



The paradox of the federalism and management of the ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia: The case study of the Gambella People's Regional State

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Abstract

In particular, ethnic conflicts in the GPNRS are specifically discussed in this paper as it explores the conundrum of federalism and ethnic conflict management in Ethiopia. It attempted to look at the circumstances in which federalism can either help to lessen or exacerbate ethnic tensions. It also attempted to disentangle and analyze the relationship between ethnic conflict and federalism as a result of the interaction of several factors including constitutionalism, democracy, and the rule of law in federal countries. Further, the study identified some drawbacks, such as political clienteles, tensions within minorities, and border and ethnic disputes that hinder federalism's ability to effectively manage ethnic conflicts. Moreover, descriptive and analytical analyses were conducted on data gathered using primary and secondary approaches. Concerning the study, information gathered from observation, focus group discussions, and interviews was analyzed, interpreted, and investigated using narrative and explanation. Last but not least, some suggestions for potential federalist applications include eschewing ethnically based political parties, avoiding politicizing human variety, and implementing democratic federalism.

Keywords: Federalism, ethnic conflicts, gambella, nuer, anuak

Introduction

Ethnic tensions and conflicts in particular seemed to be the worst tangle to deal with when mixed civilizations coexisted inside the same governmental jurisdiction (Van der beken, 2012). This led to the need for policy makers, practitioners, and academics in states with diverse populations to identify workable governance structures that support diversity accommodation (Vander beken, 2012; Abebe, 2012). To this end, a multicultural federal political structure that grants geographical autonomy to minority ethnic groups is believed to be a useful invention to accommodate the diversity (Abebe, 2012). However, some people are also skeptical of the ethno-federal concept of managing problems relating to identities, notwithstanding its basis. The "paradox of federalism" is what is meant to be understood from these two opposing faces (Anderson, 2015).

For proponent federalism mitigates ethnic conflicts. Succinctly scholars such as (John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, Bermeo cited in Gizachew, 2016) pinpointed that federal institutions promote successful accommodation of diversity and manages ethnic differences. Altogether for those who see the analgesic potential notwithstanding its pitfalls division of authority between regions or states remained a preferred way to control ethnic conflicts (Horowitz 1985; Anderson and Erk 2009). Federalism is also alleged to be potent instrument to manage ethnic conflicts in ethnically diverse states through the recognition of cultural and ethnic plurality (Bulmer, 2017; Gemperle, 2010; Asnake, 2009) ^[3]. Countries from western world such as Belgium, Switzerland and Canada had durable thriving experiences in accommodating cultural pluralism through this model (Abebe, 2012; Bulmer, 2017; Mesfin, 2011). On the other hand, skeptics are less passionate about the roles of federalism in accommodating diversity and mitigating ethnic and identity related conflicts. For them, federalism is not suitable for managing conflict in ethnically divided states; rather it can intensified the cleavages among ethnic

groups which can give a rise to ethnic conflicts (Teshome and Zahoric, 2008:4). Similarly, Teshome and Zahoric (2008) in their work had cited Flienner (2000), Mamdani (2003) and many other scholars orated the inability of the ethnic based federalism in mitigating ethnic conflicts. Thus, federalism based on ethnicity by and large provides a fertile ground for the ethnic conflicts, secessionist movement and suppression of the individual rights (Teshome & Zahoric, 2008:4). In the same hint, some had also opined the caution about the feasible outburst of the ethnic mobilization in the countries that adopt an ethnically based federal state structure.

Likewise, federalism also enhance the thrust of the autonomous self-government which in turn heighten the communal rallies among ethnic group to stand for the same causes notable reference is defunct soviet styled federalism (Gizachew, 2016). Hence, in developing and transitional society's ethno-federalism also augment the odds for conflict when other exogenous conditions such as intense elites and national mobilization along ethnic ground are mixed up (ibid). Among advocators and hecklers scholars of federalism who underline the startling breadth of ethnic conflict had further noted that the capacity of federalism to effortlessness or degenerate ethnic conflict depends on various factors in play (see Gizachew, 2016; Horowitz 1985; Anderson and Erk, 2009). For Horowitz (1985) skillful division of authority between regions or states and center has the potential to reduce conflict. He further stressed that the most compelling rampart to see that federalism or regional autonomy will not become just a step to secession is to reinforce those specific interests that groups have in the undivided state (Horowitz, 1985).

With reference to the above arguments both normative and empirical events on Ethiopian federal experiment in accommodating ethnic diversity are relevance to make coherent analysis on studying Ethiopian experiences particularly GPNRS. Since 1991 the country

institutionalized ethno-federal arrangement in the aftermath of the regime changes by the then Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which restructure the unitary state into federal structure (Bekalu, 2017:42) [4]. For this reason, the maneuver is to manage intra/interethnic conflict that for long ravages the historic Ethiopian state (Abbink, 2006: 4; ICG, 2009; Mesfin, 2011) [1].

Additionally, the endeavor for establishing democratic federal state is to endorse special protection to marginalized minority groups in term of power inequalities, cultural disrespect and uneven resources distribution through granting self-government to each ethnic group as a mean to halt ethnic conflicts (Abbink J, 2006; ICG, 2009) [1]. Although there are such pledges, the system imminently fails to meet its oaths rather it sway the dimensions of the conflict from national to local levels (Abbink, 2006) [1]. The evidences are inter and intra-ethnic conflict that became widespread among ethno-linguistic groups throughout the country and GPNRS in particular (Abbink, 2006; Mesfin, 2011; Dereje, 2009; Meckelburg 2005; Medhane, 2007) [1, 7, 8, 9]. GPNRS is one among the nine and now (11) ethnic based regions with the constitutionally granted powers to administer its own affairs (Article 47) FDRE constitution. The region is a home to five ethnic groups namely; the Nuer, Anuak, Majang, Opuo and Komo which are usually referred to as "indigenous peoples of the region". Additionally, the region is also inhabited by immigrants from other parts of Ethiopia which are collectively called as "highlanders" (Casco, 2013; Dereje, 2009; Meckelburg, 2005; Medhane, 2007; Young, 1999) [5, 7, 8, 9, 12]. Therefore, this research had tried to assess the paradox of Ethiopian federalism and management of the ethnic conflict with particular emphasis to Gambella Peoples' National Regional State (GPNRS).

Research Design and Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study the researcher had employs some research tools in collecting and analyzing necessary data. Thus, the research method used in this study is qualitative with both primary and secondary data sources. As a result, interviews of the key informants and the reviewing of the relevant legal documents were done for the case of the primary data. While, reviewing related literatures on the topic were also used in the case of secondary data. In addition to this, the researcher also employed non-probability (purposive) sampling in selecting participants. So, 10 participants were interview from the federal and regional government officials plus other stakeholders. Some other interviewees were also selected from the elders who are well informed with the situation after the adoption of the federal government. Hence, youths within the region were also contacted for FGD because they are the main providers of conflict labors.

Research Findings and Presentation

Federalism and Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia

Ethiopia became federal state after the downfall of the military junta in 1991 as the result of the protracted civil war waged by the ethno nationalist coalition party known as - Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) against the regime (Abbink, 2006) [1]. The coalition is the composition of the four major ethno nationalist groups of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO),

Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), and South Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF). However, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) predominated the political setting of the coalition (Abbink, 2006; Assefa, 2006; Asnake, 2009; Vander Be ken, 2012) [1, 2, 3].

The new regime promised to bring to an end the lingering ethnic conflicts through adopting ethnic federalism. The ethnic federal model recognized the right of the ethnic groups later termed as nation, nationalities and people to self-government with the intent to abated ethnic conflicts. Thus, ethnic self-governments were created to empower the subjugated ethnic communities' by the past successive regimes (Abbink, 2006; Asnake, 2009) [1, 3]. To ensure this, local ethnic elites were hailed from their locality to administer their respective regions with the autonomous powers to make and enforced the laws and orders. In fact, it had empowers some disenfranchised groups, despite the strong dominant of the ruling party (EPRDF) via its ordered party structure (Semir, 2019) [10].

Initially, the system had in some cases successfully attempted to manage inter/intra-ethnic conflicts through creation of the local autonomy for the ethnic groups. Despite this, however, some others contended that ethnic based federalism in Ethiopia had failed to address its intended purpose of managing ethnic tensions. However, it slightly diverted the causes of the conflict to local context than at national (Abbink, 2006; Bekalu, 2012) [1]. Evidently, since the onset of the ethnic federalism in 1991 the occurrence of the ethnic conflicts becomes rampant in most parts of the country, if not all. The causes of these conflicts are issues related to land, grazing land and water resources, settlements, regional hegemony, access to state resources (political and socio-economic), language policy in education and administrative boundaries (Aelan cited in Bekalu, 2012; Semir, 2019; Yonas, 2019) [10, 11].

Similarly, Semir Yusuf (2019) [10] further renowned that ethnic federalism in Ethiopia had droved ethnic conflicts for two reasons. On one hand, the marginalized ethnic groups still felt oppressed, due to the political preponderance of the one ethnic group. The other is the severe polarization amid 'indigenous' (owners of the regions) and 'immigrants' (settlers), these often ignited ethnic conflicts (Dereje, 2006; Semir, 2019) [10]. These are particularly true especially in the multiethnic regional states such as Southern Region, Benishangul- Gumuz and Gambella Region (Dereje, 2006; Vander beken, 2012). In contrast, now a day, some scholars associated the recent violent ethnic conflicts with the issues such as contending ethno- nationalism, porous borders and volatile state and party structure (Semir, 2019; Yonas, 2019) [10, 11].

To this end, Semir Yusuf (2019) [10] contended that ethnic based federalism in Ethiopia had irony implications on the ethnic conflicts; empowering on one hand and disempowering ethnic groups on the other. These absurdities rendered the ethnic based federalism with dual purposes; to manage and escalate ethnic conflicts for the empowered and disempowering ethnic groups respectively (Semir, 2019) [10]. Certainly, these paradoxical trends of the Ethiopia ethnic federal model in regulating ethnic conflicts rendered Gambella Region with no exception owing to the perennial ethnic turmoil between various ethnic groups after 1991 (Dereje, 2006).

Ethnic Conflicts in the Gambella People's National Regional State

Now a day, ethnic conflict is the most widespread social event in the contemporary world were the interaction between various ethnic groups become inevitable with several manners of spatial, political, socio- economic and cultural relations among each other (Mohammadazeh, 2016). However, in many countries some ethnic groups have been in peaceful co- existent and some other had also experienced fairly relative harmonious ethnic relations throughout the long periods either in the pre or post conflict period (Caselli & Coleman, 2011). Likewise, ethnic relation in the Gambella region is historically characterized by both conflict and cooperation. These also account for the dynamism of their socio-economic and political relations in the region throughout the history; however, the former is the most dominant feature (Cascoa, 2013; Dereje, 2011; Medhane, 2007; Seyoum, 2015) [5,9].

As the result, the recurrent conflict between the Nuer and the Anywaa, Majang versus highlanders and the later with the Anywaa are the instances of the ethnic conflict in the region. More importantly, the most severe conflict has been the Nuer and Anywaa (Dereje, 2006). Accordingly, Dereje Feyissa (2009) [7] prominent conflict analyst in the region had categorized these conflicts in to inter/intra-ethnic; indigenes and migrants; state against ethnic groups and cross- border conflicts. All these conflicts have diverse origins which are related to the political, socio- economic, cultural and ideological factors (Cascoa, 2013) [5]. Despite the existence of the specific peculiarities of each conflict, there is also a commonly shared feature which is the most widespread point of the contention- control over the natural and state resources- jobs, funds and investments (Markakis cited in Cascoa 2013; Bekalu; 2012) [5].

In nutshell, the recurrent conflict between two dominant ethnic groups; the Nuer-Anywaa conflict is largely explained by the deep rooted historical factor that characterized many ethnic conflicts in Africa more often the evolution/formation of the state. Historically, state formation process is usually achieved through force or war by incorporating and expanding territories at the expense of the other. In light of this argument, the conflict between these ethnic groups is believed to drawn its origin after the territorial acquisition of the some section of the Nuer expelled from their original homeland by the Bul Nuer in Bentiu (Jal, 2013). As the result, the eastward territorial expansion of the expelled group took place, such expansion process pose threat to eastern inhabitants such as Dinka, Burun and Anywaa, who stand with fierce resistance against the expansion, this often led to conflict (Jal, 2013).

Until very recently, conflict between the two ethnic groups persisted, but the causes had shifted to political power struggle notably after 1991, due to reconfiguration of the state along ethnic politic (Asnake, 2009) [3]. The same instance of the Anywaa- highlander's conflict also seems historical in the sense; it was started during westward expansion of Oromo (Jal, 2013). According to Temesgen cited in Latkouth (2019), the Anywaa first met Highlanders during the westward expansion of Oromo. The conflict between the two groups became even more complicated in the post 1990s following the introduction of ethnic based federal political order in the country (Dereje, 2011; Medhane, 2007; Seyoum, 2015) [9]. In the same manner, conflict between Majang and highlanders also reached its

peak with the advent of the ethnic federalism (Seyoum, 2015). Accordingly, this study is not mere description of the causes of these ethnic conflicts rather it delved to analyzes the linkage between federalism and ethnic conflicts in Gambella region in the post 1991.

Federalism and Ethnic Conflicts in Gambella Region

Gambella had been one among the nine and now (13) ethnic based regional state since 1991 with the coming to power of the defunct EPRDF now Prosperity party. After this development the new regime underwent with serious reconfiguration of the state structure by adopting ethnic federalism. The new political dispensation ushered to creation of the regional states along the ethnic line (Assefa, 2006; Asnake, 2009; Vander be ken, 2006) [2, 3]. The hope for the institutionalization of the state along this design is to manage the existing ethnic conflict ground on the quest for ethnic equality (Abbink, 2011).

In this regard, the indigenous ethnic groups in the Gambella were offered with the ownership of the region (Dereje, 2009) [7]. However, empirically, the attempt to resolve the ethnic conflicts in the region through ethnic federalism seem impossible due to the recurrence ethnic conflict between the indigenous groups termed as the 'owner of the region' since 1991. Then the question is does the ethnic federalism been the causes of all these conflicts or? As the response, the researcher had tried to analyze the link between ethnic conflicts in the region with the ethnic federalism.

Federalism and Exacerbation of the Ethnic Conflicts in the Region

In May 1991, the joint forces of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and Gambella Peoples Liberation Front (GPLF) had taken over the control of the Gambella region from the Derg regime. This political transformation affects the distribution of powers especially in the new regional state among competing ethnic groups (Cascoa, 2013) [5]. With the emerging self- government units in the region following ethnic decentralized governance structure. The then ruling coalition party at the federal government -EPRDF promised (Anywaa dominated party) - Gambella People Liberation Front (GPLF) to rule the region as their affiliate political arm. In the meantime, the GPLF failed to deliver the inclusive governance due to its exclusionary politic toward others indigenous ethnic groups (Dereje, 2006).

The GPLF policy of exclusion in the immediate 1991 politic, trigger inters- ethnic tension, notably between the Nuer and the Anywaa. Meanwhile, the essence of the ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is the need to accommodate the demand of the diverse ethnic groups through share rule and self- rule both in the federal and regional institutions (Vander beken, 2012). With this illustration, the researcher argued that, the formation of the political parties along ethnic group goes parallel to the stated provision because the ruling party dominated by an ethnic group implied the same scenario in the government. As the result, the new regional government due to the roles played by the GPLF- (Anywaa dominated party) in the liberation had paved the way for the Anuak ethnic group to dominate both the regional legislative and administrative council.

However, the contradiction of ethnic federalism here is on how to accommodate other ethnic group who are not part of the struggle against anti- ethnic politic regime in the pre-

1991. This made it obvious for the excluded ethnic groups to struggle for the inclusion in the regional governance institutions as an ethnic group, remarkably the Nuer who constituted the majority of population though disputed in the region resorted to new wave of struggle to ensure their equitable right to fair representation in the regional institutions. As per the FDRE constitution, each nations, nationalities and peoples of the Ethiopia are granted with the right to establish their own self- government as well as equitable representation in both the national and state government (Article 39). This infer that, the accommodation of the ethnic group in the Gambella Region can only be ensured through the inclusion of all ethnic groups in the government irrespective of who struggle against the Derg. For this reason, ethnic federalism failure to balance the representation of the ethnic group with the support of the ethnic based party defied the very purpose of managing ethnic conflict instead it fueled the already existing conflicts because the underrepresented ethnic group demand for the representation led to conflict with the ruling ethnic party. Additionally, ethnic federalism with the institutionalization of the ethnicity as the only viable means by an ethnic group to achieved its desired goal. It had created an enabling atmosphere for the ethnic entrepreneur to manipulate the constitutional provisions in to an ethnic provisions, this always make it quite difficult for some ethnic groups to exercise their constitutional rights in the region. A good example in this regard is the conflict over the right to learn the Nuer language in the secondary school in the region that resulted to fierce resistant from the then Anuak ruling elites against its implementation, this later turn to the violent conflict between the Nuer and the Anuak in the main town of the Gambella. Accordingly, both the FDRE and regional constitutions make it explicit that all Ethiopian languages have equal recognition and status (Article 6). The same is certainly true that all nations, nationalities and peoples of the Ethiopia have the right to learn, write and speak with their own language for whatever purposes including in education (Article 39(3)). This provision explicitly show the contribution of the institutionalization of the ethnic politics in the 1998 Nuer- Anuak violent conflict over the constitutional provision related to the language right. In line with ethnic federalism, such conflict connoted with illustration that stated that, federalism based on ethnicity usually turns every constitutional conflict into ethnic conflicts (Asnake, 2009) [3].

Federalism also manages ethnic conflict were groups in conflict are territorially concentrated (Asnake, 2009) [3]. However, experience had shown that in most multiethnic states it's difficult for the ethnic group to be territorially concentrated. As the result, the incongruent between the territory and ethnic group become inexorable and the resulted is the intra- minorities' tension (Assefa, 2017). This scenario actually explained the recurrent conflict between the Nuer and Anuak ethnic groups in the Itang wereda the most contested district due to its mixed settlement among three ethnic groups of the Anuak, Nuer, and Opou. The former claims the full ownership of the town due to their historical right as they argued, however, giving them the full ownership will be against the very purpose of the diversity accommodation through federalism because significant number of the Nuer who resides for the long period in the

area will be left out which is also source of conflict (emphasis).

Likewise, territorial incongruent also made it difficult for the representation of the intra- Nuer group who are historically original inhabitants of the current town of the Itang together with the Anuak than those who are represented now as the Nuer in the Itang special wereda. What contributed more importantly to this incongruent between ethnic territories especially between the Nuer and Anuak as well as intra- Nuer in now Itang special wereda is said to be the result of the most multiethnic states that adopted federalism through parliamentary consensual or holding together process after the failure of the military dictatorial regime which is the case of the Ethiopia in the post 1991 (Asnake, 2009, Assefa, 2006, Vander be ken, 2006) [2, 3].

Federalism and Mitigation of the Ethnic Conflicts in the Gambella Region

One among the merits of federalism is the ability of accommodating different political parties within the polity as well as two or more political organization can rule the same government, this is what is said to be power sharing arrangement (Linder, 2002). This is seen to be the most suitable democratic form of managing ethnic conflict in societies with deep cleavage (Wolff, 2006). In our case, one among the measures being taken by the then EPRDF led federal government to manage recurrent ethnic conflict in Gambella region was the introduction of the power sharing arrangement in the regional administration previously dominated by one ethnic group. With that arrangement, the Anuak were given the presidency, the Nuer and Majang were allocated with the regional vice presidency and secretary respectively. Thus, federalism in this regards play a very crucial roles for the reduction of the ethnic conflict which is politically motivated in the region.

The notion that, federalism is also a viable option to manage ethnic conflicts by instituting identical sub- national units within diverse ethnic groups is another important variable (Asnake, 2009) [3]. In GPNRS, the reorganization of the formerly administrative zone in to ethno- nationalist zone in the post 2002 Nuer- Anuak conflict is amicably manages through the formation of the homogenous nationality zone for the three major ethnic groups though significance minority ethnic groups exist in both the Nuer and Anywaa nationality zones (Article 77 GPNRS, 2002 revised constitution). The other important means in managing the ethnic conflict in region was also the expansion of the local government units such as wereda and kebele in the respective nationality zone. For instance, the expansion of the (2) wereda to (5) in the Nuer nationality zone, (3) to (5) in the Anuak nationality zone and the carving of the Mengeshi wereda from the Godere wereda in the Majang nationality zone are the major that help for the reduction of the ethnic conflict in the region.

This experiment coincided with the Horowitz (1985) expression that, the expansion of the state institutions in to tiny local communities and scattering its disparity in to parts is very essential to reduce ethnic conflicts. Similar experience is the expansion of the sub- national units in the Nigeria federation in the aftermath of the 1967 civil war had been very successful for the reduction of the intra- ethnic conflicts (Ababakr, 2022).

Challenges of Federalism in Managing Ethnic Conflicts in Gambella Region

The post 1991 decentralization structure was primarily designed to empower the ethnic groups via granting them local self- autonomy (Zemelak, 2008). Gambella region was established for this purpose as the self- autonomous region of the five indigenous ethnic groups defined in the constitution. The region is offered with the pertinent powers and functions to decide their own internal affairs such as the formulation and implementation of its development agenda's, promoting good governance and improving access to the basic public services to local communities (Lul, 2018). However, available data revealed that, the region often hardly found it difficult to execute or implemented the primary purposes (decentralization) ground for its creation due to several factors. These include among others; ethnic and border conflicts, political clientelism, self-administrative issues and intra- minorities' tension.

Border and Ethnic Conflicts

In the last century the Horn of Africa region had become the geographical point of the ethnic conflicts: inter/intra- ethnic conflicts and sometime, perhaps, proxy war. Most countries in the region encounter recurrent civil strife involving heavy military confrontation between ethnic groups and regimes in powers with the opposition groups (Cascoa, 2013) [5]. These conflicts have diverse origins which are related to the political, economic, cultural and ideological factors. However, despite the existence of the specific peculiarities of each conflict, there is also a commonly shared feature which is the most widespread point of the contention-control over the natural resources (Markakis cited in Cascoa 2013) [5].

Moreover, according to the available data from the GPNRS, conflicts over the control of the vital natural resources-water and land, political powers struggle, cattle raids and child abduction and others factors account to the recurrent ethnic conflicts within and across the regional border (Cascao, 2013, Dereje. 2006 and Gatluak, 2012). More importantly, since 1991 the most common ethnic conflicts that posed the severe threat to the regional development and governance are the conflicts associated with inter/intra-ethnic and cross border conflicts (Gatluak, 2012)). In these regard, the most critical challenges among these conflicts is the one between the dominant ethnic groups of the Nuer and the Anuak which is the interethnic type grounded on the political powers struggle, ethnicity, and contestation of the citizenship and land issues between the two ethnic communities (Dereje, 2006).

Similarly, the second essential challenges of the post 1991 Gambella is related to the intra-ethnic dimension among the sub-clan of the three major ethnic groups of the Nuer, Anywaa and Majang in the Gambella region. Accordingly, the interviewed informant revealed that, the intra-relationship within the same ethnic groups after the reorganization of the sub-national administrative units along the ethnic, clan and sub-clan line more often become hostile. Although, this, strategy is usually employed as the mechanism to accommodate the intra-minorities at the local government units notably through the creation of the wereda, kebele and the distribution of the political powers on the clan and sub-clan basis.

However, despite this premise, some other argued that, the accommodation of the intra-minorities through ethnic based

decentralization usually led to the high tension among the intra-ethnic groups. Among the Nuer, more recently it take the language of the territoriality as the Greater Akobo and Greater Jekow; representing Gaatjiok and Gaatjaak sub-clans political tension respectively. These tensions are often exacerbated by the local tyrannies of the later sub- clans constituting the local majorities in the post 1991 ethnic politics due to their occupation of the regional executive position of the vice and presidency on behalf of the Nuer ethnic group in the regional politic, which its implication is intra-Nuer political struggle. Likewise, the same political cleavages in the form of the intra-politics is also visible among Anuaak between Lull/Openo over the political power, and the same is also true between the Majang ethnic groups especially those who perceived themselves as the pure Majang against those with the mixed origin (Dereje, 2009) [7].

Cross border conflict is the other challenge to the post 1991 decentralized governance in the region. Conflict of this dimension emanated from the porousness and lack of the strong border administration of the regional border. As the result, of the regional border position on the western most point with the Republic of the South Sudan. The sub-regional districts along the borderline suffer with the seasonal cross-borders attacks from the South Sudan ethnic groups of the Murle and the Lou- Nuer for the search of abducting child and cattle raids from the surrounding Ethiopia environs poorly administered by both the regional and federal authorities. Therefore, the post 1991 decentralization experiments in the GPNRS fall short in delivering its intended objective due to these ethnic conflicts.

Political Clientelism

One of the unique feature of the Ethiopia decentralized governance design apart from its counterpart in other African countries like Nigeria and South Africa is the provision of the constitutional space to subnational government (Vander be ken, 2006). In that the FDRE constitution leave avenue for the regions to framed its own constitution with all the necessary powers including the power to institute another level of government below the region (Article 47 of the FDRE). By doing so, GPNRS government have constitutionally established three tiers government structures; nationality zone, wereda and kebele as the local administrative hierarchies directly accountable to its local populaces.

These nationality zones were established for the three major ethnic groups of the Nuer, Anywaa and Majang each bearing the name of the respective ethnic groups (article 77(1)) of the 2002 regional revised constitution. In this respect, the sub-national government units or local governments are constitutionally granted with the adequate powers to execute its own governance and development programs as well as the mandate to elect their respective administrative councils (Article 90(2(h)) GPNRS, 2002 revised constitution.

In actual term, the informant stated that, the reality on the ground regarding powers and the functions bestowed to local administrative units in the constitution are far from the reality. The evident is the overall roles of the regional politicians in the nomination and the appointment process of the local government's administrative council members such as chief administrators; speakers and its deputy at the

zone and wereda level which defied the constitutionally assigned roles of the respective councils. They further argued that, to be appointed in the administrative council in the subnational government is based on the political affiliation with the regional executive members representing your local administrative units in order to served his/her interest than the interest of the local communities whom you are administering.

Thus, the real operation of the decentralized structure in the region is the reflection of the patron-client's relationship. In light of this, decentralization experiment in the region failed to adequately achieve its desired goal of improving the local communities' participation in the formulation and implementation of the policies due to the regional political elite's interferences in the local affairs. Some often concluded by stating that, sub-national government units ranging- Nationality zone, Wereda and Kebele in the Gambella region are not for the implementation of their cardinal objective among others; "bringing government closer to the peoples' through their elected representative, instead it is sound to said bringing public resources exploiters closer to peoples which amount to corruption". For these matters, local decentralization becomes the de concentrated arm of the region with limited roles, albeit their powers are constitutionally devolved.

Self- Administrative Issues and Intra- minorities' tension

Self-government is a constitutional right guaranteed to every citizen in most federal countries. This includes the right to uses your own language, culture, religion, developing and preserving your history as well as administering your own locality. In the same vein, Ethiopia is not exception in this regard. Since the ethno-nationalist coalition party, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took over the political power in 1991; ethnic based federal state structure was put in place as a guarantee to ethnic right to self-determination.

To ensure this, the EPRDF guaranteed all nations, nationalities and people of Ethiopia the unconditional right to self-determination including up to secession proclamation No. 7/1992 of the transitional charter. In this regards, 14 self-administering regions were created as a practical exercise to this provision. Likewise, the same provision was also carried over to article 39 of the 1995 FDRE constitution with the similar connotation by establishing nine- ethnically based regional states with the Addis Ababa and latter Dire Dawa as a federal administering city states.

However, despite the fact that, each nations, nationalities and peoples are granted with the unconditional right to self-government such as establishing regional state of their own. In actual practice this is not apparent, with the constitutional recognition of only nine regional states within more than eighty ethno-linguistic groups. Moreover, the country ethno-linguistic diversities in term of ethnic is very considerable to be mentioned, because it would be impossible to gives all 80s ethnic groups their own regional states. To this end, the FDRE constitution alternated the solution for the exercised of this right in respective regional states which they should decide accordingly (article 47). This became the rational for each ethnic communities to exercise their internal component to self-determination notably self-government (zone, wereda and kebele) in the regional states they resided.

In this respect, Gambella is among nine regional states established to serve the same purposes and this does not also materialized as well. As the result, the GPNRS is constitutionally empowered to institute sub-regional administrations below the region. The fact is to accommodate the demand of the intra-ethno national minorities to become local majorities in their respective localities. However, many observers argued that, attempt to turn the constitutional provisions into reality in the multiethnic regional states such as the Gambella region is problematic and unthinkable, due to the existing inter and intra ethnic politics among the indigenous ethnic groups. Moreover, others with the ethnic and clans views further argued in favor of the argument advanced against the accommodation of the intra-minorities through post 1991 ethnic model. In that, it created local tyrannies of the some Anyuaak and some Nuer sub- clans, and at the same time, they developed the perception to consider the region and the respective nationalities zones as belonging to them instead to all ethnic group members.

As an evident, they cited the concentration of the regional political power in the hand of the same clans within the Anywuaa (Openo) and the Nuer (Gajaak) ethnic groups for the long period of time following the 1991 ethnic decentralization in the GPNRS. The possible result, become what (Choudhory suggested cited in Yonatan, 2009), "ethnic decentralization encourages and perhaps, legitimizing the discrimination against internal minorities in the framing of the public policy, the delivery of the public services, contracting and public employment".

In light of this argument, the politically dominant clans from both ethnic groups in the region framed the public policies and delivery of the basic services in their own favors. To this end, ensuring right to self- rule to intra- minorities favor only those in the regional powers, this make it difficult for the sub- clans excluded by the EPRDF policy to ensure this constitutional rights. For instance, the question of the self-government notably wereda question in the Buribiey, Nyikaani and the Dunchay and Yeri in the Nuer, Anyuaak and Majang Nationality zones respectively is the clear indication of the above mentioned facts; those being marginalized in the public decision making process through ethnic based decentralization in the region (Field survey, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The application of the ethnic federalism as the best mechanism to manage ethnic conflict in multiethnic societies is now the most controversial point of debate among scholars. Many opted for ethnic federalism in that it has the potential to accommodate the interest of the different ethnic groups. However, others critics doubt the roles of the ethnic federalism as the tool to mitigate the ethnic conflicts rather it fueled the existing one. In our case, some evidence had revealed the conflict promotion roles of the designed ethnic federalism particularly in the multiethnic regional state like Gambella. The formation of the political parties along ethnic line and one party dominant in the multiethnic polity is very dangerous for the peaceful co- existent among the ethnic groups. In GPNRS, the introduction of such federal design heighten the existing tension between the Nuer and the Anuak especially the domination of the regional politic by the latter without due regards to ethnic diversity in the region is the impact of the bad ethnic federal

design. Federalism can also be a genuine governance strategy for the promotion of the peace and stability among diverse ethnic communities if it is properly designed such as experience in Switzerland. Conversely, Ethiopia design motivated for the desire to maintained powers by the ethnic entrepreneur contributed a lot for the fragile ethnic federalism. For instance, the political preponderance of the minority ethnic groups in the Gambella regional states politics via ethnic party is the main cause of the ethnic conflict in the region since 1991. The cure for this bad design, is what Bekalu (2012) noted as the government should avoid “politicization of the human diversity” is very vital to manage the politically inspired ethnic conflict. The overall remedy in this regard is the need to adopt the democratic federalism by any regime in Ethiopia since the current regime in powers address the problem related with ethnic political parties which is the main cause of many recurrent ethnic conflicts in the region.

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