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EPRDF's State-building Approach: Responsive or Unresponsive?

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Abstract

State-building establishes state-nation (s) [the state that makes diversity and democracy possible] as opposed to nation-building [which urges to create one nation (nation-state) without due consideration of diversity]. Through the institutional, policy and politico-psychological innovations, state-building is geared to accommodate diversity and ensure democratic good governance. In this regard, federal governance has the potential to do so as it combines elements of shared-rule and regional self-rule. Since 1991, Ethiopia has been in the track of state-building project experimenting identity-based federal model on one hand and lavishly adding (un) responsive strategies. This paper argues responsive state-building strategies consolidate federal democracy; foster culture of accommodating and managing diversity; strengthens federal decentralization and resolves conflict in Ethiopia. To the contrary, the paper challenges any unresponsive state-building approach that emanate from government’s ideology, policy, practice on one hand and unconstitutional ways of peoples’ reaction to the state.

Keywords: *federalism; ethnic federalism; state-building; responsive and unresponsive approaches*

1. Introduction

States of the world have emerged through different processes of state formation. If anything they have in common, they have given up their identity markers such as culture, language, and psychological makeup in favor of the political dominant group. In post-colonial African context, for instance, the process of formation/consolidation of most of the states has been through the highly centralized unitary model. To be sure, most African states have these common characters: are multi-ethnic; all failed to restore and sustain their original African identities; inhibit incomplete state formation; invariably have authoritarian, undemocratic, and ethnocratic governments; experience ethnic based tensions and conflicts. Hence, Ethiopia fully shares these features. Obviously, the post 1991 Ethiopian socio-economic and political developments have been influenced by its pre 1991 ones. Given the different interpretations and narratives of the history of its existence as a polity, it is difficult to have authentic and comprehensive understanding of the trajectory of the Ethiopia's politics. As a result, the process of Ethiopian state formation/consolidation and the justifications given to it have been contested for different political interests and motives (Ezekiel, 2014). Generally speaking, the pre 1991 Ethiopian state building showed plausible centralist-unitary through cultural assimilation pursued by successive regimes.

This piece examines whether the Ethiopian federal model has been practically responsive or not taking in to account the contemporary socio-political developments either to strengthen Ethiopia's so far federal experience or challenge its constitutional and institutional existences. Accordingly, the article is structured in to four sections. Obviously, the first section is introductory part. The second section exposes federal state-building and rationales of considering identity in Ethiopia's federal making. The third section delves in to and challenges the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front's state-building approaches whether they are responsive or unresponsive from the historical, social, cultural, economic, and political realities. Finally, the forth section provides conclusion on the basis of major arguments.

2. Federal State-building in Ethiopia

2.1. Theoretical framework

a) Federalism

The rationales why states of the world are unitary, federal or hybrid governance systems, in one way or another, are to keep/sustain territorial integrity and create national consensus (Pierre, 2005:221). In unitary states national consensus is obtained by recognizing the state as the sole source of coercive authority within the national boundaries whereas federalism deliberately reduces national consensus to the greatest common denominator between the various groups composing the nation. The hybrid systems, however, mix both cases (Ibid). Hence, in all cases, the objective is either to build the state (state-building envisioning state nations) or to build the nation (nation-building objected to create nation state).

Traditionally, federalism has been regarded as a process of state formation in which smaller units join to create the bigger state. In contemporary times, however, the relevance of federal arrangement particularly in multi-ethnic societies is for two reasons: first, to accommodate diversities and demands of ethnic groups; second, to protect the territorial integrity of the state through the union of ethnic groups. This implies that federalism prevents (resolves) or mitigates ethnically inspired conflicts and thereby can ensure stability in states (Roza, 2004). Put differently, federalism aims at compromising internal pluralism and keeping external uniformity (Dicey, 1959). In the words of Watts,

(2009:8) federalism refers to the advocacy of multi-tiered government combining elements of shared-rule (collaborative partnership through common government) and regional self-rule (constituent unit autonomy). Although federalism is one part of decentralization, however, the former is a system of governance guaranteeing and establishing constitutionally at least two tiers of governments which are neither subordinate to each other. Like any other forms of decentralization, federalism empowers local peoples, accommodates/manages diversity and hence paves the way for conflict resolution that may arise as a result of multiple interests. Hence, federalism has rightly the potential to address all identity, diversity and governance related problems which the highly centralized and undemocratic systems unfold.

b) State-building

The discussion of state-building, as a concept and usage, has got popularity in the post WW II (OECD, 2008; Vaughan, 2011; Markakis, 2012). There are two pertinent contexts either to discuss or take it as socio-economic and political strategy of a given state. The first context is when state-weakness (*not altering the willingness of the peoples to the state and the government*); hence, shortly when state fails. Secondly, when the nation fails-*(the peoples change their attitude towards the government and the state and look for another alternative)* as the last resort. Although scholars and practitioners would agree on the general understanding of what state-building is all about, it has been differently defined from different perspectives. Accordingly, for some state-building is the establishment, re-establishment, and strengthening of public structures for efficient delivery of public goods (von Bogdandy et al, 2005).

However, comprehensive conception of state building has been provided by DFID, (2010: 12). Accordingly, state building combines two important dimensions: enhancing capacity of the state to function and the political processes that underpin the state-society relations. It is about strengthening the relationship between the state and society, and developing effective ways of mediating this relationship. Hence, state building is a long-term, historically rooted and internal process driven by a wide range of local and national actors. In light of this, there are three state-building scenarios. First: state building is not a technical process of strengthening governmental institutions (preferably institutional building) rather it is basically about state-society relations – *the psychological attachment of the citizens to the physical state and the government*. Second: state-building is primarily an endogenous process and subject to multiple factors. Thirdly, state-building is a dynamic process with three-interrelated elements: political settlement among elites, survival functions and expected functions of the state to earn actual and perceived legitimacy and bring about stability. This piece focuses and analyzes the Ethiopian case based on the third scenario.

To begin with, political settlement is about ensuring common understanding among elites to organize political power which serves the interests and beliefs of the society. Sometimes, it goes beyond elites and embraces the whole society. Survival functions, on the other, initially consolidate authority of the state and builds confidence of the citizenry in the government. Put differently, the basic functions of the state have to do with the security of the state and the people. Last but not least, the expected functions are other extra functions that the society anticipates from the state. These functions are not essential for the survival of the state. They are about efficient delivery of public services, good governance, and other services such as health, education, infrastructure; employment programs; personal safety and access to justice to the society by institutions of the government. Conversely, such functions are also crucial to building the legitimacy for the state and government (DFID, 2010).

Just although there are debates as to whether federalism is the means and/or the end to state-building, this article holds the position that federalism is both a means to state-building and the end in itself. Accordingly, state building is a process that integrates the disparate groups, peoples and nations together. It also determines the relation as well as makes the state represents all these differ-

ent groups structurally and institutionally. Put differently, building unity without undermining diversity through the carefully negotiated terms that are acceptable to all on national issues. Hence, vertically all groups have the same perception and belongingness to the state as well as horizontally there is symmetric relations. Even if there are rough horizontal relations among the groups, the vertical function remains pivotal to experience successful state building.

Contextualizing to the Ethiopian case, according to Goitom, (2014) Ethiopian governments have been preoccupied to regime survival than diverting state resources to development endeavors. Hence, the country has experienced problematic state-building whereby the political culture of the country continues to be zero-sum game and competitive interest among elites of different groups (Merera, 2010). However, state-building in the post 1991 Ethiopia is a complex process of building national unity and integrating the different identities of 'nations', 'nationalities' and 'peoples' of Ethiopia so that the so called 'community of citizens'-*national citizenship*- created under shared socio-economic and politico-cultural systems (Kidane, 1997; Vaughan, 2011).

c) Responsive and Unresponsive State-building Approaches

According to DFID, (2010), state-building is examined from two approaches: responsive and unresponsive. The approach which gives priority to meet public expectations in order to enhance state legitimacy is known as responsive state-building approach. The political settlement extends beyond elites reflecting broader compact between the state and society. The major indicators of responsive approach includes: state focuses on enhancing legitimacy and recognizes importance of inclusive politics; state creates structures and robust institutions responsive to citizens; state accepts the need to meet some expectations; as a result, public confidence and expectations grow; citizens are active responsible. To the contrary, unresponsive approach primarily focuses on ensuring state power at the cost of public expectations as the government relies more on the system of patronage leading intra-elite tension and instability in the society at large. As a result, state institutions are patronage, hence, some groups pose potential threat to the others; there is low drive for loyalty, reliance on repression and little attention given to expectations from the government side; and steps change (conflict, people's movement, and demand for new political settlement).

2.2. Federalism in Ethiopia

If we historicize Ethiopia's state building, the pre 1991 sustained the centralist unitary-state model in which the politically minority ethno-national groups were to be assimilated by the politically dominant culture (Kidane, 1997:121). This has had implications for the post-1991 Ethiopian state and society (Goitom, 2014: 27). In the 1991, the EPRDF— a coalition of largely ethnic-based movements toppled the Military regime and took the mandate to administer Ethiopia. Realizing the pre 1991 Ethiopia's state-building, the immediate solution of the regime is to pursue the policy and practice of ethnic-based federalism. Through the federal democracy, the rights of the nations, nationalities, and peoples would be respected as federalism combines elements of national shared-rule and regional self-rule. The regime has adopted this ethno-territorial federalism to achieve two historic and important promises: to pacify intra-society relations; redefine state-society relations on the basis of civic citizenship, and determine nations, nationalities, and peoples' rights to self-determination (Dereje, 2013). Hence, the Ethiopian federalism inextricably links identity and territory.

Ethiopia's peculiar nature of federalism has been praised and condemned. Some see it as the only viable option for the integrity of the Ethiopian state and society. Others posit that it exacerbates and ignites identity politics, hence, would lead to further disintegration comparing with the failed federal states in the fall of 1990s. In order to validate their arguments for and against it, there are two competing propositions: one to fill the gaps that the ethnic federalism unveils while the other is taken as to rescue it. Understanding the relevance of territory-identity centered federal structure, some practi-

tioners and scholars propose non-territorial/personal federalism as a complementary to ethnic-federalism. The proposition is to bridge some kinds of limitations and risks of using ethno-territoriality approach for accommodation of diversity to meet the interest of the dispersed minorities. On the other side, geographic federalism is proposed that needs restructuring the territorial units of the Ethiopian federation regardless of emphasis on ethnic composition attached to specific territory.

3. Examining EPRDF's State-building Approaches

As tried to be highlighted above, the EPRDF has centrally dwelled on federal democratic governance to answer historical, socio-economic and political questions. Especially emphasize has been given to addressing historical nationalities' injustices. John Markakis, (2011) has divided Ethiopia's state-building trajectories in to three: imperial model (pre 1974); socialist model (from 1975-1991) and federal model (since 1991). However, Clapham (2013) argues that Ethiopia has an old federal experience of which the post 1991 was a departure from the historic *one-revolutionary as compared to the preceding one*. Hence, the Ethiopian state and society in the post-military regime have been directed along the democratic federal state, *de facto* from 1991-1994 and *de jure* since the 1995 (FDRE Constitution'). Accordingly, the regime has employed multiple state-building strategies: ethnic-federalism, revolutionary democracy, and developmental (which favors dominant party system). These strategies are briefly revisited, appraised, and examined separately below.

3.1. Is (are) the Strategy (ies) Responsive and/or Unresponsive?

a) Ethnic federalism

As aforementioned, the foundation upon which the EPRDF's state building strategy is built is the recognition and institutionalization of ethnic identity with special emphasis given to the historically oppressed nations, nationalities and peoples. This is believed to be the only mechanism that could guarantee stability and sustain the existence of Ethiopia as a state (Assefa, 2013). The long last nationalist movements organized and marched under the banner of their own national identity within the framework of self-determination, have had an eager to be rid of resentful memories of the fallen older and its dead projects-*centralized unitary system and nation building*. Andreas (2010:43) strongly argues that federalism has enabled Ethiopia in two folds; first, it survived the country from further disintegration and secondly it established a legitimate political authority in the history of the country. He continues that by this time nations, nationalities, and peoples are persuaded not to renounce Ethiopia but instead to join together to form a legitimate political order for peaceful mutual cooperation (Ibid).

According to Roza (2004), Ethiopia followed a new state building strategy focusing on two things: protecting the identity and rights of nations, nationalities and peoples and ensuring the unity of the Ethiopian state. Clapham (2013) sees the Ethiopian ethnic federalism as a potential to state building. He argues that federalism has served its historic mission in rectifying the deep-seated imbalances among the peoples. As a result of this, the post 1991 system has promised to dismantle inequality between peoples of the embodying state and those who forcibly been incorporated into it.

Generally speaking, the set-up of federations is either on the basis of identity (ethnic) or territory (geography) depending on the objective realities and elite's subjective decision to address the concerns of societies. However, there are plenty of debates with regards to the model of Ethiopian federalism. In the first place, there is the fear that it invites ethnic conflict and risks of state disintegration. The worry in this view is that Ethiopia may face the fate of the USSR and Yugoslavia. The second view asserts that Ethiopia is a colonial empire (Assefa Jalata, 2009). Due to this, it sees the

federal exercise as yet another colonial trick than emancipating nations, nationalities and peoples from the past injustices and oppression.

The third and the last is the view of that argues that the ethno-federal arrangement has maintained the unity of the Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples on one hand and the territorial integrity of the state on the other. This is the position of the ethno nationalists and practitioner politicians. The view provides full recognition to the principle of ethnic self-determination (Alem, 2005: 313-314). Kassa Tekleberhan, (2010: 12), who although recognizes the existing controversies, posits the relevance of ethnic-based federal arrangement stating, "If I don't want my wife to divorce me, I have to work on our relationship and the same is true for her; and this holds true for nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia." As Assefa (2006) puts, identity based federal approach has been regarded as the only ideal type for post 1991 Ethiopian state.

b) Revolutionary democracy

The second and more ambiguous state-building strategy of the EPRDF is revolutionary democracy. Democracy is equally important to guaranteeing nations, nationalities, and peoples' self-determination in the post 1991. The EPRDF has articulated the concept of democracy from an ideological strategy inherited from the armed struggle of the 1970s and 1980s on one hand and a codified discursive strategy that has to coexist with the liberal dominant model following the collapse of socialist regime (Bach, 2011:649). Accordingly, it has publicized its own model-*revolutionary democracy* (Tronvoll, 2012)-*meant vibrant with its ideological underpinnings*. The bases of revolutionary democracy are communal participation and consensual representation led by a vanguard party (Tronvoll and Hagmann, 2012).

According to Bach, (2011) the Ethiopia's revolutionary democracy has come through three ideological sequences and underpinnings. The first sequence is Marxist-Leninist ideology in the pre 1991 that was purely the TPLF perspective. The second one was the liberal reforms of the transitional period (1991-1995). Accordingly, revolutionary democracy and liberal institutions (constitution, multiparty system, free press, and elections, etc), then, were designed to feed each other rather than contradict (Bach, 2011: 643). Objectively, liberal democracy has been supposed to legitimate the survival of the EPRDF leadership while revolutionary democracy has been maintained as core doctrine of the political ideology (Abbink, 2011). The last ideological sequence within was the TPLF split in the 200- reconfiguring the revolutionary democracy and giving birth to more contested concept-*developmental state* (Vaughan, 2011).

The EPRDF's revolutionary democracy has faced critical criticisms and regarded as unresponsive. According to Merera (2003 & 2011), revolutionary democracy is nothing but what the EPRDF has invented for itself where the conscious choice of this ideology is driven by the hegemonic aspirations of the vanguard party has brought about fusion of the party and the state. The late Prime Minister Meles also, albeit very late, has exposed the ambivalence of the concept of democracy of the EPRDF after the post 2005 election. He said: "The relevance of democracy for us is unquestionable and we did that, but the debate should be how best we achieve it within our context" (cited in Tronvoll and Hagmann, 2012:280). He meant that the universal standards and liberal principles of democracy have to be addressed and shaped in the interest and whim of the ruling party and political elites.

Moreover, revolutionary democracy has reinvigorated as a response to a threat of internal dissent within the party (Ibid). Bach, (2011: 644) on the other has dual position. In the first decade of EPRDF's rule, revolutionary democracy seems neither revolutionary nor liberal rather it is a symbol of giving due emphasis on the creation of federal democratic constitution and multiparty system within the parliamentary democracy. Later on revolutionary democracy has become a continuous struggle-a malleable ideology; a powerful fighting tool (exclusionary weapon, discursive exclusionary strategy targeting opposition parties, and radical EPRDF officials) (Ibid).

c) Developmental state

The concept of developmental state was initially used to describe East Asian States which have experienced rapid economic growth through state-led development policies. Narrowly, the term has been used to refer to state-led economic planning. But, it was Chalmers Johnson¹ who first conceptualized developmental state in the 1980s. According to Routley (2012:8), developmental state has four basic attributes. These are: (1) capable, autonomous (but embedded) bureaucracy; (2) development oriented political leadership; (3) symbiotic relationship between some state agencies and key industrial capitalists; and (4) successful policy intervention which promote growth. In light of this, developmental state: “[h]as sufficient state capacity to be effective in its targeted areas and has developmental vision such that it chooses to use this capacity to work towards economic development”. Mkandawire (2001: 289), on the other, defines it as saying: “Developmental state has two components: one ideological and the other structural”. It is ideological when the legitimacy is judged on the government’s ability to promote sustainable development; hence, the mission of the state becomes ensuring economic development. The structural component emphasizes on the capacity to implement national economic policies effectively that is determined by various factors-institutional, technical, administrative and political (Ibid).

When we come to the Ethiopian experience, the idea and practice of developmental state were there during the transitional period. Before the fall of the military government, TPLF had a socialist thinking based on Marxist-Leninist understanding of society, economy and politics. However, the western liberal thinking coincided with EPDRF’s control of Ethiopian state and society. As a result, EPDRF’s political economy thinking was like pendulum: on one hand it has to adjust itself with the global context and domestic realities. On the other, it has developed and inherited the democratic-centralism during its insurgency that could be an instrument to prolong its power. Hence, on one hand EPDRF has decided to control the commanding heights of the country’s economy and opened the market for the private sector (EPDRF, 2007:65-68).

According to Abbink, in Ethiopia developmental state as a concept and practice marks the fourth phase of the EPDRF’s ethno-federal experiment: *Marxist-Leninist ideology during insurgency; liberal reforms during transitional period; TPLF’s split in 2001; and developmental state paradigm and practice*. In practical terms, the five year Growth and Transformation Plan is the highest stage and best indication of Ethiopia’s ambition to experience developmental model stressing on economic growth. It entails full emphasis on national economic development whereby political consideration would be secondary and legitimacy would be sought in the economic growth achievements such as infrastructure, road building, hydro-power mega projects, double digit GDP growth, and foreign direct investment etc. on one hand and technocratic approach on the other (Ibid:598).

From the theoretical and practical point of view, however, developmental state frustrates the country’s nations, nationalities and peoples need enshrined in the federal and regional constitutions on one hand and impacting negatively state-society and intra-societal relations on the other. It prioritizes national issues at the expense of regional and local interests for which the ethnic federalism stands. From the view of opposition political parties, developmental state is an instrument of EPDRF’s ambition to remain on hegemonic crippling opposition political parties and making them irrelevant. Hence, dominant party system has replaced multiparty democracy. This is typically unresponsive to the post 1991 Ethiopia’s federal democracy.

¹ Chalmers Johnson is regarded as a father of Developmental State concept when he coined it in his study on industrial policy in Japan. Accordingly, he argued that the East Asian countries including Japan were based neither on Soviet-type command economies nor on laissez-faire free market economies, but on market-conforming methods of state intervention-Capitalist Developmental State (Johnson 1982:1999 cited in INEF, 2010: 8).

3.2. Analysis of EPRDF State-building Approaches

In the last decade of the 20th century, in Ethiopia, the move has been seemingly state-building project recognizing and sustaining the existence of complete different nations, nationalities and peoples. Hence, they are constitutionally recognized and the federal arrangement which fits the reality of the Ethiopian society has been endorsed-*ethnic federalism*. In this vein, the institutional and constitutional strategies till 2001 has been responsive state building though there have been rhetorical foundations in it. The incumbent government has popularized the motto of '*unity-in-diversity*' that basically signifies the ethno-federal model of the Ethiopian state. However, intra-party elites' division and the Ethio-Eritrean war have shifted responsive state building to unresponsive ones since 2001. As a result, national issues have been championed regional/identity issues. The federal flag has been hoisted one meter higher than the regional states' flags showing federal government supremacy and subordination of regional states. Moreover, the planning and implementation of many socio-economic and political policies are top-down through party-chain.

Generally, this article possibly argues that EPRDF has tended to nation-building (*Amharic language is increasingly becoming the lingua franca of the country; extensive penetration by the federal government-territorially, politically and economically in regional and local issues, etc. and excessive integration*) which basically contradicts with major tenants of identity based federal arrangement and federal democracy in general. Summarizing the EPRDF's state-building approach, the following points are identified:

- The focus of the EPRDF is to earn legitimacy through economic growth but denies recognizing the importance of inclusive politics through multiparty political system. Contemporary, the regime is advocating one/dominant party system as a viable strategy for developmental state.
- The government is establishing structures and institutions responsive to developmental state paradigm seemingly reversing ethno-federal and democratization structures and institutions.
- The government is delivering core functions securitizing issues to the regimes survival. Since the adaptation of the developmental state concept, civil servants, private sectors, media and individuals have put in either box of developmental or rent seekers. Those who comply with the policies and strategies of the government are developmental whereas those who challenge are anti-developmental, terrorists, narrow nationalists and fundamentalists.
- Government is diverting the attention and expectation of the society to national socio-economic issues as the pressure from society at all levels getting strong regarding realization of constitutional civil and political rights, group rights in line with ethnic federalism.
- As a result, there is eroded public confidence, diminishing civil and political rights expectations, politically motivated and intimidated.

4. Conclusion

Democratic federal system has to address three inherent problems of nation-states. First, the nation-states deny people-hood to ethno-culturally diverse peoples within their territory; second, nation-states link citizenship and nationality together; third, nation-states pursue the idea of creating culturally homogenous societies. The reality, however, shows that only tiny proportion of world's distinctive religious, linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups have formed their own states (Ibid). Hence, a solution is accommodating diversity within the territory of democratic federal state. In light of this

view, federalism has the potential to balance people-hood and state-hood through harmonizing the elements of *national shared-rule* and *regional self-rule* (Watts, 2009; Kymlicka, 2006).

In Ethiopia, federal democratic governance is not an issue to be brought to the table and discuss on it. Ethiopia is home to more than 80 ethnic group; multi-religious; highly divided societies; rough (problematic) state-society and intra-society relations; undemocratic and very centralized political culture; land of poverty; violent conflict prone country; encircled by volatile states, etc. in addition to these realities, federal governance is becoming a viable approach as it combines two basic elements: *shared-rule and self-rule* (when one is preferred over the other both have the potential either to encourage and discourage decentralization or centralization). Ethiopia's federal experiment-identity based federal arrangement and the overarching democratization processes are keenly the only and responsive strategies to state-building project in the post 1991. Addressing historical injustices and nationalities' question would only be possible and viable through consolidation, not deterioration, of constitutional federalism and democratic governance.

However, any minor changes/return backs to centralization tendency, overlooking identity issues, importing non-federal and undemocratic values in all aspects, making/implementing socio-economic and political (laws, polices, strategies, etc.) which either needs constitutional amendment or not comply with the existing constitution, and inability/not willing to be lifted up from dictatorial political culture of the country mark civil wars, state-failure, state-disintegration, and looking for alternative state or nation or government in Ethiopia. Some developments immediately after the 2015 national election in Ethiopia depicts the need for expanding federal and democratic values than narrowing them through military and leadership instrumentalities. Hence, the EPRDF state-building strategies like revolutionary democracy, developmental state, dominant party system and centralization tendency of governance would undermine Ethiopia's federal experiment, decentralization and conflict resolution.

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