experiment has created negative implications on national unity and feeling of

³ Key informant from Addis Ababa University, department of political science and international relations

⁴ A key informant from the House of Federation (HoF)

⁵ A key informant from Ministry of Federal Affairs (MoFA)

Ethiopianism. For instance, a key informant (KI1) from Institute of Federal Studies explained the implication of ethnic federalism on national unity in the following manner:

The existing federal system is anti-unity; it vandalized unity. By equating unity with Amhara, and Amhara with Ethiopia, the system deteriorated national unity enormously. Regional and ethnic based parties are established in the place of nationhood, and Ethiopianism is seen as sign of oppression. Ethnic based system is launched and national unity is ripped. Damaging symbols of unity, quenching history, preparing texts that disdain Ethiopianism, equating Ethiopianism with Neftegna⁶ system, and downsizing national symbols and spirit are done to ruin unity. Day of flag and nationalities would promote unity if they were from true sense. Nevertheless, the Flag Day is to compensate the flag they contempt; day of nationalities is simply dancing and eating together. Unity cannot be realized via dancing and eating together; unity is thinking; it needs an exit from ethnic thinking and narration. Nothing is done on unity and Ethiopianism; ethnic identity and ethnic nationalism are cultivated in the place of Ethiopianism and nationhood. Currently, Amharanet, Oromonet, Tigrenet etc are flourishing instead of Ethiopianism. And this had not been before but surfaced since 1991 (28 February 2018).

Supporting the above idea, Tewodros (2014), *Enqu* magazine columnist, stated that in the post-1991 period, after the demise of the military regime, ethnic nationalism has clearly launched with institutional and legal structure. "In order to create ethnically autonomous state regardless of citizenship essence, desecrating and vandalizing Ethiopia and Ethiopianism become primary tasks" (Tewodros, 2014, p. 10). In the same manner, a key informant from Department of PSIR, Addis Ababa University added the following:

Ethnic identity, the key principle of this system, has deteriorated national unity. Since ethnic identity is the epicenter, those who advocated unity and national spirit are tagged as chauvinist. The beginning of ethnic based identification including car plate damaged unity significantly. The overemphasis on the issue of ethnic identity

waned national symbols that intertwine us. This created opportunity for ethnic conflicts to happen in many places including universities. A federal system should balance self-rule and shared-rule, but in Ethiopia it is inclined to self-rule. At the current situation, every citizen cannot freely move, work and live everywhere he chooses (KI2, 28 February 2018).

The federal system gave more emphasis for ethnic groups and ethnic identity. The ethnic policy of the incumbent government thwarted national spirit and inculcated the sense of ethnicity (Dagnachew, 2014). In spite of the preamble of the constitution, the promise of togetherness, practically the federal system becomes pretext to loose national unity and ethnic relations (KI4⁷, 03 March 2018). The relations of ethnic groups are accompanied by problems; ethnic groups give primacy to their identity and marginalize others (KI3, 28 February 2018). Identity based demarcation affected free movements and ethnic groups consider regions as their only territory. National identity is shifted into ethnic loyalty and belongingness. Cordial ethnic relations are strained, and national unity and the unity of the people at large are threatened (Addis Guday, 2014; KI3, 28 February 2018). Ethiopianism is seen as a remnant of oppression and national unity is replaced by fashion like ethnic identity. Instead of citizenship, ethnic identity becomes criteria of service delivery in *Kebeles* and other public organizations. Consequently, the ethno-centered politics enervated Ethiopianism and becomes the source of rift and dissension instead of unity (Addis Guday, 2014). Ethnic groups emphasized on promoting and developing their language, culture and identity at the expense of unity. Autonomy is given to ethnic groups in the name of self-rule and the constitution is employed to justify the move. Displacement and ethnic tension becomes common scenario in many parts of the country. In such a way, despite its rationale of maintain unity, the ethno-federal system instilled ethnic hostility and unrest. Hence, identity centered mode of functioning strained national spirit and threatened the survival of the state itself.

As mentioned before, the federal system created the sense of 'self' and 'other' among ethnic groups and diminished unity by intensifying ethnic homestead. After its formalization, the federal system has created 'native' and 'non-native' (Abbink, 1995, 2006; Asnake, 2009) dichotomy among people that lived together. In other words, the federal system deemphasized national unity and promoted ethnic based nationalism (Abbink, 2006, 2009; Alem, 2005; Daniel, 2003; Merera, 2003, 2004; Paulos, 2007; Siraw, 2015). Prior senses of unity and nationhood are eroded and new ethnic based loyalty is

⁶ *Neftegna* is an Amharic word literary interpreted as gun holder, but the TPLF led EPRDF used the term derogatively to blench Amhara as oppressor, chauvinist and remnants of the past system.

⁷ Key informant form Debre Markos university, department of civics and ethnical

being cultivated. The people that had lived together are divided into regions/ethnic groups and inter-ethnic cooperation is weakened considerably. Regardless of its objective of achieving unity and peace, the federal system instituted exclusive ethnic discourse (Hagman and Abbink, 2011) and reinforced ethnic tensions. The culture of mistrust is planted and unity is trapped by newly induced ethnicity. Ethnic identity becomes more valuable than national identity for achieving economic, social and political demands. Remarkably, the overemphasis on ethnic identity degenerated into the puzzle of 'country' within country. Thus, the ethno-federal system infringed national unity and cultivated ethnic loyalty which posed the risk of dismemberment. This is related to the argument that the federal system poses the risk of disintegration just like Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (Aklilu, 2006; Alem, 2005; Asebe, 2012; Bekalu, 2016; Merera, 2004; Siraw, 2015; Wondweson and Záhořík, 2008).

Ethnic Federalism and Border Conflicts

As mentioned earlier, Ethiopia has adopted ethnic based federal system visualizing different goals. Resolving chronic ethnic grievances (Cohen, 1995; Kidane, 2001; Tronvoll, 2008), redressing ethnic inequalities (Young, 1996), securing lasting peace and maintaining national unity are of the fundamental rationales behind its commencement. Interestingly, the federal system introduced self-rule for ethnic groups to give lasting solution for the questions of nationalities the previous regimes failed to address. In such a manner, the federal system is considered as a panacea to the state ravaged by various ethno-national movements. As a result, to realize shared-rule and self-rule philosophy of federalism (Watts, 1996, 1998), the country is reconstituted into nine ethnic based [administrative] regions.

However, the intra boundary demarcation comes up with new trends of border contestation between ethnically constituted regions. Government officials argued that the federal system does not create border conflicts rather they confessed that its practical implementation bore some conflicts. On the other hand, scholars (key informants) explained that border conflicts surfaced in the country following ethnic based political arrangement in the post-1991 era. For instance, KI2 stated that:

Since borders the federal system has brought are considered as international, the country is pushed into crisis. Instead of administrative boundary, the federal system created border that looks like border of two independent countries. Badly, the system created border by integrating ethnic identity with land. The creation of border

in such circumstances between neighboring nationalities (groups having shared identity) that cannot be easily identified has multiplied conflicts. The problem is that the system gives political organization and power opportunity for ethnic groups, and border is tied with ethnic identity. Hence, any venture to border is seen as venture to identity (28 February 2018).

In the same breath, another key informant added the following:

The border that comes after the federal system looks like tensioned international border. Furthermore, the secession clause of the constitution (article 39) triggered the issue of border. As per the constitution, regions have unconditional right to secession. When they secede, they go with the border they hold. Assuming probable secession, regions engage in border expansion and ethnic irredentism. In such a fashion, ethnic based demarcation and secession right becomes main sources of ethnic clash and unrest. If the border was administrative, why regions are firing with each other?! Why they enter into border conflict?! But now, just like international border, regions fight over boundary. In the absence of Amharanet, Oromonet, Tigrenet; no border conflict was present (KI1, 28 February 2018).

In principle, regions have administrative border, but practically there are tendencies in which regions consider it as international border (HF, 28 February 2018). While regions were demarcated, less public discussion was held and this opened room for signs of ethnic conflicts to be here and there (MFA, 01 March 2018). Misunderstanding the federal system and the principle of administrative boundary, even regional officials engaged in creating border. In the current context, the issue of border is too stiff and protecting border is considered as protecting ethnic identity. Identity based intra boundary demarcation give regions green light to dislocate the 'non-indigenous'. Using border as pretext, ethnic based politicians and elites triggered conflicts for political power and other entitlements (KI3, 28 February 2018). Thus, ethnic based demarcation paved venue to border tension between regions that shares common border.

In the post ethno-federal period, border conflicts are multiplied and created tension in many places of the country. Muluneh (2014), *Fact* magazine columnist described the issue of border conflict in the post-1991 Ethiopia as follow:

Citizens who had lived together for years without border entered into identity and border clashes

following the artificial border of ethnic politics. These groups used un-bordered resources commonly but the post-1991 boundary demarcation put border between them and triggered conflicts. For example, the split of Borena and Dogdi into Oromia and Somali regions after the federation created ceaseless conflict. In the banner of ethnicity, border becomes the cause of conflict. The causes of Gedeo-Guji (South Ethiopia), Amhara-Oromo (around Wollega), Kareyu-Ittu (Afar) and Arsi Oromo (East Ethiopia) conflicts are border demarcation (pp. 8-9).

Many Ethiopians had lived together sharing resources commonly. However, the federal system created border and divided resource and people into regions having their own autonomy. According to the constitution, regions are delimited on the basis of settlement pattern, language, identity and consent (FDRE constitution, 1995). In spite of such provision, on the ground regions are delimited on ethno-linguistic basis as a fundamental criterion (Abbink, 2006; Alem, 2004; Asnake, 2010; Berhanu, 2008; Daniel, 2003; Merera, 2004). Amazingly, population size, historical validity and natural resource are hardly considered while regions are demarcated (Berhanu, 2012; Daniel, 2003). The demarcation of regions irrespective of life style, history and social setting created rivalry between peoples/ethnic groups that had lived together but separated into different region. Asebe (2012) opined that let alone political participation but also resource right is determined by ethnic membership despite past history and interdependence.

Prior resource based local conflicts are renovated into regional border antagonism. In this regard, Asnake (2009) stated that the federal system shifted local resource conflicts into identity based clashes. Put briefly, the federal system introduced border in the dynamics of resource conflicts. Currently, border tensions are only rare in regions that do not share common boundary. The worst thing here is that debt of boundary claims are paid through innocent lives. For instance, the major cause of Oromo-Somali, Gedeo-Guji and Amhara-Afar conflicts are border. Ethnic politicians/elites manipulated administrative jurisdiction (self-rule) philosophy of federalism for political, ideological and economic gains, and international like borders are created. Not only local elites but also regional and federal officials compete and claim over border supporting their ethnic group. This infringed the rights of free movement, working and living within the country. Therefore, the ethno-federal experiment switched resource based local conflicts into border and identity based clashes.

Ethnic Federalism: A Panacea to Ethnic Conflicts?

As explained earlier, ethno-federal arrangement has commenced to end perennial ethnic conflicts and marginalization of ethnic groups (Alem, 2004; Cohen, 1995; Paulos, 2007; Tronvoll, 2008). Moreover, the federal formula is seen as a double edge to accommodate ethnic groups' cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and political claim on the one hand and continuous peaceful coexistence on the other hand. As a result, the ethno-federal experiment has opted as a remedy to all conflicts and claims of ethnic inequalities that had existed in the country (Alem, 2004; Tsegaye, 2010). Hence, it is from this rationale the right to autonomy is granted for ethnic groups (regions). Yet, the ethnic based regionalization has come up with its own positive and negative implications.

The data obtained from government officials and scholars revealed contradiction. According to government interviewees the federal system does not bring conflicts, rather it respected language, culture and identity of ethnic groups. In line with this, an informant from Ministry of Federal Affairs argued that:

Currently, no ethnic conflict exists in Ethiopia; neither had been before, nor prevails in the future. Simply, individuals who do not represent nationalities but trade in its name enter into conflict. If you take Oromo-Somali case, it is not ethnic conflict but individuals clashed with each other in the name of Oromo and Somali. The current conflicts are prior water and pasture conflicts that had existed since the previous unitary systems. The federal system respected culture, language and identity but never created conflict. Actually, there are some conflicts because of ill implementation of the principle. For instance, Kimant case happened in an attempt to oppress identity but peace prevailed when treated as per the constitution. In short, the federal system does not bring any conflict (01 March 2018).

By the same token, Abrham (2017) and Wondyirad (2017) thought that conflicts happened in different parts of the country are not steamed from the federal system but they are signs of rent-seeking and mal-governance behaviors and practices. However, an interviewee from House of Federation confessed the presence of ethnic conflicts emanated from misunderstanding of the federal system and its overemphasis on ethnic identity. Meanwhile, according to the official data the problem of good governance, poor administrative skill and bias/inclination to one's ethnic group are identified as factors behind ethnic conflicts and tensions. The data collected from officials vindicate that the government

talks about the merits of federalism when criticized for ethnic federalism and its defects (the use of ethnic identity as a socio-economic and political basis), which can be described as 'contention of fool'.

On the other hand, the data collected from scholars revealed that ethnic conflicts are increasing in the country from time to time. All key informants unanimously asserted that the ethnic based arrangement of the incumbent government created ethnic conflict and culture of mistrust even among ethnic groups that had lived together for many years in harmony. In this respect, the idea of key informant (K13) is worth mentioning here:

The federal system is failed to reduce ethnic conflicts. When we see some places, prior water and grazing conflicts are changing their form and become identity based. Particularly, since recently, ethnic conflicts are increasing, multiplying and changing their nature. For instance, Oromos are displaced from Somali; Amharas too dislocated from South, Oromia and Benshangul Gumuz regions. The poor implementation of federal systems' self-rule and shared-rule accentuated ethnic conflicts. The 'we' versus 'them' thinking pushed former personal conflicts into identity based. So, the current federal system gave former conflicts ethnic shape (28 February 2018).

Likewise, another key informant argued that:

...the federal system has created ethnic based conflicts. Ethnic conflicts had not existed before; there were only personal and tribal/clan/group conflicts over water, pasture and other economic reasons. Earlier conflicts were competition for power and economy. For instance, Gonder, Gojam and Shewa had clashed over power; Oromo and Somali, Amhara and Afar had clashed intermittently over water and grazing. However, in the post-1991 former conflicts changed their form and become identity based. Consequently, the identity based system has created identity based conflicts (K11, 28 February 2018).

The more emphasis on identity issue waned national symbols that integrated the people together. This opened the room for ethnic unrests and tensions to spout in many places of the country. Many of the conflicts such as Amhara-Afar, Oromo-Somali, Amhara-Tigray and university students' conflict are ethnic conflicts (K12, 28 February 2018; K14, 03 March 2018). The feeling of suspicion and mistrust, the byproduct of ethnic based federalism, has heightened the issue of ethnic unrest and pandemonium (K14, 03 March 2018). Prior personal

conflicts are transformed into a conflict in which regional militia and Special Forces are participated; and easily resolvable local conflicts transformed into a situation in which regional presidents are assembled (K12, 28 February 2018). The shift into identity based makes not only conflicts to happen frequently but also complicated the settlement processes. Thus, the ethno-federal system increased both the level and intensity of ethnic conflicts.

Ethnic conflicts are multiplied and increased since 1991 (*Fact* magazine, 2014) and it paved avenue to narrow nationalism (Muluneh, 2012). Dislocation, death and destruction of property become very common due to increasing ethnic clashes (*Addis Guday*, 2014; *Fact*, 2014; HRC, 2017). For example, the Gedeo ethnic based conflict in 2016 (HRCO, 2017), the conflict between Oromo and South region, Amhara and Afar (VOA, 28 July 2017; FBC, 28 July 2017), violent clash between Oromia and Somali (BBC, 18 December 2017; HRCO, 2017), student ethnic based conflict at public universities (EU, 2017; Zerihun, 2012), the unrest between Oromo and Gumuz, Gedeo-Guji violent conflict and the increasing tension between Amhara and Tigray are some current evidences that shows the recurrence of ethnic tensions and unrests within the country. The increasing intensity of ethnic unrest infringed citizens' right to free movement, work and living. The culture of mistrust, suspicion and hatred are being cultivated in the places of mutual trusts and interdependences. Ethnic conflicts become more serious challenge which threaten the socio-economic reality, political stability and survival of the country.

The federal system introduced to address ethnic conflicts could not bring the expected outcome. Ethnic based conflicts cannot be alleviated as envisioned rather they are accentuated and multiplied (Abbink, 2011; Alem, 2005; Siraw, 2015; Tache and Oba, 2009; Tsegaye, 2010; Wondweson and Záhořík, 2008) in time and space. Former resource based personal/clan clashes are leaped into identity based conflicts considerably. Even societies that did not have record of violent conflicts started to experience protracted identity based conflicts (Asnake, 2009; Muhabie, 2015b; Tsegaye, 2010) following ethnic based federalization. For example, Oromo-Somali, Gedeo-Guji, Amhara-Kimant and Amhara-Afar conflicts were either very small scale and personalized or locally resolved through traditional mechanisms. However, at present, these conflicts are transmuted into ethnically mobilized and bloody clashes. Seemingly, ethnic tensions and unrests are still increasing. Now a day, it is common to hear and see news of death and dislocation caused by ethnic fracas. According to Daniel (2003), Ethiopia was the most stable country but now ethnic conflicts are increasing and it is sliding into chaos. Ethnic conflicts have occurred in different parts of the country (Abbink, 2011; Lubo, 2012; Tsegaye, 2010) and continue to be bottleneck to its peace and stability. Hence, the ethno-federal arrangement fueled, reconfigured and

transformed historical conflicts into inter-ethnic and inter-regional level.

According to Bekalu (2017) the ethno-federal formula has contributed to ethnic tensions by widening disparities. The feelings of 'we' versus 'them' breed mistrust and suspicion which has strained cordial relationship. Peoples are dislocated from places they had lived for long. For example, Amharas were displaced from Gurafereda, Bedeno, Harar and Arbabgugu (Bekalu, 2017; Desalegn, 2014); Oromos too displaced in mass from Ethio-Somali region. More than dozen of conflicts happened in the past decades (Abbink, 2006) and claimed the lives of many innocent individual (Abbink, 2011). The Oromo-Somali, Amhara-Afar, Oromo-Harari, Somali-Afar and Amhara-Oromo (Wondweson and Záhořík, 2008) are few examples with bad consequences. Despite the rationale of the federalization, ethnic conflicts are gaining salience and become more frequent (Alem, 2004, 2005; Muhabie, 2015b; Tsegaye, 2010). To this end, the ethno-federal arrangement detribalized the country and fostered rivalry between ethnic groups that had lived together in harmony. Therefore, it is likely that in place of ending ethnic grievances, the ethno-federal system created new ethnic conflicts/grievances even between ethnic groups that did not have such history.

CONCLUSION

Ethiopia has launched ethnic federalism as a panacea to deep rooted power centralization, ethnic grievances and inequalities, and authoritarianism. However, its organizing principles have created intricate problems. Ethnic identity is recognized as an overarching socio-economic and political basis. The more emphasis on ethnic identity switched national loyalty to ethnic loyalty and ethnic citizenship become valuable instrument for socio-economic and political privileges. The problem lies not with respecting and recognizing identity, however, the core of the problem is founded at the use of ethnic identity as a fundamental criterion for socio-economic and political issues in the context of intertwined society. Historical validity, social reality and cultural interdependence are hardly considered while ethnic based regions are instituted. The denial of such issues brought an impasse on the existing inter-ethnic relations. Needless to mention, the new arrangement integrated land with ethnic identity. And this has bred its own political repercussion on the dynamics of resource conflicts and ethnic relations.

The ethnic based arrangement magnified and politicized ethnic differences. This opened the room for ethnic elites to manipulate ethnic differences as a powerful drive for implicit and explicit economic, social, political and ideological ends. Astonishingly, ethnic elites

compete with each other to access power, resource and other entitlements using ethnicity as a short cut. In such a manner, ethnic elites orchestrated animosity among people that had lived together by planting and widening political rifts. By reciting perceived past historical incidents in the context of their ethnic group, elites planted hatred and hostility. Eventually, the 'we' versus 'them' mentality accompanied by negative stereotype has cultivated as the byproduct of politicization of ethnicity. Besides, nationhood is de-emphasized and loyalty is shifted into ethnic homestead. Hence, the enhancement of ethnicity as a mobilizing factor of politics resulted in economic, social and political marginalization. Ironically, in place of rectifying perceived past injustices and ethnic grievances, the ethno-federal system has come up with new injustices and grievances. As a result, ethnic tensions and unrests become common scenarios in the post-1991 Ethiopia.

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