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**Local conflicts between Somali and Oromo people in the
context of political decentralization in Ethiopia:
Comparative case study on Ma'eso and Babile Districts**

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Dedication

To My Dearest Mother: Amina Ibrahim Mohamed, and to: My Beloved Wife Ferha Ibrahim Abdikadir.

Abbreviation

1. DPPC Disaster prevention and preparedness commission.
2. DUP Democratic United Party.
3. EPRDF Ethiopian peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front.
4. ESDL Ethiopian Somali Democratic League.
5. FDRE Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
6. GTZ German Corporation for Technical Cooperation.
7. IGLF Issa and Gurgura Liberation Front.
8. JPC Joint peace committee.
9. OLF Oromo liberation Front.
10. OPDO Oromo peoples Democratic Party (An EPRDF affiliated Party).
11. ORS Oromo Regional State (Oromo region).
12. SRS Somali Regional State (Somali Region).

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Abstract

The paper addresses local conflicts between Somali and Oromo people in the context of recent state political and structural changes in Ethiopia. The aim is to explore the underlying causes of conflicts and the intervention mechanisms used under a firmly centralized governance system, and the impact of 1991 ethnically-based decentralization system on the local conflicts between Somali and Oromo communities along the border between the two states.

The paper argues that the 1991 decentralization system have aggravated the already existed local resource use conflicts between different pastoral and agro-pastoral Somali and Oromo communities.

There has been a long history of cultural and linguistic integrations between these two groups who live in geographically mixed settings. There has also been an ongoing cycle of resource conflicts mainly created by the physical mobility of pastoralist in search of water and pasture. This created a fierce competition over land and water sources live in an environment known to endemic poverty, recurrent droughts, and where these vital resources are scarce. In recent times however, the existed local resource conflicts have taken political dimensions mainly due to the state political and structural changes in the country.

The 1991 state political and structural changes in the country demanded the formation of ethnically-based regional states in previously non ethnic-based provincial administrations ruled by highly centralized governments in the past. Consequently, the question of demarcating the boundary between culturally and geographically mixed neighboring societies like Somali and Oromo has resulted in disagreements and fresh disputes between the newly formed regional states.

The paper examines the emerging challenges of the local conflicts between Somali and Oromo people along the border between the two states. Especial emphasis is given to the cases of Ma'eso and Babile districts. In doing so, the paper addresses issues such as causes, consequences and resolution mechanism used during Derg regime and under the current EPRDF led government.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1. Introduction.

Ethiopia is a country situated in the Horn of Africa; it is the third-most populous nation in Africa with a projected population of over 70 million. The country is bordered by Eritrea to the north, Djibouti to the northeast, Somalia to the southeast, Kenya to the south, and Sudan to the west. Despite the fact that the country is flush with minerals', natural resources' and vast fertile land, it happens to be one of the poorest countries in the world. The country is very diverse with more than 80 multi-ethnic groups, and to name a few among them are Somalis and Oromo.

Despite the reality that there are agro-pastoralists, and sedentary farmers, pastoralists comprise about 12% of the population (Kassa, 2000). The majority of the Somali, the Afar, and the Oromo-Boran are pastoralists. These groups generate their livelihood by keeping a large number of livestock and by varied farming of cattle rearing. Year in and year out, the inhabitants live and endure extremely harsh environmental conditions, extreme poverty and well-known recurrent drought in these areas.

Historically in these areas, there have been many conflicts triggered by a competition for natural resources between diverse local factions. The main causes of these conflicts between the Somali, the Afar and the Oromo-ethnic groups in the southern part of the country are due to the harsh environmental conditions and the increasing need for basic human survival resources (*most significantly land and water*). In the past, one of the major grounds for violent conflicts between these ethnic-groups was a fierce competition for access to water sources and grazing land, especially during dry seasons. On the other hand, the intensity, scope, constituency of conflicting parties and the consequences of these conflicts have increased in the last three centuries largely, due to the political and state structural changes in the country.

The different ethnic societies in the country be positioned under one formal governmental structure in the 19th century, but it was in the era of Emperor Haile Selassie government that formal state institutions were suitably established (Tsegaw, 2001:2). In 1974, the Emperor was removed from power by an exceedingly centralized communist government headed by Mengistu. In Ethiopia, throughout the monarchical rule and the Derg communist regime, the country was under remarkably centralized form of authority, where the production and the re-distribution of the states resources were strictly controlled by one authoritarian government and was fundamentally dominated by the Amhara ethnic-group.

The domination of state power by a single ethnic group had created economic, social, and political inequality and consequently a grievance by the rest of the ethnic groups in

the country. As a result, a number of ethnic-based opposition movements initiated a struggle over the national politics. The state power struggle between nationalist movements of the various ethnic-based insurgent groups had further deepened ethnic conflicts in the country. The central Derg government era had ended after EPRDF forces defeated the Derg regime. Soon after that, the EPRDF introduced ethnic-based decentralized regional system in 1991.

In 1991, EPRDF instituted federal accord along the ethnic lines aimed at dismantling the past, get rid of the centralized control structure, resolve the prolonged ethnic hate and conflicts created by the dominance of a single ethnic faction. To achieve this, all ethnic groups in the country are structured into nine mostly ethnic based autonomous regions and two city administrations.

Formerly neglected ethnic groups have welcomed the new idea of decentralization system. These groups admired the recognition of their local ethnic dialects and culture in their newly created zonal administration. They judge that the new system will pledge self-rule and will end the dominance of the state power by single ethnic group. In addition, unlike the previous centralized governments, there is a wide reception that the new system will grant better service to allocate necessities to the lower level municipalities and especially to the secluded countryside area inhabitants. Many also argue the new ethnic-based federal system has decreased the national ethnic instability and animosity among ethnic groups (Shide; 2003).

Yet, in addition to the previously existed conflicts over natural resources, the introduction of ethnic based decentralization system in Ethiopia has brought in new form of conflicts, particularly at the local level.

For decades, the very centralized governments in the past administered the country in non-ethnic based provincial divisions. The new system is wrapped up with the creation and implementation of boundaries to distinguish ethnic based limits. This has worsened ethnic tensions; one of the highly disputed boundaries exists between the Somali and the Oromo regional states where both sides are claiming an unfair demarcation by the federal authority.

The Somali and the Oromo agro-pastoralists share more than 1000 km long of not clearly demarcated border in the southern and eastern parts of Ethiopia. The conditions in these uncertain areas are known for its tremendous and ruthless environment. The land dispute between these two regional states was escalated with the introduction of decentralization system in the country in 1991. The area in question stretches from Moyale to Ma'eso that affects a vast land to some extent. Along this border between the Somali and the Oromo regional states, lay districts found in the far southern part (Moyale district) to those in the northern (like Ma'eso district).

In the early era of federalized system in the country, various ethnic-based political organizations were created in the objective areas, such as OLF, EPRDF-OPDO, DUP, IGLF, and ESDL all claiming to representing their respective ethnic groups. As a result,

the local traditional resource conflicts were transformed into politics that are more complicated and this had fueled the existed local conflicts in the untested districts. The newly created political elites had tried to secure the largest and most promising areas possible under their jurisdiction. At the same time, these elites had maltreated the decentralized authority and resources. They started to mobilize local people along the tribal lines. In some areas, local people started permanent claims over areas they had shared or lived side by side in the past. This kind of local conflicts were previously confined to just rural areas and now it has spread to major urban settlements and revenue centers.

Increased division and hostility ruined the century's old peaceful co-existence among different neighboring ethnic communities (Shide, 2003; Getachew, 2006).

Two of the more than 30 districts affected by the borderline disputes between the Somali and Oromo regional states are Ma'eso and Babile districts, which are located in the eastern borderline of these two states.

The essay compares the local conflicts set off between the Somali and the Oromo inhabitants in Ma'eso and Babile districts during the firmly central previous regime (Derg) and under the new regime of a decentralized form of authority initiated by (EPRDF) in 1991.

The comparison between the two districts is very important because in these localities, the major dynamics or the original cause of the conflicts during Derg regime and even under the current government seems impossible to tell apart. To be precise, throughout the Derg regime, there has been conflicts' stemming from the competition for land and water sources in both districts. Ever since the decentralization system of 1991, conflicts' resulting from the unlawful bickering over competition for power and resource has escalated to a new height among the various ethnic-based political parties and elites. The two subject ethnic groups had different approach to react and manage these on going and never changing conflict. Unlike in Ma'eso district, where disputes have always been violent and deadly during and even after the collapse of the Derg regime, the people of Babile district have never resorted to violence in order to settle differences' with their close by ethnic population.

1.2. The objective.

The objective of this paper is to explore the underlying causes of the local conflicts between Somali and Oromo identity groups and conflict resolution mechanisms used.

The aim is to explore the characteristics of these local conflicts under firmly centralized governance system, and the implications of post 1991 conversion to an ethnically-based decentralized federal system. In doing so, an attempt will be made to pinpoint the local conflicts during Derg regime especially conflicts over natural resources and conflict resolution mechanisms employed during this period. Most importantly, how the nature of neighbor conflicts were altered from the time of political decentralization in Ethiopia.

The paper will scrutinize the differences and similarities of the causes and consequences of local conflicts in Ma'eso and Babile districts.

1.3. The main research questions.

The paper will attempt to answer the following key questions:

1. What was the nature of the local conflict between Somali and Oromos people in Ma'eso and Babile districts, and what was the conflict intervention mechanisms employed during Derg regime?
2. In post 1991 political changes, how decentralization have changed the nature of conflicts between Somali and Oromo people in Ma'eso and Babile districts. What was the conflict intervention mechanisms employed under the current EPRDF led government?
3. What are the similarities and differences on the causes, consequences, and modes of regulating these conflicts between the two districts?

1.4. Methodology and data sources.

The information needed for this paper will largely be based on qualitative data. Materials for analysing the nature and history of the local conflicts both during Derg regime and under current government will be drawn from both primary and secondary data.

Text materials from the rich ISS library, internet, and Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis-Ababa will serve the main source for building the conceptual framework of this paper. Data used for the analytical chapters of this paper is extracted mainly from studies and assessments made by previous researchers and few assessment made by GTZ located in Addis-Ababa. Some documents collected from concerned government authorities, interviews made with local elders in the districts, and reflections of my past experience also constitute the analysis part of the paper.

1.5. Scope and Limitations of the research.

This paper studies the conflicts between Somali and Oromo communities along the border between the two states. Especial emphasis is given to trends of the post 1991 local conflicts in Ma'eso and Babile districts. To give better understanding however, history of local conflicts in these districts during Derg period are reviewed and compared with the current ones.

The limited number of contemporary studies/researches on local conflicts between Somali and Oromo in general and the study districts in particular had constrained me to give better understanding of the local conflicts in the study districts. Another constraint was the topic of my research and my limited understanding of Oromifa Language. These have constrained me to collect sufficient and proper first hand data for my study during my field visit.

1.6. Organization of the study.

The paper consist five chapters; the first chapter will introduce the testament of the problem, the objective, the methodology used, and the scope and limitations of the study.

Chapter two will deal the main concepts and theories of local conflicts. This chapter explores some of the conceptual ideas about causes of local ethnic conflicts and conflict resolution approaches. It attempts to discuss some of the concepts and issues involved in local conflicts, such as conflicts over natural resources, ethnicity and local conflicts, and forms of governance and local conflicts, as well as conflict resolution approaches.

Chapter three and four; Constitute the main data analysis part of the paper. Chapter three briefly reviews the major violent local conflicts that occurred during Derg regime between Afar, Somali, and Oromo the local pastoralists and agro pastoralists.

Chapter four analyzes the emerging challenges of local conflict and modes of regulation. First, an overview of the historical background of Babile and Ma'eso districts will also be made. Then, this chapter will assess the local conflicts between Somali and Oromo communities who inhabit along the border between the Somali and Oromo regional states, and the regulation mechanisms used. In light with this, the cases of Ma'eso and Babile districts are compared during Derg regime, and under the current government.

Finally chapter five will sum up the main issues in the local conflict between the neighboring Somali and Oromo communities. Here a summary of the major similarities and differences of the conflict in the two districts of Ma'eso and Babile will be made. And as a final point, it will set some general ending and proposals.

Chapter Two: Main theories and conceptual considerations

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, some general theoretical discussions of conflict will be made. This chapter explores some of the conceptual ideas about causes of local ethnic conflicts and conflict resolution mechanisms. Concepts and issues involved such as ethnicity and conflict, conflict over natural resources, and forms of governance and local conflicts, as well as conflict resolution approaches will be addressed.

2.2. Understanding conflict

Conflict is a very vague word. Different writers and organizations define conflict in different ways. Some may look at it from the narrow point of view while others may see it from a broader perspective. Though various definitions of conflict can be found yet, the main role of conflict theories and concepts is to explain social conflicts in general,

examining their sources, patterns of escalation, de-escalation, consequences and management (Salih, 2006; Handout: Lecture 1).

Doucet, 2003, for instance, viewed conflict as intricate social phenomenon which is a feature connected to the human existence that is essential to social change and transformation. He defined conflict as a "*situation when parties disagree about the distribution of material or symbolic resources and act on the basis of these perceived incompatibilities*" (Doucet, 2003:3).

Most conflict theorists however, stress *consensual* and *dissensual* conflicts in explaining the nature of the goals in which parties may go into conflict. Consensual conflicts are those that arise from the competition of contending parts over limited or scarce resources which they all value such as land, water, power, financial resources and the like. The underlying basis for such conflicts could be real or perceived unfairness or exclusion. There are also dissensual conflicts, where parts may come into conflict about differently held values, culture, religion, and ethnicity and so on. In fact, in some conflicts both consensual and dissensual components are usually present. In addition to the conflicting parties may have other qualities such as high levels of interdependence and shared norms which may reduce the possibilities of certain conflicts to turn into violence (Salih, 2006; Handout: Lecture 1).

Conflict analysts are also interested in struggles involving violence or other forms of coercion. Hence, it is important to differentiate between conflict and violence. Violence is often related to devastation and damage of the conflicting parties.

The following section will highlight the natural resource competition, especially land and water as a contributing factor to the local conflicts between and among pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the Horn.

2.2. Conflict over natural resources

People used to compete over the natural resources they need to support their livelihoods since time immemorial. There has however been great divergence on the value and the type of the resources, as well as the nature, scope, and complexity of the struggles over these resources (Buckles and Rusnak (eds), 1999:2).

There can be a number of reasons why conflicts over natural resources occur. In the greater Horn of Africa, the assumption that violent conflicts just emanate from ethnic, religious, or cultural differences is limited. Pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities in the Horn rely on land and water in advancing their livelihoods. Such resources are scarce and under increasing pressure. Nowadays, the nature of local conflicts over land and water has been intensified due to the ever increasing demand as a result of rapid population growth and increased consumption of such vital resources. Endemic poverty, recurrent drought, and harsh climatic conditions constitute some of the major contributing factors to local conflicts over natural resources. These circumstances complicate the use of the natural resources, as well as modes of management. They also intensify the nature

of competition and thus conflict between the local pastoral and agro-pastoral groups in the Horn (*Suliman, 1999:205*)

Apart from conflicts over competition for land and access to water sources, insecurity and livestock raiding for economic or culturally related matters also play a tremendous role in violent conflicts between neighboring local pastoralist communities in the Horn.

As the type, nature, and value given to the use of natural resources differs under certain circumstances, there is also divergence in approaches used for solving conflicts that emanate from natural resources too. There is a tendency of using violence means in the context of local resource access among pastoralist communities in the Horn. These trends usually call for a good understanding of the nature of the conflicts and the power dynamics that shape the particular nature of socio-economic environment of the resource use (*Buckles and Rusnak (eds), 1999*).

In fact, in order to manage some of the natural resource problems in the Horn, there is a need to tackle the specific causes of conflicts over natural resources, such as land-use, human and animal population growth, and climatic variations. But, it is also equally important to take into account the crucial issues of the state, and identity politics in analyzing the contemporary local conflicts between various ethnic communities in the Horn (*Suleiman, 1999:206*).

2.3. Ethnicity and conflict

Ethnic group or ethnicity may be judged as fuzzy concepts in both its existence and legitimacy. Different scholars define the term differently. Some scholars see ethnic groups to be objective entities with distinct boundary, while others understand it basically as fluid subjective entities with changing nature, largely due to the nature and strength of the interaction of a given group(s) with other group(s) (*Defa, 2002:8*). Some describe ethnicity as social relationships between groups of persons who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from other members with whom they have minimum interaction (*Smith 1997 cited in Salih, 2006, Handout: Lecture 5*).

Various other definitions of ethnicity can exist, but, for simplifying the term “ethnicity” or “ethnic group” the following definition of ethnicity which is most commonly cited will be used for the purpose of this paper. Most commonly, ethnic group or ethnicity is referred to a collectivity of people who share the same primordial characteristics such as common ancestry, language, and culture. In that sense, ethnicity can be referred to as the behavior and feeling (about oneself and others) that supposedly emanates from membership of an ethnic group (*Tsegaw, 1994; Salih, 2006, Handout: Lecture 5*).

Despite one encounters difficulty to accurately analyze what ethnicity may mean, and what may constitute ethnic conflict, however, the fact is; in almost all human beings ethnic groups usually organize their cultural resources in order to improve their position, prohibit others from scarce resources and control them for collective action (*Salih, 2006, Handout: Lecture 5*).

In recent years, there was a notable indication about ethnicity on the various debates that added up to the discourse on the newly democratizing African states (Doornbos, 1991). Though, most of these discussions and questions focused on the role of ethnicity at national politics and state formation, it is however noteworthy to make a close look at its exposure on conflicts at the local level.

As instrumentalist scholars argue, ethnicity drives its importance from multifaceted social truth from which it comes out. It serves as device for social competition (Tsegaw, 2001). In the Horn, one can observe that when ever local conflicts emanating from competition for land and water intensifies, it leads to a situation where ethnic and cultural divisions get strong and thus come into play in the local conflicts between local pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the Horn (Suleiman, 1999:206). Further more, ethnic tensions have also increased with the recent political and state structural changes under way in these countries.

In formulating democratic state, ethnicity have played a tremendous role in the political power struggle between elites not only at the national level of the newly democratizing African states, but also at the local level in those states that have introduced ethnically-based decentralized system of governance like Ethiopia.

2.4. Forms of governance, and local conflicts.

In multi-ethnic African states, over-centralized state with unequal access to state power unavoidably creates conflicts. One of the reasons for this could be the state in these countries often serves as the key controller for the creation and redistribution of political, economic, and social wellbeing. Hence, as those in power may attempt to consolidate power they often favor their ethnic groups while marginalizing others. This inevitably stimulates ethnic tension and thus conflicts. Former Amhara state domination of Ethiopia can be cited as an example of such conflicts (Creative Associates International, 1996, at http://www.caii.com/CAIStaff/Dashboard_GIROAdminCAIStaff/Dashboard_CAIAdminDatabase/resources/ghai/costcaus.htm#c2).

Never the less, in the last ten years, the process of centralization and one ethnic dominated state power has been constrained by a variety of social and ethnic-based political movements. The human, financial and social costs caused by these ethnic conflicts in the Horn, raised new questions and concerns about ethnicity in state formation thus making the issue of governance at the heart of internal conflicts (Rupesinghe, 1996:42).

The supremacy of centralized state power has been declining, and there has been a profound political shift underway in most of the African countries. As a result, many of these states have introduced in new forms of decentralization (Doornbos, 1991:54).

Federalism, inter-governmental decentralization, and devolutions are some of the most cited forms of devolving power to lower levels. But there are wide varieties of arrangements and categories for the devolution of power to lower level structures.

Similarly there are variations in arrangements within each category. There are differences in terms of power sharing and relationships, as well as the distribution of resources between the different levels of the structure of the government. The most comprehensive form of 'decentralization' or as others may refer to 'federalism' involves sharing of state power, resources, and responsibilities between the central and local governments. With this form of governance, sub-national governments (regions) with clearly defined territorial boundaries usually enjoy considerable degree of autonomy from the centre (Lovies, 2000; (UN-HABITAT, 2002; Ayenew, 1998; S. R. Osmani: SEPED conference paper series # 7, at http://www.undp.org/poverty/publications/conf_pub.htm#Series%207 on 12/07/2006).

Whether devolution of power in a political system to the lower levels refers to decentralization or federalism is not a matter of discussion here. These concepts essentially describe a process that has the same ends. To be more precise, in multi-ethnic societies, both federalism and democratic decentralization can be viewed as ways of empowering local institutions by creating autonomous local or regional authorities. Both decentralization and federalism can be interpreted as instruments intended to forge better service delivery, and transform or solve internal conflicts of the multi-ethnic states and especially at the local levels (Lovies, 2000).

Local level democracy Advocates argue that, in multi-ethnic nation-states, political decentralization accommodates diversity of the various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Since it permits high degree of autonomy, it serves as a compromise between secession and highly centralized governance arrangements. It provides a formula for different ethnic linguistic and religious groups to live together as united political community (Ayenew, 1998; UN-HABITAT, 2002; Sisk and Risley, 2005).

In deed, local governments serve a key agency in the well-being of the population of developing African countries. Local level authorities serve as a link between communities and officials of central and regional governments (De Wit, 2000). There is there fore, a growing acknowledgement that establishing democratic local authorities will help in building social harmony, community sprit, and political stability (Sisk and Risley, 2005).

While realizing the positive effects of establishing local level democracy through decentralization of power and resources to local governments, it is however, important to take a critical look at current modes of thinking and practices at the local level regarding political decentralization and its effect on local ethnic conflicts.

As Olowu, 2001:52 explains, there have been two political problems facing in most of the decentralizing African states. In the first place, the top political and administrative leaders of these states were not ready to share the power and resources with the lower levels mainly fearing a possible disintegration of national unity. The other problem facing these states was the fear of elite capture for the decentralized power and resources to the lower levels.

Many countries have managed the first problem but there is no country that has fully managed the second one (Olowu, 2001:52). The political power struggle and thus local conflicts continued especially at the sub-regional levels even after some multi-ethnic African states such as Ethiopia moved to a comprehensive of decentralization system that involved the formation of autonomous regional states.

One can sense that in the Horn, the conflicting parties usually belong to different ethnic groups. Though some question whether the conflicts in the region are caused by differences ascribed to ethnicity, never the less, it is undeniable that they are a contributing cause and more often than not are exploited by the contending political elites (Assefa, 1996).

In many situations, one can observe elites usually take the advantage of exploiting the cultures, values, and practices of ethnic groups. These become the reference points that some members of certain groups call upon for identification, by claiming to create a collective political identity. Thus, it can be argued that to a large extent, what has been called ethnic conflict is elite-driven conflict, rather than people to people confrontations. Local political elites of many of the Horn stimulate the ethnic difference and can worsen ethnic tensions. In many instances, such an elite-driven conflict has the potential of turning conflicts between small elites into prevalent conflict among the greater population (Salih, 2006. Handout: lecture 5; Assefa, 1996).

It is also important to point out, that state weakness is necessary precondition for violent conflicts to erupt. As noted by Mansoob, (2002:389) *"State's failure in providing security and minimal level of public goods often forces individuals to rely on kinship ties for support and security"*. When the state's authority declines groups become fearful for their survival and security, they tend to rely on their capabilities, by investing and preparing for violence (Mansoob, 2002).

This phenomenon is also indicated by Doornbos, 1997; Doornbos observed that some of the conflicts in the post colonial Africa are voiced as ethnic while reflecting a search for security due to the failure of the state to provide it. According to Doornbos, 1997:25-26), *" Besides, resorting to ethnic identity, and expression of ethnicity often reflects a search for security given the failure of the state to instill or sustain, a sense of confidence in its long-term goals and objectives"*.

2.5. Conflict Intervention approaches.

Having discussed different conceptual explanations of the causal relationship between local ethnic conflicts and competition over natural resources, ethnicity, and various forms of governance, the paper now looks at different intervention approaches of managing local conflicts.

The overall field of conflict management is filled with conceptual and definitional haziness. Conflict management can take various forms and may involve a complex and multidisciplinary field of studies (Reimann, 2001:1). It is therefore, beyond the scope of

this paper to discuss the different definitional and conceptual explanations related to different approaches of conflict management.

Thus, to help facilitate better understanding, four approaches of conflict management as they relate to local conflicts discussed in the preceding chapters of this paper will be discussed. These are; conflict settlement, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and traditional practices of conflict management. But, more emphasis will be given to the conflict transformation and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

In the case of conflict settlement, various researchers use this term to mean different in the aspects of conflict management. Conflict settlement can be referred to mean as all strategies that in one way or another seek to end violent conflict through a cease-fire or stop the hostility. According to Riemann, 2001:10) conflict settlement can be defined as *"all outcome oriented strategies for achieving sustainable win-win solutions and/or putting an end to direct violence, without necessarily addressing the underlying conflict cause."*

In the case of conflict resolution, scholars define it much broader aspect than conflict settlement.

According to Riemann, 2001:12):

"Conflict resolution refers to all orientated activities that aim to address the underlying causes of direct, cultural and 'structural violence'. Structural violence defines the social, political and economic structure of a conflict situation, while 'cultural violence' may refer to the social and cultural legitimization of direct and structural violence."

In the case of conflict transformation; as many scholars defined, conflict transformation can be referred to as *"outcome, process- and structure-orientated long-term peace building efforts, which aim to truly overcome revealed forms of direct, cultural and structural violence"* (Lederach, 1995 and 1997, Curle, 1971, and Galtung 1996 cited in Riemann, 2001: 13).

By interpreting this way, it means that conflict transformation moves beyond the aims of both the conflict settlement and conflict resolution approaches. It means now that, efforts are made not to eliminate conflict as such; rather, it is assumed that conflict expressed in a non-violent manner is an essential catalyst for change. Thus, conflict transformation tries to change the conflict itself and some aspect of the socio-political system in which the conflict occurs (Riemann, 2001 cited in Shide, 2003).

One approach to conflict transformation focuses on levels of governance and social interaction. In this approach, harmonizing peacemaking efforts by facilitating the cooperation of various levels of local governing bodies such as governing elite, community leaders, and grass-roots processes constitute the center for attention in conflict transformation (Sisk and Risley, 2005).

Other strategies such as a process of sustaining and developing a dialogue between the

contending groups, as well as series of problem solving workshops and peace conferences can be viewed as short-term, and medium-term involvement in conflict transformation approach. But, establishing deeper common interest and shared needs through increased cooperation and improved communication between parties could indeed provide a form of 'successful outcome' in conflict transformation (Riemann, 2001: 13).

With regard to the traditional approaches of conflict management, there is a growing acceptance for the importance of exploring the local culture in understanding and managing local conflicts. Historically, natural resource conflicts at the local level in different parts of the Horn were often dealt with through customary or traditional dispute resolution practices. Far before any type of state formation the traditional local pastoral and agro-pastoral groups used to settle their differences, manage resource use, and solve the emerging local conflicts through the use of indigenous knowledge and ritual practices (Anand, 2003 cited in Shide, 2003:12).

As a rule, traditional approaches use indigenous institutions such as traditionally elected hereditary leaders and council of elders, customary rules and regulations relating to peace making, access to resources, and other social aspects. In fact, these traditional practices are still strong in local pastoral and agro-pastoral different ethnic and clans in the Horn. This fact suggests that conflict management techniques requires better understanding of the cultural knowledge and resources at work in the particular conflict situation (Anand, 2003 cited in Shide, 2003:12).

Never the less, currently traditional mechanisms alone cannot be considered to be enough for the management of the new challenges and changes in the global environment that result many of the conflicts that local people are experiencing today (Shide, 2003). Besides, indigenous institutions have their own negative aspects. It is clear that in many instances there may be discrimination on the bases of gender and age. They may also sometimes be biased towards certain groups' interests (De Wit, 2000).

One could argue that the level of conflict management will depend on the strength, constraints, and the cooperation between the informal or traditional and formal conflict management institutions and practices. But, great care must be exercised when selecting the level of the structures of the formal institutions. One can argue that centralized form of managing local conflicts has also not been effective in many situations. In the Horn, evidences shows how specific centralized government policies have aggravated an already existed local resource conflicts. For instances, the state's land tenure policies intended to restore peace and ensure national security in most peripheral regions has complicated the existed peaceful co-existence of local communities in certain countries in the Horn (Tyler, 1999).

This suggests that, when conflict escalates into open violence, it is more often than not local authorities that are best able to play mollifying roles. Despite the importance of empowering local authorities, there is a risk however, that empowerment at the local level can lead to elite capture, and unintended negative consequences (Sisk and Risley,

2005).

In many local settings where violence occur an additional key root cause is the absence of legitimate and capable local authorities that can manage conflicts through legitimate exercise of power (Ibid).

Accordingly, for the newly democratizing states it is indispensable to build strong and capable local political elites for local peace and stable state building from below. It is thus, important to revive local authority's legitimacy and capacity for security and better service delivery in their localities (Ibid).

Finally, the conflict intervention approaches discussed above has to be understood as integrative and complementary hence, I would say that all these approaches have their proper place in the life-cycle of a conflict management.

Chapter.3: General review of the nature of past local conflicts between Somali, Afar, and Oromo

3.1. Introduction:

As I have mentioned in the introduction part, Ethiopian pastoralists make up roughly 12% of the population. Though this percent symbolizes about 25 different ethnic groups, majority of them are however Somalis, Afar, and Boran-Oromo communities. These communities draw their livelihoods from the production of livestock in an environment where natural resources of land and water are scarce and thus competition for these vital resources is extremely high (Kassa, 2000).

Among others, various ethnic pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, and cultivators share these decisive natural resources of land and water sources. They are located in areas of harsh ecological conditions, with no or little demarcated borders between them (Otim, 2002). These conditions usually make the possibility of local conflict to blast very high.

In fact, the local pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in Ethiopia have had their cultural way of managing resource use, and ways of resolving their conflicts. In recent years however, these traditional systems have been subject to changes caused by many factors. To mention few, population growth, environmental degradations, vast human and livestock migration, recurrent drought are of the major factors. Further more, conflicts between these local groups have also taken political dimensions, due to the various forms of state structures introduced in the country.

This section will make a short review of the major local conflicts between different ethnic groups of Somali (Issa) and Afar, and between Somali (Garre, Digodi, and Marehan) and Oromo (Borana).

3.2. Local conflict between Issa-Somalis and Afar.

As mentioned earlier, the settlements of Afar and Somali (Issa) pastoralists found in eastern and north eastern parts of Ethiopia also extend to the neighboring countries of Eritrea and republic of Djibouti. Afars inhabit some parts of Eritrea, and Djibouti, where Issa are also found in the republic of Djibouti as majority inhabitants.

Afar and Issa have had a long history of local violent conflicts. Short rainfall and general harsh ecological and climatic conditions usually push these people to move in search for grazing land and water. This brings a fierce competition over the scarce resources which in-turn breeds deadly conflicts between the two groups (Kassa 2000). Besides, there are culturally related conflicts such as animal raiding and a culture of rewarding warriors. Aggressively fighting is usually seen as sign of heroism, and thus prominent warriors are rewarded accordingly.

Post 1991 political and state structural changes have restructured the non-ethnic based provincial administrations ruled by highly centralized governments for centuries into ethnically-based regional states. Afar people formed their own state, while predominantly Issa pastoralists were put under Somali regional state administration. As a result, in addition to already existed local conflicts, other local conflicts that are directly linked to permanent claims of both urban and rural areas have blown up between the two ethnic groups. These conflicts entailed with an intense competition over administrative power and economic resources.

Among the recent deadly conflicts between Issa and Afar is the one that occurred in Anbule, Gadamytu, Undufo, and Adaytu towns and the surrounded rural areas. Though, Afar people on their part claim that historically these places where belong to them, but most of these areas are now occupied by Issa. There are a number of newly established towns in different places along the border between Afar and Somali people. After 1991 decentralization system, both Issa and Afar people started to establish new towns by constructing massive houses in previously grazing land and in the formerly disputed settlements. Hence, these areas become points where violent and deadly conflicts continued until recently.

Past emperor Hailesilase and Derg governments used to mediate violent conflicts between Issa and Afar pastoralists by using military forces. They intervened in particular situation, typically when these violent confrontations tend to endanger the main high way to Addis-Ababa which is the most important root to and from Assab, Asmara, and Djibouti ports. Strategies used during this period included the use of military forces and extreme punishment of both sides when violent conflicts occur in these localities (Shide, 2003).

Derg government also used other strategies, such as, land reform policies, and Separate grazing reserves. Villagazation and rural peasant formation was also encouraged. Though, these acts were intended mainly to restore peace in the province, and in other

cases to minimize local conflicts between the two groups, it did not serve however, those intentions (Gebre Mariam, and Kassa, 2001).

In view of containing violent conflicts between the two groups FDRE and regional states of Afar and Somali, conducted various peace conferences in different towns. Joint peace committees (JPCs) from elders, regional, zonal and district administrators were formed. The JPCs has initiated and took active role in peace negotiations. As Gebre/Mariam and Kassa (2001:10) noted, during April/May 1997, the use of traditional elders together with formal administrative structure has improved the dispute between these two groups. Local elders supported by JPCs and federal, regional, zonal, and district administration officials had been able to return many of the raided livestock, they also influenced to accept blood compensation "Dia" of those killed from both sides. In this way, they resolved some of the local disputes.

Despite all these efforts, there is no sustainable solution yet. There are sporadic destructive outbreaks of violent conflicts between the two societies. Unlike border disputes between Somalis and Oromo states, there is no referendum conducted for resolving the boundary dispute between Somalis and Afar states yet.

3.3. Local conflicts between Somali (Garre, Digodi, and Marehan clans) and Oromo (Boran clan).

Somalis and Oromo (Boran) local people in the southern part of Ethiopia depend on livestock, and mixed livestock and crop production in their livelihoods. The areas inhabited by these groups extend beyond the border between Ethiopia and Kenya. Boran (Oromo) and Somali (Garre and Digodi) clans live in southern part of Ethiopia and north eastern parts of Kenya. Like Afar and Issa pastoralists, these pastoralists have the culture of keeping large number of livestock (Camel, cattle, sheep and goats).

According to Kassa, (2002), in the past before Ethiopian state formation and even during Emperor Menelik II, Boran community's grazing land covered huge area of today's southern and southeastern parts of Ethiopia, and north and north eastern parts of Kenya however, most of these areas are now occupied by non-Boran people.

The nature of the local conflict between these groups relates largely to competition over scarce natural resources of land and water, and a culture of livestock raiding too.

The land dispute between the various Somali groups and Boran clan started during the Italian administration in Ethiopia. However, the violent conflict in these areas has further soared after Italian colony left the country, during which there was no strong state that could handle local conflicts (Ibid).

The mode of life of these pastoralist groups especially Boran was greatly affected by the subsequent reforms of Hailesilase and Derg governments. According to Kassa (2002), the 1948 treaty in Nagele town produced the formation of the tribal reserves with demarcated borders. Land was redistributed to the major clans located in these areas where each clan

was given a defined tribal land area. The objective was to peacefully settle the inter-ethnic conflicts in the province. Never the less, there was no clear demarcation on the area between Boran and Somali clans (Garre, Gurre, Digodi, and Marehan) thus, there was violent conflicts in these areas (Ibid).

The activities of the Borana province authorities have also negatively impacted on the local conflicts between these different communities. According to Kassa, (2002) Derg government favored Somali and other non-Boran clans over the Boran group. As Kassa, 2002 further explained the non-Boran officials (from Somali, Gujji, Konso and Burji) who dominated the local administration has favored their own clans in terms of providing land, and other state provided opportunities (Ibid).

Even though, the creation of tribal land has to some extent solved some of the violent conflicts between these local different ethnic groups, the local resource conflicts and animal raids between Boran and Somali clans persisted even after these policies were put in place. Further more, not only violent conflicts occurred in areas where tribal land policy was not implemented but, inter-ethnic local conflicts continued in areas even where these tribal land policies were put into operations too. This was largely due to states inability to execute regulations enacted for the implementation of such tribal land policy (Ibid).

Derg government also adopted various reforms, such as land for tiller proclamation, the formation of peasant associations and villagization in both rural and urban centers. These policies has affected the livelihoods of neighboring local communities, and also increased the animosity between them. For instance, in pastoral areas, these policies imposed restriction for the free movements of many pastoralists, they also initiated a permanent claims of land by one group over the other (Shide, 2003; Kassa, 2002).

Under the current government policy, former Borana province was divided into two distinct ethnically-based regional states. Boran, Guji, and other Oromo clans in the former Borana province are now under Borana and Arsi zone administrations of Oromia state, while Somali clans (Garre, Digodi, Marehan, and few others) are now under Liban zone of Somali regional state administration.

Under EPRDF rule, in addition to the violent local conflicts that was mainly emanating from competition over land and water resources, there emerged disputes along the border between Somali and Oromo regional states. In the southern part of the country the border dispute affected different places from Moyale, to Nagele, Hudat, Gorabaqqa, and Gura-dhamole districts.

Despite, the referendum conducted in 2004 in these areas have solved some of the boundary disputes between the two societies, especially urban centers, there are still, some places where referendum was conducted but sporadic local clashes still exist. For instance, in October, 2006, vicious conflicts erupted again in Hargedeb town which is found in the Somali district of Gorobaqqa. Referendum is also yet bending in Moyale

(the major town in the district), due to disagreements between the two regions over the registration of the voters and other related problems.

3.4. Conclusion

Somali, Afar, and Oromo (Boran) communities represent the majority of pastoralist groups in Ethiopia. Somali and Afar are found in the eastern and north eastern parts of Ethiopia; both groups reside in Djibouti too, while Afar people settlements also extends in some parts of Eritrea. There has been a violent confrontations between these predominantly pastoralist groups.

Similarly, There has been a long history of violent conflict between Garre, Gurre, Digodi, and Marehan (all Somali clans), and Boran (an Oromo clan) in the southern part of the Ethiopia.

In the past most of these conflicts occurred mainly due to fierce competition over natural resources of land and water, especially during dry seasons. However, the state structure and state policies have greatly affected the nature of these local conflicts and the composition of the conflicting parts too.

Highly centralized governments in the past used to mediate the local violent conflicts between these local pastoralists by using military forces.

Derg government adopted land reform policy. Under this policy priority for land access was given to cultivators and in some instances, state sponsored wild life sanctuaries. Hailesilase emperor regime launched tribal land reform policy. Accordingly, land was redistributed to the local people on clan bases. These policies have greatly impacted the mode of life of these local people, and consequently shaped the existed local conflicts.

The current government has adopted decentralization system of governance as a means of transforming the local ethnic-based conflicts in the country, and as means of improving the peaceful co-existence of these different ethnic groups. But this has also brought in unintended consequences.

There has been various peace conferences held since then. Referendum was also conducted in the disputed areas between Somali and Oromo regional states in 2004. These acts have improved a little on the animosities between the contending groups. Despite all these efforts, unfortunately, there is no sustainable solution to the problem yet.

The following chapter (Ch.4) will further examine local conflicts between Somali and Oromo communities who share a long border and long history of both interaction and dispute. But especial emphasis will be given to local conflicts between the different ethnic groups in Ma'eso and Babile districts.

CHAPTER 4: THE EMERGING CHALLENGES OF LOCAL CONFLICT AND MODES OF REGULATION; THE CASE OF MA'ESO AND BABILE DISTRICTS IN ETHIOPIA

4.1. A brief Historical background of Ma'eso and Babile districts.

4.1.1. Ma'eso district:

Geographically Ma'eso district is located in 291 km to the east of Addis Ababa. It is found in the lowland area nearby the Hararge Mountains. The main railway and the motorway both from Addis-Ababa to Djibouti pass through Ma'eso, Bardode, Asabot, and Mullu towns. These are the main urban centers in the district.

According to central statistical authority's population census, results for Somali region (1994:66), Somalis in the district are estimated to be 42146, while 1683, and 180 are said to be Oromo and other minority different ethnic communities in the district. On the other hand, central statistical authority's population census -results for Oromia region (1994:67), estimates 80670, 5282, and 5620 for Oromos, Somalis, and Others respectively.

In the rural areas the major ethnic groups include, Issa (Somalis) who are largely pastoralists, Hawiya (Somali) who practice mixed livestock and crop production, and small numbers of mixed Somali clans, these later ones are minority sedentary farmers who live with other Oromo clans in the district. Majority of Issa speak only Somali language, while Hawiya and other Somali clans in the district speak both Somali and Oromo languages. Oromo local clans also include Ittu, Alla, Noolle, and Obora. Majority of Oromo clans in the district are agro-pastoralists and sedentary farmers, they speak Oromifa language only. In the towns, apart from Somali and Oromo major ethnic groups, there are also small number of Amhara, Guraga, and other minority ethnic groups (Getachew, 2006; Shide, 2003).

The district residents draw their livelihoods from the production of livestock, and livestock with mixed crop production under harsh ecological environment, where there is inadequate rainfall and recurrent droughts.

During Derg regime Ma'eso district was under Asaba-Tefari province (Awraja in Amharic language) of east Hararge zone. But, the 1991 decentralization system restructured the district along ethnic lines. Consequently the district residents were put under Somali and Oromo state administrations with no clearly demarcated border between them (Getachew, 2006; Shide, 2003).

Until recently Ma'eso town served as a home for both regions' local administration offices. Both Somali and Oromo district administrations opened their administration, police, Justice, education, and health Office in Ma'eso town. But, after 2004 referendum Somali district administration was relocated to Mullu town in the district.

4.1.2. Babile district:

Babile district is located in some 561KM to the east of Addis-Ababa, and 72 Km to the west direction of Somali region's capital of Jig-Jiga. According to central statistical authority's population census -results for Somali region (1994:66), the population of the district is estimated to be 93,527, out of which 93,499 are Somalis, 11 are Oromos, and 17 are different minority ethnic groups. On the contrary, the central statistical authority's population census -results for Oromia region (1994:67) estimates 40,538, 5175, and 2307 for Oromos, Somalis, and Others respectively.

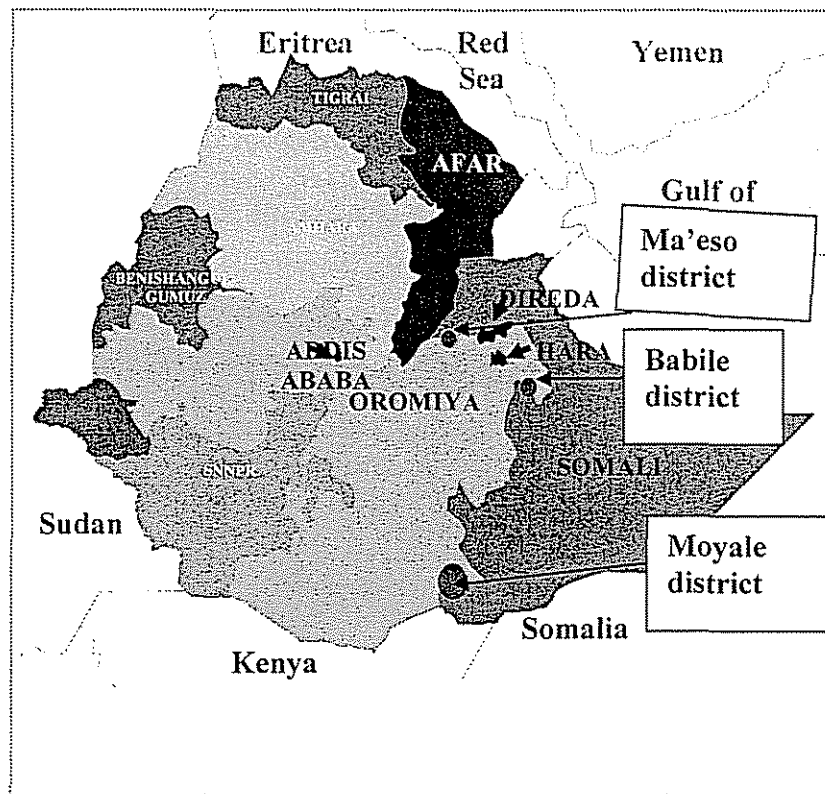
The major ethnic groups found in the district are Hawiya (they are majority in the district), Garri, Akisho, Ogaden, Madigan, Maayo, Maaru, Dooyo, Wara-Dooyo, and few other communities. In the town, there are also small number of Amara, and Gurage ethnic groups.

Majority of the population in the district are agro-pastoralists and settled farmers. Majority of residents of western, southern and northern parts of the district are predominantly settled farmers, while in the eastern and southeastern parts are dominated by agro-pastoralists and pastoralists too.

During Derg regime, the district was under Hararge province (Awraja in Amharic language) administration. The current government structure divided the district into two distinct administrations. Accordingly, various identity groups of the district were put under Somali and Oromia regional state administrations.

Babile district is surrounded by Fik district (Ogaden tribe are majority in Fik) administration of Somali region to the east and southeast; Gursum district to the northeast; Fedis district of Oromia regional state to the southwest; and Harari regional state to the west. While Somali state government currently administers the southern parts of the district, the northern parts are under Oromia state administration. Babile is the only major town in the district, and currently both Somali and Oromo local administrations have opened their district offices in the same town of Babile (Shide, 2004:14).

Map of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, stating the current regional boundaries and the location of Ma'eso and Babile districts.



NB: This Sketch is Un-official and Un-authoritative.

4.2. Local conflict and modes of regulation during Derg regime in Ma'eso and Babile districts.

4.2.1. Introduction

For a long history, both Somali and Oromo local pastoral groups have suffered in terms of huge property and human life loss as a result of an ongoing cycle of violence. These were local conflicts largely created by a fierce competition over land and water under harsh ecological and climatic conditions. In recent periods, the different state and political forms have also affected these local conflicts.

Derg regime came to power in 1974. During this period the state changed from a state ruled by a monarch to dictatorial highly centralized military regime. The state had little or no confidence over the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities located in the peripheries. Derg regime thus, used to control these communities in a rather coercive manner.

This section, will analyze the nature of local conflicts in Ma'eso and Babile districts, and mechanisms used to solve these conflicts under highly centralized Derg government era.

4.2.2. Local conflicts and modes of regulation during Derg regime in Ma'eso district.

Historically in Ma'eso district, there have been violent local conflicts between the different ethnic groups of Somali (Issa), Oromo (Ittu), and Afar. During Derg regime there were sporadic violent clashes between Issa pastoralists and Oromo local groups (mainly Ittu) usually in the grazing areas from Ma'eso town to Asebot Mountains (Getachew, 2006; Shide, 2003).

During this period, one of the major violent conflicts between Issa- pastoralists and Ittu occurred in 1984, in largely Ittu inhabited areas where animal pasture and water is plenty even during the dry seasons. As Shide, (2003: 22), expressed this conflict happened a period during which drought has smashed the grazing land and water sources of the Issa inhabited areas. As a result, Issa pastoralists come to access *Todobashub* water wells and the nearby grazing land. The result was a deadly conflict where more than 50 Oromo farmers were killed and many others displaced, in this incident more than 5 Issas were also killed. As Shide, (2003) further explained, in order to relocate the displaced local Oromos, Derg Military intervened forcibly and ordered Issa pastoralist to withdraw the areas with in 15 days.

The southward movement of Issa pastoralists during dry seasons and their contact with Oromo clans living in there created an antagonistic competition and disagreements in utilizing these resources. Because Issa pastoralists have got automatic guns from Somalia especially during and after Ethio-Somali war they used to depend on force means in accessing the water and grazing land in the district areas (Shide, 2003).

During Derg regime, local conflicts in the district were confined to between Issa and Ittu local groups only. So, there had not been violent confrontations neither between Hawiya and Oromos nor between Oromos and other different minority Somali clans in the district (Ali, 2005; Shide, 2003; Getachew, 2006).

This peaceful coexistence among these different ethnic groups was based on the historic alliances of the Somali clans with Oromo different clans. Accordingly since these Somali clans was minority (except Issa-Somalis) when compared with their Oromo counterparts in the area. They were accepted as '**Mogasha**' (i.e. traditional Oromo practice of accepting other clan into an Oromo clan) by Ittu. Accordingly, there was close cooperation and alliance between these Somali ethnic minority groups and Ittu clan in the district (Getachew, 2006:16; Shide, 2003). Likewise, there were no conflicts in the major urban centers. The conflict between these local groups was restrained to the rural areas only.

During Derg era, The Ethio-Somali war in 1977, and the associated rise of ethnically-organized regional rebel movements in the area has also increased the arms in the hands

of local people. It has also increased the damage caused by local conflicts in the district (Shide, 2003:20; Getachew, 2006:17).

During Derg period, the main tactic of containing the violent local conflict in the district was the use military forces. The form of interventions during Derg regime included military raids intended to bring peace and order, and to punish groups that the State believed to be the aggressors, especially mobile Issa pastoralists (Ibid).

The implementation of agrarian reform policies, land redistribution and formation of peasant associations during Derg regime have also changed the relationships between the local pastoral, agro-pastoral, and farming groups in the district. Under the 1978 'land for tiller' proclamation, priority for getting rural land was given to cultivators, and state owned enterprises. During this time, the previously communal grazing land, and areas previously owned by Somali mobile pastoralists was redistributed to Oromo farmers in the area. These policies heightened local tensions, especially between Hawiya and Ittu local groups (Shide, A.2003:19).

To ensure security, Derg governments planed to slow down the mobility of the pastoralists. The pastoralist's reluctance to accept the policy and Derg regime's tactic of enforcing the policy by force caused occasions of unlawful killings

For instance, as Shide, (2003:22) articulated, and later Somali-Ma'eso district council member has further explained to me; in 1986, Derg military waged war against Issa pastoralists, after Issa killed senior hydrologist whom the government sent him to make a study for developing water sources in that area. In this conflict, more than 50 Issas and few Derg military forces where killed. The government's military has also confiscated a large number of livestock from Issa. Some of these animals where auctioned in the local markets of the district, and some others where redistributed to local farmers. This act again, had further intensified the animosities between the local groups in the district (Shide, 2003).

During Derg period, local people in the district used to resolve their major disputes mainly through traditional conflict resolution systems. This is because of the peaceful co-existence between Oromo people and other Somali clans in the district (except Issa). In addition to this, the absence of conflicts in the major urban centers has also helped town residents to play a great role in solving some of the local conflicts. Hawiya and other Somali elders in the district together with Issa elders in the major urban settings used to play a strong role especially, in returning raided livestock from both sides (Issa-Somali and Ittu-Oromo). Like wise other Oromo clan elders with the collaboration of urban elders of both Hawiya and other Somali clans were doing the same in solving some of these conflicts in the district.

4.2.3. Local conflict and modes of regulation during Derg in Babile district

Emperor Hailesilase government's tribal land policy divided the rural settlements in the district on clan bases. That means, land was redistributed and thus owned on clan bases, and this trend continued during Derg regime.

During Derg regime there has not been a report of violent conflicts between Somali and Oromo people in the district as such. During emperor Hailesilase time however, there had been violent conflicts with in Somali tribal groups in the district. According to some elders whom I met them in Babile town, there has been a violent conflict between Ogaden and Hawiya (both Somali clans) some 30 years back. During this period, a number of people were killed and huge livestock looted from both sides. After nearly seven years of continued conflict, Hailesilase government had forcibly stopped the conflict between Hawiya and Ogaden clans.

As Ali, 2005, exposes the two groups (Somalis and Oromos) in Babile district had had a long history of cultural and linguistic interactions. Concerning the cultural integration between the identity groups in Babile, Ali, 2005 differentiates the effect of cultural assimilation from aculturalization in the district. He explains that there was a long history of aculturalization between different identity groups in the district. This means, the harmonious relationships between these two groups is the result of generations old cultural exchanges that took place from both sides of Hawiya and other Oromo clans in the district. According to Ali, (2005: 39);

"There existed generations-old cultural and linguistic transactions and widespread affinal relationships between the two ethnic groups. These phenomena have resulted in the cross-cultural fertilization and acculturation whereby similarity of many cultural traits, including bilingualism of the overwhelming majority of the people from both groups took place".

This view has been supported by Hawiya elders whom I met in Babile town. The elders believe that *Maya* belongs to *karanle* who is a sub-clan of Hawiya and *Maru* and *Dooyo* who also both belong to *Gugundhabe* of Hawiya clan.

Never the less, the elders whom I met have further explained that there were some conflicts between farmers with in Hawiya clan in the rural areas of the district. Elders explain that, after Maru (a sub-clan of Hawiya) left from their localities as a refugee to Somalia during Ethio-Somali war, Derg government started to redistribute their farm lands to Ciye (a sub-clan of Hawiya too) who stayed in the district during this period. Then in 1988 Maru people come back from Somalia and started to get back their land from Ciye. The result was a violent conflict between the two groups, where two Maru and one Ciye men died, and some houses of Maru burned.

The conflict was successfully stopped and sustainable resolved after the Abamana, and the council of elders (traditionally elected clan leader and tradition council of elders) of Hawiya clan immediately intervened.

As in the case of Ma'eso district; there has also been unlawful killings and raids committed by Derg military forces in Babile district as well. As elders in the district told me, in 1987 Derg military invaded Burqo kabale, which is 80km to the west of Babile town. During this raid, Derg military killed 28 people and confiscated more than 260 cattle from the Burqo kabale residents. They said Derg military was suspicious that these areas were safe hidden place for armed anti-government movements. The same cases occurred in different places in the district such as Ibro-Muse and Dhandhame rural towns both found in the eastern side of Babile town.

4.3. Local conflict and modes of regulation under EPRDF led government in Ma'eso and Babile districts.

4.3.1. Introduction

Under the centralized Derg regime, conflicts at the local level was mainly due to competition over natural resources, but at the national level the conflict was largely one occurring between central government and ethnically-based nationalist movements in their competition over national politics and power.

As I have discussed in the introduction part, with the collapse of the military regime in 1991, Ethiopia has entered a new political process. The new ethnically-based decentralization system has reorganized the various ethnic groups in the country into nine by large ethnically-based autonomous states and two city administrations. In 2000, a further step in this process was implemented with the so-called 'District Level Decentralization Program' (DLDP), which reinforces the devolution of administrative and political power down to districts.

Under the new constitution, regions and districts were given the power to enact their social, economic, and political policies. They have the power to formulate their plans, raise their own revenue, and prepare their budgets. They are also entitled to receive financial transfers from the federal government based on percentage of population, level of development, and their strength in generating local revenue.

Though, the international borders of Ethiopia are more or less known, the inter-regional borders of the country remains vague. The formation of the new ethnically-based regional states required to draw a border between previously non-ethnic based provincial (Awraja in Amharic language) administrations that highly centralized governments administered in the past.

However, as the inter-regional borders remains vague, an attempt to depict such boundary between the newly formed federal states had brought in new sources of struggle, especially at the district level. New political elites emerged from these regions and instrumentalized the local conflicts in areas where the new states share border between them.

Local conflict was aggravated as a result of competing local political elites in their attempt to secure as large area as possible in their jurisdiction. In their struggle to generate more revenue at the local level, violent conflicts started in urban centers and revenue sources in the districts.

Ma'eso and Babile districts are two of over 30 districts where the boundary dispute between Somali and Oromo regional states has greatly affected the lives of local communities along the border between the two states.

This section, will analyze the impact of political decentralization on the local ethnic conflicts along the border between Somalis and Oromo particularly in the study districts of Ma'eso and Babile.

4.3.2. Local conflict and modes of regulation under EPRDF led government in Ma'eso district.

Since 1991 the administrative structure of Ma'eso district has significantly changed in line with the adoption of district level decentralization system in the country.

During the transitional period, the government institutions at all its levels were weak. There were different ethnically-based political parties in the district. Among others, there was OPDO (an EPRDF affiliated Oromo political party), OLF, IFLO forces on the Oromo side, and IGLF, DUP, and later on ESDL political parties on the Somali side. All these political parties have been directly and indirectly involved in the boundary dispute, and thus the local conflict in the district (Shide, A.2003; Getachew, M. 2006).

In Ma'eso Hawiya, other Somali clans, and Oromo clans lived in a mixed way. But, the claim of each of these ethnically-based political forces (especially OLF, IGLF, DUP, and after the transitional period OPDO and ESDL) to include Ma'eso and its neighborhoods in their respective jurisdictions have spoiled the peaceful co-existence between district residents and especially between Hawiya and Ittu. The disintegrated Derg military weapons during this turbulent period have also increased the consequences and damage of the violent conflicts in the district.

As mentioned earlier, While Hawiya, and other Somali minority groups lived in mixed way with their neighboring local Oromo clans in the district. Their relationships have been spoiled by the growing Oromo and Somali nationalism. Initially, this situation has affected the areas jointly inhabited by Hawiya and Ittu clans. As a result, the two group started to separate their grazing land, then continuous struggle has emerged between the two (Ibid).

According to Shide, (2003: 23);

"Violence initially broke out between Issa and Hawiya Somalis, and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fighters in Afdem, Mullu and Ma'eso areas in 1992.In Ma'eso town alone, more than 10 people died from both sides. But OLF Forces retaliated by killing 17 Hawiya senior elders and, as a result Hawiya were displaced from Kora area

in the district and from the other neighboring districts of Oromo regional state. Similarly local Oromos living in a neighboring adjacent Afdem district have been displaced from Afdem town during the violence between OLF and Issa pastoralist fighters”

Fortunately, this violent conflict did not engage in other Somali minority groups in the district; hence they have not been displaced from their localities.

These violent conflicts between the contending ethnically-based political forces ended after various clan-based Somali political parties merged into ESDM and later on ESDL party, and when OLF boycotted the new transitional charter in 1993 and started gorilla war against federal government (Getachew, 2006; Shide, 2003).

Local conflicts in the district has also taken a new profile in the years following after the transitional period and when most regional states started to fully decentralize the power to district level administrations in 2000.

This was the second phase of decentralization program in Ethiopia, which involved further devolution of administrative and financial resources from regional state level down to district levels. The district council was established, and financial resources were transferred to districts through ‘General purpose budget grant formula’. An element in the formula encourages that districts should generate more revenue from their localities in order to get relative increase in the financial transfers from their regional governments.

During this period there started new conflicts mainly in the urban centers and revenue sources in Ma’eso district. Both Somalis and Oromo started to open their offices in Ma’eso town and began to extend their area of administration to the major urban centers and rural kabales in the district. While initially Oromo regional administration first opened their district office in Ma’eso town, Somali state also opened a parallel office in the town in later time (Getachew, 2006; Shide, 2003).

From this period on wards, the Somali and Oromo local conflicts over disputed areas along the boundary between them has become an inter-regional state boundary dispute between the newly established Somali and Oromia Regional States. New political elites has emerged from both sides and used the ethnic and identity differences of the local people to forge their own interests. In their attempt to enlarge areas under their jurisdiction primarily the urban settlements and revenue sources in the district, local elites of both sides started to mobilize people in the district along ethnic lines. This again fuelled the traditional resource conflicts and territorial dispute and animosities established during transitional period (Ali, 2005; Shide, 2003).

The most commonly cited violent conflict during this period is the one occurred in Daima village. Daima village is small town between Asabot and Ma’eso. Majority of the residents in the village are Oromos (Alla, Ittu, and Jarso). Hawiya people are also available in the near by areas. The areas is known to its good grazing and water points for livestock, it thus attracts Issa pastoralists especially during dry seasons (Shide, 2003).

Daima violent conflict happened in June, 2000. This incident first started after Issa pastoralists with huge livestock crossed the main road that normally differentiates their zone from the neighboring Oromo people. First local Oromos in the areas raided and took 600 cattle, and killed two young Issa who was herding these livestock. Then this incident was followed with a clash between Issa and Oromo in ma'eso town. This happened after Issa armed men entered Ma'eso livestock market and clashed with Oromos in the town, where an Oromo police man was killed (Shide, 2003:24; Ali, 2005:36).

Again, as a revenge for the two young Issa men killed, in June 19th, 2000, armed Issa men hit back Daima village. In this raid, Issa arbitrarily killed 39 Oromo farmers, including some children and elderly. As a result, the main high way and rail way that connects Addis-Ababa and Diridawa, and to Djibouti was closed the following days (Shide, 2003:25; Ali, 2005:37).

Daima deadly conflict has heightened the tension between the local people in the district as well as between the two regional state officials. Though, Issa elders and Somali state officials wanted to make the traditional blood compensation (Dia) payments, conversely, local Oromos and state officials viewed this act as massacre and demanded the perpetrators to be brought to justice (Ibid). This was an act that proved difficult for Somalis to fulfill.

The other important period for the local conflict in the district was the period after both Somali and Oromo regional states officially agreed to peacefully solve the border dispute between them through referendum in 2003, and after the referendum was conducted in 2004.

The aim of the referendum was to make demarcation on the long-standing border dispute between the two regions. During this period, local conflicts in the district's towns and their environs has increased and involved different actors especially after the two states reached an agreement to end the long-standing border dispute and ownership of the towns by referendum, in 2003. The dispute around the issue of the ownership of these major towns and the control of Bardode check point had sparkled (Shide, 2003:36; Getachew, 2006:22).

During this period, major violent conflicts occurred in Bardode town and Bardode customs check point, and after referendum was held another violent conflicts erupted in Mullu, Asabot and again in and around Bardode area.

Asabot, Mullu, and Bardode are the major towns in the district next to Ma'eso town. The four towns (Including Ma'eso) locate in strategically important places. They serve as good sources of revenue generation for local authorities. This is because; in these towns there are livestock market centers, small shops and trade for local people. Further more, near Bardode town there is a customs check point, which serves a big source of revenue collection for local authorities from passing by vehicles and trains to and from Addis-Ababa and Djibouti.

The rural areas around these towns, especially Bardode and Asabot, is good place for farming and animal grazing. Different Oromo clans, Hawiya and other minority Somalis live in these areas, Issa pastoralists also come to these areas during the dry season in search of pasture and water.

The border dispute between Somali and Oromo in Ma'eso was further aggravated because of claims and counter claims of the ownership of these economically strategic towns. After the deadly conflict in Daima, there has been a series of attacks and counter attacks in the district especially in Ma'eso, Bardode, Mullu, and Asabot towns and their environs.

This time, it was reported that local authorities in the district has directly and indirectly involved in these conflicts. According to the two states joint forum report (2002), the situation in the disputed areas was intensified with the direct involvement of the local authorities of the two regions through distribution of arms and bullets and use of grain relief for mobilizing the local people along ethnic lines in the name of defending their respective districts boundaries.

Violent conflict erupted in Bardode town in 2004. The violent conflict started after 20 Oromo armed men killed one Hawiya elder in Bardode town. In return Hawiya first attacked the Bardode customs check point and killed one Oromo police man. In another incident highly mobilized Hawiya gunmen collided with local Oromo in Bardode town. In this conflict more than 12 Oromo was killed and the small shops in the town was looted. There has been deadly confrontations between the two groups at the check point where a number of people were killed from both sides (Getachew, 2006:21; Ali, 2005:38; Shide, 2003:27-28).

In 2004, Oromo gunmen assaulted Haradimtu rural kabale where 8 Somalis and 5 Oromo were killed, and more than 100 houses belong to mostly Hawiya were burned. After this incident local Hawiya in Haradimtu areas was displaced to Abesale rural kabale¹, and Awash town (Awash town is belong to Afar people whom Hawiya has a close relationship) (Ali, 2005:38; Shide, 2003:27).

There have also been a number of violent confrontations between the two after referendum was conducted in Ma'eso district in March, 2004. For instance, Hawiya attacked Abansaale rural kabale in November 2004 where they have burned more than 77 houses. The angry Oromo farmers sought revenge and killed one Somali person who was traveling with a vehicle along the road to Addis-Ababa (Ali, 2005:38; Shide, 2003:27).

But the most surprising violent conflict after the referendum was the one happened in early 2005. This event ensued when Oromo local people mainly young men that were deported from Djibouti raided local minority Somali groups in Jiriqale rural kabale near Asabot town.

¹ Kabale is the lowest administrative unit of the new state structure of Ethiopia.

This was a surprising attack because it was the first of its kind that involved Somali minority groups in the district (other than Hawiya and Issa). As I have mentioned earlier, they are very small different Somali clans that have lived peacefully together with Oromo local clans for centuries in the district. They have not been involved in the various conflicts in the district neither during Derg regime nor after EPRDF took the power. This conflict has caused a big damage to these small groups, their houses were burned, their livestock raided, and many of these small groups have escaped the area. Some have fled to Jig-Jiga (the capital city of Somali state), others relocated to Error district (in Somali state), while still some others left to Haradimtu, and Abesale rural kabaless where they joined with Hawiya and Issa clans.

During and after referendum violent conflicts in the district became a day-to-day activity. As a result many innocent people from both sides were killed, injured, displaced, and their livelihoods seriously convoluted. In all these deadly conflicts, the extensive use of local militia and direct and indirect involvement of local elites of both sides was reported. This has increased both the recurrences of the conflicts and the number of casualties (Getachew, 2006; Shide, 2003; Ali, 2005).

The immediate response of the government institutions to these deadly local conflicts was just a rush, an act like the 'fire brigade' by dispatching the federal military and police forces to stop the killings. However, the frequency of the violent clashes between the two local neighboring communities obliged the Federal government and the two regional states to take the matter seriously. The regional affairs office under Prime Minister Office and the Ministry of federal affairs which was later given the mandate to deal with matters of disputed border areas in collaboration with the officials of both states and local elders have conducted a series of peace conferences.

Federal government organized four days 'Peace and Development' Conference in September, 2000 in Addis-Ababa university Campus. In this conference, more than 1000 invited participants from traditional leaders and elders of Somali and Oromo people (selected from not only the border dispute affected areas, but also nearby districts), Officials from Regional, zonal, and districts of both Somali and Oromo states were invited. The proposed solution in the Addis Ababa conference included that the claims of the two groups to certain places along the border to be decided through referendum (popular vote). Till then, both the Somali and Oromo peoples are expected to stay where they are at present and to keep their peaceful co-existence (Gabra/Mariam, and Kassa, 2001).

Following this, various joint conferences were held in the two states. There have been consecutive meetings between the officials of the two regions at federal, regional and district levels. There have also been various conferences at the local level for local rural and urban elders, women, and youth of the two regions. The main objective of these conferences was to minimize the hatred sentiments and animosity between the local elites and communities.

Further more, in 2001, officials from both regional governments of Somali and Oromo mediated by officials of the federal government's Ministry of federal affairs meet in Addis-Ababa. In this meeting, Federal government officials proposed a compromise resolution for the disputed places between the two states. According to the proposals both regional officials should stop emotional claims and counter claims on specific disputed areas (places where it is already clear that one ethnic group is the dominant over the other). This was an attempt to reduce both the number and complexity of the disputed places. For instance Somalis would have received the kabales that is more or less exclusively inhabited by Somali settlers, and vice verse. This was based on the mutual acceptance of both sides in their respective claims. This process has reduced the number of disputed kabales in the district sharply. However, this has not solved disputes in urban centers mainly areas where local elites are more interested like Bardode customs check point.

The two regions have established 'a neighboring regional affairs office' to handle cross border issues in their respective states in 2001. Various joint conferences were held between communities and administrations along the disputed border. Further more, in 2005 the two regions have established 'joint peace committee' (JPC) at regional, Zonal, and district levels, they had also agreed to formulate 'a joint development and security co-operation programs and law enforcement' to prosecute the unlawful practices and human right violations committed in the disputed border areas.

The referendum was conducted in 2004, for all the disputed kabales with the exception of three kabales in the district (Bardode customs check point or Keta, Goljano, and Abesale). The reason why referendum did not take place in these areas is said to be due to disagreements between the two states on how the referendum was handled, and of course because of the continued violence and killings in the district.

Despite all these efforts, no sustainable solution to the territorial disputes, and cross border raids and local conflict continued. Ma'eso district is one of the worst places where violent conflict continued until recently.

4.3.3. Local conflict and modes of regulation under EPRDF led government in Babile district.

As mentioned earlier in Babile district apart from local conflicts with in the Somali clans in rural areas, there had not been any ethnic based violent conflicts between the local people in the district prior to 1991. But, with the formation of ethnically-based regional states in 1991, both Somali and Oromo states started claims and counter claims for the ownership of the district.

Both states have conflicting ideas about the identity make up of the various communities in the district (Shide, 2004). Local communities in the district speak both Somali and

Oromo languages, but Hawiya (who are dominant in the district) and other groups in the district largely speak Oromifa language.

As Shide, 2004 illustrated, the Oromia administration officials believe that the dominance of Oromifa language by the majority tribes such as mayo, Maru, Madigan, Hawiya, Akisho, and others in the district is evidence that these people belong to Oromo. On the contrary, Somalis believe that the tribes that make up the Babile district as being originally ethnic Somalis, and speaking Oromifa language does not make them to be Oromo. Somalis argue that the Oromifa language dominance is due to the close interaction with neighboring Oromo tribes and these become strong only during Hailesilase and Derg periods (Shide, 2004; Ali, 2005).

Local Hawiya elders also tell that most Hawiya local people paused to speak Somali language and preferred instead Oromifa language. But, this was just Hawiya's strategy to isolate the animal looting and concealed raids they have sustained from their rival Ogaden people who speak only Somali language (Interview with Hawiya elder in Babile on October, 18th, 2006).

The major political change in the district was the formation of ethnic and clan based political parties in mid 1991. OPDO forces entered the district in early 1991. According to a former Babile district (Somali side) official, OPDO have successfully established both party and district administration offices in the town in 1993. OPDO continued to extend its administration further to sub-district levels (Kabales). This was followed by DUP and ONLF who opened their party offices in the same town of Babile.

As a result, the relationship between Somalis and Oromo elites become struggle over the political and administrative power of the district, especially the Babile town.

A number of violent conflicts occurred after 1991 political changes in the district. The first incident of killing occurred in early 1993 after an active member of OPDO cadre was shot dead in Babile town (Shide, 2004:16). This was followed by the clash between ESDL and OPDO local militia in late 1997 in areas very near to Darera-Arba rural kabale. But, Shide, 2004, explained the same incident as one occurred between the Somali and Oromo local groups in the district. What ever the case may be, this is an evident that violent confrontations has started with the appearance of local political elites in the district. These conflicts has damaged the security and peaceful live of the district residents.

The other violent conflict took place in Babile town in 1999 where one Oromo police man was wounded. This happened after Somali state pushed to open their administration and police offices following Oromo state who did the same. Then Oromo police in the district tried to stop Somalis from opening their offices in Babile town. As a result, the two police started exchanging fire, and thus violent conflict erupted in the town of Babile (Shide, 2004:17).

After a decision to conduct referendum in all the disputed border areas was reached in 2000 Addis-Ababa conference, local political elites of the both Somali and Oromo in the district have increased their campaign and mobilization of local communities. Both Somali and Oromo authorities started to coerce local people in the district who have mixed affiliation and common cultural values to choose to be included into the administration of Somali or Oromo regional states, as being Somalis or Oromos (Ibid:17).

The local political and administrative elites of both sides have tried to forcibly and through other means get the heart and minds of the local people. They started to unlawfully arrest and punish any one who actively opposes their campaigns. They also tried to influence local people by providing some benefits. It is reported that the use of grain relief from donors and from federal DPPC for political mobilization of the local people has worsened the conflict in the district, especially in the town (Shide, 2004:19; Ali, 2005:38).

Despite all their actions, it is astonishing to see that there was no established animosity and violent conflicts at the grass root level in Babile district. There have not been violent conflicts between local communities in the district (Ibid). The high cultural and social affiliation and strong traditional means of conflict resolution has safe-guarded these communities to fall into open violent conflicts.

In an attempt to delineate a border between the competing local elites, regional affairs office of the office of the prime minister has sent a committee to Babile district in 1994. The committee was mandated to study and propose solution on disputed areas between the two states. The committee decided that Babile town and other 34 rural kabales to be given to Oromia district administration, while only 8 rural kabales were put under Somali district administration. However, Somali state district and regional officials have rejected this decision (Shide, 2004:16; Ali, 2005:39).

Before the referendum, Ministry of federal affairs conducted a mediation meeting. In this meeting both regional state officials were asked to limit their claims only to the kabales which they are absolutely sure they will succeed incase referendum is conducted. However, unlike Ma'eso district, both parts insisted their claims thus this did not make any significant change in terms of number of the disputed kabales in the district.

Like many other disputed border areas between the two regions, the last attempt to bring presumably sustainable solution to the prolonged local conflict in the district was the referendum conducted in 2004.

There was mixed results from the 2004 referendum. According to former Babile district official (Somali side) interviewed on October 21st, 2006 in Jigjiga, out of the 27 kabales that referendum took place, Somali administration won 11 kabales, while Oromo state also secured 15 rural kabales and the Babile town. Both parts were very much interested in Babile town because Babile is the only town in the district and it became the center for the competition between the elites. Somalis on their side have rejected the results of the referendum, while Oromos accepted it.

Though, the violent conflict between the competing local administrative elites was cooled down after the referendum yet, one can observe a frozen conflict. Accordingly, one can see that the expected peace and reconciliation did not materialize in the district, especially in Babile town even after the referendum.

4.4. Conclusion

Chapter four has examined the local conflicts between the two neighboring Somali and Oromo communities with in the context of both centralized and decentralized forms of governance. The case of Ma'eso and Babile local conflicts during highly centralized Derg regime and under the newly introduced ethnically-based decentralization system in Ethiopia were scrutinized.

In the past, there have been local conflicts between the two societies in both Ma'eso and Babile districts. These conflicts was mainly stemming from competition over natural resources of land and water between the pastoral and agro-pastoral groups in both the districts. However, in resent years the intensity, scope, consequences, and the constituents of the contending parts have changed mainly due to the state, political and structural changes.

With the introduction of ethnically-based decentralization system in the country, the existed local conflicts took political dimensions. The political struggle between the various ethnically-based political organizations in the early stages of 1991 decentralization system, and the local political elites that emerge in the later times have greatly impacted the existed local conflicts in the study districts.

Despite the similarities on the causes of the conflicts in both Ma'eso and Babile districts, yet the effect of the conflict was greatly different between the two districts. There was difference in terms of the scope, frequency, and extend of damage of the conflicts both during Derg and under current government.

The dispute between the competing local political elites was strong in Ma'eso district. The dispute between these local political elites turned the conflict into a wide range of people-to-people fighting between district residents in Ma'eso district. During and after referendum conflicts in Ma'eso district involved in new groups into the local conflicts. As a result, fresh local groups who did not have any violence with any other group in the district are now involved in the new confrontations. The damage resulted from these new confrontation was also high. Many innocent people were killed and huge properties lost.

In contrast, the frequency and consequences of these conflicts were relatively small in Babile district. There have not been open violent conflicts between ethnic Somali and Oromo communities in the district as such. Though, the conflict between competing local political elites has affected the relationship between the different local groups to some extend, it has not however, trigged down to local people in the district. Hence, there have

not been violent local conflicts between the local Somali and Oromo people in the district.

The next chapter will make general conclusions. It will recapitulate the main issues involved in the local conflict between the neighboring Somali and Oromo communities, and especially in the two study districts. The chapter will summarize the major similarities and differences of the local conflict in the two districts of Ma'eso and Babile as well.

Chapter-5: Conclusions

5.1. Conclusions

The paper has explained the nature of local conflicts between the different ethnic communities along the border between Somali and Oromo regional states. A general review of the type of local conflicts in the past periods between the different ethnic groups along the border between Somali, Oromo and Afar was made. Then the paper examined the causes, consequences and resolution mechanism employed in the local conflicts in Ma'eso and Babile districts during Derg period and under the current EPRDF led government. The paper aimed to explore the characteristics of these local conflicts under centralized governance system, and the implications of post 1991 conversion to an ethnically-based decentralized system in Ethiopia.

This chapter will summarize the main findings, made conclusions and as a final point, will set some general ending and proposals.

The geographical settlements and the relationship between Somalis and Oromos along the border between the two states is a complex one. Historically, Somalis and Oromo in the study districts have a long history of co-existence and strong cultural integrations. In Babile district for example, some of the people who speak Oromo language claim that they originally belong to ethnic Somalis. In addition to, during Derg regime and even beyond Hawiya and other Somali clans in both districts (except Issa) had lived together peacefully with their bordering Oromo people.

Concerning the causes of the conflicts, there are some similarities on the major underlying causes of the local conflicts in the study districts. There are both economic and political inter-play factors for the local conflicts in the study area. In the past, economic factors such as competition over natural scarce resources mainly grazing land and water played the main causes of the local conflicts in both Ma'eso and Babile districts. But in recent years, the politicization of local conflicts as a result of 1991 state structural changes have also complicated the nature, scope, and the constituents of the conflicting parts in the study districts.

The environmental conditions under which these groups live in are characterized with endemic poverty, short rainfall and recurrent droughts. Thus there is a fierce competition

over the scarce natural resources not only between different ethnic groups, but with in the same ethnic and tribal communities too. In addition to this, there was political involvement in the local conflicts of the two districts. In both Ma'eso and Babile districts, local conflicts are also characterized with political and administrative power struggle between ethnically-based political organizations and newly emerged political elites at the local levels.

Despite the similarities on the causes of the conflict in both Ma'eso and Babile districts, yet the effects of these conflicts was greatly different between the two districts. There was difference in terms of the scope, frequency, consequence, and extend of damage of the conflicts both during Derg and under present government.

In Babile district during Derg local conflicts over natural resources was one occurring not between different ethnic (Somali and Oromo) groups as such. Rather, competition over natural resources and culture of animal raiding was one taking place with in Somali tribal groups in the district (Between Ogaden and Hawiya and with in Hawiya sub-clans).

In contrast during Derg era, local conflict in Ma'eso district was one occurring between different ethnic groups most importantly between Issa (Somalis) and Ittu (Oromos) on one hand and between Issa and Afar people on the other hand. Although, these local conflicts were marginally connected to the ethnic politics however, the frequency and damage of the conflicts was more serious in Ma'eso district.

Derg government used military force and adoption of various policies (like Land tenure policy) in order to pause these local conflicts. Rather than proposing solutions, these policies have provoked new tensions and interrupted traditional local resource use and tenure systems and therefore, resource disputes. This reflects, as Tyler, 1999 depicted, on how state's policies enacted with little consideration of the existing traditional and local practices have aggravated the existed local conflicts. It also shows how useful are the traditional practices in building peace and stability from bellow.

The traditional means was more effective than government enacted policies in both districts. In Babile for instance, the traditionally elected Abamana and council of elders have intervened and successfully stopped the conflict that took place between Maru and Ciye (Both Hawiya clan) in 1988. And in Ma'eso district the traditional elders of Hawiya and elders of the other Somali minority clans (both have good relations with Oromo local people) together with different ethnic communities in the major urban settlements used to solve local conflicts especially animal raids between Issa and Ittu.

Never the less, the resource conflicts were further complicated by the politicization of these local conflicts. The emergency of different ethnically-based political parties (OLF, EPRDF-OPDO, DUP, IGLF, ESDL) and later on followed by the political elites that come into view have complicated the existed local conflicts in both districts. After 1991 political changes one can observe in both districts, what Asafa, 1996 described as elite

driven conflicts whose aim is to advance their personal interests rather than the interest of the public as a whole.

Despite this, the frequency and damage of the conflict on the local people as a result of political involvement of local conflicts was high in Ma'eso district. There has not been open violent conflict between Somalis and Oromo in Babile district as such. In Babile, the post 1991 conflicts was one occurring between local political elites in their struggle over administrative and financial resources. These confrontations however did not trigger down to local people in the district. The strong acculturation and ancestral myths helped Babile district residents to avoid these conflicts to turn into violence.

In contrast, the conflict between contending local political elites had triggered down and impacted a lot on local people in the district. As I have explained, during Derg period, there has not been open violent conflict neither between Hawiya and Oromo local people, nor between other Somali minority groups and Oromo local people in Ma'eso district. There was cultural assimilation, where Oromos local communities have accepted these Somali minority groups into traditional *Mogasa* system. However, the co-existence and cultural interactions of these people have been badly damaged by the current government's ethnically-based decentralization policy.

Reinforced ethno-national sentiments by several ethnic-based political organizations during the transitional period, have increased the animosities between different ethnic groups in Ma'eso district more than in Babile, and even elsewhere along the disputed border between Somali and Oromo regional states.

In Ma'eso district, OLF took critical steps during transitional period. Their intention was to enlarge the areas they claim to represent. As Getachew, 2006 has further explained, OLF wicked acts included to execute non-Oromo mainly Somali people, so that all non-Oromo people will escape the area.

The violent conflicts in both districts were further intensified during and after referendum. This time local elites put their efforts to change the demography of their respective territories. Thus, they started to mobilize local people just by exploiting the ethnic difference of the people in the districts.

Again the nature and impact of these claims and counter claims and subsequent damage of local conflicts entailed with this are different in the two districts.

In Babile district, the two states have conflicting claims over the identity formation of local people in the district. While in Ma'eso district, the dispute is mainly the ownership of the rural and urban settlements in the district. In Ma'eso both Somali and Oromo have conflicting claims over which ethnic group represent the majority in the disputed places.

In Babile district, local elites used to mobilize local people by using different means such as influencing local people by using the relief grain for political purposes during food

shortages, providing job opportunities to their supporters. Local political elites also used illegitimate means such as unlawful arrests, and punishing those who oppose them. There have not been open violent conflicts however, between different ethnic (Somali and Oromo) groups in Babile district.

In contrast, local elites got involved in the local conflicts in Ma'eso district. An extensive use of local armed militia men was reported in all local conflicts during and after referendum in Ma'eso district. The conflict resulted from local elite's administrative power and financial resource competition has turned into a wide range of people to people fighting in the district. The consequence was high; several innocent people were killed, displaced, and huge property lost was recorded in all the deadly conflicts in the district.

Unlike Babile district, in Ma'eso district there has been a sequence of violent conflict even after the referendum was conducted. There are still complaints on how referendum was conducted in many places including Ma'eso district. While violent conflicts continued in kabales where referendum is undertaken, there are still other places where referendum is yet to be conducted.

In short, ethnic-based decentralization system in Ethiopia, have impacted local conflicts in the study area in three ways;

First, the formation of 1991 ethnically-based regional states also provided the bases in which the state borders are delaminated. But, to draw a physical border between socially, culturally, and geographically mixed communities who previously lived together under highly centralized non-ethnic based provinces (Awraja) had brought in new challenges that complicated the already existed local conflicts.

Secondly, the political dimensions of ethnically-based decentralization system in the country reinforced ethno-nationalism sentiments. It legitimized the ethnic differences of the neighboring societies. As a result, different ethnic pastoral and agro-pastoral communities started to permanently claim and counter claim the traditionally communal land and water sources.

And finally, because district level decentralization system offers devolution of not only administrative power but also financial resources to local authorities. These opportunities gave local elites a prize worth to compete for the devolved political, and administrative power, and financial resources (Getachew, 2006).

In addition to, in order to increase their share of financial transfers from federal and regional governments, district level decentralization system required that district authorities should generate more revenue from their localities. This also augmented the struggle between local elites to sustain as much promising areas as they could put under their respective jurisdictions. These conditions, wrenched apart in age-old relationships, and cultural integrations among neighboring different ethnic Somali and Oromo communities in the study areas.

In an attempt to solve the border dispute between the two states, both concerned federal and regional government institutions undertook several measures. Various awareness building workshops was conducted in various places in the two regions. Border affairs office aimed to handle border dispute issues, and Joint peace committees (JPC) was established in different levels of the structure of the two regions. An evaluation aimed to correct the wrong doers of the districts and zonal officials were also conducted. The two regional states also agreed to establish a law enforcement unit, so as to act against the unlawful practices by local political elites. And finally referendum was held in almost all the disputed areas along the border between the two regions so as to transform these local conflicts in a peaceful manner.

Despite these positive results, there have been however, discouraging results too. One can observe that, in both states there is no effective mechanisms whereby inter-regional disputes can be addressed prior to the emergence of violent conflict.

The inability or unwillingness of higher regional authorities of both regions to deter the unlawful practices, and not to prosecute those commit such criminal acts gave a chance for contending local political elites to cause violent conflict in the districts. Under certain circumstances both sides failed to stop unlawful practices such as when local elites participate directly and indirectly in fueling these local conflicts. Most horrible, is the failure of both regional state authorities to interrupt these local conflicts in an impartial and transparent manner.

In both regional states especially in the districts, there is a poor administrative capacity, biased law application. Lack of respect and implementation of agreed points are also seen in many cases. Further more the traditional reconciliation mechanisms are not properly used and linked to inter regional peace initiatives either.

In many localities, the referendum did not bring the expected sustainable solutions to the disputed border between these two states. Although there have not been violent deadly conflicts in Babile district after the referendum, however one can observe a frozen conflict that may erupt any time. Where as in Ma'eso district the violent conflict continued and in some areas it even worsened. In both districts, there has been continues complains on how the referendum was conducted and administrated.

In general, I can say that the border dispute between Somali and Oromo in general and those in Ma'eso and Babile districts in particular are very complex one. It is not an easy task to draw demarcation between different ethnic pastoral and agro-pastoral groups whose livelihoods depend on vast livestock and people movement, especially in dry seasons. It is also not easy to physical demarcate between highly culturally integrated communities who lived centuries in an ethnically mixed settings.

However, this does not mean that decentralization is impossible in the study districts by itself. But I rather emphasize the importance of developing meaningful approach by the different levels of the government, from federal to district levels, as well as the traditional

leaders, elders and other civil society organizations to address the problem in sustainable manner.

Harmonization and reinforcing the traditional institutions in resource use and dispute solutions and building the capacity of these institutions by supplementing them with the modern conflict resolution mechanisms through training and awareness building would yield better results. This, I believe will help improve the common understanding between the two communities, and thus will reduce local disputes to turn into awful deadly conflicts. I also believe that establishing joint administration by both Somali and Oromo states would help minimizing the risk of competing local elites and improve the fragile peace in highly integrated and acculturative communities like Babile district.

Finally, this paper does not claim to have covered enough about the nature, scope and intervention mechanisms of the local conflicts in the study area both during Derg regime and under the current EPRDF leg government. There fore, more research is important in these areas, especially the impact of decentralization system in the study areas, why local conflicts in Ma'eso was more violent in nature while the major causes of local conflicts in the two districts are more or less similar. And of course what conflict mechanisms would yield better to ensure sustainable peace and revive and strength the existed collaboration and co-existence of these local brother communities.

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