GOVERNING CONTESTED CITIES
IN FEDERATIONS

Urban Politics, Conflicts and Policies of Addis Ababa & Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

MILKESSA MIDEGA



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One
Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

For the first time in modern Ethiopian history, the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious character of the Ethiopian state was openly acknowledged only in 1991, through the establishment of federal system. Within the federal dispensation, the focus of this study is the governance of conflicted cities. Cities are the locus where the challenges of living together, that is, the challenges of diversity, first emerge (Gilbert, 2009). In modern states, they became the seats of governments—local, provincial, national/federal or supranational—that are set essentially to provide political, economic and social services to the citizens. Thus, today, multiethnic cities and their policies in particular may pose challenges and tensions at the urban level as issues of ownership, political participations, social inclusions, and indigenous cultural rights are increasingly getting importance and public attentions than ever. As a result, it is argued that the real test of building inclusive and democratic national politics and policies starts at the urban local level (Bollens, 2000).

Ethiopia is one of the least urbanized countries in the world. This country has more than 110 million people, out of which urban and rural inhabitants constituted 19% and 81% respectively (CSA Population Projection, 2020). In terms of ethnic composition, Ethiopia is home to no less than 80 different national groups, of which the major ones include Oromo (34.5%), Amhara (26.9%), Somali (6.2%), Tigrayan (6.1%), Sidama (4.0%) and others (ibid.). This ethno-national diversity—"nations, nationalities and peoples" as the constitution prefers to call—has been politically essential cultural feature of Ethiopian population (FDRE Constitution, 1995). It was mainly on the basis of this essential feature that the 1995 constitution reconfigured Ethiopian polity into a federation of nine regional states, until Nov 2019 when Sidama Zone became the tenth regional state.

This cultural diversity is more so in the major urban areas of Ethiopia. However, the ethnic compositions in urban Ethiopia in general do not appear to be reflecting (or representative of) the ethnic composition of the country. For instance, analysis of Central Statistical Authority's (CSA) data on Ethiopian urban population indicates that Amhara constitute 42.4%, followed by Oromo (22.5%), Tigrayan (9.4%), Gurage (9.1%) and the remaining groups (16.6%) (Golini, 2001: 124). In a multiethnic country like Ethiopia, one needs to find possible explanations to the basic question as to why the urban population of some ethno-national groups tended to significantly exceed their country level population percentages. This leads to the importance of discussing the notion of 'urban accessibility' in multicultural contexts. It means that all urban public services, be it provisions of transportation, electricity,

"As Ethiopian federalism enters unchartered new waters, to make sense of what might be ahead for the country's two chartered cities, we have to look back and try to identify the bigger long-term dynamics of federal politics. An informative and insightful comparative study of the two contested cities of the Ethiopian federal order arrives at the right time when the country needs scholarly, thoughtful, and even-handed analyses of such dynamics. Dr. Milkessa's new book is recommended reading for specialists and non-specialists alike."

Jan Erk

(Extraordinary Professor, University of Western Cape, Dullah Omar Institute for Constitutional Law, Governance and Human Rights)

"Ethiopia is a country of rich cultural diversity. The attempt to build a nation-state out of the diverse communities faltered as a result of demands from the diverse communities for authentic cultural identity, self-definition and self-administration. In a response to this, Ethiopia started to implement a multinational federation. The governance of cities today in Ethiopia has to be seen within this context of multinational federalism. Dr. Milkessa Midega relied on an extensive literature, experiences of city administrations in multinational federations and empirical research to write a book that could show the way for governing contested cities through a just approach that is able to accommodate the interests of its different stake holders. The book will be an invaluable resource for researchers and policy makers."

Bekele Gutema

(Professor of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University)

About the Author

Milkessa Midega graduated in Political Science and International Relations (B.A.) in 2008 from Addis Ababa University. He completed his graduate study (M.A) and postgraduate study (PhD) in Federalism and Governance Studies in 2011 and 2017 respectively in Addis Ababa University. He served as an assistant lecturer, lecturer and assist professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of Dire Dawa University since 2008 until he was assigned as Academic Vice President of Oromia State University in Nov 2017. He had also served as heads of Oromia Youth and Sport Affairs Bureau, and Oromia Land Use and Administration Bureau from 2018 to 2020. Some of his publications include "Ethiopian Federalism and the Ethnic Politics of Divided Cities: Consociationalism without Competitive Multiparty Politics in Dire Dawa" in Jan Erk (ed.) The Ethnopolitics of Ethnofederalism in Ethiopia (Special Issue), Journal of Ethnopolitics (Vol. 16, Issue. 3: June 2017), pp. 279-294; "Ethiopian Federalism: The Politics of Linguistic Pluralism and Language Policy Discourses," in Ethiopian Journal of Federal Studies (Vol. 2, No. 2, August 2015), pp. 87-127; "The politics of language and representative bureaucracy in Ethiopia: the case of Federal Government," in Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research (Vol. 7, Vol. 1, January 2015), pp. 15-23); "Dire Dawa under coalition rule: Ethiopia's regional ethnic politics or federal geopolitics?" in Ethiopian Journal of Federal Studies (Vol. 1, No. 2, Nov. 2014). pp. 95- 114; and a book: Afaan Oromoofi Imaammata Afaanii Biyya Itoophiyaa, 1855-2015 (Addis Ababa: Eleni Printing Press, 2015). The author has participated in and presented different papers on national and international conferences. He can be accessed at: milkessam@gmail.com.

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