

## **Ethno-Linguistic Federalism in Ethiopia: Opportunity or Threat to National Unity?**

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**Abstract:** Even if Ethiopia is left without a single choice other than introducing the federal political system, it did not escape criticisms. Especially, as far as national unity is concerned, there are strong opposing views- the pro-unitary state and the pro-multiethnic federal system. This study is aimed at examining whether the so far ethno-linguistic federalism experience of the country has been contributing to national unity as well as national consensus or not. To this end, the study relied on secondary sources. Based on a systematic analysis of relevant sources, the following findings are obtained. Though the proponents of pro-unitary system are of the opinion that the current federal system which at least constitutionally gives equal footing to ethnic groups is against the national unity of Ethiopia, this study shows that it is not ethnic federalism that is a barrier to national unity but there are diverse factors. These factors include, but not limited to, unbalanced interest of ethnic groups' elites, inadequacy of commitment to ethno-linguistic federalism principle, lack of constitutionalism and misconception of ethno-nationalism. It is true that the popular struggle for real autonomy and self-rule on one hand and the division or confusion regarding the Ethiopian national unity on the other hand has continued. This study suggests that acknowledging past injustices, practicing ethno-linguistic federalism principle genuinely and foreseeing reciprocated fate are imperative for building national unity and national consensus in Ethiopia where all ethnic groups' identity is treated equally.

**Keywords:** Ethno-linguistic federalism; National consensus; National unity; State building

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## 1. Introduction

Global historical evidence demonstrates that self-rule has been the leading political ideology in guiding the political and cultural actions of territorially or culturally defined human groups that see their common destiny as a people or a nation (Watts, 2009). The struggles for self-rule/self-determination and popular sovereignty emerged in opposition to political totalitarianism, cultural dominance and economic exploitation on the global level. For this purpose, it is widely accepted in contemporary theory and practice of democracy and conflict resolution that one of the most effective ways to accommodate ethno-linguistic diversity is through the practical application of ethno-linguistic federalism in the institutions of self-government, power-sharing and decentralization that are commonly associated with federations (Donald, 1999).

In a state characterized by diversity, the major target of ethno-linguistic federalism is to save a state from devastation and disintegration with spices of social capital for the process of building national unity/national consensus and diversity management (Stepan, 2010). To achieve national unity, ethno-linguistic federalism principle is devoted to develop systematic diversity management formula in a diverse people. As such, scholars state that the most common typical cause to form a federal state structure is accommodation of diversity (Aroney, 2010). Based on this concept, national unity in federation refers to the process of building unity within diversity by bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups in respect of differences to eliminate sources of internal conflicts (Fisseha, 2013). In this regard, the main objective of ethno-linguistic federalism is accommodating diversity, maintaining unity and sharing power among different groups. These principal values are the basic instruments for national unity in ethnically plural society like Ethiopia (Ibid).

Based on this, ethno-linguistic federalism in Ethiopia was founded upon the conviction that the unitary state institutions and the coercive homogenization attempts by the previous regimes were failures and instructive of a fundamental shift. In line with this, the federal constitution suggests that the federal project was one of putting the state apart and reconstructing it using the various ethnic groups as the building blocks with the result of the ascendancy of ethnic nationalisms directly supported by the state (Eshete, 2013). The federal constitution also depicts that the political project had the objective of making the primary locus of the Ethiopian national and political unity first in the different 'nations, nationalities, and peoples' or the states they constituted, and secondarily in the Ethiopian state, notwithstanding the objectives of the regimes prior to 1991 (Anderson, 2013). Although there was no agreement more on mechanisms for addressing the problem than on the nature of the problem itself, the major political forces of the time considered it critical to deploy ethnicity, expressed in terms of national self-determination, as foundational principle of political organization.

On the other hand, some scholars argue that ethnic federalism undermines national unity and encourages conflict (Aroney, 2010). One among many misapprehensions about the assumption of federalism and its practical experiences is that state-building may suffer as a result of the ethnic based division of powers; and that secession may be pursued by regional groupings (Elazar, 1993). Some federations have failed (most notably, Yugoslavia) and many other federations continue to be challenged by the demands brought about by diversity. There is doubt (Aalen, 2006) that federalism leads to division which may put national unity in danger which in turn may bring disintegration. Particularly, this group argues that different ethnic conflicts happened in different parts of Ethiopia which displaced millions of peoples indicate that Ethiopian national unity is undermined and it will be leading to disintegration of the state as a whole.

Nevertheless, there is no empirical support whether the so far ethno-linguistic federalism experience of the country has been contributing to or not in attaining national unity as well as national consensus. There is, thus, an absence of empirical evidence to suggest that federations in general, and Ethiopia in particular are more likely to experience internal conflict or instability due to adopting ethno-linguistic federalism. Therefore, the questions that would be answered include: What are the challenges and implications of building national unity within diversity in Ethiopian federation? How can ethno-linguistic federalism serve as an approach of building national unity and national consensus in a given

federation? Is ethno-linguistic federalism a threat or an opportunity for national unity, particularly in Ethiopian existing situation? Based on today's experience, what measures should be taken to overcome the existing challenges and build strong unity within diversity in Ethiopia?

## **2. Research Methods**

This study used a qualitative approach. It is evident that the qualitative approach study tries to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people try to attach to them. In other words, qualitative research is proper therein; it entails scrutinizing information and eventually creating an analysis and drawing conclusions concerning the information analyzed (Creswell, 2003). This study uses secondary sources of data. Accordingly, secondary data that were collected through systematic and comprehensive reading of books, journal articles, Ethiopian constitutions, and credible internet sources are qualitatively interpreted and analyzed. Accordingly, this piece has three folds. Firstly, it sets up a conceptual framework for analysis and interpretation. Secondly, it examines the status of Ethiopian national unity under ethno-linguistic based federal system based on a critical analysis of ongoing discourses, and thirdly, it identifies the factors that are challenging Ethiopian national unity. Finally, similar values and opinions of existing pieces of literatures are systematically grouped under the same category for better understandings and analysis

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. National Unity/Consensus and Ethno-linguistic Federalism**

Ethno-linguistic federal system is different from other forms of federal political systems due its main objective which is building national consensus among different ethnic groups. Some existing literature (Anderson, 2013) suggest that ethnic-federalism can only exploit its positive opportunities that are unity within diversity if it integrates ethnic groups' interests and values so that it can push pre-modern ethnocentric political activities to the periphery. Before discussing how ethno-linguistic federalism brings national unity and consensus, let us raise core points regarding the issues of national unity, national consensus and unity within diversity in federations.

Basically, ethnicity is a notoriously greasy concept that, for the purpose of this study, Van Dyke's description is as useful a preliminary point as any (Van Dyke, 1986). According to Van Dyke (1986), ethnicity is a group of peoples predominantly of common descent, who think of themselves as collectively possessing a separate identity based on shared cultural characteristics, usually language or religion. Due to this, divisions of ethnicity tend to be deeper and more lasting than other social relations. Based on this concept, ethno-linguistic federalism is a federation where ethnicity and language are the defining features of the system. Moreover, each of the society's major ethnic groups is assigned its own ethnic and language homeland (Suberu, 2001). This does not mean that there is no minority group within majority at subunits level. On the other hand, building national unity under ethno-linguistic based federal state structure is drawing boundary lines to accommodate ethnic groups as a way to express, institutionalize and protect their identities and nationalisms on a durable and often permanent basis (Anderson, 2013). From this, it is possible to argue that national unity does not mean creating oneness or avoiding nationalism of ethnic groups but encouraging/promoting and institutionalizing all groups' interest at the centre on one hand and encouraging self-rule at local on the other. Here, both national consensus and national unity are two sides of the same coin which play pivotal role to bring state stability and make ethno-linguistic federalism successful.

Despite the great body of existing literature on federalism, issues relating to the character of building unity within diversity and national consensus in a state where its political system is designed along ethnic and linguistic line have been comparatively neglected. When we look at the experience of federations concerning how to build national unity under ethno-linguistic based federal political system, there is no uniformity. However, the final goal is achieving both diversity management and national unity. For instance, some federal systems develop constitutional mechanisms to build

national consensus, particularly on common goals where as some federations establish independent institutions with the responsibility and polices of creating unity within diversity (Covell, 1993). A notable federation where both national unity and diversity management have become successful is Belgium (Cameron, 2009) even if it is hardly possible to categorize its political system under ethnic based federal system. As far as Ethiopia is concerned, there are gaps in both institution and constitution. As would be seen shortly after this section, the case is relatively complex in Ethiopia. Therefore, based on these theoretical concepts, one can argue that the basic goal in all federal political systems is to build national unity within diversity and addressing diverse interests.

### **3.2. Ethno-linguistic Federalism in Ethiopia: A Political Maneuver or Remedy of the Past?**

After Ethiopia had taken its current shape, Ethiopian leaders followed the Jacobin republicanism approach whereby they governed the state by suppressing ethnic and language diversity by imposing the language, culture and religion of one ethnic identity over the other ethnic groups. This principle of governance by Ethiopian successive regimes brought a never ending growing protest against a highly centralized system of governance that marginalized socio-economic and cultural rights and suppressed self-determination of ethnic groups (Brietzka, 1995). At the end, the political history of Ethiopia is changed through the adoption of ethno-linguistic based federal system which is a turning point.

According to the architect of current Ethiopian state structure, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), ethno-linguistic federalism was a reaction to the ethnic domination and marginalization in the history of the Ethiopian state. Existing literature (Fiseha and Habib, 2010) demonstrates that ethno-linguistic federalism was not only a way of maintaining unity and preventing civil war, but also it became a means to overcome the Amhara hegemony (Keller and Omwami, 2007). There are scholars (Watts, 2001) who have favored the adoption of federalism in Ethiopia as it will lead to efficient delivery of public services, enhancement of regional/local economic growth and balanced regional development. According to this argument, national unity of Ethiopia would have been at risk had it not been for ethno-linguistic federalism that can accommodate diversity and enhance national unity. The adoption of ethno-linguistic federalism brought an end to the long history of disproportionate centralization and assimilation project, and to the nation building approach around the identity of one particular national group- the Amhara. At least at theory level, it introduced an accommodative approach<sup>1</sup> by recognizing diversity as a foundation of reorganizing the state. On the other hand, some Ethiopian scholars and political parties (Alem, 2005) have criticized the idea of ethno-linguistic federalism from its inception and many have viewed it as a political maneuver of Tigray People's Liberation Front/Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF/EPRDF) to divide the country and loosen the sense of national unity and Ethiopianism.

When we look into Ethiopian national unity before and after the adoption of ethno-linguistic federalism, there are still unresolved hot contests. There are scholars (G/Selassie, 2003) who argue that in Africa, following independence, a notable state that became successful in maintaining national unity was Ethiopia. It is due to the then regimes promoted religious and linguistic homogenization policies in Ethiopia, where Amharic became the sole language of primary education (Fisseha and Habib, 2010) and literature was banned in all other languages (Gudina, 2004). Moreover, the constitution (FDRE constitution, 1995) affirmed the church to be the national church and for the first time legally required the emperor to be a member of the church. Many non-Amharic speakers, non-Amhara ethnic groups and non-Christian Ethiopians thus converted to orthodox Christianity and/or changed their names to Amharic ones as a result of such policies.

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<sup>1</sup> As a post-cold war constitution, the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia's constitution encompasses some specific elements in the context of the country's political environment, especially in relation to national diversity, which according to some observers enabled the country to continue to exist from entire collapse by taking in to account the then political demand of different ethno-nationalist groups.

One cannot deny that when Ethiopia was under theocracy and feudalism, when the Abyssinian Christians were powerful, there was totalitarian system with firm central control and dictatorship. There was no room to accommodate diversity and religious freedom. Instead, there was imposition of religion and ideologies on indigenous people through colonization. Here, figurative Ethiopian national unity was maintained by power through forced conversions and depopulation, mass reversion and/or conversion. There is no doubt that in real world, this kind of maintaining national unity through assimilation would not have long existence. The central argument of this paper here is that there was no national unity at all if not however, it was fake national unity for the reason that identity of one ethnic group is imposed on the others, and the majority of Ethiopian nation, nationalities and peoples identity is oppressed and erased. Today, some elites and ethnic-based political parties blame ethno-linguistic based federalism as a reason for absence/constraint for national unity as well as national consensus in Ethiopia (Chane, 2018). However, the reality on the ground is far from this as there are other contributing factors rather than ethnic-based federalism.<sup>2</sup> Based on this, the next section of this study would focus on identifying factors affecting Ethiopian national unity under ethno-linguistic based federal system.

### **3.3. Challenges of National Unity in Ethiopian Ethno-linguistic Based Federalism**

The peaceful interaction between the state and identity groups and among identity groups plays critical role in constructing national unity of a given federation. Respect and equality of identity among the multicultural societies is a bridge in creating an understanding and cooperation to national unity project since it possibly results in national consensus for all-inclusive and collective political and economic destinies. However, in existing Ethiopian circumstances, creating national unity is faced with two problems of clear ideologies which cannot go together and at odd. The first ideology is fake unitary group and the other is called federalist group. Here, one can argue that it is very difficult to build a common country with two insignificant opposite ideologies.

Although it is almost three decades since Ethiopia started to experiment ethno-federalism as a means to overcome, if not reduce, its internal identity instability, these ideologies are negatively affecting Ethiopian national unity. On one hand, there is an attempt of developing self-rule at local level and building ‘one political and economic society’ (Kymlicka, 2004) which is to improve national unity at centre. In doing this, though there are limitations in order to ascertain autonomous local government,<sup>3</sup> there are also constraints that are influencing national unity. A cautious look at Ethiopian ongoing political discourses is jam-packed of doubt and misdirection and pointing finger to ethno-linguistic based federal system, while in reality there are aspects that require due attention.

#### **3.3.1. Unbalanced consensus on common issues in Ethiopia**

From its nature, ethno-linguistic based federal system requires negotiation of interest<sup>4</sup> which is absent if not limited in Ethiopian federation (Maiz, Caamano and Azpitarte, 2010). There are ethnic elites who oppose the existing political system from its adoption, where-as there are others who argue that

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<sup>2</sup> These groups argue that ethno-linguistic based federalism largely affects loyalty to the centre by creating artificial loyalty to one's ethnicity. It brought a disagreement or conflict of trustworthiness between the center and the local units.

<sup>3</sup> It is very difficult to argue that local governments are autonomous for the reason that Ethiopia has been experiencing extreme and repeated mass protests, uprising and society-government relationship crisis over the past two to three decades. The absolute dominance of one vanguard party, EPRDF as well as the absence of fair representation of Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples at federal institutions resulted power dominance by single ethnic group, deterioration of institutions and political opposition.

<sup>4</sup> The lack of cross-ethnic consensus on diversity reduces the possibility of the success of ethno-linguistic federalism. The lack of cross-ethnic commitment to accommodation of diversity adversely affects the relationship between local majorities and minorities. Hence, it makes ethno-linguistic federalism less attractive.

the only option to maintain Ethiopia as a state is through ethno-linguistic federalism. As it is also stated under conceptual framework of this study, in its principle, ethno-linguistic federalism is one option in order to improve unity within diversity though there maybe gaps in democratically and genuinely implementing its principle. However, in any federation, when there are interests that are difficult to come/bring together, it is inevitable that national unity as well as national consensus of that federation is under doubt (Paul, 2014). Due to this, conflict may happen and we should not condemn the ethno-linguistic federal system rather than ethnic group interest that is very far from each other. The other sensitive and core point that can be raised in this line is concerning the absence or limitation of consensus in Ethiopia on the content and nature of constitution itself, the type of government and flag.

As explained earlier, in Ethiopia, ethno-linguistic federalism, unlike other forms of federalism, was supposed to be the only option which aims at answering the long protracted question of nationalities. There was no or little option other than ethno-linguistic federalism for the liberation fronts of that time (Tewfik, 2016). Basically, it requires accepting this reality in order to build national unity as well as national consensus. For this study, it is possible to identify two generalized perspectives that exist at opposite pole. Firstly, conflicts among ethno- linguistic groups elite concerning the need of existing state structure and political system itself. Secondly, tensions between values of ethno-cultural identity as well as a set of historical blunder that should be redressed at present through the respect of self-determination and self- administration. However, at grassroots level there is no as such disputable interest between ethnic groups.

Ultimately, it is also possible to raise disagreement that exists between Ethiopians themselves and historians as far as Ethiopia is concerned. There is no clear agreement concerning how and when did today's Ethiopia really come to being (Tibebu, 1994). Some historians affirm that the Ethiopian history dates back three thousand years ago and above whereas the other historian camp argues that the modern Ethiopian history starts from the unification era in 19th century characterized by making Ethiopia and re-making Ethiopia. The unification route was kind of conquering by force that escorts for causalities and the coercion has imprinted an awful history in the mind of those ethnic groups who have been conquered by force. Indeed, there are ethnic group elites who have a high regard for the then vanquisher as the hero of unified Ethiopia. Therefore, there are contrasting influences which need to be solved through both institution and policy in order to strengthen national unity and consensus in Ethiopia.

### **3.3.2.Lack of commitment to the principle of Ethno-linguistic federalism**

Existing literatures (Aalen, 2002; Feeley and Rubin, 2008) suggests that genuine implementation of ethno-linguistic federalism needs commitment from both institution and policy of the government. Coming to Ethiopia, as stated under conceptual framework, democratic federalism is a pathway to diversity accommodation and creation of unity within diversity. There will be hardly possible choices except ethno-linguistic based federalism to address the nationalities question. Since, unitary states failed to answer this long standing question and furthermore it perpetuated this problem, it will be wise to come up with effective practice of ethno-linguistic federalism. Thus, ethno-linguistic federalism has many things for the nationalities of Ethiopia than serving only as a political maneuver. It would again be unrealistic to assume that Ethiopia disintegrates as it opts for ethnic-linguistic based federalism. This does not mean that based on three decades of experiment on federal system, Ethiopia applied democratic and genuine federalism. There are still gaps in its practice, particularly, absence of fair representations at federal institutions (Midega, 2014).

As explained earlier, accommodation of diversity, which is a vital issue in Ethiopia, is one of the purposes of federalism in multi-ethnic federal systems. Due to the existing reality in Ethiopian federation, accommodation of diversity does necessarily need commitment to ethno-linguistic based federalism principles otherwise it would be limited to paper only. It is so because accommodation of

diversity and the establishment of a democratic environment that enhances the participation of diverse groups are crucial to avoid marginalization of some groups within a multi-cultural federation (Watts, 2001). If these conditions are lacking in practice, those groups left behind or groups which do not get appropriate share of power will opt to leave a union (Charles, 1994). From this, we can understand that failure to justifiably represent diversity through shared federal institutions will create real threats to the unity of a federation. This article argues it is important to promote a democratic federal political system in Ethiopia along with genuine democratic institutions that are accountable to the people.

The other concern that influences national unity as well as diversity management in Ethiopia is media. The role of media<sup>5</sup> in building national unity is to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among the individuals and various ethnic groups. It plays a pivotal role by patronizing joint good relations in different occasion of different religious, racial and ethnic groups. It contributes to eradicate discrimination and superiority of one ethnic group through encouraging others/all to participate in different fest of mainstream. Historically, in Ethiopian politics, media particularly diasporas media played a critical role in removing TPLF regime. However, study shows that there is limited role played by Media in order to improve Ethiopian national unity and equal protection of all identities.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.3.3. Elite's<sup>7</sup> misconception of nationalism<sup>8</sup> and national unity**

The challenge to Ethiopia at present is either accepting past injustice that lead to common struggle for national unity or rejecting it which may bring reducing national consensus (Pawulos, 1998). In this regard, elites and political activists play major roles. Under this sub-section, we will look at the controversy around nationalism and its link with Ethiopian national unity.

Basically, the term nationalism is the principle that recognizes the nation as the primary unit of political commitment whereas nation is a group that people define themselves as a group member (Paul, 2014). When it comes to national identity, it is linked to genetics that there is a basic particular difference between people of one nationality and others. On the other hand, some scholars view nation as supposed rather than based in substantial reality that are socially constructed in their virulent forms which might by itself lead to conflict (McHenry, 2008). When one group believes that they are superior to others and have the right to rule other groups, it is easy to see how results in violence.

Some scholars (Watts, 2009; McHenry, 2008) argue that the development of nationalism would affect national unity, and the most important issue for them is not economical exploitation and political dominance of particular nation but maintaining national unity. On the other hand, some other writers warn that given the diversity found in a particular state, if the quests for nationalism exist, the possibility to have national unity is in danger (Aalen, 2006; Keller and Omwami, 2007). Here they argue that the development of nationalism may be negative nationalism that would adversely affect the progress of national unity. Coming to Ethiopian political discourse, some criticize the quest of

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<sup>5</sup> Whenever the issue of maintaining national unity comes, the role of media including social media becomes a burning question. In most multiethnic developing countries, media attempt to play crucial role in managing ethnic tensions and integrating diverged ethnicities. In this study I will focus on the role of media in national unity.

<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that media has no role in changing political landscape of Ethiopia. For instance, an accumulation of years of frustration from ethnic groups who are marginalized by the TPLF government brought endless protests that finally lead to political reform.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'elite' is originally from the Latin, *eligere*, which means "to elect". The elites are a relatively small dominant group within a large society, which enjoys a privileged status in comparison to other individuals' status in the society. There are various elite groups in society those who have explicit and implicit role in national unity. And these are political, business, professional and education elite. This study would focus on political elite.

<sup>8</sup> There is only ethno-nationalism and there is no strand of nationalism that could be described as Pan-Ethiopian. The so-called Pan-Ethiopian nationalism is a deviation of one ethnic group nationalism which is hidden as Ethiopian and this could lead to confrontation.

nationalism, self-respect and self-determination as evil to the Ethiopian national unity (Leta, 1998). This group gives concern, not to the elimination of diversified identity that the Ethiopian state experienced but just to maintaining the Ethiopian national unity. Based on the three decades experiment of federal system, there is a fear that the existing political crisis is due to development of nationalism whereas that is not the case indeed. However, existing literature suggests (Kohli, 1997; Aalen, 2006; Mengisteab, 2001; John, 2013)<sup>9</sup> that there are still gaps in implementing genuine federal political system hand in hand with democratic nationalism which helps us to bring national unity.

The other wonder to be discussed here is roles of elite in building national consensus. In Ethiopia, there is lack of national consensus on some of the contents of the constitution and/or its practice, type of government, flag, the continuity of centripetal and centrifugal forces and polarized politics and this demonstrate the continuity of Ethiopia's exclusionary politics. In the absence of consensus, it is difficult to bring unity that it needs a major breach by concerned groups particularly elites of ethnic groups.

The ruling party and the oppositions (elites/academicians/activists/civilians) and the opposition among themselves need to develop an art of concession and cooperation, civility and responsibility, in their political discourse otherwise no one can improve national unity as a whole (Cameron, 2009). Above all, Pan-Ethiopians are a threat to Ethiopian federation national unity. As it stands now, elites and/or political parties who call themselves Pan-Ethiopians are centrifugal forces who should learn from the failure of former governments and opt for new democratic Ethiopia that accommodates diversity and fair representation of nations and nationalities. There should, moreover, be a national consensus on national issues so that it is possible to build national unity on one hand and maintaining diversity on the other hand.

Finally, it is wise to look at the constitutional set up of Ethiopia in line with national unity and diversity. From its nature, Ethiopian constitutional blueprint has some structural limitations as far as diversity accommodation and building national unity is concerned. Concerning this, some attribute these to its full institutionalization of ethnicity where as it is, however, possible to argue that the limitation is attributable to a more fundamental problem which involves a couple of things. Firstly, the constitution's conception of the characteristics of ethnic groups in general and the nature of Ethiopia's ethnic diversity in particular, and secondly, the mechanisms through which national self-determination is translated into state structures through instituting a particular form of federation.

#### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

National unity and equal respect of all identities through democratic self-rule in a federation is part and parcel of state stability. This article showed that if Ethiopia is going to be surviving as a state in the future, it highly demands the enhancement of self-rule and democratic ethno-linguistic federalism. Otherwise, it is challenging to bring national unity by eliminating nation's self-rule which will even hasten the disintegration of Ethiopia.

Now, Ethiopia is facing lack of national consensus not because of development of ethnic groups' nationalism but due to these groups who think that its development would affect negatively the Ethiopian national unity. Particularly, those groups fail to understand unbalanced interest of elites, lack of ethno-linguistic institutionalization and absence of autonomous representation. So, they blindly favor unitary system of governance for Ethiopia arguing that ethno-linguistic federal system brought division along ethnic lines which create favorable condition for ethnic conflict to occur in different parts of Ethiopia. At present, there still are constraints and dilemmas in the field of national

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<sup>9</sup> John Markakis, a long-time scholar on Ethiopia, suggests that causes of ethnic conflicts are mostly competition for resources and power. He also seems to endorse the cultural difference theory when he tried to explain the Issa-Afar conflict in the light of historical. Merera Gudina attributes ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia to, among other things, contending nationalisms that have emerged and evolved over time in Ethiopia. He also deplores the incomplete transition to democracy and political instability (Merera Gudina, 2004). From both scholars perspective, we can argue that the development of nationalism strengthens national unity as well as federal system in Ethiopia.

unity and local self-rule of nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia. The federal formula lacked genuine institutions and policies to encourage democratic national unity within diversity.

As a way out, this study suggests that institutions have to be established by the government which is aimed to facilitate and create democratic and all-inclusive and genuine national dialogue. All ethnic groups elites, activists and media has to come to the center as well from periphery and play their own role for the effective implementation of democratic ethno-linguistic federalism on one hand and foundation of national unity through acknowledging past injustice, agreeing on today's common interest and promising for the destiny of their future state, Ethiopia. Finally, this study argues that if the intention is to preserve national unity of Ethiopia, then ethno-linguistic federalism can offer a solution to the concern of both national unity within diversity and self-rule. It can be an incentive for national unity and peace. However, it can do so only if both/or all groups are willing to compromise having realized that the assimilation approach and military option is not viable any more.

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