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# The post 1991 'inter-ethnic' conflicts in Ethiopia: An investigation

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**The purpose of this research was to investigate the main causes of the post 1991 ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia based on secondary data. The theoretical ground of the study was the instrumentalist paradigm which claims that ethnic conflict is a clash between rational agents over scarce resources. Accordingly, the research has established that the post 1991 ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia consisted of multifaceted variables which made the conflicts simply appear as a mere inter-ethnic differences. The real causes of the conflicts were inequitable distributions of economic and political power or the demand for access to political and economic benefits. Furthermore, almost all of the major conflicts were not based on ethnic antagonisms. Yet, they were labeled as 'inter-ethnic conflicts' simply due to the fact that they bear the names of the participant ethnic groups. Above all, the conflicts seemed to be inter-ethnic clashes resulting from sheer ethnic differences on account of the previously created inter-ethnic distances among the various ethnic groups of the country.**

**Key words:** Ethnicity, ethnic conflict, ethno history of Ethiopia, ethnic politics.

## INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is composed of several ethno-linguistic communities with different histories, languages, and cultures. Despite their diverse historical origins and with several points of contacts over the centuries, all of them have coexisted and continue to exist as nations among nations. According to the Central Statistics Agency (2007), the Ethiopian nation, nationalities and peoples are categorized under two ethno linguistic groups called Afro Asiatic and Nilo Saharan. Afro Asiatic is further divided into three group- Semitic, Cushitic and Omotic. The Semitic includes the Amhara, Tigre, Gurage, Harari, Silte etc. The Cushitic include the Oromo, Somali, Agaw, Kimanti, Saho, Afar, Sidama, etc. The Omotic includes Wolayita, Gamo, Dorze etc. The Nilo-Saharan includes Agnuak, Nuer, Megengir, Berta, Gumuz etc (Central Statistics Agency, 2007).

In Ethiopia, there are over 70 different ethno-lingual communities with over 200 dialects. All of the groups have lived together in centuries of diversities and unity described as innumerable social, linguistic, and cultural differences. There were also important points of peaceful and warlike contacts among the groups which resulted in a vast amount of assimilation of populations, very considerable adoptions of languages, innumerable

conversions from one faith to another, and extensive intermarriages (Twibel, 1998: 37 to 38). Assimilations and adoptions in Ethiopia have begun with the Cushitic and the Semitic in the central highlands of Ethiopia between the 12th and 13th centuries and accelerated during the Oromo expansions in the 16th century and assimilation policies of the Ethiopian Emperors between the 16th and the 19th centuries (Galperin, 1981: 56).

The historical assimilation and adaption processes in Ethiopia often took place violently especially during the periods of the Ethiopian Emperors. As a result, the contemporary Ethiopians have developed ethnic prejudices and stereotypes that lead them to generalize that ethnic conflict arises solely from ethnic differences or ethnic antagonisms. However, based on scholarly arguments regarding the sources of ethnic conflicts, one may presume that this is a misconception. For instance, according to Cordell and Stefan (2009: 25), though ethnicity may provide the mobilizational basis for collective action, it is not the ultimate, irreducible source of violent conflict.

Generally, the majority of ethnic conflicts in various African countries which are regarded as inter-ethnic conflicts emanating from mere ethnic differences are

reported to have other causes. Hizkias (2001: 18), for instance, argues that most of the wars waged in Africa and particularly in the Horn during the past 30 years have been described in terms of “inter-ethnic conflicts”, both by the adversaries themselves and by external analysts. He also writes that the civil wars in the Sudan have been characterized as conflicts between the Arabized northerners and African Southerners, with cleavages along religious, racial, cultural, and linguistic lines. The various civil wars in Ethiopia have been characterized as wars between the Amharas and the Tigrians, Oromo, Eritrean, and so on. The Somali conflicts have been described as conflicts between the Maraheens and the Issas, or between the Darods and the Ogadens, and so on; and the conflict in Djibouti as between the Afars and the Issas” (Hizkias, 2001: 18)).

What Hizkias shows herein is that many people hold the belief that almost all of the conflictual problems in the Horn of Africa and particularly of Ethiopia emanate from ethnic differences. In addition, in the case of Ethiopia, Asnake (2002: 16 to 19) has characterized almost all of the conflictual problems of the post 1991 as inter-ethnic problems caused by the ethnicized state administrative structures adopted since then.

Even if there are some scholars who simply generalize that such conflicts are inter ethnic, others strongly argue that these conflicts considered as inter-ethnic in the Horn of Africa are driven by multifarious complex and interrelated variables rather than pure ethnic hatred and antagonism. Nonetheless, conducting investigations as to what really causes the so called inter-ethnic conflicts is the only way to decide as to whether or not the particular conflict is inter ethnic. According to Norman (2004), African conflicts are complex as they make ethnicity the core of the problems even though they are initiated and aggravated by economic and political crisis in general. This scholar gives examples of these problems in relation to the wars in Angola as well as that of the Democratic Republic of Congo; he contends that the former is financed by Diamond and Oil and the latter is due to economic plunder (Norman, 2004). Hence, there are sufficient researched evidences to indicate that the conflictual problems in most of the African countries are not merely due to ethnic differences but due to other variables such as political and economic causes which surface the existing ethnic differences.

In the case of the Liberian conflict Lemarchand (1983: 62), attributes the causes to the returnees of Americo-Liberians-who came back from America in 1820, snatched the lands and powers of the indigenous people and imposed western culture on the indigenous one. Concerning Rwanda, a country which has suffered horrible deaths of over 800,000 people of Tutsi origin in genocide allegedly committed by their neighboring Hutus of the same country (Stanton, 2004: 18). The conflictual problems between these two groups, according to Lemarchand (1983: 53 to 54), were deep rooted for they

were the result of the colonial “divide and rule” policy of the Germany and Belgium that gave rise to the differences of the two groups by propagating that the Hutus had been oppressed by the Tutsis. According to Gahama (2002: 4), the conflictual problems of Burundi were due to the hatred developed and spread by the Belgian colonial powers who favored the minority Tutsis and the Ganwas by alienating the majority Hutus. In Nigeria, the conflicts are rooted in the “divide and rule” policy of the British colonization and the post independence military interventions of the central government (Osaghae, 1983). Somalia’s conflictual problems are similarly rooted in the system of colonization which divided the country in to Italian and British Somali lands and forced them to follow different institutional and administrative systems (Osaghae, 1983).

In the case of the Sudan, the conflictual problems are rooted in “the British divide and rule policy” that resulted in the division of the Northern and the Southern Sudans. The Northern Sudan which was dominantly Muslim Arab had more active participation and opportunities of education, economy and benefits of modernity. On the other hand, the Southern Christian Sudan was in a deep rooted backwardness and poverty. As a result of these inequalities, violent conflicts took place between the Khartoum Military government of post colonization and the Liberation Movements of the South (Wai, 1983: 305).

Hence, each of these conflictual problems of African countries particularly in the Horn shows that there are different variables that are responsible for causing them. In addition, there is no evidence to prove that any of these conflicts is based solely upon the hatred of the different ethnic groups for one another. So, this research intended to shade light on misconceptions regarding the sources and nature of ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia by investigating some post 1991 ethnic conflicts of the country. The fundamental research questions of the study were: “Were the post 1991 conflicts in Ethiopia merely based on differences of primordial ties?” and “What were the root causes of the post 1991 ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia?”

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

Scholars believe that there is difficulty of getting a clear definition for ethnicity due to the haziness of the objective and subjective criteria involved in the determination of members of the group. Usually, ethnicity shows grouping based on primordial ties like origin, language, culture, history, territory etc which are based on objectively determined factors. A person who does not fulfill these factors but who based on his subjective interests demands to be identified with a particular ethnic group may face problems if the group does not accept him. And inability to get a clear definition of ethnicity has even led to a tendency of avoidance approach to the search for definition (Hizkias, 2001: 110).

However, according to Rupesinghe (2001: 28),

avoidance makes issues of ethnicity full of ambiguity that makes the problem of ethnicity to constantly recur. "Ethnicity" is... full of ambiguity ... and perhaps it is this ambiguity which provides for its constant recurrence. But ask anybody to define ethnicity and the problem begins..." There is a generally recognized difficulty in distinguishing the term "ethnic group" from other related terminologies like "Tribe", "Clan". Nonetheless, all of them are usually used in day to day political, social, cultural, and legal parlance. According to Bates (1983: 153), "ethnic group" differs from "tribe" and "clan" in that the latter terms are generally used for the rural and traditional grouping of political organizations where as the former term is used to refer to the same grouping of people but based on material interests in the modern competitive environment of the "nation-state" building system.

As Bates further argues, an "ethnic group" is "a group organized based on a common set of social, economic and political activities consisting members who share a common conviction, interest and fate...". He asserts that symbolism of the group is a characterization of collective myths of origin and kinship as expression for the cultural uniqueness and elaborated language heritages. He considers that the term "ethnic group" "represents, in essence a coalition which has been formed as part of rational efforts to secure benefits created by the forces of modernization and benefits which are desired by all but scarce." The difficulty in getting a clear meaning for the term ethnic group is a fact admitted by scholars who instead describe it by using common factors that apply to the members of the group. Hizkias (2001: 113) for instance states that "...it is not clear what is meant by the terms "ethnic group," "ethnicity"... [M]any concepts, such as...tribe, and ... clan, have been used interchangeably with that of ethnic group, and it is very difficult to distinguish between them. A commonly used definition is that an ethnic group is a collectivity of people who share the same primordial characteristics such as common ancestry, language and culture...Ethnicity then refers to the behavior and feeling about oneself and others."

Even if none of these scholars clearly define the term "Ethnic group" in a way that distinguishes it from tribe, clan or any other similar grouping of peoples, their description tries to show that the term ethnic group is used in this modern world whereas tribe and clan are used in the traditional rural societies for referring to group of people. On the other hand, ethnicity however is more than a mere aggregate of peoples for it involves awareness of belongingness in a feeling identity that identifies one with others and distinguishes one from others. Rupesinghe (2001: 29) describes ethnicity as, "... [A] group possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity, composed of people who are aware, perhaps only latently, of having common origins and interests. Thus, an ethnic group is not a mere aggregate of people but a self-conscious collection of people united, or closely related, by shared experiences and a common history." Hence, the factors used by

scholars in describing an "ethnic group" which include "primordial characteristics like common ancestry, language, and culture" are not only the bases for identifying the members of one ethnic group from another but also factors that keep the members together by creating cohesion and solidarity.

"Nation", "Nationality" and "People" are terms related to ethnic groups in that they also refer to a group of people. However, the 1994 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is based upon these terms without making any distinction among them. According to this constitution [Proclamation No. 1/1995 Article 39 (5)], the three terminologies are simply described as "...a group of people who have or share large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory." This definition shows that having or sharing common culture, custom, language, belief in identity, psychological makeup, and contiguous territory are the yardsticks that determine as to whether or not a group of Ethiopians can be called "Nation", "Nationality" or "People" to exercise its rights and perform its duties as a group in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.

In fact, making distinctions among the three terms has no legal significance as any group that fulfills the requirements is entitled to the constitutionally guaranteed rights irrespective of the vague definition. Yet, it is my belief that any of such group can be called an ethnic group as long as it has the attributes of primordial characters like common origin, history, language, culture, and even territory and belief in a common identity. From the way they are used in establishing member states of the federation it is possible to see some differences among the three terms. For instance some of them are called as national regional states like Oromia National Regional State, Tigray National Regional State, Amhara National Regional State etc while others are given the name peoples regional states like Harari Peoples Regional State, Afar Peoples Regional State etc, and for one of them all the three terms are employed together [Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 1/1995: Art 47 (7)].

According to the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front, the terms "nation, nationality or peoples" do not necessarily refer to one ethnic group alone. For instance, it consists of the Harari Peoples Regional State, which is one of the member states of the federation that is composed of different ethnic groups, and it also consists of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State that is composed of nations and nationalities which have not yet developed into nations (Ministry of Federal Affairs December 2004: 10). Though, the distinction is not clear, the way the terms are employed in the constitution indicates that Nation is considered as a group greater than Nationalities and Peoples and it represents a group of

peoples of different origin and primordial ties. There is no single provision in the constitution that uses the term ethnic group. However, the names used for establishing the member states of the federation like “Tigray”, “Afar”, “Amhara”, “Oromia”, and “Somalia” are name of groups of peoples with primordial ties of their own language, history, culture, identity and territories (Mammo and Papadopoulos, 2004: 128). So, the term Nationalities in this context is equivalent in use with the term ethnic groups.

Just like ethnicity, ethnic conflict is not a well defined concept. Consequently, we find so many definitions which according to Senggirbay (2011: 1), “range from competing ‘meta-narratives of meaning’ to violent conflagrations where the combatants display different cultural symbols.” From what Horowitz (2000) states, it seems that the difficulty of defining ethnic conflict lays in the term ethnic. As Horowitz (2000: 95) asserts, regarding the notion of the compound term ethnic conflict only a part of it that is, ‘conflict’ has acceptable explanation. As he notes, “most definitions embody an element of struggle, strife or collision, and in this way distinguish conflict from competition. Some go further and suggest that conflict entails the struggle for mutually exclusive rewards or the use of incompatible means to a goal. Although, much ethnic conflict is properly described in these terms, mutually exclusive ends or means nevertheless need not be intrinsic to all conflict.”

In the history of ethnic conflict research, there are two major theoretical paradigms that is, instrumentalist and primordialist. According to the instrumentalist view point, participants in conflict expect to gain some material benefit like jobs, wealth, and power from the conflict. On the other hand, the Primordialist interprets ethnic conflict as an outbreak of common antagonism. To analyse the role of confidence that people get from considering their own ethnic group members thrive in business and politics, Horowitz (1985) used the combination of primordialist and instrumentalist theories. In contrast, Bates (1983) work on ethnic conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa falls within the instrumentalist paradigm. As Bates asserts, ethnic conflict is a clash between rational agents over scarce resources. Following this assertion regarding the causes of ethnic conflict, this study investigated the causes of the major post 1991 ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia in light of the past socio-political relations of various ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research is a qualitative research based on ten selected post 1991 conflicts that have occurred in Ethiopia’s regional States. The data for this research were collected from secondary sources such as books, articles, and legal documents published after the occurrence of the conflicts. To investigate the root causes of the selected ethnic conflicts, the instrumentalist view point was used. To this end, the research has tried to investigate the claims and intentions of the participants of the selected conflicts. In other words, the material

benefits like jobs, wealth, and power expected to be gained from the conflicts by the participants of the conflicts have been examined.

## **INVESTIGATION OF MAJOR POST 1991 ‘INTER-ETHNIC’ CONFLICTS IN ETHIOPIA**

In this section, an attempt was made to explain the major causes of ten selected post 1991 conflicts in Ethiopia and as to whether they were ‘inter-ethnic conflicts’ merely based on ethnic differences. Since the primary documents that contain the original decisions of the authorities were inaccessible, this study was unable to offer a detailed analysis of each case. Yet, the study shows that the discussion under this section would at least shade light on misconceptions regarding attribution of ethnicity as the major source of ethnic conflicts. To show the clear picture of the root causes of the post 1991 ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia, this section presents a brief historical description of the pre 1991 nation building process and centralization of power in Ethiopia and moves on to the main concern of the research.

According to Galperin (1981: 58), between the 4th and 6th centuries, Ethiopia was a Christian Kingdom called Axumite that declined in the 8th century due to Muslim Arab’s conquest that created the Muslim Sultanates of Ifat, Hadiya and Adal Kingdoms. Galperin contends that between 1434 and 1468 Emperor Zara Yaqob had established a Christian empire over the Islamized peoples of the Eastern and Southern parts of the country. As a result, a feudal clerical state that continued to thrive until the beginning of the 20th century had come to exist. The 16th century history of this state was noted by the endless wars against the Muslims and the Oromo [expansion], which still have considerable impacts on the inter-ethnic and inter-religion relations of Ethiopians (Galperin, 1981: 58).

The Ethiopian state during the post Axumite period is described as the roaming of the nucleus between the areas of Gojjam, Gonder, and Shoa until it was established at Begemidir-Gonder. This state had reached its peak between the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th century the Ethiopian empire had faced internal resistances in the form of incessant feudal internecine, religious and inter-ethnic conflicts, and struggles against external colonizers (Galperin, 1981: 58).

The centralized Ethiopian state was created by Emperor Menelik II (1889 to 1913) who was able to put all the feudal and ethnic resistances under his control through spreading his troops all over the empire and consolidating the monarchical power that ended in 1974 with the deposition of his successor Emperor Haileseilasie II (Galperin, 1981: 58). The nation building process of the monarchy which used the politics of divine power and Orthodox Christian state religion was against the interests of the different ethnic groups. As a result, the various ethnic groups of the country were forced not only to submit to the centralized monarchy’s rule, but also to adopt the language, culture,

religion etc. of the monarchy. Many writers consider this political process as the war waged by the Amhara against all the other ethnic groups to subdue them to establish "Amhara domination" or even "colonization" (Tekalign, 2004: 56; Asnake, 2002: 6). Therefore, the process of Amhara's empire building by waging war against the different ethnic groups had resulted in the formation of ethnic based political parties. This is evidenced by the political parties established in the names of the major ethnic groups as liberation and secession movements like in the cases of the EPLF-Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (which has already succeeded in its political program of independence), TPLF-Tigrean Peoples' Liberation Front, OLF-Oromo Peoples' Liberation Front, ALF-Afar Peoples' Liberation Front etc.

In 1974 the Socialist government, Dergue which took power following the overthrowing of the monarchy made some political reforms but it did not properly address the previous ethnic conflicts in the country. Regarding this, Mammo and Papadopoulos (2004: 9) state that "...the military Stalinist system [Dergue]...recognized power to come from people ...church and state were formally declared separate...land was declared to be the state property of all the people. Society fell into drastic change and all opposition was dealt with a crude and simple response: violence!" The Dergue introduced popular sovereignty, secularism and land as public property in to the nation state building process. However, it addressed the dissatisfactions of the different ethnic groups through military force until it was overthrown in 1991 by the ethnic based political parties.

As discussed so far, the causes of Ethiopia's pre 1991 inter-ethnic conflictual problems were rooted in the unjust social, political, economic, cultural as well as religious inter-ethnic relations which resulted from ethnic domination in the name of homogenous state formation. The post 1991 Ethiopian inter-ethnic relations are based on the policy of rectifying the unjust historical relations that existed among the different ethnic groups. The ethnic causes are the bases for the creations and struggles of the ethnic based political parties that formed coalition under the name Ethiopian peoples' revolutionary democratic front (EPRDF). EPRDF represents, according to Asnake (2002: 1), a coalition of four ethnic based organizations; they are the Tigray peoples liberation front (TPLF), the Amhara national democratic movement (ANDM), the Oromo peoples' democratic organization (OPDO), and the southern Ethiopian peoples' democratic front (SEPDF). The EPRDF was established as a coalition of ethnically oriented political parties which conducted guerilla fighting and that eventually toppled the Dergue regime in 1991. The post 1991 Ethiopian inter-ethnic relations can therefore be characterized by a process of ethnicization of all the state structures, distribution of resources and political powers. As Alem (2004: 91) describes, "[i]n 1991 the Ethiopian government employed ethnic pluralism as an organizing principle, creating multiple ethnic-based

territorial units with a "right of secession" provision."

In 1991 the EPRDF decentralized power by establishing fourteen regional governments (Proclamation 7/1992). Later on, it adopted the Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution of 1995 which reduced the number of member states of the federation to nine empowering each of them to make, execute and interpret its own laws to regulate the matters that fall under its jurisdictions in accordance with the federal constitution (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Article 47(3) and 52, August 21/1995: 8). The state structural and organizational reform which was introduced has institutionalized a federation with ethnic named regional states through recognizing the rights of "nation's nationalities and peoples for self determination including secession" (Article 39 and 47).

One of the primary agendas of the EPRDF was to address inter-ethnic conflictual problems in the country. Therefore, it recognized groups called "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" of Ethiopia and conferred upon them unconditional right to self-determination including secession which was practiced between 1991 to 1994 under the transitional government of Ethiopia (TGE) and finally provided in the 1995 FDRE constitution becoming the political as well as the legal foundation for handling inter-ethnic conflictual problems. According to Mammo and Papadopoulos (2004: 9), this right became the principle from which the principal policies for the government of the country were built. A double process occurred at the same time: the ethnicization of the political culture and the politicization of ethnic identity as the primary vehicle for claims and entitlements to economic resources and political power. The civic basis for politics was displaced by the legalization of ethnic ideology, the creation of ethnic based political organizations, the creation of ethnic-designated regional states and the division of the country's territory along ethnic lines. This new social arrangement is called ethnic federalism. Ethnic federalism was promulgated into a fundamental constitutional law above and beyond any customary law in 1995 (Mammo and Papadopoulos, 2004: 9).

In spite of the creation of ethnic federalism as an endeavor to address inter-ethnic conflictual problems in Ethiopia, many ethnic conflicts have occurrence after 1991. The major post 1991 inter-ethnic conflicts observed in Ethiopia are: the Silte-Gurage conflict, the Wagagoda language conflict, the Sheko-Megengir conflict, the Anuak-Nuer conflict, the Berta-Gumuz conflict, and the Gedeo-Guji conflict, the Oromo-Amhara conflict, the Borana-Gerri conflict, the Afar-Issa conflict, and the Oromo-Somali conflict. The major causes of each of these cases are discussed as follows:

1. The Silte-Gurage conflict, according to Asnake (2002: 8), was one of the post 1991 violent inter-ethnic conflicts that manifested when the Silte who had been considered a sub Gurage ethnic group, demanded and succeeded to

get a separate Zonal Administration of their own in the Southern Nation, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional State after it could not be suppressed through military force. This conflictual problem of the Silte-Gurage which manifested itself as Silte ethnic self assertion based on difference of language and Islamic faith, this very problem was based, according to Asnake, on incompatibility of interests particularly as "the Silte felt that their incorporation within the Gurage undermines their...prospect for development..." This conflict is therefore rooted in the incompatibility of the opportunities of the Silte with those of the Gurage.

2. The "Wogagoda" language conflict was the other violent inter-ethnic conflict that took place during the same period when the Siltie-Gurage conflict occurred. Asnake (2002) contends that it was violently manifested by the Wolayita ethnic group who objected to and successfully avoided the application of the "Wagagoda" language alleging that it is against their identity. "Wogagoda" was the language formulated by the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State through homogenizing the languages of four different but related ethno-lingual communities vs. Wolayita, Gamo, Gofa, and Dawro which shared some degree of linguistic affinity and intelligibility so that it would be used as their elementary schools' media of instructions and their local administrations' working language.

The reality, according to Tsegaye (25 June 2006 personal communications), is that members of these different ethnic groups are observed to have easy communication with each other showing that the language is not a newly created but that it preexisted and that their objection against it was mainly due to other variables which were associated with existing political dissatisfactions. In support of this argument, Asnake (2002: 9) argues that the main problem of Wolayita was rooted in the dissatisfaction that it had on the state restructuring made by the 1995 FDRE constitution which established the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State by amalgamating the seven ethno-lingual communities that had regional state status under the TGE and by incorporating Wolayita into the North Omo Zone. Like that of the Siltie-Gurage this conflict can be attributed to the incompatibility of opportunities.

3. The Shako-Mezengir conflict of March 2002 violent inter-ethnic conflict manifested when the Shako-Mezengir and the Yaki ethnic groups successfully demanded separate administrations in the same regional state (Asnake, 2002: 9). The cause of this conflict is that the inclusion of the Keficho Zone and Yaki Woreda into the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State was not in the interest of the Shako Mezengir Peoples Democratic Unity Organization which wanted these people to be incorporated into the Gambela Peoples Regional State (Asnake, 2002: 9). This is an indication for the existence of the interests of the political elites even in addition to the incompatibilities of opportunities propelling

the conflicts.

4. The Agnuak-Nuer conflict of December 2003, according to Harmon (2004: 24) was violently manifested; as a consequence it attracted Federal intervention; it was as a result of the dissatisfactions expressed by the Nuer ethnic group. The latter group allegedly opposed the unjust allocations of power and resources in the Gambela Peoples' Regional State. The conflictual problem which some writers label as ethnic cleansing is again not due to ethnicity but it is mainly due to unjust political and resource allocations. As described by Asnake (2002), "the Nuer activists express their dissatisfactions that they have lost the political, economic, social ... opportunities that they would be entitled to as its population is the majority in the region with Nuer (40%), and Agnuak (27%) pursuant to the 1994 census".

5. The Berta-Gumuz conflict of January 2001 was the other violent inter-ethnic conflicts which was handled through the involvement of the House of Federation when the Berta ethnic group expressed its dissatisfaction alleging that the Gumuz ethnic group with less number of populations was made to get more numbers of administrative units and greater number of representation at the Benishangul-Gumuz Peoples' Regional State. This conflictual problem is mainly due to the variables similar to that of the Agnuak- Nuer conflict which was based on allocation of power and resources (Asnake, 2002: 11).

6. The Gedeo-Guji conflict was the violent conflict manifested but suppressed by the police force of Oromiya National Regional State when the Gedeo expressed their traditional dissatisfactions on the use and allocations of pasturelands and water resources as opposition against the new state restructuring policy which included the Gedeo into the Southern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State and the Guji in into the Oromia National Regional State (Asnake, 2002: 16).

7. The Oromo-Amhara conflict of Eastern Wollega, as Assefa (2002: 29) states, was a violent inter-ethnic conflict. It was suppressed by force when it opposed forced evacuations by the Oromo against the Settler Amhara in Horo, Addis Alem, KIRAMU, and Northeastern Wollega. Asnake (2002: 29) states that this conflict was due to incompatibility of interests in economic, social, and political opportunities of the two groups.

8. The Borana-Gerri conflict, as Befikadu (1999: 24) presents, it was a violent inter-ethnic conflict which manifested as a result of the Borana ethnic group's dissatisfaction with the Gerri's actions to get grazing lands and water resources that allegedly belonged to the Borana in the Oromia Regional State. Asnake (2002: 19), on the other hand, attributes these conflictual problems to the new developments of the Gerri's demand for ethnic self assertion and related difficulties of ethnic boundary delimitations. This conflictual problem like that of the Siltie-Gurage was expressed as ethnic self assertion of the Gerri who began identifying themselves with the Somali, yet ascribed to a number of interrelated factors that includes

traditional cattle raiding and competition over pasturelands as well as water resources which manifested itself as conflict over frontiers between Oromia and Somali regional states (Asnake, 2002: 14).

9. The Afar-Issa conflict refers to the violent conflicts due to the dissatisfactions of the two groups on the uses and allocations of pasturelands and water resources of the Afar Peoples' Regional State which is aggravated by draught, famine, external intervention for geopolitical strategic interests, poverty etc. This conflict is attributed to variables similar to that of the Borana-Gerri; both are mainly rooted in traditional cattle raiding and competitions on pasturelands and water resources which have transformed themselves in to frontier conflicts after the state restructuring reform of post 1991 (Asnake, 2002: 15 to 13).

10. Finally, the Oromo-Somali conflict which manifested violently and finally handled by the House of Federation through conducting a referendum was the other conflictual problem that Mark (2002: 1) attributes to poverty, famine, competition on natural resources, difficulties in resolving the ethnic lines of the border between Oromia National Regional State and the Somali Peoples' Regional State and external factors like civil wars in Somalia that caused population flows in and out of West Hararge Zone. This conflict is quite complicated in that there existed traditional conflicts on pasturelands and water resources which sometimes lead them to raid on one other's cattle whenever the poverty is worsened by natural and human catastrophes like draught, famine, war and interventions of insurgents, and religious extremists for strategic positions (Mark, 2002: 1).

As discussed above, the major causes of most of the post 1991 conflicts between the various ethnic groups Ethiopia can be classified generally as socio-political, socio-economic, or socio-cultural scenarios. Thus, the causes of the Silte-Gurage conflict, the Wagagoda language conflict, the Sheko-Megengir conflict, the Anuak-Nuer conflict, the Berta-Gumuz conflict, and the Oromo-Amhara conflict were competitions over socio-political and socio-economic benefits. On the other hand, the causes of, the Gedeo-Guji conflict, the Borana-Gerri conflict, and the Afar-Issa conflict were socio-cultural problems. What is more, the Oromo-Somali conflict was a border political dispute which can be considered as competition over resource. Therefore, it is plausible to argue that ethnic differences have got little to do with regard to causing the post 1991 ethnic named conflicts in Ethiopia.

## Conclusion

As this study tried to establish, the principal causes of the post 1991 ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia were inequitable distributions of economic, social, and political opportunities or competition for resources and political power. As scholars already figured out, ethnicity is a cover for most conflicts between groups. Regarding this, based on Cordell and Stefan's (2009: 5) idea, Senggirbay (2011: 1) writes

as follows. "Ethnic conflict may not describe the conflicts based on ethnic differences because 'at least one party to the conflict will claim that its distinct ethnic identity is the reason why its members cannot realize their interests, why they do not have the same rights, or why their claims are not satisfied.' As it turned out, 'ethnic' might serve as a cover of any other conflicts between any groups of people." As Senggirbay further contends, most conflicts between groups of people are generally caused by social problems or straitened circumstances but it's not clear why certain conflicts are labeled as "ethnic." As can be observed from the ten conflictual cases presented in this article, none of the ethnic named conflicts were conflicts based on ethnic antagonism. However, they simply appeared as ethnic conflicts just because they happened to bear the names of participant ethnic groups. In particular, the major factor which made the post 1991 ethnic conflicts of Ethiopia appear as inter-ethnic conflicts resulting from pure ethnic variations was the previously created inter-ethnic distances.

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