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Ethnic Pluralism as an Organizing Principle of the Ethiopian Federation

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Abstract. In 1991 the Ethiopian government employed ethnic pluralism as an organizing principle, creating multiple ethnic-based territorial units with a ''right of secession'' provision. Ethiopians are watching this experiment with considerable apprehension. This paper: (1) provides a concise historical background of ethnic relations in Ethiopia, (2) examines the type of ethnic federal state established in Ethiopia, and (3) points out some problems encountered with ethnicity as an organizing principle and attempts a preliminary assessment of the ethnic-based federal experiment. The sources of data for this paper include public documents, fieldwork, and interviews with 30 knowledgeable Ethiopians in Addis Ababa. I spent several months during 2000–2002 observing political developments in the country as they pertain to ethnic federalism. Within Africa, a nation-state fully acknowledging and based on ethnic pluralism is unique. Thus far, the Ethiopian federation appears to have undercut the drive for secession by largely removing its rallying cause, manifest ethnic oppression. Nonetheless, the fact that the ruling group comes predominantly from a small ethnic group has raised serious protest from other ethnic groups, larger and smaller. Its use of democratic centralism has also undermined effective decentralization and democratization. Ethnic pluralism as an organizing principle underpinning the federal government in Ethiopia is a fragile and perilous experiment.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, today's Ethiopia, on the one hand, and most other African countries, on the other, are using diametrically opposed ways of looking at ethnicity. E.g. in Uganda, the central government discourages political parties along ethnic lines, does not allow ethnic parties, and champions a de-ethnicized unitary state.[1] In Ethiopia, on the other hand, the federal government encourages political parties to organize along ethnic lines. It champions an ethnic-pluralism-based federation, even granting its constituents a ''secession option''. The fact that ethnicity was the major vehicle for political mobilization in Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s primarily accounts for

the Ethiopian experiment recognizing ethnic pluralism as an organizing principle of the federation. Now that the experiment has lasted more than a decade, it is possible to make a preliminary assessment of its performance. The delicate and controversial experiment with ethnic pluralism as an organizing principle, clearly an exception to the general pattern in Africa, may have potential lessons for other multiethnic countries as they grapple with issues of ethnicity and with institutional arrangements to address them.

Following the collapse of military rule in May 1991, Ethiopia used ethnic pluralism as an organizing principle to establish a federal state, creating primarily ethnic-based territorial units and providing for an option of "ethnic secession".[2] The federal state was formalized in a new constitution that came into force in 1995. Multiple ethnic groups are formally the founders and constituent units of the federal nation-state. The ethnic-pluralism-based principle of political organization is probably the most controversial issue in the public discourse among Ethiopians everywhere. Its supporters claim that it has maintained the unity of the Ethiopian peoples and the territorial integrity of the nation-state. They also argue that it has brought recognition to the principle of pluralism and ethnic equality. Non-partisan observers see ethnic-pluralism-based federalism as serving the pragmatic purpose of ensuring political stability over all of Ethiopia by creating enough political space for multiple ethno-nationalist organizations in order to avert "ethnic revolts". Opponents of ethnic pluralism as an organizing principle fear that it invites ethnic conflict and risks state disintegration. Some object to ethnic categorization altogether. Others argue that ethnic rights as group rights are incompatible with liberal democracy. Many argue that the new regional state boundaries lack historical validity and needlessly endanger the survival of the Ethiopian state as presently constituted. Still others, of ethno-nationalist leanings, doubt the federal government's real commitment to ethno-national self-determination on the level of regional state. They support the ethnic-pluralism-based federal constitution *per se*, but claim that it has not been put into practice. To many critics, the ethnic- pluralism-based state is a *de facto* one-party state in which ethnic organizations are mere satellites of the politically and militarily dominant Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). Finally, those who consider Ethiopia as a colonial empire see the exercise of ethnicizing the federal state as yet another colonial trick and advocate "decolonization", instead.

This paper has three interrelated objectives. First, it provides a brief background of unitary policies in Ethiopia before 1991. Second, it

examines the development and structure of the ethnic-pluralism-based federal state established by 1995, focusing on linguistic and educational pluralism, as well as administrative autonomy. Third, it points out some problems encountered with ethnic pluralism as a principle underlying political organization (problems of definition of ethnicity, coincidence of ethnicity and regional state, and recent political party crises) and attempts a preliminary assessment of the ethnic-based federal experiment. The sources of data for this paper include public documents, fieldwork, and interviews. The public documents include the transitional charter and the subsequent constitution, relevant proclamations, government statistical data, government and private print media, state radio and television. I spent several months during 2000–2002 observing political developments in the country as they pertain to ethnic federalism, and interviewing 30 Ethiopians, including public officials, non-governmental organization officers, academics, intellectuals, and businesspersons in Addis Ababa.

Theoretical considerations

The 20th century has been characterized as ''an ethnic century''.[3] Hutchinson and Smith call it ''the era of ethnicity''.[4] Major sources of ethnic conflict include politics, economics, culture, ideology, and international relations. Examples of ethnic conflict include Nazi Germany's creation of an artificial German ethnic uniformity and its extermination of Jews, Gypsies and others deemed ''undesirable'' by the regime, as well as the Nigerian civil war over Biafra, the Malay-Chinese conflict in Malaysia, the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the Kurdish question and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in the Middle East, the African-American and Hispanic struggles in the US. The last decade of the last century witnessed the collapse of the USSR as a Soviet Empire and its disintegration into ethno-national sovereign states, the breakup of Yugoslavia, the ''velvet divorce'' of the bi-national Czechoslovakia, ''ethnic cleansing'' in Serbia, pogroms in Burundi, and genocide in Rwanda. Even Great Britain is undergoing an indeterminate process of devolution or breakdown.[5]

Social scientists had once maintained that industrialization and modernization would diminish the significance of ethnicity in heterogeneous societies.[6] ''They felt that with the breakdown of small, particularistic social units and the emergence of large, impersonal bureaucratic institutions, people's loyalty and identity would be directed primarily to the national state rather than to internal racial and ethnic

communities''[7] The reverse is what has happened, however. Connor claims that modernization, in fact, increases demands for ethnic separatism.[8]

After World War II, newly independent states emerged out of the artificially created colonial territories, with boundaries drawn up with little regard to ethnic composition. They

> ''found themselves faced with the problem of integrating diverse cultural groups, speaking different languages and even maintaining different belief systems, into a single national society. The upshot has been numerous and constant ethnic conflicts in which one group refuses to recognize the political authority of the central government, which is usually dominated by members of a rival group''.[9]

In the second half of the 20th century, some twenty million people died as a result of ethnic violence.[10] As Moynihan said:

> There are today just eight states on earth which both existed in 1914 and have not had their form of government changed by violence since then. These are the United Kingdom, four present or former members of the Commonwealth, the United States, Sweden, and Switzerland. Of the remaining … contemporary states, some are too recently created to have known much recent turmoil, but for the greater number that have done, *by far the most frequent factor involved has been ethnic conflict*.[11]

Only a handful of some 189 members of the United Nations are ethnically homogeneous states.[12] As Williams put it, ''multi-ethnicity is the rule''.[13]

Within the social sciences, there has been a debate on the conceptualization of ethnicity, whether it is primordial or socially constructed. The ''primordialist'' approach is associated with Geertz,[14] whereby a people's most powerful given or taken-for-granted attachments are deemed to be to their ethnic groups:

> ''Considered as societies, the new states are abnormally susceptible to serious disaffection based on primordial attachments … Economic or class or intellectual disaffection threatens revolution, but disaffection based on language, race, or culture threatens partition, irredentism, or merger, a redrawing of the very limits of the state, a new definition of its domain''.[15]

The constructionist approach underestimates the power of taken-for-granted attachments and identities, and argues that people's identities

are socially constructed and reconstructed in the context of historical and sociological situations.[16] The dominant view today is that ethnicity is socially constructed.[17] But the either/or debate may be presenting us with "an unnecessarily dichotomous choice".[18] Weber had pointed out the sociological correspondence between the ethnic group and the nation;[19] thus, the debate on the primordiality or construction of ethnicity extends to nationalism as well. Beyond social science, "ethnic entrepreneurs",[20] political leaders and elites manipulate ethnicity or ethnic nationalism to achieve political ends. For example, ethnic or nationalist ideologues may claim that ethnic groups or nations existed as "eternal beings present as such from the beginning of time" or that "nations have existed in anything close to their modern form since the beginnings of history".[21]

Smith[22] makes a useful distinction among ethnic category, ethnic community, and ethnic nationalism. An ethnic category is seen as a distinct cultural group by outsiders but has little or no sense of its common ethnicity. An ethnic community (*Ethnie*) "is a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural element; a link with a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity".[23] "One of the self-appointed tasks of nationalists is to turn ethnic categories into ethnic communities, and ethnic communities into ethnic nations".[24] Ethnic nationalism is a consequence of the development or, better still, politicization of ethnic consciousness by an ethnic community.[25]

An analysis of the causes of ethnic separatism includes geopolitical, socioeconomic, and historical-cultural variables. Following Smith, I focus on historical-cultural factors in the emergence or resurgence of ethnic nationalism in Ethiopia. "History and culture … can indicate much about the likelihood of ethnic consciousness developing into ethnic nationalism and, hence, into a secession movement".[26] On the local level, ethnic nationalism entails vernacular mobilization, cultural politicization, and ethnic purification.[27] In the last decade of the 20th century, excluding Singapore and Bangladesh, more than 10 ethnically defined states have come into existence.[28]

Ethnic nationalism is a major source of inter- and intra-societal conflict. Ethnic relations are seen as "manifestations of stratification and of the competition and conflict that develop over societal rewards – power, wealth, and prestige".[29] There are structural or macro-level patterns as well as social-psychological patterns of ethnic relations. The power-conflict perspective emphasizes the structural patterns. "Because the state controlled the production and distribution of resources,

competition for them was waged in the political realm, making the state the focus of social conflict''.[30]

Doornbos maintains that ethnicity as such does not explain anything; it needs to be explained, and that can only be done contextually. It may be ''liberatory'' or ''chauvinist'' in its role or contribution.[31] Poluha views ethnicity contextually. She questions the assumption that ethnicity overshadows other forms of association and identity in all circumstances, and questions the assumption that ethnic-group interests have priority over all others. She also questions putting group rights ahead of individual rights. ''Ethnification'' and liberal democracy are not compatible, according to Poluha.[32] But she is clearly wrong. The Swiss case demonstrates not only the compatibility of liberal democracy and ethnic group rights but also the enrichment of individual rights through group rights.[33] Ocholla-Ayayo sees ethnicity as a tool manipulated by political elites.[34] Jerman distinguishes between two types of ethnicity and roles for ethnicity. One is ''objective'' (denoting cultural differentiation, but not necessarily social integration, or ethnic consciousness); the second is ''subjective'' (denoting ethnic consciousness and social identity).[35]

Unitary policies in ethiopia before 1991

Ethiopia has great ethnic diversity with 84 ethnic groups.[36] Twelve of these ethnic groups had a population of half a million or more, out of a population of 53 million in 1994 (see Table 1). The two major ethnic groups (the Oromo and the Amhara) constitute over 62% of the population. The Amhara are sedentary agriculturalists, while the Oromo are partly agriculturalist and partly pastoral. The third largest ethnic group, the Tigray, has been the politically dominant ethnic group since 1991, but comprises only 6% of the population.[37] Historically, however, the Tigray region is considered the cradle of Ethiopian civilization. The Somali inside Ethiopia, who are pastoralists, virtually tie with the Tigray for third place. The four ethnic groups constitute almost three-fourth of the population. In 1994, three other ethnic groups, namely, Gurage, Sidama, and Welaita, had a population of over one million each. The Gurage are the entrepreneurial ethnic group *par excellence*, and the Welaita have the highest population density in the country. Thus, the seven largest ethnic groups comprise 84.5% of the country's population. Five ethnic groups, the Afar, Hadiya, Gamo, Gedeo, and Keffa, had populations between 599,000 and 1,000,000. The twelve

largest ethnic groups constitute almost 92% of the population. Fourteen ethnic groups had populations between 100,000 and 500,000, while twenty-eight ethnic groups had a population of between 10,000 and

Table 1. Distribution of ethnic groups (100,000+) in Ethiopia, 1994.

Ethnic group	Population	Percentage of total population
Oromo	17,080,318	32.1
Amhara	16,007,933	30.1
Tigraway	3,284,568	6.2
Somali	3,160,540	5.9
Guragie	2,290,274	4.3
Sidama	1,842,314	3.5
Welaita	1,269,216	2.4
Afar	979,367	1.8
Hadiya	927,933	1.7
Gamo	719,847	1.4
Gedeo	639,905	1.2
Keffa	599,188	1.1
Kembata	499,825	0.9
Agew/Awingi	397,491	0.7
Kulo	331,483	0.6
Goffa	241,530	0.5
Bench	173,123	0.3
Kemant	172,327	0.3
Yemsa	165,184	0.3
Agew/Kamyr	158,231	0.3
Ari	155,002	0.3
Konso	153,419	0.3
Alaba	125,900	0.2
Gumuz	121,487	0.2
Jebelawa	118,530	0.2
Koyra	107,595	0.2
All others (incl. 53 ethnic groups)	1,409,766	3.0
Total	53,132,296	100.0

Source: FDRE Central Statistical Authority, The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia Results at Country Level Volume II Analytical Report. Addis Ababa: CSA, June 1999, pp. 41–43.

100,000. Twenty-three ethnic groups had a population of less than 10,000 each in 1994.[38] For the most part, each ethnic group has its own language.

The religious composition of the population is as follows: Christian (61.7%), Muslim (32.8%), Traditional (4.6%), Others (0.9%), Not Stated (0.1%). Orthodox Christians constitute 50.6%, Protestants constitute 10.2%, and Catholics comprise 0.9% of the total population (see Table 2 for a numerical breakdown).[39] The "Traditional" category above refers to those Ethiopians who follow indigenous religions. Ethiopian Jews, known as *Bete Israel* or *Falasha* numbered roughly one hundred thousand in the recent past, but virtually all of them immigrated to Israel within the last two decades. Traditionally, they were artisans (mainly potters); they did not farm, as they were denied access to land.

Although the reality of ethnic oppression in Ethiopian history is beyond dispute, the historical formation of the state is a complex and complicated affair in which so many ethnic groups and regional entities have been victims and victimizers at different moments in the long history of state formation. This applies to practically all ethnic groups in the country.

The history of state formation in Ethiopia is a source of profound, even bitter contention. At one extreme, pan-Ethiopian nationalists contend that the Ethiopian state is some 3000 years old. According to this perspective, well represented by Gashaw, the Ethiopian state has existed for millennia, forging a distinct national identity. Ethiopian

Table 2. Distribution of religions in Ethiopia, 1994.

Religion	Population	Percentage of total population
Orthodox	26,877,660	50.6
Protestant	5,405,107	10.2
Catholic	459,548	0.9
Muslim	17,412,431	32.8
Traditional	2,455,053	4.6
Others	478,226	0.9
Not stated	42,756	0.1
Total	53,132,296	100.0

Source: FDRE Central Statistical Authority, The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia Results at Country Level Volume II Analytical Report. Addis Ababa: CSA, June 1999, p. 56.

nationalism is a historically verifiable reality, not a myth.[40] It has successfully countered ethnic and regional challenges. The assimilation of periphery cultures into Amhara or Amhara/Tigray core culture made the creation of the Ethiopian nation possible.[41] From this perspective, Ethiopia is the melting pot *par excellence*.[42] The image it projects is one of Ethiopia as a *nation*-state contrary to ethnic pluralism.

At the other extreme, ethno-nationalist groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) claim that Abyssinia (central and northern Ethiopia, the historic core of Ethiopian polity) colonized roughly two-thirds of the territories and peoples to form a colonial empire-state in the last quarter of the 19th century.[43] For about a century, until the third quarter of the 20th century, most of the population in the west, south, and east of the country was turned to tenancy, reminiscent of European feudalism, and settlers, mainly from the Amhara ethnic group, and the local nobility, enjoying ownership of "a third of the choice land", acted as landlords. From the ethno-nationalist vantage point, Ethiopia is a colonial empire that needs to undergo decolonization where "ethno-national" colonies become independent states.[44] The image it projects is one of Ethiopia as a *colonial*-state.[45]

A more sensible image of Ethiopia would be as a historically evolved (non-colonial) empire-state.[46] The ancient Ethiopian state, short-term contractions in size notwithstanding, expanded, over a long historical period, through the conquest and incorporation of adjoining kingdoms, principalities, sultanates, etc., as indeed most states in the world were formed.[47] The declared objective of the framers of ethnic-pluralism-based federalism was to transform the empire-state into a democratic state of ethnic pluralism[48] in order to ensure that no ethnic community would find it necessary or desirable to secede.

Adopting the centralized French model, previous modern Ethiopian governments attempted to forge cultural homogenization through state centralization and one-language policy during most of the 20th century.[49] It should be noted that Amharic had served as a "court" language for roughly a millennium. In the span of a century, three forms of ethnic social engineering have been attempted in Ethiopia. The first social engineering was designed by Emperor Menelik (1889–1913) but significantly elaborated by Emperor Haile Selassie (1930–1936, 1941–1974).[50] It attempted to create a unitary state on the basis of cultural assimilation, using Amharic as the sole language of instruction and public discourse and Abyssinian Orthodox Christian culture as the core culture of Ethiopian national identity.[51] This effort was in keeping with the pan-Ethiopian nationalist perspective. Cultural and structural

inequalities typified imperial rule, with ethnic and regional discontent rising until the revolution of 1974 overthrew the monarchy. The policy of assimilation into mainstream Amhara culture provoked some subordinated ethnic groups into initiating ethnic movements in various regions of the empire-state.[52]

The second ethnic social engineering (1974–1991) was the military government's attempt to maintain a unitary state on the basis of Marxism-Leninism with some gestures to regional autonomy and cultural pluralism in mass literacy campaign, folk music and dance.[53] Totalitarian rule unequalled in its brutality and a campaign against a plurality of ethno-nationalist armed groups characterized the military period. In its last years, the military regime created twenty-four administrative regions and five autonomous regions within the unitary form of state, but no devolution of authority was discernible.[54] Ethnic-based opposition organizations intensified their assault on the military government in the 1980s. The two social engineering attempts had failed by 1974 and 1991, respectively.

The third ethnic social engineering (1991-present), under investigation here, is the EPRDF government's attempt to maintain the Ethiopian state on the basis of an ethnic-pluralism-based federal political system of multiple states, as well as cultural, language and administrative autonomy at regional and sub-regional levels.

Multiple ethno-nationalist movements grew immensely during military rule. Apart from the Eritrean nationalist movement, the major ethnic organizations included the TPLF, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and Afar Liberation Front (ALF); minor organizations included Islamic Oromo Liberation Front (IOLF), Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), Ogadeni National Liberation Front (ONLF).[55] The ethno-nationalist organizations posed the gravest threat to military rule and to the unity and territorial integrity of the country. Thus, pluralistic ethnic nationalisms emerged as a major political issue and a major factor in the demise of the monolithic and centralizing military regime.[56] Indeed, it was the TPLF/EPRDF, in collaboration with the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) that brought down the military regime, although the OLF, Afar and Somali movements played a minor role. TPLF (only at one initial moment), OLF, and WSLF had sought secession prior to the collapse of the military junta. They were willing to come together to forge a new constitutional arrangement probably because they had come to realize that secession was not a viable option. At the same time, however, a secession provision had to be made as a part of the compact, if only to justify the sacrifices they had called upon their

mobilized constituents to make during long years of struggle. Supporters of the secession clause claim that ethno-nationalist organizations would not have joined a federal arrangement if secession were not constitutionally recognized.[57]

The ideological antecedents of EPRDF's ethnic federalism project can be traced to Marxist-Leninist ideology and its conception of "the national question". The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) at home and abroad had introduced Marxism-Leninism to Ethiopia in the mid-1960s. "The national question" had soon after emerged as the burning question.[58]The ESM was initially divided on the "correct" resolution of the national question. In the end, the ESM attempted to legitimate ethno-nationalism within the ideological compass of Marxism-Leninism, marking a radical departure from the inherited pan-Ethiopianist ideology.[59] The ESM saw its resolution within the framework of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of "the right of nations to self-determination, up to and including secession". By 1971, the ESM adopted this doctrine. When the ESM gave birth to Marxist-Leninist political parties, notably *Mela Ityopia Socialist Niqinaqe* (MEISON) in 1968 and Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) in 1972, it also bequeathed them this doctrine. When the military junta adopted the Marxist-Leninist orientation of the ESM, it conspicuously rejected "the right of secession" doctrine. But other ethno-nationalist organizations, including OLF and TPLF made "the right of nations to self-determination, up to and including secession", their organizing principle and *raison d'être*.[60] When EPRDF assumed power in 1991 in alliance with OLF and others, this doctrine became the basis for constructing a new federal state structure. Thus, ideological orientation and political necessity contributed to the emergence of ethnic federalism as an organizing political principle for resolving issues of ethnic and regional autonomy and the right to self-determination while retaining the Ethiopian state.

The development and structure of the ethnic-based federal state

The EPRDF-spearheaded a multi-ethnic coalition and convened a national conference in July 1991, and quickly established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) under a transitional charter. Twenty-seven political, predominantly ethnic-based groups participated in the charter conference.[61] According to the preamble of the charter, "self-determination of all the peoples shall be [one of] the governing principles of political, economic and social life". It underlined the need to end

all hostilities, heal (ethnic) wounds, and create peace and stability.[62] The transitional charter affirmed the right of ethnic groups to self-determination, up to and including secession (Article 2)[63] and provided for the establishment of local and regional governments "on the basis of nationality" (Article 13). It also stipulated that "the Head of State, the Prime Minister, the Vice-Chairperson and Secretary of the Council of Representatives shall be from different nations/nationalities [ethnic groups]" (Article 9b). Thus, a new federal state structure was constructed with ethnic pluralism as its organizing principle.

The charter conference established an 87–member Council of Representatives (COR), comprising "representatives of national liberation movements, other political organizations and prominent individuals" (Article 7). The COR acted as the national parliament for the two-and-half-year transitional period. EPRDF had the largest voting bloc with 32 seats, followed by the Oromo Liberation front (OLF) with 12 seats.[64] The radical departure from the unitary policies of the two previous regimes and the virtually singular focus on ethnicity provoked immediate opposition from pan-Ethiopian nationalists.[65] At the other extreme, the OLF bolted out of the transitional government in June 1992 and abandoned its participation in the upcoming district and regional elections, charging election fraud on the part of EPRDF and complaining that the provision for ethnic self-determination and regional autonomy enshrined in the Charter was not genuine.[66] In April 1993, EPRDF, which has ethnic constituents in (and rules) Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, and Southern regional states, ousted five Southern political groups (the "Southern Coalition") for flirting with (ethnic and multiethnic) opposition groups meeting in Paris. Thus, by the time the constitution was ratified in 1994, EPRDF's ethnic-based federal design, as well as its political legitimacy, was already under challenge in some critical quarters.[67]

The transitional COR established a Constitutional Commission to draft a constitution. It later adopted the draft and presented it for public discussion (as the military regime had done in 1987). After that, a Constituent Assembly ratified the ethnic-based federal constitution in December 1994, which came into force in August 1995. The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia starts with the words: "We the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia". This phrase indicates that all the ethnic groups as collectivities, rather than individual citizens are, in principle, the authors of the constitution. Thus, Ethiopia's ethnic federalism is based on multiple ethnic communities (in Smith's sense) [68] as the constituent units and foundations of the federal state.[69]

Comprising a preamble and eleven chapters, the constitution covers separation of state and religion, transparency and accountability of government, human and democratic rights, structure of the federal and regional states, and division of powers. Although Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic state, the preamble affirms that the Ethiopian peoples, ''in full and free exercise of [their] right to self-determination'' strongly commit themselves to build *one political community* and *one economic community* based on their *common interests*, *common outlook*, *and common destiny* (italics mine). These clauses were inserted in the preamble, after a long debate, in order to underscore the need for political and economic unity among the diverse constituent ethnic groups and regions.[70]

In the following two sections, we will look at two important components of the multi-ethnic-based federal state: linguistic and educational pluralism, and administrative autonomy. Linguistic and educational pluralism is important because it was one of the factors that created profound alienation for ethnic groups for whom the dominant culture-*cum*-language was not their own, and it is one indicator of pluralism in multiethnic societies. The administrative autonomy section indicates specific ethnic and regional rights included in accommodating perceived demands of major ethnic groups.[71]

Linguistic and educational pluralism

The languages of Ethiopia belong to four language families: Ethio-Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic, and Nilo-Saharan. There are 12 Ethio-Semitic languages, including Amharic, Tigrinya and Guragigna, Harari and Argobba, 22 Cushitic languages, including Oromiffa, Somali, Sidamigna, Afarigna and Hadiyigna, 18 Omotic languages, including Welaitigna, Keffigna, Kulogna, Goffigna and Benchigna, and 18 Nilo-Saharan languages, including Gumuz, Nuer, Anyuak, Mesengo and Nyangatom.[72]

As indicated earlier, cultural assimilation with Amharic as the language of instruction was the policy during the imperial and military periods. However, post-1991 Ethiopia's multi-ethnic federalism is characterized by cultural, including linguistic, pluralism. Although Amharic is the working language of the federal government, state television and radio media today broadcast in Oromiffa and Tigrinya as well. Furthermore, each regional state has the right to choose its own working language. In addition to Addis Ababa (the federal capital) and Dire Dawa (federal territory), Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela,

and the polyglot Southern regional states have chosen Amharic as their working language.[73] Indeed, Amharic is the second language of about 10% of the Ethiopian population. By comparison, Oromiffa, the next major language in the country is the second language of only 3% of the population (see Table 3). In the Federal court system, the working language is Amharic; in the regional system, the working language is up to the region. The courts are also free to use the Ge'ez (Ethiopic) script as Amharic does, or a non-Ethiopian script.

Each regional state can choose its own language of instruction in primary schools. Out of some 80 local languages spoken in the country, 22 are now in primary school use. Within each regional state, municipalities, zones and districts can choose their own language(s) of instruction. In Oromia regional state, for example, Adama (now the regional state capital), Amharic is the language of instruction as much as Oromiffa. Within the Southern regional state, Guragigna, Sidamigna, Welaitigna, Hadiyigna, Gamogna, Keffigna, or Gedeogna, etc. are the languages of instruction as much as Amharic in their respective zones and districts. Due to lack of resources in the local language, including writing system, adequate teaching material, and teaching staff in the local language, as well as to pragmatic considerations such as prospects of employment and social mobility, many communities have chosen Amharic as their language of instruction. But, according to the federal Education Sector Development Program, more textbooks will be printed in local languages. In the Afar, Somali, Beni Shangul-Gumuz, Southern, and Oromia regional states, pilot nomadic schools and boarding schools have been established and/or are planned in order to provide educational access to children in pastoral communities, in most cases for the very first time. Plans are also underway for Regional Education Media Units to design and transmit educational programs in local languages. Within the framework of the federal Education Sector Development Program, each regional state has produced its own educational development plan, and 87% of the program is to be implemented by the regional states themselves. Although they also have a degree of financial autonomy, they are subject to federal Ministry of Finance oversight.[74]

Regional autonomy and ethnic self-determination

The constitution established an ethnic-based federal republic comprising nine regional states created on the basis of predominant ethnic

group, except the Southern regional state formed by 46 ethnic groups, and except two federal territories, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa (see Table 4). It affirmed the unrestricted corporate right of all ethnic groups: ''Every nation, nationality and people shall have the unre-

Table 3. Distribution of mother tongues (100,000 +) and second languages in Ethiopia, 1994.

Mother tongue	Population	Percentage of total population	Second language population	Percentage of total population
Amharic	17,372,913	32.70	5,104,150	9.61
Oromiffa	16,777,976	31.58	1,535,434	2.89
Tigrinya	3,224,875	6.07	146,933	0.28
Somali	3,187,053	6.00	95,572	0.18
Guragigna	1,881,574	3.54	208,358	0.39
Sidamigna	1,876,329	3.53	101,340	0.19
Welaitigna	1,231,673	2.32	89,801	0.17
Afarigna	965,462	1.82	22,848	0.04
Hadiyigna	923,958	1.74	150,889	0.28
Gamogna	690,069	1.30	24,438	0.05
Gedeogna	637,082	1.20	47,950	0.09
Keffigna	569,626	1.07	46,720	0.09
Kembatigna	487,655	0.92	68,607	0.13
Agew/ Awingiga	356,980	0.67	64,425	0.12
Kulogna	313,228	0.59	19,996	0.04
Goffigna	233,340	0.44	33,449	0.06
Benchigna	173,586	0.33	22,640	0.04
Arigna	158,857	0.30	13,319	0.03
Konsogna	149,508	0.28	5658	0.01
Agew/ Kamyrgna	143,369	0.27	11,026	0.02
Alabigna	126,257	0.24	25,271	0.05
Gumuzigna	120,424	0.23	4379	0.01
Jebelawigna	116,084	0.22	15,738	0.03
Koyrigna	103,879	0.20	2371	0.00

Source: FDRE Central Statistical Authority, The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia Results at Country Level Volume II Analytical Report. Addis Ababa: CSA, June 1999, pp. 46–48.

stricted right to self-determination up to secession'' (Article 39).[75] The act of secession requires a two-thirds vote in the legislature of the seceding ethnic group to be followed 3 years later by a referendum in the seceding region. It does not require the approval of the federal legislature.

The House of Federation (upper house) is the guardian and interpreter of the constitution. It is the chamber in which ''nations, nationalities, and peoples'' (i.e. ethnic groups) are directly and pro-

Table 4. Population of Ethiopia by regional state, and no. of ethnic groups in each regional state represented in the House of Federation, 2001 (in thousands).

Regional states	Population	No. of ethnic groups
Tigray	3901	3
Afar	1272	1
Amhara	17,205	5
Oromia	23,704	1[a]
Somali	3898	1
Benishangul-Gumuz	565	5
SNNP	13,293	46
Gambella	222	4
Harari	172	1[b]
Addis Ababa	2646	Not applicable
Dire Dawa	342	Not applicable
Total	67,220	67

Source: FDRE Central Statistical Authority, *Ethiopia Statistical Abstract 2001*. Addis Ababa: CSA, March 2002, p. 24; FDRE House of Federation Secretariat Current List. 2002. Addis Ababa: House of Federation Secretariat.

[a] It is indeed puzzling that only the Oromo are represented from Oromia regional state. The Oromo population numbered some 17 million, according to 1994 Census. In 2001, the population for Oromia regional state is given as 23.7 million. Even taking into account normal population growth rate (3%), it means a few million inhabitants in Oromia regional state are non-Oromo. Yet they have no representation in the House of Federation.

[b] The Oromo are the numerical majority in Harar, closely followed by the Amhara. Yet, they have no representation in the House of Federation. The ruling Harari ethnic group constitutes less than 10 percent of the population in the regional state. See also Asmelash Beyene, 1997, p. 14 cited in Aklilu Abraham and Asnake Kefale, ''Federalism and Decentralization in Ethiopia: Emerging Patterns and Problems'', a paper prepared for a Workshop on ''The View from Below: Democratization and Governance in Ethiopia'', (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2000).

portionately represented. The House is composed of at least one representative from each of 67 ethnic groups in the country, and one additional representative for every one million population of each ethnic group. As a result, most ethnic groups are represented in the 112-member House of Federation. The Southern state (SNNP) with 46 ethnic groups has 54 representatives.[76] The two largest ethnic groups, the Oromo and the Amhara have 19 and 17 representatives, respectively; the politically dominant ethnic group, the Tigray, has 3 representatives. The multiethnic federal territories of Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa have no representation in the House of Federation.[77]

The constitution provides considerable executive, legislative and judicial authority to regional states. "All powers not given expressly to the Federal Government alone, or concurrently to the Federal government and the States are reserved to the States" (Article 52). Each regional state has its own constitution, flag, executive government, legislature, judiciary, and police; it chooses its own working language; finally, it has the right to secession. The constitution also allows further decentralization from regional state to zonal and *woreda* (district) levels. Some constituent parts (e.g. ethnic zones) want their statuses upgraded to that of regional state, primarily because that is where executive power lies.

The constitution provides little guidance to management of federal-regional relations. Dealing with inter-state border disputes, Article 48 stipulates settlement by bilateral agreement among the disputant states. If the parties fail to reach an agreement, the House of Federation will decide on the basis of settlement patterns and the wishes of the people concerned. Article 50 only stipulates the general need for mutual, reciprocal respect between federal and regional governments.[78]

There is immense economic interdependence, e.g. trading in grain, coffee, etc., among the regional states, and between regional states and the federal state. There are also the beginnings of exchange of experience, e.g. in education, health, soil and water conservation, etc., among the regional states themselves. Generally, the federal government mediates relations among regional states. Relations between the federal government and regional governments and among regional governments have been relatively smooth thus far because a multiethnic ruling coalition and its allied ethnic parties have enjoyed a monopoly of power at all levels of government, except in one zone. The ruling coalition, EPRDF, consists of three ethnic and one multiethnic organization, namely the TPLF, Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), and

Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Front (SEPDF). The structure within EPRDF provides equal votes for the four components in its central as well as executive committees. EPRDF is the *de jure* ruling party, with hegemonic control over EPRDF-allied ruling parties in the remaining five regions of the country, Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela, Harari, and Somali.

Some issues of ethnic pluralism as an organizing principle of the federation

The problem of definition of ethnicity in Ethiopia

The phenomena of ethnicity are varied, fluid and paradoxical. Ethnic communities rise and fall, persist and dissolve, change and resurge. Ethnic identity is malleable and overlaps with other important social identities based on locale or region, religion, gender, class, citizenship, etc. As a consequence, individuals possess multiple identities. Yet the framers of the federal system in Ethiopia who used ethnicity as their organizing principle appear to have been unaware of the scope and complexities of ethnic pluralism and ethnic identity.

The Ethiopian federal state defines ethnic identity, using mother tongue and descent. Language is the main reference regarding ethnic category (i.e., language-based ethnicity). But in the popular imagination and government practice, ethnic descent is also used at times. However, millions of Ethiopians have multiple ethnic genealogies as they have intermarried and intermingled freely over centuries. Thus, many problems arise in making ethnic classification of individuals and of groups as well.

Let us look at the case of the Silte group. Several years ago, the Southern regional parliament had classified the Silte as being of Gurage ethnic stock and had thus incorporated them in the Gurage (ethnic-based) zone of the Southern regional state. However, there was a debate subsequently about whether the Silte were Gurage or not in ethnic category. The Silte contended that they are not Gurage but a distinct ethnic category. The Gurage insisted that they were in fact their co-ethnics. According to a civil servant of Gurage (non-Silte) origin, the Gurage are an ethnic group comprising the *Sebat-bet* (seven clans, literally, houses) Gurage, the Soddo, and the Silte. The *Sebat-bet* (literally, seven houses) consist of seven clans who speak seven mutually intelligible dialects. The Soddo are territorial-based and identify with *ager*

(literally, country). They are divided into Soddo Kistani (Christian) and Soddo Jida, the former identifying itself as Gurage and the latter as Oromo.[79] The Silte are Muslims and trace their ancestry to a non-Gurage ethnic group, the Hadiya and are called *Yeren* (Upper) Hadiya by the *Sebat-bet* Gurage.[80] The issue of Silte identity was settled, at any rate for now, by referendum among the Silte in spring 2001. More than 99% reportedly voted to be identified as a distinct Silte ethnic group, and not as Gurage. According to Markakis, the Gurage are a collection of seven clans and other territorial-based groups and, as they migrated to urban areas, they were categorized as an ethnic group by other Ethiopians and subsequently by the central government.[81] But the Silte issue could be the tip of the iceberg as any number of groups now classified as Gurage could choose to exercise their own self-determination, i.e., self-definition.

If we look at the Amhara, whether they see themselves as an ethnic community, or whether they are even an ethnic category at all, has been a bone of contention.[82] Gashaw (1993) asserts that Amhara "does not necessarily imply a distinct ethnic category … Those who speak Amharic today do not have any ethnic affiliation to each other. … There is no intra-Amhara ethnic consciousness… There is no distinct sociological profile of an Amhara because there is no such thing as an Amhara with distinct ethnic attributes"[83] The Amhara is "a multi-ethnic group who speak Amharic".[84] In an important televised public discussion in late 1991 with the then president, Meles Zenawi, Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam had argued that the Amhara were not an ethnic group, i.e. an ethnic community, by self-definition. Whether that is the case or not, it is nonetheless the case that multiple identities or levels of identity do operate. There is a regional, even local, dimension of ethnicity. Regional orientation is popularly perceived as an important signifier of identity. Native speakers of Amharic in Shoa province[85] saw themselves not only as Amhara and/or Shewe, but also as Bulge, Menze, Merhabite, etc. identifying themselves by their locales. More broadly, they referred to themselves as Shewe, still identifying themselves by region.[86] In Gondar province, they identified themselves as Gaynte, Gondere, Wolkaite, etc., or more broadly, as Gondere, again based on locale or region. In Wollo province, they identified themselves as Amara Saynt, apparently the original home of the Amhara, Ambasel, Ancharo, Bati, Yeju,[87] etc., or more broadly as Wolloye, again specifying locale or region. Under the ethnic federal scheme of things, all these Amharic native speakers were lumped together as an Amhara ethnic community. The Amhara are an (externally defined) ethnic category and perhaps an

ethnic community. But it is only since 1991 that Amhara ethnic nationalism began to emerge, as symbolized by the formation of the All-Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO).[88]

In Tigray province,[89] the Tigray identified themselves as Adwetay, Aksumay, Tembenay, Agame, Endertaway, Raya,[90] and so on. The Tigray emerged as an ethnic community by the time TPLF was created in the mid-1970s.[91] As stated earlier, at a larger geographical level, the Amhara identified themselves as Shewe, Gojjame, Gondare, Wolloye, etc., and the Tigray identified themselves as Tigray, or recently as Eritreans in the case of the new state of Eritrea. From the above cases, it appears that the ruling party and government have imposed an "objective" scheme of ethnic categorization on the basis of native language or mother tongue. Certain individuals and groups object to such ethnic categorization.

The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. They may be one ethnic category. But are they one homogeneous ethnic community or segmented (and interrelated) ethnic communities? Perhaps there are distinct ethnic communities among the Oromo, including: Bale Oromo, Arsi Oromo, Qotu or Harar Oromo, Shewa Oromo, Jimma Oromo, and Wollega Oromo. Furthermore, because of their large number and long geographic reach, historically the Oromo have been perhaps the most important source of interethnic mixing, intermixing with the Amhara, Tigray, Gurage, Hadiya, Kambata, Wolaita, Sidama, Somali, etc. The Oromo have an institution called *Mogessa* that transforms an ethnic group into being Oromo.[92] The degrees of general pan-Oromo collective identity and specific area-based identities call for detailed investigation.

Coincidence of ethnic and regional: ethnic or multiethnic regional states?

All the regional states have more than one ethnic group within them. Thus, whether the federal system in Ethiopia is ethnic-based or not could be subjected to scrutiny. Although the division of Ethiopia into federal units takes multiple ethnicities into account, ethnicity is not always the only criterion for creating regional units of the federation. In fact, the Somali region is the only federated unit where ethnicity and regional state coincide. In all other regional states, two or more ethnic groups coexist in varying proportions.[93]

One can refer to some states, e.g. Afar, Somali, Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia, as ethnic-based states in the sense that one ethnic group is

predominant. But the remaining states, the Southern, Gambela, Beni Shangul-Gumuz, and Harari states, are clearly multi-ethnic. In Tigray, although the Tigray are predominant, the Kunama and Irob (Saho) ethnic groups are also represented in that region. In the Amhara state, although the Amhara predominate, there are also the Agaw, Argobba, and Oromo. In Oromia, in addition to the predominant Oromo, other ethnic groups, including Amhara, Gurage, Sidama, Somali, Tigray and Yem live there. The Southern regional state is composed of 45 ethnic groups. Gambela and Beni Shangul-Gumuz are also multi-ethnic regional states. In Harari regional state, the non-Harari ethnic groups, Oromo and Amhara, are much more numerous than the ruling Harari themselves. Thus, in most of the regional states, multi-ethnicity is the norm, not the exception. As noted earlier, the House of Federation represents 67 of the 83 ethnic groups in the country.[94]

Nonetheless, the Ethiopian system, in the main, does qualify as a case of an ethnic-pluralism-based federal state system. It should be noted that the ethnic-pluralism-based state system could and does not require that the federated units consist of perfectly (ethnically) homogeneous populations. In the Southern region, Beni Shangul-Gumuz, and Gambella, the appearance of multi-ethnic regions is due to a more basic framework of ethnic federalism; the regions owe their existence to an apparently voluntary consent of its constituent ethnic groups. The case of the Harari city state is an exception to the rule. However, it would be reasonable to conclude that the federal system is appropriately and meaningfully characterized as ethnic-based.

Recent political developments

Ethnic political parties administer the regional states. In the case of the four major regional states, Amhara, Oromia, Southern, and Tigray, member organizations of the ruling EPRDF coalition have acquired political and administrative power in their respective regional states. Outside those currently administered by EPRDF coalition partners (the four regional states and Addis Ababa), EPRDF- allied parties administer all the other regional states. These allied ethnic-based parties currently subscribe to the EPRDF agenda and vote with EPRDF on all vital issues that come before the federal parliament. Indeed, it is a puzzle that EPRDF has not brought the allied parties into its fold organiza-

tionally. Apparently, the allied parties are not considered "mature" and/or reliable enough to join the EPRDF.

Within the ruling EPRDF coalition, there is no doubt that, thus far, TPLF calls the shots. Now the viability and stability of the political system, in its infancy, is dependent on TPLF/EPRDF. In 2001, TPLF split almost down the middle. The other coalition partners also had major purges. The countrywide political crisis in 2001 demonstrated amply that ethnic-based parties inside EPRDF as well as EPRDF-allied parties have not been autonomous political actors. To varying degrees, all of them have been overly influenced by TPLF, the dominant ethnic party inside EPRDF. All of the coalition and allied parties complained of TPLF "tutelage". Ethiopia today is a *de facto* one-party state in which ethnic political organizations with administrative authority are under the influence of the TPLF, the leading ethnic unit in the ruling coalition, EPRDF.[95] This in turn could lead potentially to domination by one ethnic group.[96]

Since 2001, the crisis has the potential for creating more internal cohesion within EPRDF only if TPLF hegemony gives way to a more equitable distribution of power in real terms. One possibility for the ethnic-based federal system to survive is if currently dominant ethnic parties openly tolerate competing political parties in their respective regional entities. In this context, it is noteworthy that in the Haddiya zone of the Southern regional state, an opposition party won elections in May 2000, but it did so despite regime-*cum*-dominant party harassment, etc. A few ethnic opposition parties legally operate in the Somali regional state. A second possibility is for the ruling coalition, EPRDF, to open up membership in its coalition to other ethnic or multiethnic parties on an equitable footing. The third possibility of a national, meta-ethnic party – instead of a coalition of ethnic parties – may also be available now.

The major organization advancing the cause of secession is the OLF, an organization that emerged in the last days of imperial rule.[97] The ONLF also struggles for the secession of the Ogaden (Somali) region. That most ethnic groups appear willing to live within a federal framework is, in part, an important achievement of the ethnic-pluralism-based state system. The Ethiopian-Eritrean war of 1998–2000 demonstrated that all ethnic groups, including those in all border regions have a high degree of Ethiopian state nationalism.[98] There was genuine and spontaneous demonstration of pan-Ethiopian nationalism across the board among diverse ethnic backgrounds. Supporters of the regime point to this as vindication of ethnic federalism, but it is more likely a

testimony to the durability of pan-Ethiopian nationalism also manifested at the historic Battle of Adwa in 1896.

The ethnic-based federal state system has created conditions conducive to equalitarian ethnic pluralism in the areas of administrative decentralization, language, and culture. There is administrative decentralization at the regional, zonal, and district levels. There is decentralization of education, health, agriculture and other development fields. The state police are formed by and are accountable to regional state authorities. Fiscal decentralization involves designation of federal and regional revenue sources and budget allocation. Regional states choose their own medium of official communication, and choice of medium of school instruction is now made at state, zone, and district (*woreda*) levels. In the cultural realm, there is equal recognition of religious holidays and rituals, free expression of ethnic folklore, dance, music, and art, generally, a spirit of equalitarian cultural pluralism.

Nonetheless, the ethnic-based state system has contributed to creating conditions conducive to ethnic conflict. These include: attacks on the Amhara ethnic group at Watter, Bedano, Arba Gugu in the Arsi zone of Oromia regional state, and in the Wollega-Gojjam border area of the Oromia regional state; conflicts between the Berta ethnic group and ''settlers'' in Beni Shangul-Gumuz over election rights; conflicts between the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups in Harari city state; attacks on Tigray businesses in Addis Ababa, Awassa, etc. during two-day riots in April 2001; conflicts between the Amaro and Burji, Guji and other ethnic groups in Southern regional state; the Awassa ethnic conflict in the summer of 2002; the Tepi, Illibabor conflict in the summer of 2002; and the strong ethnic antipathy between the Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups.

In the short term, the ethnic-pluralism-based political system appears to have averted the drive for secession by ethno-nationalist organizations by denying them the rallying cause of ethnic oppression. Nonetheless, the proclaimed ideal of ethnic-pluralism has not prevented the OLF from bolting out of the federal government. From the OLF perspective, TPLF denied ethnic pluralism, including ethno-national self-determination, the political space necessary to operate effectively.[99] The proclamation of ethnic equality has dampened grievances based on deprecation of non-Amharic languages and non-Amhara cultures. At the same time, however, the move towards equalitarian ethnic pluralism has inevitably increased ethnically inspired hostility between previously dominant and dominated ethnic groups, as all are forced to adjust to new terms of inter-ethnic and inter-regional relationships.[100] Therefore,

in the short run, the drive toward equalitarian ethnic pluralism has necessarily intensified inter-ethnic discord instead of cultivating ethnic harmony. In the long run, however, the drive toward equalitarian ethnic pluralism has the potential to enhance ethnic harmony based on mutual respect and reciprocity. Ethnic harmony is a long-term intended consequence of equalitarian ethnic pluralism. Ethnic equality is a long-term goal of equalitarian ethnic pluralism. Ethnic groups that ordinarily would not have supported the government are hinging their support, alliance, and membership in the state structure on the basis of the secession provision. Has the ethnic-based system intensified or ameliorated ethnic conflict? The answer is mixed. In the short term, it has intensified ethnic conflict. In the long term, amelioration of ethnic conflict and inequality is possible; but the opposite is not impossible either.

Conclusion

Advocacy of the rights of ethnic communities emerged in Ethiopia by the 1960s and 1970s. The postwar imperial state (1941–1974) reacted by suppressing politicized ethnic activity. The military state (1974–1991) reacted by a combination of suppression of politicized ethnicities, on the one hand, and giving limited recognition to non-Amharic languages on the other, in its National Literacy Campaign, media cultural shows, and a regional autonomy project that was never implemented. As a nation-state, Ethiopia, in the 1980s, was ''brought to the brink of disintegration by conflict in which ethnicity featured prominently''.[101] Politicized ethnic groups in fact seized state power in 1991 under the leadership of the militarily strongest Tigray Peoples Liberation Front, with the assistance of EPLF. The transitional government laid the groundwork for the ethnic-based federal state system that formally came into force in 1995. In this sense, the ethnic-based federal state system in Ethiopia is a triumph of politicized ethnicities and a concord among ethnic nationalisms. There also seemed little alternative at the time to some sort of ethnic federalism, if the EPRDF were to establish its rule and retain the country as one unit in the global interstate system. Thus, pragmatic concerns about peace and stability, under EPRDF leadership, recommended ethnic-based federalism as an expedient framework for resolving issues of ethnic equality and the right to self-determination. Leaders of ethnic parties that ordinarily would not have supported the government, e.g. in the Somali region, have stated publicly that they are

hinging their support, alliance, and membership in the state structure on the basis of the secession provision.

Regional states have cultural and administrative autonomy. In some regional states, constituent parts want their statuses upgraded to that of regional state, primarily because that is where executive power lies. But none have the economic resources that would impel them to secession. Economically, regional states are not viable and are dependent on federal revenues and disbursement. There is also immense economic interdependence among the regional states, and between regional states and the federal state. But there is little interaction and exchange of experiences among the regional states themselves. The federal government mediates relations among regional states.

Potentially, problems of secession would arise in border regions, notably the Somali region. Politicians in the Somali Republic have not abandoned irredentism and fan separatist sentiment among Somalis on the Ethiopian side. Other border regional states such as Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz are too dependent on the federal government to seriously entertain secession. Oromia is the most challenging regional state in the current federal arrangement with regard to issues of secession and economic resource base.

If this multi-ethnic federal state experiment fails, no one knows what the future holds. Whether a nation-wide consensus on some other form of (federal) state could be forged is unknown and, at this point, unknowable. A return to some form of unitary state would be improbable, as many ethnic groups and regions, notably Oromia, Afar, and Somali regions, are likely to strenuously object to such an outcome. As the saying goes, ''the genie is out of the bottle''. In the absence of a nation-wide consensus on a successor form of state, the collapse of the Ethiopian state per se, as happened from late 18th century to mid-19th century, cannot be ruled out altogether. Alternatively, the military may once again seize power. All that can be concluded provisionally is that the viability and durability of ethnic federalism is indeterminate. Contingent events will shape the outcome of the politically fragile ethnic federal experiment. For now, the stability of the infant political system is dependent on the dominant front (EPRDF).

The framers of the multi-ethnic federal state contend that their aim was to make Ethiopia a society of equalitarian pluralism so that no ethnic group will find it necessary to secede from the state. If the experiment succeeds in that respect, it may encourage other African countries to move in the direction of the ethnic pluralism as a political principle of state construction. If it fails, e.g. in the event of a civil war

or actual disintegration of the nation-state, it may serve as a warning of what form of state construction to avoid.

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Notes

1. See E.F. Byarugaba, "Ethnopolitcs and the State – Lessons from Uganda", pp. 180–189, and F.E. Muhereza and P.O. Otim, "Neutralizing Ethnicity in Uganda", pp. 190–201, *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa* M.A. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis eds. (Uppsala: Nordikska Afrikainstitutet, 1998).
2. The regional states that formed the federation were: (1) Tigray, (2) Afar, (3) Amhara, (4) Oromia, (5) Somali, (6) Beni Shangul-Gumuz, (7–11) Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples (a "voluntary" merger of 5 regions), (12) Gambela, (13) Harari, and (14) Addis Ababa. Later, Dire Dawa was made a federal city-state.
3. Stephen Cornell and Douglass Hartmann. *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1998).
4. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith eds., *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. v.
5. Eamon Duffy, "The Luck of the English", *The New York Review of Books*, XLVII, 20 (December 21, 2000), pp. 75–78.
6. Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966).
7. Martin N. Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000), p. 7.
8. Connor Walker, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
9. Marger, p. 8.
10. Robin M. Williams, "The Sociology of Ethnic Conflicts: Comparative International Perspectives". *Annual Review of Sociology* 20 (1994), pp. 49–79.
11. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 10–11, emphasis added.

12. Marger.
13. Williams, p. 50.
14. Clifford Geertz, ''The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States'', *Old Societies and New States: Modernity in Africa and Asia*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 105–157.
15. Geertz, pp. 110–111.
16. Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991).
17. Cornell and Hartmann.
18. Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8.
19. Max Weber, ''Ethnic Groups'', *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 389–395.
20. Nelson Kasfir, ''Explaining ethnic political participation'', *World Politics*, 31 (1979), p. 376.
21. Calhoun, pp. 30–31.
22. Anthony D. Smith, ''The Ethnic Sources of Nationalism'', *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, ed. Brown, Michael (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 27–41.
23. *Ibid*., pp. 28–29.
24. *Ibid*., p. 31.
25. *Ibid*.
26. *Ibid*., p. 28
27. *Ibid*., pp. 35–37.
28. *Ibid*., p. 27. Between 1990 and 1996, ''twenty new states based largely upon dominant ethnic communities have been recognized'' (Hutchinson and Smith, p. v).
29. Marger, p. xiii.
30. See M.A.M. Salih and John Markakis eds. *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), p. 7.
31. Martin Doornbos, ''Linking the Future to the Past – Ethnicity and Pluralism'', *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa* M.A. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis, eds. (Uppsala: Nordikska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), pp. 17–29.
32. Eva Poluha, ''Ethnicity and Democracy – A Viable Alliance?'' *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa* M.A. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis eds. (Uppsala: Nordikska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), pp. 30–41.
33. Nonetheless, some Swiss cantons still deny voting rights to women.
34. A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo, ''Ethnicity as a Mode of Conflict Regulation'', *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa* M.A. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis eds. (Uppsala: Nordikska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), pp. 86–91. *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa* M.A. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis eds. (Uppsala: Nordikska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), pp. 156–179.
35. Helena Jerman, ''Dynamics of Ethnicity – A Case Study from the Western Bagamoyo District in Tanzania''.
36. The estimate of the number of ethnic groups in Ethiopia ranges from 63 (the number given by the transitional government in 1991) to 84 (based on the number of languages in the country). Other countries with high ethnic diversity include the U.S., Canada, Russia, India, and Nigeria.

37. The military struggle the TPLF demonstrated in the struggle against military rule enabled it to acquire political dominance since 1991.
38. See FDRE Central Statistical Authority, *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia*: *Results at Country Level Volume II Analytical Report* (Addis Ababa: CSA, June 1999), pp. 41–43.
39. *Ibid*., p. 56.
40. See Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa, 1972); Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia*, *1270–1527* (Clarendon Press, 1972).
41. According to Gashaw: ''The Ethiopian ruling classes cannot be identified with a particular ethnic group. They are a multi-ethnic group whose only common factors are that they are *Christians, Amharic speakers*, *and claim lineage to the Solomonic line*'' Solomon Gashaw, p. 142, emphasis added).
42. ''The central theme of Ethiopian history … has been the maintenance of a culture core which has adapted itself to the exigencies of time and place, assimilating diverse people''. Zewde Gabre Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia*: *A Political Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 1.
43. Reflecting OLF views, Herbert S. Lewis maintains, ''the modern empire was created only during the last 110 years as a result of the rapid southward military expansion of the Amhara rulers of Shoa''. Herbert S. Lewis, ''Ethnicity in Ethiopia: The View from Below (and from the South, East, and West)'', Crawford Young ed., *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 160.
44. Asafa Jalata, ed. *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1998).
45. Advocates of ''decolonization'' can also be understood as basing their arguments on internal colonialism thesis. In this connection, Eritrea is the only case of external colonialism.
46. For a seminal sociological work on the subject, see Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).
47. In many pluralistic societies, ethnic groups have become part of a larger national society either through conquest or by voluntarily relinquishing sovereignty to a central state in order to secure economic and political benefit. See Marger. ''Historically, states have arisen in response to the requirements of territorial control, surplus expropriation and external defence in relatively wealthy and densely populated areas. Almost invariably, they derive from a core zone in which the criteria for state formation are most clearly met and then expand into surrounding regions, until they are checked either by the countervailing power of rival states, or else by the progressive weakening of the force that can be projected from the core, into poorer and less densely settled peripheries''. Christopher Clapham, ''Controlling Space in Ethiopia'', *Remapping Ethiopia*: *Socialism & After* eds. Wendy James, Donald Donham, Eisei Kurimoto, and Alessandro Triulzi (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), p. 10.
48. Some Ethiopianist scholars see democracy and ethnic federalism as mutually exclusive. See, for example, Poluha, pp. 30–41, Theodore M. Vestal, *Ethiopia*: *A Post-Cold War African State* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), p. 207. Brietzke, however, characterizes the experiment as ''an ethnicized attempt at a democrati-

zation'' (p. 1). Paul H. Brietzke, ''Ethiopia's 'Leap in the Dark': Federalism and Self-Determination in the Draft Constitution, paper presented to the Horn of Africa Conference, Trento, Italy, December, 1994, p. 1. Gudina calls it an ''ethno-cratic state'', Gudina, Merera, ''The New Directions of Ethiopian Politics''. In *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies*: *Papers Presented to the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1994, Vol. II Social Sciences. H.G. Marcus ed. (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press), p. 913.

49. It should be noted that Amharic had served as a ''court'' language of roughly a millennium.
50. Emperor Menelik relied on indirect rule as far as possible. Emperor Haile Selassie's conscious effort to undermine traditional regional nobles in favor of state centralization commenced in earnest after he was restored to the throne in 1941.
51. ''Abyssinian nationalism, whose traditional organic core was the Tigre/Amhara segment of the population, was a hegemonic doctrine with relation to other ethnic groups'' (Gashaw, p. 138).
52. See Alem Habtu, ''Books on the Ethiopian Revolution: A Review Essay'', *Socialism and Democracy* 3 (1986), pp. 27–60; John Markakis, N*ational and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
53. According to the military regime's 1987 constitution, Ethiopian was a unitary state that ''shall ensure the equality of nationalities, combat chauvinism and narrow nationalism'' (Article 2). Brietzke observes: ''In true Leninist fashion and apart from celebrations of local music and dances, Mengistu's style of governance was universalist and unitarist in the extreme; through 'popular' mobilizations, *'the masses' were to be emancipated from their nationalities as well as their class*'' (p. 3, emphasis added).
54. See Solomon Gashaw, p. 154.
55. WSLF and ONLF were also instruments of the irredentist Republic of Somalia and enjoyed its backing.
56. ''The legal unaccountability of senior officials that was pioneered by Haile Selassie took even more authoritarian directions under Mengistu, and this helped to fuel regional rebellions and an increased ethnic consciousness'' (Brietzke, p. 2).
57. Interview with informants in Addis Ababa (summer 2001).
58. It should be noted that, outside the purview of intellectual movements, there were proto-ethnic, ethnonationalist, nationalist, peasant and/or pastoralist struggles on the ground: the Woyane revolt of the early 1940s, the Eritrean liberation movements of the early 1960s, peasant revolt in Gojjam in the mid-1960s, Bale during most of the 1960s, and one in Ogaden in association with Somalia irredentism, etc.
59. Student activists at Addis Ababa University and abroad were principal formulators and advocates of the national question in the late 1960s / early 1970s. See Alem Habtu, ''Reflections on the Ethiopian Student Movement in North America (1965–1970): A Personal Account'', *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Horn of* Africa (New York: Center for the Study of the Horn of Africa, 1987), pp. 65–70; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, *1855–1974* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1991) p. 225; Asafa Jalata, p. 9.
60. After all, it is former student activists that also created these ethnonationalist organizations in the early to mid-1970s.
61. In addition, there were trade union and university representatives. For a list of the groups, see Aaron Tesfaye, *Political Power and Ethnic Federalism* (Lanham, MD:

University Press of America, 2002), p. 75. Some of the groups were created overnight on the eve of the conference.

62. ''Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia'', (Addis Ababa, July 22, 1991), p. 1.
63. ''The right of nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination is affirmed. To this end, each nation, nationality and people is guaranteed the right to … exercise the right to self-determination of independence, when the concerned nation/nationality and people is convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged or abrogated''. Ibid., p. 2. This article was premised on the oppression thesis, i.e., the assumption that it is ethnic oppression that drives people to secession. According to Kifle Wodajo, Chair of the Constitutional Commission, the 1994 constitution does not make such an assumption as an ethnic group could demand secession on other grounds, e.g., economic resource advantage.
64. There was no explicit reason given for the seat allocations. They probably reflected the relative political and military strength of the attending parties.
65. The late Professor Asrat Woldeyes, a well-known medical surgeon and founder of the All-Amhara Poeople's Organization, came to symbolize this opposition. He had earlier registered his objection to the secession clause during the July 1991 charter conference.
66. See National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *An Evaluation of the June 21, 1992 Elections in Ethiopia*, (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1992); Leenco Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads*: *Decolonization & Democracy or Disintegration*? (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1999).
67. Lata charges that ''the process has in fact now ended in the restoration of a Derguelike one-party regime instead of the pluralist democratic order that was originally envisaged'' (*ibid*., p. xiii).
68. See endnote 23.
69. As Andreas Eshete put it, ''ethnic communities have now inherited Ethiopia''. See ''The Protagonists in Constitution-Making in Ethiopia'', *Constitution-Making and Democratisation in Africa* Goran Hyden and Denis Venter eds. (Pretoria, SA: African Institute of South Africa, 2001), p. 83. Indeed, primacy appears to have been given to ethnicity even at the risk of undermining the concept of citizenship. For example, Addis Ababa is a federal city. But official identification requires ethnic identification, although the latter is irrelevant in a federal city.
70. Interview with Kifle Wodajo, Chairman of the Constitutional Commission; he had himself fought for inclusion of this clause (August 2001).
71. Although fiscal decentralization is an important component of Ethiopian federalism, an examination of its features is beyond the scope of this paper. See Leulseged Ageze Zelelew, ''Fiscal Decentralization and Development in Ethiopia: A Preliminary Assessment'', (Paper No. 38. A Symposium for Reviewing Ethiopia's Socioeconomic Performance, 1991–1999. Addis Ababa: InterAfrica Group, 2000); Tesfaye, pp. 116-128.
72. Lionel M. Bender, J. Donald Bowen, Robert Cooper, and Charles Ferguson, eds., *Language in Ethiopia* (London: Oxford University Press).
73. Amharic is also the dominant market language. For example, most companies advertise on TV in Amharic more than in Oromiffa (Afan Oromo) or Tigrinya. Generally, Amharic had already emerged as the lingua franca of Ethiopia by the time the monarchy was abolished.
74. *Education Sector Development Action Plan* (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education, 1999), pp. 7–15.

75. ''Nation, nationality and people'' assume pre-existing and mandate-giving entities.
76. The smallest ethnic group represented is the 1,526-strong Koma (FDRE Central Statistical Authority 1999), p. 42.
77. The two are federal territories directly answerable to the federal government. Since specific ethnic communities do not inhabit them, they are deemed to have no right of ethnic representation. However, their inhabitants are represented in the House of Representatives. The federal House of Representatives (lower house) is elected on the basis of population size; the total number of representatives is 547.
78. The federal government recently (spring 2003) introduced a bill that gives discretionary authority to the federal government to intervene in regional states if it deems it necessary to do so for political, humanitarian and human rights reasons. Such a robust intervention authority would erode state rights. (Personal information, June 2002.)
79. Interview in Addis Ababa in August 2001; John Markakis, ''The Politics of Identity – The case of the Gurage in Ethiopia'', *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa* M.A. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis eds. (Uppsala: Nordikska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), pp. 127–146.
80. The seven clans of Sebat-Bet Gurage include Ezha, Geta, Meq'werqwer, Muhre and Aklil, Endegane, Yegre-Anghet Cheha, and Yinor and Anner. See Gabreyesus Hailemariam, *The Guragues and Their Culture* (New York: Vintage Press, 1991), p. 1. Gurage informants I interviewed list them with somewhat different names (January 2002). Then there are Soddo (Kistani), Silte, Welene, Soddo Jedha, and Kebena. See also Markakis, p. 131.
81. Markakis, 1998, pp. 131–136. A linguist of Gurage origin, Hailu Fulass, had claimed that there were 13 languages among the Gurage, some mutually intelligible, some not. The languages include ''Sebat-Bet'', Welene (a combination of Sebat-Bet and Silte), Silte, and Soddo (language closest to Amharic, Tigrinya, and Geez), according to a Gurage informant in Addis Ababa in January 2002.
82. I am using the terms ethnic category, ethnic community, and ethnic nationalism in the sense that Smith defines them.
83. *Ibid*., pp. 143–144.
84. *Ibid*., pp. 144.
85. Markakis referred to Shoa as ''the most heterogeneous of the ancient Ethiopian provinces with several ethnic and religious groups''. John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 19.
86. Maimire Mennasemay argues as follows: '' … we have to consider the Ethiopian polity as the outcome of a 'longue duree' historical trajectory whose internal dynamics of national integration was articultated in terms of 'Hager Bet' or 'terroirs', such as Gojam, Wollo, Shoa, Wellega, Sidamo, Tigre, Harar, etc. The 'terroirs' were interethnic, historically formed political domains; every 'terroir' was seen by its inhabitants, and the inhabitants of other 'terroirs', as part of a larger historical entity – Ethiopia''. ''Adwa: A Dialogue between the Past and the Present'', *Northeast African Studies*, 4, 2 (1997), p. 58.
87. The Yeju are said to be originally of Oromo stock but have been Amharized for some generations.
88. In summer 2002, the president of AAPO, Hailu Shawel, and his followers formed the All-Ethiopian Unity Organization (*Reporter* [Amharic edition], Nehase 13, 1994 Ethiopian calendar), pp. 7, 28. But others, including former vice president *Keg-*

nazmatch Qen'a Tibeb insist that AAPO is alive and well and will continue to be the organization of the Amhara ethnic group (*Asqual*, Nehase 14, 1994, Ethiopian calendar), p. 1.

89. Traditionally, the Tigray people themselves use the word Tigray to designate only the *awraja*s of Adwa, Aksum and Shire. The rest are referred to simply as Temben, Agame, Enderta, Raya Azebo, etc.
90. Like the Yeju, the Raya and Azebo in Tigray region are of Oromo ancestory but now speak Tigrinya and Amharic, not Oromiffa. The Raya and Qobo in Wollo zone are also of Oromo origin but are Amharic speakers. But Oromo ethnonationalists claim them all as Oromo.
91. The House of Federation recognizes the Tigray, Kunama, and Irob (Saho) ethnic groups in Tigray regional state.
92. For example, the Arsi who consider themselves to be Oromo were apparently Kambata and Hadiya who were transformed into Oromo ethnicity, according to Arsi oral history.This information was provided to the author in summer 2001 by an Ethiopian social scientist with intimate historical knowledge of the country.
93. In Tigray regional state, the non-Tigray ethnic groups (Kunama and Irob / Saho) are fairly small in number. In Afar regional state, there is a small Argobba ethnic group beside the overwhelming Afar group. The Amhara ethnic group is predominant in the Amhara state. But Agaw Himira (Agaw-Kamirgina), Agaw Agawawi (Agaw-Awongigna), Bete-Israel (''Falasha''), Qimant, Argobba, and Oromo ethnic groups also live in the Amhara state. Likewise, the Oromia state is overwhelmingly Oromo. But significant numbers of Werji, Mao, Amhara, Gurage, Somali, Tigray, etc. live there. Gambela state comprises two major ethnic groups (Anwar and Nuer) and two minor ethnic groups (Majangir and Komo), excluding recent Amhara and Oromo settlers. Beni Shangul-Gumuz state comprises the Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Komo, and Mao ethnic groups as well as Amhara and Oromo settlers (Young 2001). Harari regional state is the most odd in that the Harari ethnic group is much smaller than the Oromo or Amhara. Out of a total population of 131,139, the Harari numbered only 9734 compared to 68,564 Oromo, and 42,781 Amhara (Asmelash Beyene 1997, p. 14 cited in Aklilu Abraham and Asnake Kefale, ''The View from Below: Democratization and Governance in Ethiopia'', Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2000). Not only is Harari a multiethnic state, but also the Harari political rulers represent a tiny fraction of the state population. Finally, the most multiethnic state of all is the Southern Ethiopia Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State (Southern State), representing 45 ethnic groups, including the Gurage, Hadiya, Kambata, Wollaita, and Sidama. The South is clearly not an ethnic-based state; it is a multi-ethnic state. There is no single dominant ethnic group. In that sense, the Southern, Gambela, Beni Shangul-Gumuz, and Harari regional states are unique.
94. See Table 2. The smallest ethnic groups in the country (hence, unable to form their own respective districts (*wereda*) include Saho, Kunama, Koma, North Mao, Shinasha, Zoyisse, Gobez, Gidole, Arbore, Gnangatom, Tsemai, Dimme, Bodi, Mao, Zelmam, Minit, and Sheko.
95. See *The Economist*, August 16, 1997.
96. As Zakaria put it: ''Once an ethnic group is in power, it tends to exclude other ethnic groups''. Fareed Zakaria, ''The Rise of Illiberal Democracy'', *Foreign Affairs*, 76, 6 (1997), pp. 35–36.

97. Islamic Oromo Liberation Front is also engaged in armed combat for Oromo secession.
98. It is noteworthy, for example, that Somali youth in the Somali regional state insisted that the educational requirement for volunteering for the war front be reduced so that they could fulfill their duty as Ethiopian citizens.
99. See Leenco Lata, *ibid*. See also Mohammed Hassen, ''Ethiopia's Missed Opportunities for Peaceful Democratization Process'', paper presented at the 37th annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Toronto, 1994.
100. For the Amhara's changed circumstances, see, for example, Cressida Marcus, ''Imperial Nostalgia: Christian Restoration & Civic Decay in Gondar'', pp. 239–256 in *Remapping Ethiopia*, eds. Wendy James, et al (Oxford: James Currey, 2002). Hogg (1997, p. 17) observes, ''The new federal structure of Ethiopia has provided a new arena for old inter-ethnic battles to be fought. Borana-Garri clashes in the southern rangelands can now be played out in the context of Oromo-Somali regional state relations, and, in particular, the struggle for control of Moyale district''.
101. Salih and Markakis, p. 7.