Ethnic Inequality and Fractionalization are the Main Causes for the Instability of the Country
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Social exclusion and propagation of inequalities are often seen as serving fertile ground for mobilization of violence. Groups with shared characteristics such as ethnicity or religion are pressured into undergoing this unfair process eventually leading them to civil unrest or armed conflicts in an effort to claim back their rights; have their voices heard; and redress the inequalities sustained. Social exclusion may be systematic and intentional – thus found embedded in the formal institutions of the state and manifested through government policies. In Ethiopia, given the past and current wars, massive population displacement and mismanagement of scarce resources among others, many argue that the country's instabilities and conflicts are rooted in none other than ethnic polarization and fractionalization.

In the context of social exclusion, though impossible to identify a single specific cause, studies show that inequalities may take anyone of the following forms when expressed. **Political exclusion** is the method where citizenship rights such as political participation and the right to organize, and also of personal security, the rule of law, freedom of expression and equality of opportunity are denied. This form of exclusion is most severe where the state lacks neutrality and is operating as a vehicle of a dominant class/group - also reinforced through unequal power relations. The second form is **economic exclusion** where access to the labor market, credit and other forms of 'capital assets', including utilization of resources is unequally distributed among certain groups. **Social exclusion** on the other hand takes the form of deprivation from gaining access to for instance, social services, based on gender, age, including ethnicity. The fourth mode of enforcing inequalities is identified as **cultural exclusion -** where different variables determine the acceptance and respect of diverse values, norms and ways of living over others.

Proponents of ethnic inequalities as one of the main causes for the instability in the country therefore argue that there is indeed an urgent need to consider the ethnic dimension of development as an integral part of policy formulation and implementation in order to genuinely address ethnic conflicts and polarization in Ethiopia.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that the new state arrangement gave pre-existing ethnic conflict new shapes and paradigms; created competing ethnic groups for resource domination; politicized ethnicity; and reconfigured ethnic relations causing rise in boundary dispute between states within the federation. For them, the institutionalization of ethnic federalism helped marginalized ethnic groups attain representation at the federal and regional level thus paving the way to building a multi-cultural and lingual state.

Further, they stipulate that minority identities, including their language and culture, were preserved and developed through the federal system which simultaneously encouraged establishment of self-government for assured collective security and increased self- identification with the federal state. Hence, according to them, the fundamental cause for lack of harmonious inter-ethnic coexistence goes beyond ethnic inequalities and is reflective of the practice of 'federalism' in Ethiopia. *Source:* [Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia: Federalism as a Cause and Solution; Takele Bekele](#)

The debate on the topic was organized by DHLO in partnership with USAID/OTI ESP. ***Habegar Debates*** hosted the event **2nd December, 2023 in Addis Ababa** between *Ato Niguse Birhanu* and *Mebratu Senbeta (PhD)* with *Tirufat Belayneh* moderating.

Here is the link to the full debate video.

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