

Ethnocultural Diversity in Ethiopia: A Blessing or a Curse?

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Abstract: This article is aimed at assessing the existing social capitals in an ethnoculturally diverse Ethiopian state and its significance in ensuring peace and development in the country. Ethiopia is a multicultural and multinational state, where there are over 80 ethnolinguistic or ethnocultural groups. To conduct the research, a qualitative research approach and a descriptive research design were employed. Data were collected through in-depth and key informant interviews and reviews of relevant literature. The collected qualitative data were transcribed using verbatim transcription following which the process of data winnowing was employed to identify relevant data. The transcribed data were converted into text, and then thematic analysis was conducted to give meaning and explanation to the interview results as well as results from the relevant literature reviewed. The study revealed that ethnocultural diversity does not naturally create a space for conflicts in the absence of triggering socio-political and historical factors. It was also found that the presence of ethnocultural diversity has contributed to the prevalent existence of long-established pro-peace social capitals across the diverse ethnocultural groups, which are of high significance in ensuring peace and development in the country. Thus, the paper argues that ethnocultural diversity should not be considered a threat but a resource for peace and development if the socio-political environments and historical factors are properly managed so as not to misdirect the diversity.

Keywords: Conflict transformation; Development; Endogenous; Ethnocultural diversity; Social capital

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1. Introduction

Diversity and plurality of cultures are salient characteristics of humanity. Such nature of human society has long been studied in different ways focusing on "... universalism and pluralism, stability and mobility, dynamism and deceleration, ...," and different views were forwarded to establish a homogeneous world against the existing social reality. These views were, "One World, One Mankind, One Market, One Planet, the Space-centered thinking versus the place-centered thinking, and the cosmopolitan localism" (Sachs, 2006: 209-225). However, there is no single, and only one truth and reality, rather the plurality and diversity of truths, realities, views, and perspectives in society. Therefore, the pluralism and diversity of societies have to be recognized and accepted with the different truths and realities that they have uniquely (Dietrich and Sutzl, 2006).

The uniqueness of every human individual makes conflict an inherent part of humanity's life. Therefore, the creative management of differences is the principal culture of peace (Boulding, 1998). If it is needed to have a peaceful and viable state, the issue of identity and diversity needs to be managed well. Ill management of diversity could result in violent conflicts thereby leading to destruction. The interdependent world functions well only if people build unity through common bonds of humanity and respect for cultural differences. In the era of globalization, the need for cultural acknowledgment by the world community is fundamentally important (Fukuda-Parr, 2004).

Diversity is all about identity, freedom, and inclusion. It is the undisputed right of human beings to be who and what they are, to behave according to the dictates of their personhood, and to be acknowledged in a given societal structure irrespective of their uniqueness (Mayadas, 1977). Policies acknowledging cultural diversities and promoting diversity to develop do not result in disintegration, struggle, feeble development, or authoritarian rule rather it is important in resolving what appeared to be never-ending tensions. Positively considering and recognizing cultural diversities is far better than trying to eradicate them or thinking that they do not exist (Fukuda-Parr, 2004).

Appreciating diversity means giving credit and an optimistic valuing of the accepted uniqueness of mankind which is a clear pronouncement of respect for all creations. Accepting diversity also means being able to live, and allow others to live too. Diversity appreciation is the principle and culture of democracy, and celebrating it validates the values of democracy and discards the deceitful view that allows monocultures to prevail while equality is advertised for all (Mayadas, 1977).

Cultural diversity is a positive characteristic of humankind (Hassan, 2004), and it refers to the living together of different forms of cultural groups in a certain area. It is, therefore, within differences that one can find beauty (Pooch, 2006; Bathily and D'Alessandro, 2021). Cultural diversity is the most crucial element in innovation (Steven, 2001) as it creates new ways of looking at things and gives new ideas and opportunities that have never been considered before. It is also possible to make use of human and cultural differences through learning and understanding why differences exist (Hassan, 2004).

In a representative democracy, the role that diversity plays in addressing social, political, and economic issues is much greater than in homogeneous societies. Learning about other cultures also helps us to better understand different perspectives. It helps dispel adverse labeling and personal prejudices about different groups. It can also help us build bridges of trust, respect, and understanding across cultures as we interact with each other (Minta and Valeria, 2013; Partnership International, n.d.). On the other hand, in social relationships, cultural diversity provides exposure for the development of mutual respect and understanding (Hassan, 2004). It benefits everyone as it opens up a way to better problem-solving, more empathy, and compassion. It is an impetus for development for individuals, communities, and countries (Wals, 2009; International Science Council (ISC), 2020).

In general, cultural diversity has enormous advantages for knowledge sharing between and among groups. Well-managed cultural diversity promotes greater productivity, innovation, and creativity. In educational institutions, it creates a dynamic learning environment and shapes students to better prepare for dealing with a more culturally diverse society (Steven, 2001; Hall, Martinez, Tuan, McMahan and Chain, 2011). One of the different ways to accommodate cultural diversity is to

acknowledge enough space for the diverse groups to have their position in the state's socio-political, economic, and cultural lives. Peacefully maintaining cultural differences is a means of establishing balance, equity, peaceful coexistence, and mutual interdependence (Boulding, 1998).

Societies have cultural resources to transform conflicts from violence to peaceful problem-solving behavior, such as the Oromo's Gadaa system of governance. In this system, clan leaders and Abbaa Gadaas are important in settling inter-clan conflicts (Negasa, 2022; Ta'a, 2016). Studies have also revealed that there are various endogenous conflict transformation mechanisms of different ethnocultural groups in Ethiopia (Bouh and Mammo, 2008; Abteu, 2017; Alemie and Mandefro, 2018; Agalu, 2020; Hassan, 2020; Muluken, 2020; Bekelcha, Sefera and Fogi, 2021; Wondimu, 2021).

Ethiopia is a land of linguistic and cultural diversity, with over eighty ethnolinguistic groups and various religions. It is a museum of peoples with complex patterns of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups as well as massive biodiversity (Markakis, 1989; Gashaw, 1993; Young, 1996; Joseph, 1998; Wagaw, 1999; Tronvoll, 2000; Mengisteab, 2001; Habtu, 2003; Keller, 2005; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Population Census Commission, 2007; Van der Beken, 2007; Semela, 2014; Wassie, 2020; Berhe and Gebresilassie, 2021; Desalegn, Aynalem and Tassie, 2021).

Studies conducted in Ethiopia focusing on the positive contribution of ethnocultural diversity in ensuring peace and development are limited. They do not also address the potential opportunities that cultural diversity has in ensuring peace and development in the country. For instance, Adamu (2013a) tried to look into the political challenges of diversity in Ethiopia. Ottaway (1994) stressed that ethnic-based federalism and a secession clause inserted into the federal constitution could lead to the country's disintegration at the end of the day, with the assumption that allowing cultural diversity to flourish would lead to state disintegration. Lemma (2011) conducted a study on Addis Ababa City considering the economic benefits of cultural diversity in business activities in the city. Levine (1974) wrote about the state and its people from the view of a centralizing and homogenizing state.

Some other studies also focused on students' conflict and conflict resolution mechanisms in higher education institutions (Mekonnen and Endawek, 2007; Yirga and Bejital, 2007; Adamu, 2013b; Bazezew and Neka, 2017; Yadessa, 2018; Ashine, 2019; Wereta, 2019; Abebe, 2020). Epple and Thumbauville (2012) also focused their study on how the development agenda affected the people thereby instigating conflict that resulted from the country's laws and policies where some of the enacted policies clash with certain cultural values of the people. Further, Sempon (2013), presented that linguistic diversity has a negative impact, and Abbay (2004) pointed out that diversity in multiethnic Ethiopia has been a challenge to state-building.

Despite the potential opportunities that ethnocultural diversity could play in ensuring peace and development in multiethnic and multinational states, there are no studies conducted so far in Ethiopia to uncover the opportunities embedded in ethnocultural diversity that could be employed to transform different forms of conflicts and ensure peace and development in the country. Thus, the objective of this article is to assess the possible contributions of ethnocultural diversity to peace and development in Ethiopia.

Theoretical Framework

This article is guided by the social capital theory that began to get prominence since 1980 following the works of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993). Referring to different sources, Bhavnani and Backer (2007: 2) tried to describe social capital in a number of ways as "structures of cooperation, civic engagement, political equality, trust, and tolerance; frequency of social contact, reciprocity, voluntarism, and optimism." According to Coletta and Cullen (2000), social capital is a subcategory of social cohesion, which they describe as the absence of latent social conflict along economic, ethnic, or political lines and the existence of solid social ties as indicated by high levels of interpersonal trust, reciprocity norms, membership in cross-cutting associations, and effective and responsive institutions.

The social capital theory is the one that emerged and became important in the last two decades in social sciences (Rogošić and Baranović, 2016). Though there were earlier works by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), the concept of social capital became much more common after the work of Putnam (1993) and Smith (2007). Initially, during the time of Bourdieu, the concept was used to describe how elites establish linkages with one another to keep their power; nonetheless, there was an exclusionary tendency during those old ages in the usage of the term in the social and political lives of the elites.

Contrarily, Putnam (2000) assumed a different path and emphasized the positive role that social capital plays in linking, bonding, and bridging members of social groups by promoting positive social relations and the construction of productive social contact and association. Hence, social capital is defined as the relationships that people have with one another in social networks, as well as the reciprocity and reliability standards that these relationships foster. Therefore, the social capital theory states that linking and bonding social capital has the capacity to create strong social bonds within a group and the bridging social capitals establish links across groups, and these could serve as a means to maintain and sustain peace within and across different social groups.

Social capital is important in a number of ways. First, it makes it easier for members of social groups to handle their issues. Hence, cooperation makes people better off. Second, it acts as a lubricant to facilitate community advancement by fostering trustworthiness with other citizens. Third, it helps in the understanding of the numerous connections between our fates as diverse groups, which helps us to live better lives, which is important to develop greater levels of compassion, tolerance, and understanding for the suffering of others. Finally, it is also important to succeed in life using information that one receives through his/her social networks and social relations (Smith, 2007).

This idea is supported by Bhavnani and Backer (2007: 1) who stated that networking that transcends one's own immediate social or group boundaries is essential because it produces a type of social capital that prevents or lessens conflict, therefore, "... higher levels of social capital leads to greater associational life." The premise is that, possibly, a higher level of social capital is associated with lower levels of political violence.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research Design and Approach

This article employed a constructivist approach to research that assumes reality is socially constructed and subjective, and a descriptive research design was used to collect data from both primary and secondary sources. A descriptive design was adopted since it is significant to describe, interpret, and give meaning to results obtained from both primary and secondary sources through interviews and desk reviews.

2.2. Study Area

The study was conducted in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is one of the most populous states in Africa with over 110 million people. Currently, the country is a federal state with eleven regional states and two city administrations. There are over eighty ethnocultural groups that were brought together as a result of historical developments in the second half of the 19th century.

2.3. Study Participants

For the purpose of this research, public officials at different levels and representatives of key federal offices, such as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the House of People's Representatives, the House of Federation, the Forum of Federation, the Office of Prosperity Party, the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia, the Institute of Policy Studies, the Ministry of Peace and its associate offices (the Office of Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission, and the Peace and Reconciliation Commission) were addressed during the data collection period.

On the other hand, representatives of competitive political parties such as the Ethiopian Citizenship Party for Social Justice (EZEMA), the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Balderas for Equality and Justice, Amhara National Movement, Enat Party, Freedom and Equality Party, Harari Democratic Party, and Addis Tewuld Party, were also the research participants. Furthermore, other knowledgeable persons from all walks of life were consulted.

In all cases, the research participants were purposively selected, and the purposive sampling technique was employed to select them based on their relevance, in terms of their political and social involvement, academic background, and position in government and society.

2.4. Data Collection Methods

This research utilized in-depth (IDI) and key informant interviews (KI) to gather data on the political and social history of Ethiopia in relation to the study topic. In this case, thirty-six IDIs were conducted with knowledgeable individuals from diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, the KI was also employed to gather expert opinions and perspectives on the issue. Accordingly, twenty-four KIs were conducted with federal government representatives, political party representatives, religious leaders, and community leaders and elders. Further, another data-gathering method used was a review of the relevant literature, and the kinds of literature in the areas of social sciences relevant to peace studies were reviewed considering the objectives of the article. In the process of data collection, an interview guide was used as a tool to collect data.

2.5. Types of Data and Data Sources

Primary and secondary data were collected for the purpose of this research. The data were gathered through fieldwork and reviews of relevant literature pertaining to the study topic. Fieldwork was undertaken to collect primary data through IDI and KI whereas secondary data was collected through the critical evaluation of existing relevant literature in the area.

2.6. Data Analysis Method

Data were collected from informants through in-depth and key informant interviews and relevant literature reviews. The data that were collected through interviews were transcribed, in which verbatim transcription was used, and converted into text in the form of written reports. The transcribed data were sorted out and cleaned using the process of “data winnowing” as described in Creswell and Creswell (2018: 305), a process that is used to screen the relevant information from junk in order to condense that data into smaller most important groups. Finally, the document was coded and thematized following which thematic analysis, which offers a totally qualitative, in-depth, and nuanced explanation of data, was applied to give meaning and explanation to the interview results. Similarly, data obtained from relevant literature reviews were thematically organized and analyzed accordingly.

3. Results

3.1. Diversity’s Contribution to Peace and Development

The world in which we live is inherently diverse (Hassan, 2004; Sachs, 2006; Bathily and D’Alessandro, 2021) and ethnocultural diversity can be defined in many ways such as diversity of culture, language, ethnicity, religion, political views, etc. (Report, 2009). Ethiopia, which is a diverse state in many ways (Divine, 1972, as cited in Bayu, 2021), is not unique in this regard. According to most of the research participants, unlike what many Ethiopianist writers and people with unitarist thinking pretend it to be, Ethiopia is, truly, a diverse state, which is also clearly stated in the federal constitution of 1995. They underlined that the diversity of the country extends from ethnocultural (human) to non-human elements. They stated that Ethiopia’s diversity is real and not an imagined one (IDI#4,8,11; KI#9,17,20).

Considering the necessity of peace and development in the reality of mankind, the KIs pointed out that all over the world, people work towards peace and development, and wars, conflicts, destructions, and demolitions are not inherent alternatives to be lived with by the people. It was emphasized that diversity is a flavor of life, where life without diversity is like having only one type of dish in which there are no opportunities to enjoy verities of tastes and odors. Therefore, variety is enjoyable. It is a condition in which someone tastes the beauty of life in languages, cultures, and religious practices of different ethnocultural groups. They are life-giving to the ingroups and outgroups or insiders and outsiders to the cultural groups which are practically seen when people share life across different ethnocultural groups in their day-to-day lives (KI#15, 24).

It was stated that different people think of ethnocultural diversity as a challenge to peace and development and a threat to state existence. This problem has a direct and indirect relationship with political power competition, the country's history of oppression and assimilation, and competition over resources due to both actual and perceived scarcity and demographic factors in some places. Most of the time, it is thought that ethnoculturally diverse people do not tend to understand one another. The expectation is that they develop a negative attitude that becomes a challenge to peace and development due to historical biases in many ways (KI#11, 14; IDI#10).

Nevertheless, the participants detailed that ethnocultural diversity is not a threat to the peaceful coexistence of people of different ethnocultural groups. For them, in ethnocultural diversity, there are various social capitals that people have developed over time through sociocultural, historical, and religious interactions that define their relational life and help them to create a strong social bond and, thereby ensure peace and development. These social capitals create an opportunity where people come together to share ideas, issues, beliefs, and ways of life, and build positive interethnic and intercommunal interactions (IDI#14, 18, 30). One of them stated:

The slogan 'Our diversity is our beauty' is always right, but a problem arises when different groups mobilize this ethnocultural diversity to realize their ambitious political desires. The idea that problems emerge from the country's diversity and multiculturalism is groundless. In no part of the world, including Ethiopia, it is impossible to reach such a conclusive idea that multiculturalism is the root cause or mother of all problems. Rather, our diversity makes us better understand one another and live together in a complex social world. It is important to understand the needs and interests of diverse ethnocultural groups as much as possible and accommodate them accordingly. When we do this, we benefit from the opportunities offered by diversity for social, political, economic, and cultural transformations (IDI#30).

In this quotation, people living together, helping the needy, practicing different cultural festivals, and performing rituals together are reflections of the beauties of diversity as stated by the informant.

As described by one of the participants, there is an opportunity in ethnocultural diversity. This is because certain ethnic groups have historical circumstances that have resulted in the development of different social matrices. In many ways, they developed an important culture of living with one another and sharing experiences. According to this informant, it is important to enlighten members of the ethnocultural group which is critical to ensuring peace and development. Life experiences with a group are different from others and sharing thoughts, ideas, and experiences helps to positively shape the views and ways of thinking of others. In this regard, homogenous societies lack different ways to transform problems and build intercultural peace and development. The informant added that conflict does not only occur in heterogeneous societies. Heterogeneous societies can be prone to conflicts and lack of peace, but they also have an opportunity where they can pool resources in diversity to manage and transform their problems to ensure peace and development (IDI#2).

Moreover, ethnocultural diversity is important for intercultural learning and communication. People living in different places have the chance to share knowledge and skills across cultures that help contribute to the development of different social groups. The culture of work is different across diverse ethnocultural groups. The best experience, in this case, is the Konso people's terracing and environmental protection culture that could be applied in other parts of the country. Other ethnocultural groups also have unique work habits. Hence, the prevalent existence of ethnocultural

diversity is significant in the exchange of skills and knowledge that largely contribute to development. It is all about intercultural learning across ethnocultural groups (KI#2, 10, 20).

Regarding the issue of peace, one of the KIs stated:

Peace is the source of everything. Therefore, people are always longing for peace. In Ethiopia, at a societal level, no one desires a war, and in the history of this country, there has never been a time when a conflict has taken place between different groups for being ethnoculturally diverse. If that is the case, it is up to research findings to reveal it to the people. But as far as researchers are concerned, there is no such conflict in the history of this country. Hence, it is possible to say that, so far, there have never been conflicts in the name of ethnicity or diversity in cultures. Consequently, most of the time, conflicts in Ethiopia are politically motivated conflicts (KI#20).

According to this quotation, conflicts in Ethiopia are politically driven and elite-agitated, not due to ethnocultural diversity, and are not caused by the country's diversity.

Most participants described that most of the time, irrespective of their ethnic background, different community members live and work together, participate in development works, lead their everyday life communally, and share and enjoy holidays beyond what is publicized on television and other media outlets (IDI#15, 27). Especially, one of them underlined that this was what he experienced in his childhood. He narrated that he grew up in a small village where people from different ethnocultural (the Sidama, Oromo, Gurage, Silte, Sodo/Wolayita, and Amhara) and ethnoreligious backgrounds (Muslims, Christians, and traditional belief followers) lived together. He explained that he had been breastfed by mothers from these different cultural backgrounds, and stressed he believes that he shares the blood of almost all members of the community in one way or another (IDI#27).

Moreover, he stated that there were marriage relationships in the area across the different ethnocultural groups. Hence, his mother was from a Muslim background and his father was from an Orthodox Tewahido Christian family. Further, other close relatives, from both sides, were also followers of traditional beliefs. However, whenever there were certain social and cultural events, they shared everything respectfully. The culture of respect and tolerance among the people was so great that they equally participated in every social affair. There were also almost no cultural taboos (in the sense of not eating meat slaughtered by others) in their social relationships. This shows how people used to live peacefully together in previous years. According to him, this has, probably, been practiced also in different parts of the country and stressed that different from TV shows, if one goes deep into the local community, there is a strong social capital upon which their social cohesion is established which, in turn, highly contributes to peaceful inter-social and inter-communal relations (IDI#27).

A similar experience was shared by another participant who was born and grew up in Bale, Oromiya. While describing Muslim-Christian relations, he stated that the life of the Ethiopian people is beyond what is taught either in Mosques or Churches. What is mostly taught in both cases is not to eat meat slaughtered by any of them but in the lives of the common people, this is not an issue and he strongly stated that people share a peaceful communal life (IDI#15).

It was further described that the different ethnocultural groups in Ethiopia did not come to know the value of peace through formal scientific learning, teaching, and research. The value of peace is embedded in their social and cultural lives. They reflect these values in different ways in their daily activities. They use it to bless people by saying, "May you not lack peace, and during farewells, they say, Be in peace, or May the peace of God be with you," (KI#23). This shows that their knowledge of the value of peace is very deep. This is common across all ethnocultural groups in the country. Therefore, the contribution of ethnocultural diversity to peace and development is so immense that Ethiopians have a positive advantage in being ethnoculturally diverse reciprocally.

3.2. Cultural Diversity and Its Management in Ethiopia

According to KIs, in a country where there is well-managed and equal treatment of ethnocultural groups, and a democratic and well-functioning federal system is ensured, ethnocultural diversity is an opportunity. It is a gift of nature that everyone needs to enjoy. It is practically a resource from which

we can exploit huge prospects for ensuring peace and development, and in this regard, Ethiopia has untapped resources. Both historically and socially, ethnocultural diversity is an asset. There is no problem with being ethnoculturally diverse. At a community level, people are always seen to be living peacefully together. They settle their differences through their cultural practices. There are also many endogenous mechanisms that they use to build social cohesions. However, in a condition where there is ill management, unfair treatment, and the employment of an exclusionary system at all levels—socially, politically, culturally, and economically, the negative consequence of ethnocultural diversity outweighs what is gained from it (KI#15, 18).

All cultures have their own way of defining peace and peace-promoting ways of living together. Peace reached through endogenous peacebuilding and conflict transformation mechanisms is more stable and sustainable than the liberal approach to peace. It has the power to create more sustainable peace. Such mechanism of peacebuilding and conflict transformation has lived within the traditional and cultural lives of the society since time immemorial before the coming and introduction of modern peacebuilding and conflict transformation mechanisms. As to these informants, using force or the military was not seen as the only means of problem-solving in different ethnocultural groups. But through time, the socio-politico-cultural transformation and the intrusion of foreign cultures affected the endogenous approaches that different communities used to manage their problems, and kings and emperors, as well as different regional governors, began to use force as an alternative solution to maintaining peace and a means of subjugation and controlling peoples (KI#7,9,11; IDI#7).

The introduction of ethnic-based federalism and the political culture that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) adopted in 1991 further exacerbated the problem over the last twenty-seven years which created a rift across the ethnocultural groups (KI#18, 21; IDI#12, 21, 22). However, this view was refuted by other participants who stated that the problem was not about adopting ethnic-based federalism but rather the failure of the government to implement it in the right way as per the provisions of the state constitution. They underscored that the political system that the EPRDF introduced gave a chance to those once marginalized in the history of the country to meaningfully participate in the politics of the country even though there were also unfair representations during those periods (KI#1, 17; IDI#9, 11, 16, 25).

The Ethnic-based federalism that Ethiopia adopted could be the best federal arrangement model in the world if properly exercised, free from intervention by the central government for the sake of sustaining its power. In developing countries in general and the Ethiopian case in particular, power means everything. In these countries, it was stated that elites run for election not surely for the well-being of the society but rather for their material fulfillment. Political power is considered the source of economic power as it empowers them to exploit public resources by becoming key role players in the political spheres running after their economic benefits (KI#12, 22).

In line with this idea, an IDI interestingly described that the outgoing and incoming Kenyan members of parliament promulgate new laws at the end and the beginning of their tenure. The outgoing team designs a law that doubles and sustainably secures its benefits after leaving office whereas the incoming team focuses on laws that best keep their interest while they are in office. Focusing on Ethiopia, this informant described that there is no problem with the constitution and the federal arrangement. However, what has complicated the problem of this country and the issue of ethnocultural diversity as the mother of every problem is the way the ruling party manages everything for its politico-economic benefits (IDI#16).

Concerning the current crises in Ethiopia, such as mass eviction and displacement in different regional states, merciless killings of prisoners being taken out from prison houses, imprisonments without the due process of laws, etc., it was stated that two factors lay behind the exacerbated problem of peace in the country. The first is the way the government is managing problems where it is opting force to a negotiated settlement of issues with groups that believe they have a stake in state affairs. Research participants from the competitive political parties stressed their grievance against harassment that the government is doing to their members and supporters and described that even

though they complained explicitly in writing to the government, no one considered their appeal (KI#4,5). Particularly, it was stated that with the OLF, an agreement that was made with the leaders after a government change in 2018 was not put into implementation. Contrarily, through time, members began to be hunted down, thrown into jail, and killed. Many families were dispersed on the accusation of having links with the OLF. Participants from the EZEMA and Balderas, as well as the OFC, further elaborated their concerns regarding the unjustified imprisonment and killings of their members and supporters by an unknown entity across the country (KI#11, 18).

On the other hand, as stated by one of the KIs, the issue with the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) and the people of Tigray, what is being done to them, is against the principle of the rule of law. Though there was an interest-based politically motivated conflict between the federal government and the TPLF based in Tigray (Mekelle), the common people of Tigray living across the country have been suffering from mistreatment by the federal government security forces and agents in the form of mass imprisonment and removed from their works in government and non-government institutions (KI#3,12).

The second critical factor behind the complicated peace problem in today's Ethiopia is the government's failure to keep the promise that was made when it came to power in 2018 in front of the parliament. According to this informant, the government is working towards centralizing the state system more than ever and people are being imprisoned based on their differences in political views, and certain groups of society are generally defined and systematically excluded from the system because they strongly oppose the centralizing and unifying tendency of the government. This shows that the government is less interested in critically working for peace (KI#16; IDI#18, 30, 31).

Further, there is a problem in acknowledging diversity in this country. Against the existing reality, most think that Ethiopia is the land of Christians and Semitic culture, which is largely known for adherence to Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Christianity and speaking of the Amharic language. Furthermore, most of the time, people were given derogatory nomenclatures (case in point- galla to the Oromo, wolamo to the Wolayita, gudela to the Sidamas, janjero to the Yem, shankilla to the Benishangul Gumuz, ...) and even these days, in some cases, they use them to ridicule the society (KI#20,24). Additionally, people tend to undermine one another using pejorative terms. This has gone even to the level of racism where one group thinks in terms of its ethnic superiority at the expense of other groups. Since 1991, though legal procedures defined place names to be called after their original names of the pre-formation of the modern Ethiopian state, (for instance: Adama to Nazareth, Bishoftu to Debre Zeit, Bule Hora to Kibre Mengist, Ambo to Hagere Hiwot), many use it in their communication blatantly, a name that even the regional government does not use in its administrative procedures (KI#10).

Generally, some of the participants stated that there is a chauvinistic view ruling over this country seen from different perspectives. There is labeling one another as narrow and cocky, leading to conflict in society. For instance, the Oromo were called 'narrow' during the EPRDF regime but no one dares to investigate why it is said so, even though the term does not represent the identity of the Oromo people. According to informants, the people were labeled like this since they are uncompromising with their identity and natural freedom. The Oromo political parties, mostly the competitive ones, are always in favor of the real implementation and practicality of the constitutional rights enshrined in the constitution in the right way. They want the Oromo people to enjoy political and economic freedom that they have been denied in the Ethiopian political system since the creation of the modern Ethiopian state. The Amhara have also been called chauvinists but the people are going barefoot and they are wearing dabaloo¹ Hence, by what standard they are called cocky is not clear while leading a destitute life which mostly shows us that there is illiteracy and a lack of civilization in this country, where the so-called educated and political elites even do not understand the social reality of the people of the country (KI#1, 17; IDI#3,14,17).

¹ A traditional cloth worn in the rural areas of the Amhara region

Therefore, these and other similar socio-political factors are challenges that undermine cultural diversity and positive interethnic and intercultural relations in Ethiopia. These issues make ethnocultural diversity difficult and a source of conflict in this country. Hence, for positive social relationships, and to use opportunities in cultural diversity, any concerned body should work to avert the negative attitude that has so far been built in generations.

Diversity and Endogenous Mechanisms of Conflict Transformation

Although the modern conflict transformation mechanisms (the legal court system) and modern education system obscure the role that endogenous conflict transformation mechanisms could play in ensuring peace, the KIs, and IDIs revealed that these days there are practices in conflict transformation works across the different ethnocultural groups (KI#6,17; IDI#14,19). Various studies also reveal that at local levels, different ethnocultural are working towards establishing peace and harmony among communities (Alemie and Mandefro, 2018; Agalu, 2020; Muluken, 2020; Bekelcha *et al.*, 2021).

The KIs and IDIs stated that the Oromiya Regional State Government has declared a proclamation to establish an endogenous court system in the region. This was done by recognizing the equal, or even better, importance of endogenous approaches to peacemaking and conflict transformation with the formal (modern) legal court system. They stressed that ethnocultural diversity is endowed with various social capitals that serve better in ensuring peace and development. It is important for value exchange and intercultural learning. When people come together, they share many things like the value of respect and tolerance, environmental protection and conservation, or generally how to deal with all forms of life from humans to non-human creatures. Here, they emphasized that what is important is, therefore, looking for an integrated approach in the process of peacebuilding and conflict transformation to ensure peace and development (KI#7, 23; IDI#6, 10, 19).

Almost all of the research participants stressed that local intercommunal activities such as daboo/guuzaa, dugda, daadoo, jigii, and quuqubee/equb and afooshaa/idir are important in creating positive social relationships and cohesive communities, regardless of ethnic and cultural background. According to these informants, ethnocultural diversity is an asset in multiethnic states, as it has positive impacts in ensuring peace and development. In the Oromo tradition, Haadha Siinqee plays a role in managing and settling conflicts (KI#16, 19; IDI#14,34,35). In the Gurage ethnic group, elders are sent to the raiders' village with reeds to plead for them to return the cattle (IDI#5, 28, 29). In the Gamo society, elders carry grasses and stones to stand between the parties in conflict (KI#9, 10; IDI#10, 28).

Informants further described that for the Sidama ethnic group, a new year, Fiche Chembelala, is celebrated each year with different cultural songs and dances and a variety of cultural dishes. However, before the New Year's celebration, they necessarily perform a ritual process. They also conduct a reconciliation process among groups that have been at odds over the past year. This is to welcome the New Year with peace of mind and heart. Everyone forgives truly and there will be no one who welcomes the New Year with an unclean spirit, heart, or mind. Traditional chiefs and endogenous religious leaders also play a role in managing conflicts from further escalation. This is done by bringing the parties in conflict together to discuss and justify their issues/truthfulness in a face-to-face modality. This shows that dialogue and communications, support and assistance to one another, and awareness and understanding of the way of life of the other ethnocultural group are significant in promoting social cohesion and further exploiting positive opportunities in ethnocultural diversity (KI#2; IDI#7, 23).

Generally, the Office of the Ministry of Peace has collected and compiled existing social capital across the diverse ethnocultural groups in the country. In most cases, they are more or less similar in their practices. They are represented by a council of elders, women, and youth, and meetings are held under the shadow of big trees. The way they work to manage conflicts and ensure peace in their respective localities is also almost similar. For justice inquiry, and truth and theft investigation, they

use different natural and cultural materials which people hold and confess whether they have committed a crime to any other person or not. These social capitals also have the nature of linking/bridging and bonding within and across different communities (KI#7; IDI#9, 11, 21).

Based on this, these social capitals are classified into three different functional categories. The first are the ones that establish links and bonds within and between different community members thereby strengthening effective social communication; second, those that play a role in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in post-conflict periods; and lastly, the transboundary social capitals that people use to manage conflicts beyond their immediate ethnic or clan groups. Each of these and the community in which they are practiced are discussed hereunder.

The linking and bonding social capitals include the Gadaa, Siinqee, Guddifachaa, and Qanafa (Oromos); Yeferes Abat, Yelam Ras, and Yewuha Abat (Agawo Hawi); Halaale, Yaka, Luwa, Affini, and Fiche Chembelala (Sidama); Kamakase (Yem); Medi'a and Dagu (Afar), and Adanye Yebali Kinat Sera (Silte). Others that are commonly practiced across the country are edir and equb. There are also social capitals that are commonly practiced by people who adhere to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity irrespective of their ethnic identities. These are tsewa, sembeta, yekerestena abat, and yeneseha abat (KI#8, 22, 24; IDI#9, 15, 36).

The second category, the post-conflict peacebuilding social capitals that play a significant role in ensuring peace, and some of these are shimglina which is practiced throughout the country but in different names; zeweld, senyesegeed, kiflo, and mezerd (Raya-Qobo people); Abagar (north and south Wallo); Erufo Mereba, Aba Aga, Abagar, and Sora Aba Orma (Wallo Oromo); Areqisgi and Mehey, and Yelam Ras (Agaw Hawi); Shemerneh/Merkeba (Waghimra); ewus (afersata/awuchachegn) common throughout the country during the imperial era; Gadaa, jaarsummaa, gumaa, gondoaroo, siinqee, haadha yaa'ii biyyaa, and jaarsa biyyaa (the Oromos); Xeer, gedfedisi, and gedhosti (among the Somalis); heeraa (Harar); timba, tahini'aya, nemo, ashora/albura, and shumbu (Benishangul Gumuz); sanganena, Bayito, and demergra gerebo (Tigray); gereb, medi'a, and maro (Afar and Wajrat); Affeni, dugumale, Halaale, yaka, and Luwa (Sidama); dere-duleta/dere-waga (Gamo, Gofa, Wolayita, and Dawuro); Wursa (Basketo); Hata-Alate (Ale); helta (Konso); hoketa (Kambata); seera (Halaba); getsera (Hadya); bitante and gome (Gofa); chimata nelig nesowoga (Gamo); chima and aliso waga (Zeyise); gidicho wagansi gondoro (gidicho); deha'i and kimiyuma (Derashe, Mosiye, Mashole, and Kumuse); chimuntanta sera (Burji); boko (Kore); shatintha zaba (Konta); kesh (Ari); mageno (Gedeo); worafo (Shakicho); Otho (Kafa); and Ku'ar Muon (Nuer) (KI#9,18; IDI#32, 33).

The third category is those transboundary social capitals that play a role in conflict transformation and maintaining peace beyond the immediate ethnic or clan boundaries. These are the michu and harma hodha (Gumuz); the Gereb (Afar and Wajrat); guddifachaa, moggaasaa, gondoaroo, and haadha yaa'ii biyyaa (Oromos); Xeer and Xeer Dhiblee (Somali); maro fe'iyima and ketayza (Afar); luwa (Sidama); getsera (Hadya); gidicho wagarsi gondoaroo (Gidicho); deha and kemayuma/kemuma (Derashe, Mosiye, Mashole, and Kumuse); and Boko (Kore). Blessing and cursing are also other capital commonly practiced throughout the country (KI#7; IDI#24, 26).

However, informants accentuated that, different socio-political factors have an impact on exploiting the potential of ethnocultural diversity for ensuring peace and development in Ethiopia. An oppressive, exploitative, divisive, and assimilative political system put in place since the country was instituted as a unified state either directly or indirectly downplayed opportunities in ethnocultural diversity. Different ethnocultural groups were denied the opportunity to develop and promote their languages and other cultural values that could have positively contributed to the sustainable development of the country. Therefore, the lack of democratic governance is the bedrock of problems in political governance due to which even today the country is facing crises of all forms (KI#3, 20, 23; IDI#1, 2, 5, 13, 20).

4. Discussions

Diversity is a salient characteristic of humanity and different literature affirm that the world is truly diverse and multicultural in many ways (Hassan, 2004; Sachs, 2006; Bathily and D'Alessandro, 2021) including ethnocultural diversity (Report, 2009). Ethiopia is also a country that is known for its ethnocultural diversity as established by different literature (for instance, Hartmann, 2008; Gashaw, 1993; Joseph, 1998; Wagaw, 1999; Tronvoll, 2000; Mengisteab, 2001; Epple and Thubauville, 2012; Sime and Latchanna, 2016; Vasudeo, 2021). Concurrently, findings from KIIs and IIIs support the fact that the country is ethnoculturally diverse.

As discussed in different literature and also underscored by informants, the ethnocultural diversity of the Ethiopian state is a matter of historical development in the second half of the 19th century's territorial expansions and annexations (Kidane, 1997; Zewde, 2002; Habtu, 2003; Berhe, 2004; Fantini, 2007; Adamu, 2013a, b; Bayu, 2021). However, some go further to present that the old Abyssinian empire itself was an ethnoculturally diverse state (Adamu, 2013a, b; Sime and Latchanna, 2016; Sertse, Mersha, and Habtewold, 2020). This generally gives us the fact that the Ethiopian state from its inception was diverse and multicultural, in which people of different languages, cultures, and religions have lived together. Unfortunately, for a long time in the history of the country, ethnocultural diversity was not officially and legally recognized until the promulgation of the 1995 federal constitution in Ethiopia (FDRE Constitution, 1995). This was further acknowledged by the research participants who indicated that the country is diverse and multicultural ethnically.

As also described by informants and also pointed out in different literature, the issue of peace and development is a general concern of humanity. They are the primary needs and interests as well as intrinsic to any society across the world (Mahmoud, Connolly, and Mechoulan, 2018). On the other hand, conflict is also part of the life of society (Galtung, 1970). Both are social facts and realities that could be described as a single coin with two faces. Since the world society works to ensure peace and also strives to meet societal transformations and developments in a number of ways, Ethiopia and its people are not exceptional in this regard and the issue of peace and development also matters in the country.

Since time immemorial, people across the world have developed endogenous ways of working with issues of development and conflict transformation. There are mechanisms they use in conflict management and peacemaking as well as the way they nurture generations on how to live in a multicultural world. In working with these issues, social values and norms, what is generally called social capital, play a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviors or generally the worldview of members of society. As discussed in different literature, these social capitals are important to enlighten the mind through intercultural learning and communication, experience sharing, positive social interactions, and peaceful and harmonious relationships across diverse ethnocultural groups (Minta and Valeria, 2013; Partnership International, n.d.). The prevalence of all these qualities of social relations on the other hand is the basis for social development both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The Ethiopian people are endowed with various forms of endogenous social norms and values- the Social Capitals- that play a substantial role in ensuring peace and development in the country. As diverse as the people of the country, there are diverse social capitals that have served as a glue to cement them together as well as a bridge to link them across periods of history. They have long been using them in their everyday lives in order to transform individual and group conflicts, and environmental protections and conservations that are worth in peace work and development issues.

Development is an issue that everyone aspires to and, Ethiopia and its people are not exceptional in this case. There are a number of ways in which social capitals contribute to ensuring peace and development. From this perspective, as part of the world community, Ethiopian people strive to realize peace and development in their everyday endeavors. In this regard, being ethnoculturally diverse has a number of positive contributions to make in working towards achieving peace and

development by employing existing endogenous sociocultural norms and values what is commonly called social capitals.

This entails ethnocultural diversity which is not a challenge to peace and development as well as the peaceful coexistence of people in a diverse social environment but rather is a resource that is important to build a cohesive society through the linking and bonding as well as the bridging capacity of the social capitals as also presented by different scholars (Sama, 2007; Dryden-Peterson and Mulimbi, 2017; Kirk, Stein and Fisher, 2018; Islam, Hussain and Orthy, 2020). Otherwise, in ethnoculturally diverse states, sources of conflict in most cases are political problems for power competition and the problem of misunderstanding among members of the diverse ethnocultural groups that become the basis for the development of negative attitudes towards each other.

Even though Ethiopia, as a state was instituted through the wars and conquests of the 19th century's historical developments, and most written histories of the country are documented from this perspective, as informants described, the people of the country also developed a culture of peaceful coexistence at the local level regardless of their linguistic, cultural, and religious differences. This peaceful coexistence is the result of the social norms and values that the people developed over a long period of time that served as a glue to connect people of different languages, cultures, and religions together. This is called social capital, and the Ethiopian people are well known for this because they have been practicing it for a long time in history.

Generally, in Ethiopia, the social capitals are classified into three categories which are the linking or bonding and bridging social capitals, and conflict transforming social capitals. The linking or bonding of social capitals play a significant role in bringing together members of the community either within a specific cultural group or across members of different cultural groups. Whereas, the bridging social capital serves as a bridge to bring members of ethnoculturally different groups together thereby creating a cohesive society that nurtures the condition of peace in the society. On the other hand, the conflict transforming social capitals are important in transforming conflicts and ensuring sustainable peace after any form of conflict takes place in social relations.

5. Conclusions

Ethnocultural diversity in multiethnic and multinational states is an opportunity that serves a lot in conflict transformations, development works, exercising effective governance systems, environmental protections, natural resource conservations and management, and generally transforming society's potential and actual conflicts through the application of different endogenous mechanisms within the community or society. Therefore, in a condition where different socio-political factors are not an impeding factor, ethnocultural diversity plays a significant role in ensuring peace and development in multiethnic and multicultural states.

Further, ethnocultural diversity plays a significant role in creating a cohesive society through intercultural learning and communications as different groups have social capitals that are important in strengthening social bonds through the exchange of societal norms, values, traditions, institutions, and endogenous knowledge that are used to foster social relations thereby contributing to ensuring peace and development. Therefore, while living together, members of society exchange views and ideas across ethnocultural groups that are imperative in establishing networks within society.

Wisely considering things, as a state, Ethiopia is blessed with ethnocultural diversity. From north to south and east to west, there are different ethnocultural groups, all having developed unique endogenous conflict transformation mechanisms, systems of administration, social relations, and development works that are vital in the everyday lives of the people. There are social capitals that are not yet tapped in this country; however, they could play a great role in ensuring peace and development.

So far, according to key and in-depth interview informants from the Ministry of Peace, around thirty-seven different social capitals can positively contribute towards ensuring peace and development through creating strong social bonds, establishing networks across members of

communities, both with the insiders and outsiders, and serving as a means of educating people and enlightening minds in the form of cultural exchanges have been identified across the diverse ethnocultural groups.

However, to use the positive opportunities in ethnocultural diversity for different purposes, there has to be a conducive socio-political environment in the country. The level of development of society and the political culture of the country could either directly or indirectly influence the condition of social relations that could have a spillover effect on peace and development endeavors, and the move towards creating a cohesive society in the country. Hence, the absence of a balanced and democratic political culture that accommodates ethnocultural diversity, and a lack of a culture of respect and tolerance among members of different ethnocultural groups could nurture conflict and undermine development in several ways.

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