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Research Articles

Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism: A Model for South Sudan?

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Abstract

The civil war that broke out in South Sudan in mid-December 2013 stimulated an already growing interest in federalism and its various models in the country.Among the most interesting of them is the model of Ethiopia, which was designed to overcome ethnic-based conflicts similar to those in South Sudan.However, unlike most countries which have tried to suppress ethnic identities and based their constitutions on a contract with their citizens, in Ethiopia the constitutional contract is between ethnic groups which are granted the right to self-determination.With the overthrow of the Derg by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of ethnic-based parties, it was widely anticipated that Ethiopia would disintegrate, but the EPRDF's radical decentralization of power to ethnic communities preserved the central stateand appears to have been a factor in the country's dramatic growth rates in the past decade. It has not, however, ended ethnic conflict.While South Sudan has much to learn from Ethiopia and its survival will depend on developing an appropriate model of decentralized governance that addresses ethnic conflicts, the wholesale adoption of its neighbor's model of federalism is not feasible due to the differences between the two countries' societies and political cultures.

1. Introduction

Representatives of the people of southern Sudan advocated and were promised federalism at the 1947 Juba Conference, but the Arabo-Islamic elite to whom the departing British handed over power constructed a unitary state which laid the basis for ethnic-based conflicts that continue to the present.In response to

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the region's marginalization in the 1960s, the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA) launched an insurgency demanding secession, but eventuallyagreed to federal arrangements for southern Sudan under the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972.When that agreement broke down, the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/ Army (SPLM/A) revolted in 1983,calling for federalism under the banner of New Sudan and maintaining that position until the eve of the independence referendum in 2011.However, the virtual consensus on federalismcollapsed when the SPLM/A became the ruling party and in all but name formed a unitary state.The interest in federalism continued, however, and when civil war erupted in December 2013, it came increasingly to the fore. Federalism became a major demand of the rebel Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement-Independent Organization (SPLM-IO), and the aborted peace agreement of August 2015 called for the establishment of a federal system.

Afflicted by not-dissimilar ethnic conflicts as South Sudan, the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) and the ethnic-based coalition it created, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), established a federal system in which the country's ethnic groups were made part of the political process and granted the right of self-determination.This approach challenged African governments,which have attempted to overcome ethnicity by political or violent means in an effort to establish a nation-state, and as a result it has not found favor on the continent.Indeed, SPLM/A leaders from Dr John Garang, the first leader of the party, through to SalvaKiir, President of the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS), and DrRiekMacher, leader of the SPLM-IO, have all rejected the Ethiopian model of federalism.But Africanefforts to overcome ethnicity and construct a Western-modelled nation-state have frequently not been successful, and the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan makes clear the need to address the problem of ethnic conflict and consider alternatives to the present failed model of governance.

What follows is, first, a brief consideration of the theory surrounding ethnicity; secondly, an examination of the ethnic-based conflict in Ethiopia that provided the background to the EPRDF'sunique model of federalism; thirdly, an overview of the Ethiopian federal system; fourthly, an assessment of how it works in practice; and lastly, consideration of whether Ethiopia's system of federalism could,or should,be adapted in South Sudan.It must be stressed

that for the purposes of analysis it is not easy to separate ethnic federalism from a broader concern with EPRDF governance.

2. Ethnicity:A Theoretic Interlude

Initially,ethnicity was characterized by academics as "primordial" and critical to human organization and identity (Geertz, 1963), with some assuming ethnicity to be genetically based and necessary forensuring group preservation (Chapman, 1993).These theorists held that ethnic groups had clearly demarcated and largely unchanging boundaries that produced permanent identities.However,these hallmarks of an earlier generation of academic thinking have beenfor the most part rejected.

The present-dayorthodoxy regards ethnic identities as social constructs that emerge as a result of historical and political conditions, and instead of current ethnic identities and conflicts being the result of age-old processes, they are likely to be the product of more recent social and political changes as well as and interactions between groups.Ethnicity is thus a social construct, and by implication, ethnic boundaries are typically fluid and shifting, which permits people to have multiple identities, any of which may come to the fore depending on the circumstances.In this light, colonialism and imperialismare seen ascritical to identity-formation, a process in which older identities become enmeshed with ones newly adapted to meet the needs of changing conditions.

Ethnic identities in Africa and elsewhere can manifest themselves in cultural, social, economic, and political guises, but it is the politicization of ethnicity and its use in mobilizing opposition to those holding state power that have gained the most attention.Ethnic conflict typically arises as a result of state actions related to issues of distribution and domination, often within the context of so-called nation-building (Fiseha, 2006, p. 77).While thedissident movements that emerge are usually led by intellectuals whose interests may not correspond with those they lead, the fact that ethnicity is invariably the preferred mobilizing tool makes its mass appeal clear.The focus is the state because it provides the means to access scarce material and social resources under the control of ethnic monopolies.

Also not to be discounted is the humiliation that ethnic domination produces in some communities; the pursuit of dignity is thus a further factor motivating people to revolt, and one more difficult to address than material inequities.In the Horn of Africa an Ethiopian elite from the Amhararuled an empire for hundreds of years before the EPRDF captured state power; in Sudan an Arabo-Islamic elite in the riverine core was handed power by the departing British; in Djibouti the Somalis have long dominated the Afar; and in Somalia various clans have used the state to oppress other clans.

While colonialism favored particular groups over others, national movements attempted to transcend these divisions by creatingmass movements in opposition to the colonial power.But the departure of the British, Italian, and French from the Horn and the transfer of power to local authorities that typically became agents of the metropoles set the stage for another round of conflict that has, and continues, to take an explicitly ethnic form. Moreover, in the cases of Ethiopia and Sudan the language and religion of the dominant ethnic groups were forcefully identified with the "nation-state" and became further layers through which marginalized groups had to pass in order to be assimilated if they were to achieve national integration and advancement.It is not simply that Ethiopia's many ethnic groups and multiple religious traditions do not conform to the ideal of the nation-state, but that successive political regimes have failed to accommodate this diversity through appropriate institutions and policies (Fiseha, 2012, p. 8).The same can be said for Sudan and, more recently, South Sudan.

The failure of states to accommodate ethnic groups may cause these groups to aspire to nationhood and a separate state, but the typical pattern is for secessionist movements to formcoalitions based on ethnic groups or regions which define themselves as nations,as was the case in Eritrea and South Sudan.However, Eritrean and South Sudanese experience suggests that if means are not developed to overcome ethnic-based tensions that come to the fore in the course of a secession struggle,conflictswill emerge later.The threat that politicized ethnic groups pose to social stabilityarises directly from their exclusion fromstates specifically organized to monopolize power for ethnically favored groups and preserve a status quo in which they are the primary beneficiaries (Markakis, 1994).It is thus ethnicallymonopolized states, and not

marginalized ethnic groups, that are the cause of struggles over state power in the Horn.

Nonetheless, mainstream academia typically views ethnicity as dangerous on the grounds that it leads to politicization, weakens shared values, produces elites with sectional interests, and undermines stability (Fleiner, 2000; Clapham, 2002; Horowitz, 2002).Other analysts go further and claim that ethno-nationalist demands can make federalism impossible and even lead to civil war (Nordlinger, 1972; Elazer, 1987).Most academics probably agree withLipset's call, at the regional level, for boundaries to cut across ethno-linguistic and religious lines and thereby undermine these identities rather than reinforce them,and, at the central state level, for cross-ethnic alliances to be encouraged as a counterweight to ethnic regionalism (Lipset, 1983, p. 81). This approach to dealing with conflict in ethnically divided statesassumes that the ethnic elites are not territorially based, not a product of intense mobilization, and are loyal to the state (Lijphart, 1994).However, none of these conditions applied in Ethiopia, Sudan or South Sudan,which madethe maintenance of a unitary state highly problematic.

3. Genesis of Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism

The social structure of Amhara-Tigray society that formed the pre-revolutionary core of Ethiopia was the "classic trinity of noble, priest, and peasant [and] the relationship to the only means of production, that is land" (Markakis, 1974, p. 83).The state extracted surpluses through a tithe on land, taxes on livestock and trade, as well as through the provision of various services to the church and the nobles, while Muslims were denied access to land. Although the historical origins of this systemlay in Tigray, from at least the thirteenth century power passed to the Amhara and particularly its heartland of Shoa, with the notable exception of Emperor Yohannisfrom Tigray who ruled briefly in the nineteenth century (Zewde, 1991, p. 57).After Yohannis's death at the hands of the Mahdists in 1889,the Amhara Emperor Menelik assumed power and – in competition with European states– expanded imperial Ethiopia to its present-day boundaries.

Land hunger and the desire to fend off encroaching Western impe-

rialism stimulated the southern expansion of the Amhara, which in turn laid the basis for the ensuing ethnic conflicts(Markakis, 1994, p. 91).With the state assuming the central role in the production and distribution of material and social resources, in addition to being the main source of employment for the Western-educated intelligentsia, Ethiopia became a classic example of an "ethnocratic state"(Mazrui, 1975).But class was not absent from this calculation,because although the Amhara peasants belonged to the dominant group in cultural, religious, linguistic, and psychological terms, they had no share of power and their poverty was often as pervasive as that of those in the colonized south.

While capital flowed to the south with its abundance of fertile land and other resources, Tigray stagnated and resentment grew (Young, 1997, pp. 65-91).The resentment took a violent form in Eritrea, which under British tutelage after the expulsion of the Italian colonizers during World War II had achieved a level of economic and political development unknown in the rest of the country.In 1961 the largely Muslim and lowland-based Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) launched a rebellion calling for national self-determination, but it was overtaken in the 1970s by the highland-centered,and Marxist,Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF).

Despite widespread ethnic-based oppression and the growing revolt in Eritrea, it was not until the late 1960s that a university-student movement emerged that could not only analyze the problem but lead the opposition.Although the students largely adopted the class analysis of Marxism, in 1969 theycondemned Amhara ethnic chauvinism for the cultural oppression of other ethnic groups.The Eritrean demand for the right to self-determination, however, caused a split between the majority who, contending that, since Ethiopia was feudal,Eritrea could not be considered a colony, supported a unitary Ethiopia, and a minority who held the country to be in a transitional phase in which nations and nationalist movements could emerge and be supported.While this debate may seem arcane, it determined whether the strategy to overthrow the regime would be based on class or ethnicity.Drawing its lessons from that debate, the founders of the TPLF,who were activists in the student movement, would subsequently accept the latter explanation and on that basis develop its strategy. But crucially the centrality of class was never – at least in theory – rejected.

Due to the limited development of an urban working classand the students' weak links to the peasants or ties to the Eritrean revolutionaries,it was left to the military to overthrow the tottering regime of HaileSelassie.This is similar towhat happened in Sudan: it also had a rebellion in the periphery and a radical intelligentsia at the center, but in the event the military took power in 1964 and 1985.Significantly,in both the Ethiopian and Sudanese cases the military failed to overcome the national revolts, and this ultimately proved their undoing.Lacking a coherent ideology, the junior officers of the Derglooked to the students for direction and to carry out the land reform, which virtually overnight eliminated the feudal class – after businesses were nationalized and landlordism was ended, the tiny but rising bourgeoisie also disappeared.As well as raising the standard of living of peasants and granting Muslims the right to hold land, the Derg promoted local languages and cultures. Crucially here was the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN), which undertook important studies of Ethiopia's ethnic communitiesand which the EPRDF later utilized to formulate its model of ethnic federalism. However, the regime treated the national question as solely a cultural phenomenonand not a political one amenable to power-sharing.As a result,national demands throughout the country came to the fore and this proved crucial in the regime's undoing as armed struggles increasingly drained it of resources and legitimacy.

When looking for a model for a future Ethiopia free of ethnic domination,the TPLF drew from the Ethiopian student movement, which in turn was strongly influenced by the theoretical writings of the Bolsheviks.Like the Ethiopian revolutionaries, the Russian Bolsheviks had been confronted with the practical problem of capturing power in a largely feudal empire with a small urban working class and many ethnic groups, and, upon taking power, of working outhow to administer the state.To win the support of the ethnic minorities, Stalin attacked "Greater Russian chauvinism," recognized the sovereignty and equality of the empire's nations, and mobilized the marginalized minorities around a commitment to national self-determination (Stalin, 1913).Crucially, he defined a nation as a stable community with a common language, single territory, coherent economy and common psychology, and as a product of rising capitalism (Stalin, 1913, pp. 303-314).By linking the definition of nation to the possession of land, Stalin discounted the nationalism of Jews or Germans in the

Russian empire inasmuch as they did not have their own territory.The TPLF/EPRDF employed much of this model inits armed struggle and future organization of the Ethiopian state.

Having accepted the need to unite Ethiopia's ethnic communities to struggle against the Derg, the TPLF organized a democratic frontthat gave ita hegemonic position with a single organization, program, leadership and army, albeit that the separate national components were given a measure of autonomy.The EPLF could not join the front because it was committed to secession, while the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)was not clear on the question of secession andnot prepared to accept the dominant position of the TPLF.In the absence of suitable coalition candidates, the TPLF established its own ethnic movements, beginning with the Amhara under the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (EPDM) – later renamed as the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) to emphasize its ethnic character – and in 1989 the two movements came together as the EPRDF.

Meanwhile the TPLF began to construct the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) from captured Derg soldiers, and in 1990 it joined the EPRDF.A host of other armed ethnic-based groups joined or affiliated with the EPRDF both before and after it defeated the Derg.A skeleton multi-ethnic coalition was thus in place when the EPRDF assumed power in 1991 and provided the basis upon which the state would be constructed.

4. Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism

While the OLF feared that the EPRDF would not live up to its commitment to national self-determination after it took power, other groups led by the Amhara and remnants of the Derg were convinced that the EPRDF, in alliance with the EPLF, would bring about the dissolution of the country.Indeed, the EPRDF's efforts to create national-based groups and ignore pan-Ethiopian groups in the lead-up to the transitional national conference fed these fears.In the event, anational conference was convened in July 1991 with the attendance of 27 organizations, 19 of them representing ethnic groups and only threebeing of pan-Ethiopian persuasion.This conference adopted a Transitional Period Charter laying down the legal framework for reconstituting the state

and devolving power along ethno-regional lines (Twefik, 2010). With such representation the EPRDF was able to pursue its political program and ensure that it could dominate the Transitional Government and thereby accomplish its plans to structure Ethiopia along ethnic lines.

With power having been linked to ethnicity,a proliferation of ethnic-based organizations could participate directly in the new political dispensation.Critics viewed the policies of the EPRDF as posing a threat to the existence of Ethiopia, andfor no other end than ensuring the dominance of a front organizationin which Tigrayans were a minority (Balcha, 2007; International Crisis Group, 2009).The EPRDF's response was that the biggest threat of state disintegration lay instead in an ethnically dominated state and the ethnic conflict which this produced and it held that its policies, were designed both to preserve the unity of the state and to harness ethnic energies in promoting development.Almost three decades later, that debate is still going on.

Putting flesh to its principles, the Transitional Government passed the "Proclamation to Provide for the Establishment of National/ Regional Self-Government" in January 1992 (Proclamation No. 7/1992) which divided the country into ethnic blocs.A Boundaries Commission was founded that made language the critical variable in defining ethnic markers. Fourteen regions were established, although further divisions within these regions were left to local governments.While having important minorities, Tigray, Amhara, Oromo, Somali, and Afar regionshad ethnic cores,but the other regions were formed by bringing different ethnic groups together as a unit.Addis Ababa and Harar were given special status and not included in Oromia despite their Oromo majorities. The EPRDF was slow to organize affiliated parties in the Somali and Afar regions because it concluded that clan, and not ethnicity, defined identity in pastoralist societies and it thus endeavored to work with traditional leaders.

The resulting configuration was far from clear and the regions were highly diverse in terms of size, population, and resources. The lack of ethnic homogeneity in even the five abovementioned states necessitated special zones and *woredas* (districts) to accommodate minorities.The Southern region was the most ethnically diverse, and as a result 14 zones and five special *woredas* were established.This restructuring did not always take place

peacefully:given that some areas lost administrative status, groups fought to have regional and *woreda* centers and thereby gain recognition.

The regional structures were already operational before they were given a constitutional basiswith the passage into law of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in August 1995 (Proclamation No. 1/1995).Unlike Western constitutions, it is an agreement not between citizens but ethnic groups (Young, 1998, p. 195).The EPRDFexplicitly rejected the nation-state model that underpins Western states and which was transplanted to Africa often with disastrous results.The Constitution closely followed the work of Stalin:"a nation, nationality or people is 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 identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory" (Article 39).In practice the definition proved sufficiently vague (the distinction between nation, nationality, and people was never made) that determining boundaries would largely be made politically and pragmatically.

Furthermore, in keeping with devolving power to ethnic groups, the powers of the federal government were identified and limited in the Constitution:"All powers not given expressly to the Federal government alone, or concurrently to the Federal Government and the States, are reserved to the States" (Article 52).But this is immediately clarified by Article 51(2), which gives the federal government the right to "formulate and implement the country's policies, strategies and plans in respect to overall economic, social and development matters," and by Article 52, whichempowers the states to "formulate and execute economic, social development policies, strategies and plans for the state."

The most controversial element of the 1995 Constitution, however, was its provision in Article 39(1)granting the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia the right to secede from the federation.Again, this provided ammunition for critics of the EPRDF who feared Ethiopia's disintegration, while others doubted that the conditions to which this right is subject – gaining a two-thirds vote in the relevant state legislature, followed by a majority vote in a referendum, and agreement on the division of assets – could ever be realized in practice.

The Constitutionprovides for a bicameral legislature at the center made up of a House of Peoples' Representatives and a House of the Federation.The former body is elected by direct universal suffrage for five years.It has 547 seats, 20 of which are allocated to groups that have less than the 100,000 people which are otherwise required for representation.The House has exclusive power for making laws and does not need the approval of the House of Federation.

The House of Federation, by contrast,explicitly represents ethnic groups. Its representatives are selected by the regional or state councils, with every recognized nationality having at least one representative and an additional one for every million people. At the last count there were 137 representatives of 69 regions, although curiously Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa were not represented.The House of Federation is tasked with resolving issues related to the country's ethnic groups, mediating disputes between them, and acting as a court of last resort through its Committee for States' Affairs, whichdeals with such disputes.In the early years of the newly structured state, the House of Federation handled many disputes as the system was worked out.The House of Federation also decides on the division of joint federal and regional tax sources and subsidies of the federal government to the regions.Lastly, it nominates a largely symbolic president for the country, who must then be approved by a two-thirds vote of both houses.

Language was considered the determining characteristic of ethnicity. Article 5 of the 1995 Constitution grants the equality of all the country's languages, butmakes Amharigna the "working language" of the federal governmentwhile giving the regions the right to determine their own working languages.Language policy is usually controversial, but there was little dispute about recognizing Amharigna as the working language of the federal government since there was no realistic alternative.Meanwhile, granting the right of the regions to determine their own language practicesserved to mute this divisive issue at the national level.The major non-Amharigna-speaking groups, such as the Oromo, Tigray, Somali, and Afar, began teaching in their indigenous languages for the early years of school, with Amharigna as a secondary area of study, before turning to English for the latter years.The OPDO abandoned the Abyssinian Geez script in favour of the Latin alphabet and was followed by many of the ethnic language groups

in the Southern region.

The EPRDF at first encouraged the widest possible use of indigenous languages in support of the principle of diversity, but asthe problems of isolation and lack of resources became increasingly evident, it began stressing unity and efficiency and discouraging administrative proliferation.With there being no clear definition of ethnicity, andevery incentive for local politically ambitious groups to call for their own region, zone, or *woreda*, the ruling party felt compelled to slow down or even stop a process that logically followed from its own political program.

Another difficulty with any state-based system of ethnic federalism is the fact that nationalities do not always coincide with the established regional boundaries.The system also undervalues the shared histories of nationalities, their changing character andtheir geographical movements, and the attempt to contain these groups can undermine national integration.Clapham (2002) notes too that in Ethiopia a "substantial portion of the population is of mixed ethnic background or unsure of which ethnic group they belong to or wish to identify with" (p. 64).Critics of Ethiopian ethnic federalism have argued as well that it restricts labor and capital mobility (Tronvoll, 2003).In response, however, it may be noted that rising standards of living and rapid urbanization encourage mobility and would thusfacilitate inter-ethnic integration;similarly, the past decade of rapid economic growth serves to discount arguments that Ethiopia's federal arrangements impede development.

Regional states have executive, legislative, and judicial powers and are headed by a powerful president.Below them are zonal administrations that are appointed by the regions and tasked with overseeing *woreda* administrations.However, in the Southern region,because zones have elected councils and in some cases represent specific ethnic communities, the regional state executive is shared among the political elite in much the same manner as at the federal level.As a result, the Southern region has been called a "federation within a federation" (Fiseha, 2012, p. 34).The *woreda* is the third level of administration: it has an elected council and executive, as well as judicial bodies and the power to "prepare, determine and implement activities within its own areas concerning social services and economic development" (Proclamation 7/92, Article 40).The EPRDF has looked increasingly to

woredas to implement its policies.Special *woredas* are designed to provide self-government for minority ethnic groups not numbering enough to establish zones or regions, and these report directly to the regional governments.As noted above, however, some ethnic communities are not contained within geographical boundaries, and as a result it is difficult under Ethiopia's system to ensure their ethnic rights.At the bottom of the governance hierarchy is the *kebele*, which has responsibility for law and order and providing basic services.

5. Ethnic Federalism in Practice

Any assessment of Ethiopia's model of federalism is difficult because of the complexity of the system andbecause, first, it is the subject of enormous controversy and serves as a proxy for the EPRDF's domestic and international enemies, and secondly, for the purposes of analysis it is not easyto separate ethnic federalism from EPRDF governance writ large.

Since much of the criticism of the EPRDF's ethnic federalism proceeds from what many consider its authoritarianism, it is important to distinguish the Front's approach to democracy from that of liberal democracy.As developed in the West, liberal democracy is identified with individual rights, rule of law, the regular holding of multiparty elections, and with the advent of neo-liberalism in the 1980s endorsement of capitalism and rejection ofeconomic democracy (Abrahamsen, 2000, p. 9).The EPRDF, however,considers liberal democracy a product of a particular stage of economic and class development in the West and inappropriate for a poverty-stricken Ethiopia casting off the last vestiges of feudalism.Instead,the EPRDF emphasizes ethnic and class rights, economic justice and equality, and holds that these objectives can be realized only under the auspices of a vanguard party and democratic centralism.

Called "revolutionary democracy" by the EPRDF, its origins lie with Lenin's *What is to be Done?*where it was conceived as serving as a bridge between pre-capitalist and socialist societies (Bach, 2011, p. 8).Revolutionary democracy has its social base in the peasantry,who constitute the large majority of the population and arealso the political base of the EPRDF. The party holds that

the primary concern of the peasantry is development and need only one party to represent their interests - a notion cast into doubt when peasants in some parts of the country voted for opposition parties in the 2005 national elections.

Critics accuse the EPRDF of being elitist and opaque, riding roughshod over competing political organizations, having scant respect for elections, controlling Parliament (of the 547 MPs in the current House of Representatives only one belongs to an opposition party and one to an independent party),having a fetish about control, opposing the emergence of an independent judiciary, viewing urban dwellers and middle-class Ethiopians as potential enemies, and assuming a proprietorial position over the peasantry (see, for example, Ottaway, 1995, Gudina, 2003, Aalen, 2006, and Balcha, 2007).While cultural diversity is encouraged, political pluralism is given short-shrift and independent voices in civil society, the media, and trade unions have all been repressed by the EPRDF.The limits to its tolerance were manifest in the wake of the 2005 national elections in which almost 200 unarmed demonstrators were killed by the security forces and thousands arrested, after which tight controls were applied to the media and political parties.

Opposition to the government peaked again in 2016 over the expansion of Addis Ababa into Oromia.A pattern of land-grabbing produced dissent in various parts of Oromia, but it took a violent form when Oromo farmers on the outskirts of the national capital (which is in Oromia) were the victims.Central government officials anxious to make land available for industrial expansion failed to follow the Constitution, which required that they consult both the Oromo regional government and the Addis Ababa municipal government whose land was being expropriated.It would also appear that some OPDO officials were complicit in the extortion.In anenvironment where the government was increasingly distrusted,an administrative problem became a major political problem, and it was exacerbated by the shooting of hundreds of demonstrators by security forces, thousands of arrests, and the declaration of martial law.What began as an Oromo problem spread to the Amhara regional state, where complaints were raised about perceived Tigrayan dominance and the incorporation of the territory of Walkait into neighboring Tigray – here too demonstrators were shot.

As occurred after the 2005 crisis, the EPRDF rejected a political formulation of the problem in favour of a technical one by attributing it to youth unemployment, malgovernance, and the need to reform institutions.Conversely, while some critics of the government attribute the problem to national federalism and others, to state led development, most of them emphasize the EPRDF's authoritarianism and the need for democratic change. Nevertheless, although it is the case that the EPRDF's revolutionary democracy should be challenged, most academic critiquesdo not acknowledge that anything other than the Western notion of democracy even exists, much less the limitations of this notionor the increasingly constrictive form it takes in the era of neo-liberalism, the war on terror, and mass surveillance.

A major criticism of ethnic federalism was that it was a TPLF-concocted formula to dismember the country.However, it has beentwo and a half decades since the Constitution was passed and no region has attempted to enact its provisions on self-determination. That suggests that constitutional conditions are too difficult to realize, the constitution has served to overcome the reasons why regions might want to secede, or that the EPRDF is indeed committed to a united Ethiopia and will take measures – fair and foul – to ensure that none of the country's ethnic groups leave.A close analysissuggests that all these reasons explain why none of Ethiopia's constituent parts have seceded.The fact that in practice ethnic groups may not be permitted to secede does not entirely negate the significance of the constitutional right to self-determination, since it still acknowledges the legitimacy of these groups and would serve to empower thempolitically should there be widespread support for secession.

There was also concern that the EPRDF's system of federalism was being implemented at the same time that not entirely dissimilar models in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union were collapsing. Again, the staying power of the system suggests these concerns were overdrawn.Another commonly expressed concern is that ethnic federalism leads to a decline in national identity and loyalty.Apparently listening to the regime's critics, President IsiasAfewerki assumed this was the case when he attempted to forcibly capture disputed border territory in 1998, as a result of whichhe provoked a two-year war that Eritrea lost because of the strong sense of Ethiopian nationalism.Indeed, it is noteworthy that large numbers of recruits from the non-Abyssinian lowlands joined

the national army.Loyalty to the overarching Ethiopian state and regions can thus co-exist in a federation that endorses multiple centers of power and endeavors to balance both loyalties.

Critics have also drawn attention to the lack of assertiveness of the regions under Ethiopia's system of federalism.However, unlike some federations, such as the US, which were formed by the coming together of existing units that were zealous about protecting their autonomy, in Ethiopia the units of the federation never had a previous independent identity and could not be expected to have the same level of independent-mindedness.However, their lack of a previously recognized identity has made it much harder to determine their boundaries, which in the early years was the cause of many disputes.With the passing of time these problems have subsidedwithout however entirely disappearing.

Instead of conflicts between ethnic communities over grazing land, access to water, and the like, which were common in Ethiopia, conflicts now take the form increasingly of disputes between regional governments (Asnake, 2004).This has the advantage that conflicts can be resolved by negotiations between accepted unit administrations which can as a last resort call upon the intervention of the federal House of Nationalities.But in the case of the lowland states with large numbers of pastoralists, neither state boundaries nor regional authorities have gained sufficient legitimacy, and as a result conflicts are often resolved by reference to traditional authorities.Unlike the pre-1991 period, when inter-ethnic conflicts raged and ultimately brought down the government, such conflicts now do not threaten the stability of the central state.

To the extent that the "national question" has been resolved by the establishment of ethnic-based government units, critics have drawn attention to thelimited rights of minority groups within some of these units. As a result, some critics have argued that the system replicates the kind of ethnic dominance that proved crucial in causing the EPRDF-led revolution (Assefa, 2017).The problem is especially poignant because the Ethiopian federal system is based solely on ethnic units and does not have any overriding or complementary form of power-sharing.The lack of attention to this issue in the 1995 Constitution and the experience to date shows that it has not been a major concern of the EPRDF. The problem can be deconstructed by distinguishing between

the core ethnic states of Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Afar and Somali regions, on the one hand, and Benishangul and Gambella, on the other.The former states are dominated by particular ethnic communities and minority rights largely dealt with through the establishment of special *woredas*, but the minorities do not have any other guaranteed representation in the regional government or its institutions.Moreover, inOromiathere are large numbers of non-Oromo inhabitants, mostly Amhara, and they have not been granted special *woredas*; as a result, conflicts between the two communities are common.

Benishangul andGambella do not have overriding majority communities and thus power must be shared in arrangements that have proven problematic in their own right, but also of concern are the rights and security of the large number of non-indigenous highlanders resident in the states (Young, 1999).While the constitutions of both regions acknowledge the right of non-indigenous peoples to live and work there, they do not provide for their election to public offices or special *woredas*,which could be relatively easily implemented since most highlanders are concentrated in the urban centers.Legal acknowledgement of the cultural autonomy of minorities, community councils, laws granting minorities rights over matters of family, marriage, religion, and language, or an activist human rights commission could also be employed, but to date have not (Fiseha, 2012, p. 24).

Although critics repeatedly emphasize the domination of the TPLF over state governance, the fact that the Front has not overcome discrimination against Amhara in Oromia or highlanders in Gambella and Benishangul suggests a more nuanced answer to the problem.Amhara disenfranchisement in Oromia is due to a needto present the OPDO as an independent actor defending the rights of Oromo when the party is challenged by the OLF.The fact that, unlike the past, the TPLF no longer pulls all the political strings in the region, however, does not change the popular perception that the OPDO dances to its tune.No armed opposition groups of any significance threaten the governments of Gambella and Benishangul, but it is their very weakness that appears to explain the EPRDF's reluctance to bring them into line.

Unlike other federal systems where regional and central authorities are often in dispute over power and access to resources, in Ethiopia no such conflicts are evident because the ruling

party maintains a high degree of unity and when disagreements emerge,they are resolved internally.Where governments are weak this has the advantage of maintaining stability, but at the cost of open debate over matters of public policy.Moreover, the dependence of the federation on an all-powerful party raises concern that should the EPRDF disintegrate– which almost happened in 2001 when a major dispute broke out among the TPLF leadership – the country could collapse in a similar fashion to the Soviet Union when its ruling Communist Party broke up.A similar crisis emerged in late 1917 and early 2018 when Prime Minister Haile Mariam Desalegn resigned and strikes in the Oromo and Amhara regions brought overland transportation to a virtual halt. Indeed, a central contradiction of Ethiopia under the EPRDF is that while the ruling party has encouraged ethnic and cultural diversity, it has largely foreclosedpolitical pluralism.

A claim commonly made is that ethnic federalism has not led to a radical devolution of power but to its recentralization (World Bank, 2001;Gudina, 2003;Balcha, 2007; ICG, 2009). This is largely true, for a number of reasons.First, under both the imperial and Derg regimes the fiscal system Ethiopia was highly centralized, and as a result the regions were completely dependent on the center. The situation has not changed significantly under the EPRDF.While the regions are responsible for most social services, including health and education, the federal government collects about 80 percent of the total revenue,whereas the states are able to cover only 20 percent of their expenditures from their own sources.Likewise, the local affiliates of the EPRDF are overseen by the national headquarters, although this role has declined in recent years.

Secondly, the role of the central government was extended in the peripheral regions through the Regional Affairs Department (subsequently called the Ministry of Federal Affairs), which operated out of the Prime Minister's office.Previously known to "hire and fire" poorly performing governors and other regional officials, since 2001 its overt role has declined and it is now limited to "enhancing the capacity of the less developed states" (Fiseha, 2012, p. 17).Nonetheless, the problem of the "less-developed states" and their failure to significantly advance their capacity and autonomy raises the issue of whether Ethiopian federalism can be described as asymmetrical.

Thirdly, disagreements within the TPLF came to the fore after the end of the Eritrean War in 2000. During the war the national government operated along collegial lines,but in 2001 Prime Minister Meles reasserted his authority and purged the TPLF and EPRDF, with the result that collegial governance ended and he became the uncontested chairman of the TPLF and EPRDF, the prime minister, and unofficially the ideological guide for both fronts and the government.However, in the wake of Meles'sdeath, the in-coming Haile Mariam Desalegndoesnot have his institutional or personal authority, and it remains to be seen whether he will attempt to acquire it or opt for a more pluralistic approach to decision-making.

Fourthly, the EPRDF's response to widespread angerafter the 2005 national elections was to embrace the notion of the development state as modeled on South East Asian and Chinese experience.Building on its rejection of the neo-liberal model of development and its desire to curb political opposition without opening up the political system, the EPRDF made it its primary objective to raise living standards rapidly, particularly for the peasantry.In this quest the regime can claim considerable successes, but these accomplishments have further empowered the central state, especially in the field of economic policy, and undermined regional powers.As a result, some analysts (Fiseha, 2014; Clapham, 2013) have concluded that the centralization of power under the developmental state is incompatible with the EPRDF's vision of a decentralized ethnic-based federation.

In this regard, there are enormous differencesin levels of economic development across the country,a variation that reflects inequities in the distribution of resourcesand a legacy of center-periphery oppression; the implication is that many of the regions have limited capacity to develop and implement economic policies (Cohen, 1995, p. 164).Whereasthe living standards of Ethiopians generally have seen dramatic improvements, the peripheral states under the EPRDF have not overcome their legacy of oppression and underdevelopment.Moreover, the lack of government reach in the borderlands has meant that ethnic and sectional conflicts are common and not easily contained.Although suchlocal-level conflicts do not pose a threat to the state, limited government control makes these areas desired locations for regime-threatening groups like the OLF, the Ogaden National Liberation Front, and Al-Itihad Al-Islamiya.In addition, the govern-

menthas to ensure that conflicts in neighboring states, including South Sudan, do not spill across joint borders.Consequently, the EPRDF's priority in the western and eastern lowlands has been security, which has been pursued both through military means and by nurturing local elites committed to the federal system andthe regime.However, while increased training within the public sector and providing for the education of indigenous government employees at the Civil Service University in Addis Ababa have improved regional administration, local elites in the lowlands have generally not lived up to expectations.

Standards of living have been raised by the central government's provision of infrastructure, roads and links to the center, and the building of schools and health facilities.However, marginalized groups like pastoralists and traditional farmers in the lowlands have had their meagre economies threatened by governmental leasing of land to private (usually foreign) agro-industrial and energy companies.This lack of attention to the livelihoods of the indigenous people is likely to exacerbate resource conflicts, which in turn will necessitate the engagement of central government security agencies.

According to Fiseha, "In a democracy power ultimately emanates from the people, served through democratic elected institutions. In Ethiopia the party [i.e. the EPRDF] dictates the institutions of democracy, hence the party – not the people – is sovereign" (Fiseha, 2012, p. 26).This seems a climb-down from his conclusion six years earlier that "multicultural federalism remains the only defensible option to hold Ethiopia together" (Fiseha, 2006, p. 88). Party hegemony in the state is not unique to Ethiopia or Africa, and the democratic rights of people in much of the rest of the world have been severely undermined by corporate capitalism and in the West by the so-called war on terrorism. But Fiseha's point is valid:the achievements of the EPRDF's ethnic federalism are threatened by the virtual party-state merger of the EPRDF, the very sameweakness which had set the Derg on the road to destruction.Indeed, Horowitz contends that under an ethnic-based system of federalism, majority rule leads to domination by the leading ethnic group, whereas if a minority ethnic group holds power the result will be authoritarianism and centralized control (Horowitz, 1994, p. 46), a situation that EPRDF critics contend is the situation under TPLF leadership.

Despite the many criticisms of the EPRDF's ethnic federalism, two of the leading critics and opposition politicians – MereraGudina and Beyene Petros – support a radical devolution of power to the country's ethnic communities and state ownership of land(A. Fiseha, personal communication, 5 November 2014).Indeed,it would appear that only a minority of Ethiopians want to turn their back on ethnic federalism, even though they may not approve the way it operates under the EPRDF.

The EPRDF's model of federalism was designed to overcome ethnic conflict, de-center the state, and give marginalized communities a role in governance and by bringing government closer to the people toempower the peasants and raise their standard of living.While the EPRDF brought peace and stability to the country, the early years of its rule do not stand out for major improvements in living standards.However, in the past decade, which can roughly be associated with the formal commitment to the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) or the "democratic developmental state,"the level of economic development and poverty-reduction has been impressive.Equally significantly, this growth can be attributed largely to the regime's rejection of neo-liberalism, the latter involving a reduction in the role of the state (i.e. the state is seen as a 'night watchman'), and, correlatively, its conferral on the central state of a leading role in directing the economy.The critical role of the central state in development, however, threatens to undermine the authority of the regional governments.

Figures vary between agencies, but there is general agreement that from 2000 to 2013 the country's annual per capita growth rate has averaged about 10 percent, almost double that of sub-Saharan Africa; life expectancy has grown from 52 years in 2000 to 63 in 2011; and while in 2000 Ethiopia had one of the highest rates of poverty in the world, with 56 percent of its people living below USD 1.25 a day, by 2011 that figure had dropped to 31 percent (World Bank, 2014).There are equally impressive statistics that demonstrate rapid improvements in, among other things, school attendance, vaccination take-up, maternal deaths, infant mortality, andthe pace of poverty reduction.According to the World Bank, "Agricultural growth drove reductions in poverty, bolstered by pro-poor spending on basic services" (2014, p. 17), with 60 percent of the national budget having been allocated to sectors of the economy that favor poor people.

Poverty reduction was almost exclusively in the countryside; poverty in the cities increased marginally, although unlike elsewhere in Africa, urban Ethiopia has not grown exponentially because state ownership of land discourages peasants from leaving their homesteads.Not surprisingly, critics contend that the EPRDF's land policies, combined with a federal system that discourages movement from ethnic homelands to the cities, will ultimately constrain development.Nevertheless, while the EPRDF has been unhappy with the performance of some regional governments – notably Oromia and the lowland regions –it has contributed to implementing the biggest poverty-reduction program in Africa. Indeed, International Crisis Group (ICG)fears that as a result of its economic achievements the international community might be prepared to overlook the EPRDF's undemocratic practices (ICG, 2009, p. 4), while the Guardian newspaper concluded that Ethiopia was "the darling of the global development community and the scourge of the human rights lobby" (Guardian, 22 October 2014).

Thus, although the EPRDF's objective of making Ethiopia a middle-ranking country economically by 2020 is ambitious, based on the record to date it is not unrealistic, provided the Front is able to maintain stability and by 2018 that was increasingly in doubt. While the dangers of politicized ethnicity have not ended, the effectiveness of ethnic federalism and the rapidly growing economy have meant that the major threat to both the regime and its progressive orientation comesfrom an expanding urban middle class that the EPRDF'sown policies have produced.The challenge of the EPRDF will hencebe to gain the support of the urban poor, small businesses, and workers without weakening the links to the peasantryon whom the survival of the regime depends.It is this link to the peasantry which sets the EPRDF apart from other governments in Africa that are captive to urban interests and which makes poverty-reduction feasible and politically necessary.But to the extent that the EPRDF is successful in dramatically raising the living standards of the peasantry, it will become increasingly economically differentiated and wealthy peasants arelikely to increasingly oppose the state-imposed constraints on land ownership.

6. Ethiopia's Ethnic Federalism:A Model for South Sudan?

The TPLF and SPLA were established at similar times, fought regimes of a similar character, and both concluded that the central hegemonic state was the principal problem, in response to which they advocated a radical decentralization of state power.The SPLA condemned the monopolization of power by the successive Arabo-Islamic governments it resisted and called for a transfer of power to the "marginalized" peoples of the periphery.

But with the attainment of independence,the SPLA reproduced a centralized state not unlike the one it had fought.As a result, South Sudan has suffered endemic ethnic-based conflicts that bear comparison to those that continue to destabilize Sudan after separation.Meanwhile, the EPRDF developed a system of federalism that has not ended ethnic conflicts but largely channeled themthrough institutional avenues where they can be contained and cannot threaten the survival of the state.Additionally, by recognizing the cultures of historically oppressed groups, giving their languages written form and teaching these inschools, the Ethiopian federal system has bestowed dignity on people andfostered cultural pluralism. As the continuing crisis makes clear the state has by no means gained legitimacy in the eyes of all Ethiopians.

However, wholesale transplantation of the Ethiopian model of ethnic federalism to South Sudan is not feasible. This is sobecause it is a highly complicated system that is at present poorly understood in South Sudan; is largely a product of a highland society of peasants, whereas the majority of the people of South Sudan are agro-pastoralists;was introduced in Ethiopia only after extensive studies of the country's ethnic communities,whereasknowledge of South Sudan's ethnic makeup is limited, and the outcome of the present political crisis in Ethiopia makes its future increasingly unpredictable.

Moreover, it is inconceivable that the present dysfunctional state and divided South Sudanese leadership would have the capacity to implement and manage such a complicated system of federalism, even if there were the political will to do so.Indeed, in my assessment of the Naivasha peace process, I concluded that "a SPLM-led state could not provide the most elementary functions

of governance" (Young, 2012, p. 357); the submission to the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan,by Professor Mahmood Mamdani, reached a similar conclusion (African Union, 2015, 10 March, p. 55.)Mention has been made of the danger of an asymmetrical federalism developing in Ethiopia due to a legacy of underdevelopment in the lowland regions relative to the more developed highland regions.Regional inequities in resource distribution are equally great in South Sudan and reaching an agreement onthe distribution of oil revenues will be daunting.Despite these obstacles and the others outlined above, South Sudan will have to follow Ethiopia in devolving power and responding to ethnic-based conflicts with appropriate systems of governance if it is to survive.

While aspiring to be the leader of the marginalized in Sudan and calling for a devolution of power, the SPLM/A refused to give political recognition to ethnic groups and instead followed the Derg and successive governments in Sudan in attempting to overcome politicized ethnicity and achieve a nation-state, often through violence and state centralization.However, most of the fighting during the latter years of the warwith Khartoum was between southern Sudaneseand the war did not end with the signing of the CPA, but with the Juba Declaration a year later, which was an agreement between a Dinka-dominated SPLA and a Nuer-dominated South Sudan Defense Force (SSDF) (Young, 2006).Upon coming to power, government departments and their personnel were divided in effect along ethnic lines, while in the countryside ethnic-based conflicts about resources proliferated, on occasion leading to the SPLA's defeat by ethnic armies.

The SPLM/A never followed the TPLF in developing a popular base and a program to address the problem of ethnic conflict and marginalization. This was due to its militarism, made possible by its dependence earlier on the Derg and later on the West, which provided the peace process thatbroughtit to power.Not only did the SPLM/A not have to do the hard political work of building constituencies and resolving community problems, it also never developed effective systems of administration in its liberated territories. That lack of experienceis reflected in the post-liberation weakness of the government.

The immediate stimulus for the civil war that broke out in December 2013 was the killing of Nuer civilians in Juba by the Pres-

idential Guard, but it took place within the context of the breakdown of the Juba Declaration (most of the senior commanders of the SPLM-IO are Nuer from the SSDF), competition between the Dinka and Nuer components of the SPLM government, and the descent of the country into ethnic-based conflicts.Most of these conflicts were pursued at the local level and did not directly threaten the state, but the fact that the SPLA could not provide security for the citizens of the country increasingly undermined the legitimacy of the state.Two rebellions – that of the Murle (see below) and the Nuer-dominated SPLM-IO – did, however, challenge the state.

The Nuer leaders of the SPLM-IO were junior partners of the Dinka in the national government, aspiringthrough war to gain a more favorable position in the state and thus not committed to a fundamentaltransformation of the state.In contrast,the TPLF/EPRDF developed outside the Amhara elite and state structures and were dedicated to overthrowing the entire edifice of ethnic-based rule.Crucially, the TPLF/EPRDF program emphasized that an Amhara elite, rather than the entire Amhara community, was the cause of ethnic marginalization,unlike the SPLM-IO and other South Sudanese rebels who ignore the class element in their attack on a system of ethnic domination.As a result,its supporters are motivated largely by hatred of the Dinka, with the popularity of federalism in the rebel camp stemming from the belief that it would create "Dinka-free" local governments.

TPLF federalismtook formin an environment in which Western liberalism had no social basis, and as a result its leaders developed systems of governance that reflected the collectivist values of their constituents, foremost of which was national self-determination.Likewise, in South Sudan most people are pastoralists and peasants, capitalist penetration is limited, the SPLM/A is built on the twin structures of authoritarianism and militarism, and the urban middle class is minuscule.The only basis of liberalism in South Sudan is a civil society that was created mainly by Western aid agencies together with a handful of professionals, most of whom serve in the government bureaucracy and are so deeply enmeshed in the ruling party as to seriously compromise any commitment to liberalism.Moreover, the SPLM/A accepted a neo-liberal economy and rejected economic democracy in spite of the enormous inequities that afflict the country.Complementary to an inappropriate economic model, the government adopted

a range of governance institutions based on Western experience, and the question was not if they would break down, but when. Ethiopian experience suggests the need for South Sudan to develop systems of governance that meet its unique needs and not to be influenced unduly by Western models that evolved under radically different circumstances.

Although not trapped like the SPLM/A in having to espouse liberalism to win the support of Western benefactors, EPRDF federalism is facing many challenges.One difficulty is that it assumes a largely primordial understanding of ethnicity in which ethnic groups are contained within clearly demarcated territories, whereas experience, including that of South Sudan, makes clear the malleability of both ethnic identities andboundaries.This has proven especially problematicin pastoralist areas, where the economy necessitates that people and animals moveacross regional boundaries.South Sudan has a relatively much larger pastoral economy than Ethiopia and hosts many Sudanese pastoralists; boundary demarcation is thus even more complicated, which explains why so little effort has been made to carry it out. Further complicating boundary demarcation has been the successive movements of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), which have reached a crisis state in the wake of the 2013 civil war and will not be readily overcome.While the EPRDF has had to utilize traditional leaders to resolve conflictsin the pastoral areas, the SPLM/A has limited the role of traditional rulers in governance and conflict resolution, despite theirlegitimacy and the frequent lack of authority of the local government leadership.Given those conditions, it is hard to imagine any functioning governance system in South Sudan that does not incorporate traditional leadership.

State boundaries in South Sudan originally cut across ethnic communities, a practice favored by liberal academics who, like African leaders, fear that embracing ethnicity poses a threat to achieving a national state.But this approach has not stopped ethnic conflicts:indeed, it only works when ethnic communities are not territorially based, have not been politicized, and have a primary loyalty to the state – none of which prerequisites apply in South Sudan.Because of the strong ethnic dimensions to the recent civil war,this will necessitate the formal or informal application of ethnic boundaries, and indeed this occurring in a haphazard manner in response to particularly political contin-

gencies.And indeed, in opposition to the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) which called for South Sudan to retain the ten states it was bequeathed at independence until agreement was reached on a revised federal system the government of SalvaKiir has repeatedly and arbitrarily extended the number of states, largely on an ethnic basis. Making the situation more problematic and prone to violence the creation of these states involved little or no planning and without agreement on their borders.

It must be stressed again that it is the ethnicization of the state that is the starting-point of politicized ethnicity, not the other way around.Liberal theorists usually call for power-sharing at the center, and while not constitutionally endorsed, there was such an unofficial sharing of power between the President (representing the Dinka), the Vice-President (representing the Nuer), and the Speaker of the Assembly (representing Equatorians), but it broke downwhen Salva dismissed his Nuer Vice-President in July 2013.The arrangement was unstable even during a period of nominal peace, and the IGAD peace mediators' efforts to resurrect it have not been successful; were it to resume, it is unlikely to be either functional or sustainable.

Even before the outbreak of the SPLM-IO insurgency, Murle under David YauYau demanded the status of a state, and after defeating the SPLA in a series of battles in 2013, that demand could not be ignored.But what finally motivated the government to respond to these demands were fears that the Murle would make common cause with the Nuer insurgents.As a result, a peace agreement was signed that created the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) in late March 2014 which gives the Murle many of the attributes of statehood and YauYau the status of a governor.While the GPAA constituted a form of ethnic federalism, the need for allies in a context of war has led the SalvaKiir government to establish increasing number of states, even though they have little authority and virtually no resources, and can be dismissed by the President without any reference to the constitution.The result is thatnominally ethnic-basedlocal governments are being established to meet the security needs of a weak government, rather than that a countrywide debate is being conducted to come to an agreement on what form of government best meets the needs of the people of South Sudan.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined Ethiopian ethnic federalism at a time when faith in South Sudan's system of governance has all but collapsed and many have placed their hopes in federalism.Federalism hasmany advantages over the currently largely unitary system, but some caveats should be made.First, federalism provides only a *means* to resolve South Sudan's problems and should not be viewed as a short-cut to reforming the SPLA, containing corruption, sharing power, raising living standards, overcoming economic inequities, providing services, or addressing the many other problems that bedevil the country.And, crucially, no version of federalism can overcome the fundamental problem of a lack of capacity.Secondly, this study has examined Ethiopian federalism because it was designed to overcome ethnic conflicts and regional disparities, problems that have brought South Sudan to its present sorry impasse.While the studyconcludes that South Sudan can learn much from Ethiopian federalism,the latter's wholesale adoption is impractical.Instead,South Sudan needs to developapproaches to governance that confront the problem of politicized ethnicity, not rely on inappropriate Western political and economic models and not establish systems of governance due to the pressures of war.

South Sudan would benefit, however, benefit from Ethiopian experience by establishing an institute of ethnic studies that would identify and analyze the country's ethnic groups and their traditional forms of governance as a step towards formalizing the role of traditional leaders in government and adopting elements of these systems of governance.

The South Sudanese would also be advised to encourage and give support to local cultures and foster the use of indigenous languages, which has been one of the most successful elements of Ethiopian ethnic federalism.It is striking that although much of the SPLM/A mobilization took the form of an affirmation of African identity in the face an Arab-dominated state, it has taken little interest in encouraging and developing local cultures.

Lastly, to build state capacity, particularly in the regions, South Sudan would be advised to adopt another Ethiopian innovation, a civil service college that providesskilled local administrators who can help in realizing the objective of local autonomy.

These, however, are technical measures that cannot begin to overcome the political problems of the country, problems so severe as to raise questions about the very viability of the state.In the wake of the collapse of ARCSS on 8 July 2017 and a return to a war that neither IGAD nor the US show any sign of being able to end, and while the parties to the conflict are too weak to conclusively defeat the other,contemplating the form of government in a post-conflict South Sudan may seem remote.Indeed, stopping the conflict and overcoming the humanitarian disaster must be the priority, but this cannot be divorced from considering and debating questions of governance, something which is sadly lacking at this juncture.With that in mind, there is a virtual consensus among South Sudanese in favour of federalism, and hencea consideration of the Ethiopian model, be it positive or negative, offers important insights.

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