The Myth of the Culturally and Ethnically Neutral State: How Should the Ethiopian State Respond to the Ethnic and Cultural Differences of its Citizens?[1]

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Abstract

This paper addresses the challenge of organizing the public sphere in the multi-national society of Ethiopia. The author argues that since human beings are encumbered selves, the governing structure of the public sphere should be responsive to these encumbrances and should be informed by people's identities and notions of truth. In Ethiopia, there is a general agreement among academics that the state should not disregard cultural and linguistic identities. However, there is no consensus on how to respond to ethnic concerns. Some argue that federalism based on geographic convenience can sustain the various identities of citizens without compromising other concerns and demands. Others contend that institutionalizing ethnicity is necessary to address the inherent right to self-government of various nations and ethnic groups. In this paper, it is intended to show that there are compelling reasons to maintain the federation that institutionalizes ethnicity. This is because ethnic identities and cultures are important components of citizens' encumbered selves, and as such, such identities should inform the governing structure of the public sphere. The paper uses both secondary and primary sources of data, including unstructured interviews and discussions with key informants. It highlights the importance of acknowledging and accommodating the cultural and ethnic identities of citizens while also considering other concerns and demands. The study recommends further investigations into the merits and demerits of the territorial design of federation, as this is a complex issue that requires careful consideration. Overall, this paper contributes to the ongoing debate on how multinational societies should organize their public sphere. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and accommodating the cultural and identity

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attachments of citizens, which are integral components of their personhood. The study recommends that policymakers consider these factors when designing the governing structure of the public sphere in order to ensure that it is responsive to the needs and concerns of all citizens.

Keywords: multi-national society, identity, truth, institutionalization of ethnicity, administrative convenience.

Introduction

The point of departure for this paper is Michael Sandel's claim that human beings are encumbered selves in the sense that they are partly defined by their prior moral ties, attachments, and commitments. In other words, it is not possible to separate the persons that we are from our attachments, ends, and commitments. Here, my argument is premised on the assumption that we are "we before we are an I" in the sense that our personal identity depends on the identities that we share with others. By "encumbered self," I want to emphasize the fact that the individual's identity cannot be separated from his community's identity. But the identities that constitute our "selves" need not only be cultural and ethnic; they can be religious, national, and so forth. Here, by taking the current Ethiopian state's boundaries as given, I want to deal with the question: if we (Ethiopians) are encumbered selves, what bearings should this have as far as the issue of organizing a multi-ethnic state is concerned? What should its implications be for the governing structures of the public sphere in Ethiopia? Should the Ethiopian state nurture support for the ethno-cultural identities of citizens? Or, should it be indifferent to it?

When I deal with the question of how the state should deal with the ethno-cultural differences of its citizens, I shall assume that whatever response the state takes to deal with the problem in question should not question the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. In my view, there cannot be an overriding reason to call into question the continued existence of the Ethiopian state. The question is, why should we take the continued existence of the state as given? I contend that we should do this or risk the undesirable consequence of "the proliferation of many mini-states," which is not viable both economically and politically (Adeno 1997:114). But this is not to undermine the fact that there are ethno-cultural groups who take themselves as "nations" in their own rights. However, there is no agreement among the academics in Ethiopia whether ethnic groups should be taken as "nations," in the sense used in the UN document. The 1995 Ethiopian constitution makes the matter more confusing by using a rather vague expression, "nations, nationalities, and people," to

refer to ethnic groups. Although there is no universally agreed definition for a 'nation,' it can be said that nations describe themselves in terms of "We" and think that they have the right to self-determination. And research findings show that when members of an ethnic group think that their political aspirations have long been denied, they express their demands in nationalist terms. Thus, to become a "nation," members of a given group not only should have a homogeneous ethnic and cultural identity and, more or less, defined boundaries, but they should also have a belief about their shared identity. This is especially true of an ethnic group that is believed to have had a "historic homeland" and which had been forcibly incorporated into a larger state. What is unique about these groups is the fact that they want to regain their hitherto self-governing rights in the form of having greater autonomy from the central government. It goes without saying that there are such groups in Ethiopia. But I am not claiming that each ethnic group can be taken as a nation in its own right. Although I shall not take up this issue here, I think that there are un-enabling conditions for several ethnic groups that tend to force them to settle for something other than self-government. If we agree that there are nations, as many writers agree, they have almost by definition the right to self-determination that goes as far as secession (Kymlicka, 1998:169).

According to Will Kymlicka, the way multinational states were originally formed makes the demands for self-determination by groups who have lost their pre-existing autonomy a powerful one. He states that in multi-national states that arose through the forcible incorporations of the previously self-governing groups by the larger state, the incorporated groups seek to regain their former autonomy. They seek to "maintain or regain their own self-governing institutions, often operating in their own national language, so as to live and work in their own culture" (Kymlicka, 2002:350).

One might argue that since the modern Ethiopian state was, with the exception of a few instances that saw the peaceful submission of the hitherto independent kingdoms, formed through the forcible incorporation of the hitherto more or less self-governing groups under the leadership of Emperor Menelik II toward the end of the 19th century, the incorporated groups naturally demand to regain their self-government rights in various ways. This is not to contend that the groups that peacefully submitted to the central authority and those who constituted the then state before the formation of the modern state do not seek to claim their right to self-government. It is only to emphasize that the fact that the protection of self-government rights for those who are forcibly incorporated amounts to regaining their hitherto self-

governing status. Seen from this angle, the constitutional provision of the right to self-government to ethnic groups seems to be the right response to the demands in question. Here, there is little or no disagreement regarding the formation of the modern Ethiopian state. According to Bahru Zewde, the use of force in the process of state formation is not unique to Ethiopia. He says as Bismarck's Germany was built by blood and iron, so was Menelik's Ethiopia (2002:64). Here, one might argue that the comparison is not fair on the ground that while Bismarck united different principalities that are characterized, by and large, by cultural and linguistic homogeneity, Menelik united people with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds[4]. Here, one might argue that although in both cases force has been applied, that alone is not enough to make the comparison fair owing to the reason just mentioned. Here, one might also ask: Why has Germany's nation-building process succeeded while ours has not succeeded? It can be asserted that our nation-building process has not been finished because there is still the threat of disintegration. Nevertheless, despite the cultural and linguistic dissimilarities between Germany and Ethiopia, one cannot deny the fact that force played crucial roles in the formation of both states. The question I want to deal with here is not whether Ethiopia was formed through the use of force, for that is not unique to Ethiopia, but rather how should this fact bear on the state's decision about the governing structure of the public sphere today? And how should this play out in the context of the claim that the continued existence of the Ethiopian state is not up for negotiation? I will be dealing with these issues in this paper.

If we take into account the fact that there were pre-existing kingdoms before their forcible incorporation, we can intellectually guess what their demands could be against the state currently. The Wolaita was arguably the most powerful kingdom in the South, which was incorporated into Ethiopia in 1894. Kaffa was another powerful kingdom in the South that was incorporated in 1897 (Zewde, 2002:65). Now, what these and other hitherto independent kingdoms demand from the state is not an outright secession. As seen in the recent demonstration in Wolaita against the government demanding greater autonomy from the state (which they stressed can be exercised by forming a self-governing region on a par with other regions)[5], these groups' demand is

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[4]This assertion is based on an informal discussion with Pro. Bekele Gutema on June 30 at 11:00 AM.

[5]In the demonstration that took place in the zonal capital, Wolaita Sodo, where hundreds of thousands of people took to the street demanding the right to self-government. In the protest, the former zonal administrator said, the question is a historical question that took at least 125

simply the demand to regain their previous autonomy. Here, one might also contend that the adoption of federalism is the most workable solution to counter an armed struggle by ethno-nationalist groups. It can be added that even the Derg, which followed a centralized administration, was compelled in its last days to consider some form of devolution of power and decentralization (Clapham, 1988). Furthermore, the fact that the failures of the successive Ethiopian regimes' attempts to forcibly suppress ethnic sentiments have led the post-1991 leaders to believe that the most pressing political issues that need to be solved are the questions of nationalities (Tareke, 1991, 202).

With regards to the question of how the Ethiopian state should respond to the ethno-cultural diversity of its citizens, there is general agreement by the academics in Ethiopia that the state can no longer disregard matters of ethnicity. No one claims today that the Ethiopian state should respond to matters of ethnicity and cultural differences with indifference or neutrality. There is a general understanding, both by the academics and the general public, that disregard for ethnicity tends to marginalize and threaten the disadvantaged groups. One of the main reasons why the state should not disregard ethnicity is because of the fact that there cannot be a strict separation between state and ethnicity. Modern states, regardless of whether they are liberal or not, cannot function well unless they make one or more languages at least the working one, if not the national ones. It, for example, cannot help making one or more languages the language of schooling. And when it does so, as Kymlicka notes, it ensures the continued existence of "the language and its associated traditions and conventions to the next generation" (1995:111). And the state's inevitable bias in favor of the culturally and linguistically superior group or groups will put a subtle assimilative pressure on ethnic minorities. As Kymlicka notes, participation in the major social, economic, and political institutions of modern states requires, among other things, fluency in the working language of the federal state, and such de facto language requirements tend to put a subtle assimilative pressure on ethnic minorities who inhabit the mainstream society. In other words, the modern states with their vibrant economies tend to create a single dominant culture in the mainstream society. This, according to Kymlicka, demands that the universal individual rights be supplemented by group-specific rights for ethnic minorities (1995:7). The right to self-government for ethnic groups is a group-

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years. This means that ever since Wolaita has been incorporated into Ethiopia, the question has been asked in various forms: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxf_KDlJFnU

specific right because this is the right that individuals have by virtue of being members of a specific group, and this is required, according to the defenders of multi-national federation, to ameliorate the state's inevitable bias in favor of the dominant group and to ensure the survival of minority cultures. Kymlicka thus argues for the support of what he calls "societal cultures" (1995:76), which are territorially concentrated and are based on a common language. In other words, to ameliorate the state's inevitable bias in favor of the culturally and linguistically dominant group, the state should help national minorities engage in the same process of nation-building as the national majority. He argues there is no best solution to ameliorate the impacts of this inevitable bias on national minorities except through the institutionalization of group-specific rights for ethnic groups in the localities where they constitute a majority. In other words, he sees little problem with the drawing of the internal boundaries of the state along ethnic lines. But not everybody agrees with this assertion. For example, Brian Barry contends that cultural diversity can lead to state disunity and may "reward ethno-cultural political entrepreneurs who can exploit its potential for their own end" (Barry, 2001:21).

On the other hand, multi-cultural federalism has a concern for deep diversity. According to the proponents of such arrangements, multinational federalism would, among other things, allow different peoples, occupying different territories, to each have access to distinct administrative units in which they constitute a majority. In contrast with territorial federalism, multinational federalism would reflect the diversity of the peoples in the diversity of its federated states (Seymour and Gagnom 2012, 4). Since the Ethiopian federation, which mostly saw the drawing of the internal boundaries of the state along ethnic lines, took ethnicity as people's "primary political identity" (Fessha, 2017:235)[6], the question arose: Why should only ethnic identification matter? The question is, why should the state treat only ethnicity as the "primary political identity" of citizens? Here, it is believed that people perceive themselves as encumbered selves in the sense that they regard their ethnic identities as partly definitive of who they are. But it is not only their ethnic identification that determines their identities, but their cultural and religious attachments partly define them. According to the detractors of ethnic based federalism, the taking of ethnicity alone as people's "primary political identity" tends to disregard the importance of other historically and cultural

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[6] With the exception of few cases such as the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region most regions and the state of Harari were formed through the drawing of boundaries to make one ethnic group dominant in the locality.

significant identities in Ethiopia. Fessha, for example, argues that there is a historically significant identity (i.e., provincialism) that should bear on our decision regarding the organization of the federation. There are also cultural and religious similarities that transcend ethnic boundaries. It is argued that the institutionalization of ethnicity tends to disregard these identities and other cross-cutting issues. What is more, there are also people with mixed ethnic origins who refuse to identify themselves with any ethnic groups whose interests are downplayed by the ethnic-based federation. These groups generally want to identify themselves not in terms of hyphenated citizenship (as Oromo Ethiopian, for instance) but as simply Ethiopian.

All these factors seem to lead us into the conclusion that the ethnic-based federalism is not the best solution to the management of diversity in Ethiopia. The idea is that although the governing structure of the public sphere should be responsive to people's encumbered selves, this does not warrant the drawing of the internal boundaries of the state along ethnic lines. But not everybody agrees on this point. While some writers see this as the right way to address the legitimate demands of various ethnic groups, some see it as a wrong path to address the challenges. Those who reject such federalism often dub it as "tribal" federalism (Haile, 1996); some even regard the very use of "ethnic" as an emotionally charged word[7]. Those who defend it take it as an aspiring multinational federation on a par with, in principle, other modern multinational federations. But can we take other identities, such as provincial, religious, cultural, and so forth, as things that equally matter as ethnicity in Ethiopia? I shall argue in this article that although there are other significant identities that matter to people in Ethiopia, it does not necessarily warrant the drawing of boundaries in accordance with the criterion of geographic proximity. In other words, I shall argue that although the drawing of boundaries along ethnic lines causes an undesirable state of affairs, it appears that there are overriding reasons to maintain it in Ethiopia. This, however, does not mean that multinational federation does not result in an undesirable state of affairs. As Kymlicka acknowledges and as the Ethiopian federal experience proves it as well, it leads to what Kymlicka calls the phenomenon of "parallel society" (2002:12)—where every national minority builds its own institutions, run in its own language, without learning the language of the majority. He also calls such societies "parallel societies" where national minorities co-exist "alongside the dominant society without necessarily much interaction between them" (Kymlicka, 2002:12). The Ethiopian experience

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[7] This assertion is based on my discussion with Pro. Bekele Gutema.

with federalism has shown us that there is not much interaction across ethnic groups who exercise self-government rights. In the Ethiopian higher institutions, it is very common to see members of the same ethnic group going together, making little or no interaction with members of other ethnic groups. It should be noted that given the level of mutual disinterestedness we show to one another, it is difficult, if not impossible, to ensure the continued existence of the state. This is because, as David Miller notes, there must be something distinctive about a given state that marks it off from other states, and that goes above and beyond the fact of sharing common boundaries and institutions (Miller, 2000:59). I contend, as will be shown toward the end of this paper, that multinational federation can be pursued without downplaying the need for the distinctive something that ties us together.

The paper has three parts. The first part consists of arguments for the drawing of boundaries along ethnic lines in Ethiopia. The second part deals with arguments for adopting the geographically based federalism. In the third part, I shall argue that there are overriding reasons for maintaining the territorial design of the federation.

1. Ethnicity as Citizens' Primary Political Identity and the Controversy it Caused in Ethiopia

Many agree that the Ethiopian federalism, put in place with the adoption of the 1995 FDRE constitution, is unique by taking ethnic identity as the most important factor in organizing the state[8]. Article 46 of the constitution used an ethnic criterion, settlement pattern and the consent of the people concerned in drawing the internal boundaries of the state. Now, the question is, does it address the ethnic concerns and demands of the various ethnic groups? Does it constitute the right response to ethnic demands and concerns? Some writers

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[8] Although article 46 says that the federation is to be organized on the basis of settlement pattern, language identity, and the consent of the people concerned, one clearly can see that the ethnic factor is the most important organizing factor. This is because even in the case of the SNNPR, the zones and woredas are formed on the basis of ethnicity. It was not the consent of the people that mattered, for there have been ethnic groups who have sought to form their own regions but were denied for no justifiable reasons. Even the criterion "the settlement pattern" is questionable for ethnic groups who are found in geographically separate areas that are allowed to form their own zones. One case in point is the Hadiya zone, which is divided by the Kambata zone. Thus, what remains is the ethnic factor as the most important organizing principle. It is based on this criterion that mostly ethnic-based regions such as Oromia, Amhara, and Tigray are formed. One of the few exceptions to this is the SNNPR, which was formed through the forcible lumping together of the more than 50 ethnic groups. The states of Harari and Benishangul Gumuz are also exceptions.

view the constitutional and institutional response to ethnicity as an appropriate response to address the ethnic group's demand for self-administration. But the detractors of ethnic-based federalism argue that although the institutionalization of ethnicity "represents recognition of the political relevance of ethnicity in Ethiopia" (2017:232), it does not necessarily mean that it is the best solution for the management of ethnic diversity in Ethiopia.

1.1. Ethnicity as the Organizing Criterion of the State: The Merits of the Territorial Design of the Federation

The Ethiopian federalism allows the drawing of the internal boundaries of the state on the basis of an ethnic criterion. Article 39, sub-article 3 of the FDRE constitution allows and provides self-government rights to ethnic groups in areas where they constitute a majority. It says: "Every nation, nationality, and people in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government, which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in states and federal government."

This shows that the constitution uses only ethnic criterion[9] to determine what it calls "nations, nationality, and people" which is entitled to self-determination. In other words, it does not use other relevant criteria such as cultural, religious, and historically relevant identity of "provincialism." But the question here is, what does the expression "nation, nationality, and people" refer to? Why did it not simply say "every ethnic group"? The constitution

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[9] Here, it should be noted that some of the defenders of the territorial design of the federation do not agree with the characterization of the Ethiopian federation as "ethnic" and "tribal." One of my informants said that these words are couched with emotions and disapproval and should be replaced with a more neutral word, 'nation.' He argued that while ethnicity might indicate blood relations, nations indicate something that goes beyond blood ties. But the problem is that there is no universally agreed definition of a nation. If we take David Miller's characterization of a nation, it includes both objective and subjective criteria. The objective criteria include linguistic and cultural homogeneity and inhabiting a geographically defined territory; the subjective criterion refers to the belief of the people concerned and the tendency to think of themselves in terms of a "we." If we take this definition for granted, obviously there are many groups that can be called 'nations' in Ethiopia, and hence it is a multi-national state. But the question is, what about other groups that do not fulfill the criterion of geographic concentration? Given our definition, they cannot be called 'nations.' Hence, despite the differences of opinion in the characterization of the Ethiopian federalism as "ethnic," one might contend that such characterization should be maintained on the ground that it tends to include the numerically inferior and geographically dispersed groups in addition to the other groups. Be that as it may, this will be an issue for further research. I will continue to refer to Ethiopia as both a multi-ethnic and a multi-national state, without downplaying the differences of opinions.

says it refers to: "A group of people who have or share a large measure of common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identity, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory." This shows that ethnic criterion has been used as the main criterion for organizing the state. More specifically, article 46 of the constitution says the federation is organized on "the basis of settlement patterns, language identity, and consent of the people concerned."

Taking ethnicity as the organizing principle of the state, nine mostly ethnic-based regions and two special administrative zones were formed. But more recently, two more regions that were part and parcel of the Southern Nations, Nationality, and Peoples Region, namely, the Sidama and the South West Region, were added to the list, making the total number of regions eleven. Out of the eleven regions, six regions are named after the dominant ethno-linguistic group of the region. These are Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Somalia, Afar, and Sidama. Despite the existence of minorities in each of these regions except the Sidama, they are named after the dominant ethno-linguistic group.

With regards to the naming of the regions mentioned above, the problem is that it tends to give the impression that the region is the historical homeland of the dominant ethnic group, causing the impression that it does not belong to the minorities inhabiting the regions. One may thus argue that taking "a territorial unit as belonging to a particular ethnic group" tends to explain away minorities within the regions as insignificant details. But even with regards to the issue of the naming of the regions after the dominant ethnic group, it seems that there is no hard and fast rule governing the naming process. This is because we have the case of the state of Harari, which is named after the numerically inferior Harari ethnic group, disregarding the two larger ethnic groups inhabiting the regions[10]. This, as Fessha contends, indicates the government's "fixation with creating ethnic homeland" (2017:233). But, be that as it may, ethnic-based federalism has its advantages and disadvantages.

1.2. The Merits and Demerits of the Institutionalization of Ethnicity

According to the proponents of ethnic federalism, the organization of the state along ethnic and linguistic lines can help ensure the development of the languages, cultures, and identities of the various ethnic groups of the country.

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[10] According to the 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia, the Harari make up less than 10% of the total population inhabiting the region. It also indicates that the Oromo and the Amhara are the two largest ethnic groups inhabiting the region, respectively.

It goes without saying that people want to develop their language, culture, and identities. And this desire and need cannot be easily met and fulfilled in the context of multi-ethnic states since, as mentioned earlier, the state's inevitable bias in favor of the culturally and linguistically dominant group will put a subtle assimilative pressure on numerically inferior groups. This suggests that the state has to put in place a mechanism by which it can ameliorate its inevitable bias in favor of the dominant group, and it is believed by the proponents of ethnic-based federalism that the best way of doing this is the drawing of the internal boundaries to ensure self-government rights to ethnic groups in the place where they constitute a local majority. This allows, they contend, the groups in question to have an important control over crucial issues that affect their lives. The self-government rights give the various ethnic groups of Ethiopia an important right and power over the development of their language, culture, and identities, among other things.

According to Kymlicka, it is in the nature of a multinational federation (which is a success in many countries of the world) to institutionalize ethnicity and draw boundaries along ethnic lines (2006:57). According to this line of thought, although Ethiopia's federalism lacks many elements that make it democratic, the principle that it followed is that of multi-national federation. Thus, in this restricted sense, it can be taken as a multinational federation. It is believed that one of the most important advantages of this kind of federalism is that it gives various ethnic groups important control over crucial issues such as language policy and the development of their culture and identity. The point is that unless the state puts in place this mechanism that empowers the vulnerable groups, very important issues will be put to "the usual process of majoritarian decision-making (Kymlicka, 1989:180). But this, as Kymlicka notes, cannot guarantee a win-win solution for all the ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic or multi-national state because the minority's demands and concerns will necessarily be "outbid and outvoted" (Kymlicka, 1989:180-1) by the majority. But this, as we shall see in this paper, does not mean that multinational federation does not have disadvantages. It causes many undesirable states of affairs. But, as the defenders argue, its advantages outweigh its disadvantages.

According to the defenders of multinational federations, such as Kymlicka, if a given state is the result of the forcible incorporation of previously self-governing groups who perceive themselves as nations, then the groups in question can legitimately claim to regain their self-governing status. Thus, a multinational federation is not something that the state permits self-governing

power for the groups in question as a matter of charity. In other words, it is an obligation that emanates from the group's pre-existence as independent groups. Here, one might argue that before the incorporation of the hitherto self-governing groups into the larger state, the developments of their languages, cultures, and identities were a non-issue for them because their cultures, languages, and identities did not come under any kind of pressure, partly because of their geographic isolation from the larger state. As research findings show, when ethnic groups are found in a geographically remote and separate area, the development of their languages, cultures, and identities cannot be constrained (Kymlicka, 2003:15). But if language, identity, and culture are maintained and preserved at the expense of political, social, and economic marginalization, it seems to be too demanding for the group in question. As Kymlicka notes, "[I]f taking language preservation seriously means adopting policies that prevent the spread of literacy, block access to mainstream society and economy, then this seems so high a price to pay (Kymlicka, 2003:15-16). If minorities are constantly isolated from the mainstream society in the name of preserving their distinct cultural identity, this tends to marginalize minorities from major economic, academic, and political institutions (Kymlicka, 2002:34). Therefore, multi-nationalism should not be promoted at the expense of the economic and political marginalization of the group in question. But this, as will be shown in this paper, does not mean that multi-nationalism cannot be promoted without compromising the group's interest to participate in the state's main institutions.

One of the advantages of ethnic-based self-government rights is that it offers the opportunity for a certain ethnic group to be led by individuals who are drawn from among themselves. People want to be led by individuals who belong to their ethnic and cultural groups. In this regard, the territorial design of federalism fares better than the previous systems where administrators were appointed from outside of the group in question. The federalism that has been put in place since 1995 is generally seen as a mechanism of representation. Part of the reason for this, as Clapham notes, is the fact that "for the first time under Ethiopian rule, people from the previously conquered areas of the country were governed by rulers at the local level who were visibly drawn from their own community" (2012:157). As Isaiah Berlin puts it in relation to erstwhile colonies right to self-determination, the right in question is the demand for status and recognition. The question is, under what scheme can people express their identity "visibly and proudly"? One might argue that people want to be recognized as a distinct group by other people, and when they exercise important control over crucial issues that affect their lives, their

chance of being recognized by their "significant others" greatly increases. As Berlin says, people's demand for recognition and status is partly manifested in their desire to be led by individuals drawn from among themselves. As evidence for this, he claims that the people of former colonies:

> Complain less today, when he is rudely treated by members of his own race or nation, than when he was governed by some cautious, gentle, well-meaning administrator from outside. I may feel unfree in the sense of not being recognized as a self-governing individual human being; but I may feel it also as a member of an unrecognized or insufficiently respected group (Berlin, 1969:157-8).

This can also be seen from the Ethiopian experience with federalism. The complaints that many had against the EPRDF-led government were that it was not sufficiently federal. And part of the reason for such belief was the fact that the federal government did not allow the devolution of power to the regions to a sufficient degree. The federal government attempted to strengthen its grip on power by appointing individuals whom the majority regards as not genuine representatives of their ethnic identity[11]. One might also argue that the experience of the SNNPR shows that people are complaining less today because they are being led by individuals from their respective group. The complaint they had against the EPRDF-led government was not that their leaders were not the genuine representatives of their respective group, as in the case of the Amhara, but that they were simply puppets appointed by the federal government to promote the latter's interest.

The quest for status and recognition presupposes the fact that we are beings with a sense of identity. We conceive ourselves in terms of a "we" before we conceive ourselves in terms of an "I." As Taylor contends, where there is a lack of recognition, the people in question feel real damage. As Taylor says, "Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the recognition or misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (1994: 25). People may feel "real damage" as members of an insufficiently recognized group. This again can be proved from the experience of the people of the SNNPR. This region is unique in that it was created by lumping

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[11] This is especially evident in the Amhara region, where former leaders such as Addisu Legese, Bereket Simon, and Tefera Walewa, among others, are not regarded by the majority as genuine Amhara.

together the more than 50 distinct ethnic groups of the region. It is believed that this unconsented arrangement has caused real damage to the emotional and psychological makeup of the people in question. This shows that people feel less recognized when they are recognized as one of the many. Here, one might argue that the people of the five regions that are named after the dominant ethno-cultural group of the region can be taken as, by comparison, a sufficiently recognized group because the region's nomenclature reflects their ethnic identity. By contrast, one might say that the people of the SNNPR may justifiably claim to be insufficiently recognized because they are referred to, by their "significant others," as Debub (simply South), at the expense of their ethnic identification. The naming of them as simply Debub without reference to their group-specific identity, according to some informants I talked to, causes "real damage" to them[12]. What makes the matter more interesting is the fact that even linguistic groups with mutually intelligible languages, who are regarded as dialects of a single language such as the Wolaita, the Gamo, the Gofa, and the Dawro, refused to be demarcated as one region, partly because of the fear that, if they are demarcated as one region, they will end up being insufficiently recognized. This is because, given the internal divisions and disagreements, they know in advance that the region, if formed, is not going to be named after one of them. When the government cadres came up with the proposal of naming the new region Omotic (named after the river Omo), each of the groups in question took the proposal as nothing but an insult to their dignity. In the protest that took place in the town of Wolaita Sodo, protesters were heard chanting, *Omo is river, Debub (South) is direction*, expressing the rejection of the new proposed Omotic region[13].

Here, one might argue that it is the politicization of ethnicity that has led to the hitherto diffuse cultural groups identifying themselves as distinct ethnic groups. One might also argue that because there are other identities that matter to the Ethiopian people in addition to ethnic identity, the use of the latter as people's "primary political identity" is unjustified (2017:233). According to Fessha, it is possible to respond to ethnic demands without taking "ethnicity as the exclusive political identity." I shall argue in the third part of this paper that although taking ethnicity as people's "primary political identity" has many

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[12] I talked to three informants regarding this issue who inhabit the SNNPR. They are Tamirat Chisha, Side Getiso, and Shibeku Hoshe. On July 07, 2021, all of them said that they regard the characterization of Debub as an insult to their dignity.

[13] See the video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjFCUJeTRR8

disadvantages, it has advantages too. The question then becomes, which one outweighs?

2. Examining the Geographic Convenience criterion for organizing the state

In this section, I shall discuss the demerits of organizing the Ethiopian state in accordance with the geographic or administratively convenient criterion. By paying attention to the Ethiopian federal experience of the last three decades, I will discuss some of the major problems experienced. But, in the end, I shall argue that there are still overriding reasons to maintain the geographic logic.

2.1. The Problem with the Homeland Solution

According to Fessha, "the geographic logic of the federation" explicitly constructs and designates states as belonging to particular ethnic groups, leaving the rest with the feeling of an outsider" (2017:236). For Fessha, the Ethiopian federalism presumes unreasonably that a given state belongs to the dominant ethno-linguistic group, causing the impression that it does not belong to the minorities inhabiting the region (2017:236). But, on the other hand, one might argue that "the homeland" solution is not a problem in and of itself on the ground that before their incorporation into the bigger state, the various ethnic and cultural groups had their own historic homeland. This is not to downplay the discriminations and violations of human rights that minorities inhabiting various regions are experiencing. The proponents of multinational federation argue that as long as the fundamental rights of the minorities inhabiting a region that is governed by the ethnic majority are respected, the "homeland solution" will not create much problem. The other major problem is, according to Fessha, that by taking ethnicity as the only politically relevant identity, it negatively impacted "the formation of cross-cutting or overlapping identities, thereby facilitating the fragmentation of the population along ethno-linguistic lines" (2017:236).

According to the detractors of Ethiopian "ethnic federalism," taking ethnicity as people's most important identity is also problematic because, by taking ethnic identity as something fixed once and for all, it overlooks the fact that ethnic identity is fluid and it may undergo significant changes over the passage of time[14]. Here, one might argue that ethnicity can be constructed on the ground that the hitherto cultural communities in Ethiopia have been transformed to become political communities. Fessha writes, "Ethnic identities

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[14] This assertion is based on an informal discussion with my informant (the detractor), Amanuel Alemayehu, on June 29, 2021.

that, in the past, had a mere cultural dimension are increasingly turning into politically relevant identities" (2017:235). In other words, the point is that through the territorial design of federalism the previous groups with distinct cultural identities began to regard themselves as distinct ethnic groups. This, according to some writers, can be known from the increasing demand for recognition and the right to self-government in the ethnically diverse state of the SNNPR (Vaughan, 2006). Markakis also writes, "Communities that were thought to have solid ethnic foundations and identities began to unravel, as clans and branches within them emerged to claim distinct identities and to demand political recognition" (2011:234).

It is also argued that the territorial design of a federation tends to cause the demand by some ethnic groups to be demarcated into another state. This can be known from the increasing demands by some ethnic groups in the Oromia Region to be demarcated in the SNNPR and vice versa (Markakis, 2001). There were demands in several regions calling for re-demarcation. For example, there were demands and protests in the Amhara region, calling for the re-demarcation of Wolkait, an area also claimed by the Tigrai region, into an Amhara region. There are similar contested areas between regions, zones, and woredas. What lies behind the demand for re-demarcation, according to Fessha, is not some perceived better economic gain, but it is that of identity. The Amhara claim that Wolkait is an Amhara through and through. The demand is "motivated by issues of identity and belongingness" (2017: 236).

One may also assert that the provision of an "autonomous homeland" solution to ethnic concerns and demands leads to an increase in the "competing nation-building process" (Fessha, 2017:237). Critics argue that since the "homeland solution" is causing the formerly diffuse cultural groups to demand self-government rights in different states, especially in the SNNPR, it has to be abandoned and replaced by other viable solutions. But this, as Fessha acknowledges, does not mean that if there is no "homeland solution," there will not be an increasing demand for nation building. Here, one can mention the Wolaita, the Gamo, the Gofa, and the Dawro (who are known under the nickname WoGaGoDa), who are regarded by linguists as the sub-clans of the Ometic language family (Dea, 2006:148). But despite the overwhelming linguistic and cultural similarities, they are demanding the right to self-government separately, perceiving themselves as a distinct group. But does this necessarily mean that where there is no homeland solution, the demand for self-government by ethnic groups' decreases?

As Fessha notes, "The experience of multi-ethnic states does not support the claim that minority nationalism and its competing nation-building project does not emerge as significant force in the absence of a homeland solution" (2017:237). The very existence of ethno-nationalist groups who demanded the right to self-government before the establishment of the federal system proves that this is the case. But here critics might argue that since the institutionalization of ethnicity tends to "sharpen and institutionalize what were previously more diffuse ethnic identities" (Kymlicka, 2006:57), the "homeland solution" should not be taken as the best mechanism of addressing ethnic demands and concerns. But, according to Kymlicka, it is in the nature of a multinational federation to sharpen and institutionalize ethnic identities, whatever form it takes initially. In other words, the fact that there are "more diffuse ethnic identities" in Ethiopia cannot provide a strong ground to reject the territorial design of the federation. On the contrary, there are overriding reasons for the implementation of multinational federation. He thinks that there are multinational federations that can be judged as successful, and what characterizes all of them is the fact that they institutionalize ethnicity. The point is that if the vibrant multinational democracies can be judged as a success by institutionalizing ethnicity, there cannot be an overriding reason for taking the Ethiopian federation as a failure for institutionalizing ethnicity. It can, however, be judged as a failure on other grounds. Kymlicka writes,

> It is part and parcel of multinational federalism that it institutionalizes national identities and the result of this institutionalization is typically to reinforce these identities and to designate borders for them. If these consequences are inherently wrong or unacceptable, then no multinational federalism in the world could be judged as a success" (Kymlicka, 2006:57).

The other important problem with multinational federation is, according to critics, that it tends to erode citizens "sense of identification with the larger state". One may contend that since "the institutionalization of ethno-national identities (and hence ethno-national boundaries) is not, in and of itself, either good or bad" (Kymlicka, 2006:58), multi-national federation would be taken as an ideal solution after exhausting all other possible options to manage ethnic diversity. Thus, it is of crucial importance to examine if the federation that takes geographical or administrative convenience into account can be taken as the best solution to deal with ethnic demands and concerns in Ethiopia without compromising citizens' sense of identification.

2.2 The Right to Self-Government

As mentioned earlier, the hitherto independent ethnic groups in Ethiopia demand the right to regain their self-government rights. For example, when the Wolaita's aspiration to be a self-governing region on a par with other larger regions was denied by the current government, they insisted that they too deserve this right by virtue of being a group that lost its hitherto self-governing rights[15]. In my view, as long as the demand for self-government falls short of the demand for cessation, there cannot be an overriding reason for denying this right for the hitherto self-governing groups. But if the federation is organized on the basis of geographical or administrative convenience, since it allows the division of an ethnically homogenous unit into different administrative regions, it cannot help them regain their previous right to exist as a group. Especially when this is done to numerically inferior groups, what will be at stake is their right to maintain their distinct identity into the future. This is because when they are demarcated into different regions in the name of geographical convenience, they will find themselves competing with other groups to maintain their distinct existence. But, under such circumstances, they may not withstand the subtle assimilative pressure emanating from, among others, the *de facto* language requirements of the heterogeneous region. Such assimilative pressure is very often, part of the reason for the ethnic minorities to seek their hitherto self-governing status (Kymlicka, 2002:50). Taking these things into account, one may conclude that the state has the obligation to protect their right to self-government.

As Kymlicka argues, the state has to nurture support for culture not because it has rights in and of itself, but because it provides a context of choice (1995:76). The dominant liberal tradition, by taking individuals as mere right bearers, failed to see that meaningful choice requires a secure cultural context—a choice enabling conditions. But here I am not saying that the state can concern itself with any culture that an individual associates himself with. Instead, I am concerned with what Kymlicka calls a "societal culture":

> That is, a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing

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[15] There have been repeated protests in different woredas of the Wolaita zone last year demanding the right to form a self-governing region. They often chanted: it is not fair to deny regionhood rights for those who were nations in their own rights: *hagar lenebere kilil aybezabetem.*

both public and private spheres. These cultures tend to be territorially concentrated and based on a shared language…and they involve not just shared memories or values, but also common institutions and practices (Kymlicka, 1995:76).

It is under the territorial design of federation that the members can develop their "societal cultures," which are territorially concentrated and are based on a common language. For the reasons mentioned earlier, the development of this culture will significantly be constrained in the mainstream society where vulnerable groups contact the dominant cultural group. Since the culture in question encompasses both public and private spheres, its sustained existence is ensured. Unless the minorities' cultures are embedded in the state's institutions, they cannot last long. As Kymlicka contends: "Given the enormous significance of social institutions in our lives, and in determining our options, any culture that is not a societal culture will be reduced to ever-increasing marginalization" (1995:80). His argument in favor of building societal culture for cultural groups allows for national minorities to develop their own culture in the place where they constitute an ethnic majority. But when members of these groups come to cities to permanently live there for whatever reason, they will inevitably be immersed in "the societal culture" of the dominant group.

But critics argue that a group's continued existence as a distinct one can be ensured through the application of "provincial federalism" (Fessha, 2017:80). They argue that 'provincial federation' allows the right to self-determination of ethnic groups and also creates a common national identity without compromising ethnic concerns and demands. Here, we can agree on the point that there must be something distinctive about a given state that goes above and beyond sharing common institutions and boundaries. The idea is that since ethnic federalism (multi-national federation), as is the case with Ethiopia, takes ethnicity as the primordial identity, it negatively affects people's sense of belongingness to the larger state. In effect, critics are arguing against what can be called "hyphenated citizenship" (Joppke, 2002:245), such as Amhara Ethiopian and Oromo Ethiopian. Under the multi-national federation model that Ethiopia has been following for three decades, such identifications are regarded as possible. But critics argue that the provision of a homeland solution for ethnic groups in the area where they are the majority tends to reduce people's loyalty and identification to the state.

The proponents of "provincial federation" argue for the division of large states such as Oromia and Amhara into smaller administrative units such as Wollaga, Jima, Arsi, Gojam, Gondar, Wollo, etc. (Fessha, 2017:240). One of the advantages is that since they are not named after a single ethno-nationalist group, they tend to deconstruct the notion of a homeland, causing the impression that the region belongs to all the ethnic groups inhabiting them. The advantage of such division, they insist, is that the units exercise their right to self-determination and also can cooperatively engage with the other provinces with homogeneous populations. This arrangement, they insist, will necessarily ensure their continued existence as distinct societies and reduce the threat of secession to a significant degree. The problem the proponents of "provincialism" have not paid due attention to, though, is the fact that this arrangement may work well for states with both large populations and large territories, but it is very dangerous for ethnic minorities that are concentrated on a limited territory.

The problem is that while the arrangement may allow the division of larger regions into smaller administratively convenient units, it endorses the lumping together of various ethnic minorities into one province. Thus, the arrangement does not help ethnic minorities exercise their right to self-administration in a meaningful way. This is because "self-administration" worthy of the name ensures that they have important control on crucial issues that affect their lives such as language policy and educational policy. But, under the "provincial federation", there will be different and often incompatible competing interests, say, for example which language should serve as the working one for the region formed by lumping together different ethnic groups. If such issues are put to the usual process of the "majoritarian decision making", the local ethnic minorities will be "outbid and outvoted" (Kymlicka, 1989:180-1), to use the phrase familiarized by Kymlicka, by the local ethnic majority. But, under the territorial design of federation, minorities will have important control over several issues such as language policy and curriculum of schooling in the place where they are concentrated.

This, however, should not be taken as an assertion that multi-national federation does not have problems. As the Ethiopian experience shows, the provision of a "homeland" solution often led majorities to see minorities within them as strangers, aliens and new-comers(mete) (Abbink, 2011:608-9). It is clear that there cannot be "the distinctive something" as long as these attitudes exist.

Because of partly the lack of the distinctive something, we are mutually disinterested; we are simply building our respective nations. But, democratic citizenship cannot be built unless people of a given bounded political community start to see one another as having common national identity. Otherwise, there is no reason why they should be required to sacrifice for their co-nationals. If there is no compelling reason to regard citizens of a given bounded political community in terms of a "we", one cannot be obligated to pay tax for the government. It is as if I am paying tax to a total stranger with whom I have no special relation whatsoever. Therefore, there must be something distinctive about us that goes beyond sharing common institutions and boundaries. But what should this be? Before I take on this issue, let me say few more things on the advantages of the Ethiopian model.

According to its defenders, it is indispensable to respond to the question that has bedeviled the Ethiopian state at least since the time of Emperor Haile Selassie, namely, the question of nationalities. The question of nationalities is fundamentally about the quest for the recognition and protection of the cultures and identities of the various ethnic groups of the country. For the defenders of the Ethiopian federalism, rejecting it for using an ethnic criterion cannot be convincing because the problem is not that it is organized on the basis of an ethnic criterion, but that it is not federal enough. David Turton writes,

> …it is not ethnicity itself which makes ethnic federalism prone to conflict and violence, but the failure to implement the federal model in a way that responds to the expressed needs and interests of ordinary people. Put differently, ethnic federations are most likely to fail, not because they are too 'ethnic', but because they are not sufficiently federal (Turton, 2006:22).

According to this line of thought, if one rejects the territorial design of federation on the ground that it is not sufficiently federal, it is reasonable to an extent. But the solution for that is not rejecting it altogether, but making it more federal.

One of the underlying assumptions behind the use of an ethnic criterion in multi-ethnic states is the claim that groups do not have rights. This is the claim that it is the individual members of the state that have rights, not the group they are members of. Under the territorial design of the federation, individuals have not only universal human rights but also group specific rights and obligations that are not owed to members outside of the group. When a self-

governing ethnic group makes its language the official language of the woreda, zone or region it is governing, minorities inhabiting the regions may find it discriminatory. In the newly run Sidama region, children of non-Sidama ethnic origins are forced to take a course in Sidama language. We also see commercial signage written in the Sidama language to which various ethnic groups inhabiting the region have little or no access. Thus, as the Ethiopian experience with federalism shows, group specific rights tend to be discriminatory. These are but few of the undesirable states of affairs caused by the territorial design of federation. But can these be sufficient reasons to reject it as the solution for the management of ethnic diversity?

Although group-specific rights tend to discriminate against the minorities inhabiting the region, it remains a viable solution for the management of ethnic diversity. But, here, this should not be understood in the sense that group-specific rights should take precedence over individual rights. This flies in the face of our intuitions about the rights of individuals. One should not take precedence over the other; but, on the contrary, as Kymlicka contends, individual rights should be supplemented by group specific rights because group specific rights cannot be subsumed under the universal civil and political rights (Kymlicka, 1995:111). If this is correct, the Ethiopian state's decision to use an ethnic criterion in the identification of its citizenry in sharp contradiction to an overarching category of citizenship seems to be less questionable. Although minorities inhabiting regions are discriminated against by the majority's exercise of self-government, their fundamental human rights should be protected. The idea is that as long as they are not concentrated in a given locality, they cannot be entitled to a right to self-government. As a territorially dispersed group, they should settle for something less than self-government. But, the problem in Ethiopia is not merely that minorities inhabiting self-governing units are discriminated against, but that their fundamental human rights are violated. Thus, before rejecting the Ethiopian federation as unviable, we should first make it sufficiently federal.

But, on the other hand, making it sufficiently federal is not a guarantee for the prevalence of mutual-disinterestedness. One of the informants[16] I talked to regarding the issue in question said he felt that he was in another country when he went to regions that did not speak the language that he understands. He thinks that when you go to some regions in post 1991 Ethiopia, if you do not speak their language, you will feel excluded and discriminated because you

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[16] This informant is a university professor. I heard him say this in 2012.

will find very few people who speak the language of wider communication, Amharic. In the Bule Hora University where I attended public lectures (in 2014) where almost half of them were ran in Afaan Oromo, one presenter, after introducing himself in English, said: "Sorry foreigners I am going to switch the language to Afaan Oromo." The question is, why did he say "foreigners" when in fact he knew that almost all the attendees are Ethiopians? Does this mean that, for the person in question, there is no difference between, say, Kenyans and Ethiopians who do not belong to his specific group, that may even include the Oromos that do not belong to his specific clan? These are very difficult questions that need further studies. But, the very use of the word "foreigner" might indicate his, one might suspect, disinterestedness in group other than his own. Suffice here to say that when nations are engaged in a competing nation-building process, we might see mutually-disinterested groups or "parallel" society.

Thus, as Kymlicka claims, "multinational states can generate only a relatively weak and conditional sense of loyalty among their national minorities" (1998:169). Since the nations within multi-nation states have prior moral obligations to the members of their own group than to members that lie outside of their group, one might contend that their allegiance to the state is merely conditional and can be revocable at any given time. One may think that the Ethiopian constitutional provision of the right to self-determination, including and up to secession shows the conditional sense of loyalty that citizens have towards the state, putting the continued existence of the state at stake.

3. The Ethiopian National Identity at Stake

As Kymlicka says, despite its many advantages, multi-nationalism leads to what he calls the phenomenon of "parallel society" (2002b:12). The problem is that we cannot get along with one another well without "the distinctive something". Historically, language, religion, and culture have played important roles in building the "distinctive something" in Ethiopia, however contested and contentious they might be. Should we give our backs to "the national identities" that have been passed down to us from the past? Should not the inherited national identities be diluted over time and not completely changed, so as to include new demands and concerns?

One of the defenders of the claim that there must be something distinctive about a given state that marks it off from other states is David Miller. He argues that the inherited national identity should not be completely abandoned.

For example, with regards to religion, he thinks if there is a religion that played a significant role in the nation-building process, we should not abandon it and instead make it part and parcel of the new national identity (Miller, 1995:189). He thinks that national identity might be diluted over time to include new demands and concerns, but we need one distinctive something, one way or another. A similar thing might be said about language. One may contend that, following a similar line of argumentation, if language has played a significant role in the nation-building process, we should not give our backs to it. It should be, the argument goes on, part and parcel of the new national identity. But this may not necessarily mean that one should be able to speak a given language in order to become Ethiopian. But the fact that we need "something distinctive" cannot be questioned on the other hand.

Here, given my teaching experience with students who come from different ethnic backgrounds, I contend that the need for one or two (one or two, I would like to stress) languages of wider communication is very important. During my summer teaching classes, I came across classes where the overwhelming majority of the students (with the exception of two or three students in some cases) do not speak English (the language of instruction) and Amharic—the working language of the federal government. Since, unfortunately, I do not speak their languages; teaching in the language that they understand is, as it were, a dead option to me. One might argue that the problem lies in the language policy. The government's language policy does not obligate citizens to learn the language of wider communication. If the government does coerce citizens in some form to learn one or two languages of wider communications, I think we can, through time, develop some kind of trust in one another, and democratic cultures can also be built over time.

As we have learnt since the implementation of federalism, our mere allegiance to the principles of the constitution cannot provide the tie-that-binds-us-together. As long as we need an overarching category of citizenship, we need to be ready to sacrifice for Ethiopians, regardless of their ethnic membership. I contend that there has to be "something distinctive" about us that goes beyond our allegiance to the constitution. Otherwise, there cannot be an overriding reason why I should not equally sacrifice for non-Ethiopians who want to be governed by the principles enshrined in the Ethiopian constitution. But, determining "the distinctive something" is the most difficult task at hand.

Liberal nationalists such as Kymlicka contend that as far as the state follows the principle of what he calls "liberal neutrality," i.e., as far as the state does

not grade language, it can promote one language as the national one, which every citizen, regardless of his or her ethnic membership, speaks. He thinks that this provides "the distinctive something." He thinks that this will not affect the continued existence of national minorities as distinct groups because under a multinational federation, they will have all the tools that they need to develop their languages, cultures, identities, and economies. I contend that this can provide a model for providing "the distinctive something" that Ethiopia needs. I contend that given the level of mutual disinterestedness we are experiencing, we need, at least, two languages of wider communication that can be regarded as the national ones, in the loose sense. In the loose sense, because one can still be Ethiopian without being able to speak them, but they have to be regarded as "ours," in some sense, regardless of our ethnic membership. These languages, I contend, are Amharic and Afaan Oromo. Amharic, because it is the most dominant language, because of the "historical circumstances made it so." Afaan Oromo, because it is the second most dominant language spoken by non-Oromos, and it is also the language of the single largest ethnic group—the Oromo. But this does not mean that we should limit the number of our national languages to two. More languages may be added as new demands arise and as circumstances permit. What has to be stressed here is that we need "the distinctive something" that goes above sharing common boundaries and institutions, and language plays an important role in this regard. This will not be a problem, as long as we do not take the inherited national identity wholesale and, on the contrary, ensure that it is diluted over time to include new demands and concerns. In other words, what is being advocated here is a thin form of national identity, not a thick one that is defined based on a specific form of life or conception of the good.

Conclusion

In this paper, it is contended that Michael Sandel's notion of the encumbered self is defensible. We are always claimed by prior moral obligations to some people that are not owed to humanity as such. The point is that we always define ourselves in terms of particular identities, and such identifications are not philosophically problematic.

But we are not defined by a specific identity; we are defined by many such identities. We are beings to whom different things matter. But when it comes to the question of what identity should inform the drawing of boundaries in the multi-ethnic states of Ethiopia, two opposing positions are held. However, both agree that the state cannot disregard matters of the ethnic and cultural

identities of its citizens. While one contends that the state can respond to such demands through what is known as geographic federalism that lumps together two or more ethnic and cultural groups to constitute one region, the other argues that the federalism that runs along linguistic and ethnic lines better protects the ethnic and cultural differences of citizens, and it also responds to the legitimate quest for self-determination made by some groups that can be called nations on their own rights. Since these are groups who had their own "historic homeland," and since they were forcibly incorporated into the larger state, and since they are demanding to regain their autonomy in the force of self-government rights, there cannot be an overriding reason to reject such demands.

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