

Art¹-Based Approaches and Identity from War-Making to Peace-Making: Exploring the Ethiopian-Eritrean Experience

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Abstract

Presiding on theoretical and empirical explorations, this paper views the Ethio-Eritrean scenario as a “demarcation between Romeo and Juliet” and examines it in retrospect and prospects. Art-base approaches such as *music and identity bridges humanity both for conflict and peace. This paper analyzes the scenarios of art and identity for war and peace including within historic core Ethiopia and the Ethio-Eritrean ill-fated relations since the secession of Eritrea in 1993. Historic core Ethiopia has passed and inherited rooted anomalies. In the pre-1990s, the assimilation policy project under and into single dominant ethnic group, i.e., the Amhara language, culture and the Orthodox Christianity, disregarding about 85 languages and identity groups, gave birth to ethnic resentment, hostility and formations of radical groups contemplating national questions and seeking for radical changes. Fueled by the intelligentsia, the Ethiopian Students Movements, the national-wide discontents burst-out to ethnic armed liberation movements with converging and diverging motives. This ended up in secession of Eritrea in 1993 and the surgery of Ethiopia into an ethno-linguistic based federal state in 1991. Ever since and up to the existing “no war no peace” Ethio-Eritrean stalemate situation, art and identity has been used and abused for humiliation and war mobilization which was and is constructs of the political elites. Today, in a clear contrast, art and identity has continued to neutralize, resurrect and entrench fraternity within the federal democratic Ethiopia since 1991 and towards Eritrea even sometimes during war and stalemate period. The paper concludes that art and identity is a double edged sword for peace and conflict as well, presenting windows of opportunity for conflict transformation at hand yet requiring honest political commitments by the elites and by peace actors and practitioners including from below. Such creativity transcends rethinking the status quo separation into sorts of recognition, acceptance, empathy, and a route to confederal political marriage that sets out their common problem.*

Keywords: Art-Based Approaches, Music and Identity, peacemaking, state formation and nation building, Ethiopia assimilation policy project, ethno-linguistic based federalism, Ethio-Eritrean “no war, no peace” situation.

¹ All be it music, drama, poetry or identity mentioned in this paper operationally refers to the totality of the *art-based approaches* for war or peace making purposes.

1. Introduction

“Hostile neighbours Ethiopia and Eritrea passed the bloodiest decade of war in 2000, with a tragedy that consumed about 80 000 lives. Yet, a decade later, the two countries are falling in love in the northern Ethiopian regional capital, Mekelle...The war—politically but not culturally motivated and lacking social backing—split two brotherly nations only on demarcation. But there seems to be no demarcation in their hearts.” (Mohammed Selman, 2011)

This paper presumes that it attracts the attention of the populace, particularly scholars and political elites, because it is among the rarely, and under, studied academic works in Ethiopia, between Ethio-Eritrea and beyond in the context of art-based approaches-and-identity and war-and-peace-making experiences and existing scenarios. In fact, Craig Zelizer (2003) in his *community arts-based processes and peace-building* study in Bosnia-Herzegovina writes that “despite the widespread use of arts-based processes in peace-building work in the conflict resolution field, to date there has only been minimal research on arts and peace-building.”, this reality in turn constrains the paper from inclusion of sufficient contending view points and perspectives on the *ever been forgotten* topic both theoretically and practically from policy and academic endeavors.

With these considerations, by briefly presenting its conceptual backgrounds, historical roots, existing contexts, and simmering scenarios, the paper addresses the question: what was and is the role of art-based approaches such as music and identity in war-and peace-making within the former and particularly between the Ethio-Eritrean “no war, no peace” ongoing stalemate? Relying on historical account of narratives and interpretations, existing observations, literatures and recorded data sources, etc., this paper treats the issue in dichotomous as a pre- and- post-1991 phenomena. This is for the mere fact that beginning from the *ancient* Ethiopia that dates back to 3000 years and particularly from the medieval period to the end of the imperial and military rules in the early 1990s, identity was used and abused under a monolithic state formation and nation-building project that completely defied diversity and multicultural communities which then it served as a springboard for suspicion, fear, hostilities, resentments and wars (see Andreas, 2003, 2010; Marakakis, 2004; Merera, 2003; Alem, 2003). On the contrary, after the end of the old order in 1991, the national political diagnosis implanted an ethno-linguistic based federalism—*a nationalism from the peripheries*, and a departure and champion of democratic unity in diversity with legal and institutional entrenchment of self-rule, shared-rule and self-determination including the right to secession. Literally, thus, identity has gained recognition and

potential for peaceful coexistence, solidarity and prosperity than its old poisoning features (Ibid). Its foundation seems to be on the assumption what Ted Robert Gurr (2000) argues that ethnic identity and interest per se do not generate dangers rather are hegemonic elite's motives.

After navigating the Ethiopian context, however, this paper gives more emphasis to the Ethio-Eritrean *art* and identity factor in view of war-and peace-making particularly after the secession of Eritrea from, and the “border” war with, Ethiopia in 1993 and five years later respectively.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This section reviews the literature works relevant on the art-based approaches and identity both in making and unmaking violent conflicts at intra-and international levels and with particular emphasis on its capacity for building peace and reconciliation. Yet the subject of art-based approaches and identity in conflict transformation/peace-building has far less theoretical work.

Since the early 1990s with the emergence of “new wars” (Kaldor, 1999), conflict transformation or peace-building began to involve non-state actors with new approaches focusing on the psycho-social aspects of conflict where the use of music and art increasingly gained appealing attention (Bergh, 2010). Similarly, Lumsden (1999) states three zones of social reconstruction that explore the role of arts. He outlines them which need to be addressed in post-conflict reconstruction including the outer social world; the inner psychological world and a transitional zone between the two where arts have an important role to play in this transitional area that they can help with healing, exploring ideas and helping to integrate the inner and outer worlds.

Despite its suffering from academic works on the use of such approaches for peace, there are clear experiences and understanding of the use of music and art for violence and war-making. Wilmer (2002) and Kelly (2000) argues that “[t]hroughout history and more recently in Southeastern Europe many artists and arts based processes have also served to reinforce nationalist ideologies, foster divisions and provide justification for barbarous acts” (cited in Zelizer, 2003). Here, this section reviews some literature works on music and its role in making violence and peace as well. Music could be abused to entrench *images of enmity* on cultural boundaries by performing old and/or new ones about the past, existing or future conflicts(McCann, 1995).

Table 1: Summary of negative roles, *Music and Conflict*

<i>Conclusive Themes</i>	Case of Evidence	Period	use of <i>conflict music</i> for	Author(s)
<i>Music is often used to foment conflicts</i>	Northern Ireland	1960s		McCann 1995
<i>Music uses to mobilize resources for conflict</i>	Nazi Germany	1930s	Uniting rallies	Reinert 1997
	Croatia	Before the war began in 1990s	Ultra-nationalism	Pettan 1998
	Serbia		Bolstering the myth of Serbian uniqueness	Hudson 2003; Bohlman 2003,
	Kosovo Albanians		National identity and bolstering preparation for war	Sugarman 2006
<i>Music during wartime can serve as morale booster and diversion of for the non-fighting population</i>	Bosnia-Herzegovina	1990s	Morale booster and diversion of for the non-fighting population	Hadzhusejnovic-Valasek 1998; Zelizer 2004
	UK	WWII	Morale booster and diversion of for the non-fighting population	Weingartner 2006
<i>In active warfare music builds a (temporary) community and foster strong euphoric feelings</i>	During the invasion of Iraq by American soldiers	2003	marshal troops in(to) battle, through marching rhythms	McNeill 1995 Gittoes 2006
<i>Music intimidates tortures and humiliates</i>	in the Balkans , in WWII,		intimidate; as torture; torment and humiliate prisoners of war	Hogg 2004, Pettan 1998, Moreno 1999, Gilbert 2005, Cloonan & Johnson (2002); Cusick 2006; Bayoumi 2005
<i>Music Encourages fighting</i>	Rwanda and Sudan/Darfur		encouraging fighting in Rwanda and Sudan/Darfur, encouraging jihad	African Rights 1995; Carlisle 1973; Lacey 2004
<i>Music is also used to clarify and disseminate ideology</i>				Corte & B. Edwards 2008; Eyerman 2002; Futrell et al. 2006

Source: As cited in A. Bergh and J. Sloboda, n.d.a

Music has the power to penetrate beyond the mind to the heart and markedly affects memory, emotion, perception, cognition, consciousness, and the (re)construction of self and group

identities (Johnston, 2010; Bergh, 2006, 2010). From the table above, it is easy to capture the abuse of music in creating fear, suspicion, hostility, enmity, emotions and commitments, breaking-down relationships, creating and rigidifying boundaries, etc.

The second major emphasis of this section is the use of art for conflict transformation. Art can be seen as a window through which we are able to examine our perceptions, attitudes and values. Art can promote dialogue in two ways. The first way is in the act of collaborative creation where the work of art is an outcome of the parties collaboratively examining issues together. The second way lies in the works of art themselves where face-to-face dialogue may be impossible because certain parties are not recognized as legitimate, works of art can promote widespread discourse that leads to reflection and recognition (Thomas, 2009).

Despite the ability of cultural expressions or art to promote recognition, legitimacy, and dialogue, it is important to acknowledge their limitations in resolving conflict. For instance, the Israeli-Palestinian situation involves a number of interrelated issues, which no single theory or policy can resolve. The indicators of success in this task are difficult to measure, as they require gradual changes in perceptions and attitudes, and the creation of networks across war torn populations. Nevertheless, cultural expressions inform our everyday actions, and art holds the potential to profoundly influence the resolution of conflicts across the globe (Ibid).

LeBaron (2011) points out that “[i]n conflict zones around the world where relations are ruptured and devastation abounds, the arts flourish. Arts are under-acknowledged for their potential to make serious contributions to transforming conflict. In post-conflict societies, there is always art. People sing their sorrow, paint their grief, and dance in the shadows of what once was”. Despite its recent academic and practical enthusiasm, art (such music therapy, drama, poetry, dance, etc) had been rarely practiced and understood, and continue to be with *relative* optimism, for conflict transformation or peace purposes by societies or other actors in such cases at multicultural settings.

Efforts are often made to *build bridges* between conflict parties (Zartman, 2003; Lederach, 2005). Experiences and scholarly works reveal endeavors including instances of the Israeli-Palestine, the Balkans, Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, etc. Conflict transformation or peace-building interventions, however, require context and additional parallel considerations (see A.

Bergh and J. Sloboda, n.d.a). Lumsden (1999) suggests that the arts and artists have a critical role to play in post-conflict reconstruction in that they can help foster a creative process for rebuilding social relationships and have been applied across societies situated in ongoing and post-conflict setting:

Within Bosnia-Herzegovina ... arts-based peacebuilding that have been used to rebuild social relationships include: the Pavarotti Music center in the divided city of Mostar, which facilitates interaction between Croats and Muslims through musical exchanges; and the work of the Open Society Institute, which supports a network of Balkan artists across geographical space to explore issues of reconciliation. Apart from efforts in the Balkans, in conflict regions throughout the world, the arts have often had a significant impact on bringing together divided communities. Examples include community theater productions and mural projects in Northern Ireland, Africa, and the Middle East; peace concerts on the dividing line in Cyprus and Angola; and bi-communal orchestras and poetry groups in the Middle East.

Another analytically embedded discourse in this work is identity and, ethnic identity in the particular historical context. Though, the tie between identity theory and reconciliation, an aspect of peace-building theory remains underdeveloped, there exists Kelman's and Lederach's work on identity-related aspects of reconciliation which will be treated later and here let's first see the *identity-conflict nexus*. As works of Edward Azar, *et al* (1978) declares the intractable identity-based conflict is well established. Julianne Funk (2003) cites Northrup (1989) about the role of identity in intractable conflict cycle –a complexity of perceived threats and injuries is deep rooted in the very relationships:

... when a party's identity is perceived to be invalidated, the party responds, ...with psychological distortion in order to force meaning back onto the disturbed construction of identity/meaning. ...the party rigidifies its redefined constructs and interpretations, as protection for the self/group; it is at this point that we notice extreme, irrational and/or seemingly unjustifiable responses, like dehumanisation of the threatening party. ..., the parties may end up cooperating to maintain the conflict – they may assimilate the conflict itself into their identities and may even institutionalise the opposition through custom and policy. In this way, the sequence can become a self-perpetuating cycle, which makes it exceedingly difficult to stop or undo. ... [that require creativity] how to resolve or transform such intractable identity-based conflict and actually move towards building peace.

Ethnic identity, for instance, with regard to nation-state construction, the primordialists, with theoretical limitations as Thompson (1989) claims, maintain that the drive for efficient, dynamic modern states could directly interact with the drive for personal identity, which is based on primordial ties. The *primordialists* claim that in areas where the practice of civil politics is deficient or weak, primordial attachments could be used to devolve political power and delimit territorial units (Geertz 1973). On the other hand, the *instrumentalists* view, ethnic identity is a

particular motive driven phenomena constructed by elite or specific social groups, i.e., “a social construct that emphasizes the sharing of cultural and linguistic characteristic and, kinship roots for the purpose of group mobilization” (Messay 2001 cited in Berhanu 2008). The *rational choice* perspective also asserts that men always act to maximize their individual and/or collective benefit (Hechter 1986). In relation to ethnic identity and state-construction, John Markakis (1994) in his study of ethnic conflict in the Horn of Africa concludes that ‘ethnicity is an imperative embedded in the foundations of the political order and functions as a controlling factor in the political process, long before an ethnic movement appears to challenge that order’ (cited in Berhanu 2008). Generally, however, *critics* contend that ethnic identities are affected by their individual and affective ethnic motives, as well as goals of political elites claiming ethnic identity as flexible through the process of fission and fusion among other dynamics.

Importantly, the focus of this paper is the *identity-peace nexus* which not less, if not more, equally is pertinent. At odd with the history of historic core Ethiopia, Julianne Funk (2003) states that identities are *not necessarily* conflicting and rather could be transformed for peace:

... identity is about the self's or group's concept of what it means to be itself. Its core need is to make the world predictable so that the self or group can situate itself in it securely. As such, it is completely possible, and even desirable and healthy, to find one's safe place in the world positively: by affirming the self or group through constructive conceptions of self.

In the same vein, Herbert Kelman (emeritus professor at Harvard) is a prominent scholar of conflict and peace and his recent considerations (2004) claims that identities could be transformed for peaceful coexistence:

Reconciliation presupposes and is a consequence of successful conflict resolution. Conflict resolution addresses the issues, which produces new attitudes that must situate themselves somehow in relation to old attitudes and an old belief system where the other is distrusted and even dehumanised. Reconciliation, however, moves a step further than conflict resolution to an actual change in identity... Consequently, a transformation of the relationship to one that respects the other's basic, existential need for identity is necessary for conflict resolution to proceed to something more sustainable... The party's negation of the other must change...

Contemporary peace discourses maintain that there are capacities for transforming conflicts creatively on the accounts of art-based approaches across cross-cutting identities. The next section deals with the historical trajectory of pre-federal Ethiopia where Eritrea was its integral province and art-based approaches and identity served elite motives fueling political anomalies.

3. Historical Contexts : The Pre-1991 Ethiopia Political-Ills and Constraints

Despite the focus of this paper is the Ethio-Eritrean post “border” war “no war, no peace” stalemate situation, a brief *detour* to the pre-1991 period is necessary. This is because the seeds of existing problems are rooted in the past shared history where Eritrea was an administrative province of Imperial Ethiopia (Kinfu, 2001; Marakakis, 1994; Clapham, 2000; Alemseged, 2004) and in fact still is impossible to explain and understand it in detachment. There is *no necessary* connection between ethnic identity and conflict as Horowitz (1985) argues. Empirically, in Ethiopia and in other parts of the world, however, it remains major cause and subject of conflict.

In pre-federal Ethiopia, multiculturalism had been abused for elite motives; identities were viewed as mutually inharmonious source of national tension or disunity and disintegration. Attributing to nation-building and national unity, markers of ethnic identities such as language, religion, cultural values, etc., were deliberately and with brutal force put under a *homogenization project of the assimilation policy* sponsored by the *Amhara elite* (Teshale, 1995; Andreas, 2003, 2010; Merara, 2003; Marakakis, 1994; Alemseged, 2004). Such project polarized ethnic identities as the theoretical discourse goes that ethnic identities could be political products of socially defined and historically determined processes (Fuku and Markakis 1994) and if or when such ethnic plurality is abused it leads to conflict production, as the elite becomes the key actors in the creation of ethnic ideology and ethnic politics for acquisition of political power (Mesay 2001) and political power, setting for fear and elite competition, becomes among the rituals by which status is determined (Horowitz 1985). As a result, ethnic politics became real source of “we” and “the other” images among identity groups sowing the seeds of mutual suspicion, fear, hostility, resentment, stereotype, humiliation, revolution and war that partly ends up in secession on the one hand and political transformation on the other. These were the dominant relational patterns between the state and society and among identity groups during the state-construction process until the early 1990s Ethiopia which consequently and since after took a departure as Geertz (1973) likewise theoretically asserts:

With regard to nation-state construction ... in modernizing societies, where the tradition of civil politics is weak...primordial attachments tend to be repeatedly, in some cases almost continually, proposed and widely acclaimed as preferred bases for the demarcation of autonomous political unit' ...'primordial discontent strives more deeply and is satisfied less easily', while 'civil discontent finds its natural outlet in the seizing, legally or illegally, of the state's apparatus' ...'economic or class or intellectual disaffection threatens revolution, but disaffection based on

race, language or culture threatens partitions[secession], irredentism or merger, a redrawing of the very limits of the state, a new definition of its domain .

Although art/music has automatic linkages neither to conflict nor to peace, Bergh (2010) argues that its content, context, and application rather matters. As experienced during the WWII and in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s, and other several instances (see Hadzihusejnovic-Valasek 1998; Zelizer 2004; Weingartner 2006), during the battle and victory of Adwa, in March 1896, against and over the fascist Italy with an army of over 100,000 men (Clapham, 2000) where the victory coined as icon and pride of the black soul, among other events, traditional songs of heroism (*shilela*, *qererto*) mobilized Ethiopian fighters and galvanized their patriotic morale.

Internally, for centuries, art/ *traditional music* as inherently associated with culture/identity had been used to pursue the abused identity politics in Ethiopia. Accordingly, art/music can be viewed from three inseparable but reinforcing angles. *Firstly*, the ruler/elites used and abused it for its personal position. *Secondly*, it served as a tool for glorifying the “self” and stereotyping or humiliating the “other” among interacting identity groups rigidifying the *enmity* boundaries. Here, the “azmaries” (traditional singers) are in reach for both the powerful and powerless. *Thirdly*, it was utilized as a key mobilizing resource in the hands of the *attempted rebellions*, *armed national liberation movements*, and wars with particular impetus since the formation of armed fronts on *pre-mordial solidarity* such as the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), ONLF, etc., who according to Berhanu (2008) fought for non-premordial motives realized in the post-1991 period. Identity (a pre-mordial sentiment) and art-based approaches were mobilizing factors as, for instance, the work of super stars liberation war singers such as Eyasu Berhe from Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF²), Wedi-Tkul, Bereket Mengstab and Wedi Tkabo (in *post-independence period*) from Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), and many others from

² I was brought up in the heydays of the liberation wars and then people daily used to cry and dance to such tunes; the art wing and artists of the Liberation Front used to sing and dance armed and wearing enchanting heroic clothes and the civilian masses are invited to dance under the shadow of two extreme spaces where *qemish*(woman’s dress) and *Sre*(man’s trouser) are hanged on air symbolizing “cowards” *vis-à-vis* “braves” to join the Front respectively. Music in such context was too effective weapon to mobilize and boost military and civilian morale and aspiration where even every woman dances only to the *Sre* because everyone is alert that the *qemish*(woman’s dress) *vis-à-vis* *Sre*(man’s trouser) dichotomy is only tactical despite feudal gender roots were traceable.

Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and from Diaspora opposition groups. For Broughton et al (2006) cited in Luwam (2011), music was a mobilizing resource in pre- and post-independent Eritrea:

‘[T]he “predominant theme that guided Eritrean musicians from the 1950’s was love of the mother land. ‘Hagerey’, which means my land in Tigrigna, could very well be the most frequently used word in Eritrean’s musical vocabulary. Even after Eritrea gaining its Independence on May 24, 1991[sic], Eritrean artists did not cease to use the word. However, the content of the music changed from “we will be liberated” to “we must develop” ... In the beginning when it was impossible to talk about politics publicly, music was used to communicate and agitate the people as an underground movement ... In times of war, contrary to the expectation of the enemies, it helped both the fighters and the mass to uplift their morale. Music was almost compared to anesthesia when listened during the worst times of the struggle. It was also an outlet for the Eritrean people, to have their voices heard by both friends and foes that their victory was undisputed: “awetna nay gidin eyu”. In conclusion, the huge contribution of music to the Eritrean struggle for independence was no less than the use of military armaments.’

As music/art bridges members and channels shared values or causes, it has tremendously shaped the attitude, behavioral and cultural fabrics of the Ethiopian society that have experienced divergent motives under the respective armed movements and later brought together after decades of such seemingly irreconcilable distinct experiences under a federal umbrella. The critical point here is that music/art throughout the pre-1991 Ethiopia, remained an irreplaceable tool for hate and war-making. Since such music/art of the recent past have evolved from within the society, its effects cannot be irrelevant. There is no way of ruling out its inherited poisoning effects even today. In fact, incumbent regimes in both countries are using art to realize the cause.

In short, the denial of recognition of, and equality among, multicultural identity groups, self-rule and other opportunities in pre-1991 Ethiopia one way or the other precipitated, aggravated and pervasively embedded grave *national questions* which in turn brought-down the old order of imperial and military regimes through the revolution and liberation wars. The national question and national liberation wars also gave way to secession of Eritrea and the restructuring of Ethiopia as a federal and democratic state (Alem, 2003). Such restructuring of the state brought about the constitutional right to self-determination and self-rule based on distinct ethno-linguistic identity. The preamble of the FDRE constitution affirms that the Ethiopian peoples, in full and free exercise of their right to self-determination strongly commit themselves to build one political community and one economic community based on their common interests; common outlook, and common destiny (see also Assefa, 2006, 2008).

Evidencing the theoretical assumptions celebrated by ethnic federalism advocates such as Clapham (2001), O’Leary (2002), Osaghae (2006), Kymlicka (2006) and others alike, constitutional recognition and guarantee of such ethnic identities under federalism as organizing principle has become a robust cause for democratic unity in diversity laying a foundation for mutual acceptance, empathy, unity, shared-identity and vision that will be treated later in separate section.

4. The Existing Contexts: Post-1991 Period Constraints, Prospects and Scenarios

Here, the paper surveys the constraints and prospects within Ethiopia post-1991 period democratic order and in relation to Eritrea since its secession and after the “border” war of 1998-2000. Since the 1991 period, there is liberal political space which *neutralized* the polarity of identities in Ethiopia and towards its neighbors. Similarly, the roots of ethnic animosity are in transformation to which John Markakis (1994) observes ethnicity in the Horn of Africa in his study as *situational* subject to the context prevailing:

an ethnic group as a political actor is a product of the situation, not of history, and what mobilises its members to take collective action is concern for future prospects, not an atavistic attachments to the past ... Ethnic groups’ sense of sharing the same material and social prospects are more important than ethnic identity because identity is defined in the process of interaction- cooperation, competition, confrontation, even war- among groups.

Hence, with the exception of some politically motivated music/art works such as the “Yasteseryal” (in *Amharic language*) music album which its release coincided with the hotly campaigned *Third National Election* of Ethiopia in May 2005, the post-1991 context witnessed unprecedented promises and prospects of art towards conflict transformation. Indeed, there is wider popular opinion that the Ethiopian *National Election* of May 2005 presented polarized and crosscutting political agenda on the national table. These polarized political agenda were seemingly the *reversal* to the struggle between the old *vis-à-vis* the new orders, i.e., the pre- *vis-à-vis* post-1991 period (see Kidane, 2007). The proponents of the old order tightening their vested interests for taking state power by any means exploited realities of *relative* resentments on good governance, employment opportunities and the space *surfeit* for multi-party operation coincidentally engineered the instrumentality of music/art to spark memories of historical power competition, myths of superiority, suspicion, fear, emotion, hatred and enemy images. It was

thus an attempted use and abuse of music for conflict-making in the womb, and taking the opportunity, of the national electoral campaigns.

Remarkably, the *institutionalization* of democratic system in 1991 opened a new route for use of multicultural music for development, peace and democracy (unity in diversity). Currently, Nations, Nationalities and People of Ethiopia have been using music/art to preserve their identity (culture, history, language, religion, etc) and develop respective language and cultural values, foster solidarity and fraternity among one another, to memorize and heal past traumatic experiences. So, music/art continued to bridge their past realities with current and future motives.

Particularly, state sponsored cultural shows, exchanges, and ceremonies through the multicultural event of Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and People Day, the proliferation of non-amharic (from the rest, about 85, identity groups) art/music across the country as well as the hybridization of musical/art works where both backed by the public media entertainment programs exposed multicultural identity groups to one another physically beyond constitutional entrenchment, and similarly remix of shared memory works are sketched out as promising prospects today becoming a tool for peace-making in federal Ethiopia. Such contacts among multicultural groups with an art-based peacemaking approach are theoretically supported as Yehuda Amir (cited in LeBaron, 2011) rightly points out:

when people with differing beliefs come together to interact in meaningful ways and establish constructive coexistence, “the in-group member no longer perceives the member of the out-group in a stereotyped way but begins to consider him or her as an individual and thereby discovers many areas of similarity.” In the nuanced world of the arts, it is difficult to maintain stark distinctions between “us” and “them,” and the black and white terms that maintain them. Arts-based approaches take conflict parties outside “business as usual,” disrupting facile narratives and facilitating communication across psychological, physical and emotional boundaries. When perceptions change, understanding, acceptance and empathy often follow. People emerge from creating images or moving together in improvised dance with new appreciation for each other’s dilemmas and complexities.

Another quite promising private business cultural programs with dramatic youth enchantment and mobilization in *art and creativity* (music, dance, poetry, painting, and talent show, etc., - that all are peaceful and marketable) are recently mushrooming country-wide having huge cultural diplomacy, trust and image-building against the abused past among multi-ethnic identity groups in Ethiopia, demonstrating the fact that diversity is both *beauty and strength* given such programs are neutral and at least including tracks from below. Since the recent period, pioneer commitments parallel to the legal space and the enabler IT infrastructure having wider mass

media broadcasting thus include “Ethiopian Idol”, “Balageru”, “Yemaleda Kokoboch”, Teteki Flega”, “Ethio-Talent Show”, etc. among the popular ones. According to conflict transformation and peace-building scholars and practitioners, this is an indispensable peace-building approach in identity based post conflict context. In reality, this is not a mere claim because identities which once had been conflict fault-lines in the past become to the contrary as cited in Julianne Funk (2003), Seul and Kelman (2004) asserts so that:

... negative construction of the other– including prejudice, disapproval and condemnation of the other’s identity– is not inevitable. Put simply, such a value-laden comparison with another is not necessary to secure selfhood. We can see the presence of difference in the world and between people or groups as an enriching diversity – where the in-group is uniquely particular because the out-group is also particular– instead of threatening to one’s own particularity.

Here, constructivism provides a theoretical context for the use of cultural expressions in resolving conflicts. If perceptions and values are socially constructed, then art is an instrument of this construction. In relative sense and with regime specificity, art and identity supported conflict and peace in Ethiopia in the old and new orders respectively.

4.1. The Ethio-Eritrean Scenario: Demarcating Between *Romeo and Juliet*?

The Ethio-Eritrean experience in lieu of art-based approaches is similarly with promising prospects and astonishing potential for bridging hearts and thereby transforming conflict. Retrospectively, the Ethio-Eritrean history is drowned into four traumatic experiences: the betrayal of Menelik II of *Shoa* that destined Eritrean as Italian colony and the abrogation of the UN sponsored federation after a decade in 1962 by Emperor Haileselasie; the bitter Eritrean liberation wars against the central government and its eventual separation from Ethiopia in 1993; the bloody “border” war of 1998-2000 with about 80,000 human toll (its cause ironically termed as “two bald men fighting over a comb”) and subsequent traumatic deportation of huge non-citizens (*amiches*) from both countries.

Except a makeshift and state-produced nationalism induced one after the “border” war period, none of all these historical events created permanent and rigid identity and border boundary between them (Riggan, 2011). Moreover, “this was especially problematic in cases where ties between those who shared common language, ethnicity, and social institutions [are] stronger than national bonds” (Abbay, 1998; Mahrt, 2009; Negash, and Tronvoll, 2000; Tronvoll, 1998, 1999 cited in Riggan, 2011). In the context of fluid identity and border boundaries as separate states which, in turn, fueled what Appadurai (2006) terms “anxiety of incompleteness”, “[t]he border

war might be seen as eruption that emerged out of an ongoing tension to cope with the lingering, unresolved blurriness between the two nations” (Gilkes, 2005; Negash and Tronvoll, 2000; Plaut, 2005; Reid, 2005 cited in Riggan, 2011).

Despite the existence of huge cultural and historical similarity between the two countries and regardless regional and global mediation as well as arbitration made from above they have continued in “no war no peace” stalemate situation for the last 17 years. Neither the “border” issue nor their attitudinal and relational realities underpinning the *status quo* are transformed. It seems to what LeBaron (2011) conceptually draws, where both political elites are in a rather too rigid polarized position, as follows:

‘Contemporary peacemakers—whether insider-partials or outsider-impartials—are challenged to span cultural divides and connect across multiple differences, countering cognitive habits of enmity. Creativity proves essential in meeting this challenge. Peacemaking scholar Tatsushi Arai defines creativity as “unconventional viability. His definition evokes the oft-quoted statement of Einstein that “[w]e can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” What stands in the way of such creativity? Johan Galtung identifies the true obstacle as, “[i]n one sentence: actors deeply engaged not in solving but in winning, victory, the V-word. To conflict parties committed to the goal of winning, Other is the problem, not the relation to Other. Bring Other to heel, and the world is right. Other is Evil, up against our good Self, there can be no compromise, no creative ‘transcendence,’ only victory for the Good over Evil. Moreover, Other should not only be deterred from exercising his evil craft, but be crushed never to rise again.’”

In spite of the failures of top-down peacemaking efforts and absence of attitudinal and relational transformation between them, there is tremendous potential from below. In the midst of all shared traumatic memories, the people to people empathy scenario seems questioning *the elite sponsored “border” war enmity* into ironically stating it as silly as “demarcating between *Romeo and Juliet* in a bed” where the two people actually seem structurally destined alike to *Romeo and Juliet* in the novel work of W. Shakespeare. Mohammed Selman (2011) a lecturer in Journalism in Mekelle University who won the Excellence in Journalism award from the Foreign Correspondents Association in Addis Ababa in 2009 astonishingly writes to this inter-cultural *potential*, titled [Ethiopia]: *Dancing to the Eritrean Tune*, as follows:

Hostile neighbours Ethiopia and Eritrea passed the bloodiest decade of war in 2000, with a tragedy that consumed about 80 000 lives. Yet, a decade later, the two countries are falling in love in the northern Ethiopian regional capital, Mekelle...The war—politically but not culturally motivated and lacking social backing—split two brotherly nations only on demarcation. But there seems to be no demarcation in their hearts.

This writer (2011) presents summary of prompting indicators that hopefully seems markers of peace and brotherhood between the two people which reads as:

Both governments even ban each other's music. Unwritten law has Eritrea restricting Ethiopian music, especially in the port region of Mitsiwa'e. Consider Selam-Bus, aboard, Eritrean culture dominates TV programmes, with its music and movies featuring Eritrea's official language of Tigrigna. Yet, in spite of all the Ethiopians on the bus, the full trip seems to be sponsored by Eritrea. Even Mekelle dances only to the Eritrean tune. Traditional restaurants blare Eritrean music, notice boards and cinema houses announce the schedule for Eritrean movies and glossy posters of Eritrean music stars decorate coffee houses. Mekelle, in fact, has three government-controlled FM stations that all enjoy playing Eritrean music, which is obviously not in the government's interest. The fact is, listeners prefer the music of their "enemies" to their own. "Even at their weddings the grooms urged ... to play Eritrean," ... Almost 90% of the songs ... [played] are Eritrean ... local residents prefer Eritrean films. So adverts posted throughout the city shout "New Eritrean movies: coming soon!" ... Every Saturday and Sunday youths flood the city's recreation centres and TV houses—a cinema hall where people hunker down and watch international soccer and popular local TV shows on a big screen—which are addicted to Eritrean dramas ... Only the English Premier League draws bigger crowds. And these sites can tap into the Eritrean channel from Arab satellites and present it to large audiences in Mekelle, with no competition from Ethiopian TV. ... Of course, the wide acceptance of Eritrean music and other art has to do with proximity. At some point in history, the two peoples were one. Mekelle and Asmara share language, culture and social fabric.

With honest and sympathetic commitments of both elites and peace actors, such deep *empathy* and heart-touching feelings of forgiveness are foundations and provide windows of opportunity for conflict transformation and *normalization*. Such "loose" or *fluid* heart-boundary between "in-groups" and "out-groups" is *unusual* refuting the widely held discourse as Edward Azar (Azar *et al*, 1978) contends that identity laden conflicts are protracting. In fact, the cultural values and traits of these *two* people are alien to alienated, individualistic and selfish mode of living as for instance is anomalous to feed in separate dish or plate. The family being the formative and basic unit of society feeds its members together. Thus, their shared deep cultures of accommodation, generosity, civility, altruism, patriotism, forgiveness etc seems responsible for such empathy which rules out demarcation on their heart except territorially as rightly Mohammed Selman (2011) observes.

Currently, Ethiopia hosts tens of thousands of Eritrean refugees and the Ethiopian government has officially allowed them to work, move and learn in public Universities freely as "citizens". Given realities of bloody war experience and ongoing "no war no peace" stalemate situation, such brotherly interaction between hosting society and refugees is *exceptional* phenomena. It may be attributed to *premorial* attachments demonstrating traits of *extended family* as Fishman (1980) claims that ethnicity is continuity within the self and within the link to a common ancestor by experiencing being bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, and blood of their blood.

Furthermore, Eritrean Refugees participated in Bike Race Sport coined “Tour Dedebit 2015” organized by the ruling party in Tigray regional state (TPLF) to celebrate the 40th year anniversary day of the beginning of the armed liberation struggle. *Dedebit* is a jungle where the *TPLF* was born in February 1975. According to peace-building scholars (Lederach, 1997) such ceremonial contacts are sort of people to people diplomacy (track III) which bridges them through trust-building.

Similarly, *acting/performing together* (Cohen 2011) is creative way for conflict transformation and this has been common incorporating Eritrean refugee musicians both in governmental and social (e.g., marriage) ceremonies in Tigray Regional State and in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. An instance here is that the famous Eritrean singer Efriem³ Arafaine (*Nishaney*) has been performing music concerts together with Tigrayan Ethiopian counterparts notably Andom G/hiwot (from *Sheraro*) and others during his stay as a refugee in Ethiopia. Other refugees also include young artists Freselam Mussie (boldly beloved, “Hiray Belni”) and Fa’ad Al’amin (beloved and famous actor in the Eritrean liberation war movie “Tmali”). Such acting/performing together is well established by writers as Cynthia E. Cohen (2011) aptly puts:

Performances are powerful. They embody a kind of power that can be crafted to contribute to the transformation of violent conflict. Performances can capture people’s attention, reaching beneath the defensive structures of guilt, shame and rage; to restore capacities for agency and heal relationships; challenge existing assumptions; support expression that is otherwise forbidden; bring reluctant adversaries into conversation; propose new ways of framing issues; and more. Even when confronted with the power of violence and economic, political, gender-based and cultural domination, performances challenge and subvert widely accepted patterns of supremacy, fear, exclusion and repression.

Another clear *window of opportunities for championing peace* between the two people include the wide-spreading production and remixing of beloved shared memory music works in the post-“border” war period by Ethiopian star singers. Such renewed old shared music works are deeply attached to the past which stirs the memories of lovely life when Asmara was also another peace city of Ethiopia. Today, all these songs, despite the governments in foe, bridge both peoples’ hearts, their past with their future. In the absence of commitments by governments and peace actors, such star singers from various ethnic identities with pure as well as hybrid languages are passionately singing for peace.

³ I spent several nights in night-clubs as well as in my home with him for the mere fact that I admire his works and due also to may be the affection to and shared feeling of “*wherever we are together*”.

Among these include an old love song by a distinguished Eritrean female singer Tsehaytu Baraki, recently renewed and remixed by the Ethiopian singer and journalist in EBS TV Yosef Gebre where the spirit of the song was and is thirsty for her lover, now for his lover yet both captivated by tight temporary inconveniences. Similarly, “Fiyameta”– by Jossy Gosse, a song conveying similar enchantment and waiting for his lover whose relation is cut-off by separation of the two people; Mesfin Bekele, Tkue Weldu, Brhane Haile (*Asmeretey*) and may others including Eritreans. Undeniably, the liberal space provided by the Ethiopian rulers is an enabler for such peace saving artistic commitments.

The windows of opportunities witnessing people to people bridging also include deeper love for the entertainments and participation by Ethiopians and Eritreans alike in the programs of Radio Erena, a neutral Eritrean Diaspora mass media hosted in Europe. This media shares the feeling of Ethiopian government in opposing the Eritrean government in Asmara seeking a regime change. Yet both peoples identify this media as “theirs” preferable social media, sponsored by neither of the two hostile governments. At any rate, this brings these people together for neutral media often do such imaginary contacts channel clarifications of misinformation and trust-building among them. Besides, majority population, in or from the north, residing in urban and rural areas prefer watching and listening to Eritrean official TV and Radio programs to the Ethiopian ones in respective order. This doesn’t reflect any political allegiance, however -it is mere entertainment by choice.

In all these promises and opportunities, identity in terms of blood, art, language and shared history lay at the center as glue bringing these *mere* territorially separated people together. Thus, it seems conclusive that the absence of commitments from elites and peace actors to exploit this opportunity nurtured, and the rather abuse of identity by the ultra-nationalist Eritrean rulers, entrenched the “no war no peace” stalemate situation between the two states for worse.

4.2. The Ethio-Eritrea “No War, No Peace” *Impasse: Constraints Built on Sand?*

Here, I raise clear challenges posed by both governments and from above as spoilers of the existing windows of opportunities. Particularly, the Eritrean elites evade the possibilities of peace and normalization both, in principle and practice, from below and above. This is mainly because its *ultra-nationalistic* orientation tightening its held on art-based approaches *per se* for distinct state identity construction to “heal” the *anxiety of incompleteness* may be attributed to as

Appadurai (2006) contends that ‘... the minor differences between people who live in close proximity and share a common lifestyle are often the most threatening, as they “are a constant reminder of the incompleteness of national purity” ’(cited in Jennifer Riggan, 2011) and when necessary for war-making and if possible for deterrence. On this regard, the pre-1991 phenomenon of the liberation period has also boldly relapsed as the quote (Eritrean Ministry of Information, 2011) goes:

... [P]roud Eritrean fathers started an armed revolution against the Ethiopian colonizers under Emperor Haileselassie. Parallel with the armed resistance, musical revolution also became an asset to raise the awareness and build an unshakable strong sense of nationalism within the Eritrean population ... all the revolutionary songs made and composed in the terrains of armed resistance front made their way to the ears of the entire Eritrean population ... The valiant freedom fighters had their weapons aimed against the colonizers[Ethiopians] and the musical front had another weapon that spread messages of freedom and resistance, where many fighters as they say had acquired their spirit from ...Apart from entertaining the valiant fighters, music during the revolution played a leading role in boosting the will of the perseverant fighters, raised the inclination of the local population to join the armed struggle while on the other hand terrorized and killed the spirit of the enemy ...With the wake of independence in 1991, all the songs focused on the legacies of independence and the heroism of the martyred heroes during the 30 years of struggle. ... Nonetheless, like every other aspect in the country, music also had to redirect its way and become the main tool of strength for Eritreans when the TPLF attempted invasion of Eritrea in 1998... The resistance through music nurtured by Eritrean fathers of music was well maintained by the young artists who passionately wrote and effectively rebuffed the enemy deals.

Regardless of these unceasing position by the Eritrean elites leaving no liberal space for self-sponsored art-based approaches and identity for peace, Bergh (2006, 2010) underlines the shifting quality of arts and artists where and who sings for war today sings for peace tomorrow. For this reason and given the fluid identity and border boundaries with boiling down people to people empathy prospects, the prevailing constraints are elite-sponsored and rather *built on sand*.

Not less considered are also the Ethiopian elites and regional as well as global peace actors’ failure or ignorance to exploit and utilize opportunities of art-based approaches and shared identities to mobilize champions of peace from multidimensional perspective relying on all tracks of peace-building. Similar to Herbert Kelman’s (2004) reconciliation approach, John Paul Lederach’s (1997) approach, a peace researcher and practitioner theoretically asserts for this dimension:

... conflict resolution should be focused not on resolving issues but on restoring and rebuilding relationships, which is itself another definition of reconciliation. To do this, it is useful to approach identity through the back door, and not explicitly. Focusing on creative ways to increase mutual, non-threatening encounters for the purpose of shared goals (like resolving a conflict) is less threatening

to the self-esteem than a message that it must change something about itself because that thing is somehow a problem. The latter will be experienced as a judgment that the aspect needing change is somehow undesirable, harmful, and therefore unvalued. The former distracts the parties from the salient issue(s) and focuses on the real challenge— a mismatch between the reality of interdependence via a relationship and a choice to not relate and even negate the other. The fact is that neither conflict nor reconciliation is possible without relationship.

The real challenge of the “no war, no peace” situation today is sponsored and nurtured by both elites in power. For instance, only the government owned mass-media *as an island* ban the use of Eritrean music or movie in Ethiopia *being a sea which dances to an Eritrean tune*. And instead both elites massively broadcast war memories with the intension of indoctrinating respective citizens against the “other”. The long Eritrean movie “tmali” (yesterday, in Tigriḡnya language) sponsored by the government which narrates exactly the Eritrean 30 years war for independence and later bloody “border” war is notably done for this purpose. The movie ends with love tragedy which everyone who watches it rolls down tears for reasons of the tragedy of the love, remaining indifferent for the causes and effects of the war as the movie presents and narrates. Ethiopians often dance to Eritrean music even to these war songs *humiliating* and labeling them as cowards, snake, inhumane, destitute and barbarian. Dancing to such context is *unusual* yet might be for some extent for they are brought up in war torn society crying and dancing to memorable war tunes.

5. Conclusion and the Ways Forward

From theoretical and practical perspective, *art-based approaches and identity* bridge humanity both in war and peace. However, the notion of the nexus between art, such as music and drama, and conflict and/or peace, ever been understudied and is not well established, is contentious because it is subject to multiple intermingling factors involving history, identity, level of development, political orientation and commitments, shared fear and hope, etc.

Though historic core Ethiopia (including the seceded Eritrea in 1993) is as old as 3000 years, its modern state formation and nation-building process has passed and inherited anomalies. For centuries, the country has experienced and experimented acute ethnic identity based hostility and competition for regional and national power. Ethnic identity issues became clear markers of politics of state-formation and nation-building projects, particularly since the end of the 19th C, where multiethnic communities were forcefully subjugated to legal and institutional assimilation policies under the feudal imperial as well as the authoritarian military rule that intercepted and

reversed the social revolution of 1974. The assimilation policy project under single dominant ethnic group, i.e., the *Amhara language, Abisinyan culture* and the Orthodox Christianity, gave birth to ethnic resentment, hostility and formations of radical groups contemplating national questions such as *right to self-determination and land to the tiller*, and seeking for radical changes. However, the *amharanization project* remained solid policy and iron ruling order, except little *cosmotic* changes, even after the revolution. Galvanized by the *intelligentsia*, Ethiopian Students Movements, the national-wide discontents burst-out to ethnic armed liberation movements with converging and diverging motives. This ended up in secession of Eritrea and the surgery of Ethiopia into an ethno-linguistic based federal state since the 1991 regime change.

Associated with the anomalies of policies of *nation-building and state-formation*, art-based approaches such as music and identity have played dual function: instrument of violence and conflict transformation until the beginning of the last decade of the 20th C and since the immediate then after respectively. Thus, throughout history and up to the existing “no war no peace” Ethio-Eritrean stalemate situation, *art-based approaches and identity* have been used and abused for the purposes of enmity formation and war mobilization which was and is mirror images of the elites’ sponsors.

With the regime change in 1991, in a clear contrast, *art and identity* have continued to neutralize, resurrect and even entrench fraternity among the populace both *within* the federal democratic Ethiopia and also towards Eritrea even sometimes during war and stalemate period. Thus, the paper concludes that *art and identity* is a *double edged sword* for peace and conflict as well presenting a *window of opportunity* for conflict transformation at hand requiring honest political commitments by the elites and concerted efforts by peace actors and practitioners *including from below*.

It requires that both countries have to sit in a boat for *problem-solving* and need a *con-federal marriage* because only such political arrangement transforms their *relationships* beyond sweating on the existing issues of the conflict. In the context of institutionalized and consolidated democracy, there exists no legitimate reason for separation, closing borders and sawing landmines. Rather under the tiding forces of globalizing phenomena and regional integration processes among nations even with no memory of shared history who had never been together,

coming-together deepens economic interdependence and really benefits, it doesn't incur any cost, which gradually may develop into *one* economic and political *community*.

The Ethiopian federation today is an opportunity for such arrangements where the constituent units are founded on a federation of *holding-together*. This *holding-together federalism* was already experimented in Ethiopia to accommodate Eritrean *self-rule* in the periods of 1952-1962. Upon unilaterally dismantling of the federation by the Emperor, however, both Ethiopia and Eritrea went into situations of war and separation where mutually have ever since been *losing*.

There are only *rare and short living* instances that claim separation has ever become rewarding option. Eritrean is a clearer *example* where separation has brought about neither readymade *democratic self-rule* nor *prosperity*. It is plausible and legitimate that only *democratizing the unity in diversity* through going beyond negative, including positive, peace ranging from protection to provision, from equality to equitable redistribution of resources, from self-rule as a distinct one to the right to secession, etc., becomes a viable option.

During the liberation wars, armed ethnic groups representing Eritrea, Tigray, Oromo, and others were fighting for separation from Ethiopia. Later, however, except Eritrea all nations, nationalities and peoples remained one under, and changing to, democratic unity in diversity who is now by far *advantaged* from the *holding together federation* than the separated Eritrea which it continued to remain *basket of all-ills*.

Therefore, *separation* neither under *normalization* nor in situations of “no war, no Peace” doesn't offer *basket of bread and justice* rather the reverse do. Accordingly, Ethiopia and Eritrea have made ***four mistakes in history*** which still require *rethinking* and *creatively transforming* them. *Firstly*, the national question would have been constitutionally addressed within the democratic unity in diversity short of secession. *Secondly*, neighborhood based on peaceful interdependence would have substituted the rigid *separation* and would have open-up appetite for reintegration. *Thirdly*, the “border” war for which “two bald men fought over a comb”) would have been resolved by arbitration, if not through negotiation and mediation. And *finally*, the existing “no war, no peace” *impasse* is making the *mistakes* from *bad to worse* to which conflict transformation and peace-building efforts exploiting the existing *reap opportunities of art-based approaches and shared-positive memories* between them could have applied for

constructively. These mistakes have still been crafted and *sponsored* by *political elites* creating *differences* and *abusing* such windows of peace *opportunities*. The problems are *political* not *cultural*, and shared-culture could and *should* mediate politics for common good, *peace* and *interdependence*.

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