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Federalism and ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. A comparative study of the Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz regions

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, state restructuring has become a global phenomenon. In almost all corners of the world, there are currently efforts that aim at redesigning structures of states in response to demands of communities for increased participation in the politico-economic realm. In this context, federalism has become attractive to multiethnic countries as a way of maintaining balance between such lofty ideas as 'self-rule' and 'shared-rule' As a result, today many countries all across the world are experimenting with federalism and other forms of autonomy in order to resolve inter-ethnic conflicts and tensions.

Ethiopia witnessed a major turning point in the arena of national politics since the early 1990s. One of the most important features of the political changes in the post-1991 period has been the recasting of the Ethiopian state into an ethnic federation. In doing so, the country has constitutionally formalized ethnicity as a fundamental principle of state organisation, representation and political mobilisation. As a result, both ethnicity and governance experienced changes. This thesis analyses the impacts of federalism on ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia in general and in the Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz regions in particular by using comparative and empirical approaches.

This study broadly examines three key questions. First, it seeks to problematise the question of federalism and ethnic conflicts at the theoretical level. Second, it discusses factors such as conflicts and unequal ethnic relations that led to the reconstitution of the Ethiopian state into an ethnic federation. Third, it considers the impact of federalism on ethnic conflicts from two broad angles, intra-regional and inter-regional conflicts. In fact, as will be demonstrated in several chapters of this thesis, both the Somali and the Benishangul-Gumuz regions were affected by conflicts that have been in one way or another intertwined with the federal restructuring of the country. For instance, in the multiethnic Benishangul-Gumuz region, intra-regional conflicts emerged at two levels – between the newly empowered

'titular' ethnic groups and the titular and the 'non-titular' groups. This shows how ethnic federalism would have different outcomes for different groups. In the Somali region, intra-regional conflicts on the main emerged among different clans. When it comes to inter-regional conflicts, ethnic federalism has different conflict outcomes. On the one hand, the reconstitution of the country into an ethnic federation led to the transformation of 'traditional' resource conflicts (e.g. between the Somali and their neighbours) into nation-state type boundary conflicts. The boundary thinking that federalism engenders at local and regional levels, on the other hand, induces conflicts between groups who in the past had peaceful relationships (e.g. conflicts between Gumuz and Oromo neighbours).

This thesis also examines contextual factors such as democracy and rule of law that explain the success and failures of federalist projects in striking the 'right' balance between unity and diversity. This is necessary to appreciate the gap that prevails between the theory and practice of Ethiopian federalism. Finally, the thesis synthesises the theoretical and empirical discussions and seeks to identify some of the institutional and ideological aspects of Ethiopian ethnic federalism that need reform.

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Acronyms

ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
ARDUF	Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front
B-G	Benishangul-Gumuz
BGNRS	Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State
BGPDUF	Benishagnul-Gumuz People Democratic Unity Front
BNWEPDUP	Benishangul North West Ethiopia People Democratic Unity Party
Boro-SPDM	Boro-Shinasha People Democratic Movement
BPLM	Benishangul People's Liberation Movement
BWEPDO	Benishagnul Western Ethiopia People Democratic Organisations
CCI	Council of Constitutional Inquiry
CoR	Council of Representatives
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
DWPDM	Dil Wabi People Democratic Movement
EBPDO	Ethiopia Bertha People Democratic Organisation
EPDM	Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ESDL	Ethiopia Somalia Democratic League
FAG	Federal Auditor General
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FRUD	Front for Restoration of Unity and Democracy
GPDUP	Gambella People's Democratic Unity Party
GPLM	Gambella People's Liberation Movement
GPLP	Gambella People's Liberation Party
HoF	House of Federations
HoPR	House of Peoples' Representatives
KPDM	Komo People Democratic Movement
MEISON	Mellaw Ethiopia Socialist Niknake
MKPDO	Mao Komo Peoples' Democratic Party
MoFedA	Ministry of Federal Affairs
MPDM	Mao People Democratic Movement
NDRP	National Democratic Revolutionary Programme
NEBE	National Electoral Board of Ethiopia
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People Democratic Organisation
ORA	Office for Regional Affairs
PDRE	People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
RBPP	Rer-Barre People's Party
SALF	Somali Abbo Liberation Front
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopia People Democratic Movement
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region
SNRS	Somali National Regional State
SPDM	Sheikash People Democratic Movement
SPDP	Somali People's Democratic Party
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF	Tigray Liberation Front
UEDF	United Ethiopian Democratic Forces
WPE	Workers Party of Ethiopia

Map 1 Ethiopian regional divisions