

Ethnicity, Displacement And National Integration: Three Pronged Challenges To Ethiopia

Habtamu Wondimu*

Introduction

Displacement (expulsion from a habitual residence) and migration (voluntary movement to another locality) seem to be common phenomena these days. In 1995, there were about 20 million displaced persons in the world within the borders of their own country (UN, 1995). Also, there were 27 million refugees world-wide and 8 million of them lived in Africa. Estimates show that about 1.6 million persons have been displaced in Ethiopia in the past several years. This includes over 871,000 Ethiopians who were refugees in the neighboring countries (mainly The Sudan, Djibouti and The Republic of Somalia) and who returned to Ethiopia in the past four to five years (MOLSA, 1995).

Persons who are displaced due to ethnic conflicts number in to about 330,000, not including those who are expelled from Eritrea (including Asseb) and those who have abandoned resettlement areas (MOLSA, 1995). GTZ (1994) estimated that 200,000 persons are expelled from Eritrea and those who have abandoned resettlement areas (mostly due to ethnic conflicts) were about 253,000. These figures do not include close to 400,000 demobilized soldiers of the previous government. Though it is difficult to give exact figures on the number of persons or families who are displaced due to ethnic conflicts, various reports and field visits show that the number is large and perhaps over half a million persons.

Two different documents of the RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission) state about the situation as follows:

Over the past 1½ years conflicts, mainly ethnic, have been taking place in some areas of Ethiopia. This was particularly true in parts of Oromia which witnessed the deaths of many innocent people, the destruction of infrastructures and the disruption of normal life. As a result of these hostilities, farmers have lost all their belongings and have been left empty handed. Those who survived the strife have been

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forced to leave their villages and have fled to neighboring Woredas or regions in search of assistance (RRC, 1993a: 1)

The ethnic/intertribal conflicts which occurred in 1992 caused the displacement of a considerable number of people from their original localities to move to nearby villages and woredas in search of protection and assistance. These conflicts resulted in the deaths of many innocent civilians and the destruction of property and infrastructure in the areas of conflict. The displaced farmers in the zones of West Hararge and Arsi were among these victims who lost their properties and homes (RRC, 1993b:1)

The Ethiopian people and government (mainly through the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission - RRC and Refugees Rehabilitation Office), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and various NGOs, have provided food, shelter, clothing, medicine and other assistance to the displaced and other needy persons. With the exceptions of those in the multi-ethnic centers such as Addis Ababa, Nazareth, Dire Dawa and Shashamene, the overwhelming majority of the displaced persons are *back in their respective ethnic regions*. Mainly relief work, more than rehabilitation and development work; was done during the drought and famine years (e.g. 1983/84) and for the displaced persons (e.g. 1991/92/93). Perhaps, with the new thinking of preparedness, relief, rehabilitation and development situations might improve during drought periods (RRC, 1994). Perhaps half of the displaced persons have been rehabilitated so far. The efforts to rehabilitate the displaced persons seem to continue. However, the delicate issues of ethnicity and migration are not properly dealt with; particularly by researchers. First, let us define the concepts of ethnicity and national integration.

The Transitional Government's proclamation concerning the establishment of regional self governments has defined a nation or nationality as people living in the geographic areas and having a common language and a common psychological make up of identity (TGE, 1992). Usually an ethnic group refers to a group of people with a common cultural tradition and sense of identity. An ethnic group may be bound together by a sense of history and tradition, language, geography, religion, etc. (Penguin's Psychology Dictionary). In this sense, Ethiopia has over 60 ethnic groups, often referred to as nations, nationalities and peoples. Whatever one may feel about ethnicity, it is a vital force in group identity and social life, as the mobilizer of interest and a universal feature of human life (Edwards, 1985; Davis, 1979; Waters, 1990). Bekker (1993) states that ethnicity is *probably the*

greatest enigma of our time that should be clearly discussed and understood if nations are going to be politically stable and economically developed (p.1).

National integration is an important issue for multiethnic (plural) societies such as Ethiopia. The need for a country where various ethnic groups are interconnected in some defined manner; where people have multiple identities or values, where principles of equal opportunity, tolerance and fair settlement of differences (and disputes) prevail; participating and sharing authority, and the respect of the right of individuals seem to be the agenda of the day in Ethiopia. The existence of these conditions (national integration) is a major precondition for political stability and socio-economic development.

In addition to the displacement mentioned above, the over-30-years-long war in Eritrea (a province of Ethiopia till May 1991), conflicts in southern Ethiopia (e.g. between Geri, Borena and Gebra tribes in 1993/94 i.e. Oromo and Somale ethnic groups; Gedeo and Guji ethnic groups in 1995; Hamar and Borena Ethnic group in 1992/93; Dasanch and Bume ethnic groups in 1993) (Ayalew, 1995) and other areas (such as Bale, Arsi, Hararghe) in the past four to five years indicate that the need for consensual integration and better understanding between the various ethnic groups is in order. Several social-psychological studies show that even a superficial (let alone ethnic, language, religion based) categorization of people into groups without realistic conflict or competition is sufficient to produce an in group out group bias in the allocation of rewards or punishments (e.g. Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Phinney, 1990). This finding tells us that it is very easy to trigger off intergroup bias, discrimination, and conflict since the tendency to favour in-group (own group) and to discriminate out group exists in people. It may be possible to create regional boundaries and political organizations based on ethnic (linguistic) lines to create prejudice, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, evicting 'the others' and discrimination. The tendency to claim that one's own group as virtuous, superior, intelligent, and wise but the other groups as immoral, weak, stupid, conformist and backward develops or continues to be maintained.

As Edwards (1985) indicates, ethnic or national identity is a powerful, sometimes non-rational group attachment that should be handled carefully. Usually very strong identification with both national (Ethiopian) and the respective ethnic group(s) indicates integration. The writer is not arguing for assimilation or exclusive identification with the dominant culture, but for the acceptance of multiple identities, values and cultures. It is a known argument that membership in a group provides people with a sense of belonging which contributes in a positive self concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). On the surface, the issues of ethnicity, displacement and national

integration look like temporary problems. But they have deep social and psychological roots and will continue to affect and disrupt the society if not properly understood and dealt with.

With the change of the government and policies of regionalization, the issues of ethnic relations and national integration have been either marginalized or merely politicized. The case of thousands of displaced families will serve as a major illustration for these problems.

A national study, sponsored by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) was conducted in 1994/95 about the situation of the displaced families in Ethiopia. Only the relevant aspects of this study will be reported here. The writer was the consultant and the research team leader of the study. The methodology and the findings will be presented below.

Methodology

The Participants

About 8,010 family heads of displaced persons participated in the study. All regions were included in the study and the number of persons who completed the questionnaire appears in Table 1. The participants were mainly farmers, traders and housewives. Different sampling methods were used to select the subjects who completed the questionnaire.

Table 1. Population Ratio and Sample Size of Each Region

No.	Name of Region	Total Population (%)	Crude Estimate of Displaced Persons	Sample Size
1	Tigray	6.3	110,625	1,430
2	Atar	1.4	73,011	103
3	Amhara	26.2	584,000	1,583
4	Oromia	34.3	375,000	2,103
5	Somale	4.4	130,000	395
6	SNNP	20.7	215,000	1,170
7	Gambella	1.6	83,443	265
8	Benishangul/Gummuuz	0.2	10,430	108
9	Harari	0.3	15,645	103
10	Dire Dawa	0.3	15,645	142
11	Addis Ababa	4.3	57,527	608
	Total (56 Million)	100%	1,670,326	8,010

Source: MOLSA (1995) Report of the Survey Study to Rehabilitate the Displaced Families in Ethiopia, P.9 and 14.

About 54% of the participants were males and 46% were females. The mean age of the participants was 38.21 years. Those illiterate were 38.9% had primary education and the rest (22.6%) had secondary education and above. Again 60% were Coptic Orthodox Christians while 31% were Moslems and the remaining were Protestants or Catholics.

The Instruments and Procedure

A questionnaire--consisting of items regarding demographic issues including ethnicity, living situation, causes for displacement, assistance needed to be self reliant, etc.--was prepared and pilot tested. The questionnaire was completed in March and April, 1995 by trained MOLSA experts interviewing the displaced persons in a tent, a tukul, under a tree, a plastic house, in a Kebele hall, or on the street. Attempts were made to interview every other person in a camp, in the city and in other cities, persons present (available) that day were interviewed till the quota for that area (kebele, center, etc.) was fulfilled. The data collected were computer analysed and percentages and means obtained.

Results

As indicated earlier, the study was very large and the focus was on the assessment of the total situation of the displaced persons and preparation of a proposal on the methods of rehabilitation. Our focus in this paper will be limited to the issues of ethnicity and displacement in relation to national integration. The approach and interpretation is social-psychological.

As could be observed from Table 2, the Amhara, Oromo and Tigrians were the largest number of participants. In proportion to the total population ratio in Ethiopia, the number of persons displaced from Tigray, Amhara, Somali and Kambatta ethnic groups were large. It is to be noted that the sample size does not reflect total population ratio. It reflects the combination of the estimated number of displaced persons in each region, the total population, and our decision to have at least 100 and a maximum of 2,100 participants as the sample of a given region.

Out of the questions, two important questions which were put to the participants were: where they were displaced from and where they would like to live and work in the future.

Table 2: Participants by Nationality/Ethnic Group

No.	Ethnic Group	Number	Percentage
1	Amhara	2442	30.49
2	Oromo	1782	22.24
3	Tigrai	2213	27.6
4	Somale	328	4.09
5.	Gurage	258	3.22
6	Hadiya	253	3.16
7	Kambatta	200	2.50
8	Sidama	34	0.42
9	Agnuak	22	0.27
10	Benishangul	15	0.19
11	Other Ethnic Group +	409	5.11
12	Unspecified ++	54	0.67
	Total	8010	100

+ such as Wolaita, Gedeo, Agaw, Sidamma, etc

++ Did not specify their ethnic group (perhaps are mixed)

Table 3 shows where the participants were displaced from. The largest number of persons were displaced from Eritrea (46.18%) and Oromia (20.56%). Persons displaced from Somali, Amhara and Southern Ethiopia Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) were 5.82%, 5.79%, and 4.64%, respectively. A large number (9.89%) of "displaced persons" (returnees) were from the Republic of Somalia. It was difficult to distinguish the Somalis from Ethiopian and the Republic of Somalia both in Moyale and at Jijiga which were two of the cities of the study.

It is also to be noted that the number of returnees from the Sudan was large, but not very well reflected in Table 3. An estimate shows that there were 160,000 persons who returned from the Sudan in 1991-93 (Dessalegn, 1994).

Regarding where they would like to live and work at, 57.91% of the respondents indicated that they would prefer the respective area (urban and rural areas) that they were living at the time of the interview. Only 10.1% indicated that they would like to

live and work anywhere in Ethiopia. The remaining preferred major cities, or where their relatives lived. A follow up question was put by the researcher to a few individuals in Addis Ababa, Nazareth, Shashamane, Hossana and Wolaita why they

Table 3. Regions/Countries of Displacement and the Ratio

No.	Displaced from	Percentage
1	Eritrea and Assab	46.18
2	Oromia	20.56
3	Somali	5.82
4	Amhara	5.79
5	SNNP	4.64
6	Tigray	1.97
7	Gambella	1.24
8	Benishangul/Gumuz	1.04
9	Afar	0.58
10	Sudan Republic	0.80
11	Somalia Republic	9.89
12	Other Places	1.50

did not select going back to the places from which they came. The answers were varied and the main ones are the following.

- Eritrea is now an independent country and they are not 'allowed' to go back (mainly Addis Ababa and Nazareth respondents);
- Will not be accepted by the so called 'the indigenous people' of the place left;
- It is the policy and the guidelines (*memeria*) of the government that all people live in their ethnic region;
- The people and the political situation of the areas pushed them out and cannot go back;
- They are scared of attacks from the people in the area;
- Do not want to be displaced and be kicked out again;
- Towns are better to live in since "there is government" and towns belong to all ethnic groups; etc.

The overwhelming majority (91%) of the interviewees were displaced in 1991 and 1992 (1983 and 1984 Ethiopian Calendar). About 62% of the respondents indicated that the main cause for their displacement was the war which ended with the collapse of the Derg (May, 1991) and the establishment of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (June, 1991). About 18% indicated that they were displaced due to ethnic

conflicts. The remaining 20.32% indicated search for better living, abandoning settlement areas due to poor health and/or for economic reasons, etc. as the main causes for their displacement.

Discussion and Conclusion

Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic country with over 60 ethnic groups. The ethnic groups who account for one percent and above are: Oromo (29.07%), Amhara (28.29%), Tigray (5%), Gurage (4.36%), Somale (3.79%), Sidama (2.96%), Wolaita (2.57%), Hadiya (1.51%), Afar (1.37%), Agaw (1.15%), Gamo (1.09%), Gedeo (1.07%), Kefficho (1.04%) and Kembatta (1.02%) (CSA, 1991). These 14 ethnic groups account for 84% of Ethiopia's population. These and other ethnic groups have coexisted peacefully for decades, perhaps with the exception of struggles for power or against the governments and occasional clashes due to territorial (land) claims between neighboring ethnic groups. Mesfin (1994) indicates that there was no war due to racial, linguistic, or religious differences. To the writer's knowledge, none of the governments of Ethiopia have clearly reported to the public the nature, magnitude and the modes of resolution of ethnic conflicts. Open discussions, accountability, equity and fairness have not been the traditions of the political systems.

As would be expected in any major multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-religious country, some stereotypes of ethnocentrism and misperceptions exist among various ethnic and social groups in Ethiopia. For instance, Abaineh (1985) reported that authoritarianism, suspiciousness, aggressiveness, and tribe consciousness are the characteristics of one or more of the three major ethnic groups (Oromo, Amhara and Tigray) as perceived by themselves.

Usually stereotypes serve as rationalisations and justifications for racism and discrimination. Prejudice, racism and discrimination are integral parts of ethnic conflicts in many societies (Peres, 1971; Levine and Campbell, 1972; Tajfel, 1982). There is no doubt that the need for more economic resources (mainly land and cattle), competition and manipulation for political power (by the group leaders), the oppression and exploitation of some ethnic groups, and the incompatibility of interests and values between various ethnic groups are some of the major causes of conflict. Also misperceptions and the 'wrong political climates' tend to aggravate the situation.

No precise and easily understandable explanation has been given by researchers to human atrocities such as slavery, racially motivated tortures, the Holocaust in

Germany, and ethnic cleansing. But the above and other explanations and theories are often proposed. For instance, Allport (1954), Bizman, Amir and Malka (1992), Phinney (1990) and others propose that equal status contact between members of various groups, pleasant and rewarding social climate, desegregated residence, increased intermarriage, common and superordinate goals and social mobility tend to reduce prejudice and conflict, and improve interethnic relations.

Despite the diversities, great similarities exist between the ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Dominant values (familism, childrearing), outlook to life, the general socio-economic situation (farming, house construction, etc.), some interethnic friendships and marriages, and existence in one social system for hundreds of years tend to unite and create major similarities between the various peoples. Some degree of commitment to common values and norms is usually needed to maintain social order in a country and this is perhaps the case in Ethiopia. There is a large room for critical and objective social, historical and economic research concerning ethnic relations in Ethiopia.

Migration within Ethiopia has been a natural phenomenon for decades. For instance, CSA (1992) reported that in 1982/83 alone, there were over a half million persons who changed their areas of residence, many of them to other 'ethnic groups'. The main reasons for migration were search for better living and employment opportunities, repressive (oppressive) conditions at the place of origin, natural catastroph like drought and famine, search for better areas of grazing, and adverse economic (living) conditions. Usually these are voluntary movements due to what is commonly called *push-pull factors*--leaving impoverished areas for better areas. Language, religion, culture and the administrative borders did not and cannot stop peoples' movement, interactions and intimate relationships. No doubt that stereotyping and ethnocentrism continue to exist despite the interactions. Peoples' movement mentioned above does not include Derg's forced resettlement programs which by and large failed to make the settlers self sufficient (Alula, 1990, Alemneh, 1990). Hundreds of today's displaced persons are the former settlers in various unused fertile lands' of the country (e.g. Metekel, Gambella, Asosa, Bale).

The Ethiopian dominant values include helping each other, peace, education, familism, respectfulness, and religiosity (Habtamu, 1994). These are explicit and positive values. They need to be maintained and developed. The implicit and negative values include racism, talkativeness, mistrust, low respect for crafts and labor, superstitiousness, warriorship, and fatalism. These implicit values need change (be exposed and discouraged) for better national integration and for better socio economic development.

Several studies show that ethnicity is a multifaceted, dynamic and even negotiable social category (e.g. Nagel, 1995; Waters, 1990; Foster and White, 1982). Historical, socio-economic, social relational, political and situational factors influence ethnicity ("ancestry choice", as Waters calls it). Hence for the development of stable national integration the socio-economic system in Ethiopia would have to establish a favourable climate for the development of new values and habits, easy social mobility, the respect for individual human rights, civic responsibilities, and policies and practices which will eradicate prejudices, racism, inequity, ethnocentrism and displacement. The development and strengthening of these conditions would assist in the building of a well integrated and stable Ethiopia.

Also, autonomy combined with interdependence, the acknowledgment and respect for ethnic and individual differences, pressure for genuine co-operation to attain common goals, the development of culture of peace and tolerance, the realization for the coexistence of ethnic and Ethiopian identities, wide interactions between various groups, and fairness in resources' distribution and conflicts' resolutions are highly recommended for a true and lasting national integration of Ethiopia. The responsibility for these difficult tasks lies in the hands of the Ethiopian government, the education sector, civic societies, religious leaders, ethnic and community leaders, political organizations and the community at large.

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