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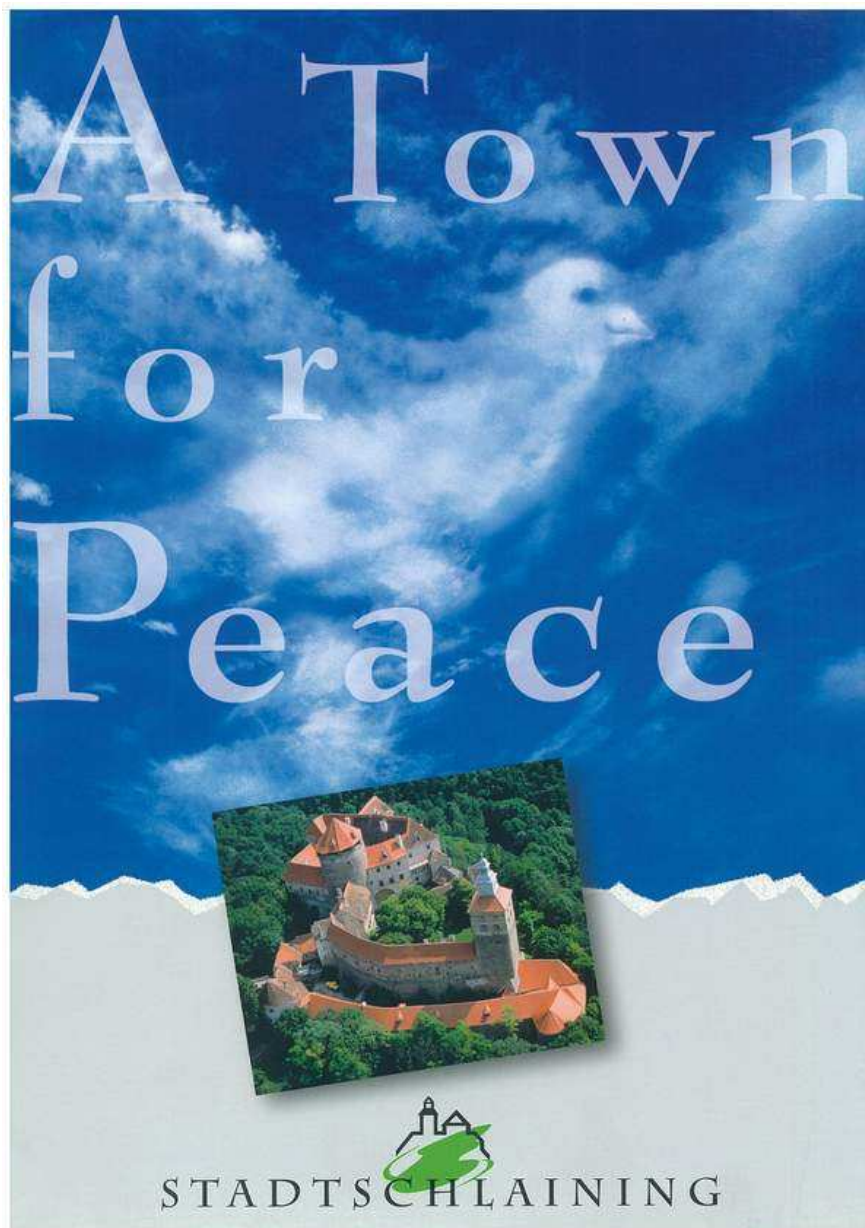
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ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Research Project Co-ordinator: Ronald H. Tuschl

A Town for Peace

STADTSCHLAINING

CONTENTS

Ronald H. Tuschl: Editor´s Note

The EPU (European University Center for Peace Studies) is an international, non-governmental organisation with UNESCO status, and is affiliated to the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR), also located at Stadtschlaining. It was founded in 1988 by Gerald Mader in his capacity as president of the ASPR, with the support of European UNESCO commissions.

Primary Goals of the EPU are spreading the idea of peace in the spirit of the UNESCO; giving scientific and educational support to global peace building; promoting a "world domestic policy" based on sustainable development, cooperative responsibility and ecological security; contributing to the development of a global peace culture; training and improving individual capabilities in peace-making and conflict resolution.

The third issue of the EPU Research Papers is the result of a research project which took place during the Spring Semester 2006 of the EPU. The authors of this issue are describing and analyzing the ethnic and religious conflicts of the southern hemisphere of this world society.

Mesfin Getachew (Ethiopia) works out the causes and dynamics of conflict structures between Oromos and Somalis in Ethiopia at the Horn of Africa.

Ronald H. Tuschl,
Research Director and Editor

Stadtschlaining, May 2006

Mesfin Getachew: Ethnicity and Ethnic-Conflict in Post-Federal Ethiopia: A case of Mai'so District Conflict Between Oromos and Somalis

Introduction

The historical process underlying in the creation of the modern Ethiopia state has been marked by power struggles and conflictual cleavages among diverse forces. These forces could be arrayed into twin contending categories. The first group aimed at consolidating political sovereignty under a centralized authority. The second, comprising centrifugal challenges, asserted local supremacy and resisted consolidation by the former. Somewhere between the two, there have been small and medium scale intra and inter-local frictions that develop into a situation of conflict. As Markakis states that:

"The modern state of Ethiopia was formed in the second half of the nineteenth century. Up to that time, the boarder of the Abyssinian Kingdom enclosed the northern plateau, from Shoa in the south, The Awash River in the east, the bend of the Blue Nile in the west, and the highland region beyond the Mereab river in the North (that was to become the Italian Colony of Eritrea). Within their domain, the Abyssinians had assimilated most though pockets of Agaw speakers remained. Introduced in the fourth century, Orthodox Christianity reigned supreme. Islam was preserved among the minorities converted to this religion centuries earlier, and a form of Judaism survived among the Falasha people… Amharic was the official language and lingua franca of the kingdom ...(2004:11)"

Accordingly, one can imagine the volatility of the state from this point. In our present, troubled world, Ethiopia can be seen as a main factor for stability in the Horn of Africa. The Horn of Africa is a highly complicated and deeply interwoven political region, with lingering conflicts and pressing social and economic problems. Thus, the stabilizing role of Ethiopia also with a view to Addis Ababa being the Head Quarter of the African Union is vital for herself, for the region and for Africa as a whole.

Such comprehensive stability demands adequate management of societal conflicts. As in many other societies, 'conflict in Ethiopia has been, and somehow still is to a certain extent, taboo. The word conflict is used quite often to refer to a physical confrontation such as fight, battle, or struggle. More fundamentally, conflict denotes disagreements on, or opposition to, interests or ideas'.

In this sense, 'conflict describes relationships in which each party perceives the other's goals, values, interests or behavior as antithetical to its own'. Starting from this, there can be a multitude of ways to resolve such existing or perceived contradictions. Any society and any political system in the world have to try to develop its own institutions, organization, and systems to handle conflicts peacefully and to prevent violence. 'What has to be prevented is violence, not necessarily conflict as such. Rather conflict can and perhaps should be accepted

as an inevitable component of all-social political relations, as well as an indicator of problems'. Finally, it should not be forgotten that conflict is a most powerful factor to bring about change and development in the above-mentioned definition.

According to a Somalis proverbial saying

"The solution to a Conflict is Talking about the Conflict." Somali Proverb

'The underlying causes of such inter and/or intra-group scenarios of conflicts are complex and intricate. As such, the conflicts were products of ramifications of various determinants of state and society relations and institutions. These causes may vary from tendencies of competition over scarce material resources, to aspirations of being dominant intra-group forces, to geographical, Psycho-cultural historical feelings or biases of non-complimentarily, to tensions induced by extra-group factors such as different forms of state intervention, resource alienation (especially land), Political-oppressions, etc.

In spite of this complex patterns and processes, different modes of alleviating and deescalating conflict situations have emerged. The modalities may embrace traditional or indigenous methods of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. In addition, there are formal modes of resolutions including either persuasive or coercive intervention by the state.

Given this backgrounds of traditional or formal conflict resolution, the surge of tensions relating to questions of ethnicity or national identities in the post-1991 politics of Ethiopia attract a significant research interest. In this context, this study focuses on the border/territorial disputes between the Ittu/Oromos and the Issa/Somalies of Ethiopia. Both of which have traditionally been considered to belong to the same sort of group.

Violent conflicts within and between the Somalis and Oromos pastoral tribal groups of the Southern and Eastern parts of Ethiopia are not a new phenomenon. Centuries of interaction between the two groups of people have created a complex pattern of ethnic and linguistic groups relationships. Currently the issues of where the administrative boundaries between the two Regional States should be drawn in areas of mixed cultural, linguistic and ethnic affiliations have resulted in boundary disputes besides the resource conflicts which already existed. Local tribal elites have emerged on both sides, exacerbating the problems, bearing the name of boundary dispute exploiting the situation.

We need to see the root and immediate causes of the conflicts, the attempted interventions by the Federal government, and other efforts made by the Oromia and the Somali Regional states separately and/or together.

Moreover, traditional mechanisms together with state led democratic resolutions should be employed to preserve the traditional wisdom or pastoral cooperation. In addition, ways must be designed to resolve the inter-pastoral conflicts over resources along those boundaries.

The overall objectives of the case study are to examine the history and causes of ethnic-conflict in Ethiopia. To investigate the existing context identifies the parties involved in the conflict and searching for a solution to the conflict. As a result, all the involved stakeholders may respond appropriately.

The specific objectives of this study is to examine the Ittu/Oromos and the Issa/Somalis border disputes as a case of identity question on the one hand, the scarce resource competitions existed between and among different groups and the various modes and mechanisms of conflict resolution, applied or alternatively available, in settling dispute emanating from this particular question.

The study has employed explanatory tools and theories from inter-related disciplines on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. In particular, in examining the Oromo/Somali border dispute geographical, historical, Socio-economical and political factors and processes were given a due attention. The analytical framework is based on a case study in Mai'so and the surrounding localities. The case study involved interviewing concerned officials in federal, regional and wereda/district level. The study also heavily relied on extensive review of published and unpublished secondary materials.

Lastly, as crucial part for the study, frequent field visit was conducted in districts, and certain areas prone to conflict. Interviews were conducted with district and zonal officials from the region, local elders, and residents of Mai'so, Bordede and division commanders of the federal defense force in the district. I personally participated in the peace processes, which took place at different times. As a Federal government representative and mediator. I led frequent meetings of local elites and elected elders, and clan leaders. I have visited the raided and burned villages and met with victims of violence.

Generally, all these activities have helped me in changing my understanding of the situation to answer the research questions and it will help me deepen detailed further field research I have planned.

PART I

Theoretical Framework: Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts

    1.1.Contending Approaches of Explaining Ethnicity

Ethnic conflicts and manifestations of heightened ethnic sentiments have emerged as crucial issues of concern and debate in many parts of the world. In particular, ethnicity and ethno-nationalism have come to be considered as factors that can cause or intensify both inter-state and intra-state conflicts (Brass, 1991). Nevertheless, understanding and explaining ethnicity tended to be uneasy and challenging tasks. As such, ethnicity is a difficult and complex notion foundered by a synthesis of myth and realities of identities (Cashmore, 1996). It is characterized, among others, as elusive as it is imprecise and inexact (Guibernau 1996 cited in Guibernau and Rex, 1997:4); fluid and flexible as it may be expanded and contracted depending on specific contexts and elastics as it may refer to complex and wide varieties of identity groups (Brass, ibid.).

Thus various conceptions and analytical views of ethnicity have emerged. Earlier anthropological studies on ethnicity emphasized on subjective processes of 'structural relationships' that coincides with identity formation (Attah-Poku, 1998). In another versions of this view, Anthony D. Smith (1988) argued that 'boundary maintenance', a crucial factor in ethnicity, is dependant on structural differences of groups. Accordingly, structural relationships are more decisive in defining ethnicity than cultural factors, as well as during processes of state formation and creation of ethnic identity (Brass, ibid: 110). On the other hand Clifford Greetz (1963) came up with the 'primordialist' analysis of arguing that ethnicity is mainly expressed by culturally distinctive characteristics. These characteristics include, inter alias, shared myths of origin, common language, ritual, religion and genealogical descent that distinguishes groups and peoples from one another (Brass, op.cit.Greetz, 1991). Similarly an ethnic group is defined as ' a collectivity within a wider society having a real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements that are viewed as epitomizing their people hood' (Schermerhone, 1970 cited in Poluha, 1998:32).

In reaction to the strong emphasis on primordial qualities, the 'instrumentalists' model underlined on cultural aspects of interactions and a sense of distinctiveness of an ethnic group in relation to other who are seen to have ethnic identities of their own (Keyes, 1976 cited in Brass, op.cit.). Thus, the primordial characteristics were viewed as important in so far as they help people to distinguish themselves in comparison to "other" (Keyes, Ibid.). In the words of Iva Poluha, 'there must be a "significant other", because ethnic groups are always in relational. There is always a "we" and "us" in relation to a "you" and "them" [and] the relationship is usually in flux, rather than stagnant' (Poluha, 1998:33) While the primordialists emphasized on deeply affective and emotional character of ethnicity, and its necessary origins in real culture experience, the instrumentalists focused on the 'contingent, situational and circumstantial' use/manipulation of ethnicity for political and economic ends. (Cashmore, 1996:121) In the latter's sense, ethnicity is a social construct influenced by situations and contexts that may be referred to as subjective factors. The subjective factors are not shared attributes that are given or 'our there'. They are cognitive elements such as sense of belongingness and self-identification, as well as material political and economic forces that result in the creation of the "we consciousness" in contrast to 'they'. (Guibernau and Rex, 1997:4,6) They involve any particular combination of non-primordial factors chosen by a group to assert its identity and used as a common source to achieve certain goals. (Brass, 1991:170) Accordingly, it is argued that;

"Ethnicity is not a historical given at all and in fact a highly adaptive and malleable phenomenon. In response to changing conditions, the boundaries of an ethnic collectivity can expand or contract, individuals move in and out and even share membership in more than one community. The very content, symbols and meaning of a particular collective identity can and do evolve. In effect, ethnicity is dynamic, not a fixed and immutable element or social and political relations. (Cashmore, ibid.:123)"

In other words, in addition to 'objective' or primordial differences, there must exist other subjective elements that may be instrumental in mobilizing ethnic groups to assert a distinct identity and pursue a set of objectives. In such a way therefore, ethnicity can be 'harnessed by minority groups who see separation as a means to end oppression'. (Poluha, Ibid: 33)

In effect, the creation and recreation of ethnic identities and boundaries make ethnicity a fluid and changing process, in Poluha's term an 'ethnification process' (ibid: 34). In this process, past ethnic cultures are reified through new histories and myths in order to achieve present needs. Thus,' ethnic identities are shifting and changing according to historical and social process' (Tegegne, 1998:119) In conceptualizing ethnicity in the context of multi-ethnic and pluralistic societies, it is crucial to take into account complex and dynamic historical process and factors.

As indicated above, it is difficult to come up with a uniformly acceptable and applicable conception of ethnicity. However, the 'constructivist' approach based on a historically grounded analysis and the views ethnic identities as social constructs defined by historical conditions in which they emerge has gained wider acceptance and consensus in the contemporary debate and research on ethnicity (Markakis, 1998). In general, in understanding ethnicity, three essential elements need to be emphasized:

'The vital importance of the past an awareness of the history of a country or a people in understanding the complexities of the present';

'Politicization of ethnicity involving the preserving of ethnic groups and their distinctiveness, and transforming them into political conflict groups for the modern political arena'; and
The elasticity nature of the term ethnicity and the wide variety of potential ethnic groups.

1.2. Ethnic Conflicts

Theoretical and political perspectives on nature and sources of conflicts draw on competing analytical conception. While some perspectives diverge from each other, others tend to show semblance, uniformity, of views with varying conclusions. However, currently there is a lack of consensus among the various perspectives on the levels of analysis, tools of theoretical or empirical analysis, and models of interpreting the ethno national conflict problematic. Invariably, therefore, modalities and approaches suggested or employed to resolve the conflict situations have similarly been divergent.

Much of the literature treats conflict or war as a situation of organized armed contest between two or more independent units. In other words,' conflict occurs where there is interaction between at least two individuals or groups whose ultimate objectives differ' (Teshome, 2004:86). Conflict also includes domestic conflicts between ethnic as well as civil wars between dissidents and a state (Hoehl, 2004). Thus, conflicts can range from individual acts of aggression and protest to organized extreme violence perpetrated by institutions, organizations and countries (The Greater Horn of Africa Initiative, 1996). A phenomenon or conflict may be distinguished from non-conflict circumstances by a set of four criteria developed in (Brown, 1997:81). These are: i) the direct protagonists engaged in it are convinced of its existence; ii) differences of values, interests, goals or relations underlying the conflict are vividly manifest; iii) the protagonists of a conflict could be states or a significant portion of the population within the state (i.e., intra-state groups between themselves or against the state); and iv) the protagonists must regard the outcome of the conflict important; and in the case of intra-state conflicts, outcomes must be seen as vital for society; and all solutions short of violence viewed impossible.

In particular, ethnicity may be taken as a factor of conflict usually when the opposing protagonists belong to groups with different ethnic identities who identify each from another with competing values and interests (Markakis, 1998). It is crucial, therefore, to examine various factors in a social setting that serves as a potential base for ethnic conflict. Some of these factors inter or intra-ethnic competitions are identified as follows.

One contending perspective maintains that ethnic conflicts in countries of the Horn of Africa, as well as Africa at large, are mainly results of incessant competition among various ethnic forces to control state power (Nicol et al, 1996:3). The focal element of contest is on possessing the power base of the state. At various levels, the state controls the resources or the means to acquire resources, and hence, has become the focus of attention. Controlling access to state power would ensure welfare and privileges (The Greater Horn of Africa Initiative, 1996:2-29). Yet, such access is not available for all groups who desire to promote their privileges.

Consequently, political power structures of the postcolonial states of the Horn have been ridden by interest contradictions. These states have been subject to challenges by 'groups defining themselves variously by nationality, region, ethnicity, class or religion but whose common denominator is powerlessness accompanied by material deprivation and social discrimination' (Hoehl, ibid: 114). As a result, the contending groups seek to change the structure and the power base of the existing states in order to maximize their access to state power; and at the extreme, to gain autonomy or independence (Markakis, 2004.:17). It is argued thus that competition to obtain access to state power can escalate ethnic conflicts.

The question to be raised is whether interventions based on this approach can effectively result in the elimination of sources of the conflict; and whether changes of state structure can be carried out smoothly without escalating the conflict situation. In addition, it is worthy to note that some of the very groups with the common denominator of deprivation and powerlessness may tend to enter into tension due to other causes.

On the other hand, ethnic conflicts are viewed as; products of competition over scarce material resources; and that struggle for power among different ethnic groups are reflections of desires to maximize economic privileges (Mkutu, 2001:6). Here, the emphasis is on economic factors as determinant variables of the relations and behaviors between groups. Accordingly, inter-ethnic interactions would be frustrated when economic opportunities and development and social status among ethnic groups are perceived as unequal and exclusionary. As Brass (Ibid.:3) states:

"Ethnic groups […] will tend to cooperate with the other ethnic groups within a given country as long as they feel that the distribution of income and wealth

among the groups is somehow 'acceptable'. The larger the difference between the actual distribution and the 'acceptable' one, the stronger the incentive for the losing group to look out for its own interest rather than cooperate with other groups. (Emphasis mine)"

Further more, it is noted that, 'the increasing competition for land (and other resources such as pasture, water, and fuel wood) has engendered social tensions and cleavages between the "haves" and the "have-nots" (Mkutu, ibid.: iii). Such factors of tension are considered to be more explicit at the intra or inter group/community levels (Attah-Poku, 1998:71-73). However, various conflicts may unfold in complex and intricate political and socio-cultural milieus; and this, therefore, precludes exclusive determinism of a single factor.

Similarly ethnic conflicts are seen to be cause due to the deliberate manipulation of ethnic sentiments and identities either by leaders of ethnic groups (ethnic elite) or by a government in order to secure economic and political advantages (Hoehl, ibid.:114). In particular the role played by an educated, literate intelligentsia in the creation and propagation a pan-ethnic consciousness has been identified as crucial in this regard (Ahmed, ibid.) The institutions and the structures of the state may be set in such a way that inter-ethnic rivalries would be consciously employed. The state can delineate the strategic contexts in which ethnicity is or is not salient; and may design the choices of political actors regarding astrictive markers of ethnicity and forms of organization in which it may be exercised (Poluha, ibid.)

These different perspectives have made important contributions in the analysis of ethno-national conflicts and problems of state and governance in the specific context of Ethiopia. Their divergences illuminate on alternative analytical referents as much as their similarities may have yielded plausible explanations. Thus for the purpose of this paper, a synthesis of the various arguments is employed in order to identify various factors that led to the violent conflicts between the two ethnic groups.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Federal Ethiopia

As Hizkias Assefa states it: Most of the wars waged in the Horn of Africa countries during the past 30 years have been described in terms of ethnic conflicts, both by adversaries them selves and by external analysts…The problem of definition and concept of ethnicity in Africa at large is a very complicated concept (Hizkias, unknown:1).

In Ethiopia many as a major cause of conflict have identified ethnicity. The country's major civil wars were between the central government, which was seen to have been dominated by the Amhara people and various insurgency groups bearing the names of ethnic groups such as the Oromo, Tigre, Afar, Ogaden and others in the form of Liberation Fronts.

The centrist state structure that prevailed in Ethiopia since the second half of the 19th century came to its collapse with the May 1991 defeat of the Dergue regime by the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic front (EPRDF). The EPRDF led transitional government of Ethiopia (TGE) commenced on a transition process by introducing some fundamental political, structural and economic reforms. The transition process culminated in the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE).

The post-1991 politics of Ethiopia witnessed a major departure from the past in terms of political and structural dimensions. The political dimensions anchored on the principles of "unconditional" right accorded to "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" to exercise 'self-determination, including secession' (TGE, 1991: FDRE, 1995:96) reinforced ethno-national sentiments and tendencies across the polity. Several ethnic based political organizations and parties sprouted claiming representations of their respective nationalities in the new government. More often than not, two or more political organizations emerged with contending claims of being the right representatives of just the same ethnic group (Markakis, 2004). A number of these organizations grappled with each other either for intra-group political supremacy or for realizing a new form of ethno-national identity, and in few cases, with an explicit or implicit tendency of distinctive state hood.

The problem of the border dispute between the Oromos and the Somalis is mainly motivated and influenced by these post-1991 political developments and changes that marked a turning point in the political history of the modern Ethiopian state.

The structural dimension is inter-linked and, to some extent, dependant on the political dimension. In tandem with the right to self-determination, an ethnic based federal structure was established formally abolishing the centralized state structure (FDRE, 1995: 96). Federally redefined regional entities established their own legislative, executive and judiciary institutions (ibid:108). In this dimension too, the ethnic linguistic criterion became the major political principle. The regional and local self-government experiment introduced a new political frontier of opportunities and challenges. It offered an alternative approach to resolving the ethnic nationality question (MFA, 2003:3). However, It also opened a Pandora's box of tendencies of competition and tensions of interests, values, and identities at intra and inter-group levels over various political, economic and socio-cultural/historical issues. It is within these contexts that the Oromos and Somalis question is to be explained.

The strength of the state has enabled the EPRDF to establish itself effectively at the center of power, and to transfer the legitimacy inherent in the symbols and institutions of Ethiopia onto its own government. Whereas the preceding regimes of the Dergue and the emperor fought local autonomy, the current regime is

opting for accommodation within a federal structure that concentrates decision-making at the center. It hopes to vitiate regional grievances with cultural concessions and by providing development benefits, which do not jeopardize political control. In the process some regional factions, such as the Somali National Region State, are incorporated into the government. Recognition has also been given to cultural diversity. In Oromiya, as in other regions, local languages have become languages of government and been introduced to the school curriculum,

A number of factors added to the complexities of the conflict in the 1990s.The reorganization of the Ethiopian state under federalism unwittingly introduced two new bones of contention. Firstly, the federal structure of the state required fixed, recognized boundaries separating its constituent units. Since the territorial boundaries between states, when they are drawn, will be definitive and final, it is crucial for the parties involved to secure as generous a settlement as possible. This inhibits comprises and makes negotiation difficult. Secondly, decentralization of the state administration has aggravated local conflict since federalism offers state resources associated with local administrative status. The input of material and social resources at the wereda level, which control its own budget, makes wereda status a prize worth competing-even fighting-for.

The regional policy of the EPRDF on the other hand, has succeeded in addressing some of the major demands in the regions. Cultural policy and limited regional autonomy have alleviated some of the political disaffection among the Oromo, Afar and Somali. Government alliances with local client parties like OPDO have contained the impact of the more radical movements. It has also succeeded in preventing the consolidation of the different opposition movements.

The economy, however, plays a central part in determining the stability of the regime. After decades of warfare, the prevailing peace in most of the country is still appreciated. Growth has been steep, though from a low base, and in the countryside. There is a noticeable improvement in food security and living standards. Discontent is most prevalent among urban populations and rural elite, but among these groups there are also strong constituents benefiting from the return of Ethiopian chat and coffee exporters to the world market and the flows of international investment. There is hence a combination of diverse political and economic groups with a vested interest in political stability and the preservation of peace. It remains to be seen whether the benefit of economic growth, a functioning administration and social reconstruction outweigh the attractions of armed struggle, ethnicity and ethnic conflict. Based on these facts the Mai'so district conflict has to be analyzed

PART II

CASE STUDY: MAI'SO DISTRICT

III.   The Mai'so District Conflict in the Historical Context

Geographically the Mai'so district intersects the three regional states of Afar, Somali and Oromia. As a result, different climatic and ecological conditions provide in the ranges as physical barriers exerted considerable influence on cultural and socio-economic relations and interactions among the Afar, Somali and Oromo ethnic clusters. Historically the district/cluster was comprised of both the current Oromia- Meiso, Somali region Mai'so as well as some part of the Afar regional state. Nevertheless, the Mai'so clusters are characterized by manifest differences and sub-group identifications that reflect intricate linguistic, religious, historic and settlement patterns and interactions.

In relation to this, geographically the area is bisected by the Assebot Mountains. Similarly the mountain chains of Assebot not only divide the region in two areas, but also cut the way of life of the area as sedentary/agropastoral and nomadic/pastorals. In addition to the natural characteristics of the region, economically, the district is known to its very center for the strategically important main feeder highways. Both the Ethio-Djibouti railways and the main roads bypass through the district. And most of the dominant towns in the districts i.e. Mai'so, Assebot, Mulu, Bordede are basically established along side of the railway lines and stations.

As the purpose of the study, the Mai'so cluster/district is well known by its chronic drought, restrictions on pastoral movements and uncontrolled pastoral expansion, traditional conflicts. In fact, based on these factors as well as population increase due to high birth and uncontrolled influx of people, lack of good governance and failure of traditional system affected by high instability factors (MFA, 2004 Case study). Consequently, these factors are causes for instability and result in an increase of mistrust, hatred, and competition for political and economic resources, and they contribute for violent conflicts (Nicol, 2000:i).

 The Mai'so cluster (composition of both regions wereda structure), unlike other nearby districts, it is a melting pot for multi- ethnic composition. Dominantly, the cluster is inhabited by Oromo clans (Itu) and Somali clans (Issa, Hawiya), however there are also other Oromo clans, various ethnic groups like Amharas, Tigrians, Gurages and other minority groups are living in the urban areas.

According to local elders, historically, the first settlers in the area were the Afars, then the Oromo/Ittu and Nole clans, and then the Somali-Hawiya and Issa respectively. The settlement and subsequent high influx of the Issa Somalis and the displacement of the Afars from their areas were the first incidence, which could be witnessed as both negative and affirmative interactions and relations of the different clans.

Administratively during the emperor's time, the cluster was accountable to the then Adal and Gurgura Awraja (zone) of the Harerghe region (Markakis and Vaughan, 2005:100). The Military government has also adopted the pervious structure except for certain restructuring process in late 1980s. After the 17 years Guerrilla movement the EPRDF took power in the country in 1991. In the mean time Ethiopia has adopted new political structure of federalism. And the seizure of government by the EPRDF led guerrilla movement and its new and fresh orientations towards reforming the country. The untouchable unitary system that it was a taboo has got new impetuous to ethnic-regional based Federalism. The introduction of the new form of political structure in the nation resulted for the restructuring of the districts along the ethno-linguistic identity and consequently district classified in to the new federal regional states i.e. to Oromia and Somali regional states with out clear and known demarcations.

Despite the pre-1992 period, which there were traditionally manifested relations and conflicts, the post 1992 new structure and political atmosphere overwhelmingly affected the inter and intra ethnic relations and alliancesas a whole.

According to the new federal structures, the Oromia regional state Mai'so wereda embedded in the western Harerge Zone, and the wereda administration headquartered itself in Mai'so town. In fact the district structure established formally in 1994 after the end of the transitional period. Prior to the establishment of the formal district structure, the district as well as the cluster was predominantly under the autonomy of EPRDF- OPDO, OLF and to some extent to IGLF, IFLO forces and cadres.

In spite of the political rivalries among the Oromia/Oromos based political forces in the area. The political tactics followed by OLF were basically to strengthen its holding as Oromo territory in Mai'so and nearby districts by excluding and executing other non Oromo people mainly the local people Somalis.

OLF boycotted the Transitional Government Coalition (TGE) in 1993 and decided to go out for the armed struggle. However this measure taken by the OLF helped the EPRDF allied OPDO to strengthen its capacity and lastly to win the 1995 national election and establish its government in the district level.

On the other hand the Somali based Mai'so district includes areas like north of the Ethio-Djibouti railway line to the Somali region and to some extent to the Afar region nearby district. The district embedded in the Somali regional state of Shinile zone its center in Mai'so town as of the Oromia Mai'so did.

According to official documents of the region, principally the district recognized and demarcated as part of Somali regional state in 1996. But practically the district structure and official assignments had been undertaken by the Oromia

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regional state around 1997.In fact due to its location; the district long existed as periphery to the regional state. In this respect, the civil administration has limited presence and little capacity to deliver even minimal service. In fact the lack of proper system and organizational structure of the regional state by itself contribute more for the dysfunction of the district properly.

However, prior to the establishment of the district by the regional state, political parties like IGLF, DUP, and lastly, ESDL (was born by the merging of both parties) was to some extent active in the Somali inhabited areas and the urban areas of Mai'so, Bordade, Mulu and others, but with out having or establishing government district structures.

The clan distribution and composition of the Mai'so cluster particularly the chronically conflict prone areas represent more or less heterogonous population, but predominantly the Oromo clan (Itu) and Somali clans (Issa and Hawiya) are majority. Anthropologically, the Assebot mountain chain as well as the Ethio-Djibouti railway line gave a bottom line for the dividing point to the dominant Oromo and Somali clans.

Clan distribution and structure of the Oromia side Mai'so district is relatively even in its distribution and composition. But the Itus are majority in Bordede and to some extent in Mulu areas.

On the other hand, the Somali side Mai'so district has also the majority of Issa and Hawiya clans besides the presence of Gurgura, Ogaden, and Gedbursi clans in the area.

Historically, the Itu Oromo and the Hawiya Somali had common agreements and alliance. The presence of Hawiya in the area as a small group was protected and immuned by the Itus as a settler and close allies. After the adoption of new federalism based on ethno-regional states and the search for identity in the Hawiya side affect, the long lasting cooperation and alliance with Itu Oromo and forced them to see to the newly coined Somali regional state and shift their alliance to Issa side.

In addition, the historical relations between the overall Oromo clans and the Somali (mainly Issa and less to Hawiya) were marked by periodical traditional conflicts known as cattle rustling, raiding and mass thievery.

The Meiso cluster is distinguished to its pastoral, Farming and agro pastoral livelihoods. In addition, the passing of the main railroads and the railway stations have significant role in the economic aspects of the cluster and contributes more in urbanization.

Predominantly the Oromo inhabited areas known for its agrarian livelihood except the Itu's sub-clan Shenan, who practiced as pastoralists. On the other

hand, the Somali inhabited area featured dominantly as pastoralist livelihood. Equally trade and to some extent service sectors also have had momentous roles in the economic relation of the area.

Significantly trade and economic relations are mostly concentrated and limited in the urbanized areas. The diverse livelihood, historical animosities as well as political boundaries caused proactive barriers on the over all economic and social relations and interdependence.

IV.   The Nature and Development of the Conflict

4.1. The Conflict situation

Historically, according to te local officials except for certain traditional conflict between Somali-Issa and Oromo clans as well as central government backed campaigns against the Issa ambitious territorial claims and expansions, there was no exaggerated and recorded conflict in the pre-1991 period. In general the over all conflicts, animosities, competitions, between the clans of the Mai'so clusters are basically due to the following reasons: scarcity of resource, poverty, pastoral mobility in search of pastureland and water point, historical relations and animosity, government policies like the land to the tiller, the government's role in having relations with clans marginalization (Mkutu, 2001: iv) the Ethio-Somali relation and war, the marginalization of Issa and the new born sentiment of Greater Somalia, the independence of Djibouti gives confidence to Issa clan, the Ethio-Eritrean war limited the movement of the Afar community and gave chance to Issa use Djibouti as main trade route, the OLF syndrome, federalism and the newly structured regional states along ethno-regional base are some of the reasons .

Apart from this, the history of modern chronic conflicts dominantly characterized since the 1992 government change. In the study of the anatomy of conflict in the region, the nature, behaviors and trends of conflict vary from time to time based on the root and immediate causes. In the anatomical study of the conflict, its causes, actors and responses, there are three well-known and significantly dominant conflict incidents:

1. Transitional period

The period is known from 1990-1995, and is characterized by new waves of political changes, over all political instability, and clan conflicts. The coming up has both nationally and ethnically based political forces and their political motives as well as their competitions contribute to the instability of the nation and people to people relations. The EPRDF led TGE has exerted an effort to normalize and mobilize the national sentiment in alleviating existing problems. The failure of the

system, the political strategy and the ambition of certain ethnic based political forces in relation to the newly coined sense of identity and its sympathy to it directly and indirectly affected people to people and group relations through out the country.

As part of the country, after the fall of the Derg-military government, the Mai'so cluster was under control of small EPRDF forces and dominant OLF forces separately. During this period The EPRDF forces and structure were busy in forging government structures. However, prior to other forces the Oromo based OLF was active in the Mai'so cluster and nearby districts like Afdem in mobilizing local Oromo clan to pursue its strategy. Consequently after mobilizing the local clans and by stimulating historical incidents with the Somali clans, OLF started to claim these disputed areas exclusively as Oromo areas. This claim and threatening of local non-Oromo community to leave the area caused new type of conflicts, which are supported by well-organized political forces unrecognized before (Ahmed, 2004:109).

The Incident
The claim of OLF forces backed by local Oromo in the Mai'so and nearby districts, and the campaign undertaken to free the area from the non- Oromo community mainly from the Somali clans resulted in raid, mass killing and attack on the Somali in Afdem, Beki and Kora area. Somali armed men took revenge and killed Oromo community members in Mulu area.

The escalated situations and conflict forced both parties to mobilize their forces accordingly and the Somali armed group got a chance to forge Clan based political group called IGLF. The establishment of the IGLF by the Somali Issa changed the course of conflict in the area and since then the recurrent conflict had been between IGLF and OLF forces. Accordingly the conflict between these groups consequently forced OLF to flee from different areas including the district center Mai'so.

Causes of the conflict
Primarily, the territorial claim and expansionist policy of OLF, lack of controlling systems and rule of law from the ruling EPRDF administration, lack of good governance has been the main causes of the conflict. Other causes include: The historical animosity and unbalanced power competition among the clans, utilizing the newly coined ethic identity negatively.

Actors in the conflict
The actors in the conflic were clan-armed men (Issa, Afar and Oromo), Political forces OLF, IGLF, IFLO and later DUP. EPRDF, participated in the conflict as a neutral actor.

Outcomes

The conflict caused many fatal and non-fatal casualties on both side, forced displacements of civilians from their respective areas to clan-affiliated areas as of the Somalis fled to Mulu, the Oromos displaced to Beki and other nearby towns and areas. This Coined a new type of relation among the clans initiated by hatred, retaliation and competition, it also forged new alliances of Somali Issa and Hawiya instead of the long-established alliance between the Oromo Itu and the Somali Hawiya. In addition it resulted in the formation of new political forces like IGLF, moreover,it shifted historically known clan conflict to politically motivated and backed conflict. This could be the main departure point of the transformation of the conflict into a new era of vicious circle of conflict.

Responses
The EPRDF led TG and its force intervened in cooling down the conflict and returning the displaced community to their original places. At this point the TGE has no experience of conflict resolution and transformation but deploying and intervening with the armed forces.

2.   The Dimma 2000 incident

After the violent conflict in the transitional period, the area was in temporary relief and relative stability except the traditional and minimal conflicts initiated by cattle raiding and other pastoral conflicts.

The relative peace and stability in the area was due to the restructuring and establishments of local administrative networks and governmental functions. In spite of the formal structuring of district networks and its center in Mai'so town by Oromia region in 1992, similarly the Somali regional state also took courage to forge a parallel district centered in Mai'so in 1996. The forging of the parallel district and using Mai'so as a district center for both regions feared as a source of contention. Due to high governmental and local elder's consultations the tensions and fears are destined to halt for the time being.

Dima is a small village town between Assebot and Mai'so, and inhabited by Oromo clans as well as some Issa cattle herders in most of the rural areas. The area distinctively has favorable pastureland water points. The drought stricken Issa forced to fetch scarce resources in the Dima areas. The move of Issa herders to the pastureland and water points unfortunately motivated the Oromo clans to control the area evacuated by the Issa clans.

The Incident
The Ittu/Oromos who raided of 600 cattle and attacked an Issa herder started the incident. After wards the Issa retaliated by mobilizing their force attacking Dima and indiscriminately killed 47 people. The situation escalated to violent conflict.

Cause of the conflict

The causes of the conflict, this time were very much complicated, some how indefinable. But some of the causes seemed: drought, failure of traditional conflict management mechanisms and lack/scarcity of grazing land, animosity and hatred indoctrinated by local elites.

Actors

The actors of the conflict were some how similar to the previous transition period conflict actors. Both local clan armed men and respective local government actors in favor of their respective clans and regions participated in different forms.

Outcomes

As a result, the violent conflict between the two clans backed by their respective local administrative networks resulted: indiscriminate massacre of 47 people, loot of 600 cattle and under-stocked large families, high mobilization of youngsters and local armed men along side their clan, open route for high flow of illegal arms trafficking from different directions for the supply of the conflict, more or less the conflict and animosity transformed to administrative networks.

Response

The federal government agencies and both regional states actively responded in mitigating the conflict and move to normalize things. The Ministry of Federal Affairs in collaboration with the Defense force went a long way to ease the tension. The Federal Affairs ministry, defense force, local government structures, and regional states, with the local people and elders held serious and consecutive meeting to manage the problem. From this conflict the Federal government and other government bodies should have got a lesson. All in all the approach was too late and a "fire brigade approach" the same time it has never brought long lasting solution for the conflict.

3.   The 2003-2005 Bordede, Mulu and Mai'so incident

 A/ The Eve of the Referendum

Due to the quasi- efforts of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and reluctant attempt of the regional states to end up clan motivated conflict the post Dima incident was relatively calm and stable. However, the recent installation of Kebelle networks by the Somali regional state in Mai'so district forced Bordede to accommodate both the Oromia as well as the latecomer in the Somali regional kebelle structure.

The installation of parallel administrative structures (Weredas) and institutions in certain areas of the district molded both regions to stifle competition and mobilization to control the towns. Because of these over mobilizations and unnecessary competitions the federal government (Federation Council) vows to decide such pending and controversial issues by referendum.

In addition to this, mostly the Somali- Hawiya clan inhabits Bordede. The Bordede town as part of the urbanized area is composed of different ethnic groups and clans. However the establishment of custom point in the outskirt of the town along side the main high way gave the chance to the Somali Hawiya living around either to share the revenue or dismantle the custom point.

Nevertheless, the intention of the Somali Hawiya as well as the local cadres worsened the issue and increasing tension between the clans. Utilize this opportunity as a way to mobilize their clan forces and to move new settlers in the Bordede kebele for the preparation of the referendum. Similarly, the Oromia structure also mobilized their forces the same as the Somali structure did. Finally violent conflict erupted in 2003 at Bordede town.

Incidents

One can see that, how the two more or less same clans who were living together for a long time in peace developed animosity and hatred between each other. Somali-Hawiya armed men supported by local, zonal institutions and law enforcement forces attacked Bordede and killed 12 people from the Oromo clans. Consequently, the Oromo clans with the help of local networks, returnees, and demobilized soldiers attacked the local Somali community and killed some people the same time.

Causes of the conflict

The causes of the conflicts, we had so far seemed not more than pretexts. The following were the likely causes of the conflict: resource competition (revenue from the custom point) specially the Keto/Bordede Custom point Khat/Gatt revenue, territorial claims (referendum), lack of good governance and accountability, politicization of the conflict, the OLF syndrome and the Greater Somalia dreamers who were dismissed from regional state offices. And last but not least, the drought of 2002-3.

Actors of the conflict

The actors of the conflict were various, from different levels of government structure to the unemployed lampens, this time there were OLF sympathizers who were fueling the conflict on the Oromo side and the Greater Somalia dreamers who were fired from regional state offices were taking their own stake in the conflict. Besides, both Oromo Ittu and other clans; and Somali Hawiya armed clan men, local administrative networks, police, militia, clan elders, demobilized soldiers and returnees etc…

Out comes

The last recorded conflict in the area actually apart from the pervious conflicts and incidents has distinctive characters. In this matter extensive mobilization, type and number of weaponry and the extent of actors and the increased number of its casualities characterized the conflict. In the matter of fact, from both side people killed and wounded, many civilians displaced from their home, there is

high concentration of modern armaments, hostilities and animosity escalated, the actors of the conflict used modern and mass killing armaments like RPG, PKM, AK47, M14 and others.

B/ During and After the Referendum

The Oromia and the Somali regional states governments reached to agreements to resolve the boundary claims existed between them by referendum in March 2004. Based on the agreement signed the referendum has taken place in October 2004, in the 456 kebeles (the lowest level administrative units) except 3 kebeles in the Mai'so district and 4 kebeles in the Moyale district. The referendum did not bring solution; instead it intensifies the conflict and the violence into a full-fledged war. Accordingly, the following problems and challenges are identified as causes for the failure of the implementation of the Referendum result; lack of preparations for the referendum, disarmament was not respected, illegal campaign for the referendum, using relief aid as a means for campaigning, (in many of the cases even after the recent conflict) for example certain administrative elements were controlling and manipulating relief assistance. N.B. In that case relief assistance has become important in the political economy of conflict, new settlement in areas of conflicts, which has created new form of conflict, lack of facilitators/organization of supporting committees, deliberate acting of violence when the referendum taking place, lagging of the demarcation process, manipulation of certain places without vote, lack of cooperation from the regional and local administration bodies etc have been identified.

Sustainable violence was triggered in December 2004,in the Mai'so district and its environs after the referendum; violence has become the day-to-day activity. As a result of this people are displaced, massacred, injured, houses burnt, and residents of different areas are looted their properties and cattle and so on.

4.2. The Attempted Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Different Levels

Any attempt to assess the underlying causes and the potential resolutions of conflict within the cluster must also seek to address the wider regional dimension. Those areas (kebeles), which are found in the Mai'so district, though the referendum has been made according to the scheduled time framework, the conflicts, could not be de-escalated. Following all the conflicts frequent meetings were taking place and agreements are reached. But these did not bring peace and security to the people too.

Primarily, the second tier of the problem pertaining to the resolution of the dispute is no less vexing. The various mechanisms that were arranged to resolve the contention between the Oromos and the Somalis protagonists have aroused some degree of criticism. The criticisms emphasized on the lack of fairness, impartiality, and even on the legitimacy of the process and forces in resolving the

dispute. Particularly, the Somalis protagonists are not happy about the outcome of the resolution. Claiming that: the political forces in power on the side of the Somali Regional state were not capable enough to negotiate and protect the need and interest of the people. They are also raising question about the timing of the referendum since it has had lots of irregularities before and after the referendum. Moreover, this has invoked a practical test for the principle of self-determination that is unequivocally enshrined in the FDRE constitution, and rendered a scenario of inconclusiveness to the problem and the mechanism of its resolution in the near future.

Secondarily, the leadership on different levels of government structure has been identified as the sources of the problems. On the side of Somali regional state, they don't have any interest to accept the referendum result as it is. On the other hand on the side of Oromia Regional state they don't want to resolve the conflict in a peaceful way. Besides the area is the main route of contraband revenues. Which is the bone of contention between the local elites. It results the escalation of the conflicts rather than the de-escalation of it.

The Federal Government of Ethiopia has decided that this conflict can only be resolved only when the leadership of both regional governments, have to commit them selves by exerting efforts to end the conflict once and for all. The following plan was proposed based on this background.

Analysis of Findings

In view of intense political polarization and agitations by the contending protagonists at different levels, it became necessary to address and bring about a definitive resolution to the Mai'so Bordede border conflict. The following discussions examine contending perspectives and interpretations on the legal and political issues in the light of ongoing controversies.

Initially the conflict between the two groups was over pastureland, water and access routes; a purely pastoralist confrontation. However, they did not fight entirely on their own. Forces from outside and inside intervened to tilt the balance.

Currently, the issue of where the administrative boundaries between the two states should be drawn in these areas of mixed cultural, linguistic and ethnic affiliation, has resulted in boundary disputes between the two ethnic groups in addition to the resource conflict which already existed. Local tribal elites emerged on both sides and exacerbated the problem, bearing the name of boundary dispute, exploiting the fact that people have mixed cultural, linguistic, and ethnic affiliation. Hence, the boundary dispute and the manipulation of local elites further intensified the conflict over resource, and this in turn, complicated the boundary dispute between regions. These have resulted in causing conflicts

between different ethnic groups, in some cases leading to the outbreak of violence, killing and property damage.

The legal basis for the assertion of the boundary conflict heavily draws on the principle of self determination enshrined in the transitional period charter and later in the Federal constitution have been used as basic point of reference.

The Oromo/Ittu and the Somali/Issa conflict is the most serious ongoing dispute in the region, with ramification that go beyond the regional states of the respective national states and concern national security and consequently, the Federal Government. The conflict has a history of gradual intensification, and has proved intractable despite persistent efforts at various levels to resolve it. It is particularly complex for a number of reasons.
Firstly, it involves resources that are both local such as land and water, national, such as major transport routes, and regional, such as external trade, and custom points, Khat/Chat trade,
Secondly, direct responsibility for resolving it falls on the political leadership of the two regional states, both of which are of recent origin, limited legitimacy and credibility and little experience in the side of the Somali National Regional State.
Thirdly, the dispute cross-boarder linkages with neighboring Djibouti, Eritrea, Somaliland, Somalia complicate the issue

Sustained violence was triggered in December 2004, when the relocation of certain kebeles based on the result of the October 2004 referendum started to demarcate. Since then, the violence has claimed the district or cluster.

Conflict resolution efforts take place on three levels. One is the community level, where internal group conflict is managed traditionally with a well defined, respected, and therefore effective process of resolution through compensation. Consequently, community participation in the effort to resolve this fostering conflict has minimal.

Primary responsibility for resolving the conflict fell on the administration of both regional states. They came under increasing pressure from the federal government to end the violence and reach an agreement on the issues that divide them. This approach made little progress, other than to confirm both sides in their respective negotiating positions.

The Federal Government was then obliged to take the initiative. Historically, the state in Ethiopia kept a low profile in the pastoralist zone, leaving the people to manage their own affairs, and to settle disputes among themselves in a traditional manner.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The Federal Government policy for conflict management in inter-ethnic disputes relies on consultation, negotiation and persuasion. Having sidelined the traditional leadership that has emerged under its wing. It assigns the responsibility at first instance to the local political leadership and administrative authorities to contain and resolve conflict in their jurisdiction. It encourages the rival groups to form joint-committees, which are strengthening with the participation of military and security officials.

The expectation of the Federal Government in this area has not been fulfilled. The new political order it has sponsored is short on legitimacy and credibility and lacks experience. Moreover, it is only beginning to erect a structure that would meet adequately the administrative functions of government at every level, and until this task is completed traditional authority will continue to play an important role in local government. The federal government came to recognize this fact belatedly and to involve the Oromos and Somali Chiefs and elders in the effort to manage conflict.

Recommendations

The conflict resolution mechanism should be adjusted to deal with this problem. This would aim to strengthen the system of government in the pastoralist areas by incorporating into it traditional elements that are still functioning. The clan is still the cornerstone of pastoralist societies, yet the political system ignores it, reserve for the appointment of a few elders and chiefs as advisers to elected councils social and political life in the pastoralist world is ruled by kinship. Only in the political sphere is this principle not recognized. This disjunction is a handicap in governance.

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Abbreviations

DDO-   District Development Organization
DUP-   Democratic Unionist party
EPRDF-   Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESDL-   Ethiopian Somali Democratic League
FDRE-   Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
IFLO-   Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia
IGLF-   Issa Gurgura Liberation Front
Kebeles-   The Lowest Local Government in Ethiopia
OLF-   Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF-   Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO-   Oromo People's Democratic Organization
SPDP-   Somali People's Democratic Organization
TGE-   Transitional Government of Ethiopia

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Editorial

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