

About EAPRI

EAPRI is an independent, nonprofit policy think tank that aims to bridge the gap between research, policy & practice in the East African region.

At EAPRI, we believe in the power of critical information in creating change agents & building a brighter future. Hence, we are committed to provide high-quality policy research that inspire participatory & sustainable policy solutions.

Our Vision:

To be the leading institute in policy research, capacity building and policy dialogue facilitation in East Africa.

Our Mission:

To conduct in-depth and actionable policy research, strengthen policy capacity, facilitate policy dialogue to smoothen democratic transition in East Africa.

Objectives:

- Produce & interpret empirical evidence to inform policy formulation
- Organize & facilitate policy dialogue to create consensus on pressing policy matters
- Strengthen capacity in policy evidence utilization & implementation
- Providing state of the arts consultancy & advisory services on policy issues
- Support community development initiatives



Collective madness happen only under ulterior motive in Ethiopia

The ethnic conflict narrative in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian government has been using ethnic conflict as a critical threat to grip on power for over two decades. They framed it as a peril to scare the Ethiopian people and the international community alike. Then, they presented themselves as the only savior from this looming danger.

I wrote few arguments against this mantra on a conceptual and an empirical ground over the last two years. I argued ethnic conflict (if it make any sense at all) has a very rare chance to happen in Ethiopia because of the crosscutting nature of various identities. This argument has generated controversy among handful of government supporters mainly because it goes against the dominant narrative in the country.

What constitutes Ethnic conflict?

A conflict between individuals or groups of individuals become an “ethnic conflict” only when the individuals (groups) in conflict expressly fight for their ethnic group's position within a particular society. It is a collective madness.

Even in this sense, the empirical justification for ethnic conflict ranges from very weak to non-existent. Ethnic diversity entails clear economic, political, social and cultural consequences and those consequences often cause conflict rather than the ethnicity of the person per se. Under this condition overplaying ethnicity will cover those important variables that underlie conflicts and other ulterior motives and divert our attention from the real issue.

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- The ulterior motives & way forward

Moreover, the fact that people who engage in conflict have ethnic identity and the chance for conflict between people from diverse ethnic group is higher compared to people from the same ethnic group makes ethnic conflict a buzzword.

The way ethnic conflict is conceptualized in Ethiopia homogenized and bundled every sort of conflict under this wrong tag and clouded us from seeing the hidden motives behind.

Ethnic conflict as a feature of plural democracy

Ethnic struggle and conflict is a normal and common phenomenon in plural democracy. It is not necessarily violent and could be seen as bargaining mechanism between competing groups over resources.

In the Marxist language, it is a milestone for social change. Marx & Engels argued, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”

Can Ethiopians withdraw into Ethnic Bunker?

Many writers argued against the possibility of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian identity shows a general pattern of fragmentation that the multiple axes of identification have means that the different ethnic groups have had their lives intersect one with another in overlapping and complex circles of identity construction and rejection. The shape and edge of Ethiopian identity is historically changing, often vague and to a degree malleable. The fact that the Ethiopian people have intermarried and intermingled, share religion and other social identities, and that there is no significant disagreement between people reduce the chance for ethnic conflict in the country.

Specially, in a context where religion and ethnicity crosscut each other, one identity cross-connect while the other divide people. This cross-connecting identity will create a bridging social capital and that reduces the chance for binary division. Therefore, this strong social fabric in the country can tackle the perils of communities withdrawing into ethnic bunker in Ethiopia.

The ulterior motive design

Based on the arguments I presented above, one can easily arrive at a conclusion that there is no sound logical ground for ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. Moreover, the concept of ethnic conflict by itself is weak and unclear. But politicians rarely look for sound logical grounds or rely on analytical skills for decision-making in Ethiopia. In most cases political decisions are informed by ulterior motives (*hidden reason for doing what they do*).

In almost all political decisions there is certain lurking variable(s) that are invisible to the Ethiopian people. On a recent ethnically framed proxy war between the Oromo and the Ethiopian Somali, René Lefort wrote the following: “as if, one fine morning, for no particular reason, a few overexcited Oromos had decided to turn on their Somali neighbors, and vice versa, to act out an ancient and unresolved “ethnic conflict”. This account of things has one essential outcome: these events are attributed to ancestral tribal urges, responsibility for them to unstable locals, and the regional or federal authorities are ultimately exonerated from all responsibility other than their failure to contain the violence.”

Religious scholars argue that evil lies dormant in the human soul, and it can be fanned into flame by the most ordinary human passions: the passion for power, for wealth, for a good for self and family. This is the ulterior motive that underlie the ethnic conflict mantra in Ethiopia.

The roaring we have been hearing from the northern tip of the country recently is a clear manifestation of this same motive. The deep passion for power and wealth is boiling. Although there is little to no logic or analytics behind this passion driven roaring, it does not mean the chance for the community to withdraw into an ethnic bunker is zero.

The group that has framed and used the ethnic conflict and genocidal narrative for over two decade wont easily stop pushing it. They, in fact have always justified the one party domination on the ground that Ethiopia is too potentially fractious, too ethnically diverse, to withstand strains.

Therefore, it is likely that they will continue to design for collective madness in the country to prove thier thesis correct and to ensure their ulterior motive. But the Ethiopian people are also aware enough about the potential ethnic games. They have overplayed the same card and the people have seen the wind multiple times. But now, I earnestly hop that the Ethiopian people have learned enough to reverse the looming danger.

Way forward

Some opt for ethnic denaturalization as a lasting solution for the threat of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. Others suggest partitioning the country into ethnically homogenous self-governing groups. But both group ignored the actual underlying potential cause for ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. There are at least two major lurking variables behind potential ethnic conflict. The first one is injustice. By ensuring justice, freedom and equality, it is possible to eliminate the danger of ethnic conflict in Ethiopai. The second lurking variables is a complex passion for power and wealth. This is the variable that inform design for collective madness in the country. Strict measure needs to be taken on these self centered people with ulterior motives. If we control these two variables, the chance for ethnic conflict is next zero in Ethiopia.

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