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Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism and its Implications for University Students: The Case of University of Gondar

Bitwoded Admasu Dagnaw

University of Gondar, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, Ethiopia

Abstract:

Prior to 1991, Ethiopia experiences a unitary state system in which the central government had an undivided ultimate right on all aspects of economic, social, and political issues. Initiated, organized, and led by an association of discontented Tigrean elites, due to high centralization of power, the TPLF started its liberation movement to topple the military regime. Assuming power EPRDF established a multi-ethnic federal system based on equality, the rule of law, and the right of nations to self-determination. This ethnic federal political system has its own positive and negative sides on the peaceful coexistence of the Ethiopian people in general and to higher education university students in particular. This research deals about Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism and its Implications for University Students: The Case of University of Gondar. Since the research aims to understand the perception of students and their attitude towards other ethnic group as a result of the ethnic federalism, the study used qualitative research methodology. In terms of techniques of data collection methods, the researchers have used open ended questions, six focus group discussion, and non-participant observation. In addition to these techniques of data collection methods, the research has used also Books and other related secondary sources. The findings of the research have shown that students' day-to-day interaction at their class room, café, dormitory and libraries is highly affected by the ethnic federalism, both negatively and positively, following its implementation since 1991. Negatively, ethnic federalism encouraged political alignment that prevails over ethnic allegiance among students. Students have developed an antipathy attitude towards other ethnic groups. In addition, cultural sharing has faced problems due to lack of common language as different nations and nationalities achieved a right to use their own language. Positively, ethnic federalism gave the opportunity to student the right to promote and foster their cultural values and traditions. Many students are interested to know the cultural diversity, plurality, and ready to accept the existing reality.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, Accommodation, Political Alignment, Cultural Values, Perception, Antipathy, Plurality, Amalgamation, Common Language, Xenophobia, Tolerance, Racial Intolerance, Diversity, Pluralism, Separatist, Co-existence.

1. Introduction

In the second half of the twentieth century a new type of politics came into existence concerning on ethnicity or ethnic views. In its simplest form, it denotes that people of a particular ethnic community or group favours to show their loyalty to their own groups rather than to the political authority or the nation-state. In other words, the loyalty to the ethnic group is considered more important than any other form of loyalty. It has been observed that the members of the ethnic group are enthusiastic to get certain political privileges and only the political authority is eligible to meet this demand or to allow the members of the group to enjoy or acquire the privileges. This situation makes way for a new type of relationship between the ethnic group and political relations. This is ethnic politics. Particularly, after the ratification of the 1994 federal constitution, certain trends of ethnic federalism have surfaced in Ethiopia and they are influencing policy makers, political actions, political thought, and even some times have fuelled disturbance in the various regional states among the different ethnic groups. This politics of ethnicity affects not only policy makers and politicians' but also young students who join different higher education institutions in Ethiopia.

In this case, the University of Gondar is one of the institutions that is more likely to experience such kind of problem. Though this socio-political interaction between students who come from different part of Ethiopia has its own advantages, it has also its own impediments. Having a unique socio-political and ethnic background, students who come from different regional states to the University of Gondar may not have proper socio-political interaction with each other. Due to this fact, problems of misunderstanding among the students usually arise.

Many scholars have defined the word “federalism” in so different ways. However, according to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, federalism is the theory, or advocacy of federal political orders, where final authority is divided between the sub-units and the centre. Unlike a unitary, state sovereignty is constitutionally split between at least two territorial levels so that units at each level have final authority and can act independently of the others in some area. In countries where there is a federal arrangement of government citizens have political obligations to two authorities: the federal authorities and the state. In its most general sense, federalism is an arrangement in which two or more self-governing communities share the same political space. Citizens of federal state are members of both their sub-units (sometimes called a province, canton, land or a state) and a larger federation as a whole (Norman and Kormis, 2005:1).

The study of modern federal system begins with American federalism in 1789, but some argue that the study of federalism is as ancient as the history of association between human beings. But, if one restricts himself to the study of federalism since the late 18th century, he/she can observe an emphasis on how different parts come to form a union and at the same time a constitutional safeguard is provided to the component units. Consequently, the theoreticians have emphasized constitutional contractual agreement between the units to form a general cooperative authority in contradiction with a unitary system (Solomon, 2006: 31).

More philosophically, federalism can be understood as a way of approaching politics that acknowledge group identity alongside individual identity. However, it is a particular form of group identity- spatial locational or territorial one. It gives rise to a set of normative issues about the virtues and vices of a system of multiple governments and it raises practical questions about how powers are to be divided and relations between governments are to be defined and conducted (Fenna and Hueglin, 2006: 31).

There exist three ways how nations achieve federal system of government: coming together federalism¹, holding together federalism,² and putting together federalism. Among these, the recent Ethiopian experience of federal formula falls under putting together federalism because it is a forceful or a fraudulent incorporation of different nationalities by organized elite who are organized and strong enough to control political power through forceful means. Both Ethiopia and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic are typical examples of nominal federal entities with a very high level of centralization.

Federal system may vary contextually depending upon where they are established, or they may vary in form and type, but whatever form federalism takes, or whichever country it is established, ‘self-rule’ and ‘shared rule’ are the fundamental principles of federalism, the federal units are granted the right to govern their own affairs and they should acknowledge the authority of the federal government to rule on their collective behalf in clearly defined areas. By and large, most federal systems have been the result of compromise among elites. In some federations, the compromise was about different cultural interests such as language, religion, or, more generally, distinct cultural histories. In these cases of cultural federalism federation has arisen out of the desire to build a strong union without giving up regional cultural autonomies (Fenna and Hueglin: 2006:57).

1.1. The Historical Evolution of Federalism

In the 19th century the French theorists of socialist federalism, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, wrote that ‘the 20th century will open the age of federations, or else humanity will undergo another purgatory of thousand years’ (Fenna and Hueglin: 2006: 11). At the beginning of the 21st century, federalism once again proved its resilience as an important form of government and ideological dispensation. This is despite recurrent skepticism about its desirability and appropriateness in a globalizing world. In the period prior to World War II, some scholars doubted its relevance in an industrializing society.

However, in the contemporary world state re-structuring has become a global phenomenon in almost all corners of the world. There are currently movements and at redesigning structures of states in response to demands of communities for recognition of their identities and increased participation in the political realm. The federal principle, which aims at balancing political autonomy and union, greatly attracts multi-ethnic states as a means of managing their ethno-linguistic diversities. Today many countries of the world are experimenting with the federal option and other forms of territorial autonomy in order to accommodate ethno-linguistic groups in national politics and reduced enter-ethnic tensions and conflicts

More importantly, federalism emerged as an important instrument of nation/state building after the collapse of European colonial empires in the immediate post World War II period. In this respect many post colonial multi-ethnic countries of Asia and Africa adopted federalism. Even if several of this federations failed in their infancy, the role of federalism in balancing the competing and perhaps and conflicting demands for autonomy and unity in such countries as India, Malaysia, Nigeria could not be doubted. Since the end of the cold war federalism, once again emerged into the spot light because of two contradictory developments. And there exist several reasons for adopting federal political structure

First, the disintegration of the socialist federation of the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia refreshed doubts about stability and durability of multi-ethnic federations. The continuing conflict in Canada over the question of Quebec’s independence and the frequent political stalemates that characterize Belgium strengthen uneasiness about the stability of multi-ethnic federations.

¹ Coming together federations emerge when two or more than two existing sovereign countries agree to create a federal system for governmental efficiency, economic development, and security purpose. This federation can promote economic prosperity by removing internal trade barriers, and they may also foster peace by preventing wars and preventing fears of war.

² Holding together federalism is achieved when sovereign states band together to create common central government to which the state surrender some of their sovereignty. In this federation, an already existing large polity is subdivided in to various sub units that enjoy sovereignty over certain policy areas. It is an approach to cope up with ethnic divisions, or it is a strategy used to save a decentrating unitary state.

Second, in spite of these problems politicians used to reconstitute multi-ethnic countries through federalism after the collapse of authoritarian regimes and centralist nation building projects. For instance, international powers imposed federalism to reconstitute Bosnia-Herzegovina after a bitter war and genocide that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Russia adopted federalism to maintain what is left of the Soviet Union. Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism in 1991 after the end of military dictatorship. There is, therefore, a growing interest in the case of federalism as a way of managing ethnically diverse countries. In ethnically divided countries, they have a hope in the political recognition of cultural and ethnic pluralism through federalism. Usually, it reduces ethnic tensions and conflicts. That is why federalism has been regarded as a compromise between ethnic-nationalism- which takes nationalism in its classical form and also between nations and states.

Unlike Donald Levine description of the evolution of Multi-ethnic Ethiopia as a proper historical evolution of modern Ethiopian that redirected the historical evolution, it seems that ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is at menace because of the long years established legacy of unitary state with its centralization of bureaucracy.

1.2. Post -1991 Ethnic Federalism: Reflection, Perception and Response of University Students

Ethiopia witnessed a major turning point in the area of national politics since the early 1990s. One of the most important features of the political changes in the post 1991 is the re-structuring of the Ethiopian state through the model of ethnic based federalism. In an attempt to introduce a federal system, a radical re-organization of state structure and the state society relation, the ruling regime has constitutionally formalized ethnicity as fundamental principles of political organization. Hence, Ethiopia is presently a federal form of government, which officially advocates decentralization of power in favor ethno-linguistic regions and multi-party democracy (Asnake: 2004:51).

The post-1991 political development in Ethiopia not only brought changes of a military regime but also significant changes in the structure of the Ethiopian state and its underlying ideological foundations (Asnake, 2003:257). The victors that caused the downfall of the military regime in May 1991 came up with remarkably different visions about the future of the Ethiopian state and modalities of managing its diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. In other words previous projects of Ethiopian regimes which focused on centralization of ethnic based federalism and the constitutional recognition of rights of ethnic and linguistic groups for self-determination up to and including secession was the culmination of decades of complete that overly consumed the nation's human and material resources. Ethiopia is presently experimenting innovative forms of governance, which officially advocates decentralization of power from the centre to the ethno-linguistic regimes and multi-party ethnic democracy (Asnake, 2003:258).

The regime transformed the hitherto centralized states into the federal democratic republic and also redefined citizenship, politics and identity on ethnic grounds. The intent was to create a more prosperous, just, and representative state for all people. Yet, despite continued economic growth and promised democratization, there is a growing discontent with the EPRDF's ethnically defined states and rigid grip on power and fears of continued inter-ethnic conflict without a genuine multi-party democracy, the tension and pressures in Ethiopian politics will only grow greatly increasing the possibility of violent eruption that would destabilize the country and the region (International Crisis Group, 2009: 1).

The endeavor to transfer Ethiopia into a federal state is led by the TPLF which has dominated the coalition of ethno-nationalist parties that is the EPRDF since the removal of the Dergue in 1991, the security services committee that overthrew Emperor Haile Sillasje in 1974. The EPRDF quickly institutionalized the TPLF's policy of People's right to self determination and self rule (International Crisis Group, 2009: 1).

Since 1991 Ethiopia has gone further than any other country in using ethnicity as the fundamental organizing principle of a federal system of government. The basic reason of introducing ethnic federalism is needed to alleviate the long standing demand of the national questions of Ethiopia's diverse ethno-linguistic grouping. Accordingly, by settling the problem of power distribution and enhancing access to power for the hitherto ethnically marginalized groups, ethnic federalism can be considered as a major positive departure from Ethiopian past. Thus, the government advanced its reform measures emphasizing that it is imperative to redefine the underlining premises of organizing the state and society on clean slate. This involved reorienting the state towards ethnic based structure and promoting mainly ethnic based civil society and organizations.

Another prominent rationale was based on the argument that ethnic federalism offered an opportunity to promote the rights and benefits of ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Thus, ethnic empowerment was felt to be the single most appropriate instrument to enhance the political, economic and socio-cultural rights of Ethiopia's Nations Nationalities and Peoples. In particular the issue of developing languages, cultures, and the sense of pride in ethnic identities emerged as a manifest advantages of the political process, moreover ethnic bases of the federalism was favored as a means of reversing the repressive, hegemonic practices of previous governments that have led to internal wars their by emphasizing the conflict dimension of ethnic federalism. The federal constitution ratified in 1994 defined the countries structure as a multi-cultural federation based on ethno-national representation.

The government has created nine ethnic based regional states and two federally administered city states. The result is an asymmetrical federation that combines populous regional states like Oromia and Amhara in the central highlands with sparsely populated and under developed once like Gambella and Somali (International Crisis Group, 2009:1). The new regime's policies of ethnic federalism and ethnic democratization are of significant interest for many scholars. There are various debates about the problems and advantages of Ethiopian ethnic federalism. With regard to redressing the problems of nationalities in Ethiopia, ethnic federalism has enabled the diverse peoples of Ethiopia to use their own language for education and self administration.

The new regime opened up an entirely new opportunity for the development of an independent press, and it also encouraged, religious freedom and the right of assembly for many Protestant religious denominations that had been forbidden under the military regime.

There was a clear sense of change in a more democratic direction and opportunities were eagerly made use of, mostly in Addis Ababa: many had hoped to see the possibility of a free and fearless development of political culture within the University. However, events would demonstrate that even though everything seemed to be allowed, the reaction to political activism were highly unpredictable. In the society at large it soon became very clear that there were limits to the freedom of public debate and criticism of the government (Balsvik, 2007: 117).

2. Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism and its Implications for University Students: The Case of University of Gondar

It is almost two decades since Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism. The country has avoided the level of wide spread, brutal inter-ethnic conflict and anarchic, central collapse that has plagued two of its neighbors- the Sudan and Somalia. Particularly minority ethnic groups, once dominated by the ruling elite group associated with the imperial monarchy, now have greater opportunity to educate children in indigenous languages, run local bureaucracies, and make more decisions about their own economic and social life. In these senses, Ethiopian Ethnic federalism can be considered a success at least at present (Alemayehu, 2009:89). Negatively, there is prevalence of ethnic based opposition movements and complaints of systematic discrimination.

Following the increasing number of schools and students after 1991, the ethnic diversity of Ethiopian universities has been increasing steadily over the last twenty years. As this diversity achieved, the opportunity for students to socialize, learn, and develop among others of different ethnicity and culture augmented. While higher education helps to develop diversity, and cultural plurality, and in particular, the role of inter-racial interaction in realizing them is still emerging (Antonio, 1998: I). In relation to this, the ethnic diversity of the University of Gondar has been increasing steadily over the last eighteen years with the political development of ethnicity in Ethiopia. With the coming of diversity, the opportunity for students to socialize, interact, and among others learn different cultures.

Negatively, ethnic federalism has brought about undesirable consequences among students in the university. Its harmful impact on students' interaction at the university resulted in less unity among different ethnic groups than before. This fact prevented them from fighting for a medium of action and expression for national broader issues. This division among students is not only on broader issues but it extends to minor issues. Among this issues in which students confront each other includes disagreement on living in the same dormitory, on the use of common properties such as libraries, teaching classroom, cleaning and washing rooms, the division of assignments, etc.

It is widely perceived and resented by students that the ethnic based policies of the state affected not only the atmosphere on the campuses but also all kinds of appointment. Loyalty was rewarded, while those who expressed their dismay over the new system of ethnocracy lost their jobs (Balsvik, 2007: 138).

Usually, dormitories are divided according to student ethnicity. This is, in fact, their preference. Put differently, students prefer living with their ethnic group to live and share the same living rooms. A significant number of students from Amhara ethnic group wanted to halt the trend towards ethnic polarization and ethnic associations within the university which they considered destructive to the student movement. But other students, however, perceived such an attitude as an attack on their constitutionally guaranteed autonomy as an ethnic group. The government's encouragement of the idea of forming ethnic associations definitely contributed to this sense of disunity (Balsvik, 2007:130-31). Other factor also contributed to a divisive rather than united stand on the part of students is due to the expansion of the old University institutions in Addis Ababa and the opening of new ones.

In 2005 there were nine universities in Ethiopia, and it was announced that there would shortly be four more; there was a policy of sending students away from their home base in order to mix students of different ethnic groups, ostensibly so that they could learn to live together. Universities were perceived as instruments for nation building and a 'melting pot' strategy (Balsvik, 2007: 136). Students from Addis Ababa tended to perceive their identity as Ethiopian and socialize across ethnic divides, to a greater extent than those coming from outside Addis Ababa- from one of the ethnic federal states (Balsvik, 2007:137). To give validity and to strengthen the above claim, these researchers have used three techniques of data collection methods- non-participant observation, focus group discussion, and distributed open and close ended questioner for the students at the University of Gondar.

Firstly, a total of hundred students have been taken randomly and asked how strong the present Ethiopian ethnic federalism affected their interaction with other students of different ethnic groups. Some of them argued that this federal system created good social interaction among the different ethnic groups. Other group of students responded that the Ethiopian ethnic federal political system affected their relation negatively. As one respondent put it in his/her own words, "there exist sometimes unnecessary arguments especially in the dormitory. If that occurs, most of the time students appear to be irrational and take side and argue in support of their own ethnic group". Another student also argues that, "sometimes the present

2.1. Ethnic Federalism and its Effects on the Social Relation and Interactions of Students

Ethiopian ethnic federal system affects interaction of students to be ethno-centrism especially in assignments and other social relations. There is ethno-centrism and a sense of superiority and making other ethnic groups inferior than other and generally the ethnic federalism affects our interaction and makes us to be separated one ethnic group from the other. Another respondent also contended that this ethnic federalism affected students' social interaction because the ethnic group which constitute majority and consider the university their own property and reaches to the extent to discriminate students who came from other regions. Another two students also explained the negative impact of ethnic federalism by stating that, "it promotes narrow nationalism by developing some hatred attitude towards other ethnic groups".

Whereas on the positive side many students argued that the present Ethiopian ethnic federalism has important advantage in their social interaction because this federalism adopted diversity and pluralism in which different nations and nationalities live peacefully with each other. As Ethiopia is a mosaic of ethnic groups, one way of accommodating this diversity is to adopt ethnic federalism. A student of third year at the law school argued that, 'the current political system promoted students interaction positively. It created good social interaction when you live with other ethnic groups. As to me, I learnt and shared a lot of things that was vague before I joined the university'.

He also explained that, "I know in the place that I grew up and things concerning in some regions in the university is different. I got many good students who are sociable and sympathetic". Another student also contended that, "I strongly support ethnic federalism and have many positive aspects on us: example students who came from different regional states have their own way of life, custom, culture, language, and religion. Therefore, this will give an opportunity for students to live together and creates understanding among us. We can live together by sharing various unique characteristics." Another student stated that, "I preferred to be placed at the university where I did not grow up because I want to experience life far from my family. In addition, I would like to know and learn life in other regions and ethnic groups by understanding their culture. Furthermore, I feel that Ethiopia is a state everywhere I go that it is my place."

Students were also asked whether they want to be placed in the universities they grew up or to pursue their education in other regions. They gave different fascinating answers. Particularly a student responded in such a way that, "when I was at the preparatory class, I preferred to join University of Gondar. It is out of my region; however the reason that I preferred this university is that I want to know about different places of Ethiopia and to understand about the cultural and religious aspect of the people. This is a means to have knowledge about different regions of Ethiopia. In fact many other students put the same reason. We can understand that he realized the diverse multi-ethnic society of Ethiopia with various cultures and language. More than that in different parts of Ethiopia there exist magnificent places, museums, cultural sites to be visited, and experienced.

2.2. The Direct Impact of Ethnic Federalism on Students Preference to Join Higher Institution

Many respondents also preferred to join universities where they grew up. This is because of different reasons mainly to live with their family, whether condition, and perception of fear of other ethnic groups' traditions and cultures. Specifically, a student's argues that he want to be placed where he grew up, "when I go to a university to other regions there is sense of superiority by students in that region. In addition there is no safety if he goes out of the university campus. Whenever conflict occurs in any one of the university, a student who do not belong to that particular region where the university is located may feel sense of insecurity, since students in this particular region might take revenge on the students of other region where conflict arose.

In addition there is a sense of domination by the students of that region". Other respondent also preferred to be placed in his/her own region taking into consideration mainly the cost of transportation. A student from Awassa has said that, "it is financially difficult to afford the cost of transportation travelling from Awassa to Addis taking pension for two or three days and then come to Gondar. Imagine how it is too costly, so it is better for me to be placed in a university which is quite close to my parents". Another student has also said that, "I preferred to be placed the university that I grew up because there is bad perception about some regions which are not comfortable to me. There is for example narrow political attitude, highly politicized regionalism; there is also shortage of facility difficult to get it easily.

Generally speaking the previously graduated student influenced me prefer to be placed in a university". Many students also preferred to be placed in their locality for various reasons. Most of them are in favor of getting the nearby family assistance; in addition the weather condition which a student grew up is always preferable according to his/her argument. Some students also mentioned the issue of adaptation not to go to new regions and environments. So they prefer the area where they grew up than travelling to the new regions and adopt a strange environment.

In order to know students interaction with each other and the perception of ethnic federalism, the researchers have randomly taken 100 students from the University of Gondar in different departments. Students were asked and gave different interesting answers. Students from the different department were asked to answer whether they are excluded from assignment activities because of their ethnic background, half of the students have answered that they are not excluded from assignment activities. Almost thirty students admitted that they are excluded from assignment activities. As the data above depicts, nineteen students on the other hand believed that their ethnic background affected their interaction with other ethnic groups sometimes.

These students were also asked whether they want to make some type of interaction and contact with a student from other ethnic group, almost 75% of the students wanted to know the culture of other ethnic groups. They insisted on ethnicity should not be a determinant factor for their friendship with the other ethnic group. Eleven students admitted that they do not want to have some kinds of friendship with the other ethnic groups and also another eleven students want some kind of interaction with other ethnic groups.

2.3. The Attitudes of Students Ethnic Affiliation Perspective towards other Ethnic Groups

As the data portrayed students were also asked whether they want to make some friendship with students of their ethnic group. Majority of them have argued that they do not want to make relationship with their ethnic groups. These students almost forty of them prefer to have some relation with the other ethnic group. Another thirty four students responded that they want to have some relation with a student who came from the same region where they grew up. They have many reasons for this fact. But language and religion are two factors why they want to have friendship with their ethnic groups. Some of the fourteen students responded that sometimes they want to have sharing ideas with their ethnic group.

The data shown above also reveals that eleven students want to have contact and relationship with their ethnic group. Another interesting question forwarded was if they want to study with some one of different ethnic group. Almost all of them gave a positive answer. 80% of the students have agreed to study with some one of other ethnic groups. 7% of the students preferred not to study with ethnic group which is different from their region. The remaining 12% students wanted to study with someone who came from different regions. This group of students was also asked how often they study with a student with the same ethnic group. About 66% of this students accepted that they study sometimes with a student similar to their ethnic groups, whereas 23% of these students accepted they often study with a student different from their ethnic groups.

As the data analysis from above statement already assessed hundred respondents were asked variety of question about their lives, interactions and relation in the University of Gondar. The respondents were asked the question if they do have the interest to live at the same dormitory with some one of different ethnic group. As the data clearly shows most students enjoyed lodging with students of other regions (cultural ethnic groups). That means more 76% of the students have accepted the idea of accommodation of diversity, respecting the other cultural ethnic groups values and traditions. Even though 13% sometimes supports the idea of living with different ethnic groups, 8% is against the above idea of lodging with other cultural ethnic group. 3% of the respondents are always comfortable in sharing and living with the other ethnic groups.

Where as in making friendship 50% of the students prefer to make a friend with different ethnic group and 30% supports the idea of friendship with different ethnic group, where as 16% rejects the idea of making friendship with other with other cultural ethnic group. 4% of the respondents are always comfortable with being a friendship other than their ethnic groups. From the respondents point of view and interpretation we can analyze that most of the students are comfortable with diversity, differences, respecting others values and ready to learn others cultural values. This will help to integrate diverse cultures into the larger society without cutting them off from their past. This again helps to reinforce the socio- political culture of young students in the University since they are ready and willing to make sacrifices for those with whom they share a common purpose with the other ethnic group.

Concerning university placement 50% of the students do not like to be placed in a university where they grow up. They prefer to experience other ethnic groups cultures and traditions and the circumstances of life. However, 28% the respondents argue that it is appropriate to be placed in a university where they grow up. Hence they prefer to experience different cultures and traditions by moving to other regions. However, 28% of the students argue that it is appropriate to be placed in a university where they grow up. According their argument, that will give the chance to stay close with their parents and feel security. About 19% sometimes want to be placed in a university close to their place of birth; however, the remaining 3% are always comfortable to stay close to their place of origin during their study stay.

Concerning the present Ethiopian ethnic federal system and students' relation and interaction at the university....about 63% of the students have agreed that the present Ethiopian political system promoted positively their interaction and relation. It opened a room for dialogue. Whereas, 15% of the students argue that federal political system hinders their relation and interaction and forced the students not to transcend ethnic issues against the concern of national issues. Still 13% of the students argue that federalism promoted their interaction only sometimes. And finally only 3% stressed on the importance of federalism and believe that federalism always promoted their relation and interaction at the University of Gondar.

In order to substantiate the above data about the perception of students about Ethiopian ethnic federalism and student's perception of different ethnic background four focus group discussion(FGD) was undertaken to get a real and reliable information from students. In this focus group discussion different opinions were forwarded from these students about advantages and disadvantages of Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism towards day-to-day students' interaction at the University of Gondar.

In relation to students' day-to-day interaction and ethnic federalism's positive and negative influence, students from Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, Somali, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' gave the following information: All students as mention above have agreed in many points though they have differences. Initially, when we first arrived to the University of Gondar, our perception towards others was not good and there was some form of groupings of students based on their ethnic group. They used to go to café together, they do assignment works together. Even some times one ethnic group forwards a hate speech towards other ethnic groups. Last year 2011 there was some conflict between Amhara students originally from south Gondar and a Tigray student at Tewodros campus. Even though the conflict was personnel; it turned out to be ethnically politicized issue. Students from both ethnic groups took side and the conflict was reached at climax, though it was finally resolved by the intervention of the university administration³.

As students promoted to second year and become senior, the feelings of their perception of Ethiopian Ethnic federalism and its implication among themselves can be described as follows: As we transferred from freshmen to second and third year (in law student case fourth year and fifth year) our interaction to other ethnic group and the desire to know the cultural values of other ethnic group usually increases. Most of us believed that dividing based on ethnic lines has no use for our country. We start to believe that Ethiopia is one country having more than eighty ethnic groups having their own languages and cultural backgrounds. However, one thing remains a critical factor to create a harmonies relationship between students religion. Religion in this university and other universities is still creates some problems among students. Especially the local people of the city of Gondar have some sort of negative attitude to some religions.⁴

At the second FGD, which consists of four students from Oromia and three other students from SNNP, researchers realized that students have some affiliations towards their ethnic groups in terms of allocation of dormitories, dining at the café, sharing reading

³ FGD with five students from Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, SNNP, Somali, at Atse Susneyos Hotel. On the 27th of April 2004.

⁴ FGD with five students from Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, SNNP, Somali, at Atse Susneyos Hotel. On the 27th of April 2004.

materials at the library. In these seven students added additional and more interesting remarks on the above issues: Students who came from Tigray, Oromia, Somali, and Gambella do have a high tendency informing groupings and doing things within their own ethnic group. For instance, suppose a student washing his clothes or he/she is taking shower after that he/she gives the next turn to a student that belong to his/her ethnic group. In addition to this as you know there is a shortage of recent reference books in the libraries. Students prefer to give the reading material to his/her ethnic group. Thirdly students prefer, due to language and religious issues, prefer to make a girl friend with the same ethnic group.⁵ Though he agrees on the above points, one student from the above seven students, has dissimilar opinions different from other six students. Bitterly explains his feelings as follows: Nowadays there is a high feeling of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism among students at the University of Gondar. We should not hide facts in this regard because it is visible. There is an ethnocentric feeling. Especially regarding religious matters the situation of the students at the universities of Ethiopia in general at the University of Gondar in particular is similar to a volcanic activity underneath the earth. Generally, we can conclude that ethnic federalism created mistrust and suspicion among different ethnic groups.⁶

As stated above students from Oromia, Tigray, SNNP, they seek to make friendship with other ethnic groups with other ethnic groups in the campus. Especially, students who came from urban areas have no any tendency to make some sort of friendship among their ethnic groups. However, a FGD from the point of view of students of Gambella, Afar and Somali regional states gave different perception about Ethiopian ethnic federalism and its influence among student's friendship, interaction and relation. The following point reflects this student's outlook about their interaction with other students:

As we first arrive we faced and experienced some kind of cultural difference at the university and in the city of Gondar which is different from where we came from. There exist differences on dressing style, the way we see and perceive the environment around us, language usage (even we observed the Amharic language at the capital Addis is somewhat different from Amharic spoken in Gondar), in addition to this we perceived some form of influence and domination from other students specifically those students who are from Gondar and its environs. In terms of sensitive issues, such as religion and ethnicity, which usually consider to be as the cause of conflict among students in other universities, we, as the dormitory, café, classroom we try to avoid any discussion concerning this issues because we understood that once raised, this sensitive issues it may lead us in to conflict.⁷

As one realize from the above comments of students who came from presumably less developed regions have some sort of the perception of exclusiveness and inequity. As they came from previously less integrated regions, they do have their own perception towards others tradition and culture. The way they understand others is influenced by their previous regimes high centralization policy and this regimes oppressive tendency. The above four students asserted the following points regarding Ethiopian ethnic federalism towards their interaction and relation with other students. Our perspective towards Ethiopian ethnic federalism has two dimensions:

3. The Positive and Negative Effects of Ethnic Federalism and Tolerance among Students

Positively, ethnic federalism offered the nation, nationalities the opportunity to use and foster their cultural values, languages, and customs; However, on its negative side ethnic federalism created excessive groupings and narrow nationalism. This again obliged students to stick to ethnic issues instead of broad national issues and show loyalty only to his/her ethnic groups. We have now developed a character affiliation towards our ethnic groups. Upon the completion of our education, we want to work in any part of Ethiopia. This is, in fact, our ambition and vision but because of the negative influence and its implication, most of us feel that it is better to go to our regions where our ethnic group exists. This in turn hinders the cultural interaction and peaceful coexistence of different nations and nationalities in Ethiopia.⁸

A focus group discussion with four Oromo students asserted that "Ethiopian ethnic federalism has brought some peaceful coexistence among different students at the university of Gondar students of different ethnic group are eager to learn the culture of other ethnic groups. However, on the negative side this ethnic federalism has brought ethnic nationalism and there are some groupings among students. Some sections of students have developed an attitude that their ethnic group is superior to other ethnic groups. In the federal state structure, the main problem is dissemination of intolerance. In other words students have begun to give priority and claim their ethnic origin instead of claiming nationally he/she is Ethiopian".⁹

A focus group discussion with four Amhara students also claimed that "though we accept the adoption of federalism as a system which respects the rights of nations, nationalities and peoples, it has some pessimistic consequences. There are groupings among students based on ethnicity. In addition to this some instructors treats students based on ethnicity. More than this as federalism based on cultural ethnicity it has a tendency of developing narrow nationalism".¹⁰ Another five Tigrean student's claim that "the present Ethiopian ethnic federalism is the only solution for the unity of Ethiopia. This federalism, according to them, enabled students including (us) to learn and to use our mother tongue.

⁵ FGD with four Oromia students and three other students from SNNP at Atse Susneyos Hotel. On the 29th of April 2004.

⁶ FGD with four Oromia students and three other students from SNNP at Atse Susneyos Hotel. On the 29th of April 2004.

⁷ FGD with four students from Somali (one student), Afar (one student), and Gambella (two students) at Maraki Campus students cafeteria, on the 8th of April 2004.

⁸ FGD with four students from Somali (one student), Afar (one student), and Gambella (two students) at Maraki Campus students cafeteria, on the 8th of April 2004.

⁹ FGD with four Amhara students at Maraki Campus students cafeteria, on the 27th of May 2004.

¹⁰ FGD with four Amhara students at Maraki Campus students' cafeteria, on the 16th of May 2004.

If Ethiopia failed to follow ethnic federalism, the consequences have been disintegration and continuous war among different ethnic groups".¹¹ These five students who came from Tigray region added other negative sides of ethnic federalism. Though this ethnic federalism have enabled different ethnic groups to develop their languages and culture as we mentioned above, it created some existing problems in relation to religion which is usually observed in some ceremonies organized by the university of Gondar. Some non-Christian students have a perception of dissatisfaction during Easter because they claim that the Christian students are privileged and served with special dishes.

In addition to the above facts this ethnic federalism has also brought minor conflict on the day-to-day interaction of students. Students usually do not agree on issues such as Television program at night (which program should be open), dormitory allocation choices etc. The following comments were obtained from the dean of students: We usually placed and allocate dormitories for student based on alphabets. We get the name of the students from the registrar. Then we place them based on alphabetical order. However, most of the students prefer to be placed based on their ethnic background.

Especially, first year students are eager to lodge with their ethnic groups. Repeated questions of dormitory exchange have been raised from this group of students. In fact, be it religious or ethnic based issues, most of the challenge comes again from this group. In addition to this, problems arise on a specific television programs. Students usually want to see their respective ethnic group television programs and we cannot accommodate the interest of all students at the same time. This leads some disagreement among students of different ethnic groups (Kelemu, 08 June 2012). To resolve such kind of repeated problem, the university implements different strategies as to the dean of the students told these researchers the following important comments how to accommodate diverse student interests: To improve tolerance culture among students, matters in relation to students' service such as lodging dormitories, café, students' guidance and counseling etc. are given for them. Concerning accommodation of diversity and tolerance orientation, is also given by the higher administrators of the University. Regarding television show programs we have selected representative student from each cultural ethnic group and students from the student council to manage this real problem (Kelemu, 08 June 2012).

4. Conclusion

States adopt federal arrangements for various reasons: economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Politically, states prefer federal structure for their people to administer their own affairs locally, since most of political activities are done at local level. Economically, states prefer federalism as the people feel the ownership of properties and to enable them to participate in economic activities. Culturally, states prefer federalism to unitary state structure as it gives different multi-cultural ethnic groups to promote their cultural values and specifically to use their own languages. In view of this, Ethiopia adopted a federal state structure as of 1991, which is a great departure from the previous state administration. Prior to 1991, all leaders of Ethiopia, in one form or another, adopted a unitary state structure whereby high concentration of power at the centre.

Unlike pre-1991, one of the most important features of the political changes in the post- 1991 is the re-structuring of the Ethiopian state through the model of ethnic based federalism. This was aimed to introduce a federal system which is radical re-organization of state structure and the state-society relation. The ruling regime has constitutionally formalized ethnicity as fundamental principles of political organization. Hence, Ethiopia is presently a federal form of government, which officially advocates decentralization of power in favor ethno-linguistic regions and multi-party democracy.

The adoption of Ethiopian ethnic based federal structure has brought both negative and positive impact on peaceful co-existence of different nations nationalities. Positively, the adoption of ethnic based federalism enabled nations and nationalities to use and promote their own cultural values and to administer their local affairs by themselves. This federal formula also encouraged the rights of minority ethnic groups. But on the negative side, this ethnic based federalism does not solve the perennial problems and failed to address conflicts which arise between different ethnic and religious groups.

This research examined both negative and positive impacts of federalism on the University students giving special emphasis on students who are attending their study at the University of Gondar. To investigate and look into the impact of federalism on students' day-to-day interaction and relation, the researchers have used books and journal articles as source of reference material. As far as data collection is concerned, three techniques of primary data collection techniques have been used: non-participant observation, six focus group discussion, and almost hundred students were asked to feel open and close ended questioners.

Since students are from different regions of Ethiopia, representing different ethnic groups, their attitude as well as perception reflects the views of other Ethiopian ethnic federalism. Students have agreed, by and large, federal state structure brought some peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups. It enabled nations and nationalities to promote their own languages and cultural values. However, students argued that this ethnic federalism has brought its own negative consequences. There are some groupings in terms of ethnicity and religious affairs. Specifically, the issue of religion is the most sensitive political matter that is more likely to cause some conflicts and disagreements among students. Generally, the ethnic federal political structure hampers students not to think the broader national issues and forced to show loyalty only to the ethnic group. Due to this fact, up on the completion of their study, many students would like to be employed in regions where their ethnic groups inhabit.

¹¹ FGD with four Amhara students at Maraki Campus students' cafeteria, on the 16th of May 2004.

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