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Ethnic Federalism and Political Transition

A study of private media opinions on ethnic politics, human rights
and democracy in a changing Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study examines opinions on ethnic federalism in Ethiopian private media. It focuses specifically on how the opinions presented are related to perceptions of human rights and democracy in a context of political transition in a multi-ethnic society. Furthermore, it pays certain attention to the point of departure of the argumentation presented, distinguishing between ideology and pragmatism. The empirical material consists of 30 (English language) opinion pieces published on five private Ethiopian media sites. This material is studied with an analytical tool consisting of four ideal types of argumentation. These four ideal types are divided into two *ideological* ones and two *pragmatic* ones. The ideological ideal types are called *the socialist perspective* and *the liberal perspective*. The pragmatic ideal types are called *the peace-oriented perspective* and *the transition-oriented perspective*.

The study finds that opinions on ethnic federalism in Ethiopian private media appear to be characterized by negative attitudes to the ethno-federal system. It is rather often suggested that ethnic federalism is detrimental to the promotion of human rights and democracy. Moreover, it is commonly argued that the current political situation offers a possibility of abolishing or thoroughly revising ethnic federalism. Commonly advocated solutions include constitutional and electoral reforms. The study also indicates that the opinions are more often anchored in experiences of the ethno-federal system than based on ideological conviction.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The spring of 2018 was a time of unexpected and unprecedented changes in Ethiopian politics. Some two years of intense and violent public demonstrations, stemming from widespread public discontent and grievances, culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and the declaration of the second state of emergency in as many years.¹ The four-party coalition Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – completely dominating the domestic political landscape since 1991 – was changing under external pressure and internal power play. With Hailemariam's resignation, the dynamics of power within the ruling EPRDF changed significantly. Up until then, the decisive power within the coalition, and thus in the country, was practically confined to the constituent member Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – the minority party that was the main force behind the 1991 overthrow of the Derg military regime. The TPLF has been the core of the EPRDF that constructed the ethno-federal Ethiopia of today, led by strong man and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi until his death in 2012.² However, this power structure was rather abruptly abandoned in April 2018, when Abiy Ahmed of the EPRDF member Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (now Oromo Democratic Party) succeeded Hailemariam Desalegn as Prime Minister. Prime Minister Abiy is considered the first leader in modern Ethiopia with ethnic belonging in the Oromo group, which is the biggest ethnic group in the country, constituting about 35 percent of the population.³ The Oromo have demonstrated against being deprived of political influence and being in other ways marginalized under the EPRDF regime, and the Oromia region was the scene of several of the most intense anti-government demonstrations in the past years. In other words, a member of the group being installed as the leader of the country was a recognition and source of hope for many Oromo, and it paved the way for reshaping the political landscape.⁴

¹ Maasho, Aaron. (2018). Ethiopia declares state of emergency after PM's resignation. [Electronic] *Reuters*. February 15. Available: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics-idUSKCN1FZ1C4> [2019-02-27]

² Hagmann, Tobias & Abbink, Jon. (2011). Twenty years of revolutionary democratic Ethiopia, 1991 to 2011. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 579-595. p. 579

³ (2018). Abiy Ahmed sworn in as Ethiopia's Prime Minister. [Electronic] *Al Jazeera*. April 2. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/abiye-ahmed-sworn-ethiopia-prime-minister-180402082621161.html> [2019-02-27]

⁴ (2018). Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister. [Electronic] *BBC*. September 14. Available: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007> [2019-02-27]

Furthermore, PM Abiy is also part of what could be called a reformist wing of the EPRDF which allowed him to reach the premiership, and he is now redrawing the map for the governing of the country. Almost immediately after taking office, Abiy launched an immensely ambitious reform agenda that could change the country in its foundation.⁵ Indeed, big political reforms have been implemented in a staggering pace in the course of the past year. These reforms include a peace deal with neighboring long-time enemy Eritrea, decriminalization of political opposition groups, establishment of a gender-balanced cabinet and the release of thousands of political prisoners.⁶ Many of the implemented and planned reforms have, rightly so, been described as liberal and in line with what is usually labeled Western democratic values.⁷ This raises questions regarding the current development of the EPRDF coalition, its ideological foundation and its plans for rebuilding Ethiopia. Since its creation, the EPRDF has been anchored in the highly contentious and analyzed idea of “revolutionary democracy”, originally developed in Lenin’s interpretation of Marx.⁸ However, several studies suggest that revolutionary democracy has been for the Ethiopian government a flexible tool to justify their policies (perhaps being neither revolutionary nor democratic) rather than a solid ideological conviction.⁹ For instance, the EPRDF has several times before – although not to the same extent or in the same pace as now – put in place policies that are closer to liberalism than to socialism. Hence, the general knowledge of what actually constitutes Ethiopian revolutionary democracy seems to be slightly blurred.

Regardless, Ethiopia has been reshaped fundamentally by the EPRDF. After its ascension to power in 1991, the EPRDF established a federal state order in which ethnicity provided grounds for regional state division and (nominal) self-government.¹⁰ The impacts of this ethnic federalism have been extensively researched over the past 20-25 years, among other reasons since it radically changed the idea of Ethiopian citizenship, downgrading national origin in

⁵ Yohannes, Gedamu. (2019). How change happened in Ethiopia: a review of how Abiy rose to power. [Electronic] *The Conversation*. Available: <https://theconversation.com/how-change-happened-in-ethiopia-a-review-of-how-abiy-rose-to-power-110737> [2019-02-27]

⁶ (2019). Ethiopia’s Abiy Ahmed: The leader promising to heal a nation. [Electronic] *BBC*. Available: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46735703> [2019-02-27]

⁷ Lefort, René & Tronvoll, Kjetil. (2019). Ethiopian elite lost in electoral maze under Abiy’s gaze. [Electronic] *Ethiopia Insight*. February 27. Available: <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2019/02/27/ethiopian-elite-lost-in-electoral-maze-under-abiy-gaze/> [2019-02-28]

⁸ Bach, Jean-Nicolas. (2011). *Abyotawi* democracy: neither revolutionary nor democratic, a critical review of EPRDF’s conception of revolutionary democracy in post-1991 Ethiopia. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. Vol. 5, No. 4, 641-663. pp. 641-642

⁹ For instance: Bach, J-N. (2011). pp. 653, 656-657

¹⁰ Abbink, Jon. (2011). Ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia: reassessing the experiment after 20 years. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. Vol. 5, No. 4, 596-618. p. 596

favor of ethnic affiliation.¹¹ Ethiopia has recurrently, not least in recent years, been torn by internal conflicts with ethnic overtones, often over issues on land or political influence. With the possibilities that have arisen with the new political leadership, some of these conflicts have flared up and there have been concerns that PM Abiy will not be able to contain a potential outburst of previously repressed grievances.¹² The PM on his end has repeatedly returned to a rhetoric focusing on *medemer* (roughly translated to “unity”), stressing the importance of overarching political divides.¹³

Given the pace and direction of the current reforms and the increasingly open political space in Ethiopia, public discussions regarding the new political leadership and its potential ways forward are booming. Discussions are taking place in Ethiopian as well as international media, and members of the Ethiopian political diaspora are returning to the country to take part in the debate.¹⁴ Reflections on the ongoing changes in the Ethiopian society are many. The discussions often reflect issues regarding ideology, ethnic federalism, nation building, nationalism, identity politics and the balance between individual and group rights.¹⁵ These discussions constitute the area of study of this thesis.

As implied above, there is extensive research on the model of ethnic federalism as well as on Ethiopian media. My thesis will primarily build on research on two areas of Ethiopian politics – interrelations between media and politics, and ethnic federalism. Regarding media and politics, researchers such as Terje Skjerdal and Nicole Stremlau have conducted significant studies on media-politics relations in Ethiopia that provide grounds for further research. Stremlau’s studies include interesting discussions on the development of the press in post-1991 Ethiopia. Stremlau’s research shows that the private press has at times been a lively arena for political debate, although it did suffer a heavy and long-standing backlash in the violent aftermath of the 2005 elections.¹⁶ Skjerdal, on his end, has contributed with elaborate studies on the role of the state-owned media in the development politics of the EPRDF. His research

¹¹ Abbink, J. (2011). pp. 596-597

¹² Mamdani, Mahmood. (2019) The Trouble With Ethiopia’s Ethnic Federalism. [Electronic] *The New York Times*. January 3. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/03/opinion/ethiopia-abiy-ahmed-reforms-ethnic-conflict-ethnic-federalism.html> [2019-03-06]

¹³ Girmachew, Gashaw. (2018). What’s the Essence of PM Abiy’s Concept of “Medemer”? [Electronic] *AllAfrica*. August 16. Available: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201808200833.html> [2019-03-06]

¹⁴ Shaban, Abdur Rahman Alfa. (2018). Ethiopia govt welcomes leadership of Ginbot 7 back home. [Electronic] *Africa News*. September 9. Available: <https://www.africanews.com/2018/09/09/ethiopia-govt-welcomes-leadership-of-ginbot-7-back-home/> [2019-05-22]

¹⁵ See for instance: Girmachew G. (2018-08-16)

¹⁶ Stremlau, Nicole. (2011). The press and the political restructuring of Ethiopia. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. Vol. 5, No. 4, 716-732. p. 724

also covers the existence of and reasons for self-censorship in political journalism in Ethiopia.¹⁷ As for studies of the ethno-federal model, researchers such as Asnake Kefale, Jon Abbink, Tobias Hagmann and Jean-Nicholas Bach have greatly contributed to the area of research. Their gathered research covers the ideological and practical foundations of ethnic federalism as well as its political and legal implications and effects.¹⁸

However, there seems to be a gap in the research when it comes to national opinions about ethnic federalism in Ethiopia. Taking the above research as point of departure, this particular time appears to be a good opportunity to further research discussions on ethnic politics in Ethiopia. The new leadership's approach to ethnic federalism does not appear to be perfectly clear, and "the national question" is frequently debated. Furthermore, it seems as if this issue is often discussed in relation to peace, democracy and human rights. This is precisely where I identify the approach of my study. Perceptions of ethnic politics and views on how they relate to democratic development and human rights are not prominent features of the previous research. These issues are even more interesting in Ethiopia at the moment, for two primary reasons: First, the new direction of the political development (established by the new Prime Minister and his political allies) provides a foundation for the occurrence of a wide array of opinions and sentiments, as mentioned above. I believe this has several explanations, including the diversity and size of the population¹⁹, the recent history of internal conflict and unrest, the current political momentum, and that what is at stake in the long run is actually a more democratic society. Furthermore, many of the opinions now visible would probably not have been as openly proclaimed without the current expansion of the political space, which constitutes the second reason. As stated, the media in Ethiopia has been heavily restricted by the government since 2005, and a significant amount of previously suspended media institutions have become active during the past year.²⁰ Ergo, the ongoing development includes a media environment that is more open and tolerant to diverse views, increasing the existence and accessibility of relevant data.

¹⁷ Skjerdal, Terje S. (2011). Development journalism revived: The Ethiopian case. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*. 32:2, 58-74

Skjerdal, Terje S. (2010). Justifying Self-Censorship: A Perspective from Ethiopia. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*. Vol 7, No. 2, 98-121

¹⁸ Asnake, Kefale. (2013). *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia*. Routledge: Abingdon

Hagmann, Tobias & Abbink, Jon. (2011). Twenty years of revolutionary democratic Ethiopia, 1991 to 2011. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 579-595

Bach, J-N. (2011)

¹⁹ The Ethiopian population is estimated to exceeding 100 million. The World Bank. (2017). *Population, total*. Available: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ET> [2019-05-22]

²⁰ Stremlau, N. (2011). pp. 716-717

In other words, the timing appears to be right for researching how opinions on the political development of Ethiopia are reflected in domestic media – especially from an academic point of view. I further believe that it is particularly interesting to review opinions that concern ways to arrange and administer the nation under the new conditions, and how these are assumed to affect the development of human rights and democracy in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a special case in this aspect, since the current ethno-federal order is rather unique in relation to other African states, and these issues seem to permeate the Ethiopian debate. With this in mind, I intend to provide a clearer picture of how the arguments go and on what grounds the arguments are founded, with a specific focus on the discussions regarding ethnic federalism and its implications for human rights and democracy.

1.2. Aim and purpose

The aim of this study is to describe and explain opinions in Ethiopian private media on the recent and current political developments in the country, with a special focus on views concerning the ethnic-based federalism and its implications for human rights and democracy.

The purpose is to increase the knowledge of how opinions on ethnic politics are related to perceptions of human rights and democracy in multi-ethnic countries in political transition. The purpose is motivated by the notion that understanding these opinions provides a contribution to the gathered knowledge of the promotion of human rights and democracy.

1.3. Research questions

The ambition is as mentioned to investigate how private media in “the new Ethiopia” regard the ethno-federal system in relation to human rights and democracy. The study will focus on the way participants in the debate in private media – reflecting on nation building and democratization in a multi-ethnic Ethiopia in political transition – perceive the problem at hand, and how they present and argue for their suggested solutions. Assisted by a theoretical framework on different ideological and pragmatic approaches to multiculturalism, ethnic politics, human rights and democracy, I will attempt to answer the following set of questions:

- How is ethnic federalism assessed as a way of handling the multi-ethnic population of Ethiopia?

- What perceptions of the relations between ethnic politics, human rights and citizenship motivate the assessments of ethnic federalism? How can these perceptions be explained in the light of ideological and pragmatic reasoning?
- Regarding nation building and democratization in this multi-ethnic context, what ways forward are suggested, and how do these suggestions relate to the presented 1) perceptions of human rights and citizenship, and 2) ideological and pragmatic arguments?

1.4. Material and demarcations

The primary material to be analyzed in this study consists of 30 articles published on Ethiopian private media sites between April 2nd, 2018²¹ and May 15th, 2019. All articles are written in English and are opinion pieces, i.e. their main purpose is to express specific views on the topic at hand. Regular news articles are for this reason not analyzed. I have decided not to exclude any certain kind of opinion piece, as the purpose is simply to identify expressed opinions on ethnic federalism on established Ethiopian media sites. Therefore, the material includes both editorials, where the positions of the specific publisher are expressed, and articles written by stand-alone debaters that do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher. As for the content, every article focuses on the political development in Ethiopia under the new leadership and more specifically include views on the ethno-federal system. The material is comprised by articles from the following publishers:

Addis Standard – www.addisstandard.com

Addis Fortune – www.addisfortune.news

Borkena – www.borkena.com

Ethiopia Observer – www.ethiopiaobserver.com

The Reporter – www.thereporterethiopia.com

The reason why I will only analyze material from private publishers is simply that I have not been able to find the above kind of material in state-owned media. The lack of such material, I believe, has to do with the influence the EPRDF has had on state-owned media since the party seized power in the early 90's – a relation I will further describe in my account of previous research below. Moreover, as stated above, I will not analyze any Amharic language material.

²¹ The day Abiy Ahmed was sworn in as Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

Unsurprisingly, the reason for this is that I (unfortunately) do not understand Amharic. This might naturally be to my disadvantage, since it means that a big part of the debate is out of my reach. However, there is reason to expect that I will not miss out on a substantial amount of opinions on the matter at hand. There is research suggesting that English language Ethiopian press has been able to develop more freely than Amharic press under the previous regime.²² I will return to this as well in my account of previous research. Furthermore, the number of articles (matching my requirements) that I have been able to find amounts to 30, which, I believe, constitutes an appropriate body of material for a study of this size. It will allow me to conduct a detailed analysis of the entire material, which is a common requirement for a qualitative text analysis.²³ In other words, a significantly larger material would likely have a negative impact on the quality of the analysis. As for my method of gathering material, I have browsed through the opinion/editorial pages of private and state-owned Ethiopian media sites and looked for English language articles regarding ethnic federalism.

²² Stremlau, N. (2011). p. 726

²³ Boréus, Kristina & Kohl, Sebastian. (2018) Innehållsanalys. In Bergström, Göran (Ed.) & Boréus, Kristina (Ed.). *Textens mening och makt*. Lund: Studentlitteratur AB. pp. 50-51

2. Previous research

2.1. Post-1991 Ethiopia: the idea and implementation of ethnic federalism

In this section, I will account for research on the federal state project that was initiated after the major power shift of 1991, focusing on the ethno-federal system defining post-1991 Ethiopia. I will use the studies of several researchers (mainly Asnake Kefale, Jon Abbink and Tobias Hagmann) to describe important parts of the idea and implementation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia. This will provide a necessary background for understanding the context in which the material analyzed in this study is written.

In 1991, an insurgency led by Meles Zenawi and the TPLF culminated in the seizure of power from Mengistu Haile Mariam and his Marxist military regime, the Derg. This marked the end of a civil war that started 1974, when The Derg assumed power. The Derg conducted a brutal military reign marked by severe violations of the citizens, not least the Red Terror of the years 1977-1978, during which horrible crimes were committed in a ruthless campaign against political opponents.²⁴ Once in power, the TPLF-led coalition of rebel groups, the EPRDF, launched a radical state building project based on the country's diverse composition of ethnicities. Informed by Marxist doctrines, the EPRDF established the "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" (NNP's) – the ethnic groups of the country – as constituent and sovereign parts of the new Ethiopia and created a political system in which ethnic identity was the defining feature. The actual federation, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, was formally established through the adoption of the still effective 1995 Constitution (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia). The country was divided into the two chartered cities Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa and the following nine ethnic regions: Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Harari and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region. The constitution was partly created to provide all NNP's of Ethiopia with a set of rights regarding culture, self-determination and political participation.²⁵ Jon Abbink notes that crucial in this aspect are a number of articles of the constitution, including article 39, which defines NNP's in the following way:

²⁴ Hagmann, T & Abbink, J. (2011). p. 581

Abbink, J. (2011). p. 597

Stremlau, N. (2011). p. 716

²⁵ Abbink, J. (2011). pp. 596-597, 600

Asnake, K. (2013). Figure 0.1

“A ‘Nation, Nationality or People’ for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of a 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 grants the NNP’s their rights to self-government and self-determination to the degree of secession, as well as their right to expression, development and promotion of their culture and preservation of their history. Abbink further notes that other constitutional articles that are important for the ethno-federal system are articles 8 and 53 (although I believe he actually refers to article 54). The former establishes that the political sovereignty is vested in the NNP’s and the latter (article 54; my note) regulates the representation of NNP’s and “minority nationalities” in one of the two houses of the parliament. These parts of the constitution, Abbink states, have indeed been subject to criticism, not least with regards to their compatibility with democracy.²⁶ Furthermore, Abbink describes another theoretically important part of ethnic federalism, while noting its restricted implementation. This regards the actual decentralization of power and decision-making to the ethnic regions. Abbink points to the rather limited practice of regional self-government on several areas, but notes a few areas where it has been implemented:

“This programme of decentralization has had limited results over the past two decades, but it can be seen in the adoption of the locally dominant languages for administrative purposes and the staffing of the new bureaucracy by ethnic locals.”²⁷

With this said, the constitution and the federal division created a system in which political competition and representation was organized along ethnic lines, with a wide range of consequences for the Ethiopian society.²⁸ Regarding the discrepancy between the aims of the ethno-federal project and its actual results, Asnake Kefale has conducted elaborate research. In *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia*, Asnake writes that the establishment of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia was based on two goals: providing the ethnic groups of the country with the right to self-determination and ending conflict between them. Asnake concludes that neither of these goals was fully achieved. His findings suggest that the actual self-determination of the federal ethnic regions has been limited to “linguistic and cultural autonomy” and that ethnic

²⁶ Abbink, J. (2011). pp. 600-601

²⁷ Ibid. p. 601

²⁸ Ibid. p. 596

conflicts have been continuously occurring.²⁹ In conclusion, he writes: “... the Ethiopian federal experiment faced serious difficulties to provide a new democratic basis for the Ethiopian state.”³⁰

2.2. The role of the press in post-1991 Ethiopia

As shown above, the emergence of the EPRDF as a state-bearing party reshaped Ethiopian politics fundamentally. Naturally, this reformation affected the media and its role in politics as well. Regarding this specific development, Nicole Stremlau provides an insightful analysis in *The Press and the Political Restructuring of Ethiopia*, where she maps the role of the media in post-1991 Ethiopia, with specific emphasis on the press.³¹

In the early years of EPRDF rule, the government departed from the severely repressive ways of the toppled Derg regime. In a time when it was crucial to legitimize the rule to the people and the international community, the press was liberalized and freedom of expression radically increased. However, this development started turning as the EPRDF had to handle the growing criticism the party received in the open media landscape. Many of the newspapers that had been established were highly critical of the EPRDF and its ethno-federal politics, and the government eventually came to react aggressively to this criticism.³² In the period leading up to the 2005 elections, independent Ethiopian journalism was reaching its peak. But the results of the elections (the main opposition made game changing progress) took the government by surprise, and they were soon accused of manipulating the results to their advantage. Public outrage erupted and the government responded violently, arresting journalists and closing most of the oppositional newspapers. These events set the tone for the EPRDF’s continued approach to the (private) media – that is, an approach characterized by tight control and isolation of critics.³³

As for the state-owned media, Stremlau notes that it has been controlled by the party since it seized power. In fact, the TPLF, the leading member of the EPRDF coalition, had already developed a large Tigray-based media apparatus during the years of struggle against the Derg.³⁴ This media apparatus, especially the radio stations, played an important role in mobilizing the population in the struggle. These mobilization efforts were mainly based on a focus on

²⁹ Asnake’s findings on the impact of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic conflict will be accounted for in greater detail in the theory chapter, since they will form an important part of the analytical tool used in this study.

³⁰ Asnake, K. (2013). p. 163

³¹ Stremlau, N. (2011)

³² Ibid. p. 716

³³ Ibid. p. 717

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 716, 719, 727-728

economic development rather than political ideology – a focus that has remained a defining feature of the state-owned media and which will be further accounted for in the next section.³⁵

Stremlau further notes that whereas the government radio broadcasts have remained directed toward the rural masses, the target groups for the government press have generally been “party cadres and government bureaucrats”.³⁶

When it comes to the debate on ethnic federalism in the 90’s, the private press was where to follow the discussions. The EPRDF and its affiliated media were accused of not engaging in the debate, in which several private newspapers assumed a firmly critical stance against the ethno-federal project. This criticism included claims that the ethno-federal politics disregarded the historical relations between and the unity of the groups and regions that constituted the nation. In this camp, the EPRDF was also condemned for having created a rooted fragmentation by concentrating the power and wealth of the nation to one ethnic minority group (the Tigrayans).³⁷ Stremlau writes that the term “unity”, which was frequently used in the argumentation, is a historically powerful term that has been charged with different political meanings by previous Ethiopian regimes.³⁸ I believe it will be good to take this notion into account in my analysis, as this contested term appears to recur in the current debate as well, not least in the speeches of the Prime Minister himself. Apart from the deeply critical publishers, there were also newspapers that occupied a middle ground in the discussions, tolerating the EPRDF and its ethnic federalism while remaining keen on criticizing government policies/management.³⁹ This editorial stance was more successful among the English language papers, since the government was not as concerned about their potential influence as it was about the effect of the Amharic ones. Some of these English papers, including *Addis Fortune* and *The Reporter*, grew influential and remained active after the 2005 elections, although with a less critical tone.⁴⁰ Most of the deeply oppositional ones, however, were closed or lost momentum, as journalists were jailed or feared persecution. The EPRDF, committed to preventing the opposition from regaining its strength in the future, fell back on highly restrictive measures. Ahead of the 2010 election, an anti-terrorism proclamation and a civil society proclamation were established – both detrimental to any political opposition.⁴¹

³⁵ Stremlau, N. (2011). pp. 719-720

³⁶ Ibid. p. 721.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 724-727

³⁸ Ibid. p. 725

³⁹ Ibid. pp. 724-726

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 726-727

⁴¹ Ibid. pp. 726-727

Now it should be mentioned that things have changed since the publication of this article. To name two significant examples (from a long list), the above-mentioned civil society proclamation has been replaced by a substantially less restrictive legislation, and great numbers of previously imprisoned political dissidents have been released.⁴² With this noted, however, Stremlau's research remains relevant to this study for a number of reasons. Most importantly, her findings on the prominent role of private press in general, and English language press in particular, in previous debates on ethnic federalism suggest that the selection of empirical material for this study is reasonable.

2.3. Ethiopian state-owned media – self-censorship and development journalism

The above research is related to the fact that the concept of development is (or at least has been) dominant in the state-controlled national discourse. This “development discourse” has been researched in Terje Skjerdal's study on the Ethiopian case of development journalism, in which he concludes that journalists in Ethiopian state media prioritize reporting on positive development efforts rather than conducting critical journalism that could include politically oppositional views.⁴³ In yet another study, Skjerdal studies self-censorship in Ethiopian media and finds that reporting on ethnic issues appears to be commonly subjected to self-censorship. In this study, Skjerdal conducted interviews with 61 journalists in Ethiopian state media institutions, and was able to draw some interesting conclusions. What is particularly interesting about this study is that it suggests that the editorial policies of these (state-owned) media institutions were fairly unrestricted, but the actual reporting was clearly inhibited, especially on sensitive issues such as ethnic politics. The reason for this, Skjerdal found, was that there existed a widespread practice of self-censorship among the journalists. There were several reasons for the practice of self-censorship, but Skjerdal concluded that these reasons were in general connected to various degrees of fear and uncertainty among the journalists.⁴⁴ There were also findings that indicated self-censorship on ethnic issues within private media establishments, but these indications were not further investigated in this study. With this said, however, Skjerdal also noted that despite several accounts of grave government-sanctioned

⁴² Townsend, Dina. (2019). Ethiopia's new civil society law. [Electronic] *Include*. March 11. Available: <https://includeplatform.net/ethiopias-new-civil-society-law/> [2019-05-25]
(2019). Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed: The leader promising to heal a nation. [Electronic] *BBC*. Available: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46735703> [2019-02-27]

⁴³ Skjerdal, T. S. (2011). pp. 58, 69-71

⁴⁴ Skjerdal, T. S. (2010). pp. 98, 116

repression of private media during the 90's and after the 2005 elections, the private media has been able to continue performing critical journalism.⁴⁵

2.4. Summary

In conclusion, I believe the above research forms a firm basis for studying current opinions on ethnic federalism in private media. It is clear from the research of Abbink, Hagmann and Asnake that ethnic politics is a controversial topic, especially concerning its impact on democracy. Furthermore, Streamlau's and Skjerdal's studies suggest that the national debate on ethnic federalism has continuously been active, but that the private media has been able to maintain independent journalism on ethnic issues to a greater extent than state-owned media. My perception is that this research combined with the current development of the Ethiopian political landscape makes a study of this kind both timely and relevant. It seems as if current conditions are conducive to the possibilities of creating further knowledge on perceptions of ethnic politics in Ethiopian private media.

⁴⁵ Skjerdal, T. S. (2010). pp. 104-105

3. Theory

As suggested earlier, the lines of argument presented in the material seem to be of shifting and dynamic character. This is both expected and fair, given the complexity of the phenomenon that is the ethno-federal project. It is clear that – if the aim is to identify the ideas/perceptions that explain the presented opinions – a theoretical framework for analysis needs to reflect the various dimensions of the debate. It must be applicable to the wide range of views in the material and simultaneously provide a useful categorization of its content. In other words, it should be neither too narrow nor too wide, and its demarcations must be clearly defined. I believe the best way of achieving this is taking as point of departure the most apparent division of the arguments, and further identifying separate sub-divisions. Glancing at the material, it appears that several debaters mainly found their arguments on ideological conviction whereas others emphasize practical experiences of the ethno-federal system. This is where I identify the main division, separating *ideology* from *pragmatism*. These two features will divide this chapter into two main sections.

In the first section, I will account for characteristic attributes of two distinct ideological approaches to multiculturalism and ethnic politics – the socialist and the liberal. While Marxist-Leninist ideals in Ethiopia are hardly as common now as they were in the late 80's and early 90's, I believe it is fair to expect socialist takes on ethnic issues in the current debate, as the ethno-federal order is so deeply rooted in today's Ethiopia. Hence, I will begin with mapping the socialist view on multinationalism that provided the theoretical foundation for Ethiopian ethnic federalism. I will also account for elaborations of this political theory. Moving on, I will describe a conventional liberal view on human rights and democracy that has come to permeate the international discourse on human rights. Versions of this perspective seem to appear frequently in most debates on the current political development in Ethiopia, including the one in focus in this study. Please note, however, that I aspire neither to give a full account of these ideological approaches to cultural rights nor to provide perfect definitions of the separate ideologies. The purpose is to identify key features of approaches that are likely to appear in the material, in order to enable the creation of ideal types that will serve as the analytical tool of this study.⁴⁶ I will elaborate on the construction of these ideal types in the methods chapter.

⁴⁶ Bergström, Göran & Svärd, Per-Anders. (2018). Idé- och ideologianalys. In Bergström, G & Boréus, K. p. 148

In the second section, I will give an equivalent account of two approaches to ethnic politics that are not clearly guided by ideology. These theories examine the connections between ethnic politics, peace and security and democratic development, with a specific focus on multinational countries with a recent history of conflict. One line of argument focuses mainly on democratic transition whereas the other focuses more on stifling ethnic conflict. The latter perspective is based on the Ethiopian experience of ethnic federalism. These two perspectives, for quite obvious reasons I dare to say, seem strikingly relevant to the debate I will analyze. Similar to the ambition with the ideology section, my aim is to identify key features of the approaches, rather than giving an exhaustive description of the entire field of research on this topic. This section will also serve as foundation for the construction of ideal types that will be part of my analytical tool.

Now that this has been established, let us get properly acquainted with the theory.

3.1. The ideological dimension of ethnic politics – groups, individuals and rights

3.1.1. Socialism and peoples' rights

In understanding how certain ideologies approach the idea of ethnic politics and national pluralism, it seems natural to start with the ideology that inspired the creators of the Ethiopian ethnic federalism. From the emergence of the student movement in the 1960's until the end of the Derg rule and the Cold War in the early 90's, most political thinking in Ethiopia took different forms of Marxism/communism. In this leftist political environment, the discourse on the national issue was dominated by Joseph Stalin's theory of nationalities. Both the Derg, which was backed by the Soviet Union while occupying the power in Ethiopia, and the TPLF, which seized the power from the Derg, were guided by the theory of nationalities, even though they implemented it in different ways.⁴⁷ Reflecting on the prospects of solving "the national problem" in a time of capitalistic imperialism, Stalin concluded that Leninism "... recognizes the latent revolutionary capacities of the national liberation movement of oppressed countries and the possibility of utilizing these capacities for the purpose of overthrowing the common enemy – that is, for the purpose of overthrowing imperialism."⁴⁸ National liberation movements were thus seen as a part of the bigger proletarian revolution. It is in this context Stalin highlighted the understanding of self-determination that came to be adopted in Ethiopia and

⁴⁷ Asnake, K. (2013). p. 28

⁴⁸ Stalin, Joseph. (1942). *Marxism and the National Question*. New York: International Publishers. pp. 185

that is reflected in the country's current constitution. Stalin argued that Leninism corrected the inaccurate interpretation of self-determination as the right to autonomy or cultural autonomy, by expanding it to meaning the right of oppressed countries to complete secession. According to Leninism, simply the right to autonomy counteracted the purpose of self-determination, understood as combating annexations. An oppressed nation having its own cultural institutions, for instance, would still allow the ruling nation to keep the political power.⁴⁹ As for the actual meaning of a nation, Stalin formulated the following definition: "... a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture".⁵⁰

In addressing the national problem, Leninism assumed a set of theses about power relations in the international order. An important feature of these theses is the descriptive statement that the world consists of two camps: a wealthy minority of civilized nations and the majority of the global population (consisting of dependent and colonized countries) which they exploit. In other words, oppressors and oppressed. The only way to change this order, the theses suggest, would be the cooperation of the proletariat and the national liberation movements in forming a "common revolutionary front". It would also be necessary that the proletariat of the oppressor nations supported the right of secession of the oppressed nations, in order for them to become independent states.⁵¹ This emancipation of oppressed nations from imperialism would in turn render possible a "union and collaboration of nations within a single economic system, which... can arise only on the basis of mutual confidence and fraternal relations among nations", as Stalin put it.⁵² What is important to apprehend here is the heavy emphasis on self-determination and the right to secession that permeates Stalin's theory. These rights are both described as collective cultural rights and deemed crucial for liberating people from exploitation and oppression. In this Leninist thinking, the only condition for not supporting a people's right to secession was if a secession would interfere with the interests of the proletarian and anti-imperialist movement.⁵³ The right to secession, it should be said, is indeed a universally established cultural group right and is today not particular to socialist ideas of human rights, but Stalin's theory (and policies) has nonetheless inspired more extensive implementations of ethnic- and culture-based politics, not least in Ethiopia.

⁴⁹ Stalin, J. (1942). pp. 183-184

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 12

⁵¹ Ibid. pp. 187-188

⁵² Ibid. p. 188

⁵³ Ibid. pp. 183-184, 187-189

The development of this and other Marxist-Leninist branches into a socialist concept of human rights has been examined by Franciszek Przetacznik. In *The Socialist Concept of Human Rights: Its Philosophical Background and Political Justification*, Przetacznik studies how the socialist states post World War Two understood, justified and sought to implement human rights. In these accounts, he makes some descriptions relevant to this study of the socialist view on state-individual relations and these relations' implications for human rights protection. While noting that the socialist concept of human rights has incorporated ideas from Western philosophy, Przetacznik pays certain attention to the status of the state particular to socialist theory.⁵⁴ This status upholds the state and its political aims as prioritized over the rights of individuals, as the interests of the state are to be understood as representing the will of society as a whole. This, however, does not imply that human rights are considered irrelevant or unimportant. It rather means that, at least when it comes to the legal protection of rights, sovereign states should be given space in defining the catalogue of rights and obligations that applies to their own citizens. As Przetacznik puts it:

“Pursuant to Socialist doctrine, human rights are understood as the totality of the most substantial general democratic rights which States must grant to individuals within the sphere of their jurisdiction. [...] This doctrine reflects the Socialist concept of the protection of human rights, according to which the individual has no standing in international law and the relationship between an individual and the State is regulated only by rules established by the State itself.”⁵⁵

Regarding these the most substantial democratic rights, a set of rights entitled to peoples or nations (as collectives) are considered to be of special importance. First off, there is the right to self-determination as defined above. This right is considered absolute, as it is understood as “inherent in the nature of each people, nation and State”.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the rights to peace and to the sovereignty of peoples or nations over their wealth and natural resources are attributed special status. The right to peace is considered a fundamental right, since only peace and security allows peoples to struggle for and enjoy their other rights.⁵⁷ The right to sovereignty over wealth and resources, in turn, is tightly connected to the liberation of oppressed peoples from colonization, as it is noted that real self-determination cannot be achieved without the

⁵⁴ Przetacznik, Franciszek. (1977). *The Socialist Concept of Human Rights: Its Philosophical Background and Political Justification*. *Belgian Review of International Law*. Vol. 13, No.1. pp. 244-245

⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 248-249

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 263

⁵⁷ Ibid. pp. 251-252

control of the liberated people over their wealth and resources.⁵⁸ All three of these rights are granted to collectives, and all three are considered necessary for the enjoyment of the individual rights recognized by the state.⁵⁹ As for the protection of individual rights, the socialist perspective paves the way for opposing the twofold categorization of rights that distinguishes between civil and political rights on the one hand and social, economic and cultural rights on the other. This legal distinction, which prevents implementing all rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural) the same way, overlooks the socialist objective of creating the same opportunities for everyone to participate in the economic, social and cultural life. The argument is that such a distinction fails to recognize that the enjoyment of civil and political rights requires the full protection of social, economic and cultural rights.⁶⁰

To summarize, the socialist view on human rights rests on a strong emphasis on the sovereign state and its right to determine the best for its people. As the interests of the state are considered the interests of society, the state has the power to decide the extent to which individual rights are acknowledged. Central to this is the international legal protection of the right of nations or peoples to their own state and the wealth and resources within its boundaries. Only when these laws and norms are respected and ensured can individual rights be enjoyed by the citizens. And finally, individual rights must not be detached from each other in their implementation, for only equal implementation of social, economic and cultural rights and civil and political rights can realize the full potential of each separate right.⁶¹

3.1.2. Liberalism and state neutrality

An ideological stance that constitutes a prominent side in discussions on multiculturalism, and which seems to appear in the Ethiopian case, is a Western liberal one. This approach, like most others, comes in different versions, but a neatly articulated one (that has been important to the academic debate) was written by Ronald Dworkin. In his paper *Liberalism*, Dworkin addressed the moral foundations of liberalism in an attempt to identify what actually distinguishes liberalism as an ideology. He did not explicitly address the matter of multiculturalism, but nevertheless provided elaborate thoughts on state-citizen relations that are relevant to the issue. Dworkin noted that the moral foundation of any political theory can be divided into positions that are either *constitutive* or *derivative*. The constitutive element is the ideology's perception

⁵⁸ Przetacznik, F. (1977). pp. 264

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 277

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 267-268

⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 277-278

of what is good and desirable for each and every one, what is “a good life”, and the derivative element is constituted by the procedural positions we assume to achieve the constitutive aims.⁶² In this way, for instance, capitalism could be understood as derivative to constitutive principles of liberty.⁶³ What Dworkin argued was that the constitutive morality of liberalism is a certain conception of equality. This conception builds on the assumption that citizens’ preferences in terms of what amounts to the good life differ, and that government policies that favorize any particular preference therefore constitute unequal treatment of the citizens. Hence, political decisions must be neutral on conceptions of what gives life value.⁶⁴ However, since it is not easy to accomplish neutrality on preferences in decision making, certain procedural measures must be put in place to reach that aim. Dworkin argued not only for a somewhat redistributive capitalism and a representative democracy, but also for a set of rights to prevent majoritarian oppression of minority preferences. For instance, he gave the example of a majority voting for the prohibition of certain minority practices that it finds immoral. Since the publicly elected legislative body in a representative democracy is held accountable to its electorate, it cannot completely disregard the preferences of the majority. However, making a decision in line with these preferences amounts to imposing *external* preferences on individual citizens – that is, preferences commanding them to strive for a certain conception of the good – thereby neglecting their right to be equally treated. Therefore, Dworkin suggested, there must also be (civil) individual rights that identify those decisions that lead to the dominance of a certain conception of the good and remove them from the sphere of political decision making. Otherwise, state neutrality to personal preferences of the good life will not be achieved.⁶⁵

A similar emphasis on equality and neutrality is clearly articulated in Jack Donnelly’s liberal conception of human rights. Donnelly generally suggests that there is an international, overlapping, consensus on human rights that is based on a principle of equal concern and respect, which he argues is compatible with more or less all doctrines, cultures and religions. With this said, he also specifies a liberal theory of rights that constitutes a part of this universal consensus.⁶⁶ This liberal theory, I argue, illustrates well some viewpoints on human rights and

⁶² Dworkin, Ronald. Liberalism. [Electronic] *Scribd*. May 21, 2016. Available:

https://www.scribd.com/document/313373358/Ronald-Dworkin-Liberalism?doc_id=313373358&download=true&order=467282113 [2019-05-25]. Note: Originally published in

Hampshire, Stuart (Ed.). (1978). *Public and Private Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 183-184

⁶³ Ibid. p. 185

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 184

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 196-197

⁶⁶ Donnelly, Jack. (2013). *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*. 3rd edit. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. p. 94

multiculturalism that are commonly associated with Western liberalism. Drawing on the perception of individuals as equal and autonomous agents, Donnelly formulates what he calls a tolerant liberal neutrality. Donnelly's thoughts, like Dworkin's, are explicitly characterized by a focus on everyone's right to their own conception and pursuit of the good life. On this note, he writes:

“... I do not believe that liberals (or others) need apologize for rejecting out of hand arguments that some groups are entitled to pursue their conception of the good life at the cost of the good life, thus defined, of others.”⁶⁷

This also illustrates a skepticism toward making groups of people, rather than individuals, holders of human rights. Donnelly develops his thoughts on this in a quite detailed manner, and stresses that although he is not categorically averse to groups as rights holders, group human rights should be justified with great caution. As can be seen, Donnelly makes a distinction between group rights and group *human* rights. Since he is firmly committed to the universality of individual human rights, that they are valid all over the world, he notes that human rights for groups should also be universal. That is the very reason for his strong skepticism.⁶⁸ For if groups should have human rights, a range of complicating circumstances arises. These circumstances include questions on how we define groups that are entitled to rights, what rights they should have, if these rights are necessary and efficient, how they should be exercised and so on.⁶⁹ However, as I mentioned, Donnelly does acknowledge some contexts in which group human rights can be justified. One of those is when the self-determination of a people is at stake. Since human rights are internationally recognized, but nationally implemented, then the exercise and protection of individual's rights rely on the state within which the individuals are located. With this in mind, a situation where a group of people belongs to a state which has been imposed on the group rather than shaped by it (as in the case of colonialism) implies a right of that people to break free. This might, ironically, seem very similar to the socialist perspective above and to a certain degree it is, but there is an important difference. Make sure to note that Donnelly's justification of a group's human right to self-determination ultimately depends on the possibilities of the *individuals* that constitute that group to fully enjoy their *individual* and *universal* rights.⁷⁰ In other words, even though the state should be able to implement individual rights in its own way, it does not get to entirely exclude certain individual rights from the

⁶⁷ Donnelly, J. (2013). pp. 68-69

⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 10, 47-48

⁶⁹ Ibid. pp. 49-51

⁷⁰ Ibid. pp. 48-49

catalogue (in the interest of society). Apart from the right to self-determination, Donnelly also pays certain attention to indigenous peoples. In cases where the survival of small cultural communities faces serious threats as a result of individual rights, it can be justified to protect the group from interference by individuals of the majority. For instance, the right to property in land could be restricted for individuals that are not members of the specific community.⁷¹ However, Donnelly remains by the viewpoint that the general approach to group human rights should be one of skepticism. The *prima-facie* assumption, he suggests, should be that (primarily) the individual rights to freedom of association and non-discrimination suffice to protect the interests of even oppressed groups. Specific group human rights are only to be viewed as exceptions that prove the rule.⁷² Individual rights approaches in contexts of cultural pluralism can take several forms, Donnelly argues. For instance, non-discrimination can be ensured in various ways. It can take the form of reverse discrimination (in order to ensure the equal rights of members of particularly exposed groups), but a state can also decide to treat for example all religions identically. However, noting that these are simply different ways to implement non-discrimination, equally important for protecting people's equal pursuits of the good life (such as their culture) is ensuring the individual rights to participation and freedom of association.⁷³ The right to participation in this context is to be understood as a set of individual rights that ensure economic, social, cultural and political participation, such as the rights to work, education and freedom of speech.⁷⁴

In conclusion, then, what mainly characterizes the liberal approach to state-citizen relations in a multicultural environment is a strong emphasis on protecting the autonomy and equality of every individual. Donnelly, being a strong advocate of this approach, puts it like this:

“For all its problems, a vision of group membership as a voluntary exercise of protected individual autonomy challenges coercively imposed ascriptive identities, denies the naturalness of difference, and insists that group membership ought to be irrelevant to the concern and respect one receives from the state.”⁷⁵

3.2. The pragmatic dimension of ethnic politics – peace, democracy and development

⁷¹ Donnelly, J. (2013). pp. 49-52

⁷² Ibid. pp. 46, 52

⁷³ Ibid. p. 47

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 45

⁷⁵ Ibid. pp. 47-48

3.2.1. Democratic transition in ethnically divided post-conflict societies

As we have already established that ethnic politics is a complex and contested matter and also know that Ethiopia has a history of ethnic division and conflict, it seems fair to expect that voices are raised on the potential impact of ethnic federalism on the efficiency of Ethiopia's desired transition to democracy. It is also fair to acknowledge the possibility that such opinions may be more closely related to practical experience of the ethno-federal order than to ideological conviction. These expectations indeed appear to be reflected in the material, which motivates the following account of a line of argument oriented toward democratic transition.

Some highly relevant findings in this context can be found in David E. Kiwuwa's case-study of ethnic politics in Rwanda. Kiwuwa's research is focused on how deep ethnic division in post-conflict countries affects the process of transition to democracy. Drawing mainly on the Rwandan experience and a parallel theoretical analysis, Kiwuwa constructs a so-called integrative model for evaluating democratic transition in deeply divided ethnic societies. Given that Ethiopia can indeed be described as going through some form of democratic transition (from a conflict-ridden past), Kiwuwa's conclusions seem to offer accurate tools for analyzing transition-oriented reflections on the Ethiopian case of ethnic federalism.⁷⁶ Kiwuwa builds on the perception that unipolar societies with deep ethnic divisions and high ethnic consciousness, particularly in Africa, are likely to fail or at least face severe challenges in their democratic transition. He identifies four variables as crucial for a successful transition: unity, equality, trust and institutional engineering.⁷⁷

Addressing *unity*, Kiwuwa notes the inherent challenges in the issue that has above been expressed in terms of "who constitutes the nation". He further argues that these challenges may become increasingly palpable in times of expanding democratic space. As new possibilities appear, the political stakes are raised, sometimes leading to intense disagreements or even conflicts between different social groups. Such competition can in worst-case scenarios lead to non-democratic states where single ethnic groups reach dominance.⁷⁸ Now this is not to say that ethnic divisions always counteract transition. In fact, the diversity in some African states has proven to decrease the possibilities of establishing centralized coercive power.⁷⁹ However,

⁷⁶ For Kiwuwa's definition of transition, see: Kiwuwa, David E. (2012). *Ethnic Politics and Democratic Transition in Rwanda*. Routledge: Abingdon. p. 22

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 42-43

⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 24-25

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 25

with this said, the argument remains that some aspects of national unity are conducive to democratic transition. While national diversity can be recognized and even encouraged, there needs to be at least a sense of belonging to the same political community for the diverse social groups to coexist in a system of shared institutions. Therefore, it is of importance that the state is somewhat (politically) cohesive before the process of transition is commenced.⁸⁰

As for *equality*, Kiwuwa notes that when inequalities become structural, when they deny members of certain groups equal citizenship, the prospects of achieving democracy radically decline.⁸¹ The political system, then, must realize structural equality without for that matter failing to recognize cultural differences or forcing groups to assimilate. This in turn calls for accommodative mechanisms like the ones described earlier in this chapter, such as proportional representation, power sharing and land rights.⁸²

Moving on to *trust* and its relation to transition, Kiwuwa notes that trust is important in several ways. Both interpersonal trust, between citizens, and trust in public institutions is considered crucial. It provides the confidence in political competition that is necessary for democratic development, especially in post-conflict countries, as competition in such states is often a zero-sum game for resources and power. As for the actual meaning of trust, Kiwuwa mentions a number of established definitions, one being “... the propensity of people in society to co-operate in producing socially and politically efficient outcomes”.⁸³ On this note, Kiwuwa himself further suggests the following: “In post-conflict deeply divided societies trust is premised on three things: 1) absence of perfect information; 2) high probability of uncertainty; and 3) a history of violent confrontation.”⁸⁴ Regarding the links between democracy and trust, there is much to take into account. Apart from stating that it has indeed been supported that there is a strong relation between democratic institutions and interpersonal trust, Kiwuwa reflects on different categories of trust and their relation to transition, specifically in deeply divided ethnic societies.⁸⁵ Here, Kiwuwa mainly focuses on particularized trust, generalized trust and political trust (as it is manifested within institutions). Particularized trust can be understood as trust within localized relationships, or “in-groups”. This kind of trust tends to emerge where close relations exist on the basis of for instance ethnicity, religion or biological kinship. According to Kiwuwa, particularized trust is usually considered highly important for

⁸⁰ Kiwuwa, D. E. (2012). pp. 26-27

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 29

⁸² Ibid. p. 29

⁸³ Ibid. p. 30

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 30

⁸⁵ Ibid. pp. 31-33

transition to democracy, but in the case of deeply divided societies it can, conversely, be detrimental. The reason for this is that whereas the trust within the in-group is deep, the suspicion toward “the other groups” is strong. In other words, it does not encourage compromise between different social groups.⁸⁶ Generalized trust, however, is a wider societal trust that transcends group boundaries. Although it may be harder to establish in fragmented societies, it remains necessary for the democratic transition to proceed. For instance, the electoral process and accommodative mechanisms mentioned above require trust between the social groups whose value they are supposed to recognize, not least with regards to the degree of uncertainty and high costs of non-cooperation that Kiwuwa finds characterizing for deeply divided societies.⁸⁷ This brings us to the question of (political) trust in institutions, and eventually to the importance of institutional engineering in situations of transition. Political trust, Kiwuwa states, denotes the kind of trust that is accorded to public institutions as agents of action (as opposed to the interpersonal trust vested in individuals as agents of action). This means that groups and individuals feel that institutions are legitimate bodies for socio-political action. Granted, there are different ways to understand what generates this kind of trust, but what is firmly stated here is that it regardless plays an important role in a political system’s transition to democracy. The more confidence people have in transitional institutions the more likely are they to succeed in their mission.⁸⁸

But what kind of *institutions* are we talking about then, and how should they function in order to allow for democratization of multi-ethnic post-conflict societies? In this context, Kiwuwa puts emphasis on constitutional and electoral institutions. The shaping of these institutions is considered pivotal for the sustainability of a democratic system. As for the desired role of these institutions, there is a focus on acknowledging divisions and recognizing separate group interests, especially in the environment of intense zero-sum competition that often emerges/prevails in the early stages of transition.⁸⁹ Take for instance the formulation of a new constitution in a nation of deep ethnic divisions. A strategically formulated constitution should perhaps include not only individual rights schemes but also guarantees of collective rights to autonomy for certain communities. This could provide a more stable solid ground for democratic development, for example by preventing democratically elected majorities from imposing harmful legislation on minorities in the future.⁹⁰ Similarly, there are several electoral

⁸⁶ Kiwuwa, D. E. (2012). p. 33

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 33

⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 34-35

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 35

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 37-38

measures to take to realize accommodation of conflicting interests and values. Furthermore, such measures must be taken, as holding elections is such a fundamental part of the transition process. Without public elections, no democracy. But ethnically fragmented societies may require us to adjust for the sky-high stakes that arise when communities are to compete for power in a new political landscape. The “all or nothing” aspect of a majoritarian system comes with great risks and costs in divided nations. Kiwuwa notes that adjustments of electoral institutions that could reduce such risks include “... communal electoral rolls, reserved seats domain, ethnically mixed or mandated candidate lists and ‘best loser’ seats...”. Such measures could enhance the prospects of fair representation and power sharing.⁹¹ Naturally, the separate measures can be prioritized in a number of ways and within different systems. Kiwuwa discusses the principles of some common alternatives and notes that some encourage co-operation and voting across ethnic boundaries whereas others put more emphasis on proportional representation of ethnic groups. Finally, what Kiwuwa emphasizes is the importance of adapting the electoral system to contextual circumstances. Hence, there is no standard solution to be applied on all ethnically divided societies.⁹²

All in all, Kiwuwa concludes that deeply divided post-conflict societies with high degrees of ethnic consciousness and mobilization face a number of particular challenges in their transition to democracy. Furthermore, he suggests that his integrative model offers, although not a perfect solution, at least a foundation for successful transition in such countries. As accounted for above, paying specific and careful consideration to unity, equality, trust and institutional engineering is what this model prescribes.⁹³

3.2.2. Federalism and ethnic conflict

Another aspect of ethnic politics that seems to be quite frequently addressed in the debate concerns the implications of ethnic politics for peace and security. On this topic, it would be unfortunate not to discuss Asnake Kefale’s analysis of the Ethiopian federal project and its impact on ethnic conflict. In the above-mentioned *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict*, Asnake takes as point of departure one of the original aims of the ethno-federal project, preventing ethnic conflict, and considers why this aim was not achieved. As accounted for above, the federal project has indeed created new conflicts along ethnic lines, both within and between the

⁹¹ Kiwuwa, D. E. (2012). p. 39

⁹² Ibid. pp. 40-41

⁹³ Ibid. pp. 163-164

regional states. However, Asnake argues that it was not necessarily ethno-federal policies per se that were the issue, but rather the ways in which they were introduced, implemented and maintained. I will present Asnake's conclusions on the most important aspects to consider when federalism in multinational societies is on the agenda.

One significant mistake that Asnake identifies in the Ethiopian case is the downgrading of national citizenship, and important political rights that are related to it, in favor of ethnic identity. The fact that the new regions were designed (in a top-down manner) to match ethnic with politico-administrative boundaries had several troubling implications. Asnake points out that this redrawing of the map did not take into account that ethnicity is inconstant and variable. A significant issue was that some of the bigger ethnic groups were given their own regions, which ironically created new, non-titular, minorities in these regions. The non-titular groups have faced obstacles in achieving political influence, for instance because the federal electoral law prevents those who do not speak the local languages from standing as candidates for regional political office. Such regulations institutionalize differences in citizenship not only between but also within the regions, increasing the risk and duration of intra-regional conflict.⁹⁴ Asnake argues that what is needed for the stability of federalism, instead of politics of inclusion and exclusion, is some national sense of unity – such as an equal overarching citizenship. That, however, cannot be achieved in a nation which is not, in any substantial way, democratic. This brings us to what Asnake defines as the most crucial aspect of the failure of the Ethiopian experiment. He identifies clear connections between peaceful multi-ethnic federations and democracy as well as between authoritarianism and failed ethno-federalism.⁹⁵ The main point, I believe, is quite clearly illustrated in this quote:

“... in a democratic system, institutions like political parties, civil society organizations and the independent press positively contribute to the peaceful management of ethnic conflicts, by creating cross-cutting partnerships that surpass mere ethnic cleavages. Ethnic federalism in an authoritarian political system tends to exacerbate ethnic division.”⁹⁶

Lack of opportunity to gain influence through pluralistic political competition is likely to result in intensified rather than reduced conflict, Asnake suggests. In a political system where the power is highly centralized, such as Ethiopia under the TPLF-EPRDF, promises of regional self-determination and autonomy cannot be realized as the dominant party retains tight control

⁹⁴ Asnake, K. (2013). pp. 170-172

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 168

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 168

over the federal units. Furthermore, such circumstances counteract the establishment of such inter-ethnic political collaborations and national civil society organizations that are conducive to efficient conflict management in an ethno-federal environment. Instead, political movements may resort to armed struggle as a response to political marginalization.⁹⁷ On a related note, Asnake argues that from the Ethiopian experience, it can be seen that the contested concept of self-determination including secession, although democratically reasonable in theory, can in fact contribute to destabilizing ethnic relations. He suggests that a constitutional right to secession in combination with administrative territories drawn along ethnic divisions could encourage ethnic nationalism. In a similar fashion, it could undermine the kind of peaceful political compromise that is important to federalism. When ethnic-based secession is legally encouraged and the ruling party is unwilling to share its power, ethnic separatism, instead of peaceful inter-ethnic cooperation, is likely to be nurtured.⁹⁸

Another aspect that Asnake carefully reflects on is the choice of “ethnicity as the basic instrument for the territorial organization of the ethnic federation”.⁹⁹ Asnake identifies several problems with using ethnicity to organize the state. Communities that are characterized by mixed or overlapping ethnic identities, for instance, face serious challenges when new regional boundaries are drawn along the lines of predefined ethnicities and imposed top-down. When a new boundary is drawn through an ethnically mixed settlement, new conflicts may occur as a result of renegotiation of ethnic identity. Similarly, it can transform conflicts that were initially about land and resources into boundary conflicts with ethnic overtones. Both kinds of conflict have taken place (and still do) in Ethiopia.¹⁰⁰ There is also the issue of differences in size between ethnic populations in federal states. If regional boundaries coincide with ethnic populations, there is a risk that the bigger regions become much more influential, even dominant, resulting in an (ethnic) power asymmetry within the federation. This could also be a reason for a ruling group to cling to authoritarian methods, as democratic elections could result in the loss of centralized power over such major regions.¹⁰¹

Drawing on the Ethiopian experience, then, Asnake identifies a set of factors that are particularly important for federalism to succeed in curbing ethnic conflict. One of these goes back to the importance of some kind of national unity that transcends ethnic divisions. On this

⁹⁷ Asnake, K. (2013). p. 168

⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 49-50

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 173

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. pp. 127-128, 173-174

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 173

note, Asnake points to the importance of connecting the rights of the inhabitants to overarching citizenship rather than to ethnic identity. The condition to be located in the “right” ethnic region to be able to fully exercise one’s rights reinforces ethnic divisions and destabilizes ethnic relations. Ensuring each individual citizen their human and democratic rights as members of the state, on the other hand, counteracts ethnic otherness and promotes feelings of a shared purpose.¹⁰² This connects to another important factor: careful consideration in drawing the boundaries of the federal units. Here, as we saw above, Asnake warns against creating ethnic regions like the ones in Ethiopia, and opts for drawing the boundaries where they don’t coincide with ethnic ones. The latter solution, Asnake argues, better serves the purposes of balancing power between ethnic groups and stifling conflict and disagreement.¹⁰³ And perhaps most importantly, Asnake emphasizes the major effect the political system has on a federal project’s success in conflict management. He highlights the importance of democracy and an open political space in which multiparty competition prevails. On this note, heavy emphasis is put on the individual civil and political rights that are typically connected to democracy, such as the freedoms of speech and association. In this context, Asnake also considers procedural measures that could assist in designing peaceful federations, such as electoral systems that build on proportional representation rather than “winner-takes-all” equivalents.¹⁰⁴

In conclusion, then, Asnake points to the risks of the conflictive features of ethnic politics. He suggests that ethnic politics complicate conflict management and advises against the creation of administrative units demarcated along ethnic lines. Furthermore, Asnake emphasizes the importance of overarching national citizenship and the protection of civil and political rights for the prevalence of inter-ethnic peace.

3.3. Summary

3.3.1. Summary of the theoretical accounts

In this brief summary, I will repeat the most important features (for the purposes of this study) of the theoretical accounts. Please note that I will be a bit selective in these summaries and that this selectiveness is intentional. I will perhaps emphasize certain features of each theory more than the reader would expect. The reason for this is that these summaries will serve as foundation for the ideal types, which need to be clear and concise in order to serve as useful

¹⁰² Asnake, K. (2013). pp. 171-172

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp. 172-174

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. pp. 174-175

tools. In other words, the ambition is to demonstrate what I will primarily bring from this chapter to the following, in which I will present the method and construct the analytical tool (the ideal types) of this study.

Let us start with the *socialist* concept of human rights. This concept revolves around the sovereignty of the state and the fundamental rights of cohesive peoples (or national groups) to their own state and the resources within it. The idea is that the full right to self-determination, including complete secession, is a way of liberating groups of people from the oppression of imperialistic powers (that is, states imposed on these groups). The firm commitment to state sovereignty and the right to self-determination is connected to the notion of the interests of society as the most important concern and to the idea that the state knows what is best for its citizens. This calls for international legal protection of the collective rights to peace, self-determination and sovereignty over wealth and resources. In other words, this approach is characterized by a strong emphasis on collective rights. For only when the above rights are respected can the individual rights of the citizens be enjoyed. Furthermore, as the state's interests are perceived as representing the interests of the society (the collective), the state is trusted with designing the catalogue of individual rights and duties that should be applied to its citizens.

Moving on to the *liberal* approach. This account starts with the idea of individuals as equal and autonomous agents. The idea is that only the individual can determine her own conception of the good life, and that state decisions that favorize any such conception amount to unequal treatment of the individual citizens. For this reason, it is argued, political decisions should be neutral on conceptions of the good, such as different cultures and identities. This leads to an emphasis on a strong protection of the individual rights of equal citizens, as well as to a critical attitude to collective rights and different categories of citizenship. This approach, however, includes the notion that in some cases, the survival of certain minority groups is threatened by the individual rights of the majority population. In such cases, collective rights might be justified. However, the idea is that such rights should be limited to the absolute minimum. The general assumption should be that freedom from discrimination and the individual rights that are needed to ensure equal participation in society are sufficient to ensure the equal opportunities of all individuals (to pursue their own conception of the good life).

Then there is the perspective that is focused on democratic *transition*. This approach builds on the experience that ethnic politics complicates democratic transition in countries with a high degree of ethnic consciousness. However, this perspective also takes into account the

experience that underrating the importance of ethnic affiliation in these countries will aggravate the difficulties in achieving an efficient transition. This calls for a pragmatic way of recognizing the deeply entrenched interests of ethnic groups while also creating a sense of national unity (a sense of belonging to the same political community). The suggested approach is to focus on designing constitutions and electoral systems that are sensitive to the particular context. The idea is that constitutional reform will provide a way of guaranteeing the individual rights of citizens *as well as* the collective rights of ethnic groups. Furthermore, electoral institutions should be designed to reduce competition for power between ethnic groups in the process of transition. Instead, the institutions should be constructed so that they increase the possibilities of power sharing, proportional representation and self-governance. This approach, in other words, is supposed to offer a way of combining individual rights with collective rights and national citizenship with ethnic membership.

And finally, there is the perspective that emphasizes conflict management. This approach builds on the experience of ethnic politics as detrimental to national *peace*. It builds on the experience that ethnic-based administrative units and political competition between ethnic groups deepens divisions between such groups, which increases the risks of inter-ethnic conflict. For these reasons, this approach includes a skeptic attitude to ethnic-based group rights and ethnic-based political competition. This, in turn, is related to an experience-based skepticism toward institutionalized ethnic membership and to a preference for overarching national citizenship and individual rights. Another important feature of this approach is the creation of multi-ethnic administrative units as a method for balancing power and reducing tensions between ethnic groups.

3.3.2. Alternative theoretical perspectives

Now, I will also briefly introduce a set of theories I will *not* use in the analysis. The reason for this is that these theories have gained quite substantial influence in the international discourse on multiculturalism, but they do not seem to be represented in the material I will analyze. Moreover, they overlap to a certain degree with the theories used for the ideal types, and for that reason, I believe that including them would impair rather than improve the analysis. However, since I still believe that they could provide meaningful contributions to this particular debate, I will present them here to allow for some reflections of my own in the concluding discussion of this thesis.

First off, there is the communitarian school, which challenges the conventional liberal notions of equality, human rights and democracy. To this line of thought, Charles Taylor has made considerable contributions. Taylor addresses the liberal politics of equal respect (or dignity) and contrasts it with what he calls the politics of recognition (or difference). An important perspective Taylor brings is the notion that individuals shape their identities and become full human agents through *dialogical* development – through explicit and implicit interaction with the people in their close surroundings, their so-called significant others.¹⁰⁵ This dependency of identity on social context implies that social contexts (or cultures, if you will) deserve recognition. This, in turn, demands from the state a certain amount of protection of and support to cultural communities such as ethnic groups, and a readiness to grant collectives, apart from individuals, certain rights. The state, then, should not be neutral in its approach to culture, as the liberal tradition prescribes.¹⁰⁶

Responding to this perspective is a group of theorists that present arguments that are usually defined as social liberal. These theorists strike what I would call a middle way between the conventional liberal and communitarian lines of argument. Here, Will Kymlicka as well as David Beetham provide elaborate suggestions on how human rights can be realized in multicultural societies. Kymlicka and Beetham (in different ways) incorporate collective cultural rights in liberal conceptions of equality. Using the example of a cultural minority, Kymlicka demonstrates that special protection of specific cultural communities might in fact be needed to ensure equal opportunities for every citizen. Such special protection can take the form of collective rights that interfere with the rights of the individuals of the majority, granted that they serve the purpose of creating equal circumstances. From that point, then, all citizens will have equal opportunities to shape their lives the way they want to.¹⁰⁷ To my understanding, Beetham would agree with this, but takes it a step further. While Kymlicka proposes legal rights (and in some cases economic insurance) to protect minorities, Beetham argues that further, *procedural*, measures are necessary.¹⁰⁸ In all situations where the issue of who constitutes the political nation is not completely resolved (that is, where there is not a culturally or ethnically homogenous population), majoritarian democracy will fail to treat the citizens as equals. Beetham therefore suggests context-based measures of representation and power sharing to

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, Charles. (1994). The Politics of Recognition. In Taylor, Charles & Gutmann, Amy (Ed.). *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 31-33

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. pp. 32-36, 39-41, 58-59

¹⁰⁷ Kymlicka, W. (1991). pp. 185-187

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. pp. 199-200

Beetham, D. (1999). p. 112

ensure a fair recognition of minority cultures. His suggestions include different forms of regional autonomy, protected quotas for government employment and rotation between communities for leading offices at national level.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Beetham, D. (1999). pp. 112-113

4. Methods

4.1. Reflections on the choice of method

The aim of this study is, as stated above, to identify, describe and explain perceptions of ethnic federalism in relation to human rights and democracy in a multi-ethnic and changing Ethiopia. When analyzing opinions, ideas or ideologies, I believe it is useful to be guided by the notion that ideas exist within social contexts and can be understood as action-oriented. They relate to social institutions and aim at changing or preserving these institutions. Understanding, and thereby being able to challenge, social structures requires an understanding of the ideas they are built upon. With this approach, ideas and opinions can be viewed as tools for prescribing or stimulating certain action, such as political organization and behavior.¹¹⁰ Considering that prescribing action is the purpose of the material I will analyze, I am confident that it will be fruitful to stick to this approach.

But how exactly should we apply this approach so that it allows us to actually understand the presented opinions? First off, it is important to remember the purpose of the analysis. A common understanding of idea analyses in general is that they usually have one or more of the three following purposes: descriptive, explanatory or critical.¹¹¹ As for this study, I have no particular ambition to question or challenge the ideas I will study. Hence, this analysis does not have a critical purpose. When it comes to determining whether it is descriptive or explanatory, or both, I believe a quick review of the research questions presented above will clear the picture. The first question is to me clearly descriptive as it aims solely to describe which opinions are presented, how they are presented and how they can be interpreted. While I will argue that also the third question is mainly descriptive, it should be noted that the second question is both descriptive and explanatory. When explanatory idea analysis is defined, it should be noted that the content of the ideas has subordinate importance. The subject of analysis is rather the underlying causes of the ideas. In order to explain their progress or decline, the ideas are related to certain social developments and phenomena.¹¹² Now if we return to the second and third questions, the elements concerning ideological and pragmatic thinking are indeed related to current and historical developments in Ethiopia and other parts of the world. This has been accounted for in the theory chapter. In other words, while emphasis will remain on describing,

¹¹⁰ Bergström, G & Svärd, P-A. (2018). pp. 144-145

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 140

¹¹² Ibid. p. 142

I will attempt to do some explaining as well. With this sorted out, I will now move on to how the analysis will actually be conducted. As the study aims at describing and explaining opinions and perceptions, an important task will be to sort and categorize the opinions and perceptions. Equally important will be to identify appropriate points of reference for and substantial differences between the expressions of opinion, so that they can be compared in a constructive and systematic way.¹¹³ To achieve this, I will construct distinctive versions of lines of argument that I expect to encounter in the empirical material – so-called ideal types. This will allow me to isolate and highlight the elements that are most relevant for my research questions.¹¹⁴ And what are these elements then? What I intend to research is expressions of opinion on the ethno-federal system and its implications for human rights and democracy. Subsequently, the most relevant elements appear to be different views on how ethnic politics (and multiculturalism) relates to human rights and democracy. Therefore, this is what unites all ideal types that will be used in this study. Furthermore, the ideal types are divided into two categories of argumentation: *pragmatic* argumentation and *ideological* argumentation. This will hopefully serve as a way of reflecting what I expect to see in the material: that the debate at hand is often conducted either from clearly ideological positions or from positions characterized by practical experience of ethnic politics. Naturally, that does not exclude that some debaters argue from both positions, but it is nonetheless useful to divide the two.

Within the category of ideological argumentation, I have identified two lines of argument that I believe will be represented in the debate at hand: *the socialist* and *the liberal*. Within the category of pragmatic argumentation, I have identified two clear lines of argument that are likely to be represented: *the transition-oriented* and *the peace-oriented*. These ideal types will be described in greater detail in the final part of this chapter. However, I would now like to reflect on why they are constructed the way they are, in order to create an understanding of how they will serve their purpose. Ideal types are not to be understood as perfect definitions of what they represent or neutral descriptions of reality. When I, for instance, present an ideal type of liberal argumentation, I'm not suggesting that it reflects the true essence of liberal thinking. Neither do I attempt to provide an objective description of liberal argumentation in reality. What I do attempt, however, is to identify distinct features that are typically considered characterizing for liberal argumentation, so as to present a clarified form of liberal argumentation. The point of this is to create a point of reference – a distinct version of a set of

¹¹³ Bergström, G & Svärd, P-A. (2018). pp. 147-148

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 148

ideas to which other ideas can be compared. It allows us to measure how close a presented idea is to the clarified version and in what ways it resembles or departs from it. This way, we can understand the structures of the statements presented, and what kind of effect on social structures they are expected to stimulate.¹¹⁵

Of course, there are other ways to study ideas and opinions in written material, so allow me to account for why I chose not to use these alternative methods. My initial thought was to conduct a discourse analysis with a so-called “what’s the problem represented to be-approach” (WPR-approach). This would perhaps have been a better way of analyzing how ethnic federalism is perceived as a political and social problem and how such perceptions are created than the method I have chosen. However, a WPR-approach, or a discourse analysis in general, is often considered to be more appropriate when the researcher is looking to find *underlying* and *implicit* perceptions in the material, not seldomly with the aim of exposing power relations within the discourse or analyzing the constituent features of language.¹¹⁶ When I realized that my aim is primarily to describe and explain the logic of ideas that are *explicitly* expressed, I started to see that I should conduct an idea analysis instead. As I further understood that I (at least in this study) have no intention of exposing power relations or conducting linguistic analysis, the thought of using an idea analysis seemed even more appealing.

With this said, there are naturally some risks with conducting an idea analysis in general and with using ideal types in particular. These risks deserve some attention. The most significant challenge in idea analysis is constructing analytical tools that are precisely enough strict. For instance, an ideal type that is too sharply defined might tempt the researcher to “force” the material to fit within the confines of the ideal type. This can have negative consequences for the validity of the study, since it makes it difficult to actually measure what is supposed to be measured. On the contrary, an ideal type that is too general in its structure will not offer enough support in the analysis.¹¹⁷ In other words, it will be important to construct ideal types that are clearly demarcated from each other without being specified to the point of losing their analytical value. If they overlap to an extensive degree, the reliability and replicability of the study will be jeopardized, and if they are too wide in their scope, they will lose their precision.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Bergström, G & Svärd, P-A. (2018). pp. 147-149

¹¹⁶ Bergström Göran & Ekström, Linda. (2018). Tre diskursanalytiska inriktningar. In Bergström, G & Boréus, K. pp. 254-256, 271

¹¹⁷ Bergström, G & Svärd, P-A. (2018). pp. 169-170

¹¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 155-156

Finally, I have some notes on the issue of transparency. This is a study based on interpretations of written material, which means that there are always reasons for the reader to suspect that the interpretations are affected by subjectivity. Furthermore, one might also suspect that relevant parts of the material are excluded from the analysis. In order to avoid these suspicions to the greatest extent possible, I will try to make my analysis transparent by thoroughly motivating my interpretations and by supporting these motivations with citation of the material.¹¹⁹

4.2. Connection between theory and analysis

Now, as the theoretical accounts above may sometimes appear to revolve around different topics, my ambition here is to clarify precisely why they are important for my analysis. In this section, I will also repeat and isolate the most important features of the separate theories, in order to specify the ideal types that will constitute my analytical tool. To do this, I will take as point of departure a structure that serves the purposes of 1) connecting to my research questions, and 2) showcasing how the theories differ from and resemble each other. Allow me to start with identifying this structure. Although ethnic politics is not paid equal amount of focus within all the theoretical accounts, each theory does allow for reflection on a number of factors that I believe are crucial in understanding opinions on ethnic politics (which is what we are trying to do here). First off, each theory, on the basis of either ideological or pragmatic arguments, presents human rights protection in multinational/multicultural contexts as somewhat of a problem that needs to be fixed. Wherein the actual problem lies, however, is contested. This factor can thus be described as a description of the problem of human rights protection in multinational states. Secondly, each theory provides reflections on how a state should approach different, and often conflicting, cultures within its confines. Thirdly, they all include discussions on what categories of membership (for instance: citizenship) should be formalized within a multicultural nation. A fourth discussion they all contribute to, which is tightly connected to the third one, is what kinds of rights the inhabitants of a multicultural nation should be entitled. Fifthly, they all provide somewhat of a general, concluding, approach to how differences in culture and nationality within a nation should be handled by the state in relation to the promotion of human rights and democracy.

Of course, each theory includes other factors that might be relevant for ethnic politics, and they might even have more such factors in common. However, the reason I have chosen the five

¹¹⁹ Bergström G. & Boréus K. (2018). Samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys. In Bergström G & Boréus K. pp. 40-41

factors above to define the ideal types is that they, apart from being appropriate for describing the theories, also correspond to the research questions that this study is supposed to answer. Let us revisit these questions to make this clear. Let us begin with the first question.

- How is ethnic federalism assessed as a way of handling the multi-ethnic population of Ethiopia?

This question, the way I hope it is understood, seeks to answer whether or not the debaters view the ethno-federal system as an appropriate or inappropriate (or neither) way of dealing with issues of cultural diversity in Ethiopia. It is basically a matter of problem description. To put it in even briefer terms, it is a question about whether this system is viewed as good or bad. Naturally though, it goes deeper than that. Ethnic federalism in this context is an expression of identity politics, with emphasis on *ethnic* identity, in a multinational country. Subsequently, this is also a question about the state's approach to and handling of the interests of, and differences between, the various ethno-cultural communities. Should the state be neutral or selective in its approach to these differences? Should it protect all cultures equally or some cultures specifically? Or should it simply protect no culture at all? With this noted, let us move on.

- What perceptions of the relations between ethnic politics, human rights and citizenship motivate the assessments of ethnic federalism? How can these perceptions be explained in the light of ideological and pragmatic reasoning?

These questions start where the previous one ends. Perhaps, they even overlap. In the first of these two parts, we consider which ideas and perceptions motivate the opinions on the state's approach to the multi-ethnic population. What thoughts about social membership and human rights protection precede the presented opinions? What rights should people be granted and how should these rights be implemented? Should they be ensured equally for all or differently with regard to group identity? Should individuals or collectives be prioritized? Should the population be categorized as citizens of the nation state or as members of different national communities within the state? In the second part, in turn, we are looking at a closer examination of the foundation of these ideas. Is it an ideological or pragmatic foundation? Are the arguments philosophical or based on experience, or both? Allow me to carry on.

- Regarding nation building and democratization in this multi-ethnic context, what ways forward are suggested, and how do these suggestions relate to the presented 1)

perceptions of human rights and citizenship, and 2) ideological and pragmatic arguments?

This question clearly connects to the fifth defining factor of the ideal types: the general approach to human rights protection and democratic development in multicultural societies. Answering this question will serve the purpose of connecting the findings of the preceding questions. After analyzing opinions on citizenship, rights and state-culture relations – from both ideological and pragmatic points of view – we will here investigate the opinions on what path Ethiopia should choose to promote human rights and democracy in the multi-ethnic society. We will also analyze how these opinions are related to ideological and pragmatic arguments.

4.3. Analytical tool – definition of ideal types

Now that I have hopefully provided a clear view of how the theory will allow us to understand the empirical material, I will demonstrate precisely how the theory will be applied in the analysis. In other words, I will now deconstruct the theories according to the structure described above, in order to define the ideal type of each theoretical perspective. Subsequently, this section is based on the summary of the theoretical accounts in the theory chapter. I demonstrate one ideal type at a time, starting from the top.

The first of the two ideological perspectives is *the socialist perspective*. This is, as mentioned, characterized by a strong emphasis on collective rights, self-determination and national groups of people.

The socialist perspective

Problem description

National groups of people are oppressed by imposed superior states. This constitutes a violation of these peoples' right to self-determination.

View on the state's approach to culture

The state should allow for the secession of national groups on which the state has been imposed.

View on membership

Emphasis on the importance of membership in national groups.

View on human rights

Collective rights prevail over individual rights.

General approach

Strong protection of the collective rights to peace, self-determination and sovereignty over

wealth and resources. Strong international protection of state sovereignty over implementation of individual rights.

The second ideological ideal type is *the liberal perspective*. This is characterized by a strong emphasis on individual rights, non-discrimination and equal citizenship. It also advocates that the state remains neutral to different conceptions of the good life, such as cultures and identities.

The liberal perspective

Problem description

Identity politics violates the autonomy and equality of individuals.

View on the state's approach to culture

The state should be neutral in its approach to culture.

View on membership

Emphasis on the importance of equal citizenship.

View on human rights

Strong emphasis on the protection of equal individual rights. Acceptance of collective rights only in exceptional cases.

General approach

Strong protection of equal individual rights. Focus on non-discrimination and freedom of association and participation as measures of ensuring equal opportunities. Protection of a limited amount of collective rights in cases of exception.

The first pragmatic ideal type is *the transition-oriented perspective*. This is characterized by an ambition of creating national unity while recognizing ethnic identification. This is to facilitate an efficient democratic transition. It is also characterized by the combination of individual and collective rights and its emphasis on adapting to the context.

The transition-oriented perspective

Problem description

Ethnic politics in ethnically divided societies complicates the process of democratic transition.

View on the state's approach to culture

The state cannot be neutral in its approach to culture since this would overlook the deeply entrenched nature of ethnic identity.

View on membership

Ambition of combining national citizenship with institutionalized ethnic membership.

View on human rights

Emphasis on combining collective rights with individual rights.

General approach

Emphasis on combining individual rights of citizens with collective rights of ethnic groups.

Focus on both constitutional and electoral reform. The reforms should aim at facilitating self-governance of ethnic groups as well as a certain degree of political participation on the basis of national citizenship. This includes the reduction of zero-sum political competition between ethnic groups.

The second pragmatic ideal type is *the peace-oriented perspective*. This is characterized by a skepticism toward collective rights, ethnic administrative units and ethnic-based political competition. It is also characterized by the advocacy of multi-ethnic regions as a way of balancing power between ethnic groups.

The peace-oriented perspective

Problem description

Ethnic politics is detrimental to inter-ethnic peace.

View on the state's approach to culture

The state should be neutral to culture to the greatest extent possible.

View on membership

Preference for national citizenship over institutionalized ethnic membership.

View on human rights

Emphasis on the protection of individual rights. Skepticism toward collective rights.

General approach

Emphasis on the protection of civil and political rights. Focus on creating multi-ethnic administrative units and avoiding ethnic-based political mobilization.

5. Analysis

The analysis is structured so that each research question is accounted for in its own section. Subsequently, this chapter is divided into three main sections. Each main section, in turn, is structured by the main division between ideology and pragmatism and further divided by the ideal types. I have used the ideal type structure to code each article in the material in order to present the analysis in a systematic way. Naturally, the ideal types I have constructed do not perfectly frame every important aspect of the content of the material, since they are uniform categories. As mentioned in the method chapter, people's views are seldomly as standardized as ideal types, and some views reflected in the material have proven to fall outside the scope of the ideal types almost entirely. However, and this has also been noted earlier, views and opinions can be analyzed by their proximity to the defining features of the ideal types. This is what has made the categorization of the material, which will naturally be accounted for below, possible. Moreover, a given article can indeed contain opinions that correspond to two or more ideal types. It is possible, for instance, that a debater has a liberal problem description and a transition-oriented general approach. This, however, is not an issue, since the objects of analysis are the *opinions* that are present in the debate, not the debaters that hold these opinions. With this said, I have paid certain attention to multi-faceted articles of such kind in the coding of the material. Finally, some articles mainly consist of arguments that lack sufficient proximity to any ideal type to be coded as either liberal, socialist, peace-oriented or transition-oriented. In order not to arbitrarily force this material into the ideal-types, I will account for these opinions under the headlines "other ideological perceptions/approaches" and "other pragmatic perceptions/approaches". For even if some arguments do not correspond to a specific ideal type, one can at least evaluate if they are derived from ideological or pragmatic reasoning.

5.1. Perceptions of ethnic federalism

In this section, the first research question is the topic at hand. Here, then, I will account for the perceptions of ethnic federalism as a measure of handling the multi-ethnic population that are presented in the material. As previously noted, this is a question about problem descriptions and of the state's approach to cultural diversity. Which is the point of departure for the people involved in the debate? Is ethnic federalism an adequate or an inadequate way of handling the multi-ethnic population?

5.1.1. Ideological perceptions

- Liberal perceptions

Among the debaters that reflect on ethnic federalism from an ideological point of view, the liberal approach is clearly the most common. A few of the articles analyzed contain problem descriptions and views on the state's approach to culture that lie close to the ideal liberal views. In an article written by Christian Tesfaye in *Addis Fortune*, the suggested state approach to culture even significantly resembles the ideal type equivalent. Christian is deeply critical of the ethno-federal system and the ethnicization of politics it entails, and explicitly advocates that the state should assume a neutral approach to cultural diversity within the nation:

“Ethnicity should be treated in the same manner that religion was with the secularisation of the state. Citizens can choose to affiliate themselves with any lingo-cultural group of their choice, but the state should not have anything to do with it. It should not be used to demarcate regions or in choosing who gets to run public institutions.”¹²⁰

It should be noted that Christian's general problem description is mainly pragmatic, pointing to the conflictive features of ethnic federalism.¹²¹ With this said, the very firm commitment to state neutrality is closer to the liberal perspective, I would argue, since the peace-oriented perspective is slightly more flexible on that note (even though it advocates neutrality to the extent possible).

A similar approach can be identified in Belayneh Begajo's article in *The Reporter*. Belayneh argues that the Ethiopian political system has undermined the rationality in individual thinking by promoting political mobilization along the lines of ethnic groups and suggests that “politics should be an individual game not an identity-based group game”.¹²² Both accounts bear noteworthy resemblance to the liberal notion of individuals as autonomous agents pursuing their own conceptions of the good, and with the liberal emphasis on state neutrality that such autonomy requires.

Furthermore, there are other debaters than Christian Tesfaye who combine liberal with pragmatic arguments in their description of the problem. We will have the opportunity to review

¹²⁰ Christian, Tesfaye. (2018). A State Divided. [Electronic] *Addis Fortune*. October 6. Available: <https://addisfortune.net/columns/a-state-divided/> [2019-05-13]

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Belayneh, Begajo. (2018). Identity-based group political thinking is the wrong path for nation building. [Electronic] *The Reporter*. December 22. <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/identity-based-group-political-thinking-wrong-path-nation-building> [2019-05-13]

the pragmatic arguments below, so focus here will be on the liberal arguments. Teshome M. Borago's opinions illustrate a combination of perceptions quite well in an article in *Borkena*. Teshome starts by noting that ethnic federalism has caused conflicts throughout the country and then looks at the problem from a liberal point of view. This problem description can be summarized by a quote of two brief sentences:

“This Ethnic federalism policy is not only a threat to peace, but it is also an antithesis to democracy and individual liberty. It has institutionalized ethnic apartheid and a permanent underclass.”¹²³

Here, we can identify, in the first sentence, a perception of ethnic federalism as detrimental to individual liberty and, in the second sentence, a statement that implies that the policy leads to inequality between citizens – both defining features of the liberal perspective. A similar combination of peace-oriented and liberal views can be seen in an article written by Dula Abdu, who expresses almost identical liberal arguments.¹²⁴ An increasingly diverse problem description can be found in an article by Derese G. Kassa. Addressing the possibilities of the “the pro-democracy unity camp” to positively affect the political development in Ethiopia, Derese presents opinions that could at least be interpreted as liberal. For instance, he writes that the ethnic federalism has been detrimental to the individual freedoms and liberties of Ethiopians and their common national identity. With this said, his formulations only imply that he is leaning toward state neutrality, and his problem description is based on pragmatic arguments as well.¹²⁵

- Socialist perceptions

Rather surprisingly, nowhere in the material is the basic perception of the ethnic federalism based on clearly socialist reasoning. No article contains an argumentation that takes as point of departure the fundamental collective right to self-determination *and* describes the ethno-federal system as an adequate way of organizing the country, its politics and its population.

- Other ideological perceptions

¹²³ Teshome M., Borago. (2019). Adwa and Abiy's mixed message on federalism in Ethiopia. [Electronic] *Borkena*. February 24. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/02/24/adwa-and-abiys-mixed-message-on-federalism-in-ethiopia-by-teshome-m-borago/> [2019-05-14]

¹²⁴ Dula, Abdu. (2019). Dr. Abiy Kill Kilil today, not tomorrow. [Electronic] *Borkena*. February 21. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/02/21/dr-abiy-kill-kilil-today-not-tomorrow-dula-abdu/> [2019-05-14]

¹²⁵ Derese G., Kassa. (2018). Three strikes and Patriotic Ginbot 7 should go home! A Rejoinder to Dr. Berhanu Nega's Address. [Electronic] *Borkena*. May 25. Available: <https://borkena.com/2018/05/25/three-strikes-and-patriotic-ginbot-7-should-go-home-a-rejoinder-to-dr-berhanu-negas-address/> [2019-05-18]

In a quite theoretical article published in *Borkena*, Kebour Ghenna appears to identify a problem constituted by a lack of philosophical creativity in the national discourse on ethnic federalism. He criticizes both nationalists and those advocating ethnic politics for not reflecting on the prospects of a post-national state characterized by openness and inclusiveness. Although the arguments are mainly philosophical, there is no real connection to either of the ideological ideal types. This, I believe, is clearly illustrated by the following quote:

“Why is it we can’t reflect on what a modern postnational state should look like. By postnational state read a country with no core identity, no exclusionary space, say, an Ethiopia that accommodates any resident born anywhere in Ethiopia, together with new comers from Africa and the world.”¹²⁶

5.1.2. Pragmatic perceptions

- Peace-oriented perceptions

In a recent article in *Borkena*, Dawit Woldegiorgis presents a view on ethnic federalism that is probably the most distinct representation in the material of the ideal peace-oriented problem description. Dawit argues that Prime Minister Abiy and his government has failed to act on recent and spreading violence and even raises concerns over a potential eruption of civil war. The primary cause for this highly unstable and volatile situation, Dawit argues, is the ethnic politics of the EPRDF regime:

“Ethnic politics has been bleeding the country and now there are fears that the country might collapse. The leaders and the elites knew that the ethnic politics that has been institutionalized by the ruling party, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) for the last 28 years was the single cause of discontent and disenfranchisement that brought the country now to its knees.”¹²⁷

This problem description can be found in yet another article written by Dawit Woldegiorgis, published shortly after the appointment of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister.¹²⁸ A similarly alarming view is shared by Dula Abdu in the article in which he also presents liberal views.

¹²⁶ Kebour, Ghenna. (2019). Ethiopia: Where are we heading? [Electronic] *Borkena*. May 5. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/05/05/ethiopia-where-are-we-heading-by-kebour-ghenna/> [2019-05-21]

¹²⁷ Dawit, Woldegiorgis. (2019). Ethiopia: A Country on the Brinks. [Electronic] *Borkena*. April 10. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/04/10/ethiopia-a-country-on-the-brinks-by-dawit-woldegiorgis/> [2019-05-15]

¹²⁸ Dawit, Woldegiorgis. (2018). The beginning of the end for the TPLF: The Death Knell. [Electronic] *Borkena*. April 14. Available: <https://borkena.com/2018/04/14/the-beginning-of-the-end-for-the-tplf-the-death-knell-dawit-woldegiorgis/> [2019-02-21]

Dula focuses on the conflictive features of the ethno-federal system and, like Dawit, points to the fact that similar systems have resulted in genocide in other countries.¹²⁹ This view is explicitly presented in a number of formulations, including the following quote, which reflects on both the conflictive features and the state's approach to cultural diversity:

“Ethiopia will face genocide and will disintegrate like Yugoslavia unless Dr. Abiy says enough is enough and gets rid of Kilel and return Ethiopia to its old traditional provincial system or states without solely relying on ethnic boundaries where governors and mayors will be elected by the people without any consideration to their tribe or religion simply based on the content of their character and leadership to govern.”¹³⁰

I would argue that the last part of the quote is an example of the view that culture, here in the shape of ethnicity or religion, should be removed from the political sphere, or at least from the electoral part of politics. This then implies at least a certain degree of state neutrality to culture, similar to the ambition of the peace-oriented ideal type reasoning.

Moving on, there are peace-oriented articles containing problem descriptions that are very clearly anchored in local and specific experiences of ethnic federalism. Damo Gotamo, in an article published this year, writes about the effects of ethnic politics in the multi-ethnic city Awassa in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region. In a clearly upset tone, Damo argues that ethnic federalism has led to an incompetent and corrupt local rule dominated by the ethnic group Sidama, which constitutes only a small part of the city's population. Not unlike Dula, Damo means that both conflict and political injustices are results of ethnic politics:

“Citizens in Addis Ababa, Awassa, Dire Dawa and other cities have been living under constant fear and mercy of ethnic extremists. People who were born in these cities have been treated as second and third citizens by people who are unfamiliar to a city living.”¹³¹

Damo continues by arguing that the Sidama hegemony in Awassa has developed to frequent misuse of power, causing harassment, conflict and displacement of members of other ethnic groups.¹³² Similar, although not as alarming, argumentation is presented in an article by Netsanet Fekade, in which she focuses on both democratic transition and peace, with a stronger

¹²⁹ Dula, A. (2019-02-21)

Dawit, W. (2019-04-10)

¹³⁰ Dula, A. (2019-02-21). *Kilel* is an Amharic word that translates to “protected area” and refers to the ethnic federal regions of Ethiopia.

¹³¹ Damo, Gotamo. (2019). Awassa too Belongs to its Residents! [Electronic] *Borkena*. April 8. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/04/08/awassa-too-belongs-to-its-residents-by-damo-gotamo/> [2019-15-16]

¹³² Ibid.

emphasis on the latter. Netsanet contrasts the Ethiopian political system with that of Ghana and highlights that Ghana – also a multi-ethnic country – is one of the most peaceful countries on the continent. A significant difference between the two countries, Netsanet notes, is that Ghanaian law prohibits political membership and campaigning based on ethnic affiliation, whereas the Ethiopian constitution could be perceived as encouraging it. She further highlights the establishment of ethnically mixed boarding schools as a way of creating bonds that transcend ethnic divisions.¹³³ In other words, she argues that the Ethiopian way of making ethnicity a defining feature of politics has been detrimental to peace, whereas the Ghanaian approach, in which ethnicity is removed from the political system, is conducive to peace.

As mentioned above, there are articles in which peace-oriented arguments are combined with liberal ones. One clear example is Christian Tesfaye’s article in which he expresses an apparently liberal view on state neutrality (which is accounted for above). This article is actually mainly characterized by a description of ethnic federalism as a system that creates inter-ethnic conflict over resources.¹³⁴ Similarly, Keadu Mekonnen has a peace-oriented point of departure but reflects on the state’s approach to culture and membership from a clearly liberal point of view. The following quote, I would say, is a testimony of his significantly pragmatic and peace-oriented problem description:

“Destruction and mayhem follow wherever identity based political puritanism is installed, regardless of its ideological origin. Humanity has played this dangerous game over the course of the 20th Century; the right-wingers played it in Nazi Germany; and the leftists throughout the communist bloc. All what that produced is a pile of corpses estimated to be in hundreds of millions.”¹³⁵

Keadu argues that ethnic-based political mobilization in Ethiopia is an expression of such “identity based political puritanism” and, all too clearly, points to its destructive features.¹³⁶ Addisu Admas, in an article titled “From Ethnocentric to Ideological Parties”, argues in a comparable way. Addisu suggests that the tribal mindset of the ethnic-based parties formed within the ethno-federal system triggers feelings of resentment and animosity between ethnic

¹³³ Netsanet, Fekade. (2019). Ethiopia: Political ethnocentrism is the antithesis of nation building. [Electronic] *Borkena*. January 10. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/01/10/ethiopia-political-ethnocentrism-is-the-antithesis-of-nation-building-by-netsanet-fekade/> [2019-05-16]

¹³⁴ Christian, T. (2018-10-06)

¹³⁵ Keadu, Mekonnen. (2018). The New Era of Transformation and the Elephant in the Room. [Electronic] *Addis Standard*. September 5. Available: <https://addisstandard.com/opinion-the-new-era-of-transformation-in-ethiopia-and-the-elephant-in-the-room/> [2019-05-17]

¹³⁶ Ibid.

groups, leading to conflict and destabilization. Addisu also argues that their very existence is based on the state's failure to meet the fundamental demands of the ethnic groups of the country – a problem that in turn stems from a poorly crafted constitution.¹³⁷

In two articles published within a short period of time earlier this year, Kebour Ghenna presents two different, peace-related, problems with ethnic federalism. In one of the articles, he points to the worrying indications of conflicts caused by ethno-nationalism in the past and warns that the upcoming elections will consolidate ethnic-based sovereignty in the federal regions, leading to repression of ethnic minorities within each region.¹³⁸ This problem-description, then, is slightly transition-oriented as well as it notes the risks of ethnic-based competition for power in the new political landscape. Although he presents similar descriptions, Kebour goes further in his argumentation in the other article. There, he suggests that the destructive and dominant features of ethnic politics have erased the space for ideologically motivated forces to compete politically.¹³⁹

- Transition-oriented perceptions

Two articles stand out in the material as the most apparent examples of transition-oriented approaches to ethnic federalism. Both articles are written by Messay Kebede and published in *Ethiopia Observer*. In each article, the point of departure is a pragmatic attitude to the significance of ethnicity in Ethiopian politics and the challenges it forms on the country's path to democracy. Although he acknowledges that ethnic divisions may inhibit the effects of democratic reforms, he also notes that one cannot simply disregard deeply entrenched ethnic identities. Messay stresses the importance of understanding the conflict-ridden context and writes the following regarding Prime Minister Abiy's ambitious reform agenda:

“Under his reassuring and uplifting vision, most people lost sight of the deep and numerous problems besieging Ethiopia after the 27 years of the divisive, corrupt, and ethnic-centered rule of the TPLF.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Addisu, Admas. (2018) From Ethnocentric to Ideological Parties. [Electronic] *Borkena*. October 21. Available: <https://borkena.com/2018/10/21/ethiopia-from-ethnocentric-to-ideological-parties/> [2019-05-18]

¹³⁸ Kebour, Ghenna. (2019). Some tough decisions needed. [Electronic] *Borkena*. January 26. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/01/26/ethiopia-some-tough-decisions-needed-by-kebour-ghenna/> [2019-05-21]

¹³⁹ Kebour, Ghenna. (2019). If not careful, we can lose Ethiopia. [Electronic] *Borkena*. March 26. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/03/26/if-not-careful-we-can-lose-ethiopia-by-kebour-ghenna/> (2019-05-21)

¹⁴⁰ Messay, Kebede. (2019). Assessing the One Year of Abiy's Premiership. [Electronic] *Ethiopia Observer*. April 8. Available: <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2019/04/08/assessing-the-one-year-of-abiy-s-premiership/> [2019-05-14]

He further argues that even though ethnic-based administrative divisions have caused (and still cause) ethnic conflicts and constitute democratization hurdles, the state would fail if it turned completely neutral to ethnic affiliations and the interests they entail.¹⁴¹ This argumentation, I would argue, is strikingly similar to the ideal transition-oriented problem description and its approach to cultural diversity. This approach, as defined above, prescribes context-sensitive recognition of ethnic differences by the state, which is what Messay appears to be advocating in both articles.¹⁴² He presents similar views in a number of other articles, also in *Ethiopia Observer*. Although these are not as strikingly transition-oriented, they are all anchored in a tolerant approach to the historical presence of ethnic identification in Ethiopian politics.¹⁴³ In one of these articles, in which he addresses a research paper on Ethiopian democratization, Messay writes:

“As stated above, the article questions the viability of a pan-Ethiopian ideology on the ground that identification with ethnic and populist demands determines, whether one likes it or not, political legitimacy in today’s Ethiopia.”¹⁴⁴

In one of the other articles, he further elaborates on the challenges ethnic politics poses to the implementation of the pan-Ethiopian agenda he associates with the Prime Minister and his reformist party wing. He identifies conflicting mechanisms in the ambition of democratically uniting the country within the confines of ethnic politics.¹⁴⁵

Other perceptions of ethnic federalism that revolve around the democratic development of Ethiopia are expressed by Abdissa Zerai. Abdissa argues that political systems dominated by ethnic-based parties tend to have a negative impact on democracy. The argument is that the politization of ethnicity reduces citizens’ electoral choices to the interests of their ethnic groups. However, in a country like Ethiopia – that is, a country with a high degree of ethnic

¹⁴¹ Messay, K. (2019-04-08)

¹⁴² Ibid.

Messay, Kebede. (2018). On Transitional Government and Ethnic Federalism. [Electronic] *Ethiopia Observer*. August 3. Available: <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2018/08/03/on-transitional-government-and-ethnic-federalism/> [2019-05-14]

¹⁴³ Messay, Kebede. (2018). The Rise of Abiy Ahmed and the Janus-Faced Nature of “Abiymania”. [Electronic] *Ethiopia Observer*. September 8. Available: <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2018/09/08/the-rise-of-abiy-ahmed-and-the-janus-faced-nature-of-abiymania/> [2019-05-21]

Messay, Kebede. (2019). Charisma: Is it a Path for Ethiopia? [Electronic] *Ethiopia Observer*. February 14. Available: <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2019/02/14/charisma-is-it-a-path-for-ethiopia/> [2019-05-18]

Messay, Kebede. (2019). Addis Ababa: Drawing a Line in the Sand of Ethnic Politics. [Electronic] *Ethiopia Observer*. March 12. Available: <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2019/03/12/addis-ababa-drawing-a-line-in-the-sand-of-ethnic-politics/> [2019-05-18]

¹⁴⁴ Messay, K. (2019-02-14)

¹⁴⁵ Messay, K. (2019-03-12)

consciousness – it is a complicated process to abolish or reform the ethnic system.¹⁴⁶ This reminds us of the acknowledging approach to the significance of ethnicity that is a defining feature of the transition-oriented ideal type.

Reflecting on the prospects of the Ethiopian general elections planned to be held in 2020, Tadesse Melaku presents similar opinions in an article in *Borkena*:

“The upcoming election is likely to be divisive and bitterly fought and ethnic politics is likely to become the main campaign strategy. Most political parties are ethnic-based and, in view of this, divisive messages about past grievances, real or perceived, are hard to avoid.”¹⁴⁷

These opinions, I believe, mirror the warning the transition theory provides regarding the “all-or-nothing” aspect of majoritarian elections in deeply divided post-conflict societies. It is an example of a problem description that recognizes the risks of zero-sum competition between social groups in the early stages of transition. Similar cautions, for the record, are expressed in an article written by Mebratu D. Kelecha and published in *Addis Standard*.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, there is Aklilu Abraham Adeye’s article in *The Reporter*, in which he mainly focuses on the divisive features of ethnic affiliation in countries in transition. Aklilu notes that ethno-lingual and cultural affiliation is likely to remain important in Ethiopian politics and points to the importance of adapting the transition to that notion.¹⁴⁹ In other words, he presents a pragmatic attitude to the high degree of ethnic consciousness in Ethiopia while also noting that it creates challenges on the road to democracy.

- Other pragmatic perceptions

In one of these articles, Kebour Ghenna assumes a position “outside of the box” and suggests that a major problem is the lack of direction in the national debate about the ethno-federal

¹⁴⁶ Abdissa, Zerai. (2018). Ethiopia’s best step forward is to integrate ethnic parties in diverse alliances. [Electronic] *Ethiopia Observer*. July 19. Available: <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2018/07/19/ethiopias-best-step-forward-is-to-integrate-ethnic-parties-in-diverse-alliances/> [2019-05-14]

¹⁴⁷ Tadesse, Melaku. (2018). Why We Must Reform the Constitution Before Elections? [Electronic] *Borkena*. August 17. Available: <https://borkena.com/2018/08/17/why-we-must-reform-the-constitution-before-elections-tadesse-melaku/> [2019-05-14]

¹⁴⁸ Mebratu D., Kelecha. (2019). Daunting challenges meet Ethiopia’s promising reforms. [Electronic] *Addis Standard*. January 18. Available: <https://addisstandard.com/opinion-daunting-challenges-meet-ethiopias-promising-reforms/> [2019-05-21]

¹⁴⁹ Aklilu Abraham, Adeye. (2018). Mapping major milestones and directions for political reforms. [Electronic] *The Reporter*. August 25. Available: <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/mapping-major-milestones-and-directions-political-reforms> [2019-05-18]

system, and appears to argue that this leads to a lack of direction in the actual development as well. For instance, he writes:

“With that background nothing meaningful will happen to change the current ethnic based discourse, or to put a brake on the slide towards ethnic centered nationalism. We already know that ethnic attachment in Ethiopia is deepening not diminishing, while efforts at preserving the nation state also persist along with it.”¹⁵⁰

He goes on to note that ethnicity offers a way of advancing interests as well as a basis for struggling to maintain or achieve advantages in society. In other words, he presents a pragmatic attitude to the prevalence of ethnic affiliation as basis for political mobilization. With this said, although he implies a skepticism toward ethnic federalism, he does not clearly state what he advocates himself.¹⁵¹

Another problem description that is hard to analyze with the constructed ideal types is found in a response to an article by Dawit Woldegiorgis, which is mainly peace-oriented. Tibebe Samuel Ferenji, addressing Dawit’s rather alarming article, presents his views on a range of issues in the political situation of Ethiopia. Regarding the ethno-federal system, he simply notes that it is dangerous and backward without specifying the reasons for this. In a rather pragmatic manner, he also argues that if people are bothered by recruitment of public officials from ethnic-based parties, then the people has to decide on replacing the ethnic politics with a citizen-based political system.¹⁵² Contrary to this, Messay Kebede argues in an *Addis Standard* article that there is a problem in choosing between the two distinct systems of ethnic federalism and civic nationalism, since each system could aggravate current conflicts.¹⁵³

Yet another article containing critical views on ethnic federalism that are hard to place is written by Christian Tesfaye and published in *Addis Fortune*. Christian argues that the experiences of other African countries show that ethnic politics is harmful and detrimental to nation building,

¹⁵⁰ Kebour, Ghenna. (2018). Ethnic Identity and National Loyalty – Conflicting Direction. [Electronic] *Borkena*. August 18. Available: <https://borkena.com/2018/08/18/ethiopia-ethnic-identity-and-national-loyalty-conflicting-direction-by-kebour-ghenna/> [2019-05-21]

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Tibebe Samuel, Ferenji. (2019). Facts why Ethiopia does not fit the “Failed State” Status: Response to Major Dawit, Woldegiorgis: (Part 2). [Electronic] *Borkena*. May 6. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/05/10/facts-why-ethiopia-does-not-fit-the-failed-state-status-response-to-major-dawit-woldegiorgis-part-2/> [2019-05-21]

¹⁵³ Messay, Kebede. (2018) Where to be: On the right or left of Abiy? That is the question. [Electronic] *Addis Standard*. October 11. Available: <https://addisstandard.com/opinion-where-to-be-on-the-right-or-left-of-abiy-that-is-the-question/> [2019-05-21]

without emphasizing any specific part of nation building. What characterizes the article is the criticism of ethnonationalism, and a sustained trust in nationalism as an alternative:

“The fact that nationalism is driving the national discourse may not be the worst idea. It is the lesser of two evils, the other one being ethnonationalism – a concept that is narrower, more selective and highly toxic in a country with so many lingo-cultural groups.”¹⁵⁴

Additionally, there is an article by Teshome Abebe in which ethnic federalism is presented as “... destructive, injurious...” and “... devastating to the nation’s unity.”¹⁵⁵ Teshome does not, however, go into detail on the experiences rendering these perceptions. Finally, a similarly diverse and pragmatic problem description is discernable in a recent article by Aklog Birara in *Borkena*.¹⁵⁶

5.2. Perceptions of human rights and membership

In this section, our focus lies on the second research question. This means that we are looking closer at the perceptions of the relation between ethnic politics and human rights protection. It mainly concerns opinions about what categories of rights should be prioritized and how the population should be categorized in a multinational state. We also examine how these opinions can be explained by their origin, by analyzing the degree of pragmatism and ideological reasoning behind the opinions.

5.2.1. Ideological perceptions

- Liberal perceptions

If we revisit Belayneh Begajo’s article in *The Reporter*, we can find a textbook example of the liberal approach to membership in the nation. Belayneh, throughout the article, attaches great importance to individual freedom and advocates building society on rational individual decisions, with formulations such as the following:

¹⁵⁴ Christian, Tesfaye. (2018). Nationalism Can Help Us Find the Light. [Electronic] *Addis Fortune*. July 7. Available: <https://addisfortune.net/columns/nationalism-can-help-us-find-the-light/> [2019-05-21]

¹⁵⁵ Teshome, Abebe. (2018). As its rivers flow, so does the future of Ethiopia! [Electronic] *Borkena*. December 10. Available: <https://borkena.com/2018/12/09/as-its-rivers-flow-so-does-the-future-of-ethiopia/> [2019-05-21]

¹⁵⁶ Aklog, Birara. (2019) Ethiopia’s Policy Log Jam: Why I urge Prime Minister Abiy to leave a lasting legacy. [Electronic] *Borkena*. May 15. Available: <https://borkena.com/2019/05/15/ethiopias-policy-log-jam-why-i-urge-prime-minister-abiy-to-leave-a-lasting-legacy-aklog-birara-dr/> [2019-05-21]

“Individual citizen based approach is [the] way forward for Ethiopia’s future. Individuals are assumed rational in their thinking and decisions and they have freedoms to take any personal actions with accountability. Life by design is individual.”¹⁵⁷

This is as close as it gets to the liberal ideal type in terms of views on citizenship. Moreover, as we can clearly see, it is an argument that is based on philosophical reflections on the nature of human beings and not on a pragmatic approach to previous experiences. It is a formulation strikingly similar to the reflections on individual autonomy found in for instance Dworkin’s and Donnelly’s works. With this said, Belayneh is not as detailed in his views on what kinds of rights should be granted within the citizen-based political approach he advocates. He simply notes that there needs to be national consensus on a range of issues including identity rights, without specifying further whether such rights are for instance collective or individual.¹⁵⁸ More or less the same can be said about the arguments presented by Teshome M. Borago in the article mentioned above. Teshome reflects on Ethiopian nationalism and contrasts “the spirit of Adwa”¹⁵⁹ with the tribal mindset of ethnic federalism. He argues that this spirit was an example of the civic nationalism he advocates, which builds on citizen-based democratic institutions as opposed to the institutionalization of ethnic membership. In other words, he wishes to replace the division into different (ethnic) categories of citizenship with one nationwide citizenship. As for his rights approach, one can suspect that he is skeptical of collective rights given his emphasis on civic nationalism and individual liberty, even though it should be noted that he does not make any such arguments explicitly.¹⁶⁰

Yet another liberal view on rights and nationality is expressed by Ashalew Aberra in an article about expectations of privileges for ethnic Oromos in Addis Ababa. Ashalew calls for constitutional amendment to abolish the practices of affirmative action and special privileges for collectives. He writes:

“To mention some of the articles in the constitution such as the one that allows secession of regions, the preamble that defines Ethiopians as a conglomerate of ethnic groups as opposed

¹⁵⁷ Belayneh, B. (2018-12-22)

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ “The spirit of Adwa” refers to a national spirit of inter-ethnic unity which is associated with the 1896 battle of Adwa, in which Ethiopia defeated the Italian colonial forces and put an end to the First Italo-Ethiopian war. Landguiden. (2016-06-07). *Etiopien*. Available: <https://www.ui.se/landguiden/lander-och-omraden/afrika/etiopien/> [2019-05-17]

¹⁶⁰ Teshome M., B. (2019-02-24)

to individuals born with inalienable rights, and the article that allows the Oromos to have special privileges in the capital city should immediately be discarded.”¹⁶¹

A more apparently ideological reflection on state membership can be identified in Keadu Mekonnen’s previously mentioned article. Discussing ways of structuring the state, Keadu presents philosophical arguments that resemble the liberal argument that group membership ought to be irrelevant for the state’s treatment of its citizens. He argues that the primary “unit” that should be recognized by the state is the individual, not the group in which the individual is a member:

“... if one needs a concise view of the world and our proper place in it, the most plausible view is one predicated on the idea that the individual is of intrinsic value: it isn’t the view which gives precedence to the notion that you’re a member of a tribe although in many ways you are.”¹⁶²

In other words, then, what Keadu seems to be suggesting is that the state should not be organized around the ethnic groups with which individuals are affiliated. Instead, focus should be on the equal citizenship in the nation that all individuals, irrespective of ethnic belonging, have the right to. Keadu further underlines this view when he writes that ethnic-based political parties need to be prohibited for “... a genuine civic solidarity to take root in Ethiopia...”¹⁶³

An article that, perhaps quite surprisingly, contains implied preference for individual, citizen-based, rights protection at the expense of the protection of ethnic groups is Derese G. Kassa’s otherwise transition-oriented article. Reflecting on the prospects of constitutional amendment, Derese writes:

“We all know how flawed and controversial many of the provisions in this constitution are. To mention a few, sovereignty rests on Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and not individual citizens.”¹⁶⁴

With this said, Derese does not explicitly dismiss the practice of granting groups rights or special status – a practice that, as we have established, lies closer to the transition-oriented ideal type.

¹⁶¹ Ashchalew, Aberra. (2018). It is high time that people should start making real demands. [Electronic] *Borkena*. July 17. Available: <https://borkena.com/2018/07/17/it-is-high-time-that-people-should-start-making-real-demands-aschalew-aberra/> [2019-05-17]

¹⁶² Keadu, M. (2018-09-05)

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Derese, G. K. (2018-05-25)

- Socialist perceptions

Looking at the perceptions of human rights and membership in the material, socialist views remain strikingly absent. Merely in one of the articles can arguments on state membership that appear somewhat socialist be found, and it should be noted that the resemblance is not obvious. The article, written by Aklilu Abraham Adeye and otherwise mainly transition-oriented, contains opinions on several areas of reform in the new political environment. As for the ethno-federal system, Aklilu argues that Ethiopia's current regions and its definition of ethnic groups as "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" does not adequately match the size, composition and interests of the country's diverse identity groups. He argues, for instance, that some ethnic groups in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNP Region) have the size and historical cohesion to form their own regional states, given current conditions. With this said, Aklilu does not firmly advocate the preservation of regionalization along ethnic lines. However, neither does he directly oppose it. And it appears as if he suggests that in case the Ethiopian population democratically decides to maintain the ethno-federal order, this order should be anchored in a commitment to the self-determination and autonomy of groups formed by shared culture and ideology. One of several formulations that point to this is the following:

"... the new political order should be prepared for at least two paths or trajectories in the "SNNP" amorphous region as well as beyond. One path is the maintenance of current identity-based through a Democratic Nationalist desire for self-rule within the framework of a pluralistic political system."¹⁶⁵

This emphasis on the protection of self-determination of cohesive national groups, as we have established, is a feature that characterizes the socialist view on membership and rights protection within the country. To conclude, however, that is where the similarities between Aklilu's reflections and the socialist perspective end.

- Other ideological perceptions

Some views on membership in the state that are quite unique in this material are presented in the above-mentioned article by Kebour Ghenna. Discussing the vision of a post-national state and an alternative to civic nationalism and ethnic membership, Kebour writes:

"By postnational state read a country with no core identity, no exclusionary space, say, an Ethiopia that accommodates any resident born anywhere in Ethiopia, together with new

¹⁶⁵ Aklilu A., A. (2018-08-25)

comers from Africa and the world. [...] Indeed, a new model of another way of belonging.”¹⁶⁶

These thoughts do not appear to be derived from previous experiences, but from philosophizing (on conceptions of citizenship) that takes place outside the confines of ideal type liberalism and socialism.

5.2.2. Pragmatic perceptions

- Peace-oriented perceptions

Looking at opinions on rights and membership, Addisu Adma’s article is a good example of how such opinions can build on peace-oriented problem descriptions. Addisu argues that the reason ethno-centric parties exist is because ethnic groups have to struggle for their fundamental cultural demands to be met. He further suggests that if the constitution was designed to ensure the protection/survival of these groups, there would be no reason to form ethnic-based parties:

“To be more specific, if their fundamental demands involve the maintenance and protection of their ancestral land, language, culture and self-governance within a federal system of government that guarantees their overall rights and duties as citizens of Ethiopia, I am not sure how they could justify their very *raison d’être* at all.”¹⁶⁷

Addisu does not provide a detailed description of how these demands should be met, although the above quote implies that some sorts of collective rights should be granted. However, it also appears as if he suggests keeping such rights at minimum, in favor of individual citizen-based rights. Furthermore, this perception of national unity as superior to parochial interests permeates the article. Discussing the replacement of ethno-centric parties with parties informed by ideology, Addisu writes:

“It will also create a sense of unity of purpose and solidarity among groups who are not bound by ethnic ties, but by ideas and shared goals.”¹⁶⁸

This corresponds to the skepticism toward politicization of ethnicity and the trust in overarching citizenship that comes with the peace-oriented approach. An even clearer example of this is

¹⁶⁶ Kebour, G. (2019-05-05)

¹⁶⁷ Addisu, A. (2018-10-21)

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

constituted by the concluding remarks of Christian Tesfaye's article "A State Divided". Reflecting on the conflictive features of ethnic-based struggle for resources, Christian argues:

"Civic nationalists ought to be able to argue that any citizen has the right to have a say over all the resources of the nation without dismissing individuals' choice to identify with any group."¹⁶⁹

Other peace-oriented arguments for equal citizenship are, although not explicitly expressed, rather apparent in Dula Abdu's article in *Borkena*. Dula likens ethnic federalism to apartheid and argues that it is the "anathema to democracy, individual rights and nation building".¹⁷⁰ Dula's argumentation clearly shows an emphasis on the importance of individual rights, and the comparison with apartheid reveals an aversion to ethnic-based distinction between citizens. Moreover, his conclusion that anything but an abolishment of the ethno-federal system will cause further bloodshed demonstrates the pragmatic foundation of his arguments.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Netsanet Fekade's argumentation seems to contain an experience-based desire to replace the special status of Ethiopia's ethnic groups with a regained sense of national unity. This can especially be seen in her reflections on the establishment of ethnic federalism:

"National identity was relegated. Ethnic groups and their right to self-determination took prominence in the 1995 Constitution. Regional boundaries were re-demarcated along ethnic lines. This led to further division and violence."¹⁷²

Similar skepticism toward the rights of the cultural groups of Ethiopia can be seen in Kebour Ghenna's mainly peace-oriented articles.¹⁷³

Yet another perception of ethnic federalism as creating an unjustified division between citizens is presented by Damo Gotamo. In a formulation I quoted when analyzing his problem description, he argues, in a highly critical way, that ethnic-driven conflicts have created second and third citizens.¹⁷⁴ Granted, this does not necessarily mean an opposition to all kinds of collective rights and privileges of ethnic groups, but it does indicate a positive attitude to equal citizenship.

¹⁶⁹ Christian, T. (2018-10-06)

¹⁷⁰ Dula, A. (2019-02-21)

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Netsanet, F. (2019-01-10)

¹⁷³ Kebour, G. (2019-01-26)

Kebour, G. (2019-03-26)

¹⁷⁴ Damo, G. (2019-04-08)

- Transition-oriented perceptions

The transition-oriented opinions on rights and membership, as defined in the ideal type, build on an approach that is more open to institutionalized ethnic membership as a complement to national citizenship. Once again, Messay Kebede's reflections provide textbook examples. Addressing those who advocate the complete abolishment of ethnic federalism, Messay writes the following:

“... the explanation for the difficulties that Abiy is facing in his attempt to reform the Ethiopian society is his reluctance to take the bull of ethnic federalism by the horns and replaces it by a political system centered on citizenship rather than ethnicity. As tempting as this solution is, it is heedless of the deep-seated nature of ethnic identity in Ethiopia.”¹⁷⁵

In another article, Messay, in a similar fashion, suggests that there is no way of achieving Ethiopian unity without also giving due recognition to ethnic identity.¹⁷⁶ In order to strike a balance between national unity and ethnic identity, Messay proposes a system where ethnic-based regional elections are combined with national (universal) elections of a politically and symbolically influential president. This president could for instance appoint the Prime Minister, who would execute the policies of a parliament which is appointed through the regional elections and thus ethnically proportionate. This, Messay argues, would be a way of combining individual with collective rights, recognizing Ethiopians as citizens of the country *as well as* members of ethnic groups. This would in turn facilitate a more efficient democratic transition.¹⁷⁷ Similar perceptions can be identified in Abdissa Zerai's discussions on how to handle the high degree of ethnic consciousness that characterizes Ethiopia's political system. Among other things, Abdissa notes that a great deal of the Ethiopian population lives in small countryside communities where ethnic ties are strong, which makes it difficult to simply dismiss ethnic-based political mobilization altogether. Instead, Abdissa suggests that a way of recognizing ethnic affiliation without obstructing the democratic development could be to facilitate the formation of multi-ethnic integrative parties. Such parties, by having multi-ethnic leaderships, would be characterized by long-term and accommodating political ambitions, as opposed to narrow-minded group-based ones. Although this implies a tolerant attitude to a certain degree of ethnic-based membership, Abdissa does not elaborate on his views on rights

¹⁷⁵ Messay, K. (2019-04-08)

¹⁷⁶ Messay, K. (2018-08-03)

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

Messay, K. (2019-04-08)

protection and citizenship. What is clear, however, is his pragmatic and transition-oriented perspective, neatly illustrated in the following formulation:

“Overall, at this critical juncture, it appears that focusing on the formation of such integrated yet diverse groupings is the most practical progressive step.”¹⁷⁸

Yet another transition-oriented article that appears to contain tolerant views on ethnic membership is Tadesse Melaku’s piece in *Borkena*. Tadesse discusses ways of including the people in a revision of the constitution, in order to reach consensus on issues regarding (among other things) self-determination and human rights protection. Although he notes that the ethno-federal system, for instance through collective rights such as the right to secession, complicates the transition process, he suggests that ethnic-based group interests should not be overlooked. For this reason, he proposes setting up roundtable discussions through which the people can agree on constitutional matters that divide ethnic-based parties. On this note, he writes:

“... the federal constitution must be revised if it is to serve the functions of limiting power and safeguarding rights of citizens and communities.”¹⁷⁹

This, he argues, would reduce the risks of ethnic-based zero-sum competition in the upcoming national elections.¹⁸⁰

As in the case of general opinions on ethnic federalism, Messay Kebede maintains a transition-oriented line of argument regarding rights protection and membership. This means that there are more articles than the above quoted in which Messay promotes the combination of collective and individual rights.¹⁸¹ However, since the arguments are more or less identical to the ones analyzed a few paragraphs above, I will not give them a detailed presentation. I believe the following quote –which contains Messay’s reflections on an establishment of the above described presidential system – will suffice:

“In this way, identity politics will have its representation in the parliament while it is at the same time transcended by a presidential power incarnating pan-Ethiopianism.”¹⁸²

- Other pragmatic perceptions

¹⁷⁸ Abdissa, Z. (2018-07-19)

¹⁷⁹ Tadesse, M. (2018-08-17)

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Messay, K. (2019-02-14)

Messay, K. (2019-03-12)

¹⁸² Messay, K. (2019-02-14)

In the articles that are not clearly anchored in specific ideal type problem descriptions, it has proved difficult to discern “clear” views on rights and membership as well. An exception from that pattern is Christian Tesfaye’s article in which he presents nationalism as a practical alternative to ethno-nationalism. In this article, Christian writes:

“Nationalism could serve a positive purpose as long as individual rights are protected. Patriotic feelings can be realised by creating consensus around hot-button issues such as the official language, administrative demarcations and the right to secede.”¹⁸³

Christian seems to combine a basic preference for citizen-based enjoyment of individual rights with a pragmatic attitude to meeting the collective demands of ethnic groups. Similarly sustained pragmatism is also discernable in one of Kebour Ghenna’s less uniform articles.¹⁸⁴

5.3. Ways forward

In this the final section of the analysis, the focus will be directed toward the concluding parts of the articles. The aim is to answer the final research question. What we are looking for then is suggested general approaches, or solutions if you will, to the matter of handling the multinational Ethiopian population in this time of political transition. How should human rights be ensured and the population organized for the country to become more just and more democratic? How are the suggested approaches connected to pragmatic and ideological reasoning? These are the matters at hand here. In other words, I will map the suggested ways forward in the material and connect the findings with the findings of the previous sections.

5.3.1. Ideological approaches

- Liberal approaches

In the four articles¹⁸⁵ that contain mainly liberal arguments in general – and liberal views on human rights protection and citizenship in particular – there seems to also exist consensus on which reforms are needed going forward. First of all, each writer firmly argues that the

¹⁸³ Christian, T. (2018-07-07)

¹⁸⁴ Kebour, G. (2018-08-18)

¹⁸⁵ Teshome M., B. (2019-02-24)

Belayneh, B. (2018-12-22)

Aschalew, A. (2018-07-17)

Kebadu, M. (2018-09-05)

constitution needs amendment or replacement. The main targets are the articles and formulations (of the constitution) that grant sovereignty, self-determination and self-rule to the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia. These are in general perceived as important features of the ethno-federal system which, according to the liberal arguments, undermines human rights enjoyment and democratic participation based on equal national citizenship. For instance, Keadu Mekonnen poses the rhetorical question:

“If I, for example, pledge no allegiance to any given nation, nationality or people (as defined in ethno-linguistic lines), would there still be a conceptual place where my value of being an individual with inviolability can be preserved?”¹⁸⁶

He further advocates the prohibition of political parties based on ethnic membership. This opinion is shared by Belayneh Begajo, who argues for the formation of national (ideologically informed) political parties, and also attaches importance to establishing common national goals on the areas of democracy and human rights, including identity rights.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, it should be noted that Teshome M. Borago, apart from advocating civic nationalism in a liberal manner, proposes that the current ethnic-based regions are abolished in favor of “small geographic regions tailored to local realities on the ground”.¹⁸⁸

In other words, we can see a general focus on protecting the rights of individuals as equal citizens of Ethiopia as opposed to protecting ethnic groups by means of special status and collective rights. Moreover, in two of the articles, emphasis on the importance of non-discrimination and equal participation is explicitly expressed.¹⁸⁹ Belayneh Begajo puts it all too clearly:

“... identity-based group political thinking consciously takes an irrational path to achieve its exclusive goals. Group thinking is by its nature temporary, artificial, inherently irrational, discriminatory, and is dangerously the wrong path for nation building.”¹⁹⁰

The above formulation is a good example of a feature that these articles have in common: the ideologically derived opinion that individual rights tied to national citizenship is the right way forward for Ethiopia.

¹⁸⁶ Keadu, M. (2018-09-05)

¹⁸⁷ Belayneh, B. (2018-12-22)

¹⁸⁸ Teshome M., B. (2019-02-24)

¹⁸⁹ Belayneh, B. (2018-12-22)

Aschalew, A. (2018-07-17)

¹⁹⁰ Belayneh, B. (2018-12-22)

- Socialist approaches

Yet again, socialist argumentation is absent throughout the material. Although one could perhaps, with an excessively flexible approach, interpret some suggested policies as leaning slightly toward socialism, any such interpretations would likely be more misleading than clarifying.

- Other ideological approaches

Once again, this category is represented solely by the article written by Kebour Ghenna, in which he encourages reflections on what a post-national Ethiopia would look like. It is safe to say that in this article, no apparent general approach is discernable. It appears as if Kebour simply wants to initiate more broad-minded discussions on the alternatives to the divisive ethno-federal system.¹⁹¹

5.3.2. Pragmatic approaches

- Peace-oriented approaches

Several of the articles consisting of mainly peace-oriented arguments contain general approaches that, as one could expect, resemble the liberal ones. In general, what is prescribed in these articles is the abolishment or thorough revision of ethnic federalism. In several of these articles, calls for a new or amended constitution are made.¹⁹² Moreover, two of these hold arguments regarding constitutional amendment that are explicitly based on making or keeping peace among ethnic groups. Whereas Addisu Admas argues that a constitution which meets the fundamental demands of ethnic groups (in terms of preservation of land, culture and self-governance) will render ethnic politics (and struggle) redundant, Netsanet Fekade suggests holding national elections before any constitutional revisions are made. Netsanet raises concerns over amending the constitution in this unstable situation, and points to the risks of further violence:

“As eager as I am to see the Constitution and electoral laws reviewed with respect to ethnic issues, the timing may not be conducive. It could be the spark that would set the country

¹⁹¹ Kebour, G. (2019-05-15)

¹⁹² Dawit, W. (2019-04-10)

Netsanet, F. (2019-01-10)

Addisu, A. (2018-10-21)

Kebour, G. (2019-01-26)

ablaze. Perhaps, a more effective approach will be to work on shifting mind-sets first. Once elections are held in 2020 and we have the first democratically elected parliament, questions of constitutional review must be raised.”¹⁹³

Dula Abdu argues in a peace-oriented way but does not focus on constitutional reform – at least not explicitly. However, he is clear on the point of abolishing regional design along ethnic lines and advocates a return to Ethiopia’s “old traditional provincial system or states”.¹⁹⁴

Moving on, Christian Tesfaye notes that the prevalence of ethnic mobilization should not simply be erased, but firmly argues that neither should ethnicity provide basis for regional demarcations or appointment to public offices. As mentioned in the first section of this analysis, Christian’s commitment to state neutrality is so firm that it might be interpreted as closer to the liberal view than to the peace-oriented, but his point of departure in the experiences of inter-ethnic conflict is the reason why I define his general approach as pragmatic.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, several debaters share an advocacy for arranging public dialogues on the way forward, not seldomly regarding constitutional amendment and the withdrawal of ethnocentric politics. Two of the articles keep the door open for inviting international mediators in a worst-case scenario.¹⁹⁶ In three other articles, there are pronounced calls for the prohibition of ethnic parties altogether.¹⁹⁷ In connection with most of these arguments, there is a focus on reducing conflict or maintaining the peace that does exist. Finally, several writers express, in different degrees of clarity, the need for strengthening national citizenship as a measure of granting people their rights.¹⁹⁸

- Transition-oriented approaches

¹⁹³ Netsanet, F. (2019-01-10)

¹⁹⁴ Dula, A. (2019-02-21)

¹⁹⁵ Christian, T. (2018-10-06)

¹⁹⁶ Dawit, W. (2019-04-10)

Dawit, W. (2018-04-14)

Kebour, G. (2019-03-26)

Aklog, B. (2019-05-15)

Messay, K. (2018-10-11)

¹⁹⁷ Dula, A. (2019-02-21)

Kebour, G. (2019-01-26)

Addisu, A. (2018-10-21)

¹⁹⁸ Aklog, B. (2019-05-15)

Damo, G. (2019-04-08)

Dula, A. (2019-02-21)

Christian, T. (2018-10-06)

As for transition-oriented approaches, there are solutions presented in the material that are very much aligned with the ideal type approach. These are, once again, found in the writings of Messay Kebede. Messay, throughout all but one of his articles in *Ethiopia Observer*,¹⁹⁹ proposes a combination of ethnic-based regional self-governance with a trans-ethnic presidential system. This approach – which would require revision of the constitution and reform of the electoral system – is based on his notion of ethnic identification as too deeply rooted in the Ethiopian society to be removed from the political sphere. Also noting, however, that ethnic politics tends to complicate democratic transition, Messay argues that the option he advocates is (among other things) a way of relieving tensions between ethnic groups in times of political change. It enables, Messay argues, the expression of both individual and group rights.²⁰⁰ I believe his entire approach is well summarized in the following paragraph:

“If one accepts the fact that ethnicity is now part of Ethiopian political landscape but also wants to merge it with a non-ethnic national identity, the way to bring about this conversion is to design a political system such that ethnic politics gives birth to a trans-ethnic federal system. In this regard, I refer my readers to some of my previous articles in which I argued in favor of the establishment of a strong presidential power by universal suffrage while retaining the ethnic political structure at the regional level.”²⁰¹

This, I would argue, could basically be used to define the transition-oriented ideal type. It is a distinct example of a context-sensitive and experience-based combination of constitutional and electoral measures which aims at facilitating democratic transition through promoting national unity and protecting cultural group rights.

Indeed, not all lines of argument are as streamlined as Messay’s, but there are more that are sufficiently characterized by a focus on transition to be included in this category. Abdissa Zerai, for instance, proposes replacing mono-ethnic political parties with integrative multi-ethnic dittos, thereby reducing the anti-democratic features of ethnic politics without neglecting ethnic-based group interests. The following quote is a good example of his arguments:

¹⁹⁹ Messay, K. (2018-09-08). I believe the lack of elaboration on the presidential system in this article has to do with its generally retrospective character.

²⁰⁰ Messay, K. (2019-04-08)

²⁰¹ Messay, K. (2018-08-03)

“... at this stage, it seems prudent to encourage the formation of multi-ethnic integrative parties in order to blunt the destructive edge of ethnic nationalism, so laying the groundwork for a gradual shift to a more civic- and ideology-oriented politics.”²⁰²

In this quote one can also discern a positive attitude to an eventual establishment of a somewhat liberally informed political system. With this said, Abdissa does not elaborate on his thoughts on the civic politics he mentions. Moreover, there are two other articles in which the suggested approaches are only to a certain degree transition-oriented. These approaches resemble each other since they both include a focus on public deliberations and amendment of the constitution. One of these articles, written by Tadesse Melaku, contains an emphasis on creating an interim constitution before elections are held in the new political climate. This is to agree on the terms of the election, which could otherwise lead to a competition for power between ethnic groups. The best way to achieve such constitutional amendment, Tadesse argues, would be to arrange all-inclusive roundtable discussions between the government and the opposition.²⁰³ On the benefits of such roundtable discussions, Tadesse also makes some ideological arguments. One of the principles of such discussions, he writes, is the concept known as “the veil of ignorance”.²⁰⁴ This concept was elaborated by John Rawls in his highly influential work *A Theory of Justice*. It can briefly be described as a social liberal conception of equality and has inspired Ronald Dworkin and Jack Donnelly (and many others) in their reflections on equality. With this noted, the connection to the transition-oriented ideal type approach is mainly the focus on the actual process of transition, and the emphasis on designing electoral and constitutional institutions to reduce zero-sum competition. However, what is primarily absent in this regard is a clear advocacy of rights granted to ethnic groups. Derese G. Kassa argues in a similar way. He opts for all-inclusive national dialogue on a number of topics, including evaluation of the top-down imposed constitution. This, Derese suggests, could pave the way for a referendum to be held on an amended constitution, which in turn would create better conditions for the next democratic elections to be legitimate, free and fair.²⁰⁵

Another rather transition-oriented approach can be identified in Aklilu Abraham Adeye’s (arguably slightly socialist) article. Aklilu opts for both electoral and constitutional reform while also keeping the door open for maintaining an ethnic-based system. Aklilu is highly critical of the division of the population into Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (NNP’s) but is

²⁰² Abdissa, Z. (2018-07-19)

²⁰³ Tadesse, M. (2018-08-17)

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Derese G., K. (2018-05-25)

not categorically opposed to democratically anchored self-rule of ethnic groups. Reflecting on the NNP definition, he writes:

“They should be modified or scrapped altogether and replaced by a term that is equitable and culturally and ideologically appropriate for Ethiopia and the specific identity groups.”²⁰⁶

Aklilu reflects on the possibilities of reorganizing the regions so that they are better aligned with the experiences of cultural, social and political cohesion of the country’s ethnic groups. This then, would require reforms of both constitution and electoral system, and would hopefully lead to a political system that is sensitive to the Ethiopian, multicultural, context. The following quote illustrates his analysis quite well:

“Subsequently, Proportional or plurality electoral system is unavoidable political requirement befitting Ethiopian reality and for fair, equitable and inclusive political system in today's Ethiopia. Winner takes all system becomes more appropriate for a unitary state and society.”²⁰⁷

Then there are transition-oriented articles in which the suggested way forward is elaborate in general but not very specific on the issue of ethnic federalism. Mebratu D. Kelecha’s piece in *Addis Standard* is one such article. Mebratu proposes an extensive package of reforms covering the justice system, the civil society and the legislative and executive bodies, but he does not describe in detail his visions for the ethnic-based political system. In fact, one of the few things he suggests on this note resembles the peace-oriented approach. Encouraging the Prime Minister to maintain peace and order, he writes:

“It also helps create a sense of citizenship and belonging to a political community without political affiliation or membership in ethnic communities, which will have a positive effect on reducing tensions.”²⁰⁸

- Other pragmatic approaches

One approach that is completely unique in this material is presented by Teshome Abebe. In Teshome’s article, he expresses his support of a proposal formulated by the researchers Engidashet Bunare (water engineer) and Shiferat Lulu (hydrogeologist). Their proposal is based

²⁰⁶ Aklilu A., A. (2018-08-25)

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Mebratu D., K. (2019-01-15)

on the results of a recent study of theirs, in which they state that “ethno-language” was never a defining feature of the administrative regions of Ethiopia before the introduction of ethnic federalism. Their own approach proposes the creation of “hydrological physical regions” based on the river basins of the country. Their argument, according to Teshome, is that this would “enhance development and integration of the Ethiopian people”, and Teshome agrees with this.²⁰⁹ In other words, he presents a very pragmatic approach that is not clearly connected to either peace or democratic transition.

Furthermore, there are two articles that both have a focus on the conflict between national and ethno-national identity in Ethiopia but lack a clear connection to any of the ideal types. In both articles (written by Christian Tesfaye and Kebour Ghenna), an approach is presented that includes national discussions on issues regarding ethnic group rights, power sharing and administrative demarcations. Kebour’s idea of the discussions is that they could create a foundation for designing a new constitution.²¹⁰ Moreover, Tibebe Samuel Ferenji, who does not present a cohesive general approach, is open for discussions on and revisions of the constitution. However, he argues that public discussions should be based on a revision conducted by an independent commission – something that should not be organized now, but under the authority of a democratically elected government.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Teshome, A. (2018-12-10)

²¹⁰ Christian, T. (2018-07-18)

Kebour, G. (2018-08-18)

²¹¹ Tibebe S., F. (2019-05-06)

6. Results and conclusions

6.1. Results

In this chapter, I will summarize the findings of the analysis by answering one research question at a time. This time, I will not use the ideal types to divide the sections as I believe it would prevent me from presenting the results in a somewhat lucid way. Without further ado, let us begin with the first question.

- How is ethnic federalism assessed as a way of handling the multi-ethnic population of Ethiopia?

To begin with, the most apparent and present perception in the material is a negative attitude to ethnic federalism. Not a single article contains an entirely positive perception of this system, and a fair amount of the articles contain highly critical views. On this point, it is interesting to note that, contrary to what could perhaps be expected, quite few articles contain an explicitly expressed opposition to the state being active/selective (as opposed to neutral) in its approach to culture within its boundaries. Given the prevalence of negative views on ethnic federalism in general, one could expect that positive attitudes to state neutrality would be more present and apparent. The indications that they are not can perhaps be explained by the small share of clearly ideological argumentation in the material, as it is rather apparent that pragmatic argumentation dominates this part of the debate. That is, the criticism of ethnic politics is mainly anchored in negative experiences of its implementation in Ethiopia, and not necessarily in a categorical dismissal of ethnic politics in general. With this said, ideological argumentation in general and liberal argumentation in particular is clearly existent. This part of the material, I would say, is the most cohesive. As expected, most of the pronounced advocacy of state neutrality is found here.

A result that deserves special attention is the unexpected lack of socialist perceptions in the material. Indeed, it could be argued that liberalism is more dominant in the international discourse on human rights and democracy, but it is still somewhat surprising that there is not a single writer who defends the ideological principles on which ethnic federalism was founded. This could have to do with the dissatisfaction with ethnic federalism that permeates the material. But in that case, would it not be possible to defend the ideological foundation and point to

practical issues regarding the implementation of the system when discussing its potential failures? However, I do not have sufficient support to draw any conclusions on this note.

Returning to the negative perceptions, it should also be noted that one can discern different degrees of negativism in the problem descriptions. The liberal problem descriptions present a highly critical view of ethnic federalism since they build on principles that firmly advise the state against interfering in matters of culture. Furthermore, most of the peace-oriented reflections present ethnic federalism as a dangerous political system. However, these are not as clearly connected to general opinions on the state's approach to culture. Furthermore, most of the least negative perceptions of ethnic federalism are found in the transition-oriented problem descriptions. These are, as expected, slightly more tolerant to a non-neutral state approach to culture. Often, the (very pragmatic) argument is that although it does make the transition more difficult, ethnic-based political mobilization and competition is a natural result of the deeply entrenched ethnic identities of the country. This profound identification with ethnic groups is in turn quite often presented as a result of the ethno-federal system.

Finally, it should also be noted that there are perceptions of ethnic federalism that are not in line with any of the ideal types. These are mainly pragmatic since they are generally anchored in experiences of the ethno-federal system. However, it is difficult, at least with this analytical tool, to discern a clear emphasis on a certain phenomenon in these descriptions of the problem. Naturally, it would be terrific if the analytical tool was constructed by ideal types that could be applied to analyze every single part of the material. However, it is hard to achieve that and at the same time present the material in an accurate way, that is, without forcing the ideal types on the material.

- What perceptions of the relations between ethnic politics, human rights and citizenship motivate the assessments of ethnic federalism? How can these perceptions be explained in the light of ideological and pragmatic reasoning?

First off, there seems to be a rather clear connection between the highly critical perceptions of ethnic federalism and a skeptic attitude to collective rights and special status for certain groups of the population. These connections are most visible in the liberal argumentations, but they are also discernable in some of the peace-oriented parts of the material. The parts of the material that lie close to the liberal ideal-type generally suggest that ethnic politics is characterized by an inability to treat individual citizens equally or fairly. In the description of ethnic politics as a major national problem, the liberal argumentation typically points to its negative impacts on

individual autonomy, liberty and rights. These phenomena are more efficiently realized by the means of equal citizenship and non-discrimination, it is argued.

In the articles that are mainly peace-oriented, the attitudes to individual versus collective rights and national citizenship versus ethnic membership are not always as clear. In general, what can be seen in the peace-oriented argumentation is an implied skepticism to dividing the population in different categories by the means of ethnic politics. This skepticism is typically seen when the writers argue that such division creates conditions for inter-ethnic conflict. However, there are also peace-oriented parts of the material where a rather tolerant attitude to some collective rights (such as rights to land, language and culture) can be discerned, in a few instances to a higher degree than expected.

In the transition-oriented argumentation, ethnic politics is often portrayed as challenging yet necessary for the protection of people's rights in countries like Ethiopia. Something that is significantly more apparent in the transition-oriented parts of the material is a confidence in the possibility of combining national citizenship with institutionalized ethnic membership. This view also includes a positive attitude to combining individual and collective rights. The argument is that no sustainable democratic system will be reached without a certain degree of national unity, while at the same time, a complete depoliticization of ethnicity would be detrimental to the protection of group interests that are deeply rooted in the Ethiopian society. The transition-oriented articles are rather uniform and streamlined, like the liberal ones, despite the pragmatic foundation. A possible explanation to this is that a substantial part of the mainly transition-oriented articles is actually written by one person (Messay Kebede). Whereas this particular writer is an ideal type transition-oriented debater, there might actually exist more conflicting views within the transition-oriented approach.

Furthermore, worth mentioning is that there are rights and membership views presented that bear resemblance to the socialist concept of human rights. These are constituted by a seemingly firm commitment to the right to self-determination of historically cohesive groups in the multi-ethnic federation of Ethiopia. With this noted, however, these perceptions are only implied and appear in merely one article. Moreover, there is only one article that contains ideological (or at least non-pragmatic) reflections on membership that are neither liberal nor socialist. These reflections are not particularly elaborated.

Perhaps, it should also be noted that the pragmatic argumentations form the bigger part of the debate, and that peace-oriented and transition-oriented opinions are about equally common. As

for the parts of the material that are pragmatically oriented yet lack an orientation toward peace or transition, it is hard to discern views on the relations between ethnic politics, human rights and citizenship. The exception from this is two articles in which negative attitudes to ethno-nationalism are expressed.

- Regarding nation building and democratization in this multi-ethnic context, what ways forward are suggested, and how do these suggestions relate to the presented 1) perceptions of human rights and citizenship, and 2) ideological and pragmatic arguments?

Some of the most common opinions in this material are calls for revision, amendment or replacement of the current constitution. Constitutional reform is undoubtedly, and understandably, perceived by many as a crucial issue in the current political situation of Ethiopia. Most of the articles that are firmly critical to the ethno-federal system – in general liberal and peace-oriented articles – propose amendment of, if not the entire constitution, the parts of the constitution that establish the sovereignty and special status of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of the country. The typically suggested alternative is a constitution that is more focused on the protection of the individual rights of equal citizens. This view is represented in the transition-oriented set of approaches as well, although not to the same extent. What is particularly interesting about the opinions about the constitution, however, is that calls for its revision are made within all lines of argumentation. It should also be noted that these opinions are not always based on the content of the constitution, but also on its undemocratic nature. This leads us to another part of the suggested approaches – inclusive deliberation on the political system. Different kinds of dialogues are suggested in several articles, especially on the topics of constitutional and electoral reform. An interesting finding on this note is that deliberation is significantly more often part of pragmatic approaches than of ideological dittos. This, however, could be explained by the finding that in general, pragmatic opinions are much more common than ideological ones in the material.

Moving on, another connection between the liberal and peace-oriented approaches is the idea of prohibiting or phasing out political parties organized around ethnicity. From the liberal side, it is argued that ethnic-based political group thinking undermines the individual autonomy that is the foundation of citizen-based rights protection and democratic participation. From the peace-oriented side, it is typically argued that political competition between ethnic groups deepens divisions, which causes inter-ethnic violence and conflict.

Then there is the frequently advocated transition-oriented approach that is based on a combination of ethnic federalism and a trans-ethnic presidential system. This, it is argued, is a pragmatic way of combining citizen-based national democratic participation with ethnic-based regional self-governance, aiming at ensuring the individual rights of all Ethiopian citizens while simultaneously protecting the collective rights of the country's ethnic groups. It is suggested that the establishment of this trans-ethnic federal system would allow for a smoother transition from the deeply rooted ethno-federal system. It regards a feature that several transition-oriented approaches have in common, which is the focus on lowering the stakes in inter-ethnic political competition in the new political landscape. This is sometimes described as avoiding zero-sum competition for power between ethnic groups. Yet another feature of the transition-oriented approaches, although clearly not as frequently mentioned, is the formation of multi-ethnic integrative parties. It is suggested that this would provide a way of mitigating the features of ethnic-based competition that obstruct democratic transition without overlooking profound ethnic-based group interests.

Another rather expected finding is that there are suggestions from the liberal and peace-oriented sides of replacing the ethnic regions with administrative units that are not ethnically demarcated, whereas the transition-oriented approaches are in general more open to keeping ethnic-based regions.

As expected from the answers to the first two research question, there are several suggested approaches that do not build on the ideal type perceptions. These include the replacement of ethnic-based regions with hydrological physical regions and several proposals of public deliberation on contested issues such as cultural rights and constitutional amendment. And finally, once again, the absence of socialist arguments should be noted.

6.2. Concluding discussion

Now what conclusions can we draw from this? Did this study serve its purposes? In order to answer these questions, it might be a good idea to review the aim and purpose of the study. Basically, my aim was to describe and explain opinions of ethnic federalism in Ethiopian private media, in a context of democratic transition. Special attention was paid to opinions on ethnic federalism in relation to human rights protection and democratic development. The purpose of this was to draw on the Ethiopian experience to increase the knowledge of how opinions on ethnic politics are related to perceptions of human rights and democracy in a multi-ethnic country in democratic transition. I believe that I have – at least to a certain degree –

succeeded in doing this. However, I also believe that I should draw my conclusions with caution. Indeed, I have encountered some obstacles in the process of approaching the empirical material. It is my opinion that these obstacles deserve some attention before any conclusions are presented.

First and foremost, constructing ideal types that would adequately reflect the opinions in the material was a challenge. Initially, as mentioned in the theory chapter, the idea was to include two more ideological ideal types in the analytical tool. These were to be based on theory that has made significant impact on the contemporary scholarly debate on multiculturalism. The two ideal types I had in mind were to be defined as *communitarian* and *social liberal*, the former based on the work of Charles Taylor and the latter on the separate works of Will Kymlicka and David Beetham. Both sides, if I may call them that, have provided elaborate theories on how to protect human rights and facilitate democratization in multicultural contexts. Taylor's communitarian approach, for instance, can be used to oppose a conventional liberal perspective (in line with the ideal type used in this study). Furthermore, Beetham's and Kymlicka's theories provide a perspective that incorporates some measures associated with communitarianism in an originally liberal approach. Taylor's approach – based on the notion that individuals shape their identity through dialogical development within their communities – forms a strong basis for advocating collective rights and a selective state approach to culture. In a similar way, Beetham and Kymlicka present reflections on fair recognition and equal opportunity that constitute convincing arguments for the protection of cultural minorities. For the purposes of this study, these are highly relevant reflections. In fact, they might actually underlie some or even many of the opinions presented in the material, not least since they share several features with the ideal types I have used. For instance, the emphasis on collective rights and state selectivity is present in several transition-oriented approaches. Likewise, the commitment to equal opportunity is represented in the liberal approach, and some peace-oriented debaters pay certain attention to the recognition of cultural group demands. And these are only a few examples. However, the reason why I excluded these theoretical accounts from the analysis was that they struck me as too theoretically detailed to be applied to the empirical material. At least, that was my perception when I looked closer at the material. After all, articles of opinion are supposed to disseminate convincing and easily understood arguments (on often complex issues) in a fairly compressed format. In other words, there is not necessarily enough space to describe in detail the dimensions and nuances of one's ideological conviction. In retrospect, I believe that the findings indicating the dominance of pragmatic argumentation show that these considerations

were reasonable. So even though I was hesitant to leave these alternative ideal types behind, I rest assured that doing so was a good decision.

As for using the socialist ideal type, I am not as convinced I made the right choice. Looking at the results, it is easily argued that this ideal type did not constitute a crucial part of the analytic tool. The more or less complete lack of clearly socialist reasoning in the material still strikes me as rather surprising. With this said, it could also be argued that the lack of socialist opinions is a finding as good as any. Indeed, socialist arguments may well (and I still believe they do) exist in the general debate on ethnic federalism. Perhaps, they would have been represented to a greater extent in a different empirical material.

Furthermore, as the results clearly indicate, many parts of the actually quite extensive material contain a mixture of arguments, sometimes in contradictory combinations. This amounted to a challenge in terms of separating and interpreting the opinions in an adequate way. In order to demonstrate that I was aware of and facing this challenge, I tried to be as transparent as possible when I conducted the analysis. This explains the rather hefty use of quotes. Moreover, one could also reflect on the possible contributions of additional pragmatic ideal types to the analysis. Since the analyzed part of the debate appears to be mainly pragmatic and the topic at hand is complex, it would not be unreasonable to expect other pragmatic lines of argument. However, given the results, I find it hard to locate any other both uniform and frequently used pragmatic approaches than the peace- and transition-oriented ones.

Now let us return to the actual conclusions. As mentioned, the results clearly indicate that a common opinion in Ethiopian private media is that the new political situation (where a more democratic society is within reach) offers a possibility of revising or abolishing ethnic federalism. There are indeed different ways of approaching and describing the problem, but a prevalent opinion seems to be that ethnic politics should be practiced with great caution or not at all in Ethiopia. It is, I would say, neither common nor uncommon that the above opinions are held about other countries (similar to Ethiopia) as well – that is, countries characterized by conflict-ridden pasts and multi-ethnic populations. Furthermore, it can be concluded that opinions on ethnic politics is often connected to opinions on human rights and democracy, and that it is more common that ethnic politics is associated with negative impacts on human rights and democracy than with positive equivalents. Moreover, the opinions about ethnic politics are more often presented with reference to experiences of ethnic politics than to ideological convictions. However, this does not necessarily mean that they actually *are* based to a lesser degree on ideological conviction (or any other conviction for that matter). That is just the way

they are typically presented in this material. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that among the ideological approaches to the problem, different kinds of liberal principles (regarding multiculturalism, human rights and democracy) seem to have a significant influence.

Now it must be noted – and this is important – these conclusions only regard this, clearly demarcated, part of the Ethiopian debate on ethnic politics. One should be particularly aware of the fact that, although these media sites reach a substantial amount of people, the number of writers represented in the material I analyzed is hardly large. These conclusions, then, cannot be generalized to the public Ethiopian debate on ethnic politics, or even to the equivalent debate in media in general. For instance, one cannot draw any conclusions about perceptions of ethnic federalism in state-owned media, except possibly that the debate in private media is more vivid than the one in state-owned media. With this noted, I conclude that this study has described opinions on ethnic politics in the private media of Ethiopia – a conflict-ridden and multi-ethnic country on the path toward democracy. Finally, I hope, and believe, that this study has also provided some useful explanation of how the described opinions are related to perceptions of human rights and democracy.

6.3. Further research

There are several highly interesting and relevant ways of building on this study. In my opinion, research that would serve a great purpose would be focused on the opinions on ethnic politics of greater parts of the Ethiopian population. For instance, how are the relations between ethnic federalism and democracy perceived by the (major) rural population? What differences can be seen in popular opinions on ethnic politics between and within the different regions? These are questions that could form a foundation for such research. Other further research could be focused on the current political direction of the constituent members of the EPRDF coalition. This was actually my initial idea when I set out to write my thesis. However, the difficulties in finding relevant material that was not in Amharic proved to be too big of a hurdle (for me). However, such a study could provide knowledge on issues that are likely to have a massive impact on the further development of Ethiopian politics.

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Please note that Ethiopian authors are not listed by their last name since Ethiopians traditionally refer to each other by the first name.

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