Federalism and <u>Conflicts'</u> Management in Ethiopia: Social Psychological Analysis of the Opportunities and Challenges

(Discussion Paper Prepared for HOF)

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I. Introduction

Ethiopia has about 80 ethnic groups (nations, nationalities and peoples) amounting to about 84 million people in 2012 (projected population, CSA, 2010). The ethnic groups which account for about 1% and above of the total population are the following fifteen:

Oromo (34.5%), Amhara (26.9%), Somali (6.2%), Tigray (6.1%), Sidama (4.0%), Gurage (2.5%), Wolaita (2.3%), Silte (2.0%), Afar (1.7%), Hadiya (1.7%), Gamo (1.5%), Gedeo (1.2%), Kaffacho (1.13%), Agew (1.05%), and Kambatta (0.94%). The first two ethnic groups account for 61.4%, the first six account for 80.2% and all the fifteen account for about 93.72% of all the population. The overwhelming majority of the ethnic groups live in Southern Ethiopia.

In terms of religious affiliation, the Ethiopian people are Coptic Orthodox Christians (43.5%), Muslims (33.9%) and Protestants (18.6%). The Catholics and others account for 4%.

According to UNCTAD (2011), Ethiopia's GNI per capita was $380 and life expectancy at birth was 55.7 years. The most recent (2012) Ministry of Education statistics shows that the net primary education enrollment is 85.4%. It is to be noted that the expansion in the education sector in the past few years has been extraordinary.

Since 1991, the Ethiopia Government, lead by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has been operating Federal system of Government where efforts are being made to democratize a very poor, multi-ethnic and traditional country. The country is divided into nine ethnic-linguistically based regions and two urban areas (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa). The regions are: Oromia, Amhara, Tigray. Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, Afar, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and Harari.

There have been some conflicts between ethnic groups, bordering regions and other social groups in the past several years. In this paper, efforts are made to assess the Constitutional and legal provisions regarding regions and groups, causes of conflicts, strategies used to manage the conflicts, and the way forward. Issues of ethnicity, ethno linguistic federalism, and prejudice are delicate, sensitive (emotionally toned), and controversial topics to discuss among (by) many elites in Ethiopia. I believe that empirical studies, open but responsible deliberations, and development of strategies regarding the above and related issues are highly beneficial. It is hoped that this report will contribute in the discussions and understanding of the situations.

II. Objectives and Method of Study

The main objectives of the paper are explication of constitutional and legal provisions regarding ethnic groups, indicating the duties and responsibilities of the Federal and Regional Governments in dealing with ethnic issues, describing the main causes of conflicts, indicating economic and social-psychological factors contributing to conflicts, and making general remarks, as the way forward. It is hoped that the paper will create various constructive debates and discussions, as the sole purpose is sharing experiences and understanding the reality on the ground.

The study is a qualitative descriptive study. The sources of data for this paper/presentation are mainly secondary sources and the author's casual observations. The secondary sources include books, articles, various reports, MA theses, and government documents.

III. Definitions of Core Concepts

It is very important that clear definitions, which are acceptable by most objective researchers and policy makers are provided in the discussion of complex and sensitive issues such as ethnic group, social/ethnic identity, conflict, diversity, cultural competence, prejudice, discrimination, conflict management and federalism. Risking some redundancy and boredom, brief definitions are provided next. At the outset, it should be understood that there is no one precise definition for any of the above complex concepts/terms.

a. **Ethnic group/Community** <u>**Nation, Nationality and people**</u> **(N.N.P)**

a category of human population that shares attributes such as common origin, history, culture, language and territory. Members are supposed to be genetically more closely (blood) related to each other than to members of other groups. The Ethiopian Constitution (FDRE, 1995) defines an ethnic group (nation, nationality or people) as "a group of people who have or share large measure of common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological makeup, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory" (Article 39-5). Ethnic groups are psychological communities whose members share a persisting sense of common interest and identity based on some combination of shared, historical experience and valued cultural traits, beliefs, language, way of life or a common homeland (Harff and Gurr, 2004). Often belief of common ancestry, shared memories, historical territory, self identification, common language, and cultural solidarity are used as the criteria elements.

b. **Social Identity** – identifying oneself with a group (sense of belonging) more overtly and taking the norms and attitudes of the in group more than the out group. The process by which an individual learns certain roles and behaviors expected of him in specific social situation. Acquiring self concept through socialization and enculturation process. Views of self and how others' view him/her.

c. ***Ethnocentrism*** – the characteristic of holding one's own racial/social group as superior. Tendency to judge the behavior of other groups by the standards of one's own. It is also a personality characteristic with tendency to project hostile impulses to others. Ethnocentrism is usually the fertile ground for prejudice (aversion of other groups) and stereotyping (categorization and labeling).

d. <u>***Conflict***</u> – a situation where the goals of at least one party are defined in ethnic terms, and distinct ethnic identity and intensive misunderstandings,

differences in interest and goals, disagreements, and antagonism or confrontation between them occurs.

e. ***Cultural Competence*** – a set of congruent behaviors, and attitudes which reflect the observation of rights of others, respecting their social identity, and no discrimination. It includes cultural awareness/sensitivity, respect for different perspectives, and skills for interaction in cross-cultural situations. Learning and understanding the customs, values, roles, world views, and history of other groups provide cultural competence skills.

f. ***Ethnicity*** – is a sense of identity consisting of subjective or symbolic use of culture by a group of people in order to differentiate themselves from other groups.   It creates internal cohesion and sense of kinship and inclusion. Some researchers say that it is basically a shared pattern of characteristics such as cultural heritage, nationality, race, religion and language.

g. ***Federalism*** – political system based on democratic rules and institutions in which power to govern is shared. It is a political arrangement where authority is divided between the center and the sub units. Generally refers to decentralized governance system where conflicts are managed by central and sub national groups. It is a political system where joint action and self-government exists (shared rule and self rule).   Some of the nomenclatures include Federations, Confederations, Unions, Associated States, etc.

h. ***Prejudice*** – unsubstantiated prejudgment of an individual or a group, as favorable or unfavorable in character and tendency to act in a consonant manner (bias). An attitude formulated in advance of sufficient evidence and held with emotional tenacity. It is a belief that predisposes individuals to believe and think in a certain, perhaps biased way towards others.

i. ***Racism*** – the social and political belief that utilizes race (like common ancestry or somatic characteristics) as a basis for economic, political and social segregation, denial of rights and treatment of the disadvantaged group as inferior. It is any action, practice or belief that reflects division of human beings as inherently superior or inferior than others. As the UN

(2007) clearly states practices and advocacy of superiority are "scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable, and socially unjust".

j. ***Discrimination*** – the process of distinguishing differences between people, based on racial, religious or ethnic considerations. Unjustifiable negative behavior towards a group and its members.

k. ***Diversity*** – It is the condition of being different and encompasses acceptance and respecting of differences emanating from race, ethnicity, gender, age, language, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, and socio-economic status. Understanding that each individual and social group is unique and moving beyond simple tolerance and embracing the individual and social group differences (variations).

IV. Constitutional and Other Legal Provisions Regarding <u>Nations , nationalities and peoples</u>

One of the better devices to calm intergroup or intrastate conflicts is through Federalism (Horwoitz, 1997), as it accommodates differences in multi- nations ,nationalities and peoples states. It is often argued that as self-governance, and participation level increases, the demand for secession decreases. <u>The Ethiopian Constitution has explicitly indicated that the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia are sovereign, equal, and have vast rights and freedoms. Perhaps, direct quotations of Article 8 and 39 and 46 would suffice as illustrations.</u>

<u>Article 8 states that (1)"All sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples of Ethiopia.(2) This Constitution is an expression of their sovereignty. (3) Their sovereignty shall be expressed through their representatives elected in accordance with the Constitution and through their direct democratic participation."</u>

<u>Article 39 states that, (1) "Every Nation, Nationality, and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self determination, including the right to secession. (2) Every Nation, Nationality, and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write, and develop its own language; to express, to develop and</u>

to promote its culture; and to preserve its history. (3) Every Nation, Nationality, and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and the equitable representation in state and Federal governments…. (4) A Nation, Nationality or People for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological makeup, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory."

These and other articles have firmly affirmed that the ethnic groups in Ethiopia are equal, all the power belongs to them, their cultures and languages will be respected and developed and no discrimination will be made between them. Regions have been formed based on the settlement patterns, language, identity and the consent of the people concerned.

The House of Federation (upper house) is the guardian and interpreter of the Ethiopian Constitution. It is the chamber in which ethnic groups are represented. As per the Constitution, each of the nine regional states has its own constitution, flag, executive government, legislative, judiciary, and police. Each chooses its own working language and each ethnic group has the right to use the mother tongue to educate its children. Obviously these are some of the major rights that almost all the secessionist movements have been demanding before 1995.

The following are the main powers and functions of the House of Federation (HoF):

- Interpretation of the Ethiopian Constitution;
- Deciding on the issues of self-determination, including the right to secession;
- Promoting equality of people of Ethiopia;
- Striving to find solutions to disputes or misunderstandings between regions;

- Ordering Federal intervention in any violation of the constitution and in conflict situations;
- Holding referendum when there are border disputes between regions/states;
- Determining the division of joint revenues and the subsidies that the Federal Government may provide to the regional states.

In addition to the HoF, the Ministry of Federal Affairs (MoFA) is established mainly to look after the affairs of inter and intra-regional conflicts and intergovernmental relations (i.e, nations , nationalities and peoples, federal affairs, and nations, nationalities and peoples relationships/conflicts, etc.). The following are the main powers and duties of the Ministry of Federal Affairs (FDRE, 2010); (It is to be noted that the first eight duties are common for all the ministries):

1. Initiate policies and laws, prepares plans and budgets and upon approval implement same;
2. Ensure the enforcement of the federal government laws;
3. Undertake study and research, collect, compile and disseminate information;
4. Undertake capacity building activities;
5. Provide assistance and advice to regional states;
6. Enter into contracts and international agreements in accordance with the law;
7. Address women and youth affairs in the preparation of policies, laws and development programs and projects;
8. Submit periodic reports to the Prime Minister and the Counsel of Ministers;
9. Cooperate with concerned federal and regional state organs in maintaining public order;
10. Facilitate the resolution of disputes and conflicts that may arise within regional states;
11. Upon the requests of regional states, devise and implement sustainable political solutions for disputes and conflicts that may arise within regional states;

12. Coordinate the implementation of decisions authorizing the intervention of the Federal Government in the affairs of regional states;

13. Serve as a focal point in creating good Federal-Regional relationship and cooperation based on mutual understanding and partnership and there by strengthen the federal system;

14. Provide assistance to regional states, particularly to those deserving special support;

15. Coordinate, integrate and follow up supports given by other Federal organs to regional states deserving special support;

16. Work with various organizations to ensure that peace and mutual respect will prevail among followers of different religions and beliefs, and to be able to prevent conflicts.

V. Brief Remarks on Social Identity, Prejudice and Discrimination

Some principles related to prejudice, **Nations, Nationalities and People** (N.N.P) identity, and conflict are presented below (Allport, Tajfel, etc.):

1. Sources of prejudice (negative attitude) and discrimination (negative behavior) are fear, differing world views, poor knowledge of the other group, lack of adequate contact with the out-group, value differences, ignorance and status differences (unequal power/status).

2. Increasing interaction and knowledge (contact hypothesis) between groups, willingness and commitment to change attitudes and behaviors, clear understanding of self and others, and abiding by the laws tend to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

3. Prejudice and discrimination have existed in the world, based on race, sex, religion, ethnic group**,(N.N.P),** skin color, ideology, class, political orientation, and sexual orientation. States have to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and promote tolerance, understanding, equality, respect for rights, and good relations among various peoples.

4. Past economic and social relations, the way one is socialized (norms, values, personality, and parenting), current socio-economic conditions and

the argument that human beings are aggressive and selfish are some of the social-psychological explanations for prejudice and discrimination.

5. People have the tendency to favor themselves and their own social/ethnic groups (**N.N.P)** more than others or out-groups. In-group members tend to interact more with their own group members, and this tends to intensify loyalty to the group.

6. Individuals who are prejudiced toward the out group tend to hold negative attitudes towards the out-groups and show exaggerated loyalty and glorification toward their in-group. Ethnocentrism, the belief in the superiority of one's ethnic group **(N.N.P),** includes a favorable bias for the in-group, over estimating the quality of their group's performance or behavior.

7. When people are asked, who they are, they tend to list some personality traits, roles and social group memberships such as being shy, religious, Oromo, Christian, father, teacher and female. Some of these are elements of social identity (perceived membership to a social group). Some of the claimed and ascribed identities (based on affiliation) would shift (are fluid) depending on the specific context and culture-though more salient identities such as gender, ethnicity/nationality, and religion might not. It is understood that people are simultaneously members of many social groups and have many social identities.

8. Our preconceptions control our interpretations of many situations and relationships. To protect our preexisting biases, usually information is readily bent, folded, exaggerated, undermined, or mutilated.

VI. Causes of c Conflicts in Ethiopia

As defined elsewhere, conflict is any form of clash, dispute or expression of grievance that occurs due to some political, social and /or economic matters. There have been conflicts in the borders of Oromia and Somali, Afar and Isaa, Garre and Borana, Oromia and Gumuz, Guji and Gedeo, Agnwa and Nuer, Sidama and Guji, and Kereyu and Afar in the past couple of decades.

The main causes for the conflicts are competition over natural resources such as land, interest for power, misunderstandings/misconceptions, fiscal and development inequality, religious diversity, blood feuds, lack of well defined borders between regions/zones/woredas, claim of prejudice, marginalization and discrimination. Recent studies show that wanting greater share of various resources seem to be the major contributing factor (IPSS/AAU, 2010. 2011, 2012). Separatist movements of Eritrean, Oromo, Tigrean, and Ogaden Somali origins existed for decades (before the 1995 Constitution).

It is to be noted that decades of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination also contribute toward conflicts. A survey study conducted by Zeigler et al. (1972) among the then Haile Sellasie I University (the present Addis Ababa university) students reported that Amharas are religious, patriotic, traditional, proud, tribe-conscious, stubborn, loyal, and old fashioned. The Oromos were claimed to be superstitious, traditional, kind, old fashioned and tribe conscious, while Tigreans were considered as tribe conscious, emotionally tempered, hard-working, talkative, ambitious and aggressive. One common trait mentioned by all these , **N.N.P** groups' students is that the out-groups are tribe-conscious (ethno-centric). Though it is a study of perceptions, it indicates some of the beliefs, attitudes and perhaps the behaviors of some youth. Furthermore, a recent study by the author indicates that some amount of prejudice; in-group favoritism and out-group degrading exist despite advocacy, proclamations and measures regarding equality and non-discrimination.

The study conducted in 1997, in which 1,172 young adults attending teacher training institutes throughout the country, who were, members of 12 **N.N.P** groups mentioned the following "superiority characteristics" of their own **N.N.P** groups: like working hard, being cooperative, being patriotic/nationalist, belief in equality of people, having a good culture, being peaceful unless provoked, being religious, and being polite. The "Inferiority characteristics" listed by some members include: poor economic/development condition of their **N.N.P** group, being racist and tribal, talking and gossiping a lot, lack of work discipline, violations of rights of others, and prevalence of various harmful

traditional practices such as FGM (Habtamu, 2001). The point is that such stereotyping also contributes towards resentment and conflicts between the **N.N.P** /social groups.

The author concurs with Sisay (2007), who identified that the following are the main causes of ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia: claims and counter claims for land and water points, exclusion from power at some levels, unmarked boundaries, blood feuds, proliferation of small arms, feelings of insecurity by some groups, domination by a given group and lack of good governance.

VII. Management of Conflicts in Ethiopia

It is a fact that ethnic groups that are treated unequally resent and usually attempt to improve their conditions (the prejudice, discrimination and oppression). The following are five principles suggested by Harff and Gurr (2004; 182-191) for managing (**N.N.P)** ethno- political conflicts in heterogeneous societies:

1. States and civil society should recognize and promote the rights of minorities – should be free from discrimination based on race, national origin, language, or religion. The minorities have the right to protect and promote their collective interests. Anti discrimination laws, policies to promote minority representation, etc. should be in place.

2. Democratic institutions and power-sharing are the best means for protecting group rights. All people should have equal civil and political rights. Acceptance of peaceful means for resolving civil conflicts and decentralization are required.

3. Conflicts over self-determination are best settled by negotiations for autonomy within existing states. Acknowledging collective rights and providing institutional means for attaining them would help. It also provides better decision making access to the central government.

4. International actors should protect minority rights and promote settlement of ethno political (**N.N.P)** wars. Use of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peaceful settlement of emerging conflict, mediation and arbitration, and some accommodation are recommended.

5. International actors may use coercive means to stop civil wars and mass killings of civilians. To stop those who are determined to win regardless of costs, perhaps peace enforcement would be in order. (Also coercive prevention of violent conflicts).

Conflict management is an intervention towards preventing the escalation and negative effects, especially violent one, of ongoing conflicts (University for Peace, 2005). It is the reduction, and containment by reorientation of the issue, reconstitution of the divisions among the conflicting parties. It is the elimination of the propensity of conflict to violence by encouraging positive behavioral changes among the parties involved (Dereje, 2010: 79).

It is to be noted that diversity, or ethno-linguistic federalism do not cause N.N.P conflicts, as could be observed from the experiences of Belgium, Canada, and Switzerland. One of the better devices to calm intergroup of intrastate conflicts is through Federalism (Horwoitz, 1997), as it accommodates differences in multi-ethnic states. It is often argued that as self-governance, and participation level increases, the demand for secession decreases.

There are several forums and councils by which the Federal and Regional Governments meet and discuss mutual problems, including conflicts. These include Joint House Speakers Forum, Forum of Dialogue between the HoF and each Regional State, Adjoining Regional States Joint Forum, Peace Committees at kebele, woreda or zone levels. All of these, including some "Elders Arbitration Committees" and "Pease and Democracy Conferences" try to promote harmonious inter cultural relationships among diverse (often conflicting) groups, solving problems in non-violent ways, and abiding by the rule of law.

Often, the general steps taken to manage conflicts are: Gathering of information about the situation, bringing the conflicting parties together to discuss the issue, intervention of a third party (such as committees, Federal Police, etc.), setting up some institutional structures to address the problem, reconciliation, and advocacy for peace, accommodation and development.

VIII. General Concluding Remarks

Domination by some elite groups, oppression of the minorities, and lack of equality and democracy had existed in Ethiopia for decades. Prejudice, stereotyping, marginalization/exclusion and discrimination have prevailed implicitly or explicitly. Putting people into groups and categories is highly prevalent in the whole world (perhaps a normal cognitive process), including Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Constitution has tried to deal with the historical and the then prevailing situations. Nationalities struggles were reactions against oppression and inequality. The ethno nationalist movements included Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Afar Liberation Front (ALF), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Tigrean Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF).

There were twenty-seven political groups, majority being (**N.N.P)** based, who participated in the Transitional Period Charter Conference in 1991.

The current constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia starts with the statement, "We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia: strongly committed in full and free exercise of our right to self-determination, to building a political community founded on the rule of law and capable of ensuring a lasting peace, guaranteeing a democratic order, and advancing our economic and social development; … Full respect of individual and

people's fundamental freedoms and rights, to live together on the bases of equality and without any sexual, religious, or cultural discrimination." (FDRE, 1995: 75). Language and cultural pluralism, regional autonomy, separation of state and religion, transparency and accountability of government, human and democratic rights, the structure of the federal and regional states, and division of powers are clearly stated.

The effort is to "transform the empire state into a democratic state of ethnic pluralism, in order to ensure that no ethnic community would find it necessary or desirable to secede" (Alem, 2000: 10). Cultural, linguistic and political autonomy are granted at regional, zonal and woreda levels.

The constitution established (**N.N.P)** federalism giving full (**N.N.P)** autonomy and equality while maintaining the unity of the country (Alem, 2003). **N.N.P** based nine territories were formed – Afar, Oromo, Amhara, Tigtay, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) Region, Gambella, and Harari. Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa are Federal city states. The SNNPR has several **N.N.P** groups (about 50), grouped in to zones, woredas/districts, and special woredas.

As a concluding remark I would like to make a few generalizations.

1. The efforts of the framers for the Ethiopian Constitution to abolish domination and oppression, provide equality to all citizens and **N.N.P** groups, devolution of power, encouraging negotiation and accommodation are to be appreciated.

2. It should be clear that a strong commitment and true implementation of the Constitution are needed. The efforts of HoF, MoFA and Regions are worth noting in that conflicts are managed, efforts are made to bring about peace, stability and prevalence of social justice and trust among various **N.N.P** groups.

3. Noting the immaturity of the Federal system from village to national level, in the interpretation and implementation of the constitution and various laws, balancing of unity with diversity, the inclination towards ethnocentrism, and some weaknesses in conflict prevention and management would have to be noted and capacity building efforts have to

be strengthened. It is also highly recommended that efforts to deal with diversity should include the advantages of unity and similarities between **N.N.P** groups, as there are vast similarities among the Ethiopian ethnic groups more than differences.

4. Education and training of relevant personnel in the woredas, zones and regions level on issues of peace, human rights, culture of peace, conflict prevention, communication and dialogue might be in order. Perhaps serious efforts have to be made in the integration of the modern/constitutional strategies with traditional methods in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

5. Social-psychological theory of contact hypothesis provides empirical evidence that people of diversity (ethnic/ **N.N.P** social group), learning about each other (cross-cultural competence), living and working together, interactions, mobility, and having similar goals and equal treatment greatly reduce (eliminate) prejudice and discrimination. National efforts would be needed to create and or further develop interpersonal and intergroup contacts, interaction, and cooperation.

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