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Social Stratification and Marginalization in the Southern Nations Nationalities and People Region of Ethiopia: The Case of Manja Minority Groups

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Abstract - In Ethiopian politico-legal history, since 1995 the federal constitution was built on the principle of accommodating diversity and shared distribution of power and responsibilities between the central, regional and local governments. However, disagreements on the effective protection of the rights of ethnic and occupational minorities are tremendous. Both the Federal and regional governments of Ethiopia are overlooked constitutional guarantees to minority ethnic groups which led to discrimination, alienation and marginalization. In this regard, the regional constitution of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) also faces couples of pitfalls in entertaining and ensuring ethnic and occupational equality of groups within its legal and constitutional realms. The major purpose of this study was therefore to explore the causes and consequences of marginalization and social inequality of the Manja ethnic minority, in reference to the SNNP's constitutional powers and practices and the endeavors made so far to address the problem. To achieve the target of the study, multidisciplinary approaches such as web-based evidences, published and unpublished research outputs and personal observation have thoroughly employed. Moreover, the social exclusion theory and rights based perspective of exclusion and marginalization have used to analyze and discover the real picture of the problem in the Sothern Nations Nationalities and the peoples region of Ethiopia.

Keywords: *federalism, minority, marginalization, ethnic/group inequality, constitution.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

a) Federalism and Multicultural Society in Ethiopia

Nowadays, federalism is recommended as a good model to manage and govern ethnic pluralism in Ethiopia. It is conceived as an instrument that protects the right of minority groups and promote social security and state integration (Van der Beken 2013:3).

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The post-1991 period witnessed the introduction of an unprecedented political structure in the modern history of Ethiopia. The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which came into force in 1995, is built on the principle of accommodating diversity and the protection of the rights of the minority groups (FDRE constitution 1995:1-7). As a matter of fact, the new constitution was adopted after the downfall of the dictatorial government of Derg, and consists of various human rights provisions and powers and benefits shared with regional states, but the federal constitution is not without drawbacks in its implementation.

As to some previous researches, example (Abbay 2009, Fiseha, 2007, Fiseha, 2006, Habtu, 2004, Taddele, 2010), the major drawback of the federal constitution of Ethiopia is its inability to address the rights of "ethnic and occupational minorities in the ethnic-based regional states it established". The federal constitution envisages ethnicity as the sole organizing principle, but it overlooked constitutional guarantees to minorities who are hardly labeled as ethnic groups per to the regional or federal parameters of classifying groups as ethnic groups or not. In this regard, many people's are discriminated, alienated and marginalized based on their work and decent status in the contemporary Ethiopia (Ethiopian Human Right Council, 2009:3). There are minorities, which are neglected and abused on the basis of a particular career customarily given to them. For instance, communities living in southern Amhara called Enewari Woreda, the Hadicho, Mana and Manja living in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) are subjects of alienation and segregation in the contemporary Ethiopia (Assefa 2015:6). In the opinion of the researcher, the 'ethnic' based formulation of federalism of the country is incompatible with the existing statuesque that it has been created the strongest and unbroken margin among the Ethnic communities that damages the solidarity and the oneness of the Ethiopian society. Furthermore, I perceive that the occupational minority group are oppressed and dominated by the majority ethnic groups rather than by the federalism policy. To my knowledge, in many parts of the country,

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According to Freeman and Pankhurst cited in De Sisto(2014:83), in many federal states, minority groups are economically abused, marginalized, ignored in the political state of affairs and culturally segregated which are manifested in their day to day activities. In terms of effect/consequence, the different dimensions of inequality and marginalization are very interrelated to each other, their spillover effect among each other made the system very complex for providing of viable solutions.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine and analyze the multifaceted socio-economic and political exclusion and marginalization of the Manja minority groups who are inhabited in the southern nations, nationalities and peoples region of Ethiopia through using the Rights-Based Approach (RBA) and the Social Exclusion Theory (SET). In so doing, the study also explores the pattern of life and living conditions of the Manja minority groups in terms of social, economic and cultural features.

b) *Theoretical Foundation of the study*

i. *Social Exclusion Theory*

There has been different theories approached to explain the causes and effects of social inequality. Social exclusion theory is among these theories which shed light on the causes and consequences of social injustice prevailed in a particular society. The Social exclusion theory in this paper is used to examine the exclusion of the Manja minority group based on the ascribed and occupational status. The minorities are marginalized by the majority due to economic, social and cultural factors which are the legacy of the previous history and now embedded and institutionalized in the norms and values of the society of the oppressed and the oppressor. In support of this, Yimer (2012:23) noticed that social exclusion is a condition in which marginalized groups are not allowed to participate actively in their community because of their identity and social status such as race, gender, age, occupation etc. Other researchers, example Yoshida (2013), De Sisto (2014) and Estivill (2003) in a similar vein added that the social relationship between the community and the

marginalized groups are more vague, ambiguous, and unclear. The community considers the excluded groups as being guilty who are responsible for their exclusion and criminalize them for their behavior and lack of dedication to the social fabric (ibid).

c) *Rights Based Approach*

The other approach used to analyze the social problems in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples region is a right based approach. A Right Based- Approach focuses on solving discrimination and inequality through making and including the needs of the marginalized and victim groups in development agendas and activities of the larger community, perhaps the majority groups. More importantly, this theory helps duty bearers to strengthen their capacity to shoulder their responsibility and right holders to claim for their fundamental human rights. In line with this conviction, the UNICEF (2007:11) officially reported that on the need to promote the needs and demands of minority groups, all development policies and interventions exercised to empower local communities should readjust the power imbalance that prevailed within the community. This approach helps duty bearers to strengthen their capacity to shoulder their responsibility and right holders to claim for their fundamental human rights.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

a) *The Causes and Levels of marginalization of the Manja group/minority/People*

The Manja people are a minority group in habitated "in pockets of Kafa, Sheka, Bench Maji, and Dawro zones, and the Konta special woreda" in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People region of Ethiopia (Yoshida 2013:3). In Dawro, Bench Maji, Konta and Kefaa zones of the southern region, social identities associated with occupational tasks and clans are still used as the main customary practice for the day to day interaction in many aspects, like in social economy, administrative marriage and ritual practices of the communities (Haaland, et al. 2004: 156). These identities are constructed in hierarchical strata similar to the caste system and depicted as follows.

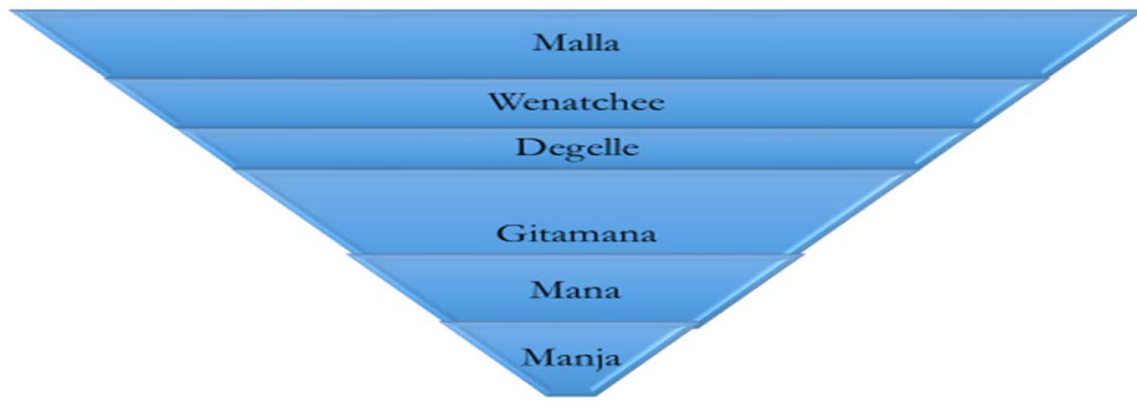


Figure 1: Hierarchical Structure of society in some part of the SNNP region in Ethiopia

The pyramid portrayed above indicates that in the southern parts of Ethiopia, there are class structures which it has a similar feature with the caste system. Accordingly, the pyramid displayed that the social structure from the superior to the lower class which it has been taken as a norm in the part of the community. The Manja people are found in the lower level of the social strata and the marginalization and segregation is much higher at the lower strata where the Manja people are situated.

Haaland, et al. (2004: 156) and Yoshida (2013:3-4) explained the occupation and the role of each strata stated in the above pyramid in the community. The Malla has been assumed by the community as citizens, farmers, leaders, whereas the Wogatche are assumed as Steely coiners. The Degelle has been believed as tanners, the Gitamana as iron smelters and the Mana as Potters. People in lower strata called Manja also taken as Charcoal producers, forest users and former hunters. That is why the purpose of this study was to investigate the causes and consequences of the marginalization of the Manja people and the efforts made so far by the government any other stakeholders to address the problem.

The Manja people are excluded because of engaged in less valued occupational tasks and born from a particular clan (Yoshida 2013:13-14). The multifaceted and complex process of marginalization and social exclusion indicates that the social integration and organizational bottlenecks that confront the realization of solidarity, human wellbeing and an equal opportunity of the diversified community. Tewdros (2008:2) in his study also reported that the Manja people have been segregated from the other people saying the cultural activities of the Manja community are assumed to be contrary to the community's norms and religious practices. Consequently, the other communities are not willing to have economic, social and cultural ties with the Manja community.

Under Rights -Based Approach, in the context of marginalization and exclusion, I can argue that rights

such as the right to humane treatment, the right to respect and reputation and right to equality of the Manja minority groups are not fully protected, though the mentioned rights are well depicted in the federal constitution. For instance, as in Article 18(2) of the FDRE constitution, no one should be compelled to slavery and slavery like practices. Article 24(1) also states that "all persons have a right to respect due to human beings and to the protection of their reputation and honour". Moreover, article 25(1) noted that all people are equal before the law without any bias and prejudice to get equal opportunity and protection of the law. On top of this, the federal constitution irrevocably ensures that any law should provide to all persons identical and efficient security without any discrimination on the basis of "race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status" (FDRE Constitution 1995:5-7).

The primary and secondary duty bearers thus have an obligation to protect and fulfil the right of Manja people through different means such as providing free education using incentives and empowering to participate in decision making processes that directly affect them. Moreover, the general public should have to be informed and empowered their capacity and knowledge through different means like human right education and community programs that can foster social interaction and cohesion.

For long years, the socio-economic and political division of the societies of the southern region has been creating different hierarchical arrangements and social groups ascribed to the type of occupation and descent of clans (De Sisto 2014:83). To my belief, in the history of the country, the discriminatory and anti-social values and cultures practiced to categorize the society between different social settings are structurally oppressive in terms of benefits and social status. Surprisingly, despite the existing oppressive structures, the socially ascribed hierarchical structures have been very intact for many years in the southern region. This therefore indicates that the acceptance of the people to traditional



institutions and cultural divisions is much stronger than to the legal and institutional apparatuses of the state.

Accordingly, people from different clans do not have equal access to land, political office and social prestige, except the royal clan called Malla. For example, per to the aforementioned strata, the most disadvantaged and excluded social class is the Manja clan as they are considered as inferior people who are hardly treated as humans in their locality, possibly in the southern region. As the result of this, the Manja people remain an excluded and highly marginalized groups in the governance, resource allocation, political, cultural and economic matters of the community (Yoshida 2013:14). And they are described as unhealthy and anti-social, dishonest, unreliable, backward, primitive, animal like, subhuman, craven, emotional, immoral and shameful. Their house is portrayed as tiny and untidy, they alleged to have ugly faces and darker skins. They are also described as not real people because of eating dead animals without being slaughtered (De Sisto2014:8).

According to Yoshida and Freeman, the main ground of the community to discriminate the Manja group are rooted on eating habit, physical appearance and other primordial characteristics. He also synthesizes that

"The Manja peoples eat unclean and filthy food, such as the meat of religiously prohibited animals likes savanna monkey, baboon, coloubs, wild boar, and dead animals. They do have also short and very curly hair. They are people who never give a care about hygiene, and do not wash their clothes and body and smell unpleasant (in some cases due to skin disease). The Manja are wicked and liars, they are not interested in education, so that they are ignorant and lazy. They are extravagant and thieving and lack sense of majority" (Yoshida 2008:50 and Freeman 2016:6).

The Manja people are socially excluded in their day to day activities of the so called superior class. The discrimination is manifested in every occasion of social life, such as at greetings, meal ceremony, shared labor, in choice of partner and the direction of funeral grounds. Furthermore, when the Manja meet people from the other strata, they are anticipated to disgrace themselves, stepping down, welcoming their masters with the term of *"show occhiqebona"* plainly meaning, "let me die for you" (Yoshida, 2009:302).

This sort of naming and discriminating (shaming) makes the Manja peoples to be seen as disfavored groups and peoples and categorized in the camp of animalism which is so inhumane and illegal. These people were hunters up until the destruction of the feudal system that made them landless groups for centuries. For the sake of survival, they had eaten animals that cannot be consumed by the dominant ethnic groups. In addition, because of the stereotype and exclusion by the dominant groups, the Manja did not get a better education that can help them to empower their capacity in thinking and claiming of their rights. For all these injustices, the Manja now perceived that they are treated unjustly by the government and government agencies when problems happened between the so called superior (Malla) and Manja classes (Yoshida 2013:9). Hence, the relationship between the Malla and Manja is manifested by prejudice and violation of rights.

In around 1980's, when the Derg was in power, there had been attempts to abolish the harmful traditional practices against the Manja group through holding several meetings with an intention to improve the groups' discriminatory trends and to create a healthier relationship between the majority community and Manja, but it was not successful (Yoshida 2013:9).



Adopted from: Yoshida (2009:303)

Figure 2: Awareness creation against discrimination and exclusion

Since discrimination is a human rights issue, some NGOs initiated campaigns of awareness creation to abolish discrimination and exclusion. This poster is made by NGO for a campaign condemning exclusion and discrimination against the Manja. In the middle of this picture, a Manja person with no umbrellas in the rain asking to use the restaurant and the Malla (royal family) restaurant holder refusing consent to get in. The Amharic¹ version in the left hand side of the poster stated by the dominant ethnic group or Malla indicates "how these people can eat in our restaurant? Do not come to our restaurant, our customers can stop coming to use in our restaurant if they see you eating food in our restaurant". The Manja family in the right hand side also said "we have the right to be served in your restaurant as far as we are capable to pay for your service, as other customers do. We are equal before the law and the eyes of God" (Yoshida, 2009: 302). This drama was organized for creating awareness in areas where the Manja people are located. And such type of educational drama can have a paramount importance to dismantle the deep rooted oppressive cultures, values and norms of the society.

Moreover, the Manja people who are living in keffa and sheka zone started struggling against discrimination imposed to them from the majority and dominant ethnic group in 1997 up until now through collecting of petitions about asking recognition under "Nations, Nationalities and people's provision". In overall, they made petitions for maximum of forty times (Yoshida 2013:2-13). However, the campaigns and the demonstration that made so far are less comprehensive to include other zones where the Manja people inhabited in. Nonetheless, in 2002, the Manja had begun to use a forceful attack in the Kefa zone to end discrimination and exclusion and thus many people from the Malla side were killed and their property was burned. For this reason, many demonstrators from the Manja group had been arrested. As a matter of fact, in 2008, even if the regional state government had attempted to solve the issue of Manja and recognized the existence of social exclusion against the Manja, the regional government rejected the idea that the Manja are covered under the Nation, Nationality and People provision" (ibid). In this case, I support the decision of the government that says the Manja people are not different from the rest of the community and cannot deserve distinct nations and nationalities provision. The Manja people are living scattered in many parts of the region and collecting them into one and recognizing as unique ethnic identity is quite difficult. Instead of doing this, I think, the government should focus on fostering good governance and providing social services like education, as well as in empowering political power for the Manja people to determine and administer their issues and concerns.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Manja peoples are the most excluded and marginalized groups in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples region of Ethiopia. These people are marginalized because of their descent, pattern of life and occupation. Even though, the reasons for being discriminated, such as eating religiously prohibited wild animals, hunting and other occupational tasks have shown a sort of reduction, the wrong perceptions and social stereotype of the Malla community against the Manja are hardly improved. Notwithstanding the incumbent government guarantees the rights of minority groups explicitly through the 1995 constitution, the modus Vivendi of these people is still with a little improvement. In this regard, the government has the obligation to protect the rights of minority groups and to empower their capacity to claim their rights, since it is not fully discharged its responsibility to ensure equality of all as it should, and is expected to do. However, the one fact that the Manja minority groups have their own representation in the federal parliament, regardless of the negligible empowerment and top down decisions and policies that the government practices in the SNNP. The top down decisions of the government and the other actors could not address the problem of the segregated and marginalized communities in the SNNPR in general and the Manja communities in particular. The concerned bodies and other stakeholders should take therefore systematic measures such as comprehensive trainings and human rights education to the Manja people in particular and the community in general.

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