Nationalists versus Ethnic based political parties In Ethiopia

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Abstract

Based on Secondary data the article analyzes party Politics in Ethiopia in light of its merits to building a democratic state and society in Ethiopia.

Nationalist Vs Ethnic Based Parties: Merits and Demerits in the National Endeavours to realize an enduring culture of Culture of Democracy and Good Governance*.

Abstract

Ethiopia is a peculiar sub-Saharan African country with a long history of statehood. However the political development of the country has been characterized by conflict and instability and weak institutionalization of state machineries and a lack of democratic political culture. Despite Ethiopia’s blessing with leaders with a vision to modernize it, the practice shows the prevalence of very strong, centralistic and autocratic state machinery dominated by a political elite that is less willing to go along a different road and realize the states dreams of democracy and prosperity. Dominated by power politics and byzantine type political manoeuvers, Ethiopian politics suffer from democratic deficit characterized by lack of a genuine community participation in the political decision making process. Consequently the country’s history and experience of political party system is dwarf. This coupled with countries recent history and or daring experiment of politicization of ethnic identity and ethnic federalism implemented for the last three decades by the current EPRDF government, put the country in question that any formidable sense of democratization can be realized at least in the coming short terms. This article, based on secondary data, analysed the nature of party politics in Ethiopia based on comparison of the countries experience in the last century and comparing this with what is the experience of other African countries as well as what is in the literature. The paper finds out that Ethiopia has to travel along a different path away from politics of identity to that of the politics of ideals, if it has to achieve the states goal.

Key words:-Nationalism, Ethnic party, democratic culture, Political Party, Ethiopia.

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1. Introduction

According to David Easton’s conceptualization, Politics involves change; and the political world is a world of flux, tensions, and transitions. Political Change may be violent or peaceful. This can also be swift as in case of revolution or progressive as in case of reform. Achieved taking in any of these forms political changes can have a far reaching local regional and global consequences. The rise of Socialism and its spread from Russia to different regions of the world has had effect on the political dynamics in Ethiopia in the 60s, 70s and 80 as it has had impact on many countries of the world (Schumpeter 2003 Vasquez 2004). The domestic effect of the Change in Ethiopia in this relation was the provision of a socialist ideology based on which the students movements of early 19607 and 70s mobilized the people mainly at urban areas. To this effect most of political organizations formed in Ethiopia at then had a socialist ideological orientation. The popular uprising thus led to the down fall of the monarchy and rise of a socialist military dictatorship of the Dergue in Ethiopia in 1974 (Clapham 1989). By the same token the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 has had a local political effect of collapsing the socialist regime which also gave rise to the coming into power of The TPLF/EPRDF regime in the year 1991 in Ethiopia (Ellen Grigsby 2009 p4).

Ethiopia’s history of political dynamics fits to the above conceptualization of politics as a change and the political world as a world of tension and transition. Political transition in Ethiopia has been dominantly achieved through tragedy. Thus people in Ethiopia view change as a negative force that alters socio economic and political realities in to the worst. The modernizer Atse Theodor’s II political career ended in the tragedy of Meqdelal. Atse Yohanes IV reign culminated in his Good Friday at Metema (Izabela Orlowska in Trodnheim 2009) . While Menilik’s political career ended peacefully, his grandson who succeed his throne i.e Regent Iyasus career ended in his abdication before his actual coronation in 1916. The long serving emperor’s career ended up when he was overthrown through coup in 1974. Mengistu Hailemariam political career was came in to end when he flee the country for Zimbabwe in 1991. All these are all bold examples testifying the proverb that goes all political careers in Ethiopia ends in Tragedy.

Revolutions, peasants upheaval, military coup d’ états and civil disobediences have been a political instrument of regime change in Ethiopia (Young 2006). What is missing in Ethiopians historical trajectories so far is the peaceful means of changing an incumbent government by election. This takes us to the discussion of political transition in Ethiopia and the role of party politics in this process based on the existing dichotomy of Ethiopian political parties in to Ethnic and nationalist model.

A discussion of democratization in general and that of political transition in particular is impossible without a reflection on party politics and the role of electoral systems. In the study of political science half of a discussion of democracy and good governance relies on such variables as civil and political liberties such as aspects of electoral dynamics and civil rights exercised by individuals and society organizations (Grigsby 2009 p213). Contemporary scholarship views a party as a team of politicians whose paramount goal is to win electoral office(Bawn etal 2012 p1). Grigsby defines political parties as organizations that put forward proposed leaders whom they support for official positions in government (Grigsby,2009 p208). One of conceptualization is focusing on bridging and or connecting role of parties. As a connector political party connect the people with the government.

As a Euro centric concept, Party politics gleaned from the experiences of established democracies in Western Europe and the United States. This Euro/American centrism can be discerned from historical accounts and limited scholarly discussion on party politics and party systems in the developing countries. Only a handful of developing countries were represented in the categories of first and second waves of democracy. As democratization emerged in the developing world during the Third Wave, scholars looked to existing theories of party politics in an effort to explain parties and party systems in the newly emerging political systems.

As such party systems in developing countries is characterized by volatility, are less institutionalized, have weaker voters- parties attachments, and parties are poorly reliant on programmatic appeals and problems of organizing along salient social cleavages. These are explained by the peculiar institutions, distinctive legacies (such as the colonial experience of many African countries) and the authoritarian institutions of post colonial
African countries.

Since colonialism, African states have frequently been hampered by instability, corruption, violence, and authoritarianism. Few of them have been able to sustain democratic governments on a permanent basis, and many have instead cycled through a series of coups, producing military dictatorships. Instability ensued in many African states owing to the politicization of ethnicity. — (Salih 2005)

During the period from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, Africa had more than 70 coups and 13 presidential assassinations. The political uncertainty of post-colonial Africa affects the choices of political elites who may prioritize short-term gains and hedge their political strategies (Salih 2003). Thus many of African countries followed different historical trajectories which have had lasting effects making the task of making and sustaining parties and party systems problematic.

2. Types of Political Parties

Different methods of categorizing political parties are discernable in the literature. One of these approaches used by Gunther et al. 2003 is based on three criteria's: (1) The nature of the formal organization of the party, (2) The nature of the party’s programmatic commitments and (3) The strategy and behavioural norms of the party.

So based on this classification parties are divided into two distinct blocks namely thick and thin. The Thin category refers to party systems common in 1850s and has the sub divisions of Elite based parties which relates to traditional, local notable and clientalistic types. The other groups here are ethnic based parties consisting sub division of congress form and purely ethnic divisions. Electoralist division consists of personalistic, catch all, and programmatic sub divisions. The movement parties are divided in to left liberalist and post industrial extreme Right of the 2000s (Gunther 2003 p 175).

The naming of the aforementioned party typology is made based on similar works available in the field. So these typologies are in conformity with the art of knowledge in the field of party political study. Yet there were some types of party (the Religious Fundamentalist, Ethnicity-based and nationalist parties) for which conceptual definitions and studies are only emerging in the literature of conflict and political studies. Of these this article focused on the ethnic and the nationalist typology of parties in a way that this would help the subsequent analysis of party politics in case of Ethiopia.

Ethnic based Parties

From the categorization of political parties into different genera used by Gunter 2003 we can learn ethnic party systems are less common and of which less is said by the researchers on the field. To this end however the conceptualization of Ethnic parties by the author is significantly contributing to the knowledge in the field. Parties and ethnic parties can be defined based on different criteria’s. Based on their goal, structure, mobilization tools used and their behaviour. Ethnic parties are defined as those that aim to meet the goal of their ethnic groups using primordial identity, cultural and linguistic affiliations as means of mobilization in a populist way.

Unlike virtually all other political parties, including nationalistic parties, electoral mobilization made by ethnic parties is not intended to attract additional sectors of society to support the party whose interests are perceived as intrinsically in conflict with those of other ethnic groups.

Thus, even more than the religious fundamentalist party, the potential electoral clientele of the party is strictly defined and limited by ethnicity, although within that definitional category cross-class electoral appeals may lead to the adoption of eclectic programmatic objectives.

(Gunter et al. 2003).

In relation to these for instance Chandra (2004) defines an “ethnic party” as “a party that overtly represents itself as a champion of the cause of one particular ethnic or set of categories to the exclusion of others, and
that makes such a representation central to its strategy of mobilizing voters.”

Horowitz (1985) in his part defines “ethnic parties” as “those ethnic” or “non-ethnic” by examining the message it sends to the electorate during election campaigns and rallies and by studying its policies. Horwitz maintains in explaining the exclusionist nature of ethnic parties by saying that:-

“the main distinction between an ethnic and a multi-ethnic party, lies not in the number of categories that each attempts to include, but in whether or not there is a category that each attempts to exclude” (Ibid).

The categorization of ethnic parties in to ethnic and multiethnic is discernable in the literature (Wondosen 2008). In this relation in his categorizing parties in Ethiopia Merara 2003 divided parties in Ethiopia as Ethnic and Multi Ethnic. This is based on the conception that an “ethnic party” speaks for one ethnic category while “multi-ethnic party” speaks for many ethnic groups. This is compatible with the nature of parties that are formed in countries dominated by politicization of ethnicity such as Ethiopia. Where we have many ethnic parties that excludes “others” (implicitly or explicitly) and on the other hand we also find multi-ethnic parties that are formed by individuals and groups which are protagonist of ethnic identities just like ethnic party. This is a type of ethnic party that does not identify a clear outsider group .Thus multi-ethnic party defers from an ethnic- party only in its inclusiveness. (Chandra 2002: 6).

Chandra 2005 identifies a third strand called a non ethnic party. According to him a non-ethnic party differs from ethnic one because the former “does not make an ethnic appeal central to its mobilizing strategy” . The other important category in this relation is the congress ethnic party system discussed by (Gunter et al. 2003).

A congress party is a coalition, alliance or federation of ethnic parties or political machines, although it may take the form of a single, unified party structure. Key aspect of the congress party at national level is its electoral appeal which is made to national unity and integration rather than division and to ethnic sharing and coexistence rather than domination and threat.

Examples of this types are the Congress Party during India’s first two decades of independence; the Kenya African National Union under Jomo Kenyatta and the Barisan Nasional (National Front coalition) of Malaysia (Gunter 2003).

2.2. Political parties in Africa: Comparative Over View

The history of party formation in Africa relates to colonialism and anti colonial liberation movements. Both cases contributed to weaker and mono party system to prevail in post colonial countries of Africa (Wondwosen 2008). Salih 2003 maintains that the raison d’être of the one-party system, which reigned over a greater part of Africa between the 1970s and the mid-1980s, was attaining the twin objectives of unity and development (Salih 2003). Arguably the different historical, social and economic circumstance countries pass through determines the patterns of party formation change and sustainability. Accordingly in many of African countries the socio economic and political contexts are important in determining the nature of party systems that exist. Apart from the glitter of the capital cities and a few urban centres, the general socio-economic context in Africa characterized by underdevelopment and poverty plus a bad economic and social circumstance that limits political parties to thrive and contribute positively to national development and democratization endeavours.

Structurally many African political parties follow the one that appear similar to the established democracy. But the appearance and the substance definitely differ since peculiar social and political reality in Africa makes parties reality that appears more of Africa than otherwise.

Accordingly the study made on African political parties’ nature by Salih 2005 has identified prevailing cleavages and other peculiar characters. African political parties, use ethnicity in combination with linguistic, religious and regional cleavage for mobilization of supporters. According to Salih Ethnic-linguistic cleavages do indeed structure party identification in many African societies. Yet ethnicity was not necessarily the primary cleavage as other structural factors are also important for partisanship. For example apart from Lesotho (the Basotho National Party) and Ethiopia’s coalition of ethnically-based political front (the Ethiopian
People’s Revolutionary Democratic Forces (EPRDF), African political parties tend not to use the names of the ethnic group or groups which make up the majority of their constituencies. In Africa therefore, the party name most commonly reflects an ideological orientation (socialist, social democratic, liberal or conservative) but not an ethnic one.

**Ethnic Parties in Africa**

Erdman (2007: 23; 2004) divides ethnic-based political parties in Africa into two types: ethnic-party, and the ethnic congress party. For Erdman (2007: 23), an ethnic party is based on one ethnic group, while the ethnic congress party is based on several ethnic groups. Most of African countries ethnic-parties are rare while the ethnic congress party is the most common. The fundamental reason for the existence of many ethnic congress parties in Africa is the presence of many small (numerically) ethnic groups that can not constitute a meaningful representation in parliament unless they form a coalition. In every African country (except Botswana, Namibia, Burundi, and Rwanda) there are many ethnic groups but none of them can claim majority status.

The context Ethno-regional groupings are the logical strategies for political parties to challenge incumbent parties in Africa. It is argued that the lack of class divisions and the absence or the weakness of strong civil society led African political parties to be established along ethnic lines (Salih 2005 ).

The socio economic and political context in which most of the African societies passed has been characterized by the absence of development of civic culture and the prevalence of vertical relationships among different groups. In the absence of formal associations capable of engaging the population, the introduction of liberal democratic procedures, at the influence of external interest groups makes political parties in Africa to appeal to the available alternative which is ethnic identity. In short most parties in Africa are influenced by such cleavages as ethnicity, religion economic status and ideological orientation in their dealing with party politics and elections.

### 3. Party Politics in Ethiopia:-Developments

Party politics, as a Eurocentric concept that best fit to capitalism, modernization and preceded by a well established civil society discourse is rather alien to Ethiopia which has its own peculiar political history and socio economic trajectories. In contrast to other countries in Africa undertaking political activities under the agencies of political parties in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. The history of party formation based on common interest or shared values of individuals connected through the bond of citizenship and organized in civil societies that emerge as political party in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. The history of party formation based on common interest or shared values of individuals connected through the bond of citizenship and organized in civil societies that emerge as political party in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. The history of party formation based on the army and people’s interest has been characterized by the absence of development of civic culture and the prevalence of vertical relationships among different groups. In the absence of formal associations capable of engaging the population, the introduction of liberal democratic procedures, at the influence of external interest groups makes political parties in Africa to appeal to the available alternative which is ethnic identity. In short most parties in Africa are influenced by such cleavages as ethnicity, religion economic status and ideological orientation in their dealing with party politics and elections.

But following the demise of the monarch who used not to allow any political party, a number of leftist and center party surfaced. However the hope for parties improving political participation was dashed by the takeover of the military dictatorship of the countries power. The antidemocratic disposition of the military regime culminated in the advent of an authoritarian and state-sponsored organisation, namely, the Workers’ Party of Ethiopia (WPE). This organisation, formed by the military regime, ushered in a political landscape dominated by a one-party system. In addition to Dergues brutality, blunders committed by some of the disaffected political groups themselves were contributing factors. Fighting of parties each other was underway. For instance, the EPRP vs. the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party (EDUP), the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) against the EPRP, the TPLF against the EDUP), tactic and strategy (the EPRP against Meisone, and the TPLF against . the Eritrean Liberation Front), etc (Andargachew 2000). Dominated by the socialist Workers Party of Ethiopia during the military regime the political and legal environment of the
country was hostile for the development of civil society with a demoting effect for party politics to blossom.

**During the Haile Selassie I (1930-1974) regime**

Talking of Ethiopian typology relating to political parties Merera (2003) used the term Ethnic and Multiethnic parties. “Multiethnic party” to denote a party that recruit members irrespective of their ethnic origin.” In Merera’s terminology an “ethnic based party” is a party that is formed to serve particular ethnic group(s), and “multi-ethnic party” is a party that recruits its members irrespective of their ethnic affiliation.

While ethnicity, as a basis of political party formation at both Africa and global level, is rarely used and mostly countries ban use of ethnicity for party formation, categorizing Ethiopian political parties in to two based on ethnicity is minimalistic. This categorization of Merera also suffers from ignoring the fact that the first party formed in Ethiopia was ideological than ethnic “Ethiopian People’s Council” was a non-ethnic organization (Andargachew 2000: 9). And there have been a number of political parties which are ideological at least in their designation and membership.

As mentioned earlier, political Parties were absent during the monarchy regime since political they were not allowed functioning in the country. Thus what there was the opposition forming political parties in the form of liberation front’s in exile in the neighbouring countries. Example of these include: the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front), the ENLF (The Ethiopian National Liberation Front), and the SALF (The Somali Abo Liberation Front).


In tandem with the students movement that overthrown the monarch, in early days of the Drgue regime we had the emergency of political parties in Ethiopia. Informed by their socialist background none of these emerged parties used ethnic designation if not composition. These were ideology based political organizations namely: the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), established in 1972; “Melaw Ethiopia Socialist Nknake” or the “All Ethiopian Socialist Movement” (MEISON) established in 1968; the Marxist-Leninst Revolutionary Organization (MLRO) (its Amharic acronym was Malerid); the Workers’ League (WL) (its Amharic acronym, “Wez hq”); “Echat”, and “Abyotawi Seded”. So the history of political party formation during military period as well was of ideological than Ethnic based (Andargachew 2000).

**Ethnic parties in Ethiopia Post EPRDF 1991.**

TPLF/EPRDF introduced ethnicity as political basis for Ethiopia up on coming in to in may 1991 (Abbink 1997) and reorganized the country’s administrative structure in to largely ethnically-based regional states. Comparatively speaking of EPRDF with its preceding two regimes a number of ethnic-based political parties mushroomed in Ethiopia. This is partly because the EPRDF, as an ethnic based party, encouraged the formation of political parties along ethnic lines and tacitly discouraged non-ethnic parties or other pan-Ethiopian parties (Merera 2011).

More importantly the political dynamics of development in Ethiopia viewed in light of party politics reached its heyday during the early days of EPRDF government of Ethiopia. This is true of the political atmosphere emerged during the transitional government of Ethiopia (TGE) especially during the Ethiopian peace and democracy conference held on July 1991 which marked mushrooming of political parties organized based on ethnic and multi-ethnic plus other modalities. Relating to the legal environment both the Transitional Period Charter and the 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution sanctioned freedom of association as a right to be enjoyed by the citizen. As a result, many ethnic and some multi-ethnic political organisations proliferated. This period marked a historical juncture for the advent of multi party politics in Ethiopia (Abbink, 2011).

The exponential growth of political parties from zero to four dozens make the task of shed light on Substance of these parties a political imperative. According to Merara 2011 most of the parties invited for participation in the transition process were lacking organizational capacity and experience other than merely claiming to represent ethnic groups. The also have no records of earlier mobilisation and political activities that they
undertook among their alleged constituencies of support (Merera 2011 p688). This can be a by product of the lack of organized political life during the military regime. What is the implication of this condition is the incapacity of parties to be competitive and powerful institutions that checks the government in policy matters and providing competent alternative to the community’s demands (Abink 2000 p154).

The large number of parties flourished in 1991 does not mean the country has had a high level of urbanization, civil, social and economic development. Rather the reason is best explained by the easier entrance criteria introduced by EPRDF. The ethnic factor used as criteria for party formation blurred the boundary between elites and laymen, between bourgeois and the proletariat and between the urbanites and rural peasants. The newly introduced ethnic criteria for party formation and the support given for this endeavour by the incumbent government made every one capable of making his or her own party. The result was clear: Ethiopia had a four dozens of political parties in 1990s. A situation drummed for TPLF/EPRDF acceptance within and without which contributed for their ascendance in to political power house to survive the next three decades without any formidable opposition all in the name of federalism and multiparty system.

Daron Acemolgu and Robinson 2012 in their book entitled “Why Nations Fail” pin point that critical Junc-_tures are important to transform societies. Of course the critical juncture in the world political events that coincide both with the down fall of the military in Ethiopia and collapse of the soviet Russia and the coming in to power of the EPRDF was one of the opportunities for realizing positive change in the country’s political history. The TPLF/EPRDF though originally Albanian Leninist used this critical juncture to its advantage by declaring its adherence to capitalism and democratization which was the popular political ideology of the day both regionally and globally. The federalism structure introduced, the Liberal constitution promulgated and the number of parties mushroomed were indicators of this blending in to the environment tactically used by the incumbent regime of EPRDF.

But as days went by the enthusiasm of an emerging democratic political atmosphere started to dissipate. Beside capacity limitations fake natures of parties mentioned above many doubt the process by saying whether the incumbent EPRDF/TPLF was credible and dependable to uphold democracy and multi party politics viewed in light of its historical background and the byzantine political manoeuvring dominating the country’s political engineers namely the elites.

The sceptics emanated from the history of TPLF which contempt for tolerance and pluralism, Marxist–Leninist orientation and radical ethno-nationalist disposition. Subsequent events and occurrences confirmed the already existing suspicions when the EPRDF pursued a policy of excluding some groups from participating in the political process. “From the very start, the EPRDF did everything in its power to prevent such established political organisations as the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (Meisone), and the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF) being included”. This was done under the pretext that these organisations are prone to undermining the already initiated democratic process through espousing chauvinism and war mongering.

Then exclusion project persisted and proved to be dominate in the coming decades of EPRDF leadership of Ethiopia. The popular political parties with establishment were replaced by what Merara 2003 calls PDOS. Most of these satellites were formed from above by EPRDF to compete with and undermine non-conformists from influencing matters in a manner that would be detrimental to the EPRDF’s hegemonic aspirations. For Abbink (2000) (PDOs) were formed from above as EPRDF clients. A situation similar to what Patrice Chabal calls it: the neo patronimial bargain characterized by clientalism(Chabal 1999). They were provided with all the necessary support and state resources at the disposal of the EPRDF in order to enable them to throw their adversaries off-balance.

TPLF/EPRDF originated primarily from an ethnocentric rebel groups that established a long tradition of secrecy and exclusionism as well as with extractive organizational structure, political parties existence of autonomy and independence of its control was seen as threat. To this end (S.avaengah 2011) has a long quote:-

Whilst those suspected of collaboration with the EDU or with government forces were allegedly excluded or
expelled in their hundreds. As one source put it “membership was voluntary but practically you would have to be a member so as not to be considered an enemy”. Whilst the mass associations were designed to deliver a united and committed “Tigray people” in support of the Front, the security demands of the campaigns against shifta, EDU, EPRP, and the government always served also to delimit this unity, encouraging the identification, isolation and defeat of a range of political and social “enemies’ (S.avaengah 2011 p.625).

The cultural heritage, traditional norms and past experience of the power politics characterising the Ethiopian political setting in which TPLF/EPRDF born and grown up to victory influenced the prevailing lack (by the government) of tolerance of difference of opinion raised by the civil societies and political parties emerged in this era in Ethiopia post 1991. This position of lacking pluralism is reinforced by the prevalence of divisive ethnocentric ideologies of the regimes affiliated parties practically making the political and legal environment hostile for genuine party politics to thrive (Abbink, 2000).

The nomenclature used by many Ethiopian observers to refer this case was that where there is prosophies Juliflora an aggressive weed, there will be no tree or grass other than its bread can grow. By the same token where there is EPRDF/TPLF there will be no political party or civil society other than its forged can survive. This has been proved to be fact if one sees what has happened in the post 2005 election aftermath period of the Meles Zenawi regime in Ethiopia where the government crippled both political parties and civil societies to the extent that the government claimed to win 100 percent of the political seat in the 2012 election.

4. Discussion

Dis/advantage of Ethnic based Vs Other Political Party Systems

Discussion of ethnic party system is characterized by prevalence of problems caused by the ethnicization of political systems than otherwise. Many scholars have indicated that ethnic parties and the politicization of ethnic differences create instability and are assumed to be a major threat to the state. Norris 2003 argues that Party systems where ethnically based political parties dominate “are prone to conflict, exacerbating existing ethnic divisions... because holding the reins of power in state office is often seen as a zero-sum game, rather than a process of accommodation” ( Norris and Matts 2003:3, citing Donald Horowitz). This theory is strongly advocated by Horowitz (2000: 294). Others also consider ethnic divisions as one of the causes for the weaknesses of political parties in Africa. By using South Africa as a case study Nikiwane (2000) said, “The biggest weakness of these opposition parties is that they are regional, at best, and tribal in orientation. Their only hope was to unify their organizations. But because of their fundamental structures (parochialism), they have consistently been unable to come together, let alone to agree on unified positions.”

According to Law 2005 ethnic party system usually leads a country to three directions: military regime, one-party authoritarian regime, or the establishment of multi-ethnic parties and coalitions (Law 2005).

Ethnic, religious and regional parties lead to ethnic conflicts and wars. Basedau et al (2007: 617) noted that in many contemporary African democracies ethnic, religious and regional parties are illegal. In fact, this is not unique to African countries. In many post-communist countries in Eastern Europe, and Asian countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey and Algeria ethnic and religious parties are banned due to various reasons. The most important reason is to avoid ethnic conflicts and wars. According to Bogaards (2008: 6), the ban of ethnic party is usually a form of political engineering aimed at ethnic conflict prevention and management. Perhaps, the first nation in Africa that banned particularistic parties was Ghana. Kwame Nkurumah, the first leader of independent Ghana, passed a law banning such parties in the 1960s. In contemporary Africa, twenty-two African countries have laws directly or indirectly banning particularistic parties.

According to Chandra (2002) in countries where ethnic-based parties dominate the quality of democracy is likely to suffer. This assumption, is based on the concept of the so-called “out bidding effect” concept. This concept (i.e. “ethnic outbidding”) states that the rise of ethnic party, which is always the result of ethnic divisions “infects” the political system, destroys competitive politics, and threatens the survival of democratic institutions.
For Sisk (1996) ethnically-dominated party system lowers the quality of democracy because it limits peoples’ electoral choices only to the members of a particular ethnic group. Ethnic-dominated party systems also decrease the quality of democracy because in such system politicians are focused more on the interests of their respective ethnic groups at the expense of the country’s interest. Elites struggle to win the maximum rights and privileges for their ethnic groups. This condition fuels ethnic competition with the hope of gaining influence in national politics.

Ethiopian experience of democratization along flourishing civil society and building genuine multi party system in which the true meaning of government of the people for the people by the people is materialized have been proved to be far from reality. Unlike Ethiopia which is established state if not (established autocracy) with long experience of statehood, the problem for democratization in many African countries have been lack of the culture and experience of building and living in a centralized political system widely known as the state. So the fragmentation along lineage and tribal lines was challenge for these countries. Paradoxically Ethiopia with a well founded experience of statehood failed to uphold a democratic court in which the civil societies thrive for the same reason that make the state unique example in Africa. That is the very strongly centralized and dictating and hierarchical state structure survived for centuries and showing no willingness to travel along a different path of society transformation and political development best explain the prevailing lack of democratic culture up on which genuine party system to flourish.

The centralistic nature of Ethiopia’s state machinery makes the core principle of democracy such as separation of the public and the private as well as the separation of power between the Legislatures, Executive and Judiciary branches of government almost, practically impossible. That is why it is said that Ethiopians politics is the politics of the executives who are also the judges and the law makers and even law breakers. So as yesterday during the transition period when the incumbent EPRDF promised the local as well as international community for opening up the political space, as well as the economy, only few of the Ethiopian community believed that whether the TPLF/EPRDF mean what they were saying. The governmental political praxis exercised in the last 28 years proved the sceptics true and death of optimism.

Ethiopia was in critical juncture when Menilik passed away 110 years ago. Because the coming in to power of regent Lij Iyassu with breath taking modernization policies and actions of those days attracted a lot of foreigners to invest and engage in Ethiopia development(see Markakis 2009 in Ethiopian 16th ).But the critical opportunity became day dream as the visionary regent was overthrown by covert means of regime change held in 1916. Once again Ethiopia was also at a historic moment when the emperor was overthrown by the visionary student’s revolution of the 60s (Clapham 2000).But once again the students revolution was diverted by the coming in to power of the military dictatorship that put Ethiopian people in endless war and the country fall under yolk of domination for 17 years (Clapham 2006).

History repeats itself. According to most political observers and writers on Ethiopia the country became at a critical juncture when the military dictator was demised in may 1991. But the aftermath of Meles Zenawis EPRDF was obliviously of increased level of inter communal conflict, high level of debt, and lack of any sense of democratic institutions including political parties, civil societies and free press outlets. Consequently the country entered a new face of civil disobedience that brought the country in to the verge of state collapse characterized by lack of peace and stability. Accordingly, Ethiopia of today (i.e 2019) is said to be in the most critical time frame as the EPRDF was controlled by the reformist elites. However what history of change and critical junctures lost in Ethiopia in the past can inform us is genuine democratization is the most challenging task to realize and benefit Ethiopian people from state fruit. One of the most occurring variables that have shown little or no change between all these four critical junctures is the suffering of the population in the hands of extractive elites controlling the state apparatus to serve their own personal or groups interest. Junctures come and go but lack of a Denmark like state is missing in Ethiopia as elsewhere in Africa. Ethiopia has been wandering between generations and governments in search for the right political ideology and economic development model including through emulating from other countries experience but for no success so far (Clapham, 2006).

One of the oldest states in Africa Ethiopia represents a peculiar political economy in Africa. Throughout its
modern history leaders in Ethiopia arise with an aspiration and sometimes rhetoric to modernize the country. And economic policies were designed albeit a little success and with different consequences. Logically and as political writers stipulate democratic consolidation is unthinkable without flourished civil society and strong institutions. And modernization entails societies moving away from issues that divide people to come to that unites (Arndet 2008). Shift from inscriptive to affective (Max Weber) from kin to institution, from clientalism to meritocracy etc. Fukuyama in his bestseller work of Political Order and Political Decay 2014 argued that when societies develop and the economy shifts from agriculture towards heavy industry and then service economy, traditional social identities would be eroded. High literacy rate, geographic mobility, modernization, access to the media would loosen the grip of kinship and ethnicity in developing countries this in turn creates a environment for civic culture to flourish hence people to start organize themselves based on ideological orientation and interest. Urbanized diversified communities thrive by building civic culture and form political parties based on values and ideologies than clientalism and primordial affiliation (Fukuyama 2014).In this regard Norris etal 2003p5 has to say: - “Better-educated and more cognitively sophisticated citizens...have less need to rely upon the traditional

social cues of ethnicity in electoral choices”

Ethiopia’s experiment of legalizing ethnicity as political instrument has coasted its citizens a lot. This is Paradox, firstly because, given the country’s political history of lacking anything that resembles ethnic to form political party during the monarchy period and the socialist regimes. This sounds crazier when one learns the geo political locations and history of the country. Clapham (1984) says “Geography determines the Horn’s politics as much as anything else in its history and social makeup” and the contradiction is when Ethiopia applying the most susceptible form of federal government i.e. based on ethnicity and legalize ethnic party system constitutionally. Ethiopia situated in a vulnerable geopolitical location and a conflict zone, is unique in Africa with its federalist political system that gives explicit recognition to ethno-linguistic party politics.

The question therefore begs is that what informed TPLF/EPRDF to introduce ethnicity as political instrument? An official response usually given by EPRDF politicians and cadres to this question is that the Ethnic Federalism and ethnic political party that goes in tandem is a response to question of “nationalities in Ethiopia. Clapham (1984) comments on this issue by quoting that Ethiopia’s Ethnic federalism is very different from the previous two regimes that led the country – and indeed from anything else in Africa. “I have never met any African political figure from outside Ethiopia who did not regard Ethiopian ethnic federalism as completely crazy” (Clapham 1984).

In relation to this, Abbink 2011 quotes his observation about Ethiopia current state of political affairs:-

... when speaking with politicians, academics or students from other African countries one usually hears: “We do not understand Ethiopian politics. How can they go and institutionalize tribalism. This was the one country in African with a non-colonial history, an indigenous state that had some unity and a centralist tradition, and now they follow us and go back to fragmentation. Why?” True or not, this very common remark might give us some food for thought (Abbink 2011p599).

Arguably democratic consolidation can hardly be achieved without political parties playing a significant role both in the debate and by practising the principles and policies they advocate. This is made possible in an environment where the flourishing of civic culture where the civil society can operate freely and mobilize as well as organize the community towards the common good is made possible. Putnam (in Roßteutscher ( 2005 p118) stresses the importance of civic engagement for the socialization to and reproduction of values conducive to democratic politics:-

Current civil society, particularly social capital, theorists called upon this literature to bolster their arguments for the link between civil society and democracy. Putnam, for example, stated that, when people lack connections to others, they are unable to test the veracity of their own views, whether in the give-and-take of causal conversation or in more formal deliberation. Without such an opportunity, people are more likely swayed by their worst impulses .
Conclusion

Contrary to what is accepted in the political science discourse regarding societal change and transformation and the imperative of greater communities participation, there is a very weak civil society base in Ethiopia due to reason mentioned above and the prevalence of culture of mutual suspicion and mistrust among different groups. Party politics is thus less developed and political organizations are mostly formed based on ethnic cleavages (save few established based on ideals) and are controlled by the elites and function based on clientalism. This in turn limits party’s capacity to create functional relationship and a platform for the negotiation as well as articulation of interests of citizens. In Ethiopia today political parties have become a means of states power hence resources control, where patronage and ethnic allegiance and affiliation is the rule for members recruitment hence appointment by the ruling regime. In Ethiopia parties are perceived by the people as a source of elite enrichment; therefore politics itself becomes a means of wealth accumulation, devoid of any idea of serving the interest of the mass and for the common good.

After 28 years of TPLF/EPRDF rule, the dominant rhetorical figure in Ethiopian politics is that of ethnicity, which has permeated daily life and overtaken democratic decision-making and shared issue-politics (Abbink 2011). This elitist and ethno centric nature of party politics in Ethiopia also have negative spill over impact on both party social base and sustainability. It is hard to maintain party sustainability where people are divided and responsive to ethnic and regional loyalties rather than ideology or party programs geared towards group or individuals interest. The under developed and weak opposition parties in Ethiopia today also limits the ability of party leaders to aggregate interests and play their role in political transition and democratic consolidation.

All These problems would require additional political-legal re-engineering that could engage Ethiopia’s citizens, depoliticize ethnic identity, and reduce the politics of top-down rule, distrust and threat, indicative of a strongly authoritarian political culture lingering from Ethiopia’s past. In Ethiopia despite long aspiration of its people for democracy and development, the real work of building an inclusive, democratic and more just society that puts ethnicity in its place and builds on addressing shared challenges and problems has only just begun. Constructive work on commonalities between population groups rather than using difference and division is needed i.e., a new psychology of trust and cooperation to maximize the potential and fulfil the ultimate aims of the state.

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