Along Ethiopia's Western Frontier: Gambella and Benishangul in Transition
Author(s): John Young
Source: *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 321-346
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/161849
Accessed: 13/11/2009 07:40



*The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37, 2 (1999), pp. 321–346
Printed in the United Kingdom 

# Along Ethiopia's western frontier: Gambella and Benishangul in transition

John Young

ABSTRACT

The lowland Ethiopian regions of Gambella and Benishangul, bordering Sudan, form a classic frontier zone. 'Modern' politics dates from the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, and has been shaped by developments on either side of the frontier, as well as by the complex relations among indigenous peoples, and between them and immigrants and officials from highland areas of Ethiopia. The implementation of the post-1991 Ethiopian government's programme of ethnic regionalism has intensified local rivalries, and regional governments remain weak, being highly dependent on professionals from highland Ethiopia. Education, transport links, and other indicators of development remain poor. None the less, local political power, in sharp contrast to earlier periods, has to an appreciable extent passed into the hands of indigenous leaders.

## INTRODUCTION

Attempts by generations of rulers of Ethiopia to centralise the state were reversed in 1991, with the coming to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which facilitated the independence of Eritrea, and has pursued an innovative programme of transferring authority to ethnic-based regional administrations (Young 1996, 1998). The rise to power of the Derg, or military regime, in the wake of the collapse of the imperial government of Haile-Selassie in 1974, had given renewed vigour to Eritrean separatists and spawned numerous liberation movements, the most enduring of which were ethnic based, and the most significant of which was the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) (Young, 1997). Rejecting secession, the TPLF stressed national self-determination for Ethiopia's oppressed minorities, and a devolution of state power. The EPRDF, which the TPLF has dominated since its establishment in 1989, has in turn pursued these policies. As a result, the EPRDF government granted

* Research Associate, Institute of Governance Studies, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada. Funding for this study was provided in part by the Canadian International Development Agency, Addis Ababa.

political recognition to ethnic communities, established a system of regional states, and even granted these states the right to independence under the 1994 constitution (Constitution of the FDRE 1994).

Nowhere, however, has the EPRDF's policy of establishing regional governments been more seriously challenged than in the underdeveloped and politically marginalised territories of Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz on Ethiopia's western frontier. Most of Ethiopia's peoples are settled peasants who inhabit the relatively developed highlands, and have long lived under the authority of regional or national governments. This has not been the case for the largely stateless peoples who live in the lowlands to the east and west of the highly populated central plateau, including the subject of this study, the regions of Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz.

Despite their historical importance as a frontier between highland Christian Ethiopia and lowland Moslem Sudan, and in this century as borderlands between contemporary states and bases for rival insurgent movements, Gambella and Benishangul have generally been ignored by governments, development agencies and political analysts. This study seeks to advance an understanding of the area in three ways: first, to bring to light revolutionary struggles in Gambella and Benishangul that are poorly understood, and yet form the backdrop to present political configurations and systems of administration; second, by examining the experience of these territories to contribute to the understanding of the on-going process of decentralisation in Ethiopia, a process instructive to other states in Africa suffering from its legacy of ethnic conflict; and lastly, to make a small addition to the growing literature on African borderlands (Fukui & Markakis 1994; Nugent & Asiwaju 1996). Given the rapidity of change in this area, it should be noted that this research involved a first visit to Gambella and Benishangul in July and August 1997, with a second visit to the regions in February 1998, and was followed up with interviews and library investigations.

## HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Gambella and Benishangul share adjacent lowlands along the Ethiopian border with Sudan, and their indigenous peoples are of Nilo-Saharan extraction. Both areas were known as slave reserves from Axumite times, and their peoples acquired the highland pejorative term of *shanqila*. More recently, Benishangul suffered at the hands of the Funj Sultanate (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries), and both it and

Gambella were nominally under the Turco-Egyptian empire, and were victims of the Mahdist state in the Sudan and of Emperor Menelik in Ethiopia. These legacies, an inhospitable climate and the geographical barriers posed by precipitous escarpments, did not favour development and occupation, and only brought outsiders to the area for short periods in search of slaves and ivory. One of these outsiders was Kassa Hailu, the future Emperor Tewodros, who raided the borderlands for slaves in the 1840s and 1850s (Crummey 1986:139). The quest for territory, however, intensified in the late nineteenth century with the 'scramble for Africa', in which Ethiopia under Menelik was a key player. After defeating the Italians at Adwa in 1896, and in the wake of the disarray in Mahdist Sudan, Emperor Menelik extended his authority over Benishangul and Gambella, setting the stage for a formal agreement in 1902 on borders with the British as the colonial power in the Sudan (Bahru Zewde 1991:83). Although this initiated a process of incorporation into Ethiopia, the border also provided opportunities (as to some extent it still does) for local inhabitants to move from side to side, and, until very recently, 'there was no great feeling of the permanence of allegiance once given' (Johnson 1986:241).

As part of the 1902 agreement, Britain was granted a commercial post inside Gambella on the navigable Baro River, which links the region with the White Nile and Khartoum. This in turn stimulated commercial penetration of the frontier, particularly the export of coffee from south-west Ethiopia, and of gold from Benishangul. It also fostered rivalries between the governors of highland areas adjacent to Gambella, and among indigenous rulers in Benishangul, over local control of the trade (Bahru Zewde 1991:97, 113, 125). In spite of these mercantile developments, central authority remained limited, and there was little attempt to develop Gambella and Benishangul and link them economically with the rest of Ethiopia. This was because of the limited capacity of the central state, the difficulties in building transport systems to and in such remote and inhospitable areas, and ultimately because such borderlands were not considered of great interest to the power holders in either Addis Ababa or Khartoum. Instead, slavery continued until at least the 1930s, and banditry has never been completely eliminated, particularly in the territory west of Lake Tana (Fernyhough 1986:154, 161).

The major indigenous communities of Gambella are the Anwak and Nuer, together with much smaller numbers of Majangir and Komo, and in recent years many highlanders, notably Amhara and Oromo,

have moved to the area. The Anwak are peasant farmers of maize and sorghum who settled in the territory in the nineteenth century, after military defeats by the Nuer forced them to move eastwards until they reached the escarpment and the resistance of adjacent Oromos. The Nuer are semi-pastoralists who graze their cattle in the Gambella plains in the dry season (approximately November to May), and move to lands along the Sobat River during Ethiopia's rainy season (June to October); in addition they engage in simple cultivation. The Nuer moved east in waves because of fighting with Dinka to the west, population pressures, and later to escape British taxation. Nuer society is clan based and decentralised, and with small surpluses, largely egalitarian. Headmen have little authority and act with the approval of their villages, serving principally as mediators who can readily be replaced, thus encouraging instability. Anwak society is somewhat more hierarchical, and agriculture figures more prominently. Cattle raiding, courage, fighting ability and autonomy, however, are valued by both communities, and as a result intra and inter-tribal conflict is common.

The absence of schools encouraged wealthier inhabitants of Gambella to send their sons to mission schools in southern Sudan, thus inculcating non-Orthodox Christianity (in an Ethiopia where Orthodoxy dominates) and the English language, traditions which continue today. According to the 1994 census, Gambella has 71,500 Protestants and 39,000 Orthodox followers, mostly highlanders (Central Statistical Agency (CSA) 1996a:45). The first government high school was not built in the territory until 1972, in the final days of the Haile-Selassie regime. Economic development did not seriously begin until the advent of the Derg in 1974. The Marxist imbued military built an infrastructure of clinics and schools, and brought in Russian technicians who started a number of water-works projects. Negatively, Gambella's communal cultures encouraged the regime to attempt to go straight to communism, and a number of revolutionary campaigns were conducted that ill-benefited local residents. Even the Derg, however, had to bring traditional elements – who alone had legitimacy – into the local government, and little progress was made in breaking down the autonomy of the indigenous peoples. According to one analyst, Ethiopian socialism 'had little resounding effect on the people of these regions who have kept on with their simple daily life as if nothing has changed' (Aleme Eshete 1978:114)

The pattern of underdevelopment and limited government was similar in Benishangul, but the mix of peoples was different. The largest

communities are the Moslem Berta and the mixed religion Gumuz, who together constitute almost half the population. In addition, there are smaller indigenous communities of Shinasha, Komo and Mao, as well as highlander populations of Amhara and Oromo. James Bruce described important trading relations in the 1770s between these people on the western frontier and the highland Agew. But a century later these generally benign relationships between highland and lowland people were being 'ruthlessly transformed into those of exploitation' because of pressures of taxation, tribute and long distance trade in precious metals, ivory and slaves (James 1986:120). In addition to Ethiopian expansion, the indigenous people also faced pressures from the Turco-Egyptian government which sanctioned slave raiding in the area.

Some indigenous people like the Gumuz were for a time to retreat into areas less accessible to the Ethiopian state. However, most local leaders reached agreements with their overlords, and were permitted to retain a measure of autonomy, at the price of acknowledging Ethiopian sovereignty and continuing to supply the imperial government with tribute, usually in the form of slaves and ivory. As a result, central administration was only lightly felt until relatively recently. Economic linkages were generally more developed with Sudan, where they were facilitated by cross-border cultural homogeneity and superior road and rail networks.

## THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

Opposition to the authoritarian rule of the Derg spread throughout Ethiopia by the late 1970s, and its attempts to dismember traditional institutions, centralise authority, develop alliances with particular ethnic communities and use Gambella and Benishangul as bases for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, all served to stimulate dissent in these frontier territories. However, opposition movements in these regions were generally weak politically and militarily, and slower to take form than elsewhere, while – given strong cross-border connections – Sudan played a crucial role in their emergence. In both regions, dissidents attempted to develop relations with more powerful movements, initially in Sudan, and then in Ethiopia – first with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and then ultimately and more successfully with the TPLF. Establishing relations with the TPLF not only served to increase their military and political capacity, but was also later to give them legitimacy in the post-Derg TPLF dominated government

that was formed by the EPRDF in 1991. It also meant that these regional parties were the principal beneficiaries of the subsequent decision to establish regional states.

In Gambella, educated Anwak first took the political initiative in 1979 by crossing the border and forming the Gambella People's Democratic Movement (GPDM). The longer residence of the Anwak in Ethiopia, and their more settled existence when compared to the Nuer, probably explains their earlier opposition to the Derg. Anwak reliance on peasant agriculture also made them more subject to the highly disruptive 'revolutionary' campaigns of the Derg than the Nuer, who developed closer links with the regime. The GPDM launched a guerrilla campaign, but was unable to mobilise more than a negligible portion of the population and never held any liberated lands. As a result, it appealed to the OLF which operated in the region for support, but the Front made assistance dependent upon the GPDM acknowledging their followers to be 'black Oromos', something the movement was not prepared to do.

Instead, the GPDM's weakness, and its growing recognition by the late 1980s that the TPLF was the leading opposition force against the Derg, led it to approach this northern-based movement for support. By 1989 the TPLF controlled Tigray, and was in the process of creating a coalition capable of defeating the Derg and forming a government. As a result, the TPLF was sympathetic to the appeal of the GPDM, once the movement dropped its demand for independence and brought its political orientation in line with the Front, which called for national self-determination. About 500–600 GPDM members received military and political training in Tigray, and attended the 1989 organisational conference of the EPRDF, but the organisation was not accepted for full membership, being relegated to the status of 'ally' (Abera Tesfaye 1998). When the EPRDF moved south in 1990/91, the Derg quickly evacuated Gambella, and EPRDF forces, accompanied by a small contingent from the GPDM, occupied the region.

On attaining power, the GPDM removed the predominately Nuer leadership that had dominated the province under the Derg, and settled old scores with its now weakened ethnic rival. This action in turn stimulated the Nuer to establish their own political party. Meetings were held in both Ethiopia and Upper Nile province, home of Sudan's Nuer, and the result was a political programme that provided the basis for the formation of the Gambella People's Democratic Unity Party (GPDUP) (Chual Pech 1997). The new party appealed to the EPRDF for recognition, which it received, and was

then permitted a minimal presence in the regional government, and later parity with the GPDM.

Dissidents in Benishangul also began to oppose the Derg in the towns by the late 1970s, but were quickly eliminated; the handful who survived fled to Khartoum, and began deliberations and a search for allies (Ibrahim Mohammed 1997). From the beginning, this opposition was dominated by the Berta, with small representation from the Gumuz and no participation by the other indigenous communities. With the assistance of the Sudanese, these dissidents established the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM). Like the GPDM, the BPLM first appealed to the OLF, but again its demand that the people of Benishangul declare themselves 'black Oromos' was not acceptable, and the animosity that developed between the two organisations was to have tragic consequences. The BPLM conducted small-scale guerrilla operations, but had little impact in the anti-Derg war. Instead, in 1988 the BPLM turned to the TPLF for support, which it received, but like the GPDM it was not granted full membership in the EPRDF.

As part of its effort to weaken the central government, expand the war and support the Ethiopian opposition to the Derg, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) moved far south of its usual field of operations, and captured Benishangul. It then turned over the territory to the OLF, which was assumed to have popular support and an ethnic affinity with the local people. That proved not to be the case, and in the event the OLF was only able to hold the territory for two months before the Derg re-took it. However, before the OLF retreated it burned down the newly constructed hospital in the capital Assosa, destroyed the town's only electricity generator, stole 1·8 million birr (about US$900,000) from the bank, most of which were deposits from peasant cooperatives, and took any valuable items it could carry. It also terrorised many of the non-Oromo population of the territory, and in one incident rounded up approximately 300 people, mostly Amhara peasants including women and children, and massacred them just outside Assosa, apparently in retaliation for earlier actions of a local Derg established militia against OLF suspects.[1]

In spite of this legacy, the EPRDF made the same mistake, and allowed the OLF to assume control in 1991, when Derg forces fled south evacuating the territory. The stage was then set for Benishangul's second war, as the OLF defeated the much smaller forces of the BPLM, who were not prepared to accept the hegemony of the Oromos in a region in which they constituted only 12 per cent of the population

(CSA 1996b:40). With the BPLM defeated and the EPRDF otherwise preoccupied with establishing a transitional government, the OLF began pursuing its own programme in Benishangul. This involved replacing Amharigna with Oromiffa in the schools and punishing those who spoke the language in the streets, terrorising Amhara and any who opposed them, and propagating the view that the inhabitants of Benishangul were black Oromos, while preparing the ground for an independent Oromia which would include Benishangul. In response, the indigenous population petitioned the EPRDF to intervene, leading to the region's third war in January 1992. The subsequent defeat of the OLF by the EPRDF army left the BPLM in a dominant position in the region.

## POST-1991 POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Government has always been a difficult proposition in Gambella and Benishangul. Until the Italian invasion of 1935, administration was limited to sending a few tribute gathering expeditions that were little different from raids. Isolation encouraged a hostile attitude to outsiders, and until very recently officials and police in Gambella were regularly attacked by inhabitants who resented attempts by government to impose laws, limit freedom of action, impose chiefs and introduce taxation (Shumet Sishagn 1986:140–1). Conversely, central governments were usually weak, could not attract competent civil servants to operate in these regions, and provided few desired services. Given this legacy of economic underdevelopment, and the absence of basic infrastructure even by the low standards of Ethiopia, the decentralised organisation of its indigenous societies, the absence of democratic traditions in the modern sense, and the limited and late emergence of opposition forces that could assume power, post-Derg regional governments were destined to be weak and unstable. In spite of this economic and political weakness, the EPRDF recognised that its own emphasis on national self-determination meant that local demands for autonomy could not be convincingly denied. Moreover, the fear of Oromo hegemony as a result of the actions of the OLF clearly figured in the subsequent decision to group the disparate peoples of Gambella and Benishangul under separate regional governments, rather than link them with the neighbouring Oromo regional government.

Unlike many areas in Ethiopia, the major conflicts in Gambella are not with external groups, but are internal, and the EPRDF's decision to establish the regional state served to intensify inter-ethnic tensions. Anwak animosity with the Nuer grew as ever larger numbers of Nuer

fled to the territory to escape the war in Sudan during the 1980s. Some of these refugees were readily integrated into the broader Ethiopian Nuer community, serving to shift the population balance increasingly in their favour. In addition, the UNHCR provision of education for refugees and those living adjacent to the camps largely benefited the Nuer and led to their advancement, further challenging Anwak dominance. Nowhere were these tensions greater than in Gambella town, which was divided into separate ethnic enclaves. The Anwak typically viewed the town as their community, and the Nuer as interlopers and Sudanese; indeed, the area of the town inhabited by the Nuer continues to be known as 'New Lands'. Violent conflicts have broken out between the two ethnic communities, in which education and jobs have usually been the points at issue.

In spite of these tensions, the ethnic-based political parties agreed on a formula by which the eleven positions on the executive council of the regional government were divided evenly, with the Anwak and Nuer each holding five positions and one held by a member of the third largest indigenous community, the Majangir, whose population numbered 9,400 (CSA 1996a:32). In the 1998 government an Anwak holds the position of chairmanship, the vice-chair is held by a Nuer and the secretary is from the Majangir. The other representatives are elected at large, supposedly based on their proportion of the population, but according to the 1994 census the Nuer numbered 64,473, while the Anwak totalled 44,581 (CSA 1996a:32). Population figures are a matter of considerable dispute, and both leading communities claim their numbers were seriously underestimated in the recent census.

Given this background, it is not surprising that party politics in the post-1991 period has been tumultuous. The first regional chairman, an Anwak, was killed by disgruntled constituents, the first Nuer party chairman is currently in prison, while his successor was deemed unsuitable to hold office in the regional government because he was illiterate. Evidence of the weakness of the parties can be seen in their inability to control elements within their own communities intent on stirring up hatred, or manipulating ethnic animosity for political advantage. The decision to merge the two major and one minor parties that make up the government into a single party is unlikely to overcome these problems or increase stability.

Party weakness is reflected in increasing corruption. The major form of corruption has its origins in arrangements made between bureau or department heads and contractors, all of whom come from the highlands, and therefore those bureaux that oversee the most

construction projects are also the most financially rewarding. Given the level of underdevelopment in Gambella and the desire of the EPRDF to reward its political allies, a considerable amount of central government money has flowed to the region, most of it into the state sector. Indeed, with few revenue sources and a low level of commercialisation, almost all the financing for construction and state supported development comes from the central government. Other forms of corruption include the hiring of relatives and accepting bribes to acquire government housing.

The local police are the first line of defence against corruption, but they are not immune from ethnic and clan loyalties, and have had to be reinforced on occasion with outside forces. The regional judicial system is in turn very weak; the inherited system disintegrated with the collapse of the Derg, and the EPRDF has been reluctant to employ judges from the previous regime. As a result, throughout Ethiopia suitable local officials were given 4–5 months legal training and appointed as judges. In Gambella, with its limited population of educated people, many of those appointed had not completed high school. Presently, a number of Gambella students are taking a three-year law course at the Civil Service College in Addis Ababa. Judges have also been dismissed for corruption, though a senior member of the judiciary reported that some of these dismissals have been for political reasons. The regional prosecutor's office has in turn been criticised for not being sufficiently vigorous in pursuing corruption cases, which usually only come to light after politicians leave (or are forced out of) office. Another line of defence against corruption is the auditor general's office, and this is making progress, but like other such offices in Ethiopia it faces serious competition from the private sector for skilled personnel, and it is new and largely untested in the region since it only began auditing bureaux for the first time in 1997 (Omot Gilo 1998).

However, the EPRDF's preferred method of dealing with corruption and maladministration (as well as eliminating political enemies) is through evaluation sessions, or *gim gima*, which take the form of 'peace and development' conferences, and are widely attended and given publicity in the official media. Such a conference was held in Gambella for thirteen days in August 1997, when the regional government was severely criticised for its poor performance, inadequate utilisation of resources, failures in development and corruption (*The Ethiopian Herald* 12–14 August 1997). As a result, the chairman and vice-chairman of the region, both of whom were party leaders, were dismissed and jailed,

as were two bureau heads and other officials. Resolutions were passed condemning officials who pursue 'private interests, practice narrow tribalism [and] abuse power and violate human rights' and similar conferences at zonal and woreda levels were called for (*The Ethiopian Herald* 23 August 1997).

Development has also been hindered by the destabilising impact and legacy of the various wars that plagued the area in the 1970s and 1980s. Sudanese government assistance to Ethiopian rebels was reciprocated with Derg support for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, allowing it to operate during the 1980s from bases in Ethiopia, most of which were in Gambella. Initially the indigenous peoples of the region welcomed the SPLM, because of their ethnic and religious affinities and shared opposition to the Arab and Moslem-based government of Sudan. However, along with the SPLM came a large influx of southern Sudanese (in the 1980s Gambella's Itang refugee camp was the largest in the world) which the local administration and limited infrastructure were ill-equipped to cope with. Moreover, the presence of the SPLM and refugees brought political instability and ended most cross-border trade, including the Baro river linkage. Today most people complain bitterly of the SPLM's lawless behaviour, destruction of wildlife, theft of cattle, rape of women and destruction of forests.

The EPRDF's poor relations with the SPLM developed during the course of their respective struggles, when they were supported by opposing governments. During the final stages of the war the NIF provided support for the EPRDF which in turn made clear its intention to establish good relations with the Sudanese government. Johnson (1996:175) argues that the EPRDF's closeness to the NIF led the SPLA to fear for the safety of the refugees at Itang camp as the Front's forces approached Gambella, and to lead them back to Sudan; however, he acknowledges that most analysts attribute the move to the SPLA's need to attract food resources from international relief agencies. As a result, the EPRDF army forced the SPLM to leave the region, and it was followed by hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees. The EPRDF then invited the Sudan government to reactivate the Baro river trade. The loss of bases, military support and a radio station in turn helped precipitate a crisis in the SPLM which brought about the formation of a number of dissident groups. The most significant groups for Gambella are the Southern Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) of Riek Machar, a Nuer, who is currently aligned with the government in Khartoum, and the much smaller SPLM United, also largely Nuer based, both of which operate immediately across the

border. Although Nuer intellectuals in Gambella are sometimes critical of the SSIM, most ordinary Nuer have supported the movement and oppose the SPLM. In late 1998 there were indications this was changing, due to the unhappiness of Nuer chiefs in Sudan who were disenchanted at receiving few or no benefits from the internal peace agreement; as a result there were reports of them deserting Riek.

In any case, circumstances radically changed in 1995, after the Ethiopian government charged Sudan with involvement in an attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Mubarak in Addis Ababa. This led to the Sudanese embassy being down-graded, and to the expulsion of Sudanese Islamic NGOs. Most significantly for Gambella, the Sudanese consulate in the region, which was intended to activate the Baro river trade, was closed, and the EPRDF and the SPLM resumed relations. Ethiopia, along with Eritrea and Uganda, subsequently received finance from the US for protection against Sudanese Islamists, and it is believed that some of this money was given to the SPLM. The EPRDF was none the less confronted with a dilemma, since the SPLM, given its past record, was not readily accepted by the people of Gambella.

As a result, although the SPLM was given semi-diplomatic status in Ethiopia, and permitted to carry out logistical operations, its members in Gambella were limited (according to various sources, including the SPLM, they numbered about twenty at the time of my visits to the region in July 1997 and February 1998), it was not allowed to operate militarily within Ethiopian territory, and it was clearly warned that the lawless behaviour of the past would not be permitted. While no complaints are now heard about the behaviour of SPLM personnel, the border area is highly unstable and awash with arms. In November 1998, the SPLA was ordered out of Gambella as part of an agreement between Addis Ababa and Khartoum that was meant to improve relations between the two countries, in the wake of the outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea earlier in the year.

The refugee situation remains in flux, reflecting conditions of both famine and war in southern Sudan. Early in 1998 concerns were expressed that a successful SPLA attack on Juba could produce a massive movement of refugees, but in November 1998 Sudanese government victories in eastern Equatoria reduced that prospect. As well as the war in southern Sudan, there is a continuing problem with clan fighting between Nuer, and SSIM attempts to mobilise Ethiopian Nuer which have involved kidnapping young men for their army and taking them across the border. The EPRDF army frequently suffers

from this violence, and has withdrawn from a number of isolated outposts, contending that the Nuer should settle their own problems. While the situation along the border remains very dangerous and subject to rapid changes, most of the rest of the region is peaceful.

Similar patterns of post-1991 political development can be discerned in Benishangul. BPLM support derived almost entirely from the minority Berta people, and as a result other indigenous communities began to establish their own parties and to make demands, which could not legitimately be denied, for a role in government. However, unlike Gambella, the major conflicts in Benishangul have taken place within the dominant party. From its inception, the BPLM has been based on an uneasy coalition of contending factions, in part due to competition over access to the rewards of office, but in part to ideological factors which have intruded because of efforts by Sudan's post-1989 National Islamic Front (NIF) government to influence the region's politics and administration. Along its entire border with Ethiopia, it was only in Benishangul that Sudan could seek to mobilise a substantial number of Moslems (CSA 1996b:57).

Thus one faction of the BPLM fell under the influence of the NIF, which supplied it with arms, training and bases, and facilitated the entry of Islamist elements into the regional government. Sudan's Radio Omdurman broadcast appeals to Islamic fundamentalism, Islamists used mosques and Koranic schools in Benishangul to preach their message, and the border Moslem population was encouraged to enter schools in Sudan where religious education was under the control of Islamists. The Sudanese faction within the BPLM demanded Benishangul national self-determination, which was interpreted by the EPRDF as being independence as a prelude to union with Sudan. A *jihad* was declared, and the party began military operations against government infrastructure, military outposts and resident highlanders.

As in Gambella, conditions markedly changed in 1995, when Ethiopia charged the Sudanese government with involvement in the attempt on Mubarak's life, and with supporting Benishangul Islamists. The Sudanese connection with the regional government was ended and seventy-seven civil servants were dismissed for 'anti-peace and anti-development' activities, a phrase assumed to cover pro-Sudanese and OLF elements, as well as corruption. Among those accused of being Sudanese agents and dismissed were the vice-chairman of the region, the education bureau head, the Ethiopian ambassador to Yemen, Yussuf Hammed Nasser, who was from Benishangul, and other lower ranking officials.

As noted above, deteriorating relations with Sudan set the stage for the EPRDF government to develop ties with the SPLM, but before the movement was permitted to establish bases in Benishangul, highly sceptical residents, particularly those along the border, had to be assured that the movement would be better disciplined than in the past. This was assured, and in addition it was promised that the Ethiopian army would guarantee the security of local residents if the movement's presence led to Sudanese army attacks. In February 1998 local residents told me that EPRDF officials assured them they had nothing to fear from the Sudanese army, because the NIF regime could not withstand the alliance of the governments of Eritrea, Uganda and Ethiopia which opposed it. In the event, the SPLM proved itself well disciplined, and to date there have been no Sudanese army incursions. More significantly, terrorist attacks emanating from Sudan ended at the beginning of 1997, when the SPLM captured a swathe of territory along the border from Kurmuk to Gissan which had served as a base area for the BPLM. At the time of writing, this force under Commander Malik Agar was operating south of the Blue Nile, and a new liberation movement, the Sudan Alliance Forces (SAF), was operating along the north shore of the Blue Nile and parallel to Ethiopia's Benishangul border. The headquarters of the SAF is in Asmara, but it uses facilities in Bahir Dar for logistical purposes and the transport of personnel to its base in Menza, just inside the Sudan border (Abdel Aziz Khalid 1998). Almost certainly, this operation will have been negatively effected by the Ethiopian–Eritrean border closure, and the improving relations between Ethiopia and Sudan.

The legacy of violence in Benishangul remains a serious impediment to development. In addition, political instability, a limited resource base or inability to use it effectively because of a lack of skilled personnel, and a high degree of corruption, have plagued the regional administration. As noted, the major political force in the territory, the BPLM, divided into three factions, one of which has been discredited because of its association with Sudanese Islamists. Of the four chairmen of the region who have held power since 1991, two are currently in prison (Attom Mustapha and Abdu Mohammed Ali), and one lived in 'exile' in Addis Ababa after his life was threatened by Islamists, only returning to the region at the beginning of 1998 (Ateyeb Mohammed). The present chairman (Yaregal Aysheshm) has held office for the past three years and is providing badly needed stability.

Politicians in Benishangul developed a formula similar to that of Gambella for sharing power. The regional executive has thirteen

positions, of which the lion's share are held by the Gumuz and Berta, with the chairmanship and vice-chair respectively; five other executive positions are held by the Gumuz and four by the Berta. The Shinasha, who with 32,000 people constitute the third largest indigenous community (CSA 1996b:40), are led by the Boro Shinasha People's Democratic Movement, which was granted the position of secretary; the relatively tiny communities of Mao and Komo together were given a seat for the Mao-Komo People's Democratic Organization, and the mixed largely Amhara and Oromo population of Metekel zone hold a position in the name of the EPRDF. There are no women on the council.

Two surprising facts emerge from this distribution of seats: first, the Gumuz with 107,500 people (CSA 1996b:40) hold more seats than the Berta with 116,000, including that of the chairman. This is partly explained by the fact that representation on the regional council was not strictly by population, but by the election of three representatives from each of the nineteen woredas. Second, the region has 102,000 Amhara and 59,000 Oromo, amounting to 26 per cent of its population (CSA 1996b:40), but because of provisions in Ethiopia's electoral laws which require that those running for office must speak one of the indigenous languages of the region, they are seriously under-represented in the executive, the council and the federal parliament. This provision was apparently considered necessary to protect the interests of Ethiopia's long-suffering indigenous peoples, but it produces resentment among resident highlanders.

The regional government started out with one party, the BPLM, which then uneasily absorbed representatives from other ethnic communities. This fostered instability and intra-party fighting, which led to the emergence of separate ethnic-based parties. These parties then came together to form a fractious coalition government, but after the Mubarak assassination attempt they became even more divided. The regional government announced – as in Gambella, suggesting that the EPRDF was behind the policy – that the various ethnic-based parties would again come under the roof of one party, and in early 1998 that had been accomplished. However, there is no reason to think that such a party will be any more manageable than the multiparty coalition that previously formed the government. As well as political divisions, Benishangul has also suffered ethnic conflict, notably between 'reds' (Amhara, Shinasha, and Oromo) and 'blacks' (the Gumuz). In the past, battles have taken place between the Gumuz and Amhara in Metekel, and between the Gumuz and Oromo in the south. In the

Gumuz populated Kamashi zone, local respondents told me that Oromos were taking slaves until 1993 and that students had to carry weapons to school to defend themselves. Since then conditions have reportedly much improved and most of the population has been disarmed.

While corruption may well provide the cement that holds faction-ridden governments together, the region can ill-afford the loss of public resources. Whole complexes of partially completed government buildings can be seen in Assosa, testimony to corrupt relations between politicians and contractors. Hiring relatives is also a major form of the misuse of public resources. Indicative of the scale of the problem, during a peace and development conference held in Assosa in June 1996, the then deputy prime minister, Tamrat Layne, dismissed the entire regional government and had many of its members imprisoned for corruption. This stimulated change, and two months after the conference the BPLM acquired a new leadership, took an overtly secular stance, and re-named itself the Ethiopian Berta Democratic Organization. In the past year there would appear to be a decline in corruption, which may be attributed to the greater stability of the government of Yaragel Aysheshm, the growing importance of the regional auditor general's office, but probably most significantly to the continuing pressures of *gim gima* sessions (Fikru Jeldessa 1998).

## PROSPECTS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hope for the future of Gambella and Benishangul lies in the fact that both have large land bases and small populations: Gambella has fewer than 200,000 people and Benishangul has fewer than 500,000, according to the 1994 census (CSA 1996a, 1996b). Thus neither region is faced with the struggles over access to land which figure so prominently in the highlands. With fertile soils, generally plentiful rainfall and sufficient land, subsistence and commercial production could be substantially increased in both regions. The EPRDF's consolidation of power has also provided greater security in the traditionally tumultuous frontier areas of Gambella and Benishangul. However, neither region is meeting its potential in either agricultural production or industrial development, and again political factors seem to be the major obstacle.

At present, Gambella is a food deficit area, whose inhabitants are largely dependent on a diet of maize with little protein or vegetables.

There are opportunities for expansion of cattle raising in non-tsetse areas. Potential for mining exists, and gold is being extracted using traditional methods, but at present there are no companies operating in the area (Gatewech Pal 1997). The territory is rich in water resources, and a dam started by the Russians has recently been completed at Abobo, which should provide irrigation for 100,000 hectares of land if the necessary infrastructure is built. Gambella's population places a high value on education, although among 117,000 adults, only 34,300 are literate, very few of them women (CSA 1996a:83). The very limited number of educated indigenous people means that most support and professional staff in Gambella are local Amhara and Oromo, whose combined population amounts to 23,000 (CSA 1996a:32). While plans are afoot to introduce indigenous languages into some of the elementary schools, at present all instruction is carried out in Amharigna, which is also the language of administration.

The EPRDF is making major efforts to educate regional officials and improve skill levels. Some twenty students from Gambella (all from indigenous communities) are attending the Civil Service College in Addis Ababa. While in more politically developed parts of Ethiopia selection for the college is largely based on the political affiliations of the candidates (i.e. most are EPRDF cadres), in underdeveloped Gambella selection appears to be based on either merit or nepotism. A public administration institute was established in late 1997, and is providing instruction for local officials. While the EPRDF hope that education will significantly reduce the current levels of corruption seems unduly optimistic, raising educational standards should increase the effectiveness of administration and – particularly when directed at indigenous people – begin the process of reducing the wide gap in skills between them and the highlanders who at present virtually monopolise professional and skilled positions in the region.

However, education cannot alter the fact that Gambella has a difficult climate, the region is malaria-ridden, infrastructure is minimal, and it is a long way from potential markets in either the Ethiopian core or Sudan. The Nuer earn money from the sale of their cattle, but typically this is not reinvested, but is instead used to buy guns, pay dowries for wives, and then start farms. Although as pastoralists they are considered wealthy, cattle numbers are low given the potential of the area. Neither the Nuer nor the Anwak are production oriented: what is produced on property that is held in common is shared and consumed. Private investment is limited because highlanders fear

possible confiscation of their property by indigenously controlled regional governments, and assume that they will not be able to re-coup their capital outlays in future sales; as a result they repatriate their profits to Addis Ababa or elsewhere.

Benishangul's economy is more diversified than that of Gambella, but less developed. Officially 83 per cent of the Benishangul's budget comes from the federal government, and almost no taxes are collected from indigenous cultivators (Mesfin Bekele 1997). Officials argue that 'local people do not have a tradition of paying taxes', but it is more likely that successive weak governments either did not have the capacity to collect taxes, or did not want to jeopardise their limited authority by imposing taxes on a population long used to a measure of autonomy. In any case, apart from relatively affluent urban dwellers, most of Benishangul's people are desperately poor and taxes would have to be set at very low levels. The region has no modern industries, mines, commercial farms, insurance companies or paved roads; it has one small government bank, two petrol stations and only a handful of NGOs. Of an adult population of 370,000, fewer than 56,000 are literate, and the 1994 census reported that Benishangul had 167 professionals, only two more than Gambella with less than half its population (CSA 1996b: 100, 138). Remarkably, however, according to the president of the region, in the last half of 1997 more than 225 professionals were hired, thus dramatically increasing the capacity of the regional administration (Yaregol Aysheshm 1998). The region's ability to attract professionals is due to the improved security situation, the fact that Amharigna is the language of government – permitting the employment of skilled personnel from across Ethiopia – and the declining employment prospects of recent university graduates in preferred areas of the country.

Administrative capacity has further benefited from the regional government's policy of looking outside the region for bureau heads when suitable local candidates cannot be found. Approximately half of Benishangul's bureau heads are outsiders (Atekilti Gebre-Miden 1998). This policy was introduced in 1996, after wide-ranging assessments convinced the government that inexperienced indigenous bureau heads were not up to the task and development goals were not being met. While indigenous people are favoured in public service appointments, promotions and educational opportunities, only 17 out of 225 recently appointed professionals are indigenous (Atekilti Gebre-Miden 1998).

The biggest potential areas for economic development lie in agriculture, mining and irrigation and electricity. Benishangul is

currently self-sufficient in food, and has the ability to send oil seeds and honey to the highlands and – given peaceful conditions – the more accessible centres in the Sudan. The region exported coffee (from the highlands, although it can be grown in Benishangul), bamboo and maize to Sudan until the breakdown in relations. In the short run the regional administration is focusing on increasing peasant production through the provision of extension services, subsidised fertilisers and credit, all nation-wide EPRDF programmes. Extension services need skilled labour which is a major limitation in every sphere of Benishangul. The central government's programme to subsidise fertilisers is gaining popularity, but is being withdrawn before backward regions like Benishangul have had the opportunity to utilise it fully. Local peasants appear to be wary of entering credit schemes, and in any case few such schemes operate much beyond subsistence level.

A serious deforestation problem is emerging, caused by large numbers of Sudanese refugees in the province, and, more significantly, by increasing domestic demands as a result of high population growth in a savanna zone with limited wood fibre (Amanuel Yonnas 1997). Local officials are calling for a major reforestation programme, and the use of alternative energy sources, but the lack of human and financial resources make this unlikely at present. Cattle raising is severely restricted by the prevalence of tsetse fly, although this does not affect goats and sheep. Again, the lack of market outlets, which would logically be in neighbouring Sudan, limit prospects for commercial production. Agriculture can be distinguished between that carried out by indigenous peoples and 'settlers', most of whom are Amhara from Wollo province who were forcibly moved to the region during the 1984–5 famine, together with Oromos who migrated to the area because of the availability of land. The latter communities have a higher amount of capital, use highland technology, including the plough, and are invariably more affluent. Gum tapping employs about 1,000 workers on a seasonal basis in the Kurmuk area and a smaller number in Metekel.

Mining, primarily gold and to a lesser extent marble and granite, has considerable potential. Gold has been mined in the region for centuries, mostly in the Assosa and Metekel areas, using traditional placer methods. Officials estimate that 55,000–65,000 people are involved in this production, of whom about 65 per cent are women, although their husbands and fathers control the earnings (Amanuel Yonnas 1997). Mining is carried on throughout the year, but because of the need for

water it is concentrated in the rainy season. Until recently much (although how much is unknown) of the gold was exported to Sudan; a small amount is sold on the local market and the rest is purchased by traders who take it to Addis Ababa where it is purchased by jewellers. There are a small number of indigenous (Berta) goldsmiths, but their activities are limited to melting down gold dust and nuggets to form simply made rings.

All of the gold mining is illegal, but neither the regional or national governments have the means to control it, and as a result it is carried on openly and not taxed. The regional government would like to improve the miners' working conditions and ensure they are fairly compensated, and there are plans to begin an integrated programme that will focus specifically on women. However, the technically illegal nature of the activity, the wide area over which it is being carried out and the limited resources of the government, lead to pessimism about the outcome of such efforts. While government revenues are unlikely to be soon, if ever, forthcoming from traditional mining, large foreign mining companies, notably Golden Star and St Genevieve, did carry out studies in the region. However, companies are restricted to mining ore at levels below ground that would not interfere with the activities of the placer miners. This could be very rewarding for both the regional and national governments, which share the distribution of such revenues. Unfortunately both of these companies left the region in the final months of 1997, one of them – Golden Star – amid charges by the regional government that it had been infiltrated by the OLF (Yaregol Aysheshm 1998).

Water resources also offer prospects for the future, since a number of rivers flow through Benishangul, including the Blue Nile and some of its tributaries. Metekel zone in the north-east of the region is immediately below Lake Tana and could readily serve as a source for down-stream irrigation. Indeed, an Italian project was started in this area under the Derg, but it proved politically controversial and was shut down, never to be resumed, after a number of the project's technicians were kidnapped by the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party during the war. While small projects such as micro-dams are being planned, no large-scale projects appear under consideration, at least publicly. Again the drawbacks to such projects are the lack of capital, the absence of skilled personnel and potential political insecurity in the region. The first two obstacles could be overcome with international support, but such assistance elsewhere in the country is being withheld because of Egyptian concerns about the loss of

downstream water. The objections of Egypt, both because of its economic clout and the weight it carries politically through its importance in the Middle East and its ties with the US, are closely listened to by the IMF and international lending agencies, much to the annoyance of the Ethiopians. Thus there are almost certainly plans for utilising Benishangul's rivers, but the projects lie in the future and will not be publicly discussed because of predicable Egyptian complaints.

A major obstacle to development is the low educational attainment at every level from the political leadership through to the administrative staff, and down to the general population. Few indigenous people have acquired an education, and this is proving to be a major impediment to economic progress. Unless this is overcome, it will become a cause of political tension as highlanders continue to assume professional and skilled positions in the region. Even unskilled labour is in short supply, despite the large numbers of Oromos who have moved to the area in recent years, and the relatively high wage levels of 8–10 birr (US$1.20) a day.

Low educational levels are first a reflection of the poverty of the region's peasants, who see few benefits from sending their children to school, while recognising the costs of losing family members who supply farm labour. Second, most of the indigenous people are Moslems, a community historically discriminated against in Christian dominated Ethiopia; and, as elsewhere in the country, Moslem parents fear that sending their children to government schools might lead to them being converted. Third, conservative Moslems do not place a high value on educating their daughters (only 25 per cent of children attending elementary schools are girls) and fear for their public exposure (Enyew 1997). Lastly, it has been difficult to attract qualified teachers, there are few schools and these are in isolated areas which until recently have been subject to terrorist attacks.

As a result, few indigenous children proceed as far as high school: of 300 students attending Assosa's high school only 20 were indigenous, mostly Berta, and only 3 of these were girls. There are no post-secondary educational institutions in the region, although there are plans to establish a Teacher Training Institute. However, the picture is mixed: the relatively small Shinasha community generally has high educational levels; the Gumuz, who still largely practise shifting cultivation, have very low levels. Despite their low educational levels, the Gumuz have shown a strong interest in development. In Kamashi zone, for example, government officials and traditional leaders mobilised local people to provide voluntary labour, building supplies

and salary supplements for teachers in their desire for education for their children (president of Kamachi Zone 1998).

The regional government is taking up the problem of skill shortages in a number of areas: first, by building more schools and attempting to attract qualified teachers; second, by starting a programme of supplying female students with clothes to attend school, and overcome objections of Moslems concerned about the modesty of their daughters, while at the same time providing a material incentive for sending them to school; and lastly, by confronting skill shortages in the public sector by means of short courses, seminars, the start of a distance education programme and sending employees from indigenous communities to the Civil Service College in Addis Ababa. As in other regions in Ethiopia, a public administration institute has been opened to train local officials. The language of instruction in elementary schools remains Amharigna because of the cost and difficulty of training teachers and translating textbooks into the large number of indigenous languages. But in time the region can expect to follow the pattern elsewhere in Ethiopia of elementary schooling in indigenous languages, and English in the high schools. Arabic is not being taught in schools, because although it is widely used in the region, it is not an indigenous language. Unfortunately, it is precisely the lack of education in Arabic that has long encouraged Moslem parents to send their children to schools in Sudan.

Lastly, transportation and communications remain major obstacles to development. Benishangul is bisected by the Abai (Blue Nile) river, over which there is no bridge. As a result, the road link between the regional capital of Assosa and the Metekel zone capital of Pawe must pass through Wallega and Gojjam, a distance of 1,250 km, against 180 km if there was a bridge over the Abai. Travel within zones varies, but is often poor and subject to seasonal disruption.

## CONCLUSION

While it is sometimes held by critics that Ethiopia's regional governments are mere puppets of the EPRDF, this is not reflected in the constitution which grants extensive rights to the regions. In practice, the EPRDF apears to be generally true to its stated commitment to national self-determination, and gives local decision-makers a free hand in *most* spheres and in *most* regions. However, the low level of political development in Gambella and Benishangul means that the EPRDF plays a greater role in local administration in these

regions (together with the Afar and Somali regions) than in other parts of the country. EPRDF representatives to Gambella and Benishangul (both of whom are currently from the TPLF) operate out of the Prime Minister's Office, and are officially considered 'advisors', but it is acknowledged that they participate in regional council meetings, reconcile differences between coalition parties in government, and conduct the crucial *gim gima* sessions (Thomas Kiru 1998). Almost certainly, they and other EPRDF cadres are involved in developing the political positions of the government, reviewing appointments and dismissals, and working with the federal ministries of defence and foreign affairs in matters of external security. Nonetheless, the day-to-day affairs of government remain in the hands of local politicians.

Ultimately any assessment of the future prospects of Gambella and Benishangul must begin with their historical legacy of isolation, victimisation and underdevelopment. In the past, administration has been limited, badly conceived, pursued with minimal resources and incompetent personnel and provided few services that met the needs of the indigenous peoples. These conditions fostered distrust between indigenous people and outsiders, reinforced demands for autonomy and led to resistance to modernisation that challenged traditional institutions and ways of life. The EPRDF programme of national self-determination responds to local desires for autonomy, but assumes that the disparate communities and interests in society can come together to effectively administer themselves.

Thus far Gambella and Benishangul have not met these hopes. Given the weakness of the private sector and the country's limited infrastructure, the EPRDF has looked to the central and regional states to serve as the principal agents of modernisation and development. But as the power and finances of the regional states grow, they are increasingly becoming the focal points where the contradictions, largely between competing ethnic groups, economic interests, and between a rising middle class and traditional groups, are fought out. A society with liberal democratic traditions can survive and even thrive in such an environment. Highland Ethiopia has no such traditions, but it does have – in Tigray and Amhara regions and to a much lesser extent in Oromo and the southern regions – ruling parties with the capacity to discipline their members, contain corruption and oversee development programmes. The lowland regional states have neither democratic traditions, nor disciplined ruling parties capable of arbitrating interest disputes. Moreover, given few opportunities for self-aggrandisement in their tiny and highlander-controlled private sectors,

the lowland regional states face far greater demands and strains than their counterparts in the highlands.

While the weakness of the lowland regional states (including the Afar and Somali states) is acknowledged by the EPRDF, three points should be borne in mind. First, a significant number of the people inhabiting these areas are pastoralists with no tradition of indigenous settled administration, whose experience of central government has until recently been largely restricted to military occupation and tax collection. Second, it must be noted that present extremely low levels of development are largely due to the failures of past centralised regimes. Lastly, weak links to the highland core of Ethiopia, which are a product of underdevelopment and political marginalisation, have repeatedly made the frontier regions of Gambella and Benishangul unstable and bases for subversion. The TPLF in particular is very aware of the part played by uneven regional development in stimulating unrest, since it largely derives its own origins from such circumstances.

The EPRDF government is thus clear in its commitment to the advancement of the lowland regions, but its approach to their administration is decidedly pragmatic. As a result, what seems to be emerging in Ethiopia is a two-tier system of federalism. Although neither Ethiopia's constitution, nor those of the regional states, makes such a distinction, in practice one is made between the highland regional states with their greater level of political and economic development, and the four lowland states of Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz, Afar and Somali, which stand out for their lack of development and historical political marginalisation. While the highland states are zealous in protecting their autonomy and expanding their administrative capacity, the latter regions which are not yet capable of assuming the full responsibilities of local government are provided with additional support. Unlike the highland states, government officials in Gambella and Benishangul welcome central government assistance.

These conditions have led them to be placed under the Prime Minister's Office, which oversees their political development, provides them with a disproportionate share of central government material and human resources, and encourages foreign donors to direct their assistance to these areas. Although a case could be made on administrative grounds for linking Gambella and Benishangul to the adjacent Oromo state, the level of mistrust created by the OLF makes this politically impractical. Moreover, the EPRDF may also have been concerned about giving the Oromo region, which already has the

largest territory and population in Ethiopia, and arguably the weakest government in the highlands, the onerous responsibility of administering such underdeveloped territories.

The result is that while the highland states led by Tigray and Amhara have made rapid progress, the lowland states are far behind, and are likely to retain that position for the foreseeable future. That said, the EPRDF's pragmatic approach to the lowland states which attempts to bridge the gap between its commitment to national self-determination which these states are not currently capable of fulfilling, and centralised administration which has proved disastrous historically for their development, is probably the only viable course at this time.

## NOTE

1. The numbers killed in this incident and given here represent an approximation based on information provided by a large number of government officials and citizens of Assosa.

## REFERENCES


Aleme Eshete. 1978. 'The "primitive communism" of the Nilo-Saharan Ethiopian nationalities and the proclamation nationalising rural land: the case of Nuer and Anuak of the Gambella region', unpublished paper, IDR Seminar, Nazareth, Ethiopia, 27–29 October.

Bahru Zewde. 1991. *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1974*. London: James Currey.

Central Statistical Agency (CSA), Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. 1996a. *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia Results for Gambella Region*. Addis Ababa.

Central Statistical Agency. 1996b. *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia Results for Benishangul-Gumuz Region*. Addis Ababa.

*Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*. 1994. Unofficial English translation from the Amharigna original, 8 December. Addis Ababa.

Crummey, D. 1986. 'Banditry and resistance: noble and peasant in nineteenth century Ethiopia', in D. Crummey, ed., *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*. London: James Currey.

*The Ethiopian Herald*. 12, 14, 23 August 1997.

Fernyhough, T. 1986. 'Social mobility and dissident elites in Northern Ethiopia: the role of bandits, 1900–69', in Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest*.

Fukui, K. and J. Markakis. eds. 1994. *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*. London: James Currey.

James, W. 1986. 'Lifelines: exchange marriage among the Gumuz', in D. Donham & W. James, eds., *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*. Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, D. 1986. 'On the Nilotic frontier: imperial Ethiopia in the southern Sudan, 1898–1936', in Donham & James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*.

Johnson, D. 1996. 'Increasing the trauma of return', in T. Allen, ed., *In Search of Cool Ground: war, flight & homecoming in Northeast Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Kurimoto, E. 1997. 'Politicisation of ethnicity in Gambella', in E. Fukui *et al.*, eds., *Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 2. Kyoto, 1997; the author regrets that he was unable to consult this paper in the preparation of the present article.

Nugent, P. & A. Asiwaju. 1996. *African Boundaries: barriers, conduits and opportunities*. London: Pinter.

Shumet Sishagn. 1986. 'The economic basis of conflict among the Nuer and Anuak communities', *Proceedings of the Third Annual Seminar of the Department of History*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.

Young, J. 1996. 'Ethnicity and power in Ethiopia', *Review of African Political Economy* 70.

Young, J. 1997. *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975–1991*. Cambridge University Press.

Young, J. 1998. 'Regionalism and democracy in Ethiopia', *Third World Quarterly* 19:2.

*Interviews*

Abdel Aziz Khalid, Brigadier, Sudan Alliance Forces: Bahir Dar, 15 March 1998 (died shortly after this interview).

Abera Tesfaye, currently a TPLF MP from Tigray and an EPRDF representative to Gambella, who previously served as a trainer of GPDM forces in Tigray: Addis Ababa, 2 March 1998.

Amanuel Yonnas, Mines Bureau: Assosa, 14 August 1997.

Atekilti Gebre-Miden, head of Public Service Bureau: Assosa, 20 February 1998.

Chual Pech, former Gambella regional vice-president and leader of the GPDUP: Gambella, 15 July 1997 and 12 February 1998 (second interview conducted while in prison).

Enyew, Education Bureau: Assosa, 14 August 1997.

Fikru Jeldessa, Auditor General's Office: Assosa: 16 February 1998.

Gatewech Pal, former bureau head, Public Works, Urban Development, Mines and Energy: Gambella, 9 July 1997 and 12 February 1998 (second interview conducted while in prison).

Ibrahim Mohammed, 1997, founding member of BPLM, Assosa, 15 August 1997.

Mesfin Bekele, Social Affairs Bureau: Assosa, 14 August 1997.

Omot Gilo, head, Auditor General Office Gambella: Gambella, 11 February 1998.

President, Kamachi Zone: Kamachi, 23 February 1998.

Thomas Kiru, secretary, Gambella Region: Gambella, 10 February 1998.

Yaregol Aysheshm, president of Benishangul-Gumuz Region: Assosa, 15 February 1998.