Ethnic Federalism and One Party Rule in Ethiopia

By Ephrem Madebo

"What is this fake Nationalism? Is it not simply Amhara and to a certain extent Amhara-Tigre supremacy? Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian language is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian music is? Ask anybody what the "national dress" is? It is either Amhara or Amhara-Tigre!! To be a "genuine Ethiopian" one has to speak Amharic, to listen to Amharic music, to accept the Amhara-Tigre religion, Orthodox Christianity and to wear the Amhara-Tigre Shamma in international conferences. In some cases to be an "Ethiopian", you will even have to change your name. In short to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask"

Walleligne Mekonnen November 17, 1969

This paper is presented in two parts. The first part presents the historical account of federalism, i.e. its evolution and purpose, what federalism is and the different flavors of federalism. The second part of the paper uses its first part to examine Ethiopia's ethnic federalism. I strongly advise readers to critically read all parts of the paper to see the pros and cons of federalism, and have an informed stand as to why one disagrees with Ethiopia's ethnic federalism.

In his 1969 ground breaking paper, "On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia", Walleligne Mekonnen stated that Ethiopia is the prison of nationalities. In deed, as Walleligne eloquently said it some 40 years ago, Ethiopia has been an inexorable prison of nationalities, and the question of nationalities has been, and is the most contentious issue since Ethiopia took its current shape between the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Emperor Hailselassie, the man who ruled Ethiopia for 45 years, never acknowledged the existence of nationality problems in Ethiopia, and Colonel Mengistu, the military dictator who succeeded him; believed that the pathetic autonomous regions that he created would solve Ethiopia's deep-seated nationality problems.

The current rulers of Ethiopia are not outsiders to ethnic politics, in fact; their cerebral cortex is polluted by ethno-nationalist ideology from the get-go. They raised arms and fought a bitter war for 17 years seeking a lasting answer to what they believed is Ethiopia's burning question which is- the question of nationalities. Today, the same people that claim to have given their youth life to a humble cause are ruling Ethiopia along ethnic lines creating a federal system [ethnic federalism] that has made them lords of the land, and everybody else a vassal.

The long history of Ethiopia is marked by power struggle between the Amhara and Tigre aristocracies. Ethiopian history clearly depicts the North-South movement of the three power houses [Axumaite Kingdom, and Zagwe and Solomonic dynasties] until Emperor Tewodros in the middle of the 1800s initiated the first effort to unify and modernize the state of Ethiopia. However, Ethiopia did not emerge as a modern nation-until the late 19th century when Emperor Minelik expanded to the South and annexed the Cushitic, the Omotic and the Nilotic people of the South, East and Western parts of Ethiopia.

By any standard, Emperor Haile Selassie was the primary architect of modern Ethiopia who guarded the sovereignty and independence of his country for 44 years. But, despite Haile Selassie‘s reputation as the father of the nation and Africa; drought, corruption, bad governance and failure to resolve the national question brought down his regime.

The military junta [aka Derg] that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia with iron fist from 1974 to 1991. The Derg nationalized financial institutions and private enterprises, and took full control of markets and agricultural production. In one of its most celebrated radical move, the Military regime nationalized rural land and abolished feudalism in March 1975. However, poverty, drought, gross inequalities and the long standing ethnic tensions limited Colonel Mengistu’s Marxist regime to just 17 years.

Initiated, organized and led by an association of discontented Tigrayan elites, the TPLF started its liberation movement in rural Tigray in February 1975. In the next 17 years, the TPLF employed ethno-nationalist ideologies to mobilize Tigreans and disgruntled military service men to ultimately drive out the Marxist dictator in May 1991. Upon assuming political power, in 1991, the TPLF and its ragtag fighting force declared its allegiance to a clean break up with the past and the establishment of multi-ethnic democracy based on equality, the rule of law, and the right of nations to self-determination. Surprisingly, not that many Ethiopians knew the name TPLF when federalism was introduced in Ethiopia [in 1991], and officially sanctioned in the 1994 constitution.

It has been almost 19 years since Ethiopia embarked upon what many Ethiopians claim is a treacherous experiment in “Ethnic Federalism”. When ethnic federalism was introduced in the late 1990s, many feared that Ethiopia would cease to exist as a nation. Well, we must be happy that at least ethnic federalism did not disintegrate Ethiopia; but it did not avoid bloody ethnic conflicts either, or bring the much needed peace, prosperity, and regional stability that many expected form the introduction of federalism.

Ironically, today, the most prevalent political development in Ethiopia is the establishment of ethnic federalism and the consolidation of a centralized one party rule. As a result, today, Ethiopia; a country of more than 70 ethnic groups, is a bonfire waiting to happen; and is a time bomb a heart beat away from blowing up.

What is Federalism?

Many scholars have defined the word “Federalism” in so many ways; therefore, any attempt to add to the already existing wide pool of definitions would be confusing the already confused laity. According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, federalism is the theory or advocacy of federal political orders, where final authority is divided between the sub-units and the center. Unlike a unitary state, sovereignty is constitutionally split between at least two territorial levels so that units at each level have final authority and can act independently of the others in some area. In countries where there is a federal arrangement of government, citizens have political obligations to two authorities; the federal authorities and the state or zone authorities.

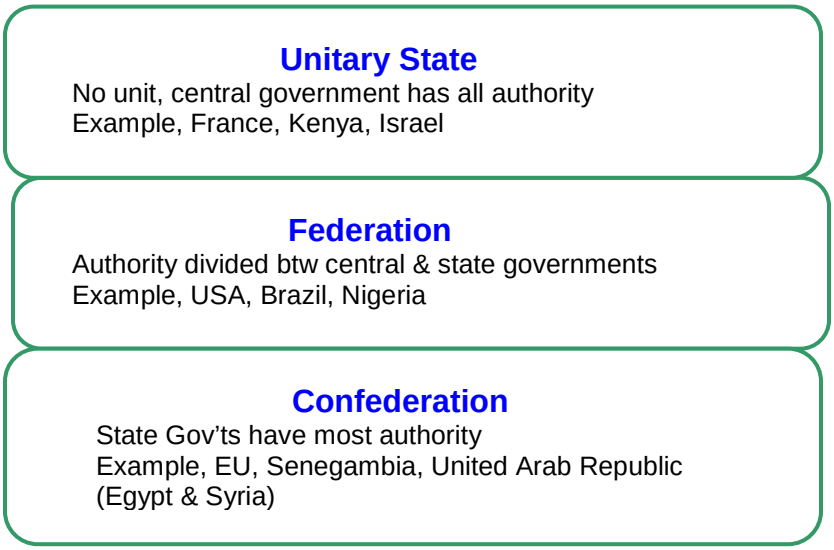
Federalism is a political thought that evolved through the years. Great thinkers of the last six centuries such as L. Hugo, Hume, Rousseau, and Kant have contributed to the political theory of federalism, but most scholars agree that Johannes Althusius [1557, 1630] is the father of modern federalist thought.

In his 1603 book, P*olitica Methodice Digesta,* Althusius argued for autonomy of his city Emden, both against its Lutheran provincial Lord and against the Catholic Emperor. Althusius was a Calvinist, and Calvinists were minorities in Germany, hence, he developed a doctrine of resistance as the right of minority citizens to resist tyranny. Althusius and many Orthodox Calvinists insisted on sovereignty in the social circles and subordinate only to God's laws. The French Huguenots developed Althusius’ theory of legitimacy further arguing that people who live in a distinct community or territory have a God-granted right to resist rulers without rightful claim.

As it is clearly stated in the above paragraph, there is a strong cause and effect relationship between tyranny and federalism. Even at its inception, federalism was regarded as a solution to accommodate differences among populations divided by ethnic, religious, or cultural cleavages yet seeking a common political order that binds them together. Today, nations, ethnic minorities, or religious groups may invoke their right for federal arrangements of government for various reasons where many of the reasons can logically be summed up to two sets of arguments.

The first argument favors federalism than secession; and the 2nd argument supports federal arrangements than a centralized unitary state. Basically, in plural societies; federalism is the preferred method of government arrangement than unitary state or making a decision to secede. Hence, it is no a coincidence that these two sets of arguments gave rise to two different starting points of federalism - “Coming Together” federalism, and “Holding Together” federalism, which will briefly be discussed next. The experience of the USSR in the 1920s and the Ethiopian experience of the 1990s gave rise to the third form of federalism known as “Put Together” federalism.

The sovereignty of a nation may reside in a unitary or federal form of government structures; and sovereign countries may form an association where member states delegate a certain amount of their competences to common institutions, in order to coordinate their policies in a number of areas without constituting a new state. The figure below shows unitary, federal, and the confederation forms of associations.



Why Federalism?

The objectives of establishing a federal state are deeply linked to the context of the individual countries. One of the natural benefits of federalism is the opportunity to create a larger state and enjoy greater access to economic and military resources. Besides, to a multiethnic nation like Ethiopia, there are many other compelling reasons to adopt a federal system. Federalism is a tool that helps nations like Ethiopia build a democratic republic by preventing tyranny of the majority. Moreover, liberty and the power of elected officials could be reconciled within a federal structure that would constrain the power of the government by balancing it in the institutional separation of powers of branches of government and the territorial division of power between the center and the states.

For example, instead of 'putting together' federation which is coercive, the formation of holding together federations [voluntary basis] could have been the ideal choice for Ethiopia. This is an obvious certainty because the need to reduce group conflict, demonstrate respect for diversity, and the commitment to protect the integrity of the culture of different groups is one of the utmost justifications given for entering into a federal arrangement.

Coming Together Federalism

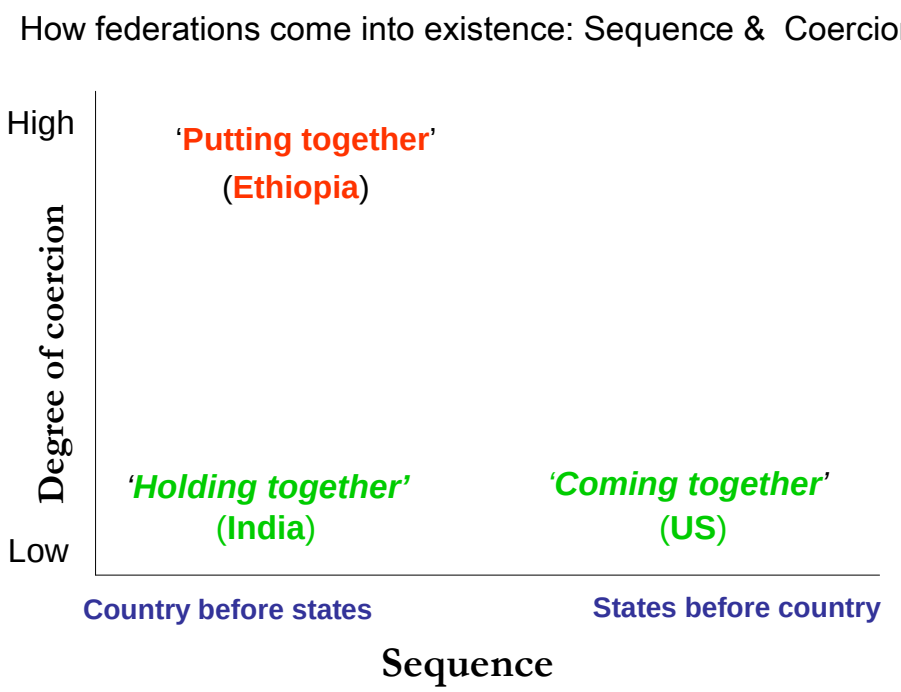
Coming-together federations emerge when two or more than two existing sovereign countries agree to create a federal system for governmental efficiency, economic development, and security purposes. Federations can promote economic prosperity by removing internal trade barriers, and they may also foster peace by preventing wars and preventing fears of war, in several ways. Countries or nations that create federation become jointly powerful enough to dissuade external aggressors, and/or to prevent aggressive and preemptive wars among themselves. For example, the 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrean war could have been avoided had Ethiopia and Eritrea solved their problems though federal arrangements. The most important aspect of 'Coming-together' federation is that the different sovereign units come together to form the federation on the voluntary basis.

Holding Together Federalism

In contrast to "coming together" federations, where sovereign states band together to create a common central government to which the states surrender some of their sovereignty, in a holding-together federation, an already existing large polity is subdivided into various sub-units that enjoy sovereignty over certain policy areas. Holding together federalism is an approach used to cope with ethnic divisions, or it is a strategy used to save a disintegrating unitary state. In most cases, 'Holding together' federations are the outgrowth of a consensual parliamentary decision to preserve a unitary state by creating a multi-ethnic federal system.

'Putting Together' Federalism

'Putting together' federations are identified as those federal states like the USSR that are integrated non-voluntarily, i.e. by coercion; or as the recent Ethiopia experience says it all, 'Putting together' federalism is a forceful or fraudulent incorporation of different nationalities by an organized elite as in Kratocracy (Kratocracy = government by those who are strong enough to seize power through force or cunning). Both Ethiopia and the former USSR are typical examples of nominal federal entities with a very high level of centralization. As the name 'Putting together' clearly indicates, in 'putting together' federalism, there seems to be a coercive entity that forcefully puts units together. In the case of Ethiopia, that coercive entity is TPLF.



Symmetric and Asymmetric Federalism

A federation could take the form of symmetric or asymmetric federalism in different countries for various reasons. However, regardless of what form federations take, the term federalism is used to describe a government system in which sovereignty is constitutionally divided between the federal [central] authority and constituent political entities, or at a very fundamental level, federal principles involve a combination of self rule and shared rule.

Symmetric federalism is found in federations like the United States where the constitutional power divide between the constituent states is equal which basically means that every state in the union has the same power. This is in contrast to an asymmetric federation, where a distinction is made between constituent states. In Asymmetric federalism, the constituent entities of the federation have the same constitutional status, but one or more than one of the units may posses different powers. India is a typical example of Asymmetric federalism where states like Jammu, Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh enjoy more autonomy that the others.

Federalism in Ethiopia

When it ceased power in 1991, the TPLF regime decided to break form the past and have a different look at the question of nationalities. In its first two years as the ruling party of Ethiopia, the TPLF allowed the different ethnic groups to fully express their culture and language, and reorganized the country along administrative and political lines. Moreover, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) introduced dualism and promised freedom and the rule of law in a country where absolute monarchs rambled for centuries.

At the beginning, many Ethiopians gave the regime the benefit of the doubt when it enshrined democratic principles in the constitution, and implemented public policies that devolved administrative authority from the center to the zones.

The Genesis of Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia

Like India and Nigeria, Ethiopia's decision to implement federalism was negotiated between the regional elites, but unlike the two countries, in Ethiopia, the relative strength of the regional elites [Oromo, Amhara, Sidama, Somali and the Southern region] was weaker, and it was no match to the Tigran elite that controlled the gun and the purse of the country. In July 1991, the TPLF regime called a national conference that included representatives of 31 political movements (including OLF) and ratified the formation of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. This short lived good gesture of the TPLF party made many Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia believe that Ethiopia was on a path to what appeared to be 'holding together' federalism.

However, in 1992, ethnic tensions grew up through out the country as the TPLF regime organized the first local and regional elections. Despite the participation of ethnic parties in the coalition government, the skeptical Oromos, Amharas, and Somalis feared that the election would only legitimatize the Tigray minority to dominate the country using EPRDF as a cover. In 1992, few days before what is known as the first multi-party election, representatives of the two major ethnic groups [OLF, AAPO] and two other members of the ruling coalition [EDAG, GPDO] announced their withdrawal from the election process. To make things worse, in April 1993, SEPDC, one of the largest collations in the country, was expelled out from the Council of Representatives.

By the time of the 1994 election, the major ethnic parties were systematically forced out of the TGE, reducing membership of the council to the TPLF and the ethnic parties it produced cloning itself. All in all, in the run to the election, the TPLF preserved its political dominance by repressing organized opposition and flexing its muscle against defenseless loose alliances. Consequently, what appeared to be a 'holding together' federation in 1991, ended up evolving into 'putting together' federation in 1994 when the TPLF controlled ethnic parties created federal states where administrative power was devolved to the states while political power was monopolized by the center**;** and the center was TPLF.

In one of the most bizarre move in the history of nation building, a liberation front that loosely represents less than 5 million people, shoved out the representatives of more than 60 million people and proudly claimed to have established the "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia". In its devious effort to appease donor nations and to calm down ethnic tensions, the TPLF, at first declared its intention to implement a plan to devolve power from the center to states and local governments. To the appeasement of the TPLF, this calculated move fooled many people including, the regional elites, that Ethiopia was heading towards holding together federations. Many of the regional elites believed that their respective regional states were responsible for regional political life, development policies, laws, regulations and taxes. However, having been imposed from above by the

TPLF, when it fully materialized, Ethiopia's federalism was clearly – 'putting together' federations.

Well, it is obvious that the system the TPLF put together has some federal semblance, but there is absolutely no political freedom at the state level. Article 52 of the Ethiopian constitution clearly states that states may write their own constitution, decide their own official language, develop their own administrative systems, establish separate police forces, and collect certain taxes. However, the power of the sates to exercise these constitutional rights is limited by the center, and any kind of economic or political initiative of the states came from the center than from the constituent states.

Federalism and Power Sharing

Federal systems may vary contextually depending upon where they are established, or they may vary in form and type, but what ever form federalism takes, or which ever country it is established, 'self rule' and 'shared rule' are the fundamental principles of federalism. The federal units are granted the right to govern their own affairs, and they should acknowledge the authority of the federal government to rule on their collective behalf in clearly defined areas.

The principle of federalism allows the co-existence of a state government and a federal government, each with its own sets of laws. The particular rights of the center are enshrined in the constitution in relation to the sates. In most cases, federal laws override state laws when the two conflict with each other. However, states have very clearly defined juridical rights, and they are constitutionally protected from the capriciousness of the center.

The ideal of democracy is the dispersion of power, and the ideal of federalism is power sharing, or self administration. But, the tendency of democracy and federalism in Ethiopia is the centralization of power, where regional states are manipulated by the center. The actors at the center of politics in Ethiopia are hatemonger, deceitful, and snobby individuals; and when political manipulation, ethnicity, and arrogance are coupled with this, Ethiopia's ethnic federalism has no chance of keeping together the country's eighty plus nationalities. As the saying in politics goes, in politics, the centripetal forces often tend to dominate the centrifugal forces;

Ethnic Federalism & Power Sharing in Ethiopia

Article 56 of the constitution states: A political party or a coalition of political parties that has the greatest number of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives shall form the Executive and lead it.

Ethiopia has been ruled by one party since 1991. Through out this article, I have argued that EPRDF is the cover TPLF used to have legitimacy to rule over Ethiopia. But let's just forget this argument for a moment and believe that EPRDF is the real power that has

the final say in the affairs of Ethiopia; and let's also assume that all elections of the EPRDF era are fair and free.

Evidently, EPRDF is not a party; it's just a coalition of one liberation front and three other ethnic "Democratic" organizations [TPLF, OPDO, ANDM, & SEPDF]. Therefore, the amount of seats the EPRDF wins in any election is the sum of the votes that each organization wins [because EPRDF is not a party]; hence, the share of power within the front must reflect the relative importance of each organization in national elections. In short, with 80.3% of the total number of seats in the parliament held by Oromia, Amhara and Southern Zone, there is no way what so ever that TPLF should controls power representing Tigray that has only 6.9% of the seats in the national parliament.

Regional States	**Oromia Zone**	**Amhara Zone**	**Southern Zone**	**Tigray Zone**
Representative Party	OPDO	ANDM	SEPDF	TPLF
Population	26.553.000	18.185.502	15,042,531	4.334.996
# of House Seats	178	138	123	38
% age of seats relative to the three orgs	37.30%	28.90%	25.80%	8%
% age of seats relative to the total # of seats	32.50%	25.20%	22.50%	6.9%

A very interesting question here would be – Are the Oromos with 32:5%, the Amaharas with 28.9% and the Southern People with 22.5% of the total seats in the national parliament willingly giving their power to the Tigrayans who have a measly 6.9% of the total seats in the national parliament? If the answer yes, why? Or is it true that, in the TPLF Ethiopia, the concept of majority is interpreted depending on which side of the aisle Meles and Sebaht Nega are? In the last 20 years, the Prime Minister [Meles Zenawi], foreign minister [Seyoum Mesfin], and the eight powerful people in Ethiopia [Sebhat Nega, Arkebe Oqubay, Abay Tsehaye, Abadi Zemo, Tsegay Berhe, Azeb Mesfin, Haftom Abraha and Samora Yenus]; and the entire command and control core of the nation's armed forces have all been ethnic Tigreans and members of the TPLF party. Is this what the principles of federalism presuppose?

On paper, the Ethiopian constitution gives a great deal of power and administrative authority to regional states, however, in practice; the overwhelming amount of political power is clenched in the palms of the central government. Basically, the regional states are forced to closely follow the policy lead of the center; not just the center, but states are mainly forced to follow the Five Year Program of the TPLF party than asserting their policy independence. The 1999 World Bank Report states, "*What is revealed by this reality is the manner in which the EPRDF government has systematically neutralized political opposition and placed the political elite and party cadres who support it in positions of power and authority at the regional level*". The TPLF regime has authored a fairly good constitution, but in everything it does, it almost always goes around the

constitution than going through it. Today, 19 years after the introduction of federalism, the government of Ethiopia operates more like a unitary state.

Greed, inherited hegemonic attitude, bigotry and their ideology of revolutionary democracy has allowed the Tigrean elite to dominate all spheres life in all domains of the Ethiopian society with an acquired legitimacy. As it has clearly been noticed, in the last 20 years; the TPLF elites have charged with betrayal patriot Ethiopians who questioned this acquired legitimacy.

In multiethnic societies, where there are ethnic tensions; the federal form of government should create a growing sense of equality among the different ethic groups and must understand, accommodate, and resolve their conflicting interests. Proportional, but equal power-sharing, respecting each others culture and language, and mutual understanding is a very effective and lasting method of governance in keeping plural societies together and advance in economic development. The TPLF elites have such a condescending approach that assumes political power rightfully belongs to the federal government; and they also believe that it is the federal government that should devolve power on to the regional level governments. This approach ignores that power belongs to the people who give it to the next tier upward and all the way to the central government.

Federalism and Revenue Sharing in Ethiopia

As a former student of Economics and most importantly, as a proponent of free competition; I detest the concept of revenue-sharing because the notion of revenue sharing subverts competition, which is one of the corner stones of federalism**.** In federalism, competition between jurisdictions is considered as an engine that produces gains for the national economy by promoting consumer sovereignty. Don't get me wrong, I am not an advocate of the classical concept of "Laissez-faire". In a developing nation like Ethiopia, there are important roles that the central government must play in guiding the national development effort. I also believe that the central government in Ethiopia should use some kind of income re- distribution to help states overcome their financial shortages. The problem in Ethiopia is that, the TPLF regime has assumed so many responsibilities for so many diverse national, regional and sometimes even local problems that it no longer has the ability to do anything well.

At the center of Ethiopia's Ethnic federalism, there is this system of revenue sharing that includes chunks of grants the central government gives to regional states. According to the claims of the TPLF regime, the rationale behind the revenue sharing is - 1) To enable the central government and regional governments to efficiently carry out their respective duties and responsibilities. 2) Assisting regional governments to develop their regions on their own initiative. 3) Narrowing the existing gap in development and economic growth between regions to encourage activities that have common interest to regions. These claims sound good on paper, but only if a fair balance is maintained between the claims of diversity and the requirements of unity. Otherwise, the mechanisms of center-state revenue sharing relations would remain non-functional. In Ethiopia, the regional states were systematically assembled to be dependent on the center.

Currently, in Ethiopia, the federal government transfers a huge deal of resources to regional governments. At times, the transfer may look good, but this kind of transfer mechanism increases the center -state dependency. Regional governments are 'self-governing units', hence, they should be encouraged to collect taxes and finance their own expenditures. But, the Ethiopian federal system is built on the principle of "Collect and Transfer". It's the fundamental principle of governance that any government should meet its expenditure or, at least; its revenue on core services should come from its own resources. The transfer of power from the center to the regions must include the power to collect resources and the power to tax. Without this kind of power transfer, regions may not be called self-governing units, they are simply powerless dependent units.

Revenue sharing by itself is not the crucial problem of federalism in Ethiopia. In fact, the fundamental problem of federalism in Ethiopia is the methodology selected to involve the different regional élites and the criteria used in assembling federal units. Ethiopia is a very poor country; and on top of that, it is a deeply divided polity [Ethnically]. In an already divided country, assembling regional units and demarcating their boundaries along ethnic lines is a recipe for disintegration. The approach of using ethnicity and language as a single criteria to draw regional maps, prohibitively limits population movement between the regional units, and creates a demand for uncalled secession. It also limits the ability of the federal government to coordinate and lead the development effort of the nation, and hinders the development of a free market economy that has the potential to integrate all parts of the country.

The other dark side of Ethiopia's federalism is that, it is imposed from above, i.e. it is 'Putting Together' federations. The argument of this article is not against federalism; federalism is the most favorable option for Ethiopia. But, the very purpose of federalism is to hold nations together; therefore, it should not be imposed from above; and must not be used as a tool to obliterate the national sense of oneness and indivisibility. In plural societies like Ethiopia, there are many important conditions that must be considered in order for federalism to work; the following are the most important: 1) There should be an all-embracing sense of national unity among Ethiopians that ethnically based federalism is appropriate for development and to keep the country together. 2) The effective implementation of federalism presupposes administrative and financial capacity. Hence, financial and administrative capacity must be considered when regional states are assembled. 3) The relationship between the center and the regional states must clearly be defined by law; and no person, agency, or authority should be allowed to go around the law.

Claims & Realities

We have already seen that according to the TPLF regime, regional economic growth is the primary objective of the revenue sharing phenomenon. However, there are many indications that this claim is disingenuous. The fiscal policy of Ethiopia is driven more by the political goals of the TPLF elites than by the factors of economic development. The TPLF elites know very well that there is acute poverty, disproportionate regional development, and startling inequality throughout Ethiopia. Hence, there is a strong desire to score political victory from the TPLF side by creating a "King Maker" role for itself in

an effort to reduce the nation's disturbing economic disparities. Reducing social & economic inequalities is something that benefits the regional states and the central government; however, bending the constitution and public policies to score narcissistic political victory is another thing that makes the regional sates perpetually dependent wagons.

If we go back to square one of our "Nation Building" argument, it was clearly stated that the TPLF elites were not even interested considering 'resource distribution' and 'development potentials' as decision inputs when assembling the regional states. Some of the regional states that could have been put together to make a larger state, were assembled independently to deliberately open the door for a state- center dependency. For example, in Benishangul/Gumuz and Gambella, income tax collected from government employees accounts for most of the revenues collected; and according to the World Bank Report, Benishangul and Gambella depend on revenue sharing from the federal government for more than 90% of their public expenditures; which basically means that these two states are barely able to finance 10 percent of their public expenditures on their own. This kind of nation building by the TPLF regime is nothing more than aggravating the pain of a helpless patient and treating the same patient with an overdose that kills gradually.

The other untold story of revenue sharing in Ethiopia is that - the TPLF regime uses its financial leverage to force states to strictly follow its political and economic program. With its strong power of the purse, the TPLF regime controls the policy making process both at the national and regional levels. None of the regional governments have the freedom to set their regional development priorities because their spending decisions are overwhelmingly influenced by the TPLF five year program priorities. Mind you, it is consistently claimed that Ethiopia is governed by the EPRDF, but every evidence points that TPLF is the single most important decision making body in the country with a clear veto power over any one including the comatose parliament. All in all, the decision making power of the regional sates is constrained by the TPLF ideology of revolutionary democracy that prohibits deviation from the dictates of the center, nullifying the fundamental principle of federalism which is - "Shared Rule" and "Self-Rule".

In the real world, the center-state revenue sharing model is not unusual; it exists even in the United States, but in developed countries like the US; revenue sharing involves tax sharing while in developing countries it takes the form of block grants to regions. In Ethiopia, the central government's dominance in revenue generation has created a Center - State vertical dependency. Ideally, federalism is characterized by a fiscal balance; where taxing power is devolved to regional states to enable them generate adequate revenue that at least offsets their expenditure. The Ethiopian experience is the other way around. In fact, today; Ethiopia is a class room example of vertical imbalance where the variance between expenditure responsibilities and revenue generating capacities is outrageously wide.

For example, in one of the first five years of federal experience in Ethiopia, the total expenditure of the regional states was birr 3.14 billion, out of which only birr 807 million (25.6%) was financed by regional revenues. The rest of the money (74.4%) came from

the federal treasury in the form of block grant. Obviously, the power of the purse plays a critical role in the center- region relationship and has been the main tool by which the TPLF regime goes to the extent of limiting the power of regional governments. The power of the purse gives the central government the ability to manipulate and control the actions of the regional states by withholding funding, or putting stipulations on the use of funds.

Over all, the highly centralized center-region relationship has severely diluted the federal division of power. This is a clear sign that the regional governments are not able to act independently; or when they act, they act more or less as extended arms of the TPLF party. This is not surprising because the amorphous ruling coalition of Ethiopia, the EPRDF, dominates all regional governments through the satellite ethnic organizations created to be landing pages for the TPLF party.

To sum up, in the last 19 years, Ethiopia has been conducting an experiment on a new brand of federal arrangement which is known as 'ethnic federalism'. Ethiopia's federal system is unique in its own way that the country's constitution allows the marriage of political pluralism and the right to secession. But, there is a vivid disparity between the democratic elements of the constitution and the political praxis of the TPLF party. The political ideology of the ruling party [Revolutionary Democracy] is devoted to the protocols of democratic centralism; but this devotion or the practice of democratic centralism has stalled the process of decentralization and democratization in Ethiopia. In a multi-ethnic country like Ethiopia, federalism is the unsurpassed solution to embark on the path to development while keeping the unity of the nation intact. But, the success of federalism is contingent on how self-rule and shared rule are balanced. To resurrect Ethiopia's moribund federalism and to go forward, it is vitally essential that the national decision making process includes all nationalities of the country regardless of their size, or level of economic development.

The unity and prosperity of Ethiopia highly depends on the balanced share of power between [at least] the four major ethnic groups, the Oromo, Amhara, Somali, and Tigre. These major ethnic groups must adhere to pluralist policies and comply with the principles of democracy. They should also embrace, respect, and involve the other nationalities in the democratic process of the country. Currently, the TPLF elites have pushed the envelope a little too hard and a little too far. In Ethiopia, political, social, and economic life is dominated by the Tigrean minority élites. No matter who says what; this has got to stop! Ethiopia and Ethiopians must be left free to peruse their own destiny, they shouldn't always be forced to choose between two evils for the choice between evils itself is evil.

Author's closing note: Walleligne was an Amhara who unequivocally spoke against the Amhara supremacy. Today, Ethiopia needs Tigrean heroes who have the courage to speak against the TPLF domination, just like Walleligne did 40 years ago!

ebini23@yahoo.com

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