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Assefa Mehretu
Michigan State University, mehretu@msu.edu

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Ethnosymbolism and the Dismemberment of the State in the Horn of Africa:
The Ethiopian Case of Ethnic Federalism ,by Assefa Mehretu, Professor of Geography,Michigan State University,East Lansing, MI 48824, Email: mehretu@msu.edu

Abstract

The paper has three major objectives. The first is to do a critical review of the current largely antagonistic narratives of ethnic instrumentalism in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa that have ultimately led to the balkanization of the state and caused serious political instability and fratricidal conflicts with traumatic and costly consequences in the region. The second is to do a critical review of the policy of the current Ethiopian government to implement ethno-territorial formations under the rubric of *killils* (Amharic for territorial enclosures), and to demonstrate how this may seriously vitiate national integration along compatible cultural and economic dimensions. The third is to examine an alternative theoretical framework from social geography and to demonstrate the potential for creating compatible narratives for non-exclusive communal (cultural) and neoliberal (socioeconomic) order that would unleash Ethiopia's energy and those of its neighbors from the crippling impasse of divisive tribalism (Leoussi and Grosby 2007: 16-17).

Introduction

Recent internal as well as regional antagonisms in Ethiopia and the Horn were caused by political forces which emerged in the last 30 years as a result of governments which advanced fundamentalist ideological and ethno-religious positions. In their own self-promoted messianic righteousness and with little to no political legitimacy, both the post-1974 governments used Marxist ideology and/or ethno-symbolism as foundations of their respective architecture of hegemonic governance that enabled them to successfully marginalize their opposition while feigning to embrace the people's basic demands for social justice, land reform and democracy.

However, by the very nature of their divisive and antagonistic systems of rule, they led Ethiopia and the region to the most traumatic period in their modern history as "the hottest conflict zone in the world" (Pendergast and Thoamas-Jensen 2007). With Marxist revolutionary and/or ethno-linguistic instrumentalist discourses with seductive emancipatory mirages, the Derg, which ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991, and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which replaced the Derg and is the current government, foisted on Ethiopians radical and sometimes harsh methods of governance which held little promise to solve the problems of democracy and development the country faced (Pausewang et al 2002: 26-44; Marcus 2002: 181-245; Wolde-Giorgis 1989: 55-68; Aalen and Tronvoll 2009). Both the Derg and the EPRDF also created a divisive environment for counter-narratives to compromise Ethiopia's integrity and to allow ethnically inspired inventions and imaginings that came at the expense of the cognitive historical and cultural moorings of the peoples of the country (Levine 1974: 80-86; Ayele 2003; Abbay 1997). Handicapped by the antagonistic fragmentation that their policies engendered, both the Derg and the EPRDF lost precious opportunities to carry out real and necessary transformative projects that the people had hoped for (Levin 2007).

Instead, the country descended into deadly fratricidal conflicts, with considerable sacrifice of life and treasure. Although the EPRDF has brought much needed relief from the brutal excesses of the Derg and has produced relative peace in the country, there is still restiveness fueled by the "withholding type" fragmentary ethno-linguistic federation (Ghai 2000; Fisseha 2006; Paul 2000) that has energized some liberation fronts some of which have active armed insurgencies for secessionist or irredentist objectives (Melbaa 1988; Holcomb and Ibssa 1990; Jalata 2005). Eritrea's secession land-locked Ethiopia but itself became a "shattered illusion" to its supporters with a despot in Asmera who chose to fight a devastating border war with Ethiopia soon after the cessation and presided over an economic collapse of the country (Fessehatzion 2002; Araya 1997; Kendie 2005; Reid 2005; Marcus and Brown 1997). There is a military standoff between Ethiopia and Somalia as the latter's jihadist insurgency continues to make direct threats on Ethiopia's integrity that has at one time caused the Ethiopian armed forces to enter Somalia to neutralize the threat (Hagman 2006; Menkhaus 2007). Finally, the border between Ethiopia and its two neighbors, Eritrea and Somalia, has been militarized and cauterized crippling any form of regional economic interactions for the foreseeable future (Abbay 1997; Abbai 1999; ICG 2009).

Divisive Counter-Narratives

The rhetoric of internal division in Ethiopia began with the Derg following the fall of Haile Sellassie's government in 1974. The Derg demonized the monarchical order and promised a radical change for Ethiopia by successfully preempting the variegated popular demands for democratic transformation, land tenure and economic development (Wolde-Giorgis 1989: 58-59). The country went into turmoil when the Derg overstepped its mandate and decided to transform it into a Marxist-Leninist state. The instability that followed the Derg's draconian measures and its brutality towards its opposition resulted in weakening the fledgling Ethiopian unity and national character and its international standing. It also inflamed tribal insurgencies in some regions of the country to engage in invented divisive counter-narratives to advance their own partisan objectives. Some of these counter-narratives were recited to undermine the monarchical order and its assumed core hegemonic constituency. Even though many of these counter-narratives were not based on new findings of archeology or history, they became a staple material that the Derg regime and its myrmidons recited interminably to undermine the old order. Many of these counter-narratives became even more strident with the rise of identity politics under the EPRDF. Only three of these counter-narratives that had particular resonance among ethno-politicians as well as some scholars will be addressed here. This is not to say that the conventional narratives have more veracity than the counter-narratives, a claim nobody can make these days because of the pitfalls of socially-constructed postmodernist imaginings in which, as Truilzi lamented, the writing of history in post-colonial Africa has become "a complex political, not simply historical affair" (Truilzi 2007). The point that is being made here is, whereas the conventional narratives were centripetal trying to forge unity within diversity, the counter-narratives have been centrifugal toward the fragmentation of the Ethiopian state.

The counter narratives are grounded on what Conversi (2007) calls ethnosymbolic "instrumentalism" which "conceives ethnicity as a dependent variable, externally controlled according to its strategic utility for achieving more secular goods (formally in the name of the group, in fact solely to the elites' advantage)" (Conversi 2007: 16).

The first was the counter-narrative that rejected the claim that Ethiopia has been, at least in modern times, a multicultural nation whose peoples lived together peacefully and that "there has been little history of sectarian violence" prior to the onset of the Derg regime in 1974 (Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen 2007; Levin 1974; Kebede 2008: 176). However, the counter-narrative that was predicated on the nationalities question advanced contrarian viewpoints (Gudina 2006; Jalata 2005: 65-136; Melbaa 1988: 39-61) which gave rise to the current Ethiopian Constitution that is designed to decouple centralizing political power from tribal hegemony (read as Amharan or Abyssinian) and redress past grievances of all of Ethiopia's tribes by applying a territorial arrangement of "separate development" and put all of Ethiopia's "nations, nationalities and peoples" on the same egalitarian platform (GOE 1994; Berhe 2004). However, can it be said that these objectives have been accomplished by EPRDF''s ethno-linguistic paradigm? Even under the most generous concession to postmodernist claims on self-determination, cultural recentering and recovery of territorial rights (Squires 1993), what really happened in Ethiopia after tribalism took center stage in political discourse tells a different story. According to much of the critical literature on the EPRDF, the "victorious ethnonationalists" of "insurgent Tigray" (Tareke 2009: 76), who in 1991 successfully wrestled state power from the Derg, pushed ethno-linguistic federalism to appease tribal secessionists of the time while assuring themselves hegemonic positions that Tigray's demographic power and location would not have warranted (Paul 2000; Fiseha 2006; Clapham 2009; ICG 2009; Pausewant et al. 2002; Lyons 2009; Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Cliffe, Love and Tronvoll 2009). The facts on the ground from the last two decades reveal ominous outcomes: (a) an unstable "withholding type" fragmentary ethno-linguistic federation that has increasingly tribalized the discourse on self determination and democratic rights (Ghai 2000; Fisseha 2006; Paul 2000), (b) one-man dictatorship in and economic collapse of Eritrea which fought a devastating border war with Ethiopia in 1998-2000 that claimed more than 100,000 lives with an even greater number of casualties " (Negash 2007) (see also Araya 1997; Kendie 2005; Reid 2005; Zewde 2008: 363-374), (c) continued security threats from tribal liberation fronts some of which like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) have active armed insurgencies for secessionist or irredentist objectives (Jalata 2005; Melbaa 1988: 105-125; Jalata 2005: 175-200), (d) jihadist insurgency in Somalia which had made direct threats on its neighbors that ultimately led to Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia (Hagman 2006; Menkhaus 2007), (e) militarization and cauterization of the entire border between Ethiopia and both its neighbors of Eritrea and Somalia, crippling any form of regional economic complementarities among the three countries for the foreseeable future (Abbay 1997; Abbai 1999; Negash 2007), and (f) pervasive complaints about gross violation of democratic rights with incarceration of journalists and members of the opposition in both Ethiopia and Eritrea (ICG 2009; Pausewang et al. 2002: 230-244; Negash 2007).

The second counter-narrative singled out the Amhara and Tigreans as an "Abyssinian" ethnocratic ruling elite that practiced cultural, political and economic hegemony over Ethiopia (see Keller 1988: 63-64; Tareke 2009:

32; Melbaa 1988: 39-47)). The "Amhara ruling class" especially has been a convenient straw man for years although there has not been an authoritative study of the ethnic and religious make-up of Menelik's or Haile Sellassie's royal household, aristocratic elite, or political and cabinet appointees all of which, by and large, contained representatives of all tribes and religions. What made the "Amhara" label so seductive is because Amharic has been the lingua franca of the country (Zewde 2008: 77-93) and, rolled together with its dual, Orthodox Christianity, it offered a teflon-clad revisionist world view of the divisive forces that vociferously narrated the evils of "Amharization" (Iyob 1995: 90) or "Abyssinianization" (Tareke 1996: 20) as these two cultural iconic markers of the central "Shoan" hegemony fit neatly in the effervescent imaginings of tribal separatists of Oromo and Eritrea. Otherwise, a closer scrutiny of the counter-narrative would show that: (a) those who are so called "Amhara" do not refer themselves as such with the special exception of perhaps residents in major towns like Addis Ababa (Wolde-Mariam 2003); (b) "Amharas" and Tigres who lived in what is called Abyssinia, namely northern Shoa, Gojjam, Gonder, Wello, and Tigray were and still are among the least developed and most marginalized peoples of Ethiopia's modern history and polity, and they had very little or nothing to do with or gain from the central hegemony of multiethnic and multicultural Addis Ababa; and (c) the Shoan hegemony centered in Addis Ababa had always been multi-ethno-lingual with presence it its ranks of powerful members of the royalty, nobility, aristocracy, regional governors, and government ministers that were Amhara, Oromo, Tigre, and others. By the same token, the spokes of EPRDF's architecture of hegemony, which claims to be multicultural, are knotted in Addis Ababa as the preeminent hub of political power and hegemony. But it would make no sense to take a leap from that and put blame on the people of Tigray or Tigres anywhere for the deeds of the EPRDF. That would be unfair and unnecessarily divisive (see also Zewde 2008: 355). The third counter-narrative was that the "Abyssinian" center colonized the non-"Abyssinian" periphery (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990: 71-144; Melbaa 1988: 33-61; Jalata 2005: 69-93; Keller 1988: 59-64; Gebre-Medhin 1989: Iyob 1995: 29-46; Smith 2007; Vaughan 2006). Assuming that there is a general agreement of what exactly "Abyssinia" refers to, which Ethiopians rarely used to refer to themselves formally unless in jest or, more currently, to own the term and rehabilitate it, the notion that such entity was a colonizing power and that Ethiopia is a recent invention merely confirms, as Kebede (2008: 176) observes "the extent to which Ethiopian history and culture were being depicted through Eurocentric concepts". It also calls for unrealistic Ethiopian exceptionalism and denies the ancient country what almost every major country in the world took for granted in its history of expanding and consolidating its sovereign territory. Furthermore, as Mohammed Hassen (1990) has amply demonstrated, the Ethiopian history of migration, conquest, subjugation and hegemony was fully bidirectional in which both the so called "Abyssinians" from the north and the Oromos from the south have competed for supremacy on central Ethiopia prior to Menilik's national consolidation of the Ethiopian state (see also Levin 1974: 72-86; Zewde 2008: 353-357).

Both the Derg and the TPLF elite used such counter-narratives to demonize the pre-1974 governments as a feudal hegemonic order with a core constituency of the "Amhara" that had used its power to marginalize and sometimes colonize the other ethno-linguistic and regional components of Ethiopia.

Although the original motive of the Derg and EPRDF may have been to downgrade the alleged "Amhara" elite in Addis Ababa, both were contemptuous of the Ethiopian state as a mere collection of disparate "nationalities" that were allegedly forced together by imperialist "Abyssinians" from their north-central heartland of Ethiopia (Melbaa 1988: 47-61; Holcomb and Ibssa 1990: 71-132; Jalata 2005: 65-93; Gudina 2006). Furthermore, with the assumption of the "Amhara" ruling elite as a subtext for all the problems of Ethiopia, the post-1974 regimes were unchallenged when they devised their own brand of a fatal architecture hegemonic of governance that was first anchored on Marxist-Leninist dogma that gave license to the brutal Derg to declare a "red terror" against its own citizens (Wolde-Giorgis 1989: 55-68; Pausewang et al. 2002). It also enabled the TPLF to afford a pretext to use ethnic-based territorial divisions and thereby compromising Ethiopia's territorial integrity that had been in place since the latter part of the 19th century (Rubenson 1976: 172-287; Marcus 2002: 77-180; Ayele 2003: 27-28; Abbay 1997; Wolde-Giorgis1989: 55-68). In order to advance its own agenda, the TPLF followed the Derg's footsteps and continued to demonize Ethiopia's centralizing narratives (often attributed to the Amhara or the Abyssinians), thereby placating and satiating extremist tribal secessionist elements like the TPLF itself, the EPLF, the OLF and the ONLF) (Iyob 1997; Holcomb and Ibssa 1990: 71-144).

Gerrymandering Ethnic Homelands (*Killils*)

As a logical outcome of the counter-narratives that helped implode the Ethiopian state, the EPRDF, with little input or challenge from the Ethiopian people, decided to impose a system of "separate development" by dividing Ethiopia into tribal territories called "*killils*" (Amharic for territorial closures). Although *killils* were random gerrymandered territories, the EPRDF elevated their status to federal administrative regions (Abbay 2004; Berhe 2004; Marcus 2002; Wolde-Mariam 2003: 95-101; Vaughan 2003, 2006: 181-207; Smith 2007). Predictably, the use of tribalism as an emancipatory factor by the EPRDF served to exculpate those tribal groupings like the TPLF, EPLF and OLF who had characterized the Ethiopian state as an "invented" entity of the "Abyssinian imperialists" (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990; Gebre-Medhin 1989; Jalata 2005; Melbaa 1988). Although the focus on tribal issues goes back to the Derg which introduced it in national political discourse to redress felt past injustices and socio-economic marginality claimed by some of Ethiopia's ethnic groups, it was the EPRDF which used tribal distinctions as a political tool to divide Ethiopians into "nations and nationalities" with rights to secede (GOE 1994). EPRDF's *killils* divided Ethiopia into nine gerrymandered federal territories, eight of which had specific tribal designations. By using the idea of ethnic homelands with covenants of political and property rights, the EPRDF exceeded the threshold for a redemptive use of ethnicity to build unity in diversity in the Ethiopian state (Fisseha 2006). The *killil* concept incubated three serious dangers that would present challenges for responsible governance of the state: (a) dual citizenship problems and "decentralized despotism" arising from *killils*, (b) systemic marginality of all Ethiopians derived from the "homeland" logic, and (c) spatial disintegration and developmental dysfunction of the country.

The first serious problem with *killils* is their effect on people who are unable or unwilling to claim belongingness to any tribal grouping. Such Ethiopians would be floated with no homelands from where to exercise the full measure of their rights vested in *killils* (see GOE 1994; Fisseha 2006). This is incompatible with a secular federal sovereign state in which every citizen has a right without any prejudice to reside anywhere in the country of which he/she is a citizen (Lefort 2007). Even more damaging to the central state apparatus is that *killils* subjugated the individual citizen of whatever ethnic origin to double jeopardy under the centralized hegemony of the state exercised by EPRDF as well as "decentralized despotism" by *killil* functionaries with each seeking compliance under duress (Fisseha 2006; Mamdani 1996; Vestal 2000; Pausewang, Tronvoll and Aalen 2002; Smith 2007). Cases in point are the Oromo elite, practicing a form of decentralized despotism by imposing the use of Oromifa and the Latin script called Kube in the Oromo *killil* for schools and official communication thereby restricting the teaching and use of Amharic and denying students from those *killils* to effectively communicate in the lingua franca of the central state; or the dangers that the people in the Somali *killil* experience in balancing the power of the central Ethiopian authorities and those of the Somali insurgency of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in which an appearance of overt support for one of the other can be deadly (Menkhaus 2007).

At another level, as the current national leadership in Eritrean has amply demonstrated, secession has failed to guarantee freedom from "decentralized despotism", the worst of which is being experienced by Eritreans (Araya 1997; Negash 2007; Reid 2005; Kendie 2005; Pendergast and Thomas-Jensen 2007; Lyons 2006).

Decentralized despotism confounds ordinary people about their national citizenship by effectively endorsing dual-citizenship modalities under the law in which non-secular ethnic affiliation in *killils* may subordinate the secular citizenship in the Ethiopian state (Berhe 2004; Hagmann 2005; Lefort 2007). Decentralized despotism has been blamed for the "dysfunction" of African governments even though few African countries overtly allowed top-down imposition like EPRDF's dual-citizenship modalities using tribal territorial separation as in the *killil* system (Fiseha 2006; Lefort 2007; Mamdani 1996; Holne 2006; Hagmann 2006; Abbink 2006a). Dual allegiance and despotic structures which the *killil* system can default to have inherent propensities for a blowback in the form of centrifugal ethnic breakup with *killil* boundaries serving as fault lines (Abbay 2004; see also Boone 2007). Following this logic, the EPRDF was challenged to make good on its promises for self-determination including secession. However, as some have observed the EPRDF, which has become "a centralized authoritarian … party system that operates behind the facades of federalism and ethno-national self-determination" (Tronvoll and Aalen 2002: 230-244;);was not likely to allow a break-up of that magnitude (Lyons 2006; Jalata 2005; Menkhaus 2007; Vaughan 2003).

The second problem posed by *killils* is systemic marginalization of all Ethiopians. *Marginality* is "a complex condition of disadvantage which individuals and communities experience as a result of vulnerabilities that may arise from unfavorable environmental, cultural, social and political and economic factors" (Mehretu, Pigozzi and Sommers 2000). There are two types of marginality: *contingent* and *systemic*. *Contingent marginality* is a disadvantage that results from competitive weakness in free markets, and will not be germane to this discussion.

Systemic marginality, on the other hand, is a disadvantage that results from extra-market vulnerabilities which allow ethnic-based hegemonies to control social, political and economic outcomes for ordinary citizens. This is central to the hegemony that led to the *killil* arrangement. *Killils* make every Ethiopian citizen vulnerable to *systemic marginality* by making it a requirement that everyone should declare his or her membership to an ethno-linguistic group and be assigned to one of the nine *killils* from which he/she may exercise political and property rights without challenge. This meant that centuries of tribal mixtures along social or territorial lines suddenly came into question subjecting those who refused to be assigned to *killils* or lived outside what the EPRDF assigned as their "homeland" to have their national citizenship rights superseded by rights in the "*killil*" (Fiseha 2006). Although EPRDF's intent may not have been that extreme, its *killil* covenants enabled the "fatal coupling of power and difference" (Gilmore 1992) in which those designated as "native" to a *killil* would exercise their statutory or assumed power under the *killil* covenant to create undue stress on "others" defined as non-natives or immigrants or *"metes"* (in Amharic) to the *killil*. This can happen to marginalized groups even if they just happen to find their ancestral home on the "wrong" side of an arbitrary boundary that the EPRDF has gerrymandered, or even if their forefathers were born and grew up where they currently live (Fiseha 2006). *Killil* covenants have led to a variety of compromises that non-natives have to endure especially from tribal extremists who, in rare situations, have used violent means to "cleanse" their *killils* (see Abbink 2009b, especially his table entitled "list of violent conflicts between Ethiopian ethnic groups, 1991-2005"). Sometimes systemic marginality of non-natives had collateral impacts on natives who have come together with non-natives by marriage or friendship. This was especially witnessed in Eritrea during its 1998-2000 border war with Ethiopia in which the former evicted from its territory Ethiopians including Eritreans married to Ethiopians. The EPRDF responded by doing the same to Eritreans with traumatic outcomes to families, relatives and friends in both countries. EPRDF has also used systemic marginality by first cherry-picking and incorporating opposition parties that accept its agenda while at the same time marginalizing or banning pan-Ethiopian opposition parties as well as secessionist tribal parties like the OLF, and using their "exiled" status to leverage compliance and loyalty from more pliant ethnic brokers (Boone 2007) with a clever combination of the proverbial carrot (patronage and protection) and stick (exile, jail terms or firepower) (Chanie 2007; ICG 2009: 2-12; Clapham 2009; Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Chanie 2007).

The third problem is that ethnic *killils* are so narrowly conceived that they will truncate spatial homogeneity regions in historical experience, political objectives, economic geography, and environmental problems. This will produce a series of intractable national problems. Depending on the permeability of the *killil* boundaries, issues that require pan-*killil* spatial integration such as commodity markets, power, transport and communication infrastructure, education, language and science and technology policy, resource mobilization, and environmental protection become subject to unnecessary red tape among disparate *killil* bureaucratic elite that bolster their own narrowly framed *killil* or tribal self interests even if they are detrimental to the macroeconomic geographic viability of their own people or the nation at large.

This evokes the classic case of the "tragedy of the commons" metaphor in which uncoordinated and unregulated competition for the utilization of multi-*killil* assets and advantages will compromise the general welfare of the entire collective. The dispersion of authority over national resources (like major watersheds and agro-climatic zones) will also undermine their mobilization and sustainable use for the whole country. Regions that grow coffee, *teff* or wheat are environmentally and culturally determined. They do not necessarily co-vary with artificial *killils*. Their agronomic improvement, productive development, and exchange potential are trans-*killil* problems and require national coordination (Abegaz 2004). The same is true for environmental protection agenda ranging from prevention of soil erosion to watershed management. The Oromia *killil* spans over three major topographic entities, the Rift Valley, the Eastern Highlands and associated lowlands, and the Western Highlands and associated lowlands of Ethiopia, and covers seven major watersheds (the lakes region, Omo, Awash, Blue Nile, Baro, and Gambella). The same physical features are shared by almost all the other *killils* in the country (Wolde-Mariam 1970, 1972; Wubneh and Abate 1988).

Prospects for Communal and Functional Integration for Ethiopia

The EPRDF has been successful in its use of ethnic division as a means of governing without a concerted challenge. Although the government should be credited with relative peace and stability in the country, and a modicum of euphoric centeredness by many of Ethiopia's tribes, its system of territorial governance is fraught with potential problems (Abbink 2006b). It is inconceivable how "the increased ethnic awareness and tensions created by the regionalization policy and their potentially explosive consequences" (ICG 2009: ii), with occasional deadly flares in regional conflicts (Abbink 2006b), can be harmonized with the 21st century's challenges facing a poor country seeking democracy, economic development and globalization (Vestal 2006; Zewde 2008: 371-373). As Levine pointed out in his paper on "*Ethiopia's Missed Chances*" (2007), both the Derg and EPRDF failed to opt for a more democratic system of governance with an economic superstructure that supported what the people had really demanded at the time: "land to the tiller" and a government of their choice. However, both the Marxist Derg and the ethnic EPRDF misread the signals, intentionally or unintentionally, and led the country into ideological and ethnic fundamentalisms with an appropriation of illegitimate and fatal power. In the case of the Derg, it proclaimed a "red terror" against anyone who questioned its messianic righteousness with punishments of imprisonment and extra-judicial killings without recourse to the law (Zewde 2008: 428-443). The EPRDF did not go to that extreme. However, it did use its own legal provisions to marginalize its opposition with threats of loss of patronage or jail terms (Chanie 2007; Vestal 1997, 2000; Pausewang and Tronvoll 2002; ICG 2009; Aalen and Tronvoll 2009).

The reintegration of Ethiopia which would build on gains of "ethnic awareness" and internal détente (ICG 2009; Clapham 2009; Zewde 2008: 371-373) requires a paradigm shift. A new paradigm should accommodate both an enlightened ethnic-based agenda for self determination as well as a national agenda for secular democracy and economic development. The theory of integrated national development calls for the "'cosmic' unity of opposites" constituting both ethnic (communal) and national (functional) objectives (Friedmann 1988: 9, 93-103).

This framework of national development does not allow tensions between the local ethno-linguistic "life space" as in *killils* and the neoliberal functional integration of the national "economic space" as in non-ethnic formal administrative territories as in the United States (Friedamann 1988: 93-103). As Friedmann points out, both are "are necessary for sustenance of modern societies" (Friedmann 1988: 96; see also Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Gore 1984; Markusen 1984). *Communal* forces*,* which are inherently centrifugal in the context of the central state apparatus, refer to "common bonds" experienced by people in intimate communal spaces (sometimes virtual spaces) sharing similar "history, collective memory, habitat and folk culture, traditions, poetic spaces and symbolic landscapes" (Johnson 2002; Conversi 2009) and aspire to sustain their communal solidarity. In essence, communal integration within a sovereign state may be similar to the *killil* concept in Ethiopia but without its corrosive covenants for exclusive spatial closure, propensity for "us-and-them" divisions, and vulnerability for systemic marginality and "dual citizenship" (Reid 2005; Holne 2006; Hagmann 2005). *Functional integration*, on the other hand, is a neoliberal concept that is transcendental of communal and local objectives and is "used to contribute to the development or maintenance of a larger whole" (a sovereign state). It empowers citizens to enjoy their individual freedoms to pursue opportunities based on self-interest for political, humanitarian or entrepreneurial objectives not necessarily and solely anchored in their ethnic "homelands". In practical terms, neoliberal functional integration enables unrestricted social and spatial mobility within the sovereign state and allows people from anywhere to pursue their social, political and economic objectives at the local, national, regional and global scales (see Boone 2007). The degree of compatibility between these dual identities is dependent on the neutrality of the central state apparatus and its abilities to balance the *centrifugal communal* agenda and the neoliberal *centripetal functional* agenda. In its neutral role, the central state apparatus becomes the repository of "image of unity that transcends class, gender, or 'racial' difference (that) is important to the exercise of nation building" (Johnson 2002). It cannot take sides as the EPRDF government has done from the beginning by pushing the ethnic agenda and became hostile to non-ethnic and national platforms. In this framework, *communal* forces will operate freely within the national legal system and pursue their legitimate role for the full recovery of their communal life.

However, the central state apparatus, as a secular entity, will have to apply robust safeguards to prevent slippage into parochial and nihilistic fights between and among "ethnic brokers" (Boone 2007) that can disable inter-ethnic harmony and neoliberal functional projects in the national interest. On the other hand, neoliberal functional forces cannot suppress legitimate and peaceful communal interests. Some of the complaints about the pre-1974 Ethiopian state had to do with its hegemonic inclination to advance neoliberal functional integrative goals that allowed the marginalization of communal interests in a variety of areas but most importantly in language, religion, culture, media, educational policy, agrarian development, land policy and political participation (Abbay 1997; Wagaw 1999; Abegaz 2004; Akalu 1982; Gudina 2006; Keller 1988: 15-44). The same was true of the Derg regime which used brutal means to suppress communal solidarities in both rural and urban settings (Zewde 2001: 248-256).

When communal and neoliberal goals are harmonized, cultural groupings will advance communal obligations in bounded or non-bounded spaces while at the same time they are able to work in their own individual interest as national citizens and ultimately in the collective interest for modernist neoliberal functional state apparatus. It is important to note that spatial closures for communal ethno-linguistic identify formations are rarely the same as those for neoliberal and functionalist objectives for political, economic and environmental integration. However, they must be compatible along three crucial dimensions. The first is that ethnic territories (like *killils*) should not have rigid boundaries that have legal standing unless cessation for political independence is a serious agenda. That should be reserved for non-ethnic federal administrative boundaries of the secular central state apparatus. The second condition is that the individual citizen of a multicultural sovereign nation must be free to choose whether and how he or she wishes to engage the communal domain. He/she self-selects which communal group or groups to join or not to join at all. In a modern secular state, belonging to a non-secular ethno-linguistic or religious communal grouping is and must be an option, not a mandate. Belonging to the sovereign nation is an inalienable right of every citizen. The two cannot be confused and they do not have to be antagonistic (Friedmann 1988: 101-103). There are valuable lessons on this from Ethiopia's recent history. Two case studies of Ethiopian ethno-linguistic groups who successfully navigated their communal (cultural) and neoliberal functional (economic) spaces for outstanding achievements are the Gurage and Eritreans. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the Gurage, whose ancestral home is in the Southern Nations *killil,* became the most successful entrepreneurial class of business people in Ethiopia with a freedom to scan the entire country for functional economic opportunities especially in the major urban centers like Addis Ababa.

They were also admired for their voluntary communal solidarity, not only manifested in their collaborative networks outside the Gurage communal areas, but also in sending remittances and paying visits to their extended families in their communal homeland (Shack 1966; Wubneh, and Abate 1988: 13; Teferra 2008: 41-62). This was also true of Eritreans when they were Ethiopian citizens. They were free to live and work anywhere in Ethiopia. Like the Gurage, they were also among the most successful professionals, entrepreneurs and businesspeople in the country. Those who chose to do so were also free to exercise their prerogatives to enjoy their communal links with Eritrea not only for cultural reasons but also to advance political objectives which later included the vote to secede from Ethiopia in which many actually participated while they resided in Ethiopia as bona fide Ethiopian citizens (Negash 1997: 175-177; Araya 1997). There are also examples of other cultural groups in Ethiopia that pursued mostly neoliberal functional political and economic objectives and were less interested in the communal option.

The third condition for compatibility between communal and functional identities is to accept the variance between communal zones, which can never be accurately demarcated on the ground (Johnson 2002) and federal administrative boundaries (ordinarily delineated by use of convenient natural features or Cartesian coordinates). Most administrative boundaries are largely physiographic (as in the old Ethiopian provinces) or largely Cartesian (as in the Jeffersonian state boundaries in the U.S.A.).

Whereas the pursuit of the recovery of communal life for Ethiopia's cultural groupings is a viable and necessary postmodern ideal, demarcating exclusive cultural territories with covenants is a seriously flawed undertaking (see also Johnson 2002). Communal solidarity and integration should be looked at in their dynamic character involving multiple sources of communal identity like history, language, religion, material culture, and even occupation. Communal solidarity and integration can also occur in virtual spaces without geographic limits (Kitchen and Doge 2002). Although some communal factors like language may have territorial attributes and nodes of archeological and historical significance, people with those identities often migrate out of those territories into the rest of the country or even outside the country. The distribution of the people of a certain tribe around their historic core is asymptotic with distance-decay in numbers and relative magnitude with mixing and thinning out at the outer limits. In a globalizing world, there are also "cyberspace communities as placeless communities" growing in significance with virtual communal solidarity to pursue social, political and economic goals from local to global scales (Kitchin and Dodge 2002). The 13 provinces (14 before Eritrea seceded) of the country prior to their dismantlement were geographically compatible and viable from both the viewpoints of communal and functional integration.

A genuine devolution of political power from the center may have had a better chance of success without the dangers of the divisive identity politics and territorial tension that the current *killil* system of federal administration engenders. At the same time, the older provinces had cultural homogenous majorities or pluralities for progressive aspects of communal integration without jeopardizing the multi-cultural character of Ethiopia's people and their proven history of living together and defending their country in mutual tolerance for diversity (Erlich 1986: 202. Wolde-Giorgis 1989: 69-81; Rubenson 1976: 362-406). Each of the former 13 provinces, while it enjoyed a dominant cultural or linguistic group like Oromo speakers in Wollega or Tigrigna speakers in Tigray, or Amharic speakers in Gojjam or Somali speakers in Hararghe, it also embraced other ethno-linguistic groups within its midst. Environmental and functional integration were also achieved. Each province had a significant share of the physical attributes of Ethiopia, highlands (*dega*), plateaus (*woina dega*), lowlands (*kola*), and major river basins. Each of the then 13 provinces of Ethiopia had all the three environments and at least one of the major rivers of Ethiopia (Abbay, Tekezze, Baro, Omo, Dawa, Ghenale, Wabe Shebele, and Awash) pass through it or serves as its boundary. There was a sort of democracy of geography in the way pre-1974 Ethiopian provinces were spatially organized. Provincial towns like Addis Ababa in Shoa, Assela in Arsi, Dessie in Wollo, Yirgalem in Sidamo, Mekele in Tigray, Nekemte in Wollega, Jimma in Kaffa, Gonder in Begemdir, Bahr Dar in Gojjam, Dire Dawa in Hararghe, etc. were principal urban hubs, and centers of multicultural celebration, and a source of pride of their respective provinces. They were foci for traders from *kola, woina dega,* and *dega* regions and served as break-of-bulk points for the country's principal export staples, and contrary to divisive counter-narratives, the towns that served the eastern, southern and western provinces such as Dire Dawa, Jimma, Yirgalem, and Nekemte were more developed urban centers than the towns in the northern provinces of Gojjam, Begemder, Wollo and Tigrai (allegedly the hubs of the phantom ruling "Abyssinians").

The *killil* idea as a means of communal integration for the pursuit of non-confrontational cultural objectives would have had positive outcomes for all the peoples of Ethiopia. However, their official use in enclosing "nations" for the purpose of federal redistricting of Ethiopia is problematic from viewpoints of territory, politics, culture, economy and environment. When the geography of political *killils* is compared to the geography of the old political provinces, several problems stand out with *killils*. First, *killil* regions (unlike the provinces) introduced major disparities in the distribution of land-based resources. The best lands for food security with good soils, major rivers, highest precipitation and the longest growing season were allocated to three *killils*, Oromo, Amhara and Southern Nations. Three *killils*, Tigrai, Afar, and Somali, were given the worst lands that have historically shown to be drought-prone and vulnerable to famine (Wolde-Mariam 1991). Second, for some *killils* like Gambela, Benishangul-Gumuz and Afar, their "national" boundaries have caused them to be geographically marginalized and isolated from the country's heartland, its major cities as well as its developmental and transport infrastructure. Under the old provincial system, all these three regions were integrated to the central and more prosperous plateaus of their respective regions. Third, *killil* boundaries present the most dysfunctional administrative shapes that both central and local governments would find problematic to manage (see Woldesemait 2007; Zewde 2008: 350-357). Afar inhabitants in the south are over 600 kilometers in straight-line distance from their fellow Afaris in the North. In the Oromo boomerang-shaped *killil*, Oromos at the Kenya border are over 700 kilometers in straight-line distance from fellow Oromos in the north, and those on the Sudan border in the west are over 800 kilometers from those in the east at the border with the Somali *killil*. Somalis in their *killil* are equally separated with about 800 kilometers of a north-south transect. This must make it most burdensome for *killil* inhabitants to seek *killil* level central administrative services that are so remote and for some killils like the Afar and Somali, poorly served with urban functions and means of transport.

Conclusion

Ethiopia has been through decades of political turmoil as a consequence of the Derg and EPRDF governments trying to impose solutions that were not anchored in the country's historical and cultural backgrounds and not responsive to the peoples' hunger for a democratic and egalitarian state with ownership and access to their land-based assets unencumbered by barnacles of *killil* and central bureaucracies. The ideological and ethnic fundamentalist hegemonies that the Derg and the EPRDF respectively applied proved to be clear cases of political malpractice that got the country even more bogged down by intractable problems. In the euphoria that followed the defeat of the Derg regime by the TPLF (the core of the EPRDF government), many had anticipated a truly democratic transformation of Ethiopia that would release its potential that the Derg had smothered by its quixotic Marxism. The EPRDF brought a welcome relief from the brutal Derg but it lost precious opportunity to respond to what Ethiopian really wanted: land reform and a government of their choice. Ethnic fragmentation, especially in the manner in which the EPRDF used as its core governing principle, was never featured in any of the pre-Derg or pre-EPRDF emancipatory narratives.

The EPRDF not only embraced the Derg's anti-development policy on ownership of land-based properties but also pursued the divisive and antagonistic ethnic projects that fringe tribal groupings had advocated. By so doing, it allowed an environment for a whole scale assault on centripetal narratives that had some success in building social capital assets for an enlightened pluralism in Ethiopia. Instead, it let ethno-linguistic identity politics to go way beyond their presumed role for non-confrontational egalitarianism, communal solidarity and ethnic pride.

With an obstinate hold on its ethnic agenda, the EPRDF minimized macro-national solidarities and prevented neoliberal and functional agenda for economic and political integration of the country. Instead, it politicized and radicalized tribal identities giving credibility to backward-looking divisive insurgencies. Its first precipitous act was to grant secession to one of Ethiopia's 14 provinces, Eritrea. Although it did not materialize from the *killil* logic, the secession of Eritrea, instead of helping quell decades of warfare between the Ethiopian state and Eritrean insurgents, it soon led to another devastating war and a complete breakdown of relations between the two countries. This was a total blow to the neoliberal goals of regional integration for the benefit of both countries. They lost in time, treasure and social capital by allowing tribal objectives to override critical neoliberal legacies of socioeconomic complementarities and interdependence (Abbay 1997; Negash 2007). Eritrea's economy is in shambles and Ethiopia became landlocked and lost precious momentum to become the hub of regional integration and common market in the Horn (Fessehatzion 2002; Reid 2005; Medhanie 2007; Zewde 2008: 371-373; Marcus and Brown 1997).

As experienced by India, Chile, Brazil, South Africa, Ghana and Botswana, the 21st century of flexible industrialization and globalization demand a virtuous equation to earn political as well as economic dividends. This equation's most crucial independent conditions are good governance, political stability, freedom of movement, freedom of enterprise, freedom to own and securitize assets, and robust social overhead capital. The staple political discourses in Ethiopia and the Horn in the last three decades that produced ethnic-based tribal and territorial (*killil*) divisions, dual citizenship modalities, systemic marginalization of ordinary citizens, and structural barriers to factor mobility are contrarian to the achievement of this virtuous equation for progress. The pursuit of the independent conditions for national development requires a paradigm shift in central state governance from partisan to neutral with enhanced credibility to harmonize cultural (ethno-linguistic) as well as economic (neoliberal) geographic objectives that benefit the whole country.

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