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Contemporary Challenges to Building Multinational Federalism in Ethiopia: A Qualitative Review

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Abstract

Federalism in general and multinational federalism in particular is largely believed to be a system to realize self-rule and national unity in a diverse society. However, building multinational federation in Ethiopia is not taking in the desired direction of accommodating diverse needs and interests, from both vertical and horizontal power distribution relationships. In light of this, the objective of this paper is to assess the contemporary challenges of building multinational federalism in Ethiopia. To achieve this objective qualitative research design with a desktop research review was employed. The study revealed that the current challenges made the federal system ensure neither significant self-rule nor absolute centralization of state power. The argument, therefore, is, building multinational federalism is a matter of surviving together and is a means for discreet management of diversity for the heterogeneous society of Ethiopia. For this reason, the experiment needs more improvement than its current performance. Hence, further democratization and empowerment of the system are required to build more co-operative and decentralized multinational federalism.

Key words: *Diversity, Ethnicity, Experiment, Ethiopia, Multinational Federalism, Power, Democratization*

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1. Introduction

Though Ethiopia is a home for diverse groups of "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" (NNP), its political and administrative system had been organized against the existence of such reality (Assefa, 2012). The socio-economic and political system practiced during the consecutive Emperors of modern Ethiopia, Tewodros II (1855–1868), Yohannes IV (1871-1889), Menelik II (1889–1913) and Haile Selassie's I (1930–1974) had failed to accommodate the various ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity (Bekele, 2019). Commonly, the conventional Ethiopian central ideology throughout the imperial period was constructed from a narrow understanding of diversity and regional autonomy which did not give room for the promotion and respect of ethno-linguistic differences (Asnake, 2014; Barata, 2018).

For example, Emperor Haile Selassie I, in his endeavor to build a strong and central Ethiopian state adopted an assimilatory domestic policy to remove the ethnic identity of the non-Amhara peoples and substitute it with an Amhara identity (Van der Beken, 2015). Such 'homogenizing' nation-building policies contributed to public contention and even a full-fledged civil war bringing the country to the edge of fragmentation (Van der Beken, 2019). Hence, lack of recognition of the diverse nature of the Ethiopian state and the interference with local autonomy partly caused different peasant uprisings like the first Weyanne rebellion in Tigray and the 1968 Gojam rebellion. Such resistance reached an ultimatum when the students of Addis Ababa University later followed by other sections of the population called for the obliteration of the feudal system in January 1974. However, the revolution was hijacked by the military junta, named as the Derg, which removed the Emperor and came to power in 1974 and stayed up to 1991 (Yonatan & Binyam, 2019).

This regime restructured the political and economic systems of Ethiopia in line with the principle of socialism ideology (Keller, 2002). As far as power decentralization is concerned, the Derg regime had attempted to introduce different reforms. It introduced Kebele Peasant Associations, New Democratic Revolution and recognized regional autonomy mainly to address the perpetuated national question (Ghebrehiwet, 2015). However, in practice, similar to the previous regimes meaningful political, fiscal and administrative powers were not devolved to the provinces. Thus, in reality the government failed to answer the question of identity and it set up a communist dictator government (Defere & Alemayehu, 2019). This leads to the emergence of ethnic-based movements

against the military rule with a varying strategy on how to fight to equality, democracy, and development (Beza, 2018).

Thus, ethnicity in Ethiopia attained political mellowness during the reign of the military government, and all political armed forces that appeared during that worring time were obliged to take concern of this fact (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003). For example, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) mobilized their group to purge themselves of ethnic domination and to realize self-rule (Alemante, 2003). On the other hand, other political organizations that support the colonial thesis like OLNF (Ogaden National Liberation Front) and WSLF (Western Somalia Liberation Front) demand full independence from Abyssinian domination (Alem, 2003). Nevertheless, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) honored ethnicity over class as the foundation of unfairness and oppression in Ethiopia (Temesgen, 2016; Barata, 2018). Lastly, TPLF/EPRDF played a key role to defeat not only the other competing liberation fronts but also the robust military government itself that was deposed from power in May 1991 (Aregawi, 2004). Thus, the ethnic based movements were finally succeeded in toppling the centralist Derg regime (Erk, 2016).

After the dawn fall of Derg, EPRDF initiated to introduce federal system of state arrangement in the Transitional Government (1991-1995) and it formally institutionalized it by the 1995 Constitution (Aalen, 2002; Abbink, 2011; Zemelak & Yonatan, 2012; Erk, 2016; Milkessa, 2017). Different from the past, heavily centralized Ethiopian regimes, the EPRDF established a diversity-oriented decentralized federal arrangement to transfer fiscal, political and administrative power to the regional and local governments (Paulos, 2007). Consequently, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution reorganized the country into nine diversity-oriented regional states (Young, 1998; Alemante, 2003) and two federally charted cities, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa (Yeshtila & Kjosavik, 2016; Milkessa, 2017); with a view to ensuring self-rule for the NNP (Assefa, 2012). This is an expedient approach to administrative sovereignty of the different ethnic communities in the country. However, only five ethnic groups (Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, and Somali) which are numerically large have regions in their name (Asnake, 2014; Erk, 2016; Assefa, 2018).

Contrary to previous governments, EPRDF has focused its efforts on promoting rather than disregarding ethnicity as a critical constituent for political enlistment (Abbink, 1997; Paulos, 2007;

Asnake, 2010; Green, 2011). The federal system has brought different advantages and disadvantages. Unlike the centralization policy of the previous regimes it helped various ethnic groups to use their language in education and administrative units, improved political participation of citizens, encouraged the ethnic groups to develop and preserve their culture and history, recognize and respect the rights of minorities to exercise self-government (Assefa, 2007; Zemelak, 2011; Asnake, 2014). The practice of federalism has also brought untended consequences. Mounting regional nationalism which can affect the unity of the state because ethnicity is chosen over national identity, ethnic division, ethnic conflicts, uneven economic development among the members of the federation are some of the demerits of the federal practice (Assefa, 2012; Beresa, 2015; Tesfa, 2015a ; Kassaw, 2017). Hence, paradoxes are observed between the very rationales of the federal system and its unintended consequences in the ground. Since descent is popularly used to define individuals in a community and is used in the political discourse of self-rule, it seems that primordialism has largely affected both popular discernments and political discourses in Ethiopia (Asnake, 2010). Similarly, Zerihun & Samuel (2018) further argued that since self-determination is mainly asserted to end ethnic conflicts and manage diversity it seems that the present federal system of Ethiopia is influenced by the idea of primordialists. However, the subjective components such as shared spiritual make-up and the political goal of self-rule designate some kind of instrumentalism (Seyoum, 2015).

The federal democratic governance experiment for more than two decades in Ethiopia is contemporarily resulted in intense public unrest (Defere & Alemayehu, 2019). The system has been under massive pressure since 2015, with wide-ranging and unprecedented anti-government public protests basically in the two populous regional states, Oromia and Amhara (Assefa, 2018; Asayehgn, 2019; Hadush, 2019). The public protest is triggered by a long-standing combination of ethnic, social and economic reasons (Záhořík, 2017). The unrest caused the death of hundreds of people, devastation of property, industrial units and development ventures (Mohamed, Andreas & Samuel, 2018). The government attempted to silence the protest and instability by declaring a state of emergency in October 2016 for sixth months, and this was extended for another four months in March 2017 because of heavy protests in the two largest regional states, Oromia and Amhara. These public protests caused the resignation of former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn; and the coming of Abiy Ahmed as a primer of the country. Comparatively, the leadership transition in August 2012 which caused Hailemariam Desalegn to the premiership was

relatively stable than the February 2018 transition which was/is full of "doubts", "ambiguities", "debates" and "controversies" that bring Abiy Ahmed to the office (Hadush, 2019). Together with such situations, after the coming into power of the new prime minster, Abiy Ahmed, essential reforms have been taken or introduced. As mentioned by Mohamed et al. (2018), releasing of many prisoners, returning home of many armed opposition groups, for instance, Arbegnoch Ginbot 7 Movement, Ogaden National Liberation Movement (ONLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) from Eritrea and peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea (though this is not yet fully public or open) are few to mention among the reforms taken so far.

However, this does not ensure the basic aspirations of Ethiopians: political stability, peace and security and rule of law. Rather at present, troubles expanded to many members of the federation although Tigray and Afar are relatively stable regional states than the others. There is unrest in Oromia, Amhara, Somalia, Benshangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations and Nationalities and the like. Ethiopia, a strategic horn African country, which was relatively stable, is now in deep crisis and characterized by large internal displacement and severe human rights violations. Some associated such pressures and conflicts with the federal structure itself which is practically inadequate to answer questions related to self-determination, the politics of resource sharing, political power, representation, ethnic and regional boundaries and others (Siraw, 2015).

The current time in Ethiopia is a critical period when the democratic strength of the federal system is to be tested. Thus, the objective of this article is neither to explain the importance of building multinational federations nor to raise questions on its suitability to the multicultural state, Ethiopia. Rather it focused on assessing the major challenges that Ethiopia faces in the experiment to building multinational federation. It reviewed why building multinational federation in Ethiopia is not going in the desired direction of accommodating diverse needs and interests, from vertical and horizontal power distribution perspectives. This paper, therefore, contributes more to the existing literature on understanding the major problems the multiethnic Ethiopia faces to build multinational federation. In this context, the objective of this paper is to assess the contemporary challenges of building multinational federalism in Ethiopia. In so doing, a qualitative research approach was employed for its appropriateness to investigate such challenges, mainly by collecting secondary data.

2. Multinational Federalism in Ethiopia

In the land of Africa, some argue that federalism is a means to accommodate ethnic, religious, and racial diversity, while others argue that it exacerbates ethnic divisions and leads to fragmentation (Adem, 2013). In a similar vein with the second argument, federalism in post-colonial Africa was perceived as a colonial instrument for divide and rule and was in fear of aggravating state fragmentation in the framework of artificially drawn boundaries (Assefa, 2018). In this context, it remains debatable whether federalism accommodates diversity or exacerbates fragmentation, and this continued without an absolute winner (Belair, 2016). Since lack of due recognition to the diverse nature of the country had been an existential threat (Bekele, 2019), Ethiopia opted for the first position with the view of accommodating diversity and consolidating unity and territorial integrity (Assefa, 2019). The introduction of the federal system was one step to recognize ethnic groups' rights and to transform the structural problems that caused civil wars in the history of the country (Mesfin, 2011). The introduction of the ethno-federal constitutional arrangement, therefore, was aimed at rectifying the long-standing ethnic inequalities and manage ethnic split (Assefa, 2007).

Managing the ethnic heterogeneity of the Ethiopian people is the clearly avowed rationale of the country's federal system (Zemelak & De Visser, 2017). For this reason, the FDRE constitution plainly recognizes the self-rule of all the NNP residing in the country (Erk, 2016). Most multinational federations recognize various types of ethnic self-rule but such an explicit approval of ethnicity as the organization of a new political order is unique in Africa (Abbink, 2011; Erk, 2016). This marks a new political change after colonization in Africa and symbolized the main break from the age of centralization that distinguished the Ethiopian state for the most part of its history (Yonatan, 2017).

Different from the mono-national federation, where state lines are drawn based on geographical or administrative expediency, Ethiopia's federalism is a multi-national federation, which considers ethnicity as the foundation for the arrangement of the state and draws the internal frontier of a state along ethnic lines (Yonatan, 2017). Hence, Ethiopian federalism is referred to as multinational federalism arranged based on the multicultural nature of Ethiopian people to address the historical question to self-rule that was claimed during the imperial and the military rule (Van der Beken, 2015). If this is so, why Ethiopian federalism is widely branded as "ethnic" federalism in the

literature while settlement patterns, identity, language and consent of the people should be considered in establishing the member states of the federation as it is clearly stipulated under Art. 46 (2) of the FDRE constitution? This needs deep analysis which is not exactly within the scope of this work. However, the current Ethiopia's federalism has rebuffed the longstanding argument that Ethiopia is a historic nation-state and affirmed Ethiopia as a multi-nation state (Yonatan, 2016).

The promises in the constitution and the reality on the ground are quite different (Erk, 2016). This can be validated using different indicators. For example, from the practice of the political system of the country, the centralized decision-making system of the EPRDF party restricted the self-rule of the federating regions (Mesfin, 2011) because the federalization and decentralization system is made to be in line with the party's democratic-centralism ideology (Abbink, 2006). This principle has restricted the space of the regional states to exercise their autonomy proclaimed in the constitution (Merera, 2007; Asnake, 2014). The centralized party structure limits bottom-up democratic participation which helps it to control the regional states to implement the ruling party's polices which are aimed for regime survival, but not for true self-determination of the ethnic communities (Assefa, 2020). The regional states are mainly the implementers and service providers of the federal government with weak experience to develop and execute their regional policies (Gemeda, 2017). Due to this, there is little policy variation from the federal government to the local governments which is inherently against the principle of federalism because in true federalism policies in general are not expected to be uniform across the different government tiers. Such centralist tendency of the EPRDF party is discordant with regional self-rule and autonomy, separation of power, federal decentralization and political pluralism which are the explicit promises of the FDRE constitution (Assefa, 2007; Merera, 2007; Bassi, 2014).

Like other types of federal system of governance, the FDRE constitution divides government power into federal and regional power under its article 51 and 52 respectively. Besides, the constitution recognizes every NNP of Ethiopia to administer their people and resources autonomously and get equitable representation in state and federal governments Art. 39 (3). This territorial autonomy of the NNP stems from the idea that it would help them exercise language, cultural and political representation rights (Van der Beken, 2014). The most contentious constituent of the article, however, is evidently the unconditionality of the right to self-

determination which allows for secession (Art. 39 (1)) following cautiously specified procedures (Art. 39 (4)). For the proponents of secession, it is a guarantee to the NNP to live together without subjugation, manipulation and domination but for those who oppose it, it is the democratization of the system not the presence of secession as a right which guarantees the Ethiopian people live together (Tesfa, 2015a). For those who are not in favor of secession, the explicit inclusion of secession as a constitutional right can open the door for fragmentation of the state. Such scholars criticize Ethiopian federal system saying it emphasizes more to 'self-rule' than the 'shared-rule' (Alem, 2005). But this contestation is not without problem to the federal experiment of the country.

The problem with self-determination enshrined in the FDRE constitution is it only empowers the indigenous ethnic groups settled in the federating units which resulted in 'territorialized ethnicity' (Van der Beken, 2019). Many of the regional states constitutions which function under supremacy of the federal constitution accept this fact too (Gifayehu, 2019). This reserved right to self-determination for indigenous groups contributed for practical competing tensions among inter-ethnic groups and in return with the federal government (Yonatan, 2017). Therefore, balancing measures are important to complement the empowerment of the various ethnic groups (both indigenous and non- indigenous) and safeguard of the national citizenship (Siraw, 2015; Zemelak & de Visser, 2017; Milkessa, 2017; Van der Beken, 2019).

The other instance which challenges the success of Ethiopian federalism regarding self-determination is the financial impact of a political asymmetry. State-owning ethnic groups get larger share of the federal transfer than those that are made to implement their right to self-administration at the status of local government (Yonatan & Binyam, 2019). According to such writers, the regional state of Gambella which consists a total population of 310, 000 based on previous census received a 1.54 Billion Birr from the national government while Benchi Maji *Zone* populous than Gambella received about 1.2 Billion Birr. Partly, it seems due to this reason today different ethnic communities especially from the Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Representative (SNNPR) are claiming to establish their own regional states.

The FDRE constitution comprises certain fundamental human rights and freedoms and democratic rights. Inclusion of such rights and freedoms in the constitution is not an end by itself, it should be implemented. However, the practice of the federal system suffers from lack of constitutionalism due to incongruities between constitutional principles and the veracity in the ground (Záhořík,

2011). This difference between provisions of the constitution and its implementation rises the controversy over legitimacy of the constitution (Tsegaye, 2010). Assefa (2019) argues that constitutionalism in Ethiopia is enfeebled because the government doesn't aggressively respect human rights, media freedom and rule of law which these have their own effects to building the multinational federation. Likewise, Gashaw (2015) further argued that lack of adequate constitutionalism in Ethiopia is occurred because the government and the public officials are not apprehended accountable and answerable to the choices of the people and the government-citizens relationship is not based on the promises of the constitution. Constitutionalism needs independent and autonomous institutions that function according to their constitutional mandates, but such institutions are constrained (both at federal and regional level) due to the political interference from the political bodies (Solomon, 2015). Hence, the idea here is that the institution of the constitution without solidifying constitutionalism can disconnect the government and the people.

3. Center-states Relation

Federalism is a better option for diversified and large states (Abbink, 1997; Aalen, 2002; Semahagn, 2012; Dickovick, 2014a; Bélair, 2016; Van der Beken, 2019). Because it balances between particularism and centralism (Gemeda, 2017). It lets states to formulate their own laws, freely use their state resources and decide their self-government (Assefa, 2020). In a similar token, the existence of the members of the federation and their autonomous power is constitutionally ingrained that cannot be formed, amalgamated, or abolished by normal legislation passed by the national government (Erk, 2014). In Ethiopia too, the existence and autonomy of the sub national units is enshrined in the 1995 Constitution. Constitutionally, the FDRE constitution supports decentralized federal system of governance with sovereign federal and autonomous regional states. This is clearly stipulated, for instance, under articles 8(1), 39 (3), 46 (2), 47 (1), 50 (4), and 88 (1) of the same constitution. Similarly, Art. 51 and 52 of the constitution lists powers of the federal/central and regional/state governments respectively.

The center-states relations is vital to achieve the common goals of the members of the federation like what is declared in the FDRE constitution, 'to building a political and economic community'. To do this, in different federal systems a system is developed to balance the vertical intergovernmental relations and keep and maintain the constitutional order (Assefa, 2018). The FDRE constitution uniquely has not envisioned the system of federal-regional intergovernmental

relations and did not give general directorial principles and institutions with this authority (Habtamu & Zelalem, 2019). Similarly, the constitution is silent to mention a body or an institution that can handle a dispute that may occur between the federal government and any of the members of the federation though it clearly declared that the House of Federation is authorized to settle horizontal conflicts which may arise between or among the federating units (Nigussie, 2015). Absence of such visible practical institution that can coordinate and escort the federal-regional government relationships effects the federal government to control the constitutionally guaranteed right to self-autonomy of the federating units (Kena, 2016).

From the viewpoint of power distribution, the powers granted to the federal government are the most substantial (Gemeda, 2017). In addition to this, further powers are enumerated to the federal government those listed powers and functions to the House of Peoples Representatives (Art. 55) and in other provisions. Partly for this reason, there are many writers who argued that this distribution of power is not unproblematic because the key powers are given to the federal government through which it uses them to constrain the regional governments (Gemeda, 2017). As stated by Gifayehu (2019), although the FDRE constitution doesn't command hierarchal federal-federating units' relations, the federal practice is characterized by "top-down" relationship which can corrode the essence of cooperation. This top-down federal-states relation make the later as "administrative agents" of the former rather than autonomously functioning units (Kalkidan, 2010). The constitution states how the different NNP can be represented in the parliament and the house of federation but failed to provide general directions on how power sharing in the executive body can be safeguarded (Nigussie, 2015). In practice, therefore, it is the executive organ that dominates the other institutions (Dejen, 2015).

Thus, the center-states relations of the Ethiopian federal practice is known by the domination of the central government over the regional sates (Abbink, 1997; Young, 1998; Aalen, 2002; Semahagn, 2012; Yonatan & Kirkby, 2008; Asnake, 2010; Assefa, 2012; Dejene, 2015; Assefa, 2019). As a result of this, the federal experiment has encountered different challenges that have handicapped the conversion of the system into a democratic, viable and sustainable multinational federal system which is described using the following major manifestations.

3.1.Strong Administrative Control from the Federal Government

Ethiopia has been experiencing a practice of decentralization after Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front came to power in 1991 particularly with the endorsement of the 1995 constitution (Tsegaye, 2019). Impressively, the 1995 constitution introduced division of power between the federal and regional polities. The constitution plainly mentions the federal powers, the state powers, concurrent powers, and gives residual powers to the states (Articles 51-52 and 97). It also proclaims that both federal and federating units shall respect each other's power (Adem, 2013). Drawing their origin to article 52 of the FDRE constitution regional states have adopted their constitution with similar provisions of the federal constitution (Kenna, 2014). Such institutionalization of the constitutions with little difference is a sign of the practice of formulating institutions from above with less participation of the respective people in each regional states (Solomon, 2015).

Opposite to the framework of the federal constitution, the administrative federal-states relation is characterized by supremacy of the former over the later which is evidenced by different empirical studies. A study made by Samatar (2004) showed that the ruling party's [EPRDF] manipulation of internal regional politics derailed the pledge of an autonomous and valid local administration that could provide solutions for past injustices. Correspondingly, Alene and Worku (2016) on their part argued that the administrative federal practice in Ethiopia is based on centralized dominant party system which contradicts with the principle and practice of genuine federalism. Administratively, this centralized dominant party structure debilitated the autonomy and the real function of the regional states. Similarly, Dejen (2015) in his study entitled; "Decentralized Governance under Centralized Party Rule in Ethiopia: The Tigray Experience"; noted that, the dominant party rule has irritated the actual function of decentralized governance and the self-ruling subsistence of local governments.

Thus, the center-state relations in Ethiopia is reflected by increased central dominance over the regional governments which can be characterized by clientelistic relationship between the central and regional political parties (Paulos, 2007). This is because, the EPRDF joysticks all the regional state governments of the federation, directly via its member parties in the four relatively developed states or circuitously through its affiliate parties in the developing states. The party structure of EPRDF is centralized paradoxical to the 1995 constitution's provision of the right to self-rule. Dejen (2015) argues that what affects administrative decentralization in Ethiopia is not what is

declared in the constitution but the party structure which is different from the provision of the constitution. Aalen (2002) noted that it is the controlling nature of the EPRDF that abates the regional governments in Ethiopia in a manner that diminishes regional autonomy. The contradiction between generously established constitutional powers to the members of the federation and a centralized federal system in practice ascends from the hegemonic nature of the party scheme (Assefa, 2019).

This article argues that genuine federalism today is non-existent for the reason that administrative regional autonomy is not respected, due to gap between constitutional provision and practice. Hence, administratively, Ethiopia is not a federal state as solidified in the FDRE constitution. In the words of Kalkidan…"when it fully materialized, Ethiopia's new state building attempt through the federalism ideal becomes a near to unitary federation than being a devolutionary one" (2010, p. 88). This shows that the Ethiopian federal practice needs further devolution of power to the local people.

3.2.Economic and Budgetary Dependency of Ethno-regions on the Federal Government

One basic institutional design that makes the regional states dependent on the federal government is the constitutional assignment of the major revenue sources to the federal government (Aalen, 2002). Arguably, for those who support the concentration of fiscal power on the hand of the federal government their justification is to address and balance regional inequalities or disparities (Tesfa, 2015b). However, irrespective of the variation in the degree of dependency, the regional governments are more likely to depend on both technical and financial assistance of the federal government in running their regional affairs (Aalen, 2002). And the regional states rely on transfers from the federal government for most of their budget (Yonatan & Kirkby, 2008; Green, 2011). This creates vertical imbalance because the most lucrative sources of revenue are given to the central government (Mesfin, 2011). For Deribe (2015) the vertical imbalance is created because of the incongruity between expenditure and financial autonomy where the regional governments have full responsibility of fiscal expenditure but limited source of revenue because of the concentration. Similarly, the finding of Temesgen (2016) indicated that such fiscal vertical disparity is occurred because the assignment of expenditure is done according to the broad principles in the constitution while the taxing power is concentrated at the central government.

In addition to this, the current practice of intergovernmental fiscal transfer indicated dependence of the regional states on federal government subsidy because economically the federal government is stronger than the regions (Alene & Worku, 2017). The regional states acquire their basic resources (revenue) from the federal government in terms of block grant and subsidy. As stated by Tadewos & Mishr (2014) regional governments in Ethiopia covers only 20% to 5% of their entire expenditures. According to Diribi (2014) the constitutionally guaranteed self-administration of regional states in Ethiopia is constrained because of their fiscal dependence on the federal government for subsidy. The 'loans and assistances part of the subsidy' in particular affects the federating units' budget autonomy (Duguma, 2014). The writer further argued that the fiscal vertical disparity is created because the main sources of revenue are granted to the federal government and regions have poor revenue generation capacity. This shows how much the regional governments are exceedingly dependent on the federal government's allocation to fill their budget. Thus, much more endeavor is needed to rectify the imbalance of top-bottom versus bottom-top fiscal relationship (Sintayoh & Meheret, 2018). Because the fiscal vertical imbalance negatively affects the other types of decentralizations, political and administrative (Diribi, 2014). Thus, the idea here is the economic and budgetary dependence of the regional governments on the federal government is used as an instrument to constrain the autonomy of the federating units.

3.3.Insufficient Decentralization in Administrative and Economic Practice

Similar with decentralization, federalism involves division of power between different tiers of government (Yonatan & Kirkby, 2008). Although federal systems differ in their form, essentially, the basic doctrines encompass a mixture of self-rule and shared-rule. For this reason, in federal states power is constitutionally distributed to the federal units, simultaneously being constitutionally concentrated at the center (Keller, 2002). One of the reasons for the need of administrative and economic decentralization is to manage ethnic diversity and ensure societal cohesion, which is the purpose of federalism too. In the 1990s in many Sub-Saharan African states top-down decentralization measures supported by both political and international financial institutions has been undertaken (Dickovick, 2014b ; Sintayoh & Meheret, 2018). Similarly, Ethiopia declared diversity-oriented decentralized federal system in its 1995 constitution with the aim of devolving political, fiscal and administrative powers from the national government to the federating units, which is called the first phase of decentralization (Bongwa, Kassahun & van Dijk, 2011). But this phase of decentralization was started during the transitional period (Deribe, 2015.

This was an important measure to end the intrastate conflicts that have been happened in Ethiopian history between the central government and local administrators questioning for self-rule and decentralization (Siraw, 2015). To make the government closer to the local people and transfer powers and responsibilities to districts, District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP) was realized since the early 2000 which is called the second phase of the decentralization process (Deribe, 2015; Besfat, 2018). It was also planned to reduce poverty by supporting the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) which was executed from 2001-2006 (Alene & Worku, 2017). Thus, it was announced to narrow down the vertical and horizontal disparities (Sintayoh & Meheret, 2018).

However, considering the achievements registered so far, the decentralization at constitutional/institutional level and the reality on the ground goes in different directions (Erk, 2014). Because, contrary to the principle of the 1995 constitution, there are hindering circumstances to establish genuine administrative and economic decentralization due to the absolute power of the ruling party, and the major economic means are controlled by the state in the name of developmental state ideology (Bahru. & Pausewang, 2002; Asnake, 2014; Záhořík, 2014). As noted by Besfat (2018) top-down planning approach, unclear assignments of powers and functions, executive control at local level, weakness of local councils in holding the executive accountable, lack of sufficient budget, low level of revenue mobilization capacity are few among the challenges to implement the district level decentralization program.

Similarly, Alene & Worku (2017) argued that the centralization tendency of the EPRDF government, lack of technical and economic capacity of the regional governments and local governments and lack of adequate and qualified human resource threatens the practice of district level decentralization. Overlapping of powers and responsibilities between regional and woreda level governments has contributed for the limited function of the District Level Decentralization (Deribe, 2015). According to Tegegne & Abrham (2014) the practical execution of district level decentralization is challenged due to weak inter-governmental coordination, insufficient devolution of power, poor budgeting and expenditure administration and substantial financial dependency of districts on higher government levels. It is also weakened because the expenditure priorities are determined by the regional governments which limits local preferences (Tadewos & Mishr, 2014). Different from this, more in general, the Election Board and Population Census

Commission are not totally decentralized and the Human Rights Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and the Ombudsman are not sufficiently decentralized to the local people (Gemeda, 2017). This restricted the very objective of these institutions at local level.

The serious issue here is what such absence of genuine administrative and economic decentralization implies for the practice of federal system in the country. One can argue that the decentralization policy of the government on paper and the centralization in action could lead the state to failing to yield the anticipated result and obstruct to exit from the country's previous monarchical and authoritarian political trajectories. This is against the original goodness of decentralization and federalism as well. Thus, the unnecessary practical interference from the national government and the weaknesses of the constituent units seen above has hampered the self-rule of regional states and local governments which were promised to ensure by the multinational federalism.

4. State-to-state Relations /Horizontal Power Relations/

A constitution that creates a federal type of government should found instruments to uphold and preserve the vertical separation of powers and control the horizontal relations between the states (Adem, 2013). Vertically, federalism divides government power into federal and regional or provincial levels. In this context, neither of the two government levels is legally superior over the other. Power is also shared among the federal units. Horizontally, all members of the federation are equal partners of the union government. This is to mean that neither of the members of the federation is legally superior over the others since the union government is formed by their free consent.

Consolidated interregional and interethnic cooperation is a guarantee for sustenance of genuine federal system. In this situation, social and economic integration plays crucial role to safeguarding the federation. This is because federalism is beyond giving recognition to rights and accommodation of interests of various ethnic groups, because it includes social and economic integration or beyond, of the units (Assefa, 2018). However, the Ethiopian federal system deficiencies a wide-ranging policy for integrating diversity and for building interconnection among them [Ethno-national groups] as it places emphasis on nationalities' right to self-determination (Assefa, 2018). Thus, today's federal practice in Ethiopia faces different contemporary horizontal challenges though some of them were historically existed. The factors that affect the health of

inter-ethnic relations are multifaceted and complex, but in one form or another are reflected in the subsequent factors.

4.1. Ethnic Revivalism

The relationship between national and ethnic-identities and among the various ethnic groups themselves has central role in strengthening or weakening national cohesion of a federation (Sharma & Swenden, 2017). In the present Ethiopia, however, the imbalances between national identity and ethnic identity could challenge the sustainability and practice of the whole federal system (Mesfin, 2011). According to Defere & Alemayehu (2019) the failure of the federal arrangement to stead ethnic identity with Ethiopian citizenship encouraged extreme differences instead of upholding unity in diversity. This becomes worse when the political ethnicity differences are manipulated by the political elites or political entrepreneurs to attain or maintain their political power (Mesfin, 2011). Ethnically defined communities will unavoidably contend with others for scant resources, namely political power and material and natural resources (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003). As autonomists press to form a political scheme that articulates and defends their own distinctive group characteristics, the effect is a political contestation. Thus, the utilization of ethnicity as a source of power and resource has a potential to create political polarization (Endalamaw, 2015). Because unless the politics in ethnically diverse society is executed with high caution, its peril outweighs the advantages (Gardachew, Kefale & Kumie, 2019). And this can bring political instability that can curb the success of the ethno-federalism to balancing centripetal and centrifugal forces in an ethnically divided communities (Roeder, 2009).

In Ethiopia, inter-ethnic politics is one among the major challenges in converting the doctrine of ethnic federalism into practice (Erk, 2016). The elevation of ethnicity into a key political identity and the associated division of the people along ethno-linguistic lines has been experienced, for instance, in the growing use of ethnicity as a basis for political mobilization, in the change of cultural groups into political groups and in the composition of the House of Federation (HF) (Yonatan, 2017). The author further argued that, the rise of ethnicity into a most important political identity associated with fragmentation of the population along ethno-linguistic delineations exacerbates the growing use of ethnicity as a center for political mobilization.

The growing of such extreme ethno-nationalism make some ethnic groups feel to rethink their autonomy of self-determination than any other time since 1991. The followers of ethnic federalism are disposed to apply Article 39 of the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution, which lets for self-government, as a bargaining chip in relation to the bigger ethnic groups (Mohamed et al., 2018). Practically, for example, in the Southern Nations and Nationalities, one among the members of federation, different ethnic groups seek to establish their own new autonomous regional states. This by itself is not a problem since it is constitutionally granted right to all the ethnic groups but the way used to manage it, is not unproblematic. Both the attempt to realize self-rule through undemocratic and unconstitutional means though it was healthy at the beginning, and the forceful response of the federal government to suppress the question were at least observed in the process. This may possibly cause the members of the federation to diminish their trust on the union government. Thus, in this sense, inter-ethnic politics contributes a challenge in putting the principles of ethno-federalism into practice (Erk, 2016).

This paper argues that the growing of unhealthy ethnic revivalism or ethno-nationalism is among the dominant threats to building multinational federation that could be taken as a reason that taken many to the fear of, fragmentation. This is because historically it was witnessed that ethnicity had decisive effect in the national integration and political legitimacy crisis of the country (Alemante, 2003). But it would oversimplify to say all contemporary Ethiopian problems are attributed to the ethno nationalism itself since historical and other factors have also a share. Hence, as noted by Yonatan (2016) federalism is not a solution for the entire challenges of ethnic heterogeneity. Genuine national integrative institutions are required to consolidate the connection between the national citizenship and sub-national group membership.

4.2. Party (EPRDF) Ideological Impact and its Instability

The type of political economy to be followed to eradicate poverty and realize sustainable development in particular and on how the economy should be governed in general has been a source of political debate in Ethiopia (Fesseha & Bizuayehu, 2017). This fact divides scholars into different groups by supporting different alternative political economy ideologies. After the 2005 election shocks the EPRDF adopted “Developmental State” through which the influence of the federal government was reinforced and political deliberations were second to economic development (Abbink, 2011). But for some other writers the idea of building developmental state

was initiated before the 2005 election shock. For instance, according to Fana (2014) the objective of building developmental state get root following the 2001 riven of the ruling coalition. As noted by Beresa (2015) it is about a decade since it began to be clearly marked by the Ethiopian regime and become a topic of hot debate in academic and political settings. However, the focus of this paper is not to demonstrate the nature and development of "Developmental State" rather in this sub-section, it only tries to show the impact of the economic model to the experiment of building multinational federalism in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian development model is different from both the present western world "liberalism" and the East Asian "Developmental State" because it combines democracy and development due to this called "Democratic Developmental State" (Fesseha & Bizuayehu, 2017). Adopting this new development model Ethiopia has been successful to record fast economic growth (Samuel, 2011; Matfess, 2015; Clapham, 2018). However, this inspiring economic performance is in paradox with the country's deficiency of political stability which is known by protests and uncertainties (Assefa, 2019). As stated by Záhořík (2017) the clash between development concept enunciated by the government and the social and ethnic equality notion established by the protestors added for the political instability of the country.

According to Assefa (2018) the paradox of Ethiopia's remarkable economic achievement and the rising political instability [is because] the development ideology debilitated regional states self-governance exacerbated by vanguard party that has controlled political power and made the institutions less strong, marginalized the political opposition, and encouraged hardliners leading to political instability. Policies and strategies of the country are highly centralized which flows from the federal government and the regional states are expected to replicate such federal policies and strategies (Keller, 2002); which doesn't make sense to the logic of federalism. This state-led development approach affects the daily functions of federalism because it is founded on an economic centralizing principle different from ethnic federalism (Erk, 2016). For instance, as noted by Zemenu (2016) the adoption of this new development paradigm constrained the fiscal autonomy of the federating units. The state also constrained the freedom of private investments (Clapham, 2018). The discourse of constructing developmental state, therefore, has controlled political discussions, self-rule and regional autonomy in Ethiopia in current years (Fana, 2014; Mesgna, 2015).

Thus, the fusing of federal system with developmental state constrained self-rule of regional governments (Beresa, 2015). Because developmental state unlike federal system chooses strong central government that can make decisions at the expense of lower levels of government units, which is not the experience of genuine federal systems. This contradiction between federalism and developmental state sapped the federal practice in Ethiopia. Hence, the argument the writer wants to exhibit in this sub-section of this paper is, the 'Democratic Developmental State' adopted in Ethiopia is not democratic as its name because it weakened regional autonomy in particular and federalism in general. Matfess (2015) called this situation 'Development Authoritarianism' where democratization is weakened for the sack of economic development which is contrary to the promises of the FDRE constitution. For Bizuayehu & Fesseha (2017) the adoption of developmental state ideology which practically undermines regional autonomy in Ethiopia requires a conversion of constitution, and state arrangement from federal to unitary structure. Thus, Ethiopian federalism and its developmental state ideology have not been correctly associated where the latter is superseding the former (Assefa, 2018).

More recently, following the coming into power of the new Primer ambiguity is growing on the ideological stability of the model. His political friendship with the Arab and western states make people to be dubious whether there will be continuity with the Asian development model or not. This ideological uncertainty or may be flux has yet negative impact in building multinational federalism. Because the state again is subject to acclimate-may be a new development model? For the reason that, 'a cursory view of PM Abiy's actions and speeches over a year suggests that PM Abiy has shifted from EPRDF's ideological platform. Often in defiance of his party members and the Ethiopian Parliament, PM Abiy is unilaterally reversing the country's long-held developmental state' (Asayehgn, 2019, p. 41). In this sense, Ethiopia is in a time when it may test another new development model. It seems a laboratory of ideologies where their impact is to be experimented. This crisis of the party is not without bad consequence for the federal experiment of the country for the reason that EPRDF is not only dominant party but it also represents ethnic groups in the four major regional states and in the rest regions through its affiliates. This is described in the words of De Waal as:

> Because the Ethiopian system consists not only of constitutional-administrative federalism but-the EPRDF's constituent parties are organized on these [ethno-national] lines-it is

> essentially vulnerable to political entrepreneurship within its own structures based on appeals to ethno-nationalist identity (2018, p. 14).

Hence, the argument is, the party's decay is not unproblematic to the started experiment of building multinational federalism because the vertical and horizontal actual intergovernmental collaboration and feeling of fraternity and unity among the members of the party is affected by this situation. As noted by Erk (2016) the intra-party politics inside the EPRDF often trumps the formal separations of powers enshrined in the FDRE in the constitution.

4.3. Border Tensions/Conflicts

In this sub-section I am not going to give full picture of conflict and its dynamics in Ethiopia. But I want to provide glimpse on the most general ones to show how boarder conflict is threat to the practice of building multinational federalism in the country. It is well understood that conflict is natural which can be caused or raised because of divergence or incompatibility of interests at individual, group, community or state level. As noted by Abbink (2011) local boundary and identity conflicts have augmented in Ethiopia. The issue of and access to land is currently contributing a key role in the Ethiopian conflict dynamics. The ethno-territorial dispute between Oromos and Somalis, the conflict between Afar and Somali Issa, the conflict between indigenous Berta, Gumuz and descendants of afterward settler communities like the Oromo, the Amhara and other are to mention few from the inter-communal conflicts (Abbink, 2011; De Waal, 2018). And more recently, there is tension in between the two most Northern regional states, Amhara and Tigray because of border issues in Wolkayit and Raya where "border and identity recursion committee" from the side of Amhara are claiming for. Especially in Raya the in and out exchange between the regions is limited and often totally closed which never happened in the past 25 or more years. In addition, 'there are conflicts over rights of residence in localities that may translate into demands for existing regions to be divided, possibly creating new states (Southern region)' (De Waal, 2018, p. 15).

These ethno-nationalistic conflict made it nearly impracticable for citizens and business men to transport easily from one ethnic-zoned region to another (Asayehgn, 2019). Thus, though Ethiopia introduced multiethnic federalism in 1991 as a tool of handling the complex ethno- linguistic diversity, ethnic conflicts or clashes are still serious challenges in the country (Muhabie, 2015). This is similar with what Erk and Anderson (2009) have noted in their discussion on the paradoxes

of federalism which also existed in the present Ethiopia because federalism provides formal recognition to the heterogeneity of Ethiopians but it also hardened identity politics which causes conflicts among ethnic groups because of competition over natural resources, territory, identity and ownership. Such tensions and conflicts seriously affects the intra-regional and inter-regional relationships and any failure to resolve these contests involves severe dangers for the viability and continuity of the federal system (Van der Beken, 2019).

This work, therefore, argues that these inter-communal tensions, conflicts and violence have given less attention even though they have the potential to result in the federal break-up. This is because, these inter-communal regional dispensation outbreaks in different parts of the country can jeopardize the federal system and exacerbate for more ethnic divisions. But resolving the conflicts is not an easy task. Some of the complications in settling such conflicts rest also with the fact that the state borders were initially defined by the national government, but under the constitution any vicissitudes to the borders must be cooperatively decided by the states concerned (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003).

4.4. Socio-economic Disparities

Economic connection and augmented population mobility among diverse groups will promote inter-ethnic integration to uphold at an even larger pace (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003).The economic balance or imbalance among members of a federation also has its own influence on the success or failure of multiethnic federalism (Smith, 2014). But it is clear that all the members of the union cannot exactly have the same level of economic development since there could be difference in terms of human and natural resource. The idea this work argue for is, the economic convergence or divergence among members of a federation can contribute for determining the persistence or feebleness of multiethnic federalism. In Ethiopia, though all regional states are constitutionally symmetrical having similar official association to the federal government, there is obvious social, economic and political disparities and influence among the subnational units (Semahagn, 2012).

Theoretically, federalism in Ethiopia is accepted to guarantee unbiased distribution of power and resources among sub-national units (Muhabie, 2015). Practically, however, the economic disparities among the relatively advanced regional states (Tigray, Oromiya, Amhara and SNNPR States) and the poor peripheries (Afar, Somali, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz) create

challenge to translate the principles of ethnic federalism into practice (Aalen, 2002; Erk, 2016).This disparity also exists within both the relatively developed and developing regional states. Consequently, this uneven economic development or disparities creates inter-ethno regional tensions among the federal units (Khan, Faguet & Ambel, 2017). Horizontal economic balance or equality is critical for the continuity of the federal system (Deiwiks, Cederman & Gleditsch, 2012). Hence, it is claimed that such economic disparities is one among the factors deteriorating mutual trust among the federal units. This is because the developing regions could feel as they are not really reaping benefits from the federation and the relatively developed regions may not want to continually back/support the first (Mesfin, 2011). In this sense, it could be a forgone conclusion to say all members of the union government are uniformly benefiting.

In addition to the socio-economic variations the constituent units of the Ethiopian federation are different in terms of population size and demographic composition. The difference in population size is startling. For example, the population size of Harari, one of the federating units, shares about 0.23% of the total population while Oromia region is populated not less than 36% of the population (Yonatan & Binyam, 2019). This asymmetry in demographic size makes difficult to achieve balanced representation, for example, in the house of federation so that to keep the interest of the smaller states not to overridden by the larger ones (Tesfa, 2015b). For this reason, ethnic groups which are smaller in demographic and geographic size feel a sense of exclusion from the federal institutions in their relationship with the federal government (Mesfin, 2011).

The disparities in demographic composition is more complicated because there are ethnic communities denied the status of state while numerically larger than other ethnic communities. For instance, ethnic groups that are demographically larger than Harari and Gambella in the Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Representative (SNNPR) but do not get the status of state (Yonatan & Binyam, 2019). More recently, however, the Sidama people have voted to establish their own regional state through a referendum which is a good progress of the federal practice from the right to self-determination. Other similar ethnic groups in the region are also claiming to establish their own regional states. In sum, these geographic and demographic factors are among the challenges in implementing the principles included in the 1995 constitution (Erk, 2016). Because as noted by Tesfa (2015b) the clear disparities in population, territory, composition and

socio-economic development have created power differences which is contrary to Art. 47(4) of FDRE constitution that declared symmetric right and power relation of the constituent units.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Ethiopia has announced a multi-national federal system since the formulation of the 1995 constitution. Such constitutional and institutional designs to formally recognize national diversity is a first component to accommodate the socio-cultural and politico-economic diversity of Ethiopians but is not an end by itself. With due recognition of the achievements the federal system has registered so far, there are different contemporary challenges that emanates from both constitutional design and practical limitations which hampers the translation of the system into practice.

Because of such contemporary challenges which have vertical and horizontal nature, the experiment to building multinational federalism in the country is not going in the desired direction and goals of the FDRE Constitution. This paper argues that these challenges make the federal system to ensure neither significant self-rule nor absolute centralization of state power. Due to this, Ethiopia has currently feeble kind of federalism. However, the need of federalism to the multicultural Ethiopia should not be central to the political debate, but the way the federal arrangement is structured, organized or practiced. Henceforth, further democratization and empowerment of the system is required to build genuine, democratic and cooperative multinational federal system in the country. To do this;

- ✓ Competent, well-functioning and an independent institution that can manage the relationship between federal and regional states/governments is required to further strengthen their cooperation.
- ✓ The federating units should be adequately empowered in terms of policy formulation and implementation.
- ✓ Genuine implementation of decentralized but cooperative governance should be realized.
- ✓ Non-hierarchical and horizontal relationship among members of the federation should be deepened to fortify ties among the various ethnic groups.

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