

MENELIK'S ETHIOPIA UNDER FIRE: THE DANGERS OF ETHNIC FEDERALISM

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One hundred years ago today Ethiopian patriots valiantly shed their blood at the Battle of Adwa to successfully defend the sovereignty and independence of their country from Italian colonialism. The victory of Adwa is significant in many respects - domestic as well as international. From my particular perspective today, however, Adwa's importance lies in the unique role it has played and continues to play both as a symbol and a lodestar of Ethiopian nationalism and nationhood. The victory of Adwa is the pride and the achievement of all Ethiopians. At Adwa the whole nation, in its multi-textured diversity, came together in defense of a common country and a common national identity. Although the notion of ethnic identity would have been surprising or even incomprehensible to them, it is important to underscore the fact that the patriots, heroes and heroines of Adwa hailed from all ethnic groups, thus demonstrating the essential fact that they fought and died to preserve and memorialize a greater, superior and overarching identity: Ethiopianhood.

It is ironic that a hundred years later Ethiopia's own children have chosen to put Ethiopian nationhood to a more severe test either by denying its existence or otherwise working to undermine its vitality. Lest this appear an exaggeration let me quote one of the current purveyors of national nihilism, Mr. Dawit Yohannes, the craftsman of the new Ethiopian constitution and the Speaker of the Council of Representatives. He says:

There is no country called Ethiopia, no state that defends the interests of this multi-ethnic community grouped under the name Ethiopia. That's why we have been immersed in wars for over the last 30 years. We must start all over again, from scratch.

It would be tempting to dismiss this statement as the rambling of a disingenuous politician who deliberately confuses the historical reality of Ethiopia's existence with the undemocratic nature of its state system. But coming as it does from one of the major figures behind the new constitution, the chief inspiration of which is the glorification of ethnic identity to the denigration of Ethiopian identity, it deserves all our attention. It is one thing to decry-as many of Ethiopia's finest sons and daughters have expressed in their struggles over the years-the historically undemocratic nature of the Ethiopian state system, particularly its failure to provide an appropriate framework by which all Ethiopians could celebrate in equality their linguistic and cultural heritage without in any way undermining their membership of and loyalty to a broader national community. But it is quite another to bury Ethiopia as a state and as a nation in the glorification of ethnic community. The glorification of ethnic distinctiveness over and above national cohesiveness is an extremely shortsighted and dangerous project: It tends to throw the proverbial baby - Ethiopianhood - out with the bath water.

The new constitution purports to democratize the state system by making Ethiopia a loose federation of ethnic groups with virtually an unqualified right to secede, if a group so chooses. This constitutional formula has received lavish praise from some Western governments. Indeed some have touted the formula as a model other African states would do well to consider as a cure for ethnic tension and division. Can this really be right?

My own answer is no. I argue in my remarks today that the net result, even if the intention were otherwise, of such an arrangement is to turn the achievement of Adwa on its head. That is, the triumph of such an arrangement might well be the defeat of a strong, vibrant and composite

Ethiopian nationalism and its substitution by a bunch of mutually hostile, squabbling, intolerant mini nationalisms à la Bosnia. Nationalisms of this kind are fraught with many difficulties, as the war in Bosnia and the tragedy in Rwanda have amply shown.

Before plunging into my objections to ethnic federalism as a means of addressing ethnic problems in Ethiopia, however, I would like to issue several caveats. First, I do not argue that the concept of federalism is in itself ill-suited to Ethiopia's circumstances. In fact, I believe that an appropriately nuanced and calibrated federalism is perhaps the only way by which ethnic and cultural diversity may be accommodated today, but only within a united and indivisible Ethiopia. Second, I do not argue that ethnic identity should be completely ignored in the process of defining an appropriate federal system in Ethiopia. On the contrary, in light of Ethiopia's present-day realities, no serious constitutional design can hope to ignore it. What needs to be strongly resisted is the cult of ethnicity that denies or belittles the value of a united Ethiopia, and seeks to promote and perpetuate separate ethnic communities. Nor do I disagree with the constitution's affirmations of the right of ethnic groups to speak their languages, or practice their cultures.

I seek to show in the following pages the grave risks that attend the type of federalism the new constitution has sought to institutionalize in Ethiopia, especially in light of the further decision to grant ethnic groups the right to secede from the federation if they so choose. I believe that the justifications that seek to ground a federal state organized principally along ethnic lines are far outweighed by the grave risks it poses.

I. JUSTIFICATIONS FOR ETHNIC FEDERALISM

The proponents of ethnic federalism seek to justify it in terms of several values which they assert it promotes. First, they argue that ethnic federalism allows ethnic groups a measure of self-government which in turn supposedly quells their desire to separate from the nation. The inarticulate assumption behind this argument is the thought that self-government best promotes the true interests and preferences of members of an ethnic community, and that ethnic-oriented leaders represent their own communities better than do officials of the central government.

A related justification stresses the advantages of devolution of power from the center to the regions. The argument here focuses on the notion that a decentralized government will be closer to the particular ethnic community than is otherwise possible. Again, there is an assumption that this form of decentralization will encourage greater popular participation than would otherwise be the case.

A further justification relies on the opportunity that a federal unit drawn along ethnic lines provides for institutionalizing, preserving, and promoting collective rights. The argument here is that the right of an ethnic group to develop its language and practice its culture is best accomplished as an institutional matter when the group is given its own territory.

Finally, in the eyes of its proponents, ethnic federalism allows a more equitable and less uneven development of the country. At the very least, the argument goes, states will have more access to and control over resources for purposes of administration than they ever had before.

II. EVALUATING THE JUSTIFICATIONS FOR ETHNIC FEDERALISM

Several of the goals identified above in support of ethnic federalism are not altogether implausible, though it is unclear whether, or to what extent, they were in fact the animating force behind the new constitution. Even if the merit of these justifications is granted, however, the risks inherent in ethnic federalism are too high that its appropriateness for or workability in Ethiopia cannot easily be conceded. This paper seeks, first, to identify the pitfalls inherent in the idea, and

then focus on the lack of fit between the goals identified and the means chosen to implement them. Finally, it seeks to demonstrate that the goals of ethnic federalism can be accomplished in less risky ways.

A. Danger: Balkanization

The first great and real danger that refashioning the Ethiopian state along ethnic lines has created is balkanization of the country. Amid the continuing and heightened ethnic consciousness and mobilization that is gaining ground in the country, this kind of federalism, even without the additional risk created by the right of secession, is bound to unleash separatist tendencies among the states. The proponents of ethnic federalism may argue that it is unfair to blame them for such tendencies because these tendencies predated the choice of this form of government. While this is partially true, the argument exaggerates the extent to which separatist impulses and ethnic consciousness were prevalent in the country prior to the EPRDF regime. The fact is that it is the regime which, for its own narrow and short-sighted purposes, actively and relentlessly encouraged, promoted and even required political groups to organize along ethnic lines. The most extreme example of this is the transmutation of the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement - once a movement that prided itself as Marxist - into the Amhara People's Democratic Organization. Moreover, the argument fails to acknowledge the fact that, even if the regime did not actually create these separatist tendencies, it did nothing to dissuade or discourage them. On the contrary, viewing ethnic identification as a non-negotiable article of faith and the be-all and end-all of one's personal identity, the EPRDF regime has created a system of government that has a great potential for assisting and heightening, even if not actually creating, separatist movements and feelings of ethnic distinctiveness. First, an obvious effect of dividing a country by ethnic groups is to intensify and institutionalize ethnic differences, thereby promoting groups to view one another with hostility and suspicion. Life under EPRDF has already shown that when the state makes ethnicity a status - giving political identity, people will regroup themselves under its banners' and come to view those different from them in ethnic background as the "Other." Thus, far from reducing, mitigating or bridging such divisions and differences, ethnic federalism seeks to assist such a view by constitutionally requiring ethnic segregation. Throwing up fences around ethnic groups, however, can never pull people together; it only helps to fence off non-members, thereby creating barriers and obstacles for inter-ethnic dialogue, cooperation, interdependence and national cohesion. It is in this sense that I believe that ethnic citizenship and national identity are ultimately incompatible propositions.

Such a system is inadvisable and unworkable for multi-ethnic polities because ~encourages and is bound to encourage ethnic groups to develop a conception of political community in which their identification or links with other groups and the central government will gradually become less important than their identification with the regional government, which an ethnic group will come to view as its natural champion. Since each region has been, or will come to be, identified with a major ethnic community, the community will eventually come to see itself as a distinct political community. Equating political boundaries with ethnicity is bound to encourage a feeling looking inward, of insularity, and a desire for total control of one's own "turf," even when a group may have been previously unaware that it constitutes a distinct group. Moreover, the creation of an ethnic government structure is of great assistance to ethnic leaders for collating and articulating ethnic grievances against the federal government, and preparing themselves for the ultimate showdown. In these Circumstances, the surprise will be if secessionist tendencies did not arise or flourish, not whether they will. A major consequence of ethnic federalism is thus to nurture rival nationalisms alongside one another.

Rival nationalisms cannot coexist in the same political space for a long time, nor can they foster a sense of loyalty to the larger political community. As experience has so far shown in Ethiopia, dual loyalties are hard to maintain. Loyalty to one's ethnic group is threatening to prove a more potent

force than loyalty to the Ethiopianhood. If this trend continues-and there are few hopeful signs that it will not-there is little or no doubt that the country is headed for another round of secessionist wars, only this time even more disastrous because the stakes are higher and the conflagration more consuming.

This is neither idle speculation nor alarmist exaggeration. The experience of the erstwhile European communist-states demonstrates the hazards of such a system. The Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia from whom the EPRDF copied its political formula all relied on ethnic federalism as a means for resolving the so-called nationality problem with one major difference: They did so in the context of a civic culture based on Marxism-Leninism and the discipline of a single party and united military structure. Communist philosophy viewed ethnic federalism as a necessary accommodation to then-existing ethnic conditions, and hoped that ethnic affiliation, like class distinctions, would wither away with the development of the workers' state. The stated aim was to create a socialist identity that would merge and transcend ethnic identities. We have seen, however, what happened when the institutions of central authority were dismantled in the wake of the outbreak of democracy in those countries. In each of these countries, the collapse of the central institutions gave way to parochial and ethnic self-interests, ultimately resulting in national disintegration and civil war. The experience of these countries vividly demonstrates that groups who allow their ethnic identity to prime their national identity are incapable of dreaming multi-ethnic co-existence. As a consequence, they are unlikely to form or survive as a multi-ethnic state.

The separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia should serve as a reminder of the difficulty of maintaining the integrity of a state built on shaky ethnic foundations. To put it differently, when multiple ethnic nationalisms coexist within a single polity, changes in the position of a particular nationalism changes the environment for all other nationalisms. The "success" of Eritrean nationalism has inspired and emboldened other nationalisms to aspire for statehood. In the face of such risks, it would seem that the better course of wisdom would have been to avoid ethnicity as an overriding principle of state organization and politics.

Unfortunately, the ruling circles in Ethiopia have not shown such wisdom and it would be too optimistic to expect it from them. First, the very success of ethnic nationalism requires that Ethiopian nationalism fade away. That is precisely why Meles Zenawi and his cohorts are intent on denying, belittling or revising Ethiopia's history, and destroying the country's unifying and common institutions. Second, especially in the case of the TPLF, promoting ethnic nationalism is a way of blackmailing Tigreans to support the ethnic cause, or to cow others into silence. Either way Ethiopianhood suffers. Incidentally, when viewed in this light it is not surprising that the TPLF initially decided to celebrate Adwa's victory as if it were solely a Tigrean holiday. To the ethnonationalists, robbing all Ethiopians of the memory of a common history and a common national identity promotes the cultivation of a new one. If there is any doubt about the ambitions of the ethnonationalists, it should be dispelled by the TPLF's decision to grant ethnic groups the right to secede in the name of the controversial and little-understood principle of self-determination. That decision represents the coup de grace to Ethiopian nationalism. Granting the right of secession to ethnic groups clearly implies that the federal structure in the making and the kind of Ethiopian statehood it envisions are intended to be consensual and provisional, liable to be dissolved or discarded at will. The essential idea behind the new constitution is that the federal union is a compact between the federal government and the regions. In the event of ethnic dissatisfaction, therefore, a region can withdraw from its association with the country.

This is contrary to the practice of modern federal constitutions whereby the acceptance of a federal constitution usually signifies the establishment of a permanent and indestructible union. Under the EPRDF's constitution, however, the federating ethnic groups retain the right to change their minds about their association with the Ethiopian state. Their relationship with the Ethiopian

state has thus been made always provisional and contingent. Consequently, the risk of termination or dismemberment is one which the country will always continue to face. In fact, that risk has already begun to take shape in some sections of the country. The resurgence of the Somalis in the Ogaden in pursuit of their demand for a separate state demonstrates the extreme fragility of the new Ethiopian state. The notion of a voluntary union among ethnic groups to form a country can hardly yield a stronger one.

Even if the state did not terminate at will, the right to secession is inadvisable as a practical matter. Credible claims of secession inevitably and quickly inflame and polarize a society. Such an atmosphere is not conducive to conducting politics and the business of government rationally and peacefully. Undertaking nation-wide programs of social and economic recovery in such an atmosphere is equally difficult because emphasis on the cultural and political autonomy of the federal units is likely to give rise to, or be accompanied by, an increasing emphasis on economic self-sufficiency—that is, by creating an ethnic economic enclave. Already, the TPLF has demonstrated this by pursuing a frenetic and single-minded effort to build Tigray as economically self-sufficient—a development which is fueling a groundswell of anger and resentment in the rest of the country. It is the function of a constitution to prescribe political structures and processes that provide for a settled political atmosphere. One way to accomplish this is to remove from the constitution highly contentious issues that have the potential to infect daily politics and routine government processes. Secession and ethnic politics are sources of enduring constitutional insecurity. Any sensible government would avoid such politics by all means.

Those convinced of the right to secede should realize that secession has no stopping point. The separation of one region not only leads to the separation of other regions, but also subjects the seceding unit to similar claims internally. Secessionist regions are not themselves homogenous as it is often asserted. They all contain significant minorities. The vision of a federal system with coinciding ethnic and state boundaries is simply chimerical. As Uri Ra'anan has convincingly shown the paradigm of a "polity whose territorial and juridical frontiers coincide with the ethnic boundaries of the national entity with which that state is identified" is a transparent fallacy. Only a handful of countries fit the paradigm of a "nation-state."

The question of secession raises yet another issue. Even assuming it were possible objectively to define a people by its "ethnic" characteristics, there is still the problem of identifying the land that attaches to that ethnic group. This is no easy matter because different groups may lay claim, in whole or in part, to the same territory, relying on various factors including history, patterns of settlement, and security-economic or otherwise.

Consequently, it is no mere coincidence that most modern federations have shied away from ethnic federalism and the right of secession. Indeed, the most successful federations have drawn state boundaries so as to diffuse and restrict the power of states in a federation - not to highlight their ethnic distinctiveness or emphasize their unilateral right to bring down the federation. Nigeria, for example, learned the hard way the destructive potential of a federal structure driven by ethnicity. At independence, the Nigerian state was organized as a three-way federation in which each of the three regions reflected the predominance of one major ethnic group. This structure led quickly and inevitably to an attitude of self-sufficiency, intolerance, and separatism which ultimately led to civil war when Biafra decided to secede from the federation. This experience taught Nigerians and other Africans an expensive but valuable lesson: there is a high correlation between the geographical concentration of an ethnic group and its tendency toward separatism. No wonder successive Nigerian governments after the civil war have made sure to move in the opposite direction. No wonder as well that the record of the federal idea in Africa has been a dismal failure. Indeed, it is not surprising that Nigeria and now South Africa are the only states which continue to experiment with federalism in the entire continent. But the dubious distinction of experimenting with ethnic federalism in Africa belongs to the EPRDF alone.

B. Federalism and Democracy

A second perspective from which the value of ethnic federalism may be assessed is democratic theory. This perspective asks: What are the consequences of ethnic federalism for different conceptions of democracy: for participation, responsiveness, liberty and equality? Is ethnic federalism necessarily the antidote to too much concentration of power at the center that has characterized previous Ethiopian governments? Is federalism a complete solution to the political management of ethnicity?

At first blush, ethnic federalism might appear to be a cure to the abuses and excesses of despotic governments in Ethiopia which in the past wielded too much power. The classic defense of federalism as it emerged in the United States suggests that its fundamental purpose is to protect citizens from governments and minimize the possibility of tyranny, especially tyranny by the majority, by ensuring that power is fragmented among competing authorities.

The goal of federalism, insofar as it seeks to limit government by fragmenting power, is laudable, but its ethnic conception does very little to protect the individual and minority groups from the tyranny of ethnic majorities within their own states. Once each ethnic group is identified with a particular state, that state belongs to it. Those who are not members of the ethnic group do not belong and are considered beyond the pale. Consequently, they will not only not enjoy equal rights of citizenship as members of a single country but may even be subjected to special disabilities by virtue of their different ethnic identity. This is not simply a theoretical possibility, but has already become a booming reality in Ethiopia. Recent experiences in the South and East of the country have shown the extent to which the ethnic model of federalism can even countenance serious violations of the most fundamental of human rightsⁱⁱⁱ: the right to life. Primarily Amharas, but also Gurages and others have been massacred or expelled from these regions. Because the whole idea of ethnic federalism rests on the notion of demographic homogeneity, non-members do not belong, and are bound to face open hostility and invidious discrimination. Even individuals belonging to the same ethnic group are not necessarily free from danger. They too run the risk of being run over by a collective ethnic steamroller if and when the individual asserts interests or entertains ideas that are perceived to run counter to the collective conception of the good of the ethnic community.

A different strand of the democratic perspective stresses the advantages of decentralization from another standpoint: the responsiveness of government and citizen participation. The argument here is that the political weight of an individual is greater if he or she is one of a smaller rather than a larger number of citizens. That is to say, political leaders in a democracy are more sensitive to public opinion with smaller constituencies, thereby maximizing opportunities for effective citizen participation.

These goals are laudable as well, but again, there are difficulties. To begin with, in order for individuals to have a real chance of exerting influence upon their governments in the suggested ways, the units need to be a great deal smaller than the ethnic regions that have now been demarcated. Consider, for example, the Amhara and Oromo regions. Historically, under the provincial system of government in Ethiopia, Amharas predominated in three or four provinces, while Oromos predominated in several more provinces. The proposed system of ethnic federalism, however, would amalgamate these regions into two huge political communities with the result that the state governments of these communities will be much farther removed from the people than before. Thus, a democratic view of federalism would in fact tend to justify the break-up of the newly created regions rather than their aggregation.

The federation in the process of creation lacks the elements of a democratic system in yet another sense. The regions that have been created are not really federating units. They lack any organic and separate existence in the past. They are, rather, artificial creations. They came into existence not by virtue of agreement and consensus among the federating units, but rather as a result of an imposition from above according to a plan which was secretly arrived at by a few individuals in the Transitional Council. The plan did not receive the benefit of public discussion, debate, or sober deliberation even in the Council, much less in the country as a whole. Though Amharas, for example, by and large have lacked a consciousness of ethnic nationalism, preferring primarily a supra-ethnic identity, they have been lumped together as one nation by official fiat. There is no history which defines these regions politically in terms of the Amharic language they now speak. Nor have they chosen collectively to define themselves in linguistic terms. To a greater or lesser degree, the same comments apply to the Oromo regions as well. Pray tell me: which history is it that unites the Christian Oromos of Shoa and Wellega with the Moslem Oromos of Harar, Arsi or Bale? In light of this the federation lacks the most essential condition for success: acceptance by the population. A workable federal system, especially one which is highly divisive and contentious cannot be thrust on the population from the top. To thrive or even survive, federal institutions must be built on a voluntary basis and on an appropriate social, economic, psychological and emotional infrastructure. EPRDF's formula for Ethiopia has none of these essential elements.

C. Ethnic Federalism and Economic Development

The fundamental problem all Ethiopians, regardless of their ethnic Origin, face is economic deprivation. As such, it is important to consider the implications that ethnic federalism holds for economic development: Does this model enhance or frustrate the capacity of government institutions to generate effective policy and respond to citizen needs?

In the view of its proponents, ethnic federalism can enhance and promote an even and balanced development of the country as a whole. They draw support for their view from the fact that historically the over-concentration of power at the center has denied the regions access to local and national resources. Under the new system, however, it is argued that state governments can finance development by borrowing from "domestic lending sources", tax revenues collected at the regional level and federal subsidies. In addition, this decentralized structure, it is hoped, will allow increased democratic participation of the local people in the design and implementation of economic and social policies. The principle from which these arguments are derived is sound. The principle of local experimentation, participation and innovation is one of the central ideas animating the concept of federalism. Justice Brandeis captured the essence of this principle in his analysis of federalist values¹¹:

It is one of the happy incidents of the federal system that a single courageous state may, if it chooses, serve as a laboratory and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.

But this venerable principle is liable to result in disaster when it is taken out of context and misapplied. To appreciate these consequences, it is important to bear in mind the difference between ethnic federalism and political federalism as it exists in the United States. Unlike Ethiopia, in the United States, state boundaries bear little correlation with deep ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic divisions. In view of these differences, it is important to consider carefully and objectively the adverse economic consequences that will flow from such an arrangement.

The first casualty will be the notion of a common market, so essential to building a common country. As is well-known, the effect of the introduction of an ethnic model of development in Ethiopia has been the mobilization of ethnic politics. Each ethnic region sees itself as a distinct political entity. The parties that have arisen have all identified themselves with particular regions and ethnic groups, each party seeking support only from its own ethnic base. In general, many of these parties are, or seem to be, less interested in, or not interested at all, in the welfare of all the citizens of the country as a whole. Thus, ethnonationalists, even if they might not be secessionists, are likely to be struggling for a closed, self-reliant ethnic economy, which would increasingly assume a disintegrative economic role with respect to the national economic system. I have already mentioned the TPLF's efforts to build Tigray as a separate and self-sufficient economic entity. Under these circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that state governments will engage in discriminating policies and practices that seek to impose obstacles to the free flow of goods, capital and labor - and even ideas. Signs of these evils have already surfaced in the practices of some regions. For example, the TPLF does not allow newspapers and other political publications originating in the centre to be distributed in the Tigray region. Also, persons regarded as outsiders have been excluded from equal participation in the economy and government of these regions and dispatched to their own respective regions. The emphasis on ethnicity and the hostility it breeds also kills the incentive for investing in regions other than one's own. Such practices thus sound the death-knell of an all-Ethiopia common market.

Another looming danger concerns control over important resources of the country. Given the high level of ethnic politicization, some ethnic groups are likely to want to exclude others from the use or exploitation of resources found within their regions. The banner of self-determination and the notion of loyalty to the ethnic community are unlikely to create incentives for the regions to cooperate in sharing fairly the resources of the country.

The experiences of several countries in Africa illustrate the real danger of economic balkanization. For example, the discovery of oil in Eastern Nigeria was a key factor in that region's attempt to secede from the country. Similarly, the secessionist tradition of Katanga in Zaire is largely on account of the fact that it is endowed with strategic mineral resources that it seeks to control for its sole benefit.

III. OTHER ALTERNATIVES

In light of these experiences and the dangers implicit in the notion of ethnic federalism, a consensual, legitimately binding and democratic constitution-making process would have looked to other alternatives, both to accommodate ethnic diversity and to maintain and promote national unity. Consideration of other alternatives would not overlook the advantages of a federal system. But the tensions necessarily built into an ethnic-based federal structure would have been avoided. The federal idea can be implemented by restructuring the state along internal regional boundaries that have evolved historically and have received particular legitimacy by the passage of time. For example, the erstwhile provinces of Tigray, Begemider and Semien, Gojjam, Shoa, Wellega, Kaffa, etc. have strong historical legitimacy that could be used as a basis for building a federal system. This is not necessarily to suggest that boundary modifications could not be made. On the contrary, criteria of administrative convenience, economic rationality and geographical considerations may be taken into account to create a more nuanced and less risky federal arrangement. In addition, ethnic criteria and the democratically expressed choices of the inhabitants of a region would be put in the balance. In this way, the need for linguistic and cultural accommodation could be satisfied without impairing national unity, state coherence and territorial integrity. Such an alternative will also encourage cultural dialogue, cooperation and interdependence among the regions. The argument that an ethnic group can practice its culture and promote its language only by forming its own state is unconvincing because the more

nuanced approach advocated here does also ensure that an ethnic group can pursue these goals in each of several states. That is to say, ethnic homogeneity within a region is not a sine qua non for the pursuit of these values. For example, Spain has 17 regions in 12 of which Castilian is spoken. Similarly, 11 of the 12 provinces of Canada are predominantly English-speaking. There is thus no reason, for example, why Oromigna cannot be used in several Oromo states instead of in one enormous and cumbersome state.

The argument that focuses on homogeneity is disingenuous as well. It blithely assumes that ethnic homogeneity is a feasible goal. Seldom is any territorial unit homogeneous in its ethnic make-up. In Ethiopia, the federal land tenure system under the imperial regime, resettlement programs, migration due to war and drought and above all a long history of living together and inter-ethnic marriages have all contributed to the ethnic heterogeneity of regional populations. Underlying the notion of ethnic federalism are assumptions that an ethnic group can be objectively identified and that a determinate territorial unit is clearly associated with such a group, unencumbered by the foregoing considerations. There is no basis in reality to these assumptions. Those who seek consolation from the experience of India, which is held up as a country which tried to manage ethnic identity by dividing the country along linguistic lines, would do well to remember that this formula has not worked there either. Not only has it not discouraged Kashmir, Assam, or Punjab from seeking to secede, but also it has not precluded ethnic favoritism, economic protectionism and other evils associated with feelings of ethnic distinctiveness. India's linguistic federalism may well prove to be a way station toward the creation of independent states. Unlike Ethiopia, however, at the very least India has a government committed to national unity-it does not subscribe the notion of secession.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic federalism is a dangerous idea. It rests on erroneous assumptions and is proposed by doctrinaire ideologues who have not taken the time or trouble to ponder all its untoward consequences. The main justification for ethnic federalism is accommodation and protection of cultural diversity. No one in his or her mind can quarrel with such a proposition. But everyone with a right mind should resist the temptation of those inclined to throw the baby out with the bath water. National unity, reconciliation, peace, individual rights and territorial integrity should not be impaired in the name of ethnic purity and homogeneity. Regional autonomy as part of a carefully balanced and calibrated federal system in Ethiopia is important in order to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity. But another essential element of a workable federal system is a commitment to unity. A system that puts a premium on a strong and overriding attachment to regional and/or ethnic identity, however, almost inevitably leads to the attrition of a unified national identity. Moreover, a strong attachment to an ethnic nationalism constructed on the presumption of homogeneity is unlikely to promote the values of tolerance in a multi-ethnic society. Giving pride of place to ethnic identity sacrifices the vision of an all-embracing national community. The defeat of such a vision by ethnic stridency will only embroil all Ethiopians in further destruction and civil war, with all their attendant consequences - greater impoverishment, human rights violations, more refugees, and environmental degradation.i.

i. Alan C. Cairns, "Constitutional Government and the Two Faces of Ethnicity: Federalism Is Not Enough" in *Rethinking Federalism*, at 19 (Karen Knop et al. ed. 1995).ii

ii. Uri Ra'anana, "The Nation - State Fallacy" in *Conflict and Peace Making in Multiethnic Societies* 5 (Joseph Moteville ed. 1990)

iii.As Asbjorn Eide notes, many dangers in here in ethnonationalism. Because it is expansionist, exclusivist, and secessionist, it generates conflicts with grave consequences for peace and

human rights. See Eide, "In Search of Constructive Alternatives to Secession" at 145 in *Modern Law of Self-Determination* (Christian Tomuschat ed. 1993).

iv. New States Ice Co. v. Liebman, 285 U.S. 262 (1931).

