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Federalism and Conflict Management in Ethiopia:

Case Study of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

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Abstract

In 1994 Ethiopia introduced a federal system of government as a national level approach to intra-state conflict management. Homogenisation of cultures and languages by the earlier regimes led to the emergence of ethno-national movements and civil wars that culminated in the collapse of the unitary state in 1991. For this reason, the federal system that recognises ethnic groups' rights is the first step in transforming the structural causes of civil wars in Ethiopia. Against this background this research examines whether the federal arrangement has created an enabling environment in managing conflicts in the country. To understand this problematic, the thesis conceptualises and analyses federalism and conflict management using a qualitative research design based on in-depth interviewing and content-based thematic analysis – taking the case study of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state.

The findings of the study demonstrate that different factors hinder the federal process. First, the constitutional focus on ethnic groups' rights has led, in practice, to lessened attention to citizenship and minority rights protection in the regional states. Second, the federal process encourages ethnic-based elite groups to compete in controlling regional and local state powers and resources. This has greatly contributed to the emergence of ethnic-based violent conflicts, hostile intergovernmental relationships and lack of law and order along the common borders of the regional states. Third, the centralised policy and decision making process of the ruling party has hindered genuine democratic participation of citizens and self-determination of the ethnic groups. This undermines the capacity of the regional states and makes the federal structure vulnerable to the dynamics of political change. The conflicts in Benishangul-Gumuz emanate from these causes, but lack of territorial land use rights of the indigenous people and lack of proportional political representation of the non-indigenous people are the principal manifestations.

The research concludes by identifying the issues that determine the sustainability of the federal structure. Some of them include: making constitutional amendments which consider citizenship rights and minority rights protection; enhancing the democratic participation of citizens by developing the capacities of the regional states and correcting the organisational weakness of the multi-national political parties;

encouraging co-operative intergovernmental relationships, and maintaining the territorial land use rights of the Benishangul-Gumuz indigenous people.

Keywords: Federalism, Ethnic groups, Intra-state Conflict, Conflict management, Intergovernmental relationships

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Acronyms

AAPO	All Amhara People's Organisation
ADPS	Agricultural Development, Policy and Strategy
AEDO	All Ethiopian Democratic Organisation
AESM	All Ethiopian Socialist Movement
ALF	Afar Liberation Front
AMC	Agricultural Marketing Corporation
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic movement
ARS	Amhara Regional State
BGRS	Benishangul-Gumuz Regional state
BGPDUF	Benishangul- Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front
BIPPCSA	Bureau of Information and Public Participation, Co-ordination and Social Affairs
BNWEPDUP	Benishangul North West Ethiopia People's Democratic Unity Party
Boro-SPDM	Shinasha People's Democratic Movement
BPLM	Benishangul People's Liberation Movement
CCE	Council of Constitutional Enquiry
CEWARN	Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism
COPWE	Commission for Organising the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia
CSAE	Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
DADC	Dedessa Agricultural Development Centre
EBDO	Ethiopian Berta Democratic Organisation
EPDM	The Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPRA	Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Army
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
EDU	Ethiopian Socialist Movement
FCEC	Federal Constitutional Enquiry Commission
FOTW	Flags of the World

FPTP	First-Past-The Post
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPLM	Gumuz's People Democratic Movement
HICE	Household Income, Consumption and Expenditure Survey
HOF	House of Federation
HoPR	House of People's Representatives
IFLO	Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia
IGR	Intergovernmental relations
KPDM	Komo People's Democratic Movement
MLLT	Marxist Leninist League of Tigray
MOFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
MPDM	Mao People's Democratic Movement
NEBE	National Election Board of Ethiopia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organisation
ORS	Oromia Regional State
SEPDC	The Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition
SLF	Sidama Liberation Front
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SNNPRS	Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Regional State
TLF	Tigray Liberation Front
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
WADU	Walyita Agricultural Development
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia

Glossary

Awraja	Imperial era zone
Derge	Literally ‘Committee’ used to denote the regime in power from 1974-1991
Fetha Negest	Law of the kings
Kebele	The lowest unit of administration
Kibre Negest	The Glory of the Kings, an account of the mythical origins of the Solomonic dynasty
Lij	Title generally reserved for the sons of the royal family
Michu	An institution through which friendship bonds are established mainly by performing traditionally prescribed rituals
Nefteгна	Literally one who owns a gun, associated with soldier settlers in southern Ethiopia to whom the government granted rights over land and people in the 19 th century
Negus	King, title of the provincial lords of high birth or special merit
Neguse Negest	King of Kings, or Emperor
Ras	Literally head, the highest traditional politico-military title under <i>negus</i>
Region	The name for the constituent units within the Ethiopian Federation
Woreda	District administrative structure between Kebele and Zone

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Part One: Introduction and Theoretical Framework for Analysis

Chapter One

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Intra-state conflicts that involve ethnic groups have become common since the establishment of the modern state in Ethiopia. However, Emperor Haile Selassie and the military regime neglected the issues and focused on Ethiopian state building. As a result, protracted civil wars continued and became the main reasons for the fall of the military regime in 1991 (Young, 1998). The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) regime has implemented federalism as a means of intra-state conflict management since 1994.

This research project provides in-depth understanding of the relationship between the federal system and inter- and intra-regional conflict management in the country. The motivations for this study and research focus include the following. Firstly, I participated in the EPRDF armed struggle that caused the collapse of the unitary state and the emergence of the federal system. As a result, I have a deep and compelling interest in discovering whether the federal arrangement can manage violent conflict similar to the one I participated in. Secondly, as a Civil Servant in the Internal Security Affairs' Department of the government of Ethiopia, I dealt with different intra-state conflicts in the early period of the federal arrangement. Although my contact with the conflict focused on security matters, my concerns about the repeated occurrence of intra-state conflicts such as between the Oromos and Somali, Afar and Isa, and the Gumuz and the Oromo prompted me to initiate this research. Thirdly, the federalisation of the state has stimulated academic debate about whether it can prevent,

manage and resolve intra-state conflicts in the country. On the one hand, some scholars have praised the federal arrangement as an innovative conflict management tool (Mengisteab 1997, Young, 1998, Olowu, 2003). Others, however, consider it a risk to the national integrity of the country (Webengida, 2005; Kefale, 2004). For this reason, I developed an intellectual interest in researching the complexities of federalism as an approach to conflict management. Whilst studying for an MSc in Governance and Development Management at the International Development Department (IDD), University of Birmingham in 2003/04 I developed a research proposal on this topic. It is my hope that it will contribute new insight for the current debates in this field of study and possibly equip policy makers with knowledge that will help them to review the implementation process of the federal system in Ethiopia.

The research focuses on federalism as an approach to conflict management in the country and investigates whether the federal arrangement has addressed and transformed the sources of intra-state conflicts. For this purpose, it focuses on two interrelated research questions:

- Has federalism created an enabling environment for managing the sources of conflicts in Ethiopia?
- What explains the conflicts in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state and the federal response to their management?

These research questions are relevant for theoretical and practical reasons. Firstly, the study is theoretically informed by the global experience of federalism as a national approach to conflict management. This is because federalism has been exercised and

studied as a field of study in many developed and developing countries. Federalism also has been used to address conflicts that involve ethnic groups. For example, the federal system of Switzerland specifically devolves power to ethnically-based Cantons (Fleiner, 2006). India established its regional states on the basis of language and religious (mainly Punjab region) differences after such demands emerged from regional-based political parties in 1959 (Bharghva, 2006). Moreover, Spain also recently devolved power to ethnic groups to manage violent conflicts that emerged from demands for self-rule. However, many federal attempts in Africa, such as in Cameroon (1961-1972), Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953-1963), with the exception of Nigeria and the recent federal arrangement of South Africa, have failed due to a variety of factors (Kavalski and Zolkos, 2008). Hence, federalism has had less popularity in many multi-ethnic countries in Africa and a centralised national state has been considered the best nation-building approach in the 20th century. As a result, the federal approach to conflict management has remained markedly under-researched, especially in the context of multi-ethnic African countries. Therefore, a study on federalism as a national level approach to conflict management can contribute empirical data and new insight to scholarly debate in this field of study in the context of African multi-ethnic countries.

Secondly, the study contributes to understanding of the causes and management of conflicts in multi-ethnic countries in general, and in Africa in particular. Inter- and intra-state conflicts have become world phenomena since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. These conflicts involve different ethnic groups in many countries of the World including Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the intra-state conflicts in Africa have been associated with primordial

ties of ethnic groups and the mobilising effect of greedy ethnic leaders who use the ethnic card to satisfy their political and economic objectives (Collier, 2001:150-152). The reasons for inter- and intra-regional state conflicts in Africa are associated with the colonial and post-colonial nation-building projects. Some of the colonialists adopted indirect rule (British) which resulted in two forms of governance within a country; and favoured and disfavoured ethnic groups in countries such as Uganda and Tanzania (Emerson, 1963:97). The colonial boundaries also divided the same ethnic groups into different countries and become a reason for high incursions of people from one country into another and interference in the affairs of neighbouring countries. The post-colonial African leaders considered states as homogeneous entities and attempts to homogenise different ethnic groups into one culture and language followed (Emerson, 1963:104). Moreover, African leaders considered the rural people to be 'backward', and that cannot hardly a reliable basis for modern nationhood. They tried to modernise rural people through modern education and industrial expansion, but that required large amounts of capital and high technology (ibid). The result of the nation-building project was centralisation of the state, horizontal inequalities, and the emergence of ethnicity as a political frontier, during the post-colonial period and the post-Cold War era in Africa (Ottaway, 1999; Stewart and Brown, 2007). Therefore, a study of the causes of conflict will not only reinforce the above analytical approaches to conflict but also provide new insight into the dynamics of conflict in 21st century Africa.

The study also has importance in the context of Ethiopia. Although much research has been done on the history of the Ethiopian nation-state (Zewde, 2002, Pankhurst, 1997, 1995; Tibebu, 1995, Donham, 1986), and recently about the structure of the federal

system (Aalen, 2002, Fiseha, 2006, Nugussie, 2006), there is a distinct lack of case studies that relate the federal process to specific issues of conflict management in the context of the constituent units of the federal system. Therefore, this study will help to fill this research gap.

Moreover, the research also has relevance for federalisation and the policy formulation processes in the country. The case study of this research addresses some empirical issues, such as the territorial rights of indigenous people, minority rights' protection, and language criteria in defining ethnic groups. The outcome of this research could greatly contribute to the federal process, and lead to constitutional amendment, both at federal and regional levels. Moreover, the outcome of the study could create a greater awareness among the policy makers, mainly in relation to the formulation of economic, social and political policies which could affect not only the indigenous people in Benishangul-Gumuz, but also other ethnic groups in other regional states.

Research Methodology

The methodological approach of this research is qualitative because it aims to achieve in-depth understanding of the relationship between federalism and conflict in Ethiopia. Moreover, the study requires data collection that embraces perceptions about the actors who have been involved either in instigating or managing conflict. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to be 'flexible' enough to conduct data collection, by identifying informants using purposive sampling methods and interviewing using semi-structured open-ended questionnaires (Coffen and Atkinson, 1996). In addition, the qualitative research design also enables the researcher to apply

‘triangulation’ methods, which involve comparing and contrasting the empirical data for validation purposes (Robson, 2002).

The qualitative research design was also useful in the data collection process during the field work. For example, I was able to be flexible in the identification of the people who had access to the required data about the conflict between the Oromos and the Gumuz in 2008. As a result, I was able to interview different informants from the federal and regional governments, NGOs and political parties, who had different perspectives about the source of the conflict and how it was managed. The qualitative approach has also enabled me to validate facts that have been forgotten or were not emphasised by the informants, due to the differences of perspectives and access to the required data.

In addition, the research methodology has enabled quantitative data collection to be used as a supplementary source. This is necessary because some of the sources of conflict in the regional state are associated with horizontal inequalities, budget allocation and population size, which require collection of quantitative data from secondary sources.

I have focused on a regional state case study of Benishangul-Gumuz because it was a necessary condition to be engaged on the ground, and to address practical issues in the country if the research questions were to be answered. The selection of the case study is appropriate because a cycle of conflict has occurred in this region involving different ethnic groups since the federalisation of the state. Moreover, the conflicts in the regional state have involved other bigger states such as Oromia and Amhara. The

Benishangul-Gumuz regional state is relatively small with a range of different inter-governmental relationships at both the regional and federal government levels. Therefore, this case study enables me not only to analyse the pattern of conflict in the regional state and fill the research gap but also to see the relevance of regional conflict at the national level.

The study also focuses on the relationships between the indigenous and non-indigenous groups in the case study of the regional state. For this purpose, it primarily considers the Gumuz and the Berta indigenous ethnic groups. The reason for this is that although the regional state composes five indigenous ethnic groups, the Gumuz and the Berta have been involved in several conflicts with the non-indigenous people and the neighbouring regional states. Moreover, both the Gumuz and Berta have entered into power struggles for the control of regional political institutions and public resources. Therefore, a focus on these two ethnic groups and inter- and intra-regional state relationships enables the researcher to gain an in-depth focus into all aspects of conflict in the regional state.

To conduct the research it was necessary to select a number of conflict areas or sites. This was done through an analysis of inter- and intra-regional state relationships. Priority was given to specific conflict areas such as the BeloJeganfoy Woreda in the Kamashi zone because the conflict in the Woreda involved both the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regional states. The federal authorities in these states intervened to manage the conflict in 2008. Other sites for study have been the Metekel zone, the subject of the 1992 inter-regional conflict in Pawe Woreda, and common border issues in the Awi zone. Within the regional state land-use-based conflict between

Berta and settlers in the Bambassi Woreda and the power-based conflict between the Berta and the Gumuz were of special interest to this study.

I identified the required informants through purposive sampling methods, which involved utilising networks and by conducting preliminary interviews and document reviews at the Ministry of Federal Affairs in Addis Ababa before I travelled to the research sites. These initial activities have enabled me to identify key informants from the federal and regional institutions, NGOs, and the political parties. The contacts made with key informants led to identification of other informants.

Accordingly, I travelled to various places to interview the informants and to access archival materials. For example, it was essential that I travel to the town of Asossa, which is at the centre of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state and around one hour flight from the capital city, Addis Ababa. I also travelled to Bahirdar, which is the capital of the Amhara regional state and around a one hour flight from Addis Ababa. It was also necessary to travel (by bus) to Glegelbeles town, which is the capital of the Metekel zone and around 180 kilometres from Bahirdar, to gain access to the conflict sites in this zone. Moreover, additional interviews were conducted in Addis Ababa, which houses the centre of the federal government and the Oromia regional state institutions.

As outlined in Tables 1 and 2 below, 80 informants with different background have participated in the research. Among these 60 % are indigenous and non-indigenous people who live in the regional state. They represent the regional government institutions, elders, and local people. Meanwhile, 12% of the informants represent

political parties and NGOs, which operate in the regional state. The others represent federal government institutions (19%) and neighbouring regional states (12%).

A detailed breakdown reveals informants from:

1. The Benishagul-Gumuz regional state: President's office, the Security and Administration Bureaus, the Regional People's Representatives' office, the Budget and Planning Bureau, the Civil Service Bureau, the Women's Affairs office, the Regional Agricultural College, the Metekel Zone Administration office, the Mandura and the Dibate Woredas Administrations offices.
2. Federal government institutions: representatives of The House of Federation, representatives of the House of People's Representatives (Parliament), the Ministry of Federal Affairs, and the Federal Police.
3. Neighbouring regional states: the Amhara and Oromia Regional States' Security and Administration Bureau, the Ganagwa Woreda administration from the Amhara regional state.
4. Non-governmental organisations: Action Aid Ethiopia, the Initiative for Gumuz and Berta's Development Cooperation.
5. Political parties: representatives of the regional parties, Oromo People's Democratic Movement (OPDO), Amhara National Democratic Movement (APDM) and the Oromo Congress Party (OCP) (an opposition party).
6. Elders and local people: informants from the Berta and Gumuz ethnic groups, and non-indigenous people in the regional state.

Table 1.1. Total Interview participants of the research study

Categories		Number of participants	Percentage (%)
Government institutions			
	Federal	15	19
	Benishangul- Gumuz	25	31
	Oromia	5	6
	Amhara	5	6
Political Parties		5	6
Ngos		5	6
Elders & Local People		20	25
	Total	80	100
Education Level			
	Illiterate	20	25
	Literate	15	19
	College and above	45	56
	Total	80	100
Gender	Male	76	95
	Female	4	5
	Total	80	100

Table 1.2. Interview Participants from Benishangul-Gumuz regional state by ethnicity

	Indigenous people				Total	Non-indigenous people	Total
	Berta	Gumuz	Shinasha	Mao/Komo			
	8	10	9	3	30	20	50
% age					60	40	100

Different data collection methods, including in-depth interviewing, focus group discussions, document reviewing, and on site observation have been used in the study (Robson, 2002). Among these the main data collection method was in-depth interviewing; therefore, an attempt has been made to capture the required data using open-ended semi-structured questionnaires. Overall around 65 informants participated in the in-depth interviewing. In most cases the interview was conducted in the offices of the informants and sometimes in hotels and informant's homes. It took around one hour, on average, to complete the interview questions with every informant. Overall the interview process was smooth except for some interruptions mainly during interviews held in informants' offices.

In addition, three Focus Group discussions, attended by 15 participants, were conducted at the research sites. The first one was conducted with elders from the Gambella village of the Berta ethnic group in Bambassi Woreda on the regional Agricultural College campus. It focused on understanding the reasons for conflict with the settlers in Amba 14 (village). The second was conducted with elders of the settlers from Amba 14, on the same theme. The third focus group discussion was conducted with the Dibate Woreda administration in the Metekel zone, and aimed to understand the reasons for border conflict with the Guangwa Woreda from the Amhara regional state and how the conflict was handled.

The third data collection method was document reviews of both primary and secondary sources from the archives of the federal and regional institutions. Primary sources such as the Minutes of the Constitutional Assembly, federal and regional parliamentary proceedings, the Minutes of public meetings about the relationships of the Berta ethnic group and others, and reports about violent conflicts (prepared by different investigation committees), were reviewed. Secondary sources included historical, anthropological, ethnographical and linguistic studies about the country in general, and the ethnic groups in the case study in particular. Moreover, other statistical sources such as the 1994 and 2007 population censuses, national and regional poverty indicators, agricultural policy and the strategy of the country (available on the websites of federal and regional institutions), were also consulted. The document review was useful to gain access to a historical analysis of the case study and important events in the regional state (Marshal & Rossman, 1999). Finally, although it was not a major aspect of the data collection method, onsite observation in

an open Saturday market in the town of Asossa was conducted to determine the role of the indigenous and non-indigenous people in business activities.

As the data collection was mainly based on in-depth interviewing, note taking and audio recording were employed as main data-capturing mechanisms in the field study. Also memos and interim reports have been used to capture the reflections during the interview and summarise the main points (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Moreover, the audio records were transcribed in Amharic and then translated into English in a summarised format after the completion of the field study. Similarly, summaries and an annotated bibliography were prepared from the documentary sources in accordance with the research questions (Robson, 2002).

However, this was not without difficulties. For example, transcribing the data and translating it again from Amharic to English was not only time consuming, but also resulted in loss of the meaning of the message in translation. It required me to keep reading back the transcribed data to maintain the original meaning of the data in the parts where necessary.

Following this, a content-based thematic analysis was conducted to analyse and interpret the data. The data in each case was reduced into categories and sub-categories (Miles and Huberman, 1994). A cross-case analysis has also been utilised to see the patterns and themes that could be transferred from the case studies for conclusions at regional and country levels (Ibid). For example, the inter-regional conflicts in the Kamashi zone between the Oromos and the Gumuz in 2008, and similar conflicts between the Amhara and the Gumuz in Metekel in 1992, have been

compared and contrasted during cross-case conflict analysis. Statistical data, presented in Table format, has been used to support the analysis from the bulk of qualitative data.

A constructivist approach was followed to maintain the objectivity of the research. This means basic theoretical concepts and arguments were reviewed to inform the research process, which also enabled me to construct the political activities and societal interactions during the field work. In other words the field research aimed to understand how the political processes were constituted and what the consequences and outcome will be. Therefore, informants were not selected as individuals, but as persons who represent political systems or cultural groups (Robson, 2002; Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001). Although it is believed that the research process involves interpretation where the researcher cannot show a neutral stance as is done in some scientific quantitative research designs (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001:396), methods such as in-depth interviewing and content analysis were used to capture the inter-subjective meanings of the data while maintaining the objectivity of the study.

Data validity has been checked using triangulation methods (Robson, 2002). This was done using different data sources on the same issue, such as federal institutions, the Oromia and the Benishangul-Gumuz regional states, and NGOs operating in the conflict sites. Moreover, an attempt has been made to compare and contrast the data sources during data analysis. This approach has helped the researcher to understand the reasons behind the immediate cause of the conflict and the interests of the actors involved.

Ethical considerations have also been given significant attention during the field work, analysis, and writing-up of the outputs of the research. The researcher took a letter, *To Whom It May Concern*, from the supervisor that indicated the purpose of the field study. In addition, as the sponsor of my PhD study, Addis Ababa University wrote an additional letter in Amharic that indicated the purpose of field work. Both letters have greatly helped in gaining access to the required institutions and the consent of the required informants.

However, resistance to audio recording was a challenge in the field work. This was overcome by explaining to informants the ethical principles of the researcher in keeping data confidential. Subsequently, almost 60% of the interviewees agreed to be recorded. However, others and mainly those who work at the federal institutions would not be recorded. Therefore, note taking was used instead. Moreover, as the data of this study is relatively sensitive, names of informants have been kept confidential in the analysis, interpretation and writing up of the output of the study.

In summary, the research design, the data collection methods and mechanisms of data analysis and interpretation, and the ethical considerations used in the research process have enabled the researcher to address the research questions in producing the thesis. However, this was not without limitation. I was not able to travel to one of the conflict sites for security reasons. As a result, I was unable to conduct some interviews from the lower level administrations and citizens of the Woreda. Moreover, although I wanted to capture women's perspectives on the study, only a few participated because the number of women who have access to the required data at the institutions is small.

The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into three parts, which include ten chapters. The first section contains the introduction and Chapter Two, which provides the theoretical analytical framework for the research. The second section includes Chapter Three, which discusses the socio-political and economic history of Ethiopia, and Chapter Four, which examines the federalisation of the nation state. Section three which includes Chapters' Five, Six, Seven, Eight and Nine gives a detailed study of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. Finally, the concluding chapter brings the research to an end by drawing together the main findings of the research and providing further reflections from the researcher.

A detailed outline of each chapter includes the following. Chapter Two provides a theoretical analytical framework of federalism – as a comprehensive approach to intra-state conflict management in multi-ethnic African countries. Federalism can be used as a form of governance through power devolution, resource-sharing mechanisms and democratic participation. The chapter also discusses some challenges of federalism based on the experiences of the federal systems of the former Soviet Union and Belgium. In contextualising the challenges of federalism to Africa, the chapter relates the sources of intra-state conflict to the colonial period and, mainly, to post-colonial centralised African states' nation-building projects, which resulted in cultural, social, economic and political inequalities between the ethnic groups. Within this perspective an account is given of the debates about the social construction of ethnicity and the role ethnic elite leaders played in manipulating ethnic identities. Therefore, the chapter considers federalism as a conflict management approach in transforming the social, economic and political factors which affect the ethnic groups.

Chapter Three is about the political economic history of Ethiopia, and gives a detailed account of the political, economic, and social context of intra-state conflict in the modern history of the country. It relates the sources of intra-state conflict to the centralised state structure, an attempt of homogenisation of the ethnic groups into one culture and language, exploitative resource appropriation methods from the rural population and the modernisation policies which created uneven developments. These problems led to civil wars and, eventually, the downfall of the military regime in 1991.

Chapter Four critically examines the federal constitution and its process of implementation, with respect to inter-intra-regional conflict management. Therefore, it examines the federal constitution, with respect to power relationships between the centre and the constituent units, resource sharing mechanisms, democratic participation and inter-governmental relationships. Accordingly, the relationship between national and ethnic identities, different geographical and population sizes of regional states, different levels of regional economic development and relationships to the Ethiopian state, the constitutional right of secession, the inability to protect minority rights, lack of democratic participation of the constituent units and the ethnic groups are discussed as the main issues of the constitution and the federalisation process.

Chapter Five considers the relationship between the ethnic groups and the political history of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, the case study of this research. It relates the sources of intra-state conflict, discussed in Chapter Three, to the context of indigenous and non-indigenous people in the regional state. The indigenous people, and mainly the Berta and the Gumuz, have structural differences from the non-

indigenous people, who came to the regional state from the highland areas of the country – through internal immigration and resettlement programmes. One significant difference lies in their subsistence systems, which involve shifting cultivation for the indigenous people and plough cultivation for the non-indigenous people. This difference has contributed to the conflict that arose between these groups, in relation to the use of land resources. The chapter also examines the political history of the regional state, focusing on the historical relationship between the state and the indigenous people, which can best be characterised as centre and periphery relationships; and hostility and suspicion.

Chapter Six examines the basic causes of intra-regional conflict that made both the indigenous and non-indigenous people insecure, and how the regional and federal authorities attempted to address them. The social, economic and cultural inequalities between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, the territorial issues of the indigenous people, and issues of land use rights of settlers are considered to be the main causes of insecurity in the regional state.

Chapter Seven discusses the role of political parties in the federal process of the regional state. A detailed investigation has been made of the role of the regional party, EPRDF and opposition parties in creating regional leadership, which has a direct impact on the capacity of the region to resolve conflicts. The chapter concludes by noting that focusing on enhancing the leadership capacity of the regional party can improve the ability to resolve both intra- and inter-regional conflicts.

Chapter Eight looks at the power relationships between the political actors in the regional state and how the relationship influences the conflict management process in the regional state. Accordingly, the chapter examines the power struggle between the political elite of the regional state and the effect on the conflict management process of the regional state. Moreover, it discusses the reasons that the non-indigenous people were underrepresented in the political institutions and the impact of this to the federalisation process in the regional state. Overall the entire chapter underscores that it is not only the federal structure that determines the federal process but also the dynamics of the political power relationships between the political actors in the regional state.

Chapter Nine examines the nature of inter-regional violent conflict and how it has been managed. Accordingly, it considers historical and cultural factors, the small size of the regional state and its relationship with the Ethiopian state, regional common border issues, international frontiers and possession of small arms as the main causes of inter-regional conflicts. The chapter also investigates the reasons that the above factors lead to violence. For this purpose two case studies are investigated: firstly, the violent conflict between Gumuz and Amhara in 1992-1994, and secondly, the conflict between Gumuz and Oromo in 2008. Issues such as the involvement of the lower level administration in the conflict, the lack of administrative accountability at the regional level, and the lack of rule of law – especially the failure to arrest people who aggravated inter-ethnic violent conflict – are discussed. These factors are seen to be the immediate causes of violent conflict. The chapter also examines the role played by intergovernmental relationships in the management of the violent conflict.

Chapter Ten, the conclusion of the thesis, draws together the main findings of the study. Three comprehensive issues receive significant attention in the concluding remarks. Firstly, at the national level, the chapter presents the danger of lack of focus on citizenship rights as a means of co-operation with the ethnic groups, the top down approach of the political elite of the country which has led to less democratic participation of citizens and the lack of minority rights protection as the main drawbacks of the federal constitution and the process. Secondly, it brings together the issues related to the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. Therefore, it focuses on addressing the structural causes and mainly the territorial issues of the indigenous people and the political rights of the non-indigenous people. In addition, attention is given to the rule of law and to the accountability of regional authorities and considers how significant these factors are in the determination of peaceful conflict management in the regional state. The chapter also provides some insight into the theoretical relevance of the conclusions.

Chapter Two

Federalism and Conflict Management

Introduction

Chapter Two provides a theoretical framework for analysing federalism and conflict management in Ethiopia. For this purpose it examines some common characteristics of ethnic-based federations, including the former Soviet Union and Belgium, which have similar characteristics to the Ethiopian federation with respect to using ethnicity as a principal form of organisation of the state. Following this, it examines the causes of conflicts in Africa to understand the challenges of ethnic federalism in the context of multiethnic African countries. Finally, it draws out the main issues that should be considered in using federalism as a general approach to conflict management in multi-ethnic African countries. The applicability to Ethiopia will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

The Concept of Federalism

Federalism has been used as a principle of government for reasons such as better economic and security opportunities and accommodation of different identities in the political spheres of many countries. It has been practiced in countries such as the USA, Switzerland, Canada, and Australia for centuries. Moreover, it was adopted in many developed (such as Germany, Belgium, and Spain) and developing countries such as India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Ethiopia and South Africa in the 20th century. Some of the federal states such as Pakistan, Czechoslovakia, and Cameroon failed for different reasons (Kavalski and Zolkos, 2008). Overall, there are more than 24 federal countries which satisfy some of the fundamental characteristics of federalism and around 40 % of the World population live in these countries (Watts, 2008: xiii).

Federalism is a general term that refers to the advocacy of multi-tier government, which combines elements of shared rule and regional self-rule. It aims to achieve both unity and diversity by accommodating, preserving and promoting distinct identities within a larger political system (Watts, 2001; 24).

However, within the general federal principle there can be different federal political systems, which combine elements of shared rule and regional self- rule through the constituent units (Elazar, 1987, 7-8). Therefore, federal political systems include a spectrum of more specific non-unitary forms of political systems, including federations, confederations, consociational polities, unions, and leagues (Elazar, 1987:6-8; Elazar, 1994:22-23). All the political systems include aspects of the federal principle – compared to the unitary state, which is a single source of political authority.

Federal political systems may emerge from an agreement by two or more independent political entities to acquire common political structures, such as the United States and Canadian federations. Or it may result from the federalisation of a unitary state, like the recent constitutional change in Spain, Ethiopia and Iraq (Watts, 2008). The federation of a unitary state may be based on territorial, cultural, linguistic or other divisions that the unitary state intends to resolve (Watts, 2001:76).

As the concern of this thesis is mainly with federations, it may be relevant to define what a federation refers to, in order to understand its main characteristics and explore its main mechanisms and the debates around it.

According to Watts, a federation is made up of:

Compound polities, combining strong constituent units of government and a strong general government, each possessing powers delegated to it by the people through a constitution, each empowered to deal directly with the citizens in the exercise of its legislative, administrative, and taxing powers, and each directly elected and accountable to its citizens (2001:27).

The above definition indicates that the following common characteristics of federal states have to be fulfilled in order to manage conflicts at a national level. First, federal states have a supreme written constitution that cannot be easily amended and, if amendment is required, there must be consent by a significant proportion of the population either through the regional governments or a referendum (Duchacek, 1987:201-208). Second, distribution of power – that is legislative, executive and revenue allocation – is specified by the constitution. Therefore, the political system diffuses power among a number of substantially self-sustaining centres, and the authority to participate in exercising it cannot be taken without all their consent (Elazar, 1987:166). Third, in a federation, political authority is territorially divided between two autonomous sets of separate jurisdictions, one national and the other regional, in which the former operate directly upon the people of a country and the latter on the people of a regional state (Duchacek, 1987: 192). Fourth, provision for the designated representation of distinct regional/ethnic views within the federal policy – making institutions usually includes the representation of regional/ethnic representatives in a second federal legislative chamber (Weinstock, 2001:75).

Federalism has been considered as centralisation of power on the one hand and decentralisation of power on the other. With respect to centralisation of power, it moves some powers of the constituent units to the centre. Hence, it imposes restrictions on the liberties of the members of the federation. With respect to decentralisation, it secures local autonomy for the constituent units, which leads to greater fragmentation of power. But, overall, federalism is considered as a compromise between unity and diversity, autonomy and sovereignty, national and regional issues (Smith, 1995:5).

Accordingly, there are different federations that can be categorised as integrative, ethnic-based or hybrid. The integrative federation establishes constituent units on the basis of geographical size and other socio-economic factors. It aims to foster the individual rights of citizens, like the federation that is the USA. It focuses on limiting and balancing the power of the federal and regional institutions in exercising their authority. The ethnic-based federation focuses on accommodating the ethnic groups in a country. It devolves powers along ethnic lines and enables ethnic groups to participate equally at the federal level, as in Belgium. The third type is a hybrid of the integrative and ethnic-based federations which aims to foster individual rights, but also devolve powers to territorially-based ethnic groups, like Nigerian and Swiss federations (Watts, 2008).

The above brief description of different kinds of federation shows that federal states, whether they are integrative, ethnic-based or hybrid, all attempt to secure and ensure the reproduction of a particular political institutionalisation which reflects an acknowledgement of diversity. This also shows that multi-ethnic federal states have

common challenges, which primarily derive from the ethnic diversity of their populations (Smith, 1995:7). The Ethiopian federalism was also introduced to address the causes of conflicts, derived from the diversity of the population and ethno-national movements which fought against the tyranny of the unitary state during the imperial (1931-1974) and military (1974-1991) regimes. This makes it necessary to discuss some conceptual issues, such as nations, nationalities, ethnicity and associated elements which have direct relevance to the federalisation process in Ethiopia.

Nation, Nationality, People and Ethnicity

The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995) considers nations, nationalities and people as the supreme power sources in the country (Article 8/1). Following the Federal Constitution, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional constitution (2002) also identifies the people in the regional state as indigenous and non-indigenous. The above terms, which are mentioned in both the federal and regional constitutions, require clarity of thought on how to use them in the conflict analysis of this case study.

The term nation has been defined and redefined in the context of the historical developments of countries. For example, a very popular scholar of the 19th century, Renan, understands the term nation as a ‘spiritual principle’ which connects the past and present memory of a group of people (Hutchinson and Smith, 1994:17-18). This nationhood comes by a common sacrifice of the people for the good of all and is a basis of liberty for humankind (ibid). Max Weber defines the term nation more or less the same as Renan. According to Weber, a nation is “a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a

community which normally tends to produce a state of its own” (Hutchinson and Smith, 2000:9). For Max Weber, the people of a nation might have different ethnic identities or may speak different languages, but if they develop a common national sentiment that transcends all the communities in the territory, these people could be considered as a nation. In addition, Max Weber asserts that the common national sentiment is basically achieved over a period of time by the common activities of the people (Hutchinson and Smith, 2000:8).

From both Renan and Weber, we can identify three major points about the term nation. First, a nation suggests a group of people who have a common national sentiment which is developed in the process of their common accomplishments through time. Second, the people do not necessarily come from a single race or speak a particular language to be a nation. In other words, if people with different languages and races have a common national sentiment, which is shared by all of them, they can be considered as a nation. Third, the tendency of these people and their nation is also to establish their own state.

However, Joseph Stalin defines a nation using some specific features that are common to those people who count as members of that nation. According to Stalin, a nation is a definite community of people that is neither racial nor tribal but a “historically constituted stable community of people formed on the basis of a common spoken language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture”. Stalin believed that, if a group of people are to be considered as a nation, they have to satisfy all the above factors (Hutchinson and Smith, 1994:18-21). However, if a group of people cannot satisfy these criteria, they could be considered

as a nationality, which has less socio-economic development compared to the so-called nation. Stalin's definition of a nation led to the establishment of different tiers of republics in the Soviet Union, which became a source of resentment among the ethnic groups, as will be discussed in the following sections.

Many scholars (Bauer cited in Ozkirimli, 2000:32-33; Ernest Gellner, cited in Hutchinson and Smith, 1994; John Breuilly, 1993) have believed that the common national sentiment of a nation could develop through cultural and language homogenisation of the ethnic groups in a country. For this purpose, they proposed a nation-building project focusing on industrial development and standardisation of education as the main tool to achieve a common national sentiment. They also suggested that a centralised state, which aspired to the realisation of the national community, could lead that project (Breuilly, 1993).

The nation building project has been facilitated by nationalism and national movements which evolved as a doctrine of sovereignty and unity to achieve freedom of the nations in Western Europe and was mainly anchored in the evolving middle class movement of those countries (Hutchinson and Smith, 1994:5; Kedourine, cited in Hutchinson and Smith, 1994:49-55). This was greatly supported by their evolving industries and infrastructures (Gellner, 1983:47 cited in Ozkirimli, 2000:132; Hutchinson and Smith, 1994:5).

Nationalism and national movements also deal with controlling state power. This has two aspects: firstly, it could be related to the entire people of a nation, as has happened during the popular anti-colonial movements in Africa (Breuilly, 1993;

Erikson, 2002). The aim of the anti-colonial movements was to free their countries from the colonisers and from the control of the colonial power. Secondly, nationalism and national movements could be linked to ethnic groups' movements, commonly known as ethno-nationalism, which aims to assert the rights of the various ethnic groups in nation-states (Eriksen, 2002).

After the independence of many African countries, the national movements were linked with the assertion of the rights of ethnic groups, and this undermined those nation-building projects of African leaders who sought to provide common modern identities through industrial development and standardised education, which would lead to cultural and language homogenisation (Ozkirimli, 2000; 49).

Having discussed the basic concepts of nations and nationalism, it is important to clearly specify the working definition of a nation for the purpose of this research project. The following will be used:

A nation is a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members (Smith, 1991:14).

This definition neither implies homogenisation of languages and cultures nor imposes a pre-condition of a modern economy by the standard of the developed world. Rather, it suggests that nations and their national sentiments evolve as a historical process of development of common memories of the general public that have common administrative rights through shared state authorities. This also shows that nationalism

could emerge and sustain itself in societies which have not reached the level of development of the Western world (Breuilly, 1996:162).

The term 'Nationality' refers to the ability of a person to communicate more effectively, and over a wider range of subjects, with members of one large group than with outsiders (Deutsch in Hutchinson & Smith, 2000:27). Moreover, during the 1930s in Russia, the term 'nationality' was used to separate people that had different customs or religion from the majority Russians. This is because there were many minority groups who considered themselves as different from the majority Russians (Sunny and Martin, 2001; Tishkov, 1997). Hence, 'nationality' implies membership of a distinct group, showing a similarity to the concept of ethnicity. Second, 'nationality' is used to indicate an affiliation of a person to the nation-state. For example, a person could be Ethiopian, British or Kenyan. This is usually marked by the citizenship of the person to a country. Thus, this makes the term 'nationality' synonymous with the term 'citizenship'.

The term 'people' is understood differently in different contexts. For example, the UN Charter mentions it in relation to the right of self-determination, referring to the total population of a nation-state. On the other hand, the term has been defined as applying to a group of people who have a common descent and similarity of features, or complementary habits and facilities of communication (Reynolds, 1984 in Hutchinson and Smith, 2000:140; Deutsch in Hutchinson and Smith, 2000:26). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) also defines the term 'people' in a way similar to the above definitions: "A body of persons composing a community, tribe, race, or nation". Therefore, the term 'people' could refer to the whole population if we are

referring to the nation-state. It could also apply to different ethnic groups of the nation-state, if we are referring to the groups of people within it.

The term ethnicity, a noun form of the word ethnic¹, refers to self-identifying features of a group of people (Tonkin et al, 1996:23). Max Weber understood ethnicity as a subjective common belief linked to similarities of origin or custom that could create a group (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996:35-40). However, understanding of the term differs in different perspectives which include primordial, instrumentalist and constructivist approaches.

The primordialist approach interprets ethnicity as relating to a particular race, nation or tribe and their customs and traditions; it is established at birth when people are born into an ethnic group in which they stay until they die (Horowitz, 1985). Accordingly, emphasis is given to the importance of cultural norms and blood relationships for one's identity and to the relationship between members of the ethnic group (Geertz, 1973; Van den Berghe, 1979; Horowitz, 1985; Lewis, 1994).

The primordialist approach maintains that ethnic groups are mobilised for the protection of their culture and way of life. Therefore, it fails to account for changes in the ethnic group that could result in its dissolution or adaptation to new circumstances and technological developments. The approach also overlooks the economical, political and social relationships between members of the ethnic group. It is undermined by the changes that have occurred in many ethnic groups due to

¹ The word ethnic is derived from the early Greek word 'ethnos' implies an unstructured, tribal, peripheral people (Tonkin, et al, 1996: 18-21).

colonisation, frequent migration and intermarriage (Eller and Coghlan, 1993; Harff and Gurr, 2004:96).

In contrast to the primordial approach, the instrumentalist approach focuses on the malleability of the ethnic identity and the role of elites in the politicisation of ethnicity (Ukiwo, 2005, Esman, 2004). Therefore, it is believed that an ethnic identity can be changed in the pursuit of economic interests and wealth (Hechter, 1996; Banton, 1994). In other words, people can change their identity on the basis of the benefits they could gain by doing so. Moreover, Cohn (1996) and Brass (1996) believe that the symbols of an ethnic identity are something useful to the elite political leaders to influence their constituents in pursuing their political goals. This means it is the elite group (political entrepreneurs) who create identity-based differences and manipulate those differences (political ethnicity) for the purpose of attaining political power that renders ethnic differences. This has happened in many countries such as in Nigeria, Rwanda and Burundi during the 1990s which ultimately led the countries to instability (Deng, 2009:362) beyond this, an ethnic identity could be considered as any social identity, such as membership of a trade union.

The instrumentalist approach fails to explain the reasons for the persistence of an ethnic identity within members of the ethnic group. It also reduces the ethnic identity to cost-benefit oriented economic choices; thus, it fails to account for the deeper social structures that allow manipulation of the grievances of the ethnic group by their elite leaders (Vayrynen, 1999:128).

The constructivist approach emphasises the reasons by which ethnic group identities emerge and change over time. Accordingly, ethnic identities are not static; they are passed on by families and other social actors like teachers, by political activities and by the active participation of the members of the ethnic group themselves (Jenkin, 1997). Vayrynen (1999) emphasises the social construction and reconstruction of ethnic identities through time, which involve the pre-constituted and pre-organised socio-cultural world. This involves interactions of the members of the ethnic groups with other people who have different socio-cultural patterns, the roles of the state in creating common national political identities, globalisation and the media in adapting the group to new circumstances. Therefore, ethnic identities are in a constant state of flux due to change in the circumstances of the ethnic group, its relationships with others and the active participation of the members of the group themselves (Cornell and Harmann, 1998:85).

Accordingly, ethnicity in this research context relates to group members who share a persisting sense of common interest and identity that is based on some combination of shared historical experience and values, such as cultural traits, beliefs, language, way of life and a common residential territory (Harff and Gurr, 2004:3; Jenkins, 1997:13). Accordingly, an ethnic group (community) can also be defined as a 'named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories and cultural elements, a link with a historic territory or home land, and a measure (sense) of solidarity' (Brown, 1993:28-9). However, there are no grounds for assuming any one basis for ethnic or cultural identity, such as religion, language, race or a common homeland (Gurr, 2001:163; Smith, 1997:27). As noted above, ethnic group identity is identified in the relationship between the traits of the ethnic group and the relationship of the

ethnic group with other ethnic groups. Therefore, ethnic groups can be regionally concentrated cultural groups, usually with a history of separate political existence, who need autonomy in their internal affairs and gain equal access to the centre (Schermerhorn, 1996:17). Moreover, ethnic groups can also be people or minorities, living intermingled with other ethnic groups, who seek equal rights, opportunities and access to power within the existing political communities (Wolff, 2004:2; Gurr, 2001, 163-164).

Ethnic groups can also be indigenous to a specific region or area of a country. The term 'indigenous' is usually associated with the aboriginal peoples of North and South America, Australia and others – as distinct from the invading whites. However, 'aboriginal' does not necessarily mean first-comers or first settlers. Germans and English people could be some of the first settlers in their respective territories of Europe, but nobody refers to them as indigenous peoples (Eriksen, 2002:25). Knight defines 'indigenous' as: "people who never voluntarily gave up their original status and who do not, or not completely, identify themselves with the state with which they live" (1988, 122). Eriksen also defines indigenous groups as "non-state people and they are always linked with a non-industrial mode of production" (2002:125).

Thus, indigenous groups have historical continuity that developed in their territories which makes them distinct from others. They have a tendency to preserve their cultures and traditions for future generations in their territories (Knight, 1988:123; Eriksen, 2002:127). They are also usually numerically, politically and economically non-dominant in comparison to other groups. Hence, their main political project is survival (ibid). Due to these reasons, they have continuous disputes with neighbouring

peoples and with the state. This occurs when the majority group wish to control resources in the territories of the indigenous groups. Therefore, the centre of the dispute is usually land possession. For these people, land possession is a matter of group right and any treatment that violates territorial land possession could lead to conflicts with the state (Knight, 1988:123).

The above discussion indicates that there is no clear difference between nations, nationalities and people when we consider different identity groups in a country. As a result, the terms can be used interchangeably with ethnic groups as they imply different identity groups in a country. However, ethnic groups have to be understood through different historical, political, social and economic circumstances. In other words, there are no ethnic groups that can be understood only through consideration of their primordial characteristics. For example, the same political arrangement can result in different outcomes for different ethnic groups, depending on their social, political and economic circumstances, as happened with the Welayta and Sidama ethnic groups following the federalisation of the state of Ethiopia (Aalen, 2008).

In the context of Ethiopia, we will consider the terms ‘nations’, ‘nationalities’ and ‘people’ as synonymous with ethnic groups, but we will be cautious about the impact of the vague constitutional definition of the terms and the practical implication of using them in relation to the differences between ethnic groups with reference to social cohesion, size and economic strength, which has been also manifested in the constitutional reorganisation of the regional states. The impact of this will be discussed in Chapter Four. The term ‘indigenous people’ will be applied to describe the natives of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Common Challenges of Multi-ethnic Federal States

One of the common challenges of multi-ethnic federal states is that arising from the nationalism of ethno-regional communities. Regionally concentrated ethnic groups push the federal states for more devolution along ethnic lines. For example, the people of Quebec pushed the federal state of Canada for more power devolution in recognition of full sovereignty for the province of Quebec. The Juba canton of Switzerland also seceded through referendum from another canton in pursuit of more freedom for citizens in their localities. Demands by ethnic groups for the right to constitute an autonomous state of their own based on their sovereign homeland are common issues in multi-ethnic federal states. Hence, the success of federalism in such countries depends on whether the federal state facilitates the establishment of a dual identity which considers the ethnic, tribal, linguistic and religious divisions of the people (Smith, 1995:3-11). In other words, the issue of self-determination has to be addressed in ways that allow for mutual recognition of socially significant differences without losing sight of the right to be culturally different or of the need to safeguard the basic human and political rights of citizens. The following two examples of federations show the extent to which the above problems led to the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and are challenging the Belgian federation. This has direct relevance for the Ethiopian case study.

The Russian empire became a multi-ethnic jurisdiction by acquiring the Baltic countries as well as Finland, Bessarabia and Georgia, and re-acquiring most of Poland in the early 19th century. It further expanded its territories to the Caucasus and central Asia in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. However, initially the empire was far from being a unitary state because this was beyond the limited administrative

resources of tsarism, which became a reason for the practical autonomy of non-Russian territories and local elites. Nevertheless, the traditional way of ruling the empire was later abandoned during the middle decades of the nineteenth century due to the emergence of Russian nationalism. This changed the country into a politically-charged multi-national² ‘prison of nations’ that were primarily controlled using the military and security forces of the country (Pearson, 1991: 13-15). For these reasons, non-Russian nationalism became one of the political challenges that contributed to the downfall of the Tsar during the 1905-07 democratic revolution. It also became one of the issues for which the Socialist ruling party, the Bolsheviks, sought a political solution when they came to power after the 1917 October Socialist Revolution (Pearson, 1991:15-22; Sheehy, 1991).

The Bolshevik party thought that the issue of nations and nationalities could be resolved through the proletariat revolution and socialism. Although the nations and nationalities had the right to decide on their destiny (self-determination up to secession), communists had to fight for the emancipation of the international proletariat, which goes beyond the national barriers of ethnic groups in a country. Accordingly, the main perpetuator of the idea of self-determination of nations up to secession, Joseph Stalin, made it clear in 1904 that the nations and nationalities under the Russian empire had a right of self-determination, but their final freedom could only be achieved through the proletarian revolution and under the democratic centralism of the Social Democratic Party (Stalin, 1904). Later, after the establishment of the Bolshevik party and the October Revolution, he further defended

² For example, the 1989 census shows 290 million people, which includes 22 nationalities numbering more than a million and a further 33 numbering over 100,000. These nationalities differ greatly not only as regards size, but also language, religious and cultural traditions, and level of social and economic development even after 70 years of the socialist system (Sheehy, 1991:56-88).

his idea and defined what nations and nationalities mean, and the possible political solutions associated with the issues of nations and nationalities. Consequently, he introduced the idea of regional autonomy for those well-developed nations and cultural autonomy for the nationalities of the country³.

The ideas of Stalin were also manifested in the 1918 federal constitution and the 1922 amended constitution, which basically continued until the end of the Soviet system in 1989. Therefore, under the communist party all nations and nationalities were able to establish their administrations on the basis of ethnicity and language as the main ethnic markers. However, the relationship of the ethnic groups with the centre became asymmetrical as some of them were considered as nations that had greater regional autonomy while the nationalities only had rights of cultural autonomy. Furthermore, some of the smaller nationalities also never enjoyed self-autonomous status in the Soviet Union (Sheehy, 1991; 67-77).

There were two assumptions behind the ethnic-based federal arrangement of the Soviet Union. First, that recognition of self-determination up to secession could resolve the demands of some of the national movements of the Baltic nations. In other words, recognition of self-determination was taken as a means of bringing peace and conflict resolution in the transition period to Socialism. Second, the recognition of self-determination by the Socialist Party would also bring the proletariat and peasant movements of the nations and nationalities into the main stream of the proletariat Socialist Revolution, which was led by the Bolshevik Communist Party. Hence, this would serve to strengthen the national sentiment of the Soviet Union. However, the

³ For further information refer to Franklin, B. (ed)(1973) *The essential Stalin*, Marxism and the national question, London ;Croom Helm pp; 54-84

centralised approach of the Communist Party and the ethnic-based federal approach in fact contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet Union after 70 years of socialist rule. Several points are worth discussing in connection with this:

Firstly, when the Soviet federation was established in 1918, ethnic residential areas were the chief consideration in determining the administrative borders of the constituent units. Such an approach naturally resulted in establishing units differing greatly in the size of their populations. For example, the population of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was 94 times greater than the smallest republic, Estonia. In addition, in some parts of the country (mainly in the Caucasus, central Asia, and the middle Volga) the population was so ethnically mixed that it was impossible to draw up boundaries without excluding portions of the ethnic groups (Sheehy, 1991; 67).

Secondly, the constitution ratified in January 1924 created different levels of ethnic republics under the federal government. The top tier were 'Union Republics', the second tier 'Autonomous Republics', the third tier 'Autonomous Regions' and the fourth tier were individually too small to merit mention in the rubric of the constitution but consisted of the majority of Soviet nationalities (Pearson, 1991:26). The top tier had, for example, jurisdiction over agriculture, education, justice, public health and social security, including the right to secede from the federation (Pearson, 1991:27). However, the Autonomous Republics had markedly fewer rights and cultural advantages than the Union Republics. Thus, in most Autonomous Republics, higher education and even schooling above primary school level was not available in the native language. Moreover, the Autonomous Republics had fewer deputies in the

federal government than the Union Republics (Sheehy, 1991:67-77). This led to resentment among the different units of the federal system.

Thirdly, the federal government remained committed to an approach of redistribution of resources from the centre and for affirmative action in promoting local intelligentsia in the ethnic-based republics. The redistributive approach made resources flow from the more developed parts such as Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine and metropolitan Russia to the less-developed republics, notably central Asia and the nationalities within the Russian empire. This also created resentment among the well-developed republics. The affirmative action also encouraged the creation of local intelligentsia, but they still had less influence in the political processes of the Autonomous Regions compared to Russians. Russian appointees in the Autonomous Regions were more numerous than in Union Republics. This relationship also led to resentments in the Autonomous Regions (Smith, 1995; 159).

Fourthly, all the relationships between the centre and the republics were controlled by the Socialist Party using a democratic centralist approach to governance. Accordingly, the party followed a top-down approach and took loyalty to socialism and the Socialist Party as major criteria in assigning people to different party and governmental posts. This made the party dependent on local cadres in its relationship with the republics. Hence, the ruling party lost touch with and control of the local population. On the other hand, the local cadres developed their vested interests and later became the main mobilisers of the ethnic groups against the centre during the disintegration of the regime (Smith, 1995, Pearson, 1991).

Finally, the economic progress achieved in the early period of the socialist system could not continue due to the control from above and decline in productivity of the major sectors of the economy during the 1970s and 80s. As a result, the demand of the general public for social services became higher than the country could provide. The party leaders introduced economic and political liberalisation in 1989, which was commonly known as Perestroika glasnost, but led to the collapse of system (Smith, 1995:9-10).

This brief analysis of the Soviet federation demonstrates that the extent to which the ethnic-based federal arrangement became a challenge in holding the constituent units of the Soviet federation together. Therefore, this casts doubt on whether an ethnic-based federalism can be a viable approach to conflict management in multi-ethnic African countries like Ethiopia. In addition, the analysis shows that the centralised approach of governance conflicted with the interests of ethnic-based elite groups, which required a wider participation at all levels of the institutions of governance. Therefore, in a situation where there is an ethnic-based federalism and a centralised approach by the ruling party, the vulnerability of the system to violent conflict and disintegration could increase, as happened in the Soviet Union after 70 years of rule by the Communist Party (Watts, 2008).

The second example of ethnic-based federalism is the Belgian federation. Belgium is a small country with 10 million inhabitants. Religious and language differences have played significant roles in shaping the political process since the country was established as a unitary state in 1830. (Deschouwer, 2005:50). For example, the people in the southern part are predominantly Catholic where as the people in the north are

Protestant. Similarly, roughly 60% of Belgians speak Dutch, 40% speak French and 0.6% speak German. More or less, the people have their own residential regions; the Dutch in the north and the French in the south, except for the capital city, Brussels, where both the Dutch and French live together (although 80% of the city population are French-speaking). Therefore, unlike the Soviet Union, Belgium is a bipolar country composed of mainly French- and Dutch-speaking people.

When the unitary state was established, the French-speaking people, who were also economically stronger than the Dutch, played a dominant role and French became the official language of the country. The Dutch people, however, complained about the status of their language and, as a result, the Dutch language also became an official language in 1898 (Hooghe, 2004:58; Deschouwer, 2005:50). Furthermore, ethnic tensions between Dutch- and French-speaking people led to divisions of the national political parties along ethnic lines in 1930 and demarcations of common borders between the main ethnic groups in 1963. Finally, the country became officially a federal state through further devolution of power along ethnic lines in 1993 (ibid). This shows that ethnic-based federalism came gradually through dialogue and co-operation between the main ethnic groups as a means of comprehensive conflict management.

Unlike the Soviet federation, the Belgium federation introduced some mechanisms that reduced the negative consequences of the ethnic-based federal arrangement. For example, Brussels became a regional state and the Dutch people in Brussels maintained proportional representation in the state, although they were only around 20 percent of the city's population. Attention was also given to co-operative mechanisms

that did not give any of the ethnic groups a minority status in the institutions of the federal state. For example, all the main ethnic groups have equal representation in the federal cabinet, including a veto power. This kind of power allocation reinforced vertical and horizontal co-operation and negotiations between the political authorities of the country. The result was that self-rule of ethnic groups in their regions and equal participation in federal institutions played a role in holding together those groups under the Belgian federation (Hooghe, 2004).

Nevertheless, the ethnic-based federalism of Belgium has faced several challenges. The tensions between the ethnic groups tore apart the national political parties and left the country without any federal political parties. It also led to separation of the media and other economic and social activities. Ethnic-based violent conflicts also erupted periodically until the 1980s, associated with religious, social and economic factors (Hooghe, 2004:70-75). The problems between the main ethnic groups have also led to failures of governments and untimely elections; indeed the country has been under a caretaker government since June 2010 (The Economist, 13th January 2011).

The above brief analysis of the Belgium federation highlights three major points. First, ethnic-based federalism was introduced gradually with some mitigation mechanisms that protected minority rights, unlike the former Soviet Union. Because of this, the federal arrangement contributed to a reduction in ethnic tensions that might have led to disintegration of the federation. Second, there is no centralised approach to governance like the Soviet party system. Rather, the regional political parties take measures for co-operation and negotiation at the federal level. This has played a significant role in holding the regions together. Third, regardless of the above

advantages, the cost of the ethnic-based federalism is still high and has led to failure of governments which, in turn, has been related to the existence of bipolar ethnic groups in the country.

Overall, some common characteristics of ethnic-federal states can be identified from the analysis of the Soviet and Belgian federations. The politicisation of linguistic or ethnic identity has almost always strengthened sharply the forces of territorial groups and, hence, has resulted in greater pressures for autonomy of the constituent units. As a result, there is a high degree of asymmetric relationship between regional parties and their federal counterparts in many multi-ethnic federal states. This sometimes leads not only to inter-communal tensions but also to competition over resources and grievances which, in one way or another, have the potential to mobilise individuals behind calls for more redistribution of power and resources (Smith, 1995:10). For example, although the regions of Belgium have greater autonomy in their regional affairs, there are still demands for more decentralisation of more powers. In the former Soviet Union, the Autonomous Republics also increased from four in 1924 to 15 by 1977 due to the pressure for more autonomy (Pearson, 1991:31). Similarly, the federations of Canada, India, Nigeria and Switzerland have been forced to devolve powers along ethnic lines following the politicisation of ethnicity (Watts, 1991:200).

The federalisation of the state on the basis of ethnicity can also fuel a single hegemonic cultural dominance in one region, which could be problematic to some groups who live in that regional state. This could be manifested, for example, in relation to public education, language etc. This could also lead to an attempt at drawing common borders between the ethnic groups, which in turn could be

manifested in land claims and counter-claims. This process caused violent ethnic cleansing conflicts and displacements of more than 800,000 people during the balkanisation of the former Soviet Union republics (Watts, 1991:200).

Disparity in the relative area, population and wealth of the consistent units is also a characteristic of multi-ethnic federations. For example, the existence of RSFSR, which included more than 51% of the population and 80 % of the former Soviet Union territory, caused a continuation of Russian domination. Similarly, the Dutch-speaking region and its economic strength compared to the French-speaking region has created stress in the Belgian federation. The greater size of the Northern Nigeria region also led to its division into a number of states. These kinds of differences between consistent units can lead to relationships between the centre and periphery that can potentially damage the federation itself (Watts, 1991).

The politics of uneven development is another problem in multi-ethnic federal states. Both developed and underdeveloped regional states could feel as though they were not benefiting from the federation for different reasons. For example, the more developed regional states can feel they were disproportionately subsidising the less developed states. The Baltic and Russian states opposed the redistribution of resources from the centre for to this reason. However, less developed regional states can be mobilised against the centre if the development disparity among the constituent units is high. This has been a source of conflict in the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria and the constituent units of Canada (Smith, 1995; Watts, 1991).

The above common characteristics of multiethnic federations indicate that a number of factors, including a strong federal state and an increased level of autonomy with greater democratic participation by the regional states, are required to use federalism as a conflict management approach in multiethnic countries like Ethiopia. These will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Contextualising the Challenges of Federalism: Causes of Conflicts in Africa

Conflict is inherent in human societies and comprises different levels of social interaction⁴. The term conflict, in its logical sense, is defined as a relationship between two or more parties who have or think they have incompatible goals (Fisher et al, 2000:4; Ramsbotham, et al, 2005). Incompatible goals can result from different interests, values or beliefs (ideology and religion) as well as the directions used by the conflicting parties to manage their differences (Bono, 1985:5; Wright, 1990:16-17). Social conflicts arising from imbalances of social structure, including unequal social status, unequal wealth, lack of access and oppression, create antagonistic social relations that can lead either to constructive or destructive outcomes (Dahrendorf, 1957, in Jeong, 1999:5; Kriesberg, 1998:22).

The direction of social conflicts depends on the attitude, perceptions and misperceptions of the conflicting parties, and on behaviour of the opposing parties that include cooperation or coercion, gestures signifying conciliation or hostility. Galtung (1996) sees social conflict as a dynamic process in which structure, attitudes and behaviour are constantly changing and influencing one another. Therefore, social

⁴ These could be macro-level conflicts that embrace inter-state conflicts, such as border disputes between two countries, or intra-state conflicts, for example power- and resource-based conflicts between different groups of people within the territories of a state. Conflicts can also be micro-level conflicts, including personal and corporate-level conflicts (Scherrer, 1999:53).

conflicts can be at a latent stage of development, in that expressing themselves in an observable manner, even for the parties themselves. They can be at manifest level developing to the extent that they are observable but not yet expressed in a violent manner. Violent conflicts are those escalating from a manifest level of expression to the destruction of resources and others (Sandole, 2003:40).

Social conflicts can be identified as global, regional or national. The global conflicts can be related to wealth disparities, economic barriers and ideological struggles driven mainly by religious fundamentalism. The regional sources of social conflicts are related to the overspill of conflicts from one area to another, like the Great Lakes region, characterised by identity/secession conflicts and refugee movements (Ramsbotham et al., 2005:98). State level social conflicts are related to social, economic and political structures like ethnicity, class, religion, economic underdevelopment, legitimacy of a state, and law and order within a country (Kupchan, 2001).

Earlier commentators regarded the sources of conflicts in Africa as merely tribal-, ethnic- or identity-based (Lewis, 1994; Horowitz, 1985, Osaghae, 1991). Others also associated them only with competition for power, resources of the neo-patrimonial state and representation at the state level (Braathen et al., 2000). However, the causes of the conflicts in Africa can be traced back to historical, economic and political factors associated with the colonial, Cold War and post-Cold War periods (Joseph, 1999), uneven levels of development, crises of state formation and territorial factors.

The Colonial Rule and Intra-state conflict

The colonial rulers imposed the Westphalian state system on African countries (except Ethiopia, which was occupied by Italy for about five years during the Second World War and Liberia). Although a state system was not new to African countries, the colonial administrative boundaries that cut across ethnic, tribal, religious and linguistic ties had a devastating political effect because they disrupted the pre-colonial affinities and loyalties (Francis, 2006:41). Thus, different communities of varying cultures and traditions came into a single state arena. This contributed to the low cohesiveness of the people and intra-state conflicts in some independent African countries (Emerson, 1963:97). Moreover, according to Ayoob (1995), colonial rule delayed the African economic transformation process because the economies of the countries were structured to supply cash crops and natural resources to the economies of the colonial powers. As a result, when these countries got their independence, some of them were only quasi- or weak states that did not have the capacity to control their borders or provide social services and security for their people (Joseph, 1999; Mamandi, 1996).

The indirect rule established by the colonial states also became one of the sources of intra-state conflict. Indirect rule was a form of colonial governance that involved the local chiefs and tribe leaders in governing the local people or tribes using customary laws. As a result, the indirect rule became a source of intra-state conflicts. Firstly, the colonial powers did not create a unified law in their colonies. This means there were two kinds of laws operating in these countries: civil law in the urban areas and customary laws in the rural areas. According to Mamandi (1996) this dual system created divisions between rural and urban areas, which emphasised customary and

civic rights, respectively. Moreover, the two forms of laws became challenges to the post-colonial state because they had to compete with the traditional authorities to maintain their legitimacy. In fact, this competition became one of the contributing factors in insurgent activities and state suppression of them, which in some African countries led to state collapse (Francis, 2006).

Secondly, the African independent states inherited control-based institutions, as the purpose of indirect rule was to control African societies. The post-colonial state also became control-based and the colonial institutions such as parliament, political parties and bureaucracy failed to operate in the context of the African countries which, in turn, led to the establishment of personalised rule rather than institutionalised rule. Personalised political rule was based on patron-client networks and patrimonial accumulations, which depended on military and security institutions to sustain the power of the authorities (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). This, in turn, encouraged both elite-based rivalry for control of the state and other movements to fight for equal rights, which led to violent conflict and state collapse.

Thirdly, the indirect rule of some colonial states also became a potential source of intra-state conflicts by creating favoured and disfavoured groups (Smith, 1971). For example, the French favoured the Tutsi ethnic group in Rwanda in aspects such as education and employment. The British supported the Tanzanian Christian minorities over the Muslims in education and other matters (M. Tripp, 1999). In Uganda, the colonial power favoured the Buganda people, granting them power and control over land at the expense of other ethnic groups. This created the basis for ethnic

domination and inter-group rivalries in these countries (Stewart et al, cited in Grandvoinnet and Schneider, 1998:14).

In Ethiopia, unlike other African countries, modern state institutions were established by the political elites from inside, but were imposed by force on the newly incorporated Southern and Western parts of the country. But, like other independent African countries, the centralisation of power and control of power and resources by one politically dominant ethnic group became a factor in the low levels of integration between the country's ethnic groups during the 20th century. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Overall, the colonial nation-state in Africa made little contribution to integrating rural people but rather created the potential for ethnic domination, ethnic-based power struggle and ethno-national movements that contributed to the existence of communities with low cohesion within one state arena.

State Power Relationships and Intra-state Conflicts

At independence, African states chose a centralised system of governance for a variety of reasons. Firstly, as discussed earlier, almost all the newly-independent countries inherited a centralised colonial state. Secondly, the independent states considered the centralised approach as a means of social cohesion or unity as they inherited different identity groups⁵. Therefore, many countries abandoned the

⁵ For example, Se'kou Toure' said in 1959: 'In three or four years, no one will remember the tribal, ethnic religious rivalries which in the recent past caused so much damage to our country and its population' (Emerson: 1963: 106).

customary laws and introduced centralised administrative systems. This was supported by the economic argument that African countries could not support a decentralised state structure (Thomson, 2000:108-113). Thirdly, the ideology of nationalism also helped to support, strengthen and legitimise the centralised and dominant role of the state. The promotion of African unity through the Pan-African movements equally contributed to the centralised approach to governance after independence in many countries (Stewart and Brown, 2007).

The centralised state structure contributed to the exclusion or under-representation of groups within the political structure of some states, including powers at the top (parliamentary assemblies, presidency, cabinet), at lower levels (local government), in the bureaucracy at all levels, and in the army and the police (Stewart and Brown, 2007: 223). This exposed the state to clientalist networks and corruption that only benefited people in the circle of the rulers and usually only those from one ethnic group (Ndulo, 2006:85; Dawyer, 2002:459). This has become a motivating factor for the elite political leaders driven by economic interests and power struggles to control the state (Bloomfield et al, 1998:36). For this purpose, some political leaders used mass media for propaganda against other ethnic groups in order to gain political advantage and created ethnic mobilisations where there are inequalities and problematic group histories (Brown, 1998:21; Stein, 2001:195-196). On the other hand, this has contributed to sustained government campaigns to repress ethnic minorities and democratic activities, as happened in Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Nigeria before and after the cold war (Brown, 2001:221).

The centralisation of the state was also associated with cultural oppression of the ethnic groups. Many African nation-states adopted assimilatory domestic policies and cultural discrimination, which include inequitable educational opportunities, legal and political constraints on the use and teaching of mass languages, and constraints on religious freedom. For example, in Sudan the Arab language and culture was the driving force for nation-building. This was followed by genocide in the southern region of Sudan in 1982 when the homogenisation policy faced opposition from the people in the region (Markakis, 1994). In Ethiopia the language of the Amhara and Christianity became the dominant state sponsored language and religion respectively (Clapham, 1987). “No other indigenous language was allowed to be printed, broadcast or spoken in public functions, and attempts to study the culture and history of other groups were decidedly discouraged” (Markakis, 1994:226).

The democratisation process in Africa and the introduction of electoral systems to the multi-ethnic countries transiting to democracy has aggravated conflicts. This is because the power of mass groups has not yet been institutionalised in the countries transiting to democracy. Therefore, the support of the elite groups includes hostilities which make the countries vulnerable to conflicts. As a result, regime changes and particularly the introduction of electoral systems to multi-ethnic countries transiting to democracy can cause conflicts due to the low level of political cohesion of the ethnic groups and the politicisation of ethnicity by the elite groups (Edward and Manisfield, 1995). For example, the ethnic clashes which occurred in the Rift valley region of Kenya in the 1992 election took the lives of 1,500 people and displaced more than 350,000 people from their homes (Young, 1999:28). Similar conflicts have also occurred along communal lines in Rwanda, Burundi, Algeria and Congo-Brazzaville

during elections in the 1990s (Young, 1999:29). According to Young (1999), the salience to ethnicity by African governments poses a clear challenge to the democratisation process in Africa. If there is thoughtful statecraft which enabled states to accommodate ethnic identity, that would help in strengthening the democratisation process on the continent.

In Ethiopia, the introduction of the democratisation process is associated with collapse of the military regime and the federalisation of the state. The federalisation of the state enabled the country to remove the structural sources of the previous conflicts that led to ethno-national movements (Young, 1999:31). However, the federal structure has brought new forms of power- and resource - related conflicts. These can be seen in the relationship between the centre and the regional states and between the regional states. Moreover, the existence of a multi-party system dominated by one political party also makes the power relationship between the ethnic groups and the democratisation process complex in the country (Aalen, 2002).

In summary, one of the sources of intra-state conflict in Africa is the centralisation of the state which has led to domination and exclusion of ethnic groups from the benefits of the state, and the weakening of the state associated with the democratisation process on the continent.

Uneven Development and Intra-state Conflicts

In many African countries, uneven development is merely a result of the divide and rule methods of the colonial powers. For example, during the colonial period development efforts and urbanisation were suppressed in favour of cash crop

production and mining. Infrastructure developments and social services were also focused towards these (Keen, 2005). The colonial states had no motivation to expand infrastructure and education that could enhance the cohesiveness of the people. For example, Tanzania, when it became independent, had less than one hundred university graduates, approximately 200 miles of tarmac road and six factories, including only one that employed as many as 50 persons. Guinea-Bissau had 14 university graduates and an illiteracy rate of 97% when the country got its independence from Portugal (Ayittey, 2005:83).

However, colonialism is not only to be blamed for the uneven development of the African countries. Control of the state by minority elites has also served to strengthen uneven development after the independence of many countries. For example, in Sierra Leone, the chiefs, civil servants and traders, who had better access to the state system, controlled the diamond mining licenses given by the government. Therefore, revenues went into the pockets of the elites who controlled the state (Keen, 2005:22). In the Horn of Africa development activities have been centred in urban areas and those favourable for building production capacity. Regions like Southern and Western Sudan, Northern Kenya, Northern Somalia, Ogaden, Tigray etc were left out of state development activities. Hence, the main rebellion movements until the end of the cold war were in these regions (Markakis, 1994).

However, there are some disagreements about the relationship between uneven development and intra-state conflicts. Following the instrumentalist approach to intra-state conflicts, Collier (2001) argues that grievances created due to uneven economic development and other inequalities are not the real causes of civil war. Civil wars

occur where rebel organisations, whose aim is to control state power for the purpose of getting access to public resources, are financially able to go to war. Therefore, the leaders of most rebellions do not have any political agenda. Their agenda is looting the resources of the state and enriching themselves and their followers. However, they develop discourses of grievances that aim to persuade their supporters and allow them to function as rebel organisations. It is the aims of their leaders that generate grievance. In other words the real cause of most rebellions is not the loud discourse of grievance, but the silent voice of greed. It is because of this that countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola and Sudan, which depend on exporting primary goods and have many young men with little educational access, are very much more at risk of conflict than other countries (Collier, 2001:150-152).

On the other hand, Ted Robert Gurr (2001; 2007) and Stewart & Brown (2007) argue that this economically focused argument totally dismisses the fundamental grievances such as socio-economic inequality and political repression against ethnic groups. These inequalities are multidimensional and involve economic, social, political and cultural aspects ⁶(Stewart, 2008). The economic aspect includes income, access to employment and a variety of assets such as land and credit. Social inequalities also include access to services (e.g. health care, water, and education), assets (housing), etc. This can occur between regions, like the Tamil region as opposed to the rest of Sri Lanka, or between different identities within the same region of a country, as in Rwanda or Uganda (Stewart and Brown, 2007:221). Economic and social inequalities provide the conditions that lead to dissatisfaction among the general population and

⁶ Stewart, F. (ed.) (2008) categorises the fundamental socio-economic grievances as Horizontal Inequalities. For further information, see *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic societies*.

consequently give rise to the possibility of political mobilisation (Stewart and Brown, 2007; 223).

In some cases there can be conflicts motivated by private economic interests which can sustain wars, but this rarely explains intra-state conflicts. For example, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa was solely against racism. The RENAMO struggle against the authoritarian regime in Mozambique, which was associated with different political, social and economic factors, cannot be explained by greed interests of its leaders (Gurr, 2001).

In addition, there is no single explanatory factor for conflicts. More usually conflicts involve relationships between different factors and emanate from diverse sources (Keen, 2005, Francis, 2006). For example, economic inequalities are created by historical development patterns. For instance, since independence Southern Sudan has received few government services and has a poor infrastructure compared to the northern part of the country. Hence the acute poverty of the south compared with the north, as well as the feeling that the northern-based government was exploiting the southern region's resources, without any return to the region, contributed to the outbreak of conflict in 1983 (Markakis, 1994). Similarly, conflicts between the Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda are partly explained by the structural deprivations of the Hutus during the colonial period and the failed development policies pursued in the decades before the genocide in 1994 (Goodhand, 2001:24).

Unemployment and lack of capacity to provide social services can also lead to intra-state conflicts. When the government is unable to provide the necessary social

services and is unable to create employment opportunities, intra-state conflicts can intensify. In Sierra Leone, many youths joined the rebellion due to lack of employment (Keen, 1998). Yet, this does not mean that economic growth is a sufficient condition for managing intra-state conflicts. Regardless of the overall improvement of the economic picture of a country, if economic growth and development benefits some individuals, groups, and regions more than the others, the growing inequalities and gaps can still aggravate intra-state tensions (Brown, 2001:271). Overall, uneven development in which the main manifestation is unbalanced resource sharing between ethnic groups can lead to intra-state conflicts.

Territorial Demands and Intra-state Conflicts

Among others, one of the issues related to intra-state conflict is territorial issues between the ethnic groups in a country. Territoriality refers to an ‘attempt to affect, influence or control actions by enforcing control over a specific geographical area’ (Forsberg, 1999:93). Generally speaking, there are four interrelated factors that can cause territorial demands and conflicts (Thomas Homer Dixon cited in Hauge, 1999; 108). First, territorial conflicts can be caused by the degradation and depletion of renewable resources that result in a struggle over access to and control of natural resources. For example, resource scarcity has become one of the main reasons for the conflict of pastoral people when they move from one area to another looking for water and grazing land for their animal stocks in the Horn of Africa (Markakis, 1987). However, Broding (1998:36) argues that there is no simple causal relationship between scarcity of natural resources and intra-state conflicts. Other variables, including socio-economic factors, political institutions, and psychological factors mediate the relationship (Iyob and Khadiagala, 2005). In addition, it can be argued

that the role of environmental factors in intra-state conflicts is situational. In situations of cooperation and negotiation between the ethnic groups, solutions to environmental problems are good, but when the relations are reversed, environmental issues will add to the problems created (Gleditsch, 2001:60).

The second factor is connected to local people's perceptions of internal migrants to their territories. For some indigenous groups whose traditions are associated with their territories, the existence of a large population of migrants and settlers in their territories can lead to greater resentments that lead to intra-state conflicts (Forsberg, 1999:98). For example, for the Gumuz whose livelihood is associated with their territories, the risk of internal migration is related to an outnumbering of the Gumuz by the settlers, which could lead to cultural genocide and being dominated in their territories (Vaughan, 2007). Therefore, these kinds of territorial issues can also lead to intra-state conflicts.

Third, territoriality can sometimes also relate to an assertion about rights to the land. Territoriality can be a symbol for social kinship and an inseparable part of the common ethnic identity. In such situations if there is an external threat to part of the territory, it reinforces the collective identity of the group (ibid). Therefore, identity itself can contribute to territorial conflicts in this regard (Smith cited in Forsberg, 1999:98; Ronnquist, 1999:148).

Finally, territorial conflicts can involve an aspiration of domination. One of the ethnic groups in a country could have a growing tendency to dominate in the region and expand its territories into the territories of others. In this case, the territorial issues will

be related to power politics which include enlargement of economic assets (Forsberg, 1999:101).

Federalism and Conflict Management

The management of conflicts requires a deep understanding of the context and causes as well as a willingness to manage them. Conflict management is a pragmatic way of dealing with sources of conflict, including alterations to social policies generating violent conflicts by promoting positive behavioural changes by the parties involved (Burton, 1996:11; Fisher, et al., 2000:6-7). In other words, conflict management is a generic term, similar to conflict regulation, covering all forms of conflict intervention including conflict prevention, conflict resolution and conflict transformation (Miall et al, 1999).

Accordingly, federalism as a comprehensive approach to conflict management focuses on regulating the differences between the ethnic groups in a country by accommodating them equally in the federal political institutions and devolving power and resources according to their situations. In addition, it uses conflict prevention mechanisms which focus on preventing social conflicts from escalating to violence by taking measures in the long run which address the basic causes of conflict such as poverty and other structural factors. In addition, early warning mechanisms and rapid reaction capacity mechanisms can be used and co-operative mechanisms between the constituent units of the federation can be incorporated (Botes, 2008). Conflict transformation also addresses the long term structural relations and cultural factors behind violence and social conflict. Therefore, conflict transformation focuses on addressing deep-rooted causes of conflicts such as uneven development, power

relationships between the ethnic groups etc (Botes, 2008). These are basically systemic causes of conflicts which cannot be resolved but, rather, transformed in the federal process. Therefore, conflict transformation goes beyond conflict resolution in providing a deeper and more permanent level of change. On the other hand, conflict resolution deals more with the dynamics of the conflict itself than with that of the system, as for example, in resolving specific conflicts between two ethnic groups or regional states. However, Mitchell (cited in Botes, 2008:364-365) in this regard arguing that conflict resolution not only examines the parties' needs and options to resolve the specific conflicts, but also produces changes in pre-existing systems and patterns of relationships. In the context of this study we will use federalism as a generic approach of conflict management which addresses the basic causes of social conflicts by means of conflict prevention, transformation and resolution, but we are also cautious about the differences between the different aspects of conflict intervention in analysing the specific issues of the research project.

A federal system will inherently generate conflicts. The distribution of power between and within levels of government provides a catalyst for conflict. Federalism as a generic approach to conflict management might have different effects on the transitional process of establishing the federal structure and on the established structure. For example, a transitional period to federalism which came after a protracted violent conflict could focus on conflict resolution, enabling the conflicting parties to come to a round table for negotiation. For instance, the initial assumption of the Soviet federal system was to bring the different republics together and, finally, create a general environment which overcame the barriers of ethnic nationalism through proletarian internationalism. Therefore, the recognition of the right of self-

determination contributed to bringing some republics voluntarily to the Union. Nevertheless, once the Union was established, the right of self-determination was not genuinely implemented due to the democratic centralist approach of the Bolshevik party. Therefore, the federal arrangement itself facilitated the disintegration of the Union.

A federal arrangement as a generic conflict management approach might have some problems which commonly arise from the design of the system. For example, the asymmetrical four tiers of the Soviet Union served to increase grievances among the nationalities, which resulted in defragmentation of the republics as discussed earlier. Border demarcations on the basis of ethnicity also created minority groups and tensions between the ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union. The ethnic basis of the federation also created 'centre' and 'periphery' relationships as it created bigger republics on the one hand and tiny republics on the other. Therefore, the design of the federal system created a systemic problem which became one of the causes of the disintegration of the federation itself. However, although the Belgian federal system is based on ethnicity, the system designed-in some mitigation mechanisms which have reduced the negative consequences of the federation. For example, strong mechanisms for co-operation were established in the federal institutions, which enable the ethnic groups to co-operate and negotiate at the centre. Hence, regardless of some of the setbacks of the federation, these mechanisms of conflict management have become the main reasons for the sustainability of the system (Hooghe, 2004).

Moreover, the federal system has to be examined in relation to the overall ability of the political actors to influence the federal process. This can be related to the capacity

of the key actors to ignore or undermine due processes in the federal structure. For example, regardless of the constitutional recognition of people's rights, dominant political groups can ignore those rights and impose their will on people, as happened in the former Soviet Union due to the centralised rule of the Communist Party. Or it can be related to the ambiguities or scope for self-interpretation in the federal rules, and from the operation of specific federal rules and mechanisms. For example, an ambiguity in a federal constitution can give opportunities for different interpretations which can lead to conflict between the protection of group rights and the universal political rights of citizens, as happened in the relationship between the indigenous and non-indigenous people of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. This is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Considering the above points, ethnic-based federalism as a comprehensive approach to conflict management can be discussed in relation to power relationships between the centre and regional states, resource-sharing mechanisms and democratic governance in the context of African multi-ethnic countries.

Federalism and Power Relationships between the Centre and Regional States

The power relationship between the centre and regional states has three aspects. The first aspect is related to the balance of power relationships between the different levels of the state. The relationship between the two levels of the state should keep a balance between their shared role at the centre and the autonomy of the regions. The devolution of authority outward to constituent units must be accompanied by reform of national institutions to accommodate ethnic groups and their influence on decisions at the centre (Simeon, 2004:118). For example, Belgian regions can protect their

interests in decisions made at the cabinet of Ministers and through the Senate discussions (Hooghe, 2004:75). Otherwise, conflicts can be intensified due to the low involvement of the constituent units in the national institutions (Fliner, 2001:34; Simeon and Murray, 2004:280). For example, the highly centralised oil revenue system and the lack of transparency in the distribution of those revenues contributed to the violent ethnic conflict in Nigeria (Suberu, 2004).

With regard to the autonomy of the regional states, there are two broad models. The first one is the integrated model that emphasizes the uniformity of policies across the regions through the shared decisions made at the centre. This model maximizes the uniformity and application of national norms and standards across all the regions in a country although it can negatively influence regional autonomy and the flexibility of regional states to meet local needs (Simeon and Murray, 2004; Opeskin, 2001). The second model, the divided governance model, focuses on the autonomy of the regions and provides the widest room for the regions to set their own priorities and variations in regional policy. This model can facilitate accountability and transparency for citizens, but can also create some difficulties in ensuring common standards and policy harmonization at the national level (Opeskin, 2001). In addition it can lead to formation of more regions and local governments, which in turn leads to segmenting or compartmentalizing of political functions and to mass interlocking bureaucracies or intergovernmental organisations. This can undermine the development process by creating expensive, less transparent and less accountable government. In situations where there are no corrective measures, power devolution through federalism can increase economic imbalances and migration in a country. Such problems should be

corrected by the constitution and intergovernmental relations (Wibbels, 2005; Ndulo, 2006:82-83).

The second aspect of power relationship between the centre and regional states is related to border demarcations of the regional states. In countries where the ethnic groups have their own residential territories, administrative border issues between two or more ethnic groups can be raised in the distribution of power and resources to the regional states and local administrations. There are two broad approaches to addressing these issues. The first one is dispersing the ethnic groups into different administrative units. This means an ethnic group can be dispersed into different administrative units in which the regional states will be established from the multi units of the ethnic groups. Nigeria's regional states were established according to this formula. The assumption is that, if a regional state is established from different units of ethnic groups, tensions and polarisation between the bigger ethnic groups and the regional states can be reduced (Horowitz, 1985, (Elazar, 1994:56).

Yet it is argued that, regardless of the separation of the administrative units, the bigger ethnic groups could still mobilise the units in the different administrative regional states in competing with other ethnic groups to control state power at the centre. For example, the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria compete with each other to expand their control at the centre, regardless of the distribution of their units in different regional states (Suberu, 1994:56).

The second approach is where the administrative regional states are established on the basis of residential territories of the ethnic groups in a country. Switzerland, India and

Ethiopia are examples of this approach. For example, the Swiss people live in different cantons, which can be distinguished by language differences. Therefore, the Swiss federal constitution devolves power and shares resources to the cantons. Similarly, in India, language has been taken as one of the main factors in separating the administrative units of the country since 1957 (Kohli, 2004). However, the regional states are obliged to respect the rights of the minority groups who are living intermingled with the majority ethnic group. Moreover, the Indian government has a special law and a higher commission with the aim of maintaining minority groups' rights (Mitra, 2001:51-60).

Ethnic identity has also been taken as the main criterion to define the lower and regional administrative units in Ethiopia (Kefale, 2004:51). Hence, as long as the members of an ethnic group have common residential territory and the population of the group is large enough, the ethnic group can establish its own administrative unit. However, at the regional state level, the ethnic group can either establish its own regional state or it can be part of a regional state comprising different ethnic groups. This depends on the population size of the ethnic groups, consent and geographical factors (The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Article 46).

The use of group identity to distinguish the administrative units has its own advantages and disadvantages. With respect to the advantages, it encourages people to participate in their local affairs and widens their opportunity to get access to government (Hardgrave, 1994:76). The disadvantage is that it can encourage the proliferation of more local states, which in turn discourages people's movement from one administrative unit into another (Ibid). Moreover, it can be problematic to identify

the administrative borders of the ethnic groups where two or more ethnic groups overlap each other and identities are mixed as a result of intermarriage (Kefale, 2004:62). Therefore, it can be one of the sources of tensions and ethnic cleansing as happened during the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The third aspect of the power relationship between the centre and regional states is related to a constitutional right of secession for the identity groups in a country. In this regard, there can be two types of constitutional right. The first one can be a kind of confederate constitution that brings different entities to a common market, like the European Union. This is a loose federation, as the members are considered as sovereign entities that can secede without any precondition (Elazar, 1994:22). The second issue is related to a constitution that devolves power to constituent units, which are considered as parts of the nation. In this case, the constitution will serve as a supra-national of the nation-state that will represent the nation (Eriksen, 2002). At the same time, the federal constitution redefines the nation-state in a way that accommodates the different groups in a country. Therefore, the constitution devolves power and shares resources among the groups in a country, enabling them to administer their internal affairs and participate equally in the federal institutions (Fleiner, 2001:34).

Based on the above points, the inclusion of a right of secession in the federal constitution makes it controversial. Some liberalists support the right of secession from the point of view of government legitimacy and consent of the people. In other words, the legitimacy of a government must be based upon the consent of the people, and if the people are going to control their destiny, they should have a right to

withdraw their consent from the nation-state. Moreover, it is argued that the right of secession may be useful to restore identity groups' confidence in their relationships with each other, as it shows them that they have the right to withdraw from the federation when necessary (Turk, 1999:115; Neuberger,1995).

On the other hand, there are some scholars who totally oppose the constitutional right for secession in a federalised state (Sisk, 2001; Fleiner, 2001; Diamond and Plattner, 1994). It is argued that the very principle of a democratic federalised state is accommodation and tolerance. As long as the constitution guarantees the right of self-determination, groups can exercise their group rights in their respective regional territories. At the same time, they can equally be represented in the federal institutions. Also, if the worst comes, a democratic state can hold a referendum without resorting to violence (Neuberger, 1995).

Moreover, the right of secession is very impracticable in countries that have many ethnic groups. In most cases, ethnic groups have smaller minority groups within their territories. Thus, their conflict with the majority will often end up by rearranging the patterns of majorities and minorities, generating new sources of social violence (Sisk, 2001:788-789; Fleiner, 2001:39; Diamond and Plattner, 1994). Even if there is an attempt to secede, difficulties would arise in demarcation of borders, as happened in the Ethio-Eritrea border conflict in 1998, as there are hardly any pure ethnic homelands still existing (Weinstock, 2001:79-62).

Federalism and Resources Sharing Mechanisms

An important issue relevant to federalism is resource sharing between the centre and the constituent units. It is argued that federalism provides a resource sharing mechanism which fosters equitable development by correcting economic inequalities through taxation and fiscal transfer methods (Weinstock; Boadway, 2001). The federal constitution can specify what is to be taxed by the federal and regional governments respectively. This gives regions opportunities to support their budgets from their own internal revenues. Resources can also be transferred from the wealthiest regions to the poorest regions through fiscal transfer methods. This will help the state to maintain a balanced development in all the regional states (Dahlby, 2001).

In introducing such policies, a number of factors have to be considered. The first factor is related to the tax policy of a country. In this case geographical variation of taxation and a need to reduce horizontal imbalances between the various regions of the country can be considered (Rye, 1995, cited in Ndulo, 2006:93). For example, if the federal government wants to transfer revenues from the wealthier regions to the poorer regions using fiscal transfer mechanisms, a high degree of control over taxation will be required (Dahlby, 2001). However, in countries whose natural resources come from only one region and where some regions provide a higher source of income for the federal government, conflicts can be started as the various regions want to use their resources exclusively for themselves (Weinstock, 2001:78).

However, many federal states across the world have found a relatively centralised tax system useful together with expenditure freedom for their constituent units. For

example, in Australia over 70% of tax revenue is collected by the federal government. In Belgium, Germany and the United States the regional states' tax revenue ranges between 40% and 50%; whereas in Canada and Switzerland the regional states levy more than half of the total government tax revenues (Dahlby, 2001:98).

The second factor is connected with the structure of fiscal transfers that consider the inequalities and revenue generation differences between regions. This implies tied grants (specific purpose payments) or untied (general) grants. The objective of the specific purpose grants can be related to the objectives at national level. However, these specific purpose payments may not address the inequalities and revenue-raising capacity differences between regions. Therefore, any general grants should address both differences of inequality and revenue raising capacity in order to prevent potentially violent intra-state conflicts (Ndulo, 2006:93). In relation to this, targets and quotas can be introduced to educational and other infrastructure developments to assist disadvantaged groups in a country (Kincaid, 2001:92).

The third factor is ensuring the viability of the above process by using transparent institutional mechanisms of fiscal transfer. In this regard, different countries use different mechanisms or formulae of revenue sharing, but most consider the development level of regions, population size and the role of the regions in generating revenue for the federal government (Boadway, 2001:105). However, there is no standard institutional set-up of revenue sharing that can be applied to all federal states. Therefore, countries set up either independent commissions like the Australian Grants Commission or other departments which are monitored by parliaments.

The above analysis shows that federal countries use different resource sharing mechanisms in consideration of equity and efficiency. Accordingly, some countries emphasise equitable allocation of resources together with expenditure freedom for constituent units, whereas others emphasise efficiency; so that they focus on decentralisation of resources. Countries where economic disparities are high tend to give more emphasis to equity that leads to long-term benefits and stability, regardless of its short-term negative effect on regional autonomy (Aalen, 2002:17-18). Therefore, there is no one correct fiscal policy that suits all countries. However, the point that can be emphasised in this regard is that the constituent units should be guaranteed enough financial sources through constitutional or other means to enable them to carry out their responsibilities.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that federalism in Sub-Saharan Africa is, in practice, the decentralisation of the neo-patrimonial state from the centre to the regions (Weinstock, 2001:77). Neo-patrimonialism refers to ‘a form of organisation in which relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal lines’ (Clapham, 1985:48). Hence, the state leaders control the state’s resources through patron-client relationships in order to benefit themselves and they distribute resources according to their status and the loyalty of their followers (Thomson, 2000:115). The legitimacy of the state depends on the extent to which it can redistribute resources along the patron-client hierarchy, which goes right down to the lowest, grass-root level by exchange of benefits including legal protection, job opportunity and other economic and social benefits (Clapham, 1985). Moreover, as public officials do not have any accountability mechanisms the system moves using corruption as a lubricant to the

state machinery. In addition, authorities are encouraged to intervene in the economy of a country and this leads to embezzlement of public revenue which ultimately leads to fiscal crisis and a low level of economic development and inequalities (Clapham, 1985; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997:67). The effect of the neo-patrimonial state has been a power struggle between the elites, either to retain or to control state power which, in turn, has become a source of inequality between the ethnic groups who have access to state power and those who do not. This has led to factional struggles between elite groups and suppressive measures against their opponents (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997:61-68; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Braathen et al, 2000:14-15). Consequently, in societies where national identities has been fragile and resources scarce, a unitary state was appropriate because federalisation would have exacerbated the misuse of public resources, corruption and, ultimately, violent conflicts (Weinstock, 2001).

However, neo-patrimonial relationship is not a single factor that explains the nature of African states. Firstly, as Francis (2008:4) argues, Africa is a vast continent. Therefore, ‘dehomogenisation’ of African politics is required. The social, political and economic factors which influence the state differ from country to country although there are some commonalities. Moreover, neo-patrimonialism does not explain the reasons for economic development in many African countries. According to the Overseas Development Institute report (June, 22, 2010), 10 of 20 countries⁷ which made distinct progress to global MDG targets are from Africa. According to the Africa Economic outlook report of 2010 many African countries including Ethiopia are early achievers of some of MDG targets such as education, poverty

⁷ Benin, Mali, Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Mauritania, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Rwanda and Togo

reduction and health. Therefore, the nature of African states and whether a federal arrangement can work or not has to be explored by addressing a range of issues such as the overall relationship between the state and society in both domestic and external aspects which include political, socio-cultural, economic development, security and the role of different actors.

Federalism and Democratic Governance

The concept of democratic governance implies the right of citizens to govern themselves on the basis of accepted rules and procedures. This includes meaningful competition among individuals and groups for political power, and broad participation of citizens in these processes. (UNDP World Development Report, 2002; Brinkerhoff, 2000:602). This has to lead to an establishment of an elected government, which is accountable to the electoral legislature or the electorate and acts according to the constitution (Bloomfield And Reilly, 1998:19).

The acknowledgement of group identities and the evolution of non-majority mechanisms at the central level make the federal states different from the common democratic states in exercising democratic participation (Bachtiger and Stiener, 2004:48). Proportional representation of ethnic groups in the national political institutions, including second legislative chambers, enables the groups within a country to influence decisions at the centre (Fleiner, 2001:34).

However, one of the challenges of federalism is that group politics can aggravate regional sentiments that disregard the national harmonization of ethnic groups and, at the extreme, can lead to secessionist demands (Brancati, 2006). It also challenges the

political decision-making. This is because individuals are consigned to their groups. They make their political choice and exercise their political rights by virtue of their culture and ethnic identity as discussed in the case of Belgium, for example. Therefore, this complicates the decision-making process and requires consensus or the concurrence of several ethnic elites, or may require ‘super majorities’ (Haysom, 2005:225). In addition, regionally dominant groups can deny access to state power and resources to minority groups within a particular region (Berman et al, 2004). Moreover, employment opportunities may be denied for those citizens that are not considered as natives of the region⁸ and, at the extreme, ethnic cleansing can be advanced to ensure ethnic homogeneity of a region as happened during the federal process of the Soviet Union, for example. Hence, it is argued that group rights in Africa should be considered if the state is to avert human rights violation and violent intra-state conflicts (Ayoob, 2007:107). This shows that the adoption of ethnic-based federalism is not enough to accommodate diversity in a country. The effect of ‘ethnic geography’⁹ needs to be mitigated by other commitments to non-territorial forms of protection for civil, political, social and cultural rights (Kymlicka, 2004:69; Ted Robert Gurr, 2001).

Therefore, federalism in the context of Africa has to be complemented by rule of law which implies protection of the rights of all citizens through publicly known principles, rules and regulations (Kritz, 2007:402). This has two dimensions. The first one is the elimination of wide discretionary authority for the government and the introduction of formal rules that are universally applicable to everyone. Among the

⁸ For instance, a study on Uganda showed that the power of the districts to employ staff led to a tendency by districts to employ people regarded as natives to the district (Ahikire, 2002 cited in Ndulo, 2006:82).

⁹ This phrase is used to describe the geographical distribution of ethnic groups in a country.

formal rules of law, those related to property rights, the rights to free expression, freedom of association, equality before the law and protection against discrimination are the most prominent (Ndulo, 2006:1). The second one is to create accepted methods of adjudicating disputes between the actors of the society, including the government (Kirtz, 2007:402). This implies codes, procedures and traditional laws¹⁰ that together compose an enforceable body of law that protects the rights of citizens and empowers them to avoid violence (Rotberg, 2007:86; Ndulo, 2006). In addition, there are three broad approaches of intergovernmental relations in federal systems: formal dispute resolution, informal dispute resolution, and popular dispute resolution (Crommelin, 2001).

Formal dispute resolution is done by allocating powers to constituents and by making the judiciary revise the laws of the country. The constitutional division of power at federal and regional levels between the Lower House and Upper House, and the division of power between the parliament, the executive and the judiciary create the basic rule of law for conflict management. This division of power also enables regional states to influence decisions at the centre (Opeskin, 2001). For example, in Belgium the Senate advises both the federal and regional governments on conflicts of interest between the various governments. It also plays a full role, together with the House of Representatives, in constitutional reform and legislation on the organisation of the state, and participates in all legislations that affect the regional governments (Hooghe, 2004:75). The other formal conflict resolution method is court arbitration. In some countries, for example Canada, courts have full power to scrutinize whether all laws are in accordance with the constitution. In Switzerland, such responsibilities

¹⁰ In some countries traditional laws discriminate against women. Hence, by correcting such weaknesses, these laws can be considered as an integral part of the country's formal laws.

are given to the legislative body (Amoretti and Bermeo, 2004). In Belgium, the power of the courts is limited to specific constitutional provisions (Hooghe, 2004:76).

Informal dispute resolution mechanisms entail the use of informal methods of conflict resolution before appearance in the courts. For example, the South Africa constitution encourages informal conflict management mechanisms. Courts can reject appeals that have not tried other mechanisms to settle the conflict (Ndulo, 2006:95). In Ethiopia, communities are encouraged to practice traditional conflict management mechanisms that do not conflict with the general laws of the constitution.

Finally, inter-governmental conflicts can be resolved through referenda (popular resolution) (Crommelin, 2001). For example, this is widely used in Switzerland regarding constitutional matters that affect Cantons (Watts, 2008). Referenda are also used to decide border disputes between regional states in Ethiopia. Thus, the administrative borders between the two regional states will be determined based on a ballot of the people in the disputed areas. However, although the outcome of the decision may enable regional states to determine their borders, it may not enable the regional authorities to manage the conflicts sustainably. This is because the referendum can also create ethnic minorities who still have grievances in the local administrations. Therefore, to prevent these kinds of grievances, it is suggested that the referendum has to avoid identity-based criteria. This enables the voters to determine their fate based on economic and social benefits rather than on identity, which could lead to polarization and violence. Moreover, regardless of the outcome of the referendum, the rights of the minority groups have to be respected in order to create a sustainable solution to the conflicts in the disputed area (Vaughan, 2006).

Conclusion

In conclusion, federalism in Africa has to recognise ethnic identity as a social structure of multi-ethnic countries and it has mainly to address the problems inherited from colonialism – power-related issues which has resulted in ethnic domination and civil wars, and the uneven economic development that has led to an exclusion of ethnic groups from the benefits of social services provided by the state.

However, federalism in general and ethnic-federalism in particular can be a risky experiment in the context of Africa as ethnic groups have a strong tendency towards competition over power and resources. In addition, there is a lack of democratic institutions which can regulate the competition and provide a level playing field. Therefore, the federalisation of the state should not be imposed from above. It must have strong support from below, as discussed in the case of Belgium. The constitutional design also has to balance the power relationships of the regional states in consideration of geographic size, population size and resources. Power and resources have to be genuinely distributed to the regional states. Moreover, the right of self-determination of ethnic groups has to be provided with strong mechanisms for implementation of universal political rights and minority rights protection in every regional state. Chapter Three and the subsequent chapters apply the theoretical discussions to the context of Ethiopia.

Part Two: Federalism and Nation Building in Ethiopia

Chapter Three

Political History, Political Economy and Armed Conflicts in Ethiopia

Introduction

This chapter examines the causes of conflict in the modern history of Ethiopia. It scrutinizes how the state centralisation and resource appropriation from the rural areas led to armed insurgencies which in turn became reasons for the downfall of the military regime in 1991. The chapter concludes by bringing together the basic causes of conflicts that led to the federalisation of the state after the change of government in 1991.

Brief Description of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic country. Around 86 ethnic groups were included in the third census of the country in 2007. The ethnic groups in the country could be categorised as Nilo-Saharan, Omatic, Kushitic and the Ethio-Semetic family. Many of the Nilo-Saharan ethnic groups that include among others Gumuz, Anuak, Nuer and Berta are found in the western frontier areas of the country. These people are mainly hoe cultivators who depend on shifting cultivation. They primarily live in the current Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella regional states of the country (Pankhurst, 1997; Zewde, 2002:5).

The Omatic people live on both sides of the Omo River in the south-western region of the country. Among others the Gamo, Gedeo, Kefficho and Walayta are notable for their population size in the region. The ethnic groups are widely known by the cultivation of 'Ensat' or false banana, which is used as the main staple food in the region. Many of the Omatic ethnic groups live in the current southern regional state of the country (Greenfield, 1965; Zewde, 2002:7).

The Kushitic family of ethnic groups include among others, Oromos, Somali and Afar. These people live in both the highland and lowland areas of the country. Afars, Somali, and some Oromos, who live in the low land areas, depend on pastoralism; whereas other Oromos, who live on the plateaus of the country, depend on plough cultivation. These ethnic groups mainly live in the current Somali, Afar and Oromia regional states (Barnabas, 2003:201).

The Ethio-Semitic ethnic groups, which include mainly Tigrayans and Amharas, live in the northern parts of the country. They depend on plough cultivation. The majority of these groups live in the Amhara and Tigray regional states. These ethnic groups have played a dominant role in the political history of the country ((Barnabas, 2003:200-201; Zewde, 2002:7).

Ethiopia is also a country of different religious faiths. The dominant religions are Christianity and Islam, which constitute 61% and 33% respectively of the population. The remaining 6% comprises other religious faiths (national census, 2007). Except during the Jihad campaign, by gragn Mohammed (which means left handed) in the 16th century, there have been no significant religious clashes before or after the

emergence of the nation-state (Pankhurst, 1997.) Ethiopia is widely known for religious tolerance between Christians and Muslims (Hardie, 1974; Zewde, 2002).

Ethiopia's economy is one of the least developed economies in the world. It depends mainly on agriculture, which accounts for 41.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 60% of exports and 80% of employment (Ethiopian National Bank, 2009; IMF, 2009). Industry and manufacturing constitute about 13% of the overall economy, among which 40% are food and beverages. The mining industry, which contributes less than 1% to GDP, is quite small and under-utilised (MBendi, 2010). Oil exploration for gas and oil is also underway in the Ogaden and Gambella region, but has not started production yet (MBendi.Com, 2010). The service sector accounts for 42.9 % of total GDP (Ethiopian National Bank, 2009). Overall, according to estimates of the IMF, the GDP of the country grew 2.8% on average between 1974-1991, and 4% on average between 1991/2004. Since then it has grown by more than 10 percent on average.

The infrastructure of the country is also underdeveloped. Roads are the major means of transport in Ethiopia, carrying about 95% of the country's passengers and freight traffic with a network density of 33.6km/1,000 km² in 2004/05 (MOFED, 2006). Although the country has significant potential for hydroelectric power and geothermal energy generation, only about 17% of the population has access to electricity (Ethiopian National Bank, 2009). Therefore, the majority of Ethiopians have to rely on traditional fuel – including plant and waste materials – for nearly all their energy consumption (UNDP, 2008). According to the UNDP human development indicators telecommunication links consist of two mainlines, six cellular and two internet

subscribers per 1,000 people in 2005. This placed the country among the least performing countries in technology diffusion and creation (UNDP, 2008).

Ethiopia is also one of the least developed countries regarding social services provision. For example, only 22% of the people had access to improved water sources in 2004. Health expenditure was only 21 USA dollars per person/per year in 2004. Infant mortality was 109 per 1,000 live births in 2005. And the mortality rate for children less than five years old was 164 per 1,000 live births in the same year (UNDP, 2008). According to the UNDP's human development indicators life expectancy at birth was 42 in 1990 and reached 54.7 in 2009. The adult literacy rate, for people aged 15 years, was 36 % in 2009. Real GDP per capita was 454 US dollars in 1990; by 2009 it had reached 779 US dollars. The overall human development index of the country was 0.173 in 1991 and 0.414 in 2009 – placing Ethiopia among the least performing countries in the world (UNDP reports 1990-2009).

The country remained with a unitary state structure during the imperial and military regimes, with the constituent units divided into 14 administrative provinces. These were created mainly at the administrative convenience of the regimes. Therefore, the provinces were multi-ethnic – and this kind of administrative arrangement continued until the downfall of the military regime, except for the changes that were made by the 1987 constitution which recognised the regional autonomies of the Tigray, Gambella, Assab, Eritrea and Somali parts of the country (The Ethiopian Constitution of 1987).

Map 1: Ethiopian political map during the imperial and military regimes



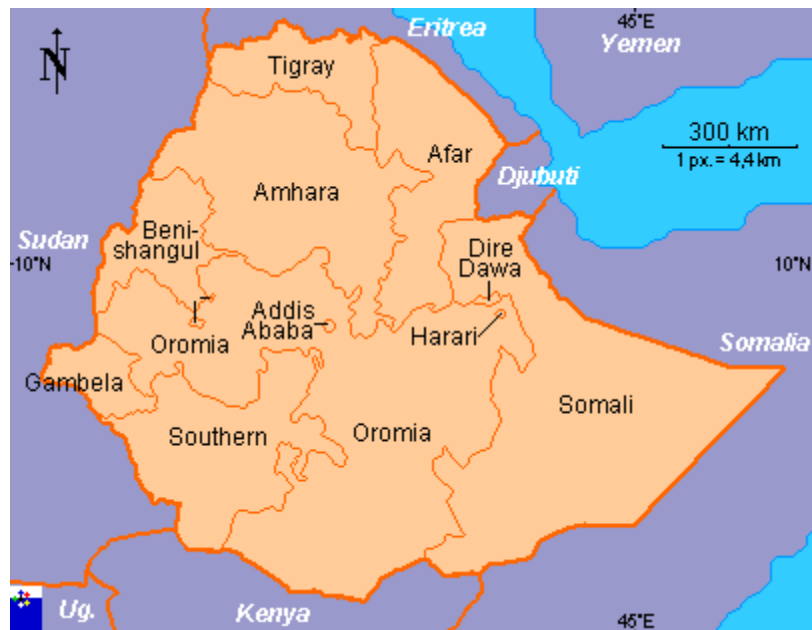
Adopted from www.mapsofworld.com

Since the downfall of the military regime, the country has followed a federal state structure in which ethnic identity has become the main organising principle of the consistent units. Accordingly, there were 14 regional states during the transition period. These were reduced into 9 member states, in accordance with the 1995 federal constitution. Now the member states are: Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromo, Somali, the

Southern nations, nationalities and people regional state (SNNPRS), Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz and Harrari regional states (The Ethiopian Federal Constitution, 1995).

The first five regional states are inhabited predominantly by the ethnic groups from which the states take their names; whereas the other regional states are multi-ethnic. For example, the SNNPRS absorbs more than 56 ethnic groups (Desalegn, 2003:44). The Benishangul-Gumuz regional state encompasses 5 indigenous ethnic groups. The Gambella regional state also encompasses 5 indigenous ethnic groups (Feyissa, 2006:209). The Harrari regional state, which is the smallest regional state, contains four ethnic groups (Kefale and Jemma, 2007:77). Addis Ababa and Direedawa cities are directly accountable to the federal government.

Map 2: Ethiopian Federal administrative regional states



Source: FOTW Ethiopia map by *António Martins* and boundaries' data by *Jarig Bakker*, [http://www.crwflags.com/FOTW/flags/et\(.html](http://www.crwflags.com/FOTW/flags/et(.html)

The total population of Ethiopia is 73,918,505 according to the 2007 census; however, the regional states population size varies greatly. The following table shows the population share of each regional state.

Table 3.1.Total population by each regional state

Regional state	Population size	Percentage
country population	73,918,505	100%
Tigray	4,314,456	6
Afar	1,411,092	2
Amhara	17,214,056	23
Oromia	27,158,471	37
Somali	4,439,147	6
Benishangul-Gumuz	670,847	1
Gambella	306,916	0.4
SNNPRS	15,042,531	20
Harari	183,344	.02
Diredawa*	342,827	.05
Addis Ababa*	2,738,248	4

*Addis Ababa and Direedawa cities are not considered as regional states as they are directly accountable to the federal government.

Source: Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia; Census, 2007

Brief Political History

The Ethiopian ethnic groups had their own civilizations and political history before they were absorbed into the nation-state in the late 19th century. The Ethio-Semitic civilisation, which was later known as Abyssinian, has its history rooted in the Axumite kingdom, which lasted until the 10th century. After the ruin of the Axumite kingdom by Yodit /Gudit, who transferred the throne to the Agew dynasty, the Abyssinians took the throne again from the Agew dynasty and made their centre in Showa and later in Gondar – which was the centre of the state for about 250 years though regional rulers assumed local power in the late 18th century. This period is known as the ‘Zemene Mesafint’ (Era of Princes). The Zemene Mesafint lasted about 100 years until Emperor Tewodros ended it by defeating the regional rulers and began to restore the integrity of the region in the mid 19th century. The Abyssinian region then remained intact during the rule of the following Emperors, Yohannes and Menilek, until it was absorbed by the nation-state, which emerged after Menilek’s expansion towards the southern part of the country (Keller, 1988:15-27).

The other ethnic groups in the country also had their own civilisations which range from different kingdoms to communal social structures. For example, among others the kingdoms of Kafa, Walyta, and Yam are some of the state structures in the southern region of the country. There were also a number of different Oromo states including Limmu-Ennarya, Jimma, Gomma, Guma and Gera. Among these, the

Jimma and Nekemt kingdoms had a monarchical system which remained even after the regions were conquered by Menilek during his southern march in the late 19th century (Zewde, 2002:16; Hassen, 1990; Fiseha, 2006:18). Other states were associated with Islamic civilisations located in Afar and Somali areas and the emirate of Harar (Pankhurst, 1997).

The Emergence of Modern State in Ethiopia

Ethiopian modern political history is closely associated with the emergence of the modern state. The modern state appeared when the nation came into being in the late 19th century. This arose from two processes. The first one is the Emperor Tewodros's consolidation of the Abyssinian regions into one administrative country (Keller, 1981:524). He defeated, if temporarily, all the regional princes, who had fragmented Abyssinia into different regions, and brought the regions under his central control. In addition to the consolidation of the region, Emperor Tewodros attempted to introduce a modern army and a centralised 'geber' (tribute)¹ system in the country. Moreover, he attempted to reduce the role of the church in the state and especially the church's economic burden on peasants (Keller, 1988:26; Zewde, 2002:60; Markakis and Ayele, 1986).

The Abyssinian consolidation was important for the nation-state formation, because the creation of a strong centre in the Abyssinian region meant the emperor's capacity to defend the region, against colonial aggression and international colonisers, increased. Moreover, it led the emperors to acquire diplomatic skills and ties which helped them to take the initiative for nation-state formation in the country. For

¹ Tribute 'geber' is revenue collected by the noblemen from tax levy or land rent and sent to the emperor.

example, Emperor Yohannes repelled the colonial aggression of Italy several times and attempted to persuade the colonisers to recognise the sovereignty of the country (Keller, 1988:27-30. Similarly, Emperor Menilek acquired modern arms using his diplomatic ties with Italy and France, which he used for the successful campaign that enabled him to conquer the southern and western regions. This led to the nation-state formation of the country (Clapham, 1987; Zewde, 2002; Keller, 1988:31-43).

The second process is related to the expansion of Menilek from Showa to the southern and western parts of the country. Although the attempt to expand Showa to the southern parts had started early in the 19th century, it was only completed in 1900 when Menilek conquered all the southern and western parts of the country (Donham, 1985, 3; Halliday and Molyneux, 1981). The conquest of the southern regions had two major features. First, it had a devastating effect on the local communities. As Menilek armies marched towards the southern region the communities, and mainly those who had their own civilizations, resisted it strongly. Thus, Menilek's armies devastated those communities where resistance was high. This happened in Walyta, Keffa and parts of Oromia. Because of the resistance the peasants' lands were confiscated and they were treated like serfs. The second feature of the conquest was negotiation. In some places Menilek's generals controlled the local communities using negotiation with the local leaders or kings. This happened, for example, in Wallega and Jimma. The king of Jimma surrendered to Menilek by negotiation; thus he retained his regional autonomy until later, when Emperor Haile Selassie made the region a province by introducing a centralised state structure in 1930. Similarly the Wallega monarchies surrendered by negotiation and the region remained an autonomous

region within Menilek's jurisdiction until it became the province Wellaga, created by Haile Selassie in 1930 (Zewde, 2002:61-68).

Accordingly, the administration of the country, which was established after Menilek's expansion, had three characteristics. Firstly, the Abyssinian areas, including Gondar, Gojam, Northern Showa and Tigray were administered by regional and local administrations headed by noblemen of the region and who were accountable to Menilek. Similarly, some of the conquered areas in the South and West were administered through regional noblemen, who had surrendered to Menilek. These included Jimma and Wallega, which are located in the current Oromia regional state, and Asossa, which is situated in the current Benishangul-Gumuz regional state (Donham, 1985:37-44). Secondly, there were many places that were controlled by nobles directly appointed as administrators by Menilek. These included the majority of the conquered regions of the southern and western parts of the country. Thirdly, there were other places which had loose relationships with the centre. These include the western frontiers and the eastern side of the country, which was mainly inhabited by Nilo-Saharan and the Kushitic pastoralistic ethnic groups. The reason for the presence of Menilek's troops in these places was basically to control the border of the country and sometimes to levy tax on the pastoralist people, although this was not always practical due to the nomadic life of the farmers (Young, 1999; Donham, 1985:37-44).

After the expansion to the southern and western parts of the country, Menilek also defeated Italy at the battle of Adwa in 1896. This had significant relevance in strengthening the nation-state with respect to both domestic and international

relationships. Domestically, it was the Adwa battle which united and mobilised all the Abyssinian ethnic groups, and the newly conquered regions, against the Italian aggression. Therefore, it created a sense of common accomplishment for the population. Moreover, the victory also contributed to the supremacy of Menilek over the regional princes (Greenfield, 1965; Zwede, 2002:76-79). Internationally, the victory enabled the country to be recognised as an independent state by the international powers and subsequently to become a formal member of the League of Nations (Keller, 1981:528). Thus, the international borders of the country were delimited with the common borders of the neighbouring colonial nation-states (Clapham, 1987; Zwede, 2002:81-85).

The Menilek regime began the process of building the modern nation-state by establishing a modern bureaucracy at the centre. This was organised at the top by ministerial offices, which were supported by educated people from the churches and by some noblemen who had been sent abroad to study in preparation for service in the bureaucracy (Donham, 1985, Zewde, 2002).

The state formation during Menilek's reign shows that it had a semi-decentralised structure. This means the relationship between the centre and the constituent units was not fully centralised. At the centre there were ministerial offices which were responsible for the whole country. However, at the same time, regional governors had authority over their administrative areas as long as they remained accountable to Menilek. Therefore, governors had their own troops and could levy tax in their administrative areas (Donham, 1985:37-38). This decentralised state structure remained in place throughout Menilek's rule and after his death, during the brief

period of Lej Eyyasu and Empress Zewditu and until Haile Selassie became the Emperor of the country in 1930 (Donham, 1985).

Modern economic institutions also started to operate in the basically agrarian economy. For example, a modern bank known as the Bank of Abyssinia was established for the first time in the capital city, Addis Ababa, in the first decade of the 20th century. The country was also connected to the outside world through the railway that passes from Djibouti to Addis Ababa. This served to promote coffee exports which later became the main export item of the country (Markakis and Ayele, 1986; Zewde, 2002:94-100).

The state formation during Menilek's regime shows three interrelated factors which provide a basic background for the causes of conflicts that emerged later during the regimes of Emperor Haile Selassie and the military. First, unlike other African countries, the formation of a modern state in Ethiopia was initiated by an already existing state in the Abyssinian part of Ethiopia. This was quite different from the process of modern state formation in other African countries, which was initiated by the colonial powers whose motivation was extracting the resources of the countries rather than nation-building (Mamandi, 1995). Second, however, the formation of the modern state brought different ethnic groups together and created a multi-ethnic country. This is because the people who were absorbed by the nation state had different cultures, languages and residential territories. In addition, the state formation was done in competition with the European colonisers during the scramble for the African continent. Thus, this led to separation of one ethnic group into different jurisdictions as happened in the other African countries. Thirdly, the Abyssinian

people, whose political elite initiated the state formation, had hierarchal relationships amongst themselves (Donham, 1985). This, in turn, contributed to the hierarchal relationships between the Abyssinians and the newly incorporated people, which also manifested itself in cultural, social and economic discrimination against the people in the peripheral areas of the country. This was intensified when Emperor Hiale Selassie came to power and built a centralised state structure.

The Centralisation of the State

The state became more centralised during Emperor Haile Selassie's rule. Haile Selassie introduced a customs structure for all regions in 1931; he also introduced a modern army and abolished the autonomous regions that had been administered by the regional noblemen. For the first time he established 100 *Awrajas* (districts) in 12 provinces. The Emperor himself then appointed all the leaders of the provinces and *Awrajas*. This process meant power was concentrated in Showa the area from which most of the nobility that governed the country came (Tiruneh, 1993; Zewde, 2002).

The country got its first written constitution in 1931. It had two main features which were relevant to the centralisation of the state. Firstly, it clearly defined the power relationship between the monarchy and the nobility – so strengthening the modern exercise of power, which was started by Emperor Menilek. For example, it endorsed the ministerial system Menilek set up in 1907. Moreover, the constitution abolished the regional power and autonomy of the nobility. Therefore, it changed all the regions into provinces, under the direct administration of the Emperor and the ministerial offices at the centre (Zewde, 2002:140-146). Secondly, the constitution introduced a parliament and Chamber of Deputies. However, it restricted membership of the

institutions to the nobility in the selection of members done either directly by the Emperor or indirectly by the aristocracy. This was done by a property qualification which enabled members of the institutions to be drawn from the landed nobility. According to this qualification the peasantry and even rich merchants were unable to become members of the parliament and Chamber of Deputies (Zewde, 2002:146; Keller, 1981:532).

Thirdly, the constitution gave absolute power to the Emperor. The parliament and Chamber of Deputies had an only advisory role. Any law had to be accepted by the Emperor in order for it to be implemented. Moreover, the constitution enabled the Emperor to transfer his power thorough hereditary means. Therefore, the constitution legalised the absolute power of the Emperor and his ability to make appointments and dismissals to the key posts in the country (Zewde, 2002:146; Clapham, 1969:112). This led to the legalisation of Showan Amhara domination in all political and economic aspects of the country. For example, in the years from 1941 to 1966 the numbers of Showans appointed to the rank of Vice–Minister or above was a remarkable 62 per cent (Donham, 1985:27). And this was reflected in the lower hierarchies of state. For example, in 1969 in the Southern Arusi District of Kofele (an Oromo area) of 30 government employees only 5 were locals. The rest were all Amharas. Similarly in Arusi, in 1969 of 22 governors only 4 were locals (Ibid). Hence, power was concentrated at the centre and strengthened through hierarchical relationships in society. The central authorities exercised their power without any consultation with the local people and authorities. All appointments were made from above through the Ministry of Interior; and all relationships with lower levels were made in the same manner (Clapham, 1969:115; Clapham, 1975:75).

The constitution was amended in 1955, introducing universal suffrage and provisions for an elected Chamber of Deputies. However, as long as political parties were illegal, and the property qualification for a candidate to the parliament was maintained, the introduction of universal suffrage could not make any significant impact on the structure of the nation-state. No change was made to the absolute power of the monarch (Zewde, 2002:206).

The power of the monarchy was also strengthened by the establishment of a modern bureaucracy. Initially, the bureaucracy was filled by uneducated aristocracy. However, later educated siblings of the nobility, who had been taught abroad and in domestic schools were recruited (Tiruneh, 1993; Donham, 1985:27; Zewde, 2002). Due to the need for educated people in the bureaucracy the expansion of education became a necessary condition to strengthen the nation-state. Therefore, a number of elementary schools, high schools, and the Haile Selassie I University (the current Addis Ababa University) were established during Emperor Haile Selassie's rule (Keller, 1981:531). However, this expansion of education was mainly focused on Addis Ababa and Showa, and to some extent in the northern provinces. For example, in 1970 there were 300,000 Ethiopian students in all elementary, high school and territory level education (Abir, 1970:49). This was equivalent to just over 1% of the whole population. The students were also mainly from schools situated in and around the capital or in the north of the country. For example 60 secondary schools were to be found in four big towns and especially in the capital (ibid). This meant other areas, particularly in the south and west regions and the ethnic groups living there were neglected in the education expansion exercise (Keller, 1981:534). Moreover, the

minor expansion of the education system in the south was considered a means of cultural assimilation. Amharic was made the Lingua Franca of all elementary schools regardless of the children's mother tongue. A study of Amharic became one of the qualifications for employment and even became necessary to access land in the southern regions (Markakis and Ayele, 1986; Donham, 1985:11).

The expansion of modern education systems and institutions created a competing new elite group which opposed the interests of the nobility. The view of the new elites, on how things should be done, differed from those of the nobility (Donham, 1985:28). This was manifested in various respects. For example, when the new elite group demanded more reforms, such as land tenure reform, the parliament which was controlled by the aristocracy refused to approve this. The new elite group was keen to participate in the national affairs of the country but the constitution did not provide any means of political participation. Political parties, associations and free expression were not allowed during that time (Clapham, 1975:72). The only option for the new elite group remained violence.

The above historical process of nation building shows that the centralisation of the state, with its power concentrated on monarchical authority and the Showan nobility, left the government unable to comprehend the evolving demands of the urban population for basic democratic rights and policy changes related to land ownership and other issues. Moreover, the homogenisation policy of the government made ethnic identity a hot issue among the educated elite, who were rooted in different ethnic groups (Tiruneh, 1993: 299). These factors became structural factors for the 1974 revolution.

However, the modern political history of Ethiopia has led to political analyses that Ethiopia is, historically, the most well situated country in Africa. Hence, ethnic differentiation can be seen as a secondary issue in comparison to the common national identity of the ethnic groups (Tibebu, 1995). Moreover, it is argued that there was no Amharan ethnic domination and subordination in Ethiopia, and that the Amhara elite group have remained multiethnic for many centuries due to intermarriage practices and they were oppressed along with other ethnic groups by the country's various regimes. (Levine, 2000: XVIII-XIX).

The problem with this analysis is that it gives little attention to the history of the South-West Ethiopian people before they were absorbed into the nation state. The point is that when these people made their own history, they were not part of the Abyssinian state. In fact, as Zewde (2002) argues, the people who were absorbed into the Menilek Empire in the late 19th century had their own states and civilisations. Moreover, although the Amharan elite group during the Menilek and Haile Selassie regimes used intermarriage as a means of establishing its supremacy in rival regions, such as Wallega and Tigray, little integration existed between the rural areas of Tigray, Amhara and Oromo (Donham, 1986). In addition, during the Haile Selassie regime, it was the Amhara elite who controlled all the central and local administrative hierarchies. For example, during 1963-8 three-quarters of the public offices in the country were occupied by people drawn from Showa (Markakis, 1987:251). As discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter, the restriction of movement and suppression carried out by the military regime against ethno-national movements also undermined any integration that could have happened between the ethnic groups in the country (Tiruneh, 1993).

In addition, when culture is not respected and people are prevented from speaking their own language in public places, this demonstrates state-sponsored domination of ethnic minority groups. Therefore, the argument that Amhara were as much victims as other ethnic groups does not explain the reality. Regardless of the class differences between the elite group and the peasants, the Amhara were not victims of cultural suppression, as the elite group had the same cultural institutions as the Amhara communities. As a result, Amhara had better opportunities than others, such as access to a justice system, employment opportunities simply because of their language abilities (Fiseha, 2006).

Rural Resource Appropriation

One of the features of the Ethiopian nation-state was surplus appropriation from the peasant subsistence economy during the imperial regime. When Emperor Menilek conquered the southern and western parts of the country, he imposed on them the land tenure system, known as the ‘Gult’² system, already in use in the Abyssinian parts of the country. As a result the land of the native people was confiscated and was given to Menilek’s nobility and their troops (normally known as ‘Nefteyaa’ in the conquered regions. This made the peasants land-less, but enabled the aristocracy to extract the surplus from the peasants as much as they could and use it to strengthen their own regional power and the imperial regime (Halliday and Molyneux, 1981; Zewde, 2002:88, Donham, 1985).

² Gult was a grant given to a member of the nobility who was authorised by the Emperor to administer a local area. The Gult owner collected a tax in kind that would be sent to the emperor in exchange for an entitlement to all necessary services including food expenses and labour service for himself from the peasants under the ‘Gult’ (Donham, 1985:5; Keller, 1981:535).

The Emperor Haile Selassie introduced a tax system when he was Regent for Empress Zewditu and implemented it fully when he became Emperor in 1930. The newly introduced tax system, known as ‘qalad’, allowed for the selling and buying of land, so that land owners were obliged to pay taxes for their land holdings to the government. According to the new system peasants were not obliged to pay tax in kind and labour service to the nobility, but they were obliged to pay a rent to the land owner for the land they were using to grow crops (Zewde, 2002:85-94). However, the landlords forced the peasants to buy the plots they were farming or to become their tenants, giving part of their produce to the landlords if they were not able to buy the plots.³ Consequently, the tax system became a tool of exploitative expropriation of the peasant resources by the nation-state (Markakis and Ayele, 1986; Zewde, 2002:192).

The Haile Selassie regime also focused on expansion of commercial farms that were needed by the international market. Here, the focus was on coffee producing commercial farms and, to some extent, sugar-cane plantations (Donham, 1985:28). Thus, many landlords tended to produce coffee either by themselves or as a joint venture with expatriate investors. However, this led to expulsion of the peasants from their land holdings in the coffee producing areas of the southern regions. For example, many peasants from the Ari ethnic group were expelled from their land holdings to enable the expansion of coffee farms (Naty, 2002:62). Moreover, the sugar cane plantation in the Awash valley dislocated many Afars around Issa. This became one of the contributing factors of the ongoing conflicts between Afar and Issa. The attempt to create modern farms in the Walyita Agricultural Development (WADU)

³ For example, Ras Birru, who was one of the Menilek appointments, forced the peasants, in the ‘Gult’, given to him by Menilek, either to buy the plots they were farming or to become his tenants and to give him a quarter of their harvest. Many peasants were forced to work as tenants of the landlord because they were not able to buy the plots (Zewde, 2002:90).

also dislocated many peasants from their land holdings (Markakis, 1987:96). In addition, the low budgetary allocation for agriculture, which was 2% in 1967 for example, focused on commercial farms rather than to the peasant economy (Zewde, 2002; 194), which remained neglected. As a result, by 1967 90% of the agrarian sector was of subsistence peasant economy and 90% of the population was illiterate (ibid).

The Haile Selassie regime also adopted a policy of import substitution industrialisation. This led to the establishment of some textile industries during the 1960s. However, the impact of the industries on the whole economy was negligible. For example, by 1970 there were about 300 industrial enterprises, whose contribution to the economy was around 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Markakis, 1987:96). The labour force employed in the industrial sector was estimated at only 50,000. Moreover, it was concentrated in only a few cities such as Addis Ababa, Dire-dawa and Asmara (Zewde, 2002:200).

The above analysis shows that the state became the main resource extractor and distributor, in order to satisfy the interests of the Emperor's and his associates' inner circle. Public and private resources were not separate during this period (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Clapham, 1985; 47). Accordingly, patrimonialism in "which authority is ascribed to a person rather than an office holder" (Clapham, 1985:48) was the main feature of the Haile Selassie imperial regime. Hence, the Emperor was considered the father of the nation and all the persons in the state hierarchy were held together by means of loyalty and kinship to him. For this reason, the Emperor himself and the aristocracy became the owners of construction companies, modern farms and factories

(Zewde, 2002). On the other hand, the regime did not have any developmental interest which did not benefit the political elite of the regime. Infrastructural development and budget allocation were tuned to the places and sectors which provided benefits to the political elite. The regime also depended on repression and undemocratic practices to sustain itself. It did not allow political participation of citizens in the governance process. Political parties and private media were not allowed to operate in the country (Tiruneh, 1993).

It was a combination of different structural factors contributed to the downfall of the imperial regime. First, the centralisation of the state and patrimonial character of the regime meant undemocratic handling of every political issue and ethnic marginalisation – manifested in cultural, economic and social benefits which ignored the majority of the ethnic groups, as discussed in the above sections. The land tenure system was another issue, not only for the rural population but also for the intelligentsia in the urban areas, who were basically affiliated with the rural population in one way or another. The regime had very little conception of what was required for handling these issues nor did it have the capacity to reform the system. Thus, the regime became hated by the population in general and urban people in particular, who were demanding democratic rights, equality of nationalities and land reform. Under these circumstances, the irresponsible handling by the government of the 1973 famine and price increases in the urban areas (which were aggravated by increased international oil prices) sparked popular urban uprisings against the imperial regime in 1974. This brought the imperial regime to an end and led to it being replaced by a military junta in 1974 (Clapham, 1987; Markakis and Ayele, 1986; Halliday and Molyneux, 1981; Tiruneh, 1993:34).

Second, the predatory relationship of the nation state with the peasants and the marginalisation of the rural population from any social benefits provided by the state contributed to the continuation of the momentum of the 1974 revolution in the rural areas (Donham, 1985:14-15; Zewde, 2002:98, Markakis and Ayele, 1986). This was manifested by the support of the rural population for the military's land reform that put land under the control of the government, and abolished the selling and buying of land bringing the former system to an end and enabling the military regime to gain support mainly in the southern and western regions (Tiruneh,1993).

The Military Regime's Political Solution: Adoption of Socialism

The military junta (Derg), which was the only organised force in 1974, made its main motto 'Ethiopia First' when it took control of the state administration. Although the purpose of this slogan was not clear at first, it was clarified later, when it was defined as Ethiopian nationalism first under Ethiopian socialism. Therefore, although the regime in principle recognised the issues of nationalities and the necessity of land reform, it was not ready to answer the demands for democratic rights for the urban population. This was demonstrated by the proclamation issued in 1974 which removed all democratic rights from citizens. Nor was the junta ready to resolve the Eritrean question peacefully. The Eritreans started fighting for independence after the federation was abolished by the Haile Selassie regime in 1960. Hence, Eritrean independence became an issue in the student movements during the 1960s along with self-determination of nations and the issue of secession. This is discussed in the following section.

As soon as the military committee assumed power, it took measures such as the nationalisation of financial institutions, land reform and nationalisation of urban land and extra houses of urban dwellers. All these measures were taken between September 1974 and July 1975 (Halliday and Molyneux, 1981; Zewde, 2002:242; Tiruneh, 1993). The measures enabled the military regime to tighten its control on the finance and resources of the country (ibid). In the following years the government confirmed its ideological socialism. It created centralised and hierarchical institutions, such as the Ministry of Central Planning, the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC), a national party, and national peasant and youth associations, which served the government as apparatus to implement the policies of its centralised system (Clapham, 1987; Clapham, 2002:19). The Derg's goal became promotion of Ethiopian nationalism under a socialist system.

There are domestic and external factors for the military regime's adoption of socialism. Firstly, the 1974 Ethiopian revolution was one of the most radical urban people's uprisings in the history of Ethiopia. Influenced by the then socialist movements in Asia and Latin America, socialism was considered as the best solution for the Ethiopia's problems by the educated people who played a leading role in the revolution (Tiruneh, 1993). As the military Junta was a group of junior officers, it was not surprising that it was influenced by the Marxist ideology and slogans among the educated people in the country. In addition, as Clapham (1987:6) argued, if the military regime was going to claim to be the leader of the revolution, it was a necessary condition to bring a different organisation to the state and the society from the monarchical system, which, in turn, determined the survival of the new regime. Therefore, socialism became the best option to appeal to the masses that

revolted against the monarchical system and to sustain the new regime. On the external side, the military Junta did not get immediate recognition from the western side as the revolution was also against the western allies of the monarchical system (Keller, 1988). So, the military regime adopted socialism and got recognition and military support from the Soviet Union, which contributed to the survival of the regime.

The military regime made little effort to change the centralised provincial administration of the Emperor; it retained the 14 provincial administrations of the Emperor until its downfall in 1991. Nevertheless, the military regime accepted, in principle, the self-determination of nationalities. Accordingly, it established an Institute of Nationalities Studies which focused on study of the culture, language and the socio-economic situation of the Ethiopian nationalities. The study results of the Institute, in fact, became a basis for the draft federal constitution which happened later, after the downfall of the military regime. The military regime also conducted a census in 1987 which recognised the existence of nationalities in the country for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. However, regardless of the rhetoric about the rights of nationalities in the country, Amharic continued as the national language and other languages were discouraged from being used in public areas (Markakis, 1994). In addition, the military regime took measures against the demands of the urban population for democratic change and support for ethno-national movements. As a result, it adopted illegal and repressive measures from the day it came to power. For example, it killed 60 senior members of the imperial regime without trial. It passed a proclamation that banned all democratic rights including speaking, writing and even thinking against the government.

In addition, in the aftermath of the revolution, a fierce struggle between the factions of the military regime eventually led to the personal rule of Mengistu Hailemariam who became head of the military junta (Markakis and Ayele, 1986). The whole state structure was controlled by military officers and civilians who were loyal to Mengistu at the top of the state hierarchy. Moreover, the state controlled the urban and rural population through different associations, which were directly controlled initially by the Commission for Organising the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE), and later by the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE). Membership of the ruling party and the associations served as a means of getting security and job opportunities which can be described as patron-client relationships (Clapham, 1987; Tiruneh, 1993). Therefore, provision of special privileges to the families of the party elites; nepotism (manifested by giving better access and job opportunities to the relatives of persons who controlled the party and the state) and cliental relationships, with the persons who controlled the ruling party and the state in return for gaining some benefits, became the main manifestations of neo-patrimonial relationships during the military regime.

Marxist oriented opposition political parties proliferated during and after the revolution growing out of the nature of the monarchical regime and the international situation. The monarchical regime did not allow any organised political movement or participation by citizens in the governance process (Clapham, 1988). Therefore, the communist movements around the world, the Chinese revolution, Cuba and the Vietnam War against American occupation, all influenced the young educated people who participated in the 1974 revolution (Tiruneh, 1993). As a result, the differences between the political parties were not ideological, but domestic political issues. The

domestic political differences mainly focused on how to address the issue of nationality (ethnicity) and how to establish a democratically elected government. The All Ethiopia Socialist Movement (AESM) considered the nationality issue as one element of the Ethiopian Revolution that had to be addressed by the class struggle. Therefore, it decided to work with the military regime and critically support it. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which considered itself a vanguard party, took a similar political position on the nationality issue as AESM, but it considered the military regime to be against the 'revolution' and decided to fight it using insurrections based on the urban areas (Markakis, 1987; Berhanu, 2003).

The military junta, however, saw all the opposition groups as anti-Ethiopian nationalism and decided to eradicate them using force. It started a campaign of mass killings, the so-called 'Red Terror', and gave local administrative leaders the authority to kill anyone suspected of being against the revolution. Tens of thousands of people were killed and left on the streets. The outcome was rule by terror and the development of a completely anti-democratic situation in all urban areas (Woodward, 2003:91; Zewde, 2002:248-256).

The above brief analysis shows that the military regime made no effort to address the basic causes of conflict in the state, which included the centralisation of the state and ethnic domination in the country. Rather, it aggravated them by adopting undemocratic policies masked by a socialist ideology. This led to mass killings and repressive measures which led to a proliferation of ethnic-based armed groups in the country.

Rural Resource Appropriation during the Military Regime

The military regime implemented different policies to enable it to appropriate the surplus of the peasant-based subsistence economy. For this purpose, Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) was established to buy the grain of peasants and other products at prices fixed by the government. As these prices were normally below market prices, they discouraged the peasants from being more productive. Moreover, the AMC used a quota system that forced peasants to give some of their grain to the market. Consequently, when the peasants were not able to provide the specified amount of grain to the AMC they were forced to sell their animals to realise the required cash (Markakis, 1987:267). The government also introduced a villagisation⁴ system with the stated objective of modernising the rural economy, but in practice it was designed to control the resources of the peasants and to mobilise the rural population in order to resist opposition groups and insurgents. However, the programme failed due to its highly centralised nature, which did not consider the cultural and social factors of the people⁵ nor the lack of resources or the low provision of social services to the newly established villages (Berisso, 2002, 119-130; Zewde, 2002, Naty, 2002:68). The tax system was also a heavy burden on the rural population. In some places tax was levied on all family members, whether they were married or not. This created significant resentment in the rural population.

⁴ Lirens(1989:1) defines villagisation in Ethiopia as a process by which ‘rural households formerly living in dispersed settlements are concentrated into nucleated settlements as a result of government policy to reorganise rural settlements’ (cited in Berisso,2002:116).

⁵ For example Berisso (2002:119) noted that, for the Guji Oromo (who are polygamists), the villagisation programme meant intensified conflict within their own families, because polygamy is exercised by dispersing the wives in different locations. Moreover, it also became problematic for some ethnic groups who bury deceased people near their houses. Thus, villagisation meant these ethnic groups could be forced to loose touch with their dead.

Another economic (perhaps political) policy of the government was a programme of resettlement. The resettlement programme was initiated as a response to the 1984 drought which focused largely in the north, mainly Tigray, Wollo and Northern Showa, and some places in the south. Overall around 594,190 people were resettled into the current Beishangul-Gumuz regional state and Wallaga, which is a zone of the current Oromia Regional State (Mebratie, 2004:144). However, the resettlement process was largely a forcible resettlement package which separated families. In addition, it was conducted without adequate infrastructure or other social services in the new settlement areas. Hence, many people died due to harsh weather, malaria and other communicable diseases (Zewde, 2002:262; Pankhurst, 2002:133-135). Equally, it displaced native peoples living in the new resettlement areas (Yntiso, 2004:46). It is also argued that the resettlement programme was designed to weaken the ethno-national movements in the country. Significant numbers of the settlers were taken from Tigray, in which an ethno-national movement had developed, spearheaded by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The resettlement package, in effect, reduced the mass base of the TPLF by dispersing the rural population away from the main places which had attracted TPLF insurgents (Tiruneh, 1993:349).

The government also attempted to expand modern farms. However, these farms contributed little to the national economy but instead consumed government expenditures that had been allocated to agriculture. For example, by the beginning of the 1980s, state farms, which occupied 324,000 hectares or 4% of the total cultivated land, consumed 82% of all fertiliser, over 73% of improved seeds, 80% of agricultural credit, and nearly all other agricultural inputs provided by the state (Keller, 1985:14 cited in Markakis, 1987:267).

In parallel to the rural development, an attempt was made to develop industry, such as the textile industries in Combelcha and Bahrdar. However, as the resources of the government were mainly invested in the importation of armaments from the eastern socialist countries, industrial development could not expand significantly during the military regime (Keller, 1985:14 cited in Markakis, 1987:267). All in all, the development of the economy was minimal. For example, when the government made a revolutionary economic development plan for 1984/85-1993/94 the anticipated economic growth was 6.5% growth in GDP and 3.6% rise in per capita income. However, this never materialised; in fact per capita income declined by about 0.8% (Zewde, 2002:263).

The above analysis shows that, regardless of the abolition of the monarchic system, the exploitative nature of the state towards the rural population continued during the military regime – through the centralised state apparatus including the AMC and through villagisation. Therefore, the relationship between the military regime and the rural population has remained conflictual except in the early few years of the revolution. This became a reason for the proliferation of insurgent groups and increasing support for EPRDF forces in the rural areas when they expanded their influence from the Northern part of the country to the Central and South-Western areas, including Showa, Gojam, Gondar and Wallega(Omer, 2002:84-89).

Armed Conflicts in Ethiopia

The nation building project which focused on centralised state building, ethnic assimilation and rural surplus appropriation led into ethno-national movements across the country. Hence, many armed groups from different ethnic groups started insurgent

activities – including in Tigray, Oromo, Somali, Sidama and Afar, in addition to the Eritrean struggle for independence which started during the Haile Selassie regime. All in all, there were 17 insurgent groups fighting against the military regime before its downfall in 1991 (Barnabas, 2003). Most of the insurgent activities demanded self-determination although the EPLF, OLF and ONLF were fighting for the independence of Eritrea, Oromia and Ogaden respectively. The civil wars associated with these insurgent activities can be discussed in relation to the main resistance groups which emerged in Eritrea (1960-1991), Tigray (1975-1991) and Oromia (1967-1991). The inter-state wars which include the Ethio-Somali wars (1977-1978, 1982, 2006-2009) and Ethio-Eritrea war (1998-2000) are not discussed here as the focus of the study is on intra-state civil wars.

The Eritreans started their armed struggle for independence in 1960 (Markakis, 1978:94). After 1941 Eritrea became independent from Italy but remained under a British care-taker administration until it was federated with Ethiopia in 1952. However, the Haile Selassie regime dismantled the federation and made the country a province of Ethiopia. This was done mainly because when Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia, the Haile Selassie regime was not comfortable with the emerging national identity of Eritrea, its free media and the number of political parties in the country. Moreover, as the main aim of the regime was the centralisation of the state, the Eritrean federal structure was considered a threat to that centralist objective. The federation was dissolved in 1962 and immediately the Emperor's official representative urged Eritreans to study Amharic, now they were Ethiopians (Markakis, 1998:109-116; Markakis, 1987:94; Zewde, 2002).

As a result, an armed struggle for independence was started by the Eritrea Liberation Front (ELF) in 1961. But later the Eritrea People's Liberation Front (EPLF) became the main resistance group, which fought against the Ethiopian Imperial and Military regimes for about 30 years, until the unitary state collapsed in 1991 and Eritrea's independence was formally acknowledged after a referendum in 1993 (Gilkes and Plaut, 1999).

The right of self determination became a burning issue in Tigray, which is considered the centre of Abyssinia, during the Haile Selassie regime. The reason is that although Tigrayans are predominantly Christians, and have lived for centuries in one region with the Amhara, they consider themselves to be culturally distinct from the Amhara, and they speak Tigrigna, which is different from Amharic. Moreover, as the Tigrians had their own place in Abyssinian history, they remained a rival ethnic group in the region. Since the death of Emperor Yohannes they had felt marginalised from the benefits of the nation-state (Clapham, 1988:206). And when the Menilek troops marched north to fight the Italian colonisers they destroyed the property of the local people. Moreover, after Emperor Haile Selassie returned from exile in 1941 he sent an unpopular Amhara governor to Tigray and the tax subsequently levied on that region was higher than the tax paid to the Italians during the occupation (Markakis, 1987).

As a result the Tigrayans revolted against the regime in 1943. The rebellion started around Mekelle, the region's capital city, and destroyed the government's military forces stationed there. However, the government dispersed the rebellion with the support of the British Air Force and took barbaric measures to suppress the rebellion (Zewde, 2002:216). The peasant rebellion surrendered and as punishment the districts

of Welkait and Thegede, in the west, and Raya, in the south of Tigray were given to Gondar and Wollo provinces respectively (Clapham, 1988; Markakis, 1987).

In addition to this the government imposed Amharic on Tigrayans as a national language and this created difficulties for young Tigrayans who wanted to go to university, as it became an entry requirement. Consequently in 1963-8 only 2% of Tigrayans were qualified to attend university compared to 65% who qualified from Showa (Haile W. Michael, 1969:3 cited in Markakis, 1987:251). In addition, the government made little effort to prevent the repeated famines that took hundreds of thousands of lives in the region. It did nothing to develop the region, except locating an abattoir there (Markakis, 1987:251).

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) started an armed struggle in February 1975 (Young, 1999), fuelled mainly by their concern that a change of government would not eliminate state structures, which discriminated against them (Ibid). The TPLF was established by disaffected university students, who participated in radical movements, influenced by Marxist ideology, against the imperial regime (Markakis, 1987:254). They went on to attack the military regime and later became the main resistance group which ultimately created a nation-wide front (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front), in co-operation with other insurgent groups, and played the key role in overthrowing the military regime in 1991 (Young, 1999; Markakis, 1994).

The TPLF leaders considered the national question in Ethiopia as a primary contradiction which determined the resolution of other political issues in the country.

Moreover, they thought that the national question should be resolved through self-determination up to secession, which imitated Stalin's approach of the nations and nationalities of the former Soviet Union, discussed in Chapter Two. This became a fundamental principle for the federal constitution which was ratified in 1995. The origins of the thesis started in the academic movements of the Haile Selassie I university during the 1960s, which were greatly influenced by the Marxist approach to the issues nations and nationalities. Ethiopia was considered a 'prison house' of oppressed nationalities by many scholars, including the very popular student movement's leader Tilahun Gizaw – who was killed by the imperial regime's security forces before the 1974 revolution (Gudina, 2006:126:127).

Although the thesis partly explains the oppression of the ethnic groups by the nation-state, it overlooks the common national sentiment created between the ethnic groups. For example, the mobilisation of all local leaders against the Italian invasion (1896) and occupation (1935-41) created a sense of common accomplishment. The assimilation practices of the nation state (especially intermarriages and adoption of Christianity mainly in Showa and Wallega) created a sense of commonality. Moreover, the expansion of the standardised education system all over the country enabled the educated people to focus on common issues – for example the debate conducted by the student movements of Haile Selassie I university during the 1960s were mainly focused on national issues such as the nationalities and land reform issues that concerned all Ethiopian people (Zwede, 2002). Therefore, Ethiopia cannot be considered to have been merely a 'prison house' of ethnic groups. There existed an Ethiopian national sentiment between the ethnic groups – and that made them a nation.

However, the common national sentiment was not strong enough to integrate the ethnic groups into the nation-state. For example, the predatory tendencies of the nation-state towards the peasant-based subsistence economy, and the modernisation policy of the government, meant the rural areas (in which the majority of the ethnic groups lived) were disregarded (Donham, 1985). In addition, the response of the state to identity-based mobilisation as in Tigray and Oromia remained harsh (Clapham, 1987; Young, 1998). Moreover, the peripheral ethnic groups had little interaction with the nation-state during the Imperial and Military regimes in the 20th century⁶. All these problems contributed to the existence of weak integration of the ethnic groups into the nation-state.

The Oromos also rebelled between 1963-1970. These people were one of the disadvantaged groups during the imperial march to the western and southern parts of the country. For example, when Menilek went to Arusi the local people resisted him and as a punishment he confiscated their land and distributed it to his noblemen. Hence, the local people became tenants of Menilek's noblemen. As this had happened relatively recently, it remained in the collective memory. The rebellion took place in Bale province as result of religious subordination and the land tenure system imposed by the government. This was also suppressed by military force (Zewde, 2002:216; Markakis, 1987:259, Clapham, 1987).

⁶ For example, the Dassanetch ethnic group, which lives along the borders of Kenya, the pastoralist people of Afar and Somali, and other ethnic groups such as the Anywaa, Nuer, Berta and Gumuz in the south-west remained alienated from the nation-state and little national sentiment was formed that would have encouraged them to integrate into the nation-state (Donham, 1985; Feyissa, 2006; Almagor, 1985:96-97).

The Haile Selassie regime also imposed Amharic on the Oromos, so that by the mid 1960s and throughout the 1970s only 15% – 20% of university students were Oromos despite the Oromos forming the largest ethnic group in the country. Again the development efforts focused on the coffee producing areas, which were unreachable for the majority of the rural Oromos (Markakis, 1987: 259). As a result, the educated Oromos created the Mechana-Tulema self-help association in 1963. The association linked the poverty of the Oromos with the conquest of Oromia by the northerners, and attracted many members including prominent military men from the army (Donahm, 1985:35).

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was established along ethnic lines in 1975 with the aim of independence for Oromia. The OLF believed colonial domination was responsible for the position Oromia found itself in. It is argued that conquest of the Abyssinians to the Southern parts of Ethiopia during late 19th century should be considered as a colonisation process, which could not be separated from the scramble for Africa by the European colonisers. Supporting this view was the harshness of conquest, the destruction of local institutions, and the imposition of an Abyssinian culture on the local people and the resource appropriation made by the Menelik regime (Lata, 1999; Jalata, 2005:1). Accordingly, the OLF fought for their independence from the jungles of Harar and continued to operate in Harar and Wallega until the downfall of the military regime in 1991 (Markakis, 1987).

However, African colonialism was mainly associated with the development of capitalism in the European countries. Therefore, it could be argued that colonialism in African was basically capitalism's conquest over the African mode of economies

(Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). On the other hand, the expansion of Abyssinia should be considered as the historical outcome of a scheme to expand one group's territory, whose own economic and cultural development was the same as their conquered people (Gudina, 2006:125-126). Moreover, there was no colonial boundary between the Ethiopian peoples, in the same way that was created by the Europeans (Ibid). Therefore, the colonial thesis of conflict analysis does not provide any insight to the problems of the country.

The response of the military regime to the armed opposition groups was an increase in repressive measures. This had two interrelated consequences, which eventually led to the ruin of the regime. Firstly, many civilians were killed and this contributed to stronger solidarity between the rural population and the armed forces in opposition to the military regime. Moreover, the opposition groups found it easier to rally the rural population to support them and to recruit youngsters who strengthened the military power of the armed opposition parties (Young, 1998). Secondly, the wars required a huge conscription programme, and mobilisation of resources, which ultimately became too big a burden for the country. For these reasons, coupled with the increased military pressure created by the insurgents (mainly EPRDF and EPLF), the military regime collapsed in 1991 (Zewde, 2002).

Conclusion

The historical sources of intra-state conflict in Ethiopia are largely associated with its nation-building project. These are, in the main, related to the centralisation of the state and ethnic domination, surplus appropriation from the rural areas and the repressive measures taken by governments against their opponents.

For these reasons, the domestic political process during the military regime created two factors which influenced the nature of the transitional and federal processes that followed the downfall of the military regime. Firstly, as the insurgents' activities were led by ethnic-based armed groups, the confrontations with the military regime aggravated the issue of nationalities that would be addressed by the transitional government. Secondly, the political process during the military regime also resulted in weakness of the national parties as they were heavily hit by the military regime and many of them were forced to live in exile. Thus, ethnic-based political forces emerged as significant political players from the civil wars that concluded in 1991. The domestic political process during the military regime necessitated a federalisation of the state, but it was dominated by ethnic-based political players, which will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

Redefining the Nation-state: The Federalisation Process in Ethiopia

Introduction

This chapter examines the federalisation process in Ethiopia. First, it discusses the reasons for the federalisation of the state, the main activities of the transition period and the realisation of the federal arrangement. Additionally, it scrutinizes the main features of the federal constitution, with respect of accommodation of the ethnic groups and the management of intra-state conflict in the country. Institutionalising identity, resource-sharing, democratic participation and intergovernmental relationships can be seen as the main influential factors when analysing the challenges and opportunities of the federal system.

Reasons for the Federalisation of the State

Ethiopia became a federalised country officially in 1995, after a four-year transitional period. There were several reasons for the federalisation of the state. Firstly, there was the failure of the nation-state nation building project. As discussed in Chapter Three, the driving principle of the nation state was one nation, one people and one flag (Abbay, 2004). Therefore, there were attempts to assimilate the multiple ethnic groups into one culture and language (ibid). These factors were reinforced by uneven economic development that disregarded the rural areas, where the majority of the ethnic groups lived. The policies and programmes of the nation building project created ethnic grievances, which were followed by demands for self-determination from a majority of the ethnic groups in the country. Therefore, a state restructuring, which could address the ethnic grievances, was required to maintain the integrity of the country (Eshete, 2003).

In addition, demands for self-determination were followed by civil wars. This involved the TPLF in Tigray and the OLF in Oromia, and other ethnic-based armed groups, among the Somali, Afar and Sidama. Their main demand was for self-rule, or secession. Therefore, a federal arrangement that restructured the state on the basis of shared rule, and self rule, was a necessary condition for round-table conflict management, before most of the armed groups in the country would disarm (Ibid).

However, although federalization of the state was a necessary condition for its survival, the reason that the EPRDF wanted an ethnic-based federal approach depended on a number of interrelated factors. First, the EPRDF's choice of an ethnic-based federalism was influenced by the Marxist understanding of the national question in Ethiopia. The national question in Ethiopia was compared to the national question of the Russian empire at the end of the 19th century. Hence, the Ethiopian student movement during the 1960s considered Haile Silassie's Ethiopia as the 'prison house' of nationalities and advocated self-determination of nations up to secession (Mekonnen, 1969). The TPLF leadership, which was highly influenced by the radical student movements in the 1960s, adopted the Marxist understanding of nationalities into its political programme and used it as an ideological guidance in the armed struggle that overthrew the military regime in 1991 (Markakis, 1998). The Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), which was established by the core leaders of the TPLF in 1985, took the national question in Ethiopia not only as an immediate question that had to be resolved through self-determination but also wanted to use it as a tactic of socialist revolution to overcome the barriers between the nationalities in Ethiopia. After the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989, the MLLT officially disappeared as a result of the unfavourable global conditions for Marxist

political parties¹. However, the EPRDF incorporated the ideas of self-determination up to secession and ethnic-based federalism into the constitutional design during the transitional period (1991-1994). Accordingly, the Ethiopian ethnic groups were understood to all have their own culture, psychological makeup and residential territories (Article 39). The Ethiopian nationalities were also considered as having different levels of social cohesion and economic development. Hence, they were categorised as nations, nationalities and people, which is quite similar to Stalin's categorisation of the ethnic groups in the former Soviet Union. Consequently, the ethnic groups which were considered relatively bigger and more economically developed established their own regional states and the smaller ones established Zones, Woreda and even Kebele levels of administration. This is also quite similar to the four tiers of republics established after the constitutional amendment of the Soviet Union in 1924. Therefore, Marxist understanding of the national question became the ideological basis for the federal constitutional design during the transitional period.

However, the ideological issue was not the only factor which contributed to the ethnic-based constitutional design. The process of the armed struggle and the balance of power between the armed political parties also influenced the constitutional design. The armed struggle against the military regime, which was mainly conducted in Tigray, created liberated areas, including some places which were formerly administered under Gondar and Wollo provinces. When the TPLF liberated most parts of the Tigrinya-speaking areas in the north of Ethiopia, the assumption was to create self-rule for Tigray. Hence, after the downfall of the military regime, ethnic-based federalism was the best way in which this could be legitimized. However, giving self-

¹ Interview notes, former central committee member of TPLF, Addis Ababa, May 2011.

rule only to Tigray and following another approach in the rest of the country was incompatible with the ideology of the TPLF and would also undermine the legitimacy of the ruling party in the eyes of many other ethnic groups including the Oromos, Somalis and Afars, who had also fought for self-rule during the military regime. Similarly, following an integrative approach of federalism was not a choice for the EPRDF because it could challenge its legitimacy in its main support area of Tigray and in the other parts of Ethiopia that had fought for self-rule.

A former TPLF member of the Central Committee explains this as follows:

It is not because that we were Marxists we fought for Tigray self-rule. The demand for ethnic-based self-rule was a necessary result of the tyrannical relationship of the Ethiopian nation state and its constituents. Then the process of the armed struggle brought all the liberated areas of the Tigrayina speaking people together into one *de facto* administration. Thus, providing a sustainable administration to the people (ethnic group) through ethnic-based federalism was a basic political right of the people².

Nonetheless, it is possible that the EPRDF would have negotiated on the constitutional design, if there had been other strong, multinational political parties that had had a role in overthrowing the military regime in 1991. However, this did not happen because the opposition parties were organisationally weak and this created favourable condition for EPRDF domination of the domestic politics of the transitional period and of the constitutional design process. Therefore, the reason that the EPRDF chose a constitutional design based on ethnic federalism has to be

² Interview notes, Addis Ababa, May 2011

answered in relation to the above factors. In other words, if the power balances in the domestic politics had been different from that described above, then the process of federal constitutional design would probably have been different, regardless of the Marxist influence on the EPRDF.

The Transitional Period and the Federalisation Process

As the country emerged from protracted civil war a transitional period was necessary to prepare for the federalisation process. Establishing a transitional government, which could stabilise the country and drafting and ratifying a new constitution became the main tasks during the transitional period. However, in the aftermath of the civil war, two contradictory attitudes were seen among the political actors of the country. On one hand, the ethno-national movements showed interest in participating in the transitional government. For example, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) agreed to participate in the transitional government during the negotiations, held in London and mediated by Herman Cohen, the USA's Deputy Secretary of State for African Affairs. Other national representatives, including those from Afar, Somali, Gambella, and Sidama, also agreed to participate in the transitional government (Fiseha, 2006:47).

However, on the other hand there was reluctance, on the side of the multinational political parties, to become involved in the transitional government. For example, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) which had irreconcilable political differences and armed confrontations with EPRDF during the armed struggle was not ready for reconciliation (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003).

A transitional conference was held in Addis Ababa in July 1991. Thirty-one political parties, including all members of EPRDF³, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the Afar Liberation Front (ALF), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), and other newly established political parties from the Southern region as well as professional associations such as the Labour Confederation and Addis Ababa University, attended the conference. They signed the charter which led to the establishment of a transitional council with 87 seats. Moreover, a power-sharing agreement was reached between the political parties, in accordance with their contribution to the armed struggle fought against the military regime. The conference passed decisions to change the state structure, to maintain peace and order, and to stabilise the economy (Fiseha, 2006:47-:53).

The Charter created a remarkable change in the state structure (Fiseha, 2006, Young, 1998, Menigestab, 1997). It made ethnicity the main factor of political representation in political institutions. This guaranteed the ethnic groups the right of self-determination, including the right to establish local and regional administrations. In all, some 64 ethnic groups were identified and 48 of them were allowed to establish a Woreda, which is the lowest local government unit. The remaining ethnic groups were considered minorities. Their population size was too small to establish the Woreda level administration, so instead they joined a district level administration. Language difference was taken as the main ethnic marker between the ethnic groups (Fiseha, 2006:47-53). The basis for the division of Ethiopia between nationalities was the

³ The Member parties of EPRDF in the aftermath of the civil war were the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), later the Amhara People's Democratic Movement (APDM) and the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO). The Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) was another party that became a member party of EPRDF during the transitional period.

work of the institute for the study of Ethiopian nationalities established by the Derg before 1991, with its emphasis on language.

Popular regional and local elections were held for the first time in the country, with the regional elections being originally scheduled for June 1992 (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003). However, the OLF and the All Amhara People's Organisation (AAPO) asked for a postponement of the elections because they needed more time to prepare; but the EPRDF insisted they take place as scheduled. As a result, the OLF withdrew from the transitional government and attempted to re-launch guerrilla insurgency. The AAPO also withdrew from the elections. Consequently, the EPRDF won the elections without significant competition from opposition parties (Fiseha, 2006).

Following the withdrawal of the opposition parties, other activities of the transitional period included the constitution-drafting process, elections for the constitutional assembly, and the elections for the first national and regional parliaments. This was all done without the meaningful participation of the opposition parties. There were a number of reasons for this. First, the OLF only participated half heartedly in the transitional process. It was not ready to disarm its fighters and was recruiting new candidates mainly from the former soldiers of the military regime, and it was accused of killing innocent people in Bedono, Arusi and Arba-Gugu ⁴ (Minutes of the transitional government council, 1992). Second, the opposition parties were fragmented during the transitional period. They did not have clear policy alternatives that enabled them to appeal to the public. Nor did they have cohesive party structures, which would have enabled them to compete with EPRDF with its strong country-wide

⁴ The transitional council established a committee that scrutinised all the accusations against OLF and these were discussed in the presence of OLF before it left the council.

party structure (Fiseha, 2006:53). Third, preferential treatment by EPRDF towards its member parties in the Oromia and southern regions created obstacles for the OLF and other opposition parties in the south (Birhanu, 2003).

Overall, the state was radically changed during the transitional period. However, the domination of one political party, and the minimal participation of the opposition parties, remained the main drawback of the transitional period. The result was that the new transitional institutions such as the central and regional government institutions fell completely under the control of the ruling party. In fact, it can be concluded that the transitional process created conditions that favoured the ruling party's control of the emerging federal state and its institutions.

Institutionalising of Ethnic Identity and its Consequences

The Ethiopian federal arrangement can be considered as a federalisation of the unitary state into a federal centre and constituent units. The main purpose of this arrangement was to change the structure of the unitary state which caused the formation of armed ethno-national movements and civil wars in the country.

The late Ato Kifle Wodajo, who headed the Constitutional Drafting Committee, aptly stated that:

Like most other constitutions, the constitution of FDRE has been greatly influenced by, and has, in fact, emerged out of the immediate conditions that preceded it – three decades of protracted civil wars that destroyed countless lives and livelihoods, and wreaked havoc on the social fabric of Ethiopian society. The constitution was designed to remove the causes of future civil

wars; to restore peace and sustain it; and to establish a democratic order in which the rights of national communities and of citizens are recognised and protected.⁵

The federal constitution became effective through the proclamation of statute No 1/1995. The constitution particularly gives attention to the right of self-determination of ethnic groups (Article, 39). Therefore, institutionalising ethnic identity can be considered the main feature of the federal arrangement, hence the description ‘ethnic federalism’. In other words, this feature became the main determining factor for the power relationships and intergovernmental relationships between the centre and the constituent units. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, focusing on nationality, the constitution stipulates that sovereign power lies with the nationalities of the country (Article 8/1). Accordingly, the federal institutions of governance are established with the consent of the stipulated nationalities. Moreover, the nationalities can withdraw their consent to the federal government through the provisions of session, provided for them by the constitution. “Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession” (Article 39/1).

Secondly, the constitution enables the ethnic groups to administer themselves on the basis of their identity differences. “Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable

⁵ Advisory opinion given by Ato Kifle Wodajo to the House of Federation, on the constitutionality of Article 38(1)(b) of proclamation 11/1995, February 2003

representation in state and federal governments” (Article 39/3). Accordingly, the constitution has identified nine regional states. Among these Oromia, Amhara, Somal, Tigray and Afar are predominantly composed of the ethnic groups that give their name to the regional states. Others, including Benishangul-Gumuz, the Southern regional state, Gambela and Hararri reflect multiethnic regional states, where the lower level of governance is established on the basis of ethnic identity.

Finally, the constitution stipulates that borders of regional administrations can be identified on the basis of ethnic identity. “States shall be delimited on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned” (Article 46/2). Therefore, the Ethiopian federal system institutionalises ethnic identity through the regional states and lower level administrations which are established along ethnic lines.

Language as Main Ethnic Marker

For the above purpose language has been taken as the main ethnic marker (in practice) to identify ethnic groups, regional states and their common borders for the last 18 years. However, this has caused much debate. It is argued that the federal constitution assumes that every ethnic group inhabits a territorially defined geographical area (Vaugan, 2008; Fiseha, 2006:135). But this does not take into account migration. For example, a number of Amhara people migrated to Oromia and the southern regions during the Menilek expansion, and later in search of economic opportunities. The military regime resettlement package also moved more than 600,000 people to Gambella, Wallaga, Metekel and Asossa (Pankhurst, 2002). Moreover, the urban

areas are multi-lingual and the growing mobility of the population, due to social, economical and political change, means it is less feasible to use language as an ethnic marker in Ethiopia (Fiseha, 2006:253-254).

However, the use of language as an ethnic marker is related to the level of integration of the ethnic groups within the state and the social structure of the rural population. The nation building project, which originally focused on establishing garrison towns around the commercial farms, served to maintain the centre and periphery relationships between the nation-state and the ethnic groups. Because of this, the rural people remained ‘loosely’ integrated within the nation state (Donham, 1985).

This can also be seen from a sample of ethnic groups in the country as shown in the table below. The sample was of the larger ethnic groups, which established regional states, and the most urbanised ethnic groups. Accordingly, 76% and 42% of Hararri and Gurague’s ethnic groups, respectively, live in urban areas; whereas the population of the other ethnic groups – ranging from 76%-95% – live in rural areas. On average 83% of the Ethiopian population live in rural areas.

4.1. Urban and Rural dwellers by regional states

	Total population	Urban	Rural	Percentage of the urban population	Percentage of the rural population ⁶
Afar	1,276,374	108,488	1,167,886	9	91
Amhara	19,870,651	4,387,853	15,482,798	22	78
Oromo	25,489,024	3,045,027	22,443,997	12	88
Hadya	1,284,373	150,949	1,133,424	12	88
Sidama	2,966,474	149,480	2,816,994	5	95
Welaita	1,707,079	289,707	1,417,372	17	83
Guragie	1,867,377	792,659	1,074,718	42	58
Berta	183,259	10,611	172,648	6	94
Somali	4,581,794	675,466	3,906,328	15	85
Newer	147,672	28,236	119,436	19	81
Harari	31,869	24,347	7,522	77	23

Source: Central Statistics Authority of Ethiopia (CSAE), Census of 2007.

People in the rural areas still depend on a peasant-based subsistence economy. This means ethnic ties have remained more significant in the rural areas. Because of this the group identity of the rural people can easily be identified by their language. So, language difference, in rural areas, is closely related to cultural and identity differences (James et al, 2002).

Okwudiba Nnoli (1978:5) explains the crucial role of language in the context of Africa as follows:

Ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. The relevant fact may be language, culture or both. In Africa, language has been the most crucial variable.

This quotation helps explain the relevance of language in defining ethnic groups in the context of Ethiopia, because many ethnic groups do not differ other than in their language and culture. For example, there is no significant noticeable physical

⁶ The percentage calculation is the researcher's.

difference between the Berta and Gumuz ethnic groups in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. Nevertheless, the ethnic groups have different languages, cultures and traditional faiths as well as different territories. Similarly, despite the common interaction between the Amhara and Oromos ethnic groups, they have mutually unintelligible languages, different cultures and they live in separate areas, except for those Amharas who migrated to the Ormos territories during the emergence of the modern Ethiopian state. Therefore, language difference is one of the major ethnic markers in Ethiopia.

4.2. Percentage of different languages speakers in regional states

Regional state	Main language	Percentage of speakers ⁷
Tigray	Tigrigna	97
Amhara	Amharic	91
Afar	Afar	96
Oromia	Oromifa	91
Somali	Somali	98
Southern regional state	Multi-lingual	
Benishangul-Gumuz	Multi-lingual	
Gambella	Multi-lingual	
Harari	Multi-lingual	

Source: CSAE, National census of 2007

The language difference also reflects, in many cases, the territorial difference of the ethnic groups. For example, the above table shows in the first five regional states more than 90% of the population speak the official languages of the regional states. This means the language difference and territorial residence of the ethnic groups coincides in these states. Even in the multi-ethnic regional states the predominant ethnic groups have their own territory. Multi-ethnic regional states exist because of political, social and economic advantages and because many of the ethnic groups are

⁷ Percentages calculated by the researcher.

too small to establish their own regional administration (Desalegn, 2003). Therefore, the argument against an ethnic identity as the main criteria for the federal arrangement, and language as the main ethnic marker, does not seem valid in the context of Ethiopia. There are solid grounds for using language as an ethnic marker – as the ethnic groups primarily live in rural areas, speak their own language, have cultural differences, and live predominantly in their own territories.

However, a language may be spoken by neighbouring groups and in the common border areas of ethnic groups or by two or more ethnic groups; hence, the Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda speak the same language and share the same territory and cultural traditions (Francis, 2006:78). If this is the main trend of the ethnic groups under investigation, there are no grounds for language to be used as an ethnic marker. Nevertheless, in the context of Ethiopia and except in the garrison towns (established during the unitary state), Addis Ababa and the common borders of the ethnic groups, the majority of the ethnic groups speak their own languages and these convey the cultural and territorial differences of the various peoples.

The role of urban areas and the mobility of people in promoting a federal identity also has to be seen alongside the overall territorial residency of ethnic groups in the country. Although economic development and urbanisation facilitate greater mobility of people that does not mean all cities become multi-cultural. There is an evolving tendency towards both multicultural and homogenous cities in Ethiopia. In many parts of the country, mainly in those regional states where the spoken language is predominantly homogenous, the spoken language in the cities and towns follows a similar tendency. For example, Mekelle and Bahrdar are growing as Tigrigna- and

Amharic-speaking cities respectively (National census, 2007). In those multi-ethnic regional states such as the southern one there will be multi-ethnic cities as well as smaller ethnic-based towns. For example, Hawassa, the capital city of the southern region, is evolving as a multi-cultural city; whereas Hosaena, a town also in the southern region, is evolving as a centre of the Hadiya ethnic group as the people in the rural areas surrounding the town are only Hadiya by ethnic identity (Ibid).

However, whether the cities are multiethnic or homogenous, civic relationship is a common feature of all of them. The existence of civic relationships in the urban areas also enhances civic ties between the members of ethnic groups, which greatly facilitate the cultivation of federal identity in the country. However, the urban areas do not need to be multi-cultural to become centres of civic ties and federal identity. Civic ties can develop in homogenous as well as multi-cultural cities; therefore both types of cities can be a centre of federal identity (Simeon and Murry, 2004).

In addition, it has to be clear that federalisation of the state imposes a constitutional framework upon urbanisation (Elazar, 1987:256). This means that federalisation of the state reduces the adverse effects of urbanisation that cause migration of people, as happened during the unitary state because of uneven economic development. In other words, the resource-sharing mechanisms devised by the federal system encourage evolving small towns that can create employment opportunities for their residents (ibid). Therefore, multi-ethnic urban areas cannot be the main phenomenon of Ethiopian economic development. However, as the country emerges into a developed nation, mobility of people (but not migration) could be increased because of the emergence of networks of different interest groups and of professional employment

opportunities, as seen in developed countries. At this stage there is a greater chance for multi-cultural urban areas to emerge. This means that group rights have to be redefined in accordance with the societal development level.

Nevertheless, the focus of the federal arrangement and federalisation process on ethnicity has had some consequences. These include imbalances between the promotion of ethnic and national identities, imbalances between the sizes (geographical and population) of the regional states, lack of minority rights protection and the issue of secession. These problems are primarily associated with the weakness of the constitutional design which will be discussed in the following sections. As a result some of them have become causes of intra-state violent conflicts in some regional states. Others can also potentially damage the federal integrity of the country which is assumed to be built up in the federal process.

Relationship between National and Ethnic-Identities

It is argued that the above parameters for the institutionalisation of ethnic identity are influenced by a primordial approach to ethnicity. The constitution implicitly denies the existences of other identities of people who cannot be defined by the ethnic markers specified in the constitution. For example, there could be many people with mixed identities or people who were born and grew up in urban areas such as Addis Ababa. These people may not have close affiliation to one of the ethnic groups in the country; therefore, they may define themselves only as Ethiopians. Moreover, the constitution also considers that all the ethnic groups have their own territorial residence. Although this is predominantly true for the reasons discussed in the previous sections, it does not consider the intermingled residential territories of the

ethnic groups in some places and along their common border areas (Aalen, 2006:246-248).

The practical implication of the above constitutional problem manifests itself in lower attention to the commonness of the ethnic groups. This is demonstrated by lower attention to citizenship rights and lack of minority rights protection in the regional states. Moreover, the constitutional emphasis on ethnicity encourages ethnic-based competition aimed at controlling state resources and identity-based demands targeted at establishing ethnic-based local administrations, which, in turn, create a wider access to state resources for the ethnic-based elite groups (Kefale, 2004; Aalen, 2006:248; Aalen, 2008). This is further discussed in the following sections of the Chapter and in Chapters Six and Seven.

Different Geographical and Population Sizes of Regional States

One of the major consequences of the ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia is that it has created regional states with significant geographical and population size differences. For example, some of the regional states including, Oromia, Amhara and Somali, are bigger in area than Harari, Gambella and Benishangul- Gumuz. Similarly, Amhara and Oromia between them have around 60% of the total Ethiopian population. This has provoked several controversies among scholars.

The Ethiopian constitution enables ethnic groups to create their own ‘mother state’ (Article 39/3). This is because creating a ‘mother state’ was considered the best means of realising the right of ethnic group self-determination. However, it is argued that the criteria for the establishment of the regional states are not entirely clear. For example,

some ethnic groups with smaller population such as the Harari established their own regional states. However, other ethnic groups with relatively greater population such as the Sidama in the Southern region were not allowed to establish a regional state although they have made demands for that⁸. Therefore, in addition to the unfair treatment of the demands of the ethnic groups in practice it has led to the establishment of smaller regional states, such as Harari, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella, on one hand, and bigger regional states, such as Oromia and Amhara, on the other.

This has caused great concern about both vertical and horizontal inequalities between the states (Fiseha, 2006; Turton, 2006; Clapham, 2006). For example, Fiseha (2006) argues that as Oromia and Amhara together have more than 50% of the seats in the federal parliament, a coalition of the winning parties from these regional states could threaten the federal structure. In addition, Clapham (2006) argues that as Amhara and Oromia are historically rival regional states, they may not be prepared to work together in a coalition and competition between them to control the centre could lead to fierce lobbying to gain support from other regional states, such as in the south. This could destabilize the status quo between the central and regional forces. Moreover, as Kefale (2008) noted, the geographical and population size differences between the regional states could create administrative and logistical consequences. For instance, the small size of some the regional states such as the Harari could create difficulty in ensuring their economic viability. The bigger regional states could also feel they are subsidizing the smaller regional states at the expense of their tax payers (Kefale, 2008).

⁸ Representatives of the Sidama ethnic group have officially asked the regional and federal governments whether they can establish their regional state mainly during the first decade of the federal state.

The imbalance of the population and geographical size of the regional states is also manifested in their relationship with the federal government. Based on field research, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state does not have any representation in federal executive institutions. However, the Oromia and Amhara regional states are represented in many of the executive ministries. This has created a sense of exclusion from the federal institutions so far as Benishangul-Gumuz is concerned, particularly during the management of the border conflicts between this state and the Oromia and Amhara regional states.⁹ This was also manifested in the budget allocation made by the HOF. The parameters used by HOF to allocate the federal subsidy to regional states were mainly related to population size. Hence, in the 2006 budget subsidy the smaller regional states, such as Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz and Afar, did not receive enough money to cover their recurrent budgets. Thus, the main opposition to the budget subsidy comes from the smaller regional states (Fortune, 2008).

This has led to suggestions for a refining of the structure of the regional states that could strengthen the federal arrangement. This could be done by dividing the bigger regional states into two or more units, and so enabling the federal state to deal with more equal sized regional states. This would create sustainable stability as it would give a slight advantage to the central forces over the regional forces (Fiseha, 2006, Clapham, 2006; Turton, 2006, Kefale, 2008).

However, the idea of dividing the bigger regional states into smaller ones has to be treated with caution. Two major points need to be considered. First, the impact of the division on the ethno-national sentiment and federal identity: for example, in Oromia

⁹ Interview notes, President of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, May 2008

there are regional differences which are manifested in religion and way of life (Fiseha, 2006). However, a feeling of ‘oneness’ has evolved in this state, mainly since the establishment of the Mehanana-Tuluma self-help association in 1960 and this has been strengthened by the establishment of the regional institutions of governance since 1991.¹⁰ Moreover, there are no significant differences in the dialect of Oromiffa, the language spoken in all parts of Oromia (Baxter, 1978). Therefore, it is debatable whether an attempt to divide Oromia into different units will enhance an Oromo ethno-national sentiment or promote a federal identity.

The second point relates to ethnic-based political parties using the case of Nigeria. Suberu (2006) argues that the division of the former three regional states into 9 then 12 and finally into 36 states has enabled central government to reduce the challenge that came from the bigger regional states. This arrangement was achieved by banning ethnic-based political parties in Nigeria. However, the bigger ethnic groups still compete with each other to control the federal institutions of governance (Suberu, 2004). In Ethiopia, banning ethnic-based political parties might harm the smaller ethnic groups. This is because the ethnic-based political parties can be useful to the smaller ethnic groups to articulate their interests and make them visible in the regional and federal institutions of governance. It might also undermine the benefits of the smaller ethnic groups that have gained from the federal arrangement.

Therefore, the idea of dividing Oromia and Amhara into different units could lead to unintended problems that might harm the federal structure. However, under the existing structure, with some refinement, healthy competition between the ethnic

¹⁰ Interview notes, administration and security experts, Oromia regional state, Addis Ababa, June 2008

groups could be maintained. Firstly, every ethnic group is aware that no individual group should dominate the federal state. The optimum goal of an ethnic group is to have a political role that reflects its population size. This could be achieved through, for example, its federal working language, allocation of the executive power, or budget subsidy. The federal state must resolve such issues in order to avoid unnecessary competition that can lead to conflict (Gudina, 2003). Secondly, increasing the role of the smaller ethnic groups at the centre could help achieve these goals. The role of the smaller ethnic groups would have to be increased, among other things, in all conflict management institutions, such as the HOF, the Prime Minister's office, the Federal police, and defence. This would promote fairer competition at the centre and mediation between groups when problems arise (Esman, 2004). Thirdly, equal resource allocation could also minimize the competition at the centre. If resources at the centre were allocated transparently and fairly, unnecessary competition to control the centre would be reduced significantly. To achieve it would be important to establish an independent commission of budget subsidy (Negussie, 2006) or introduce other mechanisms that enhance the transparency and accountability of the existing system.

Different Levels of Regional Economic Development and Relationships to the Ethiopian State

The ethnic-based federalization has also resulted in the creation of regional states with different levels of economic development and relationships to the historic structures of the Ethiopian state. For example, among the nine regional states, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Afar and Somali are considered as emerging (developing) states compared to the others. Historically, the people in the emerging regional states have

been considered as peripheries. As a result the nation-state's interest in these people had been focused on exploiting their resources rather than developing them (Donham, 1985). For these reasons, the peripheral regional states lag behind the others in all social, economic and development factors.

The federal government has also enhanced utilization of the fertile land in the peripheral regional states for modern agricultural farms. For example, cotton and sugar plantations have expanded in the lower Awash valley which, in turn, can greatly affect the livelihood of the Afar people in Dubti Woreda and Mile, for example. In addition, the people who come to work on the modern farms are mainly from the highland areas of Ethiopia. This affects the demographic composition of the local population¹¹.

The peripheral regional states have also been the most conflict-prone areas over the last 20 years. For example, Benishangul-Gumuz remained unstable during the transitional period and for the first decade of the federalisation of the country. The Gambella regional state also faced serious violent conflict between Anuak and Nuer, which resulted in hundreds of deaths and the migration of thousands of people to neighbouring countries (Feyissa, 2006). The Somali regional state has also remained a war zone.

Geopolitical factors, which include the political and religious interests of regional and international powers, play a role in the instability of the peripheral regional states. For example, an increase in Islamic fundamentalism in the politics of Sudan greatly

¹¹ Interview notes, Semera, Afar regional state, August 2010.

affected the domestic politics of Benishangul during the transitional period (1991-1994). The Ogaden issue became one of the causes of the 1977, 1978 and 1982 Ethio-Somali wars during the military regime (1975-1991) and the 2006-2008 Ethio-Somali wars during the EPRDF regime (1991 onwards). The independence of Southern Sudan from the North could also affect the politics of Gambella, for different reasons. Firstly, the Anuak and Nuer in Ethiopia are part of the bigger Anuak and Nuer ethnic groups in South Sudan. They have historically been marginalised from the centre; hence, their relationship with their counterparts in Sudan has been better than that with the rest of Ethiopia. Therefore, whether the ethnic groups in Gambella can integrate into the federal state depends on whether they would be better off than their counterparts in South Sudan. This shows that the stability of the peripheral regional states not only depends on internal factors but also on regional and international geopolitical factors.

The stability of the peripheral regional states is also related to their relationship with the centre. Although the federal constitution considers these states as equal to the others, the EPRDF considered the peripheral regional states as emerging and requiring special support and an intergovernmental relationship with the federal government. Accordingly, the federal government attempted to support them using special executive authorities originally organised under the Prime Minister's office and, later, through the Ministry of Federal Affairs. The ruling party also excluded the regional parties of the peripheral regional states from its structure and created partner relationships with them. However, as argued by Feyissa (2006), the involvement of the EPRDF and the federal government in the internal affairs of the peripheral regional states did not create regional capacities capable of realising regional interests.

One of the contributing factors for this is that the ruling party and the federal government focused on urgent security matters rather than capacity and development issues in the regional states. The approach of the federal government and the ruling party has, therefore, undermined the regional capacity for policy-making which, in turn, has contributed to greater power competition between the political elites of the peripheries and to the instability of the regional states.

The Issue of Minority Rights

The Constitution is vague with regard to minority groups that were created when the new federal restructuring was implemented in 1995. This has led to clashes between the entitlements of individuals and groups in the country. For example, in Oromia regional state among the 27,158,471 people only 23,846,380 are Oromos. This means 18% per cent of the total population are non-Oromos, and among these 5.46% are Amharas (National Census, 2007). The non-Oromos cannot stand for elections in the regional state (Beken, 2007:123). Similarly, in Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz the number of settlers is almost half of the total population, but they have limited political participation. The settlers in Gambella are not allowed to hold elections (Feyissa, 2006).

The Harari regional constitution also created elite minority and subordinated majority groups. For example, the state is predominantly composed of Oromo, Amhara and Harari, with populations of 103,421; 41,755 and 15,858 respectively (National, Census, 2007). However, the regional constitution allows the Harari to establish the regional state although Oromos also can share regional political power as a junior

partner. The Amhara do not have a right to hold elections although they can vote (Kefale and Jemma, 2007).

The problem here is that there is no clear procedure for the political participation of minority groups. Hence, this situation has created a clash with the constitutional political rights of citizens¹². Therefore, this kind of majority-minority relationship will remain as a structural source of conflicts unless corrected at national level.

The Issue of Secession

The Ethiopian constitution stipulates the right of secession in the following way: “Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession” (Article 39/1). However, this has invoked controversy. On the one hand it is argued that the right of secession is relevant to Ethiopia when considering its historical context and the balance of power which was created between the ethno-national movements and the central forces during the transitional period (Eshete, 2003, Tewfiq, 2003, Barnabas, 2003, Abbay, 2004).

As the other national political parties were disorganised during the transitional period the political forces available to negotiate the establishment of a new government were EPRDF and OLF. But OLF was fighting for independence in Oromia. Therefore, right of secession had a negotiating effect which in practice brought the OLF and national movements in the Somali region into the transitional government (Eshete,

¹² Article 38/1/a-C:

“Every Ethiopian national, without any discrimination based on colour, race, nation, nationality, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion or other status, has the following rights: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly and through freely chosen representatives (b) On the attainment of 18 years of age, to vote in accordance with law (c) To vote and to be elected at periodic elections to any level of government; elections shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors”.

2003:158). In addition, the historical relationship of the nation-state and the ethnic groups is characterised by tyranny, which contributed to the secessionist tendencies of the ethno-national movements. This has forced the ethno-national movements to include secession in their political programmes; and the inclusion of secession in the constitution could play a 'holding together' role (Eshete, 2003:168).

But there are three divergent debates on the constitutional right of secession. The first one comes from the central forces, which oppose the constitutional recognition of ethnic identity and the constitutionalising of it into the political structure of the country. This stems from a denial of ethnic identity as a social structure in society. As maintained by Gudina (2006), those who deny, and even refuse to talk about, ethnic identity have little influence in Ethiopian politics. This is because ethnic identity has been an issue since the student movements of the 1960s and it was recognised by the Derg regime as such, when it came to power, and in the 1987 constitution. The second debate comes from those who consider that ethnic identity has to be protected, like any identity in society, advocate for constitutional democracy. In other words ethnic identity can be protected by exercising individual rights. Scholars, such as Webengda (2005), oppose Ethiopian federalism and secession from the perspective of constitutional democracy. They propose an integrative type of federalism, which fosters individual rights.

The third view on the constitutional right of secession, which the author of this research shares, comes from those who accept the constitutional right of self-determination of all nationalities but do not consider secession to be useful to the conflict management process. Fiseha (2003) puts forward three points with regard to

this. The first point stems from his argument of unity with diversity and the impact of secession on the federal agreement. In federal states, although the powers of the central and federal governments are equally protected by the constitution, they do not have equal power. In fact, if the status quo of the federal arrangement is to be maintained it has to have supremacy. It is by this combination of central and regional forces that the balance of power is sustained. Fiseha makes this point:

To come to the nexus between federal supremacy and the unity–diversity matrix, in established federations one should note that the explicit declaration of the supremacy of federal law over state law is something that reflects the outcome of the unity-diversity combination during the federal bargain (2003:313).

The second point is related to citizenship rights. The federal government is established from the direct participation of all citizens and with the consent of the states. The source of the federal government's power is both the direct participation of citizens in the lower house and the participation of states in the upper house. The existence of the federal state depends on a dual power exercise. Therefore, in federations there is nothing that can be designated as an absolute power to the regional states, especially those that were unitary states before federalisation. This principle governs the relationship between the federal and regional governments of any country (Ibid). The third point is related to the contractual agreement of the federalised state. The federal contractual agreement brings the federal state and regional states into existence, with all their bargaining power, but does not confer sovereignty on the regional states, unless and otherwise there is a con-federal arrangement (Fiseha, 2003:317). Fiseha (2003) argues that the Ethiopian federal

structure has to be thought through carefully in order to create a balanced combination of unity with diversity.

Fiseha's argument can also be strengthened by the practical implication of the right of secession to conflict management. The right of secession could undermine the common national sentiment of the ethnic-groups created during the last century. As Fiseha (2003) argued the Ethiopian federal arrangement is a federalisation of a unitary state, which has existed for almost a century. In this process, the Ethiopian ethnic groups created their history together. In other words, when the Ethiopian state was federalised in 1995, there was a sense of shared Ethiopian identity, which was by far stronger than among those who came to a federalised state from different sovereign states, such as the USA¹³ and Nigeria¹⁴. Therefore, the 'tyranny' of the nation state seems solid ground for a federal state, like Ethiopia, on which to build a sustained diverse unity.

The balance of power, which was created between the central and regional forces during the transitional period, has to be seen within the above context. It is a fact that the recognition of 'referendum' as an element of the transitional charter offered a bargaining chip, particularly for the OLF and the armed fronts in the Somali region (Eshete, 2003). However, if we see the transitional charter as an accord of post-conflict management, it aims to create a peaceful situation that enables the conflicting parties to settle their differences in round table discussions. The recognition of a referendum as a means of peace creation may be acceptable. However, this does not

¹³ The Civil war in the USA happened after the formation of the confederation of the American states.

¹⁴ The Biafra civil war in Nigeria can be taken as an example of loose relationship between a federal state and its constituent units.

mean that all the elements contained in the transitional charter have to be included in the constitution. What is included depends on the power relationship and on the outcome of the negotiation process of the contending parties.

The constitutional draft was one of the tasks of the transitional period that had to be negotiated between the contending parties. The OLF was the main champion of secession, as it put secession as a primary goal of its political programme, but it had already left the transitional government before June 1992; possibly before the constitutional draft was written (Pausewang et al, 2002). Moreover if EPRDF were not the champion of the right of secession, it would have had more scope to bargain with the Somali regional opposition parties on unity with diversity. The Tigray population fought for self rule (Eshete, 2003; Markakis, 1987) but the issue of independence did not have a mobilising effect on them. This is because, in Tigray the Ethiopian national sentiment, which is historically entrenched, has never been compromised, even when the military regime conducted mass killings during the armed struggle (Young, 1998). Therefore, there was not significant domestic pressure forcing the constitutional drafting committee to incorporate the right of secession into the draft constitution by the time the OLF left the transitional government and when EPRDF had an upper hand to bargain with the Somali armed forces.

Therefore, the ideological background of the EPRDF would seem to be of paramount importance. EPRDF saw secession as a crucial element of the right of self-determination. It adopted this view from Marxist ideology but the idea was not only related to Marxism. Liberals also argued for secession, based on the right to vote or withdraw support for governments (Turk, 1999:115; Neuberger, 1995). EPRDF

believed that in multi-ethnic countries, like Ethiopia, the tendency to dominate can be mitigated by the right to secede that enables people to withdraw their consent from the federation. Accordingly, from the point of view of EPRDF, the right of secession increased tolerance and respect and the democratic unity of the country. And if the worst came to the worse secession could prevent violent conflict by enabling people to conduct a peaceful divorce from the federation.¹⁵

The ideological belief of EPRDF about the right to secede is debatable. However, when the constitutional right of secession is related to practical conflict management a number of issues must be considered. In multi-ethnic countries there is always a tendency of differentiation of identity, a tendency of one to dominate the other. This tendency exists in every ethnic group and can be managed by creating a kind of political arrangement that promotes collaborations and mutual respect between the ethnic groups (Eriksen, 2002).

In the Ethiopian context, the federal constitution manages the above tendencies by considering all the nationalities as minority groups at the federal level. In other words, there is no one ethnic group that can gain majority status within the federal state – reflecting the situation in the country. Even the larger states of Oromia and Amhara would not have majority status, unless they were allied. Therefore, it is the shared rule of all the ethnic groups that creates a majority status in the country (Amoretti, 2004). In such an arrangement, if one attempts to dominate the others its sustainability is reduced. This is because the ethnic group which attempts to dominate will have less representation at the centre, compared to the other ethnic groups combined. The

¹⁵ Minutes of the constitutional assembly, 1994

Amhara elite group domination in the last century had its own particular historical factors (Markakis, 1987). Nevertheless, even in that situation, the smaller population of Amhara, compared to the other ethnic groups, contributed to the failure of the nation-state. As any one ethnic group is not able to retain a majority status at the centre, and none of them want to be dominated, this gives the ethnic groups a stronger combined negotiating capacity. This, in turn, reinforces tolerance and respect between the ethnic groups. The outcome of this process is unity with diversity.

Moreover, a peaceful status quo is not possible through secession in Ethiopia. If we consider Oromia, for example, which is located at the heart of Ethiopia, its independence would mean the disintegration of the country (Gudina, 2006). Moreover, the process of establishing an Oromia independent state could lead to endless conflict as there are mixed identities and inter-marriage, or domestic living arrangements of the ethnic groups, including between Oromia and Somali; Oromia and Amhara; Oromia and Belishangul-Gumuz; and Oromia and the southern regional state. This is also aggravated by the absence of common boundaries between the regions (ibid). Therefore, the right of secession aggravates conflict and makes it difficult for ethnic groups to exercise their right of self-determination.

Furthermore, the right of secession is not a necessary condition for a cultivation of federal identity. In multi-ethnic federal countries a federal identity is cultivated through tolerance, compromise and partnership (Kavalski and Zolkos, 2008). For example, the Indian constitution does not accept secession. However, the federal state's capacity to accommodate and negotiate with ethnic groups contributes to a 'holding together' of society and is resulting in the building of an Indian federal

identity (Bhargava, 2006). Therefore, the right of secession neither contributes to making the system federal nor enables a peaceful divorce.

In conclusion, the institutionalisation of ethnic identity has addressed the causes of civil wars. This was achieved because the constitution devolved power to the ethnic groups, and this has enabled them to acquire elements of self-rule. However, the issues discussed above including imbalances between national identity and ethnic identity, different geographical and population size between the regional states, different levels of economic development, varying relationships to the state, issues of minority rights and the issue of secession could all challenge the sustainability of the federal system, and might necessitate constitutional amendment and refinement.

Mechanisms of Resources Sharing

The Ethiopian federal system follows a centralised tax and revenue system. In doing this the Ethiopian constitution identifies the tax sources of the federal government and the states. The federal government levies taxes and collects revenues from customs duties, imports and exports, income from air, rail and sea transport services; and monopolies (Article 97). The regional states can also levy tax and collect revenue from income taxes on employees of the state, private farmers in the regions, fees for land use and from business firms operating in the regions (Article 97). In addition, the constitution specifies concurrent powers of taxation (Article 98). Unlike the residual political powers, the constitution highlights that undesignated powers of taxation are to be decided by a joint session of the HOF and HORP (Article 99). The constitution also guarantees regional governments a right to receive federal subsidy and gives

them a right to spend money, which enables them to carry out their legal responsibilities (Article 94).

Two features can be identified from the above description of the fiscal responsibilities of the federal and regional governments. Firstly, the major revenue sources are controlled by the federal government. This means that the revenue sources assigned to the regional states are less lucrative in comparison to those sources assigned to the federal government. This makes the regional states financially dependent on the federal government. Secondly, the federal government allocates subsidies on the basis of equality to the regional states. Accordingly, a budget formula is prepared by the HOF, taking into account population size, revenue collection contribution and development disparity between the regional states (Negussie, 2006).

However, this fiscal system has caused controversies. It is argued that the constitution makes the regional states financially dependent on the federal government so that power devolution without financial independence becomes meaningless (Aalen, 2002; Aalen, 2008; Keller, 2002; Negussie, 2006). Moreover, the budget allocation process is not very transparent as it is controlled by the HOF, which is directly controlled by the ruling party. Therefore, the budget formula can unfairly benefit some regional states (Negussie, 2006; Gudina, 2003). The centralised system of the ruling party also prevents the regional states from exercising their expenditure rights (Keller, 2002).

The above criticisms of resource sharing mechanisms basically arise from two factors: The role of the ruling party in controlling the resource sharing mechanisms and the centralised nature of revenue sources. As noted by different scholars (Keller, 2004,

Aalen, 2002, 2006; Negussie, 2006) the ruling party's control of all the resource allocation mechanisms can give a greater opportunity for neo-patrimonial activities. For example, the ruling party controls the HOF which allocates the federal revenue subsidies to regional states. This can give a wider opportunity to benefit the bigger regional states by manipulating the revenue allocation formula as happened in the 2006 budget subsidy allocation to the regional states as discussed earlier. Moreover, the regional states are also controlled by the ruling party. This can create a greater opportunity for the ruling party to use public resources for regime survival including the electoral process as was noted by EU observers during the 2010 national and regional elections¹⁶. Moreover, the ruling party controls the outlets of public expenditures of the regional states¹⁷ (Keller, 2004). This can limit and, in fact, negatively influence the choice of the regional states, which, in turn, influences their development opportunities. The centralised party structure also provides greater opportunity for private resource appropriation as many of its members are involved in decisions about state resource allocations with less accountability mechanisms.

The relationship of the state and the business community is also influenced by neo-patrimonial relationships. Government is very involved in leasing urban and rural land and infrastructure development. Recently, leasing rural and urban land to domestic and international investors has become one of the main sources of government revenue. The government is also the main participant in infrastructure development, such as telecommunications, hydroelectric dams, roads, and water supply (MOFED, 2006). In addition, the recent economy boom, and the emerging private sector,

¹⁶ The EU election observers noted that the ruling party used government resources for election campaigning in the 2010 national and regional elections.

¹⁷ This is because all the lower government hierarchies are controlled by elected party members whose primary accountability is to the ruling party.

created favourable conditions for neo-patrimonial relationships to develop. Moreover, there is an emerging business class, which tends to operate through loyalty and clientelistic networks with government officials (Abbink, 2006:175-177).

As a result, this intensive government involvement in development, the lack of transparency and accountability in the institutions of governance, and the weakness of anti-corruption institutions, has encouraged corruption. The Transparency International corruption perception index (CPI) for Ethiopia underscores this problem. For example, in 2002, the CPI for Ethiopia was 3.5 – which put Ethiopia in the countries which had low corruption practices and better than Malawi (2.9) and many other African countries. However, this has deteriorated significantly over the last eight years and in 2009 reached 2.7. In the same year Malawi's CPI increased to 3.3 (TI reports, 2001-2009). This shows the extent to which corruption is challenging the EPRDF's federal government.

Furthermore, it is argued that the ruling party 'favours' the Tigray region, which is its stronghold, so far as federal government budget subsidies are concerned (Gudina, 2003). As noted earlier, there has been much government involvement in business contracts – resulting in greater opportunity for neo-patrimonial relationships, which can negatively influence the economy. But whether this influence is extended to government expenditure is dependent on the federal control mechanisms. For example, the federal budget subsidy to regional states is controlled by HOF, which includes representation of all regional states. Moreover, budget allocation is done in accordance with a budget formula that is dependent on the population size, development level, and revenue collection capacity of each regional state. Finally, the

annual budget subsidy is approved by HPPR¹⁸. Moreover, the act of favouring Tigray also can affect the loyalty of the EPRDF's member parties to the ruling party. Therefore, resource appropriation, which favours one regional state at the expense of the others, cannot be the manifestation of neo-patrimonial relationship in today's Ethiopia. The problem is related to neo-patrimonial relationships which focus on maintaining regime survival through party and state structures and control the society through patron and client relationships and repression.

Nor does the centralisation of revenue sources have a direct relationship with the role of the ruling party in resource allocation. The minutes of the constitutional assembly (1994) indicate that the main reason behind the choice of centralised revenue sources is equity consideration. However, the constitution gives expenditure freedom to regional states to maintain efficiency (Article 94). Whether these considerations manifest themselves in the context of Ethiopia or not can be discussed with respect to the following points. First, Ethiopia is an underdeveloped country. Infrastructures such as roads and social services like health and education are at a minimum level. Allocation of resources to these sectors can't be left to regional states due to the nationwide urgency of the problems and scarcity of resources. So the federal government has to play a greater role in controlling and allocating the limited revenue available. Second, the federal government emerged from a protracted civil war. Uneven development was one of the causes of the civil war. The federal state now has to play a 'holding together' role to maintain peace and order. In doing this, equitable resource sharing has to be one of the mechanisms of fiscal policy (Eshete, 2003). In addition, tied and untied grants can guide the direction of expenditure by the regional

¹⁸ Interview notes, Speaker of the HOF, Addis Ababa, June 2008

states. Tied grants can be utilised to guide regional states to meet national standards. Untied grants can be used by regional states to satisfy their local preferences (Ndulo, 2006:93).

However, in the Ethiopian context, the decentralisation of revenue collection to regional states has both efficiency and equity consequences. First, programmes designed in one region could involve spillover effects to other regional states (Boadway, 2001:106-107). For example, if the wealthier regional states were allowed to invest more locally, educated and skilled people would migrate to these regions. Moreover, as the service provision in these regions will be better than in other regional states, people would migrate just to receive the services provided. The overall result would be under-utilisation of the human resources of the country. Second, decentralisation of revenue collection will be followed by tax variations between states. As argued by Boadway (2001), this will distort the national common market by creating different markets for labour, capital, goods and services across the common borders of the states. The national resource allocation will therefore be distorted. Third, the decentralisation of revenue sources can also create imbalances between national standards. For example, if the country is to fulfil the millennium goals of education and health services, the programmes have to be supported by equitable budget allocations to all regional states.

Taking the idea of fiscal dependency of the regional states, Negussie (2006) proposes sub-division of the larger regional states, so that states will have balanced revenue sources. However, this does not resolve the main reasons for having centralised revenue sources as discussed above. Whether or not the regional states have equal

revenue sources, if the country is suffering from poverty and development disparity, centralised revenue collection and allocation can help to utilize the available resources more efficiently (Boadway, 2001). Moreover, equality of revenue sources does not necessarily lead to equality in development levels. In addition, equality in revenue sources may not be sustainable as development of new sources in one or more regional states will still create variation between the revenue sources.

However, the fiscal dependency of regional and local administrations has to be reconsidered with respect to administrative divisibility in the country. As discussed earlier, the centralised fiscal policy gives little responsibility to regions in revenue collection but gives them full responsibility of fiscal expenditure. On the other hand, the constitution enables ethnic groups to establish their administration units at any time. The relationship of both the fiscal dependency of the administrative units and power devolution to the ethnic groups can lead to administrative fragmentation which, in turn, leads to corruption and misuse of resources. Vaughan (2006) argues that the block grants to Woreda have pushed the smaller ethnic groups in the southern regional state into establishment of independent administrative units. For example, according to the deputy director of the department of conflict management at the Ministry of Federal Affairs in the Southern regional state the number of Woreda increased from 91 to 129 in around ten years¹⁹. This happens because, when ethnic groups establish independent administrative units, their elites get an opportunity to administer the block grant which, in turn, creates a lot of privileges for them. This suggests that the ethnic politics, or what Aalen (2006:260) calls ‘ethnic entrepreneurship’ of the ethnic-based political elite and neo-patrimonial relationship

¹⁹ Interview notes, deputy director of the conflict management department, Ministry of Federal Affairs, Addis Ababa, June 2008

of the state can paralyse the federal structure. This is because leaders of the ethnic groups use ethnic politics for the purpose of establishing administrations at Woreda level or above, which enables them directly to control public funds. It is because of this that several analysts (Aalen, 2002, 2006,2008; Asefa, 2006; Tronvoll, 2000) have warned that the emphasis on ethnicity and lower attention to citizenship rights can lead to the proliferation of many smaller units of administrations which can harm the federal process.

Regional states and local administrations have, therefore, to bear some percentage of revenue collection in order to exist as a regional or local government authority and to get federal grants. This kind of fiscal responsibility encourages the ethnic groups to establish joint administrative units that make them viable units for federal grants. This will also enhance collaboration between ethnic groups.

Mechanisms of Democratic Participation

It is argued that since virtually all electoral districts are drawn from within the ethnically-defined constituents, the legislative body of the federal system is necessarily made up of representatives of the regional states. This enables the ethnic groups to participate in the legislative making processes. Moreover, representatives can vote against 'hostile laws' which disadvantage the interests of the ethnic groups (Eshete, 2003:159).

Representation of the ethnic groups at the HOF also creates greater opportunities for these groups. As the HOF decides the budget subsidy for regional states,

representatives of the ethnic groups can directly participate in this process and make decisions. This prevents unfair treatment between the regional states (Ibid).

The HOF also provides extensive opportunities to foster tolerance, and encourage negotiation and a sense of belonging in the ethnic groups. This is because the HOF seeks solutions when there are disputes between regional states and instructs the federal government when there are constitutional disorders in the states (Article 62/9). Representation of the ethnic groups at the HOF enables them to foster good relationships between the groups and protect their interests when there are undesired interventions into regional governments by the federal government²⁰.

Equally, it has been argued that the constitution limits the participation of the ethnic groups at the centre (Fiseha, 2006). First, there was no legal means of influencing the legislation process which enables the ethnic groups to protect their interests. Second, the ethnic composition of members of the Cabinet and Presidents of the Supreme Court is under the control of the Prime Minister. In addition, the defence forces and the council of ministers are accountable to him (Article 74). Therefore, taken together, this implies strong central executive power which is less controlled by the constitutional mechanisms. This has several implications for the federal system. As the ruling party controls domestic politics at all levels, both the executive and the ruling party can be complementary to each other in policy implementation without the consultation of the regional governments and other political parties (Aalen, 2006:249; Aalen, 2008). However, the greater the power of the executive and particularly of the prime minister, the greater the risk that executive be dominated by one or two ethnic

²⁰ Interview notes, the Speaker of the HOF, Addis Ababa, June 2008

groups and exclude the smaller groups. This is because the selection process of the members of the executive is usually influenced by regime survival and this is determined mainly by representations from the politically dominant ethnic groups.

In addition, The EPRDF always works to control government offices from top to bottom and it has never been attempted to work with and share power with others who have different opinions on national matters.

Clapham asserts this as follows:

The EPRDF proved entirely incapable of recognising the legitimacy of any regional or ethnic movement that was not under its own control, or of according any such movement an autonomous role in the government even of the most insignificant local areas (2009:187).

Therefore, the federal structure has worked only under the ruling party. It has never been tested to see whether it can work under the control of political parties which have different opinions from the ruling party. This makes the federal system vulnerable to changes and the dynamics of the domestic politics as has happened in many African countries since independence.

In addition, the politics of regime survival undermine the local autonomy guaranteed by the federal constitution to the regional states. The ruling party has changed the regional government leaders several times before the end of their term when their loyalties have been in doubt. For example, when the TPLF leadership split into two,

the regional states leaders who supported the losing opposition were sacked from their positions in 2002²¹.

The Ethiopian federal constitution basically allows for representation of the ethnic groups in both the shared and self-rule institutions of governance (Article 8 and Article 39). This has brought wider opportunities to ethnic groups that include the use of their languages in public places, employment; and sense of pride and accommodation with the federal institutions of governance (Watson, 2002, Aalen, 2006). Nevertheless, many scholars argue that Ethiopia has not witnessed real political participation by its citizens in the political process (Fiseha, 2006, Eshete, 2003; Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003). The main issue here is that having a federal arrangement or structure is one thing, but making it work is quite another thing, depending upon other factors including the political culture of the political elite, and social and economic factors. For example, the political culture of the political elite has shown a tendency towards power centralisation and a top down approach to governance which has been entrenched since the establishment of the Ethiopian nation state at the end of the 19th century (Donahm, 1985; Clapham, 2006, Markakis, 1987).

Clapham asserts this in the following way:

...These all reflect an essentially technical conception of governance in which desired outcomes such as peace and development are conceived as driving from the ability of rulers first to develop the right policies and then to implement such policies efficiently throughout the territories that they

²¹ For example, both the presidents of the Oromia and Southern regional states were sacked due to their support to the descendents of TPLF leaders

control...This conception is deeply entrenched and indeed widely shared even among many of the government's opponents (2006:240).

When we relate Clapham's assertion to the federal process it can be dealt with comprehensively in relation to the multi-party system of the country. The Ethiopian constitution allows a multi-party system including political parties organised along ethnic lines (Article 31). There are two categories of political parties in the country: ethnic-based and national. Among the ethnic-based political parties, the ruling party, EPRDF, is a coalition whose member parties operate in the regional states of Tigray, Oromia, Amhara and Southern regional states. Also, there are affiliated, ethnic-based political parties operating in the remaining peripheral states (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003). There are other ethnic-based opposition political parties mainly from the Southern region, Oromia, Tigray and Amhara regional states. Recently, they have created a coalition party known as the Forum for Democracy and Unity (FDU), which includes some of the national parties. The other categories of political parties are those that claim to be national. These are not organised along ethnic lines, but aim to recruit their members on an individual basis from every ethnic group in the country. These include the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), All Ethiopian Democratic Organisation (AEDO) and others (Birhanu, 2003).

Therefore, the reason for the lack of real democratic participation of Ethiopian citizens can be explained by reference to the nature of the multi-party system of the country for the following reasons. The first point is related to the centralised nature of the ruling party. This can be seen in relation to the rebel background and ideology of EPRDF. During the armed struggle EPRDF followed 'democratic centralism' as the

main controlling mechanism for its members (Young, 1998, Aalen, 2002). Democratic centralism is related to the idea that decisions made by the majority have to be respected by the minority, and members of the armed front also must respect decisions made by the central committee of the national front. As this principle was used in the day-to-day life of the insurgency, it contributed to the construction of loyalty by the members of the EPRDF to their leaders. The EPRDF maintained this control mechanism after the downfall of the military regime and transferred it to the newly established member political parties using recruitment processes and indoctrination methods (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003).

For the above reasons, the relationship between the EPRDF and its member parties has remained a top-down one. In other words, the EPRDF leaders generate policy ideas and member parties implement them. Similarly, at the grass-roots level the members of the political parties make plans and the public implement them (Fiseha, 2006).

This control mechanism can be seen to have both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, it has given the party a greater leverage in implementing policies that have a nationwide impact (Aalen, 2006; 2008). In multi-ethnic African countries, unless there is a congruence of approaches between the centre and the regional states, it can be difficult to meet national standards such as the millennium goals.

However, the centralised system with its top-down approach has a number of problems. First, it has contributed to the lack of understanding of identity-based demands in the regional states. For example, the ruling party did not understand the

identity-based issues around the Silte and Gurague in the Southern regional state. The Silte were categorised as Gurague by mistake; the party did not consult local people when it made this categorisation. This was corrected after a long time and several demonstrations and violent conflicts (Kefale, 2004:56-57, Aalen, 2008). Moreover, an artificial language, called Wogagudu, was designed as a medium of instruction for four ethnic groups in the Southern regional state. A lot of resources were invested to produce the artificial language and text books. Then, when an attempt was made to implement it, violence erupted in the ethnic groups that were supposed to be using the artificial language. As a result, some people died and others were arrested during the violence (Aalen, 2006). This underlines the point that the ethnic groups can only define themselves according to the decisions of the ruling party and as long as they pose no threat to the regime's survival (Aalen, 2008).

Nevertheless, this has increased local conflicts among those aiming at identity recognition. To contain such conflicts several special Woreda administrations have been established in the Southern regional state. However, as long as the identity-based demands are used to promote the patrimonial vested interest of the ethnic leaders, they have become a challenge to the integrity of the regional states by encouraging divisibility. According to Vaughan (2006) one of the effects of the power distribution along ethnic lines in the Southern regional state is the exacerbation of class differences within the ethnic groups. Therefore, the top down approach of the ruling party, which mainly focuses on regime survival, does not allow for greater democratic participation on the ground. Hence, it becomes an inherent problem of the system to generate local demands, which can be exploited by the neo-patrimonial interest of the ethnic leaders, which, in turn, can lead to the formation of many units

that can undermine commonness, co-operation between the ethnic groups and the legitimacy of the federal structure.

Second, it has also led to the Prime Minister's dominant role, particularly since the TPLF's leadership division into two factions in 2002. The ruling party now emphasises loyalty in recruitment of party members and employees of state institutions. As a result, all levels of government structures have been filled by party members which have made the party and government structures essentially one and the same²². This has created an enabling environment for the ruling party to use state resources for the benefit of one party rule in the country. For example, as public jobs are given primarily to members of the ruling party, the EPRDF also recruited 5 million party members out of around 80 million people²³. The Party members greatly contributed to winning the ruling party 99.6% in the national and regional parliamentary elections of 2010²⁴.

Although this is not unique to EPRDF as it is a wider, if not global, problem faced by emerging and developing democracies, its conception of direct democratic participation also encourages a top down approach to political process in the country. The concept of direct participation is conceived by the EPRDF as a mechanism for creating consensus and getting feedback on policy matters from the public. Hence, as long as the party can maintain public participation, whether or not other political

²² All federal, regional, Zone and Woreda government structures are filled by elected members in national, regional and local elections, which have been controlled by the ruling party over the last 19 years.

²³ All opposition parties accused the ruling party in the 2010 election campaign of employing its members in public works during election campaign discussions between the ruling party and opposition parties, Posted on the Ethiopian Radio and Television website, April 2010.

²⁴ Speech of the Prime Minister, Melese Zenawi, to the public rally at Meskel square, Addis Ababa, 24 May 2010

parties exist or alternative ideas are presented to the public, they believe that the democratic process is not negatively affected (National Policy papers of EPRDF, 2003).

However, in practice the concept of direct participation has created problems. When the party does go to the public, it does not listen to them; rather, it tells them what to do. It was after the failure of the 2005 election in many places, including Addis Ababa that it started to do this. Since then the party has remained without a clear understanding of public opinion about its policies. For example, in the 2005 election the party got only a single seat in Addis Ababa. It seemed that the party never expected that kind of blow, according to the public comments that were made by EPRDF leaders during that time²⁵.

This partial implementation of the concept of direct democratic participation also shows a low commitment by the ruling party to the multi-party system in the country. Democratic participation is a political process that should enable the public to choose from alternative policy ideas. In addition, it can be perceived as a mechanism of consensus creation in chosen government policy. EPRDF leaders treat party policies as the only choice and invite the public to participate in implementing them (EPRDF's policy papers, 2003). For this purpose, the regime controls the flow of information using its monopolistic ownership of government media. This has contributed to the existence of weak opposition parties because, regardless of the rhetoric for a multiparty system, the existence of opposition parties is not considered by the EPRDF to contribute to democratic nation-building.

²⁵ Interview notes, Member of Parliament, Addis Ababa, June 2008.

Moreover, it is argued that the EPRDF follows a hostile policy against opposition parties that undermines their participation in the political system (Teshome, 2009:64). Hence, as noted by Clapham (2006), whether the incumbent ruling party will be able to transfer power peacefully to a democratically elected opposition party remains one of the challenges of democratic transition in Ethiopia. This has also been shown by the four national election processes and the outcomes which undermine the participation of opposition parties in the national and regional parliaments of the country. The country has had four national elections in 15 years since 1994. The first two elections (1995, 2000) were conducted without significant participation of the opposition parties. They did participate in the third (2005) election - but it was accompanied by violence and 196 people were killed in its aftermath in Addis Ababa alone²⁶. The ruling party, and its allies, won 545 of the 547 federal seats in the 2010 election. The Federal Democratic Forum Party won only a single seat, and another seat was won by an independent candidate²⁷. Therefore, although the multiparty system is constitutionally institutionalised one party politics has been the dominant feature of Ethiopian domestic politics over the last 19 years. This has made the Ethiopian federal system lose the inclusiveness and accommodation of diversity which are fundamental principles of democracy and indeed determine whether a federal system can function properly and manage conflicts.

In addition, the ruling party established different associations, such as Youth leagues, which are directly influenced by and linked to the party structure²⁸. It also provided credits to youth for establishing small scale industries used to expand party influences

²⁶ Source: the Federal Inquiry Commission, which was established in the aftermath of the violent conflict in 2005

²⁷ Ethiopian News Agency, 25 May 2010.

²⁸ There are men and women youths organised from national to local level. These associations are directly linked to and influenced by EPRDF.

during the 2010 elections. This can be proved by the fact that 50,000 youths who were benefited by the credit scheme decided to vote for EPRDF in the meeting they held in the Addis Ababa Stadium the second week of May 2010²⁹.

Having observed the lack of democratic exercise in the federal process, some analysts (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009) saw an end to democracy in Ethiopia³⁰ mainly after the conflicts in the 2005 election and the 2008 local elections which were fully controlled by the ruling party. Accordingly, they noted “the only opposition avenue remaining open appears to be that of armed struggle” (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009:204). If election results are the only criteria for the survival of democracy, the 2010 national election results might also reinforce the conclusion because the ruling party won 99.6% in all the national and regional parliaments.

However, this generalisation lacks consideration of other factors such as the socio-economic transformation made in the country over the last 18 years and its impact on enhancing citizens’ demands for democracy through peaceful means. In addition, the analysis fails to consider whether the rural population which has benefited from the social and economic development would support an armed struggle against the incumbent ruling party at the expense of the benefits from the development. Whether democracy and the federal system can work in Ethiopia is not only determined by election processes and results, but by the overall social, economic and political transformation which also requires a period of time.

²⁹ Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency May 2010.

³⁰ The conclusion came after the 2005 election conflict and the 2008 local elections result which were fully controlled by the ruling party

However, the problems of the ruling party are just one side of the coin; the other side relates to the opposition parties. There is little experience of a multi-party system in Ethiopia. There was no political space for opposition parties during the Haile Selassie and military regimes, and it was not until 1993 that the first multi-party registration was made.

Since then, three categories of opposition party have evolved. The first category is those that can be considered as 'loyal' opposition parties, who participate in elections and use their seats in the parliament to promote their political objectives (Teshome, 2009). The second category consists of illegal political parties who aim to overthrow the incumbent party through violence. This category includes the OLF, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO) and the Sidama Liberation Front (SLF). The third category is those parties which operate amongst the diaspora and tend to support both the loyal and illegal political parties (Teshome, 2009:65).

The disagreements between the loyal opposition parties and the ruling party spring from constitutional issues. As discussed earlier, opposition parties were not well represented in the constitution drafting process and constitutional assembly (Teshome, 2009). This was partly a result of the organisational weakness of the opposition parties. In addition, it is a result of the preferential treatment of the ruling party to its member political parties and the exclusion and marginalisation of the opposition parties from the political and economic processes and access to state power and its patrimonial resources. Therefore, as Gudina (2003) argued, the constitution was poorly negotiated before being ratified. As a result, the opposition parties still oppose

constitutional issues associated with self-determination that have, in turn, become a source of proliferation of ethnic-based political parties. They also oppose an electoral system, which they say is designed to serve the domination of the ruling party (Gudina, 2003).

For the above reasons, participation by opposition parties during the latest elections has been half-hearted. They boycotted the first local and regional elections, and took little part in the first national and regional elections. It is only since 2000, and particularly in 2005, that they started participating in all elections. Overall, half-hearted participation in the political process has been one of the features of the opposition groups. This has led them into a dilemma about using the parliamentary seats they won in Addis Ababa and other places in the 2005 election (Smith, 2008).

The second feature of the opposition groups is fragmentation. There is no strong opposition party or coalition party that can compete with the ruling party in all the regional states of the country. For this, there are different contributing factors. First, as Gudina (2006) argued, the different interpretation of the past and present political history of the country has played a significant role in keeping them apart. For example, while some ethnic-based political parties see a colonial history, other multinational parties consider it a nation-building process. Others see a history of Amhara ethnic-domination over other groups (Gudina, 2003). Second, the need to control the political space alone has led to fragmentation of the opposition parties. This was clearly observed in the political struggle between the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) member parties which finally led to its disintegration in the aftermath of the 2005 election.

In summary, neither the ruling party nor the opposition parties gave priority to negotiation and dialogue with each other. The ruling party took little notice of the opposition parties before the 2005 election. Even since then, regardless of some negotiations made to improve the parliamentary and electoral procedures, the opposition parties complain about the obstacles created by the ruling party (Ethiopia First web page, June 2009). This led to 96.6% control by the ruling party and its allies of the national and regional parliament after the 2010 elections, which can also be interpreted in terms of a one party state. The half-heartedness of the opposition parties also created problems in the democratic process. The poor exercise of democratic participation has made the federal system somewhat fragile over the last 18 years.

Mechanisms of Intergovernmental Relationships

The constitution sets the basics of relationships between the centre and the regional states, and between the regional states themselves. For example, the political and economic division of power between the centre and the regional states is the basis of the relationship between them (Articles.51 and 52).

The constitution also provides for the set-up of institutions to manage the relationships between the centre and the regional states, and between regional states. The constitution assigns the HOF to decide on matters of self-determination, budget subsidy and federal intervention in the regional states. The HOF is also responsible for finding solutions when there are conflicts of interest between regional states (Article 48). In doing this, the HOF gets advice from a constitutional inquiry

commission which is specifically set up to provide professional advice on matters related to constitutional interpretations (Article 48).

The executive body also established an institution firstly known as the Office of Regional Affairs and later the Ministry of Federal Affairs. This facilitates the relationship between the centre and regional states and focuses on supporting the emerging regional states (Fiseha, 2006).

The party structure is also used as a means of informal relationship between the centre and regional states. As the ruling party has been able to win all the elections, this has helped it to implement government decisions in all regional states (Fiseha, 2006:389-396).

However, the Intergovernmental Relationship (IGR) mechanisms have made little contribution towards conflict prevention. A number of observations can be made in this regard. Although the HOF is responsible for managing conflict between regional states, it does not have legislative power which can influence the laws that affect regional states and minority groups (Fiseha, 2006). Moreover, the HOF heavily relies on the information provided by the regional states; it lacks professional capacity to acquire the necessary information, historical facts and local conditions, which would enable it to handle cases fairly (Ibid).

The role of the Ministry of Federal Affairs in managing conflict between regional states is limited. First, it only focuses on the emerging ³¹ regional states. And even in the emerging regional states it focuses only on control (Young, 1999; Samatar, 2004). In addition, the representatives who are sent by the Ministry to support the regional states lack the competence to provide the required support to the states.³²

The centralised party system also made little contribution towards enabling the regional states to manage conflict in their own way. This is because the party follows centralised policy-making and implementation processes, giving little opportunity for alternative ideas to emerge from below. Therefore, this has contributed to the development of relatively dependent regional states with regard to all strategic planning (Fiseha, 2006:158). In fact, it can be argued, the main problem for regional state dependency is the centralised structure of the ruling party (Fiseha, 2006:138).

The implication of the ruling party's centralised approach to the intergovernmental relationship is that it encourages vertical relationships by which all policy level decisions come from one person at the top of state hierarchy. This can generate a patron client relationship between the public office holders, as Clapham argues (1985). In other words, ideas are generated from the person/s at the top of the hierarchy and the subordinates are obliged to follow and implement them through party procedures. Hence, the relationship cannot create regional capacities that can articulate the regional developmental and other requirements in a way that enables them to negotiate in the intergovernmental relationships as argued by Feyissa (2006), taking

³¹ Least developed refers to four regional states including Somali, Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella regional states which are considered as emerging and less developed compared to other regional states in the country.

³² Interview report, the President of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, May, 2008

the case study of Gambella. This is very visible in the relationship between the federal and emerging regional states; it is also true of the other regional states.

Moreover, the centralised approach of the ruling party discourages horizontal relationships between the regional states. This can be seen from the low level of horizontal intergovernmental relationships between Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states even when they had pressing issues of concern before the violent conflicts along their common borders in 2008³³ as discussed in Chapter Nine.

The centralised party structure also causes the intergovernmental relations to suffer from lack of accountability. This is because although decisions are made by a few people, the decisions come to the government hierarchy as a collective decision of the ruling party leadership. This lacks individual accountability and leads to abuse of power and self-protection in a collective form. However, when some pressing issues occur that make authorities accountable for their actions, the collective form of the decision process usually protects the persons at the top of the hierarchy. This can be seen from the investigations conducted after the violent conflicts between Oromos and Gumuz in 2008.³⁴ As discussed in Chapter Seven, the violent conflicts took many lives and destroyed property of the local people. Regional anti-riot police, Woreda level and local administrations participated in the violence³⁵. However, the investigation results only held accountable the lower level administrations who were involved in the violent conflict. No one wanted to question the participation of the

³³ The former Benishangul-Gumuz regional state complained that horizontal relationships are only based on the willingness of the regional leaders; therefore, they can work as long as there is good relationship between them.

³⁴ Interview notes, member of parliaments, Addis Ababa, June 2008

³⁵ Ibid

higher level authorities in the disturbances³⁶. Overall the centralised approach of the ruling party means that intergovernmental relationships suffer from a lack of regional capacity for policy formulation, accountability and horizontal intergovernmental relationships.

The Impact of the Domestic Politics on the Federalisation Process

Domestic politics has made the institutionalisation of ethnic identity one of the issues of conflict over the last 18 years. This is closely associated with the different ways the elite groups interpret history and compete to secure control over the state and its patrimonial resources. As discussed in Chapter Three, there are two political history interpretations which are relevant to current domestic politics. On the one hand, the ruling party, and other opposition parties, consider the issues of ethnic identity to be associated with an ethnic domination – which was followed by civil wars in the country (Guidna, 2006). Therefore, they felt these issues had to be addressed by constitutional recognition of both individual and group rights (Abbay, 2004). The institutionalising of ethnic identity became one of the main features of the federal constitution. This interpretation has become the dominant view in domestic politics since 1991.

But a significant part of the Ethiopian elite, and many opposition parties, do not recognise ethnic domination as the source of civil wars in Ethiopia. So they want to address ethnic rights as only one aspect of overall individual rights. As a result, they do not recognise Article 39 of the constitution, which institutionalises self-

³⁶ Ibid

determination of the ethnic groups, and defines how this can be implemented. This difference of opinion has clearly been seen in the debates between the elite groups over the last 18 years, in manifestos of the opposition parties, and during the election debates of 2010³⁷. In other words the crucial feature of the constitution, the institutionalising of ethnic identity, has not received consensus support from either the elite groups or the opposition parties.

In addition, the ruling party has not shown itself ready to reconsider some of the weaknesses of the constitutional issues such as minority rights protection and the use of language as the only identity marker. Moreover, the federal process which undermines citizenship rights and focuses in practice on fostering ethnic-based demands is not well recognised by the ruling party³⁸. This has meant the federal arrangement has been accompanied by intra-state conflict³⁹. The constitutional clause on the right of secession has also been rejected, mainly by the groups who advocated for Ethiopian nationalism and national integration.

The ruling party's domination of domestic politics has also made the federalisation process problematic and dominated by activities tuned towards regime survival. There are two aspects of this problem. Firstly, as discussed elsewhere, the centralised party structure restricts bottom-up democratic participation – controlling all the regional states through party structures (Fiseha, 2006). Therefore, the capacity of the regional government's executive body, the Regional Council, to formulate policy has been

³⁷ Debates of the 2010 election, between the ruling party and opposition parties, on the Ethiopian Radio and Television web site, posted in April 2010

³⁸ The ruling party has never recognised that there are constitutional problems which can be sources of intra-state conflict. For further information see the debates of the 2002 election, between the ruling party and opposition parties, on the Ethiopian Radio and Television web site, posted in April 2010

³⁹ Further examples are discussed in chapters six and seven

limited. In other words, the main purpose of the regional states has been to execute the ruling party's policies which are aimed for regime survival, but not for real self-determination of the ethnic groups. Secondly, the relationship between the ruling party and security and the defence forces has also strengthened regime survival party politics. The security and defence forces emerged predominantly from the EPRDF forces, which fought against the military regime. Therefore, their leadership is dominated by former EPRDF fighters, mainly Tigrayans who played a significant role during the armed struggle against the military regime. Although the greater role played by the Tigrayans in the armed forces was inescapable in the initial period of the federal arrangement, significant effort has not been made to increase the diversity of the leadership, but only really in the lower ranks⁴⁰. Therefore, the security and defence forces are criticised for being dominated by Tigrayans who represent only 6% of the total population (census, 2007). As a result, grievances have been created among several ethnic groups, who say that the leadership of the security and defence institutions has not been shared equally between all the ethnic groups⁴¹.

At worst, it is perceived that the federal system was designed for the purpose of Tigray domination over the other ethnic groups. Therefore, federalisation of the state still does not resolve ethnic domination in the country⁴² (Aalen, 2006). This perception has significantly and negatively affected the legitimacy of the federal process. Although the federal executive is more or less ethnically well represented as shown in the table below, this is not accepted by many commentators because the

⁴⁰ This was discussed when the Prime Minister presented his government's progress report to the federal parliament in 2009. Thus, the Tigrayans' domination in the military leadership was criticised by the opposition groups, such as the EDP and the OFDP

⁴¹ This is a genuine concern among many people I interviewed during my field visit in Addis Ababa, 2008

⁴² This opinion is expressed mainly on the Ethiopian Diaspora websites, such as Nazret.Com and Ethiomedia.Com

prime minister position has been held by a Tigrayan since the transition period. Moreover, regardless of the ethnic representation of the Cabinet, the persons who are assigned to executive posts came only from the member parties of the ruling party which were created by TPLF cadres during the transitional period.

4.3: Ethnic representation of the Ethiopian government cabinet members, adopted from the press release Ethiopian Embassy, UK, Thursday 13th 2005.

Tigray	Amhara	Oromia	Southern nationalities	Somali	Afar
3	6	5	5	1	1
15%	30%	25%	25%	5%	5%

Therefore, lack of general consensus on constitutional issues, the control by the ruling party of domestic politics and the greater power of the executive have undermined the benefits to the ethnic groups that could have come from the federal structure of the country.

Conclusion

The constitutional right of self-determination in Ethiopia has changed the direction of intra-state conflict. Previously, its main manifestation was between the nation-state and ethno-national movements. Moreover, right of self-determination has created the significant presence of the ethnic groups in the federal and regional institutions of governance. This has, in turn, increased the self-esteem and economic opportunities of the ethnic groups (Fiyessa, 2006).

However, the federal system still faces three basic sources of intra-state conflict. The first is related to the inability of the system to provide the necessary structure to fully accommodate the ethnic groups in the regions. This is related to an inability to clearly understand their identity-based demands and quickly resolve them. Moreover, it is related to the unnecessary aggregation of identities that has led to further fragmentation and violent conflict. The Silte and Gurague and the issues of Wogagudu language can explain this problem. This was also a reason for ethnicity politics and promotion of neo-patrimonial vested interests which manifested itself in tendencies to fragment the multi-ethnic regional states.

The second source of intra-state conflict is related to the low emphasis given to citizenship rights of the ethnic groups by the constitution and the implementation process. This is manifested in the constitution in a manner that implicitly denies the existence of a national identity and exaggerates ethnic identities. This is also reinforced by a lack of minority rights' protection in the regional states.

The third source of intra-state conflict is related to the weakness of democratic participation. This is mainly manifested in the political culture of the Ethiopian elite which gives emphasis to regime survival. The ruling party's centralised structure and top down approach also proves the existence of the problem. All in all lack of genuine self-determination of the ethnic groups ethnicity politics and neo-patrimonial interests, too little attention to citizenship rights and excessive emphasis on the politics of regime survival have become the main challenges to the sustainability of the federal system of the country.

Part Three: Case Study of Benishangul- Gumuz regional state

Chapter Five

The Ethnic Groups and Political History of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

Introduction

This chapter outlines the historical analysis of conflicts in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. It discusses the relationship between the indigenous and non-indigenous people and relates it to an analytical approach to ethnicity to understand the nature of ethnic relationships in the regional state. The chapter also briefly scrutinises the political history of the regional state as this provided one of the reasons for the establishment of the regional state.

Features of the Regional State

The Benishangul-Gumuz regional state is located along the margins of the Blue Nile. It comprises regions that were previously administered as part of Wellaga and Gojjam provinces, in the western and northern parts of the river. In the north west the state borders the regional state of Amhara; in the east, Oromia; in the south, Gambella; and in the south west, Sudan. The regional state occupies an area of 50,380 square kilometres, and is divided by the Blue Nile – with the Metekel zone and the Pawe special Woreda to the north (occupying over 26,560 km²) and the Assosa and Kamashi zones, and the Mao-Komo special Woreda to the south (occupying 23,820 km²) (BIPPCSA, 2005).

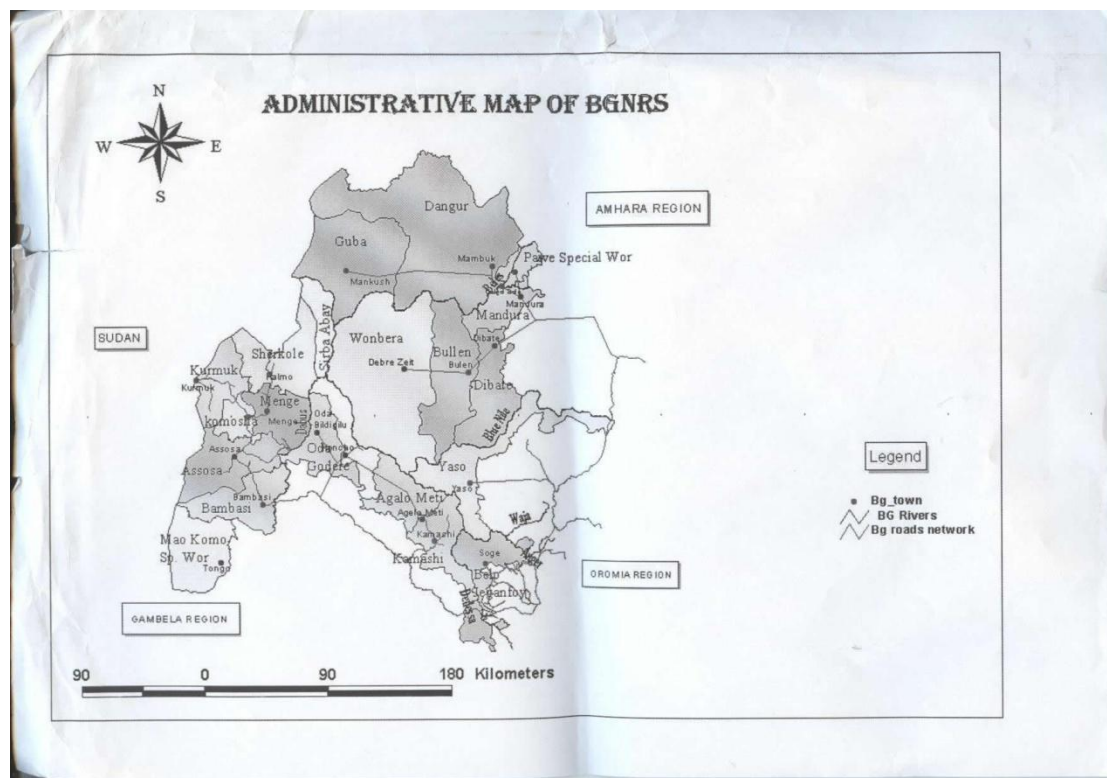
Administratively, the regional state comprises three zones, 19 Woreda councils (including two special Woredas) and 474 Kebele councils (Ibid). Table 1 below shows the names of the Woreda in every zone administration.

5.1. Names of zone and Woreda administrations

Zone	Woreda
Asossa (six Woredas)	Bambasi, Assosa, Oda Godere, Menge, Komsha, Sherkole
Kamashi(Five Woredas)	Sirba-Abbay, Meti, Kamashi, Belo- Jeganfoy, Yaso
Metekel(6 Woredas)	Dibate, Bullen, Mandura, Dangur, Guba, Wombera
Pawe special Woreda	
Mao/ Komo special Woreda	

Source: Department of Press and Public Relation of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State.

Map 3: Benishangul-Gumuz Adminstrative Map



Source: Regional state's President Office

The Benishangul-Gumuz regional state has a total population of 670,847 with an average annual growth rate of 3% (Census 2007). The regional state's population growth rate is the second highest in the country, after Gambella regional state's 4.1%. Just over 86% of the population of Benishangul-Gumuz live in rural areas, with the remainder living in urban areas. Table 2 below shows the population distribution in each zone.

5. 2. Population distribution by zone

Zone	Population
Metekel	235,638
Asossa	267,420
Kamash	88027
Mao/Komo special woreda	42,050
Pawe special Woreda	37,711

Source: CSAE, census, 2007

There are different religious faiths in the regional state; the most important being Islam, Christianity (Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic) and traditional spiritual practice. Table four below shows the population distribution with respect to religion.

5.3. Distribution of population with respect to religion

Religion	Population	Percentage
Muslim	304,432	45.5
Orthodox	221,168	33
Protestant	90,272	13.5
catholic	4,191	0.6
Traditional spiritual practice	47,478	7.1
Others	3,306	0.5

Source: CSAE, census, 2007

Agriculture is the main economic activity, generating 70.31% of the state income and employing around 90% of the total population of the regional state. The major farming systems are sedentary and shifting cultivation, for indigenous and non-indigenous people respectively. Cereals, vegetables and fruit are the major products, but productivity has fallen sharply due to inadequate modern technological inputs to the sector (BIPPCSA, 2005).

The regional state also has sufficient raw materials for both small and large-scale industries. However, except for some small cottage industries, the industrial sector is not well developed. There were 355 small-scale industries in the region, with a total capital of 4.4 million Birr in 2005. The regional state is also known for minerals, such as marble, granite, gold, and base metals, but only the gold has been exploited to any extent (BIPPCSA, 2005).

The regional state is connected to Addis Ababa by all-weather roads and one domestic airport. There are 1,290kms of all weather roads and 1,238kms of dry weather roads that connect the zone centres, Woreda centres and the state capital Asossa (Ibid). A highway is also under construction to connect Assosa to Metekel ¹ . Telecommunications and electric services are also expanding to the Woreda centres.

The general primary school enrolment rate has accelerated over the last 18 years. Gross primary enrolment reached around 80 percent in 2006/07 (Ethiopian National Bank, 2008). According to the regional President's six month's progress report of the 2010 fiscal year, 824 students sat for the higher education entrance exam in 2009. Of

¹ Interview notes, head of the Regional Finance and Planning Bureau, Asossa, May 2008

these, 809 students passed the exam and enrolled for higher education. This was considered a major achievement, by the regional state, which had far few higher education students during the unitary state regimes.

Access to health services has also increased in the regional state since 1991. There was one nurse for every 2,802 people, one physician for every 297,000 people, and one GP for every 33,000 people in the regional state in 2005 (DPPR, 2005). The state's infant mortality rate was 84 per 1,000, compared with 77 at the national level in 2007/08. The state's under-five mortality rate was 157 per 1,000, compared with 123 at the national level. State life-expectancy was 50.1 years for men and 51.1 years for women, compared with 53.4 and 55.4 respectively, at the national level. Access to a potable water supply reached 49.3% people, compared with 59.5% at the national level in 2007/08 (Ethiopian National Bank, 2008).

In political terms, the small administrative and population size of the regional state indicate that Benishangul-Gumuz regional state is not a significant or important state. However, the description of the regional state underlines the relevance of the regional state to the issue of whether ethnic diversity causes conflict and how federalism in the regional state has responded to conflicts. This is because there are multiple indigenous ethnic groups and non-indigenous people who live in the territories of the regional state. In addition, there has been a migration of people from the neighbouring Amhara and Oromia regional states to the regional state. This has influenced the nature of regional domestic politics and intergovernmental relationships. The regional state also shares international borders with Sudan, from which insurgents have crossed into the country. This factor also meant the regional

state has attracted the attention of the federal government. In fact, the dynamics of conflict in the regional state can therefore show whether the federal arrangement is succeeding in managing the conflicts in the country.

The Ethnic Groups in the Regional state: Indigenous versus Non-indigenous

Benishangul-Gumuz hosts different ethnic groups, which are categorised as indigenous and non-indigenous according to the regional state's constitution (Article 2). The indigenous ethnic groups are the Nilo-Saharan families, including Berta, Gumuz, Mao and Komo, and Shinasha (an Omatic family) (Wedekind and Alga, 2002). The non-indigenous groups include Amhara, Oromo, Agaw, Tigray and others.

The indigenous ethnic groups predominantly live in their own territorial areas. For example, the Berta ethnic group live in the Asossa zone and the Gumuz ethnic group live in the Metekel and Kamashi zones. Mao and Komo ethnic groups also live in the Mao/Komo special Woreda. Table four below shows the population size of the indigenous groups and the major non-indigenous people in the regional state.

The non-indigenous ethnic groups either live with the indigenous groups or in separate Woreda administrations. For instance, the Oromos live in both the Asossa and Kamashi zones alongside the indigenous groups. The Amharas live mainly in the Asossa zone and the Pawe special Woreda. The Agaw-Awi live predominantly in the Metekel zone (BIPPCSA, 2005).

5.4. Population size of each indigenous ethnic group and the major non-indigenous groups

Ethnic group	Population size	Percentage
Indigenous groups		
Berta	173,743	25.90
Gumuz	141,645	21.11
Shinasha	50,916	7.59
Mao	12,744	1.96
Komo	6,464	0.96
Major Non-indigenous Groups		
Amhara	142,557	21.25
Oromo	89,346	13.32
Agaw-awi	28,467	4.24
Tigray	4,559	.68
Sudanese	4551	.68

Source: CSAE, census, 2007

As the names of the people indicate the indigenous ethnic groups are distinct from each other in their language, culture and their territorial residence areas. For example, the Berta ethnic group live in Asossa and speak their own language, which is different and non intelligible with the languages of the other indigenous people. Similarly, the Gumuz predominantly live in Metekel and Kamashi zones and speak their own language which is not incomprehensible to the other indigenous ethnic groups. The Mao, Komo and Shinasha ethnic groups also live primarily in their own residential territories and they speak different languages.

The indigenous people also differ from each other with respect to culture. The Gumuz ethnic group are predominantly traditional spiritual faith believers, influenced by Christianity from the highlands of Ethiopia and by Islam from Sudan. The culture of Berta is highly influenced by Islam. This is because they were administered by Sheikhs, Islamized by their relationships with Sudanese Arabs. However, despite the

spread of Islam, traditional spiritual faith and customs remain important aspects of the spiritual life of the Berta people (Vaughan, 2007:30). The other ethnic groups including Mao, Komo and Shinasha have their own distinct cultures. However, unlike Gumuz and Berta, these ethnic groups are highly influenced by the cultures of the neighbouring Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups. For example, the Mao ethnic group are multilingual and their culture and way of living has been very much influenced by the neighbouring Oromos (González-Ruibal and Martinez, 2007:10; Vaughan, 2007:30). The Shinasha people, who live in Metekel, also have their own identity and culture, but they are influenced by Christianity and by the Agaw and Amhara way of life (Endalew, 2005:2).

The other people in the regional state are the non-indigenous people who formally and informally settled in the regional state. Around 135,000 of the non-indigenous people came mainly through the massive resettlement packages begun as part of the national resettlement programme after the country's 1984 drought (Abbute, 2002:114; Pankhurst, 1990:126). The settlers were mainly from Amhara, Wollo, Gondar, North Showa and Tigray – all categorised as drought affected areas – and from the southern region, including Kembata, Hadiya and Walyita, where there was a shortage of arable land (Pankhurst, 1990:126).

Nevertheless, the number of non-indigenous people in the territories of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state has increased since the resettlement programme of 1984. This is because many internal immigrants from Amhara and Oromia have migrated to the regional state.² So, the number of non-indigenous people in the

² Interview notes, informant from zone administration, GlegelBeles town, July, 2008

regional state is now nearly equal to the number of indigenous people counted in the 1994 census. In the 1994 census, the general population of non-indigenous people was around 42.2%. This did not change significantly in the 2007 census (Census, 1994, 2007), but this is probably because the regional state has refused to accept immigrants as *legal* residents of the regional state, since the 1994 census. Literally, the real numbers now appear to be more or less equal.

The definitions, indigenous and non-indigenous, are not clarified in the regional constitution, but the former are implicitly understood as the people who have lived in the region prior to the arrival of the highlanders in the early part of the 20th century. The regional authorities of the state appear to appreciate the difference between the indigenous and non-indigenous groups. For example, a senior expert at the regional Police Commission, who conducted undergraduate research on indigenous and non-indigenous issues, defines the terms with respect to inward migration (Wodisha, 2004:60-61). Other experts in the regional state understand this issue in the same way.

Abbute (2002) conducted a detailed anthropological study of the relationship between the Gumuz and the Settlers in Metekel. He relates the term indigenous to population size and the cultural differences between the native people and the non-indigenous people. Accordingly, referring to Berkes (2001:115 cited in Abbute, 2002:29). Abbute identifies the following four criteria of indigenous people.

They are descendants of groups inhabiting an area prior to the arrival of other populations; they are politically non dominant; they are culturally different from the dominant population; and they identify themselves as indigenous (Abbute, 2002:29).

The above criteria for indigenous groups frame the theoretical definitions utilised in Chapter Two. However, there is an omission in Abbute's (2002) criteria; that is the relationship between the dominant ethnic groups and the state. The indigenous groups tend to respect traditional value, which may be inconsistent with the features of the state. These values include property rights, law, and the role of companies. Moreover, as the indigenous group has a special attachment to its territory, land becomes a major source of dispute when the dominant ethnic groups expand their territories towards those of the indigenous groups (Eriksen, 2002:127; Knight, 1988:123).

We can, however, utilise Abbute's criteria to see the difference between the indigenous and non-indigenous people in the regional state. For this purpose, we will focus on the features of the Gumuz and Berta ethnic groups, compared to the non-indigenous groups (mainly Amharas and Oromos). This analysis will also enable us to discuss the conflict in the regional state as the Gumuz and Berta are the indigenous peoples most frequently involved in conflict with the non-indigenous people. Accordingly, the difference between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, both the indigenous and non-indigenous people have categorical names for each other. For example, 'highlanders' and 'lowlanders' are used as broad categorical names to identify the non-indigenous and indigenous groups, respectively. This is because the Nilo-Saharan ethnic groups predominantly live in the lowland areas and the non-indigenous ethnic groups either originate from, or live in, the highland areas of the country. Moreover, the Gumuz ethnic group defines all the 'highlanders' as

Shuwa, which denotes people with cruel and brutal behaviour (Abbute, 2002:224-226). On the other hand, the 'highlanders' identify all the Nilo-Saharan ethnic groups as *Shankilla*, which means 'Black' or 'Negro' with its derogatory implication (Abbute, 2002:226; Triulzi, 1981:29; Donahm, 1986).

Secondly, both the Berta and Gumuz ethnic groups have lived in their current territories for as long as anyone can remember. The Gumuz ethnic group were considered to be the first settlers of Lake Tana and Wombera – before they pushed into to the lowland areas of Metekel. Moreover, they are also considered to be the first habitants of both sides of the Blue Nile tributaries (Pankhurst, 1997). The Berta have lived in the Benishangul or Asossa area since they moved to Ethiopia from Sudan in the 17th century. However, the non-indigenous groups came to the territories of Gumuz and Berta more recently, mainly during the resettlement programme of the military regime and by voluntary immigration from the neighbouring regional states (Abbute, 2002, Membratie, 2004; Rahmato, 1988).

Thirdly, the indigenous groups are culturally different from the non-indigenous groups. For example, Gumuz society centres on a polygamy family system. A family unit usually consists of a grandfather, father, co-wives, sons and daughters. The commune that is created from a group of family units is also an economic unit that determines the survival of the Gumuz society (Abbute, 2002:66). Commune members practice field cultivation and harvesting together, supervised by elders. The Gumuz have a sister exchange marriage system, in which a bridegroom gives his sister or the daughter of his close relatives in exchange for his bride to a bridegroom from another clan (Abbute, 2002:67). The Gumuz are predominantly traditional

spiritual faith believers. The marriage system of the Berta, however, is strongly influenced by the Islamic religion, though the traditional beliefs, such as *shangur* (performed before major events such as hunting, harvesting, gold extracting, long trade journeys, and migration) still has special relevance (Triulzi, 1981:26). By contrast, the non-indigenous groups have an exogamic family structure which exists as a single social and economic unit, while intertwined with the community in a hierarchal manner (Donham, 1986). Moreover, the non-indigenous people follow a bride-price marriage system, which is rare in Gumuz society and which is considered a shameful practice (Abbute, 2002). The non-indigenous are either Christian or Islamic believers.

The agricultural subsistence method of the indigenous groups is also different from that of the non-indigenous groups. For example, the Gumuz and Berta practice shifting cultivation as a means of subsistence. This involves the clearing of land by cutting and burning trees and bushes, using the hoe as the main means of cultivation and leaving the land fallow one year in every four – when fertility is reduced (Mebratie, 2004; Triulzi, 1981). Moreover, the Berta and Gumuz see land as communal property; therefore, there is no permanent individual ownership of land that can be passed to future generations (Rahmato, 1988:123). In contrast to the indigenous people, the non-indigenous groups practice plough cultivation as a means of subsistence. This involves full clearance and cultivation of land by family members and oxen (Abbute, 2002:236). Land is also considered private property that can be leased either from the government or an individual and inherited by children (Donham, 1986).

Finally, in indigenous groups the elders mediate disputes. As a result, they have a loose relationship with the rules of the government and the government authorities. For example, the Gumuz tend to deal with incidents of homicides using traditional means of conflict management. The responsibility for conflict resolution is given to local elders who act as neutral mediators between contending families or clans. The reconciliation process involves swearing an oath not to perpetuate further killing and to provide compensation to the family of the deceased, in accordance with the sum agreed by the elders (Abbute, 2002). Although this process may reconcile rival families or ethnic groups it does not discourage murder as the killers are not punished by the law. The non-indigenous groups primarily abide by legal procedures for dealing with the social and economic affairs of their communities. They normally have strong and hierarchal relationships with the state and the government authorities (Donham, 1986; Abbute, 2002).

The result is that the categorical names which the indigenous and no-indigenous people use to insult each other, the historical territorial issues, differences in culture and means of economic subsistence are all sources of conflicts between them which the regional state has inherited. Moreover, these issues are not only sources of conflicts in the regional state. They also affect relations between the indigenous people and the people of the neighbouring regional states. This means the issues in the Benishangul-Gumuz have direct impact on the intergovernmental relationships with the neighbouring regional states. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Nine.

Primordial versus Social Construct of Ethnic Identity in the Regional State

The above description of the indigenous ethnic groups and non-indigenous people in the regional states demonstrates how elements of the primordial and socially constructed characteristics of ethnic identity interact and determine the dynamics of conflict in the regional states. These can be summarised in the following way.

The primordial ties in the indigenous groups remain intact among all their members. For example, the Gumuz have well-structured, traditional social rules that govern the role of elders in the society, their marriage system, the relationship between the members of communities and their environment; and conflict management systems (Abbute, 2002). These rules are well established among the sub-clans. For example, if a person wants to be a member of a sub-clan, they have to have blood ties that can be accepted by the existing members of that sub-clan. Moreover, as the members of sub-clans usually reside in the same location they are protected from outsiders. This situation is reinforced by other social commitments and labour mobilisation among the communities (Abbute, 2002; Mebratie, 2004).

The hostile attitude of the neighbouring ethnic groups has contributed to a strengthening of primordial ties between members of the indigenous groups. This confirms the general theory of ethnicity that when an ethnic group is threatened by others the solidarity between the members of the ethnic group increases (Eriksen, 2001). Historically, the slavery system that devastated the Gumuz forced them to retreat to a safe area which sheltered them from the 'highlanders' slave raids. This has created deep-rooted hatred and suspicion against the highlanders. The resulting

struggle for self-protection from slave raids, and for the survival of ethnic identity, has contributed to a strengthening of Gumuz primordial ties.

Despite the small size of the Komo ethnic group, and their geographical proximity to the Oromo ethnic group, they have retained their ethnic identity. This is also connected to historical factors, living conditions and the religion of the Komo ethnic group. Historically, the Komo were subjected to slave raids by neighbouring ethnic groups. They mainly live by fishing and hunting, which is considered a lower form of occupation by the neighbouring people.³ This has led to them being considered as lower status by the neighbouring Oromo ethnic group. Moreover as the Komo ethnic group are predominantly Muslim this has enabled them to define themselves as a distinct ethnic group in their relationship with the predominantly Christian neighbouring Oromo ethnic group.

This is not always the case. For example, the Mao ethnic group have a tendency to assimilate their identity with the neighbouring Oromo ethnic group. This is because everyone in this group was considered Oromo before the change of government in 1991 and the establishment of the federal system⁴. An informant⁵ from the Mao ethnic group confirmed this and that he speaks fluent Oromifa. The mother tongue of many Mao from the Woreda remains Oromifa. Moreover, the assimilation of identities within the Oromo population has been further encouraged by the fact that the different ethnic groups have similar occupations. This suggests that whether an ethnic identity

³ Interview notes, informant from Mao/ Komo Woreda, Asossa, May 2008

⁴ Many people in the special Woreda were counted as Oromos during the 1994 census

⁵ An informant from the Mao ethnic group and a member of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional Cabinet, Asossa, May 2008

changes or remains intact depends on the influence of the environment and the advantages and disadvantages of that influence for members of the ethnic groups.

However, generally speaking, ethnic identities are clearly demarcated in the regional state. For example, despite the small population size of the Gumuz in Gojjam (compared to the Amhara ethnic group) their ethnic identity has remained separate from the Amhara ethnic group. This is also a result of the historical relationship between Gumuz and Amhara and differences in living conditions and culture between the two ethnic groups. This distinctiveness can be seen in their different approaches to farming; the Christian faith of the Amhara as opposed to the traditional spiritual belief of the Gumuz; and the bride-price-based marriage system of the Amhara rather than the sister exchange marriage of the Gumuz (Mebratie, 2004; Abbute, 2002). Thus, these ethnic markers have created different meanings, which are manifested in different ethnic identities and the residential territories of the ethnic groups. This is also the case with the relationship between the Berta and other neighbouring ethnic groups.

However, the primordial ties are not as static as the primordialists suggest (Esman, 2004:31). Some of the ethnic markers of the indigenous groups have been influenced over time by the relationships between individual members of the ethnic groups. For example, members of the Gumuz ethnic group who are living with the Oromos and the Agaw have adopted a common inter-ethnic conflict management system that is known as *Muchu* (Endalew, 2002; 15). This is a traditional conflict management institution through which people from different ethnic groups manage inter-ethnic conflict (Ibid). Moreover, the Gumuz, who were traditional faith believers, have been

influenced by the Christian and Islam religions of the highlanders of Ethiopia and Sudan (Mebratie, 2004).

The economic subsistence lifestyle of the Gumuz has also been influenced by the non-indigenous groups. For example, although land is considered as communal property in Gumuz society, land renting and crop sharing systems have been adopted from the highland people. Furthermore, the Gumuz have established friendly relationships with the non-indigenous people, which enable them to share information and resources (Abbute, 2002:269-270). Inter-ethnic marriage practices have also developed among Gumuz government employees and Agaw women in the Woredas of Metekel (Abbute, 2002:270-271).

On the other hand the Gumuz have also influenced the non-indigenous people in various respects. For example, the non-indigenous people have learnt from the Gumuz about the gathering of forest foods, the planting of oppa and pumpkin, the consumption of bamboo sprouts, and field cultivation using simple hand tools to maintain soil fertility (Abbute, 2002:272).

The above two-way relationship of the indigenous and the non-indigenous groups in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state demonstrates that ethnic identity can be socially constructed by the interaction of the neighbouring ethnic groups. Moreover, it shows ethnic identity is a social phenomena that is constructed over time, due to the interaction of the members of the ethnic group with each other and through the interaction of the different ethnic groups (Vayrynen, 1999).

Certainly, some informants associated inter-ethnic violent conflicts in the regional state with the culture of the indigenous groups and mainly with the culture of the Gumuz⁶. This is because the sister exchanges marriage of the Gumuz, and the social value of Gumuz that accept murder, make the Gumuz society vulnerable to violent conflict. Sister exchange marriage is part of the Gumuz culture and arranged between clans. However, this has exposed the Gumuz to intra-ethnic conflict because the exchange of sisters of bridegrooms is not always successful (James 1975 cited in Abbute, 2002:227).

Murder is also considered to be a source of pride, and a patriotic act, by members of the Gumuz ethnic group. It is not clear how this custom has developed, but the Gumuz society honours people who commit homicide. As a result, women encourage their husbands to kill someone and if the deceased person is from the Amhara ethnic group the killer receive great recognition from Gumuz society⁷. However, the honour associated with murder differs from place to place, and is less popular for people who have adopted 'new' religions than those who still exercise traditional beliefs. For example, informants noted that the number of homicides among the Gumuz traditional spiritual faith followers of Dibate and the Mandura Woredas of Metekel zone are higher than in the Gumuz Christians of Kamashi zone Woredas⁸.

Nevertheless, it is hard to conclude that the cultural values of the Gumuz are the major contributing factors for inter-ethnic violent conflict. Firstly, although there are problematic cultural practices in Gumuz society, they are practiced mainly within the

⁶ . Interview notes, informant from Shinasha ethnic group, Asossa, May 2008

⁷ Interview notes, Head of Women's Affairs Bureau of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

⁸ Interview notes, Gumuz elders, Asossa, May 2008

circle of the Gumuz clans themselves and their consequences are also seen in the Dibate and the Mandura Woredas of the Metekel Zone⁹. Secondly, the Gumuz live peacefully with other people whose ethnic identities and cultures are different. They live peacefully with the Agaw and the Shinasa people in many places in Wombera Woreda. Moreover, the Gumuz used to live peacefully with the Oromo in the common borders of the Kamashi zone until a government change in 1991. It would be expected, if the main source of inter-ethnic conflict was cultural, that frequent violent conflicts would happen between the Gumuz and, for example, the Shinasha and the Agaw, who have daily contact with them. However, the Gumuz have experienced less conflict with the Shinasha and the Agaw than with the Amhara. This is because the Shinasha do not threaten the territories of the Gumuz – they neither cultivate land (left fallow by the Gumuz) nor cut trees in the forests used by Gumuz for honey and hunting.¹⁰ Moreover, as many Kebeles of Shinasa live with Kebeles of the Gumuz, they know how to treat each other and respect their neighbours' cultures as well.

In fact, homicides between the Gumuz and the Amhara or the Agaw occur mainly as a result of business activities. This usually arises from the mistrust which has historical roots. Indeed, this kind of conflict usually occurs when an Amharan and a Gumuz trade over crop sharing or land rental. In this situation if the Gumuz thinks that the Amhara is cheating him he resorts to violence. Equally, the Gumuz may also kill a new internal immigrant because he may violate the Gumuz's territorial rules.¹¹. Clearly, cultural differences cannot be the main source of inter-ethnic violent conflict in the regional state.

⁹ According to the regional Police sources Dibate and Mandura Woredas have the highest homicide rates in the regional state

¹⁰ Interview notes, informants Gumuz elders, Asossa, May 2008

¹¹ Interview notes, Members of Dibate Woreda Administration, July 2008

Overall, ethnic identities in the regional state are not primordial ties which cannot be changed or influenced due to circumstances. Rather they are social constructs which are influenced by the historical relationships between the neighbouring ethnic groups and changes of political environment; and social and economic relationships. Inter-ethnic conflicts in fact are not merely the result of cultural differences between ethnic groups; or a consequence of unbalanced historical relationships, but are usually invoked by factors such as land use problems and cultural inequalities.

Political History of the Regional State

Early historical records of the indigenous people indicate that the Shankilla, Bega, Ganz, Bareya and Sasu, who lived in the borderlands of the central highlands, were among the earliest inhabitants of present day Ethiopia. For example, the Sasu who lived in the west (including in the highlands of Metekel and along the shores of the Blue Nile), had trade contacts with the Axumites as early as the Axumite kingdom for their gold reserves (Pankhurst, 1997:27-33).

However, slavery and slave raids against these indigenous people arose in the highlands of Abyssinia from various factors. Firstly, the slavery system was considered as religiously acceptable (Leviticus,25:44-46) and was legally supported, mainly by the medieval Solomonic kings of Ethiopia, and enshrined in 'legal' documents such as the *Kibre Negest* (the Glory of kings) and *Fetha Negest* (the Law of Kings) (Tibebu,1995:56).

Secondly, acquiring slaves became a sign of economic strength for all the imperial regimes of the Abyssinian highlanders. This is because slaves helped to strengthen the domestic economy and were exported to Arab countries and elsewhere in exchange for different goods. As a result the transference of slaves was seen as a form of tax, accepted by the imperial regimes and exercised from the medieval period to the early 20th century (Mebratie, 2004; Pankhurst, 1997:366).

Thirdly, slaves had a great importance, in the strengthening of the imperial regimes' military power, mainly during the Gondar monarchies, and as construction workers for the imperial palaces. For example, some *Baryas* (slaves) were recruited into the Emperor Amda Seyons's army as early as the 14th century (Pankhurst, 1997:97). The Emperor Susneyos, whose capital was in the Lake Tana area, launched an expedition towards the 'Black' people between 1615-1616, in order to capture slaves who could work in the construction of his palace (Pankhurst, 1997:353).

Finally, because the customs and beliefs of the *Baraya* (slave) were different from the Abyssinian societies this meant the *Baraya* were regarded with fear or suspicion. The term *Baraya* was often employed as the name of an evil spirit, for example, in a number of Ethiopian Christian prayers (Pankhurst, 1997:357). As a result, the people were considered by the citizens of Gondar, as 'unworthy of consideration' (Pankhurst, 1997:366). This led to the *Baraya* being enslaved not only for economic purposes but because they were thought to be evil spirits. As a result, slave raids against the 'Black' people lasted for centuries, from the early medieval to the modern period of Ethiopia (Zewde, 2002; Mebratie, 2004; 69).

The consequences of the slave raids were severe on the Gumuz and other 'Black' people. Firstly, as the raids were carried out against the 'Blacks' continuously, the people were forced to retreat from their previous settlement areas and move into the harsh lowlands along the Blue Nile shores. Secondly, the slave raids had a negative effect on population. For hundreds of years, women and children were taken as slaves by the Abyssinian highlanders. Men were also killed during these raids, and, if they surrendered, they were taken as slaves (Pankhurst, 1997). Finally, the above relationship between the highlanders and the 'Black' people resulted in the highlanders of both the Amhara and Oromo people classifying the 'Black' people as inferior. This, in turn, created deep-rooted hatred and mistrust between the ethnic groups (Abbute, 2002: 246). This categorisation persists in the 21st century. An informant from the Kamashi Gumuz said:

In market areas the goods provided by the Gumuz are not seen as equal to the goods provided by others. In addition, if Gumuz are being served in catering places, others do not want to be served from the same plate that the Gumuz person has used¹².

Thus, the stigma of the slavery system is still fresh in the memory of many indigenous people and this can be a source of conflict between them and the non-indigenous groups. Moreover, the words *Barya* (slave) and *Shanqella* are also commonly used as insults, and this can lead to violent conflict.

The relationship between the unitary state and the indigenous groups has remained as one of centre and periphery, and hostile, in modern Ethiopia. After the establishment

¹² Interview notes, informant from the Gumuz ethnic group, Asossa, May 2008

of the modern state and following the abolition of slavery, the relationship the state had with the indigenous groups shifted to the acquisition of agricultural lands and collection of taxes. The lands of Berta and Gumuz, however, were considered 'no man's land' and/or 'virgin land' to be colonised and the people, mainly the Gumuz, were labelled 'rebellious and barbarous who kill others for no reason' (Mebratie, 2004:74). The local chiefs of the Haile Selassie regime demanded the indigenous groups pay more taxes, in order to earn extra money for themselves (Mebratie, 1996:78 cited in Mebratie, 2004:74). Similarly, the Haile Selassie regime abolished the role of Sheikdoms in the Berta ethnic group and appointed an administrator from the centre who was totally unrelated to the ethnic group¹³. Thus, centre and periphery relationship between the state and the indigenous people continued during the military regime, when they were administered by governors who were recruited from the central highlands (Abbute, 2002; Mebratie, 2004).

The military regime also promoted the idea of the resettlement programme which displaced the indigenous people. This in itself has provided a source of conflict for a number of reasons. Firstly, the displacement of the indigenous people is a recent event; it is fresh in the memory for most of the surviving indigenous population. Abbute (2002:294) noted that around 18,000 Gumuz were forced away from around 250,000 hectares of their traditional land, when 48 settler villages were established in the Pawe special Woreda in 1984. Similarly, the Berta people were displaced from Bambassi and the area around Asossa, due to the resettlement programme of the same year. The reason for the displacement was because the residential areas of the indigenous people were considered by the government as 'unoccupied' land which had agricultural

¹³ An informant from Berta noted that a person called Debrethion, who was sent from the centre, was the first governor to the Asossa region,

potential (Viezzoh, 1992 cited in Yntiso, 2003). As a result the displacement caused unexpected changes in their day to day life and customary services which, in turn, contributed to the impoverishment of the people (Yntiso, 2003, Alex de Waal, 1991:318). Secondly, the resettlement negatively affected the size of the land that could be cultivated by shifting cultivation and the forests where the indigenous people collected supplementary food and hunted. As a result, the indigenous groups were hostile towards the settlers mainly in the Gumuz areas, leading to community wide violent conflict after the change of government in 1991(Abbute, 2002:169).

Over all, the indigenous people were marginalized and unable to take advantage of the benefits of the state during the imperial and military regimes. The people remained an illiterate population, compared to the neighbouring Amhara and Oromo people (Abbute, 2002). For example, there was only one university graduate from the Berta ethnic group throughout the Imperial and Military regimes¹⁴. The access of the Gumuz to education, health and other services remained difficult as well. The occupations of the ethnic groups have remained limited to traditional subsistence, due to low infrastructural development and scarce modern economic activities (Rahmato, 1988).

Conclusion

In conclusion, structural differences concerning subsistence, antagonistic historical relationships between the indigenous and non-indigenous people, and centre and periphery relationships between the state and the indigenous people have become sources of conflict in the regional state. The indigenous people practice shifting

¹⁴ Interview notes, Berta elders, Asossa, May, 2008

cultivation using hand tools cross a wide tract of land, left fallow periodically. To supplement their diet they hunt in forests, which also helps to maintain the ecosystem. The traditional spiritual faiths of the indigenous people are closely connected to this shifting cultivation practice and the forests. Land is considered to be communal property that a member of the sub-clan cultivates on the basis of a traditional tenure system.

On the other hand, the non-indigenous people practice plough cultivation, which requires full clearing of land, and farming labour provided by a single family and oxen. Land is considered private property, rented using the legal means of the country. As the non-indigenous people live in the territories of the indigenous people the structural difference in the styles of subsistence of the two groups create incompatible interests, which can lead to conflict.

Antagonistic historical relationships also contribute to the current violent conflict. The indigenous people have been continuously displaced from their ancestral homes by slave raids. These began hundreds of years ago but were still happening in the early 20th century. They were forced to move by neighbouring ethnic groups. They have been categorised as slaves and 'lower' citizens; this marginalization is still evident today in business relationships and social interaction with non-indigenous people. As a result, hatred and suspicion between the groups remains high. This can contribute to the current conflicts.

The peripheral and centre relationships between the state and the indigenous people have also been a source of conflict. The medieval Emperors considered the

indigenous people as a resource pool, and this lasted until the Haile Selassie regime. The military regime also displaced the indigenous people from their settlements and marginalised them from the benefits of government. These factors all contribute to the current conflict and to horizontal inequalities between the indigenous and non-indigenous people. This will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter. The poor political and economic history of the ethnic groups underlined the importance of the federalisation of the state as a means of restoring the dignity of the people and resolving the basic causes of conflict in the state.

Chapter Six

Federalism and Intra-regional Conflict and Conflict Management in the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

Introduction

This chapter explores the federal implementation process based on field visit data. It focuses on the structural sources of intra-regional conflicts in the regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz and the management of conflict. To this end, the horizontal inequalities between the indigenous and non-indigenous people and the territorial issues of the indigenous people and land use right of settlers in the regional state are discussed. The chapter addresses these issues at greater length and explores the extent to which the federal system has addressed them over the last 19 years.

The Establishment of the Regional State and the Impact on the Root Causes of Conflicts

The 1995 Federal Constitution of Ethiopia not only acknowledged the right of self-determination but also created conditions conducive to self-administration by ethnic groups (Article 39). As a result, the indigenous groups of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state have been able to establish a regional and local administration for the first time in their history. An elder from the Berta ethnic group explained: “We knew that we were equal citizens with others in 1992.”¹ Although the people were legally citizens of Ethiopia during the imperial and military regimes, their citizenship rights were essentially worthless because their collective rights, and their right to administer themselves, were not respected by the state.

¹ The first regional states were established in 1992 on the basis of the transitional charter of the country.

The regional state was established with a regional Council (Legislative), an Executive and a Judiciary. Four political organisations, which formed a united front, under the name of *Benishangul Gumuz People's Democratic United Front*, run the regional Council. It has a total of 99 seats, of which 40 are for Berta, 35 are for Gumuz, 11 are for Shinasha, 2 for Mao and 2 for Komo. Other non-indigenous people occupy the remaining 9. The General Assembly is convened twice a year. There are also local councils established in the Woreda and Kebele of the indigenous groups' areas. The non-indigenous people can also be represented in the local councils, for example, the Pawe special Woreda was established for non-indigenous people (BIPPCSA, 2005). The Regional Executive is established from indigenous groups, and almost all the indigenous groups are represented on it. Nevertheless, there is no clear power-sharing mechanism between the indigenous ethnic groups, and this has been the source of one of the complaints of Berta ethnic group representatives. Members of the judiciary are assigned by the Regional Council, after being nominated by the regional President.²

Indigenous people can also become members of the House of People's Representatives (HOPR) of the federal government. In addition, every indigenous ethnic group is represented by at least one person in the House of Federation (HOF). This means the regional states are represented by at least five members in the HOF (Article 61 of the federal constitution).

² Interview notes, legal advisor to the President of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, Asossa, 2008

The official language of the regional state is Amharic. However, the three languages of the major indigenous groups (Berta, Gumuz and Shinasha) have recently been adopted as a medium of instruction in primary education (Vaughan, 2006).

The federal constitution stipulates that “the peoples of Ethiopia as a whole, and each nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia in particular, have the right to improved living standards and to sustainable development” (Article 43/1). In implementing this constitutional right the federal government allocates a budget subsidy every year, which covers nearly 90% of capital and recurrent budget of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. For example, out of the 307 million Birr total budget 280 million was allocated from federal government sources as a budget subsidy in the 2007/2008 budget year³. The regional state is also a beneficiary of the national infrastructural expansion, education and health services as noted in Chapter Five.

The regional state has fairly distributed the regional institutions to the urban centres. For example, the men’s boarding training centre for small-scale industries is in the Kamashi zone. The regional teacher training college and women’s Boarding School are in Metekel. Others such as the agricultural training college, the agricultural research centre, and the technical skills training centre are in Asossa. A university will be also established in Asossa by the federal government.⁴

Overall, the establishment of the regional state has brought a radical change in the political history of the people (Young, 1999). It reaffirmed the equality of the indigenous people with dominant neighbouring ethnic groups. They have been

³ Benishangul-Gumuz regional state annual budget, Finance and Planning Bureau of the regional state, 2008

⁴ Interview notes, a Cabinet member, Asossa, May 2008

enabled to administer themselves and to negotiate with their neighbours with regard to issues such as common borders and the use of agricultural land. This can be considered a total reverse of the earlier political pattern that displaced the indigenous people from their territories. Moreover, representation in the HOPR and HOF has given them equitable participation rights in national affairs, and enabled them to negotiate about budget subsidies for their special circumstances⁵.

The establishment of the regional state has, however, been accompanied by intra-state and inter-state conflicts. These have certain structural causes, some inherited from historical factors and some created by the federal system itself. The federal distribution of political power itself also causes intra-state conflict. This chapter deals with how the structural sources of conflicts have been addressed by the ethnic-based arrangement. Issues related to the role of political parties and the distribution of political power in the regional state will be dealt with in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Social and Economic and Inequalities

Scholars argue that social and economic inequalities which manifest themselves in unequal access to employment opportunities, other social services and economic activities between different ethnic communities can be causes of conflicts. The success of federal states in multi-ethnic countries can depend upon addressing such inequalities between ethnic groups (Stewart, 2008).

⁵ For example, the former President of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state had several discussions with the HOF with regard to the special budget subsidy requirements of the regional state. He also presented it in some common forums, attended by other regional state leaders (interview notes, May 2008).

The federalisation of the Ethiopian state was a first step to redress the historical inequalities and marginalisation of the indigenous people. However, whether this becomes sustainable depends not only on the constitutional federal arrangement but also on the federal process. According to a survey by the Central Statistical Agency in 2010, the numbers of urban dwellers as well as employment opportunities have grown significantly in Benishangul-Gumuz over the last 20 years. For example, the number of urban dwellers, who are mainly non-indigenous people, was estimated at around 113,279 in 2010. Economic activity in the urban areas has reached 61.5%, which is very close to Addis Ababa (64.5%) and higher than the urbanised areas of the neighbouring regional states of Amhara (57.9%) and Oromia (58.9%). Unemployment in the urban areas of Benishangul-Gumuz, at 9.2%, is lower than the average national level (15.7%) and also lower than the urban areas of Oromia (12.9%) and Amhara (12.8 %) (CSAE, November, 2010).

However, if we compare the access of indigenous groups to urban centres with that of non-indigenous groups, significant variation can be observed. For example, table 6.1 below shows the ratio of people living in urban and rural areas from the major ethnic groups that represent either the indigenous or non-indigenous people in the regional state. Although the population of Berta is greater than the Amhara population in the regional state, the Amhara population who live in the urban areas are three times greater than those the Berta. Moreover, while the number of Oromo living in the regional state is less than the population of Gumuz, the number of Oromo living in the urban areas is twice the size of the urban Gumuz population. This indicates that the indigenous groups have limited access to modern social services and business activities compared to the non-indigenous groups living in the regional state.

6.1. The ratio of people living in urban and rural areas from the major ethnic groups in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state

Ethnic group	Population	Urban	Percentage	Rural	Percentage ⁶
Total population	670,847	97,965	13.5	572,882	86.5
Berta	173,743	8,794	8.98	164,949	28.79
Gumuz	141,654	9999	10.21	131,646	22.98
Amhara	142,557	36,660	37.42	105,897	18.48
Oromo	89346	21693	22.14	67653	11.81
Shinasha	50,916	7638	7.80	43,278	7.55
mao	12,774	1628	1.66	11116	1.94
Komo	6,464	168	.17	6296	1.10
Tigray	4559	1853	1.89	2706	.47

Source: CSAE, census, 2007

It seems also that the indigenous people are choosing to distance themselves from the urban centres as urbanisation expands in the regional state. For example, the Gumuz people who were living in the surroundings of the town of Gilgelbeles, which is at the centre of the Metekel zone, are now living far away as the town has expanded since it became the centre of the zone administration. Almost all the urban dwellers are non-indigenous except the political representatives of Gumuz and guards who work for government offices⁷ (Abbute, 2002).

The former regional state President, Ato Yaregal, explained the dangers of this:

... Although the indigenous people are politically empowered, they are not economically active because all economic activities are controlled by the non-indigenous people. For example, Asossa is a centre of the Benishangul (Berta). However, the Bertas have nothing to do in Asossa. Everything is controlled by others. Such differences have also led to political conflicts. During the last election (2005), the settlers in the regional state voted for the opposition

⁶ Percentage is added by the author

⁷ Interview notes, Informant from Mandura Administration office, Gilgelbeles, July 2008

groups, who do not recognise the right of self-determination of the indigenous groups. As a result, the reaction of the indigenous groups to the settlers was hostile⁸.

The participation of the indigenous groups in the civil service staff is minimal compared to the non-indigenous groups. Table 6.2 shows the participation of the indigenous and non-indigenous groups in the Civil Service staff of the regional state as of July 2008. For example, although the general population of the indigenous groups is around 58% in the regional state, their participation in the civil service staff amounts to only 27 %, and this is less than the participation of the Amhara ethnic group (38%). Overall, 73% per cent of the Civil Service staff comes from non-indigenous groups among which 64% are Amhara and Oromo. In fact, the 27% participation of the indigenous people in the Civil Service staff only emerged after affirmative action taken by the regional state, enabling them to participate in the regional and local administrations⁹. Hence, as argued by Kefale (2008), the preferential treatment provided by the federal government for the indigenous people in respect of college and university admissions becomes justifiable to redress their historical marginalisation, regardless of the opposition from the non-indigenous people in the regional state. For example, if admission to a preparatory college after completing high school is set at 2.50 on a scale up to 4.00 for all students, students from the indigenous groups can be admitted at 2.40. Students who were able to finish the preparatory college also get better opportunities than the non-indigenous people in the regional state. Priority is also given to students from the indigenous people for technical vocational and teacher training (Kefale.2008:172-173).

⁸ Interview notes, Asossa, May 2008

⁹ Interview notes, Dean of the Agricultural technical college, Bambassi, May 2008

6.2. Participation of the indigenous and non-indigenous groups in the regional civil service

Ethnic group	Male	Female	Total
Berta	606	267	873
Gumuz	530	114	644
Shinasha	769	168	937
Mao/Como	72	14	86
Amhara	2484	1133	3617
Oromo	1784	648	2432
Agaw	360	179	539
Tigray	119	23	142
Gurage	82	27	109
Others	70	16	86
Total	6876	2589	9465

Source: Benishangul-Gumuz Civil Service Bureau.

The regional state has been one of the poorest, after Tigray and Afar, in the country. For example, the 1990 Household Income, Consumption and Expenditure (HICE) survey results indicated that the proportion of people living in absolute poverty in the regional state was 54% – significantly higher than the national figure (44.2%)¹⁰. The figure was the same (54%) in the 1999/2000 HICE survey¹¹. The HICE survey also showed that the rural people, mainly indigenous, were the main contributors (55%) to the absolute poverty in the regional state¹². Moreover, informants from Dibate Woreda noted that the living conditions between the indigenous and non-indigenous people in the Woreda were hardly comparable. The non-indigenous people could produce enough crops to feed their families and pay for extra expenses. However, many of the indigenous people were not able even to eat three times a day¹³.

¹⁰ Poverty Profile of Ethiopia: Analysed based on the 1999 HICE and WM survey results, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development(MOFED) Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, March 2002.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Interview notes, informant, Public relation officer of Dibate Woreda administration, Dibate, July 2008.

Observation on a Saturday market day, during the data collection in the town of Asossa in May 2008, noted that some mango and bamboo products were brought by Bertas, who lived near the town of Asossa, but all the other goods in the market were brought by non-indigenous groups. In fact the grievances of the indigenous people are numerous. As a Gumuz informant from the Metekel zone put it: “While we are living as we were centuries ago, others are using our resources to buy brand new cars”¹⁴.

Overall, although it requires further study, the evidence of indigenous participation in the regional civil service, and their involvement in urban areas and in economic activities suggests that horizontal inequalities might have widened during the federal process even though development opportunities and education are expanding in the regional state. Unless the development endeavours are properly tuned to the context of the population, there is the danger of a potential source of conflict as horizontal inequalities can create unmet demands which, in turn, can lead to violent conflicts.

In addressing the above inequalities, the focus of the federal and regional governments has been on expansion of social services and in taking some affirmative action to encourage the participation of indigenous people in the Civil Service. Moreover, an attempt has been made to use the languages of Berta, Gumuz and Shinasha as mediums of instruction in primary schools (Vaughan, 2007). However, the problems require a comprehensive action plan that considers the special circumstances and the territorial demands of the indigenous people. Moreover, the

¹⁴ Interview notes, a Gumuz elder, Gilgelbeles town, July 2008

indigenous people need further capacity development activities which can take their cultural practices into account. It might be useful to model a plan on lessons drawn from other countries such as Australia and Canada, which have a great deal of experience of dealing with inequality between indigenous people and other citizens.

Cultural inequalities

Cultural inequalities have also been a source of conflict between the indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Historically, the indigenous groups' cultures, and especially those of the Gumuz and the Berta, have not been regarded as equal to the highland cultures. The Gumuz and Berta suffered racial discrimination from neighbouring Amhara and Oromo. As Donham (1986) noted the *Black* people were not considered to be proper marriage partners for Abyssinians. For example, anyone born from an informal sexual union between the Abyssinians and the 'Shankilla' could be prevented from integrating into Abyssinian society for many generations (Donham, 1986, 13).

The Oromo and the Amhara generally undermine the indigenous groups and consider them as lower class citizens. This is manifested in public areas and in business interactions. For example, a quarrel between two Gumz and other two Ormos sparked a violent conflict among the two communities in Sasiga and Bolegengofoy woredas from the Oromia and Benishangul- Gumuz regional states respectively in May 2008.¹⁵ Hatred and historical prejudices are the main sources of conflict between the Amhara and Gumuz along the common borders of these two regional states, as disclosed by a

¹⁵ Interviews notes, a member of Parliament, June 2008

joint committee from the Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states in 2005¹⁶. As discussed in Chapter Five this is rooted in the relationships between the highlanders and the indigenous people going back to the early medieval period of the Abyssinian state and continued through to the 20th century. For example, Ras Hailu, the son and successor of Tekle Haimanot (1850s-1901) actively participated in the slave trade in the region (Tsega 1997, 69). Slave raids also continued up to 1921 by different governors including Zeleqe Ligu who was a governor of the region in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1921, for example, his forces penetrated as far as Wanbara to capture slaves, apparently with Haylu's blessing. Unable to defend themselves, many of the victims fled to the Sudan (Abdussamed 1995:62 cited in Endalew, 2002:18). This kind of recent historical relationship has remained sharp in the memory of the indigenous people and created a favourable condition for inter-ethnic conflict between the indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Violent conflicts, caused by cultural inequalities, are also reinforced by the cultural practices of the Gumuz people. As discussed in Chapter Five, the Gumuz respect, and consider as a hero, someone who kills, and, when the murdered person is from the Amhara, the murderer and his family get significant respect from their community. This has greatly contributed to the inter-ethnic conflicts in some Woredas, such as Dibate and Mandura.

As a result, the number of crimes in the regional state in general, and in Gumuz society in particular, is significant. Table 6.3 shows that an increasing crime rate in the regional state. Police reports on crime in the regional state show that crime

¹⁶ A report of field research on the conflicts existing in the Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz regional state Border Areas, March 2005

increases with the level of illiteracy in the rural areas. The police reports also indicate that the major crimes in the regional state are related to physical harm, often resulting in disability and murder¹⁷.

Table 6.3: Number of crime committed in Benishangul- Gumuz regional state

Year	Number of crime Committed	Number of persons participated
2001	2242	3593
2002	1366	2165
2003	2356	3808
2004	2986	4678
2005	3007	4862
2006	3062	4640

Source: the Benishangul-Gumuz Police Commission

Overall, regardless of the federalisation of the state, historical and cultural inequalities and prejudices still undermine the relationship between the indigenous and non-indigenous ethnic groups. In these circumstances, a focus on ethnic identity can result in more violent conflict, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

Thus, federalisation of the state has to create an enabling environment for the transformation of the structural causes of conflict, by creating regional and local government institutions and fostering leadership. Strengthening of regional and local institutions and the fostering of leadership are considered the basis of democratisation and democratic consolidation in traditional societies, like the indigenous people of Benishangul- Gumuz, according to the World Development Report 2011.

¹⁷ Interview reports, Police head, Dibate Woreda, July 2008

Nevertheless, although government institutions, such as regional and locally-elected Woreda and Kebele councils, and police and militia organisations, have been established in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, the capacity of these institutions to address the complex social, economic and cultural sources of violent conflict remains weak. For example, according to a study by Action Aid Ethiopia (2006), regional Woreda and Kebele councils have serious capacity problems in attempting to address the social, economic and cultural causes of conflict in the regional state. The Woreda councils were characterised by capacity deficits, poor education of elected representatives, inadequately trained staff and a weak financial base provided by the regional government. The capacity deficits include lack of training, an absence of an ability to meet guidelines or an ethical code for leaders, the lack of a clear definition of the duties and responsibilities of the different offices, a lack of cabinet job descriptions, an inability to follow-up on decisions and compile timely reports, and a failure to undertake periodic evaluations of the peace and development issues of the Woredas. Citizens were asked to rank, by 1 to 8, the most serious problems they faced in the regional state. The list included corruption, inefficient government services, unemployment and poverty, inadequate strategy for controlling HIV/AIDS, crime, human rights violations, and lack of security/stability. Inefficient government services were ranked the highest followed by corruption and crime (Action Aid Ethiopia, 2006).

Similarly, some of the institutions which are responsible for managing violent conflict are weak. For example, the regional state police force numbered around only 600 in 2006. The strength of the police is still exceptionally low for an area of 50,390 km².

There is a shortage of police transport and communication facilities¹⁸. Moreover, according to interviews in Mandura and the Dibate Woredas of Metekel Zone, police officers at Woreda level are influenced by the traditional leaders and this hinders them from discharging responsibilities such as controlling crime suspects.

The above analysis of the structural causes of conflict and the capacity of the regional institutions of governance reveal two interrelated factors. First, there are structural causes of conflict which can lead to violent conflicts in the regional state. In addition, the regional state lacks strong institutions of governance to address the structural causes of conflicts. This means that any analysis of conflict, which does not give due attention to structural causes of conflict and the capacity for governance, is inadequate, when considering the problems associated with the federal process in Ethiopia. For example, Asnake Kefale (2008), analyses the sources of inter-regional and local conflicts in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state in relation to the federal arrangement, without considering the structural causes of conflict or the capacity of the institutions of governance in the regional state. This makes the analysis inadequate.

Territorial Issues of the Indigenous Groups: Issues of Agricultural Land Use

Land use is one of the sources of conflict in the regional state. It is influenced by three interrelated factors: immigration and land encroachment, the resettlement programmes in the territories of the indigenous people, and rural development policies. In the highland areas of Ethiopia, there is a shortage of land as it is the main resource that supports the livelihood of tens of millions of rural people (MOFED, 2003:15). Due to this reason many people immigrate to the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state,

¹⁸ Interview notes, security expert, Security and Administration Bureau, Asossa, May 2008

either to settle permanently or to work temporarily. The movement of people to the regional state has become a threat for the indigenous groups, because their main occupation, shifting cultivation, requires that large areas of land are given over to forest, and a decrease of the size of the forest devastates the traditional livelihood of the people and their environment (Abbute, 2002).

Evidence from field visits suggests that many people come to the regional state searching for fertile land. For example, many families and community members come from Wollo to join existing settlers, who came during the *Derge* era, in resettlement sites in Pawe, Assosa and Bambassi in particular. Farmers from the Gojjam, Gondar and Agew areas are also moving into the rural areas of Metekel. Oromo farmers from East and West Wallega are pushing into areas of the Kamashi zone, and the Bambasi and Mao Woredas. Sudanese and the so-called ‘Felata’ migrants and merchants also come from Sudan across the international border.

These migrations have become a source of conflict between the indigenous and non-indigenous people for a number of reasons¹⁹. Firstly, conflict occurs between the immigrants and the indigenous people when the immigrants try cut down trees in the forest. This happens because to the immigrants the fallow land covered by forest seems *virgin* or unutilized²⁰. Moreover, the immigrants do not care about the environment and the natural forest because they have no legal right to live in the regional state, so their commitment to long-term sustainability is low. In addition,

¹⁹ Interview notes, Informants from Amhara and Oromia regional states, Bahrdar, July 2008, Addis Ababa, June 2008

²⁰ Interview notes, Metekel zone administration, Gegelebeles, July 2008

they cut down the trees because their cultivation system is based on full clearance of farm land²¹.

An elder from the Gumuz ethnic group, who is a leader of a committee that deals with common border issues in the regional state explained:

There are conflicts due to land use along the common borders of Benshangul-Gumuz and Amhara regional states. The Gumuz tend to own a larger land plot that can be cultivated on the basis of shifting cultivation. However, when the Amharans came they began to cultivate the Gumuz land plot; they also cut down trees so they could harvest crops on cleared land. Therefore, this became a source of continuous conflict with the indigenous people²².

All the informants from the indigenous people whom I interviewed during the field visit noted that immigration is a major source of conflict between the indigenous and non-indigenous groups²³. When people migrated to the regional state from the neighbouring states, their numbers were so large that they were able to establish their own Kebeles. For example, according to the Administrator of the Metekel zone around 10,000 internal immigrants enter the zone every year, mainly from the Gojjam, Gondar and Wollo areas of the Amhara regional state.²⁴ As a result, the indigenous people who lived there have been systematically forced to move away. Then the new settlers were encouraged by the neighbouring regional states to request a referendum in order to determine which regional state should administer their area. This has led to

²¹ Interview notes, Metekel zone administration, Gelgelbeles, July 2008

²² Interview notes, a Gumuz elder, Asossa, May 2008

²³ Interview notes, Indigenous informants, Asossa and Metekel, May-July 2008

²⁴ Interview notes, Metekel zone administration, Gelgelbeles, July 2008

systematic encroachment on the Benishangul-Gumuz territories by the neighbouring regional states²⁵.

A Cabinet member of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state explained:

Areas in Daliti were given to the Benishanul-Gumuz regional state by referendum. But since then many people from the Oromia regional state have come and settled in the same area. Now the Oromia migrants have started to call for another referendum, which would make these areas part of the Oromia regional state. You can also see this kind of thing happening in Assosa and Bambasse Woredas. People come searching for arable land but then they start claiming that land as part of the Oromia state; which is unacceptable to us²⁶.

This source of conflict is reinforced by different understanding of land use among the indigenous and non-indigenous people. For the indigenous people the issues of land use are directly linked with their survival. This is not because of the scarcity of land in the regional state, but because of the long-term systemic displacement and the recent increasing number of immigrants. This increase has been considered a threat to the survival of the indigenous groups and their right of self- administration in their own regional state²⁷.

An elder from Berta ethnic group explained:

There can be systemic and non-systemic displacement of the indigenous people following the mobility of other people to the regional state. These threats should be prevented²⁸.

²⁵ Interview notes, a Cabinet member of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

²⁶ Interview notes, President of the regional state, Asossa, May 2008

²⁷ Interview notes, A member of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May,2008

²⁸ Interview notes, a Berta elder, Asossa, May 2008

On the other hand, the land use issues are resource-based disputes for the non-indigenous people. This is because land is a resource which was bought and sold during the imperial regime and which can be leased, like any commodity, during the current regime. In addition, the non-indigenous people are plough cultivators who sustain themselves by cultivation of smaller land plots. As a result, the use of larger plots by the indigenous people is not acceptable to the non-indigenous, especially since there is a land shortage in the highland areas.

An OPDO representative in the town of Asossa confirmed this point:

There is shortage of arable land in the highland areas of the Oromia regional state. As a result there has been resource-based conflict along the common border between the Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states. The Berta and Gumuz complain about land encroachment by the Oromos, but they are not using their arable land properly.²⁹

A senior officer in the federal Police also spoke about this:

In my opinion, the problem is resource-based conflict. The Gumuz always claim that their resources have been taken by the Oromos, but they have not used their resources properly³⁰.

However, the authorities of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state believe that people from the Oromia regional state were deliberately forced to move to the lowland areas, such as Tongo, in order to get them access to land. Similarly, the Bambassi local authorities expressed concern about the numbers of Oromo peasants pushing into Bambasi, in order to obtain land without going through legal processes. This kind of

²⁹ Interview notes, Head of OPDO office, Asossa, May 2008

³⁰ Interview notes, a senior officer at the Federal Police, Addis Ababa, June 2008

peasant movement is worst in some Kebeles along the common border areas of the Eastern Wallega zone and Bambassi Woreda, including Boshuna Kergege, Moutsu Mado, and Wemba kebeles. Around 400 illegal migrants were expelled in 2006 from these areas; most went back to Begi or Mendi, which share borders with Bambasi (Vaughn, 2006). Based on interviews with members of the regional Council, there seems to be a common concern among regional state leaders that immigrants from the neighbouring regional states might outnumber the indigenous people³¹.

This has become a challenge to the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state in the formulation of rural land use guidelines that protect the rights of the indigenous groups.³² This is because the rural land use guidelines' are difficult to implement across all indigenous groups and this might encourage more immigration to the regional state. Moreover, the government does not have a clear idea about the benefits of the land use guidelines for the indigenous groups and their shifting cultivation systems. There is no national experience model on this matter that the regional government can utilise. The only available experience is contained within the provision of certificates to farmers, which guarantee the right to use land given to them by the government. These certificates have been issued in the Amhara regional state, for example³³. However, as this is related to plough cultivation, it is not applicable to the shifting cultivators. The result is that the regional state has preferred to postpone ratification of the land use guidelines to discourage internal immigrants.

One of the Cabinet members of the regional state explains:

³¹ Interview notes, Head of the Security and Administration Bureau of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

³² Interview notes, Economic Advisor to the regional President Asossa, May 2008

³³ Ibid

We don't have rural land use guidelines. We would like to work on the basis of the federal constitution. If there is massive demand for resettlement from another regional state to this regional state, the sender and receiver regional states should discuss this matter beforehand.³⁴

The above analysis of land use rights in the regional state shows how structural issues have been complicated by the ethnic-based federalisation of the state. Firstly, the people in the highland areas have real resource constraints. Therefore, they want to come and work in the relatively fertile land of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. In practice the federalisation of the state did not stop this kind of people's movements across the common territories of the regional states. Rather, it has complicated the movement of people, by creating ethnic-based regional and local administrations, whose interest lies in gaining land from each other. This is because the lower level administrations in the common border areas want to expand their territories. The neighbouring regional states have also become interested in the land use of the border lands and are reluctant to demarcate their borders for various reasons identified in Chapter Nine. The result, as noted above, has been territorial insecurity for indigenous people. This will remain a structural cause of conflict unless there is federal government intervention balancing the interests of both immigrant and the indigenous people in the regional state.

Land use rights of settlers in the regional state

Based on interviews with representatives of the non-indigenous people, land use by the settlers has also become a source of conflict between the indigenous and non-

³⁴ Interview notes, Cabinet member of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

indigenous people since the establishment of the regional state³⁵. As discussed in Chapter Five the military regime resettled many people from the highland areas, displacing the Berta and Gumuz from their residential areas. The settlers were given around one hectare of farm land per family for individual residential quarters and private vegetable gardens when they arrived in the resettlement areas. In addition, each of the settlers' cooperatives collectively owned around 500 hectares, but this was redistributed to settlers after the downfall of the military regime, and the average landholding of each settler became smaller just as demand for additional land plot due to the increasing population. For example, the average household landholding decreased to 0.5 hectare in one of the settler villages close to Asossa (Kefale, 2008:171-172). So, the people demanded additional land plots. However, this increase was considered a threat to the indigenous groups' land use practice. Moreover, some of the settlers near the town of Assosa were removed in 2006 from their farming land because of infrastructure development and, as yet, the regional state has not compensated them³⁶.

The regional head of the Administration and Security Bureau summarised this situation:

The settlers claimed more land to accommodate their population growth. The people are still cultivating the land given to them when they arrived here 30 years ago. Since then no additional land plots have been given to any family. On the other hand, the natives do not accept that additional land plots should

³⁵ 40 per cent of the total informants, in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, are non-indigenous people

³⁶ Interview notes, an elder settler, Asossa Woreda, May 2008

to be given to the settlers – as they consider their land to have been inherited from their ancestors³⁷.

Furthermore, according to the focus group discussion held with the non-indigenous people in Bambassi Woreda³⁸, the indigenous groups have started reclaiming land plots that were given to the settlers during the military regime. This has happened in the Bambassi Woreda of the Asossa zone. Ato Getachew Ayalew, who was Administrator of the local area during the military regime, gave the settlers in the village of Amba 14 additional land plots, which they have cultivated and grown vegetables and fruit and irrigated for around 21 years.³⁹

The Berta village of Gambella is near the settler village of Amba 14. As some of the settlers in Amba 14 were Muslims they had a good relationship with the Bertas of Gambella before the violent conflict erupted in 2007. They enjoyed common social activities and conducted inter-ethnic marriages⁴⁰. However, a quarrel occurred in 2007 between two individuals, one from Berta and the other a settler, over the borders of land plots. After the incident, the Gambella community claimed the settler's land, which had been irrigated and cultivated. Later the entire harvest from this land was destroyed by people unknown. The matter is still being investigated by the police, and as a result, the local administration has prevented all harvesting of the land. This led to a breakdown in the social relationship between the settlers and the Berta people and they started using different mosques and market places.⁴¹

³⁷ Interview notes, Head of settlers representatives who went to the House of Federation to complain about their political representation in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state in 2000, Asossa, May 2008

³⁸ Focus group discussion notes, Bambassi Woreda, May 2008

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Interview notes, economic advisor to the regional president, Asossa, May 2008

⁴¹ Interview notes, representative of EPDM, Assosa, May 2008

An informant from the Gambella Kebele, who participated in a focus group discussion, said: “We do not have any quarrel with the settlers. We were deprived of our land. So we have only claimed our land. The land is ours”⁴²

On the other hand, an informant from village 14, who participated in another focus group discussion, says, of the same issue:

When we started cultivating the land plot 21 years ago, it was virgin and full of forests. Since then, we have been cultivating the land without any problems. The land claim came when the regional government and the local administration said the land belonged to the indigenous groups. Therefore, the problem is related to the Asossa zone and the Bambassi Woreda administrations because they see everything in the Woreda as belonging to them.⁴³

Although the regional administration did not make a thorough study of the nature of the problem, it did halt the conflict by dividing the irrigated land into two. Half of the land plot, which is on the river side and adjacent to Gambella village, was given to the Berta ethnic group. The remaining half, which is on the other side of the river and adjacent to village 14, was given to the settlers⁴⁴. This has left both the Berta and the settlers still complaining about the decision. The Berta complain because the land plot originally belonged to them and the settlers complain because half of the land, which they cultivated for more than 21 years, was given to the Berta⁴⁵. They say they have

⁴² Interview notes, a settler informant, Bambassi Woreda, May 2008

⁴³ Notes, focus group discussions elders settlers, Bambassi Woreda, May 2008

⁴⁴ Interview notes, the Economic Advisor of the regional President, Asossa, May 2008

⁴⁵ Focus group discussions held with both the Berta and settlers, Bambassi, May 2008

accepted the decision for the ‘sake of peace’⁴⁶. Nevertheless, it has all left the relationship between the settlers and Berta polarised.

The evidence about land uses in the regional state shows different interpretations of the indigenous and non-indigenous people. Land use for the indigenous is not only about land cultivation, but also about ancestral land ownership. The land use issue is in fact an identity issue to the indigenous people, and because of this they still claim the land plots given to the non-indigenous people 30 years ago. However, this point alone does not explain the issue. There is political ethnicity of local leaders which exploits historical factors. Because of this claims erupted into violence when members of the indigenous people controlled the administrative institutions. This demonstrates the political instrumentality of ethnicity in different circumstances as noted above in Chapter Two.

However, the maintenance of territorial security for the indigenous people cannot be achieved in isolation from the individual rights of the other groups in the regional state. Maintenance of basic citizenship rights is a fundamental constitutional obligation of all regional states. Moreover, the number of the non-indigenous people is almost equal to the number of the indigenous people in the regional state. In other words, sustainable conflict management can only be maintained by balancing individual and group rights in the regional state.

However, in association with the federalisation of the state, land use conflicts between the indigenous and non-indigenous show incompatible interests between the

⁴⁶ Focus group discussions notes, settlers elders , Bambassi Woreda, May 2008

group rights of the indigenous people and the individual rights of the settlers. Although the regional constitution clearly states that any individual has a right to work and acquire property (Article 40) in the regional state, in practical terms that person has to be a member of an indigenous group to acquire land. This has clearly been shown in the denial of farming land not only to new immigrants but also to the older settlers who need additional land plots, and who lost their land plots due to the infrastructural development. This shows the federal process lacks the means to balance citizenship rights and group rights in the regional state. In other words, the federal and regional constitutions and authorities have to recognise that people have a right to define themselves other than by the identity of the ethnic groups in the regional state. Moreover, it has to be recognised that the people who define themselves by different identities should have equal political and economic rights with the indigenous people. A lack of balance between the group rights of the indigenous people and the citizenship rights of the non-indigenous people has the potential to destabilise the regional state.

Rural Development Policies of the Federal Government

Some of the development plans initiated by the federal government have become manifestations of centre and periphery relations between the peripheral regional states and the federal government. As discussed in Chapter Five, after the abolition of the slavery system the Haile Selassie regime only focused on exploitation of the fertile land of Metekel. Similarly the Military regime considered the land of Gumuz and Berta land as ‘no man’ land and initiated a massive resettlement programme which resulted in displacement of the Gumuz and Berta people from their territories. For example, the development initiatives in the Gumuz territories of Metekel resulted in

land seizures, loss of life and destruction of homes. In addition, the development policies caused a decline in Gumuz economic activities, further marginalisation, and erosion of their customary laws and regular periods of food insecurity. Deforestation associated with economic development programmes caused disappearance of wild animals and wild forest foods which are important ingredients of the Gumuz diet (Yintso, 2003:6).

The development policies of the current regime, which focus on promotion of big agricultural farms in the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state do not give due attention to the identity and collective rights of the indigenous people. There are two major points. Firstly, the rural development policy and strategy focuses on expanding modern farms in the territories of the indigenous people without due consideration of the livelihood of the local people. For example, the rural development policy categorizes the agro-ecological zones of the country into three areas:

1. The east, and to some extent, the southern arid lands where the main livelihood is cattle herding.
2. The west lowlands, where there are large areas of uncultivated land and a small population
3. The highlands, which are ideal for farming but where farm land is limited and rapidly being eroded and where population density is high (ADPS, 2002:16).

If we assume the second category of agro-ecological zones applies to the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state⁴⁷, the development policy does not consider the farming practice of the indigenous people as it only takes account of the smallness of

⁴⁷ It is because the location of the regional state is exactly in the second category of agro-ecological zone

their population size and the suitability of the land fertility for modern farms. Where the policy encourages development it focuses on setting up large commercial farms and the opportunity to attract agricultural labourers from the densely populated highland areas to settle in the region. The policy does not include anything from which the local people could benefit (ADPS, 2002, 58).

The expansion of modern farming in the regional state confirms the above analysis. For example, new investment farms, known as the Mandura Organic Agricultural Development and the Bengeth River Agricultural Development, were given to investors in the territories of the indigenous people in 1996/97 and 1997/98 (Abbute, 2002:123). Other rain-fed modern agricultural development were also established, mainly in the Metekel zone, without due consideration of the livelihoods of the indigenous people and the environment (ibid). Overall between 1995-1999 the regional government licensed a total of 17 commercial farms and gum and incense extraction firms, and mining companies leased over 122,590 hectares of arable land – all of which did negatively affect the livelihoods of the local people (Yintso, 2003:3). In addition, the regional government recently provided around 1.2 million hectares of land to the federal government, for cultivation by foreign investors⁴⁸. Although it is too early to evaluate the impact of this decision on the livelihoods of the indigenous people, it is clear it might cause violent conflict if due consideration has not been given to their territorial issues.

Secondly, the agricultural extension programmes that have been implemented in the regional state do not take into account the traditional practices of the indigenous

⁴⁸ Ethiopia's first web page, interview with Ato Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, November 26 2009

people. This is because they focus on plough cultivation training and the settling in of indigenous groups in specific places (sedentarization) (Abbute, 2002:277; Yintso, 2003:4). As noted by Mebratie (2004) it is widely considered that plough cultivation is more productive than shifting cultivation. Dessalegn (1988) argues that shifting cultivation, which is considered an outdated system of cultivation, contributes to the lower productivity of the indigenous groups in Metekel. However, Mebratie (2004) argues that although the productivity of shifting cultivation is low this does not mean that plough cultivation is more productive because there is no evidence that it produces more than subsistence level output in the highland areas of the country. Moreover, plough cultivation tends to disrupt the ecosystem, which can result in deforestation and other environmental degradation.

In fact, the agricultural extension programme is not tuned to the specific situation of the indigenous people. The regional President's six months' progress report of 2009 confirmed that lack of adequate agricultural extension packages, tailored to the regional state situation, was one of the main problems for the implementation of agricultural extension. The regional administration lacks capacity that enables it to formulate agricultural development programmes suitable to the context of the regional state⁴⁹. The support of the federal government for the regional state was inadequate, according to the former regional state President. The agricultural extension workers also found it difficult to communicate with the indigenous people, because of their different languages (Kassaye, 2002:106).

⁴⁹ Interview notes, Economic Advisor to the regional President, Asossa, May 2008.

The evidence discussed above suggests that the establishment of federal structure on the basis of ethnicity is not enough to address the historically marginalised ethnic groups. The development policies are formulated at national level and implemented by the regional states. Hence, they often ignore important aspects of social, economic and environmental factors of the indigenous people. This implies development endeavours should also be tuned to the cultural and environmental context of the people under investigation. Otherwise development induced problems can undermine the benefits of the federal state for the indigenous people.

These kinds of problems could also have similar implications in other multi-ethnic regional states such as the Southern state. In addition, the problem implies that a lack of regional capacity to develop regional policies contributes to the conflicts in the regional states as Feyisa (2006) has identified taking Gambella regional state as a case study. The centralised policy and decision making of the ruling party can contribute to this problem as noticed in Chapter Four. Hence, in addition to the efforts required from the regional states the federal institutions should also allow the regional states to stand by themselves in regional policy formulation to alleviate the problem.

Conclusion

In spite of the federalisation of the state and the intended political empowerment of the indigenous people, the structural causes of violence have not been well addressed in the regional state. These arose as a result of conflict over the territorial insecurity of the indigenous people and the land use demands of the non-indigenous people, whether those who were living in the regional state or those who migrated from the

neighbouring regional state. The federalisation of the state actually aggravated the conflict by defining the use of land in terms of ethnicity.

The territorial insecurity of the indigenous people is also closely associated with the centre periphery relationships between the federal government and the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. This is manifested by development policies, which focus on exploiting the fertile land of the region through modern farms and a rural development policy aimed at transforming the cultivation methods of the indigenous people away from shifting cultivation into plough cultivation. However, this has placed the indigenous people at a disadvantage in relation to the adoption of rural development extension package technologies, compared to the non-indigenous people. This disadvantage is reinforced by the social, economic and cultural inequalities between indigenous and non-indigenous people. These have shown a tendency to widen during the federal process of the last 19 years.

The result is that neither the indigenous groups nor the non-indigenous groups are secure in the regional state. The indigenous groups are insecure because their territorial rights are not well respected because of the land use disputes between them and the immigrant non-indigenous people, and the threats posed to their territories by national development projects. The non-indigenous people are also insecure. This is because their rights of use of land have been determined on the basis of ethnicity. As a result, they do not know what the future will hold for their children. This relates to the inability of the federal and regional constitutions and the federal process to harmonise group rights and individual rights in the regional state. It is hardly surprising that the regional state is prone to violent conflict.

If the federal system is to be embedded successfully in the regional state the following issues need to be addressed: territorial claims and land use rights of non-indigenous people, and the horizontal inequalities between the indigenous and non-indigenous; development policies must be tuned to the specific situation of the indigenous people; the capacity of the regional government must be enhanced; it must be able to articulate not only the demands of the indigenous people but also those of the non-indigenous people in the regional state.

Chapter Seven

Federalism and the Role of Political Parties in the Conflict Management Process of the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of political parties in the conflict management process of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. It investigates how the relationships between the national and regional political parties influence the capacity of the regional leadership and how this in turn influences the dynamics of the federal process and conflict management in the regional state. For this purpose, the chapter looks at the role of the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Liberation Front (BPLM) during the initial period of federalisation, the role of other regional parties which took over the regional leadership after the BPLM became illegal, and their relationship with the EPRDF and neighbouring regional parties such as OPDO and ANDM.

The chapter details that how the ethnic-based organizational structure of the regional parties and relationships with the national ruling party has undermined the leadership capacity of the political elite in the regional state. This has been caused by the ethnic competition between the political parties of the indigenous people and influence of geopolitical factors. It is, in fact, not only the federal structure that determines the conflict management in the federal process but also the political leadership created by the activities of the political parties in the country in general and the regional parties in particular.

The Political Parties in the Regional State

There are three kinds of political party in the regional state: the regional political parties; members of the EPRDF (ANDM and OPDO); and opposition parties. The regional political parties operate separately among their respective ethnic groups and as a coalition front at regional level. They aim to govern a given regional state as a coalition if they win elections. The EPRDF considers the regional party as its partner. So the EPRDF supports the regional coalition party, mainly by sending representatives from the centre, and through neighbouring regional member parties such as the ANDM and OPDO. In addition, the EPRDF does not compete for national and regional parliamentary seats against the regional political parties. The opposition parties do not have permanent representation in the regional state but they operate through representatives, mainly during elections.

The Benishangul People's Liberation Front

The Benishangul Peoples Liberation Front (BPLM) was the first regional party to operate in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. The BPLM emerged in late 1989 as an ethnic-based armed political party in opposition to the military regime (Young, 1999). It was, in fact, a continuation of the Berta's attempt to oppose the military regime in their towns during the 1970s. At the time the military regime easily defeated the opposition, but some of the survivors established the BPLM in Khartoum with the assistance of the Sudanese government (Young, 1999; Vaughan, 2006; Kefale, 2008). At its establishment the BPLM was dominated by members of the Berta ethnic group and there was little participation by other ethnic groups such as Mao Komo and Shinasha and only a few Gumuz members. The BPLM launched some attacks on the military regime along the Ethio-Sudan international borders

around Assosa, but it had little impact on the anti-Derg war because its military capacity remained small.

An added complication was that the BPLM, since its inception, had been in conflict with the OLF, another armed group operating against the military regime in Wallega. This was because the OLF has always considered the indigenous people of Benishangul-Gumuz as 'Black Oromos', did not accept their right of self-determination. For this reason, the BPLM clashed with the OLF in 1991, but it was easily defeated because of the better military capacity and organisation of the OLF at the time. At that point the OLF was able to control all the Benishangul areas. It attempted to introduce Oromifa as a working language instead of Amharic amongst the local people, including the Berta, the settlers in Assosa, and the Gumuz in the current Kamashi zone. In addition, it punished people who spoke Amharic in the streets. It was this that led to opposition amongst the inhabitants, subsequent intervention by the EPRDF and a war between EPRDF and OLF forces in January 1992. More generally, elsewhere, at this point, the OLF boycotted the transitional government and attempted to start a guerrilla war against the transitional government. It was easily defeated in the subsequent conflict with the EPRDF in the Oromia regional state (Vaughan, 2006).

The result was that the BPLM became the main political player in the regional state during the transitional period. The political situation which emerged after the defeat of the OLF created favourable conditions for the BPLM to take this role. Firstly, the ethnic-based political set-up of the BPLM mirrored the EPRDF's ideological understanding of the Ethiopian national question. It had managed to create a good relationship with the TPLF during the armed struggle and in fact, its members had

been given military training in Hagerreselam, a base area of the TPLF, during the final offensive against the military regime (Kefale, 2008). Secondly, the hostility of the BPLM towards the OLF also contributed to establishing a better relationship between the EPRDF and BPLM. The BPLM was one of the transitional conference participants that had signed the transitional charter and established the transitional government in 1991¹. The result was that the BPLM became the regional party which established the regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz. It played a major role in the regional government and all the regional Presidents during the transitional period came from the Berta, a practice which continued until 1995 – although the presidents changed three times (Vaughan, 2006).

However, there were a number of reasons why the BPLM was unable to maintain the stability of the regional state or become a sustainable ally of the EPRDF. Factionalism became a major challenge to the integrity of the BPLM during the transitional period, and one of the causes was related to the composition of the Berta people. The Berta incorporate people of Arab origin who came to conquer the region centuries ago as well as indigenous Bertas. The distinction is very clear, for example, in places such as Menge woreda. The point is that there is a clear competition between those who consider themselves Arabs and the indigenous Berta. It was believed although the BPLM was a mix of all Berta clans, that its leadership was dominated by the people of Menge, who are not considered to be real the indigenous Berta. This division between Berta elite groups was one reason for the fast turnover of presidents who came from the Berta during the transitional period.² Another reason possibly related to the above point is that, historically, the leadership of the Berta has been drawn from

¹ Minutes of the Transitional Conference, July 1991.

² For example, the first president, Atom Mustopha, was from the indigenous people, but could not get support from the mixed Arabs and served only for six months.

four *Watawit* families. However, the strong rivalry between these families contributed to the instability of leadership within the ethnic group. Equally, it appeared that the Hojelle Al Hassan family, who allied with Menilek during the formation of the modern state in Ethiopia, still plays a decisive role in the leadership of Berta, although it has been unable to create coherent leadership within the group (Vaughan, 2006).

The BPLM's dominant role during the transitional period and the factionalism within the party had different implications for the integrity of the regional state and for the maintenance of the federal authorities' interest in the regional state. The dominant role of the BPLM in the regional state became inconsistent with the political demands of the other ethnic groups created by the federalisation of the state. Therefore, the other ethnic groups such as the Gumuz and Mao/Komo rapidly established their own ethnic-based political parties. For example, in 1992, Gumuz members left the BPLM and established their own political party, the Gumuz People's Liberation Movement (GPLM). In a similar move, the other indigenous ethnic groups established their own ethnic parties, including the Shinasha People's Democratic Movement (Boro-SPDM), the Mao People's Democratic Movement (MPDM) and the Komo People's Democratic Movement (KPDM)³.

This obviously undermined the dominance of the BPLM in the regional state. The first regional government of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, established in 1993, was actually under the leadership of a newly formed coalition party, the Benishangul North West Ethiopia People's Democratic Unity Party (BNWEPDUP), although the BPLM kept the dominant role in the party structure. In the process,

³ Interview notes, current chairman of the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front, Addis Ababa, March 2011

though, the BPLM lost its claim to multi-ethnicity and was forced to change its name to the Ethiopian Berta Democratic Organisation (EPDO) after a June 1996 conference chaired by the Federal Deputy Prime Minister. Subsequently, in 1998, the various ethnic-based political organisations united to form the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Organisation. This is an EPRDF affiliated party and it has controlled state power ever since⁴.

In addition, the factionalist tendency within the BPLM also led it into connections with the Islamic fundamentalism which became state policy in Sudan after 1989. Indeed, one faction of the BPLM fell under the influence of the Sudanese extremists who supplied it with arms and training, and facilitated the entry of Islamic elements into the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. This led to demands for the self-determination of Benishangul and the declaration of a jihad against the Ethiopian government forces, which led to skirmishes on the borders of Sudan and Ethiopia (Young, 1999). Seventy-seven civil servants were dismissed for their connection with the BPLM and their role in peace and anti-development activities, and among the accused were the vice-chairman of the region and the head of the Education Bureau and as well as lower ranking officials. Currently, there are over 30 prominent BPLM leaders behind bars⁵. With the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean conflict, several moves were made to negotiate an amnesty for BPLM fighters. As a result, many returned to the Assosa zone, particularly to Menge and Sherkole Woredas, in 1999. The amnesty process was repeated, with other waves of returnees in the subsequent years (Vaughan, 2006).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Interview reports, Security and Administration Bureau head of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, May 2008.

Despite this, the BPLM, based in Eritrea, has continued its attempts to influence the Berta ethnic group. Getting logistical support from the Eritrean government, the BPLM fighters have attempted several times to penetrate the Assosa zone. For example, they destroyed some government property and around 45 civilians and police were killed and injured during an attack near Kurmuck in May 2008. In fact, the regional authorities thought this question was linked with members of the Ethiopian Berta's Democratic Movement (EPRDF's affiliated party), and the Vice-President of the regional state and other Berta authorities were detained on suspicion of a relationship with the BPLM⁶.

The fluctuations in the future of BPLM show three interrelated factors which have affected the outcome of the federal process in the regional state. First, the emergence of the ethnic-based political parties has played a significant role in the decline of the BPLM's role in the regional state. This is why the BPLM took the option to try to use the constitutional right of self-determination and push for the independence of the Benishangul from the regional state. This was intended to maintain its dominance at least amongst the Berta ethnic group, but its mobilisation capacity was seriously diminished by the factional tendencies within the party. Second, centre and periphery relationships also played a part in the rise and fall of the BPLM. As discussed above, the regional political parties in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state survived not only because they were ethnic-based but also because of their political support from the centre. Once it became clear that the BPLM had links to the Sudanese government, The EPRDF began to consider it as a threat to the national security of the country. It worked to undermine the BPLM by encouraging the establishment of other EPRDF-

⁶ IBID

affiliated ethnic-based political parties and bringing them into a coalition. Third, wider geo-politics issues also played a significant role in undermining the BPLM. BPLM links with Islamic extremists in Sudan led to the deterioration of its influence amongst the Berta elite group, which preferred to strengthen its ties with the EPRDF.

According to Kefale (2008), the relatively small availability of political and administrative positions for the Berta elite also contributed to a factional struggle for control of power and resources within the ethnic group, this in turn contributed to the decline of the BPLM. This is, in fact, quite similar to the findings of Aalen (2008) from her investigation into the impact of the self-determination on the political elite of the Sidama ethnic group. The political elite of the Sidama was, in fact, weakened by the right of self-determination following by the federalisation of the state, because some clans that were marginalised within the ethnic group wanted to assert their rights by organising themselves under a separate political party. The result was to undermine the coherence of the Sidama political elite (Aalen, 2008).

Lack of experience in self-administration in the peripheral areas was another contributing factor in the decline of the BPLM's supremacy. This was manifested by a severe shortage of well-educated personnel to fill the new administrative and political vacancies made available by the federal restructuring (Kefale, 2008).

Overall, the decline of the BPLM negatively influenced the federalisation process and undermined the quality of the regional leadership. It also created instability which resulted in delay to the formal establishment of the regional state and early regular elections after the federalisation of the state.

Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGPDUF)

After the decline of the BPLM it was the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGPDUF) which took over the leadership of the regional state. This coalition party was established formally in 1998 from the Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao/Komo and former BPLM members, and other Bertas who decided to work as members of the coalition party. The coalition party also decided to work in alliance with the ruling party. This meant that neither the individual political parties nor the coalition became members of the EPRDF, but merely worked in partnership with it (Vaughan, 2007:10). Nevertheless, since its establishment, the BGPDUF has dominated the politics of the regional state. It has won all the regular national and regional elections since 1995, including the highly contested parliamentary elections of 2005.

Power is shared between the political parties in the coalition in consideration of the population size of the indigenous ethnic groups. The Gumuz political party controlled the presidential post from 1995 until 2008. The Berta took the vice-presidential post and the chairmanship of the coalition party. The Shinasha, which is the third most populous indigenous group, take the post of Secretary of the Regional Executive. Other executive seats are allocated in the same manner: Berta (4), Gumuz (4), Shinasha (2), and Mao/Komo (1) with 1 seat going to the non-indigenous people of the regional state.

The coalition party abolished the ethnic-based organisational structure and united to create a centralised structure in October 2009⁷. According to the Chairman of the united party⁸, ethnic barriers between the political parties became obstacles to addressing the common political and development issues. A united party leadership, elected on a merit basis, was considered to have better capacity to address regional development issues. A merit-based leadership could also gain legitimacy to work with every ethnic group because it did not affect the constitutional rights of the various ethnic groups. The ethnic groups could maintain the ethnic-based state institutions which enabled them to adapt federal and regional policies to their circumstances. However, a study of federalism and leadership in the Southern regional state has shown that the ethnic groups complain about the centralised decision-making process of the regional party even after the regional coalition parties united some years ago. Whether the united party structure will affect the constitutional right of self-rule of the indigenous people in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state remains to be seen.

Since the end of 2008, the position of president has been held by a Berta, the vice-presidential post by a Gumuz member and the chairmanship of the United Front has gone to the Shinasha. This followed 15 years control of the presidential and other critical regional positions by the Gumuz. The reasons for the long leadership of the former regional president, Ato Yaregal Aysheshim, and the changes made in 2008 lie in combination of regional, inter-regional and federal political factors. It is clear the EPRDF shifted its support from the BPLM to the BGPDUF because of BPLM links with Islamic extremists and internal factional instability in the party. The appointment of a regional president who was a Gumuz and did not have any extremist links was

⁷ The major data collection about the regional party was completed in May 2008

⁸ Additional interview reports, Addis Ababa, March 2011

important for the stability of the regional state and to satisfy the security interests of the federal state. In addition, a Gumuz president was in a position to create an alliance between the different indigenous ethnic groups while factionalism between rival groups within the BPLM had become a serious threat to the integrity of the Berta elite group and to its alliance with the other ethnic groups. According to the current Chairman of the regional Party⁹, Ato Yaregal had been the best person to create stability in the regional state by bringing indigenous peoples together and create better relationships with the federal government and neighbouring regional governments. As long as these conditions were satisfied, the EPRDF gave continuous support to Ato Yaregal. As a result he became the longest-serving regional president in the country.

At the same time, he faced several challenges. First, regardless of the support of the EPRDF, the Berta wing of the BGPDUF continuously demanded the presidential position (See below Chapter Eight). Second, the relationship between the Kamashi Gumuz and the neighbouring Oromia steadily deteriorated to the point of an outbreak of violent conflict which took around 200 lives, displaced tens of thousands of people and destroyed many properties (see Chapter Nine). These issues led to parliamentary debates and an investigation and prosecution of some lower-level administration in the conflict areas of the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regional states. According to Addis Fortune, it was the poor performance of the then regional president in conflict management with neighbouring Oromo which led the federal authorities to pressurise him to resign. Others criticised him for the low economic development performance of the regional state over the previous 15 years (Addis Fortune, 3 November 2008).

⁹ Interview notes, Addis Ababa, March 2011

The federal government used the opportunity to address the demands of the Berta ethnic group for the presidential post by bringing in a Berta president, Ahmed Naser, who was born in Metehara (Afar regional state) and had few close relations with Berta in Assosa. Ahmed Naser only moved to the home of his grandparents, Asossa, in 1993 following the establishment of the regional government as one of the Bureau heads. He has served in different posts for the regional and federal governments¹⁰. The reason that the federal government wanted to bring in a Berta president was also associated with the decline of Islamic extremism among the Berta over the last decade which, in turn, can be related to the decline of Islamic extremist influence in the Sudanese government.

The domestic politics of the regional state and the balance of power between the political parties has been determined by the relationship of regional, federal and international political factors. It is the federal political factor which usually determines the rise and fall of political parties and individual members. The federal political interest also plays a dominant role in determining the degree of power-sharing between the ethnic groups in the regional states. For example, although the Berta's population is greater than that of the Gumuz, the federal government gave its support to a Gumuz president for about fifteen years. This shows that the federal process in the regional state is determined not only by the federal structure but also by regional, national and international political dynamics.

¹⁰ Additional interview notes, advisor to speaker of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional council, Addis Ababa, March 2011.

The Role of EPRDF and its Member Parties

The EPRDF operates in the regional states through the regional parties and their components. As noted above, the EPRDF influence on the regional parties emerged during the armed struggle against the military regime. At that time, the main purpose of the EPRDF was to support partner political parties which could fight and undermine the legitimacy of the military regime. It extended its support to all ethnic-based groups, including armed groups in Gambella, Afar and Benishangul regions. After the downfall of the military regime, most of the armed groups that had relationships with the EPRDF took up government responsibilities and became partners of the EPRDF in their respective areas.

However, the EPRDF has used different categorisations for the various ethnic groups. For example, political elites came from those ethnic groups whose livelihood depended on plough cultivation were considered as the basis of revolutionary democracy. They were thought to have a better socio-economic basis for fostering the ideology of revolutionary democracy. As a result, the political elite groups which emerged from Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and the Southern regional states were considered as EPRDF members because of the similarity of their socio-economic situations. By contrast the political elites from pastoralist peoples including Somali, Afar, and the shifting cultivators of Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella were not considered as possible EPRDF members because of their clan-based relationships and their low regard for women's participation in political activities¹¹. Equally, it is not clear why the pastoralist peoples of South Omo and Borena were considered as EPRDF regions regardless the similarity of their way of life to other pastoralists. It

¹¹ Interview notes, former member of the council of EPRDF, Addis Ababa, May 2011.

indicates that the EPRDF had little knowledge of the socio-economic similarities and differences between ethnic groups, regardless of their general ethnic categorisation.

As the above analysis indicates, the relationship between the EPRDF and the peripheral regional states has created categories of EPRDF and non-EPRDF regional states. Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, and the Southern regional states are considered as EPRDF regional states because member parties of EPRDF are based there. The EPRDF itself competes for regional and national parliamentary elections in these states. However, the other regional states (the peripheral states of Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and Somali) are considered as non-EPRDF because their regional parties are not considered as members of the EPRDF. In addition, the EPRDF does not fight elections in the peripheral regional states. It merely supports its partner parties in elections against opposition parties.

Of course, the EPRDF has the upper hand in influencing the regional parties on the basis of its own interests if only because it was the first ruling party which devolved power to ethnically-based regional elites. Additionally, the EPRDF initiated the proliferation of ethnic-based political parties in the peripheral regional states. This relationship between the EPRDF with the peripheral regional parties allows them to undermine the role of opposition parties in the regional states.

The EPRDF influences its partner regional parties through political training and by sending representatives from the centre to the regional states. Members of the affiliated parties have been trained in the political and economic policies and strategies of the EPRDF in Tadek, which was a centre of military training during the

military regime and the earlier period of the federal system, and more recently in Miychow town in Tigray. Representatives of the EPRDF advise the partner parties on all political, social and economic aspects of policies for the regional states¹². They also conduct peace and development conferences and carry out performance evaluations in the regional states. Several peace and development conferences, for example, were held in Benishangul-Gumuz, in 1996, 2002 and 2008. These were associated respectively with the crisis of the BPLM, the demands of the Berta ethnic group for more devolution of power within the regional state, and the violent conflicts between Gumuz and Oromos.

The EPRDF also operates in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state through ANDM and OPDO member parties for two purposes. The ANDM is an EPRDF member party which operates mainly in the Amhara regional state. It has been the ruling party there since the EPRDF came to power in 1991. Similarly, the OPDO is an EPRDF member party which operates in the Oromia regional state. It has also been the ruling party in Oromia since the EPRDF came to power. Both the ANDM and OPDO are active in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state for two reasons. First, as the non-indigenous ethnic groups are mainly Amharas and Oromos, both the ANDM and the OPDO want to operate among their respective ethnic groups. They also stand for election in the residential areas of the non-indigenous people against opposition parties. If no EPRDF-affiliated political parties operated within the non-indigenous groups, opposition parties could dominate the politics of those groups. Second, as the non-indigenous groups in Pawe have special representation in the Regional Council, and the non-indigenous groups in Asossa can also send one representative to the Regional

¹² Interview notes, member of EPRDF council, Addis Ababa, May 2011.

Council, both political parties compete in these places against opposition parties. Given this perspective, the operations of the ANDM and OPDO in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state are aimed at supporting the regional parties, as both the ANDM and the OPDO are member parties of the EPRDF¹³.

Nevertheless, according to informants from the non-indigenous people in Asossa Woreda, the operations of both the ANDM and the OPDO do not have significant acceptance among non-indigenous groups¹⁴. This is because their wider political agendas are not related to the agendas of land use and political representation of the non-indigenous groups in the regional state. Although individual members of the political parties may support non-indigenous group issues, they don't have clear answers for them in the positions of the political parties. The EPRDF considers the issues of the settlers as regional issues that have to be settled on the basis of the regional constitution. It was due to this that the ANDM did not win elections for the regional seats in either Pawe or Asossa Woredas in 2005¹⁵.

It is generally believed that OPDO and ANDM interfere in the regional affairs mainly over the relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people. As both OPDO and ANDM have offices in Assosa they deal with many such issues. For example, people are convinced that members of ANDM agitated the settlers in Assoa to complain to the HOF when they were banned from standing for elections in the 2000 parliamentary and regional elections. In 2006, around seven ANDM cadres were accused of involvement in the violent conflict between the settlers and the Berta ethnic group of Asossa Woreda (Vaughan, 2006). The same year the ANDM office in

¹³ Interview notes, former president of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008.

¹⁴ Interview notes, settlers' elders, Asossa, May 2008

¹⁵ Ibid

Asossa was also involved in managing conflicts caused by the use of irrigated land between the Berta in Gambella Kebele and *Mender* (village) 14 of the settlers of Bambassi Woreda.

The result is that the regional political parties of Benishangul-Gumuz are sceptical about the operations of the OPDO and ANDM in the regional state for two reasons. First, both the OPDO and the ANDM only operate amongst the non-indigenous groups which have many grievances in relation to land use and political representation in the regional Councils and the executive bodies. As a result, the regional political parties do not trust members of the OPDO and ANDM because they may aggravate the grievances of the non-indigenous peoples who are generally believed by regional political parties to work against the interests of indigenous groups¹⁶. Second, both the Amhara and Oromia regional governments have border issues with the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. These have not yet been resolved. So, the offices of the OPDO and ANDM in Asossa are seen as branch offices of the main party offices in Bahrdar and Addis Ababa, respectively. The regional political parties therefore do not trust the party branches in Asossa.¹⁷

The above analysis of the relationship between the ruling party and the regional parties shows two interrelated points. First, the ruling party always maintains its relationship with the Benishangul-Gumuz regional party by not competing with it in the regional party's territory. This created favourable conditions for establishing a partnership relationship with the regional party and strengthening the ruling party's rule in the regional state. Second, however, the relationship between the Benishangul-

¹⁶ Interview notes, APDM representative, Asossa, May 2008

¹⁷ Ibid

Gumuz regional parties and the EPRDF's member parties has not been as smooth as an outsider might imagine. The Benishangul-Gumuz regional state is situated between the two most populous regional states. Hence, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional authorities are always alert to the implications of increasing numbers of non-indigenous people immigrating from the neighbouring regional states. The immigrants may, in future, come to outnumber the indigenous people and this could undermine the constitutional right of self-determination of the indigenous people. In addition, it could invite more involvement by the neighbouring regional states.

In fact, the relationship between the regional party and the EPRDF's regional parties is always one of conflict and collaboration. There is conflict because the EPRDF member parties have their own regional agendas associated with the use of land and common border issues. The neighbouring regional states want to have access to the fertile land of Benishangul-Gumuz because of population growth and land degradation problems in the highland areas. They are keen to maintain the constitutional right of movement of people from the highland areas to the Benishangul-Gumuz lowland areas. The local administrative authorities in both Amhara and Oromia regional states also have a tendency to expand their borders towards Benishangul-Gumuz. These threats from the neighbouring regional states create conflicting relationships with the political elite of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, manifested in party and intergovernmental relationships.

At the same time, however, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state authorities are inclined to collaborate with the neighbouring regional states. This is because they need support from both the OPDO and ANDM in rallying the non-indigenous people

during elections. These can only be mobilised by both the ANDM and OPDO or by the opposition parties. If the regional parties lost support from the non-indigenous people during parliamentary elections, their representation in the federal institutions could be put in jeopardy. This shows the federal structure is not in fact a guarantee of implementation of the right of the indigenous people to participate in the federal political institutions. Self-rule of the indigenous population could also be undermined if the ANDM and OPDO mobilised the non-indigenous people against the interests of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional party. The result is that this kind of relationship between EPRDF's member parties and regional parties makes ethnic-based federalism prone to conflicts. This can certainly escalate violence when there are triggering factors, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

The opposition parties

The activities of the legal opposition parties have become insignificant since the establishment of the regional state. For reasons primarily associated with the political agendas and organisational capacities of these parties. As discussed in Chapter Five, the indigenous people have been marginalised and segregated for centuries. Recognition of their self-determination and enabling them to administer themselves in their localities are the minimum criteria to gain their support. Despite this most of the national opposition parties have focused on implementing only universal political rights. This has undermined the support that they might gain from the indigenous people. However, the political agenda of the opposition parties might enable them to gain support from non-indigenous peoples because ethnic federalism has placed the non-indigenous peoples in a minority status and led to their under-representation in the political institutions of the regional state. Overall, however, as most of the

opposition parties were established after the downfall of the military regime, their organisational capacity to operate among the non-indigenous people has been weak. The political environment certainly limited the political activities of opposition parties in the regional state prior to 2005¹⁸.

In 2005, however, the opposition parties were able to participate significantly in the 2005 parliamentary and regional elections. Initially, the election process sparked a democratic culture which was accompanied by televised debates and discussions about alternative policies of the contending parties towards addressing political, economic and other issues. Unfortunately, the post-election period was accompanied by the contending parties accusing each other of vote rigging, threats to challenge the constitutional order through violence, confrontations with the police, the deaths of hundreds of people and the arrest of the leaders of the main opposition party, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD).

Unlike the situation in some regional states and in Addis Ababa, the 2005 election in Benishangul-Gumuz ended peacefully. The regional ruling party, the BGPDUF, competed in the residential areas of the indigenous people while the CUD, who put up stiff competition to the EPRDF at the national level, mainly competed among the non-indigenous people. According to the National Election Board the BGPDUF candidates managed to win 88 per cent of the seats on the regional council and nine seats in the House of People's Representatives. The CUD managed to secure nine regional council seats, mainly in the areas where the non-indigenous voters were

¹⁸ Interview notes, Political analyst, Action Aid Ethiopia, Asossa, May 2008

present in greatest numbers. Two independent candidates were also elected to the council.

The EPRDF representatives were unable to win in the polling stations of the non-indigenous people¹⁹. According to informants from the non-indigenous people, the EPRDF candidates did not have any real agenda addressing the political and economic issues of interest to the non-indigenous people. Similarly, the CUD could not win a single seat amongst the indigenous people because their agenda did not address the issues of territorial insecurity. This divide shows clearly enough that without a political compromise considering both the territorial insecurity of the indigenous people and the basic political and economic rights of the non-indigenous people an election process on the basis of the current political setup could lead to violent conflict in the future. The following comment of an informant from the indigenous people (after the election results of 2005) explains the political paradox in the regional state:

While they (the non-indigenous people) live in our territories, how could they vote for the opposition parties – who do not accept our right of self-determination in our territory? If they want to exercise their right in this way, they have to go to their previous settlements.

On the other hand an informant from the settlers of Asossa Woreda explained his grievance towards the regional state as follows:

If the worst comes to the worst, it should be clear that our population size and economic capacity enables us to rally an ‘armed struggle’ aimed at

¹⁹ National Election Board, election results, 2005.

maintaining our political rights in the regional state. This could be the only way that makes the regional and federal governments accept our basic political and economic rights in the regional state.

After the 2005 election, the CUD disintegrated due to lack of ideological coherence, party discipline and under pressure from the government. In the 2010 parliamentary and regional elections only one of the CUD factions competed in the non-indigenous rural and urban areas. It did not win any seats. The national and regional election process was entirely dominated by the ruling party and its regional partners.

Conclusion

It is clear that the coherence of the regional party and its relationship with the national ruling party determine the capacity of the regional leadership for conflict management. Currently, the political leadership capacity of the regional party to articulate regional interests in intergovernmental relationships has become weak because of the factional tendencies in the Berta political elite and the ethnic rivalry between Gumuz and Berta. The focus of the ruling party on security matters and the role of geo-political factors have also contributed to weakening the regional political leadership. This has contributed to the power struggles among the indigenous people and the violent conflict between Benishangul-Gumuz and the neighbouring regional states, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Eight

Federalism and Power Relationships in the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

Introduction

This chapter examines the power relations between the ethnic groups in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. It focuses on investigating how the federalisation of the state has changed the different power relationships between the ethnic groups and how this, in turn, has led to empowerment and disempowerment of the ethnic-based political elite groups in the regional state. It concludes that a workable power-sharing arrangement between the indigenous ethnic groups, and accommodation of non-indigenous people into the main political system, could create sustainable peace in the regional state.

General Background

There is no doubt that the federalisation of the state has created different power relationships among the ethnic groups in the regional state. First, it has politically empowered the indigenous groups in the regional state. The constitution allowed the indigenous groups to achieve self-rule and participate in the federal political institutions (preamble of the regional constitution, 2002:71 and article of 39 of the federal constitution). However, this political arrangement marginalised ethnic groups which had previously been in part nationally and regionally dominant from political participation in the regional state. For example, the Amharan settlers, who were part of the nationally dominant ethnic group, during the Haile Selassie and military regimes, are badly represented in the regional political institutions. Similarly, it disempowered the Oromo people previously administered under the Wallega province, who now live in the Kamashi and Asossa zones of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional

state with little participation in the regional political institutions. In effect, the federalisation of the state has introduced another dimension of conflict which has manifested itself in the relationships between the indigenous and the non-indigenous (that is the settlers and immigrant) people of the regional state.

In accordance with the regional constitution, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state was established by the indigenous ethnic groups. This created both cooperation and conflict among them. They cooperate against the dangers posed by the non-indigenous people and the threat to territorial insecurity. The regional political elites believe that the activities of non-indigenous people have to be checked, in order for their own political and economic activities to be promoted. On the other hand, the inclusion of different indigenous groups in regional political institutions has led to ethnic-based political rivalry manifested in competition between the regional political parties for control of regional power and resources. This chapter investigates how the power relationships between the ethnic groups influence the federalisation process in the regional state. It focuses on power relationships between Berta and Gumuz, the establishment of nationalities councils and settlers representation in the regional state.

The Power Struggle between the Indigenous Groups

Historically, the indigenous groups who established the regional state had little contact with each other. The Gumuz ethnic group, who live in the Metekel and Kamashi zones, were administered by the provinces of Gojjam and Wallega (Triulzi, 1981 and Dessalegn, 1988). The Berta, whose centre is Asossa, were also administered by the Wallega province until Asossa became an autonomous administrative region (for a brief time), in accordance with the 1987 constitution of

the military regime. However, the problem with the former administration was that the provinces were administrative units which lumped ethnic groups into artificial administrative areas. For example, the Gumuz were dispersed into separate provinces predominantly inhabited by the Amharas and Oromos largely responsible for the suppression of the Gumuz and their political and cultural inequality. Similarly, the Mao and Komo ethnic groups were administered under Wallega province which forced them into cultural assimilation with the dominant groups, while the Berta were also administered under the Wallega administration which had abolished their own traditional administration.

Both the Gumuz and Berta (including Mao, Komo and Shinasha) came under one administration after the change of government in 1991. The reason for bringing them into one regional administration, according to local elders who worked for the transitional regional government, was to correct the weakness of the unitary state's administration. Firstly, both ethnic groups shared similar historical backgrounds; they had been treated as slaves and subjected to the slave raids. In addition, they had both been marginalized, in comparison to the neighbouring dominant Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups. Secondly, they lived in a similar geographical location, and both practiced shifting cultivation as their main occupation¹. Finally, scholars of ethnography and historians also defined them as belonging to the Nilo-Saharan ethnic groups (Mebratie, 2004; Abbute, 2002, Zewde, 2002).

The regional government was formally established during the first regional elections in 1992 on the basis of the transitional charter. This was endorsed by the regional

¹ Interview notes, a Berta elder, Asossa, May 2008

constitution when it became effective in 1996.² The regional constitution states that the people who can establish the regional government are the indigenous groups (Article 20), and the regional executive power should be assumed by the political party with the majority of seats in the regional council (Article 50). In addition, the constitution gives the indigenous groups the right of self-determination and the right to establish their own regional administration (Article 47).

As discussed earlier, membership of the BPLM (the party that established the regional state) came mainly from the Berta ethnic group during the transitional period. The BPLM failed to establish a good relationship with the federal government and other regional political parties and eventually became an illegal political party in 1995³. As a result, the regional presidential position shifted from the Berta ethnic group to Gumuz, a situation which continued until the end of 2008. However, this regional power distribution did not satisfy the Berta elite. The political party from the Berta raised a number of issues after the 1995 election eventually causing it to withdraw from the regional government. Firstly, the political party proposed that the regional Presidency and Secretary positions should be given to the ethnic group with the largest population. Moreover, it requested that the number of Woredas in the regional state should be restructured according to the size of the ethnic groups. It also wanted representation to the regional Councils and the executive body to be on the basis of population size. Secondly, it complained that the Berta ethnic group had failed to benefit proportionally from regional development endeavours. Thirdly, it requested that the Shinasha and the Mao/Komo should not be represented in the regional Council in the same way as the other ethnic groups, and their representation should

² Constitution of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, page 69

³ Interview notes, a Berta elder, Asossa, May 2008

either be considered a special case or limited to Woreda level. Fourthly, the political party said they would not recognise the regional government until their earlier demands had been satisfied, emphasizing that they were accountable to the federal government, on the basis of article 47 of the federal constitution⁴. When these demands were ignored, the People's representative of the Berta ethnic group resigned from the regional Council, demanding that the HOF call a public meeting.

A meeting was eventually held in March 2001 and was attended by 278 Berta and 220 people from other indigenous ethnic groups and non-indigenous people⁵. The meeting had two objectives. Firstly, it aimed to convince the Berta representatives to return to the regional council and present their requests to the regional government. Secondly, it aimed to show that the demands were unconstitutional, and to some extent undemocratic. Power-sharing issues were discussed, including the regional constitution regulation which says that the party/parties with the majority of seats should establish the regional government. The regional president presented a report about the distribution of development resources to the different zones and the political appointments, made within each ethnic group to the regional government⁶. However, the question remained how power should be shared within the majority coalition party. This was not clarified during the meeting. Nevertheless, the representatives of the Berta did recognise the regional government, agreeing to present their future demands to that government⁷.

⁴ Minutes about the discussions between the representatives of the House of Federation and representatives of Berta ethnic group and the other people from the regional state, March 2001

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Minutes of the public meeting, March 2001

⁷ Ibid

In 2002 a peace conference was hosted by the regional government under the auspices of the Ministry of Federal affairs.⁸ The purpose of the conference was to address the issues that were preventing the elites of the ethnic groups from working together. The Berta representatives requested that a Council of Nationalities be established in the regional state. This request was acknowledged and several articles relating to the Council of Nationalities were included in the regional constitution when it was amended later that year (Articles 73-95). The details of the articles have been described in the following section of the chapter.

Since the constitutional amendment in 2002 the status quo of the Regional Council has been maintained but the political party from the Berta ethnic group has not been stabilised for two reasons. Firstly, although the regional government cannot be established by any single ethnic-based political party, due to the fact that every ethnic group is a minority at the regional level, there is still no recognised power sharing arrangement within the coalition. In other words, there is no common mechanism which to distribute power among the ethnic groups. The result is that the power sharing mechanisms implemented so far have failed to satisfy the Berta political party⁹.

Secondly, violence erupted in seven Kebeles in a place called Endulu, which was under the administration of the Menege Woreda of the Asossa Zone. The seven Kebeles wanted to establish their own Woreda administration. They claimed the centre of the Woreda was so far away that it was difficult for them to receive services. Moreover, they said that since they didn't have equal representation in the Woreda

⁸ Interview notes, legal advisor to the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional president, May 2008

⁹ Interview notes, Berta elder, Asossa, May 2008

political structure they had not benefited as others from the Woreda administration. The regional administration did not accept the appeal of the Kebeles¹⁰ and as a result the Kebeles dismantled all the regional government branches and the Kebeles' administration. There followed a period of about nine months without legal administration. The problems were seen by the regional government as either associated with the weakness of the political party or with the sabotage of some of its senior members. This was at a time when the insurgencies of BPLM along the Sudan border had also affected the Ethiopian Berta Democratic Organisation (EBPDO). Some senior party members were suspected of involvement and arrested¹¹.

A number of points need to be considered in relation to the power struggle between The Gumuz and the Berta and the resulting instability in the regional state. Firstly, for many Bertas the entitlement of Vice President was unacceptable in light of their history. The administration of the Berta Sheikh had been relatively autonomous and accepting 'second position' in the regional administration dented the pride of the Berta elite.

A Berta elder who interviewed in Asossa spoke of this:

Benishangul had its own government before we became part of Ethiopia during Emperor Menilek's regime. The Berta government had continued as an autonomous administration until Emperor Haile Selassie dismantled it, because of the power struggle between local leaders after the death of the popular leader Shek Hoge. Our ancestors also fought against the Italian aggression in Adwa in 1889¹²”.

¹⁰ Interview notes, President of the regional state, May 2008

¹¹ Interview notes, an expert at the Security and Administration Bureau of Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, May 2008

¹² Interview notes, a Berta elder, May 2008

This led the Berta elite to consider themselves superior to the other indigenous groups which administered the regional state. It motivated the Berta elite to try to acquire better positions in the regional state, and when this was not possible they started to look at the possibility of secession.

Secondly, some informants in the regional state noted that the Berta's attitude towards the non-indigenous people was very negative, even more negative than other indigenous groups¹³. For example, the Berta elites complained that they were becoming poorer and poorer when others were becoming richer and richer using their resources. Moreover, although restriction of the non-indigenous people's political rights were generally accepted by all the indigenous groups, the Berta representatives made some extreme claims which were objected to by the representatives of other indigenous groups¹⁴. Overall, the Berta ethnic group tried get an upper hand in the regional state, even to establish their own regional administration, so they could implement their own plans¹⁵.

Thirdly, informants from the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in the regional state also associated the problem with corruption and control of the bamboo fields in the Asossa zone¹⁶. The Asossa zone is well known for its bamboo trees. The fields are mainly controlled by a few Berta families associated with the

¹³ Interview notes, members of Shinasha ethnic group Asossa, May 2008

¹⁴ For example, there was some opposition from the other political parties of the indigenous people when the political party from Berta lobbied the National Election Board (NEB) so that representatives of the non-indigenous people to be banned from holding elections

¹⁵ Interview notes, an expert working for Action Aid Ethiopia, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state

¹⁶ Interview notes, members of Action Aid Ethiopia and Initiative for Gumuz, NGOs, Asossa, May 2008

traditional elite of their ethnic group. The establishment of an independent regional state enabled them to extend this control of the bamboo, the commercial value of which is increasing due to higher domestic and international demand¹⁷.

Finally, the demand of Hundule Kebeles of Menge Woreda for the establishment of Woreda administration may also be associated with the historical power struggle between the elite families in the ethnic group. Some associate it with clan/sub-clan differences of the Hundule Kebeles from the remaining Kebeles of the Woreda (Vaughan, 2007:42). However, informants from the Berta ethnic group strongly argue that there are no such clan differences between the Kebeles in Hundule and the other Kebeles in the Woreda¹⁸. However, many leaders of the ethnic group and many BPLM members who fought against the military regime come from these Kebeles. So, despite the administrative problems, one of the main driving forces for the Kebeles' demand has been the desire of the local elites to create a local government which would enable them to administer the block government grants. In other words the neo-patrimonial interests of the local elite have been the driving force for the establishment of a Woreda administration.

The elite group of Gumuz, however, has been able to maintain the balance of power using different mechanisms. The representation of the ethnic groups in the regional Council was based on the number of Woredas until this was corrected after the 2000 regional elections and the 2002 consitutional changes. This meant Gumuz had been more represented in the regional Council although the population size of the Berta

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Interview notes, a Berta elder, May 2008

was greater than the Gumuz as shown in the table below. The Gumuz live in 11 Woredas, and the Berta live in 7 (Van der Beken, 2009:10).

8.1. Ethnic representation of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional council

Ethnic group	population	Total population	% representatives before the dispute	% of representation after the dispute
Berta	122 883	26.7	35	40
Gumuz	107 495	23.4	43.75	35
Shinasha	32 105	6.9	7.5	11
Mao-Komo	3843	.83	5	5
Others	194 133	42.17	8.75	9
Total	460 459	100	100	100

Source: Asnake Kefale, PhD thesis, 2008.

It should also be noted that a lack of clarity in forming Woreda administrations can also contribute to the flow of resources to which ever ethnic group has the larger number of Woredas in the state. There are no clear criteria in the regional constitution, or presented in other legal documents, which addresses this situation. As a result, regional Cabinet members have no common understanding when dealing with the issues. Some members of the Cabinet suggest that if the general population of a group of Kebeles reaches around 28,000, the Kebeles should be able to establish a Woreda administration. However, others say Woreda administration can be established only if the population in the Kebeles is 50-60,000 and if it can contribute revenue for a recurrent budget.¹⁹ For example, table seven below shows the population distribution of the Woredas in the regional state. The zones (Kamashi and Metekel) of the Gumuz ethnic group have 11 Woredas with an average population of 24,993; the Asossa zone of the Berta has seven Woredas with an average population of 38,203. In this circumstance this remains a potential source of conflict between the

¹⁹ Interview notes, Cabinet members of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May, 2008

Berta and the Gumuz, especially as Woreda administration status has a direct impact on the allocation of the federal block grants and regional budgets.

8.2. Range of population size of Woredas in Benishangul-Gumuz

Zone	Range	Woreda	Population
Metekel	Highest	Dibate	54180
	Lowest	Guba	14801
Kamsh	Highest	Belojeganfoy	24993
	Lowest	Yaso	12,619
Asossa	Highest	Asossa	87,366
	Lowest	Kurmuk	13,579

Source: CSAE, census, 2007

In maintaining the regional state status quo the Gumuz elite group has been able to get the support of the smaller indigenous groups. For example, the Shinasha have created an alliance with the Gumuz, because they live together with Gumuz in some Woredas of the lowland areas of Metekel. These have given them some advantage of employment in the regional Civil Service staff and in the regional government political institutions²⁰. In addition, the opposition of the Berta elite to the role of the Shinasha and the Mao/Komo in the regional government has also strengthened the alliance of the smaller ethnic groups with the Gumuz.²¹

As discussed earlier the link of the BPLM to external threats and the fact that its main influence focused on the Berta elite group has been a reason for the Federal government authorities to give their support to the Gumuz elite group which had not such relationship with BPLM. This has been manifested in two ways. Firstly, the

²⁰ According to the regional Civil Service Bureau members of Shinasha ethnic group have the highest number in the regional civil service following the non-indigenous people in the regional state.

²¹ Representatives of the Berta ethnic group publicly opposed the equal representations of Shinasha, Mao and Komo at the regional parliament and executive branches at the public meeting held in March 2001.

representatives of the Federal government authorities have supported maintenance of a status quo that favoured the Gumuz elite group. Consequently, the former President became the longest serving regional President in the country. Secondly, the federal government authorities supported the administrative measures taken in handling the Berta and the BPLM issues. For example, when the BPLM attacked the small towns near the border of Sudan and Ethiopia in 2008 many members of the Berta political party were suspected of involvement – including the Vice President of the regional state and other senior members. This was addressed not only by the regional administration but also by advisors from the federal government and the ruling EPRDF. The Berta communities protested against these accusations, claiming they were deliberately attacked aimed at undermining their role in the regional state²².

In summary, the Gumuz elite group has successfully manipulated the relationships of the smaller indigenous groups, the Berta elite, and the security threats to the regional state and federal government from BPLM. At the same time, there is no doubt this has contributed to the instability of the regional government, lack of harmonised regional leadership and its inability to articulate the regional state's interest in intergovernmental relationships. Since the regional state is multi-ethnic, it seems likely that resource and power-based conflict will persist between the ethnic-based elite groups. Nevertheless, it should be possible to manage this by establishing accepted power-sharing mechanisms and by providing federal incentives that encourage identity groups' co-operation.

²² Interview notes, Berta elders, Asossa, May 2008

The Establishment of the Nationalities Councils

The constitutional amendment of 2002 allows each indigenous group to establish its own Council of Nationality from the regional and Woreda representatives, utilising the organs of the Nationalities Administration Council (NAC) and the Judiciary. Each Council has its own office led by a speaker and a deputy speaker. It is considered the supreme political power of each indigenous group and given the task of promoting the language and culture of the group. Moreover, it can issue and enforce laws, which are not contrary to the regional law, evaluate and approve budgets, and recommend the appointment of judges for the high court (Article 75).

The Council of Administration, which is the highest executive organ of the Council of Nationalities, is led by the Chief Administrator, the Deputy Chief Administrator and the Heads of Executive (Article 78). It is responsible for all administrative issues, including implementation of the laws and decisions of the regional government; the organisation of government departments; agreeing the annual budget and submitting it to the Council of the nationality; and formulating detailed economic and social plans, according to the policies of the regional government (Article 79). Every indigenous ethnic group in the regional state has the right to establish its own Council of Nationality although no one has launched it yet. However, according to the legal and economic advisors to the regional president and other informants from the Shinasha ethnic group²³, this has been very controversial among the members of the Regional Council. A number of issues were raised in this regard.

²³ The informants from the Shinasha ethnic group noted the extent to which it is problematic to implement the constitutional law about Council of Nationality, Asossa, May 2008.

First and foremost, it is difficult to establish the Council of Nationalities with executive responsibilities in the territories of the indigenous groups. For example, the Shinasha ethnic group lives together with the Gumuz in some Woredas of Metekel. If two Councils of Nationalities, one for each ethnic group, are established in the area there is likely to be an administration overlap which could cause intra-regional conflict. Second, the right to establish a Council of the Nationalities is given only to the indigenous groups, ignoring the non-indigenous groups. Moreover, the working language of the Nationalities is to be the relevant indigenous language. This could marginalize non-indigenous people who prefer to teach their children their own language. This again affects the peaceful coexistence of the ethnic groups in the regional state²⁴.

Third, the establishment of the Council of Nationalities may also constrain development activities in the regional state. This is because it will create unnecessary offices and hierarchal administrative institutions that require additional recurrent budgets. This money will have to come from the state's capital budget. Moreover, unnecessary administrative hierarchies can also create implementation inefficiency because any communication gaps between the higher and lower levels of the administration and the public is widened (Ndulo, 2006).

The legal advisor to the President of the regional state expressed his concern:

How does a regional state that sustains itself by the federal government budget subsidy create additional administrative structures that consume its budget?

²⁴ Interview notes, legal advisor to the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state President, Asossa, May 2008

This constitutional right is not only vulnerable to conflicts but also consumes the regional budget's scarce resources²⁵.

Finally, the regional state lacks the expertise to implement a Council of Nationalities. The economic and legal advisors to the President stated that the regional state lacks expertise in the preparation of the guidelines that would enable the constitutional right to introduce the Councils to be implemented. Moreover, as the Council of Nationalities will be a new structure in the country it has become difficult to find experts in the Federal government who could assist the implementation, or to secure experience from other regional governments. The southern nations have this kind of regional institutional arrangement, but there it aims to play a role in the management of conflict rather than having any executive responsibility. Some of the endogenous groups in the Amhara regional state also have their own Nationality Council. This was formed to protect the smaller nationalities from domination by the much larger Amhara ethnic group which constitutes 95% of the population (Van der Beken, 2007).

Issue of the Settlers' Political Representation in the Regional State

The political representation of the settlers has also become controversial in the regional state. This is because the regional constitution does not permit full participation of the non-indigenous people in regional and federal political institutions (Article 71). Moreover, although the constitution says representation of the non-indigenous people shall be given special consideration, and that the policies will be determined by law (Article 45/3), nothing has yet been implemented by the regional council and executive body which are dominated by indigenous groups. For example,

²⁵ Interview notes, Asossa, May 2008

when the Council of Nationalities was legislated, the issues of non-indigenous people were side stepped with the excuse that these would be dealt later by another law²⁶.

In these circumstances non-indigenous people wanted to participate in the national elections of 2000. However, the political party from Berta lobbied the National Election Board (NEB) to declare that as non-indigenous people did not speak the native language they should be banned from running elections. The NEB approved this request and the representatives were banned from running elections²⁷. However, the settlers did not accept the decision of the NEB and complained to the HOF that their constitutional right to vote and run elections had been violated. The issue was forwarded to the Federal Constitutional Enquiry Commission (FCEC), which investigates constitutional issues and advises the HOF. The FCEC took expert opinion.

The controversies about the political representation of the non-indigenous people underline the problems of minority rights protection that was omitted in the federal constitution. In other words, the constitutional emphasis on ethnicity has resulted in members of Berta ethnic groups using ethnicity as a political instrument to undermine the political representation of the non-indigenous people and to promote their own dominance in the regional administration. The following expert opinion about the issue also shows the extent to which the emphasis of the federal constitution on ethnicity has created difficulties in implementing the basic political rights of citizens.

²⁶ Interview notes, legal advisor to the regional President, Asossa, May 2008

²⁷ A letter written to Asossa Zone election coordinator from the National Election Board Office, Addis Ababa, 18 February, 2000 (10 February 1992 E.C)

In the first place, some of the experts considered the decision of the NEB as constitutional. This was because if a people's representative could not speak either of the local languages, s/he could not properly represent the people, and the people would not be able to apply their right of self-administration at the regional level. In other words, the experts considered the decision of the NEB to be related to the implementation of self-determination of indigenous groups²⁸. However, other experts considered the decision of the NEB to be unconstitutional on the basis that the right to vote and run elections is a basic political right of all citizens, and is not to be associated with either ethnicity or language²⁹. Moreover, as the regional working language is Amharic the persons who wanted to hold an election could in fact speak the required language. Hence, the decision of the NEB was unconstitutional. After considering all advice, the FCEC took the issue to the HOF, which finally voted against the NEB's decision.³⁰

However, although the non-indigenous people were then able to organise elections based on the decision of the HOF, the number and distribution of seats in the regional state are determined by the regional constitution and the regional Council. Following the violent conflict in 1992, the settlers in Pawe Woreda acquired special representation in the regional Council. However, other settlers in Asossa could only be represented by one seat in the regional Council. Moreover, they could only be represented in a Woreda council by a third of the representatives when they account for the majority of the population of the Woreda. Representatives of the HOF, who went to the regional state to conduct a public meeting in 2001, saw the issue as a

²⁸ Comments in favour of the decision of NEB, by Dawit Yohans, the then Speaker of the House of Federation, 16 June, 2001(08 June 1993 E.C)

²⁹ Comments forwarded by the late Kifle Wodajo against the decision of NEB, 2001

³⁰ Minutes of the House of Federation decision about the issue of the settler's representation, 07 July 2008 (June 29 1992 E.C)

national issue that had to be addressed at national level³¹. The Director General of the NEB, however, believed such questions should be treated within the sovereignty of the regional state, as the issue fell under the constitutional rights of the regional state³². The settlers themselves have never accepted the decision of the regional state. As the settlers have lived in the regional state for more than 30 years, and their children were born there, they want representation equal to the indigenous groups. Moreover, they want their majority status to be respected in Asossa Woreda³³.

One of the settlers in Bambassi Woreda who participated in group discussions explained:

We came by force here 30 years ago. Our children who were born here have become middle-aged adults now. If this regional state does not belong to our children where should they go? Therefore, our children should get access to land and the political institutions in the regional state as equals of the native people³⁴.

Kefale (2008) argues that the settlers' demand for proportional political representation also has an economic dimension. Certainly it is clear that if they have proportional political representation in the regional political institutions this would help them address the socio-and economic problems and issues associated with land use rights in the regional state, as discussed in Chapter Six. Equally, there have been differences among the regional political authorities with regard to this issue. For example, as discussed above, the political elite of the Berta demanded the exclusion of the non-indigenous people from the political process of the regional state. On the other hand,

³¹ Minutes of public meeting held in Asossa, 20-24 March 2001(12-14 March 1993 E.C)

³² Interview notes, the Director General of the office of National Election Board, June 2008, Addis Ababa

³³ Focus group discussion notes, Amba 14(settler's village), Bambassi, May 2008

³⁴ Ibid

the former regional president, Ato Yaregal Ayisheshim, and representatives of other ethnic groups were concerned about the impact of the Berta's demand on the peace and development of the regional state. They requested reconsideration of the NEB's decision banning the participation of non-indigenous people in the regional and parliamentary elections of 2000.

At the same time, interviews held with senior members³⁵ of the regional state underline the lack of political willingness in the regional state to accommodate the demands of the settlers for proportional political representation. They give a number of reasons. The regional authorities still believe that the non-indigenous people have alternative places to live, whereas the only choice for indigenous people is Benishangul-Gumuz. In addition, this issue of minorities is a nation-wide issue. For example, there are similar problems in the Oromia and the Harrari regional states, as discussed in Chapter Four. So there can be no reason for Benishangul-Gumuz alone to deal with the issue of the settlers when other regional states do nothing, particularly when there is no pressure from the federal government to act. Indeed, according to the regional authorities the handling of minorities in Benishangul-Gumuz is better than other regional states³⁶.

Despite this, the issue of the settlers' political representation certainly indicates a violation of basic political rights in the regional state. This can be seen with respect to both individual and group rights. Individually, although settlers have a right to vote they do not have proportional representation rights in accordance with their population. Further, a basic principle of federalism is to enable a minority to make

³⁵ Several senior members of the regional council were interviewed during field visit. All of them have similar opinion with regard to the non-indigenous people's political representation

³⁶ Interview notes, a senior Cabinet member of Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

decisions on issues that concern them in their local areas (Watts, 2001). In this case, the settlers have been deprived of this right because of their identity, even when they are in the majority as in Asossa Woreda.

The Role of the Federal Government

The federal government has handled the power struggle between the political elites of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state in a way that has enabled it to maintain government survival. For example, the federal state maintained the regional president post for the Gumuz and a concession was given to the Berta which enables them to establish a Council of Nationalities, although this is something to be applied to all the indigenous groups in the regional state. As discussed above, this arose in response to the insurgency of the BPLM from across the borders of Sudan and the religious radicalism in Sudan which focused on the Berta (Young, 1999). In other words a Gumuz regional president was seen as more loyal to the federal authorities than a Berta president during the initial years of the federal system.

The result is that representatives of the ruling party do not treat the ethnic groups in the regional state equally. In Benishangul-Gumuz the federal government favoured the Berta ethnic group during the transitional period. However, when the influence of insurgent groups increased in Berta territories, the focus of the federal government shifted from the Berta to the Gumuz and it let the Gumuz take control of the critical regional posts. Since then, the Berta have felt alienated and excluded from the benefits of the regional government³⁷. Moreover, they felt that they had been attacked indiscriminately by the federal government following an increase in insurgent groups

³⁷ Interview notes, Berta elders, Asossa, May, 2008

in the region³⁸. This also contributed to competition between the ethnic groups for influence with the federal authorities. They know from experience that, if they are able to influence the centre more successfully than others they can retain power.

The result is that the way the federal government has dealt with the regional issues from the perspective of regime survival on one hand and the ethnicity politics of the ethnic leaders of the indigenous groups on the other has incapacitated the regional state leadership. This emphasizes that the concern of many scholars (Aalen, 2006, Tronvoll, 2009, Clapham, 2009) about the ruling party's failure to implement the constitutional right of self-determination of the ethnic groups' in the country is justified.

At the same time, the federal authorities have implemented different power-sharing mechanisms which have created temporary leadership stability in the regional state. For example, the under-representation of Berta in the regional council and the regional executive was corrected after the Berta political party threatened to leave the regional state. Now the Berta ethnic group has more representation in the regional council, in accordance with its population. Similarly, it has better representation in the regional executive body. The regional presidency has also been held by the Berta since the end of 2008. The idea of establishing a nationalities council has been introduced, in order to accommodate the demands of the Berta although as noted it has proved difficult to implement it symmetrically in the regional state. The regional state now also takes population size into account when allocating Woreda budgets.

³⁸ There is an opposition party in the region called 'Behenen' conducting armed movements usually by crossing over the common border with Sudan.

However, the federal government's approach is not a sustainable solution for the power struggle between Berta and Gumuz. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, there is no well-institutionalised power-sharing agreement between the ethnic groups to create leadership stability in the regional state. The power sharing agreement always depends on the federal interest, which in turn depends on inter-regional and international relations. This makes power-sharing between the ethnic groups unpredictable, and encourages them try to manipulate and influence political groups in the regional state and the federal authorities. Secondly, it is obvious that no single identity group has majority status in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state and the regional state cannot be dominated by any single ethnic group. This encourages the different ethnic groups to continue to struggle for power or to establish a separate regional state. There is a need for other economic, social and security advantages to motivate the ethnic groups to cooperate each other. At the moment, however, 90 % of the regional budget and the Woreda block grant are allocated by federal subsidy; infrastructure improvements are also mainly carried out by the federal government and there is no security threat which would force the Berta ethnic group to create an alliance with the Gumuz. So, on the basis of the federal constitution, the Berta can still think they will gain better economic advantage and political status if they establish their own regional state. This view is reinforced by the fact that the majority of the Berta population are Muslim. They had their own kingdoms during the medieval period and an autonomous administration during the Menelik period. The result is that there remains the strong intention among the Berta political elite to establish a separate regional state.

Such intentions, however, have little relevance for the other ethnic groups, especially the Gumuz. Firstly, as the Gumuz lives on both sides of the Abbay River, a regional state which includes the Berta and the capital of Asssa could be useful, in order to maintain access between the Gumuz of Kamashi and the Gumuz of Metekel. Secondly, as the Gumuz live in several Woredas, they benefit from Woreda bloc subsidies. Finally, historically the Gumuz were administered separately under Oromos and Amharas. They have shown no interest in demanding their own regional administration.

The federal government has attempted to influence the Benishangul regional state by utilising federal government structures such as the Office of Regional Affairs which was organised by the office of the Prime Minister until 2002, and then by the Ministry of Federal Affairs. The Office of the Regional Affairs sent regional advisors to the state, hosted peace and democracy conferences, and offered teams of experts to provide technical support to the regional state. The Ministry of Federal Affairs has been doing similar activities since its establishment in 2002. In addition, since 2009 members of the Ministry of the Federal Affairs have been assigned, at regional and Woreda level, to advise the regional and Woreda cabinets on issues of development. It was thought, correctly, that the peripheral regional states (non- EPRDF) were lagging behind the EPRDF regional states as far as development was concerned. However, the members of the Ministry of Federal Affairs were recruited not from the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state but from the EPRDF controlled regional states, particularly the Amhara region.

In fact, the relationship between the federal government and the peripheral regional states, which essentially mirrors the relationship between the Bolshevik party and the autonomous republics of the former Soviet Union, has led to greater interference of the ruling party and the federal state in the internal affairs of the regional states. According to the interviews carried out during the field visit to the Benishangul-Gumuz, the representatives of the EPRDF focus mainly on security matters in the regional states. These representatives lacked the capacity and expertise to advise on development policy or the strategies needed in the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state. The effect was to undermine the regional capacity for policy making. In addition, the federal intervention has aggravated the power struggle between the ethnically-based elite groups of the regional state and their attempts to gain the support of EPRDF, something which is critical to maintaining regional power control. Nor have the regional and Woreda advisors sent by the Ministry of Federal Affairs to the regional state encouraged additional capacity in the regional state. According to the Advisor to the Speaker of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, the Woreda advisors simply do not have enough expertise to advise Woreda administrations³⁹.

The federal government has taken some measures to accommodate the rights of the non-indigenous people in the regional state. As discussed above non-indigenous people were allowed to stand in elections, although other non-indigenous people in Oromia and Harari regional states were not allowed to stand. This concession was given to non-indigenous people in Benishangul- Gumuz regional state because of their organised complaint against the decision of NEB in 2000. Following the HOF decision, contrary to that of NEB, they were allowed to participate in Woreda and

³⁹ Interview notes, April, 2011

Kebele administrations, although not at a level of representation proportional to their population.

Despite these successes the basic political and economic rights of non-indigenous people are not respected. Non-indigenous people do not have constitutional proportional political representation as the indigenous people do. Nor do they have equal land use rights as citizens of the country. The rights given to non-indigenous people by the regional state can be revoked as the regional state chooses, and there is no constitutional law which limits the regional states' authority to do this. In fact, neither the federal nor regional constitutions respect the political rights of minorities which have been created through the federalisation of the state. The result is that the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people is difficult with the political rights of non-indigenous people excluded from the constitutional design of the federal process.

Conclusion

The federalisation of the state in Ethiopia has devolved power and resources to peripheral areas, like the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. However, whether the devolution of power and resources to the ethnic groups brings real change depends not only on federal restructuring but also on the federal process itself which, in turn, is determined by the power relationships of different interest groups and actors (Elazar, 1986). The transformation of the structural causes of conflict in the Benishangul-Gumuz also depends on the well-established and stable regional power relationships between the political leadership of the ethnic groups. So far, the establishment of the regional state and the devolution of power and resources to the regional state has

not brought significant changes to the structural causes of conflict because of the power struggle between the main ethnic groups within the regional state, and the under representation of non-indigenous people in the political institutions of the regional state. In addition, the focus of the federal state on regime survival, in response to security concerns and threats from across international borders, has also greatly affected regional domestic politics. Federal state support to the continuation of the Gumuz elite group in power for more than 15 years for security reasons has also contributed to the power struggle between the Berta and Gumuz elites, ultimately undermining the capacity of regional leadership.

So, if constitutional power devolution is going to bring real change, the mechanisms of power-sharing must be well institutionalised and address regional interests. The more the federal government intervenes in the regional state, the more the power struggle between the ethnic groups will increase in order to influence the federal authorities. Equally, the non-indigenous people need to be well represented in the regional institutions, as their numbers are already almost equal to those of the indigenous population. In other words, effective mechanisms of political representation must be devised which balance the group rights of indigenous people and the basic political rights of non-indigenous people. Without this, the regional state will not be able to transform the structural causes of conflict, as discussed in Chapter Six, it will also become prone to further violent conflict.

Chapter Nine

Federalism and Inter-regional Conflict Management in the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

Introduction

This chapter discusses the inter-regional conflict management process between Benishangul-Gumuz and the neighbouring regional states. It discusses the nature of conflict between the neighbouring regional states, and attempts to relate the basic sources of inter-regional conflict to historical and cultural factors, relationships between small regional states and the nation state, common border issues, international frontiers, and extensive possession of small arms. Secondly, it discusses how these basic causes of inter-regional conflict lead to violence and how the federalisation process has influenced this process. For this purpose it considers two case studies: a violent conflict between Gumuz and Amharas dating from 1992-1994, and a violent conflict between Gumuz and Oromos in May 2008. Finally, it determines the relevance of formal and informal intergovernmental relationships and the promotion of co-operation between regional states for the management of inter-regional violent conflict.

Nature of Inter-regional Conflict: Historical and Cultural Factors

Inter-regional violent conflict in this area of Ethiopia is associated with historical issues and cultural factors. As discussed in Chapter Five, for centuries the indigenous groups in the Benishangul- Gumuz state were considered slaves, and segregated from integrating into the dominant neighbouring ethnic groups. The regimes of the nation-state also advocated segregation of the indigenous groups, and did not consider them

citizens of the country until the modern era of the Haile Selassie regime (Donahm, 1985). The military regime displaced them from their territories (Mebratie, 2004). The stigma of this history is still fresh in the memory of the indigenous people and of the neighbouring ethnic groups contributing significantly to the conflicts between the neighbouring regional states¹.

The conflict between the regional states is also associated with the historical administrative structures of the regional states. As discussed in Chapter Five, historically, the Kamashi and Assosa zones of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state were administered by Wallega during the Haile Ssilase and military regimes. The people in the zone administrations were seen as ‘Black Oromos’ by the Oromos, although this was considered derogative by the Gumuz and Berta people who live in the Kamashi and Assosa zones. In addition, the OLF considered the Berta’s and Gumuz as ‘Black Oromos’ and attempted to introduce Oromifa as a spoken language in the early years of the transitional period a process which encountered strong opposition from local people.

The Metekel zone, which is the third zone of Benishangul-Gumuz, was part of Gojjam during the Haile Selassie and military regimes. During this time many people from Amhara and Agew migrated to the territories of the Gumuz and the area became considered as part of the territory of the Amhara. Hence, when the new regional states were established (after the downfall of the military regime in 1991), the Amhara regional state claimed the Dibate, Mandura and Pawe Woredas, and this contributed to the violent conflict between Gumuz and Amharas after 1992.

¹ A report prepared by a joint committee from Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states, 2005

The nature of inter-regional conflict is also related to cultural factors. The culture of the neighbouring Amhara and Oromo people is greatly influenced by the Christian religion (Donham, 1985). However, although Christianity is spreading among the Gumuz ethnic group, their culture is related to traditional spirit faith, as discussed in Chapter Five (Mebratie, 2004). Although the Bertas are predominantly Muslim, traditional spirit faith also plays a greater role in their life than Islam (Triulzi, 1981). The neighbouring ethnic groups consider themselves culturally superior to the indigenous people because of this. Moreover, the neighbouring ethnic groups see the culture of the indigenous people as a ‘source of evil’. The name Baraya (slave) had been associated with evil, mainly in the Gondar areas (Pankhurst, 1997). Similarly, the Oromos also consider the traditional culture of the indigenous people as uncivilised. The result is they undermined indigenous people when they met in public places and during interaction in the lower level administrations². In effect cultural inequalities have played a significant role in creating a polarised relationship between the lower level administrations of Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz states, which, in turn, have contributed to the violent conflict that occurred in 1994, 2007 and 2008³.

The Relative Size of the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State and Relationships to the Central Power Structures

The small population density of the regional state is another factor which has caused conflict between the neighbouring regional states. The population density of Benishangul-Gumuz is 14.5 per kilometre, while the Oromia and Amhara regional states are 104.5 and 117.4 per kilometre respectively⁴. In addition, much land in the

² Interview notes, a Gumuz elder, Asossa, May 2008

³ Ibid

⁴ The population density variation is also high in the neighbouring zones and Woredas, which have seen violent conflict between Gumuz and Oromos and Gumuz and Amharas. For example, the

territory of the Benishangul-Gumuz is fertile yet unexploited compared to the land in the territories of the Amhara and Oromia regional states. The Benishangul-Gumuz regional state is therefore attractive to immigrants from the neighbouring regional states and there have been land encroachments along the common borders. This has been the reason for high immigration from the Amhara regional state and illegal settlements in Mandura, Pawe, Dangur and Mankush in the Metekel zone.⁵ The zone administration attempted to control the movement of people by establishing check points along main roads, but this became impractical. Some migrants arrived in a systematic way and settled with relatives who had come earlier. Others came in groups and settled by establishing their own Kebele administrations (Asres, 2010). The Oromos also pushed their settlements into the Kamashi and Asossa zones. As a result, the previous settlement patterns have changed significantly over the last twenty years. According to Fufa (2010) the movement of people towards Asossa and Kamashi, along the regional frontiers, occurs not only from Oromia but also from the Amhara regional state.

As discussed in Chapter Five the past relationship of the people with the nation state also influenced the current relationships with the regional and federal states. The federal government and the ruling party consider the Benishangul-Gumuz as one of the emerging regional states which requires special support, not only from the federal government but also from the neighbouring regional states. The people who have been sent by the government to support the regional state are mainly from the Amhara or Tigray regional states. So long as they are members of EPRDF they have been

population density of Kamashi zone is 11.5 per kilometre, whereas the population density of East Wallega zone is 107.1 per kilometer. Moreover, the population density of Metekel zone is 10, whereas the population density of the Awi zone is 113.1 per Kilometre (CSAE, 2010).

⁵ Interview notes, Metekel zone zone administration head, Gilgelbeles, July, 2008

considered politically capable in comparison with members of the regional party. Nevertheless, according to the former Regional President of the Benishangul regional state some of the advisors and experts who were sent to the regional state by the federal government were incapable of fulfilling their mission. According to the legal advisor of the speaker of the regional council many of the advisors who have been sent to the regional state by the Ministry of Federal Affairs since 2009 are no better than the members of the regional party⁶. This suggests that the influence of the centre and periphery relationships still undermines the regional state's policy-making capacity.

The under-representation of the regional state in the federal executive political institutions, by comparison with neighbouring regional states, is also a source of conflict. As discussed in Chapter Four, Amhara and Oromia regional states are the biggest and most highly populated in the country. This means these regional states have larger representation in the parliament and the executive body of the federal government. For example, the Amhara and the Oromo control six cabinet positions each in the federal government, while the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state is not represented at all. This undermines the status of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state not only in federal-intergovernmental relationships, but also in regional intergovernmental relationships. This is because the authorities of the federal government not only represent the federal institutions but also their own regional states and the EPRDF's regional parties (OPDO, ANDM, TPLF or SEPDM), operating in the regional states. There are, in fact, opportunities for the federal authorities to favour their own regional states when there is conflict of interest in

⁶ Interview notes, legal advisor to the speaker of the regional council, April, 2011

intergovernmental relationships, and this was clearly seen for example in the allocation of budget subsidies in 2006.

The Issue of Border Demarcation

The relationships between the Benishangul- Gumuz and the neighbouring regional states are also associated with the territorial insecurity of the indigenous groups. Historically, the indigenous people were pushed away from their territories by the neighbouring ethnic groups (Mebratie, 2005; Pankhurst, 1997). The federalisation of the state enabled them to establish their regional state, and, according to the federal constitution, the common borders of regional states are to be determined on the basis of ethnic identity and the residential territories of the ethnic groups (Article 46). However, despite an initial attempt at border demarcation between the Benishangul-Gumuz and the Amhara regional state, the common borders have not yet been ratified. Indeed, border disputes have become a frequent issue along the common borders of the regional states. For example border disputes occurred along 19 Woredas and 71 kebeles on the Oromia side and 8 Woredas and 48 Kebeles on the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state side along nearly a thousand kilometers of borders of the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regional states (Fufa, 2010).

This has been complicated by the different views of the regional states about the necessity of regional border demarcations. Evidence from the field visit suggests that on the one hand, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional administration is an advocate of border demarcation. It is widely believed that a demarcated border would enable the

regional authorities to maintain law and order⁷. If there are clearly defined common borders between the regional states, people will be aware of the location of their residential areas and clear about which state laws they must abide by. Moreover, the demarcated borders will enable regional states to know where the boundaries of their own borders are and the confusion over the issue of land claim and counter claim should be significantly reduced⁸. Border demarcation also helps the regional state award investment licenses to investors, and controls the direct and indirect displacements of indigenous people and the illegal arms trade⁹. The Benishangul-Gumuz regional state therefore considers border demarcation to be a crucial element in maintaining law and order.

The former President of the regional state, Ato Yaregal, explained:

Both the Amhara and Oromia regional states have argued against border demarcation in some workshops. This may be due to the population pressure they have in their regional states. However, no one can settle in a place of his/her preference without consideration of the law and order of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. Mobility of people from one regional state to another regional state has to be done in a way that does not threaten the survival of the indigenous people.¹⁰

On the other hand, evidence from the field visit to Amhara and Oromia regional states shows that both the Amhara and Oromia regional states have concerns about the

⁷ All informants from the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state have emphasised the necessity of border demarcation to maintain law and order.

⁸ Interview notes, Cabinet member of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008.

⁹ Interview notes, Cabinet member of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

¹⁰ Interview notes, Asossa, May 2008

necessity of border demarcation¹¹. Firstly, it is believed that demarcated borders could instigate further conflicts. This is because the highland people along the common borders of the Metekel and Kamashi zones normally subsidize their income by temporarily cultivating land and harvesting crops in the lowland areas, due to their geographical proximity. This was common practice long before the establishment of the regional states. However, when the regional states of Amhara, Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz were established, this practice was not considered. Bringing it to an end contributed to a shortage of land in the highland areas, and it has become a reason for the increasing number of internal immigrants to the Benishangul-Gumuz¹².

In addition, demarcated borders have become a source of conflict in some Kebeles of the Amhara and Afar regional states where local leaders want to limit the movement of people into their localities. Equally, border demarcation may not reduce the expansion of the highlanders towards the indigenous groups. For example, in spite of the defined common borders between some Woredas of Benishangul-Gumuz and the Amhara regional states the Amharan and Agaw people are still moving from Dangur, Jawi and the Gangwa Woredas into the territories of Metekel, in search of fertile land.¹³

Secondly, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state and the Gumuz insist on border demarcation that focuses on ancestral residential areas as a major criterion, but this is impractical because settlement patterns have significantly changed in the common

¹¹ Interview notes, Department head at the Security and Administration Bureau of Amhara regional state, Bahardar, July, 2008; Experts, Security and Administration Bureau of Oromia regional state, June 2008

¹² Ibid

¹³ This was confirmed by a senior official of the Security and Administration Bureau of Amhara regional state, Addis Ababa, July 2008

border areas over the last two decades. The Benishangul-Gumuz's criterion of border demarcation could therefore lead to inter-ethnic violent conflict. A senior officer from the Oromia Security and Administration office said:

The Gumuz always say they were living in the gorges of the rivers because of the highlanders. Moreover, they claim every place that was inhabited by the Gumuz, despite their current settlement areas. If that is an acceptable reason, we can claim Asossa. But this will be impractical and a source of conflict.¹⁴

Indeed, if the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state insists on border demarcation, the Oromia regional state will demand referenda. This is because it is believed that a referendum would enable the regional state to consider the true views of the people. The Oromia regional state in fact asked the HOF in 2008 to conduct a referendum along the common borders of the two regional states¹⁵.

The Benishangul-Gumuz regional state however strongly opposes referenda as a means of border demarcation because it believes that indigenous groups of the regional state were pushed out by Oromo over the last 18 years. Moreover, the Oromia regional state resettled other Oromo, mainly from the Bale zone, in the controversial borders between the two regional states. Thus, many Kebeles of Oromo have already been established in the territories of Benishangul-Gumuz. The fear is that the outcome of a referendum (in these common border areas) would lead to the approval of displacement of the indigenous groups from their ancestral lands. Benishangul-Gumuz believes border demarcation should be done using other factors,

¹⁴ Interview notes, Cabinet member of the Oromia regional state, Addis Ababa, June 2008

¹⁵ A letter written to the House of Federation (HOF) from the Cabinet of the Oromia regional state, 21 May 2008 (13th of May 2000 E.C.)

including historical guidelines and the administrative ownership of the land during the four years of the transitional period after 1991¹⁶.

Recently, the House of Federation and the regional states have implicitly accepted that the referenda would not be effective in managing conflicts along the common borders of the Benishangul- Gumuz and Oromia regional states. This is because following the violent conflict between Oromo and Gumz in 2008, the HOF mediated demarcation of their borders through negotiation rather than referenda. The two states established a joint committee and demarcated around 600 kilometers borders by consensus. However, most of the controversial territories along the Deddessa River, which were the causes of violence in 2008, have yet to be demarcated according to sources in the Benishangul- Gumuz regional government¹⁷.

In some places, the ethnic groups have been living peacefully together. This has happened with Oromo and Mao in the Mao/ Komo special Woreda of Benishangul- Gumuz and the Kelem zone of the Oromia regional state. But the variety of identities in this Woreda is also another problem that hinders border demarcation based on identity differences. Overall it is difficult to implement border demarcation in places where people with different identities live (Vaughan, 2007:40). It might be added that as neighbouring regional states argue movement from place to place is a basic constitutional right of citizens in the country (Article 32) any regional state policy of making mobility illegal is against the basic democratic rights of citizens.

¹⁶ Interview notes, a Cabinet member of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state Asossa, May 2008

¹⁷ Interview notes, Advisor to the speaker of the House of Representatives of the Benishangul- Gumuz regional state, April, 2011.

All this indicates that the regional states have followed different directions to foster their own regional interests. For example, there has been serious disagreement between the Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states with regard to the Mao/Komo special Woreda during the transitional period (1991-1994). The Mao Komo border was established by a referendum held in 1995, as a result of which the highland areas of Begi went to Oromia, and the lowland areas went to Benishangul-Gumuz. However, the Benishangul-Gumuz authorities still think that the highland areas of Begi went to Oromia regional state because they were not politically and organisationally strong enough to campaign effectively during the referendum. On the other hand, the Oromia regional state is not still happy with the present arrangement, which places a large Oromo population, and small Mao and Komo groups, under Benishangul-Gumuz administration. The problem is manifested mainly by the establishment of overlapping administrations in the common border areas leading to violence (Vaughan, 2006).

Similarly, the Gumuz, in the Metekel side of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, considered their border stretched up to Metema and Welkayit. However, during the transitional period people in these places were forced to vote for the Amhara national regional State (ANRS), and the ANRS has moved a lot of settlers to the Metema area. During the transitional period the ANRS claimed some Woreda of Metekel and this sparked tension, which contributed to the violence of the mid 1990s (see below). Since then both regional states have discussed their problems and this has led to better relationships and clearer border demarcation between them. Nevertheless, research jointly conducted by both regional states in 2005 showed that migration and illegal resettlement from ANRS into Benishangul-Gumuz regional state had led to land

encroachment and systemic displacement of the Gumuz from their territories. In addition, the 1995 land distribution by the Amhara regional authorities effectively led to territorial expansion of the Amharan regional state because many Amhara were given certificates which guaranteed them the use of land in Gumuz territories. Unless continuing immigration, and the tendency of the Gumuz to retreat from their settlements, is better controlled it could become a cause of future conflict between the regional states¹⁸.

The federal constitution enables the regional states to administer land and land resources (Article, 52). It also allows for common borders between regional states to be defined on the basis of ethnicity. These factors have completely transformed the issue of land use between the highlanders and lowlanders along the common borders of the Benishangul-Gumuz and the neighbouring regional states. First, the local administrations of the neighbouring regional states tended to grab each other's land. This is because territorial expansion enables them to acquire more land, which, in turn, allows them to levy tax on land use and the use of land resources. Accordingly, the authorities of the Oromia regional state wanted to gain more land from the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state by claiming the residential areas of migrant Oromos. The Amhara regional state has also been reluctant to demarcate common borders in some places. It gave certificates of land use in some areas which were claimed by the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. On the other hand, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state also wanted to demarcate its territories on the basis of earlier settlement of the Gumuz people. This does not take into account changes in the settlement pattern that have occurred over the last 20 years. The regional state

¹⁸ Interview notes, Head of Metekel Zone administration, Gilgelbeles, July 2008.

even attempted to return the so-called illegal immigrants from Metekel and Bambassi to their earlier settlement areas (Vaughan, 2006). Land use is not only an issue for local administrators; it also involves regional level administrators.

The Dynamics of the International Frontier

The violent conflict in the regional state is also associated with the dynamics of the frontier. As mentioned in Chapter Five the regional state shares common people¹⁹ and borders with Sudan. The Berta people are found in both Ethiopia and the Blue Nile province of Sudan. For example, many people in the Asossa zone send their children to school across the border. The area inhabited by the Gumuz people also stretches across the border into Sudan. For instance, the Gumuz in Guba of Metekel are closely related to the Sudanese Gumuz across the border, the majority of whom are now Arabic-speaking Muslims who have adopted many aspects of Sudanese culture (Vaughan, 2006).

The common border between Ethiopia and Sudan, in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, is not well-controlled by either government. It has served as a base for insurgent movements and arms are traded across the borders. For example, the Guba Woreda in Metekel has been used as a crossing point for opposition armed groups moving from Sudan to Gojjam. It also served as a safe haven for EPRP fighters during the military regime. The international borders in the Asossa zone also served as an entry point for OLF fighters during the early period of the federalisation of Ethiopia,

¹⁹ Both Berta and Gumuz ethnic groups live in Ethiopia and Sudan.

and for BPLM fighters until 2008. This uncontrolled common border is, in fact , a source of conflict in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state²⁰.

The dynamics of the frontier are also associated with geo-political factors. The relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia and the domestic political factors in Sudan have greatly influenced the political situation and conflict in the regional state during the 1980s, 1990s and post-1998 (the Ethio-Eritrea war).

During the military regime the Ethio-Sudan common borders in the Asossa zone were places of cross-border insurgent supported by both the Ethiopian and Sudanese governments. As discussed in Chapter Eight after the military regime came to power in Ethiopia in 1974, the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM) conducted insurgent activity in the Benishangul areas, against the military regime and with the support of the Sudanese government, though they did not become a significant threat. In turn, the military regime also supported the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which made Gambella its base area and conducted insurgent activities against the Sudanese government from various places in Ethiopia, including Asossa, until it was expelled by the new EPRDF government in 1991(Young, 1999). In 1989 the EPLF forces came to Asossa through the Sudan borders, captured it from the military regime and turned it over to the OLF until the Derge regime recaptured it again. With the hostile relationship between the two countries, and the insurgent activities along the border, the Ethiopian government eventually used Asossa as a buffer zone (Young, 1999; Vaughan, 2006).

²⁰ Interview notes, Head of Metekel zone administration, Gilgelbeles, July 2008.

After the EPRDF came to power in Ethiopia in 1991, the dominating Islamic fundamentalism in the Sudanese government played a role in destabilising the Beneshangul-Gumuz regional state. The Sudanese government started operating in the area along with some of the factions of the BPLM. Subsequently, the pro-Sudanese faction within the BPLM demanded self-determination for Asossa and declared a Jihad against the government. This led to some military skirmishes. The Ethiopian government downgraded the diplomatic mission of Sudan in Ethiopia and closed Sudanese-affiliated NGOs which were operating in the state. It expelled from the state a number of alleged Sudanese agents who had been working as senior and lower ranking officials. It also renewed its relationships with the SPLA, allow it to use Asossa as a *spring-board* to attack the military forces of Sudan. Despite this, BPLM terrorists continued to destabilise the area around Asossa until the beginning of 1997 (Ibid).

The regional state finally became relatively stable after the relationship between Ethiopia and Sudan normalised after 1998, and particularly after the Sudanese government signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the SPLA. Since then the regional state has become a member of the Border Commission, which operates with the Southern Sudanese regional government to promote the common trade and security interests of both countries. Many armed fighters of the BPLM received amnesty from the Ethiopian government and returned home in 2001/02 (Vaughan, 2006). Nevertheless, BPLM still operates along the common borders of Sudan and Ethiopia, and has been supported by the Eritrean government since the Ethio-Eritrea war. It has attempted to destabilise the regional state several times. For example, it killed several people and burned a public bus near Kurmuck , a small town on the

border of Asossa and Southern Sudan, in 2008²¹. This led to instability in the Berta political party, still a member of the regional state. The Vice President of the regional state was suspected of being connected to the BPLM and was caught leaving for Sudan²².

The existence of a refugee camp in the Assosa zone is another source of conflict associated with the frontier. The Sherkole refugee camp is located in Komosha Woreda and established in 1997 on some 600 hectares of land for refugees from as far away as Uganda, Rwanda and the Congo. It had 14,244 refugees in September 2006, mostly Sudanese Dinka but also Funji and Uduk (Vaughan, 2006). According to the Director of Refugee Affairs of Ethiopia, since the peace agreement between the Sudanese government and the SPLA many Sudanese refugees have returned voluntarily to their country, and there were only around 5,000 refugees in the centre in August 2008. The main problem associated with refugee camps is that their inhabitants get involved in different illegal activities, including growing, smoking and selling hashish. More important, as a major source of conflict is the environmental degradation caused by the refugees burning trees and brush, and killing wildlife in the area, leading to conflict with indigenous people.

Possession of Small Arms

The widespread possession of small arms is another factor contributing to the violent conflict along the common borders of the regional states. For example, the Federal Police confiscated 192 small arms and 725 other weapons immediately after the

²¹ This incident happened when I was in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state for data collection

²² Interview notes, President of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, May 2008

violence between the Gumuz and Oromo in May 2008²³. There are a number of reasons for the increase in small arms in the conflict areas. Firstly, the armed opposition parties (such as the OLF and EPRP) who fought against the military regime left weapons behind when they operated in the Kamashi, Asossa and Eastern Wallega areas (Vaughan, 2006). Secondly, the people who live along the common borders of the regional states have felt vulnerable to conflict since the transitional period, and they have acquired small arms to protect themselves. This is shown not only in the culture of the Gumuz people, who consider small arms possession a symbol of pride and accumulation of wealth²⁴, but also within the Oromo and Amhara groups, who previously did not pay much attention to possession of weapons.

In addition, the open regional and international borders have created favourable conditions for an illegal small arms trade into the conflict areas. For example, Chagni in the Agawi zone of Amhara regional state and Gumba in the Metekel zone are centres of an illegal small arms trade, according to informants from the Federal Police²⁵. Ayalew (2010) also noted that the flow of small arms across international borders is one of the reasons for the increase in small arms possession in the Bahrdar Woreda of Amhara regional state, which is a long way away from the international border. The small arms are mainly traded by smugglers, who take advantage of poor border control across the Woredas of the common borders of both countries. For example, the border at Guba is exceptionally remote and sparsely populated, with next to no infrastructure, which makes it difficult to control the small arms trade. The Guba and Mankush Woredas of the Metekel zone have seen a dramatic increase in the

²³ Federal Police Commission progress report on the violent conflict along the common borders of Benishungul-Gumuz and Oromia, Addis Ababa, June 2008

²⁴ Interview notes, informant, Mandura Woreda, July 2008

²⁵ Interview notes, a senior officer from the main operations department of the Federal Police, Addis Ababa, June 2008

volume of ammunition being traded through the Wembera and Gilgelbelese. The capacity of the police and militia to control these activities is limited (Vaughan, 2006).

All this indicates that the causes of inter-regional conflict are not only associated with the federalisation of the state. Other reasons are associated with inherited historical factors, or related to cultural factors and the frontiers of the regional state, which require long-term socio-economic transformation and the building of a common national identity (federal identity) among the people of the neighbouring regional states to resolve. However, the main cause of conflict between Benishangul-Gumuz and the neighbouring regional states remains related to border issues, which in turn is embedded in the resource issues of the highlanders and territorial insecurity of the indigenous people. The following section discusses how these issues have been politicised, involving the lower and higher levels of administration, and have led to violent conflict before being managed by the institutions of the federal system.

Federalism and Management of Inter-regional Violent Conflict

Whether the above causes of conflict led to violence has depended on the mechanisms and institutions of conflict management used in the conflict areas. To explore this, we will examine two case studies of inter-regional conflict, which happened between Gumuz and Amhara between 1992-1994 and between Gumuz and Oromo in 2008. In particular, the examination will focus on the relationship of the conflict to their basic causes, the heavy losses suffered by both sides and the extent to which the neighbouring regional states became involved as well as the wider national impact of the development of conflict management institutions in the federal process.

The data for this part was collected from different sources, including documentary sources and the regional states institutions concerned. Contributions were also obtained from eyewitnesses, members of Parliament who investigated the causes of the conflict, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, the Federal Police, Ministry of Federal Affairs, the House of Federation and NGOs operating in the conflict areas.

Case One: The Violent Conflict between the Gumuz and Amhara

The change of government in 1991 made significant changes to the state structure, allowing the Gumuz elite group to have a say in the politics of their localities. Accordingly, the Metekel region, which is inhabited mainly by Gumuz, became a zone administration and the Gumuz elite group became the key players within that administration. During the transitional period, border issues between the states of Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara flared up. Accordingly, the Amhara regional state and the ANDM demanded that Dibate, Mandura and Pawe Woredas be included in its territory. However, this was seen by the political elite of Gumuz who were members of the BPLM, as a continuation of annexation of the Gumuz territories by the Amhara and Agew. The competitive stance of the ANDM and the BPLM, which were operating in Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz respectively, complicated the situation in the common border areas of both regional states (Vaughan, 2007).

During this situation, a member of the Gumuz ethnic group was killed by a settler during a ceremony commemorating the death of an elderly Gumuz man in 1992. The death was accidental, in fact, as it was caused by a bullet fired by the settler to show respect to the occasion according to the Gumuz tradition. Nevertheless, the accident sparked violent conflicts that continued until 1994 and claimed hundreds of lives

along with the destruction of property and the displacement of thousands of people (Abbute, 2002: 249-251).

Following this incident, the Gumuz suddenly attacked neighbouring settler villages on 27 December 1991 and again on 28 December. They also attacked people in a market area used by settlers on September 11 1993. The settlers made a retaliatory attack on 22 September 1993 and killed the local administrators of the Gumuz and the Shinasha, who were considered as the main organisers of the attacks against the settlers (Abbute, 2002:252). It was after this development that the government intervened to stop the violence.

Losses during the violence were documented by Berihun:

329 persons were killed; and elders, children and disabled persons were burnt alive with their houses. A total of 6,833 rural houses, 185 Mosques that are made of grass roofs, one church, five elementary schools and a service co-operative shop were burned during the conflict. About 1792 cattle and too many sheep and goats were looted. In addition, the harvest both stored at home and at the field was destroyed (Berihun, 1996:119 cited in Abbute, 2002:249).

It was an accidental killing of a Gumuz man by a member of the settlers that ignited the grievances of the Gumuz into violence. The conflicting parties were quickly categorized as Gumuz and 'others' that is the 'black' (*Tikur*) colour on one side and the fair (*key*) colour on the other side (Abbute, 2002). Nevertheless, this did not mean that the conflict was ethnic, it was rather a manifestation of historical relationships inherited from the past (Mebratie, 2004:19). Moreover, it was the involvement of the

armed political parties that were operating in the areas that made the conflicts violent. According to an informant who was a member of the ANDM and was a zone administrator in the conflict area, members of the Gumuz ethnic group who were also members of the BPLM were engaged in mobilising the Gumuz by aggravating their territorial insecurity. They exploited the Gumuz's grievances of displacement which had occurred during the military regime resettlement programme in 1984. They also manipulated the historical land encroachments by neighbouring Amhara and Agaw people which displaced the Gumuz from their previous territories (Vaughan, 2006).

The original grievances were hardly a sufficient condition for the violence, but the ethnicity politics of the BPLM and the inability of the transitional government to manage the conflicts before they developed into violence allowed the grievances to escalate into violent conflict. The situation was complicated by the fact that the ANDM army was part of the transitional government defence forces. They found themselves in a dilemma over whether to act as a mediator or on behalf of the Amharas who had been attacked by the Gumuz²⁶. In fact, according to Gumuz informants who were in Mandura Woreda during the violence, the ANDM army killed many Gumuz and Shinasha who were considered as organisers of the violent conflicts²⁷. In other words the interests of the government and of the political parties became mixed because the role of political parties and government institutions were not clearly demarcated during the transitional period.

Since the outbreak of violent conflict between Amhara and Gumuz, 1992-1994, a number of measures have been taken to prevent any recurrence. Firstly, a combination

²⁶ Interview notes, a Member of Parliament who was working during the transitional period in the conflict zone, Addis Ababa, June 2008

²⁷ Interview notes, Gumuz elders, Mandura Woreda, July 2008

of legal and traditional means of conflict management has been used to maintain peace among the ethnic groups. According to Abbute (2002), this has been done by establishing multi-ethnic Councils of Elders along the bordering Woredas of Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz. The Councils have had supportive sub-committees of elders in the respective peasant associations across the entire area affected. They have been assigned to restore peace and return looted property. Moreover, they disarmed illegal arms holders in co-ordination with the local authorities. All the activities of these Councils of Elders have been supervised by the ruling party, the EPRDF, and the local administration (Abbute, 2002:260-262). In addition, hostilities were assuaged according to the traditions of the Gumuz with the local administration providing oxen to be slaughtered during the reconciliation process (Ibid).

Some administrative restructuring activities were undertaken which partly addressed the aggravating factors. The Pawe area became a special Woreda, directly accountable to the state of Benishangul-Gumuz and Muslims who lived in the borders between the Agawi zone and the Metekel zone became part of Agawi (Abbute, 2002: 260-262). The ruling party also recruited and trained a number of cadres to assume administrative positions with the specific task of dealing with the causes and solutions of the violence (Ibid).

Finally, and importantly, activities started in the aftermath of the violence have continued as integral elements of leadership activity for lower administrative authorities. This has been done through the Peace Committees established at the zone administration, lower administration and Kebele levels, through reconciliation

activities whenever inter-ethnic homicides have occurred and by memos for economic and social cooperation between the two states²⁸.

Interviews conducted in zone and other lower level administrations of Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regional states, make it clear that the Peace Committees are basically established jointly by both the neighbouring zones²⁹. This can be, for example, between the Agawi and Metekel zones within Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz, respectively. The peace committees include zone leaders, heads of the Police Commissions and other responsible people at zone levels. They are also established in the same way at Woreda level. However, at the level of the kebeles, they include local elders of the communities in addition to the kebele administrators³⁰.

The function of the Peace Committees at zone and Woreda level is focused on dealing with security matters, common border issues and common development activities. Accordingly, the zone level Peace Committees work together on common security and development issues and meet every six months to evaluate the progress made. They can organise inter-ethnic public conferences aimed at reconciliation if there has been recent violence. Similarly, the Woreda Peace Committees meet every month to evaluate the implementation process of their plans. The function of the Peace Committees at kebeles level is focused on prevention of conflict and reconciliation if there has been any homicide. In order to do this, they can organise reconciliation ceremonies between conflicting families. They also manage land use disputes

²⁸ Interview notes, Metekel zone administration, Gilgelbeles, July 2008

²⁹ Interview notes, Metekel zone administration, Gilgelbeles, July 2008; Gungwa Woreda administration, Chagni, July 2008

³⁰ Ibid

between the highlanders and the Gumuz. They meet regularly every 15 days to evaluate the security situation in their respective kebeles.³¹

In addition, the sectors of the respective Peace Committees can meet either formally or informally to activate plans between regular meeting days. For example, when there are interethnic homicides both police forces from the neighbouring Woredas take responsibility for arresting suspects. At the same time, the lower level Peace Committees conduct reconciliation activities between families and communities in dispute.³²

The traditional reconciliation process can be arranged using public conferences in the neighbouring Woredas and kebeles if there are cases of violent conflict. Elders from the Woredas or kebeles are invited to a public meeting and swear not to resort to violence. At the same time, government authorities use the public conferences to address the issues of conflict to a wider audience. Several peace conferences for example have taken place in Gangwa and Dibate Woredas in both states. According to the Dibate and Gangwa Woreda administrations, harmonisation of legal measures and the traditional reconciliation processes have been the main factors that enabled the authorities to maintain law and order along their common borders.³³

Informants of the Ministry of Federal Affairs however suggest the public conferences have both advantage and disadvantage. The advantage is that they are useful to discuss the causes of conflicts, identify the initiators and maintain social connections

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Report about public conferences prepared by the Metekel and Awi zones joint Peace Committee,, Chagni, 2 July 2007 (24 June 1999 E.C)

between the conflicted parties. On the other hand, they are conducted post-conflict and therefore do not provide any direct contribution to prevention of violence. Moreover, some of the agreements reached at peace conferences may be impractical because the people who participate in these meetings are few in number compared to the general population. There is always a chance that the decisions of the meetings may not reach to grass-roots level. Agendas are politically imposed and are not initiated by the local people. Above all, the meetings are expensive to conduct at Woreda and zone levels.³⁴

Efforts at regional cooperation have also been encouraged in both Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz. Both states allocate budgets from their own resources. The budget is used to establish health centres, elementary schools and to extend rural roads that can be used by people along the common borders. The implementation of these common development activities is monitored by the regional leaders and the Peace Committees at zone level. Informants from both states confirm that these activities have significantly contributed to minimize conflicts because they have been focused on promotion of the common social interests of the people in the border areas. Moreover, Amhara regional state has helped Benishangul-Gumuz in various ways. For example, it constructed the Teacher Training College in Metekel, and trained police officers from the Metekel zone in the regional police training colleges³⁵.

According to informants from Dibate Woreda in Metekel and Gungwa Woreda in Agawi, this co-operation has helped in creating good relationships between the neighbouring people of both Woredas. First, common social services such as health

³⁴ Interview notes, Head of Conflict Prevention Department, Ministry of Federal Affairs, July 2008

³⁵ Interview notes, Metekel Zone administration, Gilgelbeles, July 2008

centres and schools have created common ownership and better interactions between people of the two states. According to Abbute (2002), students who had studied in the common schools played a pivotal role in bringing conflicting parties to reconciliation during the 1992-1994 conflicts. Second, the support provided by Amhara to Benishangul-Gumuz has helped enhance the capacity of the Metekel local administration which, in turn, has contributed to the state's capacity for conflict management.

As a result, violent inter-ethnic conflict has been kept under control in the common borders areas. There have been no significant inter-ethnic violent conflicts that have involved either the regional or federal forces, and when there have been homicides that could lead to inter-ethnic conflicts, the local administrations have kept control. The process is enforced by integrating law and order with traditional means of conflict management, and this has created a sense of security in the communities of the two states³⁶.

Second, the encouragement of common plans and activities between the lower level administrative authorities has created good understanding of each other, a common understanding of the border issues and a sense of common accomplishments. For example, both the lower administrative hierarchies resolve land-use conflicts by a win-win approach. Instead of confronting each other by land claim and counter-claim, they utilize the land in a way which will benefit the two conflicting parties. Moreover, regardless of the higher authorities' opinion on border demarcation, the Woreda

³⁶ Interview notes, Gwanga and Dibate Woredas administrations, Chagni and Dibate, July 2008

administrations of Gungwa and Dibate Woerdas, for example, believe that further demarcation can minimize conflicts along their common borders.³⁷

The above conflict management process between the Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regional states shows the extent to which federalisation of the state was necessary to reverse the historical conflicts between Gumuz and Amhara people. Unless the Gumuz had been made to administer themselves, it would have been unthinkable for the Gumuz to have local institutions such as the zone and Woreda administrations and the police institutions which have created favourable conditions to present their agendas in intergovernmental relationships. The federalisation of the state was the precondition for the win-win approach to conflict management between Amhara and Gumuz. Of course a unitary state also can create these kinds of institutions, as the unitary state of UK devolved power to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. However, the unitary state in Ethiopia did not attempt to devolve power at any point. Nor is the power devolved by a unitary state to lower units entrenched through constitutional means, whereas power devolution in federal states is protected through constitutional means and cannot be easily amended (Kings, 1982)..

At the same time, the federal structure has never been enough for a win-win approach of conflict management between Gumuz and Amhara. Restraint from using ethnicity by both the Amhara and Gumuz administrations in the issues of land use and inter-ethnic homicides has also contributed to the effectiveness of the conflict management institutions of the regional states. In addition, the regional administrations invented additional conflict management institutions such as the peace committees, integrate

³⁷ Interview notes, elders of Mandura Woreda, Gilgelbeles, July 2008

the legal and traditional conflict management institutions. Regional institutions gave a focus to promote regular contact between the ethnic groups by investing in common social services like clinics and rural roads which are used by all ethnic groups in the border areas. All this contributed significantly to the stability in the common borders of the regional states.

It does not mean that the relationships between the regional states have been entirely smooth since 1994. As discussed earlier, there are always tensions arising from the historical and cultural relationships of the people in the regional states. Moreover, continuous internal migration of people from the Amhara regional state to the Metekel zone and the unmarked common borders between some Woredas of the Dangela and Agawe zones in Amhara and the Metekel zone in Benishangul-Gumuz continue to create tensions between the regional states which require regular co-operation and negotiations between the authorities of both regional states.

Case Two: The Violent Conflict between the Gumuz and Oromo

The violent conflict between the Gumuz and the Oromo happened in 2008, along the common borders of Belojeganfoy and Sasiga Woredas from the states of Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia, respectively. Historically, the people along the common borders of the two states have not been involved in violence, but since the establishment of the regional states some issues that might cause violent conflict have emerged. After the establishment of the states, the two states tended to expand their territories towards each others' borders. For example, according to the informants from the Parliament, Oromia conducted resettlement programmes in places that were claimed by Benishangul-Gumuz. Moreover, both states established local

administrations according to residential settlements of ethnic groups, and administrative overlap occurred in places where the ethnic groups intermingled.³⁸ According to a study by experts from the Oromia regional state, administration overlap occurred in a number of Woredas including between Sasiga and Bolegangofy and between Haro limu and Yaso Woredas of Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states respectively. This contributed to the outbreak of conflict in May 2008.

There are also some places administered by Oromia that have been claimed by Benishangul-Gumuz. For example, the Kebeles of the former Deddessa Agricultural Development Center (DADC), which are currently administered by Oromia, are claimed by Benishangul-Gumuz. According to the informants from Benishangul-Gumuz, when the military regime started modern farming and a military training centre in Deddessa, the people displaced were Gumuz, but following the establishment of the modern farms other people, mainly Oromos, moved in³⁹. On the other hand, informants from Oromia said that both Gumuz and Oromo had been displaced when the modern farming and military training centre were established. However, the reason that the transitional government gave these places to Oromia was because, when the farming centre was closed after the change of government in 1991, the people who were living there were Oromos⁴⁰.

In relation to these problems, relationships between the local administrations of both states have polarised since the transitional period, leading to similar developments

³⁸ Interview reports, Members of Parliament and Human right Commission, Addis Ababa, June 2008

³⁹ Interview reports, Cabinet member of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional cabinet, Asossa, May 2008

⁴⁰ Interview notes, from Cabinet members of the Oromia regional state, June 2008

between the local people along the common border areas. The result was violent conflicts in 1994 and 2007⁴¹.

Following the 2007 conflict both regional states agreed in a meeting called by the Ministry of Federal Affairs in May 2007 (May 1999 E.C) to resolve their problems. The two regional governments established a joint committee that was meant to produce a report and recommendations about issues along the common borders.⁴² The regional states agreed to bring to justice suspects who had participated in the previous conflicts. However, the joint committee could not agree on the issues to be included in their report; as a result, the committee disintegrated and conducted separate studies, in which each accused the other. Nor did either state manage to bring anyone to justice before the 2008 conflicts erupted⁴³.

Evidence from the field visit suggests that the trouble began when Gumuz and Oromo labourers quarrelled and two Oromos attacked two Gumuz with a knife in Village 4 of Horowota Kebele, Sasiga Woreda of Eastern Wellega on 3 May 2008 (25 April 2000 E.C.)⁴⁴ The Oromia local administration took the victims to Nekemte Hospital for further treatment and arrested the offenders, but released them on bail later. Rumours circulated in the neighbouring Gumuz kebeles that the victims had not been treated well in Nekemte Hospital and the attackers had also been released. So, the Belojeganfoy Woreda administration took the victims away from Nekemte Hospital as a sign of its discontent with the Oromia Woreda administration⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Interview notes, informant, Ministry of Federal Affairs, June 2008

⁴³ Interview notes, member of the joint committee, Asossa, May 2008 and Addis Ababa, June 2008

⁴⁴ This evidence was asserted by several informants including Members of Parliament, who went to the conflict zone to investigate the incident of the violent conflict

⁴⁵ Interview notes, Members of Parliament and Human right Commission Addis Ababa, June 2008

Then the Gumuz suddenly attacked Village 4 on 17 May 2008 (9 May 2000 E.C). Armed Gumuz, including police, militia and others with military expertise, participated in the attack. They killed and injured many Oromos and destroyed the village. The Oromia regional anti-riot police and Woreda Police counter-attacked neighbouring Gumuz villages five hours later, killing and injuring many Gumuz and destroying their villages.⁴⁶ Overall, 171 people were killed and 62 were injured during the attack and counter-attack. Some 1650 houses were set on fire and around 48,976 people were displaced, according to Federal Police sources⁴⁷.

According to members of Parliament who investigated the case, no attempt was made to follow the principles of cooperation between the regional and local level administrations to manage the conflict following the original incident⁴⁸. Different reasons for this can be put forward. First, polarised relationships between the lower administrations contributed to the violence. For example, although Peace Committees were established after the 2007 conflict, they were not operational due to the lack of co-operation. Moreover, the stigma of cultural inequalities between the lower level administrations in general and the tendency of the Oromia lower administration to undermine their Gumuz equivalents along with the internalization of this by the Gumuz administration also played a role in the trouble⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Interview notes , informants from the Federal Police, Members of Parliament, Addis Ababa, June 2008

⁴⁷ Report prepared by the Federal Police about the violent conflicts along the common borders of Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia, Addis Ababa, June 2008

⁴⁸ A joint team of eight persons (from members of Parliament, ministry of federal affairs and federal police) was established to investigate the causes of the violent conflict between Gumuz and Oromos in 2008

⁴⁹ Interview notes, members of Federal Parliaments who went to the conflict areas for investigation, Addis Ababa, July 2008

Equally, regardless of the agreement reached by the two regional states to bring criminal suspects from the 2007 conflicts before the courts, no-one had been arrested. Indeed, according to the members of Parliament who investigated the case the individuals who participated in those troubles had been protected by their respective regional states. This, in turn, made the reconciliation activities carried out after the 2007 violence meaningless⁵⁰.

Third, the regional administrations were at least negligent and at worst participatory in the conflict in 2007. For example, when no criminal suspects were arrested in the respective regional states, the regional authorities did not look into the problem even after the joint research committee disintegrated, neither regional state attempted to sort out the reasons. As a result, the split in the research committee was, by itself, one of the contributing factors in subsequent outbreak of violence in 2008⁵¹.

There was plenty of scope for the authorities of the regional states to have become involved in the problem. For example, although all the Benishangul-Gumuz regional authorities who participated in interviews for this research denied that they had been informed about the Gumuz preparations to attack the neighbouring Oromos, some of the preparations included open recruitment of personnel and military training.⁵² On the Oromia side, the counter attack was made by regional anti-riot police, who are clearly accountable to the regional authorities. It is clear both regional authorities either ignored or were participants in the violence.

⁵⁰ Interview notes, members of the Ethiopian Human Right Commission, who went to the conflict areas to investigate the causes of conflicts, Addis Ababa, June 2008

⁵¹ Interview notes, senior officer of the Federal Police who went to the conflict area to investigate, Addis Ababa, June 2008

⁵² Around 200 armed men were trained as part of the preparation for the attack. Although it was rejected, a member of the Woreda administration asked a member of the zone administration for bullets in order to distribute them to the people training for the attack

Certainly, the lower level administrations as well as local security forces of both regional states were participants. Their relationship was already polarised due to land claims and counter-claims between them, and the Belojeganfoy Woreda administration and police fully participated in organising the armed men who attacked the Oromos. The neighbouring Oromia Woreda administration and police also participated in the counter-offensive along with the regional anti-riot police. This certainly made the cost of the violence higher than it would otherwise have been, especially since there were no common security or development activities in a position to minimize the impact of the polarised relationships⁵³.

The violence between Gumuz and Oromo shows that the federal structure by itself simply cannot manage violent conflicts. It also demonstrates that unless regional and local administrations restrain themselves from using ethnicity politics the structure itself can instigate violent conflicts. The historical relationship between Oromo and Gumuz was not known for violent conflict. The relationship between the Oromos and the Gumuz in Wallega was good in the early 19th century following a pact between Moreda Bakere, who was the ruler of north Wallega, and the Gumuz (Shankila). When many Gumuz fled to Wallega, due to the problems they encountered in Southern Gojjam, they were offered protection by Moreda. Though later the son of Moreda, Dejazmach Gebreezhabier, conducted slave raids that made the Gumuz move to the lower levels of the Diddessa valley which runs into the Blue Nile. Overall, however, the relationship between Oromo and Gumuz remained essentially nonviolent when compared to the relationship of the Gumuz and the Amhara (James, 1986:130). It was after the federalisation of the state that the cycle of violence began

⁵³ Interview notes, a member of the Ministry of Federal Affairs who went to the conflict area for investigation, Addis Ababa, July 2008

because the federal process was not supported by co-operative intergovernmental relationships promoting commonness between the ethnic groups.

The case study of conflict management between Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara demonstrates that interregional co-operation and common institutions, such as joint Peace Committees, joint Research Committees, public conferences and joint development activities, can play a significant role in managing interregional conflict. They are influential because of widespread co-operative motivation, at all levels of administration. On the other hand, the case study of violent conflict between Gumuz and Oromos demonstrates that hostilities between the lower levels of administration render the mechanisms of co-operation between them non-existent. As a result, the possibility of violent conflict between neighbouring peoples increases. So, whether inter-regional violence can be managed or not depends largely on the level of co-operation which exists between the different levels of administration, and the mechanisms and institutions of conflict management which can be utilised.

The Role of Intergovernmental Relationships

As discussed elsewhere, the overall federal arrangement has been able to manage protracted conflicts between the indigenous people and the neighbouring dominant ethnic groups. This was achieved by enabling the indigenous groups to establish their regional state and participate equally in federal institutions. However, whether this comprehensive federal approach to conflict management can fully address the conflicts that may arise during the federalisation process depends on intergovernmental relationships (Simeon, 2007).

Intergovernmental relationships between the regional states of Benishangul-Gumuz, Amhara and Oromia have become informal, focussing on bilateral meetings between the regional leaders, sometimes mediated by the House of Federation. For example, both the Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regional governments have had several meetings resulting in common consensus on some issues, the drawing up of memos of co-operation and the establishment of joint committees. Similarly, both Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia attended bilateral meetings in 2007 called by the Ministry of Federal Affairs. Following this, there were meetings of both regional governments that resulted in the establishment of joint committees along their common borders. These inter-governmental relationships between the regional states were not, as such, supported by institutional mechanisms and binding agreements.⁵⁴

The intergovernmental relationships in fact focused on joint committees of the lower level administrations. These can be categorised as Peace and Research Committees, essentially informal institutions, which are established by the neighbouring zones, Woredas and Kebeles. As already noted, they have a significant role in maintaining law and order. There are also Research Committees, joint teams established for specific, temporary purposes. For example, Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara states established joint Research Committees in 2005 and 2007, aimed at studying the reasons for conflict along their common borders⁵⁵. Similarly, both Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia established joint Research Committees in 2008 aimed at sorting out the problems along their common borders⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Interview notes, heads of security and administration bureaus of the two regional states, Asossa, May 2008; Addis Ababa, July 2008

⁵⁵ Interview notes, Director Security and Administration Bureau of Amhara regional state, Addis Ababa, June 2008

⁵⁶ Interview notes, Experts at the Oromia State Security and Administration Bureau, Addis Ababa, June 2008

Federal institutions such as the House of Federation, Parliament or the Ministry of Federal Affairs can intervene in managing inter-regional state conflicts. The House of Federation can arbitrate in common border issues when invited by the regional states concerned and can budget subsidy allocations. Parliament can also intervene through its powers of legislation and through the Human Right Commission when there are human rights violations. The Ministry of Federal Affairs can intervene through the Federal Police and its responsibility to support the emerging regional states. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development can also influence regional states' affairs by its authority to formulate agricultural and natural resources development policies. Finally, the Prime Minister can intervene if there are serious security threats that have grown beyond local capacity or when there are serious human rights violations (Proclamation No.359/2003).

Indeed, the Prime Minister's office made decisions on some places in dispute between the states of Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz during the transitional period, in January 1995. This was because neither the central institutions that should have taken the decisions on inter-regional issues during the transitional period nor the regional institutions were well established. 13 Kebeles from Dibate and 17 Kebeles from Dangur Woredas were incorporated into Amhara and others into Benishangul-Gumuz⁵⁷. Similarly, the Kebeles on the former Dedessa state farm were allocated to the Oromia regional state⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ A report on the study of conflicts occurring around the Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz border area, March 2005

⁵⁸ Interview notes, Deputy Director, Oromia regional State Security and Administration Bureau, Addis Ababa, June 2008

The extent to which the decision considered the territorial issues and ethnic politics in the areas is unclear. Whether the decision was influenced by representatives of the dominant ethnic groups also requires further investigation. Certainly, the authorities of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state complained that the decision makers did not consult the local people and that the decision was not supported by any thorough study of the territorial issues of the indigenous people⁵⁹. As a result, the claim of Benishangul-Gumuz to these Kebeles still continues and, in fact, this was one of the contributing factors to the violence along the Kamashi and Eastern Wellega borders in 2008.

The federal institutions do not practice institutionalised relationships with the regional states. For example, regardless of the violent conflicts between the Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states, the HOF never intervened until 2007. This is because, according to the speaker from the HOF, it has never been invited either by Oromia or Benishangul-Gumuz. As an alternative, after the 2007 conflicts the HOF invited both Presidents of the regional governments to discuss the issues⁶⁰. Accordingly, the regional Presidents agreed to sort out the problems in their own ways. The priorities of the HOF were actually with the conflicts between Oromia and the states of Somali and the Southern Region. The Ministry of Federal Affairs also did nothing except mediate between the regional Presidents to resolve the violence⁶¹.

There are various reasons for the lack of institutionalised intergovernmental relationships. Interviews of informants from the Oromia regional state suggest that for the authorities of the Oromia regional state the border issues between Oromia and

⁵⁹ Interview notes, Cabinet member, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

⁶⁰ Interview notes, Speaker, House of Federation, Addis Ababa, June 2008

⁶¹ Interview notes, a Cabinet member, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

Benishangul-Gumuz were less of a priority compared with the problems with the Somali and Southern regional states⁶². Although the authorities of Benishangul-Gumuz have made several efforts to sort out the border issues with Oromia, the efforts of the federal government to realise the constitutional rights of the emerging regional states remain minimal. Moreover, the socio-economic problems of the regional states are hardly understood by the federal government. Overall, intergovernmental relationships have focused on urgent and short term issues rather than long term issues⁶³.

There is also a belief that the smaller regional states like Benishangul-Gumuz do not have an institutional mechanism that enables them to be heard at the federal level. This is because the institutions of conflict management are dominated by people from the highland areas. For example, the HOF has been under the control of Oromos since its establishment in 1995. The Federal Ministerial Cabinet is also dominated by people from Amhara, the South, Oromia and Tigray. As already noted, Benishangul-Gumuz does not have any representation on the executive body⁶⁴.

This situation has led to two problems. Firstly, as the people in authority at the executive level are mainly from the highland areas, they have less understanding about issues affecting the indigenous groups of Benishagul-Gumuz. This can be clearly seen in the agricultural policies designed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The budget allocations made to the regional states demonstrates this relationship between the smaller regional states and federal institutions. The

⁶² Interview notes, Director, Security and Administration Bureau, Oromia regional state, Addis Ababa June 2008

⁶³ Interview notes, Senior Cabinet member of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

⁶⁴ Ibid

budget subsidy to the regional states is allocated according to the criteria of population size, development level and the ability of the regional state to collect tax revenues (Addis Fortune, 2008). However, in the 2006 budget year the federal government gave 61% weight to population size, which benefited the bigger regional states and resulted in a smaller recurrent budget, which was in fact insufficient to pay salaries in the smaller regional states⁶⁵.

Secondly, this has resulted in a lack of trust in the federal institutions amongst the smaller regional states. For example, Benishangul-Gumuz does not trust the HOF, and the regional state authorities wrote several letters to the Oromia regional state and copied⁶⁶ them to the Ministry of Federal Affairs, which they consider neutral in comparison to the House of Federation⁶⁷. The HOF solution for border disputes causes difficulties for the Benishangul-Gumuz authorities. This is because it supported a referendum as the solution for border disputes between Somali and Oromia states and between Oromia and the Southern regional states. This was, however, an acceptable solution for the authorities of Benishangul-Gumuz state in their border disputes with Oromia⁶⁸.

By contrast, the team leader of federal issues at the Ministry of Federal Affairs has noted that the necessity of institutionalised inter-governmental relationships has not been well understood at all levels of the government⁶⁹. The result is that the role of

⁶⁵ Interview notes, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Head of Finance and Planning Bureau, Asossa, May 2008

⁶⁶ Several letters were written to the Ministry of Federal Affairs in different years from the Benishangul-Gumuz President. Archival sources of the Ministry of Federal Affairs, reviewed in April 2008

⁶⁷ Interview notes, Cabinet member, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Asossa, May 2008

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Interview notes, informant, Ministry of Federal Affairs, Addis Ababa, July 2008

the federal institutions in preventing violent conflicts has become reactive rather than proactive. Their intervention is not supported by early warning mechanisms. If there were such mechanisms, the immediate causes of and preparations for violent conflict could be detected and analysed, as is done by IGAD's Protocol on Conflict Early Warning and Response mechanism (CEWARN) along the common borders of Kenya and Ethiopia (Apuuli, 2004:176). Moreover, the support of the Ministry of Federal Affairs to the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state has become a fire-fighting approach instead of producing capacity development activities that could address the special needs of the state. The result has been that the advisors sent by the federal government to the regional state not only lack the required capacity but do not have a clear mission⁷⁰.

The Impact of the Federalisation of the State on Regional Conflict Management

Some commentators associate violent conflict in the regional state directly with the federalisation of the state. For example, Abbute believes the violent conflict in Metekel in 1992 was caused by the ethnic character of the political system (2002:262), it has been argued that the attempt to define regional common borders, on the basis of ethnic primordial ties, created problems in defining the mixed residential places of the ethnic groups and the administrative boundaries of the regional states (Kefale, 2004,2008), and that this led to violent conflict between neighbouring ethnic groups, including the Oromo and the Gumuz, who did not have any protracted violent conflicts previously.

⁷⁰ Interview notes, Senior Cabinet member of Benishangul-Gumuz, Asossa, May 2008

In fact this is hardly the case. The Gumuz were involved in violent conflict from the medieval period to the fall of the military regime. The Gumuz were forced into slavery and were forcibly displaced from their territories, and in response the Gumuz made counter attacks, though they suffered heavy losses during the medieval period (Pankhurst, 1997, Mebratie, 2004; 66). They also killed a chief who administered them during the Haile Selassie regime (Mebratie, 2004:74). It is clear that the violence of 1992 actually reflected aspects of the protracted violence in the region.

The new phenomenon that has happened since 1991 is that the Gumuz have been able to control government institutions and resources that were denied them for centuries. As a result, the Gumuz have not been displaced from their settlements, despite the violent conflicts that have occurred since they started to participate in government institutions. For example, they were not permanently displaced by the violent conflict in Metekel in 1992⁷¹. The reason for this is the existence of the federal government, which could and did intervene as a neutral institution, and the existence of the regional state that could act on behalf of the Gumuz.

The basic territorial issues that can lead to violence are similar along the Benishangul-Gumuz borders with the Amhara and the Oromia regional states. However, the violent conflict has been well managed in the relationship of the Amhara and the Benishangul-Gumuz regional states for more than 16 years. As a result, the Gumuz people have been able to maintain peaceful relationships with the Amhara since 1994. If the ethnic nature of the federal system had been the main source of violence, the conflict between the Gumuz and the Amhara would have continued. It is therefore

⁷¹ After the violent conflicts of both 1992 and 2008, the people who were affected were settled again in the previous settlement areas. For this purpose different reconciliation activities were organised by the local governments and traditional elders.

clear that the federal arrangement can bring reconciliation between historically polarised ethnic groups as has happened between the Amhara and the Gumuz.

Of course, if the existence of an ethnic differentiation between ethnic groups is a social phenomenon, accepting their ethnic identity can also mean political empowerment for the ethnic groups. This can create a strong autonomy that fosters real integration of diversities which can maintain peaceful relationships between the differentiated identity groups, on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance (Fleiner, 2007:57). In other words, if the ethnic groups are not politically empowered, the state becomes a suppressing machine, as happened to the indigenous groups of Benishangul-Gumuz before they established their regional state. This means that unless there is an institutional arrangement, in which the ethnic groups can define themselves, partnership based co-operation cannot be established. Majeed et al explains this:

Only when the diversities can define themselves and build on their proper self-consciousness are they able to co-operate on a partnership basis with other diversities and thus contribute to the added value of the common nation (2007:57).

This kind of relationship between the state and the identity groups has been relevant in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state where group and individual rights have become two sides of the same coin. In other words, for the indigenous groups of Benishangul-Gumuz, group rights are directly related to individual rights. This means the economic and cultural survival of an individual is related to the existence of the community, sub-clan and clans. Moreover, the ethnic cohesion of the indigenous

groups is also high, due to the hostile historical relationship with the highlanders (Mebratie, 2004). Federalism that defines state relationships on the basis of ethnic identity can therefore address the issues of the indigenous groups because its aim is to recognise their group identities and make them feel empowered in their territories (Hawkes, 2001:159). This can create a condition conducive to the evolution of democratic institutions in the context of the ethnic groups.

The federalisation of the state has also reversed the marginalisation of the indigenous groups which developed during the unitary state. It has enabled them to participate in federal and regional political institutions, and in the regional Civil Service. Moreover, the resource-sharing mechanisms of the federal government have also played a significant role in benefiting the indigenous groups in relation to delivery of social services and the infrastructure development of the country⁷². In addition, the resource-sharing mechanisms have enabled them to establish and run regional institutions (such as the regional and Woreda administrations, the police, and schools and colleges), which contribute to enhancing the dignity and capacity of the people and to enabling them to play an equal role, as partners of the other ethnic groups, in the political affairs of the country.

However, other factors can still mean that referendum and border demarcation on the basis of ethnic identities may lead to protracted and violent conflict. Firstly, although the ethnic groups in the neighbouring regional states have their own residential areas, they still live together along the common borders. This is true for the Oromos and the Gumuz in the Kamashi zone and for the Agaw and the Gumuz in the Metekel zone.

⁷² Interview notes, head of finance and development planning Bureau, Asossa, May 2008

Secondly, in some places, mainly in the Mao/ Komo special Woreda, there is a mix of Mao and Oromo identities, due to intermarriage⁷³. Neither referendum nor border demarcation on the basis of ethnic identity are useful for peaceful conflict management in places where ethnic groups live together.

The federalisation of the state also created a favourable environment for the emergence of formal and informal local conflict management institutions. For example, according to informants from the lower level administrations in Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regional states, the co-ordinated activities of regional police institutions and courts play a significant role in preventing inter-regional violent conflict⁷⁴. Other informal institutions such as Peace Committees play a similar role. Moreover, the emergence of these formal and informal institutions has counteracted the weakness of the traditional conflict management institutions, which were used to maintain the status quo but which have not stopped the homicides that led to inter-ethnic violence.

Overall, however, there can be no doubt that the effectiveness of the regional and local institutions of conflict management depends on the attitudes and ambitions of the evolving ethnic-based elite groups. The ethnic-based elite groups in Ethiopia first emerged as significant political forces during the Haile Selassie regime. The suppressive policy of the military regime ultimately led to armed ethnic-based movements that eventually caused the regime's collapse in 1991 and the subsequent political empowerment of ethnic-based elites (Mengistab, 1997; Young, 1998). This was reinforced by the federal and regional constitutions which encouraged greater

⁷³ Interview notes, informants, from Gumuz and Berta ethnic groups, Asossa, May 2008

⁷⁴ Interview notes, informants from Metekel zone and Gangwa Woreda, Gilgelbeles and Chagni, July 2008

participation of members of the ethnic groups in federal, regional and local political institutions. As a result, members of ethnic-based elite groups got direct access to public institutions and resources, such as the regional police and budget. In parallel to this, the expansion of education enabled the ethnic groups to participate in the Civil Service, which, in turn, enabled them to recruit more members from their respective ethnic groups. It is in the last 18 years of the federal experiment that the ethnic-based elite groups have emerged as significant political players in the country.

This has played different roles in promoting ethno-national and regional interests, depending on the historical relationships between the ethnic groups. For example, the goal of the Benishangul-Gumuz elites has been influenced by a desire to have their ethnic identity recognised, and their rights to their territories accepted, by their neighbours⁷⁵. They have used all their regional capacities, created by federalisation of the state, to attain this goal. By contrast, nationalism for the Oromos is not only an assertion of rights. It also has elements of domination, which are reflected by a desire to expand their territories into the lands of the indigenous groups⁷⁶. This is certainly the ambition of the lower level administrations along the common border areas⁷⁷. Ethnic-based federalism has encouraged ethnic-based resource competition, and this certainly led to violent conflict at times.

Nevertheless, as discussed in the case studies, federalisation of the state has also created an enabling environment for the regional states to define their common

⁷⁵ A number of the regional state informants have reflected that their concern is lack of recognition to their territories and lack of equal access to the regional state apparatus, by neighbouring regional states.

⁷⁶ As an informant from the Oromia regional state noted, the ambition is also driven from the competition the Oromos have with Amharans in influencing the small ethnic groups in the territories of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state.

⁷⁷ Interview notes, Member of Parliament, Addis Ababa, June 2008

economic, social and security interests. This has been done, for example, by the Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz, in the sharing of local plans for development, jointly implemented in the common border areas⁷⁸. It can therefore lead the regional states into greater co-operation, which, in turn, could enhance the federal identity of citizens.

Conclusion

There are some necessary conditions for the outbreak of violent conflict such as unfavourable historical relationships, cultural inequalities and border disputes between neighbouring ethnic groups. However, the case studies presented here reveal that these factors by themselves are not sufficient conditions for violence. Whether the basic sources of conflict will translate into violence depends on the degree of inter-governmental co-operation and the efforts made to maintain law and order. In places where there are multi-ethnic communities, if the regional and other lower level administrations show serious co-operation and if they jointly attempt to maintain law and order, then they cannot only control violent conflicts but can also lay down a favourable basis for transforming the basic causes of these conflicts. This is because inter-governmental relationships cannot only facilitate peaceful coexistence between various peoples but can also support evolving civil societies that, in turn, promote common accomplishments through the provision of common public goods. The relationship between the Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states demonstrates this conclusion.

⁷⁸ Interview notes, members of the lower level administration of Metekle and Awi zones, June 2008

The case study of violent conflicts between the Oromos and the Gumuz also confirms the extent to which polarised inter-governmental relationships can instigate inter-ethnic violent conflicts. Involvement of the lower level administrations in conflicts, lack of accountability at all levels of the regional administrations, and lack of law and order have all contributed to the eruption of violence. In other words, although the basic causes of conflict are similar in both case studies, the involvement of the lower administrations in conflicts and lack of accountability of the regional administrators have played a significant role in creating violent conflicts between the Gumuz and Oromos.

In the last resort, whether a federal arrangement can successfully address the sources of violent conflicts depends on the extent to which federal, regional and local inter-governmental relationships promote federal co-operation and are accountable for the actions they take. Maintaining law and order, particularly the ability of the lower administrations to bring people who aggravate violent conflicts to justice, and undertaking reconciliation activities between conflicted families and communities significantly contributes to promoting peace which, in turn, creates favourable conditions to deal with the sources of conflict.

The federal arrangement can never resolve all the causes of conflict in the regional state. Other factors, such as geopolitical configurations, affect the nature of regional conflict. Inevitably, the relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia, and the political stability of South Sudan, greatly affect the stability of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. This underlines the fact that the federal arrangement must be supported

by inter-state cooperation and diplomatic efforts to reach the goal of sustainable conflict management.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

The questions this research set out to answer were whether federalism has created an enabling environment to manage the sources of conflict in Ethiopia, and what explained the conflicts in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state and the federal response to their management. The conclusions also relate the findings of the research to national and theoretical issues of federalism which offers a comprehensive approach to conflict management.

Federalisation of the state was a necessary step for the integrity of the country during the early 1990s. Although Ethiopia is a country of many ethnic groups, the previous nation state building project aimed at homogenising and imposing one language and culture on all citizens. As a result, ethno-national movements, which called for self-rule and secession, became the main resistance groups, eventually overthrowing the military regime in 1991. Federalisation of the nation-state, which included recognition of regional self-rule and equal participation of ethnic groups in federal shared institutions, meant civil war had to be curbed, in order to maintain, or re-establish, the integrity of the country.

Here, however, I argued that there are some problems in the relationship between the current federal structure and the historic trajectories of the Ethiopian state. The Ethiopian state became unitary and gave priority to building an Ethiopian identity more than a hundred years ago. Some consider themselves as Ethiopians only rather than as members of any specific ethnic group. The Ethiopian constitution however proposes that every citizen must define him/herself as a member of one or other ethnic

groups. It excludes persons who do not want to define themselves as members of any ethnic group for whatever reason. This has led to the use of language criteria for defining the ethnic groups and their administrative boundaries in places where it is not always appropriate to do so. It has also led ethnic groups into identity-based or resource-based conflicts; and encouraged the tendency to try to gain land from each other. The violent conflicts between Oromos and Gumuz in the common borders of the regional states can be partly explained in this respect. The imbalance between citizenship and group rights remain a potential problem that can lead to violence and undermine the legitimacy of the federal system.

In addition to drawing attention to this constitutional drawback, the study emphasises the necessity for federal co-operation in situations where an emerging ethnic-based elite group has become a significant political player. The emergence of ethnic-based elite groups creates a wider space for ethnic-based competition over resources, power and recognition. This is particularly the case where the basis of the relationship is ethnicity politics promoting ethnic differences for the purpose of controlling the patrimonial state resources. In other words, unless other mechanisms are employed encouraging federal and inter-regional co-operation, competition between the ethnic-based elite groups can challenge and undermine the legitimacy of the federal system. However, the emergence of ethnic-based elite groups is not a threat in itself. Indeed, it can be a source of stability if relationships between the elite groups are guided towards partnership and co-operation, as is happening in countries like the Philippines and Belgium. In both countries the co-operative relationship between ethnic-based elites has been a source of stability (Elazar, 1987). Similarly, in India the greater role of regional-based political parties in the federal system has contributed to the stability

and strength of democracy. This is because the Congress Party, which stayed in power for about 40 years, institutionalised co-operation between the regional-based political parties and the supreme federal institutions in the country (Majeed, 2005:203). Therefore, promotion of co-operation between the emerging ethnic-based elite groups on the basis of their common Ethiopian national identity, their federal identity, is an important aspect of determining the sustainability of the federal process.

The federalisation of the state has created regional states with significant variation of size. This is a potential source of conflict between the ethnic-based regional states or the allocation of federal subsidies. The bigger regional states may want to secure larger federal budget subsidies by giving more emphasis to their population size. It can also lead to a belief that their tax payers subsidize the smaller regional states because the federal government collects more revenue from the bigger regional states. The corollary is not necessarily to propose a division of bigger regional states into smaller ones. Any division of bigger regional states could instigate violent conflict as the issue of self-determination was a cause of civil war during the imperial and military regimes, and ethnic awareness has increased with the ethnic focus of the federalisation process after the downfall of the military regime in 1991. Designing transparent and equitable resource allocation mechanisms, and enabling the regional states that contribute more resources to the federal revenue to gain relatively more benefit from federal resources would be a more sustainable solution to any conflicts arising from incompatible interests in the use of federal resources.

The structure of the federal state in itself has led to greater interference by the federal government in the internal affairs of the regional states. This is partly related to the

dominance of the EPRDF as a centralised ruling party, as discussed in Chapter Four. One effect has been a failure to create sufficient regional leadership capacity, particularly in the peripheral regional states. Although the peripheral regional states are not structurally controlled by the ruling party, the federal authorities have consistently interfered in their internal affairs, using the federal structures operating alongside the regional governments. This has led to lower competencies in regional policy-making and intergovernmental relationships in the regional states. This could certainly become a source of conflict unless special consideration is given to correct the gap in capacity in the peripheral regional states.

Federal agricultural projects can also reinforce the historical marginalisation of the smaller (peripheral) regional states from the centre. The federal state has been expanding major projects including sugar and cotton cultivation and construction of hydroelectric dams in the lowland areas of the country. However, insufficient effort has been made to make these programmes compatible with the livelihood of the pastoralist peoples in Afar and South Omo or with the shifting cultivators of Benishangul-Gumuz. The most direct effect of the federal projects has tended to be displacement of the local people from their own settlements. This is another potential source of conflict between the peripheral regional states and the centre.

Lack of minority rights' protection also remains a problem of the Ethiopian federal constitution and the process of federalism. The concept of minorities has been defined by the constitution with respect to the ethnic groups with smaller populations. However, the rights of the people who have become minorities due to the federal arrangement have not been protected either by the federal or regional constitutions.

For this reason the basic political rights of the non-indigenous people in Benishangul-Gumuz and other people in the Oromia and Harari regional states have been determined on the basis of ethnicity. This violates the fundamental basis of federalism, which is harmonisation of group and individual rights. Unless the system harmonises political rights with group rights these will continue to be a source of violent conflict as happened between settlers and the Berta ethnic group in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. It should be noted that it is because of the sensitivity of minority rights that some federal constitutions in multi-ethnic countries such as India have prioritised their protection. There is a clear need for the Ethiopian federal process has to protect minority rights to prevent future violence that might undermine its legitimacy.

Related to this is the lack of genuine democratic participation though it is a constitutional right of citizens. This is primarily associated with the centralised political culture of the elite group of the country. In Ethiopia the political culture has remained centralised and top-down as it was during the imperial and military regimes. The present ruling party has followed a centralised party structure. This has resulted in a top-down approach and control-based relationship between the centre and the regional states, with regime survival as a major objective. This undermines the capacity of the regional states to formulate regional policies which are suitable to the context of their regions. Moreover, the centralised top down approach of the ruling party has led to misunderstandings over demands for self-determination, such as the Silte's identity-based demands (Chapter Four), and attempts at imposition from above as demonstrated by the case of the Wogagudu language in the southern regional state. The territorial issues of indigenous groups in Benishangul-Gumuz are another example (Chapter Six). In fact, regardless of the federalised state structure, a top

down approach and centralised political structures limit the right of self-determination of the ethnic groups in the country. Such an approach contributed largely to the failure of political systems such as in the former Soviet Union (Chapter Two). The more nationalised and centralised the party system becomes the more centralised is the federal system (Kincaid, 2005:429). Demands for self-determination must be genuinely respected and should involve the participation of the people in order to prevent any conflicts that might undermine the federal system.

The centralised approach of the ruling party and its domination in domestic politics over the last 19 years has devalued the role multiparty elections might play in the federalisation process. This is because of the control mechanisms used by the ruling party as well the organisational weakness of opposition parties themselves. It is important that domestic politics is democratic enough to accommodate citizen demands and sustain the federalisation process. Emphasis has to be given to developing the capacity of the regional states and regional parties, which can create a basic ground for democratic participation as happened in India after the long centralised rule of the Congress Party. Correction of the organisational weakness as of the opposition parties and a focus on genuine multi-national political parties can only enhance the democratic space in the country.

The study has shown how horizontal inequalities between the indigenous and non-indigenous people evolved and became a source of conflict during the federalisation process. This highlights the need for further study on whether power devolution and the resource-sharing mechanisms of the federal system have minimized horizontal inequalities in multi-ethnic regional states, such as in the south.

The evidence from Benishangul-Gumuz regional state indicates that the implementation of the federal system in the state created profound political and economic opportunities for the indigenous people. These made up some of the ethnic groups which were previously prohibited from integrating into the nation-state (Chapter Five). The federalisation of the state reduced this marginalisation by enabling ethnic groups to establish their own regional state, allowing them to participate in the centre, alongside everyone else. This created favourable conditions for the indigenous groups to engage with the state and to develop a federal identity. Moreover, as the regional state is made up of different ethnic groups of similar socio-economic backgrounds, it has enabled them to combine to protect their interests. They can negotiate together through their regional state with neighbouring ethnic groups, with regard to territorial identity. This was unthinkable during the unitary state. They can also amend national development policies in accordance with their specific requirements and traditional practices. In this respect federalisation of the state has worked well for these ethnic groups, ensuring continuity of their identities in their own territorial areas.

While these ethnic groups received significant advantages from the federal arrangement, the sustainability of the benefits depends on whether the federal process is able to manage causes of conflict in the regional state. Firstly, there are the structural causes of conflict, which have led to violent conflict between the indigenous and non-indigenous groups and between the indigenous people themselves (Chapter Six). Addressing the basic causes of these conflicts requires assuring the territorial rights of the indigenous groups, guaranteeing sustainable land use rights

according to traditional practices, and protecting the integrity of their territories from encroachment by neighbouring ethnic groups.

Moreover, development policies and the expansion of urban areas also have to adapt to accommodate the traditions of indigenous peoples, in order to minimize the horizontal inequalities between the indigenous and non-indigenous people. This must be supported by a clear power sharing mechanism for the ethnic groups to utilise, in order to minimize power-based competition between them. In addition, the political rights of the non-indigenous people have to be respected, to maintain the stability of the regional state. As discussed in Chapter Six, the population size of the non-indigenous people is almost equal to that of the indigenous people in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. A political arrangement that excludes the non-indigenous people cannot create stability in the long run. Harmonisation of both the political rights of the non-indigenous people and the group rights of the indigenous people is required, by constitutional amendment and through other regional development policies.

Secondly, the federal implementation process in the regional state has been accompanied by violent conflict (Chapter Nine). This is because the criteria regarding border demarcation within the federal constitution, which focused on ethnic identity, also encouraged competition between the regional states rather than co-operation (Article 46). As a result, the relationship between the Oromo and the Gumuz elite groups has become competitive over border issues, and this has been manifested by administration overlaps, and in land claims and counter claims. In addition, the federal process and, more especially, intergovernmental relationships have not been

established in such a way to encourage regional elite groups to advance inter-group federal co-operation.

The result is that intergovernmental relationships between the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state and the neighbouring regional states, and the federal state itself, have become fragile, and largely dependent upon informal mechanisms. There are no formal binding responsibilities and procedures that govern inter-governmental relationships, so interaction is informal and dependent on the good will of leaders. When relationships between regional leaders are good, relationships between the lower level leaders and other institutions also improve – as happened in the relationship between the Amhara and the Benshungul-Gumuz regional states. However, when there are hostilities, the informal inter-governmental relationships can totally disappear, as happened in the relationship between the Oromia and the Benishangul-Gumuz regional states before the eruption of the 2008 violent conflict. This meant there was no intervention when the Joint Study Committee of the regional states disintegrated, because these were informal arrangements, established only through the good will of the regional leaders. Both the federal and regional institutions investigated the problem after the 2008 violent conflicts, but this approach can be characterised as a no more than a ‘fire fighting’ approach to conflict management. The introduction of formal intergovernmental relationships that promote federal co-operation between regional states has become an urgent issue in the management of inter-regional conflict.

Nor does the existing relationship between political parties enhance federal co-operation in the regional state. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the ethnic-based

political parties of the regional state formed a coalition in 1995 and united in 2009. However, there is little indication of any strong unity between them. The political elite of the Berta ethnic group still aspires to have a dominant role in the regional government or to create a separate regional state. This attitude has led to direct intervention by the national ruling party, the EPRDF, in the internal affairs of the regional state and to give support to political groups which fit its criteria. Because of this, the political elites of the regional state compete with each other to secure better support from the EPRDF the result is a less coherent regional leadership. Creating proportional representation between the political elites of the regional party in the regional state and enabling the regional party to acquire better capacity for policy-making are clearly critical aspects for managing conflict in the regional state.

The management of the federal process in the regional state is also related to the rule of law. The rule of law that governs the authority's exercise of power is a condition for effective enforcement of the constitutional rights of citizens. To this end, the rules that govern political activities should be transparent and local authorities should be accountable for the decisions and measures they take (Haysom, 2002:229). However, no regional authority has been held accountable apart from the lower level administrative authorities in both the Oromia and the Benishangul-Gumuz regional states when regional anti-riot police, Woreda administrations and Woreda police participated in the violent conflict between the Gumuz and the Oromos in 2008. Nor does the federal government have any clear procedures that enable it to maintain the rule of law when regional states fail to arrest criminal suspects who aggravate inter-ethnic conflict. For example, it did not interfere when the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regional states gave protection to crime suspects after the 2007 conflict, until

another round of violent conflict erupted in 2008. Federal and regional authorities have to be accountable for the actions they take or for their negligence if the rule of law is to be nurtured in the regional state. Equally, the regional state has to be able to maintain the safety and security of people by controlling homicides which threaten the peaceful relationship of ethnic groups. This requires harmonisation of legal and traditional mechanisms of conflict management.

The undefined common borders between the regional states challenge the fundamental territorial divisions of power. Territory remains the basis for political action and for the rule of law. If territorial divisions are not clear, regional authorities cannot protect the rights of the people and the minorities living in their jurisdiction (Elazar, 1987:74). As a result, concern over territory has become a source of violent conflict between the regional states. Illegal arms possession is another factor that undermines the rule of law. The country lacks small arms possession laws that can be enforced across the regional states. Federal and regional policies are not so well organised that they can control the illegal small arms trade and possession of arms in the country¹. Defining common regional borders, with consideration for the interests of the people, as well as introducing laws to control illegal arms trade and the possession of weapons, are also vital for effective conflict management in the regional state.

In addition to consideration of the impact of federalism on regional and inter-state conflict, this research also contributes to the theoretical debates about conflict and federalism in general, and in the context of multi-ethnic African countries in

¹ Interview notes, head crime prevention main department, Federal Police, Addis Ababa, June, 2008

particular. This focus has special relevance for issues such as the source of inter- and intra-regional conflict, and how it should be managed during a federalisation process.

It has provided detailed data with regard to the sources of inter-regional conflict in the context of a federalised African country. Many scholars have associated inter-regional conflict in Africa either with the greed of ethnic leaders (Collier, 2001:150-152) or primordial ethnic identities. This study has clearly demonstrated that intra-state conflict can also be associated with historical factors and horizontal inequality. This demonstrates the relevance of Brown (1997) and Stewart's (2004) theoretical assumptions in analysing the causes of conflict in the context of African countries such as Ethiopia. In situations where there are hostile historical relationships, unmet identity-based demands, and horizontal inequalities, ethnic leaders can play a significant role in aggravating conflict and leading the groups into violence in order to satisfy their economic and political interests. For example, the territorial insecurity of the Gumuz, manifesting itself in land claims and counter claims, has been a basic cause of conflict. In other words as long as the root source of conflict has not been transformed, the elites will continue to manipulate ethnic groups and mobilise them for violence.

The study also shows that ethnic groups, which have different cultures and hostile historical relationships, can coexist if the system recognises their identity and, in particular, if the institutions of governance are able to manage the source of the violence. The analysis of the relationship between the Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regional states reinforces this. This disproves theoretical assumptions about

ethnicity that focus on primordial ties and cultural differences to explain intra-state conflict involving ethnic groups.

This research introduces the concept of indigenous peoples' territorial issues into the context of Africa reference to a situation in which there were no white settlers. The issue of indigenous peoples' territorial concerns is widely associated with their relationships with white settlers, for example in the USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. This study has shown that there are some ethnic groups in Ethiopia which have similar territorial demands to the aboriginal people in some western countries and Latin America. The similarity of the indigenous peoples in Ethiopia to other indigenous people, in the West or Latin American countries, is based on their relationship to the ecosystem and the natural world. In addition, they do not consider themselves to be part of the group of leaders who control the nation state (Eriksen, 2002:125-126). Moreover, they have a different culture and farming system that differentiates them clearly from the non-indigenous people. The land encroachment of the Amhara and the Oromos on the territories of the Gumuz and the Berta has had a similar effect to the early migration of whites in the USA and Australia. This relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Ethiopia should encourage further study in the context of Africa.

The study demonstrates the importance of federalism as a comprehensive approach to conflict management in the context of multi-ethnic African countries. Many African countries have considered ethnicity as an 'individual' issue rather than a social phenomenon. It seems 'taboo' to talk about ethnicity because it has been considered as a source of violence (Ottaway, 1999). However, this research has shown quite the

opposite. Addressing intra-state conflict by providing self rule to ethnic identities can contribute to the stability of a country. The minutes of the Ethiopian Constitutional Assembly held in 1994 show that accepting the self-rule of ethnic groups contributed significantly to disarming many ethnic-based political parties which fought against the military regime. Equally, the partnership-based relationship between the Amhara and the Gumuz has also largely reversed the hostile relationship between them.

Overall, this underlines the value of further study for the relevance of the federal approach to managing violent conflict in multi-ethnic African countries. The introduction of a federal system, in general, and self-rule, in particular, can certainly be considered as a means of intra-state conflict management for intra-state conflict that involves ethnic identity. This management of conflict can be useful, particularly if countries can utilise it at the right time and if they can maintain democratic governance through rule of law and accountability of state authorities. It can ultimately contribute to national unity with diversity. In this respect, for example, if the Sudan government had provided self-rule to southern Sudan in the 1980s, it is very possible that it could have maintained the integrity of the country. Similarly, if the earlier federal arrangement between Eritrea and Ethiopia had been properly implemented by the imperial regime, it would have contributed to resolving the issues that caused the thirty year armed struggle which led to secession of the province in 1993 (Goumenos, 2008:32-38). Despite setbacks, it is clear the Nigerian federal system has contributed to maintaining the integrity of the country across deep ethnic and religious divides (Suberu, 1994:63-64). Constitutional choices must depend upon the situation and the country in focus, but this research has demonstrated clearly that

the idea of federalism can offer considerable progress in managing conflicts and civil wars in the context of African multi-ethnic countries.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview questionnaires

1. General questionnaires

- What are the basic causes of conflict in the regional state?
- What are the consequences of the conflict?
- What measures have been taken to manage the conflict?
- What were the outcomes of the measures?

2. Specific questionnaires

Questionnaires related to use of Agricultural lands

- Why the uses of Agricultural land plots are sources of conflict in the regional state?
- Which places are vulnerable for land use-based conflict in the regional state and why?
- Who are the participants in the conflict?
- What is the role of governmental institutions in the conflict?
- What were the consequences of the conflict?
- How did you manage the conflict?

Questionnaires related to common border issues

- What are the common border issues in the regional state?
- Which places are vulnerable for common border-based conflict and why?
- Which communities/ethnic groups are the participants in the conflict?
- What is the role of the regional and local administrations in the conflict?
- What is the role of federal, regional and local administrations in managing the conflict?
- What measures have been taken to manage the issues of common borders?

Questionnaires related to Settlers' political representation

- How are the indigenous and non-indigenous people represented in the political institutions of the regional state?
- What are the grievances of the settlers?
- How did the regional state resolve them?
- What was the role of the federal institutions?
- What was the role of Political parties?

Questionnaires related to intergovernmental relations

- What are the mechanisms of intergovernmental relations in the regional state?
- How do you describe your relationship with the neighbouring regional states?
- How do you describe your relationship with the federal institutions?
- What is the role of political parties in the intergovernmental relations?

Questionnaires related to power-based conflicts in the regional states

- How is the regional power shared between the indigenous political parties?
- What were the objections of Berta?
- How did the regional state address them?
- What was the role of federal institutions in managing the Power-based conflict?

Questionnaires related to the inter-regional violent conflicts

- What were the causes of the violent conflict in Metekel and Kamashi zones?
- Who were the participants in the violent conflict?
- What were the consequences of the violence?
- What was the role of governmental institutions in the conflict?
- How did you manage the violent conflict?

- What was the role of NGOs and customary institutions in managing the conflict?