

The Predicament of an Ethnic Federal System

Conflict and Federal Failure

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Abstract

The paper inquires about the challenges of ethnic federalism vis-à-vis ethnic conflict, encompassing ethnic tensions and direct violence. The worsening of ethnic conflicts and the ceasing process of some ethnic federations, especially the dissolved communist federations, were mutually reinforcing. Empirical and theoretical discussions on ethnic federalism have shown that not less than 14 ethnic federations went defunct so the analytical framework of the article underlines that ethnic federalism is not always effective in preventing or containing ethnic conflict sustainably. Based on that, the article has reviewed literature related to the experiences of failed and fragile ethnic federations like the Soviets, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Serbia-Montenegro, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria etc. It finds that the performance of ethnic federalism to ensure a durable and legitimate ethnic federal constitutional order is dependent on several factors. The factors are categorized into mutually non-exclusive seven factors: the democratic representativeness of federal structures, ethnic political parties and elites, the realm of inclusive overarching identities crossing ethnic lines and ethnic demographic shares, ethnic federal-unit symmetry, geo-political setting, and the number of ethnic federal-units and their ethnic make-ups. The conclusion of the article states that the failure/success of a given ethnic federal polity is not limited to its constitutional outlines but also to how it takes into account its sociological, political, geographical, and economic colours. That forms the challenges of ethnic federal system to flourish as a good and feasible option to achieve a lasting just order in politically segmented multi-ethnic societies.

Keywords: Defunct-federation, ethnicity, ethnic conflict, federalism, secession.

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Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict

The availability, if possible, of a standard definition of the term ethnicity is not to the degree of its recurring usage. It is more understood than being defined. The interchangeability of other terms such as nation, nationality, community, tribe and cultural group to ethnicity complicates the definitional ambiguity of the latter. Nevertheless, the etymology of 'ethnicity' is a good starting point to make sense of its gradual adaptation into politics. It is the "social reproduction of basic classificatory differences and to aspects of gains and loss in social interaction," Eriksen (1991, p.264). Yonatan's (2008, p.17) view that ethnicity has the "immaculate sense of a group characterized by a common descent" tells the emphasis of ethnicity on the fine core of human identity, though too limited in scope to qualify ethnic identity with a monolithically singular identity marker. That is why there are points of similarities and differences between ethnicity and nationalism.

Ethnicity could be less politicized and self-conscious than nationalism in terms of its relation with the state. In such situations, ethnicity becomes more passive than nationalism and remains

only within the realm of social status and relations not capable enough to form its own political orientations, movements and related symbols like flags, songs and political figures. However, as Eriksen (1991, p.264-265) holds, nationalism also uses the linguistic, religious, racial or other identifying elements of a national group in asserting political and economic interests. In this way, ethnicity gives the foundation for nationalism that in the discourses of identity politics the one resonates with the other. Thus, the implied degree of politicization is important to control the conflation of ethnicity and nationalism for some context-specific analyses.

Moreover, the conception of ethnicity changes with the changes in the realities of ethnic groups. That means it is being fashioned by various factors beyond ancestry. Ethnicity is relevant to make sense of the past, present and future of ethnic groups. The belief in the common history and origin; cultural, linguistic, religious and so on; and the assumption of a common destiny in future are the attributes of ethnic groups. Anthony Smith (cited in Fowkes, 2002, p. 24) has categorized the attributes of ethnic groups into six: a collective name; a common myth of descent; a shared history; a distinctive shared culture, comprising language and/or religion and/or institutions and/or other cultural features; an association with a specific territory; and finally a sense of ethnic solidarity, in other words a recognition of each other as members of the same ethnic group. Though they are assumed to define the ontological formations of ethnic groups, there are discourses about discerning the degree to which the markers and the beliefs of an ethnic group could beget ethnicity. Ethnicity animates ethnic groups to give practical and visible manifestations of various sorts stretching from maintaining its core identity marker/s to mobilising individual members to contest with “other” relevant ethnic groups. However, the activation aspect of ethnicity is not free from objectively defined and static ethnic characteristics. Here, two widely known schools of thought, with their specific theoretical components, are at play: primordial and instrumentalist.

The primary focus of the primordial school of thought is the *unchangeable* guts of ethnic belongingness. Vaughan (2003, p.41) puts, “primordial has long been chaptered with assuming the fixed nature and explanatory of the very ethnic given.” That sees ethnic identification, in delineating lines of identity exclusiveness, as the sharpest form of social grouping. The sanctioning and regulatory role of ethnic identity for ethnicity is the result of, Govers and Vermeulen (1994, p.43-58) say, the “consciousness of difference” framed up on the objective perception of belongingness as a matter of the social cohesion dimension of ethnicity. It poses a challenge to the subjective recasting of ethnic identities to bring about socio-economic and political goals.

However, for instrumentalists, like Cohen (1974, p.4), ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon; defined in situational and contextual matters, being strategically and tactically manipulated so that the quality of ethnicity is capable of changing at individual and collective levels. The theory of social constructivism is the foundation for the instrumentalist school of thought since society reflexively responds to its reality. Except for the central point of the instrumentalists being elites (Vanderwerf, and Wan, 2009, p.8), the notion that ethnic identities are neither perennial nor objective attests to the constructivist origin of ethnic groups. Markakis (1974, p.236) states that an “ethnic group, as a political actor, is a product of the situation, history and what mobilizes its members to take collective action is the concern for future prospect, not atavistic attachment to the past.” The mere existence of ethnic groups does not necessarily mean an active form of ethnicity. It needs the phenomena of interactions among distinct ethnic groups. What is more, there is even a theoretical formulation that ethnic identity is a product of interacting responses between inner perception and outer forces at the individual and group levels (Epsteia, 1978). In this way, a conscious identification not primordialism, depicts ethnicity as a permanent yet dynamic social structure where “one shall assume that reflections among the interacting individual on what ‘our’ and ‘their’ culture takes place,” Tronvoll (2000, p.58).

Consequently, the conceptual vicissitudes of ethnicity underpin the identity assertions as well as the pursuit of socio-economic and political interests along ethnic lines. To assert ethnic identity distinctions in the public space, ethnic groups could use and promote languages and other specific identity markers separately identified with them. The markers construct the relevant ethnic groups and the necessary channel of mobilizations which are even instrumental to the elitist articulation of ethnic demands touching up on the recognition of primordial identities such as language and religion, or levelled inter-ethnic interactions.

Turning the discussion to the subject of ethnic conflicts, they are the results of ethnic-identity-driven socio-economic and political contentions and are known to emerge from villages to the state level, even to inter-state levels due to irredentism and boundary disputes. In the words of Esman (2004, p.3), “[e]thnic conflicts may occur at any level of social interaction from localities and neighbourhood to the central government.” Ethnic conflict could affect the everyday lives of individuals with lasting impacts defining the political and economic order of the state. The state disposition in the interactions of ethnic groups is the cause of most ethnic conflicts, especially when its ethnic neutrality or inclusiveness is questionable.

In politically divided multi-ethnic societies, predicating on Johan Galtung’s (1973) critical theories of conflict, ethnic conflicts have structural and direct violence forms. The latter, ethnic-driven direct conflict, has two dimensions. They refer to the horizontal inter-ethnic conflict and the vertical conflict of ethnic groups, directly or indirectly, against state institutions, policies, laws, and civilian and non-civilian authorities. Brancati (2006, p.665) presented the horizontal and vertical dimensions of ethnic conflicts along with anti-regime rebellions and inter-communal conflicts. In a more technical inventory manner, Hector (2000) unpacked anti-regime ethnic conflicts against the scale of political protest and armed-rebellion. It informs the relative intensities and depth of the conflicts which could be contained at the level of protective protests or deteriorating into offensive violence against ethnic groups or the state. The political protest subsumes ethnic-driven verbal opposition expressions, public demonstrations and symbolic rebellions while the armed-rebellion takes that in the direction of political banditry, terrorist campaigns, guerrilla activities and protracted civil war (Ibid, 146).

As a result, in addressing ethnic conflicts and the demand for ethnic diversity accommodation, multi-ethnic states have devised different responses at different times. Ethnic federalism has been hailed as a major constitutional option response to prevent or/contain the types of ethnic conflicts mentioned above. However, the interactions between ethnic federalism and ethnic relations are not always imperative, simple and straightforward. There are challenges affecting the success of a given ethnic federal system to serve as an enduring and legitimate tool to make, protect and build peace among competing and conflicting ethnic groups. The next part of the paper outlines and elaborates on these challenges.

The Challenges of Ethnic Federalism in Failed and Fragile Ethnic Federations

In some multi-ethnic states such as India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Belgium and Ethiopia, ethnic federalism has been applied to resolve or prevent political conflicts among ethnic groups. It has two elements. The first is to accord constitutionally sanctioned self-rule for ethnic groups under federal territorial units or through non-territorial communal rights. The latter is known as ‘personal-federalism’ (Linz, Stepan and Yadav, 2011, p. 263). Socio-cultural rights related to culture, identity, language and history; and institutional independence to organize as self-administrative federal territorial units or communities for an ethnic group are what mean by self-rule in the context of a multi-ethnic federation (Lijphart, 2008). The second element is the constitutional entitlement of ethnic groups to access a meaningful representation in the joint ruling of a federation by the federal government.

Upper houses are the most common and standard channel for that kind of representation, without relegating the significance of ethnically inclusive federal executives, public administration and judiciary; especially if the judiciary system has the power of constitutional adjudication. As a result, contentions over diversity recognition and power balance, as the major causes of inter-ethnic or anti-regime ethnic protests and rebellions, are thought to be manageable by the federal constitutional dispersal of political power among ethnic groups and inclusive shared-rule.

However, ethnic federal system may not be a cure-all for all ethnic tensions and violence. Its capacity to prevent and manage conflicting relations among ethnic groups was far from successful in some multi-ethnic federations. The failed multi-ethnic federal experiments of the USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Pakistan before 1971, and Serbia and Montenegro are some of the leading historical cases (Kavalski and Zolkos, 2008). They alluded to the proposition that the primary aim of ethnic federalism to manage ethnic tensions and violence could backfire only to escalate ethnic conflicts with the consequence of federal failure. It, however, contradicts the experience of other federations which have gradually built the legitimacy and the effectiveness of their federal systems in addressing the politics of ethnic diversity recognition and accommodation. Belgium, India, Canada, Spain and Switzerland are good examples, in line with Burgess and Gagnon (2010), of matured and/or flourishing pluralistic federations.

The reasons why some ethnic federal systems are as successful as others *vis-à-vis* ethnic conflicts resonate with the major predicaments of ethnic federal systems, Watts (2008) calls these predicaments 'federal pathologies' these means those institutional, political and social structures which are not easily set with the goals of a pluralistic federal order and its continuity. It is to Newman's (2006) understanding that federal purposes are the yardsticks of federal successes, federal culture, power imbalance among federal-units and to Abate Nikodimos' (2004, p.4-49) power concentration. Specifically, ethnic conflicts threatening the continuity of an ethnic federation are directly or indirectly the functions of democratic legitimacy, federal constitutional design, inter-ethnic relations, identity politics and geopolitics. The following seven points provide the details.

Federal Democratic Representative Legitimacy

Democracy, predicating on the conventional and procedural understanding as a consented and accountable source, exercise and purpose of power (Huntington, 1991, p. 6), has been proven an instrument for the viability of multi-ethnic federal democracies. Accountability and broad-based participation are the aspects of representativeness advanced with the democratic method of representation (Jijphart, 2008). They allow aligning the federal theoretical point of striking the balance between unity and diversity with the democratic representation of federated ethnic groups in the federal shared-rule and self-rule with positive spillovers on the stable consolidation of the multi-ethnic federal system.

While the weight of democratic representation to the legitimate and effective exercise of self-rule is obvious, its meaning to the joint federal shared-rule underlines the subtlety of difference in the representational patterns of quasi-federalism and federalism. In the former, autonomous territories, similar to Puerto Rico in the United States, may have little representation at the centre (Kymlicka, 2006, p.36). In contrast, the constitutional representation of federal-units in the common federal setups and inter-jurisdictional overlapping magnify the utility of democratic representation in a federal polity. The democratic inclusion of ethnic groups in the federal shared structures of a multi-ethnic federal system enables them to be part of decisions made at a federation scale while defending or expanding their constitutional powers and political significance, at the same time.

With the presentiment of ethnic elites not having places in the shared federal governance, could be involved in ethnic political articulations and mobilizations hostile to the intents and operation of a federal constitution. Hector (2000, p.140) underlines that “local leaders should be offered meaningful, substantial careers in the central government” to improve the representativeness of the federal government to pre-empt the possible campaigns of fragmentation by ethno-regional elites. Corollary to that, ethnic political elites assume the agency of open-ended federal constitutional negotiations and fending off federal constitutional impositions. Such engagements solicit the momentum to embrace the principle of federal constitutional supremacy as the potential source for the politico-legal loyalty and overarching identifications of ethnic groups and to induce their peaceful co-existence (Watts, 2008, p.183). The interdependency between broad-based federal constitutional commitment and federal system stability can be implied here (Tsegaye Regassa, 2008, p.3).

Other things like electoral systems and political culture remain constant, multiparty representation, therefore, has the purpose of consolidating the viability of ethnic federalism with much broad-based and democratically accountable representation. The implications of the deficit of democratic representation to the ethnic fragmentations and conflicts in defunct multi-ethnic federations of the one-party systems have lessons to draw on the implications of multiparty democratic representation to the durability of ethnic federal states. The federal constitutional systems “were often ignored in practice and were not authentically representative in USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia (McGarry and O’Leary, 2003, p.14). In these ethnic federations, how the one-party system had undermined the representativeness of federal institutions was revealed in the damping of ethnic constitutional rights as subordinate to party interest. It degraded cooperation and trust among ethnic groups and “no effective judicial review existed to decide on the claims of orders of government to function more complementary in solving the existing societal reality than party line” (Ibid, p.14). The one-party system is a serious challenge to the representative legitimacy of multi-ethnic federations at the perils of inter-ethnic competitions which are deprived of their *genuine* representations through alternative political could explode to outright ethnic conflicts with the possible extent that federalism becomes appealing to none. The conquest for representativeness in the one-party-dominated federal edifices of Ethiopia is the most common criticism of the ethnic federal constitutional operation.

Ethnic Political Parties and Elites

The nature of ethnic politics undertaken by political parties and elites is the other complicacy of ethnic federalism vis-à-vis ethnic conflicts and federal system sustainability. In a multi-ethnic federal system, the constitutional devolution of power to ethnic groups is not necessarily effective in addressing the politics of centrifugalism. It could contain ethno-nationalism up to some level as what Yugoslavia had achieved for over forty years before its demise with bloody ethnic conflicts. The point is the likelihood of ethnic federal constitutional design to provide ethnic political parties and elites with political and bureaucratic resources and self-reliance for launching inter-ethnic outbidding incompatible with federal constitutional unity and diversity. For example, for McGarry and O’Leary (2003, p.13), “giving an ethnic minority its units makes it possible for it to hold a referendum on secession, which can be useful for gaining recognition.” Accounts of that kind emphasize the mutually reinforcing divisive effects of ethnic federalism and extreme ethnic politics with the risks of federal political and constitutional crises. Brancati (2006, p.650-652) repeats that federalism could train ethnic groups or their elites to live apart with discriminatory legislations and policies inducing ethnic conflicts and secession, in times of political reforms and changes.

The self-determination-inspired constitutional decentralization made it difficult for Yugoslavia to adapt to exogenous pressures with a consolidated central administration. The drying of foreign aid from the USSR pushed its federal Government to centralize some of the fiscal autonomy of the Republics but faced with the vibrant resistance of ethnic political forces within the ruling communist party as a prelude to the culmination of the federation with terminal ethnic conflicts (Hector, 2000). It notifies that even a single party could be divided along ethnic lines so that it becomes too vacuous to hold together a multi-ethnic federation. Watts (2008, p.17-18) sees that it is difficult to establish shared-federal commitment when the federal government is exclusively controlled by ardent ethnic parties in such a way that the two regional parties of Czechoslovakia facilitated the breakup of the federation.

Nevertheless, the relationships between ethnic political parties and ethnic federal system are not always straightforward, it rather depends on the complex interactions involving the federal constitutional system of power allocation, the depth of ethnic cleavages, the nature of parties, dynamics of party competitions, party system and electoral system. As intra-ethnic political party competitions could constrain regional ethnic political aspirations from escalating into ethnic conflicts, electoral systems could encourage moderate and conciliatory parties. These parties have the potential to be the conduits of inter-ethnic integrative politics of forging ties among constitutionally self-ruling ethnic groups. Britain's, a unitary state yet with extensive federal features, the recent offer of devolution to Scotland and Wales was welcomed by voters in both lands, though more enthusiastically supported in the former (Hector, 2000, p.146). Therefore, how far an ethnic federal system ensures the self-rule of ethnic groups and how the parties play with that is one of the challenges of ethnic federalism to prescribe a viable and stable ethnic federal body politic. The recent experience of the Tigray region of conflict in the Ethiopian ethnic federal experience has shown how the power shifts among ethnic elites and parties have repercussions on the process of federal power re/centralization and the reactions of ethnic actors to this process. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) which had dominated the federal centre until the change of the incumbent party in 2019/20 challenged the federal government in terms of an authoritarian power consolidation not compatible with the federal constitutional system of self-rule and the undoing of the struggle, history and aspirations of ethnic self-determination and *ancient* autonomy (Assefa Fiseha, 2023).

Overarching Identity and State Neutrality Vis-à-vis Ethnic Groups

To prevent ethnic constitutional self-rule from leading to parochialism and fragmentation or ethnic tension, the development of an overarching identity is appealing. Aalen (2002, p.45) proposes that "people should have loyalty to the ideas of both an overall citizenship and the narrower indigenous identity." Citizenship would prevent ethnic conflicts from escalating into open ethnic fighting by forging common points of interest that could build the middle ground across ethnic political segments. The fusion of ethnic groups to pursue goals definable by citizenship has the potential to develop an overarching political identity in a pluralistic federation.

The working capacity of an overarching political identity to shift the relations of ethnic groups from competitive to cooperative supposes an inclusive and impartial state (Ibid, p.246). Substantially speaking, if the state is partial to a certain ethnic group/s, or believes so, the other groups might have a weak self-identification with the state. The perception of state neutrality empowers the state to have effective and legitimate leverage in the process of adjudicating ethnic conflicts. Therefore, the state must promote overarching identities among federated ethnic groups and ensure that federal politics is non-discriminatory.

The former Eastern Pakistan, the current Bangladesh, separated from Pakistan due to the insignificant role of its elites and the sense of alienation from the political process. McGarry and O'Leary (2003, p.14) put, "[l]oyalty depends on the neutrality of the state regarding ethnicity *per se*. States such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Nigeria had weak or no overarching identities, to begin with, and no democratic mechanisms for developing them." The sense of citizenship is an important input for the quality of a state. The stability of a modern democracy depends not only on the justice of its institutions but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens (Kymlicka, 1995, p.285). These qualities are the social capital of citizenship. For Galstone (Ibid, p 10), social capital includes general virtues (courage, law abidingness and loyalty), social virtues (independence and open-mindedness), economic virtues, and political virtues.

Demographic Content and Staatsvolk

According to O'Leary (2001), *Staatsvolk* refers to a dominant national or ethnic group. For a particular ethnic federation, the fostering of a democratic federal system based on the majoritarian principle has to be weighed against its demographic composition. The application of majoritarian democracy where there is no dominant ethnic group that feels secure would lead to ethnic competition and rivalry. In this rivalry, every ethnic group would engage without distinction. To curb that other mechanisms, non-majoritarian democratic systems, like consociationalism that protects the interests of all national and ethnic communities, should be put in place. They have the merit of offsetting ethnic conflicts by inducing communal autonomy and power-sharing across the basic structures of a federal system (Jijphart, 2008).

The other aspect of demography in federations is the distribution of ethnic minorities in constitutionally framed federal-units. The protection of such minorities is one of the litmus-test for the effectiveness of a multi-ethnic federal system in terms of conflict proofing and justice. As long as the federal government represents a federation as a single polity, it is also responsible for the protection of provincial minorities; the concept of the dual and direct relations of individuals to regional and federal governments serves that purpose (Elazar, 1987)

Population and Economic Symmetry

The other factor which may contribute to the/stability of an ethnic federal political system is the symmetry between or among ethnic groups. This symmetry may be *de jure* or *de facto* asymmetry. The former refers to the variations among or between ethnic groups that are constitutionally and legally recognized or ascribed, whereas the latter emanates from the internal dynamics of the ethnic groups in a federation. *De-facto* asymmetry is a common feature of every federation since it is impossible to have ethnic groups the same in their populations, territorial size, resources including elites and economic activities (Solomon Nigussie, 2008).

The effect of asymmetry among the constituent ethnic groups of an ethnic federation on the relations of ethnic groups and the stability of the federal order is worthy of investigation. Watts (2008, p. 180) has indicated, "[a]lmost invariably, a source of extreme instability has been the situation within a federation where one region (of an ethnic group) has dominated through having a majority of the population." Examples are numerous such as Prussia within Germany, Northern Nigeria before the Civil War, East Pakistan before its secession, Russia before the breakup of the USSR in 1991, the Czech Republic within Czechoslovakia and Serbs in Serbia and Montenegro. The basic difference among the constituent ethnic groups could provoke unhealthy interaction unless some institutionalized remedy is entrenched.

Geo-Political Dynamics

The federal solution to ethnic conflict should also be viewed with the existing geo-political scene or context. O'Leary (2001, p.20) claims. "[w]hether ethnic minority has backing from a powerful neighbouring state or its region in the border of the federation will assuredly matter, like the democratic and legal character, its mode of formation and prosperity of the federation itself."

Some geopolitical factors may call for some limitations on the autonomy of regional ethnic groups to exercise self-rule for reasons related to external threats and territorial integration (Kymlicka, 2006). This would be exemplified by the experience of the Ethiopia and Eritrea federation against the backdrop of the engagement of North African and Middle Eastern states in favour of the Eritrean insurgency. The lack of neighbour pressure against the unity of a multi-ethnic federation furnishes the ground for the proper implementation of the federal system that could satisfy the ethnic group/s for whom the power is devolved. The Indian Kashmir case concerning the claim of Pakistan and the pre-referendum arrangement in the Sudan, if the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 is considered as a federal typology; are examples of how geopolitics could fan ethnic conflicts and limit the exercise of the conational powers of ethnic groups.

Ethnic Federal-Units: Composition and Size

In the process of structuring federal-units along ethnic lines, the mutual reinforcement of various identity markers should be considered. When linguistic, religious, racial and other identity markers overlap, the cleavages among ethnic groups become too deep (Watts, 2008). The log of the former Pakistan, USSR and Yugoslavia supports this argument in a way that the severe polarization of the ethnic constituent units was the result of how they were demarcated. If they had been organized by using less divisive ethnic identities that could not underrate other shared identities among the federal-units, the relation among them would have shown loose distinctiveness. The lack of a strict overlapping between the linguistic communities of the Swiss Cantons and religious dandification has been appreciated (Ibid).

In addition to the necessity of keeping cords of identity among ethnic federal territories, Horowitz (1985) came up with the structural technique of taming ethnic conflict by the means of designing federal-units to accommodate multiple ethnic groups. By organizing multi-ethnic federal territories, it would be possible to deescalate the level and the ramifications of ethnic conflicts from a federation to a federation-unit level. Horowitz's (Ibid), requires to divide big ethnic groups not to dominate a federal-unite and, by implication, the merging of ethnic minorities under federal-units. Intra-unit conflicts could be ideological and less lethal due to the usual preoccupation of minority ethnic groups to hold the power of the multi-ethnic federal-units. Likewise, the majority might be involved in intra-ethnic contests across federal-units. Horowitz's (2002) ingenuity in the area of the electoral system also reflects the same pattern of bridging ethnic groups even employing competition rather than forming a sharp distinction between them. It is to the downplaying of ethnic conflicts by circumventing them within the component units of a federation. Horowitz (1985) observed the advantage of ascending the regional states of Nigeria from three in 1966 to 12 in 1969 and now to 36 from the vantage point of averting the reoccurrence of the daring ethnic conflicts that happened between 1966 and 1999. However, the feasibility of Horowitz's idea may be challenged under the circumstances of such deep cleavages among ethnic groups that could offset the possibility of splitting and merging them into federal-units in a legitimate manner is dubious.

The other structural element, rather than the ethnic composition of federal-units, lies in the mere number of the federal-units. The number of full-fledged constituent units and their expected interaction in federal politics defines the intensity of ethnic conflict. If a multi-ethnic federal

system establishes only two federal ethnic units, the conflict between them would be determining the continuity of the federation. The bifurcated nature of the conflict of all the two polarized ethnic federal provinces is more likely to engender a crisis in the federal system. Watts (2008, p.186) stated, “the experience of bipolar or dyadic is not encouraging” by indicating that Pakistan before 1971, Czechoslovakia, and Serbia and Montenegro before 1992 and 2006, respectively, “have provided the example of the difficulty that arises in bipolar federation... because every ‘little’ conflict, which arises between units will, threatened the endurance of the federation”. The possibility of inter-federal-unit identity groups engaging in conflict is high because the symmetries between them in economic viability and political visibility could simply provoke ethnic tensions and rivalry. The relative disadvantage of one is more likely taken as the contrivance of the other beforehand. Moreover, a conflict between the two federal-units corresponds to a federation-wide conflict. The federation-breaking conflicts between the current Pakistan and Bangladesh, the smoothness and the rapidity of the so-called *velvet divorce* between Czech and Slovakia, and the end of the Federation of Serbia and Montenegro witnessed how the *impossibility* of political horse-trading in federations of two units means conflict generation and a federal state dismemberment.

Conclusion

The rationale of ethnic federal system to bring ethnic groups together without expensing their distinct identities and interests has the implications of preventing or regluing ethnic conflict through constitutional ethnic diversity recognition and accommodation. Constitutional home rule and representations of ethnic groups are the inseparable hallmarks of ethnic federalism which are crucial to empower ethnic groups to deal with their own matters and to be part of collective decisions made at the federation scale. It allows ethnic groups to embody the foci of autonomous constitutional powers and the objects of representation in the edifices of the federal shared-rule. Cumulatively, in ethnic federal state organization, the federal self-rule and shared-rule are presumed invaluable constitutional structures to accommodate ethnic assertions and help ethnic tensions and conflicts. In that regard, however, the trajectories of ethnic federations are not uniform.

In some contexts, like the cases of Belgium, Canada, Switzerland, Spain, and, more or less, India, ethnic federalism has been touted as a successful constitutional doctrine to install a democratically functioning stable multi-ethnic federal body politic. In this case, ethnic federal constitutional dispensation has significantly contributed to the peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups which, in turn, reinforces the durability of the ethnic federal order. Contrary to that, in failed and fragile ethnic federations, ethnic federalism has failed counter-productively to address and/or exacerbate ethnic conflicts at the perils of serious political instabilities, at times leading up to state dismemberment, resulting from deadly ethnic-based communal violence, protests, armed-rebellion, terrorism etc. The federations of the USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Malaysia, the decade-old Ethio-Eritrea federation, the post-1995 Ethiopia, and Serbia-Montenegro are examples of failed and fragile ethnic federations. In such federations, the challenges of ethnic federal system to serve as a sustainable constitutional tool to manage ethnic conflicts are related to: the lack of democratically operating federal structures, the growing of extreme political parties hostile to the delicate balance of federal self-rule and shared-rule, fragile overarching identities across ethnic lines, issues related to the demographic proportionality of ethnic groups, number of ethnic federal-units and their ethnic compositions, de facto symmetry among ethnic federal-units, and geo-political settings involving irredentism. It leads to the view that the success of ethnic federal system in curbing or containing ethnic tensions and violence is the derivative of the political system, constitutional design, socio-economic, and geographical reality which are mostly fixed and not amenable to short-term intentional interventions. Issues of geopolitics and shared political aspirations and values are as vital as a democratic political environment. Undemocratic regimes

are less prone to generate the kind of political pluralism ethnic federalism needs to address ethnic rivalries and violence. The records of ethnic federations under various types of undemocratic rule attest to the challenges of federal constitutional diversity in the matrix of unrestrained power. Therefore, ethnic federal constitutional design alone is not for granted to bring about an effectively functioning and durable ethnic federal polity. The contextual adaption of the constitutional precepts of ethnic federal order is in point. Although the article has focused much on defunct and unstable ethnic federations and missed the lessons of mature ethnic federal systems, it has merits to apprise the contextual differences of ethnic federations across the board. Here, the systemic juxtaposition of failed, fragile, and consolidated ethnic federal states is a broad subject deserving further research which is important to deepen the growing discipline of federalism and constitutional conflict resolution in ethnically segmented societies such as Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan.

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