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Ethnocentrism among University Students of Post-1991 Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to capture a moment in the history of inter-ethnic relations among university students in Ethiopian since 1991. The nature of these relations has shifted in tandem with changes at national level in the role of ethnicity in political ideology. Since 1991, ethnicity has been the dogmatic principle of the country's social and political policies. As a result, this ideology has permeated university campuses, which have become hotbeds of ethnocentrism and inter-ethnic conflict. The article provides a micro-sociological qualitative description and analysis of different sites of student interaction, that is, in curricular activities such as classroom learning, extracurricular activities such as sports, and service delivery in the form of common residential compounds and dining halls. The findings show that interaction between students from different ethnic groups is fraught with intense ethnocentrism, often leading to inter-ethnic conflict in university compounds. This article takes a circumstantialist approach in demonstrating that ethnicity intensifies in political circumstances that promote its importance and wanes in those that diminish its role.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The purpose of this article is to capture a moment in the history of inter-ethnic relations among university students in Ethiopian since 1991. The nature of these relations has shifted in tandem with changes at national level in the role of ethnicity in political ideology. University education in Ethiopia began in 1950 at what was then called University College of Addis Ababa and is now Addis Ababa University. It was a period when the unity of the Ethiopian state, rather than ethnic division, was legally and politically promoted.[1] During this time, inter-ethnic cohesion among university students seemed to be strong, as was evident in the united student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The movement culminated in the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and demise of the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930–1974), events that left a profound legacy which is still felt today (Bahru, 2010, p. 2). Under the Derg (1974–1991), university students lived under the shadow of an oppressive communist regime, with the relationship between them geared towards ideological homogeneity based on communism (Balsvik, 2005, 2009).

Since 1991, when ethnicity became the dogmatic principle of social and political policies, university campuses in turn have become hotbeds of ethnocentrism and inter-ethnic conflict. 1991 was indeed a turning-point in Ethiopian politics. The roots of the problems surrounding the country's three largest ethnic groups lie in at least three major historical developments.

First, the elites of these groups have contending interpretations of the history of the Ethiopian state. Whereas Tigray and Oromo elites advance the theses of national oppression and of colonialism, respectively, the Amharaespouse the nation-building thesis (Merera, 2003, pp. 93– 107). Some observers describe the evolution of multi-ethnic Ethiopia in terms of an encounter between an "Amhara thesis", an "Oromo antithesis" and an "Ethiopian synthesis" (Levine, 1974, pp. 19–20). The Amhara elites view the

1 For example, the first article of Ethiopia's first modern constitution, promulgated in 1931, declares: "The territory of Ethiopia, in its entirety, is, from one end to the other, subject to the government of His Majesty the Emperor. All the natives of Ethiopia, subjects of the Empire, form together the Ethiopian Empire." Article 2 of the same constitution states: "The Imperial Government assures the union of the territory, of the nation and of the law of Ethiopia."

forcible creation of modern Ethiopia as a historic achievement and nation-building process (Merera, 2003, p. 95). In contrast, the Tigray elit es see itas an act of national oppression and the Oromo, as "Abyssinian colonization" (with the "colonizers" including both the Amhara and Tigray) (Merera, 2003, pp. 95–99).

Accordingly, each group prescribes a different solution to address the crisis of the Ethiopian state. While the Amhara elites have preferred the continuation of the old system of centralization, along with some reform to ensure equality, the Tigray elites – that is, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – argue strongly for an ethnofederal system based on "nations","nationalities", and "peoples" equality, albeit that at one point they advocated secession (TPLF Manifesto, 1976; cited in Merera, 2003, pp. 99). The Oromo nationalist elites, for their part, argue for "the creation of the Oromo republic out of the present Ethiopia or at least to get a proper share of power" (Merera, 2003, p. 5).

Secondly, these three ethnic groups have been in a continual struggle for power over the past hundred years, particularly so since the period of Menelike II. In the pre-1991 period, certain groups came to see themselves as victims, and others as oppressors, within the Ethiopian state. Political commentators often mention that, in the pre-1991 period, the Amhara elites in office used their power for their own economic, political and social interests (Merera, 2003, p.1). The empire-builders (the Amhara and, to some extent, the Tigray) used their power to impose their language, culture and religion on the rest of the people in the name of "nation-building" (Merera, 2003, p.1). In short, the Amhara and, to a degree, the Tigray are perceived as dominant and privileged nations.

After 1991, the adoption of ethnofederalism crystallized divisions between these three groups. Ethnicity became the salient feature and major line of cleavage among the Ethiopian people. Indeed, ethnic federalism brought radical change to the country's politics: since 1991, unlike the case in the 1960s and 1970s, it is ethnic division,rather than the unity of the Ethiopian state, that has been promoted both legally and politically. This is reflected in the socio-economic and political structure of society and, by extension, in inter-student dynamics.

With the introduction of federalism, the federal government be-

came a new arena of struggle and competition among the three ethnic groups. With the Amhara elites having been removed from power, there has been a perception that the Tigray are the ones who control the central government, which is supposed to be an institution of shared rule. In particular, the Oromo believe that the Tigray elites in office at the center govern the state in a manner that leads to the Oromo's political and economic exclusion. They argue that the Tigray, who assumed political power in 1991, have used this power for their personal and ethnic benefit. So, in the post-1991 period, as in the period before that, the Oromo in particular have felt unrepresented at the center even though it has addressed some of the injustices of the past.

These perceptions and the competition for control of the center have shaped the way that ethnic differences between the Tigray, Amhara and Oromo peoples are understood. As a result, the groups have been locked in a struggle for power that plays out in different arenas, one of these being universities, where they resort to an intentional strategy of exclusion and inclusion in student relations as a means of reversing the situation and advancing the interest of their own people. In other words, in pursuit of political dominance at the center, the elites of these groups often mobilize people along ethnic lines.

1.2 Research Method

This study utilized a qualitative research method. It provides an in-depth, micro-level description and analysis of the case of Addis Ababa University, selected because it is the oldest university in the country and has been the center of student phenomena in Ethiopia throughout its existence. At the time of this research (September 2011–June 2012), the university had eight campuses in Addis Ababa. The study focuses on the Main Campus, also known as Sidisit Kilo Campus. Consisting at the time of about 8,000 students, this is where the university administration is located, where disciplines in social sciences and humanities are housed, and where student movements that shake the country originate. Only the case of undergraduate students is described here: students at this level are in frequent contact with each other, as they live in gated campuses, reside in common residential blocks and rooms,and share dining halls, none or little of which is the case among graduate students. With regard to thematic focus, the article examines ethnocentrism among multi-ethnic students

by treating various curricular and extracurricular activities as objects of description and analysis.

As mentioned, the research was conducted in 2011/2012, and its findings, though generally valid, should be understood as best applicable to this period.[2] Data were collected by means of ethnographic methods of observation and conducting formal and informal interviews with students, teachers and university officials. We, the authors, also drew on our personal experience as former undergraduate students of Addis Ababa University (1998–2003) as well as current faculty members (since March 2008).

In the selection of informants for formal in-depth interview and focus-group discussion, we followed a purposive sampling method. We interviewed 31 individuals and held four focus-group discussions, with each group consisting of seven participants. Interviewees and focus-group participants were representatives of different ethnic clubs operating in the university compound, or students with direct experience of inter-ethnic conflict or other inter-ethnic activities in the selected university campus. Three university officials and eight teachers were among the 31 interviewees and 28 focus-group participants.

1.3 A Review of Previous Studies

Several published and unpublished works of research deal with ethnicity among university students in Ethiopia since 1991. Balsvik (2005) documents several ethnic-based student conflicts. Anteneh (2009) studied his students[3] over a semester to understand inter-ethnic communication in the classroom, finding that while the ethnic composition of classes post-1991 has become more diverse, communication is hindered by a variety of factors. Assefa (2009) considers the role of factors such as mutually negative attitudes in ethnocentric relations among students. Haileyesus (2010, p. v) finds that ethnicity is rampant among university students, who are "invariably ethnocentric". Likewise, Abera (2009) andDemoz (1997), among others, have studied ethnici-

2 Ethnicity remains a hot potato at the time of this writing. Since 2015, there have been widespread protests by Oromo students in many of the country's universities, the immediate cause being opposition to government authoritarianism. The situation is aggravated in instances where students attack people from a different ethnic group to theirs.

3 Anteneh was an English instructor and chairperson of the Student Affairs Committee.

ty in the same context, all of them with the same result: student relations post-1991 are characterized by ethnocentric attitudes and behaviour sporadically accompanied by conflict. The present study seeks to flesh out this picture of Ethiopian university students by providing an in-depth, micro-level description and analysis of the situation in Addis Ababa University's Main Campus.

Many studies in the Ethiopian context and elsewhere attempt to explain intergroup prejudices in isolation from political circumstances. Explicitly or implicitly, they apply the classic model in Allport's seminal work,*The Nature of Prejudice* (1954),which argues that the more contact groups have with each other, the more their differences dissipate and the more harmonious their relations become. We believe that this does not sufficiently explain the rise and fall of ethnicity, and argue instead that political circumstances determine the nature of inter-ethnic relations – in particular that ethnic phenomena among university students in Ethiopia today are influenced by the ethnic policy governing the national framework at large. In 1991, the country adopted a "pioneering" and "radical" policy based on ethnicity. It is radical in the sense that it is entirely different from the country's policies before 1991, and it is pioneering in the sense that the constitution of the country confers ethnic rights so extensive that they go so far as to allow unconditional secession – a provision unique among Africa's constitutions (Turton, 2006, p. 1). This ethnic ideology is entrenched too in university students' inter-ethnic relations. Given our understanding of matters, we hence adopt a circumstantialist model of ethnicity.

2. Sites of Inter-Ethnic Relations: How Ethnocentrism is Manifested

2.1 Curricular Activities: Classroom Learning

A look at inter-ethnic relations in teaching and learning activities shows that ethnocentrism is widespread among post-1991 students in Ethiopia. The main portion of students' lives on campus is devoted to curricular activities, and there are a number of places where one can go to investigate the heightened self-awareness of students belonging to different ethnic groups. Our focus in what follows is on classroom learning.

To begin with, students stay around a classroom until an instructor arrives, congregating in their respective ethnic groups. While walking through the pre-class clusters, one can identify, by listening to the language used, groupings based on similar ethnic allegiance. The major languages – Afan Oromo (the language of the Oromo), Tigrigna (of the Tigray), and Amharic (of the Amhara) can be noticed. These are the three major ethnic groups, and are capable of changing the circumstances of inter-ethnic relations in the country's universities.

On the arrival of an instructor, students follow the respective groups to enter a class. An informant likens this to the behavior of bees. In a bee colony in swarm, the bees all follow their queen in moving from one place to another; likewise, students at the center of each group guide the behavior of others. Each group follows these students to a certain part of a classroom. If one guides them to benches at the back, they follow him, and all the chairs around that student are occupied; if he takes them to a place in the middle, right, or left, they follow him accordingly. Many students adhere to this model, and one group occupies a section of classroom more likely separate from another.

When students sit in class waiting for their instructors,[4] they place exercise books on nearby seats to reserve them for their ethnic cohorts. When their fellows enter from outside, they take their seats on chairs reserved for them. This is especially apparent among the three dominant groups, i.e. theAmhara, Oromo and Tigray, and even more common among the latter two. One informant made the striking observation that if the Oromo occupied the right-hand side of the classroom, the Tigray would take their seats on the opposite side. The Amhara, too, occupy a certain part of a class and do not mix with the other groups. The only students who sit randomly are those who claim to be "neutral",or who have no choice as to where to sit, for example late-comers or members of minority groups. An informant, at the time a fourth-year sociology student, said the pattern was predictable: in his class, Amhara students would invariablyoccupy the right-hand side of the class, the Oromo, the center, and the Tigray, the back.

The language used by instructors also reveals the simmering tension between ethnic groups in the context of classroom learning. It is common for instructors to shift from English, the medium of

4 In Ethiopia, a university professor is commonly referred to as an instructor.

instruction, to another language, for example to elaborate on concepts. In such case, Amharic (the lingua franca of the country) is used, as it is the only alternative language all or most students in a class can understand, albeit at different levels. However, there are students who object to code-switching by instructors.As many informants put it, some students "do not want to hear Amharic" – the language of the pre-1991 "oppressor ethnic group", the Amhara.

One student recalls a case during a third-year course when an instructor, explaining a concept, switched code to Amharic. A student raised his hand and objected to the instructor's use of Amharic, and hence there arose a confrontation between students who opposed the instructor's code-switching, on the one hand, and those who supported it or were neutral, on the other. Both for subjective and objective reasons, many instructors today have to be careful about switching codes. In subjective terms, there could be some students who do not want to hear Amharic due to a negative attitude to the language and the ethnic group to whom it is attributed, i.e. the Amhara. In objective terms, there could be students who do not adequately understand the code-switched language.

Class discussions and assignments entailing voluntary activity also follow ethnic lines. The formation of groups for class work and assignments is automatic in the sense that students congregate in groups that exist ready-made on the basis of ethnic allegiance. Moreover, whenever they have the option, such as when an instructor does not compel them to use English, students prefer to use their own language in group discussions in class. The results of preliminary observations by Anteneh (2009) can be mentioned here. Anteneh made a study of classroom dynamics when he was an instructor and chairperson of a student affairs committee, conducting research over a semester on four classes that he taught. The purpose was, among other things, to understand students' inter-ethnic communication in the classroom. His findings showed that students keep their inter-ethnic distance, preferring to do assignments and class work with students from their own ethnic group.

In addition, ethnic groups tend to object to appellations they find pejorative – the use of these terms is often a cause of dispute and sometimes leads to a serious inter-ethnic conflict.

The post-1991 ethno-political system introduced a new politics of naming that shifted the semantic and conceptual underpinnings of the old"pejorative" appellations, but the latter sometimes arise in classroom discussion and become the cause of inter-ethnic conflict.

In a classroom presentation back in 2000, the Oromo informants in this study, for example, indicated that the Oromo students told the presenter to stop using the "pejorative" term to refer to the Oromo but he refused. In response, the presenter, also an informant in the study, said his use of the term was qualified – that is, he was using it in inverted commas, it were; further more, the instructor moderating the presentation had not asked him to desist. He maintained that reason the Oromo asked him to stop was that they were unwilling to hear the term under any circumstances, even in an academic context and in qualified usage. As it happened, at the end of the class, on the evening of 20 December, 2000, Oromo students assaulted him, beating him "until he collapsed on the ground". The situation erupted into inter-ethnic conflict between Tigray and Oromo students. Several other instances like this could be mentioned.[5]

Furthermore, students' grade performance is sometimes seen as linked to their ethnic similarity or dissimilarity to the instructor of a given course. Anteneh (2009) also takes note of this, but he contends that students make such claims out of "cheap" motives. However, many informants in this present study strongly believed that the problem is familiar even to instructors. Where students who demonstrate poor performance in classroom learning score a high grade and one traces their relationship to their instructors, an ethnic connection is often discovered. Many students assert that ethnicity is a factor in grade success or failure where there is an irrational instructor and an irrational student. They point out that "all instructors are not the same" – in other words, the rational quality of the many instructors who give grades based on merit should be acknowledged.

5 The authors were undergraduate students when the conflict broke out and, as witnesses, can attest to the truthfulness of this account given of it.

2.2 Interaction in Extracurricular Activities

2.2.1 Graduation Ceremonies

Ethnocentrism is also apparent in disputes that arise between ethnic groups during graduation ceremonies. Traditionally, a number of group events are held to celebrate the occasion. Among other things, students prepare materials that capture a collective memory. For example, T-shirts are made,folders prepared, graduation bulletins published, and group photographs taken. However, disagreements on the choice of what should constitute the ceremonies are common. Students disagree on the colors of ceremonial T-shirts, the content of the legends printed on them, and even the naming of the university from which they are graduating.[6]

While the problem is common to some extent among all graduating students, a few cases from the class of 2010/11[7] academic year can be mentioned as illustration. An informant referred to an incident in his department, the Department of Psychology, when graduates disagreed about the choice of calendar to use on their T-shirts. The Oromo students wanted to use the European calendar and accordingly render the date as 2010/2011. On the other hand, the Amhara and Tigray students formed a common front and proposed "2003/2011" (that is, using both the Ethiopian and European calendars), or, failing that, only the Ethiopian calendar ("2003"). After a long debate, all the students agreed on using both the European and Ethiopian calendars ("2011/2003").

However, on the second day, 18 Oromo students changed their minds and petitioned to use only the European calendar. As informants said, "[T]hey do not want to see 2003", that is, T-shirts utilizing the Ethiopian calendar. For their part, Amhara and Tigray students took the other extreme and decided "not to see 2011" – that is, not to use the European calendar. A third group proposed-to avoid extremes and use 2003/2011, that is, years both in the Ethiopian and European calendars, respectively. As a result, three types of T-shirts, each in its own calendar format, were printed

6 Some students criticize the Oromo for saying "Finfinnee University", instead of "Addis Ababa University", and "Finfinnee", instead of Addis Ababa. "Finfinnee" is considered the original Oromo name, whereas "Addis Ababa" is regarded as the name assigned by Amhara rulers – the so-called extremist Oromo are opposed to the Amhara name and in favor of their own one.

7 The Ethiopian academic year runs from about September to June. As such, when rendered using the European calendar, the academic year spans two years.

for three divisions of graduating students within the same department.[8] Once again, similar examples can be cited regarding other departments.

Students have also disagreed on the language-system to use in their T-shirt legends, with some proposing the use of their native language – a problem usually resolved by resorting to English. There have been disputes, too, about the color of T-shirts, on the grounds that certain colors are associated with certain ethnic groups. Informants suggested that white is attributed to the Amhara in view of the color of their traditional clothes, known as *shama*; the Oromo prefer green, red or yellow; students from Debub[9]prefer a combination of colors related to their traditional garb; and, as an informant jokingly remarked, "the Tigray like to choose rangers" (that is, military uniforms).[10]

Group photographs in connection with a graduation ceremony are also important sources of dispute, given that some students are unwilling to be in a photograph with members of other ethnic groups. The following illustration is again from the Department of Psychology. A student there said that one day all the graduating students in the department had an appointment to have a group photograph taken. However, many showed reluctance to come. Only a few arrived, as a result of which there was no point in taking a photograph of so few students from the class. A second announcement was later made and another photograph session scheduled. Once more, only a few arrived, albeit in greater number than before, and the photograph ceremony took place with those students who had been willing to attend.

The reasons for refusal to participate in group photographs are twofold. First, there has been long-standing tension between the Oromo, on the one hand, and the Amhara and Tigray, on the other. As indicated elsewhere in this paper, these groups can split any united occasion asunder, so if the two giants do not want to see each other, there is little prospect of a group photographtaking place. In the opinion of non-Oromo students, it is also the case

8 The conservative Oromo believe that Ethiopia is still colonizing Oromiya. This view seems fairly entrenched today among Oromo university students, as a result of which they tend to reject anything "Ethiopian" in favor of things European or reflective of their own ethnicity.

9 "Debub" is a generic name for different ethnic groups living in the same geographical and political landscape in the southern part of Ethiopia.

10 A reference to Tigray military culture.

that the Oromo do not agree on the choice of venues for these photographs. An informant said, "They go from one tree to another to choose one resembling Oda."[11] In the other words, the perception is that they do not wish to be photographed in places with unwelcome historical connotations. For example, some students claim that the Oromo do not want to be photographed in the historical building where the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) Museum is situated today, as it was once the palace of the "oppressor".[12] Oromo informants, however, did not entirely agree with this claim, saying that the attitudes of few Oromo cannot be generalized to all of them.

2.2.2 Sporting Events

Students are involved in sporting activities on or off campus, and these are not free either of inter-ethnic disputes. Activities include inter-departmental tournament series and qualifying matches for annual inter-university games, with students participating as players or spectators; whatever the case, these are again occasions when ethnic groups come into mutual contact.

Though each such encounter has its intricacies, an incident during the Second All Ethiopian Games, held in 2010 in Addis Ababa, sufficiently illustrates the case being made in this article. In March 2010, the Addis Ababa University students were organized to attend the games by the invitation from youth associations respective to Ethiopia's regional states where students came from.[13] At the time, students were on vacation during an inter-semester break, and it was hence a good opportunity for them to support teams representing their regional states. The univer-

11 "Oda" is a sycamore tree. In the traditional political system of the Oromo, officer-holders meet under this tree. It is now taken as an emblem of Oromo identity.

12 It was the palace of the former emperor, Haile Selassie I (19930–1974). Nowadays it houses the IES, which has, inter alia, an ethnographic museum.

13 The Ethiopian political system is divided into what are called national regional states. Theoretically, each region is appropriated to a dominant ethnic group. Accordingly, the Amhara and Tigray, each of which is a large ethnic group, have regional states of their own, known respectively as Amhara National Regional State and Tigray National Regional State. Prior to the ratification of the current Federal Constitution of Ethiopia in 1994, administrative divisions roughly corresponding to dominant ethnic groups were designated by number rather than the names of ethnic groups. For example, what is today called Amhara National Regional State was Region 3; Tigray National Regional State, Region 1; Oromiya National Regional State, Region 4; and a coterie of ethnic groups designated today as the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples comprised Region 5. It should also be noted that "ethnic group" is not used in official Ethiopian political discourse today – rather, the favoured term is the vague construct, "nations, nationalities, and peoples".

sity provided transportation to enable them to attend the games. However, the event ended in inter-ethnic confrontation among students who were already in a volatile relationship with each other. The quarrel began on the day of official commencement of the game at the National Stadium in Addis Ababa, unfolding in the presence of senior government dignitaries, among them the country's ex-president, Girma Wolde-Giorgis. Amhara and Tigray informants contended that, during the national anthem, the Oromo showed disrespect by remaining seated while the rest of the participants were standing and singing the anthem. The Oromo students, for their part, said this was not true of all the Oromo – according to them,it is often so that the attitudes of a few "extremist" Oromo are generalized to everyone in the group.

The next tournament was scheduled at Janmeda (another sports-field in Addis Ababa). This time, students organized themselves along ethnic lines, overtly to support the team of their respective regional states but covertly to provoke each other and incite disputes. The matches for this day, scheduled between teams from the Amhara and Tigray regional states, were termed a "semen derby" (a match between two teams representing ethnic groups that live in the northern part of the country – "semen" refers to "north"). The Tigray students carried a photograph of Emperor Yohannis IV, the Amhara, a photograph of Tewodros II, and the Oromo, the flag of Oromiya.[14] Each group marched on its own to Janemeda, this time on foot and without the invitation of any party. A student who participated in the event recalled that, as numerous and hot-headed as the students were, the militarized federal police were even more numerous and hot-headed – on alert after what had happened at the National Stadium on the previous day, the police had been deployed to quell any possible conflict.

The first match between the regions was a women's volleyball-game. While the Amhara and Tigray students gave their teams enthusiastic support, the Oromo were observers. Annoyed by the solidarity shown at the opening ceremony, the Oromo anticipated a quarrel between the former two who in themselves had been generally mutually suspicious and alliance developed since recently. The two groups supported their regional teams, making no attempt at mutual aggression. There were no quarrels, neither during the game nor at the end when Tigray beat Amhara; rath-

14 Yohannis IV (1872 –1889) was an Ethiopian emperor hailing from the Tigray ethnic group, while Tewodros II (1855-1869) hailed from the Amhara.

er, students from the two groups celebrated the result by waving the Ethiopian flag regardless of who the winners or losers were. According to informants who were there, this was largely a deliberate ploy to offend the Oromo students.

The second match was in men's volleyball and between the same regional states, but it was now a tenser occasion. The teams were twice in a draw before the Amhara eventually beat theTigray. Informants say the Oromo grew desperate when they saw Amhara and Tigray students remaining peaceful throughout the match. An informant describes the scene:

> When this second game ended, both the Amhara and the Tigray supporters dashed into the field. The police dashed behind them,thinking that they ran to fight each other. However, the two ethnic-group members were instead hugging each other, even before they [did so] with players. The police were stunned, and the Oromo were discouraged [by the] apparently intense solidarity between the two ethnic groups.

The following game was scheduled to be held between Oromiya and Tigray teams in the same place on the third day. On this occasion, the situation was even more delicate: conflict was brewing and the organizing committee had to find a means to prevent it from breaking out. To this end, the committee moved the game to Akaki Stadium, which is too far away from the university for students to reach it by foot. Confrontation had been averted, but the tournament was marred by deteriorating relations between ethnic groups spoiling for a fight.

2.2.3 Student Clubs

At the time of this research, 35 student clubs were registered with the Office of the Dean of Students of Addis Ababa University. These included the Peace Club, Hibre-Biher (Multiculturalism), Women's Club, Psychology in Action, Life Talk Show, The Club of Students with Disability, Debating Society Club, Anti-HIV, Anti-Drug and Anti-Alcohol, as well as Taekwondo Club.

Noteworthy in this context are clubs based on ethnic member-

ship. In the list of clubs "recognized" by the Dean of Students, only six fell into this category: the Culture and Language Clubs of the Amhara, Oromo, Tigray, Wolayta, Silte, Sidama, and Guraghe. This number is relatively small, given the diversity of students who could have organized themselves along ethnic lines. According to students, various factors account for it.

The first is objective in nature. The extent to which students are able to form associations is limited by the minimum requirement of five members.[15] Conceivably, there are minorities with less than five students on campus, albeit that many others are larger in number though not organized into clubs.

Secondly, students claim that there is a problem of licensing. In terms of the senate legislation of Addis Ababa University,[16] any association – including a student club – has to be registered with and licensed by the university in accordance with the laws of the nation and the policies of the university. The view among students is that the university is resistant to their forming associations even if they meet the minimum-number requirement. Particularly after the Tigray-Oromo conflict of April 2010, student organizations are strongly discouraged. Even walking in groups was forbidden by a circular issued by the university's Office of the President in May 2010. According to the circular, gatherings of more than eight students were banned.Students also opined that the Cultural Center of the university – the place where they present their club offerings – discourages gatherings along ethnic lines. They were granted access only to a hall originally designed for meetings rather than hosting cultural events, and even this required making written application to the Dean of Students for prior consent.

This being so, there are a greater number of de facto groupings than there are formal ethnic-based clubs per se. According to informants, intra-ethnic solidarity is felt among almost all the ethnic groups on campus, which compete with each other to assert their strength – to mention a positive example, when a call is made for a contribution to a local-development endeavour, members of the various ethnic groups take concerted steps to support their places of origin. In addition to clubs and groups, there are

15 Article 9 of Policy for Extracurricular Activities and Sports.

16 Articles 175 and above of the senate legislation in force until 2013. Since then, new senate legislation has come into effect, bringing with it some changes to the nature of student organizations.

networks. In other words, even if they have neither clubs nor informal groups, members of the same ethnicity have close relations with each other. As a student explains,

> We communicate easily with members of the same ethnic group. We share handouts easily, and pass most of the time together. We [speak by phone to] … students [on] other campuses, and generally we feel comfortable when staying with people of the same ethnic origin. We have strong networks with students of the same ethnic origin.

To return to those operating in formal clubs, as the names themselves suggest, the objective of each club is to promote the culture and language of a particular group. The membership clause is also the same in many a club, notwithstanding some variation in the degree of openness. For example, Article 3 of Memorandum of Association of the Tigrigna Language and Culture Club (Tigray Club for short) states that membership is open to all staff and students even if they are not Tigray. While other ethnic group clubs have the same rules, the Oromo Language and Culture Club (Oromo Club for short) imposes restrictions on entry to it: a person is eligible for membership only if he or she can speak, read, write and understand the Oromo language.

Clubs of the major ethnic groups have a weekly programme in the evenings from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. At the time of this research, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays were allocated to the Amhara, Oromo, Wolayta and Tigray, respectively.

2.3 Interaction in Service-Delivery Contexts

Various services are rendered to undergraduate students living on campus, including meals, dormitories, and entertainment. Ethnic interaction in these contexts serves again to shed light on the nature ofethnocentrism among students at Ethiopian universities.

2.3.1 Cafeterias

Students exhibit ethnocentrism even in cafeteria dining halls. Prior to 1991, different parts of dining hallswere known by names denoting students of the same department who regularly sat to-

gether. For instance, *"EDPM sefer"* (*sefer* means "neighbourhood") was known after students of the Department of Educational Planning and Management (EDPM), *"ILS sefer"* after those of the Institute of Language Studies (ILS), and *"Negerefejochsefer"* after those of the Faculty of Law. An informant who had been student in the EDPM department from 1981–1984 recalls that solidarity among students of the same department was so strong that even when they had no classes, they would gather together for conversation at dining halls,where they routinely occupied certain areas – as a result of which dining halls had places named after the respective departments.

However, given the salience of ethnicity as a factor insolidaristic bonds post-1991, the names of departments have been replaced by those of ethnic groups. For example, an investigation of the Main Café, a student dining hall, revealed that place names reflect ethnic dynamics. There is "*Kilil 1"* (*kilil* means "region"), similarly, there are"*Odasefer"* (named after the Oda tree), also known as "*Kilil 4", "Senbetesefer"*, also known as "*Kilil 3"*, and "*Muluwongelsefer"*, also known as "*Debubsefer"*. Only two *sefers* could be found whose names did not allude to ethnicity.

Most, if not all, the students who occupied *Kilil 1* were Tigray. It was clearly observable during peak meal hours that there were far more Tigray than non-Tigray students in this area. Crossing the dining hall, one could easily associate *Kilil 1* with the Tigrigna language, which was the medium of communication among students who chatted to each other. There is a tacit understanding that seating is ethnically allocated, such that a Tigray student who does not sit with his or her peers will be considered a spy. Consequently, Tigray students congregate in an area known as *"Kilil 1".* A Tigray informant said:

> I do not sit in other place except at *Kilil 1*. I am simply attracted to this place, and I feel comfortable when I sit with my Tigrigna-speaking friends. If I sit, for example, in another place, my Tigray friends will ask me to join them. In particularly, if a popular Tigray[17] student dissents from this place, students will seriously ask him about the digression.

17 For example, club leaders or other figures in the group

As for*Kilil 4,*it is easily identifiable from its large concentration of Oromo students at meal hours; here, one hears a great number of Afan Oromo-speakers. In regard to *Senbetesefer*, *senbete* is an ethno-religious name given to members of the Ethiopian Orthodox church. While it is common for students to go to church, some are more devoted than others and form close relationships with one another, as is evident too during dining hours. Particularly after church services, these students meet one another, observe distinctive rituals at table, and demonstrate religious fraternity; the area where they seat themselves is thus called *Senbetesefer,*[18]and is often associated with Amhara students, given the association in turn between the Amhara and Orthodox Christianity. Numerous informants said that, unlike the case with other ethnic groups,there is no single place conventionally assigned specifically to the Amhara. Nevertheless, since Amhara students are predominant in *Senbetesefer*, the latter is also known as *Kilil 3*, after the former name of what is today Amhara National Regional State.

In addition, the hall has an area dubbed *Muluwongelsefer*, which playshost mainly to Protestant Christians and tends to be the locale of students from Debub – hence its alternative name of *Debubsefer*. Most people in Debub are Christians, so, in contrast with the Amhara and Tigray, they are regarded as forming a single ethno-religious category, that of *muluwongel sefer*.

There are also a few places in the cafeteria where ethnicity is not a factor in the names they go by. In *Asamasefer*, also referred to as *Megajasefer*,students are characterised by poor table manners and known for eating heavily, quickly and greedily – *"asama"*, Amharic for "pig", is used to connote people who eat anything and everything, be it raw or cooked, and do so avidly. Likewise, *"megaja"* has pejorative connotations in that it assigns the attributes of a pack of animals to the behaviors of persons. As for *Feta sefer,*this designation refers to a category of students seen as having "relaxed"personalities (hence "*feta*"), given that they regard themselves as cosmopolitan and non-ethnocentric in attitude.

2.3.2 Dormitories

Informants who had served as proctors for a long time described the methods used in placing students in residential blocks and

18 *Senbete* is a religious festivity held on Sundays.

dormitories. Before the 1990s, students from the same faculty were assigned to the same residential block – for example, students of the Faculty of Social Sciences used to occupy what is today called B-502 or 503[19] – and thereafter subdivided into dormitories based on a common department. Hence, within the College of the Social Sciences, students from the departments of History, Geography, or Sociology, for instance, would be put on the same floor and in the same dormitory. When the authors were students themselves from 1998–2003, placement was based on year of enrolment. Students of the same batch were placed in the same residential block; then, students chose other students with whom they wished to live together in a dormitory, which comprised at least four students. In turn, they chose roommates on the basis of acquaintanceship of one kind or another, membership of the same department, or commonality of place of origin. Many informants believed that, in those years,ethnicity was not a major factor in sharing a room.

Today, dormitories house students who are organized according to one of three considerations.The first is ethnicity. In reflection of the increasing influence of ethnocentrism, many students choose to live with people from the same ethnic group as them. "In every dormitory, you will find that many or all students belong to the same ethnic group," said an informant in charge of a residential block. Groupings in dormitories are strikingly similar to thosein dining halls. Rooms are informally labelled either *Kilil 1*, *Kilil3*, *Kilil4*, and *Debub*, or "Oromo embassy", "Tigray embassy", and the like. Secondly, students self-select co-inhabitants on the basis of a common interest in addictive substances.Some dormitories are identified as *Jezbasefer,* indicating that dorm mates share an interest in drinking, smoking, and chewing *khat*. While these are common practices among students, heavy users tend to make it the basis for choosing co-inhabitants, on the reasoning that "particular moods go together". The third consideration is religion – students choose to co-habit with co-religionists. Thus, as in the case of dining halls, rooms are referred to as "*Senbete bet"*, "Mecca" or "Assembly" in allusion, respectively, to Orthodox Christian, Muslim, or Protestant Christian students residing in them.

We sought to gather numerical data on room-sharing based on ethnic factors. Accordingly, 75 dormitories were observed at different times. In 11 of these (14.7 percent), the students were

19 Residential buildings are identified by number.

all from the same ethnic group – in other words, the degree of homogeneity was 100 percent.In another 38 dormitories (50.7 percent), at least half of the students were from different ethnic background and the rest from the same – here, the degree of homogeneity was 50 percent. It was only in 26 dormitories (34.7 per cent) that students of mixed groups co-existed without there being one ethnicity in the majority. Thus, the data show that in 49 dormitories (65.3 percent), members of the same ethnic group account for at least half the total number of residents.

The cases hence illustrate that ethnic homogeneity in contemporary dormitories is the rule and heterogeneity, the exception.Heterogeneous dormitories are formed through the assignment of students who come late; when students with liberal attitudes to ethnicity congregate; or when students with close relationships from other circumstances choose to live together. In the case of late comers, they do not have the option of choosing dorm mates; instead, proctors assign them to dormitories that have vacancies or require additional residents. Student informants in this category begrudged their situation, especially when "misplaced" in dormitories where an ethnic group different to theirs is in the majority. A student who could not make his choice of dorm mates reported that he suffered much for a year:

> Last year [2010], I came late. I was just thrown into a dormitory where all the students belong to the same ethnic group, but not me. It was very tough for me to survive that year. Virtually all the time they used their own language, excluding me from conversations. They found silly reasons to try to get into disputes with me. If I read at night when they were asleep, they would say I am disturbing them,or they would falsely accuse me of stealing something – all to force me to leave the room.

Similar tensions to those in rooms play out at the level of the block or floor. It is a common experience that even greetings between students can be uneasy occasions. Students who know each other, who live in the same residential block, or belong to the same department,might exchange only cool greetings or refrain from them entirely due to mutually perceived negative ethnic attitudes.The atmosphere is uncomfortable, to the extent that

students are hesitant to walk through the corridors where they are from a different ethnic group to the one dominating a particular residential floor – they report being stared at or regarded as spies.

Apart from students, proctors too are affected by the inter-ethnic relations in dormitories. An informant said proctors are afraid of acting against disciplinary offences. For example, where a student complains to a proctor that he was disturbed by roommates, the proctor may be wary of taking measures if the roommates belong to a "feared" ethnic group.

2.3.3 Television Rooms

Communal televisions are provided in each residential building, making for a further space where students cross paths with each other. In particular, on the Main Campus where research for this paper was conducted, there are five men's residential blocks, with a TV room available in each of them.

When students arrive en masse to watch a programme, quarrels about chairs are commonplace, as when, for instance, early arrivers occupy chairs for themselves and reserve others for friends of theirs still on the way. Lighting can be another flashpoint. An informant recalls one such dispute during the show *HibreTrit*.[20] He was standing next to a switch and turned on the lights while the show's music was playing. The other students roared at this, and one of them switched the lights off; when the informant turned them on again, the two got into a verbal altercation and then a physical one. The situation immediately became a group dispute along ethnic lines. As this shows, disputes of neutral origin easily mutate into ethnic ones: when individuals of different ethnicity come into conflict, even for non-ethnic reasons, it can be quickly perceived as an inter-ethnic incident and lead to people representing each side joining the dispute.

Another source of dispute concerns what to watch and in what language. Ethiopian television broadcasts programmes in Tigrigna, Afan Oromo, Somali, Afar, Arabic and Amharic languages; it also has multiple channels, with the same programmes often aired simultaneously in these various languages. However, in the TV rooms, there is but a single TV set. As a result, for exam-

20 This was a bi-weekly programme on the state-owned broadcaster, then known as ETV (now EBC), and featured music by Ethiopian and foreign performers.

ple, when a Tigrigna programme is on ETV, students wanting to watch it in Afan Oromo might switch the channel to TVO (TV Oromiya). At this point, disputes arise, and are, again, easily interpreted along ethnic lines.

What is more, some programmes are broadcast only on one channel. For instance, football matches and other national or international sports events are usually broadcast on ETV. Students of different ethnic groups may well have different viewing preferences, and, once more, quarrels with ethnic overt ones are likely to ensue. Ironically, Ethiopia's indigenous inter-ethnic dynamics play out even in support for European football clubs, with particular ethnicities each tending to favour a particular club. Informants could not vouch for the accuracy of what are generalizations, but said that Arsenal is usually supported by Tigray students, Chelsea by the Oromo, and Manchester United by the Amhara.

To avoid friction, and, indeed, interaction, students stick to programming for their language or region. Thus, while a Tigrigna programme is on air, only Tigray students are present as viewers; when it is followed by a programme for the Amhara Region, the Tigray leave and are replaced by the Amhara, and so on. Each programme hence only has viewers of a certain corresponding ethnic group. The extreme-point in this pattern is that when national Amharic programmes begin – ones, such as the news, that are supposed to address viewers as a commonwealth – most students, barring the Amhara and some from Debub, will clear the TV halls.

The severity of these divisions were exposed in an incident in April 2004 when a grenade attack took place in a TV room on Addis Ababa University's Main Campus. Highlighting the deep ethnic sentiment among students, the attack occurred during a Tigrigna news programme and – as seems obvious from the concurrence of the act and the programme – was targeted at Tigray students who had gathered to watch the news in their language. Four students were seriously injured and one died.[21] The suspected attackers were Oromo students linked to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The person who lost his life was from the Amhara Region and had been in the TV room to collect his room

21 Currently (May 2018), one of the survivors is a member of the support staff at the College of Law and Governance at Addis Ababa University. The other survivor is a PhD student at the Institute of Peace and Security Studies (AAU) and a lecturer at Wollo University.

key from his Tigrayan friend.

One of the survivors told the following story:

> I was an undergraduate third-year student at that time.It was about 7:00pm in the evening. We were listening to Tigrigna News on B-502. While we were watching the news programme, the bomb suddenly exploded. We were watching intently because the news was about the death of KifleWodajo [a prominent scholar and one of the main actors in the making of the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution]. I was seriously injured. I nearly lost both my legs. The wound is still painful – I have not fully recovered yet. After the attack, I heard that the perpetrators deliberately chose a TV room with a large number of students to increase the casualties. There were more than 24 students in the room.

The Dean of Students has devised a mechanism to minimize the frequency of disputes around TV viewing. Permanent TV programmes are set synchronized across different student blocks. Each block is fixed with a different channel. A TV hall permanently airs a single channel, such that one has to go to a particular place to view a particular programmeat a given time. The allocation of TV channels to specific residential blocks has in effect created a community of ethnic viewers, with students split into interest groups along ethnic lines. As informants noted, TV halls are now thought of as ethnic halls, jokingly mentioning, for example, that the TV hall devoted to TVO is referred to as *Caffee Oromiya.*[22]

2.4 Intergroup Alliances

The discussion so far suggests that there are differing degrees of intergroup amity or enmity at different times. Depending on the situation, one ethnic group may ally itself with another. This could arise from various factors. For example, the perception of a broad regional connection, or of membership of a shared linguistic family, can change the attitude of one ethnic group towards

22 *Caffee Oromiya* refers to the House of Peoples' Representatives in Oromia National Regional State.

another. A Wolayta, say, could be favourably disposed towards the Gurage due to their allegiance to the same region (the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, or SNNPR), or two or more groups could enjoy afavorable relationship thanks to a shared linguistic family, as when, say, they are both Cushitic. In addition, the circumstances of a conflict could see one group siding with another. This in turn depends on a number of factors pulling the students together. For example, recall that at the 2nd All Ethiopian Games the Amhara and Tigray were in alliance on that occasion, whereas they would normally turn their backs on each other.

The discussion that follows develops these ideas by again looking at the dominant groups, namely the Oromo, Amhara, and Tigray, given that inter-relationships between them affect the relationships among other groups. At the time of data collection for this paper, students tended to split into two blocs: those supporting the Tigray, and those, the Oromo. The Amhara were said to have allied with theTigray, while the Oromo had the support of certain ethnic groups from the SNNPR. This is illustrated by the cases presented below.

2.4.1 An Auction for Building Friendships

A graffito captured the sense of unity between Oromo and Debub students in the words, "This year, the position will be SNNPR = Oromo (ONE)." Indeed, informants from the Amhara and Tigray believed that "some" students from the South were being "seduced" by the Oromo.

The case of the Wolyata and Oromo can be taken as an illustration. As a Wolayta informant noted, the nations and nationalities of the SNNPR are generally on good terms with all groups, but the Wolayta have shown a notable inclination in favour of the Oromo. In 2008, a graduating class of Wolayta students held a ceremony to "introduce" their "freshman" students to the Oromo. The Wolyata Culture and Language Club organized the event, with leaders of both the Wolyata and Oromo clubs ceremonially transferring their friendship into the custody of the newcomers;in return, Oromo students organized a farewell ceremony and cultural show at the end of 2009. According to informants from this ethnic group, members of other ethnicities were in attendance, but the Wolyata were the number-one guests.

At this event, the Oromo held an auction as a fund-raiser for their club, inviting bids for a traditional material known as *chocho* and used a container for drinking liquids such as milk. The competing bidders were all Wolayta and Oromo students, as no other major groups had been invited and those from minority groups were indifferent to the auction. The Wolyata students' bids ran up to 2,300 Birr (USD 115), but eventually the Oromo won. As for the few Tigray students who were present, they did not join in the bidding since, as informants alleged, they were there uninvited and only "for the purpose of espionage".

Then, in May 2009, there was a farewell party and cultural show held by the Wolayta. Oromo students were the primary guests, albeit that members of the Amhara and Tigray had been invited too.There was again an auction, this time for a portrait of King KawoTona, the last provincial king of the Wolayta, who had been defeated in 1896 by the then central Ethiopian state. The auction wasa neck-on-neck competition. At first, the Wolayta, Tigray and Oromo students alternated in taking the lead, until the Wolyata dropped out and it was down to a contest between theTigray and Oromo.

Finally, the latter won by 800 Birr (USD 40), in the process re-affirming their friendship with the Wolayta – or, as informants believed, it was the case that in effect the Oromo had won the friendship of the Wolayta by auction. In the bid presented by the Oromo, the Tigray students did not participate, informants said, because they had no desire to win the friendship of the Oromo, with whom they had distant or antagonistic relations. However, in the bid presented by the Wolayta, they did indeed participate, since they wanted to convey the message that they were calling on the Wolyta to join the Tigray side or at any rate be neutral.

In November 2010, Oromo students held a welcome party at what is today known as FBE Hall. Once again, the Wolayta mobilized all their ethnic members to take part. About 150 of them – nearly all in the university or at least on the Main Campus – attended the ceremony. However, security personnel at the gate would not allow them to bring in the gift article they had prepared for the Oromo students. Informants believed that security personnel had been instructed to do so as part of an agenda to discourage the increasing solidarity between the two ethnic groups, solidarity that was seen as setting the stage ultimately for conflict.

2.4.2 The Case of a Quarrel at a Movie Hall

Informants cited another instance that, in their view, exemplifies the alliance between the Oromo and Wolayta. In 2010, a quarrel broke out in a movie hall between two students: they were strangers to each other, but it was later discovered that the one was Oromo and the other,Wolayta. The quarrel was resolved without complication, however – which, by contrast, would have been likely, and serious in consequence, had the students been from other ethnic groups, particularly so if the Oromo student had had a brush with an Amhara or Tigray counterpart.

In the incident, a Wolayta student had taken a seat in a movie hall filled with many other students and reserved a seat for friend of his yet to arrive. When the Oromo student asked him to surrender the reserved seat, he refused, and the former proceeded suddenly to kick him, causing him to fall to the floor. Ethnically conscious students promptly gathered around each party. The Wolayta took the case to the university administration to petition for appropriate measures to be taken before the situation worsened. They also initiated proceedings off campus in a court of law. However, they later learnt that the offender was an Oromo who, had he known the other student, would not have done such a thing to an ally. The Oromo also issued regretful apologies for the offence, saying it was committed in unawareness of the victim's ethnic identity. The matter was duly settled, and the court case as well as the petition to the university was dropped; all that was required of the offender was that he paid damages for medical expenses.

2.4.3 Ideological Weapons to Rally Oromo-WolaytaUnity

Oromo and Wolyata students utilize a number of real or mythical ideological resources to fortify their identity as allies. They maintain, for instance, that the mother of King Tona came from Arsi-Bale (a major area of Oromo settlement) and that they hence have an ancestral tie. They extol the fact that they are contiguous groups, emphasis etheir cultural similarity as a basis for unity and positive relations, and perceive themselves as victims alike of former so-called Amhara-dominated regimes.

2.4.4 Conspiracies to Break Cohesion

The Amhara-Tigray and Oromo-Wolayta blocs viewed each other with suspicion; in the face of the mutual threat they perceived, conspiracies were hatched to split inter-group amity. This was evident in, among other things, a certain cultural show that led Amhara and Tigray students to accuse the Oromo of covertly seeking to split their friendship asunder.

The dominant ethnic groups host weekly campus events, consisting of singing and dancing, to showcase their cultures. The Amhara cultural club members claim that theirs are not "narrow-mindedly ethnocentric" and that, at these events, they play the music of any ethnic group, unlike others who play only that of their own; moreover, all interested parties are invited to attend the show, unlike clubs whose events are open only to their own ethnic group: Tigray and Oromo students, not to mentionstudents from other ethnic groups, can enjoy "multi-ethnic" songs at the Amhara cultural show.

At one such Amhara show, it was alleged, the Oromo had colluded against the Amhara-Tigré alliance. Whilst a Tigray song was playing, the Oromo, dispersed among the audience, roared in protest, cat-calling or exclaiming, "Change it!" The intention was to suggest to the Tigray that the Amhara were resistant to their music and, by implication, unfriendly to them, the implication being that their good relations were a sham. An Amhara informant described the occasion:

> One day, a group of Tigray talked to organizers about the situation. They expressed their discontentment at the fact that the participants were unwilling to listen to Tigrigna music.They regarded their amicable relationship as a mistake. They wouldn't believe that this was orchestrated by conspirators.

We ourselves, the authors, observed a similar incident that soured a cultural show. Various students, whom the Amhara said were Oromo, cried out during a song in Tigrigna: the song was turned off, and the organizers went into counsel to decide what to do. They stressed that the disruption was a deliberate ploy to abrade relations between the two groups.Subsequently, it has become

university policy that whoever shouts out during a song shall be listed and have his identity established and made known to the Dean of Students."Now," said an informant, "both the Amhara and Tigray know who is who."

Since 2015, alliances among students have shifted. In particular, the Amhara and Oromo students show strong cooperation in various arenas, their understanding of matters being that the Tigray had pursued a divide-and-rule strategy against them. Now, it appears, they have resolved the long-standing enmity between them and opted for cooperation and alliance.

3. Conclusion

Ethnicity was not the dominant ideology in Ethiopian politics prior to 1991, but since then it has gained legitimacy at the most fundamental level:in the Ethiopian constitution.Elevated to a formal ideology, it has found a breeding ground in politics and society from which to tear apart the fabric of Ethiopian unity, including unity among multi-ethnic students at universities. Ethnicity has become rampant in social, economic and political life, and so too in the academic and social lives of students on campuses.

Its impact on student relations is two-sided. On the positive side, it gives members of ethnic groups a sense of belonging that mitigates alienation and facilitates cooperation towards pro-social goals. Campus life is challenging for students from the time they arrive as freshmen and all the way to graduation; however, ethnic solidarity often helps them surmount their social or academic hurdles. On the negative side, the rampancy of ethnicity leads to unfavorable phenomena, in particular to inter-ethnic conflict. This article has fulfilled what it promised to do: to capture a moment in the history of student relations in Ethiopia at a point when students have been balkanized by ethnicity. The work that lies ahead is to investigate university policies and recommend better ways of accommodating multi-ethnic groups. Ethnocentrism is situation and its potency can be contained or intensified by existing policies and politics.

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