



Nation-building, ethnic politics and the EPRDF federal experiment

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Abstract

The EPRDF, the ruling party since 1991, adopted federalism as an appropriate political system that could be used as an instrument of managing the complex ethno-linguistic diversity and reducing the violent conflicts. Despite the adoption of federalism, ethnic politics is a critical challenge as Ethiopia continues to be worn out from within by frequent violent conflicts and shows a conspicuous symptom of nation failure and dysfunction. This situation reinstates a growing fear that Ethiopia's conflict-carrying capacity is getting overwhelmed by a superfluity of violent conflicts. Currently, the conflict-carrying capacity of Ethiopia is unable to regulate intense conflicts without loss of system integrity, in which there are several episodes with extensive human rights violations, total breakdown of political orders and transgression of justice. Therefore, the objective of this paper is dealing with the major challenges of ethnic politics in the EPRDF nation-building project.

Keywords: ethnic politics, ethnic federalism, nation-building, federal experiment

1. Introduction

Ethnic politics in Ethiopia would be better understood in the context of the birth of modern Ethiopia and the subsequent political domination, economic exploitation, religious discrimination, socio-cultural marginalization and maladministration systems exercised by the three successive ruling regimes of the country: the imperial, Derg and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). As indicated by many scholars (Teshale 1995, Aalen 2002, Vaughan 2003, Birhanu 2007, Merera 2007, Asnake 2009, Mesfin 2011) ^[9, 1, 11, 7, 9, 8] the imperial nation-building project was based on the promotion of the Amhara core identity (language, culture and religion) through the "Amharanization policy". The policy was orchestrated by the Amhara ruling class to promote the Amhara core identity by undermining the socio-cultural, economic and political desires of other ethnic groups and relegating them in to "subjected people" or "second citizens". Thus the imperial monarchy witnessed the pre-eminence of Amhara ruling class and a period when this ruling class was used as a pedestal for the distribution of socio-economic and political powers, resulting in the inability of other groups to access these opportunities. Since the country was controlled by the Amhara ruling class, the state machinery was adjusted to fulfil the interest of this group by marginalizing the non-Amhara groups from the state apparatus. Consequently, ethnicity has become the main instrument of political mobilization against the imperial order since the 1960s, and for its final collapse through a popular revolution in September 1974.

Following the collapse of the imperial monarchy the country had experienced one of the bloodiest episodes in its history due to the continuation of ethnic inequalities and grievances.

The politicization of ethnic identity, particularly by the intellectual group, sharpened the political profile of ethnicity and became the main challenge to the Derg's administration system. The rejection of the "nationality question" coupled with the repressive and dictatorial nature of the Derg aggravated the tension and led to a protracted armed struggle, more particularly with the ethno-regionalist liberation forces like the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), and many small ethnic based groups. This devastating and protracted civil war was the basic reason for the demise of the Derg's nation-building project of establishing a socialist country (Vaughan 2003) ^[11].

Soon after the downfall of the Derg in May 1991, the EPRDF took the power centre and intended to resolve the "nationality question" by exercising a federal system on the basis of ethnicity. The EPRDF believes the move to ethnic federalism increases decentralized self-administration and considers it as the only way to achieve Ethiopia's peace, stability and development. As the EPRDF assumed the major cause of violent conflict in Ethiopia was the marginalization, discrimination and oppression of the different ethnic groups of the country due to the imposition of a forceful centralized political system that rejected the rights of ethnic groups to use and promote their languages and cultures and to determine their affairs. Accordingly, it replaced the centralized government structure of the pre-1991 by a federal one having the realm of creating a "New Ethiopian State" that could survive in a united and peaceful manner (Mesfin 2011) ^[8]. However, critics assert that the EPRDF federal system and the prominence given to the principle of ethnicity have inevitably

reinforced violent conflicts. As a result, the institutionalization of ethnicity has greatly affected the economic development, political enhancement and the democratization process of the country (Aalen 2002, Merera 2003, Abbink 2006, Birhanu 2007, Markakis 2011) ^[1, 7, 2, 6]. Therefore, this paper tries to assess the relationship between ethnic politics and the EPRDF's nation-building project by dividing its federal experiment into two broad periods, i.e., the interim period (1991-1995) and the post-1995 EPRDF era respectively.

1.1. The EPRDF during the Interim Period

After the collapse of the Derg, a Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) was formed in the Peace and Democracy Conference held in Addis Ababa in July 1991. The transitional government was the composition of the Council of Representatives and the Council of Ministers. Even though twenty-seven political groups, different civic associations, prominent individuals and intellectuals had been participated in the conference, they were "self-appointed individuals, who simply claimed to represent their ethnic communities and political parties" (Birhanu 2007). Most of the participants were not only carefully selected by the EPRDF, but also they were very "weak and the potential contenders for power were excluded from the process" (Merera 2003) ^[7].

The conference was summoned after the EPRDF and some other political groups made a negotiation in London on 28th May 1991. The negotiation was organized by the USA and Britain. It was mediated by Herman Cohen, a Deputy Secretary of State for African Affairs. During the negotiation the participants made a thorough discussion on the fate of Ethiopian politics and they agreed on four major points. One, they agreed to establish a transitional government of Ethiopia in the July conference. Two, they reached in a conclusion that ethnicity to be a governing principle to establish a new political system in Ethiopia. Three, they decided the extent that the contribution of the ethno-regionalist liberation forces in the armed struggle in overthrowing the Derg to be one of the leading criterion to represent the Council of Representatives. Four, they accepted the recommendation of Herman Cohen that the EPRDF to take the mandate of restoring peace and security of the country until people's government will be elected through democratic election. Thus the negotiation of London paved not only the road for the EPRDF to the power centre, but also imprinted ethnicity to be its main brand of politics. Since that time the EPRDF has propagated the politics of ethnicity by using the mask of replacing the evil past under the guise of accommodating the ethno-linguistic, socio-economic and political diversity of the country in one political umbrella.

By using the London's agreement as a prerequisite on one hand and its military and political superiority on the other, the EPRDF identified all pan-Ethiopianist political groups, non-ethnic based political groups, and prominent individuals or parties affiliated with the Derg and then excluded from the attending conference. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the Ethiopian People's Democratic Alliance (EPDA), the Tigray People's Democratic Movement (TDMP), the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), the Worker's Party of Ethiopia (WPE) and the All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO)

are some of the political groups that were prohibited by the EPRDF from the conference under the precondition of ethnic-based political principle. For this reason, all the excluded groups strongly criticized the conference as a deception and full of cheating to legitimize the political power of the EPRDF.

Therefore, the conference was not open to all political groups of the country. Without representing the views of political pluralism in the conference, the participants assigned more than one-third of the seats of the Council of Representatives and key ministerial posts to the members of the EPRDF. For example, the Council of Representatives, which were the composition of handpicked political groups, had a total of 87 seats. Out of 87 seats, 32 for EPRDF, 12 for OLF and the remaining were allocated for the rest political groups that ranged from one to three seats. The occupation of overwhelming number of seats in the Council of Representatives helped the EPRDF "to block any legislative declaration that could obstruct its interest" in the transitional government (Birhanu 2007). While the Council of Ministers, which consisted of the Prime Minister and other cabinet members, were directly appointed by the President the TGE with the approval of the Council of Representatives. Even though the selection of cabinet posts was based on ethnic representation, there was an informal agreement that the distribution of key cabinet posts like the president, prime minister, vice chairman and secretary of the council of ministers should distribute to different ethnic groups. Surprisingly, the distribution of cabinet posts on the basis of ethnic background without considering party affiliation benefited the EPRDF more than others because its members were the representatives of almost all ethnic groups of the country. Consequently, most of the key cabinet posts (the president, prime minister, foreign affairs, defence and security offices) were allocated to the EPRDF, and the occupation of these key cabinet posts helped it to become unchallenged and uncontested political group in the transitional period (Vaughan 2003) ^[11].

During the conference, a Transitional Charter was adopted, which inaugurated a *de facto* federal system by establishing fourteen regional states principally on the basis of ethno-linguistic setting. The EPRDF considered the making of ethnicity as a noble and bold experiment inspired by a new political vision in order to recognize the principle of self-determination. Consequently, the right of "self-determination, including secession" was given to all ethnic groups of the country and included in Article 2 of the Transitional Charter. Moreover, the EPRDF assumed the charter as the first document that transformed Ethiopia into a democratic constitutional process by removing out the pre-1991 authoritarian government system. To get more acceptances from the public, the EPRDF added some crucial contents and provisions of human and democratic rights based on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). To mention a few, the preamble of the charter gives to all ethnic groups the right to administer their own affairs and effectively participate in all government organs by using the democratic principles of free, fair and proper representation. The charter also recognizes the ethno-cultural diversity and equal treatment of all ethnic groups of the country.

However, there are several claims towards the contents and provisions of the Transitional Charter. First, though the EPRDF considered the charter as a stepping stone for the oppressed ethnic groups to express their bitterness and sense of resentment against the forces of centralism, it was designed dominantly by the EPRDF members and its affiliated groups. In the preparation of the document, there was no active participation from the public and other opposition political groups, prominent individuals, politicians and the intellectual groups. Thus it was a document that was systematically and purposefully designed to sustain the political benefits of the EPRDF, rather than satisfying the demands of the Ethiopian people. Second, the inclusion of the secession clause in the charter created confusion and prompted strong public discontents throughout the country. The Ethiopian people claimed the endorsement of the right of the secession clause in the charter because of its negative impact on the national unity, integration and peaceful coexistence of the society by aggravating the vulnerability of Ethiopia for fragmentation, or for further disintegration. As the people feared and anticipated from the outset, the EPRDF allowed Eritrea's secession in 1993. The Eritrean secession took place through a peaceful referendum and became an independent country with a total of 98% vote. The Eritrean referendum for secession was took place after two years of interim period of preparations. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) played a pivotal role not only controlling the whole Eritrea by defeating the Derg in the armed struggle, but also preparing a ground for its independence peacefully. The referendum was carried out from 23-25 April 1993, and with an overwhelming majority Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia. But the secession of Eritrea did not bring long lasting peace with Ethiopia because the two countries entered into a violent conflict for two years (1998-2000). Whatever the reason may it, the conflict was very shocking, and it was considered as a war between two brothers who speak the same language, but live in to two different countries.

Roughly speaking, the EPRDF made "freedom, equal rights and self-determination of all the peoples" in the preamble of the charter as a governing principle to capture the interest of the ethno-regional political forces like the OLF, ALF, and ONLF. Plainly speaking, it was a prerequisite declaration for the secession of Eritrea before the EPLF would take a military action on the EPRDF like what it did against the Derg regime. This was evident that not only the EPLF tanks captured from the Derg joined the EPRDF troops in the capital, but also after the downfall of the Derg most of the highest military posts were in the hands of Eritrean war generals. Therefore, the EPRDF had no other alternative means to escape except recognizing the Eritrean secession officially. Whatever may be it the reason, many scholarly works confirm that the referendum was accomplished peacefully and Eritrea was born as an independent country on 27th April 1993. However, the creation of Eritrea as an independent country makes Ethiopia the only landlocked country located in the Horn of Africa. Moreover, the boundary between the two countries was not clearly demarcated, which became the basic factor for the Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998-2000.

Third, the EPRDF removed five contending political groups away from the political participation during the transitional

period. The EPRDF reduced the participation of strong political groups in the Council of Representatives, what Merera (2003) ^[7] opines that the "EPRDF leaders selectively invite weak parties most of which were created overnight and selectively excluded the potential real power contenders from the process." Theoretically, the EPRDF promised to enlarge the political space to develop all inclusive and democratic political participation in the country. But, practically the OLF, the Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) and other strong political groups were forced to withdraw from the transitional government. Gradually, the membership of the council was reduced to the representatives of the EPRDF and its allied groups as the independent representatives and other groups were completely excluded from the Council of Representatives that formed the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in the July 1991 conference. They were forced out of the transitional government by the EPRDF within the first two years of the transitional period (Lencho 1999, Aalen 2002, Vaughan 2003) ^[1, 11].

Even though many scholars forwarded different arguments for the removal of these political groups from the transitional government, Birhanu's (2007) view seems more plausible. He argues that "parties like the EPRP, which had a significant influence on the Ethiopian student movement... could have made an impact in the conference by setting contrary agendas that could derail the ambition of the EPRDF. As it was observed afterwards that the ambition of EPRDF could have suffered if it had invited the EPRP, which had a significant role in Ethiopia's political history. At least, it could have been very difficult for the EPRDF to get an endorsement of the transitional charter so easily". Similar to Birhanu's view, Lencho (1999) provides some reasons for the removal of strong political groups from the transitional government by taking the case of OLF. According to Lencho, the OLF claimed the transgression of the charter, the inappropriateness of ethnic representation and the absence of a levelled political avenue for all political groups in the transitional period. However, instead of giving political remedies for these political malaises, the EPRDF alleged OLF as a narrow nationalist group that struggled for the secession of Oromia. This forced the OLF not only to resign itself from the participation of the regional and district election in 1992, but also left the transitional government and entered into armed insurgency to secure its political supremacy in Oromia. Subsequently, the offices of OLF were closed, and its members were harassed, intimidated and tortured. The OLF officials were removed not only from ministerial and ambassadorship positions, but also from local and regional administrations. Since that time there has been no reconciliation made between the EPRDF and the OLF. Rather, many were killed, persecuted and arrested being suspected as members of the OLF. As indicated by Lencho (1999), the EPRDF's illegal measure upon OLF during the transitional period was mainly that the EPRDF would never have even a single vote in Oromia if the political space was arranged in a genuine and democratic manner. Even the EPRDF could not break the strong base of OLF in a fair political competition or without using arbitrary action.

By taking similar ruthless actions on the contending political

groups, the EPRDF remained the only strong party in the 1992 district and regional election, as well as in the upcoming national elections. In the 1992 election, for example, the EPRDF won 96.6 percent of the vote without a significant competition and meaningful participation of opposition political groups. In this election, a ten member National Election Committee (NEC) under the guidelines of the EPRDF was selected by the Council of Representatives to organize and administer the election. Accordingly, on 21st June 1992, the election was conducted. On the day of election out of 22,605 stations, elections were held in 19,148 polling stations. Around 3,457 of the total were not functioned based on the scheduled time of the election. In many areas the election was carried out in an extended time. The total turnout was estimated at more than 80% on the Election Day. According to the election results announced by the NEC, the EPRDF won 1,108 of the 1147 contested seats or 96.6%. However, the process was marred by technical problems and political controversies, such as, the withdrawal of OLF and other opposition political groups from the election, the decampment of OLF militias just before the day of election, while the EPRDF army was allowed to patrol the whole election sites, all polling stations were swamped by the EPRDF officials, and large numbers of offices of the opposition political groups were forcefully closed and remained non-functional.

After securing the election of 1992, the EPRDF strictly conducted three major political activities in the transitional period mainly to ensure its domination in the power centre. The three major activities were constitutional drafting, election for the constitutional assembly and election for the first national and regional parliaments. Accordingly, a Constitutional Commission was formed by the EPRDF in 1993 to draft a constitution, though the ultimate authority is vested in the hands of the Ethiopian people. The EPRDF assigned seven members from the Council of representatives, seven members from different political parties, three members from trade unions, three members from the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce, two members from the Ethiopian Lawyers' Association, two members from the Ethiopian Teachers' Association, two members from the Ethiopian Health Professionals' Association and the remaining three members were Women's representatives (Mesfin 2011) ^[8].

Initially, the Constitutional Commission prepared a draft constitution and provided it for public discussion in the summer of 1994. Members of the commission were largely engaged in teaching the public about the draft constitution, democracy, human rights and other constitutional provisions with a view of raising constitutional consciousness and for the development of the draft constitution. Even though different issues pertaining to the choice of the federal model, the possession of land, the issue of secession, the nature of state formation as well as the national and regional flags were raised and hot debates were conducted during the public discussion, surprisingly, no public comments were added to the draft constitution. Aalen (2002) ^[1], a close observer of the Ethiopian federal system, criticizes the process of the draft constitution as follows:

The process behind the new constitution was even less inclusive and participatory than the process behind the

transitional charter... In the constitutional process, the EPRDF totally dominated the scene. It is therefore impossible to conclude that the final confirmation of the federal solution through the constitution was based on a pact or covenant between contending political forces. The lack of broader participation and the dominance of the EPRDF in the constitutional process have a negative impact on the chances for a peaceful and constructive coexistence between the contending political forces in Ethiopia in the time after the transitional period.

Therefore, the effort of the Constitutional Commission was not accommodating to uphold the different views of the public through democratic methods. The political and ideological background of, largely the EPRDF-oriented, the commission influenced the framing of the constitution. Their power, function and commitment to contain different views was very restricted and depended on the goodwill of the EPRDF. Even though the Constitutional Commission was formed with a mandate of drafting and undertaking public discussion on the future political map of the country, in the process of constitutional design it is contended that the EPRDF has controlled the whole process to ensure its political programs by incorporating its desires and political ends in the constitution. Some of my key informants who closely observed the deliberation of the commission criticize that even the draft constitution was repeatedly modified and amended by top officials of the EPRDF before its final submission as some of the points of the commission have contrary message with the political orientation of the EPRDF. In short, the commission was guided and ordered by the EPRDF to exclusively advocate its political willing, rather than shouldering heavy responsibility for creating a broad-based constitution that would stand the challenges of Ethiopia's socio-economic situations and democratic resilience and viability. It lacks not only containing the will of the people, but also lacks great political sagacity, foresightedness and devotion. It could be because of such less transparent and inclusive process of constitutional making process and the incorporation of the political programs of the EPRDF that is the reason that most of the Ethiopian people doubt the legitimacy and accountability of the Ethiopian federal system. Having all these limitations, the EPRDF arranged a national election for the Constitutional Assembly in June 1994. The constitutional assembly election like that of 1992 has not been a free and fair one. The election was held on 5th June 1994, and a total of 1,479 candidates had contested for a 547 seats. The main task of this constitutional assembly was to ratify the draft constitution, which was already submitted to the Council of Representatives. According to the report of the Ethiopian Herald, independent candidates occupied the largest number (944) during the election, while the remaining candidates (532) belonged to 39 political groups, in which most of them were from the EPRDF and its partners. With the exception of region five, 15,162,725 were registered out of 23,923,913 estimated numbers within 26,865 polling stations in 525 constituencies. 22 constituencies were reserved for minority groups, each with a population of less than 100,000 in number (the Ethiopian Herald, No. 226, 5th June 1994).

Besides to electoral irregularities, most of the opposition political groups like the OLF, AAPO, ENUP and CAFPDE

boycotted the election. Both AAPO and ENUP claimed that the EPRDF had no mandate to rule and organize the election after its terms office of the transitional government period ended on 22nd January 1994. The two opposition parties disclosed that detention, intimidation and harassment of their members and supporters had effectively kept their parties from taking part in the election. As most of the opposition parties boycotted the election, the EPRDF and its partners captured 487 out of 547 seats of the constitutional assembly. The EPRDF, which secured an overwhelming majority of the electorate, directed the debate and final ratification of the draft constitution in the Constitutional Assembly. However, within the EPRDF dominated constitutional assembly, the independent candidates had strongly criticized the option of the federal model, the redrawing of the national flag, the issue of land ownership, the bases for carving out regional states, and the inclusion of the secession clause in the constitution. These issues were among the most contested points as a result of which the Ethiopian federalism continues to be a controversial subject in the country's political scene. It was in this politically contested situation, the elected Constitutional Assembly ratified the federal constitution with more than a 95 percent majority in December 1994 without making any constitutional compromise and accommodations (Aalen 2002, Vaughan 2003, Merera 2003) ^[1, 11, 7].

Soon after the constitution was ratified by the constituent assembly, it was decided national and regional elections should be held within six months and the national assembly should consist of no more than 550 members and should sit for five years only. It was subsequently declared that elections were to be held in June 1995. In the national assembly (the House of People's Representatives), one-third of the 550 seats were allotted to Oromia regional state, a quarter each to Amhara and SNNPRS regional states. The remaining seats were allotted to the other regional states on the basis of their population sizes. Based on the scheduled time, the first national and regional election for the House of Representatives was held in June 1995. In the election, though more than 39 ethnic based political groups were participated, the EPRDF won 471 seats or 86.10% vote of the electorate. After one month, the EPRDF-dominated parliament heralded the endorsement of the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on 21st August 1995. After strictly observing the political process of the country, Aalen (2002) ^[1] concludes that "the federal system has become exclusively the EPRDF's federal project instead of inclusively Ethiopia's federal project". This is why most of the basic federal structures and institutions, which are supposed to be perceived by the people as an independent of political party influence, have lost their neutrality and legitimacy. The major federal structures and institutional frameworks of the country are highly linked to the interest of EPRDF and its allies, rather than the interest of the Ethiopian people as a whole (Aalen 2008). Consequently, both the national and regional government institutions fell completely under the control of the EPRDF, which ultimately narrowed the political space by eliminating the diversity of political views. It transformed the political system of the country from balanced political pluralism to one-party domination, in which it controlled the apparatus of political system, economic resources and

exercised hegemonic control over other political groups of the country.

1.2. The Post-1995 EPRDF Federal System and Its Challenges

After the FDRE constitution came to in effect in August 1995, the EPRDF federal system has encountered several challenges like minority issue, one-party dominance, federal government interference, poor centre-state relations, weak political, fiscal, and administrative capacity of regional states and the prevalence of violent conflicts along ethnic lines. These challenges are emanated largely due to the controversial provisions in the FDRE constitution. For instance, in its constitution the EPRDF federal system conceives all ethnic groups in equal terms, in which it does not recognize the existence of minority groups. Thus it does not accept specific minority rights. In Ethiopian context, the concept of majority and minority is so confusing, at least constitutionally speaking. Even though the FDRE constitution uses terms like "nations, nationality and peoples", it does not give a distinct definition for them. According to Article 39 (5), the constitution defines the terms nation, nationality or people as "a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory." This constitutional definition has two fundamental problems. One, the equal treatment of ethnic groups does not take into account the differences among ethnic groups which differ enormously in size, social categories or ethnic division. Two, the constitution seems to deny the existence of any minority by conferring all ethnic groups' similar categories of rights and entitlements. On the other spectrum, however, the constitution allows for the reservation of 20 seats in the House of People's Representatives (HPR) for minority groups (see Article 54). But, the constitution does not identify the numerical threshold below which a group is to be considered a minority.

It also confirms the existence of nine member regional states and two city-state administrations. However, no convincing explanation has been provided in granting a separate regional state status for some very small ethnic groups like Harari, whereas denying the same status to the larger ones such as Sidama, Wolaita, Kafa, Hadya and Gurage, which have more than one million population each. Thus neither the population size nor the ethnic identity was a systematic and operational criterion for establishing self-government entities. It was arbitrarily and feebly constructed and imposed without a proper bargaining process among the constituting units. Therefore, disparities in the relationship between administrative boundary and "ethnic land" has been one of the main factors for violent conflicts throughout the country, as some major ethnic groups claim regional status while others need to form ethnic zone and special *wereda* (district).

Even the regional states, which have legislative, executive and judicial bodies, are forced to confirm to centrally determined priorities. They have no an internal self-autonomy to determine their own priorities. In all of cases the central government is very powerful and supreme as the EPRDF establishes an extremely centralized political system

dominated by the central government with one party political dynamics (Aalen 2002) ^[1]. Since 1991, the regional and local administration units are very weak and puppet. Such dominance has caused lack of clear check and balance of power of the central government and dependence of regions on the central government for financial and various policies and decision despite the wide range of autonomy that the constitution accords to regions. The central executive body controls all regions via its constituent and allied parties, promoting upward accountability to the party and blurs the distinction between party and state bureaucracy. Thus the extreme centralization of political system of the EPRDF undermines to a large extent the abilities of regional states to act independently. For this reason the EPRDF is referred as a unitary government in a federal guise because it is the only vanguard party, which monopolizes all political powers and follows policies that contradict with its political system.

Therefore, the political system of the EPRDF largely affects the establishment and empowerment of regional governments to determine their local affairs. This has undermined the role of regional states and the relevance of their constitutions in creating local government system appropriate to their political condition. The FDRE constitution makes a passing reference to local government, only to instruct and authorize the regional states to establish local government and determine its tiers, powers and functions. The constitution also authorizes regional states to draft, adopt and amend their own constitutions, as well as to use their constitution in designing and adopting a system and structure of local governments fitting to their social, economic and political circumstances. This is particularly important since the regional states differ from each other in terms of territorial and population sizes, ethnic compositions, economic and social circumstances. However, all levels of government structures in Ethiopia are controlled by the centre and the constitution of each regional state is symbolic and significantly null.

The EPRDF has also centralized all decision-making systems through democratic-centralism (Asnake 2009) ^[3]. Accordingly, the EPRDF followed a top-down approach, i.e., there is only one-way political channel of accountability within the organization that comes from the higher leadership to the lower. In addition to the centralization of power, the leadership style of the EPRDF is characterised by top secrecy, in which few higher leaders without the participation of the wider membership make key decisions without considering the political will of the different regional states and their communities. Under this system, first, the EPRDF is the only vanguard party that gives all political decisions at the centre; second, all government institutions are involved only in the execution of decisions passed by the EPRDF from the centre and, third, all government institutions do not have the power to influence the decision-making process of the EPRDF. Moreover, the EPRDF make strong interference in the administration of regional states, including their fiscal administration, which forced them to depend on the federal government and thereby disabling them to perform their local duties independently.

Finally, the power monopoly of the EPRDF and its consequent marginalization of other contending political groups have promoted ethnic nationalism in the country. The

political elites manipulated their ethnic backgrounds or regional enclaves in order to increase winning chance in their bid for political power. The problem of ethnic politics particularly the reckless struggle by the ethnically inclined political elites to gain power at central, regional or local levels, as well as controversies that surrounded the general image of the country contributed largely to the rise of political riots, killings and other acts of vandalism. This aspect of politicized ethnicity in the current Ethiopian situation has set one ethnic group against another with immeasurable consequences. It planted mutual suspicion and fear of domination among the different ethnic groups of the country such that the workings of the FDRE constitution became very difficult. It is on the basis of this fear of domination in the country the formation of any political activity always reflects a strong dose of ethnicism. The current Ethiopian political scenario shows the extent to which ethnic politics affects the country's dream to have democratic governance, political pluralism and socio-economic advancement. Therefore, the ethnically loaded political situation is degenerating into violent conflicts and threatens the continuation of Ethiopia as a larger nation in the world map (Merera 2003) ^[7].

2. Conclusion

After the downfall of the Derg in 1991, the EPRDF seized the power centre and endorsed a federal system by declaring ethnicity as a legitimate organizing political principle promising to bring unity-in-diversity, democracy and development; to resolve the age-old problems of the people and striving to create a "New Ethiopian State". But all these fundamental factors for adopting a federal system have confronted by a lot of challenges from the outset and most of the challenges are the result of ethnic politics. In Ethiopia, ethnic politics is a potential threat, in which it prevents the sentiment of national integration and cohesion; narrows the political space for political pluralism and eliminates genuine political contenders from the national politics. Consequently, the ethnic based political system of the EPRDF has confused the country and did not bring a remarkable economic development, political advancement and democratization process as its federal experiment revolved on the negative track-records of federalism.

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