RESEARCH ARTICLE

ETHIOPIAN OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE POST-1991 POLITICAL STRUCTURE

*Gudeta Kebede Asfaw and Alemu Kassa Reta

Department of Governance and Development Studies, Jimma University, Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the weakness of legally registered opposition political parties in post-1991 political order of Ethiopia. To analyze this state of affairs, the authors adopt a structural approach. Two major questions should be addressed in this regard. First, what factors affect operations of opposition parties? Second, why have the opposition political parties have been weakened? The paper argues that the weak nature of opposition political parties in Ethiopia has to do with the existing internal and external contexts in which the opposition political parties are currently operating. Scrutinized from this perspective, the current status of opposition parties arises from the manner in which multiparty politics is organized and governed. We view the current status of opposition political parties in Ethiopia arising primarily from the political environment or context in which these extra-constitutional actors operate or find themselves in. At the center of these contexts is the incumbent government. The research argues that weak status of opposition political parties has been caused to a large extent by the internal and external contexts. This study concludes that the vitality of Ethiopian opposition parties is limited structurally and their weak status is perpetuating for a long period in time.

INTRODUCTION

The history of *de jure* political parties in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. The political realm of Ethiopia for the first time in the country's history witnessed the advent of multi-party politics in 1991.The first legal act which guaranteed Ethiopian citizens the right to participate in political activities and to organize political parties was issued by the 1991 Transitional Charter of the then Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). Based on this legal base a plethora of political parties with varying orientations and programmes of action mushroomed in the country (Kasshun, 2003). When it comes to the relationship between the incumbent vis-à-vis opposition parties, in spite of the open up of the *de jure* multiparty systemin Ethiopia, one would be confronted with the persistent extreme inequality or imbalance within the dynamics of the country's party system(Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003). To put it simply, political party structure in Ethiopia is characterized by the extreme asymmetry between the power of the ruling party, and the weakness of the opposition parties(ibid.). Though many a seasoned scholars mentioned the weakness of opposition political parties it would also be wise enough to ask the question why and find out what explains this state of affairs. In this regard, the major purpose of this paper is to assess the status of legally registered opposition political parties in post-1991 political order in Ethiopia. Hence,by taking this dimension into scrutiny, the questions that are asked arewhat kinds of major weaknesses shared by opposition parties in Ethiopia. What are the contributing factors for the weakness of opposition parties in Ethiopia?

METHODOLOGY

This paper based on the qualitative explanatory research paradigm. This methodology is employed to answer the question of why the current status of opposition parties in Ethiopia is persisting. To answer this 'why' question, we argue that this state of affairs has been affected by internal and external factors. In this regard, the data were compiled from primary and secondary sources and through a combination of structured interviews. The desk research was used to gather secondary data in the form of written material on opposition political parties in Ethiopia. This desk research relies on newspaper reports and popular discourses on opposition parties in general and the external and internal contexts in particular. For primary data, the instruments used were a structured questionnaire and in depth interviews. Purposively, about six party officials filled out the questionnaire on the internal and external context of opposition parties. In addition to this, interviews were conducted with six senior party leaders and other key informants working within research think tank, academia, the media, political analysts, political advisor, and experts and from National Electoral Board of Ethiopia and Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).This study is limited in its analysis to the Ethiopian legally registered opposition political parties in the post-1991 political structure. This research is not a full account of all the

*Corresponding author: Gudeta Kebede Asfaw, Department of Governance and Development Studies, Jimma University, Ethiopia.

issues that concern the status of all opposition political parties in Ethiopia; rather its aim is to offer general explanations about the factors which negatively influence their status.

A Conceptual Framework and Definitions

The conceptual framework of this study is a skeletal structure of justification that attempts to explain the current status of opposition parties in Ethiopia. To frame this structure, we adopted concepts from literature study in order to describe the relationship between specific variables identified in this research. Particularly, for this study, these concepts serve as a guide to collect data, and ways in which these data will be analyzed and explained (Eisenhart, 1991).

Figure 1 Conceptual Links that show the relationship between the Internal and External Factors for the Status of Legal Opposition Parties in Ethiopia

Source: Researchers Synthesis

What explain the weakness of Ethiopian opposition parties in spite of their indispensability for the success of democracy? Addressing this question in the specific context of Ethiopia should begin with identification of most plausible sets of variables that tend to affect opposition parties weakness. As the above figure 1 illustrate, we used in two interrelated contexts to explain the status of opposition parties. In lieu of clarifying the nature of opposition politics of the day; the conceptual framework of this study visualizes relationship between the independent variables (internal and external contexts) and the dependent variable (the status of opposition political parties). The arrows show the direction of the impact relationship. It demonstrates that, in contemporary Ethiopia if there is an unfavorable internal and discouraging external context against opposition political parties, it will affect their status negatively. The two major challenges facing opposition political parties in Ethiopia body politics relate to (a) the external context within which parties operate and (b) the internal functioning of political parties. Before beginning the substantive analysis, it is important to outline concepts relating to opposition parties 'external context':

- *Political culture* is defined as 'attitudes towards the political system and its various parts, and attitudes towards the role of the self in the system' (Almond and Verba, 1963, p. 13). For this research purpose, the researchers of this study adopted the following definition of 'political culture of the ruling party', which refers here to a historically evolved style of governance, a repertoire of power symbolism, and a body of dominant values and

commitments regarding the political process (Abbink, 2006a, p. 615-616) by the EPRDF.

- *Political repression by government* refers to the arbitrarily arrest and detention, harassment and torture and other ill-treatment of police, military, and other members of the security forces to punish a spectrum of perceived dissenters, including university students, members of the political opposition and their supporters, and alleged supporters of insurgent groups, as well as alleged terrorist suspects. It also includes systematically repression of failing to provide police and security protection when citizens requested, not allowing them to exercises their right of peaceful demonstration as well as non-inclusion of opposition parties in representative institutions of the country (Earl, 2011; Davenport, 2007).

- *Fear of politics on the part of citizens* refers to the political apathy and withdrawal from the political process. It is dictated by the 'often-heard expression in Amharic '*poleickana korenti béruku*', [keep far away from politics and electricity]…don't go too close to politics, it will only stun and hurt you' (Tronvoll, 2002, p. 160). It is the unwillingness or the inability of popular citizens, with few exceptions, to break away systematically from participating in politics. It is characterized by passive citizenship, the fear of criticism, self-censorship, a fear of contesting authority, and kowtowing to those in power.

- *Inter-party relations* is conceptualized as the way political parties interact between and among themselves around issues of common interest, and how they work together and engage one another on national and public policy matters. In these relations, we used the term inter-party relations to represent the interrelationships between the ruling party and opposition parties on the one hand, and among opposition parties in the other.

Likewise the external context the four key concepts that have explaining the 'internal context' of opposition parties are defined as follows:

- *Party institutionalization* refers to the process by which organizations and procedures acquire 'value and stability' and 'the way the organization 'solidifies' (…) [and]

becomes valuable in and of itself' (Huntington, 1968, p. 12). For him (ibid), the four dimensions of the measures for party institutionalization consist of adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence. For our purpose, we make use of Ezrow (2011) party institutionalization measure and according to this definition, party institutionalization could be measured by the criteria of party autonomy, coherence, roots in society, level of organization and complexity, adaptability, and legitimacy (p. 5). 'Party autonomy' refers to relative independence of the party from individuals within, outside the party, other organizations, individuals and societal groups that are outside the party (ibid.). 'Coherence', means parties need to maintain some semblance of internal coherence and needs to act as a unified organization, though able to tolerate a degree of intra-party dissidence (ibid.). 'Roots in society' refers to the party's stable roots in a society. In other words, it addresses how the party has strong programmatic linkages to society or how the party voters are attached to it (ibid.). 'Level of organization and complexity' refers to how clearly are the internal structure and procedure defined as well as whether the organizational apparatus of the party present at all administrative levels and at a nationwide level (ibid., p. 6). 'Adaptability', refers to two things. First, it means the durability of the party in order to provide voters with a chance to evaluate them. Second, it refers to whether or not the party has survived the demise of its leader. This means, adaptable party can handle a shift in leadership and also handle the shift from serving as an opposition party to the governing party and vice versa without falling apart. (ibid., p. 7).Finally, 'legitimacy', refers to a belief in parties' works to create stability in the system as parties are best able to maintain durable behavioral patterns in comparison to the chaos created by anti-system politicians (ibid.).

- *Political party finance* refers to the use of funds for legitimate, irregular, or illicit political activities; use of state resources for political purposes; and media coverage during the campaign. According to Salih and Nordlund (2007), themain sources of political party funding in Africa include donations; public funding; minimal membership fees; public funding/subsidies; trust funds; and corrupt kickbacks from businessmen and women.

- *Party membership* refers to the formal and informal membership of political parties. The formal members identified are those registered who may pay membership dues periodically to the political party in accordance with the by-laws of the political party or they make contributionsand donations to upkeep of their parties. They are obliged to have membershipregistration cards and in some constituencies are expected to participate in the meetings of the party, to express freely their view and comments, to vote and to elect or to be elected. Whereas, According to Ninsin (2006) 'for a large percentage of the populace membership of a political party is informal and at best latent; it springs to life only during general elections' (p. 12).

- *Intra-party democracy* is understood as emphasizing the need for participationby party membership and lower party structures inthe decision-making processes of the party. According to Lotshwao (2007), for the existence of internal democracy, a culture of tolerance of debate and dissenting opinion by the party leadership is a necessary precondition.

In all the above-mentioned conceptual links, what is indicated is the attempted framework that gives an idea about the relationship between the internal and external factors for the status of legal opposition parties in Ethiopia. What lesson can be drawn from these conceptual links? It is to these the determining factors or variables that the next section turns to provide the probabilistic explanations by specifying the contexts under which opposition politics currently is operating and is more likely to affect their status.

Factors Affecting the Current Status of Opposition Political Parties in Ethiopia

In this section, factors affecting the current status of opposition political parties in Ethiopia are examined; we expect to find a positive relationship between the role and impacts of the incumbent party, on the one hand, and the weakness of opposition parties, on the other. This section concerned with the contemporary trends of crisis or fragility of opposition party politics in Ethiopia by highlighting their challenges. At the heart of dysfunctional opposition political parties in Ethiopia, there are two contexts of structural disadvantages that we framed on the rank of these parties that explain their weakness. We argue that their weakness is embedded in the structural contexts. At this point, these are critical factors that make the rise of a powerful opposition party in Ethiopia unlikely, though in no way precluding their rise sometime in the future (Suttner, 2004). In essence, their weakness is so strongly shaped by the structural contexts that merely reflect trends in all them and can itself serve as a study of structural challenges. The first useful indicator for assessing these realities is the external context or environment within which these parties' operate. In examining the external context of the opposition parties, the role and impacts of the incumbent has become decisive, since it controls social and political life and it could be a trigger for significant levels of political uncertainty on the part of opposing parties. Put differently, in assessing the external context, it is therefore, essential to recognize the background, particularly the incumbent government/party commitment, its real perception and the practical undertaking towards legally registered opposition political parties which shape significantly one aspect of the nature of Ethiopian party politics itself. This is because the current 'multi-party politics' in Ethiopia has structurally and ideologically limited and it is too closely supervised by the party in power (Abbink, 2006b). The second context or condition is the internal environment that these parties implanted in. In the final analysis, the combination of these contexts is said to sustain the weakness of the opposition and preclude the type of monitoring that is possible where an opposition is strong. Accordingly, in order to address these two contexts and to present the analysis and discussion for why the Ethiopian opposition parties are so weak, this section is organized in to two sub-sections. In light of this, we start the discussion first by examining the ideological limitation by analyzing the EPRDF commitment versus perception towards the opposition parties of Ethiopia, prior to analyzing the external structural factors.

Understanding EPRDF Commitment versus Perception against Opposition Parties

In the post 1991 political structure of Ethiopia, a significant opening for a democratic political order has been conditioned largely by the blueprints of the EPRDF (Abbink, 2000). At the beginning, the making of political pluralism in Ethiopia was a major action of EPRDF. With a pledge for a multi-party political system, EPRDF invited ethnic based and national opposition political parties to participate in the political process of the country. Such an open call to accommodate opposition in a country was a significant political innovation on the part of EPRDF. At the start, this was highly appreciated as a good political commencement by both Ethiopian and the international community, where prior to this period there was no active political parties, no strong civil society organizations, and no free press in Ethiopia. Regardless of this legacy, EPRDF legalized citizens to exercise their freedom of association for participating in peaceful and lawful political activities to assume political power as a logical outcome of its political liberalization in Ethiopia. Mostly, as mentioned in the various documents of the EPRDF, the party says again and again that, it is strongly believes that democracy is crucial to the existence of Ethiopia (EPRDF, 2001), and it claims that it has organized the country's democratic practice in constitutional and organizational framework. The emergence of the democratic state whose creation the EPRDF claimsmain responsibility, depends on the viable existence of its opposition political parties. In this regard, the EPRDF Party program endorsed at the 4th Organizational Congress, in its section of political program, the party adhere that it is working 'to ensure that parties contesting legally and democratically for public office flourish that they organize citizens legally, and that they exercise their rights to free expression and political participation' (EPRDF, p. 2001, p. 13). Nevertheless, when one can pose a question whether or not the EPRDF has lived up to these pledges particularly with regard to opposing parties, the political realties on the ground is quite controversial. On the one hand, theoretically, the EPRDF looks as if it is adhering to the notion that opposition political parties could play a key role in multiparty democracy, on the other hand, it is not only 'appear to have never envisioned a role for opposition parties' (Merera, 2007a, p. 15), but also it denounces their role and existence as it does not matter to it (EPRDF, 2000; 2002; 2006a; 2006b) as well the functioning of viable democratic system in the country.

In spite of the legal provisions and promises regarding democracy and citizens' freedom of association to form political parties, 'the government, and especially the EPRDF, is ambivalent in their attitude towards parties not associated with the régime, and also to the idea of political opposition as such' (Abbink, 2000, p. 156). Apart from EPRDF rhetoric and theoretical justification aside, however, the actual perception of the party has 'never considered opposition parties as partners in the building of democratic Ethiopia. More disturbing is the ease with which the EPRDF characterizes major opposition parties with significant followings by giving them tags such as chauvinists, narrow nationalists, or servants of the *neftegnas*' (Merera, 2007a, p. 15). In its own words, the EPRDF document remarks that the 'deeds of opposition parties in Ethiopia are undoubtedly vexing and irksome' (EPRDF, 2010, p. 3). It has

been associating opposition parties with scathing remarks, and criminalizing them as 'rent-seekers', 'worthless and archaic thinkers', 'anti-development', 'forces of violence and riot' , 'the force of destruction', 'dependency and anti-democracy forces' (EPRDF, 2002; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2007), 'anti-peace,….and even as 'the enemy of the Ethiopian people',…'adherents of neo-liberalism'' (Merera, 2011, p. 178). Dr. Negasso Gidada, Ex-President of the FDRE and the former member in the Central Executive Council of the EPRDF, is one of the key informants interviewed also attested this twisted perception of the EPRDF towards the opposition, according to him:

In 2001, the EPRDF categorized the society in to two forces, i.e., developmental and anti-developmental or rent-seekers. The party also confirmed that, there are opposition political parties led by anti-development forces or rent-seekers. Therefore, they have to corrected themselves from such deeds and willing to cooperate and work with EPRDF. If they don't, they have to be eliminated (personal interview, 2011)

In the above kind of criminalizing opposition parties, consequently, gimmicky continuities can be observed. Similarly, the EPRDF election strategic booklets document for 2010 validated this remark of the party once again. Indeed, as Vestal (1999) described it, for EPRDF the opposition parties are 'anti-democratic both in terms of their objectives and their approaches, it is futile to expect them to make a positive contribution to the democratic process in the country' (p. 149-150). In this regard, the following quote provides the similar ambivalent remarks of the regime against the deeds of opposition parties' (EPRDF, 2010):

Although all the opposition parties in Ethiopia can be viewed as rent-seekers, they undeniably have their own distinct characteristics. Some revolve around narrow nationalism, while others cherish in chauvinism. While few seem determined to prescribe to legal and peaceful struggle, others are prone to violence; whereas the rest vacillate between the two (p. 6).

Rhetoric and commitment of EPRDF aside, nonetheless, the actual perception of the incumbent party regarding opposition politics severely contradicted the indispensable role of oppositions as was expected. The benignant party ideology of the EPRDF is intrinsically contradictory to the pledge the party promised for the realization of multi-party system in Ethiopia. In this regard, if we were to draw a balance sheet of the EPRDF, there is indeed vivid mismatch between the promise that the regime held out in the early years when it assumed power and the actual perverted perception of the party. However, such perceived negative perceptions of the EPRDF against opposition parties were largely associated with or 'emanates from its ideology of 'revolutionary democracy' (Merera, 2011a, p. 162). When one takes a close look at the ruling party governance ideology, one possible account that one finds as the most compelling in the promises versus perception is the democratic rhetoric that covers reality of political façade. As Abbink (2010) pointes out:

The ruling party appears to have a 'religious' conception of politics, seeing it as ontological and in a class by itself, a way that cannot be entertained in any other form than its own, and one rooted in an ideology called 'revolutionary democracy'.

This is opposed to liberal democracy, which is seen by the dominant party leadership as unsuited to a developing country like Ethiopia, although the underlying reason might be to help it to cling to power... The TPLF/EPRDF sees itself as a vanguard party that is invincible and incapable of has led to reinforced autocratic rule and intimidation, a stifling of general freedoms and armed suppression (p. 3).

As a continuation to the above explanation, the second rationalization given is the actual ambiguous state of affairs that the party created, which is in fact the multiparty system of Ethiopia is being constructed in such a way that it does not threaten EPRDF control. Significantly, in the present political structure of Ethiopia, 'multiparty elections thus do not appear to fundamentally threaten the existing power structure: the party-dominated executive branch of government (controlling the economy, the army, and the security forces) always retains strict control' (Abbink, 2006b, p. 195). The manifestation is that, the party established and reinforced a two-track structure of freedom of association to form political parties at all administration levels. Formally, it has legalized and facilitated 'multi-party politics', to keep in line with the promises it made at the beginning to the Ethiopian people and the demands and expectations of Western donors. Informally, it has given insufficient space and insignificant role to opposition politics and is determined not to allow them any room to maneuver at all levels to challenge its power (Pausewang *et al.*, 2002), where the formal mechanism provides for a democratic façade, and systematically orchestrated to be exclusive with veneer of democratic process, the informal or actual performance severely restricts the fundamental rights and freedoms of associations and assembly of the citizens of Ethiopia (Aalen, 2009).As the above two explanations contend, we argue that ideological limitation or negative perception is one explanatory factor that is currently working against opposition political parties. It is an exclusionary one that is not willing to see any role of opposition parties in the country's 'democratic undertaking'. This kind of marginalization aims to weaken the opposition politics and it has been one stumbling-block for the development of multiparty politics in the country in general as well as an obstacle for opposition parties in particular not to play their rightful role in the democratization process. However, opposition political parties are the heart of politics in a representative democracy and most forms of governance without opposition political parties tend to be authoritarian (Matlosa, 2007). And, hence, this ideological limitation posed by the party, restricted the opportunity of opposition politics to become a political asset to Ethiopian democracy. In a nutshell, the current modus operandi of the regime in power demonstrates how flawed are the claims of the government to honor the commitment to the multi-party system and the political right of citizen to organize opposition political parties that are in principle entrenched in Ethiopia's constitution (Clapham, 2002).

External Context

The ideological limitation discussed above is relevant to our understanding of external context of political parties in Ethiopia since the external context is embedded in the ideology limitation of the regime in power. To put differently, it is important in the understanding of the state of opposition

political parties in Ethiopia, given that these parties are influenced greatly by this context in which they operate. Besides the external context, which is by large outside the control of opposition parties, it has been operating within the framework of the above ideological limitation put in place by the incumbent party. This section turns the spotlight on one dimension of structural limitation for the failure of opposition parties in Ethiopia. The essence of this section is divided into four subsections covering the existing political culture in Ethiopia, the political repression of the incumbent government, fear of politics on the part of citizens and the nature of inter-party relations.

a) The Existing Political Culture of the Ruling Party in Ethiopia

For more than two decades from the post 1991, the EPRDF has been ruling the country and there is a peculiar political culture of the ruling party. It is characterized by 'a historically evolved style of governance, a repertoire of power symbolism, and a body of dominant values and commitments regarding the political process' (Abbink, 2006a, p. 615). As indicated in the previous section, the regime in power reneging on the commitment to uphold multi-party politics and is a resort to marginalize opposition parties and monopolize the political process. As a continuation of this, its political culture 'surrounding the issue of power, based on the understanding of power as a vertical relationship, does not allow consultation or compromise' (Pausewang, 2009, p. 81). One aspect of the enduring characteristics of political culture of the ruling party is its reluctance in accepting the idea of the legitimacy of political opposition (Abbink, 2000). This emanates from the regime's 'ideological unwillingness to engage in dialogue with alternative political perspectives, a sense that 'if you are not with us, you are against us' (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003, p. 120). In the contemporary context, 'there is an identifiable mode of political culture in Ethiopia, marked by an hierarchical-authoritarian style of governance, an entrenched top–down approach based on privileged (elite) insights into the needs of the country, and a structural neglect by power holders of oppositional views and of public debate about alternatives' (Abbink, 2006a, p. 615-616). This political culture, engrained in hierarchical authority within the ruling party, has a considerable implication on the role that opposition parties should have to play in the democratic discourse of Ethiopia. However, as its common feature, the regime has not been willing to put up with its political opponents and adhered only to the centrality of its role through 'a zero-sum approach to political power' expressed in politics of exclusion. As Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003) indicated:

It is the political agenda of the EPRDF which dominates, communicated through its control of the state mass media (notably radio), and the state administrative structures…Similarly, attempts from opposition parties or other civil society actors to define an agenda for discourse are actively counteracted by the organs of state and government, and vice versa (p.36).

Driven by exclusionary politics, the other aspect of the incumbent regime's political culture as opposed to opposition parties is its hegemonic aspiration. Its lust for hegemony

asserts that political power is the only property of the incumbent regime and its coterie of supporters. It has never regarded any opposition movement as legitimate, or as having any right to oust it from power by peaceful electoral means (Clapham, 2005). In this regard, as Geberu Aserat, the former President of the Regional State of Tigray and the current Chairman of The Union of Tigrayans for Democracy and Sovereignty, ARENA, to which we put the question of what is meant by this aspiration of the party, said that:

EPRDF is not willing to see any other center of power or independent organization other than its own that play central role in the current politics of the Ethiopia. The party leadership has hold the strong conviction that it is only the EPRDF who have the country at heart and do possess the monopoly of knowledge and the magic key that is the ultimate solution to the country's endemic socio-political and economic malaise. Because no one out there knows better than the regime in power does, EPRDF is not only unwilling but unprepared to hand over political power to opposition parties whom it believe will only mess up the country's affairs and the distorted strategies they have designed and the ill-equipped programmes they have (personal interview, 2011).

In interviews, key anonymous informants as well as representative from the Ethiopian Democratic Party explained that, while our constitution contains a vigorous article of political rights which guarantees the right to assembly and the right to organize at any level and in any form, the right to strike in accordance with the law, and the right to express one's opposition, the ruling party has not always respected this constitutional arrangements, and the legal system has not been strong enough to enforce this rights and respect for political and democratic rights. And hence, in the political culture of the regime, the right of criticism and opposition as a legitimate and necessary element in the political process has becoming increasingly irrelevant for the incumbent. Opposition to the ruling party's policies and deeds has not been desired after all. Rather, it has been encouraged, and tolerance of those political parties created by it and those was deliberately formed to divide oppositions. Most importantly, they stressed that the regime in power still has difficulty accepting the basic premises of democracy- the existence of political pluralism or multi- party politics and political tolerance in its political culture. In essence, what this suggests is that while the regime in power embraced multiparty politics half-heartedly and never considered that the opposition had legitimate right to take part in the contemporary politics of the country (ICG, 2009). This is because, in the political culture of the regime in power, political pluralism, and accommodation of different ideas has no root. An exclusionary practice against the opposition is the 'hallmarksof the EPRDF regime for most of the years that it has been in power' (Kasshun, 2003, p. 143).

In light of this, what we see in Ethiopia today is intolerant political culture of regime against opposition parties characterized by 'hierarchic', 'exclusion' and 'polarization' against opposition political parties. Thus, 'the outcome of such polarisation can be expected to be the channeling of political opposition through other means than peaceful statements and rallies….Since our opinions are not heard or considered through political debate, let us talk with the barrel of the gun'

has been a political tradition in Ethiopia' (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003, p. 36). In other words, the country multi-party politics is thus compounded now by the fact that the regime is pushing more and more people and organization to armed struggle or resistance. As a result, OLF, Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), Ethiopian People Patriotic Front (EPPF), Ginbot 7: Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy Political Party have opted to use 'everything possible' and 'every means' including armed struggle to overthrow the incumbent as a way of advancing their civilian politics (Wondwosen, 2009).As key informants (2011) explained, the above kind of option taken by opposition parties, even if it is not appreciated by the ruling party, has dual political advantages. Explicitly, it has been capitalized and utilized by EPRDF for political propaganda gimmick against oppositions. It associated them as 'anti-peace' and 'the enemy of the Ethiopian people' and to make them illegitimate candidates in the country's body politics. Moreover, implicitly, it is another significant political opportunity for the ruling parties that capitalized using the formal and informal mechanisms to systematically sideline and ban such kind of contending forces at any cost. Moreover, as argued by informants this is one strategy of the ruling party not only in Ethiopia for that matter many hybrid regimes in Africa purposely established party-military relations to solidify their unlimited rule. However, apart from pursuing this exit-option, others remain to be working with peaceful struggle with all its challenges exerted by the incumbent. Although, as we will discuss later on, with the current political space, organizing and mobilizing peaceful public oppositions against the ruling party seems to be hardly possible. This is because existing EPRDF conception of multi-party governance has been deeply adversarial against oppositions and proceeded by political repressions. The current Chairman of ANDP, Dr. Negasso Gidada's statement on this subject in an October 2011 interview was particularly straightforward: 'In spite of the actual or threatened political repression, we (ANDP) opted to purse a peaceful struggle. For us, this is the only way and we need to live together with our constituency and we planned to broaden our political home base in piecemeal manner. Therefore, in the existing exclusionary political culture, we are not in a position to surrender or retreat from the political space. We vowed to challenge the system peacefully for the realization of a practically working democracy in Ethiopia' (Personal Interview, 2011).

To sum up, the regime in power has proved repeatedly that, despite its rhetoric, its promises of multiparty politics have been eclipsed by state exclusionism of other political organization and opinions apart from its version of things (Assefa, 2002). This exclusionary political culture reinforced the argument in the aforementioned section about its dubious commitment to pluralistic democracy and it has never appeared as an organization committed to pluralism for its own sake, and has been resistant to the emergence of parallel (i.e. competitor) systems of organized political forces (Vaughan, 2004). This could push Ethiopians' propensity toward extremism, a manifestation of alienation among opponents and the antithesis of a democratic political culture. Be this as it may, as informed by interviewed leaders of opposition parties and key informants, there has been systematic political repression perpetrated against the opposition political forces which is

typically 'symptomatic of the unsparing and persistent nature of the entrenched EPRDF exclusionist policies' (Kassahun, 2003, p. 143). Thus, as a continuation of this, taking political repression as the theme of its discussion, the next section treats the why and how of the regime in power's repressive actionsdirected at the contending parties.

b) *Political Repression of the Incumbent Government*

In light of the above political culture of the regime, the second major external factor that influences the rank of Ethiopian opposition political parties relates to the political repression of the regime in power. As defined in the conceptual framework, political repression involves the actual or threatened use of direct and indirect physical sanctions of the incumbent against the opposition parties in general and members, supporters or sympathizers of contending forces in particular. In connection to this, as the Economic Commission of Africa (2005) study revealed that in Africa 'the political environment is often very intimidating for the opposition, whose supporters are harassed and sometimes arrested on trumped-up charges by agents of the state acting on behalf of the ruling party. There are cases of intimidation and poor police protection in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania ....opposition political parties have little or no security' (p. 41)In contemporary Ethiopia too, some interviewed key informants (2011) indicated that as compared to the pre 2005 period, the experiences of freedom of operation for opposition political parties have been dwindling in the post 2005. This is mainly because of the failure of the system to provide a level playing field for all political contestants. There is a systematic political repression perpetrated by the incumbent government. Particularly, opposition political parties have not been enjoying freedom of operation in their activities especially lack of sufficient freedom to operate at the grassroots level, campaigning, holding political rallies and meetings, etc. Opposition parties do not have adequate police protection when necessary and cannot freely air their views on national and international issues.

They cited UFD party as a case in point. During the internal crisis of this party, the police failed to provide security protection against the faction led by Prof. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam. They also argued that, contrary to the expectation that typically opposition parties do not enjoy any security at all from state institutions. Rather, they have been vulnerable to the constant interference, intimidation and harassments by the security forces of the regime in power. In an interview, with Alemu Koyera, Administrative Coordinator of MEDREK, regarding whether the opposition politics does enjoy a level playing field, adamantly emphasized the lack of a level playing political field that the opposition managed to exploit; and he remarked that this is due to the systematic closing of political space for political oppositions. He associated these problems with the nature of the country politics and governance context. Typically, he identified the incumbent ideology, misguided governance context, and the perpetrated covert and overt repression against opposition. He underlined that these milieu has been antithesis to the development of effective political oppositions and party systems in Ethiopia. In his further remark, indeed, he accentuated that these contexts continuously prevent them from realizing their potential, and also push them

to move out from the party politics game, as if they don't have any stakes in the country's political system (personal interview, 2011).

Alemu's concern is valid that the diminishing political space to maneuver is a hindrance to the actual practice and protection of opposition parties' freedom of association enshrined in Ethiopia constitution. Generally, the relationship between the state *vis-à-vis* political associations of individuals in a given country defines freedom of association for that state (Vestal, 1999). In this light, when we infer the legal basis of this relationship, it is sanctioned by Article 31 of the incumbent government's Constitution. According to this article, as long as the purpose is lawful, 'every person has theright to freedom of association for any cause or purpose'. In line with this, in Ethiopia opposition political parties of one form or another have been established to enjoy this freedom of association. Moreover, and in accordance with what is declared in the constitutional provisions mentioned above, there is also political parties' regulation proclamation that regulates the condition by which citizens exercise their freedom of association. Furthermore, freedom of association requires, then, the non-interference of the state in the formation and in the affairs of associations that function within the scope of law. It also requires the assistance of the state in creating and maintaining an environment that is conducive to the exercise of theright to free association. However, as it is mentioned in the prior section, the difference between constitutional provisions and reality is seen most graphical in Ethiopia. Despite constitutional provisions for a freedom of association in the country, opposition parties have had to bear the brunt of state-sanctioned violence and repression.In light of this, asking the question why the incumbent did perpetrate political repression against the organized opposition political parties, as opposed to what is allowed by law concerning freedoms association, is a question that remains to be answered.

A look at the aforementioned question of political repression of the regime in power will provide reflection for examining why EPRDF failed to implement its promise for democratic election, and resorted to tactics of intimidation, imprisonment and harassments of opposition political parties. The key reason for this is emanating from what was demonstrated in the proceeding section as the political culture of the regime in power or most characteristically the hegemonic aspiration and position of the ruling party (Aalen, 2009; Abbink, 2010). Merera (2011a) also associated this condition as the mother of all problems of political oppositions and democracy in Ethiopia. This is in view of the fact that it is concomitant to the nature of the existing regime sought himself alone as the status of the sole and authentic representative of the people of Ethiopia, and adhere to bring everything under its monopolistic control. Tamirate (2007) elaborates this state of affairs as:

The regime failed to allow the development, emergence, operation and institutionalization of independent parties....The sole reason is the perception of the regime's core leadership that these patties pose a threat to its dominance. The regime takes liberty to create parties and organizations at will but does not allow independent parties to emerge and become institutions at the national level. The ruling party is especially

determined to prevent nationally oriented, democratic, multinational, multi-religion and competitive parties from emerging (p. 80-81).

The ruling party envisages itself 'as a vanguard political force, which is not inclined to compromise with opposition forces because it is convinced that it has the solution for everything' (Abbink, 2010, p. 3). This kind of political position on the part of the incumbent manifested a peculiar 'mode of political culture in Ethiopia, marked by a hierarchical-authoritarian style of governance, an entrenched top–down approach based on privileged (elite) insights into the needs of the country' (Abbink, 2006b, p. 615-616). In light of this, 'the ruling party's omnipotence in the political arena is further buttressed by its control of public resources, which are unsparingly deployed for strengthening its position on the one hand and weakening its political adversaries on the other' (Kassahun, 2010, p. 12). To realize this, 'the regime has a well-entrenched political machine dominated by a party that is not ready to let go of power…The party elite have dominated government policy since 1991 and a real option of elections resulting in government change is not yet available' (Abbink, 2006b, p. 196). In connection to the present hegemonic position of EPRDF in determining the conditions and climate of politics, as well as in creating interests which tie persons and elite groups to its power structure, Abbink (ibid) further explained these political-economic stakes of the regime as follows:

The ruling party that emanated from the successful TPLF insurgent movement came to power with the force of arms, its members sacrificing a lot during the insurgency (1975–91). Their political-economic stakes are now great. Many people in positions of power from the federal level in Addis Ababa to the kebele (local community) level are appointed because of loyalty to the party; they have income, privileges, and jobs to lose and will not voluntarily give them up, because unemployment, insecurity, or poverty is waiting…So next to substantial ideological differences and a conception of power as a cherished prize and as indivisible, there is a deep economic, if not survival, logic behind the political process in Ethiopia (p. 177).

In this political sphere, the state operates mostly as the property of EPRDF elite who hold political power and their entourage, rather than as an impartial system of institutions which serve the general interest. With this condition, for the incumbent political power is held to be indivisible and is grounded in ideas of a zero-sum politics, once gain and the other lose. According to its party document (2006a), it propagates the hegemonic position of the 'revolutionary democracy' as an ideology and the EPRDF as a ruling-party should be protected by all means necessary (Merera, 2011a). As consequences, the end result of this zero-sum game politics, has led to the strengthening of EPRDF and the corresponding isolation of the oppositions and weakening of them (ibid.). In the final analysis, what manifested is that 'power is predominantly vested not in institutions and constitutions but in the control of people, a specific ideology, and control of the use of force' (Abbink, 2006a, p. 618) in the current political system of Ethiopia.

As mentioned above, the current government has demonstrated that it will use repression to maintain its power, at the cost of realizing the country's democratic potential (Pausewang, 2009). Certainly, this is related to the fact that 'whoever opposes the incumbent political leadership in any form is summarily labeled as an enemy of the state and must be dealt with harshly through various ways-imprisonment on flimsy grounds, threats to injury and, sometimes, even physical elimination' (Tesfaye, 2011, p. 3). In this instance, when we come to analyze the how of intervention of the incumbent party in the internal affairs of opposition parties in Ethiopia, there have been a number of strategies in the menu of intervention of the incumbent party for suppression of opposition parties. Most importantly, as Merera Gudina, Chairman of Oromo People Congress (OPC), summarized that the regime, using the tax payers' money, bribed and buying of members of opposition parties or members on the inside to infiltrate *agents provocateurs* into the main opposition parties to cause disruptions in them from within. By doing so, first, it managed to spy their decisions. According to him, this situation is revealed with what was happened in the former CUD party. Their series meeting minutes were published on the Newspaper entitled EFTEN which is believed to be sponsored by the government without the party's permission. Second, using its infiltrators dissemblingly, it pushed the opposition party to have wrong decisions; the third option is it used them as a planted time bomb with the aim of dividing, weakening, and dismantling that particular party. This was manifested in the case of former ONC and CUD parties, which in the name of internal struggle and crisis, in both cases, the new party junior leaders managed to control the party and awarded its name by the NEBE of Ethiopia. Another high level key informant asked about the knowledge regarding 'infiltration of incumbent party' into opposition parties, claimed that there is so called an 'Intervening Desk within the security state apparatus'. According to this informant, this entity is responsible for the aforementioned tactics and clandestine activities against opposition parties. In sum, instead of accommodating the genuine political opposition, the core of the above strategy, as Merera (2007a) puts, is 'the fabrication of fake leadership for the opposition parties and telling members that this is the leadership that best represents their interest, and in the meantime, making sure the NEBE, the court and the government security ensure the desired result' (p. 15). As he further maintain the 'problem with such type of thinking is the refusal to allow the people to judge what is good for them and arrogate oneself to the role of judging what is good for the people' (ibid.).

c) Fear of Politics on the part of Citizens

This is the most formidable challenge, on the part of oppositions in Ethiopia within the background of very overbearing weight of authoritarianism and a legacy of political terror of the past as well as the continued political repression. This means that the fear and the negative repercussion of threat, intimidation, imprisonment, harassments, forced disappearance, and extra-juridical killing inflicted by the past and the current regime has shaped the extent of citizens' participation within opposition camp as well as bestowing their support externally. Generally, on the part of the ruling party in Africa, 'fear is an important instrument in achieving political

victories and sustaining political power' (Tronvoll, 2002, p. 164). In the current Ethiopia too, where 'the contradiction between constitutional rights and liberties and the reality, …,between the guarantee of human rights and the daily repression and control, are becoming increasingly evident' (Pausewang, 2002, p. 172), the incumbent has also used and continues to use' fear' as a shield to maintain its political dominance.

As indicated before, the incumbent regime in Ethiopia practically has great difficulty in accepting the idea of the legitimacy of political opposition. As one anonymous senior researcher (2011) explained, so far the regime demonstrated that it has psyche of accusing all those that challenge as 'enemies' of the state. According to this informant, all supporters who belong to the opposition's camp, regardless of nationality or social status are labeled as 'enemies' of the state by extension. And as such they should be dealt with as 'enemies' with the full brunt of state coercion. In this regard, the use of the repressive arm of the state is instrumental and it is rationalized as a defense of a democratic constitutional order (Merera, 2011). This was the case in point during the 2005 national elections in Ethiopia, where main opposition parties managed to win 174 seats out of 547 in the parliament, 'the ruling party quickly resorted to the use of force, suggesting that it had failed to appreciate the extent of voter discontent' (Smith, 2009, p. 868). In connection to this, for example Abbink (2010) observation pinpointed the situation as follows:

After the 2005 parliamentary elections, there was a bloodbath, which deeply shocked the nation, when 193 civilians were killed by police and special army units on the streets of Addis Ababa. The government has created an atmosphere of insecurity and fear among the general public that, in turn, have little trust in their leaders. There is insufficient space for independent initiative, dissent and debate. While election campaigns by opposition parties are allowed to be organized, for example in the run-up to parliamentary elections in May 2010, the intimidating presence of the state in the form of politicians, the police, the secret forces and party cadres is thwarting much of their scope for action and freedom (p. 3).

By creating insecurity and fear among the general public, indirectly the regime may also diminish the size of opposition parties since it managed indirectly to increase the costs of supporting opposition parties. For instance, Greene's (2009) observation of a similar case of the costs of supporting oppositions pinpointed that, 'these costs may include forgone patronage goods and the threat of losing one's job, access to public services, and the protection of the state' (p. 6). In other words, on the part of citizens, the costs of supporting the opposition include forgoing patronage goods that one might receive by choosing the incumbent party (ibid.). However, the above kind of cost of dissent for 2005 parliamentary elections in Ethiopia has indeed a clear demonstration of what harsh measures the incumbent regime can take if violent public disturbances occur again. Specifically, it may have a potential repercussion to 'imbue the people with fear and apprehension, which consequently create apathy as a survival strategy in order not to be 'eaten by politics' (Tronvoll, 2002, p. 160), given that, this bitter experience of the public in the aftermath of this elections is still fresh in the people's memory (Tesfaye,

2011). In the final analysis, as informants (2011) mentioned, the direct result of inducing fear in the part of citizens is not only 'political demobilization' or 'political emasculation' (Bahru, 2008) on the part of opposition camp, but also it 'is a tactic widely used in creating a quiescent and manageable mass of so-called supporters' (Tronvoll, 2002, p. 160) to the regime in power. In sum, the ruling party as a onetime liberation front has still continued promoting a 'culture of silence' and a 'culture of fear' that has reinforced a negative attitude towards opposition as disloyalty (Diescho, 1996).

d) Inter-Party Relations

The final explanatory variable of external context and the one that we find the most compelling in explaining the political polarization and fragmentation of opposition is the actual nature of inter-party relations. In our analysis of inter-party relations, we are attempting to address this issue by dichotomizing the interrelations between the ruling party and the opposition as well as among the oppositions themselves. Theoretically, in situations where inter-party relations between ruling party and opposition parties are cordial, this creates an environment conducive to effective functioning of parliaments and the deepening of multi-party democracy.Nevertheless, in Ethiopia, politics is an acrimonious game, and inter-party relations tend to be marked by mutual suspicion. This is mean that the country's 'political organizations are still seeing each other antagonistically and as 'blood enemies' rather than as responsible political actors and worthy partners in nation-building who have equal rights to govern the country without any encumbrance from anybody or any organization' (Tesfaye, 2011, p. 4). In the current Ethiopia's body politics, 'democratic principles like political pluralism, accommodation of different ideas, and peaceful coexistence of competing forces have no root' (Tafesse, 2003, p. 79-80). Rather, the country's national politics is characterized by animosity and mutual destruction in the last three decades, and it is understood as 'hierarchical', 'exclusionary' and 'polarization' (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003). In light of all these, generally the pattern of inter-party relations in Ethiopia depicts its ugly picture and it is explained as follows in the words of Merera (2007b):

[Inter-party relations] can be explained largely by the political polarization and fragmentation between and among Ethiopian political parties, which time and again failed to set a common agenda and mobilize millions for a common good. Conspicuously, albeit at different levels sectarianism, conspiracy and political intrigues have become the hallmark of the Ethiopian political parties and their leaders with the resultant effect of frustration, disillusionment and demobilization of the common folks across the country. To put differently, political leaders are more active in undermining coalitions than alliance-building while their vision is blurred to aggregate societal interests for a broader national development goals. To be sure, such a political malaise of Ethiopian political parties are not limited to the successive ruling-parties defending their privileges, but also opposition parties claiming to fight for the empowerment of the ordinary citizens (p. 1-2).

In one dimension, when one can see the pattern of inter-party relations between ruling and opposition parties in Ethiopia, it

has been generally characterized as much more of conflictual than collaborative. This is because it exemplifies as hostility, mutual and reciprocal mistrust, and unequal power relations mainly feature their interaction (Mushe, 2011, Gebru, 2011, Beyene, 2011, Kassahun, 2003). As partly demonstrated in the political culture of the regime in power, the government is 'ambivalent in their attitude towards parties not associated with the regime, and also to the idea of political opposition as such' (Abbink, 2000, p. 157). However, at the level of theory, the interrelationship between the ruling party and opposition parties raises the question around the role of oppositions. Conversely, in the current political setting, the meaningful participation of opposition political parties in the political process has become largely inadequate and it has greatly diluted the process of the Ethiopian democratization drive. With this an anti-democratic nature of the regime, it has been failed to allow the development, emergence, operation and institutionalization of independent parties (Tamirate, 2007).In the other dimension, interviews conducted with key informants (2011) on the state of affairs pertaining to the relations between and among opposition political parties, indicated that mergers, splits, and complete disappearances at intervals are the hallmark of their inter-party relations. In this kind of inter-party relations, 'forging of a solid and durable ground… in Ethiopia appeared to be a far-fetched undertaking' (Kassahun, 2003, p.122). At the general level, the focus of the relations between and among Ethiopian opposition political parties has been on removing the ruling party from power. As opposed to this short term political calculus, their 'forming of alliances on the part of opposition groups fails to consolidate and endure in spite of solemn declarations and pledges to work towards facilitating conditions that could lead to the entrenchment of the governance realm' (ibid.). In many African countries too, the opposition parties fail to take a unified stand and miserably fail to coordinate their efforts, as commonly observed in many countries, they rather give the authoritarian incumbents an opportunity to perpetuate their rule (Wondwosen, 2009).

As mentioned above, the collapse of opposition alliances and the failure to agree on the model of cooperation to use resulted in the opposition parties continuing to split their vote, thus posing no electoral threat to the EPRDF party. In this weak spot, there are certain major reasons why they are unable to forge a strong and unified structure of alliance or failed to lend durability to the collaboration among themselves. In connection to this, it is possible to summarize the reasons as follows; first, opposition parties' move to forge unity is not started from their consensus on policy issues. With the known position differences between or among them and without addressing these differences, they claimed that they forged alliances intermittently. Second, the various unities created in the past on the part of opposition bloc were an outcome of some pressing conditions dictated by short term orientation, particularly, with the objective of only defeating the incumbent party as well as to improve their respective lots by standing together. Third, they failed to see the bigger picture of their country and lack future vision. Fourth, they are not prepared and ready themselves for the challenges they would face ahead. Fifth, they do not prioritize their common values. Six, they do not consider their differences as more complementary than conflictual. Seven, they failed to compromise or create a middle ground position for their competing values in order to

start up a working unity. In all these 'host of incompatibilities' and 'non-complementary in priority setting' between and among opposition parties in Ethiopia, it is possible to sum up that the prevailing mutual mistrust, and lack of respect and tolerance between the ruling coalition and the opposition in one dimension as well as among the opposition itself on the other hand is the general manifestation of inter-party relations in contemporary Ethiopia.

Internal Context

Another context that is closely linked and complementary to the external context discussed in the previous sections is the internal context within each opposition party. We used this internal context as another aspect to explain why the Ethiopian opposition parties are so weak. In our conception, the four main internal factors appear to explain inchoate institutional development of opposition parties in Ethiopian body politics are weak party institutionalization; limited access to finances; low level of party membership and highly hierarchical and centralized intra-party democracy within opposition parties. In what follows, we shall attempt to briefly discuss each pieces of internal context in the next sub-section.

a) Party Institutionalization in Ethiopia

Theoretically, the crucial role of opposition political parties is to make democracy work effectively. The realization of this task is 'much depends on the degree of institutionalization of the political parties with respect to organization, discipline, internal democracy, and cohesion' (Omotola, 2010, p. 129). As Carbone (2007) on his part argues, when political parties develop as organizations that are autonomous, durable, socially rooted, legitimate and effective in their presence on the ground that the chances of them contributing positively to democratic consolidation become stronger. To put it differently, the higher the level of opposition party institutionalization, the more the system benefits in terms of political stability and vice versa (Omotola, 2010). As the general perception; however, opposition parties in Ethiopia are weakly institutionalized. This is a very general characterization and it is subsumed under number one features of opposition political parties' organizational weakness. As pointed out in the conceptual framework, there are a number of dimensions and indicators of the measure of party institutionalization. The first dimension attributed to opposition parties' institutional weakness is the lack of opposition party's autonomy. As the manifestation of the autonomy of a political party, the party should be independent, has its own value and should not be subordinated to the personal preferences of the leader or even a small group of elites (Huntington, 1968). As opposed to this, opposition parties in Ethiopia have lacked autonomy in two levels. At the leadership level, they are normally centered on a dominant personality, family or clique but devoid of organizational extension and structure. With the key role that prominent political figures individually performed internally, opposition parties are indeed called 'party of notables' (Carbone, 2007). This is because, from its inception, opposition party formation in Ethiopia remains based on the personal ambitions and ethnic differences rather than issues. They were founded and funded by either one individual party entrepreneur or a handful of

party elites. In this regard, from its start party elites in Ethiopia have no choice but to engage themselves in extensive party-building efforts. This increases their grasp on the existing party organization.

In a country like Ethiopia, having feeble level of economic development and weak private sector, on the part of the prominent opposition leadership investing in a political career is the most realistic channel for upward mobility (Rakner and van de Walle, 2007). Indeed, this elite nature of opposition parties in Ethiopia is reflected by the social composition of the founders and leaders of these opposition parties. In terms of organizational set up, they are clientelistic networks often bound around narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting society as a whole. Because of this kind of organization setup, opposition parties in Ethiopia are typically vulnerable to narrow interests and thin organizations. Therefore, it is possible to say that they are 'the product of legislation rather than the spirit of a movement' and are 'by and large socially engineered from the top' (Mmuya and Chaligha, 1994, p. 47). Informally, they are also resorted to clandestine arrangement internally and willing to recruit and offer membership to those individuals knowing them very well based on the party leader regional or ethnic ties (Merera, 2007b). Thus, opposition parties in Ethiopia are personalistic friends-hood organization. They lack structures extending beyond the national executive, and their decision making is highly centralized. Furthermore, when one can scrutinize opposition parties' leadership turnover, there have been few incidences in Ethiopia. In reality, there has been individual cronyism and 'power has been personalized in the hands of one individual to a degree where the party is a mere manifestation of a powerful person' (Ezrow, 2011, p. 5).

A next issue related to lack of opposition party autonomy strictly concerns the primary revenue sources they depend on. At the level of its revenue sources, opposition parties in Ethiopia have been also dependent on diaspora communities for funding and support (Asnake, 2011). As informants (2011) indicated, in the case of Ethiopian opposition parties, the 'narrowness' in party contributions relates to the narrow cleavages that they seem to represent. In this regard, other than compromising and taking pragmatic political options, opposition parties in Ethiopia are vulnerable to take hardline decision to satisfy their sponsors. They have been induced to be loyal to the dictates of the diaspora constituency. In sum, their representation of narrowly defined diaspora explains one aspect of their independence after all. The second dimension is the deficit of internal coherence. In Ethiopia, opposition parties are not coherent units. Consistently, they have failed to act as a unified organization and are intolerant to intra-party dissidence (Ezrow, 2011). As indicated above, Ethiopian opposition parties are personalistic and they dominated by the charismatic appeal of a single party leader. They are also characterized by covert organization within the party. As Wondwosen (2009) puts it, 'these kinds of parties face split whenever another rising star challenges the founder or the leader of the party' (p. 290). In the rank of opposition parties in Ethiopia, factional competition has been a very common phenomenon. Frequently, this was an outcome of party elite competition. In the shadow of a dominant party leader and covert organization, as champions of their respective faction groups' interests, the

elites compete for power. When their pursuits are threatened for whatever reason, it does not matter to elites anymore whether they belong to the same political party. In this context, given the lack of commitment of political elites to their parties, their internal power struggle and personal vendetta could in turn weaken the opposition party and lead to its disintegration.

However, the existence of factions in a given political party is not a problem per se. If managed properly, moderate factions can even contribute to party integrity by accommodating differences of opinion within political parties. In Ethiopia, one of the challenges for the factional politics within the opposition party faction groups is each group member is not willing and unable to understand the feelings and ideas of the other side. Ethiopian opposition parties being recurrently disintegrated internally into many factions tend to lack clear programmatic identities and are unable to provide voters with coherent platforms. Rather, they are competing based far more on personal appeals or short-term populist policy proposals designed to win over voters. In this condition voters are unlikely to spot important policy differences between opposition political parties due to the 'noise' generated by various political personalities. In connection to this, as informants (2011) indicated, despite their multiplicity, opposition parties in Ethiopia place less importance on the policy brand name and value of their party label. In the same vein, Matlosa(2007) who did instructive work on political parties in Southern Africa also argue:

[Opposition] political parties in...Africa tends to lack ideological clarity and distinctiveness. As a result, they look much the same to each other andthey tend to raise similar campaign issues. Their programmes often lack policysubstance and are generally a shopping list of promises which are hardly ever fulfilledafter elections... Election campaigns tend to revolve around individuals rather than being predicated upon well-definedand ideologically delineated policy positions/proposals. Consequently, even voterschoose parties and candidates not so much on the basis of their policy proposalsas on the basis of the personalities involved, patronage politics and ethnic/tribal/racial affinities (p. 510).

In a nut shell, opposition parties in Ethiopia are characterized by not only absence of clear ideological and policy differences among themselves, but also seem opportunist and inconsistently favoring a hodgepodge of ideas.The third dimension is related to the lack of strong roots in a society. Opposition parties in Ethiopia are not well rooted in the social fabric of society. The linkages between opposition parties and voters in Ethiopia are less ideological and programmatic. Opposition parties are not in a position to structure political preferences of their voters and provide avenues for representation. In many cases, coupled with the 'divide and rule' and the 'carrot and stick' policies of the incumbent EPRDF party, the links of these parties with civil society organizations like youth, peasants, women, and merchants so fourth are very weak. Particularly, with the current strategy of the incumbent party organizing here and there youth league, women league, and widening of party membership, opposition parties do have very little space to maneuver to forge the links. Generally, opposition parties in Ethiopia are more of restricted as an urban phenomenon. Most of them have main offices at

the capital center and they have the weakest link with the rural population. Indeed, as a generalization, opposition parties in Ethiopia have shallow root in the society.

The next dimension is related with the low level of organization and complexity. Generally, opposition parties in Africa have few or no resources with which to support themselves between elections, given the weakness of private sectors and the uncertainties of the political future. In Ethiopia too, opposition parties are mostly very weak in organizational capacity, suffering from considerable resource constraints and organizational underdevelopment. In tangible terms, opposition parties in Ethiopia have a poorly furnished and severely underfunded office. As informants (2011) indicated, since most opposition parties suffer from extreme lack of resources, their headquarters and its inner bodies have only succeeded in maintaining a tenuous organizational continuity.One of the indicators of organizational strength of a party is the degree of the party's penetration into the local level. The lack of a grassroots penetration of a given political party detrimentally affects the ability for this party in strengthening its relations to local level supporters, and reduces its ability in communicating to the electorate. As explained by informants (2011); however, opposition parties are not as such territorially comprehensive. They failed to penetrate outside the center. They don't have branches across all regions and most towns of the country. They are, indeed, rather the urban phenomena. This is because they are relatively new and their activities are focused primarily in the urban areas, but in rural areas, they are less effective in mobilizing public opinion.The fifth dimension refers to lack of adaptability. One manifestation of parties' inadaptability is their failure to be durable. As both Geberu (2011) and Dr. Negasso (2011) explain, practically speaking, Ethiopia's multi-party politics and the road to democratic undertaking are ephemeral. By corresponding, Ethiopian opposition parties in general are short-lived and do not have long history and experience. As a result, the voters do not get a chance to evaluate opposition parties' achievements over time. Coupled with this, the existed opposition parties are also characterized by high level of disintegration and thus, they are not durable and dependable in the eyes of voters. With respect to succession of party leadership, as informants (2011) argued that surprisingly most opposition parties in Ethiopia, instead of playing their rightful role as an example of the working of democracy, they have proven to be just as undemocratic as the governments that they criticize. In a good number of opposition parties in Ethiopia, regrettably, on the part of top leadership there are no specific numbers of term limits (mostly two) that restrict their office (Mushe, 2011). With personalistic and elite nature of opposition parties in Ethiopia, the top leadership of most parties has been around for a while (ibid.). On the whole, powerful leaders in the party are not willing to step down to allow the emerging leader to control the party gear. This has led to increased power struggles within the political parties and succession crisis resulted in political instability that can precipitate the split and the break-up of the parties.

Legitimacy sums up the last dimension that measures party institutionalization. At the general level, in the post 2005 elections Ethiopia, there is a high degree of dissatisfaction against opposition parties on the part of the society at large. It seems they are enjoying low level of trust on the eye of the public. This is because factionalismand internal squabbles in the opposition camp greatlytarnished their public image, reduced their membership driveand support, and made them lose potential members andleaders.In the above dimension indicators pinpointed, the cumulative result will point out that opposition parties have failed to be trusted and popular.

b) Party Membership

Functionally speaking, some of the main functions of parties in any democratic system are aggregate and articulate needs and problems as identified by members and supporters; as well as mobilizing and recruiting voters and supporters to build party constituencies and organizations by engaging in close constituency relations and constituency servicing. Ironically, in spite of these functions expected from them, Ethiopian opposition parties don't engage in well-focused mobilization and constituency outreach campaigns to mobilize party members and supporters. As Sachikonye (2006) point out 'the strength and vibrancy of parties depends on the quantity and quality of their membership' (p. 27). On the contrary, informants' interviewed on the issue of party membership argued that the practical reality in Ethiopian opposition parties is that they lack mass membership. They indicated that, in the opposition camp of Ethiopia, among other challenges, membership recruitment and retention is one of the main challenges they face.

As informed by Mushe Semu (2011), Merera Gudina (2011) and Geberu Aserat (2011), the status of opposition party membership in Ethiopia does not maintain reliable membership records. In terms of the size of their membership, they remarked that it was difficult to establish whether their membership had increased or decreased in their respective parties. However, Merera Gudina (2011b) claimed that his party has a total membership of more than 100,000. Mushe Semu (2011) also estimated that his party has more than 150,000 members. Geberu Aserat (2011) estimated they have around 800 members. Nevertheless, taking these membership estimates as reliable indicator of these three political party is difficult. First, each of these and for that matter other opposition parties in Ethiopia didn't have reliable membership records to validate their estimates. Second, as commented by informants (2011), there is a possibility that party figures were often exaggerated their membership status. They adhere that for instance if EDP and OPC leaders have indeed do have active members of these kind they are in a better position. Yet, they underlined that, these membership sizes of these parties is rhetoric one. They further argued that in the case of elitist and paternalistic opposition parties in Ethiopia, out of these total number, very small fraction of it are characterized as an active 'core member' and the remaining are nominal.

In case of providing membership records, Geberu Aserat (2011) argues that in the current Ethiopia other than the signature of founding members which are by law political parties are requested to submit, making public the record of other members of opposition parties' and supporters is a very dangerous way and it has its own security risk to the party in general and each of its members and supports in particular. He argued that ruling EPRDF never lets the opposition operate openly and engages in systematic repression to intimidate, and

arrest and arbitrary detain their members. In connection to this, he also justified that at the commencement of his party, by taking the list of founding members submitted from the National Election Board of Ethiopia, the regime security forces intimidated and arrested many of them. He remarked that, due to the repressive rules of the regime in power, many people do not want to be associated with the opposition parties in Ethiopia.

Regarding potential members of the different parts of society, Merera (2011b) argued that generally there is a weak affinity between those would be members and political parties. As the case in point, he mentioned the academic community. According to him, currently the academic community is placed in a 'buffer zone' from party membership. He argued that if they become the member of the ruling party, they are accused of being looking for position of political appointment from the regime. If they prefer to become member of opposition parties, then there would be an eminent threat of losing one's job, access to public services, and the protection of the state. Thus, to avoid either the criticism or the eminent threat, they rather decide to reside in the 'buffer zone'. With regard to the women, youth, labour union, merchants and other associations of the country, informants (2011) argued that opposition parties in Ethiopia have also had the weakest or nil links with these organizations. With the exception of merchants associations, many of these societal associations are formally or informally dominated and controlled by the regime in power. Apart from the ruling power's dominance on these entities, there is no available space for opposition parties and they face serious barriers to mobilize them against the incumbent. In the internal realm of opposition parties', however, real commitments to the agenda of members of these associations into the political party dialogue have been marginal. For instance, very few women hold senior leadership positions in the camp of opposition parties. Similar to women, the labour union, merchants and youth are under-represented and tend to play a marginal role in the organizational structure within opposition's parties. On top of this, Ethiopian opposition parties have not seriously addressed problems facing these associations. Thus, in terms of recruitment and representation of these associations, opposition parties in Ethiopia seem to have a negative track record in this regard.

c) Political Party Finance

Financial resource is crucial for any political activity. It matters in politics because parties need resources for administration and election campaigns. In connection to party politics, it determines fundamentally the quality of democracy. This is because 'the financial resources available to parties and candidates, the distribution of those resources, and the ways in which they are collected and spent can have a decisive impact on the effectiveness of political actors, the nature of electoral competition, and ultimately, the legitimacy of elections and democratic institutions' (Walecki, *et al*, 2007, p. 8). In other words, 'the viability of parties largely depends on whether they generate or receive satisfactory funding for their activities…little funding cripples a party's operations and reach' (Sachikonye, 2006, p. 32). When one examines the case of financing opposition parties in Africa; it is a complicated

issue due to a number of reasons (Makara, 2007). As he identified:

Firstly, under-funded political parties are not likely to compete effectively in the political game and are unlikely to nurture the growth of democracy. Secondly, ruling parties are likely to use their influence to solicit much more financial resources than the opposition parties. Thirdly, opposition parties are likely to illicitly solicit resources from sources restricted by the law (p. 74).

In the case of Ethiopian opposition parties, as interviews demonstrated, there is a lack of transparent and solid source of funding for opposition political parties. And, it is one of the most serious weaknesses in Ethiopian party politics. By comparing with the ruling party, informants (2011) and party leaders indicated the critical financial situation of opposition parties. They underlined that opposition parties are financially fragile; and there is a chronic shortage of funds needed to finance their operations. Their funding is precarious because of the widespread poverty among the population, the political fear and apathy on their members and supporters. As noted in the above section, opposition parties in Ethiopia didn't have mass membership and lack also the capacity to mobilize them. In reality, the absence of membership subscriptions has obvious implications for party funding. Generally, as the Political Finance Proclamations in Ethiopia (Article 28) states, the sources of finance for political parties are membership dues collected from members, subsidy and grants from the government, and donations from others. However, as interviewed parties' leaders remarked, almost every political party relies exclusively on membership fees and donations from party members for funding. In almost every opposition parties in Ethiopia, membership fees are so low that the overall contribution to party finances is negligible. They also indicated that members contribute to the financing of party activities mainly by buying membership cards, and by modest monthly contributions which are rather unpredictable due to the incumbent threat and repression against their members. In this dire context, 'the major sources of income for the opposition parties so far have been the Diaspora Ethiopians and foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin' (Wondowsen, 2009, p. 410).

However, this state of affairs of long-term dependency on external sponsors can have negative effects, undermining party autonomy, hampering institutionalization within society, and impeding consolidation of functions.In line with the above argument, as Merera (2011b) solemnly remarked, currently raising funds is one of the biggest challenges facing the camp of opposition parties. He argued that their efforts to fund-raising from the private sector are made difficult due to the existing political repression of the ruling party and widespread fear of the business community. In connection to this, he mentioned that due to the new legislation that requires the disclosure of the names of the Diaspora donors and private individuals, many of them try to extend their support via the third party with anonymous identity. However, such undertaking is no more accepted since the new rules and regulation of political funding does not allow parties to have foreign funding. Moreover, the disclosure of the names of the Diaspora donors and the prohibition of foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin from materially and financially supporting the

opposition parties is another constraint to the opposition parties generating funds from these sources. In this state of affairs, what is observed on the working of opposition parties is the continuation of 'vicious funding cycle', which is typically, explained the condition of Ethiopian opposition political parties as well. As Helle (2010) identified:

This funding cycle is characterized by the combination of three elements: an organizationally weak opposition who has scarce funds struggle to win elections. This in turn creates difficulties in their fundraising efforts because the opposition parties lose some of their already scarce funding when they lose elections, and without funding they cannot build organizations that can fundraise effectively and compete in elections (p. 16.17).

To sum up, the financial weakness of opposition parties in the country is translated into meager or non-existent formal party organization and in this regard, financially poor or with precarious financial status of opposition parties mean that they cannot function effectively.

d) Intra-party Democracy

When one can go through the literature on African political parties, one of the recurrent themes of most parties is the lack of internal democracy (Lotshwao, 2011; Olaleye, 2003). In Africa most political parties have a serious crisis of internal governance, and hence there is a considerable democratic deficit in most of them. Conceptually intra-party democracy is understood as how parties implement democracy within their party organizations. It refers to the extent to which a party adheres to and abides by the basic and universal democratic tenets. Taking this definition as a reference, we use only two perspectives to address internal democracy of opposition parties in Ethiopia to avoid the repetitive themes that we had briefly discussed in connection to their institutionalization aspect earlier. The first perspective is related with how parties run their internal affairs; and the second perspective is about whether ordinary party members fully participate in the party's decision-making processes or not. Informants (2011) interviewed for their expert knowledge concerning how opposition parties run their internal affairs, remarked that despite their slogans to democracy and political decentralization, the practical undertaking among opposition political parties in Ethiopia is that they are highly hierarchical and centralized organizations. They also argued that because of the dominance of the party leader or small group of elites, important decisions are made by the head of the party, claiming ownership of the party and their application is implemented and controlled by the leadership at the top. With regard to accommodating dissenting voices of independent minds, informants (2011) indicated that among Ethiopian opposition parties there is widespread intolerance for opposing or divergent opinions. They argued that within the continuing dominance of the head of the party, 'groupthink' prevails among very small group of elites of the political party. Independent minds and critics of the leadership or dissenting voices that challenge the statusquo are severely suppressed and have been expelled from a party. They emphasized that in personalistic opposition parties in Ethiopia political loyalty is expected from members of the respective parties and dissenters do not have place within the party.

With regard to ordinary party members fully participation in the party's decision-making processes, the internal working mechanism of opposition parties in Ethiopia didn't allow them to participate. As argued by informants (2011), since Ethiopian opposition parties are dominated by their founders and influential personalities, ordinary party members have little or no control over party leadership recruitments, nominations and policy formulations. There is lack of inclusiveness in the internal working mechanism of these parties. It is also difficult to talk about internal democracy with these parties since there is no at all democratic undertaking. To sum up, with the issue in hand, opposition parties in Ethiopia are antithesis to democracy. With the absence of internal democracy, it is difficult to call them as the legitimate candidates in for democratic governance.

Conclusion

Democratic governance is dependent on well-functioning opposition political parties. They have long been considered a necessary condition of democratic politics, and crucial actors in bringing together diverse interests, recruiting and presenting candidates, and developing competing policy proposals that provide people with a choice. However, the status of opposition parties in Ethiopia didn't qualify them to play these roles. Opposition parties of the country are substantially weak. As a precondition for studying the factors that explain the general weakness of Ethiopian opposition parties, we maintain that there are critical factors that work against the rise of a powerful opposition party. A point of departure of this study was that their weakness is so strongly embedded and shaped by the structural contexts of external and internal factors. As we have noted, the external factors are the milieu within which these parties' are operating while the internal factor is the internal condition that these parties are implanted in.Ethiopian opposition parties are constrained by external factors from carrying out their activities. These challenges include the political repression and exclusionary political culture of the ruling party; the population's fear of politics and withdrawal from the political process; and conflictual inter-party relations among political parties. The paper reveals that internally Ethiopian opposition parties are plagued by low level of organization, established around dominant personalities and have inadequate links to the society that they profess to represent; especially in the rural communities, they have very thin constituency. Besides, decisions are usually made only by the top leader. They suffer from severe financial shortage, and their financial problem in turn hindered them from recruiting and retaining members and supporters. As a result, they suffer from lack of mass membership and absence of internal democracy. The paper demonstrates that unless these structural constraints of opposition parties in Ethiopia are removed, the rise of effective opposition party is unlikely. This paper also finds that opposition parties and the existing internal and external contexts are negatively correlated. The structures of the existing internal and external contexts are organized in such a way as to generate weak spot on opposition parties. And hence, if the structural gaps are not addressed, there is likely to be persistence of actual flaw on the multiparty system of Ethiopia in particular, as well as a major democratic deficit of the country resulting from the lack of a vibrant political opposition. As a final remark we could fairly say that first

multi-party politics in Ethiopia has structurally limited and the absence of powerful opposition parties signifies the hollowness of Ethiopian democracy in general. Second, with the current setting, the chance of the emergence of vibrant political opposition in Ethiopia is very gloomy.

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Annex I: Key Informants Interviewed

- [Name withheld]: Senior Researcher
- [Name withheld]: Senior Lecturer
- [Name withheld]: Journalist
- [Name withheld]: Political Advisor
- [Name withheld]: Senior Ethics Advisor
- [Name withheld]: Experts in the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia(NEBE)

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