

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

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iii

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Addis Ababa, April 25, 2009

iv

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 politicoeconomic 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

V

'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.

vi

Contents

| Acknowledgements | iii |
|---|------|
| Abstract | V |
| Maps and Tables | xi |
| Acronyms | xiii |
| 1 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Background | 1 |
| 1.2 Issues and Problems | 4 |
| 1.3 Problem Statement | 7 |
| 1.4 Research Questions | 9 |
| 1.5 Objectives | 9 |
| 1.6 Analytical Framework | 10 |
| 1.6.1 Historical explanations | 11 |
| 1.6.2 State centred explanations | 12 |
| 1.6.3 Multiethnic society | 14 |
| 1.7 Research Design and Methods of Data Collection | 15 |
| 1.7.1 Comparative research method | 16 |
| 1.7.2 Case selection | 17 |
| 1.7.3 Data Collection | 18 |
| 1.8 Structure of the study | 20 |
| 2 Federalism, Federations and Ethnic Conflict: Concepts and Theories | 23 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 23 |
| 2.2 Federalism and Federations: Conceptualisations | 23 |
| 2.2.1 Federalism and federations. Conceptualisations | 24 |
| 2.2.2 Federal bargain, federal integration and federal | 26 |
| restructuring | 20 |
| 2.2.3 National, multinational and ethnic federations | 28 |
| 2.3 Theoretical Approaches to Federalism and Federations | 29 |
| 2.3.1 Legal and constitutional approaches | 30 |
| 2.3.2 Sociological approaches | 32 |
| 2.3.3 Symmetry and asymmetry in federations | 32 |
| 2.3.4 Political and ideological approaches | 33 |
| 2.4 Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts | 36 |
| | |

vii

| 2.5 Essence of Ethnic Conflict Management 2.6 Consociationalism and Ethnic Conflict 2.7 Federalism and Ethnic Conflict 2.7.1 Federalism as a means of managing ethnic conflicts 2.7.2 Federalism as a recipe for more ethnic conflicts 2.7.3 Beyond the controversies: contextual factors 2.8 Conclusion | 40 43 44 44 46 49 51 |
|---|--|
| 3 Ethiopia's Ethnic Federalism: History and Ideology | 54 |
| 3.1 Introduction3.2 From Multi-ethnic Empire to Ethnic Federation3.3 Ideology of Ethiopian Federalism: Self-Determination for the Nationalities | 54 55 59 |
| 3.3.1 Stalinist theory of nationality and the reconstruction of the Ethiopian state | 62 |
| 3.4 EPRDF's Revolutionary Democracy and Federalism 3.4.1 Political parties and the vanguardist tradition 3.4.2 Making sense of EPRDF's revolutionary democracy 3.4.3 Reinvention of the EPRDF as a dominant party 3.5 Conclusion | 67 68 69 72 77 |
| 4 Asymmetries and Emerging Trends of Conflicts in Federal Ethiopia | 80 |
| 4.1 Introduction 4.2 The Enduring Debate on Ethnic Federalism 4.3 Asymmetries in Ethiopia's Ethnic Federation 4.3.1 Horizontal asymmetries 4.3.2 Vertical asymmetry 4.4 Politics of Resource Sharing and its Conflict Potential 4.4.1 Subsidy formula: bigger versus smaller regions 4.4.2 Ethnic based transfer of resources fuels conflicts 4.5 Federalism and Secessionist Wars 4.6 Autonomy and Generation/Transformation of Ethnic Conflicts 4.6.1 Federal restructuring and identity conflicts 4.6.2 Intra-federal boundary conflicts 4.6.3 Intra-regional conflicts in multiethnic regions 4.6.4 Conflicts between titular and non-titular groups 4.7 Conclusion | 80 81 83 86 87 88 90 94 97 99 100 102 104 105 |
| 5 Peripherality, Ethnic-Makeup and History: Somali and Benishangul Gumuz | 109 |
| 5.1 Introduction | 109 |
| 5.2 Peripherality of the Two Regions 5.2.1 Periphery from Addis Ababa, significant to Mogadishu: the Somali region | 110 110 |
| 5.2.2 Double periphery frontier region: Benishangul- | 112 |

viii

| | Gumuz | |
|------------------|--|---|
| | 5.3 Ethnic Makeup and Relations | 114 |
| | | 115 |
| | 5.3.1 Somali ethnic identity and the clans | |
| | 5.3.2 Ethnic relations in Benishangul-Gumuz | 117 |
| | 5.4 History of Incorporation and Administration | 122 |
| | 5.4.1 Somali incorporation and administration | 122 |
| | 5.4.2 Benishangul-Gumuz incorporation and | 126 |
| | administration | |
| | 5.5. Conclusion | 129 |
| 6. Fed | eralism and Autonomy conflicts in the Somali Region | 133 |
| • • • • • | 6.1 Introduction | 133 |
| | 6.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Divisions | 134 |
| | 6.2.1 Cleavages between the Ogaden and the non- | 134 |
| | | 134 |
| | Ogadeni clans | 427 |
| | 6.2.2 Rise and decline of the Ethiopian Somali | 137 |
| | Democratic League | |
| | 6.2.3 Autonomy and intra-Ogaden divisions | 139 |
| | 6.2.4 Autonomy and cross-clan cleavages | 141 |
| | 6.3 Autonomy Conflicts: Clans and New Federal Resources | 144 |
| | 6.3.1 Identity, autonomy and Bantu minorities | 144 |
| | 6.3.2. Sheikash quest for self-administrative structure | 149 |
| | 6.4 Conclusion | 153 |
| | | |
| | eralism and Autonomy Conflicts in the Benishagnul-Gumuz | 158 |
| 7. Fed region | | |
| | 7.1 Introduction | 158 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline | |
| | 7.1 Introduction7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement | 158 159 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? | 158 159 162 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for | 158 159 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency | 158 159 162 163 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for | 158 159 162 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency | 158 159 162 163 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand | 158 159 162 163 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit | 158 159 162 163 163 166 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular | 158 159 162 163 163 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups | 158 159 162 163 163 166 168 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups 7.4.1 Citizenship right and representation for the | 158 159 162 163 163 166 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups 7.4.1 Citizenship right and representation for the non-titular groups | 158 159 162 163 163 166 168 168 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups 7.4.1 Citizenship right and representation for the non-titular groups 7.4.2 Economic dimensions of the conflict | 158 159 162 163 163 166 168 168 168 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups 7.4.1 Citizenship right and representation for the non-titular groups 7.4.2 Economic dimensions of the conflict 7.4.3 Position of the titular political class | 158 159 162 163 163 166 168 168 171 173 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups 7.4.1 Citizenship right and representation for the non-titular groups 7.4.2 Economic dimensions of the conflict 7.4.3 Position of the titular political class 7.4.4 Settlers' electoral rights and the House of | 158 159 162 163 163 166 168 168 168 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups 7.4.1 Citizenship right and representation for the non-titular groups 7.4.2 Economic dimensions of the conflict 7.4.3 Position of the titular political class 7.4.4 Settlers' electoral rights and the House of Federation | 158 159 162 163 163 166 168 168 171 173 174 |
| | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups 7.4.1 Citizenship right and representation for the non-titular groups 7.4.2 Economic dimensions of the conflict 7.4.3 Position of the titular political class 7.4.4 Settlers' electoral rights and the House of | 158 159 162 163 163 166 168 168 171 173 |
| region | 7.1 Introduction 7.2 Autonomy and Intra-regional Instability: Rise and Decline of the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement 7.3 Bertha-Gumuz Dispute: Bertha Dominance or Exit? 7.3.1 First stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for regional presidency 7.3.2 Second stage of the dispute: Bertha's demand for exit 7.3.3 Federal mediation: Neither dominance nor exit 7.4 Autonomy and Conflict between Titular and Non-titular groups 7.4.1 Citizenship right and representation for the non-titular groups 7.4.2 Economic dimensions of the conflict 7.4.3 Position of the titular political class 7.4.4 Settlers' electoral rights and the House of Federation | 158 159 162 163 163 166 168 168 171 173 174 |

ix

| 8.2 Background to Somali Relations with the Oromo and the Afar | 181 |
|---|------|
| 8.3 Somali-Oromia Boundary Conflicts: Case of Moyale | 183 |
| 8.3.1 Nature and evolution of the conflict | 184 |
| 8.3.2 Federal restructuring and the Moyale dispute | 187 |
| 8.4 Somali-Afar Boundary Conflicts: Case of the Afar-Issa | 194 |
| Conflict | |
| 8.4.1 Nature and evolution of the conflict | 195 |
| 8.4.2 Federal restructuring and the Afar-Issa conflict | 200 |
| 8.5 Conclusion | 207 |
| 9. Inter-regional Conflicts: Benishangul-Gumuz | 213 |
| 9.1 Introduction | 213 |
| 9.2 Background to Gumuz Relations with Amhara and Oromo | 214 |
| 9.3 Inter-Regional Relations: Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara | 216 |
| 9.3.1 Transformation in Gumuz-Amhara relations: Mentawuha and Mandura | 219 |
| 9.4 Inter-Regional Relations: Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia | 223 |
| 9.4.1 Boundary and resource conflicts: Darro-Dimitu | 227 |
| and Tolle localities | |
| 9.5 Conclusion | 232 |
| 10. Centre-regional Relations: Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions | 236 |
| 10.1 Introduction | 236 |
| 10.2 Centre-regional Relations and the Federal Executive | 237 |
| 10.2.1 Direct control through central advisors (1992- | 237 |
| 2001) | |
| 10.2.2 Ministry of Federal Affairs and centre-regional | 239 |
| relations | 2.42 |
| 10.3 The House of Federation in Centre-regional | 243 |
| Relations | 246 |
| 10.4 Asymmetrical Inter-Party Relations 10.4.1 Proliferation ethnic/clan parties | 240 |
| 10.4.2 Restructuring of the party landscape | 247 |
| 10.5 Political and Economic Exchanges | 252 |
| 10.5.1 Legitimacy to the 'new' Ethiopia | 252 |
| 10.5.2 The periphery and the power of the central elite | 255 |
| 10.5.3 Economic exchange: dual traffic? | 256 |
| 10.6 Conclusion | 257 |
| 11 Synthesis and Conclusion | 260 |
| 11.1 Introduction | 260 |
| 11.2 Federalism and State Legitimacy in Ethiopia | 260 |
| 11.3 Comparing the Somali and the Benishangul-Gumuz | 262 |
| Regions | 202 |
| 11.3.1 Intra-regional autonomy conflicts | 263 |

Х

| 11.3.2 Inter-regional conflicts | 265 |
|--|-----|
| 11.4 Reflections on the theoretical framework of the study | 267 |
| 11.5 Reappraisal of Federal Theories and the Ethiopian | 269 |
| Experience | |
| 11.5.1 Federalism and political pluralism | 270 |
| 11.5.2 Federalism and rule of law | 272 |
| 11.5.3 Ethnicity and federal restructuring | 273 |
| 11.6 Reforming Ethiopia's Ethnic Federation | |
| 11.6.1 Ethnic and overarching civic citizenship | 275 |
| 11.6.2 Secession and territorial adjustment | 277 |
| 11.6.3. The opening up of political space: Could | 279 |
| power sharing help? | |
| | |
| References | 282 |
| Samenvatting | 314 |
| About the author | 317 |

Maps and Tables

Maps

| 1 Ethiopia regional divisions 5.1 <i>Zonal</i> and <i>woreda</i> divisions, the Somali region 5.2. <i>Zonal</i> and <i>woreda</i> divisions, the Benishangul-Gumuz | <i>xiv</i> 111 113 |
|---|--------------------------|
| region 5.3 Location of Somali clans 5.4 Location of ethnic groups in the Benishangul-Gumuz region | 116 120 |
| 8.1 Location of the Borana, Garre, and Gabbra and the Moyale town | 186 |
| 8.2 The Afar-Issa conflict zone9.1. The location of the Gumuz9.2 The boundaries of the Benishangul-Gumuz region in 19929.3 OLF's map of Oromia | 197 215 218 224 |

xi

Tables

| 1.1 Summary of trends of conflicts in Ethiopia | 7 |
|--|-----|
| 1.2 Ethiopia, regional population, territorial size and ethnic | 15 |
| composition | |
| 2.1. Summary of theoretical approaches to federalism | 36 |
| 4.1 Distribution of seats at the House of People | 85 |
| Representatives by ethnic regions | |
| 4.2 Federal and regional revenues | 88 |
| 4.3 Federal and regional expenditure | 88 |
| 4.4 Federal subsidy to the regions | 89 |
| 7.1 Ethnic composition in the Benishangul-Gumuz region | 164 |
| Regional Council | |
| 10.1. Regional representation at the House of Federation | 245 |

xii

Acronyms

| ANDM ARDUF B-G BGNRS BGPDUF BNWEPDUP Boro-SPDM BPLM BWEPDO CCI CoR CUD DWPDM EBPDO EPDM EPRDF ESDL FAG FDRE FRUD GPDUP GPLM GPLP HoF HoPR KPDM MEISON MKPDO MoFedA MPDM NDRP NEBE OLF ONLF OPDO ORA PDRE RBPP SALF SEPDM SNNPR SNRS SPDM SPDP TGE TPLF UEDF WPE | Amhara National Democratic Movement Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State Benishangul-Gumuz People Democratic Unity Front Benishangul North West Ethiopia People Democratic Unity Party Boro-Shinasha People Democratic Movement Benishangul People's Liberation Movement Benishangul Western Ethiopia People Democratic Organisations Council of Constitutional Inquiry Council of Representatives Coalition for Unity and Democracy Dil Wabi People Democratic Movement Ethiopia Bertha People Democratic Organisation Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party Ethiopian People's Newolution Democracy Gambella People's Liberation Movement Gambella People's Representatives Komo Peoples' Representatives Komo Peoples' Representatives Komo Peoples' Representatives Komo Peoples' Democratic Party Ministry of Federal Affairs Mao People Democratic Movement Netlaw Ethiopia Socialist Niknake Mao Komo Peoples' Democratic Party Ministry of Federal Affairs Mao People Democratic Organisation Office for Regional Affairs People's Democratic Organisation Office For Regional Affairs People's Democratic Organisation Office For Regional Affairs People's Democratic Chovement Southern Ethiopia People Democratic Movement Southern Ethiopia People Democratic Movement Southern Ethiopia People Democratic Movement Southern Ethiopia People Democratic Movement Southern National Regional State Sheikash People Democratic Kovement Somali National Regional State Sheikash People Democratic Forces Workers Party of Ethiopia |
|--|---|
| | |

xiii



Map 1 Ethiopian regional divisions

xiv