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

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# 4

## Asymmetries and Emerging Trends of Conflicts in Federal Ethiopia

### 4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed the history and ideology of Ethiopian federalism with the objective of setting the ground for the forthcoming discussions on the effect of federalism on ethnic conflicts in the study regions. This chapter seeks to provide a useful link between the several case studies drawn from the two study regions and developments at the country level. It discusses the impacts of federalism on ethnic conflicts from three interrelated angles.

First, it discusses the contending debates regarding the advantages and disadvantages of federalism for ethnic conflict management in the Ethiopian context. As the theoretical debates reviewed in chapter 2, the discourse on federalism in Ethiopia has been polarised. As will be discussed in this chapter, some consider the federal system as a solution to the problem of ethnic conflicts, while others argue that instead of reducing conflicts it would exacerbate them.

Second, the chapter identifies some of the asymmetrical features of the Ethiopian federation and considers their implication on federal stability and conflicts. Federal asymmetries in Ethiopia have both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The former is primarily about the relationship between the political centre and the regions, while the latter refers to the variations that exist among the federating units in terms of political and economic power. In fact, because of the use of ethnicity as the chief instrument of state reorganisation, there is immense asymmetry in the geographic and population size of the regions in Ethiopia. This could have a negative repercussion on federal stability.

Third, the chapter also outlines some of the emerging trends of autonomy conflicts in the country. These will be discussed from the following four broad trends – identity conflicts, intra-federal boundary

conflicts, intra-regional conflicts, and conflicts between titular and non-titular communities in ethnically constituted regions.

## 4.2 The Enduring Debate on Ethnic Federalism

The political role that ethnicity should play in the politics of African countries has remained controversial. Many African countries seek to downplay its role in national politics fearing it would have adverse impacts on their project of nation building (Berman, Eyoh and Kymlicka 2004: 18; Okafor 2000: 34). Despite this, ethnicity implicitly and explicitly plays crucial roles in the politics of African states (Berman 1998: 334). Ethiopia took a divergent path from the rest of Africa when it reconstituted itself as an ethnic federation and officially sanctioned the formation of ethnic political parties. However, the reconstitution of the Ethiopian state to an ethnic federation remains controversial (Aalen 2002; Aalen 2006; Abbink 1997; Alem 2004; Asnake 2003). The ongoing debate on the impact of federalism and conflict in Ethiopia could be discussed from three angles.

First, government officials and some scholars argue that ethnic federalism would help end conflicts that ravaged the country at least since the 1960s. In this respect, Meles Zenawi, the leader of the EPRDF and who has been serving as the head of the central government since 1991 argued that:

From a purely legal point of view, what we were trying to do was to stop the war, and start the process of peaceful competition.... The key cause of the war all over the country was the issue of nationalities. Any solution that did not address them did not address the issue of peace and war .... People were fighting for the right to use their language, to use their culture, to administer themselves. So without guaranteeing these rights it was not possible to stop the war, or prevent another one (cited in Vaughan 2003:36-7).

Many scholars who consider the restructuring of Ethiopia into an ethnic federation as a novel decision share the above argument (Alemseged 2004: 606-608; Andreas 2003: 143; Mengisteab 1997; Young 1998a: 203). For instance, Kidane Megisteab stated that the 'bold policy measures such as those initiated by the EPRDF...were essential to stop

the perpetual bloodshed, to avert the country's total disintegration and to mend ethnic relations' (1997: 126). Similarly, John Young remarked that 'the establishment of ethnically based local administrations appears historically and politically sound' (1998a: 203). In the same way, Andreas Eshete underlined that the restructuring of Ethiopia into an ethnic federation demonstrated EPRDF's 'readiness to face the fact of ethnic diversity [and the] new political arrangements aim to shape Ethiopian political identity around the country's constituent nations and nationalities' (2003: 143).

Second, in contrast to the above optimistic views, ethnic federalism attracted criticism from both opposition politicians and academics. Many political parties such as the EPRP, MEISON, the former All Amhara People's Organisation (APPO), and others who were largely excluded from the political process of the post-Mengistu period were critical of the experiment on the ground that it would encourage secessionism (Aalen 2002: 42-3).

In contrast, the most important factors that still elicit scepticism from many scholars are the reliance of Ethiopian federalism on ethnicity as its organising principle and the recognition of secession. Terrence Lyons, for example, suggested that organising politics around ethnicity engenders ethnic tensions, violence and more seriously encourages political activists to organise on parochial ethnic issues and thereby fragments national politics (1996:25). Similarly, Jon Abbink underscored that Ethiopia by constitutionalising ethnicity sought to 'reify and freeze ethnic identity which is by nature fluid and shifting' (1997: 172).

Undeniably, the use of ethnicity as the key organising device of the federation brought a critical challenge to the development of an overarching countrywide citizenship (Aalen 2006: 256). This problem partly emanates from the persistent failure of the EPRDF to recognise alternative expressions of identity (Bahru 1994: 8). Ethnic federalism has been also unsuccessful in accommodating many (perhaps millions of) Ethiopians who wish to identify themselves first as Ethiopians instead of their predefined ethnic identity. In this, the EPRDF shares a paradoxical similarity with its predecessors, that is, obstinate refusal to accommodate different conceptions of Ethiopian statehood. Its predecessors, the imperial and the Derg regimes were not interested in accommodating any conception of Ethiopia other than a united country under the framework of the 'great tradition' of Ethiopian history that glorified the historic independence and unity of the country without recognising problems of ethnic inequality (Clapham 2002a: 14). The EPRDF, in contrast, considers the Ethiopia of the pre-1991 period a mere collection

of ethnic groups under the hegemony of the Amhara ruling classes and brought upon itself the risky task of reinventing the country into a political community of sovereign ethnic groups.

Third, criticism of the federal experiment in Ethiopia is by no means limited to those opposed to the elevation of ethnicity as the crucial instrument of state reconstitution. Such ethno-nationalist movements like the OLF and ONLF, which were initially supportive of ethnic federalism, oppose the present system because of its failure to make good its promises (Young 1998a: 190). For example, some Oromo nationalists consider the present system a mere continuation of 'Abyssinian colonialism' but under the supremacy of the Tigrayan elite instead of their Amhara counterparts (Asafa 1993: 397).

If one goes beyond these polarised views, it would be possible to observe that ethnic federalism has both advantages and drawbacks. Some of its key advantages include – provision of linguistic and cultural autonomy and political representation for many marginalised ethnic groups (Abbink 2006: 395). In contrast, the drawbacks of the system include – the ethnification of politics and the proliferation of conflicts in many parts of the country. In some cases, ethnic federalism led to the renegotiation of ethnic identity tearing apart common ties that developed over a long period. Concomitantly, long running conflicts between neighbouring ethnic groups over land resources turned into inter-state type boundary conflicts (Asnake 2004).

### **4.3 Asymmetries in Ethiopia's Ethnic Federation**

C.D. Tarlton, as discussed in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, examined how de facto asymmetries affect federations. Similarly, this section identifies several asymmetrical features of Ethiopian federalism and discusses their impact on political stability from two angles, horizontal and vertical.

#### **4.3.1 Horizontal asymmetries**

The constitutional promise to provide all the ethnic groups of the country with the right of self-administration translated into practice in an asymmetrical manner. Thus from among the estimated 85 ethnic groups

only five ethnic groups (Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromo and Somali) were allowed to have their own ethnic regions where they constitute the majority. In contrast, several dozen smaller ethnic groups were either put together in multi-ethnic regions (SNNPRS, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz) or attached as minority ethnic groups to the bigger ethnic regions (see table 1.2). Almost all of these multi-ethnic regions faced inter-ethnic conflicts over a range of issues such as territory, representation and sharing of resources. In some cases, some ethnic groups seek to separate from the existing multi-ethnic regions and form their own ethnic regions using the constitutional provision for internal secession (art. 47). This also engenders tensions and conflicts.

Similarly, the desire of the EPRDF to make ethnic and administrative boundaries congruent albeit at different levels<sup>1</sup> when it reconstructed the country into an ethnic federation led to huge asymmetry among the members of the federation (see table 1.2). As a result, there are huge disparities among the regions in terms of population and territorial size. Some of the regions such as Oromia, Amhara and Somali are territorially too big with the resultant administrative and logistic difficulties, while such regions as Harari, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella are too small with the difficulty of ensuring their economic viability.

Such an asymmetry could have the potential to destabilise multiethnic federations. That is why the majority of multiethnic federations avoid congruence between ethnic and regional boundaries in order to reduce the prospect of separatist nationalism (Brietzke 1995: 28). Accordingly, federations divide the dominant ethnic groups into several units. For instance, some attribute the resilience of Nigerian federalism to its territorial reorganisation from the initial three units, which were largely coterminous with three bigger ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo) into the present 36 states in which the bigger groups were divided into several competing constituting units (Horowitz 1985: 601-28).

The Ethiopian federal arrangement deviates from this trend and could adversely affect the stability of the federation in several inter-related ways. As pointed out by Christopher Clapham, in the absence of the overarching control of the EPRDF, Ethiopian federalism could lead to unstable bipolarity between the two largest regions, Oromia and Amhara, which respectively constitute more than 35 and 25 per cent of the total population (2006: 233). More worryingly, because of the huge asymmetry, the contribution of each of the ethnic regions to the stability of the federation is greatly asymmetrical. In this respect, the secession of

some of the ethnic regions like Oromia would lead to the overall fragmentation of the ethnic federation, while the right of secession becomes meaningless for many of the ethnic groups, which cannot make a viable federating unit let alone an independent state.

**Table 4.1** *Distribution of seats at the HoPR by ethnic regions*

Regions	House of People's Representatives	% of seats in the HoPR
Tigray	38	6.94
Afar	8	1.46
Amhara	138	25.22
Oromia	178	32.54
Somali	23	4.20
Benishangul-Gumuz	9	1.65
SNNP	123	22.49
Gambela	3	0.59
Harari	2	0.65
Diredawa	2	0.36
Addis Ababa	23	4.20
Total Seats	547	100.00

Compiled from (NEBE 2005)

Furthermore, federalism in Ethiopia faces an anomalous horizontal asymmetry regarding political power. This is because the ruling elite in the ethnic federation come from one of the relatively smaller ethnic regions (Tigray) that accounts for only about six per cent of the overall population. The TPLF achieved this position because of its military victory over the previous military regime. However, failure to widen the political space and share power 17 years after its ascent to state power could have negative repercussions on federal stability and development.

The main danger in this respect comes from the inability to elevate the federal government both in popular perceptions and practice above ethnic partisanship (Aalen 2006: 256). For instance, during the May 2005 national and regional election campaigns, almost all the opposition parties criticised the dominance of the TPLF at the federal level. Paradoxically, the EPRDF itself is not immune from such criticisms. For instance, the OPDO/EPRDF, which has the largest number of seats in the federal parliament was sternly criticised by the top leadership of TPLF/EPRDF for having an 'anti-Tigrayan' attitude and a 'narrow nationalist' view that preaches like the opposition, the Oromo National Congress (ONC), 'Oromo supremacy' as opposed to OLF's goal of separation (EPRDF 2000a:13-15).

Yet another feature of horizontal asymmetry refers to the dichotomy that prevails between the 'highland/central' and 'lowland/peripheral' regions. This is indeed an inherited asymmetry. In the present context, the highland regions where the large majority of the population of the country live include Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR. These regions are relatively well off in terms of social and physical infrastructure as compared to the lowland regions – Somali, Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella. Almost all of the peripheral regions remain insecure and have experienced over the last 17 years several violent conflicts. Some of the conflicts in these ethnic regions relate to the ethnic federal structure. As examined in this thesis, the Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz regions were affected by inter and intra-regional conflicts (chapters 7 and 8).

### 4.3.2 Vertical asymmetries

Vertical asymmetry refers to the dominance of the federal government and the ruling party over the regions. Asymmetrical power relations between the two orders of government could be seen from two angles.

First, the constitution provides the federal government the powers to 'formulate and implement the country's policies, strategies and plans in respect of overall economic, social, and development matters' (art. 51/2). It also has the power to 'enact laws for the utilization and conservation of land and other natural resources, historical sights and objects' (art.51/3). After giving such sweeping powers to the federal government, the constitution outlines the powers of the regions. These include enacting and executing 'the state constitutions and other laws' and 'to formulate and execute economic, social and development policies, strategies and plans of the state' (art. 52/2). Hence, Ethiopia established a centralised federation where policy decisions come from the centre and the sub-units are responsible for implementation (Andreas 2003). The other aspect of vertical asymmetry refers to the dependence of the regions on federal subsidies for much of their finances (discussed in the next section).

Second, the emergence of a dominant one party system under the aegis of the EPRDF reinforces the *de jure* asymmetry in intergovernmental relations (discussed in chapter 4).



#### 4.4 Politics of Resource Sharing and its Conflict Potential

Regardless of their level of economic and political development, federating units are almost never self-sufficient in terms of finance. Even those federations that are fiscally decentralised and allow their sub-national units to have broad-based taxes do not escape from this reality (Boadway and Shah 2007). Vertical imbalance between the two orders of government is mainly because the federal government constitutes the appropriate level of government for taxation, while the sub-national governments provide the optimum level for applying policies (Bird et al. 2003: 359). As a result, federal governments tend to collect more money than they are required to spend, while the sub-national governments cannot meet their expenditure responsibilities by themselves (Ibid). Furthermore, almost all federations face horizontal imbalances because of the differences that exist among their members in terms of geographic and population size, economic wealth and others.

In order to address these imbalances, federations mainly use such instruments as sharing of tax bases and revenue. While tax base sharing is widely practiced in the industrial world, revenue sharing has been the preferred instrument of addressing horizontal and vertical imbalances in developing countries like Ethiopia (Shah 1994: 36). The politics of sharing the 'national cake' is, however, one of the contentious issues in almost all federations. Even in prosperous federations like Canada, it has a negative impact on national unity (Milne 1986: 87). The problem is more profound in countries that suffer from economic stagnation, chronic poverty and rampant corruption (Bird, et al. 2003: 359). In such countries mustering a countrywide solidarity, which gives political legitimacy for equalisation policies tends to be difficult. Indeed, this may in part explain the difficult path fiscal federalism passed in Nigeria. As observed by Gana and Egwu (2003: xix):

In no other federation is the thorny nature of fiscal federalism dramatised as in Nigeria. The resurgence of ethnic nationalism among the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta and the claim for resource control provide one strong evidence of the furore generated by the politics of resource allocation.

The politics of fiscal federalism in Ethiopia, though not as tense as in Nigeria has been controversial. There are both vertical and horizontal

imbalances. Vertical imbalance refers to the dominance of the federal government in terms of revenue and expenditure (Keller 2002; Paulos 2007; Solomon 2006a). Hence, the federal government for the last several years collected on average more than 80 per cent of all government revenue (see table 4.2). It also remained the largest spender. For instance, in the period from 1996/97 to 2000/01, it spent more than 63 per cent of all government expenditures in the country (see table 4.3). This is despite the transfer of the task of providing social services such as health and education to the regions.

**Table: 4.2 Federal and regional revenue selected years**

	Federal Share %	Regional Share %	Total in miln. Birr
1996/97	82.0	18.0	7535.5
1997/98	80.3	19.7	8100.4
1998/99	82.0	18.0	8653.1
1999/00	81.7	18.3	9500.2
2000/01	81.1	18.9	10728.0
2005/06	78.17	21.82	29008.0

Source: the World Bank, MoFED Public Expenditure Review

**Table: 4.3 Federal and regional expenditure 1997-2001**

	Federal Share %	Regional Share %	Total in miln. Birr
1996/97	57.5	42.5	9906.3
1997/98	60.4	39.6	11227.2
1998/99	69.5	30.5	14916.4
1999/00	76.7	23.3	17183.7
2000/01	66.6	33.4	15370.1

Source: World Bank, Public Expenditure Review 2001

Like many other federations, Ethiopia uses unconditional federal subsidy (block grant) to address both vertical and horizontal imbalances. However, this has been contentious. What follows is a consideration of the problem of resource sharing from the following two angles – subsidy formula and the potential of ethnic based transfer of resources to conflicts.

#### 4.4.1 Subsidy formula: Bigger versus smaller regions

Since 1994/95, the federal government has been using a formula based division of revenue. The main concern of revenue sharing appears to be bringing equality among the regions and keeping the bureaucratic

structures of the new regions afloat (Paulos 2007). The formula is composed of three elements – regional population size, level of poverty and revenue generation capacity. There have been so far five revisions to the subsidy formula. This shows the controversies that accompany the politics of resource sharing. Many studies address the principles and mechanisms of resource allocation in federal Ethiopia (Keller 2002; Paulos 2007; Solomon 2006a). Thus, the main concern of this section is to highlight some of the controversies of resource sharing that could have implications on federal stability.

**Table: 4.4 Federal government subsidy for regions for selected years**

Region	1993/94		1995/96	
	milln. Birr	per-capita	milln. Birr	per-capita in Birr
Tigray	279.9	89.14	342.9	89.07
Afar	113.7	102.43	148.4	134.18
Amhara	697.1	50.4	853.3	58.64
Oromia	882.1	47.1	1131.4	57.2
Somali	137.3	44.0	173.6	52.1
Benishangul-Gumuz	85.62	186.13	108.4	224.43
SNNPR	471.7	45.5	682.0	90.7
Gambella	65.07	357.53	90.7	477.4
Harari	25.37	196.7	41.4	297.8
Dire Dawa	29.6	117.5	38.2	141.0
Addis Ababa	357.2	169.12	504.6	229.4
Total	3 144.5	58.9	4115.0	73.0
grant/average per-capita				

**Contd. Table 4.4**

Region	1997/98		1999/00		2003/04	
	milln. Birr	per-capita	milln. Birr	Per-capita	milln. Birr	Per-capita in Birr
Tigray	293.18	83.91	241.9	65.5	458.15	114.3
Afar	237.5	204.74	196.6	161.7	225	173
Amhara	767.82	49.82	689.5	42.31	1335.05	75.6
Oromia	909.23	44.6	767.06	34.31	1846.61	75.68
Somali	326.75	93.09	285.2	77.12	372.04	93.01
Benishangul-Gumuz	172.12	338.15	135.0	251.4	177.51	306
SNNPR	642.85	54.7	572.42	45.74	818.6	61.6
Gambella	132.11	660.55	109.08	517	130.58	546.4
Harari	80.4	536	65.33	408.31	77.52	435.5
Dire Dawa	35.5	120.75	21.09	66.32	89.91	242.7
Addis Ababa	54.82	23.29	55.8	22.36	-	-
Total	3652.24	61	3142	49.5	5969.80	85.3
grant/average per-capita						

Source: Solomon, 2006: 218-9

First, there has been disagreement between the three larger regions (Oromia, Amhara and SNNPR) and smaller regions (Tigray, Afar, Somali, Harari, B-G and Gambella) on the weight given to population size in the revenue sharing formula. The bigger regions complained that the amount of money they receive per-capita was significantly lower than the smaller regions (see table 4.4) In contrast, the smaller regions argued that financial transfer mechanisms to the regions should consider their marginality in terms of social and fiscal infrastructure.

In addition to the disquiet of the larger regions, critics of the regime accused the TPLF dominated federal government of using a politically biased mechanism of resource allocation to benefit its home province, Tigray. Merera, for example, argues that in budgetary allocation of resources (subsidy formula) to the regions, the federal government consistently favoured the Tigray region. Using the statistics for three consecutive fiscal years, 1993/94 to 1998/99 (see table 4.4), he underscored that the Tigray region received more federal subsidy on per-capita basis than such other regions as Oromia, Amhara and the SNNPR. Such allocation of finance, according to Merera, tends to heighten ethnic nationalism and served opposition forces like ‘Oromo movements as an important weapon of agitation’ (Merera 2003: 175).

Because of the controversy it generated, there were several changes to the subsidy formula. Particularly the weight given population size steadily grew from 33.3 per cent in 1996/97 to 65 per cent in the 2002/03 fiscal year (Solomon 2006a; Ye Federation Dimits 2005: 10). However, this has not satisfied the larger regions. Hence, the federal government attempted to introduce a new subsidy formula largely borrowed from Australia.<sup>2</sup> The new formula drops the controversial system of giving weight to the three variables (population size, level of poverty and revenue generation capacity). And aims at providing funds to the regions in order to cover the gap that emerges between their own revenue and expenditure so that they can provide public services (such as education and health) that meet national standards (Ye Federation Dimits 2005: 10).

In 2001, when the new formula was up for endorsement at the HoF, in an unprecedented move, the four EPRDF administered regions were divided. Hence, the larger regions – Oromia, Amhara and SNNPR – supported the new formula. In contrast, the Tigray region stood with the smaller regions of Afar, Somali, B-G and Harari. Although the bigger regions command more than 80 per cent of the votes at the HoF, adoption of the formula was postponed indefinitely. After several delays,

the HoF in 2007 decided to implement the new formula in a phased manner. However, it remains unclear how both the larger and smaller regions will receive the new formula.

Second, the constitution gives the mandate to decide on the revenue sharing formula to the HoF, which is not only a political organ but also disproportionately dominated by a single region, the SNNPR (more on the HoF in chapter 10). Until now, the HoF did not encounter serious difficulties in deciding the formula because the dominant party controls the federal government, all the regions, the lower house of parliament and the HoF itself. In this context, the task of the HoF has largely been rubberstamping the recommendations of the federal executive. Nevertheless, it is difficult to envisage how the HoF would devise a revenue sharing formula that would be acceptable for all ethnic regions, if rival political parties in a multiparty context come to control either the federal or the regional governments.

#### 4.4.2 Ethnic based transfer of resources fuels conflicts

Fiscal decentralisation usually shows positive impacts on economic efficiency and empowerment of communities at local/regional levels (Kinuthia-Njenga 2002: 98). It may as well induce local and regional conflicts over financial resources (Sukma 2006: 20). In other words, grievances of unequal ethnic gains – real or imagined – in resource allocation could lead to conflicts. In the Ethiopian case, the amount of money that a given ethnic group (administrative unit) receives from the federal distribution fund depends on its location on the administrative hierarchy. Accordingly, ethnic groups with regional status receive a relatively larger amount of federal subsidy than those with a lower level administrative unit. A comparison of flow of financial resources at the level of ethnic groups helps appreciate this problem (Solomon 2006b: 224).

For instance, a comparison of the Harari region that has an estimated population of 185,000, and the Sidama who were given a *zonal* status within the southern region with an estimated population of 2,776, 928 gives us a grossly unequal distribution of funds. The Harari region for the 2006/07 fiscal year received a subsidy of 120,530,000 Ethiopian Birr (ETB) [about € 10,0441,000] from the coffers of the federal government. In contrast, for the same fiscal year, the Sidama received a subsidy of 30,756,000 ETB (about €2, 563,000) from the southern region.<sup>3</sup> Such a

variance in the allocation of resources fuels demands for a higher level of administrative unit. This party explains the persistent demand of the Sidama of the southern region for a regional status. When we come to the study regions, there are similar agitations. For instance, the Bertha of the Benishangul-Gumuz region demanded the establishment of a separate region, while smaller clans (e.g. Sheikash and Dubbe) within the Somali region advocate for *woreda* status (chapters 6 and 7).

Second, lack of transparency over government expenditure implicitly gives an incentive for ethnic entrepreneurs to demand administrative structures on behalf of their ethnic groups. According to Richard C. Cook, the problem of elite capture, that is the improper use of financial and other resources by local/regional politicians in the wake of decentralisation would be more pronounced, if 'there is no strong support from the central authorities to prevent it from happening' (2002: 244). The record of Ethiopian federalism in terms of financial accountability has been so far dismal. The problem is greater at local and regional levels (Ali 1998). This is owing to problems of institutional capacity and lack of political will. The federal parliament does not largely exercise its oversight functions, even after the Federal Auditor General (FAG) on more than one occasion reported financial improprieties. Lack of resources and capacity are the usual scapegoats for the inaction of parliament (World Bank 2003: 35). However, the main problem is lack of political will by the dominant party that after all controls the federal parliament, the executive and all the regional governments. This problem was demonstrated in a public way when the former Federal Auditor General, Lemma Argaw surprised the country in July 2006 by telling parliament that both the federal and the regional governments could not account for 7.2 Billion ETB (about \$900 million) spent during the 2003/04 fiscal year (EIU 2007: 3; ION 2006).

Neither parliament nor the executive wanted to pursue this report and hold those who were responsible for misuse of government funds accountable. Paradoxically, the federal government was not furious with those officials who infringed on the country's financial rules and procedures, but on the Auditor General himself. Thus when the Prime Minister addressed parliament on the issue, he chastised the FAG for trespassing on the powers of the regions by auditing federal subsidies. He even suggested that the regions, if they so wish can burn their money (EIU 2007: 17). The claim of the PM about the FAG's transgression of regional jurisdiction appears to be groundless as the legal mandate of the Federal Auditor General includes auditing 'accounts involving budgetary subsidies and any special grants extended by the federal government to

regional government' (art. 7/2).<sup>4</sup> In November 2006, the PM sacked the Auditor General without following the necessary procedures (EIU 2007: 17; Groum 2006).

In short, the lack of transparency and accountability about the use of government funds could have negative repercussions on the stability of the federation. It gives incentive for regional and local elites to compete or even engage in conflict in order to seize administrative structures so that they can more easily access and squander public resources. Moreover, this will negate the idea of equalisation and countrywide solidarity.

In addition to the problem sharing government revenue, there are controversies regarding the transfer of non-budgetary resources and business companies associated with the TPLF/EPRDF. In fact, Paulos Chanie who studied Ethiopia's post-1991 decentralisation reform from a neo-patrimonial perspective came to the conclusion that in spite of the strong allegation that the EPRDF favours the Tigray region through official subsidy transfers, it refrained from doing this because of the potential of open favouritism for conflict. The TPLF/EPRDF, however, used what Paulos called 'non-official forms of the patronage network which includes parapatals, off budget funds and non-transparent infrastructure allocation to the regions' (Paulos 2007b: 425). Many allege that that the Tigray region, the home province of the ruling elite at the federal level benefited more from the assignment of off budgetary resources by the federal government and international aid agencies than the other regions (Paulos 2007a: 104; Solomon 2006a: 105). Similarly, the role of business companies affiliated with the EPRDF remained divisive. This particularly refers to the conglomerate of companies under the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT). According to some reports, the total capital of these companies is more than 3.5 Billion ETB roughly 320 million (Paulos 2007: 379). They have a strong presence in many sectors of the economy. There are still controversies regarding their initial capital, relationship with the government and others (Merera 2003; Paulos 2007; Solomon 2006b). In short, lack of transparency regarding party businesses and off-budgetary flow of resources would create mistrust of ethnic favouritism and hence undermine the development of a nation-wide solidarity, which is immensely important for the development of federalism as an institution of inter-ethnic bargaining and compromise.

## 4.5 Federalism and Secessionist Wars

Recognition of the right of secession is one of the factors that make the Ethiopian federation unique from almost all other federations. Yet, Ethiopia is not the first country in the world to recognise constitutionally the right of secession. The constitutions of the former Soviet Union and Burma used to contain provisions on secession (Duchacek 1970: 219). But none of these countries allowed administrative autonomy let alone a constitutionally mediated secession. In contrast, the dominant trend among federations historically has been to prohibit secession and to use force to clampdown secessionist forces. For instance, two of the oldest and democratic federations, the USA and Switzerland averted the threat of secession by the use of force (Burgess 2006: 272). Recently, Nigeria's federation stabilised after the defeat of the secessionists of Biafra. The Indian constitution makes clear that the unity of the country cannot be infringed (Stepan 1999: 22). The situation in Canada is slightly different from these broad trends. In its ruling on the question of Quebec's independence, the Supreme Court of Canada in 1996 neither allowed unilateral secession nor prohibited the prospect of Québec's separation. It decided to make secession a subject of democratic negotiation and deliberations (Schneiderman 1999: 9).

When we come to Africa, except Ethiopia, secession is taboo. After independence, the consensus in Africa was the inviolability of the colonial boundaries. In this respect, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the African Union (AU) in 1963 passed a resolution outlawing revision of colonial boundaries. As explained by Christopher Clapham, 'the post-1945 international system reinforced the territorial integrity and statehood of African countries' (Clapham 1996: 16).

The Ethiopian situation is different from the prevailing international norms. Hence, the country not only allowed the secession of one of its provinces (Eritrea), but also constitutionalised the right of secession. In this respect, the 1991 interim charter provided that every nation, nationality, and people could exercise 'its right to self determination of independence when [it] is convinced that [its rights] are denied, abridged or abrogated' (art. 2/C). In a similar fashion, the 1994 constitution recognised the right of 'nations, nationalities and peoples' to self-determination, which includes secession. Still, there are crucial differences between the charter and the constitution in their approach to secession. For the charter, secession was something remedial, to be sought if there are infringements on the rights of ethnic groups. In



contrast, the latter took a liberal approach allowing the free pursuit of secession, at least at the theoretical level. Moreover, the constitution, unlike the charter contained some procedures that guide the exercise of secession.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, the procedures seemed to have been designed to moderate the somewhat revolutionary gestures of the constitution on secession. That explains why the framers of the constitution gave the central role in managing questions of secession to the federal government. Hence, the federal government is responsible for arranging the crucial referendum that could lead to a unilateral declaration of independence, transferring sovereignty to the seceding state and dividing assets between the new and the rump state. However, it is inconceivable how the federal government would administer a question of secession in a transparent manner, if that will lead to the overall fragmentation of the country.

What is the contribution of the recognition of the right of secession and the overall ethnic regionalisation of the country in preventing secessionist wars? The official view of the EPRDF is that had it not been for the introduction of ethnic federalism and recognition of the right of secession in 1991, Ethiopia would have fragmented by the combined pressures of more than 17 armed ethno-nationalist forces fighting against the Derg (GebreAb 2003: 202). In this context, the recognition of the right of secession in particular is presented as an instrument that stabilised the ethnic federation by preventing unwarranted centralisation as the ethnic groups have an insurance policy of unconditional exit.

The arguments made in favour of secession are problematic for several reasons. First, a constitutional guarantee for secession instead of cementing a federal union could stimulate separatist nationalism (Brietzke 1995: 32). Indeed, the ethnic federalisation of Ethiopia and the inclusion of the secession clause seemed to have strengthened ethnic nationalism by providing ethno-nationalist movements territorial, institutional and legal bases.

Second, secession prevents the development of the political art of compromise, an important ingredient in federal development and thus encourages estranged political parties to pursue a separatist path instead of peacefully struggling within the system (Ibid). Such tendencies are evident in the Ethiopian case as well. Both the OLF and the ONLF, which today are engaged in secessionist armed rebellions, were part of the EPRDF led transitional government. They left the political process after their fell out with the EPRDF. The EPRDF and its member

organisations may as well choose the secessionist path, if their present hegemonic hold on power is threatened. For instance, according to the Indian Ocean Newsletter, top officials of the TPLF during the noisy post-electoral crisis of 2005 reportedly circulated a document, which among other things considered the secession of Tigray, if the 'chauvinists' (the opposition) would end up in power in Addis Ababa (ION 2005).

The other major argument, made in favour of ethnic federalism is the noticeable decline in the strength of armed ethnic liberation movements that threatened the political centre until 1991. Government officials argue that after the adoption of ethnic federalism and the recognition of the right of secession, the *raison d'être* for ethno-nationalist armed movements has been nonexistent (GebreAb 2003: 202). This optimistic view about federalism is to some extent shared by some scholars. For instance, David Turton who edited a book on ethnic federalism in Ethiopia suggested (2006: 1-2):

When one considers the level of internal conflict, military violence and repression by agencies of the state that characterised Ethiopia under the previous regime, the restructuring of Ethiopia as an ethnic federation has been an undeniable success. It has not only prevented the violent dismemberment of the country, but also provided peace and security for the great majority of its population and laid down, for the first time in the history of Ethiopia, "the legal foundation for a fully fledged democracy".

In a similar fashion, Alem Habtu sympathised with the decision of including the secession clause in the federal constitution for the sake of its symbolism. In this respect, he suggested that 'ethnic groups in border regional states (Somali) consider the secession clause to be the necessary condition for their continued membership in the Ethiopian state' (2005: 329).

In view of the too obvious failure of federalism in Ethiopia to either ensure political autonomy or end secessionist rebellions, it would be difficult to suggest a direct relationship between the decline in the strength of armed liberation movements and the ethnic federal structure as suggested by Turton above. In the first place, the proposition that posits ethnic federalism prevented the violent dismemberment of the country at the beginning of the 1990s fails to appreciate the fact that the major armed rebel movements that really threatened the political centre during that period were the EPLF and the TPLF.<sup>6</sup> Both of these

organisations after their decisive military victory in May 1991 realised their ultimate objectives. The EPLF, which was fighting to break away Eritrea, became the government of independent Eritrea. For its part, the TPLF became the government of the new ethnically federated Ethiopia and controls its home province. Federalism was thus neither used as a compromise nor brought power sharing through relatively free and fair elections. In such an atmosphere, the present system cannot handle demands of ethno-nationalist movements (for example Somali and Oromo) for more autonomy or secession.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, calls for an inclusive political space that allows peaceful and democratic contestation for power have been ignored. Consequently, the EPRDF not only dismisses those forces that demand changes as ‘anti-peace’, ‘terrorists’, ‘narrow nationalists’, ‘chauvinists’ and ‘rent-seekers’, but also has been engaged in armed conflict with such ethno-nationalist movements as the ONLF and the OLF.

So far, OLF’s attempt to create a large-scale armed rebellion failed. In contrast, the armed rebellion of the ONLF has been steadily strengthening. At present, Ethiopia’s undeclared war in the Somali region is receiving more international attention and scrutiny (HRW 2008). In both cases, the government used force to contain these separatist movements. Thus the EPRDF deployed troops in the largely Ogadeni inhabited parts of the Somali region, while in Oromia; it is engaged in a somewhat periodic crackdown of those who are suspected of sympathising with the OLF, throwing thousands of people into jails (HRW 2005; Scherrer 2003). According to Negasso Gidada, former President of Ethiopia, by the time he left office in 2001, ‘there were roughly 25,000 people in prison on OLF-related charges throughout Oromia and in Addis Ababa...’ (cited in HRW 2005: 12). Thus, the maintenance of Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism requires, like the ex-communist federations of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the use of force (Aalen 2006: 255).

#### **4.6 Autonomy and Generation/Transformation of Ethnic Conflicts**

Ethiopian federalism led to the operationalisation of one of Donald Horowitz’s (1985: 598-9) key propositions about the role of federalism in proliferating points of power and decentralising conflicts. While this is true, federalism has not led to the emergence of inter-ethnic electoral

cooperation and/or alignments based on interests other than ethnicity that Horowitz suggested helps reduce interethnic conflicts (Ibid). Instead, as Jon Abbink observed:

The post-1991 regime in Ethiopia, despite its promise and claims to bring solutions, has been less successful than expected in managing ethnic tensions in the country, and has basically only “decentralised” the problems by defining the sources of conflict to be on the local and not national level.... “Ethnic” struggles between communities are quite frequent, and have led to a localization of conflicts away from challenging the central state, and to an “essentialisation” of ethno-cultural or linguistic differences, which then can (re)define local group relations (2006: 390).

Consequently, the most noticeable impact of federalism in Ethiopia has been its decentralisation of ethnic conflicts at regional and local levels (Abbink 2006; Asnake 2004; Dereje 2006; Gashaw 2006; Vaughan 2006). For instance, according to a 24 May 2008 Reuters news report:

More than 20 people were killed in three days of clashes over land in western Ethiopia last week. A long-standing dispute over land along the border between Oromia and Benishangul states in western Ethiopia erupted into violence claiming the lives of more than 20 people from both sides last week. In April, land clashes in the southern Ethiopian town of Wondo-Genet killed 18 people (Reuters 2008).

The above report shows one of the increasingly important trends of conflicts in the country. Such conflicts, which are low scale and localised have become regular features of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia. The proliferation and decentralisation of such conflicts could be mainly explained by the principle of ethnic atomisation or what Daniel Bach called in the Nigerian context, ‘self-perpetuating internal political fragmentation’ (1989: 218). In this context ethnic entrepreneurs who seek to control the meagre resources made available at regional and local levels engage in the politics of ethnic entitlement. This more often than not emphasises ethnic otherness and causes conflicts between neighbouring ethnic groups. Indeed, in many of the regions such as Somali, Gambella, SNNPR and Benishangul-Gumuz, violent conflicts emerged over a number of issues ranging from land, borders and identity

to control of local administrative structures. The following is an outline of four major conflict trends with brief explanatory examples.

#### 4.6.1 Federal restructuring and identity conflicts

Ethnicity has emerged the central organising device of Ethiopian federalism; any group that wishes to have an administrative structure and representation needs recognition as a 'nation, nationality or people.' For the relatively larger ethnic groups, this process has been straightforward. In contrast, defining the ethnic identity of many minority ethnic groups has emerged as one of the arenas of local/regional conflicts. The government's instruments of ethnic codification and regulation are problematic as they are largely based on primordial features of identity (discussed in chapter 2). Nonetheless, many ethnic entrepreneurs are today engaged in a struggle for recognition of separate ethnic identities as this could lead to representation at regional and federal levels. The key attraction is provision of a separate local government organisation, as this would give ethnic entrepreneurs the chance to access government resources. Consequently, there are numerous petitioners inundating the offices of the Ministry of Federal Affairs (MoFedA) and the HoF seeking recognition of their separate ethnicity.

One of the prominent examples of identity conflicts in federal Ethiopia was the Silte-Gurage identity dispute in the southern region.<sup>8</sup> The Silte, traditionally considered part of the Gurage ethnic group effectively mobilised for recognition of their separate ethnic identity. Ethnic federalism that emphasises primordial notions of identity contributed to uncovering the internal diversities among the several sub-clans of the Gurage undermining their communal ties (Markakis 1998: 130-1; Nishi 2005: 164). Silte ethnic entrepreneurs who based their argument for a separate ethnic status on their shared Islamic identity, language and relative economic marginality mobilised for state recognition of a separate ethnic identity since 1992 (Smith 2007: 579).

The EPRDF, which was initially lukewarm to this demand, eventually arranged a referendum whereby the members of the Silte community were asked whether they are Gurage or not (Ibid 582). The voters overwhelmingly decided to disassociate themselves from the Gurage. This paved the way for the formation of the Silte administrative *zone*. As a result, the Silte political class now has access to political and

economic resources that accompany *zonal* status. Nonetheless, the separation adversely affected the relationship between the two groups.

Today many minority groups throughout the country seek to emulate the 'Silte model'. Since the basis for this model is renegotiation of ethnic identity and accentuation of ethnic otherness, it could engender tensions between neighbouring groups (such as Gabbra and Oromo relations in Moyale, see chapter 8). For its part, the government is generally unenthusiastic to accommodate such demands because of the enormous cost of maintaining smaller administrative units. Yet its reluctance, after having put up the legal and economic incentives for such an endeavour does not dissuade ethnic entrepreneurs from pressing for the redefinition of their ethnic identity. Moreover, renegotiating ethnic identity more often than not exploits ethnic resentment and engenders conflicts. In the end, this contributes to intra and inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts.

This thesis, examined how ethnic entrepreneurs of minority clans (ethnic groups) seek to renegotiate their identity with the hope of controlling local government administrative structures and land in chapters 6 and 8.

#### 4.6.2 Intra-federal boundary conflicts

The institutionalisation of federalism in Ethiopia led to the making of boundaries with the premise of matching ethnic and politico-administrative boundaries (Cohen 2000: 191). Above all, this process is characterised by a rigorous ethnicisation of territory. Indeed, there appears to be an ethnic 'landlord' for all the territory of the country. The two large multi-ethnic cities of the country (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa), which could not be claimed by a single ethnic group, were not even spared from this process. In the case of Addis Ababa, the federal constitution states:

The special interest of the State of Oromia in Addis Ababa, regarding the provision of social services or utilization of natural resources and other similar matters, as well as joint administrative matters arising from the location of Addis Ababa within the State of Oromia, shall be respected (art.49/5).

This vague provision may not have an impact for now because a single party controls the federal government, the Addis Ababa municipality and the Oromia region. The situation could become problematic if this changes.

When we consider the delineation of the boundaries of regions, the process has not been smooth (Asnake 2004). Ethnic regionalisation transformed age-old territorial conflicts into inter-regional boundary conflicts. This particularly refers to the transformation of resource conflicts between pastoral communities in the lowland regions of the country into inter-regional boundary conflicts (chapter 8). The process of boundary making among ethnically constituted regions also led to the generation of violent conflicts among various ethnic groups of the country that did not have a history of protracted territorial conflicts. For instance, inter-regional boundary making led to a violent conflict between the Gedeo<sup>9</sup> (SNNPR) and the Guji<sup>10</sup> (Oromia) in southern Ethiopia (Abbink 2006; Asebe 2007; Ayele and Getachew 2001). The groups have a long history of neighbourly relations and both were within the former Sidamo province before 1992. In line with the principles of ethnic regionalisation, the Guji who belong to the Oromo ethnic group became part of the Oromia region, while the Gedeo became part of the SNNPR. Like anywhere else in the country, the new intra-federal boundary, which divided the two ethnic groups, was not tidy as there were mixed villages.

Hence, inter-ethnic territorial disputes followed ethnic regionalisation. According to Assebe Regessa, one of the key causes for the conflict between the two groups was grievances of those Guji (Oromo) separated from their ethnic kin and kith and left within the newly established Gedeo administrative *zone* in the SNNPR (2007: 82). In 1995, following the demands of the Guji, the government sought to demarcate the boundary of the two regions through a referendum. However, the referendum ignited a protracted conflict between the two groups, which in 1998 claimed the lives of thousands of people (Ibid). The 1998 war left a deep scar in the inter-ethnic relations of the two groups, which would take several years to heal and a sustainable resolution to the conflict remains elusive. It is in fact difficult to conceive how such land/territorial conflicts could be solved as 'any dispute on land or land use...becomes a collective community issue, and pits communities against each other' (Abbink 2006: 396).

These localised territorial conflicts, though lethal to the concerned communities; do not pose a threat to the political centre. When we come

to the study regions, they both experienced intra-federal boundary conflicts. The Somali region, for example, faced the transformation of age-old resource conflicts between its Afar and Oromo neighbours into intra-federal boundary conflicts (discussed in chapter 8). Likewise, there are boundary conflicts between the Benishangul-Gumuz region and its Oromo and Amhara neighbours (discussed in chapter 9).

#### 4.6.3 Intra-regional conflicts in multiethnic regions

As stated above, even if the federal constitution promised a symmetrical federal system, where all the ethnic groups of the country would exercise equal self-determination rights, the translation of this principle led to an asymmetrical federalism in which the larger ethnic groups were given their own ethnic regions and the smaller were put together to establish multi-ethnic regions. All of the multi-ethnic regions faced violent inter-ethnic conflicts over a range of issues including sharing of political power and resources (Solomon 2006a; Vaughan 2006; Dereje 2006). In order to illuminate this trend, what follows briefly considers the conflict between the Anywaa<sup>11</sup> and the Nuer<sup>12</sup> ethnic groups who emerged as the major titular ethnic groups in the newly established Gambella region.

The Gambella region, in western Ethiopia, is one of the peripheral and border regions of the country. The region is composed of five titular ethnic groups and has a substantial non-titular population known locally as highlanders.<sup>13</sup> None of the titular ethnic groups constitutes more than 50 per cent of the region's population.<sup>14</sup> Ever since its formation, the region faced a lethal mix of two-dimensional conflicts. There are conflicts between the titular ethnic groups of the region (Nuer and Anywaa) and violence mars inter-ethnic relationships between the titular ethnic groups (particularly the Anywaa) and the highlanders (Abbink 2006; Asnake 2004; Dereje 2006; Vaughan 2006; Young 1999).

In 1992, when the Gambella region was established, the two ethnic groups joined the politics of autonomy in an unequal fashion. The Anywaa who established the Gambella People's Liberation Movement (GPLM) in 1979 and collaborated with the EPRDF in the struggle against the Derg assumed the political upper hand with the blessing of the EPRDF (Young 1999). Thus, the Anywaa political class managed to seize the attendant political and economic resources, which the establishment of the new region brought. The Nuer, who felt that they were excluded from the power structures of the new region established



the Gambella People's Democratic Unity Party (GPDUP) in 1992 and began to press for equitable representation (Ibid 332).

The two groups locked in a struggle over political power, citizenship and land use produced conflicting narratives. According to Dereje, the Anywaa who considered the increase in the population size of the Nuer and their mobilisation for political inclusion as a threat to their survival,<sup>15</sup> sought to justify their 'claim to be the dominant political force in the region' through such arguments as 'settlement history, current settlement pattern, contribution to regime change and degree of connection with the national centre' (2006: 218). In contrast, the Nuer advanced several arguments that could help them ensure their citizenship rights and equitable representation. These included common ethnic origin with the Anywaa, the egalitarian Nuer concept of land ownership and their population size, which in a dramatic fashion increased to 40 per cent after the release of the 1994 population census (Ibid 221).

The deep divisions and suspicions that prevailed between the two groups led to a cyclic conflict that led to the death of hundreds of people and destruction of property (Medhane 2007: 13). The federal government, which was mainly interested in maintaining political control, has not helped to contain the conflict by facilitating the emergence of a 'political community that articulates regional interest' (Dereje 2006: 224).

The relationship between the Anywaa and the politically excluded highlanders was also characterised by intractable conflicts. This reached a climax in December 2003 when some of the highlanders joined by government soldiers massacred hundreds of Anywaa in an apparent retaliation for the killings of some highlanders (Medhane 2007: 16).

Both study regions have shown evidence of this trend of conflict (between titular ethnic groups). In Benishangul-Gumuz, the Gumuz and the Bertha, which emerged as the dominant ethnic groups, were tied in a power struggle (see chapter 7). In contrast, the Somali region saw several inter-clan political conflicts (see chapter 6).

#### 4.6.4 Conflicts between titular and non-titular groups

The last trend of conflict is between titular and non-titular groups. The main reason for such conflicts is the obvious lack of congruence between personal and territorial ethnicity. Like anywhere else in the world, the settlement of individuals and communities does not always correspond to ethnic and administrative boundaries. It is evidently impossible to maintain an ethnically homogenous sub-national unit because of migration. The same is true in Ethiopia where millions of Ethiopians live out of their presumed ethnic homelands because of years of forced and voluntary migrations.

The makers of the federal constitution did not foresee how the institutionalisation of ethnic federalism would affect relationships between titular and non-titular communities. This problem has been exacerbated by the essentially primordialist definition of ethnicity that prevails in the political discourse of the country and in the constitution. Hence, after the institutionalisation of federalism in several parts of the country patterns of relationships between the two groups were changed. The non-titular became new minorities with limited political rights. While the titular groups sought to use their new autonomy to assert their economic and political power, the non-titular groups felt insecure, discriminated and disenfranchised. As a result, there are tensions in the relationships between the two groups in many parts of the country.

The problem is greater in most cities where the non-titular communities account for a significant portion of the population. In order to illuminate this trend, the situation in the Harari region will be briefly considered. The city of Harar found in eastern Ethiopia has a long history. It was the seat of an important Islamic kingdom before its incorporation into the Ethiopian State after the 1887 battle of Chelenqo. The Harari lent the town their name and are traditionally identified with it.

The establishment of the Harari region gave the Harari a titular status. However, the Harari 'city state' is multi-ethnic and the Harari who became the main titular group are a small minority within the region. According to the 1994 census, the ethnic composition of the Harari regional state looks like: Oromo (52.3%), Amhara (32.6%), Harari (7.1%), Gurage (3.2%) and others (4.8 %). From among the several ethnic groups that are found in the region, the Harari and the Oromo were declared as co-owners of the region and thus the region has been

under a coalition government of the OPDO/EPRDF and the EPRDF affiliated Harari National League (HNL). However, power sharing between the two ethnic organisations has remained asymmetrical, whereby the Harari control key offices such as the president and the secretary of the regional administrative council. This arrangement excludes about 40 per cent of the total regional population from political contestation and representation. Thus, there are tensions in the relationship between the titular ethnic groups (particularly the Harari) who dominate the structures of the new regional state and the non-titular groups. Without some sort of mitigation, this problem may engender violence (Asnake and Hussein 2007).

Both of the study regions observed this trend of conflict (tension). As discussed in chapter 7, there are conflicts between the titular and the non-titular groups in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

## 4.7 Conclusion

Reconstruction of the Ethiopian State into an ethnic federation was approached as a novel concept that would provide a new legitimate basis to the Ethiopian State and resolve ethnic conflicts. Some enthusiasts even suggested the emulation of this experiment by the rest of Africa. Nevertheless, seventeen years after its introduction, the record of Ethiopia's federalism, particularly from the backdrop of its promises, remains troublesome. It has neither granted political autonomy nor ended secessionist wars. Instead, several conflicts related to federalism rage in many parts of the country at local/regional levels.

The elevation of ethnicity as an instrument of state reorganisation has been problematic because of its fluidity and flexibility. In other words, ethnicity is subject to contraction and expansion. It, moreover, takes a 'different order of pre-eminence in different situations' (Phadnis and Ganguly 2001: 350). In spite of this, the framers of the Ethiopian constitution not only declared the country's ethnic groups sovereign, but also allowed the right of ethnic self-determination up to secession. The use of ethnicity as the building block of the federation put in motion a new arena of local/regional conflict over definition of ethnic identity. This has a paradoxical impact on ethnic autonomy. While the ethos of ethnic federalism has been to provide political and cultural autonomy to the various ethnic groups of the country, the State now has taken the key

role of deciding which (minority) group meets the criteria to be recognised as either ‘nation, nationality or people.’

The use of ethnicity alone as a key instrument of organising the State has engendered a number of inter-related problems. As A.C. Cairns suggested, ‘federalism can contribute to harmony and civility when the ethnic groups in question are territorially concentrated and thus capable of escaping from each other’ (cited in Gagnon 1993: 23). This was not the case in Ethiopia. In several ways, ethnic regionalisation affected inter-ethnic relations at local and regional levels. Indeed, what William Riker (1964) called local tyranny has been observed in many of the regions in Ethiopia.

The institutionalisation of ethnic federalism led to the making of intra-federal boundaries with the premise of matching ethnic and politico-administrative boundaries. However, this process was accompanied by violent conflicts. In some cases, the process of making boundaries between the new regions transformed resource conflicts between neighbouring ethnic groups into nation-state type boundary conflicts. In other cases, boundary making resulted in new border wars between communities that had no history of protracted territorial conflicts (Gedeo and Guji).

The next chapter provides a general background to the two study regions, Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz. It reviews the history, ethnic composition and evolution of Ethiopian administration in these regions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The bigger ethnic groups were given regional status, many of the smaller groups in the southern region were allowed to exercise autonomy at *zonal* and district levels.

<sup>2</sup> According to David McKay, Australia uses a grant distribution formula, which ‘weighs each state’s population according to its *disabilities*. *Disability* is a measure of factors that are beyond each state’s control and which requires it to spend more than states on average must spend to reach a particular standard of public service or which reduces its relative ability to raise revenue’ (2001: 82).

<sup>3</sup> The figures for population were taken from the 2004 Population Outlook of the Central Statistics Authority, the amount of money allocated to the Harari region was derived from the 2006/07 Federal Government Budget proclamation, while the sum for the Sidama *zone* was found from the document on SNNPR’s block grants to *zones* and *woreda* in the same fiscal year. Both documents are available at <http://www.mofaed.org>.

<sup>4</sup> See Proclamation no. 68/1997 enacted to establish the 'Office of the Federal Auditor General'.

<sup>5</sup> According to article 39.4 of the federal constitution, the procedures for effecting secession include: (a) when a demand for secession has been approved by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Legislative Council of Nation, Nationality or People concerned; (b) when the Federal Government has organised a referendum, which must take place three years from the time it received the concerned council's decision for secession; (c) when the demand for secession is supported by a majority vote in the referendum; (d) when the Federal Government will have transferred its powers to the Council of the Nation, Nationality, or People who voted to secede; and (e) when the division of assets is effected in a manner prescribed by law.

<sup>6</sup> Excepting the EPLF and the TPLF, the other ethnic liberation movements (including the OLF) were not formidable military powers at the beginning of the 1990s.

<sup>7</sup> EPRDF's position on autonomy and secession after its ascent to power has some similarity with the experience of Soviet communists. In the case of the Soviet Union, soon after the adoption of the principle of self-determination up to secession in the Soviet Constitution, J. Stalin the architect of Soviet nationality policy in 1923 said that 'this must be said bluntly— the right of self-determination cannot and must not serve as an obstacle to the exercise by the working-class of its right to dictatorship' (Hazard 1990: 51). In the same fashion, those ethnic liberation movements that today press for political autonomy and secession in Ethiopia are denounced by the EPRDF as 'narrow nationalists'.

<sup>8</sup> According to William Shack, the Gurage, found in southern Ethiopia, consist of three major groups: Sebat Bet, Soddo Kistane and Silte. These groups share a common set of artefacts, technology and mode of production as a people of 'enseste culture complex' of south-eastern Ethiopia (cited in Nishi, 2005: 158).

<sup>9</sup> The Gedeo who number more than 500,000 are one of the constituent ethnic groups of the SNNPR. They have a *zonal* status within the region. They neighbour in the north with the Sidama, while in the east, west and south they are bounded by the Oromo (Shinn et al. 2004: 178).

<sup>10</sup> The Guji are one of the largest sub-groups of the Oromo. They inhabit a large area (Guji *zone*) in southern Ethiopia. Their means of livelihood is agro-pastoralism. They neighbour the Gedeo and many other ethnic groups. Except their Gedeo neighbours, the Guji have a long history of warfare with the Oromo and other neighbours (Asebe 2007: 53).

<sup>11</sup> Anywaa, alternatively called Anuak, is one of the Nilo-Saharan groups in the Ethio-Sudanese frontier region. Found predominantly within the Gambella region of Ethiopia, according to the 1994 Ethiopian census, their population

size is estimated around 66,690 people. They constitute about 27% of the overall population of the region. Their means of livelihood is based on agriculture and fishing (Shinn et al. 2004).

<sup>12</sup> The Nuer are predominantly found in southern Sudan. They emerged as the largest ethnic group in the Gambella region in Ethiopia. Their number, according to the 1994 Ethiopian census is estimated around 98,800. They constitute about 40 per cent of the overall population of the Gambella region. The livelihood of the Nuer is based on pastoralism. They have a history of territorial expansion and a long history of conflict with their neighbours like the Anywaa (Ibid).

<sup>13</sup> According to Derje Feyissa, the highlanders were introduced into the Gambella region after incorporation of the region to the Ethiopian State at the turn of the 20th century. They were initially largely extracted from the Amhara and the Oromo ethnic groups. The number of 'highlanders' increased over the years due to forced resettlement of peasants from the highland regions during the 1980s and the migration of people for economic opportunities (Dereje 2006).

<sup>14</sup> According to the 1994 census, the ethnic composition of the region looks like Anywaa (27%), Nuer (40%), the Mezengir (6%) and other groups (which largely includes the highlanders) (27%).

<sup>15</sup> The conflict between the two groups for political dominance is buttressed by the continued expansion of the Nuer from the Sudan. During the long civil war in southern Sudan, the Nuer along with other Sudanese tribes came to Gambella in search of refuge and were settled on Anywaa traditional territories as refugees. As there is no system of identifying the Sudanese Nuer from the Ethiopian Nuer, the Sudanese migrants seemed to have joined the Nuer on the Ethiopian side in the new autonomy politics of the Gambella region (Medhane 2007; Young 1999).