Who Owns the Ethiopian Nation-State?
Part I: Definition, theories and a model for the nation-state ©[1]

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> "[T]he goal of nation building should not be to impose common identities on deeply divided peoples but to organize states that can administer their territories and allow people to live together despite differences. And if organizing such a state within the old internationally recognized borders does not seem possible, the international community should admit that nation building may require the disintegration of old states and the formation of new ones."[3]

The ownership of the Ethiopian nation-state was problematic from its inception in the last quarter of the 19th century, and particularly from the perspective of non-Abyssinian nations. Incongruous state formation processes resulted in *conquest*, *occupation*, *annexation*, *colonization*, *militarism*, and *imperialism* which aggravated harmony among Ethiopian ethnic groups. This paper explores the ownership of the Ethiopian nation-state. Part I delivers four sections of the paper. Other parts of the paper are delivered through a serious of documents bearing the same main title, but with different subtitles. The first section in this part provides a brief introduction to the problems discussed in the paper. The second section presents a summary into the history of Ethiopian state formation and its annexation of Somali Ogaden territories. The third section introduces a unique and novel definition for, and reviews the different underlying theories of, the nation-state. The fourth section describes a model, or operational expectations of a nation-state, and the practice of nation and institution building in Ethiopia against this model. The last section provides for concluding remarks.
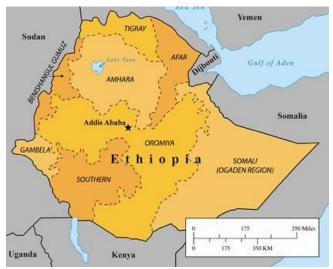
1   Introduction

Ethiopia, a country inhabited by over 70 million people, is considered one of the poorest nation-states in the world. Even though it has survived many catastrophic internal conflicts, two wars with Somalia and another with Eritrea since 1941, its people still face constant civil wars, and ever widening ethnic and national differences. Because Ethiopia decided to advance an unsustainable foreign policy in the Horn of Africa, the possibility of perpetual conflict with its neighbors and with itself seems inevitable. Ethiopia's ruling Tigrai People's Liberation Front (TPLF) serves as a vanguard party and exerts a fascist dictatorship and a tightly managed control on and domination of the lives of the people. In addition to its hegemonic and persistent creation of puppet ethnic parties that act as its proxy in the supposedly autonomous ethnic national states, the TPLF aspired and continues to aim to control, by force if necessary, the state of Somalia. The majority of the people in Ethiopia are against the dictatorial rule of the TPLF and its military expenditures to dominate Somalia.

The ownership of the Ethiopian nation-state was problematic from its inception in the last quarter of the 19th century, and particularly from the perspective of non-Abyssinian nations. Incongruous state formation processes run by Abyssinia (today's Tigray and Amhara ethnic states) resulted in *conquest*, *occupation*, *annexation*, *colonization*, *militarism*, and *imperialism* which aggravated harmony among Ethiopian ethnic groups. Strong Abyssinian central control, shored up by long-term European and American support, initially impeded construction of a modern nation-state and later hardened tendencies to impose top-down and conceited common territorial identity. Even

though the Ethiopian formal historians erroneously associate people's challenge to free themselves from the decades-old imperial rule and the emergency of ethnic and national questions with the rise of the student movements in the 1960's[4], the Somali Ogaden people were the first to challenge the imperial system on the basis of ethnic identity and self-determination struggles in the 1950's. Somalis were the first, and one of the major, ethnic groups who challenged the legitimacy of a dominant ethnic state control. Somali nationalism has been the major expression of this challenge and has evolved over time into an outright demand for independence. With the demise of the imperial and militarist domination and control in 1991, the Somali people contributed to the re-envisioning of the state as an ethnic-based federal system.

Despite the attractiveness of the theoretical framework upon which Ethiopia was re-constituted on the ascent of the TPLF to power, practical government implementation and sustenance of ethnic tokenism and puppetry and subsequent state abuse of human, environmental, and political rights re-stimulated Somali nationalism in Ethiopia. The state chose to destroy the internationally funded democratization process in 2005 and embarked on strategic starvation of the Somali people, the third largest ethnic group, undoubtedly signs of pre-meditated genocide, in 2007. As a result, national struggles for self-determination and for democracy are at patience-deprived condition, which may lead either to disintegration of the Ethiopian nation-state into its constituent ethnic states or to collectively-owned rationale coalition for state reformation process.

2 Abyssinian Annexation of Somali Ogaden

The old Abyssinian feudal state, under the leadership of Menelik II and Haile Selassie, forcefully occupied and later annexed the Somali Ogaden, along with other ethno-national homelands, into the Ethiopian nation-state in the last quarter of the 19th century. Ever since, the Somali people have been waging successive armed liberation movements to which the ruling elite kept responding with repression, exile, and denial of self-determination rights. State policies were implicitly and explicitly designed to coerce, at gun point, newly annexed nations and nationalities to assimilate into the Abyssinian culture, to accept Amharic as the official language of the state and societal lingua franca, to accept Monophysitic Christianity as the state religion, and to recognize a self-serving top-down, exclusive, definition of Ethiopian-ness as their political identity, which the Somali people vehemently rejected. Somalis viewed these as evil quartets of ethnic homogenization and as an Abyssinian Abyss.

Abyssinia solidified subjugation of the Somali people to harsh control and domination and neglected the development of institutions that may mitigate risks associated with the conflicts that may arise from the aforementioned issues. For almost seven decades, the Somali Ogaden has been a perpetual military occupation. Clearly, all these are violations of the United Nations' (UN) resolution that grants the right to independence to colonial countries and peoples and are impediments to "the promotion of world peace and cooperation"[5]. However, the then Abyssinian

ruling elite successfully argued, and convinced external and mainly western supporters, that Ethiopia is a sovereign state where the same UN resolution grants that any "attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations"[6].

The sacredness of the territorial sovereignty of the Ethiopian state argument coupled with the adamant rejection of successive rulers of Ethiopia, in direct violation of the UN charter, to accept that a multi-ethnic nation-state is not owned by a single dominant ethnic group created a binary Abyssinia-Somali Ogaden opposition on what a nation-state is or should be[7]. For over a century, the people continued resistance despite the gradually refined, and ambivalent, claims of highland leaders that all ethnic groups are full citizens of the land and are, therefore, free to participate in its institutions. Ethnic federalism was introduced in 1991 after the TPLF defeated Mengistu Haile Mariam's militarist regime. The Somali-speaking nation in Ethiopia welcomed this development with caution. After twenty one years of TPLF rule, however, the country may revert back to armed confrontations if the ruling group do not understand and act upon the fact that Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic country that needs to practice modern methods of nation-state and institution building.

3   Definition, theories and a model for any nation-state

In this paper / research, we define nation-state as "a 19th century concept of self-rule and an abstract and concrete representation of people who may or may not share common culture and history. The people interact with each other and manage their shared goals through institutions they develop incrementally and collectively and in which citizens authorize the state to have monopoly on the legitimate use of violence to defend, and maintain security, for a bounded geographical land referred to as the country. Self-rule in nation-state is executed through a government (or state) based on the rule of law". There are variations and commonalities among other theoretician's views on nations and nationalism. This paper discusses some of those theories including those of nationalists, ethno-nationalists, modernists, and pre-modernists and relates these views to the conditions in Ethiopia. This paper does not include discussion of the views of post-modernists.

The Critical differences in the many theories and thoughts on what a nation-state is mainly lie in the relevance of the process of nation-state formations and the role ethnic groups, democracy, technology, globalization, and other factors play. In the nationalist view[8], prior to the establishment of any nation-state, there exited ethnic groups and their past roles in the creation of the present are important. Less dominant ethnic groups within a multi-ethnic nation-state believe their nation was always there even if they did not fully participate in the process of state-making. If and when minority ethnic groups feel alienated or disenchanted with the state, they would assert nationalism as a way of mobilizing their people to regain their independence[9].

In the modernist view[10], the nation-state is a contemporary construction of an agrarian society (class-, not necessarily ethnic-based) which could no longer survive on its low culture and primitive modes of production. Intellectual leaders of the agrarian society, using violence, transformed a land and its inhabitants into an industrialized political community where mass education serves as the common thread that ties them together. The process, in the end, creates nationalism, a principal inevitably geared to make the people and their political institutions congruent. The past roles of specific ethnic groups in the creation process are, therefore, irrelevant. The modernist movement, which began in Europe in the 20th century, was a rejection of old European views of the world. While it has made significant contributions to global progress, this movement has been inadequate from non-European perspectives. Because of

European colonial legacy, there are many ethnic groups within most African states. For example, in Ethiopia, the largest groups include the Somali, the Oromo, the Amhara, the Tigre, the Sidama and the Guraga. The Amhara and the Tigre constitute the core Abyssinian group which, through force, external alliances and other means, excluded the less dominant groups such as the Somali and others during the process of state formation and coopted less powerful agrarian societies to form Ethiopia. How did ethnic groups or members of the agrarian class know of each other to collaborate to create a nation-state? Two theoretical groups take opposing views on the modernist conception of the superior agrarian political community.

In the pre-modernist view, with the advent of print capitalism, large members of people sharing a common language developed a sense of common identity and thought of themselves as an imagined community that is different and distinct from a religious community and sought to create an environment for the nation-state[11]. In this sense, the nation-state is, spatially and temporally, limited and sovereign because members are willing to die for the inclusive and always evolving idea. In Ethiopia, this view makes sense in a way because Abyssinian ethnic groups speak mutually intelligible languages and have developed written scripts before the people of Somali Ogaden and Oromia had scripts of their own. But the view fails because initially print capitalist societies may be capable of imagining the nation, but oral-based societies are capable of providing sustainable love and patriotism for their ethno-nation even when they lag behind in the use of writing technologies and may contribute equally or more when they catch up with the print capitalism[12]. But more importantly, the imagined view fails in the context of Ethiopia because, firstly, Abyssinian ethnic groups did not imagine a political community that is different and distinct from their Monophysitic Christian community during the process of the Ethiopian state formation. Secondly, Abyssinian scripts never developed into mature print capitalism, which explains why Ethiopia is still a dependent colonial state[13].

In the ethno-nationalist view[14], the capitalist process of creating 'political communities', or nation-states, as is commonly understood, encapsulated global industrial agenda, which engendered colonialism, oppression, or ethno-national conflicts as it forcefully lumped together disparate nations and nationalities. As soon as a nation-state emerged from this capitalist-induced process, dominant local ethno-nationals aligned themselves with overarching colonial or imperial, and external, nation-state actors. In order to sustain these alliances, the emerging dominant ethno-nationals behaved as if they were the owners of the new nation-state and as a result either destroyed, forcefully assimilated others or continually suppressed ethno-nationalist political aspirations. In the end, many internationally recognized states emerged and began playing global diplomacy as the legitimate representatives of all citizens while at the same time internal conflicts brewed underneath. In Ethiopia, the professions of diplomacy, finance, defense and security were never entrusted with non-Abyssinian folks.

Careful analysis and understanding of ethnic conflicts in post-colonial societies suggests the three main conditions that lead to ethnic conflicts are[15]: 1) Ethnicisation of the state bureaucracy 2) Exclusion of the educated sector of an ethnic group from the state decision-making 3) Unequal distribution of state resources and transaction costs across a state's ethnic-based communities. However, ethnic conflicts become more acute when the nation-state formation process itself involved historical struggles whose outcomes continued to perpetuate the domination of the state system by one ethnic group. In Ethiopia, Abyssinian ethnic groups ethnicised the state bureaucracy, excluded educated members of the major ethnic groups such as the Somali and the Oromo, which led to over hundred years of unequal distribution of state resources and power.

Contrary to the claims of modernists that nationalism is about the creation and maintenance of the congruence of a state and its associated cultural artifacts, ethno-nationalists provide that

nationalism is necessarily about the democratization of the state through the diversification of the ownership of economic and cultural resources and the self-determination of member nations within the state. Some ethno-nationalists refer to this type of nationalism as oppressed nationalism, as opposed to state or territorial nationalism, which clearly modernists seem to favor. Modernists are less concerned about situations in which the political and the national unit may never be congruent and more about the global proliferation of nation-states. Most of the current literature on nationalism reflects, for the most part, the interests of the colonizing ethno-nations be they Marxists, modernists, and even black colonialists such as the imperialist founders of Ethiopia, who controlled the state in the past, or the current ruling minority ethnic group who control it since 1991. Marxists and modernists share the global modernization view, albeit theoretically different, while black colonialists' goals are the continuation of domination and control of the resources of a multiethnic state and are heavily reliant and dependent on external diplomatic and military support[16]. While the views of ethno-nationalists are generally correct, some nationalist movements are not constrained by the enactment of progressive policies or democratization within the state, most notably, if and when ethno-nationalism within a state benefits more from the deconstruction of the concerned nation-state.

4   Operational expectations of a nation-state and its practice in Ethiopia

The theories described in the previous section may be viewed as the general model of a nation-state. However, regardless of the sharp differences in these schools of thoughts, our research uses a pragmatic model for the nation-state, which derives from our definition provided at the beginning of section 3 and our operational expectations of a nation-state (or requirements) and construction as described thus: A contemporary nation-state is required to provide for: equality among all citizens; a highly integrated civil society; a common cultural understanding for a shared glorious past or, if absent, one that is collectively constructed and universally acceptable to all; a fair language policy that demonstrates equal access to government; mass education open for all; an economic system benefiting the entire citizenry; and an agreed upon frameworks of references for the legitimacy of the nation-state itself. The state is operationally expected to construct sustainable systems for the satisfaction and implementation of these requirements incrementally and peacefully through the application of the rule of law.

Equality among all the stakeholders of the state is a principle that derives its legitimacy from morality and justice[17]. Successful nation-states provide for legally enforceable spaces that promote social equality at all levels of identity -- ethnic, tribal, clan, individual, professional association, or any legal network members decide to imagine -- so that a level playing field is present in the application of laws, in dignity and respect, and in the proportional distribution of goods and services, among many issues. Ethiopia does not provide equality among all of its citizens. In Ethiopia ethnic supremacy perpetuates lawlessness as criminality and access to power is subjectively defined by members of the ruling ethnic group. Moreover, ruling groups look down on all levels of identity that do not conform to their political views.

The difficult process of societal equalization cannot be achieved without a vibrant, independent and integrated civil society. Civil society occupies the idealistic service space where governments and market forces either could not fill or are less interested in to occupy[18]. The concept of civil society has been around for a long time and has been driven by societal needs to pursue specialized interests. Professional organizations such as medical associations, faith-based organizations such as mosques or churches, private nonprofit associations such as Médecins Sans Frontières or perhaps some political interest groups provide services otherwise not filled by the state or the market. Most civil societies contribute positively to the proper evolution of any nation-state and assist in democratization and economic and human development. Civil society,

when freely and properly developed, can provide technical advice to governments and private economic institutions. The Ethiopian nation-state does not treat its civil society groups equally. Ruling elites have never encouraged the development of cross-cutting civil society mainly because of the top-down control of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and at times outright hostility to local NGOs. But more importantly, members of civil society must share a common culture to be able to collaborate on issues of national importance. Lack of, or suppression of, cross-ethnic civil society in Ethiopia may be attributed to lack of freedom and development stage, but increasingly to the false, and self-serving, portrayal of Ethiopia's cultures as monolithic. A highland (Abyssinia) civil society organization does not have many common interests and culture with lowland (e.g., Somali Ogaden & Oromia) social or professional group.

Culture is a repository of knowledge, values, patterns of behavior, and sensibilities of a given society. When a group of people share similar tastes for music, food, or literature; when attitudes to the quality of services a state provides for its citizens coincide; when society behaves according to a commonly understood set of standards under certain human activities; when members of a society can relate to symbolic artifacts stored in this conceptual repository in the same manner -- then a society is said to share a common culture. Society took a long time to develop this repository and have used many devices and methods to achieve relatively acceptable consensus on the meaning of cultural symbolism. Each and every brain of the members of the society is concurrently a server and a client for the repository. There was never a common cultural understanding among Ethiopian ethno-nations to begin with and since its incongruous state formation, Ethiopia's multi-ethnic communities never enjoyed a common cultural understanding for a shared glorious past. For example, Somalis, referred to as "Nation of Poets", enjoy more common cultural understanding with Somalis in the United States of America, in Great Britain, in Somalia, in Kenya, and in Djibouti than with the Amhara in Abyssinia. But more importantly, the Ethiopian state, bent on staying the course with its dogmatic views, never seriously attempted to build a common culture and national heroes acceptable to all. In Ethiopia, there is no commonly enjoyed glorious past as parts of the country conquered, colonized, and oppressed other parts over the years.

The most important device for the development of culture is undoubtedly language. Similarly, the most important tool for the retrieval and comprehension of the elements of cultural symbolisms is language. Language is, therefore, a systematic mechanism through which ideas are expressed and transmitted and consists of vocal symbols in the form of words that represent meaning carried in written, oral or sign formats. Members of a nation-state use a commonly agreed upon specific language to communicate. Language, culture, and civil society are not static and constantly go through changes and development through public education, which states make available for its citizens for the purpose of social, intellectual, and economic development[19]. Ethiopia has coerced people to speak the Amharic language, which is spoken by a minority in the land, as the lingua franca of the nation-state. Major ethnic groups rejected this policy, but Ethiopian leaders insist on the national use of Amharic. This language policy undoubtedly leads to ineffective nation and institution building and the continued use of the Amharic language as the language of government doesn't advance ethnic harmony and economic development in the country.

The role of the state in the equitable distribution of goods and services are reflected in its policies for the development of an equitable economic system. The Ethiopian economy does not benefit the people equally. The Somali Ogaden region and others have experienced neglect and chronic underdevelopment and basic educational, healthcare, and water systems in lowland areas are lacking. Economic development is contingent on internal security and national defense. In order to not only diminish highland's sole control, and motivate non-Abyssinian participation, of the

affairs of the Ethiopian nation-state, but also to collectively authorize the state to be the sole user of armed defense, economic institutions need to be developed that can fund from within and provide for common security guarantees. Since its incongruous formation at the beginning of the 19th century, Ethiopia never enjoyed a monopoly on violence, which means the state did not control the sole armed group. Over the years, armed factions who felt excluded from the ownership of the nation-state challenged central authorities. In 1973, the military overthrew the imperial regime of Haile Selassie. In 1992, the TPLF overthrew the regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam. In 1993, Eritrea, led by Eritrean People's Liberation Front, declared independence from Addis Ababa and formed its own state. Since the 1950's the Somali Ogaden people initially led by the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) and later the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) resorted to armed struggle to gain their rights. Oromia, which is comprised of the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, also resorted to armed struggle under the leadership of among others the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Equitable distribution of goods and services lead to cooperative, and in the end, integrated civil society that can contribute to a nation and institution building process that follows operational expectations of a nation-state.

In addition to a state-guaranteed mass educational system that lays solid foundations for social equality, produces a highly integrated civil society, and advances a common culture through a commonly acceptable national language, an agreed upon frameworks of references for the legitimacy of the state as the only agency with a monopoly on violence[20] in its territory must exist. Referential framework legitimacy is dependent on the state to conduct its business on the basis of consistent and transparent rule of law[21] and good governance[22]. The attitudes and views of the nations and nationalities on the legitimacy of the Ethiopian state are mostly negative. In more ways than one this is the linchpin of conflicts in Ethiopia. Force cannot change this attitude towards the state. Only meaningful long sustained reversal of past atrocities may bring about attitudinal change.

5   Conclusions

While the Ethiopian reformation in 1991 from old imperial and militarist order to a federal framework is a step towards modernization, Ethiopia is still controlled by a minority bent on creating and recreating token ownership of the nation-state through puppet ethnic groups. Because of its insecurity, the TPLF has been violating basic human, political, economic, and environmental rights. Despite claims of federalism and democratic pretension, Ethiopia has not properly addressed concerns for the devolution of power, prevention of tyranny, and equitable allocation of resources. Ethiopia has not yet allowed the separation of legislative, executive and judicial matters. National struggles for self-determination and freedom among non-Abyssinian ethnic groups or demands for democracy among former ruling Abyssinian ethnic groups who feel alienated from the current system are at their peak. Ethiopia contemplated genocide on the people of Somali Ogaden with its strategic starvation and has massacred peaceful demonstrators. The people, with the help of the international community, may chart new roadmaps for co-owning the Ethiopian nation-state and addressing the issues described in the paper. The country may disintegrate without concrete steps towards collective ownership of the nation-state.

6   Notes and References

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