

**Federalism at the Margins of the Ethiopian State: The Lived
Experience of the Majang People**

By

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Abstract

This dissertation presents the experience of ethnic empowerment within federal political system in Ethiopia for the last two decades. It examines to what extent the new federal political order has delivered on its promises by taking Majang people who live in the Gambella regional state as a case study. The Majang, an ethnic minority, live in the southwestern part of Ethiopia in Gambella regional state about 302 kilometers to the south of the Gambella town. In both material and cultural sense, Majang way of life is closely related with their surrounding landscapes, above all the forest. They are the sole inhabitants of the forest lived for centuries making a living through bee hunting, keeping and shifting cultivation. It takes a critical look at Majang people core values and threat of extensive land acquisition in federal Ethiopia primarily based on first hand empirical data collected through observation, in-depth interviews and focused group discussions besides secondary sources.

It has been already two decades since the Ethiopian federation has been instituted. The Majang are in theory the prime beneficiaries of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism. Given that these are a people, not just historically neglected by the preceding Ethiopian regimes, but also raided as slaves, never treated as citizens in any form or shape. Thus, the EPDRF's constitutional guarantee of ethnic self-rule, promotion/protection of minority rights and the pledge to empower ethnic minorities were naturally greeted with enthusiasm by Majang, as was the case with virtually all of the country's ethnic munity populations. Against the background of a federal experiment that is meant to address, among other things, ethnic injustice and institute a better

system of governance in Ethiopia, this article examines the lived experience of the Majang people in Gambella Regional State.

Results of implementation of Ethiopian ‘ethnic federalism’ are largely paradox even after this political order has been in place for two decades. The paradox of Ethiopia’s federalism is that, despite the existence of extensive self-rule based on ethnicity, land acquisition primarily by migrants but also by the domestic and foreign investors has posed a serious threat to the very survival of the Majang. Despite political empowerment, there is a deep seated insecurity. Extensive encroachment into Majang forestland, indeed, is causing Majang people to suffer greatly. Threats become more intense and Majang vulnerability are more numerous and potentially serious in consequence. Consequently, these relentless land acquisitions seriously weaken and endanger Majang culture, identity and core-values.

It is argued that the people of Majang in Gambella are faced with a serious “existential threat” to their survival as a group because of the spread of land acquisition by their powerful neighbors, illegal migrant highlanders and government-backed investors. With government emphasis on policy of developmental state manifested in the form of large-scale land lease, ethnic identity and minority rights are pushed to the sideline. The implication of these finding is clear; development must take into account consent of community at local level. Persistently ignored by the state and the local government, the Majang also react to their grievances to these threats in the form of violent resistance.

If land acquisition and deforestation continues like this, the Majang would irreversibly lose their cultural identity and livelihood connected to that. We need to translate the general constitutional

policies into concrete programs and services that respond effectively to minority peoples' needs such as the Majang. The dissertation argues that proper application and respect of the federal constitution and its core principles remain the best means of addressing the problem. A new willingness is required from the state at different levels to address the Majang problem and other minorities with related condition. The purpose here is not to suggest an alternative policy to ethnic federalism, but a proof that federalism is failing at the local level to meet its objective of ensuring self-rule for the Majang people and to suggest a more accommodative and a more useful implementation of it particularly among minorities . Expressly, to address Majang security threats, the government has to look at other alternative strategies of Majang-friendly development policy such as eco-tourism and modern apiculture rather than forestland land leasing.

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List of Acronyms

ACORD	Agency of Cooperation and Research in Development
CSA	Central Statistic Agency
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESM	Ethiopian Students Movement
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GNUM	Gambella Nilotes United Movement
GNRS	Gambella National Regional State
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
HoF	House of the Federation
HoPR’s	House of Peoples Representatives
MCF	Mechanized Commercial Farming
MPDO	Majangir Peoples Democratic Organization
MNZ	Majang Nationality Zone
MoFA	Ministry of Federal Affairs
NNP	Nations Nationalities and Peoples
SEPDF	Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Front
SNNPRS	South Nation Nationality and People Regional State
SMPDUO	Sheko-Majangir People’s Democratic Unity Organization
SPDM	Sheka people’s Democratic Movement

TPLF

Tigray Peoples Liberation Front

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Political Context: From a Unitarian to a Federal State

Ethiopia is a country of diverse peoples in numerous ways such as religion, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic ways of life, language, and tradition, which is an outcome of an indigenous process of state formation. Specifically, it is the result of the late 19th century territorial expansion of the Ethiopian empire¹. For the largest part of the 20th century, however, the Ethiopian power holders made every effort for the creation of “one nation” out of many without considering the country’s diversity². The policy had the plan to assimilate various cultures into the dominant culture, principally expressed in the form of imposition of the Amharic language and the Orthodox Church. The coming to power of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (hereafter the EPRDF) in 1991 has decisively changed the process of state formation in Ethiopia³. In fact, what happened in 1991 was much more than a regime change. It has involved the restructuring of the Ethiopian state from a Unitarian to a federal political order⁴.

¹ Christopher Vander Beken. ‘Ethiopia: Constitutional Protection of Ethnic Minorities at the Regional level’. In Eva and Beken eds., *Federalism and the Protection of Human Rights in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Proceedings of the Contact Forum, 2008), 126; Christopher Vander Beken, Ethiopia: From a centralized Monarchy to a federal Republic,’ (Belgium: Ghent University, Faculty of Law, 2007).

² *Ibid.*

³ John Young, ‘Along Ethiopia’s Western Frontier: Gambella and Benishangul in Transition,’ in *Journal of Modern African Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 321.

⁴ Christopher Vander Beken, Ethiopia: From a centralized Monarchy to a federal Republic,’ (Belgium; Ghent University, Faculty of Law, 2007); Jon Abbink, The Ethiopian Second Republic and the Fragile “Social Contract”, in: (Africa Spectrum, 2009) 44, 2, 3-28.-www.africa-spectrum.org.

At the wake of the overthrow of the *Derg* regime in 1991, ethno-nationalist liberation fronts, historically marginalized and vulnerable ethnic groups, called for reasonable and contextual governance system that can lay the basis upon which equality, respect for identity, enjoyment of cultural rights, autonomy, peace, and security of survival can flourish. To this end, in the constitution-making process, an emphasis was put on ethnicity as a tool for managing age-old inter-ethnic conflict and oppression and Ethiopia formally established ethnic-based constituent units. The EPRDF, the ruling party, has embarked on the task of restructuring⁵ the Ethiopian state from a centralized to an ethnic-based federal state. As a result, three multi-ethnic (Benishangul-Gumuz, SNNPRS and Gambella) and six largely homogenous (Afar, Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, Somali and Harari National Regional States) regional states and two city administrations (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa) were created.

Consequently, Gambella has become part of the new political reconstruction in Ethiopia. It marked a turning point for Gambella. The former Gambella *Woreda* became one of nine member states within the decentralized, ethnically structured Ethiopian polity. Dereje expressed this as “one of the most visible political steps ever taken by the Ethiopian state to integrate its historical minorities”⁶. This is because although the Gambella region was integrated into the Ethiopian state at the end of the 19th century, both during the Imperial and the Derg period, the Gambella region was weakly integrated with the centre⁷.

⁵ During the restructuring process, ethnicity has been served as a central instrument to rebuild the states as a multi-cultural federal polity, *de facto* as of 1991 and *de jure* as of 1995.

⁶ Dereje Fayissa, ‘The Experience of Gambella Regional State,’ in David Turton ed., *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective* (208-230) (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2006), 208.

⁷ Dereje Feyissa, “The Ethnic Self and the National Other: Anywaa Identity Politics in Reference to the Ethiopian State System,” in Behru Zewde ed., *Society, State and Identity in African History* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2008).

Indeed, the implementation of ethnic-federalism has created a new political space for historically marginalized ethnic groups to attain local self-governance. Above all, it empowered them with the necessary political and bureaucratic resources to protect their identity, culture and sources of livelihood. However, a new socio-political process has undermined the exercise of a meaningful political power by minority groups i.e., large scale and unregulated migration from the highlands to the lowlands has radically altered the regional and local demographic structure. Acquisition of land/forest land by the migrants from the indigenous communities has become common in ‘Developing Regional States’⁸.

The Gambella region where the Majang live is one of these so-called Developing Regional States where the human security of minority groups is put in danger by the continuous large scale population movement and inter-ethnic conflict. Despite the fact that the EPRDF’s granting of national self-determination to ethnic groups in Gambella region, it did not lead to effective pacification of the region. Ever since the introduction of ethnic-based federation in Ethiopia, politics in the region has been fashioned by the identity politics largely played out under indigene-settler conflict, indigenous-investors and intra-indigenous conflict. As said by Dereje “although there are elements of reciprocity and complimentary socio-economic exchanges, the dominant pattern of inter-group relations in the region is conflictual”.⁹ Overall, it was “one of

⁸ Ethiopia’s peripheries lowland regions of Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz, Somali and Afar are sometimes referred to as ‘emerging regions’.

⁹ Dereje Feyissa, ‘A National Perspective on the Conflict in Gambella,’ in the *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (641-653) (Trondheim, 2009), 641.

the most conflict ridden regional states in federal Ethiopia”¹⁰. Monika (2005) too speaks of “a volatile region”.¹¹

In short, the political situation in the Gambella regional state is extremely explosive. In reality, managing these complex differences and other problems has been turned out to be a noteworthy challenge to the incumbent government. The case of Majang in Majang Nationality Zone evidences one of such challenges. Specifically, in Majang Nationality Zone (hereafter MNZ) territorial disintegration, highland migrants land grab, Ethiopian government’s transfer of huge tracts of land to domestic and foreign investors have exacerbated the situation. This study also seeks to examine the federal experiment in federal Ethiopia at the local level by taking MNZ in Gambella region as a case study.

1.2 The Zonal Setting: Description of the Main Study area

According to the Gambella regional state constitution, there are five owner peoples of Gambella. These are the Nuer, the Anywaa, the Majang, the Opo and the Komo. The Majang are the third largest indigenous people in Gambella region after the Nuer and the Anywaa. There are three administrative Zones ‘owned’ by the three largest indigenous nationalities. These are: the Anywaa Zone, the Nuer Zone and the Majang Zone. The Majang are the ‘owner nationalities’ of MNZ¹². MNZ consists of two *Woredas*, Godere and Mengesh, with an administrative capital at the town of Meti. It has thirty-one localities locally known as *kebeles*¹³.

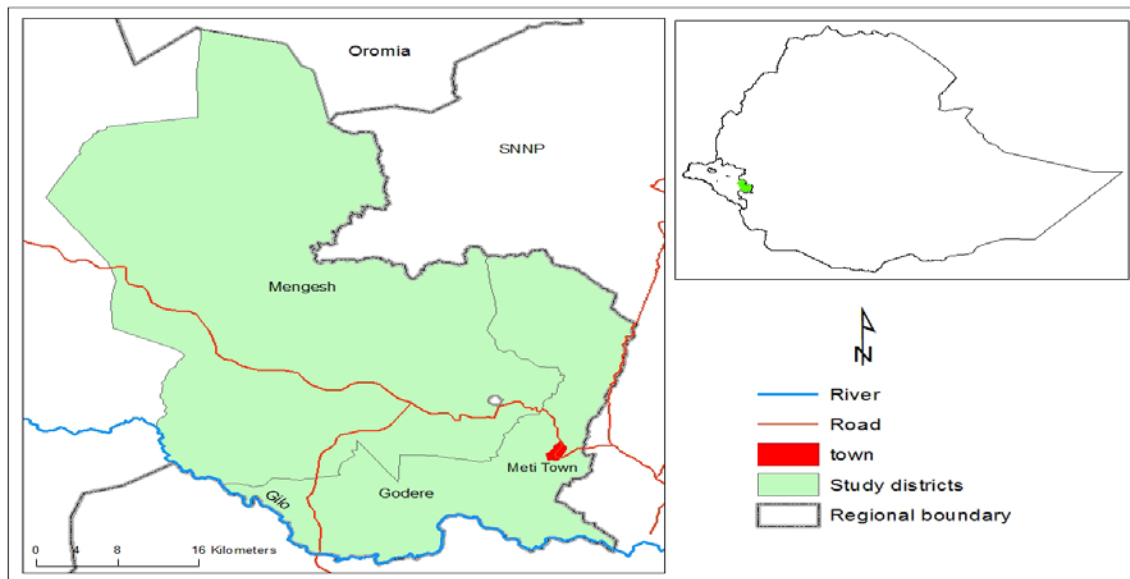
¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Sommer Monika, *Transforming Conflict in the Multi Ethnic State Gambella in Ethiopia: Mediation in a Divided Society* (Institut Universitaire Kurt Bosch, 2005).

¹² In the GPNRS, the Majang were first given a special *Woreda* named Godere special *Woreda* in 1992. It was in 2003 the Godere special *Woreda* was elevated into a zonal status known as Majang Nationality Zone.

¹³ The lowest unit of administration in Ethiopia consists of about 3,000 to 4,000 people.

Figure1: Study Districts



Source: Pact Ethiopia, 2012

Demography

The total population of the Zone is 59,227¹⁴. Out of this, Godere and Mengesh is 38,763 and 20,464 respectively. Although Majang are the indigenous inhabitants living in MNZ, they are not as such the majority. MNZ is home to various ethnic groups such as Majang¹⁵, the indigenes of the area, while Highlanders constitute the non-indigenous ethnic group. Generally, the latter are also called “Galen” as “the local people call them while Highlander/Habesha is a self-description. According to the 2007 population census, the Highlanders constitute 80 per cent and the Majang are only 20 percent of MNZ. By deducing 12,277 totals Majang number from the total Zonal population number, the number of Highlanders in MNZ is 46,950. The majority of the Highlanders live in Godere whereas the majority of the Majang live in Mengesh *Woreda*. The Majang people speak a Nilo-Saharan language of the Surmic cluster. With regard to religion,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Recently, the Majangir Zone National Council has formally changed the name of the ethnic group from Majanjir to Majang in July 2011 due to its derogatory nature. See Minutes of the Zone Council Meeting, July 2011.

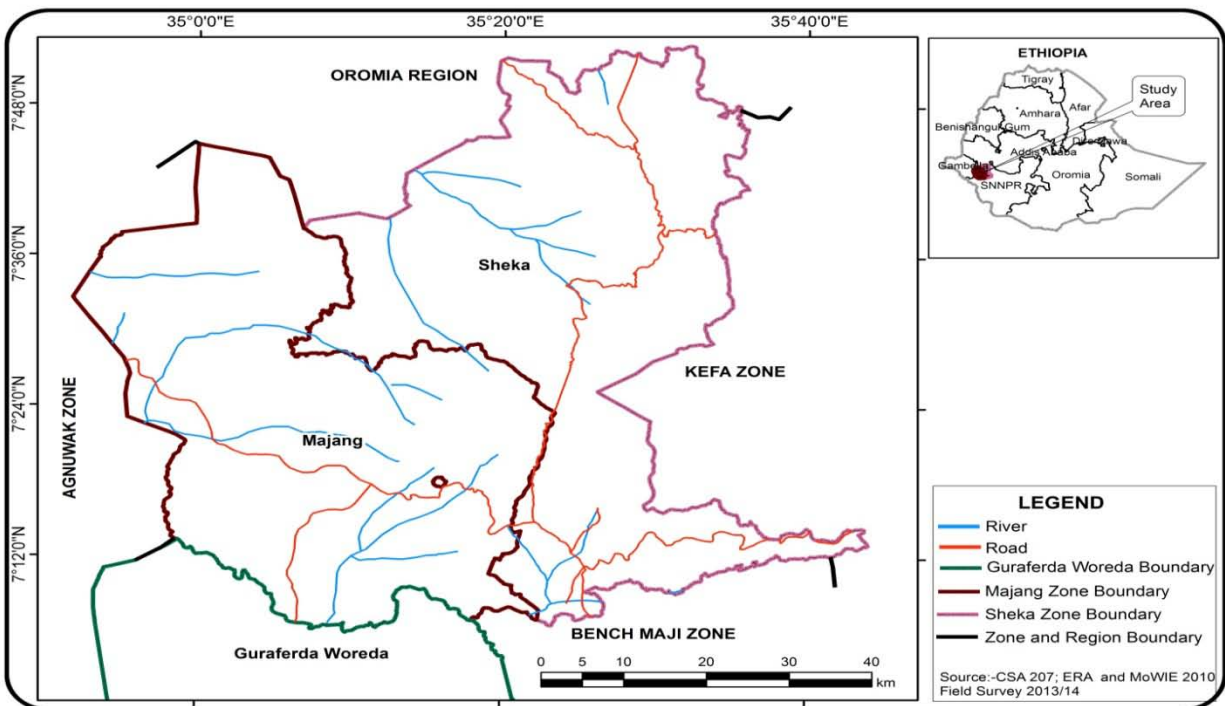
the indigenous people are followers of protestant Christian denomination where as the highlander immigrants are adherents of Orthodox Christianity and Islam. There are also few followers of traditional religion.

Table1: Demographic Distribution of Majang *Woreda*'s in the Majang Nationality Zone

<i>Woredas</i>	Urban total	Rural total	Urban + Rural
Godere	7,137	31,626	38,763
Mengesh	-	20,464	20,464
Total	7,137	52,090	59,227

(Source: The 2007 Population and Housing Census Results of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Central Statistics Authority, 2008)

Figure 2: Majang Nationality Administrative Zone and its Neighbors



Geography and Climate

The MNZ is found in the southwestern part of Ethiopia in the Gambella National Regional State (hereafter GNRS). As figure 1 and 2 depicts, MNZ is bordered by Gog and Abobo districts of GNRS on the west, by Ilubabor Zone of Oromiya region in its Northern, by Sheka and Bench Maji zones of Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) in its Southeastern part, by Dima District of GNRS on the South, and by Anywaa zone of Gambella on its Western part. The area lies within the latitudes 6° 30' to 8° 30' north of the equator, and longitudes 34° 30' to 35° 30' east of Greenwich¹⁶. In terms of physical size, MNZ has a total surface land mass of 2254.65 km²¹⁷. Out of this, Godere and Mengesh *Woreda* are 592.75 km² and 1,661.90 km². It occupies the transitional zone between the southwestern highlands of Ethiopian plateau and the Savannah lowlands of the Sudan-Ethiopia border¹⁸. The topography is characterized by lowland that is mostly covered by forest. The area is also said to have tropical warm temperature, high relative humidity, and abundant rainfall climates. The area receives its rainfall season (kirmet) from May to October and its dry season (bega) is between December and February¹⁹. The vegetation is uniformly broad-leaved tropical rainforest characterized by large trees and moderately luxuriant undergrowth lianas, creepers, mosses and ferns²⁰. It is part of the southwestern tropical rainforest belt²¹. The soil appears to be very fertile²². The zone is also the

¹⁶ Jack Stauder, *The Majangir: Ecology and Society of the Southwest Ethiopian People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 10.

¹⁷ FDRE Central Statistics Agency, *2011 Population Projection* (Addis Ababa: CSA, 2011).

¹⁸ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 10.

¹⁹ Ibid:11

²⁰ Ibid:11-12

²¹ Dereje, *The Godere Area* (Addis Ababa: Pact Gambella, 2007b), 1.

²² Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 11.

main source of the Upper Gilo watershed²³ and watered by streamlines, which are tributaries of the Nile Rivers: Gilo and Alewero.

The area is gifted with many rich natural resources. It is one of the 58 national forest priority areas of Ethiopia and the last remaining tropical rain forest in the country. It is also extremely rich in biodiversity and significant in terms of socio-cultural, economic and ecological values it holds for the indigenous community²⁴. Recorded evidences show that the Majang forest consists of 257 vascular plant species representing 90 families. The forest also harbors a number of wild animals, such as colobus monkey, Green monkey, Bush pig, Bushbuck, Leopard, Buffalo and many bird species. The forest of Majang zone constitutes more than 70% of the total area of the zone which is a major source of livelihood for the local community. Some of the non timber forest products from the forest include honey, coffee, spices, wild fruit, bush meet and wood products.

Agricultural land cover is 18.96%, grazing land 0.14%, forest 63.29%, settlement area 3.12%, wetland 0.50%, Institution/Infrastructure 6.37% and wasteland 7.63%²⁵. According to the recent Pact Ethiopia survey (2012), land cover of MNZ ranged from dense forest land space (in Kabo, Gubati, Janje, Kokori, Newe, Baya, Tingi and Fejeji *kebeles*), agricultural land (in Goshene, Kumi, Gelishi, Goshini, Shone, Akashi, Chemi, Tolina Tokali, Abiy 03-05, Gumari, Meti,

²³ Pact Ethiopia, ‘*Socio-economic*’, *Gilo Sub basin of Gambella Integrated Land Use Planning Study Project* (Addis Ababa: Gambella Land and Environmental Protection Authority, 2012), 14.

²⁴ Dereje Feyissa, *The Interface between National and Regional Level Decisions and Local Conflicts in the Gambella Regio* (Pact Ethiopia, 2007a), 104.

²⁵ Tadesse and Feyer, 2006, cited in Pact Ethiopia, *Gambella Land and Environmental Protection Authority*, ‘*Gilo Sub Basin of Gambella Integrated Land Use Planning Study Project* (Addis Ababa: Oromia Water Works Design and Supervision Enterprise, 2012), 12.

Gengeboze kebeles) to dense wood land (in Asheni and Gonchi *kebeles*)²⁶. In MNZ, there are about 9,731.43 hectares (1.49%) of moderately cultivated annual perennial field crops such as maize, sorghum, potato, sweet potato, turmeric, ginger, pepper, mango, avocado, orange²⁷. According to the livelihood Atlas of Ethiopia, the zone is coffee, honey and cereal zone of Gambella region²⁸. In MNZ, there is also a beautiful Bureyi Lake. The total area of the lake is 184.54 hectares²⁹. It is the habitat of many wild animal species especially birds, fish and others.

Livelihood Activities: Majang's mythical past and their attachment with the forest

Livestock population except poultry is the lowest economic activity of the Majang except for few Highlanders³⁰. The Majang believe that their culture, attachment with their forest and modes of livelihood is determined in the 'mythical past'. Their life is associated with the lot of the Majang 'to cultivate, hunt and keep bees; but not to keep cattle or goats or sheep' as they are ordered by the *ler*, the father of all men³¹. As a result, the Majang do not own livestock. The following quotes from Stauder clearly show the Majang's strong attachment to their culture and way of life which was based on a foundational myth:

...He[Ler] once a long time ago lived here [Majangland], and showed men how to make beehives, and how to hunt, and he gave them maize and sorghum and told them to plant it...He had a son who was a Majangir, the ancestor of all the Majangir, but this child

²⁶ Pact Ethiopia, *Land Use land cover...*, 19.

²⁷ Ibid: 25.

²⁸ Ibid: 12.

²⁹ Ibid: 26.

³⁰ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 132-133.

³¹ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 14.

*behaved badly and made Ler angry, so Ler took a stick and beat the child with it, and told him to go off into the forests and eat warthog and make hives and plant maize...But Ler left here long ago, travelling to the north, taking his cattle with him...*³²

First, in their self-description, the Majang are people destined to be people of the forest³³. Second, it is the extensive coffee plantation works and dense forest makes it difficult to practice extensive livestock population³⁴. Third, the existence of tsetse fly (Trypanosomiasis) may also have influenced the Majang to choose a forest based life rather than cattle rearing. Fourth, the abundance of wild animals supply in the thick forest may have had similar effects and influence on their way of life.

Indeed, even now the Majang consider land and forest as a primary asset for their lives. They are largely dependent on honey-keeping, hunting and shifting cultivation for their food. There are quite a lot of indications and evidences of the unique bond between the Majang and the forest. For instance, out of the total population of the Majang, only 10% reside in urban areas³⁵. According to the information obtained from the Zonal Bureau of Agriculture, majority of them live deep down in the thick forest which covers about 63% of the total land size of MNZ. In this regard, the Majang self-description is related to the forest in an existential term: “The Majang out of the forest is like a fish out of water”. Pearce (2012: 6) also emphasized the existential link between the Majang and the forest: “...their land is like their blood. It is everything. And to lose it would be to lose their identity.” Dereje (2007b:1) too emphasized the same, “Forest is where

³²Ibid.

³³ Since the Majang were forest dwellers in their origin, they settled in the tropical rainforest area of their present location.

³⁴ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 132.

³⁵ CSA, *Population and Housing ...2008*.

they dwell, collect honey, hunt and practice shifting cultivation, and obtain traditional medicine and worship.” Stauder (1971:2) also noted that Majang culture is well adapted to the particular environmental condition of Majangland. Though social changes are happening among the Majang community, they keep and strengthen their cultural tradition particularly their rich traditional life of the forest³⁶. Kurimoto (1994:906) also pointed out that while the Anywaa are ‘people of the savannah’, the Majang are ‘people of the forest’. The name Majang itself is also coined from the two words, *ma* means “let us go” and *jang* means “in the bush”. So, Majang literally means ‘let us go to the bush’³⁷. Thus, the area is an ‘ecological niche’ merely well suited to the modes of livelihood of the Majang³⁸. Beyond doubt, forestland and its resources are fundamental elements of the Majang identity and their main source of livelihood. In other words, the very survival of these people is linked with the wellbeing of the forest.

Majang spiritual world has also a physically as well as psychologically powerful attachment with the forest. The Majang ritual experts, the *tapa’d*, had occult power over Majang landscapes such as rivers, waterfalls, trees and so on. For example, Odola wrote in his biography “Balti claimed a mysterious power over the nearby falls”. The Majang have some views about spirits who resided in that place who also gave the ritual expert a special power³⁹. They had also a spiritual relation with the forest animals and trees. For instance, the Majang considered the wild coffee tree as a scared tree. Because of its spiritual value, thus they had no interest in harvesting coffee from the wild tree. Odola also mentioned that the chief of the *Meeliner* clan, Balti, became very furious when he cut the wild coffee branches since that wild coffee tree was a sacred tree, which had

³⁶ R. Sato, *Christianization through Villagization: Experiences of Social Change Among the Majangir. Ethiopia in Broader Perspective* (Kyoto: The Kyoto University Museum, Kyoto University, 1997), 574-575.

³⁷ Interview (name withheld), Gelishi, April 2013.

³⁸ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 2.

³⁹ Hoeksra, Harvey T, *Honey We are Going to Africa!* (Mukilteo: WinePress Publishing, 1995), 284.

connection with someone who had died long ago⁴⁰. The Majang ritual experts had also a shrine with the emoy plant, decorated with some stones, a broken pot, scattered beads. For instance, when they made a honey-wine they first spilled on this shrine to honor and keep their ancestors happy⁴¹. They had also sacrificed chickens, goats and sheep on the shrine for ritual purpose.

The Majang are shifting cultivators. The Majang grow crops such as maize (*makale*), sorghum (*ngiding*) by method of shifting field cultivation what anthropologists call 'slash and burn' community. Maize and sorghum are their staple food prepared in the form of porridge. They stayed in their clearings for three or four years at the most, and then moved on, clearing another small plot as before⁴². Overall, they had "...a never ending cycle of slash and burn, staying in one place a few years, abandoning it to grow over again, and moving into a newly cleared site"⁴³. In Majang, "owing to abundance of land, territorial claims do not involve aggression or competition for natural resources. The significance of territory is in settlement, but not in its restriction⁴⁴."

The Majang supplement their small and unproductive cultivation by hunting and gathering. While men hunted for wild animals and set fish traps in the rivers, the women gathered fruits and edible roots. Odola also observed, "the women worked extremely hard in searching for and digging out edible roots over a wide area in the surrounding forest"⁴⁵. Hunting had been practiced to obtain animal protein, for valuable trading commodity, social and ritual well-being.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*: 285.

⁴¹ *Ibid*.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 194.

⁴⁵ Hoekstra, *Honey we are going to Africa!...*, 303.

According to Stauder (1971:14-15) ‘with the exception of a few kinds of creatures...any animal is regarded as edible by Majangir...’ Some animals were very important trading items such as elephant tusks and leopard skins. A man killing of elephant, lion and buffalo was regarded as a vital social activity for prestige, showing attainment of manhood and ritual service⁴⁶. The Majang also obtain and prepare various kinds of medicine from the forest. They also used wild fruits, vegetables and nuts such as *gamiak* tree (nut), *aime* (fruit), mushrooms, yam (*kawun*), *jongee* (spinach-like greens) for food⁴⁷. Indeed, wild edible plants and animals are part of the regular meal of the Majang⁴⁸. Wild food plants are without doubt valuable foods in time of famine and crisis.

The Majang are also very fond of drinking wild coffee. However, they are interested in the leaves of the coffee rather than the beans. They prepare a daily traditional drink called *chemo* or *kari* from the infused scorched leaves of coffee trees flavored with other spices such as red pepper, ginger and herbs. In fact, coffee cultivation would not fit into Majang system of agriculture since it needs a permanence of cultivation which would be incompatible with Majang patterns of shifting field cultivation and settlement⁴⁹.

The Majang depend on their environment ‘for almost all the items which go to make up their material culture’⁵⁰. From wild forest trees, the Majang make their shelters, baskets and beehives.

In this regard a Majang quoted in Sato (1997:574-575) said

⁴⁶ Ibid: 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid: 24.

⁴⁸ Asseffa and Tades, 2010, cited in Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid: 25.

⁵⁰ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 24.

...The Majangir way of life is to seek woods. We do not live without woods. Because we, the Majangir seek woods and honey...we have no disease...because there are many nutrient foods in the forests. There are many animals. We cannot find good things we once had enough of. Products in the forest are exhausted...we do not know why outsiders came to our land to live...”

The Majang also prepare their traditional melodic instruments from woods in the forest. The Majang “appear to be a musically inclined people. Many were seen walking on the trails, keeping time with a small stringed instruments they had fashioned with wood and thin metal staves”⁵¹. They also make quite a lot of traditional medication from saps of leaves and roots in the forest.

Apiculture is one of the major activity, means of livelihoods and cultural practice for the Majang given that honey is one of the most valued products of the Majang people. Hence, they make an extensive use of honey from the wild bees in the forest. A single Majang may have as many as a hundred hives placed high in the trees”⁵². An average Majang produces 600 kilo of honey annually⁵³. Stauder (1971:18) observed, “the interest and effort Majangir give to hunting and fishing greatly surpasses by that they give to honey (*etet*)”. Dessalegn too underscore that Majang is

...highly forested and many here depend on the forest for their livelihoods, and especially so because honey production is an important economic activity. Communities here have a unique form of rights to trees on which beehives are hang, which everyone respects. In

⁵¹ Hoekstra, *Honey we are going to...* , 205.

⁵² Ibid: 204.

⁵³ Stauder, *The Majangir...*

*essence, the forest is common property in which individuals hold rights over the trees their hives are placed*⁵⁴.

Honey has a spiritual and material benefit to the local community. It is their only ‘cash crop’. Honey was also a pleasant nutritious drink for them though ‘its value does not lie in its nutritive aspect’⁵⁵. Actually, it is a daily diet during the long dry season period. In fact, the Majang put up for sale red peppers, sesame seeds, chickens, leopard skins, ivory. Yet honey was the major commercial item the Majang traded with high prices with their neighbors for the articles they want from the outside world, especially iron tools were necessary for clearing, hunting, and to protect themselves from external attack⁵⁶. Honey is also very important food for men during hunting, honey collecting and in times of food crisis. Honey has also a spiritual value in the Majang community. They have the responsibility to give a portion of their annual produce to obtain the blessing of the *tapa’d*. Currently, there are about 29,345 beehives in the Godere *Woreda* though almost 99.8% of them are traditional⁵⁷. This has significantly reduced its productivity given the fact that whilst the maximum yield from the traditional is 7 kg, 30 kg of honey is harvested from the modern beehives in the *Woreda*⁵⁸. On the whole, “...the time men spend in making hives, brewing, drinking honey-wine, and taking honey to distant markets to trade, it become apparent how important in Majang life are activities related to honey”⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ Dessalegn Rahmato, *Land to Investors: Large-scale Land Transfers in Ethiopia. FSS Policy Debates Series, No. 1, June 2011*(Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2011), 22.

⁵⁵ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*: 19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*: 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*: 23.

Various people who migrated to MNZ are engaged in coffee and some cereal production. Largely, almost all of the highlander's livelihood sources are crop production by clearing the forest. Thus, most of the food grains are supplied from other areas such as SNNPRS and Oromia region⁶⁰. Now a day, the Majang has already started cattle and goat rearing because of the process of sedentarisation of the last three decades⁶¹. Actually, means of agricultural production is too primitive. For the most part, farming is based on hand tools. The migrant Highlanders have been practicing highland system of agriculture, i.e., oxen as means of production. There are also Highlanders that are using mechanized farming (tractor) as a means of production⁶².

Land Tenure

Overall, based on FGD and key informant interviews the dominant land tenure systems in the study area are three. First, there is a dense forestland with traditional collective and an individual ownership right called jang. Jang is the traditional forestland holding system of the Majang. Individuals usually own jang. The jang owners can inherent rights to their children. In addition to tall trees where beehives hanged, mountains, hills, valleys, and rivers have been used as a boundary between one Jang and the other. Second, there is a private smallholder possess land holdings. This land is formerly a forest cleared by either the Highlanders or the natives mainly used for crop cultivation and coffee farms. The immigrant highlander settlers dominantly possess this land. Thirdly, we found an investment land leased to both domestic and foreign investors up to fifty years. These land holding ranges from small-scale commercial investment to large-scale investments owning up to 40 hectares and 5000 hectares of land respectively.

⁶⁰ Ibid:

⁶¹ Ibid: 133.

⁶² Ibid: 122.

Despite the fact that the forest is the major source of income and a sign of the identity of the local communities, it is under the threat due to pressures from various corners. Among the threats to the forest are deforestation for coffee and other plantations, expansion of agriculture and settlements, erosion of local traditional conservation practices, logging and expansion of large-scale agricultural investments⁶³. Today, commoditization of forestland becomes a common practice in MNZ and hence, the “right to sell jang appears to be an indisputable right for the Majangir community.”⁶⁴,

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Protection of ethnic minorities was one of the main objectives that induce the introduction and development of federalism in Ethiopia⁶⁵. It is introduced among other things to empower vulnerable, disadvantaged and oppressed “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples” in order to promote social, economic, and political inclusion. The constitution of Ethiopia is very generous in this regard given that it provides maximum self-rule right to ethnic groups⁶⁶. The federal constitution also includes special support to the historically disadvantaged NNP. Like other NNPs, the Majang people have obtained an extensive power of self-determination. The Majang also have obtained unprecedented nationality zone for the first time in their history, which is a unique experience for them.

⁶³ www.Melka-Ethiopia.org-accessed on July 16, 2014.

⁶⁴ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 109.

⁶⁵ Christopher Van der Baken, *Federalism in the Context of Extreme Ethnic Pluralism: The Case of Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region* (Verfassung und Recht in uberesee URU 46 (2013), 3.

⁶⁶ The FDRE constitution put ‘more emphasis on self-rule than shared-rule’. Yashi Ghai, 2000; cited in Assefa, *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity...*, 2009.

Interestingly, the final writing of this dissertation is coincidence with the commemoration of the 20th Years anniversary of the 1995 FDRE Constitution. Official speeches on this occasion like the previous ‘Nations, Nationalities Day’ were also merriment of the success of the federal system itself. To mention some, Honorable Abay Tsehay (2006) on the first Celebration occasion of the “Nations, Nationalities Day” in November 2006 said: “Today each nation, nationality and people, beyond enhancing its own language, culture and history, has transformed itself as to create local self administration, and development. This arrangement has brought about equal benefit in development and real empowerment for all.”⁶⁷ Ato Debebe Barud, Secretary General of the House of the Federation, in his Opening Remarks on a Seminar on Federalism and Development in Ethiopia 20 December 2014 said:

The constitution of the FDRE has managed to deal with the multifaceted problems of the country by creating a multinational democratic federal system based on the principles of equality and self-determination of the ethno-national communities. Doing this, it closed every door of exploitation, oppression and inequality. Our federal system has gone a long way to improving the peace, democracy and development of the country. After 20 years of implementation, it has brought remarkable socio economic changes that objectively altered the lives of millions of people.

In fact, as will be discussed in chapter four with the realization of the ethnic federal system, there are many encouraging changes. Nevertheless, such generalized claims of success by the government need to be problematized. Every year on the TV, newspapers and academic findings,

⁶⁷ The House of the Federation, ‘Hibere Biher’ Annual Magazine November 29 (Addis Ababa: Mega Printing Enterprise, 2006), 63.

we hear, see, and read about many problems at local level. For instance, the Majang in Gambella region face critical threats to their livelihood and way of life due to extensive introduction of new users of the forestlands – highland migrant farmers and mechanized commercial farming (hereafter MCF). That the Majang people are going through a period of unprecedented security challenges in recent years is indisputable. Tandem with this, sporadic conflicts keep occurring in the Majang inhabited areas. In some instances, many have been displaced, hundreds have died and many suffer physical and moral injuries. Majang is perhaps the area where influx of Highlanders and agricultural investment reached climax. All this is creating fear, anxiety, instability, mass displacement in the Zone.

Yet, there is no viable solution found to the problem and the situation is getting worse from time to time. One of the main rationales for conducting this study is the increase in the scope, frequency and sophistication of land acquisition, crisis, security challenges and failures in MNZ. It is really a paradox. Therefore, the dissertation seeks to answer why the Majang feel insecure at a time when they are politically empowered. In other words, why do the Majang feel insecure twenty years after the country adopted a federal system that expressly seeks to provide protection to NNP? Is there any new land acquisition development in MNZ that has threatened the Majang people continued existence so far? If yes, what kind and of what scale of land acquisition threats? Given the aforementioned problems, more specifically the study seeks to:

- ✓ explore the historical, political and economic contexts of the Majang people;
- ✓ investigate the relation between the Majang and their powerful neighbors and how do they respond to the threats;

- ✓ examine how the phenomenal rise of inter-regional migration negatively impacts on the identity and livelihoods of local communities in MNZ;
- ✓ examine how government policy of mechanized commercial farming (MCF) negatively impacts on the identity and livelihoods of local communities;
- ✓ examine Majang's response to their security threats and how the state does manage and responded to Majang people security concern; and
- ✓ critically examine how land acquisition undermines the federal project which is premised on ethno-cultural justice in light of the Majang people experience.

1.4 Literature Review: The Main Tents of the Study and State of Research

The Majang people contemporary phenomena have been the result of the interplay of several factors such as land acquisition from neighbors, domestic and foreign investors, migrant Highlanders that necessitates analytical framework. However, very few studies dealt with development MNZ since the formation of ethnic federalism using these variables. Hence, understanding the local people experience in the context of federalism requires examining their threats using these three analytical tools. Cognizant of this fact, the study applied 'immigrant Highlanders', 'Majang powerful neighbors, and 'commercial agricultural investment' as 'insecurity factors' that serve as a conceptual tool in the study of the Majang people and their growing sense of human insecurity. Thus, this section seeks to review and develop these three broad analytical frameworks in the following sections and thereby conceptualizing and identifying gaps in the accessible related bodies of literatures and demonstrate the contribution of this study to existing knowledge.

1.4.1 The Majang and their Neighbors

The major drivers of post-1991 conflicts were complex, diverse and caused by interplay of several factors such as resource and power sharing, failure to accommodate new minorities, fuzzy boundary between regional states and related territorial claims⁶⁸. The Majang people security and survival also depends very much on their complex relations with their neighbors. The Majang have faced territorial insecurity endlessly from the neighboring people even after the 1991. One of such new challenges and developments that the Majang have faced after the Derg was the new phase of dispute over ethnic boundaries specifically concerning the regional boundaries around Tapi and Bebeke⁶⁹. Sato's (1997) study briefly mentioned that a violent conflict occurred in Tapi in 1993 between the Majang and the Shekicho, which claimed the lives of many people. Sarah, *Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia* (2003) too touched the Shekicho-Majang and Sheko controversy over Tapi. She provides a very good narration and analysis of the conflictual relations between the two groups and some violent incidents though not comprehensive enough. The Sheko and the Majang fall in the same color spectrum i.e., 'black'. An MA thesis by Markos Fasil (2009)⁷⁰ also provides the situation of ethnic-conflict in Sheka Zone but largely focus on the 2002 Tapi conflict that involves the Shekicho people on the one hand and the Sheko-Majang people alliance on the other. Though he provides a good analysis on the 2002 conflict, it represents the Shekicho perspective only. The thesis heavily relied on narratives of the Shekicho – no effort was made to see the stories of the other side. It ignored the

⁶⁸ Dereje Feyissa, 'Conflicts within Ethiopian Federalation: A Reappraisal,' in Alem Habtu ed., *Ethiopian Federalism: Principle, Process and Practice* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2010).

⁶⁹ Ren'ya Sato, *Christianization through Villagization...*, 574-575.

⁷⁰ Markos Fasil, *Ethnic-conflict and its Resolution in the Sheka Zone of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State* (MA Thesis: Addis Ababa University, 2009), 60-65.

voice of the Majang in the discussion since the Majang are absent in the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion he conducted. It has also a number of factual errors. For instance, it considers the Majang as pastoralist people. Overall, Majang relation with their neighbors, their political fragmentation into three regional states and the Shekicho elite's territorial encroachment is an issue that has not obtained critical attention by researchers, which is one of the focuses of this dissertation. Besides, the issue is still ongoing one in the run up to the recent outbreak of lethal conflicts in 2014 that deserve attention. Thus, this study has also included the most recent tensions, violent conflicts, and overall new dynamics of inter-group relation from Majang insecurity discourse angle as well.

The Majang have also faced relentless territorial encroachment from the neighboring Anywaa people in the west. Essentially, the Majang often seem to regard Anywaa as traditional enemies who used to raid them⁷¹. Even after 1991, the Majang have complained the Anywaa behavior including exclusive possession of public property at regional level⁷². Literature with respect to the Majang relation with the Anywaa is as well quite limited. The single study on the subject is a preliminary study published in 1994 by a Japanese scholar Eisei Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa (Anuak) in Western Ethiopia: With Special Reference to the Majangir* (1994). The research studied Anywaa-Majang relation during and after the Derg regime. Nevertheless, since the study was conducted at the early stage of federalism, it did not examine what kind of effect it has on the dynamic of Anywaa and the Majang relation⁷³. He considers national level political dynamics as the third actor to play its own role in inter-ethnic relations

⁷¹ Ren'ya Sato, *Christianization through villagization...*, 4.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³Eisei Kurimoto, 'Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa (Anuak) in Western Ethiopia: With Special Reference to the Majangir.' In: Marcus, Herold (Hgg.): *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies* (Trenton: The Red Sea Press, 1994), 900.

between Anywaa-Majang. As said by Kurimoto, the Anywaa appeared as government agent for the Majang⁷⁴. In this regard, he offers a new perspective of looking at local conflicts by using central government as analytical tool to understand fully Majang-Anywaa relation. Its major shortcoming, nevertheless, is that it documents Majang-Anywaa relation solely from an Anywaa perspective.

1.4.2 Majang, their land and Commercial Farming

As has been acknowledged in the previous sections, indigenous Majang physical and cultural survival is strongly conditioned on their surrounding landscape. The first comprehensive study on Majang was Jack Stauder's, *The Majangir: Ecology and Society of the Southwest Ethiopian People* (1971)⁷⁵ explored Majang shifting cultivation, domestic organization, and settlement patterns. He provides a very good analysis of how Majang are strongly attached to the earth, and how they are related to each other in respect to this attachment. He shows how the domestic organization and spatial distribution of the Majang are tied into a particular system of shifting cultivation. Majang forestland and resources, however, have been threatened by state sponsored small scale and large-scale commercial farming. Sato's (1997) field observation confirmed that the Majang leaders feeling that their habitat was facing a critical moment due to the large-scale woodcutting by several private companies⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ Ibid: 908.

⁷⁵ Stauder's research is a result of a well-researched work that integrates primary data, oral accounts, participant observation and relevant secondary sources (though very few). It is useful because of it pays attention to Majang attachment to the forestland, and the ecology. Despite everything, he explored only the social aspects of land use in Majang solely from anthropological point of view. Besides, the time and the political, social and economic context are also different from the time he had done his research since the research was carried out from 1964 to 1966 and there have been a number of changes in Majang society such as socio-economic and cultural context, the ecology, the political landscape and their territory since then. Stauder, *The Majangir...*

⁷⁶ Ibid: 569.

Nevertheless, generally attempts at examining large-scale land transfers and their economic, social and environmental impact in Ethiopia have been quite limited...”⁷⁷ Actually, there has been also works that deal with land acquisition in Gambella region after 1991. In a recent report commissioned by Food Security Program Center of International Security Studies on the issues of food security via investment in developing countries agriculture, Benjamin Shepherd (2011), present a remarkable research of the impact of large scale-land transfer in Gambella save for it exclusively focus on Anywaa and Nuer zones⁷⁸. Likewise, Dessalegn Rahmato’s, *Land to Investors: Large-scale Land Transfers in Ethiopia* (2011) studied large-scale land transfer in Ethiopia and provided a fabulous study by taking Gambella and Oromia region as a case study. His analysis that was from land rights perspective and power relation found out that “the state has used its hegemonic authority over the land to dispossess smallholders and their communities without consulting them”⁷⁹. These studies, however, have largely ignored the impact of land grab by investors, Highlanders, and the continued influx of migrants on Majang livelihood, core values and identity. In addition, this study mentioned the problem of land grabs and deforestation save for it did not give detail analysis about it. Fred Pearce, ‘*Gambella, Ethiopia: Tragedy in the Commons*’, 2012⁸⁰, also provides a wonderful investigation about land grabbers, local community response and government repression. All the same, it was very brief and did not explore anything about land acquisition and Majang people state of affairs. Briefly, the

⁷⁷ Dessalegn, *Land to Investors*..., 4.

⁷⁸ Benjamin Shepherd, *Pursing Food Security via Investment in Developing Country Agriculture: Ethiopia as a Potential long-term Source of Agricultural Staples for GCC Member States* (Food security Program Center of International Security Studies: University of Sydney, 2011).

⁷⁹ Dessalegn Rahmato, *Land to Investors*..., 26.

⁸⁰ Fred Pearce, ‘Gambella, Ethiopia: Tragedy in the Commons,’ in Fred Pearce ed., *The Land Grabbers: The New Fight over Who owns the Earth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012).

previously mentioned literatures approached the problem from global environmental and food crisis perspective and dealt with Majang land grab threats in a fragmented way.

NGOs such as Pact and Accord as well have prepared critical reports on deforestation, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for the last decades in Gambella. Their action-oriented researches have produced some literatures on Majang forest situation. Among such works that deserve mention are: Tewodros Zewdie's, *Traditional Institutions of Conflict Governance and conflict Resolution Mechanisms* in Gambella (2007), which documented aspects of conflict resolution in Gambella and Dereje Feyissa's, *The Interface between National and Regional Level Decisions and Local Conflicts in the Gambella region* (2007), which document valuable information about conflict, potential and capacity of the traditional and modern governance systems and conflict management and resolution to consolidate peace and development in Gambella.

1.4.3 Inter-regional Migration and the Dynamics of Inter-ethnic relations

A present society and culture has been formed in consequence of various kinds of interethnic relations for centuries⁸¹. Migration, resettlement and interaction have played tremendously fundamental role in the history of this country up to the present⁸². Ethnic identity and ethnic-boundary itself is also a product of such courses of action⁸³. Without considering this development, it is very hard to comprehend wholly the political, economic and social history of

⁸¹ Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa...*, 899.

⁸² Shiferaw Bekele, *An Empirical Account of Resettlement in Ethiopia (1975–1985)* (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1988), 128.

⁸³ Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa...*, 899.

this country⁸⁴. The same is also true as regards to the history and current situation of the MNZ. Principally, to understand Majang history and contemporary dynamics of indigenes relation with migrant and settler Highlanders, history of resettlement and Christianization are very important socio-political processes. Literatures also show that “the most explosive conflict situation in Godere Woreda is Majangir-Highlanders tension”⁸⁵. According to Dereje, the major objects of the struggle between the Majang and the Highlanders are access and control over the forestland besides political representation⁸⁶. Hence, it is also useful to look at Majang multiple security threats from Highlanders migrants’ angle. Alula Pankhurst et al (2004) is the first comprehensive book the researcher comes across where the ‘migration and resettlement factor’ has been applied as a conceptual tool in Ethiopian political and historical investigation⁸⁷.

All the same, we have very inadequate body of literatures that dealt with the impact of these new developments on the indigenes community and in particular, Majang relation with highlander migrants, and migrants’ significant impact on Majang survival and identity. The first related study was by Dereje Feyissa’s, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region* (2011),⁸⁸ a research which was a product of a PhD dissertation at Martin Luther University explores varying configurations of modes of ethnic identity formation, and the causes of ethnic conflict between the Anywaa and the Nuer. He has conducted research and authored a number of publications on the Gambella region. This book is based on an ethnographic and historical data collected through systematic fieldwork and archival

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Dereje, *The Interface between National and Regional...*, 102.

⁸⁶ Ibid: 102.

⁸⁷ Alula Pankhurst et al, *People, Space and the State: Migration, Resettlement and Displacement in Ethiopia*, (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 2004).

⁸⁸ Dereje, Feyissa, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia* (New York • Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 6.

research in the Gambella region and neighboring southern Sudan. It presents useful research for this problem though the issue is explained with reference to ‘significant others’ in Anywaa-Nuer relations. Despite the fact that the author tried to maintain a somewhat ecumenical approach by making occasional reference to the experience of the Highlanders and Majang people, on the whole, his main concern and focus is on the Anywaa-Nuer relation. In other words, though an important contribution of Gambella regional studies, its attention on Anywaa-Nuer relation limits its impact for the study of Majang people at local level. Dereje’s latter paper *A National Perspective on the Conflict in Gambella* (2009) is the first one the researcher know of where the ‘highlander’s migration as political insecurity factor’ has been applied as a conceptual tool in the study of Majang. Notwithstanding as a pioneering work, this study too lacks a comprehensive analysis of Majang-Highlanders relations.

There are also other works that deserves attention such as Assefa Fiseha’s, *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity in Ethiopia: A Comparative Study* ⁸⁹(2008), Regassa Bayissa’s, *War and Peace in the Sudan and its Impact on Ethiopia: The Case of Gambella 1955-2008* (2010), and Alexander Meckelburg’s, *Changing Ethnic Relations. A Preliminary Investigation of Gambella, Southwest Ethiopia* (NY), Medhane Tadesse, *Gambella: The Impact of Local Conflict on Regional Security* (2007) have also presented a very good analysis on indigene-settler relation in Gambella in general and Anywaa-Highlanders relation in particular. These researchers, however, did not include the dynamics of Majang-highlander relation in MNZ. This study also attempted to explore this new development in the study area.

⁸⁹ Basically, Assefa’s book is the first comprehensive research shedding light on Ethiopian federal experience in its seminal work. Assefa Fiseha, *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity in Ethiopia. A Comparative Study* (Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publisher, 2008).

In short, as the review indicates because of a decades-long history of isolation and exclusion, the study area is characterized by amazing data gap. With the exception of selected field reports by Dereje (1997, 2008), a short briefings by Sato (1997) and Kurimoto (1994) research on the political and economic processes in MNZ since 1991 have been rare and scanty. Besides, sufficient attention has not been given to the issue of land rights of the communities in the context of the global land acquisition phenomenon. Most studies in the Gambella region have focused on Anywaa and Nuer, but little is known about what happens to the Majang people in MNZ. Notable exceptions are Dereje's and Tewodros's unpublished manuscripts, and Dessalegn's (2011), Benjamine's (2011) and Pearce's (2012) published books that dealt with the Majang phenomena in a fragmented manner. No doubt, these studies form the base of the large picture of the Majang people challenges and situations. They suffer, however, from the lack of in-depth research and an inclusive perspective that places the Majang people phenomena in the wider political, economic, socio-cultural setting. Neither of these aforementioned studies fully captures the situation of the Majang people in MNZ.

Absence of a focused and critical examination of the problem, therefore, instigated the need to investigate indigenous Majang situation to help ease their threat which to date has not been critically considered. Thus, it is necessary to conduct a study that explores the phenomena of indigenous Majang people, and relation with its neighbors, above all with Highlanders in the context of ethnic-federalism and the extent of impact of land acquisition. In other words, the researcher will espouse different perspective from the above approach and will approach the problem from a more comprehensive indigenous and federalism angle, and dynamic conflict generating factors to make sense of the complexity and interplay of conflict in the study area.

Overall, the researcher has offered and applied an alternative approach that is better to sense the problem comprehensively from wider socio-economic, political and cultural aspect using the previously mentioned three major investigative tools.

1.5 Significance of the Study

As has been underlined above, forest and land have always constituted a vital part of Majang society. It has consistently shaped the culture, value systems, social organization and means of livelihood of the Majang community. Yet, the current situation of the forest, the land associated with in-migration, investment and its threat to Majang society as a community is a field of study that has received little consideration by scholars, chiefly by Ethiopian researchers. The few scholars who have been engaged in research on Majang have failed to scrutinize critically Majang people security threats and inter-ethnic dynamics, which is one of the determinants of the nature of Majang society. The few scholarly studies we have on the Majang can barely be considered substantial works.

This research is, therefore, partly intended to redress this gap by studying Majang security threats as a community and the ensuing simmering inter-ethnic relation. The Majang people security challenge associated with deforestation, land displacement and their adaptive and coping strategies in the context of ethnic federalism, and human security and indigenous people land right perspective, as presented here, has not been attempted before. This research is the first comprehensive treatment of the subject. This dissertation, therefore, is significant at least at three levels.

Theoretical Level

Written sources on political developments in the Gambella region since 1991 is few in number and skimpy in first-hand empirical information. Besides, most of the available literatures approached the problem from anthropological point of view except Dereje (2003) who goes beyond anthropological study⁹⁰ and covers the dynamics of political development⁹¹. Consequently, most of the accessible literatures did not analyse the situation of the Majang from the standpoint of societal security and federal governance. Additionally, contributions are often geared towards the past and or have a rather general outlook on the region⁹². Kurimoto (1994) in his study of “Inter-ethnic Relations of the Anywaa (Anuak) in Western Ethiopia: With Special Reference to the Majangir” also indicated that “although we have first-rate ethnographic studies on the Anywaa..., this is a little studied area with Jack Stauder’s remarks from the Majang side... being an exception.”⁹³

A gap exists in the indigene-non-highland literature where the perspectives of the indigenous and non-indigenous groups are not integrated to understand the crisis in MNZ. Relatively, there exists good study on conflict in Gambella in general and specifically about Anywaa-Nuer relation but little attention has been given to the issue of Highlanders. Chuol Gew (2003:33) too acknowledged the fact that a conflict “which is very often neglected, is between indigenous

⁹⁰ Stauder, *The Majangir...*; Sato, *Christianization through villagization...*; Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa...*

⁹¹ Medhane, Tadesse, *Gambella: The Impact of Local Conflict on Regional Security* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2007), 28.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa...*, 900.

peoples and the Highlanders”⁹⁴. Identity politics at the region has manifested itself in the political calculus between indigenous and non-indigenous, involving a fierce competition for political posts and resources such as land. Consequently, this research triangulates theories from various disciplines such as societal security, anthropology and federal governance. For example, since rigid ethnic federalism and the role of good governance are key variables in explaining the nature and intensity of the conflict, this research has used federal governance theories and principles. In academic terms, it will be a contribution to the ongoing debate on the contentious rights of minority peoples in the context of ethnic federalism.

At Policy and Practical Level

Obviously, this research makes possible the choices of the policy maker though decision-making may not be a part of research. Accordingly, this study will have relevance to policy makers who can create or revise policies based upon the results of the study. For instance, federal and regional parliaments, the ruling party, concerned Ministry such as Ministry of Federal Affairs, Ministry of Defense, non-governmental organizations for informed and effective intervention. Moreover, the study has relevance to both conflicting parties whose situation will hopefully be improved by the findings. Furthermore, the study has impact on the conflict ridden Horn of Africa , specifically for new country South Sudan and Ethiopia since the indigene-Highlander conflict may have its own spillover effect in South Sudan.

⁹⁴ Chuol Gew, *Understanding Root Causes of Conflicts in Gambella with Suggested Management and Prevention Method* (Unpublished, 2003), 33.

Without peace and stability, there will be no development. One of the big challenges in multi-ethnic countries is how to ensure peace and stability. Hence, this qualitative case study of MNZ is important and needed for several reasons. For instance, a gap exists in conflict literatures on Majang community threats and indigene-settler relation where the perspectives of indigene-settler conflict are not well integrated to understand the implication of ethnic federalism and inter-group relation. Hence, the study will add new knowledge to this neglected area of study and hence provide invaluable information to social scientists, educators, and policy makers to better understand the problem in the region. In addition, indigene-settler tension and sometimes deadly violent conflict are becoming common phenomena in the Gambella region. In the region, settlers constitute the third largest population group next to Nuer and Anywaa. Moreover, this study is conducted in Gambella region where migrants are increasing in number due to foreign and local investment boom. The dynamic in southern Sudan has also its own implication in the regions political dynamics. What is more, this study will provide information for future researchers who wish to study similar and related issues in Gambella region, and elsewhere in other regional states. Even, the study will also be significant to other multi-ethnic regional states in Ethiopia that are undergoing similar situation such as Benishangul-Gumuz, Harari, SNNRS and countries such as Spain, India, and Iraq.

Concisely, there are significant benefits derived from the findings of this research and the foreseeable contributions are both academic and practical. In other words, the outcome of this research will have two fold significances from epistemological and empirical perspectives. This study, therefore, not only add new knowledge to this neglected area, but it also provide information to social scientists, professionals, educators, and policy makers to better understand

security threats of the indigenous Majang and the indigene-settler phenomena in the context of strict ethnicization of federalism. Local people perception and experience of federalism is a gap in Ethiopian federalism. This research reinvestigated the implication of federalism from a local perspective. Hence, policy makers can make decision based on this new and specific data.

Methodological Level

Most currently existing literatures-although brief and limited, suffer the following methodological setbacks that make the focus and approach of this research different. First, most existing literatures concentrates on to the threats posed to Ethiopia along Gambella border by issues arising from the traditional notions of state security. Hence, by identifying some of the most potent threats to Majang security in Gambella, its consequence, and analyzing the legal framework and institutional mechanisms for protecting the Majang people from these threats, this research thematically and substantively depart from all existing literatures on the subject matter in Ethiopia. Even ethnographic studies about the Majang are quite limited⁹⁵. In addition, the context at that time Jack Stauder 1971 did his research is also very different from the current one. The Derg regime context and the EPRDF context are different for Majang. For instance, there is a complete divergence in mode of governance and administrative structure. While the Derg regime followed centralized unitary governance, the EPRDF follows ethnic-based decentralized federal governance at least at theoretical and legal level. As a result, the Majang have started to be the owner of their affairs at least in theory as compared to the Derg period.

⁹⁵ Sato, *Christianization through Villagization*,... 555.

1.6 Methodology and Methods of Inquiry

To address Majang multiple security challenges, a qualitative approach is well at a paradigmatic and methodological level. To delve in depth into the complexities and socio-economic and socio-political processes in MNZ qualitative research is the best option. It allowed the researcher to study the phenomena of federal implementation in detail at local level. Besides, qualitative research has been a tool in multicultural research. For instance, it includes context as essential component of research; uniquely able to capture the meanings made by participants of their experiences, and provides the opportunity for voices that were previously neglected and lives that were marginalized to be brought to the analytical center. It helped the researcher with the documentation and description of the experiences of those facing the problem under investigation. In short, it provides a descriptive type of data that are required to answer the research problem. Qualitative research paradigm lies within an interpretative tradition, one that seeks to appreciate the meaning of human experiences. Philosophically the research is interpretivist.

Methods of Data Collection (Procedures, Methods and Design)

Creswell (1998) identified five major divisions within qualitative tradition; out of these, the researcher employed a case study research design to explore the problem in-depth through a single case. It allows for a rich and deep understanding of Majang people contemporary experience in the region.

Once the approach for the research is decided, which methods of data collection to use is a logical step to ask. In general, the methodology is designed to account for four main issues: i) An examination of the historical background of the indigenes Majang people; ii) investigate the margins of the federal restructuring process and its consequence; iii) explore the impact of MCF on the local community in MNZ; and iv) Investigate the impact of the continued in-migration on the region.

The researcher used a variety of tools to collect data. One of the research tools was socialization with the local community. The researcher cultivated friendly relation with two indigene assistants. Especially, the principal research assistant, Alemayehu Muse (an adopted highlander), helped a lot. He is very knowledgeable about Majang history and contemporary political development. He has benefited the researcher a lot as a highlander by origin and totally a Majang culturally amongst whom he grew up. He is a primary school teacher. He is teaching Majang language. Working with him helped the researcher to gain recognition among the Majang and the Highlanders. His father was one of the famous *tapat* of the *Meeliner* clan in Mengesh *Woreda*. He is a multilingual person who speaks Majang, Oromiffa and Amharic fluently.

The researcher conducted semi-structured and unstructured open-ended interviews with people of various social categories among the Majang, Highlanders, and Shekicho. Interviews are an important source of case study information. It yielded a very good insight into the problem in detail as much as possible. The researcher tried to speak with people from a variety of background such as ethnic groups, political parties, regional, federal, local government officials and elders.

Particularly, key informant interview was an important method. By the notion of “key” informants, the researcher share the concept used by Williams (1967:27)⁹⁶. Key informants are “specialists” which can furnish better information on a particular issue. For example, those who participated in a certain historical episode can have better understanding than those who did not. Hence, selection of key informant for this research was made based on such understandings. Unlike, participant observation that furnishes data on current observable things, key informant interview is important to collect data on both issues of the past and the present. “Specialists” who can better represent each group were chosen. Particularly some people from those who can best speak the language of the area, those who were participants in different political regimes, people who were political actors in conflict and decision-making process, and talk about it was used as key informants.

Interviews were conducted in various ways. Interview with rural Majang carried out in vernacular language with the help of the research assistant, who also worked as a translator. Accuracy of the translation was enhanced through crosschecking with other native translators and fortunately most of the Majang comprehend Amharic. Their problem is speaking. Interview with Majang in town was largely conducted in Amharic. All interviews with Highlanders were conducted in Amharic.

The choice of the interviews was largely dictated by their degree of relevance to the case study selected. The researcher organized the interview in a way to encourage unsolicited discussion

⁹⁶ Thomas Williams, *Field Methods in the Study of Culture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), 27.

and to allow informants to elaborate on the themes that they found most important. By recording interviews in a narrative form, the researcher tried to understand the life history, problems, concerns, and challenges of informants. The researcher used what Dereje (2011) calls a researcher mediated discursive dialogue, provoking the Majang with the Highlanders perspective and vice versa. This helped the researcher a lot to gain accesses to the perspective of the relevant actors and how they are mutually constituted.

Table 2: Ethnic composition of participants

Ethnic group	No. of Participants	Percentage
Majang	40	47.6
Highlanders	51	60.7
Shekicho	12	14.3
Sheko	10	11.9
Anywaa	4	4.8
Nuer	3	3.6
Foreign (India)	1	1.2

The study aimed to fill gap in the literature on research on the federal experience of indigenous peoples in Ethiopia. To do this, this study used interview to identify the factors that affect Majang people's core identity and value. The data analyzed were from interviews and Focus Groups Discussion (FGD) of 119 and 122 respectively in Majang, Gambella town, SNNPRS and Addis Ababa. The researcher with assistants between January 2013 and March 2015 conducted the data collection. Between January 2013- March 2015, the researcher visited MNZ five times.

The research areas include Yeki Woreda of SNNPRS where the Majang, Sheko and Shekicho live together. Though the researcher carried out fieldwork in SNNPRS, the study is focused on the MNZ in Gambella region, where the fieldwork was extensive. The researcher has spent most of the time in Godere *Woreda*, Meti town. Hence, much of the data used in this study is derived from Godere *Woreda*. The choice of the *Woreda* was largely dictated by the nature, intensity of the social and political interaction of the people being studied. These areas are a convenient place to get information pertaining to the two groups. Godere *Woreda* is the main interaction area among the Majang, Highlanders and the Shekicho in Sheka zone of SNNPRS. According to the 2008 Census, more than 80 % of Godere *Woreda* residents are the Highlanders. More to the point, most of the current MCF existed in Godere *Woreda*. Above all, most of the conflicts between Majang and Highlanders, between Majang and the neighboring Shekicho, and Majang and the investors have occurred in Godere *Woreda* and along its borders. Besides, Gelishi, Chemi, Kabo, Gumari were *kebeles* the researcher visited regularly. In addition, the researcher visited remote *kebeles* of Yari, shone, Kumi with the research assistants, Alemayehu Muse, by bus, on foot and sometimes by renting motorbike. All frequently visited sites are centers where all socio-economic groups are found in abundance and land acquisition and the ensuing conflict occurs frequently. These areas especially Kabo, Gumari, Gelishi are major areas of commercial farming. Above all, Yari *kebele* is selected because it is an area that hosted significant Highlanders. Currently, Yari *kebele* is a major target for highlander's access to land. These help the research to conduct in-depth formal and informal interviews with people of different generations and background and to observe the situation of land acquisition and forestland clearing.

Interview was supplemented by the ordinary participant observation⁹⁷ and participant observer. This included attending workshop and political meetings. The researcher participated in two workshops in MNZ. The one is about sustainable forest management and the other is about Federalism, Women and Justice. Besides, current migrant's mobility to MNZ visiting commercial farming sites, environmental situation such as forest cover, settlement patterns, livelihood systems, behaviors of interaction, to mention but some were observed. The researcher was in MNZ during conflict between the Majang-Sheko and the Shekicho and, between the Majang and Highlanders. The researcher visited Tsanu, Dunchayi, Goshen *kebeles* and talked to the displaced Highlanders, Majang and Sheko. In the localities, the researcher had the opportunity to observe Majang people cultural, social, economic and political activities. Hence, the researcher observes the daily conversation within the community and their interaction with their neighbors especially with the Highlanders. The researcher saw burned houses in Tsanu *kebele* and the atrocity committed by both sides. The researcher observed different cultural and physical contexts, which are relevant to the objectives of the study. The researcher also has the opportunity to participate in various meetings, conferences, cultural gatherings and so on that is relevant to the research agenda. In addition, field notes were important to capture the essence of what was being observed.

Data in the form of group views were also collected through FGD. Focus groups were an efficient way of gathering information within short period of time because of their synergistic nature and the fact that they take advantage of group dynamics. The questions proposed in a

⁹⁷ There are two types of participants: ordinary participant and participant observer. The ordinary participant just comes to a certain situation to engage in a certain activity, to use the researcher own example, just to attend a meeting. Participant observer on the other hand comes with double purpose: to attend a meeting plus to observe and participate. James Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt: Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 53-54.

focus group were important in acquiring feedback about the issue being studied and involve those who have a direct relation with the subject matter. Moreover, the focus groups provided an objective view of the issue and were used to correlate data provided through the interviews. An appropriate representation of different ethnic groups was made (see list of people interviewed persons in the reference section). When they work in-group, it helped to generate more reliable, accurate, and complete information through group cooperation. The selection of participants in the focused group discussion followed both homogeneous and heterogeneous group. Homogenously, for example, informants put together based on their common experience based on which they construct the best reliable and accurate information through group cooperation. Heterogeneously, informants of different ethnic background, or of different opinion were placed together in order to arrive on a common representation of certain debatable issue. As much as possible heterogeneity was carefully planned to ensure detract free environment for discussion mutual inconvenience of communication among informants who would not fairly go together.

Purposive selecting participants both from the indigenous and from the non-indigenous peoples FGD was organized in different areas with different groups. Accordingly, 23 FGD from both groups were purposely chosen and participated in the discussion. Two groups was the mix of Majang and Sheko, Majang and Highlanders, and the rest 21 were homogenous groups of the indigenous and Highlanders. Out of these, 10 were Majang, 1 Sheko, 2 Shekicho and 9 Highlanders discussion groups mostly at their respective places. Number of FGD ranges from 4 to 7 members. The questions for the indigenous Majang incorporated five parts: (1) basic information; (2) Majang identity threats that are threatening the cherished values of the Majang; (3) How they had been displaced from their land; (4) Majang view of the Highlanders, the new

federal arrangement and its opportunities and challenges; and (5) Majang view of the investors and investment and so on. The questionnaire for the Highlanders included five parts: (1) basic information about migration history, settlement and adaptation in Majang; (2) Possible causes of conflict (3) the way they had obtained land from the Majang (4); Highlanders view of the Majang; and (5) and the new federal arrangement and so on.

The researcher further supplemented interviews, FGDs by drawing on literatures especially the seminal anthropological book of Stauder. The researcher extensively consulted Jack Stauder's, *The Majangir: Ecology and Society of the Southwest Ethiopian People* (1971) and Dereje Feyissa's, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region* (2011). For the argument of Majang-Anywaa relation, the researcher widely conferred with Eisei Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa (Anuak) in Western Ethiopia: With Special Reference to the Majangir* (1994). For the discussion of land acquisition for commercial purpose, the researcher supplemented field findings with Dessalegn Rahmato's, *Land to Investors: Large-scale Land Transfers in Ethiopia* (2011), Fred Pearce, 'Gambella, Ethiopia: Tragedy in the Commons', 2012 and Benjamin Shepherd (2011) remarkable research of the impact of large scale-land transfer in Gambella. Archival evidence such as history books and newspaper articles also provided valuable data for the study. The researcher used published articles, books as well as grey literatures including brochures, pamphlets and reports. In the study, the researcher consulted articles in professional journals, doctoral thesis, monograph, interviews, original works such as letter, reports, proceedings of parliament, reports of governmental departments and agencies, International Organizations, annual reports, and

minutes. The researcher participation in the 2012 national conflict-mapping project in Ethiopia allowed to become acquainted with the available resources.

Some challenges have been encountered in gathering data in Gambella in general and Majang in particular. The researcher started data collection in February. First, there was officious challenge to get permission for data collection in the study area. Academic researchers are treated with a degree of suspicion by the system especially concerning politically sensitive issues. For instance, currently the issue of 'land grab, indigene-settler relation is extremely politically sensitive in Ethiopia. Secondly, informants were unwilling to give detail information about politically sensitive issues such as conflict and land leasing in the study area. Particularly the researcher has observed this problem from the Highlanders/non-indigenous people. They are not only reluctant to answer certain questions, but actually be reluctant to being seen with the researcher. In sharp contrast, the indigenous are very free to speak about any issue. The indigenous people are willing and free to share their times and stories. Besides, due to budget deficiency, the Majang zone was occasionally unable to pay the civil servants a salary for two months. As a result, civil servants become indifferent to the research. Besides, most of the time participants sampled for interview were not available at the agreed time. Thirdly, socialization and payment for research assistants and participants is very expensive. Fourthly, there is also security problem owing to the ongoing tension and confrontation between Majang and the government forces, which made it difficult to travel to all districts and localities. Finally yet importantly, there was a relative dearth of well-documented archival and other relevant materials. Despite the fact the researcher engaged in data collection in a condition of restriction and fear, the researcher was able to collect adequate data. Diverse formal and informal mechanisms of socialization such as having dinner together,

inviting for coffee, relentlessly trying to persuade the government officials about the benefits of the findings of the research to the Majang community and the government were used throughout.

Data Analysis

This study makes use of various techniques of qualitative data analysis. The qualitative data obtained was examined through content analysis: thematic and discourse analysis. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set⁹⁸. It analyzes the data by using content and discourse analysis, which also included narrative and critical analysis. It helps to capture various conflict dynamics and contexts. The researcher and the research assistant transcribed field notes, interviews and audio-recorded verbal interactions as they are collected. We transcribed the data verbatim to have first hand understanding of the participant's perceptions and feelings. The transcribed data is analyzed using thematic content analysis including narratives story.

The researcher carefully followed Braun and Clarke's guide' to the six phases of conducting thematic analysis: becoming familiar with the data generating initial codes, arching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report⁹⁹. The researcher coded the transcribed texts for themes according to a coded list that the researcher has developed in the course of the fieldwork. It also included extensive narratives describing their relationship and conflict accounts. The researcher describes and analyzes texts of oral narratives thematically.

⁹⁸ Braun, V. and Clarke, V., *Using thematic analysis in psychology*, *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2), 77-101 (2006)

⁹⁹ Ibid.

The research conclusions were constructed in interpretive narratives from their data and try to capture the complexity of the phenomena under study.

To make certain whether the data were the true reflections of the participants experience, the researcher followed various techniques. First, rigorous techniques to produce clear and correct descriptions of the issue have been attempted. Second, the researcher gave the findings to participants to validate the results. Third, the researcher gave the findings to scholars who have done research on the area.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

Although the research tried to situate the issue of oppression, slave raiding, land acquisition and inter-ethnic relation back as far as the early 20th century to the Derg regime (1974-1991), the main thrust and focus of the thesis is the period between 1991-April 2015. It is a truism that it is in this period one sees the federal experience of ethnic groups at local level as well as land tenure changes among the Majang community. Land acquisition by multiple actors and the resultant repercussions such as deforestation occurred at an alarming rate in these years. Obviously, the year 1991 is selected because it was the year that marked the beginning of a new chapter in Ethiopian political history, i.e., the introduction of federal self-governance. The study uses federal experience of MNZ as a case study. Hence, specifically the year marked the beginning of Majang's integration into modern political system. It not only created unprecedented momentum for an ethnic self-governance but it also provides the context for the emergence of a self-

governing Majang people with its own territory and distinctiveness. Although the research covered all Majang in habited areas in the three regional states (Oromia, SNNRS and Gambella), the study is focused on the Majang in Gambella region, where my fieldwork was extensive.

Pertaining to limitations of the study, few caveats are in order. First, the study focuses more on the interaction between Majang and Highlanders. Hence, highlander's political status in the study area and other dynamics has not been investigated in detail. Second, the study investigated the extent and impact of MCF on the landscape and the local community and the resultant violent conflicts. However, the impact of conflict and simmering tensions between the local community and investors has not been well thought-out in detail. It is the second point that requires further research. Third, regarding the issue of Shaboye people demand for recognition of their distinct identity, except providing general ideas and remarks, the researcher avoided detailed investigation. In fact, it was raised question for future research in the conclusion section. Fourth, though the researcher carried out the fieldwork in Yeki *Woreda* and Guraferda area in SNNPRS, and Oromia region, the analysis was not that much in depth. It needs further detailed exploration about Majang people contemporary situation. It is important to note now that lack of adequate historical data made it difficult to study the historical analysis of Majang in detail.

1.8 Ethical Questions and Considerations

To the best feasible degree, the researcher was mindful of ethical issues. In order to meet the best of data validity and reliability, to begin with, the researcher listened and observed carefully and

tried to cross-check whenever necessary, begin writing report afresh so that steer clear of the risk of misrepresentation, be truthful, and utilize a method of triangulation.

In addition, the researcher made sure that the participants get verbal and written information about the aims of the research. On top, participants have an opportunity to ask for clarifications and to raise any issue of concern with the research prior to conducting interview, since the issue is very sensitive and it includes vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the researcher prepared a consent form and make certain about the confidentiality anonymity participants not be stored with any identified label. In short, the researcher has taken care to respect norms of the community and the research was based upon the informed consent of participants involved. All the research participants voluntarily consented to participate but names of some sources are withheld to guarantee personal safety of the informants.

1.9 Organization and Rationale of Chapters

The dissertation is organized into eight chapters. The introductory section provides a brief description of the study area. By doing so, it illustrated the location, demographic characteristics, topography, and climate. In addition, it incorporated the background for the problems, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, significance of the study, and ethical issues. Very briefly, it describes the research methodology and field experiences.

Following this introduction, the second chapter provides theoretical orientation of the study. The domestic legal framework about minority rights and theories by different scholars about federalism and have been highlighted.

Chapter three offers a historical review of the Majang people. It seeks to explore Majang migration, settlement, and history of inter-ethnic relations. This chapter extends the discussion on Majang exposure to modernization and its repercussions. Specifically, it also spells out the key contribution of missionary works on the social, economic and political changes of the Majang.

Chapter four is devoted to ethnic empowerment and its limits. It also documents and explains the first encounter of the Majang people with the EPRDF and their response to the new federal political order. In other words, it provides ethnography of the encounter between the EPRDF and the Majang people and ethnic self-government. This helps to situate my work in its wider socio-political context. It also provides the consequential Majang security concerns in relation to their political fragmentation into three regional states and the continued territorial encroachment from their powerful neighbors.

In chapter five, broad discussions are made on the indigene Majang and non-indigene migrant highlander's relation who have been both insecure regional minorities living in the same political space. It also depicts the predicaments caused by highlander migrants in MNZ as perceived by the host community.

Chapter six provides the impact of government sponsored commercial farming on the local community. Besides, it spells out the predicaments caused by the advance of commercial farming on the Majang with particular emphasis on livelihoods.

Chapter seven consists of an extensive discussion on Majang adaptive, coping strategy and its impact on inter-ethnic/group relations. Majang responded to their identity threat in different ways ranging from violent conflict to legal measures such as petition to the federal government.

In chapter eight, which is the concluding section, provides an outline of the summary of the dissertation findings as well as a critical appraisal of the Ethiopian federation in light of the experience of the indigenous Majang people. Moreover, it forwards policy recommendations to address the human security threat the Majang have experienced, a state of affair which is intimately connected to the conflict situation in Majang Zone, Gambella regional State.

Chapter 2

Analytical Framework: Multicultural Federalism and Minority Rights

2.1 Introduction

In chapter one, general background, statement of the problem and the methodology employed to deal with the problem, significance of the study and ethical considerations are introduced. Besides, a review of available materials pertaining to the topic and a critical synthesis of empirical literatures according to relevant themes were made. This lends a hand to place the research in its wider academic milieu in the context of previous researches.

This chapter explores literatures on federalism and other relevant theories to conceptually explicate and empirically illustrate the people phenomena in the study area. It introduces about the conventional wisdom about federalism. It also reviews the domestic legal framework, and institutional and policy landscape in federal Ethiopia that guides the study and examines the extent to which it protects the country's historically disadvantaged and vulnerable Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (hereafter NNP). As this chapter provides the analytical framework to the study, the subsequent chapters provide a more thorough empirical discussions and analysis.

2.2 Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity: Situating the Research

Problematic in the Federalism Discourses

The researcher relies on literatures on Federalism and Ethiopian version of federalism to assess local experiences with the realities of ethnic self-governance by taking the indigenous Majang , one of the vulnerable NNP, as a case study. This analytical framework will provide a background into federalism and theories about federalism, which is important to understand fully how the Ethiopian federal system works.

There is a growing consensus on federalism as the best instrument for accommodating national minorities¹. This is partly due to the characteristic of federalism that “...respects the desire of national groups to remain autonomous and to retain their cultural distinctiveness...²”. Besides, it is due to the flexibility and advantage of federalism having an ‘infinite capacity to accommodate and reconcile the competing and sometimes conflicting diversities having political salience within a state.³’ Most definitions provided by renowned scholars also reflect the intrinsic eminence of federalism to accommodate diversity. For instance, Ronald Watts define federalism as normative term that advocates “multi-tiered government combining the elements of shared-rule and regional self-rule.⁴” In fact, this is a definition based on the presumed value of federalism in accommodating, preserving, and promoting distinct identities within a larger political union⁵. In the same manner, Kymlicka defines federalism; “... a political system which includes a constitutionally entrenched division of powers between a central government and two or more sub-units (province/ lander/ states /cantons), defined on a territorial basis, such that each

¹ Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular, Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 108.

² Ibid.

³ Michael Burgess, *Comparative Federalism: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 7.

⁴ Ronald L. Watts, *Comparing Federal Systems* (3rd ed.) (Ontario: Queen’s University, 2008), 8.

⁵ Daniel Elazar has identified several broad genus of federal political systems such as unions, federations, confederations, federacies to associated statehood. Federations refers to a political system in which each constituent units has sovereign powers derive from the constitution rather than from another level of government, each empowered to deal directly with its citizens in the exercise of its legislative, executive and taxing powers, and each is directly elected by its citizen. Daniel J. Elazar, 1994: xvi; cited in Watts, *Comparing Federal Systems*, 8.

level of government has sovereign authority over certain issues” which distinguishes it from administrative decentralization and confederations⁶.

However, as literatures propose, there are varying conceptions and applications of federal political systems. For instance, based on their recognition of ethnic and linguistic diversities, federations could broadly be divide into two categories; namely, national federations, and multinational and /or ethnic federations. A huge difference exists between national federations that are not designed to accommodate minorities, and multinational federations that aim to accommodate minorities⁷. Some federations such as United States of America are designed based on individual rights within a common nationality, and do not to recognize national minorities for self-government⁸. In other words, in USA and in other territorial federalisms such as Brazil, Australia, internal boundaries, power divisions are not made with the conscious intention of empowering national minorities⁹. Consequently, in America, for instance, state governments often consider national minorities as ‘an obstacle to settlement and development’ and dispossess them from their historic homelands¹⁰. Therefore, in general territorial federalism, in and of itself, is not guarantee that ethno-cultural groups will be accommodated.¹¹

Whereas multinational federations are, federations designed with the intention of accommodating national minorities. Switzerland is a typical example that scholars considered as the first “modern federation built upon indigenous ethnic and linguistic divergences that were

⁶ Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular...*, 110-111.

⁷ *Ibid*: 115-116.

⁸ *Ibid*: 116.

⁹ *Ibid*: 119.

¹⁰ *Ibid*: 115.

¹¹ *Ibid*: 118.

considered permanent and worth mentioning.¹² Moreover, ethnic-based federal arrangement is supposedly the best way to create a separate space for minority communities to flourish¹³. For national minorities concentrated regionally that they form the majority, ethnic-federalism can provide sub-units boundary that can exercise extensive self-government and make certain decisions without being outvoted by the larger society¹⁴. Ethiopia is the best illustrative example in this regard. In fact, the Ethiopian government disputes the term ethnic federalism and prefers the term multi-nation federalism in the Kymlikean sense of the term¹⁵. Kymlicka considers countries in which internal boundaries have been drawn and powers distributed in such a way as to ensure each national group is able to maintain itself as a distinct and self-governing society and culture as multinational federations¹⁶. However, others argued that in Ethiopia, in contrast to western multinational federations such as Canada, Switzerland, ethnicity is singled out as a salient instrument to restructure the state in a top-down approach that seeks congruence between ethnic and intra-federal boundaries¹⁷. As a result, many ethnic groups, which before 1991 did not mobilize based on ethnic nationalism, were required to organize themselves according to their ethnicity so that they fit into the new ethno-federal system. Associations as well as political parties are formed, in the name of fostering the well-being of an ethnic community at the expense of excluding those internal and external groups who are considered not belonging to it¹⁸.

Overall, it is a federation deliberately designed and implemented “with the goal of

¹² Daniel Elazar, ‘The Role of Federalism in Political Integration’, in D. Elazar ed., *Federalism and Political Integration* (Ramat Gan: Turtledone Publisher, 1987), 20.

¹³ See for example Philp G. Roeder, ‘Ethno-federalism and the Management of Conflicting Nationalisms’ in Jan Erk and Lawrence Anderson (ed.) *Regional and Federal Studies*. Vol. 19, No.2 (Routledge, 2009), 207.

¹⁴ Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular...*, 112.

¹⁵ This is a reaction to the position adopted by centrist elites who prefer to use a more pejorative term ‘gossa’-people who live in jungle and who have no political goal whereas EPRDF’s claim is NNP’s are political associations not anthropological entities.

¹⁶ Will Kymlicka, ‘Emerging Western Models of Multinational Federalism: Are they relevant for Africa? In David Turton (ed.s) *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative perspective* (Eastern African Studies) (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 64-65.

¹⁷ Ibid: 56.

¹⁸ Lidja Fleiner, 2001.

accommodating a high degree of ethnic and religious diversity¹⁹” as a response to ethno-cultural pluralism and claims of self-governance. This is the reason why the Ethiopian federalism is labeled as ‘ethnic-federalism’²⁰.

On the contrary, national federations are federations that ensure territorial power sharing but do not recognize ethnic and linguistic cleavages²¹. The intention is nation building, the elimination of national or ethnic differences²². Whereas, multiethnic Federations not only recognize ethnic and linguistic diversity but also reflect them in their ideology and structures. Hence, more than one nationality may be explicitly recognized as cofounders and co-owners of the federation and seek to express, institutionalize and protect at least two national or ethnic culture on a durable and often a permanent base.

2.3 Federalism and the Accommodation of Minorities in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has developed an advanced constitution based on the ideology of federalism and ethnic federation as a political institution to accommodate the identity of ethnic groups by keeping them within their own territorial units²³. As hinted above the Ethiopian system of government is, therefore, a federal one, distinctively an ‘ethnic-federation’. Indeed, theoretically ‘ethnic-federalism’, a popular way of labeling Ethiopian federalism, is a state form that ideally serves the purpose of providing ethno-cultural identity security and protection. Federalism is an

¹⁹ Ronald Watts, *Comparing Federal Systems*, 48.

²⁰ For extended discussion of ethnic federalism and multinational federations see Will Kymlicka, *Emerging Western Models of Multinational Federalism...*, 32-64; Asnake Kafale, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia: A Comparative Study of the Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions* (Leiden: University of Leiden, 2009).

²¹ Jozsef, 2005:246; cited in Asnake Kafale, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia...*, 28.

²² Michael Burgess, *Comparative Federalism...*, 104.

²³ Assefa Fiseha, *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity...*

institutional expression of the equal rights of peoples to develop their own culture and self-determination. It is a decentralization process where significant power is given to NNP. One of the foundations of the Ethiopian experiment with ethnic federalism is also its focus on minority rights and human rights in general²⁴. Scholars argued that Ethiopian federal system emphasizes ‘more self-rule than shared rule²⁵’. This section, thus, seeks to present the succinct review of Ethiopian version of federalism since the study deal with the problem from federalism angle. Put it differently, the researcher seeks to explore the constitutional and legal framework within which the Majang people federal experience should be considered and analyzed. It will also consider the extent to which the Ethiopian legal and policy framework offers to vulnerable NNP protection.

The very idea of NNP originated during the 1960’s Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM) with the national oppression thesis²⁶. The thesis characterizes national and /or ethnic inequality in Ethiopia as ‘National oppression’²⁷. The ESM main argument was that “there was one oppressor nation whose political system, culture, and language dominated the others, and there were many oppressed nations and nationalities who were politically and economically marginalized, culturally and linguistically dominated”²⁸. In fact, it was an argument based on the thesis of class struggle, which makes clear distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed²⁹. The ESM characterize Ethiopia as a ‘prison house of the oppressed nationalities and class.’³⁰ The TPLF

²⁴ Barata, *Minority Rights, Culture, and...*

²⁵ Assefa, *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity...*, 447.

²⁶ ESM was the first major political force to pursue a multi-ethnic agenda in Ethiopian political history. Merera *Competing Ethnic Nationalisms...*, 108.

²⁷ *Ibid*: 96.

²⁸ *Ibid*: 97.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

³⁰ *Ibid*: 109.

also advocates the national oppression thesis after though at one point advocate secession³¹. However, later after 1991, the TPLF/EPRDF has advocated a different version that is based on nationality oppression first rather than class. It was this ethno-nationalist perspective that led to the emphasis on the right of NNP. The use of ethno-linguistic criteria as a basis of state formation is also one of the distinctive features of Ethiopian federation³² originates from the national oppression thesis. Thus, the government has granted these rights based on the Marxist ideology that goes back to the student movement of the 1960's. Thus, these rights are conferred to all NNPs.

To its credit, the serving government under-take 'radical' and 'pioneering'³³ reform of the state explicitly based on ethnicity, proclaiming a fundamental break with the country's long history of centralized authoritarian governance to ensure their self-government and to help them retain their cultural distinctiveness. For this reason, the federal system is referred to as ethnic federalism- which was based on an official understanding of ethnic groups as identifiable corporate units, each with its own language, culture, history, and geographic territory. This concept was translated into practical reality through a redrawing of the country's politico-administrative map largely along ethno-linguistic lines. The Constitution establish nine "self governing" ethno-regional states that constitute the FDRE³⁴ and two city administrations. Indeed, the 'ethnicization of the country's political landscape'³⁵, helps historically marginalized and disadvantaged ethnic-

³¹ Ibid: 99.

³² Tsegaye Regassa 'Learning to Live with Conflicts...., 93-94.

³³ David Turton, 'Introduction', In David Turton (ed.s) *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative perspective* (Eastern African Studies) (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 1-31.

³⁴ Barata, Data Dea, "Minority Rights, Culture, and Ethiopia's 'Third Way' to Governance," *African Studies Review*, Vol.55, No. 368-80 (December 2012), 61.

³⁵ Merera Gudina, *Competing Ethnic Nationalisms....*, 110.

groups to attain self-governance and equality³⁶. The next section highlights the legal framework protecting and promoting the right of NNP's and indigenous peoples in Ethiopia, capturing some of the key provisions of the laws that have a bearing on venerable NNP and indigenous peoples. That might be useful to assess the level of implementation of the legal framework.

The historical experience of the denial of the rights of NNP to self-determination has made federalism the most desirable political solution for past injustices and inequalities. As hinted above, in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991, ethno-nationalist liberation front's, historically marginalized and vulnerable ethnic groups call for reasonable and contextual governance system that can lay the basis upon which equality, respect of identity, enjoyment of cultural rights, autonomy, peace and security of survival can flourish. In view of that, the FDRE constitution formally established ethnic-based federal system in 1995, which 'has created an avenue for addressing ethnic domination and questions of national self-determination³⁷'.

Indeed, the Ethiopian version of federalism and its institutions is based on the principle of empowering citizens/ethnic groups to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Thus, NNP are capable of taking actions and generating resources to augment their own life, destiny and to control their courses of action. Empowerment implies that people increase their control or power over their course of their lives. This right of NNP, in reality, promote social justice.

³⁶ On the contrary, some critics contend that the restructuring of the state along ethno-linguistic criteria was motivated by TPLF/EPRDF elite's interest of hegemonic control of the state and to reverse Amhara elite's historic dominance. It is merely an opportunity for EPRDF dominance which fell short of its rhetoric, and in some cases produces additional, unforeseen problems and can hamper to achieve effective self-governance and sustainable peace See for instance, Merera Gudina, *Competing Ethnic Nationalisms...*, 123.

³⁷ Asnake Kefale, 'Federalism and Self-determination: Some observations on the Ethiopian Experience', In Tafesse Olike, Yacob Arsano and Olyvind Aadland eds., *Topics in Contemporary Political Development In Ethiopia: Towards Research Agenda in the Framework of DPSIR-NIHR Research Programme (1988-2003)*(Addis Ababa, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Addis Ababa University Printing Press, 2000), 12.

The roots of empowerment lie in the political and philosophical foundations of our culture as ‘concept of democracy and its empowering citizens to participate in decisions affecting their welfare.’ Gutierrez (1994:202) defined empowerment as the “process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situation”. Others define empowerment as the “ability of people to gain understanding and control over personal, social, economic and political forces in order to take action to improve their life situations³⁸. It is the process by which individuals and communities are enabled to take power and act effectively in gaining greater control, efficacy, and social justice in changing their lives and their environment³⁹. For the purpose of this dissertation, empowerment refers to enhancing the possibilities for NNP’s to control their own lives at local, and participation at regional and federal level.

Yet, there are several conceptual confusions, uncertainty, and lack of clarity in Ethiopian Constitution. The term ‘NNP’ is contested term in Ethiopia. It seems that constitution-makers had dilemma in defining the concept of NNP. Nowhere are these terms defined save for what they collectively stand for and serve as legitimate forms of social organization and units of political action⁴⁰. In fact, Article 39 (5) of the FDRE constitution defines the concept of "Nation, Nationality or People” as ‘a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable predominantly

³⁸ Israel, B. A. Checkoway, B. Schultz, A. and Zimmerman, M., Health Education and Community Empowerment: Conceptualizing and Measuring Perceptions of Individual, Organizational and Community Control (*Health Education Quarterly* 21(2): 149-170, 1994).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dereje, The Gambella experience..., 217 .

contiguous territory'⁴¹ by adopting Stalin definition. Article 39 provides specially for the “rights of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples”; and sub-article 5 of this article defines the term ‘people’ (without an ‘s’) as synonym of terms “Nations’ and “Nationality.⁴²” In addition, the Constitution provided for the ‘rights of peoples’ and “...uses particularly unusual wording given the context of the aspirations of African States to promote national unity.... It states, “human rights and democratic rights of citizens and peoples shall be respected”⁴³. The term ‘indigenous’ appears to be used in Ethiopia’s legal discourse in reference to the ‘owner nationalities’ of a given region or administrative area, i.e., NNP. Therefore, merely for reasons of expediency, for the purpose of this dissertation the term ‘NNP’ is used as an umbrella term to subsume under one broad term virtually all groups such as groups with their own state and other minorities and indigenous peoples, migrants. The study takes the Majang as one of the disadvantaged and vulnerable NNP in Ethiopia with their own distinct identity. Though could broadly be considered as NNP, they are a minority both in number and in political impact as they continue to be affected by dynamics of power at a local level.

Moreover, the Ethiopian version of federalism has served as an instrument ‘to essentialize ethnic identities’⁴⁴ and ethnic-identity conceived in primordial terms. Arguably, the concept of NNP reflects both objective and subjective elements of ethnicity. The objective elements such as language reflect primordialism while the subjective elements such as a common psychological make-up and the political goal of self-rule indicate some kind of instrumentalism. Overall, the

⁴¹ See Proclamation No. 1/1995, Proclamation of the constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 1st year No. 1, Addis Ababa., 21st August ,1995, adopted on 8th of December 1994 and came into force on 21st August ,1995.

⁴² Albert Kwokwo Baruma, *Land Rights of Indigenous peoples in Africa: With Special Focus on Central, Eastern and Southern Africa* (Copenhagen: IWGIA’ 2010), 218.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid: 57.

EPRDF restructured the state based on what anthropologists refer to as a ‘primordial’ view of ethnic identity.⁴⁵ According to the primordial approach, ethnic identity is given to the individual just like the primordial membership of a community into which he/she was born (i.e., forever)⁴⁶. Indeed, NNP are the most obvious minority right bearers in federal Ethiopia⁴⁷. The next section discusses the constitutional and other legal provisions thematically, based on the most important demands of disadvantaged minority NNP.

Identity, Self-rule and Self-determination Rights

Indigenous people’s cultures and ways of life differ considerably from those of the dominant society. Their distinct cultures, however, are often under threat, in some cases to the extent of being threatened with extinction by the dominant society and the state. For this reason, international and regional legal regimes recognizes the aspirations of indigenous peoples to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development and to maintain and develop their identities, languages, and religions within the framework of the states in which they live. For instance, the UN Declaration establishes ‘indigenous people’ right to remain distinct and to pursue their own priorities in economic, social and cultural development and state obligations to protect or fulfill those rights⁴⁸. The Declaration emphasis indigenous peoples collective land rights which are indispensable for their existence, well-being and integral

⁴⁵ Dereje, *The Ethnic self and the National Other...*, 140.

⁴⁶ Viera Bacova, ‘The Construction of National Identity on Primordialism and Instrumentalism’, *Human Affairs*, 8, 1, 29-43 (Karpatsk,1998), 25-36.

⁴⁷ Barata, Barata, Data Dea, “Minority Rights, Culture, and...”, 64.

⁴⁸ Recently international human rights regimes have made major advance as regards the rights of ‘indigenous people’. A typical example is the UN Declaration which bestows extensive rights on indigenous peoples to enable them to maintain and develop their own culture, identity and resources under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) adopted by the General Assembly in 13 September 2007 by a majority of 144 states in favour, 4 votes against, and 11 abstentions.

development as peoples.⁴⁹ For example, article 3 affirms indigenous people's right to self-determination to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Article 7(2) of the UN declaration underlined; "Indigenous peoples have the collective right to *live in freedom, peace, and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to an act of genocide or any act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group*(emphasis added)." The Declaration under article 26 also acknowledges 'indigenous peoples' right to own the lands, territories and natural resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used.

In addition, article 11(1) stipulates indigenous peoples right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature. It also put responsibility on States to provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs under sub article 2. In relation to this, article 31 concerns the right the right to maintain, control, and protect cultural heritage as well as manifestations of their cultures including human and genetic resources seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, etc.

Equally, ILO Convention acknowledges the land and natural resources rights of indigenous peoples. According to article 13 (2), the concept of indigenous territories covers the total

⁴⁹ Article 1 of the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights (2007)

environment of the areas which they occupy or use. Article 14 (1) of the Convention required states to recognize the rights of ownership and possession of indigenous peoples over the lands which they traditionally occupy. In addition, measures shall be taken in appropriate cases to safeguard the right of the peoples concerned to use lands not exclusively occupied by them, but to which they have traditionally had access for their subsistence and traditional activities. The same provision under sub-article 2 obligates Governments to take steps as necessary to identify the lands which the peoples concerned traditionally occupy, and to guarantee effective protection of their rights of ownership and possession. Article 13(1) of the ILO Convention No. 169 provided the land rights of indigenous people as follows: “governments shall respect the special importance for the cultures and spiritual values of the peoples concerned of their relationship with the lands or territories, or both as applicable, which they occupy or otherwise use, and in particular the collective aspects of this relationship”.

Pertaining to consultation, the UN Declaration emphasizes the importance of free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples to activities planned on their lands⁵⁰. The Preamble of the Declaration emphasizes that “control by indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions, and to promote their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs”. Article 32(2) of the Declaration also provided:

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other

⁵⁰ It is thus understandable that encroachments like development projects upon indigenous peoples’ traditional lands and natural resources threaten their very survival without their informed consent.

resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

Article 10 of the Declaration underlines: “Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.” The Declaration explicitly encourages harmonious and cooperative relations between States and ‘indigenous peoples’. Similarly, the ILO Convention No. 169⁵¹ underscore that consultation must be undertaken in good faith, in a form appropriate to the circumstances and with the objective of achieving consent⁵². In addition, the Convention requires states to safeguard ‘indigenous peoples’ rights to the natural resources throughout their territories, including their right “to participate in the use, management and conservation” of the resources⁵³. Further, the Convention adds that indigenous peoples “shall not be removed from the lands which they occupy” unless under prescribed conditions and where necessary as an “exceptional measure”⁵⁴. In another key instrument that impacts on indigenous peoples, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), state parties agree to condemn racial discrimination and to ‘engage in no act or practice of racial discrimination against persons [or] groups of persons’⁵⁵. This provision also requires states to pay particular attention to indirect discrimination, which occurs where government policies, laws and regulations unintentionally cause

⁵¹ ILO No.169 is the only binding international instrument dedicated specifically to the rights of ‘indigenous peoples’, cited in ACHPR, *supra* note 41, 22.

⁵² Article 6 of the ILO Convention No. 169.

⁵³ Article 15 of ILO Convention No. 169.

⁵⁴ Article 16 of ILO Convention No. 169.

⁵⁵ Article 2(1) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

disproportionate and/or unjustifiable harm in the form of human rights violations against persons or group.

Pertaining to self-determination, land rights and development, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights provides that all people have the right to existence and the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination (article 20), the right to natural resources and property exercised in the exclusive interest of the people (article 21), and the right to economic, social and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity (article 22). The Charter under article 21 sub-article 5 demanded African States to embark on the elimination of all forms of foreign economic exploitation particularly that practiced by international monopolies so as to enable their peoples to fully benefit from the advantages derived from their national resources. The Charter also confers the right to equality (respect and dignity under article 5 and 19 which states that all peoples are equal and enjoy the same respect which is inherent in a human being with no any justification of the domination of a people by another. Article 22 of the Charter also stipulates all peoples right to culture and identity. Furthermore, the charter guarantees all citizens the right to participate in the government of their own country, access to public services⁵⁶, and the right to justice in several articles such as article 3, 4 and 5.

However, in contrast to international human rights instruments, the African Charter is unique in its approach to collective rights known as peoples' rights such as the right of all peoples to self-determination, equality; existence; development; and the right to environment. In fact, both individual and collective rights are provided in the Africa human and People's rights charter. Thus, in order for the groups that identify themselves as 'indigenous peoples' to be entitled to

⁵⁶ Article 13 of African Charter on Humans and Peoples Rights.

them, they must qualify as ‘peoples’ under the African Charter. However, the problem arises as to who or what counts as “peoples” as the African Charter does not define it. Besides, how to use the term ‘communities’ and ‘peoples’ African human rights context is very contentious. In Africa, the term ‘communities’ is has been preferred to use with indigenous rather than ‘peoples’ since the term peoples/societies refers an aggregate of individuals on a deliberate groupings based on spontaneous unifying factors essentially beyond the control of the members of the group⁵⁷ whilst communities refers to entities that exist as cultural units⁵⁸. What’s more, “the term ‘communities’ is less politically charged than ‘peoples’ ”⁵⁹.

Consequently, initially the ACHPR tended to reject the issue, as it did not find the term ‘indigenous peoples’ applicable to African conditions. African states reluctant to recognize the special rights of indigenous people arise from some misunderstandings. First, “all Africans are indigenous to Africa” and that no particular group can claim indigenous status⁶⁰. However, now the term ‘indigenous peoples’ refers to the modern understanding of indigenous people to protect them from particular form of discrimination they put up with on account of their particular culture, means of livelihood and marginalized place within the state⁶¹. Second, African states consider that recognizing the right of indigenous peoples would be to give special rights to some ethnic groups over and above the rights of all other groups within the state. Conversely, ‘indigenous peoples’ right is meant to correct their structurally subordinate position to the dominant groups and the states within the state⁶². Third, African states argued that the

⁵⁷ Nathan Lerner, 1991:29; cited in Baruma, 40.

⁵⁸ Oliver et al, 1994:120.

⁵⁹ Baruma, 50.

⁶⁰ ACHPR, 12.

⁶¹ Ibid: 12.

⁶² Ibid.

recognition of indigenous people may lead to tribalism and ethnic conflict, and ultimately disturbance of the unity of African states⁶³. Even so, recognizing the living reality of diversity in a truly democratic spirit would prevent conflict since it gives the weaker marginalized groups the opportunity to voice their particular concerns and perspectives. Hence, the ACHPR argued that recognizing multiculturalism in African context and protecting ‘the human rights of particularly discriminated groups should not be seen as tribalism and disruption of the unity of African states’⁶⁴. Last but not least, the term ‘indigenous peoples’ has negative connotation in Africa since it has been misused in derogatory and chauvinistic way by European and some post-colonial African governments respectively⁶⁵.

Later, the ACHPR acknowledge indigenous peoples as ‘the most disadvantaged, marginalized and excluded groups on the continent’⁶⁶. Thus, ACHPR adopted the modern analytical understanding of ‘indigenous peoples’ based on criteria’s of marginalization, discrimination, cultural difference and self-identification⁶⁷. Accordingly, the ACHPR has developed jurisprudence relating to ‘peoples’ rights’. A typical example is the Endorois case in Kenya⁶⁸. The Communication alleges that Kenya has violated the human rights of the indigenous Endorois community, by forcibly removing them from their ancestral land, the disruption of the community's pastoral enterprise and violations of the right to practice their religion and culture to make way for a wildlife reserve. The ACHPR found Kenya in violations of Articles 1,

⁶³ Ibid: 11-12.

⁶⁴ Ibid: 12.

⁶⁵ Ibid: 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid:11.

⁶⁸ Communication 276/2003- Centre for Minority Rights Development (Kenya) and Minority Rights Group International on behalf of Endorois Welfare Council v Kenya. The ruling was made on February 4, 2010.

8, 14, 17, 21 and 22 of the African Charter in 2010⁶⁹. The African Commission has also deliberated on the violation of the economic and social rights of the indigenous Ogoni people case in Nigeria⁷⁰. More to the point, the African Charter authorizes the African Commission to invoke international legal law which thus can help to protect ‘indigenous peoples’⁷¹. All these practice and provisions allow the African commission to interpreted the term ‘people’ in a manner that allow ‘indigenous peoples’ to claim protection under the African Charter⁷². The Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities has also attempted to list some of African ‘indigenous people’ who identify themselves as ‘indigenous’⁷³.

In Ethiopia, Chapter three of the constitution is also devoted to dealing a catalogue of “Fundamental Rights and Freedoms”. The Constitution provides for the right of people to self-determination up to independent statehood. Actually, the exercise of territorial group rights such as the right to self-determination belongs to the so-called NNP. The preamble of the Constitution also opens with the expression: ‘We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia.’ All sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia⁷⁴. Hence, the NNP is sovereign entities in the federation. Accordingly, any NNP within the regional states have the right to establish, at any time, their own States and administrative boundaries are delimited based on the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned⁷⁵. The federal government has the responsibility to promote and support the people's self-rule at all levels and

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ ACHPR, 21.

⁷¹ Article 60 of African Charter.

⁷² ACHPR, 21.

⁷³ Ibid: 14-16.

⁷⁴ Article 8 of the FDRE constitution.

⁷⁵ Article 46(4) of the FDRE constitution.

to respect the identity of NNP⁷⁶. Regional states have also the obligation to give adequate power granted to the lowest units of government to enable the People to participate directly in the administration of such units⁷⁷. Therefore, local communities such as the Majang people are in theory provided with the opportunity to influence and play an active role in local spheres of government.

Equality, Cultural and Religious Rights

The right of local communities to enjoy their own culture is important in a development context, especially in terms of its potential impact on the exploitation of land and other natural resources. Cognizant of these facts, the preamble of the FDRE constitution confers NNP the right to continue to live with their rich and proud cultural legacies in territories they have long inhabited. The right is further recognized under article 39 of the Constitution, which guarantees the cultural rights of each NNP. Specifically, NNP right to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history is guaranteed under Article 39(2). Besides, the Constitution obliges the State to protect and preserve historical and cultural legacies⁷⁸. Furthermore, pursuant to article 89(4) the government has the duty to provide special assistance to NNP least advantaged in economic and social development⁷⁹. The constitution under article 61(2) also provides that ‘Each Nation, Nationality and People shall be represented in the House of the Federation by at least one member.’ The HOF is also the house of NNP rather than regional states. In view of that, regional units, zones, *woreda* and even *kebeles* are identified as belonging to a particular nationality in

⁷⁶ Article 88 of the FDRE constitution.

⁷⁷ Article 50 (4) of the FDRE constitution.

⁷⁸ Article 40(9) of the FDRE constitution.

⁷⁹ For example, affirmative action is guaranteed under article 89(4) of the FDRE Constitution.

Ethiopia. The catch phrase ‘owner nationalities’ is thus used to designate the indigenous peoples of an area according to indigenous discourse.

Land and Resources Rights

In Ethiopia, land ownership issue is also one of the hotly debated issues in the constitution-making process. One of the background debates during the constitution-making process was that;

...in the Ethiopian context, even if we go for privatization, uniform private ownership rights to land throughout the country may not be possible to realize. For instance, it will become difficult to reconcile private ownership of land with the rights of pastoralists to the use of land on which they traditionally had inalienable grazing land. Similarly, letting the sale and free transfer of land rights will have the effect of endangering the identity, livelihood, and cultural survival of ethnic and cultural minorities within the country⁸⁰.

In view of that, the right to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the State and in the peoples of Ethiopia.⁸¹ More to the point, to protect NNP from external encroachment, the constitution prohibits land sale or other means of exchange⁸². The constitution legally recognizes the protection and control of NNP lands and natural resources in line with their aspirations and needs⁸³ and calls for protection of peasants against eviction from their possession⁸⁴. By taking into account their unique way of life, the

⁸⁰ Seyoum Mesfin, ‘Issues and Challenges in the Federal Constitution Making Process’ In Alem Habtu (ed.) *Ethiopian Federalism: Principle, Process and Practice* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2010), 55.

⁸¹ Article 40 (3) of the FDRE Constitution.

⁸² Article 40 (3) of the FDRE Constitution

⁸³ Article 39 of the FDRE Constitution

⁸⁴ Article 40 (4) of the FDRE Constitution

constitution guarantee pastoralists the right to free land for grazing and cultivation as well as the right not to be displaced from their own lands⁸⁵. This is an important pledge for minority peoples in Ethiopia since it is designed to address historical injustices related to land use, tenure and ownership. Undeniably, Ethiopian Constitution implicitly provides for both a communal and individual protection of land rights to pastoralists and peasants respectively.

Yet, pursuant to article 40(6) the government has the responsibility to ensure the right of private investors to the use of land on the basis of payment. To this end, the constitution authorizes the state the power to displace and relocate people even if it adversely affects their livelihood and identity⁸⁶. Despite the fact that all land in Ethiopia belongs to the state and the people, the State based on these provisions exercises substantial power to decide on land related issues and hence change the power relation between the state and the people supportive of the latter. Such state power could as in the study area significantly derail the people's unique attachment and right to communal ownership of land and its resources.

Actually, in relation to land and resource rights, the government has the duty to consult peoples with respect to policies and projects affecting their community⁸⁷. This right to consultation is enshrined under articles 43(2) and 92(3) of the federal Constitution. Article 43(2) states that "Nationals have the right to...be consulted with respect to policies and projects affecting their community." Likewise, article 92(3) enunciates people right to full consultation and to the expression of views in the planning and implementation of environmental policies and projects that affect them directly.

⁸⁵ Article 40 (5) of the FDRE Constitution

⁸⁶ Article 44(2) of the FDRE Constitution.

⁸⁷ Article 43(2) of the FDRE constitution.

Apart from constitutional framework, Forest Development, Conservation and Utilization Proclamation No. 542/2007, requires the participation of local communities in the designation and demarcation of protected and productive forests⁸⁸. It also demands facilitating the continuity of habitation of local communities previously residing in forests whenever feasible without obstructing its development; if not possible, the inhabitants should be resettled in areas suitable for living⁸⁹. This seems broader than the abovementioned articles. Yet, participation is limited only to forest designation and demarcation during development, conservation and utilization plans⁹⁰. Moreover, it does not require community participation/consultation/consent regarding large-scale farming, mining operations, construction of roads, irrigation, dam construction and other similar investment activities that affect forests. It only requires government approval⁹¹. In fact, priority is accorded to the protection of communities' interests whenever such designation necessitates eviction of communities⁹² save for it failed to determine the criteria for determining community interest, who decides and how.

The Constitution also recognizes the right of citizens to live in a clean environment. Citizens have the rights to get commensurate monetary or alternative compensation, including relocation with adequate state assistance where they are displaced or their livelihood has been adversely affected by the development projects undertaken by the government. The right to improved living standards and to sustainable development is also affirmed under article 43(1) of the

⁸⁸ Articles 2(7), (8) and 8(2) of Proclamation No. 542/2007.

⁸⁹ Ibid: Article 9(8).

⁹⁰ Ibid: Article 9(3) .

⁹¹ Ibid: Article 14(5).

⁹² Article 8(3) of Proclamation No. 542/2007.

Constitution. In addition, as stated previously, it also requires the government to conduct environmental impact assessment before major development projects are implemented.

Based on these constitutional provisions, Ethiopia has introduced a comprehensive environmental policy in 1997. The overall objective of the environmental policy is to promote the sustainable social and economic development of the country through, inter alia, sustainable management and utilization of the natural resources of the country⁹³. Specifically, the environmental policy seeks to achieve are ensuring the conservation, development and sustainable use of essential ecological processes and life support systems, biological diversity and renewable natural resources; and the empowerment and participation of the people in environmental management. Based on this environmental policy, proclamations have been enacted to achieve these policy objectives⁹⁴. Accordingly, the right to consultation and environmental rights is asserted in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Proclamation, Development, Conservation and Utilization of Wildlife proclamation⁹⁵ and in Genetic Resources and Community Knowledge Proclamation, which are pertinent to the protection of local peoples.

To begin with, the Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation (EIA) requires any planned development project or public policy to carry out EIA in consultation with the communities likely to be affected by the project⁹⁶. The proposed project has to pass first through EIA process and obtaining authorization from the competent environmental agency as stipulated under article 3(1). In this regard, the Environmental Protection Authority has the duty to make sure whether or

⁹³ Environmental Policy of Ethiopia, 1997, 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid: 3-4.

⁹⁵ Development, Conservation and Utilization of Wildlife Proclamation No. 541/2007.

⁹⁶ EIA Proclamation Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation No. 299 of 2002, article 6(1)

not the communities likely to be affected have been consulted and their views incorporated⁹⁷ before authorization is given to any development projects⁹⁸. These provisions are important to ensure that project owners comply with the EIA requirement⁹⁹. The Proclamation also provides for public participation in the EIA process. It requires environmental bodies to ensure that the comments made by the public are incorporated into the EIA study report as well as into its evaluation¹⁰⁰. To this end, it requires environmental bodies to make any EIA study report accessible to the public and to solicit comments thereon article 15(1). Under this provision, indigenous peoples, likely to be affected by development projects, have the opportunities to express their specific needs.

The other relevant environmental policy of Ethiopia is the conservation and management of natural resources. In line with this environmental policy and objective, the country has promulgated Development, Conservation and Utilization of Wildlife proclamation¹⁰¹. Wildlife Proclamation seeks to enable the active participation of local communities living around wildlife conservation areas¹⁰². This may include indigenous peoples residing in or around protected areas for wildlife conservation. ‘Wildlife reserve’ is defined as an area designated to conserve wildlife where indigenous local communities are allowed to live together with and conserve wildlife¹⁰³. In relation to maximizing the economic benefit from the wildlife resources of the country, the Proclamation encourages investment in wildlife-based tourism, to be conducted in such a way

⁹⁷ Ibid: Article 6(3).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid: Article 12.

¹⁰⁰ Article 15(2) of Proclamation No. 299 of 2002.

¹⁰¹ Development, Conservation and Utilization of Wildlife Proclamation, No. 541/2007.

¹⁰² Ibid: Article 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid: Article 2(10).

that shall not endanger the ecological integrity of protected areas¹⁰⁴. Yet, the Proclamation fails to subject the granting of permits for development of wildlife tourism infrastructures such as hotels, camp or other facilities in protected areas to the EIA process that would have an impact on the life of local communities residing in these reserve areas.

Ethiopia has also enacted Proclamation to Provide for Access to Genetic Resources and Community Knowledge and Community Right in 2006 based on the African Model Law in line with Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)¹⁰⁵. Similarly, the right of the communities to prior informed consent has found in Genetic Resources and Community Knowledge Proclamation¹⁰⁶. The local community has the right to revoke any project that has detrimental impact on their socio-economic life or their natural or cultural heritages¹⁰⁷. Therefore, apart from access to genetic resources and community knowledge, there is a possibility to broaden the recognition of this right to invoke regarding other development projects in their territories.

2.4 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter made reviews of legal frameworks and theories related to federalism. The chapter also reviewed the available literatures and legal frameworks in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, though no

¹⁰⁴ Ibid: Article 11.

¹⁰⁵ Ethiopia, together with AU, has developed a model law for regulating access to biological resources and for enforcing the protection of the rights of the local communities to their traditional knowledge, technologies, innovations and practices and their biological resources. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Environmental Protection Authority, The 3rd National Report on The Implementation of The UNCCD/NAP in Ethiopia (February, 2004), 23.

¹⁰⁶ Genetic Resources and Community Knowledge Proclamation, Article 7.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid: Article 7(1) b and c.

reference is made to indigenous people, the Ethiopian constitution provides NNP with the right to self-rule and self-determination rights up to secession and the right to consultation. In fact, the domestic legal framework provides extensive provision, which provides special protection to NNP in general, and pastoralists and Ethiopian peasants in particular. Since the emergence of a new democratic order in 1991, Ethiopia has recognized the vulnerability of the NNP/peripheral community and that it is working towards improving their welfare. It promotes ethno-cultural justice through the design of ethnic-based policy. The Ethiopian federal constitution order and political landscape is very generous in relation to NNP rights. In this regard, the FDRE constitution is considered as an example of “the most minority rights friendly constitution on the African continent”¹⁰⁸.

Nonetheless, ownership of land and natural resources are exclusively vested in the State and the ‘peoples of Ethiopia’. The constitution also authorizes the state the power to displace and relocate people even if it adversely affects their livelihood and identity to ensure the right of private investors to the use of land based on payment and to create favorable environment for investors in those areas that are not used by farmers. The State based on these provisions exercises substantial power to decide on land related issues and hence change the power relation between the state and the people. Thus, it appears that there is a lack of clearly defined property rights towards natural forest and forestlands. Local peoples in Ethiopia must enjoy rights over their lands and forests and the State power in such lands must operate only as a means of protection rather than as a means of interference, control and dispossession. It must recognize the unique attachment and right to land and its resources to forest based communities as it does for the pastoralist. While the legal framework remains in theory favorable to ‘NNPs’ hence

¹⁰⁸ Barata, *Minority Rights, Culture...*, 64.

consistent with the federal principle of self-rule, it remains contested at local level. The details of the paradox between NNPs right to self-rule and highlanders migration and massive expansion of commercial farms that affect local communities way of life is what the subsequent chapters take up.

Chapter 3

Majang Reminiscences of Exodus, Oppression and Land Alienation

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the conceptual and analytical views of the study based on the general normative theories of federalism and the particular right of ethnic groups in federal Ethiopia. An analysis of the federal experience of the Majang people would be imperfect without considering Majang's history of migration and state oppression and inter-ethnic relations. This chapter provides concise data on historical, social and cultural backgrounds that have an impact on Majang society in a range of ways such as slave-raiding and experiences of land dispossession, state policies of resettlement and villagization that has affected the Majang in the past. It has relevance to current discussions of the Majang people security threats. It also provides comprehensive historical account of their history unprecedented in other works to date. To the best of the researcher knowledge, there has been no comprehensive written literature found about the Majang people history.

Generally, the broad aim of this chapter is to describe and analyze the historical, political and socio-economic contexts of the Majang people in the various political systems. Specifically, this chapter presents and analyses Majang history of exodus, oppression and land alienation based on

oral history which is collected from fieldwork mainly from Majang clan leaders, elders, long resident Highlanders and from the few available secondary data sources.

The chapter proceeds in four major sections. Section one presents and analyses Majang memory of exodus. Then, section two presents and analyses Majang's relations with successive Ethiopian governments, foreign invaders, and with their neighboring ethnic groups until 1991. Section three examines the major factors for Majang's historical susceptibility to external influences. The final section provides summary and conclusion.

3.2 Majang History of Exodus

Today's Majang narrate their own version of story from their Kenyan ancestors who migrated to the current Majang settlements, and then lament their displacement by the successive Ethiopian rulers and their powerful neighbors. In fact, they have conflicting stories on how they have come to where they are today¹. They have two major narratives. The first story narrates the migration of the Majang from Kenya in unknown time². It narrates the Majang migration from northern Kenya to the present settlement in Ethiopia. Oral evidence indicates that the Majang people descended from migrant people from north Kenya who were believed to have entered Ethiopia along the western border of SNNPRS in separate waves. They migrated via the present Dima in Gambella region, and then they gradually expanded to the rest of places they live today. The

¹Majang people have a very little interest in the past. As a result, they have retained few notions of their history beyond the memories of living men. Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 1.

² Ashen –a Majang linguist by profession and former Speaker of Gambella region Council- suggests that Majang migration to the present settlement areas was 500 years ago. Interview, Addis Ababa, 2 March 2015.

Majang migration from Kenya had been organized and guided by the *tapa'd* (pl, *tapa*)³ leadership based on clan. The main leaders who might have headed the journey were mentioned by informants uniformly were the *Meeliner* clan⁴. The leader was Balusha who was later on replaced by a certain Dene.

According to informants, the main causes that forced them to leave their place of origin were basically three. The first explanation was related to a protracted conflict among different ethnic groups in Kenya. At that time, there was a very devastating inter-ethnic conflict in Kenya. When the conflict became severe, they decided to leave their place of origin to distance from the protracted ethnic conflict. Of course, the Majang have such behavior of avoiding conflict and immigrants by moving away from their settlement. Apart from the existence of conflict, informants do not tell us about the cause of the conflict and the conflicting parting.

The second factor was related to a very long and devastating drought and famine in Kenya caused by the absence of adequate rainfall for more than two years. There is a common belief among informants that the main cause for the exodus was a catastrophic drought and famine that killed many people. They called the drought '*Gomograkeyi*' literally means 'a devastating drought that annihilate the country and its people without mercy'. There was also nothing to eat caused by the drought that resulted in a great famine. The name of the famine was '*Zakoyi*' that literally means 'what shall we do?' Then, the Majang forefathers heard a rumor that there was

³ The only viable but not on permanent base organization is the ritual leaders the *tapa'd*'s. Generally, the *tapa'd*'s were/are powerful ritual experts, quasi-political leaders, and mediators in Majang community. *Tapa'd* was like a king and a spiritual leader in Majang community. It was a highly respected, worshiped and followed person in Majang history.

⁴ Their *tapa'd* was also recognized as '*tapa'd* of *tapa'ds*'. The people considered them as God and hence most of the *tapa'd* in Majang history came from the *Meelanir* clan. They are also the richest clans among the Majang community and the largest in terms of population number as well. As a result, the *tapa'd* from the *Meelanir* were the highly respected and have had a considerable number of followers.

water and rain in a place called Ethiopia. When the conflict and the famine became severe, they decided to leave their place of origin to Ethiopia. At that time, the drought did not affect Ethiopia too much.

Those two major factors were marked as the beginning of their migration into the present settlement. Informants were also silent about the details of the drought and the cause of the conflict. Yet, from the aforementioned discussion, it can be inferred that the cause of the inter-ethnic conflict may be scarcity of resource as a result of the drought and famine. Besides, there seems that the drought had been extended and affected southern Ethiopia as well. For instance, the main storytellers indicated that the Majang people journey to the present settlement site was incredibly dangerous and challenging⁵. Consequently, during their journey, they had lost countless people due to acute lack of food and the ensuing epidemic disease.

Informants told the author that they first settled around the *Omogalab* River in Ethiopia but the river dried up as there was drought. Owing to absence of adequate food, the migrants were forced to eat the skin of bushbuck and other dead animals that exposed them to a deadly diarrhea. Afterward, they abandoned the area left for the place known as the *Meren* River (a river, which originate from Ethiopia and entered Sudan). However, like the *Omogalab* River, when they arrived at *Meren* River, they found that it has been dried up because of the drought. As a result, they moved and settled around Akobo River again, a river around Mizan in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, they could not rest in Akobo River as well for it was also dried up due to the same cause. For example, they mentioned that all the fishes and other aquatic animals in the Akobo River had been rotten and significant numbers of people lost their lives when they ate the rotten

⁵ Ashene Asten, Addis Ababa, 02 March 2015.

aquatic animals such as fish, which made them to begin their dispersal into different directions. Then they decided to leave for Yeki, Mengesh, Godere *Woreda*, Gambella, Abobo and so on. This suggests that there was a drought and famine indeed in Ethiopia as well.

According to storytellers, it is from Akobo River that the Majang have spread to different places where they live today. They were divided into two groups and moved into two different directions. The first group, the *Meeliner* clan, crossed Akobo River and settled around today's Gilo and Godere River (Meti and Mengesh), Baro River, and around Gambella *Woreda*. The second group moved and settled around today's Yeki *Woreda* of SNNPRS, Dima Zone of Gambella region. Generally, The Majang settlement was in Gambella *Woreda*, Doboyi, Fijeji, Tengi, Godere, Abobo, Tapi and Kumi. Kumi was like their capital city of Majang territory. Specifically, based on their clan membership⁶, the *Meeliner* in Mengesh, *Bajeri* settled in Dunchayi, the *Gider* in Goshene, and most of the *Kewoti* in Tapi and so on.

However, today they established their permanent settlement in some of these areas. This implies that the Majang had been pushed in every direction by their powerful neighbors. In a group interview of five Majang elders in Chemi *kebele*, the researcher asked the most senior among them why the Majang lived only in some of the above-mentioned settlement sites then. After the elder thought for a while, he began to explain how they were displaced from their settlement. He said that it was the Anywaa and the Sheka people that had pushed them to the present location. The Anywaa pushed them either by force or by systematically overwhelming the Majang in number from Abobo. The Shekicho (Mocha) pushed them to Godere *Woreda* from Alamo

⁶ The Majang who have over 70 clans, with clan identity passed down through the male line but the major ones are the *Meeliner*, *Kewoti*, *Bajeri*, *Gideri* and so on. Unseth, Peter, 'Notes on Clan, Kinship, and Marriage Patterns Among the Majangir,' in Gerrit Dimmendaal ed., *Surmic Languages and Cultures* (Köln: Köppe, 1998).

desert⁷ and Tapi, Yeki *Woreda*. According to this informant, the name Tapi was also coined after a Majang *tapa'd* 'Taben'. The second elder added to the discussion they were the first to come and settle in Gambella region. When they arrived, there were only the Sheko in today's Yeki *Woreda* and Komo people in Gambella. The third elder interrupted him and added to the justification saying, "at that time, there were no single Anywaa and Nuer in Gambella region. They are newcomers. From Gambella to Bonga, there was only the Majang and very few Komo. Even the name Gambella named after a Majang *tapa'd* called *Gambella*. Gambella in Majang language laterally means 'We come into'".

The other informant, Redat Gebrekidane, added that there was only the Komo who live within that area. According to this informant, they also gave the name Komo to the people of Komo, which is related with drinking honey-wine. He said that they used to share with Majang honey-wine. One day, when the Majang drank honey-wine as usual the Komo people were there too to drink honey-wine. Nevertheless, a Majang who hold the last bowl forgot to give them honey-wine and he was about to finish it before the Komo had drunk. Then, the other Majang loudly said, 'Komo, Komo...' Komo in Majang language literally means, "Do not finish it". Please save some and give to them." After that incident, as said by this informant, the name of the people became Komo. The Majang relation with the Komo people had been very peacefully. Apart from the episode of the designation of the name Komo, they did not mention the former name of the Komo people.

The other informant, Fikere, further explained that the Anywaa came from Southern Sudan to Gambella town during the Italian occupation period. The informant indicated the Oromo *baalbat*

⁷ Alamo is a desert found at the tip of Gilo River.

and buffalo hunter, Ras Gobena, was also there at that time. He indicated that Ras Gobena used to hunt and drink *teji* with the Majang people around Gambella⁸. There was an Italian doctor who was giving medical service to the people in Gambella area. The Anywaa have heard about it and they started to come for treatment. They brought their people in poor health condition by their small traditional transportation bed. Slowly but surely, the Anywaa established a temporary grass thatched cottage home and started to settle around the medical center. At a snail's pace, their numbers were increased. They also started to show aggressive behaviors towards the Majang. An informant underlined that, from the very first contact, they did not like each other. The Anywaa were very aggressive people. They looked down on them. The Majang, then abandoned the area and the Anywaa settled there permanently⁹. According to this story, it was from the medical center that the Anywaa had steadily expanded to the territory where they live now.

The second version narrates the Majang are originally from Uganda migrated with the Anywaa. They met at the place of departure to Uganda and attribute the same reason for the migration. Political elites who have knowledge of this perspective state that their ancestors came to Ethiopia from Uganda following Baro and Gilo River with the Anywaa. When they reached where Gilo River and Baro river tributaries meet, they moved in a different direction. According to key informants, the Anywaa took the direction to Baro River and settled around Baro River where they are today. The Majang, then, took the direction to Gilo River, and settled where they live today. As it is said by informants, the Majang and Anywaa left Uganda because of protracted

⁸ According to this informant, today there is Ras Gobena School in Gambella town named after him.

⁹ As has mentioned above, naturally the Majang have a culture of retreating back deep into the tropical rain forest when people came near to them. They did not want to face competition for land and they do not often invade others. It is their culture.

ethnic conflict in Uganda. They argued that the Majang are people who naturally do not like war. Thus, when a war broke out, they preferred to move and settle in another place. Literatures also reflect the informants' view that the Majang moved to escape their human enemies¹⁰.

The third narrates Majang migration from the South around Guraferda and Boma¹¹ area near the present South Sudan¹². According to this story, the Majang were there living with the Nyalam, Suri, Murle. The Majang are linguistically very related with these people. They have also a collective name known as Ta'am. It has been long time since the Majang deviated from these group as said by key informants. It seems that the Majang are from these ethnic groups.

The Majang move from Guraferda areas was led by two powerful spiritual leaders Odi and Fediwell known among the Sheko people as well. In the south way, the Majang from Guraferda plain areas crossed Guraferda river and Boko river, and then went to Mengesh until Baro-Kela forest belt. In the upper way, they crossed Alangi River in Guraferda area, crossed Gami Mountain in Tapi and settled in the present Yeki areas. In fact, Kabo and Yeri area was originally settled by the Shabuye¹³¹⁴. When the Majang came, they started to marry with them¹⁵. The Majang were the first settlers in Yeki *woreda*, Godere *woreda* and Gambella town, Stauder (1971, 1972) traces Majang origin from the present day South Sudan. The Majang, in Stauder's presentation, are "East Sudanic", people like their neighbors such as Suri, Mekan, Zilmamu, Tirma, Tid in Ethiopia and the Boma Plateau of southern Sudan who speak like Majangir language of the

¹⁰ See for example Stauder, *The Majangir*.....

¹¹ Boma is one of the areas in South Sudan now settled by the Murele.

¹² Ashene Asten, Addis Ababa, 02 March 2015.

¹³ According to oral sources, the Shabuye population number is estimated from 5000-10,000. Still, they are considered as Majang. They have no separate recognition. In 2010, the MNZ, recognized their distinct ethnic group at *kebele* level. Though the Shabuye have their own language, it is dying. They are in a very critical condition.

¹⁴ Ashene Asten, Addis Ababa, 02 March 2015.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Murle-Didinga group¹⁶. He further argued, “Majang traditions, genealogies, and life histories indicated that they migrated northwards at least during the past century from areas nearer to the Sudan border, south of the Gurrafarda Mountain.¹⁷” Apart from this, Stauder did not tell us more about Majang language family. Sato (1997) too mentioned that the *Meeliner* have come from the southern area around Maji¹⁸. In fact, according to other studies, Anywaa migration was related with the Lwoo ‘epoch making migration.¹⁹ In the 15th century, the Lwoo began to migrate from Bahr al Ghazal led by Gilo to the Sobot River to their present settlement²⁰. Lwoo was a wide group consists of nine major divisions such as the Anywaa, Pari and the Shilluk of the Sudan, the Acholi of Uganda and the Luo of Kenya²¹. However, these studies did not mention anything about the Majang. The researcher could not also find sources that reflect the second narration of the Majang who trace their origin from Uganda with the Anywaa. Crazolara (1950) mentioned five of the Lwoo group out of the nine. May be the Majang could be one of the remaining four.

Thus, Nilotic origin of the Majang is a myth to establish a common origin with the Nilotic Anywaa in Gambella region. It appears that the Majang and the Anywaa had diverse origins. There is also majority opinion among Majang informants that the second storyline has a minority voice, which was invented by Majang and Sheko political elites after 1991 regime change and ethno-linguistic federal dispensation. This is the narration only from the leadership who argued, the Majang are Nilotic people who came from Uganda following the Gilo and Baro River with

¹⁶ Tucker and Bryan, 1956:87-91; cited in Stauder, *The Majangir...*,1.

¹⁷ Jack Stauder, ‘Anarchy and Ecology: Political Society Among the Majangir’, *South Western Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 18, No. 2, (1972), 160.

¹⁸ Ren’ya Sato, *Christianization through Villagization...*, 567.

¹⁹ Crazolara, 1950; cited in Dereje, *Playing different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia* (Integration and Conflict Studies: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2011), 44.

²⁰ Cillins, 1997:53; cited in Dereje, *Playing different Games...*, 44.

²¹ Crazolara, 1954; Rech, 1996; cited in Dereje, *Playing different Games...*, 44.

the Anywaa. This was the argument of the leadership to include Majang into the Gambella Region with the Nilotic Anywaa and Nuer people. According to informants, the leading storyteller of it is Peter Aman who was the main political actor at that time who acted on behalf of the Majang and the Sheko ethnic groups. After the 1991 regime change, ethnic groups were required to establish political parties and regional states based on ethnic origin. Accordingly, Peter Aman and other political elites of the Majang and Sheko determined to live within the region that includes all 'black people' (Gambella). Thus, as argued by informants, they created such a myth of common Nilotic origin from Uganda with the Anywaa. There is a myth of connectedness.

The ordinary people supported by some political elites, however, firmly argued that they are from the Omotic people. There was a very heated debate on these two lines of argument: Omotic and Nilotic. Perhaps the most reliable argument on the memories of the Majang origin, Migration, and settlement comes from the first perspective. This is largely a narration from the ordinary Majang, elders, *tapa'ds* and so on. For that reason, the first line of argument was described in more detail. Regarding their origin, the Majang remember their original ancestors in north Kenya, there is also inconsistency in telling the name of their ethnic group. According to their key storytellers, the Majang were part of an ethnic group in Kenya called *Damanyir*. Others remember that their ancestors name is *Masher*. Some mention their name was slightly changed from *Masher* to Mesengo, Majangir in Ethiopia. Their language was similar with the *Masher* but now that has changed a lot through time. The informants told to the author that the Masher in Kenya had also mixed their language with English due to the impact of British colonization²². There are also other Omotic people in Ethiopia who have similar language and physical

²² Interview with Tadios Lonkoyi, Meti, 11 March 2013.

appearance like the Majang such as Masher, Mursi, Uleri, Mineti and so on. Overall, the evidence indicates that the Majang myth of origin seems from the present South Sudan.

3.3 Majang and their relation with the State and their Neighbors

In the places of their destination, Majang's history was full of trouble and problem. They were victims of various forms of exploitations and dominations. Although Majang land is an area relatively isolated and accessible, their ancestors have faced oppression, and slave raiding and land alienation by successive Ethiopian rulers and their very powerful neighbors. This section is devoted to an overview of Majang real and imagined experience of victimization up until 1991.

3.3.1 Slave Raiding

The Majang have borders with a number of ethnic groups. Hence, their history, their identity, culture has been very much shaped by their interaction with their neighbors. They are sandwiched between Nilotic people such as the Anywaa and the Nuer to the west on the Savannah of the Sudan and the Cushitic people such as the Oromo, Mocha (Shekicho) and Shekko-Gimirra to the east on the highland plateau of Ethiopia²³. Yet, the Majang have a distinct culture and language, which set them apart from other people in their locality²⁴. They are distinguished from the aforementioned ethnic groups by language, culture and physical appearance²⁵ and way of life. Internally, they are communities that are 'virtually homogenous in character'²⁶.

²³ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 1.

²⁴ Ibid: 5.

²⁵ Ibid: 1.

²⁶ Ibid.

History for the Majang has always been a continuous slave raiding even after slavery was abolished in Ethiopia. Succeeding Ethiopian rulers and their neighbors used to raid the Majang for slavery. In a group discussion, Majang informants uniformly stated that their forefathers were victims' of slave-raiding by their neighboring ethnic groups and the state. Some informants even in revulsion tell that several bandits of raiders did not only relentlessly raid them but they also treated their daughters and sons inhumanly as animals and sold them in an open market as a marketable commodity. The other informant with profound emotion says, 'specially, the girls were abused in different ways. For instance, they were used as servants in the house of the rulers and chiefs. Second, they were used for sexual exploitation both by the raiders and by their owners in their destination after being sold in the market place'. The other informant after he thought for a while said that the Anywaa were also used to kill adults and cut their hands. Informants stressed that this slave raiding has a tremendous effect on Majang people dignity as a human being, settlement pattern and mobility. It greatly disrupted not only Majang settlement but also it reduced Majang territory and demography very much. It is one of the main factors that have forced Majang people to prefer an isolated settlement and limited contact with the outside world.

Historical records on slave raiding of the Majang are relatively many. Studies show how the Majang were abused by the state and neighboring ethnic groups in most cases until the 1930s and even in some instance afterwards. Stauder (1972) mentioned that the Majang were people who were living quietly in the forest in fear of raiding from hostile neighboring tribes²⁷. In general, up until the 1930s the Majang were raided for women and children by their neighbors such as the

²⁷ Stauder, *The Majangir...*

Amhara, Oromo, Anywaa, Shekko-Gimirra, by Ethiopian government forces and Sudanese Arabs²⁸. The raiders killed and kidnapped many Majang, destroyed their huts and food stores²⁹. For instance, Stauder (1971:139) mentioned that resident Majang in Gelishi, Shiri were displaced, and birth rate decreased because of raids by neighboring groups. Among the settlers in Gelishi some of them were also victims of slave-raiding and the resultant displacement. For example, Bilwan and his family were dispersed by Sheko and Amhara raids in the 1920s in the Dawar River area to the Godere River and then to Gelishi *kebele*³⁰. The Shako and Oromo too moved the father of Yewodin, Deshok's to Gomwi across the Facha'a due to the repeated raid and attack³¹. The Highlanders came also to raid the Majang for slaves.

The Majang response for slave raiding was either to flee or hide. They had barely responded. Earlier migration and slave raiding was halted mainly in the deep forest. This was because of two main factors. Firstly, the migrants and raiders did not want to face severe heat in farther lowlands though they were superior in every aspect than the Majang. Secondly, it was the ecological conditions, *tse-tse* fly zone, and the thick cover of forest that protected them from the raiders³². In addition, there was no proper road to go deep in the forest. Majang settlement sites were almost inaccessible. That was why the Majang used to avoid slave raiding and tax-gathering police expedition through hiding in accessible jungle and small settlements. The forest has protected the Majang which was part of their human security device. It was later after the

²⁸ Ibid: 4.

²⁹ Ibid: 143.

³⁰ Ibid: 151.

³¹ Ibid: 183.

³² Ibid: 4-5.

opening of air service from Tapi nearby that the Highlanders had heavily immigrated into Majang exclusive settlement³³.

However, during the Italian period, the Majang responded to Anywaa relentless and merciless slave raiding for the first time in their history. Ato Fikere said, before the Italian occupation, the Anywaa used to raid them for slave³⁴. The Anywaa came, took young girls and boys, and sold them in Gambella for Highlanders and the Sudan Arabs. Hence, to avoid the inexorable Anywaa raiding for slave and Majang humiliation, the Majang decided to fight with them once and for all during the Italian occupation. Under the leadership of a tapa'd called Yawok, the Majang courageously attacked the Anywaa. The battle was carried out in today's Gonchi and Kuwit sites. It was a fatal conflict. The Anywaa incurred heavy loss and the Majang finally, defeated the Anywaa. From then on, according to the view of informants, the Anywaa had never come back for slave raiding. In fact, Italian occupation had also stopped not only slave raiding but it also ended warfare in the lowland areas³⁵.

The relations of Majang with neighboring tribes have not been confined only to warfare and slave raiding. Especially after the Ethiopian state abolished slave raiding in the 1940's and Odola constructed roads, the Majang have established a peaceful relation with their neighboring people³⁶. This gave the Majang the opportunity to trade freely with their neighbors³⁷. Much borrowing of items of culture and some intermixing of blood have occurred³⁸. For instance, even

³³Ibid: 185.

³⁴ Interview with Fikere, Meti, 7 March 2013.

³⁵ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 5.

³⁶ Yet, despite the fact that slaves raiding ended, Majang clashed with their neighboring ethnic groups occasionally occur. Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 143.

³⁷ Ibid: 19.

³⁸ Ibid: 5.

though sporadic Anywaa raids continued, they kept on trading and there was no major confrontation between the two people during the imperial period³⁹. The Majang traded honey for tobacco, dogs, and guns of Anywaa. Majang hunters highly demanded Anywaa dogs for hunting⁴⁰. There were also inter-marriages, although it was one direction: Anywaa men marrying Majang women⁴¹. Highlanders have also started to appear in large number slowly. In fact, the first category of Highlanders that met the Majang people was the Oromo to sell their farming products and to hunt Buffalo. Then state officials and their families, and few traders largely from the Amhara followed them. In due course, these interactions with their neighbors came up with an added noteworthy problem to the Majang people, i.e., land alienation.

3.3.2 Oppression

The history of the Gambella region is also very much connected with the process of state formation in Ethiopia and associated migration of people from the northern plateau to the less densely settled “peripheries”⁴². The inclusion of the Gambella area into the Ethiopian state at the end of the nineteenth century introduced a new category of people of largely Amhara and Oromo origins called by local people as “Highlanders”⁴³. MNZ has not been an exception to this process. Nevertheless, Majang first contact with modern government and oppression started

³⁹ Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa...*, 907.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sommer Monika, *Transforming Conflict in the Multi Ethnic State Gambella in Ethiopia: Mediation in a Divided Society* (Institut Universitaire Kurt Bosch, 2005), 12.

⁴³ Medhane, Tadesse, ‘*Gambella: The Impact of Local Conflict on Regional Security*’ (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2007).

during the Italian occupation⁴⁴. The Italy administrators were settled around in today's Kumi *kebele* MNZ⁴⁵. The Majang used to call the Italian by the name *telemoto*.

According to informants, they had no peaceful relation with the Italian invaders at all. Italians were remembered for their extreme tyranny and barbaric oppression of the Majang. Key informants⁴⁶ described that the Italians with their highlander supporters (*banda*) had oppressed the local community. They used to coerce the Majang to pay too much tax and of every kind. Previously, the people used to pay to *tapa'd* not to the state. For the first time in their history, the Majang started to pay tax during the Italian period. Yet, it was the *tapa'd*, who pay tax on behalf the people, who followed and paid tribute to him/her. The *tapa'd* was obliged to pay tax both in *birr* and in kind. As honey was traditionally one of the most important items for their livelihood, they abundantly used to submit it for Italian colonizers and highlander rulers. Meat, elephant teeth, tiger skin and so on from hunting was also a common item of taxation. As was mentioned in chapter one, hunting is Majang key way of life not only for food but also for game. Hence, they are very skilled hunters of wild animals. Additionally, they used to pay tax in egg and chicken.

To make their situation even worse, the Italian invaders frequently raped Majang women and girls, strangled, and killed the local people without any rationale and evidence. The Italians also collected all spiritual leaders and imprisoned them in Gori⁴⁷. Later, almost all of them were killed. This Italian murder of Majang traditional political like leaders really weekend Majang

⁴⁴ This period refers the Second Italo-Ethiopian colonial War that started in October 1935 and ended in May 1936.

⁴⁵ Interview with Fikere, Meti, 07 March 2013.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Interview with Fikere, Meti, 7 March 2013; Ashene Asten, Addis Ababa, 02 March 2015.

strength and left them as leaderless and stateless community. This was the first major events that end Majang fragile leaders. The matter went to a serious dispute especially when they murdered a highly respected Majang *baalabat* called Betema. It was a very intolerable incident for the Majang. Thus, they decided to face the Italians to stop the oppression for the last time. Since the Italians were superior in military and number supported by Highlanders, the Majang asked the Sheko for help⁴⁸. The Sheko's response was positive since the Italians were their common enemies. The battle occurred around Kumi and Yeki *kebele*. The Majang and Sheko allied force attacked and killed lots of Italian along with the highlander who were assisting them. The Majang also attempted to kill the Italian leader but they failed to do so. They attribute it with 'medicine that he had to protect him from bullet'. After this incident, the Italians were forced to lessen their oppression and finally driven out of Ethiopia by the Ethiopian patriotic forces. Through their stay, the Italians avoided going deep into Majang territory⁴⁹.

The Majang integration within the Ethiopian empire was abusive and coercive⁵⁰. Even worse than the Italians, the Ethiopian state oppressed the Majang even after the slave trade was abolished. In fact, after the Italians were driven out of the country, the Majang relation with the Imperial rule was only concerning revenue collection. Nevertheless, the regime imposed an oppressive taxation. They used to give several types of tributes such as tiger skin, elephant teeth, pots of honey, and millet and so on. The government appointed many Oromo *Shumi and Majang tapa'd* (government *tapa'd*), who were responsible to collect tax, maintaining order and rising

⁴⁸ They defeated the Italian with the support of the Sheko. As a result, they said, "from then on, we have established a strong tie and cooperation with the Sheko people until now".

⁴⁹ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 5.

⁵⁰ Hence, the Majang have negative perception towards their rulers and neighbors. FGD with the Majang, Meti, March 2013.

supplies to government officials, over the Majang people⁵¹. Besides, some Anywaa in Abobo area were authorized by the government to act as tax collectors among the Majang in their vicinity⁵². These Shumi used to visit many Majang areas once a year with a tax-gathering police expedition. Moreover, to worsen their misery, the Majang were asked to fulfill legal requisition and illegal extortion practiced by the police to obtain free food, drink and personal profit out of the expedition⁵³. Furthermore, other studies too confirmed how the Highlanders dominated and abused the Majang in various ways. For example, Stauder (1971:152) provides that the Majang had suffered a lot in the hand of the Amhara elites. He documented that Amhara near Gelishi used to beat local people for taxes⁵⁴. The well-known anthropologist Evans Pritchard (1947) also briefly mentioned that the Anywaa of the Abobo and Gog districts has ‘reduced the Majangir to the status of vassals’⁵⁵. Yet, direct relation between the state and the local community was very limited given that the tapa’d was paying tax to the state on behalf of the people.

Overall, during the Imperial rules, except heavy taxation, slave raiding, and land alienation, modern social services and infrastructures were almost absent. The man who was very active and pioneering in this regard was an American Presbyterian known as Mr. Harvey Hoekstra known by the name Odola among the Majang⁵⁶. He had a tremendous influence in the Majang society than what the various Ethiopian states previously did. He began his missionary activity in Majang in 1964 during the imperial regime. He opened his mission in Godere River Missionary post in the east bank of the Godere River in Mengesh *Woreda*. One of the dominant clans of Majang, *Meeliner* clan, hosted Odola. Odola in his biography mentioned that it was the personal

⁵¹ Ibid: 143.

⁵² Ibid: 173.

⁵³ Ibid: 186.

⁵⁴ Ibid: 152.

⁵⁵ Evans, 1947; cited in Dereje, *Playing Different Games...*, 68.

⁵⁶ Ren’ya Sato, *Christianization through Villagization...*

intervention of the Crown Princess that led to open a new work among the people living in the rainforest in southwest Ethiopia⁵⁷. He stated that the granting of the resident visa was also on the condition that the missionary must be in the Majang people⁵⁸. He also mentioned that Her Highness⁵⁹, the Crown Princess, with her daughters, personnel secretary and bodyguard on a special chartered flight visited Odola missionary post⁶⁰.

Odola has constructed various infrastructures for the first time in Majang history. He constructed a missionary post, a modern school and a clinic at Godere Missionary post in Mengesh *Woreda*. First, he constructed the first road from Meti to Godere Missionary post working from sunrise to sunset supported by a crew of Amhara-speaking workers and modern tractors. Due to the absence of road, Odola travelled to ‘Godare River post’ by Horse on October 1964. He also constructed an airfield in Mengesh Missionary post and the small plane made its first landing in Majangland on 16 March 1965⁶¹.

Then, he had also established the first modern ‘Godare Medical Art Buildings’⁶². In Godere River all the tropical diseases such as malaria, small pox, sleeping sleekness were evident. Hence, at first, he and his missionary members were extremely busy in treating the Majang. Odola stated, “We saw many persons suffering from huge tropical ulcers. Apparently shin bone injuries are common in the forest, and with the lack of medical care the slightest injury easily

⁵⁷ Hoeksra, *Honey We are Going to Africa*, 198.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Haile Selassie, a member of the Solomonic dynasty, was Ethiopia's regent from 1916 to 1930 and Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974.

⁶⁰ Hoeksra, *Honey We are Going to Africa*, 264.

⁶¹ Ibid: 235.

⁶² Ibid: 227.

becomes an incurable wound⁶³.” He gave medical service to the people for free. Sometimes, in case of emergency and seriously ill patients, he transported people for free by plane to Addis and Mizan, Metu and Dimbidollo.

Then after besides teaching the word of God, Odola provided the community with modern education. He opened a primary school from grade 1-4. The teachers were his children, few Highlanders and Odola himself. They have taught them in Amhric and English. Children of the Majang largely from the *Meeliner* clan obtained modern education for free. The current political elites of Majang are also the products of this Missionary School.

Furthermore, Odola also taught the Majang how to grow coffee and other cash crops⁶⁴ bringing coffee seedlings by plane from Tapi Coffee Plantation. He also introduced them to bananas, pineapples, mangos, peanuts, and sweet potatoes and taught them how to grow these things.

By and large, Odola served as a doctor, nurse, dentist, midwife, preacher and teacher. He is remembered by every Majang as the one who has brought modernity to the people of Majang such as modern education, health care, and dressing in addition to Christianity. At last, Odola left the area with the order of the Derg regime. Recently, Hoekstra came to Ethiopia. While Hoektra spoke his work among the Majang people, one Majang said,

This day marks a day which is special for us. All of us we know that, Dr. Harvey ‘Odola’, is a man who God sent to deliver the people of Majang from the bondage of darkness. In those hopeless and despair days the whole world is full of evils, But

⁶³ Ibid: 205.

⁶⁴ Ibid: 274.

God opened a way to the heathen [hidden] people of the rainforest. And God spoke through the man that is among us here and today we are all changed. And I would like to tell you that God has brought the gospel you have preached. And that God is great. We thank him for all what he has done and what he has brought through you among the Majang⁶⁵.

This text reflects the massive influence and contribution of Odola to the Majang community given that the Majang were not exposed to modern education, health facilities and other social services by rulers of the imperial periods. It was Odola who has introduced such modern service for the first time in Majang inhabited land. For instance, due to absence of medical facility, they died of tropical diseases such as ulcer. It appears that the whole interest of successive rulers and their neighbors were exploitation of Majang resources through heavy taxation and to taking Majang's children for slavery. State permission for Odola missionary was related to what can be described as 'outsourcing governance' of the periphery. Haileselassie instrumentally used the western missionaries as part of the nation-building project and modernization while protecting the northern highlands from missionary influence⁶⁶.

3.3.3 Land Alienation

⁶⁵ Interview (Name withheld), Meti, 16 January 2015.

⁶⁶ See for details Widu Tafete, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian State and the Alexandrian See: Indigenizing the Episcopacy and Forging National Identity, 1926-1991* (Illinois: ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2006).

Analysis of Majang history shows that subsequent Ethiopian states and Majang neighbors have attempted to use Majang forestland and its resources without their consent in quite a lot of occasions. The Imperial rulers largely have engaged in tax collection and pacifying the area for this purpose of exploitation. For instance, during Lij Eyaasu rulership the Majang had experienced the first large scale government assault in Yeki area⁶⁷. In the clash, the Majang community in present day Yeki *Woreda* was entirely destroyed. According to Obong (2014), 150 Majang men were brutally massacred in the daylight before the public to threaten entire Majang. Consequently, Majang people were displaced from Yeki area and run to Abobo and Gog kings in Abobo and Gog areas respectively for survival⁶⁸. Others were dispersed to present day Oromia National Regional State and Southern Nations, Nationalities and peoples' Regional State⁶⁹. The main cause of the massacre was the disobedience of the Majang to allow Lij Eyaasu forces to forcefully use the forest resources for the construction of the National Palace in Addis Ababa without compensation for the local Majang Community⁷⁰. Nevertheless, the researcher does not find any evidence that Lij Eyaasu did try to build National Palace in Addis Ababa at that time.

Furthermore, during Haileselassie rulership, the Majang have witnessed the first large-scale coffee plantation. The commencement of Tapi Coffee plantation enterprise was the beginning of Majang's displacement from their land. An entire six-kebele people were displaced from their land without any compensation. Besides, the Oromo settled deep into Majang territory up to today's Gelishi kebele⁷¹ and the government had appointed them over the Majang population⁷².

⁶⁷ Omot O. Olum, *The Untold Majang Ethnic Minority Group Massacre in Gambella Peoples' National Regional State Of The Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia* (September 23, 2014).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid: 185.

⁷² Ibid.

What's more, the Amhara started to take away Majang land⁷³. In fact, in this period it was just around Tapi that these later settlers, the government and Highlanders, have rested among the Majang⁷⁴. The advent of commercial agriculture in imperial Ethiopia in the 1960s was part of Haileselassie's modernization project, which targeted the eastern and western lowlands. A similar process of land dispossession occurred among the Afar, for instance in Amibara Melka Saddi Irrigated Farm⁷⁵.

Consequently, in 1974 a minor conflict between the local community and Highlanders extended to large-scale conflict. It was a market day. The immediate cause of the conflict was the killing of a highlander police by the Majang. The police was there to calm down a conflict between a group of Highlanders and the local people. The police officer fired a gun on air to control the situation. However, the Majang misunderstood his intention and stabbed him to death. Then, the Majang started to run away. The other police officers followed the Majang and killed some of them. Others escaped and disappeared into the jungle. Then, the Majang went to their home area and killed scores of Highlanders as a reprisal. Again, the police entered deep in Majang locality and killed the Majang people. This occasion had created tension almost for three years. Due to the clash, according to highlander informants, the Majang were absent in Meti town market for three years. In fact, except for the 1974 violent conflict incident, Majang relation with Highlanders was peaceful. It was recorded as the first violent incident between them.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 5.

⁷⁵ Getachew Kassa, "Settlement Among the Afar Pastoralist of the Awash Valley, in Alula Pankhurst and Francios Piguet ed., *People space and the State: Migration, Resettlement and Displacement in Ethiopia*, Proceeding of the Workshop held by The Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists and the United Nations Emergency Unit for Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, 2004), 224.

The story of Majang oppression by the state and their influential neighboring ethnic groups continued. After the overthrow of Emperor HaileSELLASE, President Mengistu (leader of the socialist regime known as Derg) took control over state power. Unlike the previous rulers, Mengistu (1974-1991) was also very well known among many Majang people. He is known by his villagization program and by his scary brutality. Like his predecessors, he also made them pay all sorts of tax and killed some Majang in its notorious 'red-terror'⁷⁶ action. He is also responsible for three major policies: State sponsored MCF, Resettlement, and Villagization, which have brought significant impact on the indigene community, above all the unpleasant incidents of land alienation.

In fact, oral and written sources indicated that it was during the rulership of President Mengistu, the state have had much deeper contacts with the Majang.⁷⁷ Relatively, far better than the imperial periods, the Derg regime penetrated deep into the Majang people. The regime entered Majangland through its MCF, resettlement and villagization program. Local elites from the indigenes also argued, "The Military Junta government, however, had changed policy on Majang Ethnic Minority group's Forest Resources Utilization by using Investment through Tapi Coffee Plantain Development Enterprise and Resettlement program". The regime based on the ideology of large-scale mechanized production with development, progress, and modernity, and even more after the great famine periods of 1984 and 1985, the country embarked on large-scale resettlement and villagization programs⁷⁸.

⁷⁶ *Red-terror* refers to the Derg regime's measure to eliminate powerful rivals by killing from 1976 to 1978.

⁷⁷ Sato, *Christianization through Villagization...*, 567.

⁷⁸ Clapham, Christopher, "Political Framework: Controlling Space in Ethiopia", in Wendy James, D. Donham, E. Kurimoto and A. Triuzi eds., *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After* (Oxford: James Curry, 2002), 19.

The Derg villagization program had started in Majang land at the end of 1970s. The leading storytellers of it are Redat and Fikere. According to them, the Derg leadership selected leaders of the villagization program from the *Meeliner* clan and sons of the *tapat*'s. For instance, one of the leading storytellers, Redat Gebrekidane, one of the most active participants and promoter of the villagization program, is the son of the powerful *tapa't* of Bangur village. According to these informants, the Derg selected the main promoters of villagization were the youth from the *Meeliner* clan on purpose in view of the fact that the descendants of time-honored ritual leaders had strong influence and recognition in the community.

Redat underlined that it was during the Derg regime that the Majang have started to obtain appointment in government posts for the first time in their history from the Ethiopian state. Some of the Majang people even became the agent of the state by becoming member of the Ethiopian Workers Party (EWP). Fikere and Redat were also one of the members of the party and chairperson of the Youth League⁷⁹. However, according to the view of other informants, the regime Villagization program also proved unsuccessful. Because Villagization program of the Derg regime was against Majang's way of life and culture. Informant's stressed that permanent settlement in villages was inconsistent with their way of life such as field shifting cultivation. They mentioned that Villagization sites were too far from the forest where they hang their beehives. In addition, they added that the regime cadres have obligated the Majang to work in agricultural fields against their will. Sato (1997:573) too had visited a villagization site in Majang in 1995⁸⁰. He mentioned that the villagization site of *Jaman* was later ruined and abandoned due to fear of 'evil spirits' and due to the remoteness of the project site to

⁷⁹ Interview with Fikere Tefera and Tenisayi, Meti, March 2013.

⁸⁰ Sato, *Christianization through Villagization...*, 573.

administrator from Godere *Woreda*⁸¹. The Majang were also unhappy about the increased presence of Highlanders operating behind the government. More than ever, with the introduction of coffee as a large-scale cash crop near Tapi saw the arrival of some highland peoples operating behind the authority of the Ethiopian government⁸².

Furthermore, the states influence was strongly felt when it brought significant Highlanders through its resettlement program. Put it differently, besides mechanized coffee plantation company and Villagization, the Derg regime was also responsible for the planned resettlement program. In the Derg period, some of the Highlanders who currently live in the MNZ came in the 1980s as part of the resettlement program of the regime with the informed consent of neither the local population nor the new settlers. In 1985, Ethiopia was stroke by a devastating drought and famine. Especially, the northern part of Ethiopia, Tigray and Wollo were the areas devastated by the drought. For that reason, people from the north mainly Tigray, Wello and Northern Shewa, and from southern Ethiopia were moved to Gojjam, Wollega and Gambella⁸³. One of the resettlement sites in Gambella was in MNZ, in particular Godere *Woreda*. The resettlement was largely not based on the informed consent of the people, which later it has brought its own problem in the dynamic of inter-group relation and politics in the study area. Approximately, according to highlander informants, about 3000 settlers have been brought to Godere *Woreda* in MNZ. In Godere, they have settled in Kabo, Gumare, Tilku Meti, Gogobezi and Kora *kebeles*. During the resettlement, informants indicate that the Majang were also obliged by the Derg political cadres to build the houses of the settlers.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 4.

⁸³ Overall, the operation involved about 600,000 people, and was largely carried out without consultation, neither of the local population, nor of the new settlers. Monika, *Transforming Conflict...*

There are various views about the rationale behind the Derg regime resettlement programme. The first view was resettlement as a response to the famine in the Northern part of Ethiopia. This was largely a view from the state. The second view is that the Derg fear that the famine might force the people to join the rebels, especially the TPLF. Therefore, to weaken the TPLF opportunity of recruitment, the Derg regime used resettlement as a strategy. This is a view of the settlers especially from Tigray area and the TPLF. For example, one of the settlers and my key informant Negussie also said, “The main aim of the Derg regime was, in fact, to prevent Tigray people who were joining the TPLF due to the famine and drought⁸⁴”. The third view was related with the Derg intention to use Majang forest and its resources, and for voluntary assimilation of this minority people through marriage with the Highlanders. This is a view from the host community and indigenes political elites. The elites of indigenes community argued that the Derg regime against Majang interest, attempted assimilation through evictions of their forest and resources in the name of investment and resettlement. For instance, the former President of Gambella region underlined that resettlement were means of killing of Majang ethnic minority group’s by taking their forest and resources either voluntarily or involuntarily to satisfy the interests of the system⁸⁵. He further pointed out that most Majang household farmers were forced to sell their forests and land resources fearing forceful eviction of their land by plunder. To facilitate their assimilation policy, the Derg forces were also massacring some Majang Traditional Leaders and youth group who resisted against the policy⁸⁶. He further motioned that that regime has introduced heavy intoxicating beverage to the community to weaken their work culture⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ Interview with Negussie Berha, Meti, 17 March 2013.

⁸⁵ Obong, *The Untold Majang Ethnic Minority Group Massacre ...*

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Moreover, during the Derg regime, the story of Majang oppression and domination by their powerful neighbors continued and indeed, they suffered a lot. The Anywaa administrators and cadres advocated and implemented the new state policies among the Majangir. For instance, during the Derg period many Anywaa became state employees such as administrators, teachers, cadres and so forth. Though some young Majangir were recruited to the national army and government peasant, youth and women associations were setup, they had much less influences of the state policies as compared to the Anywaa⁸⁸. Again, at that period, the Anywaa reaffirmed superiority to the Majang with the state authority on their side. To quote Kurimoto (1994), “a very significant point for the Anywaa-Majangir relations was the former appeared as the government agent for the latter”⁸⁹.

Moreover, the indigenous Majang have also faced territorial encroachment from the neighboring Anywaa people in the west. An informant described the history of inter-ethnic conflict between the Majang and the Anywaa as follows:

*We were in conflict with the Anywaa since their first contact. They did not have peaceful relation with the Anywaa. The Anywaa are very aggressive people, bold and heroic people. They are always troublemakers. They relentlessly encroached into our territory. They consider us coward and lazy. It is difficult to live with them in the same locality or political space. Majang by far prefer to live with the Highlanders than the Anywaa*⁹⁰.

Another Majang informant noted:

⁸⁸ Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relation...*, 908.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Interview (name withheld), Meti, March 2013.

*In the past, we ploughed land, engaged in beekeeping and hunting. The Anywaa were, however, very lazy and did not work. They have lived by snatching and robbing our property. Our people do not want the property of others.*⁹¹

Studies also indicate that historically, in addition to slave raiding, the Anywaa encroached on Majang forestland in the west. However, for Anywaa unrelenting incursion the Majang barely responded⁹². Majang response was retreating deep into the forest. This culture of the Majang helped the expansion process of the Savannah people of the Anywaa further into the forest⁹³.

The Anywaa are typically people of the savannah who live in three ecological zones, i.e. *bap*, *wok*, and *lul*. While the first two are grassland savannah, the *lul* is a forest area densely covered by tall broad leaf trees⁹⁴. Thus, it is in the *lul* area that the Anywaa have direct contact and encroachment into Majang land. The Anywaa cleared the forest around the *lul* area and expanded aggressively into the forestland that ultimately changed into savannah land⁹⁵. Then, the Anywaa pushed the Majang further deep into the forest. Besides, the Anywaa also exploited the forest more intensively than the Majang⁹⁶. Actually, the *lul* areas have also been under immense pressure from government agricultural projects, the resettlement program, the Sudanese refugee and town dwellers⁹⁷. Thus, these developments have put immense pressure on the neighboring Majang forestland.

⁹¹ Interview (name withheld), Meti, April 2013.

⁹² Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relation...*, 900.

⁹³ Ibid: 900.

⁹⁴ Ibid: 901-902.

⁹⁵ Ibid: 903.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Moreover, the other Anywaa-Majang relation has also been witnessed during the 1980s gold panning around Anywaa-Majang borderlands and in the Majang territory⁹⁸. Yet, the Anywaa who were well armed by rifles and organization exclusively carried out the gold panning. In fact, the presence of many Anywaa in the Majang homeland has increased their daily contacts. For instance, camps around the gold mining area have been used as trading places between the two people and bases for hunting in the forest⁹⁹. All these factors have contributed to the enlargement of power imbalance between the two communities¹⁰⁰. Consequently, the Anywaa become dominant not only in the gold mining area but also in the area adjacent to it. The discussion in the previous sections indicated that the Majang, indeed, were victims of slave raiding, oppression and land alienation. Why did the Majang fail to defend their territory and people? The next subsection, in brief, examines this issue.

3.4 Factors for Majang Vulnerability to External Influences

As noted above, the Majang response for slave raiding and territorial encroachments was either to run away or hide from view. According to other studies, however, it was their mode of settlement and dispersed homestead and their environment (difficult trails of the forest and the danger to horses and mules and tsetse flies in Majang territory) that effectively ‘protected them from total enslavement’¹⁰¹. In a group interview of seven Majang, the researcher raised why the Majang failed to defend their territory. Why was the Majang vulnerable to external influence?

⁹⁸ Ibid: 909.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid: 4-5.

They unanimously attribute Majang vulnerability to several factors. These causes can be grouped into three categories: political, cultural, and numerical and military dynamics.

First, they stated that the Majang lacked vibrant political organization. This factor is also upheld by Stauder's anthropological study. He underlined that the Majang totally lacked any organized, corporate groups having continuity in time beyond the life of an individual or family¹⁰². The only political like leader for the Majang, *tapa'd*, has been undermined by missionary activities. This further weakens Majang's only viable political institutions. The opinion of one of the few surviving *tapa'd* in Gelishi *kebele*, Tanget Yewdin, was also more or less the same, "Christianity has weakened the Majang society culture, strength and solidarity".

The second factor, according to Majang informants, was the culture of avoiding new comers and conflict by moving away from their settlement to the deep forest. From this respect, Stauder points out that the Majang culture is also an incentive for encroachment for they have a distinct way of life largely based on forest, and they retreat into the forest whenever an outsider approached them. Besides, the Majang people have had a much-dispersed settlement. Moreover, the presence of vast and uninhabited tracts of land in the area encouraged the state and more Highlanders to come to their habitat.

Third, the Majang were/are militarily and numerically weak. Majang neighbors and the state militaries were superiority in terms of the number of rifle and bullets, and organization. In addition, demographically Majang were/are much smaller than their neighbors were/are. For

¹⁰² Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 6.

instance, Stauder (1971) noted that the Majang reacted to raids by fleeing or hiding, as Highlanders were much superior to them in number of rifles and bullets.

3.5 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the history of the Majang people using data from interviews, life histories and secondary sources. It described relations of the Majang to successive Ethiopian governments and their neighbors. The discussion shows that they have vibrant memories of oppression, land dispossession before and during the Derg period. History of the Majang has always been a continuous turmoil of oppression and land alienation. The Majang had also experienced continual slave raiding by their neighbors, which affected their population number, settlement, territory, and mobility. In relation to this, the Majang view their neighbors especially the Shekicho, Anywaa and the Highlanders as traditional enemies who used to raid them. The history of land displacement provides evidence that the Majang were victims of external influence in their history. Do these historical trends have reversed or continued within the new federal political order which is primarily designed to give protection for vulnerable NNPs such as Majang? The subsequent chapters are devoted to these and other related issues.

Chapter 4

The Majang in Federal Ethiopia: Political Empowerment and its Limits

4.1 Introduction: Majang encounter with the EPRDF

As has been mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Majang have been living quietly in the forest in fear of being raided by the hostile neighboring ethnic groups and the state. They have been victims of all sorts of exploitation such as slave raiding, oppression and displacements from their land by successive Ethiopian rulers and their ethnic neighbors. These had also continued during the Derg regime. As a result of their discontent with the Derg authoritarian rule, they joined the Gambella People's Liberation Movement (hereafter GPLM). It was established in 1979 by eighteen Anywaa freedom fighters rebelling against a national center that had initially promised so much by the way of an 'integrative revolution'¹. The Majang took up arms against the Derg and joined the GPLM because of the regime's cultural encroachment, heavy taxation, loss of their ancestral land to the state imposed highlander resettlement and agricultural development projects. In 1989, with the support of Peter Aman², the party organized along with

¹ Dereje, *The experience of Gambella Regional State...*, 213.

² Peter Aman (previously known by the name Tadele Beiru) was the one who served as a rapport and opened the door of the Majang community for the EPRDF. Mr. Peter is a highly educated person among the Majang community. The Derg regime brought him from Metu and appointed him as the chief administrator of Meti town. Later, however, he fled to the Sudan when he became one of the targets of the Derg "red-terror" massacre. The regime targeted him due to his opposition to the regime's oppression of the local community. While he was in the Sudan, he met with top TPLF leaders such as Seyoum Mesfin. They persuaded him to join the GPLM. He then

the EPRDF and contributed to the fight against the Derg on the western front³. In 1991, a small contingent of the GPLM supported by the EPRDF occupied Gambella.

After the downfall of the Derg regime, the EPRDF was immediately engaged in the pacification, federalization and state restructuring process. It started to restructure the country based on the ideology of the right of ‘Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ of Ethiopia. In this regard, the transitional government promoted ethnicity as the key instrument of political mobilization and state organization.⁴ Internal boundaries have been drawn and powers distributed in such a way that ensures each national group to maintain itself as a distinct and self-governing society and culture. Indeed, many ethnic groups that were not mobilized based on ethnic nationalism before 1991 were required to organize themselves according to their ethnicity so that they fit into the new ethno-federal system⁵. Generally, the approach was a top down reconstitution of the country based on ethnicity⁶. The system is widely referred to as ‘ethnic federalism.’⁷”

Accordingly, the first step for Majang ethnic group’s local empowerment was establishing its own political party. Yet, the Majang people have neither an organized traditional nor a modern political party and leadership. The EPRDF leadership preferred to organize them within the GPLM party. To this goal, the EPRDF leadership found a convenient person known by his combatant name Mr. Peter Aman for rallying the Majang people under the GPLM. He was also the first to join the federal parliament representing the Majang people. During the transitional

joined the GPLM as a combatant and contributed his own part in the fight against the Derg regime. Interview (Name withheld), Addis Ababa, 4 April 2015.

³ Eisei Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa...*

⁴ Kymlicka, *Emerging Western Models of Multinational Federalism...*

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ David Turton, ‘Introduction’, In David Turton (ed.s) *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative perspective* (Eastern African Studies) (Oxford: James Currey, 2006).

period, because of his wide experience he gained acceptance in and respect of the Majang community and the EPRDF leadership circle, he served as an important bridge between the EPRDF and the people of Majang⁸.

Actually, there was mutual suspicion between the EPRDF leadership and the local community at the beginning. On the one hand, key informants who worked with the EPRDF said that the local community was highly reserved and reluctant to participate very actively at the early time of the Transitional Government Period (1991-1994)⁹. The local community was very suspicious about the new liberation front as they had little knowledge about the difference between the EPRDF and the previous military regime. Informants indicated that at first the people considered the EPRDF as evil as its predecessors. For the local community, both the previous rulers and the EPRDF were all Highlanders/*Galen*¹⁰ that come to exploit and oppress them. What is more, the Majang have also thought that the SPLA garrison at the border and ultimately, the SPLA armed forces would have defeated the EPRDF. They considered the EPRDF as a very small army that could only control the highland areas.

Similarly, the EPRDF was suspicious of the Majang as they sided with the SPLA¹¹ and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The area was also mistakenly considered as a strong backer of the defunct military regime though the Majang people did not welcome the Derg. Furthermore, in Godere like Gojeb, Gore, and Metu were areas where the OLF hid and moved freely. It was an

⁸ Interview with Tadyos, Meti, 11 March 2013.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The Majang specifically call the light-skinned color Highlanders '*Galen*'. According to my informants, *Galen* means 'red people' who tricked and swindled the Majang to grab land since their first contact. Interview with Alemayehu Wawaye, Meti, May 2013.

¹¹ The *Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)* is the army of the Republic of South Sudan. The SPLA was founded as a guerrilla movement in 1983.

area where ardent OLF supporters reside. For instance, at that time an Oromo hotel owner allegedly killed a Tigrean (Alexander) manager of Tapi Coffee Plantation in Meti and fled to Germany. The manager was a highly respected and loved person in the area. The OLF also killed a number of Amharas and other settlers in those areas. As said by one of the key informants, the OLF had considered the local community as “Black Oromo”. At that time, there was a ‘high political intensity’ in the area. This created tension, mistrust and enmity between the Majang and the EPRDF.

Later with the relentless effort of the GPLM party (especially Peter Aman) and support of educated Majang and the endorsement of the *Meeliner* clan, the EPRDF earned acceptance in the Majang community. Hence, Peter Aman intentionally recruited educated Majang political elites as GPLM party members, largely from the *Meeliner* clan¹². They came from the same clan as the prominent Majang political leaders in the MNZ came from. In fact, there were members from the second dominant clan *Bajer*, such as Markos Damen and Negusee Tulu. Afterwards, local elites from the community that have been recruited by Peter and others established GPLM sub-office in Godere.

¹² Peter and the EPRDF knew that EPRDF acceptance in the Majang community requires endorsement of *Meeliner* clan. Thus, though there were quite many clans in Majang, the majority of the GPLM members were recruited from the dominant *Meeliner* clan. The *Meeliner* were also the one who were the richest, populous and the most respected aristocrats among the Majang community. As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the spiritual and political leaders called *tapa't*, which tend to exercise a sort of informal political leadership, were extracted from the *Meeliner* clan. Above and all, the *Meeliner* are better educated and enlighten than others. During the Imperial period, officials gave modern education opportunity or scholarship to the sons of the *Meeliner* *tapa't*. Even the first foreign missionaries under Odola was also established the first modern school in the *Meeliner* dominant area, Godere Missionary Post. Therefore, the EPRDF used a calculative move to the *Meeliner* clan to obtain easy access, acceptance and cooperation from the Majang community. In relation to this, key informant underlined, “If the *Meeliner* were not recruited at the beginning, there would have been chaos in MNZ.” Peter also recruited people from the Sheko community such as the top leaderships Doshu and Shegesi to strengthen the Majang influence within the GPLM based on his philosophy of ‘black people solidarity’. Interview with Tadele Beiru, Addis Ababa, April 4, 2015.

The EPRDF approached the Majang people with incredible pledges that would significantly change Majang people's century old oppression and domination. Above all, the Majang were very pleased about EPRDF policies of self-governance and equality. The ethnic federal dispensation was designed to protect minorities from majority oppression. Put differently, the core historical purpose of the federal system was to provide enhanced protections to minorities. It is also designed to provide access to political power and enhance their participation. Thus, the formerly isolated and discriminated Majang community had a unique opportunity to exercise self-rule for the first time in their history. Indigenous Majang established their own sub-regional units. While the Anywaa and Nuer established their own Nationality Zones, the Majang, Opo and Komo established self-governing *Woredas*. Self-governance was one of the greatest rights ever achieved by the peoples of Majang. The unprecedented local empowerment, however, was not without problem. The new political order and restructuring process has resulted in the territorial fragmentation of the Majang people into three regional states that have brought its own negative repercussion and sense of insecurity amongst the indigenous people.

In relation to this, this chapter examines aspects of federal empowerment, its limitations and repercussions. In other words, it attempts to examine to what extent the new federal system achieved its declaration of local ethnic empowerment and security. The chapter has four sections. The first section presents the positive aspects of empowerment of the Majang people with the coming of a federal political system. The second section, discusses the limitations of the empowerment and the state restructuring process. It provides the consequential Majang security concerns in relation to the political fragmentation of the indigenous Majang into three regional states and the continued territorial encroachment from their powerful neighbors, the Shekicho

and the Anywaa. The third section, briefly presents and analyses the ramifications of margins of empowerment. The last section provides a summary of the main findings of the chapter and a conclusion based on the preceding discussions.

4.2 Aspects of Empowerment

In response to the opportunities, the federal dispensation provided to minority/ethnic groups such as Majang political empowerment in the post-1991 period, the Majang began to engage themselves in organized state politics. They started to claim political, territorial, economic and cultural rights on the basis of Majang identity. After the establishment of a self-administrative structure, they established a special *Woreda* and a nationality zone,¹³ for the Majang, in 1993 and 2003 respectively; a single ethnic wide political organization, namely Sheko-Majangir People's Democratic Unity Organization (SMPDUO)¹⁴ was established in March 2001 and Majangir People's Democratic Organization in 2003. Additionally, Majang economic association was established¹⁵.

In the Majang Special Zone, locals (ethnic Majang) occupy all administrative posts and offices. At the regional level, the Majang held important positions such as speaker of the regional council for the last twenty years, secretary and head of the regional ruling party, GPLM¹⁶. These may serve as a way to bring the hitherto isolated Majang people to the centre of regional and perhaps

¹³ Pursuant to article 46 sub-articles 1 of the region Constitution, the Regional State of Gambella is hierarchically structured into Region, Nationality Zones, Administrative *Woredas*, and *Kebeles*. Accordingly, there are three Nationality Zones, 11 *Woreda*'s and one Special *Woreda* in the region.

¹⁴ Initially, the party was established in response to encouragement from the EPRDF. Vaughan, [*Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia*](#), 275.

¹⁵ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2013.

¹⁶ Interview (name withheld), Gambella, February 2013.

national politics. With the flow of finance from the center via the regional government, social services have also expanded in the MNZ at a reasonable level. This is quite a contrast to the pre-1991 period during which the Majang never had access to modern education and health services. At present, there are educational facilities in almost all *kebeles* of the nationality zone. According to the Education Bureau of Godere *Woreda*, there are about 31 government schools (16 primary; 2 high and 1 college preparatory schools, and the rest are schools for alternative basic educations and adult education in Godere *Woreda* alone)¹⁷.

Several measures have also been taken to regain and boost Majang ethnic pride and self-confidence. In this respect, the name Majangir that previously had derogatory connotation was changed into Majang¹⁸. Previously, the Majangir were also known by their neighbors by various names such as 'Mesango', 'Masongo', Mesengo, 'Ujang' and 'Tama'¹⁹. Most of these names have derogatory implications and were used by the neighboring people to express their contempt for the Majang people²⁰. Above all, mother tongue education is one of the most visible changes in the educational and cultural landscape of the Majang. Accordingly, the Majang language is used as a medium of instruction and offered as a subject of study throughout the two cycles of primary education (grades 1-8)²¹. Currently, Majang is used as a medium of instruction in 5 primary schools with 24 teachers²². The development of the Majang language as a medium of instruction could be seen as one key result of the empowerment of ethnic communities through federalism.

¹⁷ Interview with Yimam Muhe, Meti, November 2014.

¹⁸ Majang Nationality Zone Council, "An initiation to change the name of the nationality", (Amharic), Majang Nationality Zone Council, Meti, 2012.

¹⁹ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 1

²⁰ Interview with Honorable Wagine Taro, Meti, 18 March 2013.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

The new federal political order also seeks to redress the marginality of minority groups like the Majang through affirmative action policies. In this respect, preference is given to members of the indigenous Majang community when employment is made by the MNZ and the *Woreda* under it²³. Accordingly, a Majang fresh graduate is considered as one who had two years experience. There were also affirmative actions regarding education. In this case, the Majang were provided preferential access to government run boarding schools in Addis Ababa and Areba Minch. Put another way, college and university admission requirement for Majang are usually significantly lower than those set for highlander students. In some cases, admission quotas for higher education were reserved for the indigenes groups. Several Majang were admitted to the undergraduate programmes of the Ethiopian Civil Service College²⁴. As a result, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of Majang young people who joined institutions of higher learning. At present, more and more Majang individuals are finishing their university/college education and joining the job market²⁵. Indeed, ethnic empowerment has created unprecedented new employment and career opportunities for the local people.

To redress social and economic development gaps among nations and nationalities, the federal government has established Ministry of Federal Affairs (hereafter MoFA) based on article 89(4) of the FDRE Constitution. The objective of the ministry is to provide support to what are called developing regions and coordinate the efforts of the federal government regarding regional affairs. According to Proclamation No.691/2010, the MoFA is established to bring equitable development in the less developed regions, to facilitate the resolution of conflicts arising

²³ Interview with zone vice-head, Yimami Faris, Meti, 2014.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Interview with Yacob, Kumi, 2013.

between regional states, to strengthen the Federal system, to uphold Federal Regional relations in the country, and to maintain good relations, etc²⁶. To give the necessary support to the four less developed regions by the executive organs of the government, the Ministry has a Federal Special Support Board²⁷. To undertake its powers and duties, the Ministry is also organized into four core and six support processes, namely, Equitable Development General Directorate, Conflict Prevention and Resolution General Directorate, Inter-governmental Relations Directorate and Religion and Belief Affairs Directorate.²⁸

Accordingly, MoFA has deployed a number of political and development advisers in the MNZ. The MoFA sent advisors to strengthen local leadership capacity to implementing government policies and strategies, and exercise their constitutional power. For instance, to increase access to social services such as education, health, potable water to indigenous communities, the government introduced a policy of villagization in 2012. The government is implementing villagization to ensure infrastructure access and economic development. The government believes that villagization helps to provide social services to the dispersed community in the less developed regions. The policy has been implemented for the last three years though with limited success²⁹. First, it is implemented without the informed consent of the community. Second, it is in consistent with Majang way of life such as shifting cultivation. Finally yet importantly, it is

²⁶ Proclamation No.691/2010, “A Proclamation to provide for the definition of powers and duties of the Executive organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia”, 17th Year No. 1, (Addis Ababa, Negarit Gazeta, October 2010).

²⁷ The federal Special Support board includes Ministry of Federal Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Water resource Development, Ministry of Capacity Building, Ministry of Urban and Work Development, Ministry of Women Affairs, Federal Revenue and Custom Authority and federal Micro and small industries Agency. FDRE Ministry of Federal Affairs (Addis Ababa: Public Relations Office, May 2010), 20-21.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interview with Tasew, one of MoFA advisor in MNZ, Meti, June 2014

due to the absence of sufficient social service according to program. Some consider villagization as part of the government's contractual obligation to remove 'impediments' for the investor³⁰.

The above-mentioned economic, political and cultural empowerments have increased Majang's voice, assertiveness and eventually reinforced their territoriality and making of ethnic boundary³¹. In other words, the new policy of the federal government, which assures regional autonomy, encouraged them to stand up for their own rights³². Besides, the new arrangement has greatly contributed to reverse the discriminatory treatment of the Majang by their neighbors especially with the Anywaa. Above all, the new federal dispensation has also notably transformed the nature of power relations between the Majang and the Highlanders. The Majang now assume a dominant political position as compared to the Highlanders.

Overall, as FGD and several interviews indicate, there is a consensus among the members of the Majang that federalism has brought significant benefits and opportunities to them. In spite of this, the Majang still feel insecure. This paradox – political empowerment and feeling of insecurity – will be examined in the next section.

4.3 Limits of Empowerment

4.3.1 Territorial Fragmentation

³⁰ Dereje Feyissa and Fana Gebresenbet, *The Articulation between Local Land-based Identity Discourses and the Global Indigenous Movement: The Case of the Anuak of Western Ethiopia* (Unpublished, 2015), 10.

³¹ Sarah Vaughan, 'Response to Ethnic Federalism: Ethiopia's Southern Region' in David Turton ed., *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective* (Ohio: James Curry Ltd, 2006), 197.

³² Sato, *Christianization through villagization...*, 574-575.

As stated elsewhere, the new government's state reform was the restructuring of the country explicitly along ethno-linguistic lines³³. This gives ethnic groups, especially formerly disadvantaged minority-groups, the chance to become the majority at local level and to administer their own affairs. Indeed, this has brought drastic change in the local politics such as in the study area. Nonetheless, the restructuring process and the political practice have produced a mixed result in the study area. On the one hand, the Majang are very happy about their self-governance rights they ever achieved in their political history. On the other, they became very dejected for their territorial breakup into three regional states: Oromia, SNNPRS and Gambella region. These made the Majang people to lose their territory and be prone to systematic exploitation and domination in their respective regions.

During the transitional period, based on the Transitional Government Proclamation No.7/1884 EC, the Majang began to exercise self-governance under the Yeki-Godere *Woreda* of Region 11(SNNPRS)³⁴. Later, taking their advantage into account the Majang and Sheko put forwarded a claim of their own special *Woreda* within Region 12 (Gambella region) to the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. Their aim was to incorporate Sheko *Woreda* from Benchi-maji Zone, Yeki *Woreda* from Sheka zone with the Godere *Woreda* of Gambella region. At this time, the mastermind who provided with key political leadership was the legendary Peter Aman. In part, by virtue of being the same origin of Niloitic family and 'Black (tikur) people'³⁵, solidarity, Peter preferred to join region12. According to key informants, Peter's main aim was also to establish a 'big black people' regional state including Benishangul-Gumuz and SNNPRS to compete with

³³ Barata, *Minority Rights, Culture...*, 66.

³⁴ Interview with Tenisayi, Head of MNZ Health Bureau, Meti, 12 March 2013.

³⁵ The indigenes Majang and Sheko have darker skin (*tikur*) relatively compared to the light-skinned (*keyi*) Shekicho and other Highlander migrants.

the other big regions at the national center³⁶. Ever since he became member of the GPLM, he wanted Majang and Sheko to join Gambella region. Most of all, the minority Majang and Sheko in Region 11 feared being dominated by the red highlander Shekicho people. To this end, the Majang and Sheko people have established a single political party.

Majang and Sheko's move made the Shekicho political elites extremely unhappy since they consider Yeki *Woreda* as part of their territory. This situation created tension between the Shekicho and the Majang political elites regarding ownership of Yeki *Woreda*. During the boundary making process, both groups presented their own argument. The Majang-Sheko allied group has raised several historical and political rationales in their argument. First, they argued that they are the indigenous people of Yeki *Woreda*. They claimed that historically the area from Sheko *Woreda* to Guraferda and until Alamo desert were their territories. The Majang underscored that the Shekicho have no any prior settlement in Yeki *Woreda*³⁷. Key informants underlined, "In fact, still most of the residents of the town are highlander settlers. The Shekicho are very few. In Yeki, we have lived for centuries. It was a recent history that Lei Iyasu military expedition and Tapi coffee plantation displaced us from the area". Moreover, they contend that the name Tapi even named after the Majang *tapa't* leaders person *Teben*. The name was modified later into Tapi. Peter Aman, the one who mobilized the Majang people, was also born in Tapi town. The name Yeki was also derived from the name of a traditional leader of Sheko

³⁶ Peter Aman rhetoric of 'black solidarity' provided as a tool for mobilizing followers and to join Gambella region. He had a plan to establish a region and one party for 'black people' from Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz and SNNPRS. According to informants, he incessantly argued about the necessity to establish an effective and strong region for 'black people'. He contend that one region of the blacks will enable them to compete effectively and to challenge with other big regions though it did not materialize. Interview with Yacob, Kumi, 2013.

³⁷ Still, the area is an exclusive Majang and Sheko settlement starting from Alamo desert. In Tapi town, the Shekicho live only as government official and employee. According to the 2008 Population and Housing Census, In Yeki there are 22 kebele. Out of these, 11 kebeles are Sheko inhabited kebeles, namely Mero, Goderefer, Darimu, Zinki, Yeki, Tsanu, Koricha, Fedei, Shosha, Bechi, Komi. The Majang live in Goji, Sheyi, Dobi, Alemgena. The Shekicho dominantly live in Gobeto and partially in Shayi, Gobero, Eremichi, Achani, and Debichengawu kebeles

Yakene. *Yeki Woreda*, therefore, traditionally belongs to the Majang and Sheko people³⁸. Hence, they emphasized, “The Shekicho, who came 85 kilometers far from Masha, claimed our territory. It is totally unfair and unacceptable”. Furthermore, the Majang underscored that the Shekicho people and the Majang were traditional enemies, and both could not live together in the same political space. The Sheko and the Majang do not want to be together with the Shekicho because the Shekicho socially marginalized these two communities. Last but not least, the Majang argued from administrative expediency as well. They said that the capital of region 11, Hawassa, is too far from Yeki and Godere via Addis Ababa while Gambella is much closer for the Majang people.

On the other hand, the Shekicho political elites argued from two major perspectives. First, they argued from the viewpoint of historical ownership. Like the Majang and the Sheko, the Shekicho argued that *Yeki Woreda* was part of the lowland of the previous Sheka kingdom. They said they left the lowland area of *Yeki Woreda* due to the prevalence of malaria³⁹. Second, they underscored that there was a heavy battle in Tapi with the Derg regime and sacrificed scores of their people. During the conflict, the Derg military even bombed the Shekicho people by airplane and they incurred heavy losses. Yet, the Majang argued that the cause of the conflict with the Derg regime was not about *Yeki Woreda*⁴⁰. The Derg defense force assaulted them because the people of Shekicho rejected Derg villagization program.

Finally, the Boundary Commission conducted a referendum in 1993 to decide on the fate of *Yeki-Godere Woreda*. The *Yeki-Godere* administrative area was subsumed into two separate

³⁸ Interview (name withheld), Meti, July 2014.

³⁹ Amare, 2007; cited in Markos, *Ethnic-conflict and its Resolution....*

⁴⁰ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2013.

regions. Yeki was included into region 11 (SNNPRS⁴¹) and Godere *Woreda* incorporated into region 12 (Gambella Region) as Godere Special *Woreda*. The result is fragmentation of the Majang into three regional states: whilst Godere *Woreda* is placed under Majang Zone in Gambella region, Yeki *Woreda* and Guraferda are placed under Sheka and Benchi-Maji Zone of the SNNPRS respectively, and others incorporated into Oromia Regional State such as in Nono and Selle *Woreda*⁴². The Majang and the Sheko in the two *Woredas* were very unhappy with this decision.

Other studies indicate that in the 1993 referendum the majority of the Yeki residents voted in favor of the Sheka Zone⁴³. The Majang, however, contend that in the referendum about 36,000 people voted to be under Gambella region while 10,000 people voted for SNNPRS⁴⁴. Moreover, the Majang strongly believe that the case of Yeki *Woreda* was rigged by the regional state of the SNNPRS⁴⁵. According to Majang informants, even though the people of Yeki *Woreda* voted in favor of Gambella region in the referendum, the elites of Shekicho, who were politically well-organized than the Majang people, maneuvered the result. The Majang believe that the EPRDF sacrificed the Majang people and land as reward and reparation for Shekicho human loss during the conflict⁴⁶. This was due to Shekicho's differential access to EPRDF and the decision making

⁴¹ SNNPRS is a home to more than fifty-six Nations, Nationality and Peoples (NNP). NNP in SNNPRS falls into four linguistic families, to be precise; Semitic, Omotic, Cushitic and Nilo-Saharan.

⁴² As a result, the same family groups have also divided among three regional states.

⁴³ EHRC, 2003; cited in Markos, *Ethnic-conflict and its Resolution...*

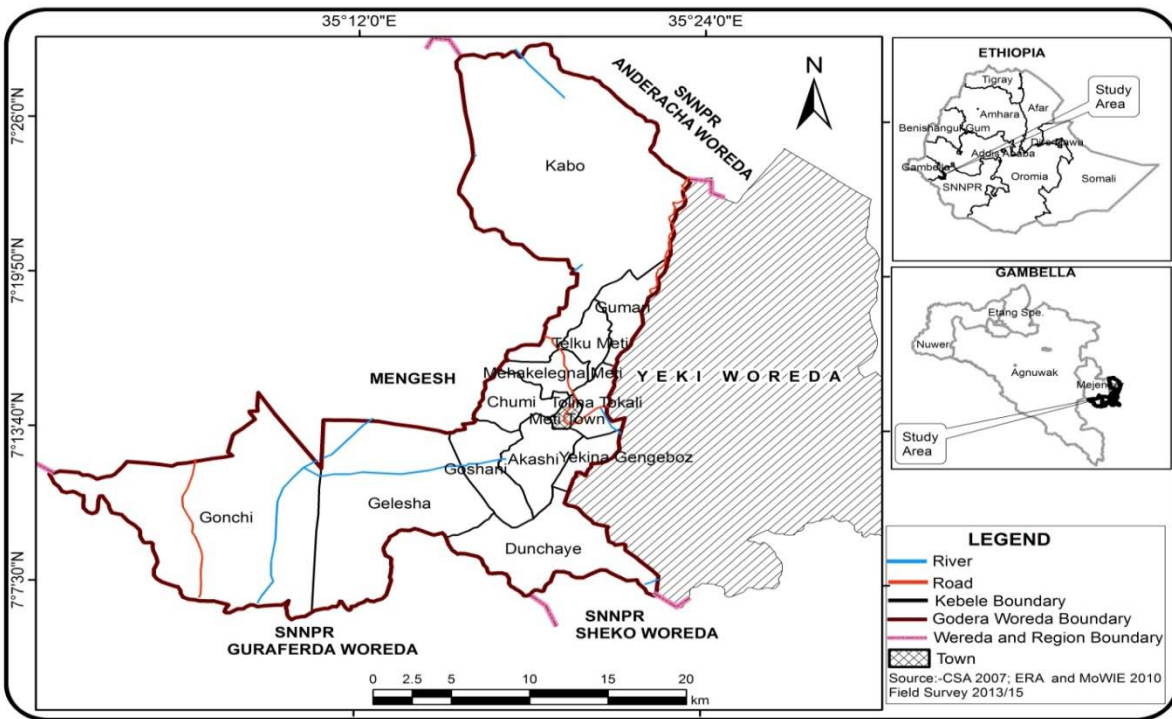
⁴⁴ In the boundary-making process, Gambella region sent three representatives to deal boundary issues with SNNPRS. The representatives were engineer Ubong, Okelo Aman and Petros Bedekan. The first two are from Anywaa while the later is a Majang. The attempt to the researcher to obtain the referendum result was unsuccessful.

⁴⁵ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2013.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

power associated with it as a member of the EPRDF⁴⁷. They also pointed out that the Ethiopian government suspected that the Majang and Sheko have relationship with the SPLA. Vaughan (2003:275) pointed out “a number of interlocutors in Tapi, for instance, claimed that ‘The SPLA was well known to be attempting to establish a strong ‘black towns’ within Ethiopia, as a buffer against Ethiopian encroachment’⁴⁸.”

Figure 3: Yeki Woreda and its neighbors



⁴⁷ Literatures also confirmed that such historical and moral claims depends on the relative political distance and closeness of various groups had with the winning party, EPRDF. See Dereje Feyissa, *The December Massacre in the Gambella Region and its Political aftermath: Analytical Report* (Pax Christ: Netherlands, 2004), 10.

⁴⁸ Yet, there was no evidence that the Majang and Sheko indeed have relation with the SPLA.

The Majang also complained that though they have tried a lot to bring Yeki into the Majang administration, they did not get sufficient support from the Gambella region leadership⁴⁹. Above all, the Majang also strongly believe that the Anywaa representatives traded Yeki *Woreda* for Dimma, which was also a contested *Woreda* between Gambella and SNNPR. That is to say that at the expense of Yeki *Woreda*, the Anywaa managed to include Dima under Anywaa Zone of Gambella Region. The Majang associate their loss of territory and their families to Anywaa mischief⁵⁰. A typical telling example is the loss of Yeki *Woreda* to the SNNPRS, which is attributable to the alleged blunder of the Anywaa representatives of the Gambella Region in the restructuring process. According to informants, the SNNPRS political elites bribed Gambella representatives⁵¹. Actually, the SNNPRS, Gambella and Oromia border areas “have seen repeated boundary shift over the last 100 years, with the historical ethnonyms marking a fluctuating series of territorial incarnations⁵²”. During the Derg regime, Nono, Sele, Meti, Yeki, Gecha and Masha were within the Mocha *Aweraja* in Illubabor Province⁵³. Now, these *Woredas* are subsumed into three regions; Nono and Selle in Oromia, Godere *Woreda* (Meti) in Gambella and the others in SNNPRS under Sheka Zone⁵⁴.

Some points can be drawn from the above discussion. First, Majang territorial fragmentation was the result of absence of vibrant political organization. Prior to 1991, the Majang had no political

⁴⁹ However, Kurimoto (1994) pointed out that the Majang boundary expanded eastward and Godere *Woreda* was incorporated into it due to the GPLM relentless strong effort to the central government though it is easy to be administered from Tapi than Gambella.

⁵⁰ As has been mentioned in chapter three, the Majang were politically less organized and hence they became under the auspices and influence of the Anywaa for long. As a result, most of the time the Anywaa acted on behalf of the Majang people during the transitional period. This has brought various harmful repercussions on the Majang people according to Majang informants.

⁵¹ Interview (name withheld), Kumi, 2013.

⁵² Sarah, *Response to Ethnic Federalism ...*, 194.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Masha, 2002; cited in Markos, *Ethnic Conflict and its resolution...*

structure. They lacked organized, corporate groups that have continuity in time beyond the life of an individual or family⁵⁵. The only political-like leader was *tapa't*. However, Majang exposure to modern Christian religion (Odola mission) has discredited the long-held traditional spiritual leader, the *tapa'd*. This affects the only political-like institutions of Majang. Other studies also concur that the Majang has been the late comers in the 'ethnic territorial game' as compared to their neighbors during the transitional period of boundary demarcation⁵⁶. In fact, the absence of capable and effective leadership is still visible among the Majang. Second, the restructuring process failed to take the historical displacement and oppression of the Majang into account. The referendum simply followed the simple majority voting system. This favored the settlers in Yeki Woreda. Besides, due to low level of education and settlement in the deep jungle, very few Majang people participated in the referendum. For that reason, the reorganization process was to the advantage of the majority Highlanders and the Shekicho.

The Majang argued that contrary to ethno-linguistic restructuring, the Majang people are fragmented into three regional states. The indigenous people and the political elites alike view that the federal government used double standard in restructuring the country. For example, while the 17,000 Harari people obtained a regional status, the indigenous Majang people were fragmented into three regions. This reflects the very concept of 'relative deprivation'⁵⁷. Therefore, with its subsequent remapping of Ethiopia by ethnic lines, the Majang have felt very

⁵⁵ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 6.

⁵⁶ Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa...*, 1993.

⁵⁷ Relative deprivation refers to the discontent people feel when they compare their positions to others and realize that they have less of what they believe themselves to be entitled than those around them. Ted Gur described it as a gap between to which people believe they are rightfully entitled and that which they think they are capable of getting and keeping. Hence, Relative deprivation is considered as a cause of aggression. Relative deprivation causes frustration and then frustration creates a potential for collective violence. See for example, Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977); R. J. Rummel, *Understanding Conflict and War* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1977).

much that they have been marginalized politically. Since 1993 the Majang have tried to live together and establish 'greater Majang' within the federal structure though it has not yet materialized. Yeki was one of the most contentious and complicated *Woredas* in the Sheka zone that created tension and violent conflict between the Majang/Sheko and the Shekicho people.

4.3.2 Territorial Fragmentation: Majang Response

As has been stated above, the indigenous Majang people have faced a new chapter of political predicament after the introduction of ethnic-linguistic federal governance. When the people heard that Tapi was included into SNNPRS, they immediately sent an application to the federal government by rejecting the decision of the boundary commission⁵⁸. Nevertheless, the government failed to respond to their demand. Besides, the regional boundary that divides the Majang from their neighbor Sheka Zone of SNNPRS is ill-defined. Consequently, since 1991, almost within ten years interval, there had been three major violent conflicts along this border.

The First Majang/Sheko⁵⁹-Shekicho Violent Conflict: 1993

As hinted above, the Majang and their allied Sheko presented their concern immediately after the decision of the commission to place Tapi under SNNPRS. Instead, the discrimination and harassment against the Majang and the Sheko in Yeki was worsened. The Majang and Sheko in Yeki *Woreda*, the Sheko in the Benchi Zone and the Majang in Gambella believed they were discriminated and dominated by others. Yet, both the federal and regional governments failed to

⁵⁸ Interview with Honorable Wagine, Meti, 2014.

⁵⁹ The insecurity and fear induced by their powerful neighborhood (Shekicho) provides sufficient motivation to collaborate and establish alliance between the Majang and Sheko.

address the demand and grievances of the indigenous people. Then, the Majang and the Sheko in Yeki, Sheko and Godere *Woredas* organized to defend themselves and to regain their lost territory. The plan was to include Sheko *Woreda* from Benchi-Maji zone, Yeki *Woreda* from the Sheka zone and Godere *Woreda* from Gambella Region to establish their own special *Zone* partly due to the loss of Yeki and the effect of marginalization in their respective native *Woredas*.

According to key informants, the immediate cause of the conflict was that the Majang and the Sheko political elites heard a rumor that the Shekicho were preparing to attack the Majang-Sheko allied group. Right away, they decided to take a pre-emptive military action. After that, brief but intense violent conflict broke out in 1993 in and around Tapi for more than a week. The Majang-Sheko alliance successfully managed to put Tapi town of Yeki *Woreda* and Meti town of Godere *Woreda* under their control⁶⁰. They also shut down the traffic in and around the towns and kept their control for a few days until the EPRDF soldiers came for mediation⁶¹. Shortly, it also expanded up to Mizan Taferi of SNNPRS and Guraferda of Oromia region. Shekicho informants stated that the united front attacked civilians in the Yeki *Woreda* in several localities such as Michi, Alamo, Tsanu, Idris, Kokebe, Kome, Bechi, Tepi kebeles. The armed Majang also looted properties and kidnapped women and children. The government national defense forces intervened to control the situation based on the *Woreda* demand. Then, there was an open conflict between the local government police, the federal soldiers and the Majang-Sheko united front. Tadyos said, “The EPRDF soldiers sided with the Shekicho and attacked us. They have wrong information about us from the Shekicho leadership. The Shekicho deceived the EPRDF

⁶⁰ Sato, *Christianization through villagization...*, 569.

⁶¹ Ibid.

soldiers as if the Majang are war-mongering people and controlled Tapi with the military support of the OLF and the SPLA.” There are also people who said that the SPLA soldiers had allegedly supported the Majang⁶².

In the conflict, civilians and armed people lost their lives; there were many casualties and loss of property from both sides. About eight people from the Majang side died in the police station instantly⁶³. The rebels also killed more than a 100 people who were regarded as political opponents of the Majang⁶⁴ such as Shekicho and Highlanders.⁶⁵ The biggest loss, however, was from the government national defense force side and the Sheko local community. The Sheko incurred the biggest loss in their confrontation with the EPRDF soldiers at Tsanu *kebele*. In addition, according to informants, about 275 member of the national defense force died, chiefly in *Arogi kebele* battle. Most of them were the EPRDF freedom fighters who took part in the struggle against the Derg regime for 17 years⁶⁶ though government sources did not confirm it.

⁶² However, the Majang unreservedly rejected such allegations. They argued that the SPLA never participate in the conflict. In fact, they did not deny the fact that they have bought their modern and sophisticated weapons from the SPLA while they were retreating. In the eve of Derg regime downfall in 1991, the SPLA in Ethiopia was in a hurry to left the country after the EPRDF approached Dima. The SPLA had a base camp in Dima. From Dima the SPLA soldiers had left Ethiopia by way of two directions. While half of them went to South Sudan via Dima, the other groups left via Godere Missionary Post to Fignedo to Pouchela in the Sudan. Those who left via the Missionary Post stayed with the Majang for some time. The Majang gave them what they want without any complain because they were afraid of the highly armed SPLA soldiers. Informants said, “At that time, we have discussed the issue to defend ourselves but we prefer to keep quit and cooperate since we were poorly equipped and organized”. When they determined to leave the area, they started to sell their weapons. They sold to us AK47 cheaply from 200 to 300 ET Birr and single bullet up to 50 cents. In fact, the SPLA refuse to give and sale weapons to the Highlanders.” The Majang underlined, “except this brief incident we did not have that much relation with the SPLA. Rather, they have strong relation with the Nuer and the Anywaa community in Ethiopia”. FGD, Meti, March 2013.

⁶³ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2013.

⁶⁴ Sato, *Christianization through villagization...*, 569.

⁶⁵ Yeki *Woreda* has 22 *kebeles* and the Highlanders are the majority. According to the 2008 population census, the *Woreda* has 134,150.00 populations. Out of this, the share of the non-indigenous Highlanders is 75 percent, which is far greater than the indigenous peoples of Shekicho, Sheko and Majang, are. There is alleged evidence that the Highlander migrants were also behind the Majang and Sheko people demand of autonomous *Woreda*. Shekicho informants strongly believe that the Highlander migrants an indispensable role in organizing the two people under Sheko-Majangir United Front. The Shekicho informants stated that the Highlanders did this because it is very easy for them to manipulate these people either to secure their land possession or to get hold of new land from the Sheko and the Majang. The Highlanders are the richest people in the area by producing coffee for export.

⁶⁶ Unfortunately, we did not find other sources to confirm these figures.

After the conflict was put under control, the federal government established a Peace and Security Committee (hereafter the Committee) to study the root causes of the conflict and come up with a solution. Representatives from both regions were members of the committee. The committee studied the matter in detail for almost two months in light of the Transitional Charter and other available government policies. Then, on 9 March 1996, a peace conference was held in Tapi town to discuss on the committee's findings⁶⁷. About 319 representatives from 28 *kebeles* including elders, political cadres, militia, *kebele* leadership and police officers took part in the peace conference⁶⁸.

In the conference, the committee chairperson presented the root causes of the conflict and proposed its recommendations. According to the committee, the causes of the conflict were absence of accountable, responsive and inclusive local leadership in the *Woreda*, tribalism and parochial leadership and the dominance of one ethnic group (Shekicho) in the civil service, police and leadership. Furthermore, the committee underscored that lack of timely handling of societal grievances and the controversial issue of ownership in a roundtable discussion and the expansion of land acquisition by investors in the name of investment have caused the conflict and simmered tension among the local community. The committee also acknowledged the fact that the Majang people have faced discrimination and inequality in the Yeki *Woreda* administration.

Therefore, to deal with these critical problems, the participants of the conference passed a resolution, based on the committee recommendations, which stated that the *Woreda*

⁶⁷ See Minutes of the 1996 Tapi Conference.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

administration should provide equal access to education, civil service, police force, political participation at various levels to all peoples. It also underscored that minority peoples, especially the indigenous Majang and Sheko, must be given the opportunity to promote their culture and tradition according to their needs and aspirations⁶⁹. The motion also recommended that the *Woreda* leadership should return the land that was illegally taken in the name of investment from the indigenous people by investors.

Nevertheless, the committee failed to address the decisive demand of the Majang-Sheko special administrative *Woreda*. The interest of the committee's proposal and the final decision of the conference was to keep the status quo. In other words, based on the committee's proposal, the participants decided Yeki *Woreda* to remain in the Sheka administrative zone⁷⁰. The participant's statement stated that, firstly, the inclusion of Yeki *Woreda* into Godere did not get 50+1 support according to the Charter and the subsequent proclamations and border demarcation requirements. Hence, the inclusion of the *Woreda* into Godere *Woreda* of Gambella region has no support from other nations, nationalities and peoples in the *Woreda*. Secondly, the Majang people who live in Yeki *Woreda* have no border relation with the Godere *Woreda*.

After the conflict has subsided and the conference ended, the government arrested alleged perpetrators. More than one hundred and seventy Majang including the then Godere *Woreda* chief administrator were imprisoned. Thus far (2014), there are some Majang people imprisoned

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

in Masha, the seat of Sheka Zone. In relation to this, the Majang-Sheko informants contend that the government imprisoned only from the weak Majang and Sheko people without due process⁷¹. The 1993 violent conflict between the indigenous Majang/Sheko and the Shekicho was also the first organized Majang response to territorial fragmentation or whichever external threats. Earlier on, the Majang had not reacted violently to the loss of their land due to their dispersed settlement, small in number and military inferiority. Above all, it was due to their culture of retreat whenever an outsider approaches them and the absence of strong political institutions to organize resistance. The present ethnic-based self-governance dispensation has provided the opportunity and encouraged them to organize themselves and to re-act to territorial loss, encroachment, and threats to their survival. Majang's have also got a new military capacity due to access to fire arms from SPLA and Derg's demobilized soldiers⁷².

The Second Majang/Sheko-Shekicho Violent Conflict: 2002

After the Boundary Commission reorganized regional states, SNNPRS has done quite a few internal administrative restructuring due to NNP demand of their own self-governing administrative structure. For instance, the Keffa Zone of SNNPRS bordering Godere *Woreda* of Gambella region had been restructured several times. Previously, Sheka zone was within Region 11. With the unification of SNNPRS, Region 11 was divided amongst four Zones: Keffa, Sheka, Benchi, and Maji zones⁷³. In 1996/97, these zones were again molded back into two zones: Keffa-Sheka and Benchi-Maji with Bonga and Mizan Teferi as the seat of the zones respectively.

⁷¹ Interview with Fikere and Alemayehu, Meti, 2013.

⁷² FGD and Interview with key informants, Meti, 2014.

⁷³ Vaughan, *Response to Ethnic Federalism...*, 195.

Nonetheless, ever since the merging was made with a very limited consultation with the respective community⁷⁴, subsequently, the Shekicho people became infuriated and resolutely demanded separation from the Keffa-Sheka Zone. This was because of the fact that the merging of the two zones was really a disadvantage for the Shekicho people. For instance, the merging of the two zones has resulted in reducing the zone capital Masha into simple *Woreda* with very limited financial and resource flow⁷⁵. Besides, their demand was partly also fuelled and encouraged by the 1996 boundary decision of the government between Gambella and SNNPRS which gave part of the Sheko *Woreda* to the Dima Special *Woreda* of Gambella⁷⁶. Furthermore, the Shekicho people felt that their historical Mocha areas were lost to Majang nationality zone in Gambella and Oromia region. Hence, they claimed other two *Woredas* in these regions as well. Finally, they had the approval from the government and the two zones were re-instated⁷⁷. Now, the Shekicho people secured their own Sheka Zone of the SNNPRS. The Zone has three *Woredas*: Anderacha, Masha and Yeki. Masha town was served as its seat. Tapi became the seat of Yeki *Woreda*. These clearly show how the federal political order has encouraged the proliferation of *Woredas* and zones – to extract financial resources and leadership positions from the federal and regional governments.

Conversely, with the previously mentioned decision the most dynamic and firm demand of people of the special *Woreda* Majang-Sheko came again into the scene. Following the separation of Sheka and Keffa into two zones in 2001, the Majang and the Sheko people raised their

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid: 196.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

concern of domination by the Sheka people. As a result, once more simmering tensions prevailed in the Yeki *Woreda*.

In January 2001, the SNNPRS organized a conference in Tapi to discuss the issue for the second time to avoid bloodshed. Fifteen Majang, fifteen Sheko and twelve Manja representatives were invited to the conference. In addition, 2-3 representatives from various ethnic groups in the *Woreda*, President of the Sheka zone, Speaker of the Yeki *Woreda* Council and other officials participated in the conference. It was chaired by Abate Kisho, the former President of the SNNPRS. Representatives of the three ethnic groups were given the chance to present their demands in the conference. Accordingly, they demanded the establishment of Yeki *Woreda* as a special *Woreda* with Majang-Sheko people ownership right. Besides, they demanded to establish their own political party, due respect for the minority people (including the Manja people dignity and identity), and education for their children in their mother tongue⁷⁸.

Yet again, the meeting ended up without appropriately addressing the root cause of the simmering tension. The final decisions and priorities of the meeting were rather about training cadres for the coming election, to consider the Manja people and electing elders to deal with the problems. As the Yeki *Woreda* chief administrator noted, the SNNPRS Council as well decided that Yeki *Woreda* does not fulfill the requirements of a special *Woreda* given the fact that the *Woreda* is multiethnic area⁷⁹. The conference participants also endorsed the Council's decision. Finally, Abate Kisho made the following closing statement, which ridiculed the demands of the indigenous Majang and Sheko,

⁷⁸ In fact, their major aim was to merge Yeki *Woreda* and Sheko *Woreda* of Benchi-Maji zone with Godere *Woreda* of the Gambella Regional State.

⁷⁹ Sarah, *Response to Ethnic Federalism...*, 196.

...As I understood from our discussion, there is no significant problem concerning fair representation of ethnic groups in this Woreda. Answering the demand of special Woreda in Yeki is like separating water from milk since Yeki is an ethnic mosaic. Therefore, the regional government does not accept the issue of Yeki special Woreda and have no answer for it. Besides, the issue of indigenous does not hold water in this case. Adam and Eve were the native dwellers of the Earth. Everybody followed them. Hence, everyone has the right to live in a place of his or her preference. All people have the right to reside and benefit equally in a place they live...⁸⁰.

Consequently, after the meeting ended without providing significant solution to their basic demands, they established a legal and certified political party known as Sheko-Majangir People's Democratic Unity Organization (SMPDUO) in March 2001. They established their main office in Yeki *Woreda* and branch offices in Godere *Woreda* of Gambella and Sheko *Woreda* of Benchi-Maji Zone in SNNPRS⁸¹.

After that, they sent a letter of membership application to the Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Front (SEPDF)⁸². However, the SEPDF/EPRDF rejected their claim to become a partner of the SEPDF in a letter written by the then president of SNNPRS and the current Prime Minister Hilemariam Dessalign in November 2001. It clearly stated that the partners of the SEPDF/EPRDF are only Sheka people's Democratic Movement (SPDM) and Benchi-Maji

⁸⁰ *Minute of the January 2001 Meeting in Tapi.*

⁸¹ Sarah, *Response to Ethnic Federalism...*

⁸² Letter of the Region President to the Sheko Zone Administration, 2002

Peoples Democratic Organization (BMPDO)⁸³. It also gave a warning that the party acting in the name of SEPDF/EPRDF is a breach of law⁸⁴.

After the SEPDF/EPRDF utterly rejected their membership request, the SMPDUO took part in the 2001 election as an opposition party. In the election, the SMPDUO managed to win the majority in Yeki and Godere *Woreda* seats easily and claimed victor to administer the two *Woredas*. Unfortunately, the election board declared the SEPDF/EPRDF ruling party as winner⁸⁵. This caused new conflict for a second time. The Majang–Sheko political leadership and the communities believed that they lost the election because it was manipulated by the Shekicho people.

The conflict was also partly instigated by the visible success of neighboring people such as Dima special *Woreda*, incorporation of their lost territory from Sheka zone, and the Sheka zone winning of separation from Keffa zone⁸⁶. Again, this incident created a sense of ‘relative deprivation’. In addition, the two communities complained that there has been no fair development in the zone. For example, while Masha and other Shekicho *Woredas* gained much development, the Yeki *Woreda* has been neglected since 1991. Tapi town in Yeki *Woreda*, though economically strong and generate lots of money, Masha is a highly developed and benefited town. The indigenes were even very unhappy about the nomenclature of the zone i.e., ‘Sheka Zone’ since it implied that the Shekicho people are the ‘owner nationalities’ of the zone. Above all, the indigenous communities alleged that Shekicho dominance, despotism and

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ In fact, the dispatch also stated that though the SMPDUO is not accepted as a member of SEPDF/EPRDF, it has the constitutional right to participate in its own mandate.

⁸⁵ FGD with Majang and Sheko in Tapi, Tapi, 23 June 2014.

⁸⁶ Sarah, *Response to Ethnic Federalism...*

exclusion of the indigenous people from Yeki *Woreda* political process intensified even after 1993. The local government has been busy in intimidating and arresting the indigenes rather than coming up with tangible solution to address the legitimate demand of the communities. Therefore, again all levels of government failed to come up with final solution to the root causes of the crisis, i.e., Majang and Sheko people demand to establish their own special *Woreda* in their traditional land and thereby ending the political exclusion.

Consequently, a violent conflict has erupted again in Yeki and Godere *Woreda*, which lasted from March 4-8, 2002⁸⁷. First, the exchange of gunfire started in Tapi *Woreda* police station when the Majang-Sheko united front attempted to disarm the local police and militia. They faced tough resistance from the police and the militia. According to Majang informants, in the police station, the Sheka police members have killed 18 Majang instantly on March 4⁸⁸. With the support of the Red Cross, workers bought a coffin for the 18 corpse and buried them. The Red-cross workers also uploaded the picture of the deceased on an internet website to show the atrocity and injustice committed on the Majang people.

Then after, under the leadership of the former Derg regime army officer the Sheko-Majang, equipped with modern guns and spears, attacked Tapi from four direction; Aemberhane, Koynani, Gezimerati and Tsanu on 5 March 2002. First, they killed more than 40 Highlanders in a place called Koynani. When the attackers tried to disarm the Highlanders in Koynani, the Highlanders refused to do so, and a conflict broke out and left many people dead and wounded. Highlanders stated, “We feared that they would come back and attack us as they did in 1993, if

⁸⁷ Interview with Jako Zara, Tapi, 24 June 2014; Addisu Durami, Tapi, 23 June 2014.

⁸⁸ FGD, Chemi, 2013.

we surrendered. Thus, we attempted to stop the Majang advance to Tapi. Unfortunately, they killed those who attempted to stop them”. After they successfully defeated the Koynani resident Highlanders, the Majang advanced to Tapi town and started to attack around 1:00 PM on 5 March 2002⁸⁹. They killed some Shekicho local police and officials and selected richest highlander settlers⁹⁰.

Death toll remained unclear. Various sources speculated different figures. According to Majang informants, from their side at least 45 Majang and 100 Sheko were killed. Besides, about 400 Sheko and 494 Majang houses were burned down. According to EHRC, 24 people died, six people injured, about 1,177 houses burned down and 5800 people displaced⁹¹. The opposition party, the Southern People’s Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) speculated a much higher figure of 1,672 deaths⁹². According to an eyewitness account, “In *Koricha kebele* alone 1000 Sheko died”. In some Majang and Sheko *kebeles*, the dead bodies were buried by women as the men were either dead or in escape. There were very high number of deaths and casualties in Korcha, Tsanu, Addisberhan, and Darimo *kebeles*. According to Majang, the national defense force committed an atrocious crime against them again as manipulated and tricked by the Sheka people as the OLF controlled Tapi⁹³. A highlander informant in Tapi said, “The Sheko and the Majang mistook the intention of the military that it came to support the Shekicho and refused to stop killing. The opposition parties in Addis Ababa also opposed the illegal intervention of the federal police and demanded fair reaction from the government⁹⁴”.

⁸⁹ Interview with Mitiku, Aynalem, Tapi, 23 June 2014.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ EHRC, 2003; cited in Markos, *Ethnic-conflict and its Resolution...*

⁹² Sarah, *Response to Ethnic Federalism...*, 205.

⁹³ Interview with Ms Alpse, former member of Federal Police, Gambella, March 2015.

⁹⁴ Interview with Tadyos, Meti, 12 March 2013; Kassa Yilma, Tapi, 06 July 2014.

After the conflict has subsided, both the SNNPRS and the federal governments took some measures. The SNNPRS Police Commission established and sent an investigation team to the *Yeki Woreda* on 14 March 2002. The commission made an extensive investigation led by a person called Yasin Muhammed. Based on the team report, the regional police arrested some Majang and highlander settlers in Masha. Some people stated that the highlander migrant residents in Tapi also sided with the Shekicho inhabitants. The team also declared the SMPDUO as guilty of inciting conflict and controlling Tapi by the use of force⁹⁵. Nevertheless, there is an alleged complaint that the regional police investigation was biased as no single Sheka was found guilty.

Moreover, the federal government stationed the National Defense Force in *Tagata*, in Oromia Regional State, thirty kilometer away from *Masha Woreda*, to give a swift and timely response when a conflict erupts. Besides, the federal government and the SNNPRS government also established an additional investigative team. After thorough investigation, the team brought those people who were suspected of inciting and participating in the conflict to the Federal High Court of Mizan Teferi. The court proceeding started on 29 April 2004. The Federal High Court found 121 SMPDUO leaders, members and 247 Manja peoples guilty of failure to discharge their official responsibility and inciting and participating in armed conflict⁹⁶. The team found out that the *Yeki Woreda* police members, who are supposed to be imperial, sided with their respective ethnic groups. As a result, some of the police members as well as other officials were sacked

⁹⁵ Birhanu, 2006; cited in Markos, *Ethnic Conflict and its Resolution...*

⁹⁶ Ibid.

from their position and imprisoned. Some were sentenced to life imprisonment⁹⁷. Lastly, the SMPDUO party was outlawed and banned from any political activities.

The Shekicho informants contend that the Majang leadership and the local community in Godere and Mengesh *Woreda* played a role in organizing, giving training to the militants and taking part in the conflict. The MNZ also served as a shelter for the suspected criminals. Even the *Woreda* administration refused to hand over suspects to the Sheka zone police, as said by Shekicho leader. In Godere *Woreda* of Gambella region, the government tried to identify those who participated in the conflict. There was an alleged accusation that the Majang had a plan to kill the rich Highlanders in Godere *Woreda*. It was the arrival of the National Defense Force, before they turned back to Godere, that saved Highlanders in Meti⁹⁸. There is also anecdotal evidence that the Majang shared highlander's farmland in the rural area and house in Meti town amongst themselves. Consequently, officials in Godere *Woreda* were arrested including the chief administrator Belete and Beniyam Bekele. Mr. Belete died when he was in prison in Masha. Overall, informants said that the investigation was totally biased, unjustified and discriminatory⁹⁹.

To address the demands of the minority of the people, the regional government of SNNPRS took some measures. The Manja, the Sheko and the Majang in Yeki *Woreda* were represented at local, regional and federal level. The government also enrolled the children of the three ethnic groups in Araba Minchi Boarding School to improve their capacity¹⁰⁰. Some of the members of the

⁹⁷ Interview with Demelashi and Tadele Koyedido, Tapi, 26 June 2014.

⁹⁸ There plan was to control Yeki *Woreda* and then turn back to Godere *Woreda*.

⁹⁹ Interview with Fikere, Meti, 7 March 2013; Kassa Yilma, Tapi, 06 July 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Markos, *Ethnic Conflicts and its Resolution...*, 58.

banned SMPDUO party joined the SEPDF/EPRDF¹⁰¹. Recently, there has been a rumor that the federal government in collaboration with the House of Federation started to address the issue of Yeki *Woreda*. The federal government sent envoys to this contentious area and a dialogue started in Mizan Tefari in 2013. However, due to the sudden death of the Former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi the meeting was suspended¹⁰².

Yet, the Majang and the Sheko people felt discriminated and dominated by the Shekicho political leaders as key positions and decision making powers were still in the hands of the Shekicho political elites¹⁰³. Besides, these people have also strong interest to be with their family in the Majang Nationality Zone in Gambella region. The Majang and Sheko in SNNPRS and the Majang in Gambella Regional State strongly aspire to live together in the same political space in their ancestral land. Therefore, the issue is still an unfinished business and in deadlock. The violent incident in 2014 also confirmed this fact (See the discussion in chapter 7).

4.3.3 Ramifications of Territorial Fragmentation: Local Tyranny

Majang people territorial and political fragmentation has brought several significant ramifications. One of the major drawbacks has been local autocracy. The majority groups in their respective regional states dominated them in almost all aspects: the Shekicho in SNNPRS and the Anywaa and, now, the Nuer in Gambella region and the Oromo in Oromia regional state. As a result, they become the victims of exclusionary politics and local tyranny given that Majang territorial fragmentation has reduced Majang political status and influence in the politics of

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Interview (name withheld), Goshene, 2013.

¹⁰³ Markos, *Ethnic Conflicts and its Resolution...*, 59.

respective regions. Put it differently, with the new federal arrangement and restructuring process, they turned into a minority in all the regional states. Consequently, for the last two decades they have faced exclusion, domination and marginalization in the respective regions.

Consequently, the study area perhaps becomes one of the areas where inter-ethnic relations are the worst in the entire country. Predominantly, the frequency of violent conflict between the Shekicho, on the one hand, and the Majang and the Sheko on the other has been creating fear, anxiety and instability in the area. As a result, the local communities have felt insecure. This made the Majang people in the three regions very furious and disappointed. Taken as a whole, their political fragmentation not only reduced their territory but also their capacity to protect their land, forest and rights.

The subsequent chapters address these quandaries and Majang response in detail. In this section, a few illustrations of how the Majang have been under their rival's control in Yeki *Woreda* and Gambella region is provided below.

Yeki Woreda, Sheka Zone of SNNPRS

To start with, according to key informants, the Majang in SNNPRS in Sheka Zone became victims of local tyranny. After the Majang have been placed under the SNNPRS, the Sheka zone politicians treated the indigenous Majang people very badly¹⁰⁴. The dominant groups adopted an exclusionary politics. The Shekicho political elites exclude the Majang from participating in the politics of the area and the *Woreda* administration. In Sheka Zone, the Majang have unequal

¹⁰⁴ Interview (name withheld), Shone, June 2014.

participation in the zonal and *Woreda* political space. The Majang as well as Sheko peoples have been under the domination of the Shekicho people. For example, as the table below illustrates, Majang and Sheko representation in the *Woreda* council was insignificant. What is more, in the 1995 election for the Federal House of People’s Representatives, it was the Shekicho who was elected in Masha and Tapi *Woreda*¹⁰⁵. Furthermore, during the 2001 election, the Sheko-Majanjir Democratic Unity Party won control of the majority of Sheko *Woreda* in Benchi-Maji Zone¹⁰⁶. It also claimed victory in Yeki *Woreda* but the Shekicho elites supported by the *Woreda* election board denied them victory and caused deadly conflict in Tapi in 2002¹⁰⁷.

Table 3: Ethnic composition in Yeki *Woreda* election to council

No	Ethnic group	Representation in 1992	Representation in 2001
1	Amhara	111	16
2	Oromo	13	9
3	Tigrayans	4	3
4	Keficho	20	12
5	Shekicho	58	20
6	Majang	5	7
7	Sheko	9	10
8	Manja	-	4

¹⁰⁵ Markos, *Ethnic Conflict and its Resolution...*, 49-50.

¹⁰⁶ Sarah, *Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia*, (University of Edinburgh, 2003), 275.

¹⁰⁷ Interview (name withheld), Tapi, June 2014.

Source: Yeki *Woreda* election Office, cited in Berhanu, 2006

Besides, the Shekicho socially marginalized the Majang people. The Majang as well as the Sheko people in Yeki *Woreda* have been the most segregated communities racially, economically and politically¹⁰⁸. The minorities are stigmatized and discriminated; they feel alienated and estranged from their social and political environment; ultimately, they feel powerless. In the study area, inferiority stereotypes have made the minority ‘blacks’ groups vulnerable to being labeled socially inferior and intellectually limited. According to some informants, the Shekicho consider themselves superior to the indigenous Majang as well as Sheko in terms of language and culture. Some Majang and Sheko elderly informants from Alamo stated that the Shekicho did not see the Majang as equals and despised their way of life and language. This attitude of the Shekicho, they said, manifested themselves in the common saying of the Shekicho such as ‘*Beriya*’ and ‘*Shankilla*’ literally means ‘black.’ To illustrate, let us see the experience of a Majang informant and his family who migrated down from Yeki *Woreda*. He says that his family used to live in Yeki *Woreda*, in Sheka Zone. In Yeki *Woreda*, according to him, they were very much stigmatized and lived in subordination to the dominant Shekicho. They were considered and treated as second citizen in public service delivery, forestland ownership and so on. Later, his family and relatives decided to abandon their long held place and they came to Gelishi *kebele* of Godere *Woreda*. He added that following them, several Majang families came to Godere *Woreda* so as to evade Shekicho abuse and highlander migrant’s resource competition. One elderly Shekicho informant, 64, denied the above accusations saying that there had never been such discrimination. Indeed, such things are an

¹⁰⁸ The settlers in the area gave and called this people by different name but derogatory; ‘Tama’ for the Majang and ‘Shankilla’ for the Sheko.

entrenched societal tradition and practice. The law forbids such kind of discrimination and stigmatization but the administration does not enforce it¹⁰⁹. It is a kind of ‘non-formal process of institutionalized stratification’¹¹⁰.

More to the point, they were denied their constitutional right of primary education in their mother tongue despite their persistent demand of primary education in their mother tongue. It is only in MNZ and Benchi-Maji Zone that they have the chance of primary education in their mother tongue. They get primary education in Amharic while the Shekicho had started education in their own language five years before. Informants indicated that the Sheko people in Benchi-Maji zone obtained primary education in their language. Thus, they requested to adopt their curriculum even though it has not been materializes yet. Yeki officials pointed out that they have now allocated budget and completed preparation that they will start primary education in Sheko areas shortly¹¹¹. Similarly, in Oromia region, the Majang have no special rights of either education or appointment and representation¹¹².

In addition, local informants indicated that there is no infrastructural development in Yeki *Woreda*¹¹³. A Sheko informant said in an increasing resentment, “Yeki *Woreda* is a very resourceful area. Especially, it is known for its cash crop coffee. Considerable amount of tax has been collected every year. However, the entire budget from the *Woreda* source and federal

¹⁰⁹ For instance, the federal and the regional government instructs the Sheka zone administration to use some sort of equal participation and quota system but the zone did not enforce it. See for example *Minute of the January 2001 Meeting* in Tapi.

¹¹⁰ Milton J. Esman, *An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge: Polity Press Limited, 2004), 124.

¹¹¹ Interview, Tapi, June 2014.

¹¹² FGD with Majang in Yeki *Woreda*, Tapi, 24 June 2014.

¹¹³ One of the causes for the 2014 Tsanu violent conflict was also the absence of development in Tsanu *kebele* such as education and health service.

subsidy of Yeki *Woreda* is going to Masha.¹¹⁴ This was also confirmed by MOFA expert in MNZ, who said, “the Sheko people obtained social services in Dunchayi *kebele* build for Majang resettled villages. Relatively, they are socially, politically and economically marginalized communities in Yeki *Woreda*¹¹⁵.

The staff pattern of the police, the civil service, appointment and representation in Yeki *Woreda* does not reflect the *Woreda*'s multicultural context. According to informants, knowing Shekicho language is a precondition to get a job. This puts them in an extreme disadvantageous position in the appointment and job market. Consequently, the Shekicho are still dominant in the power-sharing arrangement and the civil service¹¹⁶. For instance, currently (February 2015) almost all of the Yeki *Woreda* cabinets were Shekicho. Even, in the *Woreda* police there are very few Majang and Sheko people¹¹⁷. Out of 121 Yeki *Woreda* police, there are only six Sheko and seven Majang employees¹¹⁸.

In addition, the minorities complained that though they are paying tax as resident in the *Woreda*, they are considered as ‘outsiders’ in their own land. For instance, the people of Majang and Sheko hardly obtained land in Tapi town. Besides, the Majang and Sheko people who have land for residence in Tapi town were very few. Other studies indicated that though following the 2002 deadly conflict between the Majang-Sheko group and the Shekicho, the Tapi town administration distributed land to the Sheko and Majang as the battle war remuneration; they sold it to the

¹¹⁴ Interview with Sheko police, Tapi, June 2014.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Tasew, Meti, 02 July 2014.

¹¹⁶ FGD with the Sheko, Tapi, 24 June 2014.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

settlers at a very low price contrary to article 40(3) of the FDRE constitution¹¹⁹. Furthermore, the Shekicho leadership gave forestland of the indigenous Majang and Sheko people to commercial farming without the consent of the local community. The *Woreda* leadership arbitrarily gave indigenes land to migrant Highlanders and Shekicho people. For instance, recently the zone leadership gave indigenes forest and farmland to a Shekicho investor in Tsanu and Dunchayi *kebele* of Yeki and Godere *Woreda* respectively. According to Yeki *Woreda* officials the land was leased to the investor was a free land leased based on the informed consent of the local community¹²⁰. Nevertheless, the local people reported that the land was a farmland of the local community and leased without an informed consent of the local community.¹²¹ First, the Yeki *Woreda* displaced people from the area in the name of forest reservation without any compensation as said by local people¹²². The local community also took the case to Yeki *Woreda* though the *Woreda* administrator provided no immediate and proper response¹²³. Some of the representatives of the community who lodged the complaints had been arrested. This has caused a violent conflict in the two *Woredas*.

What is worse, the indigenes also face the most awful systematic persecution in their homeland. The realities of the day-to-day experience were evidence for the local government's repressive policy. When they demanded their constitutional rights, they were tortured, arrested and sometimes forced to move to the Godere *Woreda* of Gambella regional state. According to the Majang/Sheko informants, the Shekicho zone and Yeki *Woreda* police, which is staffed largely

¹¹⁹ Markos, *Ethnic Conflicts and its Resolution...*, 47.

¹²⁰ Interview with member of Yeki *Woreda* cabinet and assigned to follow the border issue, Demelash, Tapi, 26 February 2014.

¹²¹ Interview with Debochi, Tapi, 23 June 2014.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ FGD with Sheko and Majang in Tapi, Tapi, 23 June 2014.

by the Shekicho, routinely uses torture and intimidation to silence the minority indigenous people. Nearly all people interviewed from the Majang as well as Sheko remarked that they have faced the worst systematic persecution in local governments in federal Ethiopia. Individuals in an interview reported the danger of being an educated Sheko and Majang. Anyone who has attempted to oppose the Shekicho political elites was either demoted or expelled from its job. Most of the time, the Shekicho political elites institute a false and exaggerated accusation against the Majang and Sheko educated elites and ordinary citizens. The Shekicho also held the Majang and Sheko responsible for the destruction of the forest. Besides, the Shekicho accused them as ‘messengers of neighboring state, Eritrea’ and religious fundamentalists’. They labeled them as “*Tsere selam hayloch*’ (anti-peace elements). Such accusation is now widely used against the Sheko and the Majang. For instance, in June 2014 without any legal procedure they arrested one Majang investor who was working to invest in the area in mining. In addition, they arrested Tilahun Daka, Head of Security Administration in Tapi town. At the time of the research, according to informants, there were more than 150 Sheko and Majang prisoners in Masha prison¹²⁴. Besides, in the case of Yeki *Woreda*, promoting social, economic and political change can lead to severe consequences on minorities, such as losing their positions, jobs, freedoms and their lives. There has been arbitrary imprisonment and restrictions on freedom of expression, which is one of the fundamental elements of a free society.

Because of exclusion and domination, many Majang were displaced to MNZ. Most of the Majang and some Sheko educated people and political elites were employed and appointed in MNZ. Later, this also created dispute between MNZ Majang and Yeki *Woreda* Majang and

¹²⁴ It is difficult to assess its actuality at this time due to the ongoing simmering tension and conflicts.

Sheko¹²⁵. Besides, the Shekicho people continued to encroach into the indigenous Majang territory. While the Majang felt territorially fragmented, the Shekicho political elites as well felt that their historical Mocha areas were lost to Majang nationality zone of Gambella and Oromia regions. For that reason, after they secured control of Yeki *Woreda*, the Shekicho politicians have started to encroach and interfere into MNZ territory. For instance, the study shows that neighboring Shekicho people invaded Majang land of Gemadero, Dunchayi and Teti forest areas. There was also a boundary controversy over Gengeboz and Kengor sub-kebele between Godere and Yeki *Woreda*. The Majang accuse of the Shekicho that there has been a boundary intrusion and illegal settlement in Gengeboz and Kengor sub-kebele of Godere *Woreda* after the boundary demarcation¹²⁶. The zone vice-chair said, “Gengeboze is part of Godere *Woreda*. Nevertheless, about 280 people from SNNPRS illegally settled there by clearing our forest. We tried to evict them but we could not succeed due to several reasons. Now the two zones are discussing the matter to resolve it peacefully¹²⁷”.

Moreover, the Shekicho are crossing the Gemadero River (a boundary between the two zones) and taking land illegally in MNZ. In Kokori River areas, people from the Sheka zone are invading and selling Majang people forestland aggressively¹²⁸. Key informants said that some of the Shekicho invaders have about 200 to 300 hectares of land in their ownership without any legal certificate¹²⁹. The Majang underlined that group and individual free-raiders from Yeki *Woreda* are massively migrating to Majang territory due to weak governance and legal

¹²⁵ Before the conflict there was a solidarity act – Meti Majang ‘imported’ educated Majang and Sheko from Tepi to counterbalance the demographic growth of the Highlanders in Majang Zone where they have already become the majority.

¹²⁶ Interview with Yimami Faris, the then Vice-Head of MNZ, Meti, 19 May 2013.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Interview with Godere *Woreda* security expert, Meti, 25 June 2014.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

ambiguity. As a result, the Shekicho people gradually became the majority in Kabo and Gumari *kebeles* of MNZ¹³⁰.

The Shekicho were not only encroaching into Majang territory but also systematically displacing significant Majang from their ancestral land. For the last two decades, considerable Majang have been displaced in Yeki *Woreda* and settled in Godere *Woreda* especially in Gelishi and Goshene *kebeles*. In 2008, supported by the Sheka zone leadership, the Shekicho in these two *kebeles* demanded secession from MNZ to join Sheka. The Shekicho in these two *kebeles* MNZ argued that since 2001 the Majang leadership ignored the two *kebeles* in every aspect of development¹³¹. From this perspective, the Majang view their powerful neighboring Shekicho people as a threat to their survival.

Overall, during the past decades, the exclusion, marginalization and repression of the two ethnic groups have continued unabated. Their political participation and representation shows few improvements. The dominant Shekicho has continued to exclude the Majang and the Sheko in all the three branches of government. They have packed the bureaucratic structure with their own ethnic groups. Thus, the minority Majang and Sheko in Yeki *Woreda* feel statelessness due to persecution and discrimination in their ancestral land. The name of the Zone is also drawn from the Shekicho name, Sheka. No Majang ever serve as head of Yeki *Woreda*. Other studies also confirm that Majang-Sheko people are insecure and dominated in SNNPRS. For instance, Vaughan stated that “Sheko-Majangir resentment seems to have focused both on the relative dominance by other indigenous groups of the two SNNPNRS zones they inhabit (Sheka by

¹³⁰ Kabo is the largest *Kebele* in terms of size and population in Godere *Woreda*.

¹³¹ FGD with Shekicho, Kabo, 2013.

Shekicho, and Benchi-Maji by Benchi) and also on the influx-and relative wealth of outsiders in local urban and rural areas.¹³²” The Majang and Sheko have very limited rights and participation in Yeki *Woreda* while the Shekicho are clearly dominant. In Yeki *Woreda*, we have observed a pattern of inter-ethnic relation what Esman (2004) termed as ‘exclusionary domination’ in which mobilized ethnic community usually in control of the state apparatus, excludes, limits or otherwise subordinate members of other ethnic communities¹³³. In other words, it refers to “a structure of ethnic stratification with un equal rights, status and opportunities available to individuals due to entirely their ethnic origins”¹³⁴.

4.3.4 Continued Local Tyranny and ‘Shekicho Irredentism’: The Third Shekicho-Majang/Sheko Conflict

In June 2014, news has been spread about the burning of over 1300 houses due to conflict between the Sheka and Sheko ethnic groups in southern region. An unidentified number of people have reportedly been killed. Suspects that are alleged to have caused the conflict have been arrested. The researcher was in the area of conflict witnessing the development of the conflict minute by minute.

Sources disclosed that the major cause was the mining location found in Gambella bordering area in Gubeta *kebele*. The Tsanu residents disclosed that they requested a license for mining from Sheka zone after the Sheko people did, but when they were refused, they went to Majang zone and obtained the license. Yet, the Sheka zone granted the location to other Shekicho

¹³² Sarah, *Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia*..., 276.

¹³³ Esman, *An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict*, 120.

¹³⁴ Ibid: 120.

developer and when the Shekos were refused access, a conflict broke out and the security guard who was in charge of securing the location was killed. As a result, the conflict escalated and since the Sheko ethnic members were forcing the Sheka members to evacuate from the location property was damaged and people were killed. The residents who reported the killing of a special force police member said that the regional government that observed the seriousness of the conflict reported the issue to the federal police, which intervened and eased the conflict. They added that some members of the defense force have been stationed in the area and the federal police have returned to its duty station. The residents disclosed that the Gambella region was helpful in resolving the conflict.

People and businesspersons that were alleged to have involved in the conflict between the two ethnic groups have been arrested and they were awaiting an appearance before the court. Many residents whose houses were burnt to the ground during the conflict have left their living areas and sheltered in Tapi town. If the federal government and the regional government fail to provide immediate resolution to the issue, the residents underlined that the issue may lead to a much worse conflict.

The attempt to talk to the Sheka zone chief administrator to obtain explanation regarding the conflict was not successful. However, the Tapi town administration prosecutor Mr. Assefa Demessie has replied to the inquiry. According to him, the conflict occurred in the Yeki *kebele* located 60 and 70 KM away from Tapi town. He also explained that there are people that fled to Tapi town and according to the information at hand about 129 houses have been burnt to the ground. Mr. Assefa, disclosing the difficulty of getting information due to remoteness of the

area, stated that residents whose houses were burnt to the ground were sheltered in Tapi town. He indicated that there is relatively peaceful condition in the area and that he does not have detail knowledge of the status of the conflict at the moment.

The Sheka zone land lease to investor further complicated this simmering tension in 2012¹³⁵. The Sheko in the area strongly refused the granting of their land and immediately sent an application to the Yeki *Woreda* administration. The local people linked land to the investors to the Shekichoization of their land¹³⁶. Nevertheless, the Sheko did not get any solution for their demand. Then after, Tsanu *kebele* people discussed the matter and demanded to secede from Yeki *Woreda* to join MNZ¹³⁷. They have also rejected to pay tax to Yeki *Woreda*. Furthermore, MNZ officials stated that the Shekicho investor named Mr. Getu also took land from Dunchayi *kebele*¹³⁸. The Majang people said that the mineral area belongs to Godere *Woreda* whereas the Shekicho said it is within Yeki *Woreda*.

This simmering tension changed into violent conflict when the guards of the investor, Mr. Getu, killed a Sheko farmer in February 2014. The local community tried to farm their land, which is within land that was given to the investor¹³⁹. One day, the guards of the investor and one Sheko farmer clashed when the farmer tried to farm in the investor's land. This disagreement grew to a violent conflict and the guard killed the Sheko farmer¹⁴⁰. The family and relatives of the deceased burned down the property of the investor estimated about 2 million ETB in revenge. After that,

¹³⁵ Interview with Tasew, Meti, 02 July 2014.

¹³⁶ Here it is important to mention that there are also some Shekicho living in Godere *Woreda*, particularly in Gumari and Kabo *kebele*.

¹³⁷ Interview (name withheld), Tapi, 23-24 June 2014.

¹³⁸ Interview with Demelash, Tapi, 26 February 2014.

¹³⁹ FGD with Sheko, Tapi, 24 June 2014.

¹⁴⁰ The guard was arrested and now he was in prison at the time of data collection. Interview with Demelashi and Ms Kassechi, Tapi, 26 June 2014.

about nine houses of the Sheko people in Gubeta sub-kebele were burned down by unknown people but Shekicho police was suspected. Some local people said that the Shekicho police burned the houses while the Shekicho officials asserted that a group of Sheko robbery and Dunchayi Majang cooperative action burned the houses. Officials in Yeki stated, “The problem is a direct target against the Shekicho. The interference of the MNZ caused the problem. The Sheko obtained protection from the Dunchayi Majang. We are reaching the Sheko through Dunchayi Majang representatives on behalf of the Tsanu Sheko.”¹⁴¹

The whole Gubeta sub-kebele (400) Sheko people were displaced and moved to Dunchayi *kebele* and the nearby jungle since August 29, 2014. Some of them, especially the men, entered the jungle. Displaced informants told to the author that about 8 women delivered in the forest without medical help, proper food and shelter. People in and around the controversial area are moving into Tapi and other areas¹⁴². Highlanders in Dunchayi *kebele* of the Godere *Woreda* are also leaving the area in fear of further confrontation as it did in 2002¹⁴³. The researcher has also witnessed some of these incidents. For instance, on June 25, 2014 only, about seven buses full of people left the area and arrived in Tapi town. They feared that the 2002 incident might happen again. Some of 8th grade students did not take national exam due to fear of conflict. Sheko children have stopped going to school.

Immediately, Yeki *Woreda* police and SNNPRS special force were deployed in the disputed area. They established temporary police cluster in Tsanu to restore peace in the area and to protect the community property according to the demand of the local people. The MNZ also

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Interview with Sheko who work as a police for 20 years, Tapi, 24 June 2014.

deployed local militia and few police in the disputed area. The Yeki officials said, “The boundary tension can be likened to the one between Rama and Adiquala of Eritrea and Ethiopia.” It seems a conflict between two sovereign neighboring states. The security forces started to arrest, intimidate, and purge the indigene civilian and political appointees without adequate evidence and due process of law¹⁴⁴. In this regard, local informants argued that the Shekicho are arresting innocent civilians and political appointees without any evidence. Every Majang and Sheko was a potential suspect. The Shekicho officials were putting undue influence on the local community. As a result, most of Tapi Majang and Sheko officials and experts are fleeing in fear of arrest. Relatives and families of arrested people are afraid to visit them. Ato Tasew, MNZ from MoFA, underlined that the problem arises from Yeki *Woreda* officials labeling and identifying 12 Sheko people as rebels¹⁴⁵. It was after this incident that the community left the area and fled to Dunchayi and Gelishi *kebele* in MNZ¹⁴⁶. This changed the dynamics of the conflict that had involved the Majang in MNZ.

Majang officials and experts underlined that the main target of the Sheka zone is to expand their boundary in all directions. They do not want the demarcation process to happen. They also stated that the Shekicho are crossing the Gemadero River and taking land illegally in MNZ. Gemadero River marks the boundary between the two zones. In Kokori River, the Sheka zone people are also grabbing and selling land aggressively. They have 200-300 hectares of land in their possession. Some Shekicho people who grab land are from the Enabero and Agero clans. In addition, the Shekicho from Yeki *kebele* are also selling land to Amhara and Tigray immigrants

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Tasew, Meti , 02 July 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Interview(name withheld), Meti, 02 July 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

in Gengebozi area after the demarcation of the boundary¹⁴⁷. It seems that there exist new economic interest networking between the Highlanders and the Shekicho.

Consequently, the above-mentioned minor incident and bubbling tension escalated into large-scale violent conflict on 30 June 2014 around Gubeta sub-kebele in Tsanu. The place of the dispute is Dunchayi and Tsanu *kebele*¹⁴⁸. Dunchayi is one of the *kebeles* of Godere *Woreda* while Tsanu is one of the 22 *kebeles* of Yeki *Woreda*. In Tsanu *Woreda*, the Majang and the Sheko are highly inter-married and socialized with neighboring Dunchayi *kebele* of MNZ. While Dunchayi is inhabited by the Majang, Tsanu is Sheko dominant area. Tsanu is also a place where the Derg resettled farmers in 1985. During the Derg period, Dunchayi was under Yeki administration. The immediate cause of the violent conflict was the lowering of federal flag to show his anger and opposition in Tsanu by a Sheko youth called Teka Tama in April 29, 2014. He and his followers exchanged gunfire with the Yeki *Woreda* police and the police retreated to Tapi.

The insurgents attacked the cars of Sheka Zone police. Eyewitness accounts indicated that many people were killed and injured. The researcher has also witnessed injured *kebele* militias and a dead body of a highlander in Yeki *kebele*. A significant number of people are also displaced not only from Tsanu *kebele* but also from other areas in both regions. For example, many people left Yeki *kebele* and settled in Gendekore and Gengebozi in Godere *Woreda* in MNZ and Tapi town. Yeki *kebele* is about five kilometers away from Meti town while Dunchayi is 34 kilometers away from Meti town via Tapi town. The Majang were also displacing highlander immigrants in

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Godere *Woreda* security expert, Meti, 25 June 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Tsanu is also an area where in the 2002 conflict lots of people lost their lives.

Gelishi *kebele* by force. Several houses were also burned down in and around Mersha forest in Gingebeiti sub-kebele on 3 July 2014. The researcher witnessed the displacement of lots of Highlanders from Gelishi to Meti town on July 1-5, 2014. The researcher also saw Majang police patrols moving to Dunchayi via Goshen *kebele*. On July 2, there were federal police deployed in Meti town to control the situation. Now, the aim and target of the Sheko and Majang joint revolt is to expand to “liberating Yeki *Woreda* from the Shekicho domination.¹⁴⁹” This was also the major aim of the two groups in the 1993 and 2002 conflict. There has been a very serious fighting between the two groups on 30 June 2014 to 7 July 2014. The conflict claimed the lives of many people even though contradictory figures are issued by different sources. About 130 houses were also burned down according to local private newspapers¹⁵⁰.

Eyewitness accounts indicated that so many people died in the conflict. Unconfirmed reports indicated that as many as 35 people were killed and 58 injured in the conflict. Many people were also displaced to flee the fighting. According to local private newspapers, about 130 houses were also destroyed by fire¹⁵¹. Based on the Yeki *Woreda* and Sheka zone request, Federal Police and national defense force intervened to control the situation. After the arrival of national defense force and Federal police, the situation seems to subside for the time being. Actually, until August 2014, the boundary continued to be a hot spot for conflict. The rebels threatened to attack Tapi town and put under MNZ administration¹⁵². The Majang and the Sheko were always stopped by police and questioned.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with a Sheko civil servant, Tapi, 07 July 2014.

¹⁵⁰ Reporter, Issue no. 14831, 14 July 2014.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Interview with a Sheko civil servant, Tapi, 07 July 2014.

Various levels of government intervened to resolve the current boundary controversy between the MNZ and the Sheka Zone. For instance, MOFA Minister, Dr. Shiferaw Teklemariam, visited the area after the violent incidents happened at the end of March 2014. He discussed with the leadership and community representatives from the two zones in Tapi town at Green Coffee Guest House. In the Meeting, both parties agreed to solve the problem. They also established a peace committee of 10 people from Tsanu and Dunchayi *kebele* representatives. The committee is also assigned to return the displaced Tsanu people to their home.

Besides, the heads of security administration of the two regions also visited the area and instructed the respective *Woredas* to resolve the problem peacefully. Accordingly, the two zones designed a joint action plan to resolve the issue peacefully. They had a meeting in Tsanu *kebele*. Demlashi stated, “During the meeting the MNZ representatives stressed the issue of boundary demarcation. To raise boundary issue after 23 years is like igniting conflict.” However, until August 2014 insecurity continued to prevail in the controversial area. The joint report stated that the displaced people have returned into their home. However, the displaced local people are also still in the jungle and neighboring *kebeles* without proper support.

On October 21-22, 2014, the government conducted peace-conference in Tapi to address the contemporary conflict between Gambella and SNNPRS neighboring *Woredas* sponsored by Dr. Shiferaw, Minister of MoFA. In the conference, “anti peace elements”, “narrow-minded people”, arrogance, illegal weapon trafficking, land-related problems, serving as a messenger to foreign forces and rent-seeking amongst the leadership have been identified as the cause of conflict. It was also stated that a party of “yetikure hayilochi abiyot’ (Black Forces revolutionary

Party) was established recently; ostensibly based on a ‘racial’ solidarity between the Majang and the Sheko¹⁵³. The participants established a joint committee and vowed to resettle the displaced community and to bring those perpetrators before court. Local informants however deny that no such party exists in reality. They argued that the government is externalizing its shortcomings. According to the researcher investigation, it is indeed a mere allegation or labeling.

MOFA underway various works with a view of solving the conflict sustainably in collaboration with Federal and Regional Security Forces¹⁵⁴. For instance, with the intention of assuaging the dispute and disagreement between communities and bringing peace to the area, thousands of people have participated in forum discussions. In the forums, 37,009 people (6,567 women) participated: 240 religious leaders, elderly people and popular personalities, 1,707 civil servants, 5,767 members of administrative structure¹⁵⁵. The team of the federal investigation also assigned to Majang, Sheka and Bench Maji Zones is reinforcing its investigation of the criminal activities. About 18 suspects have been arrested with the collaboration of the Federal police, regional police special force, and their case is under investigation. In general, except the three *Kebeles*, all the zones show stability and security. In addition, all the people that have been displaced and staying in Majang Zone have returned to their living areas. Out of the 1700 people that were displaced from the Sheka Zone, 93% have been returned. However, the people displaced from the Kuki, Uyaka and Kumetya *kebeles* of the Bench Maji Zone Guraferda *Woreda* have not been returned home due to the security concerns¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵³ Interview with Kiros, Conflict and Early warning expert in the MoFA, Addis Ababa, 17 February 2015.

¹⁵⁴ MOFA Report, March 2015.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

4.3.5 Majang Experience of Local Tyranny in Gambella region

The Majang in Gambella region were in a better position than the Majang in Yeki *Woreda* and other areas. Yet, like the aforementioned Yeki *Woreda*, the Majang were also victims of local tyranny in Gambella region. In this regard, the Majang in MNZ very often complained about the Anywaa exclusive dominance of public space and the political space in the Gambella Regional State¹⁵⁷. Practically, there is a real political and development unevenness in the regional politics. This lopsidedness is reflected in several domains. Some scholars have also acknowledged Anywaa dominant status in Gambella region. For instance, Dereje (2006:217), states that the Anywaa and the Nuer are the ones who have dominated the political process in Gambella regional state. Specifically, the Majang people are complaining about the share of regional material and positional goods. An informant said, “We have a rich area. We have coffee, honey, Maize and ample fertile land. Yet, we are very poor by any standard.” One of the key informants, Yisaac states, “There is better school, health, electricity, road facilities in Anywaa Zone. They allege that the Anywaa and the Nuer are taking the lion’s share and they were awfully at disadvantage. Evidences show that the Majang have been victims of Anywaa’s continued dominance and exclusion in Gambella region. A few illustrations of how the Majang have been victims of tyranny are discussed below.

MNZ is the least developed area even in relation to the standard of the Gambella Regional State. Despite the fact that there is physical expansion of infrastructure in MNZ, lack of proper education, health facilities, road, electricity, potable water, etc is still evident in MNZ. Put another way, though the education sector and other social services have undergone impressive

¹⁵⁷ Kurimoto, *Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Anywaa...*, 900.

expansion there are still several problems and challenges. To start with, education facilities are still few even in Gambella region set in physical expansion, work force and number of students. There are challenges to implement the mother tongue education primary level. There are only very few Majang who were trained to teach in the vernacular. There were only 24 Majang vernacular teachers, of which only 4 of them have diploma. The rest were teachers with certificate (10+1). The absence of trained work force and materials for the delivery of educational services in indigenous/local languages was also a factor affecting mother-tongue education. The total number of Majang students enrolled in school was also very low. The table below illustrates that those enrolled in schools in Godere *Woreda* in 2013/14 were Highlanders. The number of alternative basic education (ABE) and students enrolled was also extremely very low. In Godere *Woreda*, there was only 12 ABE. The number of Majang students enrolled was only 523 (248 male and 275 female) in 2013/14 academic year¹⁵⁸. This was because of uneven distribution of resource.

Table 4: The 2013/14 Majang students enrolled in School in Godere *Woreda*

Level	Majang	Highlanders
first cycle (1-4)	856	6218
second cycle (5-8)	679	4924
high School (9-10)	205	1181
preparatory school (11-12)	8	516

¹⁵⁸ Godere *Woreda* Education Bureau, 2014.

Source: Godere *Woreda* education Bureau

There is also a poor health facility in the Majang Zone. The distribution and accessibility of health institutions was also very poor. For the last two decades, there is no single hospital in the zone. The region hospital located in Gambella town is too far from MNZ. Most of the time, the people use Aman Hospital, located in Benchi-Maji zone of SNNPRS, for emergency. Actually, the zone has five health centers, located in Godere *Woreda* (2) and Mengesh *Woreda* (3)¹⁵⁹. There are also 21 health posts: 10 in Godere *Woreda* and 11 in Mengesh. It has also 4 clinics in Godere and 3 in Mengesh *Woreda*¹⁶⁰. Yet, these health institutions are poorly furnished. They have poor quality and lack of medical equipment and medicine. In relation to this, an informant, with disappointment, underlined:

There are two Woredas in our zone. Mengesh Woreda has no road that connects it with Godere Woreda. There is no electricity, mobile network and health provision. As a result, pregnant women are dying due to birth complication¹⁶¹. Recently, about ten women have died due to absence of health services. The only option is Aman Hospital in Mizan, Benchi-Maji zone of SNNPRS. Aman Hospital is too far from here. Let alone a hospital, we do not have Health posts, which could give full service to the community. It is a pity that the existing health posts have no medicine and other medical equipments¹⁶².

¹⁵⁹ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 73.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Now, the researcher has observed that there is road construction that connects Godere and Mengesh *Woreda*. Electricity is also under construction. I have seen Electric poles are erected in the way to Mengesh.

¹⁶² Interview with Yisaac, Kumi, 15 March 2013.

The researcher's personal observation has also confirmed this fact. Pact Ethiopia reports also revealed that there are several health posts in MNZ but many of them have poor quality and suffer from lack of equipment and medicine. In fact, at the time of data collection, a hospital was under construction in Kumi *kebele* though its progress was very slow.

In addition, Godere *Woreda* has suffered from lack of clean water. Water is not easily available throughout the zone. The statistics shows that only 17.8% of the population has access to potable water supply sources in Godere *Woreda*¹⁶³. Most of the local community is dependent on river water as the main source of drinking water¹⁶⁴. However, the river water is under constant threat since watershed of the area can be seriously damaged because of commercial investment as well as pollution on account of wastages of coffee processing machines. Besides, the local community driven out of the forest (as the ensuing chapters will illustrate) is exposed to serious food insecurity. Consequently, the Majang were suffering from lack of dietary food¹⁶⁵.

Furthermore, the Majang representatives underlined that MNZ infrastructure is below the standard as compared to other nationality zones in Gambella regional state. Infrastructure is pretty much under developed. In Anywaa and Nuer zone, relatively there are asphalted roads that connect *Woreda* to *Woreda*¹⁶⁶. There is an asphalt road from Gambella to the border Pugnwedo. Itang *Woreda* is also connected with its *kebeles* and other *Woreda* in a standard asphalted road". Indeed, almost all roads in MNZ are dry weather roads. The MNZ capital Meti Town is about 317 km away from the regional capital Gambella town due to absence of proper road from

¹⁶³ Pact Ethiopia, *Land Use Land cover and Change detection...*, iii.

¹⁶⁴ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, iii.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid: 72.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Ms Shewye, Meti, July 2014.

Gambella town to Meti town. The road passes through SNNPRS and Oromia regions to reach Meti town. Likewise, the road between Mengesh *Woreda* capital, Godere Mission and Meti town of Godere is a very poor dry weather road that is only about 65 km. The researcher observed that Mengesh *Woreda* has no access to road. Pact report revealed that both districts of MNZ are the lowest in the road networks and transportation facilities. Particularly, Mengesh *Woreda* is very poor in this regard and this made it relatively isolated and inaccessible area¹⁶⁷.

It was also the researcher's observation that road networks between *kebeles* and *Woreda* capital and *kebeles* are extremely very poor. Taken as a whole, there are no proper roads that connect one *kebele* with the other: Godere *Woreda* with Mengesh *Woreda*, MNZ with Gambella region, SNNPRS, Oromia and so on. As a result, there is very limited public transport service to link all *kebeles* in the study area. Besides, the telephone service was not developed except Meti town. Incontestably, these acute absences of proper road and telephone networks have very clear social, economic and administrative implications. At the time of data collection, gravel road was under construction from Meti to Mengesh *Woreda*.

In general, it can be said that there is lack of state institutions in MNZ. Civil servants are paid every three months. The state seems to have been absent in the study area. No protection for the indigenous community though there is a ministry (Ministry of Federal Affairs) established to provide special assistance to such areas. The Majang argue that there is a problem in budget allocation in Gambella region. Most of the capital and recurrent annual budgets have been allocated unfairly to the Anywaa and the Nuer¹⁶⁸. As key informant noted:

¹⁶⁷ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, iii.

¹⁶⁸ FGD with Majang, Meti, 2014.

Now our zone has a budget deficit. As a result, it is unable to pay salary to its civil servants. We are paying salary after 90 days.¹⁶⁹” They criticized the budget allocation which was largely based on number of population. They contend that “there is always a deficit in population census in our region. It is a big politics in our region. It has several implications. The Anywaa are manipulating it. For example, our people in Abobo are always counted as Anywaa.” The Anywaa always feel superior to the Majang¹⁷⁰.

The Majang also contend that power sharing at regional level have been unfair since 1991. Key and important positions such as presidency, vice presidency have been allocated to the Anywaa and the Nuer. The Majang have only those powers that have no significant influence. A key informant underlined, “Our influence in the regional decision-making process is awfully minimal.”¹⁷¹ The Majang further argued that until 2002 we have only *Woreda* status due to the regional government undue influence and persistent rejection.

In addition to unfair share of regional material and positional goods, the people in Majang zone are tremendously despondent about the regional government influence and interference in the local politics. For example, the regional government interfered in MNZ appointment, representation and in the Zone High Court Ruling which negatively affects the zone’s autonomy.

¹⁶⁹ Concerning budget deficit, some people, however, argued that the budget deficit is a result of unwise use of budget by the zone leadership. They have used budget for salary for their *Par Diem* illegally. Due to salary deficit, in 2014 schools are closed for two months. The researcher saw high school students demonstrating in front of the Zone administrative office in this month March 2013. Many civil servants are leaving the zone. Most of the zone bureaus have no stationary at all. The researcher was surprised that when he asked them a supportive letter to sector offices but the secretaries told me “we have no A4 paper to print your letters. Let us borrow from other offices. Sector offices have no sufficient room for work. In 4 by 4 rooms, the researcher saw 6 to 8 people.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Yisaac, Kumi, 15 March 2013.

¹⁷¹ Interview (name withheld), Meti, June 2014.

Despite the fact that the Zone council is the highest authority in the MNZ, practically the role and power of the zone council is derailed by the regional government undue interference. The regional government interfered in the zone appointment process. The regional government appoints zonal as well as key *Woreda* officials. One of the former federal MP, in an increasing resentment, said:

Majang Nationality Zone Council is a rubber-stamp institution. On the one hand, it is under the influence and control of regional government. For instance, in zonal appointment, all Sector Bureau Heads appointees have been screened and selected at regional level. We do not have a role in selecting and evaluating the appointees. Everything is done at regional level and we are simply expected to approve the candidates of the regional government. Sometimes, it is the Zone Party leadership and the Zone chief administrators who know the name of the candidates. As a result, appointed officials are the tools of the regional government to control us. Our officials are accountable to the regional leaders than the people and the zone council. Therefore, what do we mean by self-government? I do not understand. It is a paradox.

This has been due to the political and economic incentives of controlling MNZ by the regional political leadership perhaps because it is the only cash crop producing area, as such a higher economic stake, including forest resources. Besides that the existence of forest-related corruption and interest networks that span from the local, the regional to the federal level.

The regional power asymmetry is also evidenced by the regional government interference in the zone affairs. The regional government also interfered in the decision of the MNZ courts. At the

present, it becomes a common happening that most of the decision of the zone have been either rejected or ignored at regional level. A classic example is the Majang Zone High Court Rulings on Deacon Yehiyis case who claimed to be a witchdoctor. He cheats and hurt people using illegal medicines. The people of MNZ also held a peaceful demonstration against him. The Majang High Court looked into the case thoroughly and ruled against him. He was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment and confiscation of his property, which he has obtained illegally by deceiving people. Then, he appealed to the regional Supreme Court. The Supreme Court annulled the Lower court verdict and set him free. The court has also ordered the return of the property and money (80,000.00 ETB) confiscated from him. The people of the zone were extremely dissatisfied. The people are questioning the fairness of the decision. Honorable Jaleta Bulti, member of the regional zonal council and the head of the zone council office, stressed;

The people are extremely annoyed and desperate that they are saying, "Is there justice and law in this country? It is an embarrassment. Justice is coming under the influence of the rich. If you have money, you can do whatever you want to do. It is like that. We have raised the issue in the regional council regular meeting. It was a very contentious and passionately debated topic. It is undeniably a rent-seeking behavior.

The regional government firmly argued that the Majang community is well represented and included in the Gambella administration. For instance the former President of the region pointed out that

The Majang have 25 delegates in the regional parliament. Besides, Speaker of the regional council is politically represented by Majang community though it is minority in the region. Moreover, two Majang's are council of administration and other three with cabinet rank in

the regional administration. Last but not least, they are represented in the Anywaa nationality zone and the Gambella Woreda and Abobo Woreda¹⁷².

4.3.6 Majang Response

4.3.6.1 Majang's violent contestation of Anywaa dominant political status: 2002

Since the 1991 the Majang have attempted to renegotiate their political status with the Anywaa in the region politics. They want to reverse the historical and the current Anywaa dominance and to assert their equality within the new federal dispensation. To this end, they took a number of measures that ranges from establishing their own political party to waging a very deadly conflict with the Anywaa. One of such measures was the first highly organized Majang response in their history in 2002 to the Anywaa continued attack on the Majang people and territorial encroachment.

As indicated in chapter 3 and 4, they were historical enemies because of Anywaa slave raiding, encroach into Majang forestland, looking down on the Majang and control of the political space. The sum total of all these grievances led to a deadly conflict. The conflict occurred for more than a month which covered large areas from Molan to Bonga, near Gambella Town¹⁷³. The major conflicts occurred in a place called Molan because the Anywaa raped the Majang women around Molan, and the Anywaa had also established their temporary camp around Molan. Molan is a border area between the Majang and the Anywaa Nationality Zone. There is a road from Abobo to Godere and from Godere to Gambella.

¹⁷² Skype Interview with Omote Obong, March 2015.

¹⁷³ Interview with Redat Gebrekidane, Meti, 16 March 2013.

The root cause for the conflict was the continued dominance and tyranny of the Anywaa who control the region apparatus. According to informants the Anywaa always took advantage on us in every aspect since their first contact. The Majang want to end the historical as well as the existing Anywaa view of supremacy. The immediate cause for the conflict was the alleged Anywaa rape and brutal murder of a Majang woman. A group of Anywaa men raped and killed a Majang woman in July 2001. There was a road construction around Molan to connect Gambella town to Mengesh *Woreda*. For this purpose, there was a coffee bar for the construction workers around Molan. The cafeteria served soft as well as alcoholic drink (such as local drink *areqa*) to the construction workers and the people around there. The victim, Jeneba Romede, was travelling from Mengesh *Woreda* to Molan *Kebele*. She was a thirty-year's old married farmer and the mother of two children. In her way, she drank tea in the cafeteria, and she was going to Molan.

A group of Anywaa men was there drinking alcohol. They decided to rape her under alcoholic influence and followed her while she was going to her home. At first, she did her best and managed to escape. Nevertheless, the Anywaa took a short path and succeeded to catch her. There was no one there to help her. Then they not only raped her one after the other but also killed her inhumanly. They cut her breasts. They did not stop there. They also inserted a wood on her eye and womb or uterus. They also chopped up her vagina into pieces as well. Afterward, they threw her into an ant hole. All of the Majang became extremely annoyed. Undeniably, it was a very unpleasant incident. The Majang found her in a deep hole and buried her in Molan. In Majang become very angry when outsiders murder their woman.

Then, the Majang people who live in Luntak, Kukuri, Dobe, and Aberi kebele gathered to hold a counsel. They also made an effort to include others in other locality. All the participants of the gathering unanimously agreed to take action against the perpetrators as reprisal. They all confirmed that they shall give a lesson for the Anywaa once for all and such things will never be tolerated like the past. The then Head of the Godere *Woreda* Peace and Security Office told to the author that:

The Anywaa inhuman killing's of our women angered all Majang starting from Mizan. We are furious when a woman killed. This incident was more than killing. It was slaughtering. Then, we ask a question for us that 'till when we tolerate such incidents. Why do we always keep quite while they are continuing killing us? We are equal and by any means, we are not subordinate and inferior to them. They think as if they are superior. We are all black people. We have to reverse such thinking. In fact, our anger was also the result of Anywaa hurt and influence accumulated for many years. The response was like rectifying the historic injustice and the prevailing imbalance relation between us.

In the meantime, Ubong Ubong, the Abobo *Woreda* Peace and Security officer went to conflict area and tried to calm down the furious Majang. He attempted to gather the people for discussion but the Majang at the meeting became angry at him when he tried to defend that the woman was not killed by the Anywaa. He strongly requested a proof. Then, the Majang became angrier and started to take violent actions. First, they detained the Abobo *Woreda* Peace and Security officer. Then they found four Anywaa around Molan and killed them all as reprisal. For a second time,

the Anywaa responded by attacking the Majang in Kukuri. They killed two people, injured many and burned down about sixty houses. Some of the people managed to retreat to Dobe kebele.

These incidents led to fear of further attacks. Thus, a heightened tension between the two communities prevailed. Schools were also closed. Subsequently, to reverse the situation, the leadership from the two zones and *Woredas* Heads of Peace and Security Officer from Abobo Zone from Gogi *Woreda*, from Godere *Woreda* (Tobel Kundi) and Godere *Woreda* Administrator (Nikodimos) conducted a meeting in Abobo. The dialogue was very constructive and they finally reach consensus to stop the conflict. They agreed that the conflict was the work of the devil and hence to stop the violence. They also vow to bring the perpetrators before court. Then, schools were opened. The Majang displaced from Kukuri were also returned back to their home. The problem subsided for the time being.

Nonetheless, a conflict brook out again after three months of the peace dialogue. The immediate cause of the outbreak of another conflict was the alleged killing of Majang people by armed Anywaa. About thirty-four Majang in *Kiyangi* in *Cheri kebele* was tied up their hand and murdered in November 2002 by the alleged Anywaa armed group. It was only two of them who were able to escape. The Majang were drinking their traditional drink *bordi* whilst the Anywaa tricked and murdered them. After that, again the Anywaa moved to *Kukri* and killed some people indiscriminately. Some of the Majang managed to flee but the disabled people (for examples blinds, handicapped), women, children and the Anywaa murdered all old people who could not escape. They burned down them alive while they were in their house. The armed Anywaa further moved to *Aberi kebele* and found four people. Likewise, they burned alive three of them but one

of them managed to run away. They did not stop there; they moved to *Newi* kebele and murdered at least two people and the others in *Newi* run away when they heard a gun shoot.

Then, a group of armed Majang and some Sheko from Yeki, Guraferda and MNZ organized and gathered at *Dangi kebele*. The Majang reached there at 3 pm at night. There were also Godere *Woreda* government officials and former members of the National Defense Force. With determination, they decided to revenge their enemies and exploiters for the last time. At *Dangi kebele*, an intense conflict with the Anywaa carried out for more than six hours. In the conflict, at least about eighty Anywaa died instantly and several others wounded. Then the furious Majang proceed to a place called *Danba kebele* within Anywaa territory. In *Danba kebele*, they found only young women and old women about hundred and forty. They killed all of them.

With no waste of time, after that the Majang advanced into *Dobe kebele*. In *Dobe*, the Majang found 29 Anywaa who were there for gold mining. The Majang knew that the Anywaa were not aware of the conflict. Then, they decided to kill them as revenge but they designed that intoxication of the Anywaa must be a precondition to take measures of any revenge. Accordingly, they approached them and invited them for a drink. According to their plan, we drink local honey beer and *araqe* together. They served drink the Anywaa until all of them were intoxicated. As they agreed in advance, they killed 28 of them. They have accomplished their plan but one of them escaped and entered to Oromia region. Informants said, from then on the Anywaa did not come back for gold mining. Earlier, gold mining was an exclusive Anywaa activity. Currently, the Majang people are also engaged in gold mining activities.

Intermittently, the Anywaa came to Majang areas and killed few of them, and the Majang also did the same. Approximately, according to oral sources while Anywaa lost about 600, on the Majang side about 80 people were killed. Considerable people were also injured from both sides. An estimated seven-hundred houses were burned down and looted. Another informant further explains¹⁷⁴,

This conflict was considered as the first highly organized assault against the Anywaa. This is because we have a long held grudge against them. We are in conflict with the Anywaa since our first contact. The people organized from all corner of Majang Zone and the Majang in Oromia and SNNPR with their own initiation when they heard about the brutal incident. In the past, the Majang preferred to move away and hide in a jungle than carried out a counter-attack except during the Italian period. At that time, we live in the forest dispersedly. Now things are different. We live in a village, town, and we were able to control the administrative apparatus thanks to the incumbent government.

Finally, though it was very late the federal government intervened. It deployed the national defense force. Then, the federal government sponsored a peace conference. The Nuer conducted the peace deal. The Nuer was considered as neutral negotiators. Dr. Gebre ab gave this task to the Nuer. Indeed, the Nuer fruitfully managed to settle the devastating conflict. The conference was held in Meti, Godere *Woreda*. Elders from Majang, Anywaa, Nuer and the Highlanders were selected and represented in the conference. After the discussion, the conflicting parties have agreed to stop the violence. Two cows were also slaughtered as a symbol of harmony. They also perform an oath ceremony, saying, ‘The one who violate this agreement and go to war, his blood will shed like these cows’. In fact, the two communities have a very good culture of respecting

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Redat Gebrekidane, Meti, 16 March 2013.

negotiations. The federal government also ordered the national defense force to station at Molan in case of further violence. On top that, the federal government has detained suspected Anywaa who have played a part in the conflict. The leaders of the conflict are also caught. Some Anywaa regional officials were also among the detainees who are now in detention in Federal Prison in Addis Ababa¹⁷⁵. As part of a solution, the Majang have got Zonal status in 2003 and their political party was also recognized after this deadly conflict in 2003. Besides, the Majang show to the neighboring people that Majang are now different people. Now the Anywaa understood that the Majang are organized and asserted their equality. They are no more like the past that their neighbors used to raid for slave. It is considered as liberation from Anywaa long domination, control and raiding.

4.3.6.2 Internal Secession

The previously mentioned discussions demonstrate the suffering, exclusion and domination of the Majang people. Since 1991, the Majang have continuously asked the regional and the federal government for fair share of resource and power. Nevertheless, there has been no sufficient response from either the regional or the federal government. A Majang informant pinpoints that “We are demanding our constitutional right. Nevertheless, they turned a blind eye to us. They are intimidating us. They consider us as a minority and uneducated people who do not deserve development”¹⁷⁶. Finally, because of the continued inequity and local tyranny, the discontent of the Majang people for the last 20 years exploded in 2012. They demanded internal secession¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Ashene Asten, Addis Ababa, 2 March 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Yisaac Woldu, Meti, 15 March 2013.

¹⁷⁷ In this regard, the FDRE constitution under article 39 sub-article 1 stipulates, “Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.” Besides, sub-

to administer their affair having either a regional status or a special zone directly answerable to the federal government¹⁷⁸.

In 2011, the people of Majang coming from about 18 Kebeles gathered, discussed the issue and sent an application through their representatives to the regional government and the HOF¹⁷⁹. The ones who initiated and organized the application are former party members, educated elites of the community, and officials who have held key position in the region since the Derg period¹⁸⁰. At the beginning, they also had the support of the leadership of the zone. The regional president, Umod Obong, went to Majang Zone to deal with the matter in September 2011. The issue was deliberated on the two days meeting conducted with the regions officials as well as the zone's *Woreda* management. Nevertheless, the discussion ended without any solution. In fact, according to informants, the president promised to address the matters as soon as possible. At the same time, informant said, "Unfortunately, rather than dealing with the issue, Obong tried to threaten us. He ridiculed what we have done. He said, "You are uneducated and very small people". In this regard, the former President state;

There was a political element because they wanted to apply the principle of President Mugabe of Zimbabwe on the highlanders in the zones that means the leadership wanted to displace highlanders by the name of community development programs. When the office of the president rejected, then they decided to establish independent zone accountable to

article 3 of the same provision states "Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in the State and Federal Governments." A close observation of these two provisions seems that sub-article one refers to external secession and the second one i.e., sub-article 3 refers to internal secession.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Tanget Yewodin, the only surviving tapa 'd, Gelisha, 14 March 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Nesatnet Mekonen, Meti, 13 May 2013.

¹⁸⁰ The first organizers of the question were Tadyos, Koshiya, Markos, Paulos, Yorim, Abreham and Redat Gebrekidane. FGD with Majang, Meti, 2013.

Federal government but all economic factors were in place there and the problem was failure of the Majang leadership to utilize them effectively and efficiently¹⁸¹.

Since the people were not satisfied with the response of the regional government, thirty-one *Kebeles* of MNZ have again discussed the matter in Meti stadium on 16 December 2011 on the agenda of “abuse of the Gambella administration for 20 years” (see appendix 2). The objective of the meeting was “to denounce the fact that the President failed to keep his promise.” Specifically, the minutes of the meeting and the letter state:

- The Gambella management members to restrain themselves from intimidating and threatening the request of Majang ethnic group’s right;
- No one can categorize or allege as opposition group since our way of struggle is based on exclusively constitutional right and it is a demand for development, good governance, equitable distribution of wealth as well as infrastructure;
- Since our demand is development not request for negotiation or power, we are not forced to negotiate. We do not have any objection over the insignificant developmental activity of the Gambella administration. However, what we demand is that the administration respects our right that has been denied for the last 20 years and for the development of our *Woredas*. If these demands are not addressed well, we will do all the necessary steps to take our demands to the federal government; and
- Finally, if the demands of our people and committee members of 31 *kebeles* are not addressed by the Gambella administration, we have unanimously decided to present our problem to the federal government to find a solution (See appendix 2).

¹⁸¹ Interview with Omote Obong, Gambella, February 2013.

Accordingly, they sent a letter that bears the seal of Godere Woreda security administration affairs coordination, to the HOF on 15 December 2012 through five representatives¹⁸². For the movement, people contributed a lot of money. Some gave up to 20,000 ETB. The two-Woreda chiefs also promised to give support to the demand and each Woreda promised 15,000 ETB at a meeting in Meti Stadium¹⁸³. Some people told to the author that they promised to contribute money under the influence of the mob.

Then, the regional government called the Majang for a meeting in Gambella. In the meeting, the Majang representatives were unhappy and left in the middle of the meeting. While the representatives of the people were on their way to Meti, the federal police with the support of Majang Zone Security Administration officers stopped and detained them at Masha in SNNPRS.

As Redat remembered

They took us back to Gambella. They put us in custody in the Federal Police compound for a while and took us to the Gambella Millennium Hall. The President, Obong, the Vice-president, Galo Waki, the Speaker of the Regional House, Ashen Astein and others were there to meet with us. During the meeting, all of us strongly underlined that if the region is not ready or unable to respond to our demands, we will continue our struggle and take the case to the federal government. They told us that ‘your questions are absolutely erroneous and illegal. Nonetheless, we will consider your concerns’. They promised us to solve the problem in the near future.

¹⁸² The participants of the conference elected Tadyos Lomkoy, Petros Bedi, Yisaac Woldu, Markos Solomon and Netsanet Mekonen to apply these issues on behalf of the Majang people.

¹⁸³ Interview with Netsanete Mekonen, Meti, 13 May 2013.

The president called the organizers to a conference in Gambella town. However, the meeting ended without agreement and some of them left the meeting before the meeting closed. Those who left the meeting were caught in Masha and were arrested. Finally, all of those people who organized and represented the people were dismissed from their job. Tadyos Lomkoy, the Head of Godere Woreda Security Administration Office; Koshiyam, Head of Godere Woreda Bureau of Youth and Sport; Markos Solomon; Head of Godere Woreda GPUDM Sub-Office; Abreham, elected Member of Godere Woreda Elders Council and Redat Gebrekidane, Head of Godere Woreda Bureau of Trade and Industry were the victims. As Redat explained to me, “The people of Majang became very angry and wanted to hold a demonstration against this decision. Even, the youngsters wanted to kill the leaders. We have calmed down the people. We insisted on that ‘Let us give them sometime if they could bring some change. If they do not bring reasonable change, we will continue demanding for secession’”.

Honorable Jaleta, on the other hand argued, “The demand for secession did not follow constitutional procedures. Besides, it is not a demand from the people. It is organized and framed by few people in secret. They raised the issue due to the interruption of Abobo-Godere short-cut road to Gambella.¹⁸⁴ It was stopped because of an alleged Anywaa attack on the workers of the contractors. In fact, the construction of the road is still suspended. Likewise, the construction of Gambella-Pugnedo-Dima was also stopped because of the death of 5 Saticon Construction workers. The federal government is now looking for new contractors. The demand of the few people is not a well-thought one”. He also confirmed, “Few people are sacked from their job due to their illegal participation in this issue”.

¹⁸⁴ From Meti-Abobo-Gambella, it is 170 kilometer while from Meti-Gore-Gambella, it is 305 kilometer. It has to cross to regions i.e., Oromia and SNNPRS, to reach Gambella. It is not only too far but the topography of the road is also extremely very bad and mountainous. Interview with Honorable Jaleta Buleti, Meti, 19 March 2013.

The then president and Vice-Minister of MoFA, Umudi Obong, had sponsored a meeting in Meti town and promised development intervention. Immediately, the President has sent three Million ETB for Medicine and drug procurement. The Majang have higher educational opportunity. A road construction to Gelishi has also started. The leadership has obtained modern cars like the Nuer and the Anywaa. Hospitals are also under construction in Dunchayi and Kumi *kebeles*. High schools have been opened in some *kebeles* such as Godere mission, Dunchayi and Kumi. The people of Kumi are the ones who even refused to pay tax to the regional government. The President divided the leadership into two and then he appointed half of them and discharged the others from their job. The appointed ones quitted their demand for secession while the others continued with their stance.

4.4 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presented and analyzed post 1991 federal experience of Majang people. It has explored ethnic empowerment, its limitation and predicaments by taking the Majang people in SNNPRS and Gambella region as a case study. Following federal restructuring based on ethnicity, power is devolved to various levels of government. Formerly, the Majang ethnic groups were administered under Illubabor Province. They were also subjected to various forms of exploitation by their neighbors and the state. Against this background, the Majang ethnic group in MNZ had occupied offices created by the federal transfer of power. This is an accomplishment by itself. Undeniably, compared to past governments, the Majang federal experiment has encouraging results. The benefits of self-government, especially, Majang

empowerment were recognized. After 1991, the Majang have achieved unprecedented self-governing zonal status in Gambella region. This is a unique experience for the Majang in the new federal arrangement.

However, the actual performance of the MNZ indicates the low primacy given to the protection of Majang territory and ethnic integrity. Above all, the fragmentation of the Majang into three regional states undermined Majang ethnic cohesion and strength. The Majang people were fragmented into three regional states, which has considerably affected their political status in their particular regions. The Majang would have greater political power if they are placed in the same self-governing administrative unit. Indeed, the restructuring process failed to take Majang history of displacement and absence of vibrant political organization to articulate their demands and protect their historical territory into account. Moreover, much remains to be done regarding the availability and quality of services. The study shows that there exists inequitable distribution of both material and positional goods in the study area. Social infrastructure such as healthcare, education and so on are almost absent in Majang inhabited areas of Yeki *Woreda*. Besides, all political institutions and structures that exercise power are in the hands of the Shekicho political elites in SNNPRS. Thus, crisis occurs because of the failure of the social and political institutions to meet the needs of the minority people. Limited in power, authority, control, minority groups have been often politically and socially excluded. The Majang in Yeki *Woreda* are majority in number as compared to the Shekicho but they experience minority status. This is due to the unbalanced power relationship between the dominant Shekicho and the minority Majang as well as Sheko people. Such social, political and economic injustice persists because of continued discrimination, victimization (those who are oppressed by injustice) and domination.

Those who dominate by controlling resource and opportunities perpetrate a systematic domination. Overall, the Majang and Sheko involvement in Sheka Zone administration and position of influence is extremely minimal as compared to the Majang in MNZ in Gambella Region. The major impediments that the Majang suffered was the loss of their legitimate majority position in Yeki *Woreda*. The Majang in Yeki *Woreda* were not merely subject to discrimination, but, far more importantly, were denied their rightful constitutional and democratic authority. They were discriminated against by a hostile Shekicho majority. The aforementioned discussions are also visible markers of the existence of local tyranny. In short, as the aforementioned discussion revealed there were four main reasons for the conflict: namely, identity, uneven resource distribution, recognition as *Woreda/zone*, control of internal revenue, more so in cash crop areas such as Yeki. And relations of domination and discriminatory practices.

The same is true in Gambella region. Within Gambella, we have observed intra-regional disparity and inequity in terms of material and positional good distribution. Both in Yeki and in Gambella region, it appears that there exists differential access to state powers and economic resources and opportunities. The dominant Shekicho and Anywaa are power holders in Yeki *Woreda* and Gambella region respectively. They are power holders, givers and takers. The Majang as well as the Sheko are mere followers though actively contest their subordinate position, at times violently. This has created conflict-prone pattern of inter-ethnic relation. Relatively, the study area was a peaceful place before 1991. Now, we have observed a dangerous pattern of conflict-prone relationship that has shaken the pre-existing culture of tolerance and peaceful-co-existence. Recently, clashes between them are becoming frequent. It is not,

therefore, a political turmoil but also a social disorder that affects the social cohesion in the study area. Overall, an exclusionary, conflict-prone and superior-inferior pattern of inter-ethnic relation has been observed. The Majang are still largely dominated by their neighbors. Majang majority in MNZ remains largely symbolic.

Overall, this chapter shows that Majang historical trends of domination and land alienation are continuing at alarming rate within the federal system as well. Full implementation of the benefits of ethnic federalism is far beyond reality. There was a big gap between reality and the political hope that was promised in the beginning of federalism. Majang federal experiences of the last two decades have been marked by persistent insecurity. When the Majang feel powerless, they feel defeated, and lose their sense of control over their lives and resort to violent conflict. People manifest their grievances through violence. The author addresses Majang response to such insecurity in chapter seven.

Now the question is at least in MNZ how or why has it been difficult for the Majang to contain their neighbors, at least where they effectively exercised political power? Besides, the lack of effective political power in regional politics and in SNNPR/Yeki, there are other forms of power, such as economic and differential access to the federal government, which has subverted Majang's political power which could have otherwise been translated as a security device. Therefore, local self-governance is like what Paulous Chanie describes decentralization in Ethiopia, "What one hand Giveth, the other hand Taketh Away." This remark is valid also for the existing reality about the Majang people; there are mismatch between the provisions of the constitution and the reality on the ground. It appears that Majang federal experience is not a

success story at all. Dominant groups at local level surpassed the very generous local empowerment federal projects. The Majang and the Sheko were, indeed, not practically entitled to equal access to whatever resources and to decide on their fate. The historical trend of discrimination experienced by Majang is happening again. Exclusion from the political process, imprisonment, and land alienation are notable examples. The chapter, therefore, argued that the very rationale of ethnic devolution has not yet been realized in achieving its projected objectives in the study area. As indicated, it is indeed a paradox.

Chapter 5

The Majang and New Forms of Insecurity: The Influx of Highlanders

5.1 Introduction

As illustrated in the previous chapter, federalism brings an opportunity to minorities to become majority at local level. It offers vulnerable and disadvantaged minorities the right to participate in the making of decisions affecting their lives through self-administrative structures and representation. The establishment of self-administrative structures could also help these groups to mobilize for collective action like generating resources to support their development. Undeniably, the adoption of the federal system governance in Ethiopia led to the empowerment of the hitherto marginalized Majang. For instance, with the introduction of federalism, the Majang assumed dominant political status over the highlander in MNZ.

Yet, the influxes of highlander migrations after 1991 have come up with its own challenges and predicaments. For instance, Highlanders migration impacts Majang forestland. As it is indicated in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, Majang forest and their surrounding landscape is the defining element of Majang life and identity. It has central importance to indigenous Majang people culture, sense of identity and survival as a community. In relation to this, this chapter investigates the phenomenal rise of migration and its detrimental effects on the Majang people in

the context of ‘ethnic-federalism’. It is a modest attempt to understand the recent increase in the magnitude of land acquisition due to unchecked highlander’s population movement to the land of this minority group and its repercussions for the livelihood and wellbeing of the Majang. Specifically, the chapter attempts to answer the following questions: (1) how land acquisitions by new users threaten the survival of the Majang?, and (2) How land acquisition by Highlanders weakens the principles that the Ethiopian system is premised on, i.e., ethno-cultural justice and security.

This chapter proceeds into five sections other than the introduction. The first section provides the background to the subsequent sections, the brief account of the development of highlander’s migration and land acquisition in MNZ. Section two provides categories of immigrant highlander land grabber and the process of land acquisition. Section three examines the magnitude of land acquisition in MNZ. It also depicts the predicaments caused by highlander migrants in MNZ as perceived by the host community. The final section contains the conclusion based on the arguments made in the preceding discussions.

5.2 Highlanders Migration to Majangland: An Overview

In Ethiopia, there is an increasing trend of population movement in the form of migration, resettlement and displacement from the thickly inhabited highlands to the more sparsely populated lowlands¹. Likewise, the history of Gambella region is very much connected with the process of state formation in Ethiopia and associated migration of people from the northern

¹ Alula et al, “Migration and Resettlement: Reflections on Trends and Implication for Food Security”, in Dessalegn Rahmeto et al eds., *Food Security, Safety Nets and Social Protection in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2013), 222.

plateau to the less densely settled “peripheries”². Majang inhabited areas have not been an exception to this process. This history of migration and settlement of Highlanders in Majang Nationality Zone (MNZ) and Yeki *Woreda* can be categorized under three consecutive periods: the Imperial period, the Derg period and the post-1991 period. In this section, a brief account of each is provided.

5.2.1 The Imperial Period (1889-1974)

King Menelik II annexed Gambella at the end of the 19th century to ensure a steady source of revenue and to strengthen his political and military position in the “centre”³. This annexation introduced a new category of people of largely Amhara and Oromo origins referred to by the local people as “Highlanders”⁴. First state officials and their families, and then few traders as well as farmers followed them.

In fact, since early times there has been gradual overflow of highlander predominately Oromo, Shekicho and Kefficho into the Majang lowland area. In fact, the first category of Highlanders that met the Majang people were the Oromo to sell their farming products and to hunt Buffalo. As has been mentioned in the preceding chapter, Oromo’s urge for buffalo hunting made earliest encroachment that were later followed by forestland acquisition. Besides, the Highlanders came also to raid the Majang for slaves. Stauder (1971) noted that bands of highlander raided these people for slave until the 1930s and even in some instance afterwards⁵. The Majang reacted to

² Sommer, *Transforming Conflict...*, 12.

³ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia* (London: James Curry, 1991).

⁴ Medhane, *Gambella: The Impact of Local Conflict...*

⁵ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 4.

these raids by fleeing or hiding, as Highlanders were much superior to them in number of rifles and bullets⁶. Later in the 1950s, the introduction of coffee as a large-scale cash crop near Tapi saw the arrival of some highland peoples operating behind the authority of the Ethiopian government⁷. This is how migration and settlement in the study area started. Actually, in this period it was just around Tapi that these highlander settlers rested among the Majang⁸.

5.2.2 The Derg Period (1974-1991)

Some of the Highlanders who currently live in the MNZ came in the 1980's as part of the resettlement programme of the *Derg* regime⁹. The resettlement was caused by the 1984/85 catastrophic famine that hit the northern parts of Ethiopia. Yet, in this period as well "...except for the coffee-growing areas around Tapi where highland Ethiopians have settled among the Majangir, the national government has not established administrative or police posts within Majangirland"¹⁰ (see chapter 2).

5.2.3 Post-1991 Period

Before 1991, the Highlanders operating behind the Ethiopian state, government sponsored Mechanized commercial farming (MCF), and resettlement were the main reasons for the increased number of Highlanders. Yet, Highlanders' settlement was limited to Tapi town and adjacent *kebeles* until 1990s and the Majang were the dominant land users in their area. It was

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *ibid*: 4

⁸ *ibid*:5

⁹ According to Majang and Highlanders informants, this resettlement was with the informed consent of neither the local population nor the new settlers.

¹⁰ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 5.

after 1991 that the number of migrant Highlanders significantly increased. What were the major factors for Highlanders migration after 1991? The next section provided the main causes of highlander migration under the headings of ‘push and pull factors’¹¹ as perceived by the migrants as well as host communities.

5.2.3.1 Push Factors

There are several push factors that stimulated and forced Highlanders migration in the study area. To start with, peer and keen pressure in the destination area have played critical role in attracting migrants. The previously resettled Highlanders, traders and the civil servants and employees of MCF were also responsible for the swelling in the number of immigrants. According to informants, the huge influx of Highlanders from the north is in search of fertile land. Key informant said, “Now, while we are talking, lots of people are coming to Godere. The Highlanders in Majang are giving information to their families, friends, and fellow citizens that there are fertile land for cash crop production and a daily labor payable of up to 200 Birr per day. They are communicating via phone”¹². Honorable Wagine Taro (March 2013) too draw attention to the same pulling factors to Majang.

Informants also stressed that people from north are a highly networked and industrious society. The life of those people who come to MNZ has also changed a lot given that they are getting hold of very fertile and vast forestland. They have become very rich within a short period. Those

¹¹By adapting Wood (1977) conceptualization, in this study those factors that attract migrants to a destination area are labeled as ‘pull factors and those factors which repel the migrants from the source area as push factors. Cited in Tesfaye, *The Migration, Environment and Conflict Nexus in Ethiopia: A Case Study of Amhara Migrant-Settlers in East Wollega Zone* (Addis Ababa: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSEREA), 2007), 55.

¹² Interview with Tadyos Lomkoy, Meti, 12 March 2013.

people who heard about this story were also encouraged immigrating to this area. For instance, the immigrants are building huge hotels and buildings in their birthplace or respective regions. Highlander immigrants indicated that they have also managed to buy very expensive cars such as Euro-trackers, Isuzu and so on within three to five years. The Highlanders also send money to their relatives in their place of origin. These success stories further encouraged other Highlanders to come to MNZ at any cost. In this regard, Wagine argued, it is the previously settled Highlanders who by exaggerating the potential of the area that triggered other highlanders to come to MNZ.

In addition, in Majang cases, most of the immigrants are from Amhara Region (Gojjam and Wolo) and Tigray highland areas that are affected by severe recurrent drought, loss of fertility, demographic increase and so on. In a group discussion of seven Highlanders, most of the participants attributed their decision to go away from their earlier homeland to land scarcity, land and soil degradation, recurrent drought, food insecurity and homicide¹³. According to informants, the most vital factor for the migrants to live their home area is owing to the acute land shortage. Primarily, in the north, it turns out to be very hard for the new generation to get land and sustain their family life. Besides, in highland Ethiopia, the land is not only scarce but also needs hard labor with low return. In addition, there is a strong population pressure, which is not in proportion with the available land. Other studies also indicate that the average size of land holding in some areas of the north and central highlands reach a threshold that lead to further migration to the low land¹⁴. These in turn resulted in entitlement decline for the new generation. Thus, according to the view of informants, it becomes very hard for new married couples to

¹³ FGD with Highlanders, Yari, 2013.

¹⁴ Alula et al, *Migration and Resettlement...*, 226.

sustain their family life. In the north, there is climate change and deforestation that resulted in persistent drought¹⁵. These chronic droughts render the community to acute food insecurity. Thus, the people started to migrate into different directions. Most of the time, they moved to less populated areas such as Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz and so on.

What is more, there are also people who run off their homeland because of homicide. Informants underlined that some of the immigrants in some *kebeles* in MNZ are there for two reasons, i.e., for economic benefit and fleeing of court persecution due to murder and other cases. One key security official in the zone told to the author:

Yari kebele is also a place where various criminals and bandits draw together. As a result, it becomes very difficult for the zone to control the areas. The land grabbers very often attacked kebele officials. It is beyond our capacity.

In this regard, the 2012 Pact survey study also disclosed that 49.6% of immigrants came to find better work (to be employed in private coffee plantations and state owned coffee plantation enterprises), 26.4 % in search of farmland and 18% due to homicide in their original place¹⁶.

5.2.3.1 Pull Factors

There are quite a lot of factors for the enlargement of the number of immigrants in Majang Zone. The Derg era resettlement program has also paved the way to numerous self-initiated migrants. Following the 1991 regime change, earliest migrants such as state-sponsored settlers, traders,

¹⁵ Interview with Ali Zinabu, Meti, 16 March 2013.

¹⁶ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 37.

employees of MCF and civil service who had lived along Tapi town penetrated deep into the land of Majang after the downfall of the Derg regime. Gradually, Highlanders began to be congested and people knew more about opportunities in the Majang lowland areas where one can produce ‘anything without much hard work’, the Highlanders began to spread down extensively.

Then, the rank of the Highlanders have been enlarged in due course by spontaneous migrations of Highlanders through family networking in search of economic opportunities, especially access to land. The presence of vast and uninhabited tracts of land in the area encouraged more Highlanders to come. In this respect, Stauder (1971) points out that the Majang culture is also an incentive for encroachment for they have a distinct way of life largely based on forest, and they retreat into the forest whenever an outsider approached them. In addition, the Majang lack vibrant organized political institutions in their history to defend their territory¹⁷. A favorable coffee price in the international market and profitable timber production after 1991 was recognized by Dereje (2009) as the most important factor for a heightened encroachment into the forestland in this zone. Indeed, the steady increment of crop prices such as rice and sesame in addition to coffee encourage Highlanders to expand crop farmland through clearing the forest. MNZ is naturally endowed with rich resources such as coffee production, favorable soil, water, and climatic conditions for agricultural production on relatively wider cultivable land¹⁸. Cognizant of this situation, Highlanders are aggressively engaging in coffee production clearing the forestland.

¹⁷ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 5.

¹⁸ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 36.

These resettled populations swell up especially after 1991 by bringing additional family members, friends and countryside fellows. These new comers cleared land for agriculture. Besides, this people are also expanding their land tenure by actively engaging in woodcutting. Their cleared farmlands are very visible in their kebele such as Chemi, Gengeboz, Mekakelign Meti. Nowadays, there is alleged evidence that they have also started to put up forestland for sale and forestland enclosure. Besides, the local community is accusing the Highlanders for having huge tracts of land¹⁹. Currently (November 2014), they are selling one hectares of uncultivated land for up to 30,000 ET Birr (approximately \$1,500.00)²⁰. They sell the cultivated land up to 70,000 (\$3,500.00) to 100,000 ET Birr (\$65, 00.00). Buying land from the local community and selling it to new immigrant Highlanders without adding any value is now an incredibly profitable activities on its own in MNZ. The people who specialize in such business become very prosperous. These people have also the power to entice and obtain land for free under the order of the leadership²¹. In this regard, the role of the local community as well as the leadership is only selling land in a very dismal low price. Therefore, the real beneficiaries were the highlander immigrants.

They are the closest people with the indigenous and the highest percentage of land possessors as individual farmers²². They have huge land as compared to average Ethiopian small holding farmers. They may be also the richest one as compared to the average Ethiopian small holding farmers. The income inequality between the indigenous farmers and the highlander farmers' is extensively huge. Apart from farming, they are engaged in logging, land selling and expanding

¹⁹ FGD with the Majang, Meti, 2014.

²⁰ Interview with Tasew, MoFA, Meti, June 2014.

²¹ FGD with the Majang, Chemi, 2014.

²² Interview with Highlander migrants, Meti, November 2014.

their tenure all the time. They also bring their friends and kin's from their original place. Astonishingly, some of the highlander farmers are in possession of as large as 100-400 hectares of coffee land in different localities though they are registered only as farmers²³.

The other significant categories of migrant Highlanders that acquire huge forestland are traders. There are considerable numbers of Highlanders traders in Majang. These traders are the ones who are largely involved in land selling as well as legal and illegal logging industry. The area is well known for the best quality of its timber. The thick and quality forest attracts loggers. There were lots of (ill) legal sawmills and furniture workers in the study area owned by traders. The furniture made of Majang timbers have very high value in cities including Addis Ababa. There are people who illegally transport timber from Majang Zone. Besides, the construction boom in the country also contributed for the increase in timber production in Majang. As a result, logging destruction of the forest has been very huge. The zone has attempted to catch and control the loggers but it has not been successful because of the prevalent dishonesty among the leadership. Most of these traders become permanent residents and farmers in MNZ.

Moreover, as has been mentioned above, the bulk of the civil servants in MNZ came after 1991. The introduction of federalism and the granting of self-governance for the Majang demanded significant educated personnel for the civil service and even for political positions. At that time, there were very few educated indigenous people in the study area. Therefore, the Majang leadership has encouraged Highlanders to come to the area and work as civil servants. Accordingly, educated Highlanders were employed as civil servants in MNZ. They constituted about 97 percent of the civil servants. Still, they are by far the dominant in the civil service.

²³ Interview (Name withheld), Meti, May 2013.

The other pulling factor of immigrants is the investment boom because of government policy of large-scale commercial agriculture since 2002. The numbers of domestic and foreign investors have drastically increased in MNZ (see chapter 6). Thus, large numbers of highlander people have started to come following the new plantations. For instance, during the field observation almost all of the technical, skill and even daily laborers of the Verdanta Harvest P.L.C and the Green Coffee S.C are Indians and Highlander Ethiopians. Officially, the Green Coffee S.C employed 7,000 highlander laborers. Almost all expertise, technical and daily laborers of the existing commercial farms were Highlanders²⁴. These temporary migrants then become permanent residents acquiring *kebele* resident identification card and the most valuable resources such as land. Indeed, these large-scale agricultural plantations are the major contributors of the population growth and migration in MNZ. Most of these new immigrants are youths from SNNPRS and Amhara region chiefly from Keffa, Sheka, Gojjam and Wollo.

The employees of commercial farming have all the resource to occupy and cultivate the land such as technical knowledge about coffee, ample coffee seedling, money and so on²⁵. The imperial period government Tapi coffee plantation had recruited almost all of its staffs from Highlanders. According to informants, immediately after the downfall of the Derg regime, they got hold of land without any proper legal procedures. With the new opportunity to grow coffee and to sell, it is a very attractive activity that encouraged them to get their hands on land. Then, they have succeeded to acquire a huge land for coffee either legally or illegally, entering into the lucrative coffee production, or logging business. Now, most of them have turned out to be rich

²⁴ This is to a certain extent on account of the indigenous people low level of skills, knowhow, significant skilled and daily laborer Highlanders have been attracted by the plantation companies.

²⁵ Interview with Afera Alumu, Meti, 13 May 2013.

out of nothing. At the height of the forestland grab, many highland civil servants, farmers, employees of the plantation companies, and traders turned into the so-called investors. There are also highlander investors engaged in small-scale and large-scale farming (See chapter 6). All the above-mentioned categories cleared the forest to grow cash crops such as coffee and for logging. Most of these investors have neither official license nor do they pay investors tax.

The above discussion suggests that there are pull and push factors for the increasing migration from the north to the southwest of MNZ. The availability and easy access to fertile forestland, rise in coffee price, the quest for better life, kin pressure are the major pulling factors. On the other hand, soil degradation, recurrent drought in the north, landlessness mainly due to population pressure and homicide can be mentioned as the major pushing factors. The state has also sponsored the settlement of Majang land as a response to drought in northern Ethiopia. The land shortage, population pressure in highland areas such as Amhara, Oromia, SNNRS and Tigray is adversely affecting the people in the peripheral area. The Majang are bearing the cost. As detailed above, neighboring people have taken significant territory and Majang people into their administrative territory and have invaded (are invading) indigene Majang territory.

Consequently, the current trend shows considerable increase in migrants; everyday significant new Highlanders arrive in Majang²⁶. In this respect, one Vice-administrator of MNZ provided a description of the extent of the problem of Highlanders migration, saying; “See this river. Does this river stop flowing? Can we stop it? No, we cannot. Highlanders migration is just like this.” Consequently, now the percentage of Highlanders has reached eighty percent of MNZ. Of the total population in the *Woredas*, about 72.5 % and 36.2% are settlers in Godere and Mengesh

²⁶ Interview with Yimam Faris, Meti, 19 May 2013.

Woreda respectively²⁷. This figures made MNZ, an area that attracts significant highlander population in the region²⁸. This trend of population movement contradicts with the assumption that the ethnicization of state restructuring might reduce the historical trend of migration of people from one region to the other. The government has a policy of intra-regional, not inter-regional migration, despite this, population movement across the region has continued unabated. The next section explored the mechanisms by which the highlander migrants obtained land in the study area. It also examined to the extent to which the migrants integrated and established social relationship with the host community.

5.3 Processes of Settlement and Land Acquisition

5.3.1 Acquisition of Farmland

The above-mentioned categories of Highlanders employed quite a few methods to access Majang forestland. Generally, it can be grouped into three categories: free gift and exchange for precious commodities, legal contractual arrangements (lease or rent) and illegal purchase from the local population and illegal clearance of forestland.

Before and in the early 1990s, the Majang gave forestland either for free as a gift or as an exchange for some scarce commodities such as clothes, salt, iron tools, and gun and bullets²⁹.

²⁷ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 36.

²⁸ Similarly, the Highlanders in Yeki Woreda by far outnumber the indigenes. Out of the total population of Yeki Woreda (134,150) of the 2008 Census, the Highlanders account about 75%. Markos, *Ethnic Conflict and its Resolution...*, 9.

²⁹ FGD with Highlanders, Meti, 2013.

This was because there was no considerable population and external territorial pressure³⁰. Secondly, the areas the Majang reside in (5000 feet down) were not well suited to the modes of livelihood of their most important neighbors, the Anywaa and the Oromo³¹. Thirdly, Majang are settled in the tse-tse fly zone where Oromo and other highland pastoralists will not usually find it comfortable to settle³². In the second half of the 1990s, however, first chief instrument for Highlanders to acquire land is entering into a traditional lease contracts with the local population called 'share-cropping'. As group discussions show immediately after their arrival, they were employed as farm laborers and sharecroppers with the local people.

There are various ways of sharecropping arrangements classified according to the share of harvest paid to the landowner as rent³³. In *Kamisho* (two-third) arrangements, the highlander paid two-third of the harvest to the landowner as rent. In *siso* (one-third) arrangement, the highlander supplied all the inputs and paid one-third of the harvest to the landowner as rent. Therefore, the highlander retained two-thirds of the total harvest. In *equili* (equal) arrangements, the harvest is divided on a 50:50 basis. Of the forms of sharecropping arrangements, *Biro* is dominant land rental form contractual arrangement between the Highlanders and the host community for up to 50 years.

In one of the group discussions, the researcher asked Majang informants why they are leasing their lands. One of the participants after he thought for a while, said, "The Highlanders are very

³⁰ Interview with Zerhun Fenta, Meti, 27 February 2013.

³¹These to say that, the Anywaa are riverian people who largely depend on the slow, big rivers of the savannah for fishing and transportation while the Oromo are a semi-pastoral people relying on large stock. Stauder, *The Majanger,....*

³² Ibid.

³³ The sharecropping agreements could be either verbal or written in Amharic largely dictated by the Highlanders.

hard working peoples and hence they are more productive than we are”. The other participant interrupted him and added to the discussion by saying, “We use very traditional method of axe plough whereas the Highlanders use far better method of ox plough. Besides, as compared to them we have a very bad working habit. We are lazy. We used to harvest food in the jungle without any hard labor.”³⁴

Now a days, especially in 2000s, commercialization of land has been intensified serving as the principal means of Highlanders’ access to forestland. Local officials told to the author that now this contract become an indirect and hidden form of land selling. Commercialization of land is common nowadays in Majang. Currently, it is a dominant to acquire land by paying money to the local leadership in an enticement. Immigrant Highlanders obtained forest farmland by buying it using illegal channels³⁵.

The local leadership and community was part of the problem of land commercialization. Local political elites and authorities have significant role and power in land allocation to Highlanders. Since early 2000s, Highlanders who had the financial capacity were given forestland by the local officials. Highlanders stated that they obtained forestland by paying 4000-5000 ET Birr to the local leadership immediately after their arrival. The leadership was selling communal forestlands of the local community to the new immigrant Highlanders. They either established relationship with local officials through brokers or previously settled Highlanders. In this regard, highlander civil servants and appointed officials in various sectors played significant role. In addition, Tapi Sheko and Majang officials also served as a broker in the land dealings. Land ‘selling’ is

³⁴ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2014.

³⁵ It is illegal because land selling is against the law in Ethiopia. Landowners have only usufructuary rights over their plots of land, Article 40 (3) of the FDRE constitution.

rampant in MNZ. One informant with profound emotion says, “Is land saleable commodity in SNNPRS, Amhara and Oromia Region? I do not think so. It is very easy to enter into this area since there is no sufficient protection and follow up in this region overall”.

The highlander immigrants once they secure land for farming, they clear the adjacent forestland and turned it into farmland. Then they entered into a contract with the indigenous people luring them with a very small payment. The local people are abusing the constitutional rights to lease it out temporarily to other farmers. This land tenure system is highly endangered due to the misuse of traditional forestland ownership by the indigenes community. Besides to that, this ‘jang³⁶, ownership has no territorially demarcated boundary. This is partly due to Majang loses attachment to territoriality or land ownership. Secondly, it was due to the abundance of land in earlier times. Finally, there is a continuation of communal ownership of the whole Majangland as a community. The native community after selling their forestland ‘Jang ‘ownership, they move deep into the forest and clear another forestland. Once more, the Highlanders follow them, lure them, and buy the land with a very small payment. In relation to this, there is a common saying among the Majang, “The Majang is the needle: The Highlander the thread.” These cycles of displacement have occurred since the end of the 1990s.

In a group discussion, the researcher asked participants why they are selling forestlands, which are their basic resources. According to the informants, factor for land selling is poverty, food insecurity and few sources of income for the local community. There is an acute shortage of food for their family. Besides, payments for medical treatment for their family become very costly. One elder says, “Previously it was very easy to find traditional medicines in the forest. Now

³⁶ It refers to the traditional land ownership rights in Majang.

thanks to Highlanders, we have no adequate access to forest anymore. The plants are also disappearing.’ Additionally, the Majang have no culture of saving. They share everything they obtained. If one gets money either as a salary or as a price after selling land, they will spend it together.

The second factor participants identified was payment for bride wealth. Now, marriage gifts are becoming very expensive. The bride is expected to pay at least 15,000 ET Birr to the bridegroom family. Earlier on, it was very easy to find gift for bride wealth from the forest and honey selling. Now due to deforestation and land acquisition it is almost difficult though not impossible to obtain such huge amount of money by selling honey and other produces. Failure in paying for the bride wealth has also a severe consequence. In Majang tradition, the elders punish the groom in a very brutal way of flogging. Some of the Majang even lost their body such as eyes, heart due to the brutal flogging culture.

Third, informants indicate that ‘the temptation of land selling is very high’. The Highlanders come with a very huge amount of money in the eyes of the poor Majang. The Highlanders knowing the return they would get from the land, they are willing to spend huge money on land. That is why they lure the educated elites and public officials. Highlanders have the power to entice and obtain land for free or on payment under the order of the leadership because of the corruption. They spend 5,000 to 10,000 Birr to the local officials in bribes³⁷. Sometimes, they bribed top officials in organized manner. Highlander people who have land tenure in the one locality contribute money and give it to key officials in inducement. This is an effective way of controlling the political elites. The Highlanders are in a better position to continuously lure

³⁷ FGD with Highlanders, Chemi, 2014.

individual Majang to sale their land. As such, Highlanders economic power has greatly undermined the Majang's political power which otherwise could have been translated into economic capacity building of the Majang. Or at least to effectively contain the human security that is posed by their neighbors. This has been the reason why the Majang could not exercise effective political power.

One informant stressed that “the Highlanders are a very tricky and shrewd people. They employed various mechanisms to cheat the local community”. For instance, the Highlanders use Majang weak Amharic proficiency to their own advantage. Using local people inability to read and write, they easily manipulate the contract. Besides, earlier on they do not have the clue about hectares, meters and other measurements. In relation to this, one informant with deep resentment said, “We simply sign on the contract trusting the Highlanders. The practice was that the Highlanders would loudly read to us and then we used to sign it. Later we found out that mostly what is written in the contract and what they read to us have indeed are differences”. The language barrier favors the Highlanders. The researcher has also observed that all of the land contractual agreements have been written in Amharic.

The Highlanders easily deceive the Majang through minor favors and payments. In relation to Highlanders behavior, the host people specifically call them ‘*Galen*’. They are so named by virtue of Highlanders land acquisition strategies and their tricky behavior. According to key informants, *Galen* means people who pull the wool over somebody's eyes. In other words, it refers to people who bamboozles and fool the indigenous people by taking advantage of their illiteracy and honesty. One educated and experienced Majang, Tadyos Lomkoyi, further put in

plain words that: “Galen means people, who crooked, tricked and swindled our people since our first contact. *Galen* is swindler who considers himself as wise and looked down on us.”

Fourth, the Majang do not know how the market works and they do not often have long-term plans and as a result sell land without envisaging in long term impact³⁸. The Majang do not have the concept of contract. They simply sign on the contract without knowing what it says. They even do not care what is on it. They have a temporary conception of contract like their shifting field cultivation. They have in mind that within few years, they would get it back. Besides, Majang conceptualization of the very idea of land selling is a bit different from the Highlanders. Highlander immigrants’ intensive agriculture and Majang shifting field cultivation is also a different way of land usage. Moreover, the Majang have no concept of boundary and territory. This different conception of land and land tenure between the Majang and the Highlanders is very much connected to the controversy over the land between the two.

Fifth, the pace of implementing the land law is slow in Majang. Many of the local community are not aware of the legal framework and various procedures involved in land selling. In addition, they are largely illiterate and not aware of their rights. Besides, until now no Majang *kebeles* have been surveyed, demarcated and issued with certificates of land ownership. There is an ongoing debate in this regard.

Last but not least, almost all informants unanimously pointed out that the main cause for land selling is to ‘Sell land before land-grabbers take it’. Besides, as affirmed by Dereje (2007) who stated, “Having realized the inevitable encroachment by the Highlanders some Majangir have

³⁸ FGD with Highlanders, Meti, 2014.

started selling forest land instead of “abandoning” it, in the spirit of the adage, “if you cannot beat them, join them”.”

The above-mentioned discussions suggest many points. First, it tells the reality of inter-regional migration and land acquisition in MNZ. Second, the discussions also suggest to us the truth that making Amharic as the working language of the Gambella regional state is indeed an advantage for Highlanders but a disadvantage for the indigenes community, especially in contracts dealing with land. The working language in GNRS/MNZ is still Amharic, which works to the advantage of the Highlanders. It reflects the predicaments of political fragmentation. If the Majang were in one administrative zone, it would have given them the opportunities to develop their language and use it as a language of local government. Last but not least, it shows a predicament of lack of competence in market system/forces.

Third, the discussions indicate that commercialization of land is becoming a legal process in MNZ which is against the constitution. The constitution made prominently clear that “rural and/or urban land and natural resources right of ownership is only for the government and the people”. Land is joint property of Ethiopian people’s Nationalities and Nations not subject to sell or exchange (Article 40/3). Yet, as demonstrated above, land is subject to various kinds of transactions between the Majang and the highlanders. This has caused negative impact on the right of the Majang. While EPRDF justifies state land ownership as a social protection devise, particularly benefiting minorities, it appears that lower level of state formation in the institutional sense of the term in MNZ has undermined the legal protection of minorities enshrined in the

constitution. For instance, one of the arguments of the proponents of state ownership of land during the constitution-making process was that:

*...it will become difficult to reconcile private ownership of land with the rights of pastoralists to the use of land on which they traditionally had inalienable grazing land. Similarly, letting the sale and free transfer of land rights will have the effect of endangering the identity, livelihood, and cultural survival of ethnic and cultural minorities within the country*³⁹.

Fourth, in relation to land selling, the discussion introduces the reality of corruption and corrupt leadership. Land related corruption has been very rampant which allows Highlanders to access forestland without any bureaucratic hurdles and legal procedures. Though forest areas are demarcated as an exclusive forest land with the supported by state and non state actors such as Majang Zone Hulegebe Project, Climate Change Alliance in Ethiopia, Pact Ethiopia, Melca Ethiopia, Mekane Yesus, South West Ethiopia Forest Protection and Development Forum and so on.

, the local people, the leadership and the highlanders are selling land within the demarcated territory⁴⁰. The researcher observed that huge tracts of land within the forest were covered by coffee plantations by highlanders. For instance, the pictures below also illustrates this fact. The area was a protected forest area in Goshen *kebele*.

Figure 4: Merisha forest in Goshene *kebele*

³⁹ Seyoum, *Issues and Challenges...*, 55.

⁴⁰ Interview with MoFA assigned Advisor, Ato Tasew, July 2014; Interview with Sahilu an expert in the Bureau of Agriculture, Meti, 22 June 2014; Interview with Shibiru Zerihun and Melkamu Abike, Meti, 30 June 2014.



Photo by the author (Seyoum Mesfin) June 2014 Goshene *kebele* (Merisha forest)

Fifth, the community at grass root level is not sufficiently empowered to protect its resources and habitat. The existence of a very huge difference between the two groups in terms of exposure to modernity and literacy level is manifested in quite different ways in the previously mentioned deliberations. This difference, in fact, has put the indigenes people in a disadvantageous position. Sixth, it also shows the prevailing poverty in MNZ. The rural ordinary community sold their land due to poverty. It also indicates the existing economic gap between the two groups. One of indigene informant quoted in the above paragraphs described the economic gap that exist now, he says, “The Highlanders are getting wealthier and wealthier while we are getting poorer and poorer”.

Finally yet importantly, the above conversation show that the Majang have been victims of deception as the above land selling case illustrates. In their study, Alula et al (2013:226)

mentioned internal migration in Ethiopia hardly exists even in East Africa standard⁴¹. Internal migration hardly increases from 16.4 per cent in the 1984 Census to 16.6 Percent in the 2007 Census⁴². According to their finding, the main disincentive to migration is the land policy constraints that prohibit formal land selling⁴³. However, as the above stated discussion revealed the reverse is true in the study area.

5.3.2 Social Relationship with the Indigenous Community

Though the Highlanders succeeded in obtaining farmland in the study area, they failed to integrate with the host community. There is an acute social distance between the two groups. The political boundary also extended and influenced social boundaries realm. Generally, social relationship between the immigrant Highlanders and the host community is minimal. The study area is a home to several highlander groups and the indigenous community. Social relationship is very important to create social bonds and harmony between the newcomers and the host community. Besides, to understand the context of Majang-Highlanders relation, it is necessary to look at the manifold dynamics that result in firm boundaries between the two groups. There are some visible boundaries between the indigenes and the Highlanders in socio-cultural, political and economic domains, which make relationship between the two groups challenging. The purpose of this section is not to explore all kinds of relationship but to illustrate as to how the boundary between the two groups is firmly drawn and how it affects their relation.

⁴¹ Alula *et al*, *Migration, Resettlement...*, 226.

⁴² Ibid: 226.

⁴³ Ibid: 230.

From interviews and observation, the Majang and the Highlanders rarely socialize with each other in MNZ. There is an enormous social distance between them. Social divisions occur in areas such as marriage, residence, language, religion and way of life. To begin with, the first visible boundary between the two groups is skin color. The language of color explains the difference in social boundary, i.e., “The ‘black’ indigenes are contrasted with the ‘red’ Highlanders.” While the Highlanders have a relatively light-skinned color, the indigenes have ‘black’ color. This makes it easy for everyone to distinguish Highlanders and lowlanders in everyday life and social encounter. This influences people to develop a biased judgment in their day-to-day relationship. This color boundary has signification implications. The Highlanders look down upon the Majang as black. This racialization of social relations has an implication in a wider political and social context i.e., the parameters of Ethiopian national identity – too black to be Ethiopian⁴⁴.

There is a clear religious difference between the two-groups though it is not a key divider. The overwhelming majority of the indigenes Majang are protestant Christians while the Highlanders are fundamentally Muslims and Orthodox Christians. Since the majority of the Highlanders are followers of Orthodox Christianity, they did not attend in the same traditional institutions such as *Mahiber* and *senbet* with the Majang. These religious institutions are a very fundamental tool for socialization among the Highlanders. Besides, Majang do not participate in the traditional saving institution *equib* partly due to the absence saving culture among the local people. One informant told to the author, “Majang people who have modern bank account are very few.”⁴⁵ Besides, the

⁴⁴ A similar discourse on color is made socially relevant in the neighboring Benshangul-Gumuz regional state. See Wold-selassie Abbute, *Gumuz and Highlander Resettlers: Differing Strategies of Livelihood and ethic Relations in Metekel, North-western Ethiopia* (Goettingen: University of Goettingen, 2002).

⁴⁵ Interview with Alemseged Hailemariam, Goshene, 13 May 2013.

Highlanders have no trust on the Majang to involve them in the traditional saving institutions. The Highlanders believe that the Majang are extravagant people⁴⁶.

The other indication of the clear margin for social relation between the two groups is the difference in drinking and dietary tradition. In Ethiopia both in rural and urban areas, coffee ceremony is an important way of life for socialization and sharing of ideas and knowing each other. In this regard as well, the two groups have a different culture. The Majang are not interested in drinking coffee bean. They have a unique culture in this regard. They drink their own traditional drink called *Chemo* made from the leaves of a coffee tree. Most of the highlander informants do not drink *Chemo*, for it is considered to have a high alcohol content⁴⁷. In addition, while *Injira* is a staple food for the Highlanders, porridge is a staple food for the Majang, which is especially visible in rural areas. Hence, the possibility for both groups to visit each other and dining together is very low. These make it very tough to establish friendly relationship with each other⁴⁸.

Social distance is also reflected in the pattern of settlement. The aforesaid issues are also further solidified by the existing segmented settlement pattern. When the researcher asked why they do not socialize, often informants would cite segmented settlement pattern in addition to dietary differences. Majang and Highlanders settlement pattern is also different not only in rural areas but also in towns. They settled in a separate place in every *kebele*. For instance, in the zone capital, Meti, most of the local people mainly concentrated in a place called stadium. The

⁴⁶ FGD with Highlanders, Gelishi, June 2014.

⁴⁷ The researcher was invited in one of the Majang house in Meti and Chemi for a *Chemo* drink, which he also found sweat.

⁴⁸ FGD with Highlanders, Kumi, June 2014.

researcher asked informants why the settlements are isolated. A Majang informant responded, “we have different culture’. A highlander informant, on the other hand said, “it is because Majang do not want to live in a mixed settlement with Highlanders. They are the ones who distance themselves from us. Whenever we approached them, they would go and settle in another place.⁴⁹” Consequently, even in public and workplaces, they have a very limited social relationship.

Language barriers between the two groups are also substantial. In urban areas, some of the Majang speak highlander’s language such as Amharic, Oromifa, Shekicho. However, the Highlanders both in rural and urban area do not speak the language of the indigenous Majang. Majang in rural areas especially in Mengesh *Woreda* can barely communicate in highlander’s language either. In Mengesh *Woreda* where the Majang are a majority, few Highlanders are able to speak the Majang language well. This is largely due to lack of interest to learn the local language seeing it as inferior language⁵⁰. Second, Amharic is the working language of the region as well as in the zone. Amharic language skill is often used as a measure of modernization, literacy and opportunity for work and appointment. This gives the Highlanders the advantage to communicate in their language while creating a disincentive to learn Majang. The Majang, however, have the interest to study Amharic and other Highlanders language since it is a working language in the regional state. Hence, the indigenes are under pressure to study Amharic to conform linguistically. Yet, in private settings, the Majang communicate in their own mother tongue⁵¹.

⁴⁹ Interview with Ayalew Yimer, Goshene, 05 July 2014.

⁵⁰ Interview with Highlander, Chemi, June 2014.

⁵¹ Interview with Esay Gnawer, Goshene, 13 may 2013; Alemayehu Ocha, Chemi, 17 May 2013.

There is also a difference in land tenure system between the two groups. While the indigenes have a mobile life style, the Highlanders have a settled life style. The Highlanders referred the mobile life style of the Majang as ‘backward’ life style. Actually, the view of the government is also the same. The Ethiopian political elites also considered communal lands as a wasteful use of land though it given constitutional protection. More of their statement regarding mobile life style is as ‘backward’. The academic criticize this government view underline the rationality of mobile and forest-based livelihoods for peripheral community⁵². In this regard, we can cite the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s speech in 2011 pastoralist day. He said, “...pastoralists no more remain research sample to showcase primitive lifestyle.” Interview with many Highlanders officials at all level of government also reflects this view. This perspective really affects the full implementation of the federal principles and the communal rights of the indigenes population. This indicates government’s contradictions – e.g. sedentarisation Vs cultural policy which recognizes diverse life styles. This also demonstrates that center-periphery dualism continues with deep-rooted bigotry.

What is more, the new federal political order has also created its own political boundaries that have a set of preferential policies towards the ‘indigenous’ ethnic groups. Political power is reserved for the indigenes Majang people. It is a preferential policy deeply resented by the Highlanders⁵³. This policy has contributed to the existing social–distance between the two groups. The political boundary refers to the difference in the degree of political entitlement, which labeled the indigenous groups as ‘owner’ nationalities and left the Highlanders without any political power. As a result, the Highlanders are ‘for all practical purpose removed from the

⁵² See for example J. Markakis. *Ethiopia: The Last two Frontiers* (Oxford: James Curry, 2011).

⁵³ Interview with Yalew, Gelishi, 04 July 2014; Ms Selamawit, Meti, 10 May 2013.

regions politics⁵⁴. Federalism has created its own problems. This is to say, “the federal system and subsequent connotation of influential nationalities owning ‘mother state’ in practice created exclusionary currents”⁵⁵. This dichotomy further strengthened intra-group solidarity. Actually, the Highlanders dominate the economic sector and provide 50 per cent of the skilled work force of the region government⁵⁶. As a result, the ‘the indigenes regard the economic success of the Highlanders with consternation’⁵⁷. The Highlanders also tend to think of Majang as backward and lazy. Hence, the Highlanders intentionally distance themselves from the Majang in every aspect of social relationship.

Additionally, the violent conflicts between the two groups and political manipulation have led to the crystallization of division between the Majang and the Highlanders, thereby crippling the already weak process of integration between them. State repression against the Majang and inter-group conflict and land controversies further affects inter-group violent conflict and the social distance. As noted earlier, the Ethiopian government’s response to Majang demand was heavy-handed. As a result, many Majang were arrested and sent to prison camps. In fact, Highlanders were also arrested but the overwhelming majorities were Majang. The government brands Majang political activists as terrorists and messengers of external forces to justify repression against the Majang⁵⁸. This has certainly served to reduce Majang legitimate demand to less important level. Indeed, it is clear ‘reductionist approach’. In addition to government repression, inter-ethnic conflicts further hardened the existing simmering tension and animosity. As

⁵⁴ Assefa, *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity...*, 277-278.

⁵⁵ Hence, one of the main causes seems to be the failure of the regional as well as the federal government to reach a suitable formula for power and resource sharing among the indigenous and the highland residents. Ibid.

⁵⁶ Dereje, *The Ethnic self and the National Other.....*, 64.

⁵⁷ Dereje, *A National Perspective on the Conflict in Gambella....*, 651.

⁵⁸ FGD with Majang, Meti, July 2014; Interview with Tesfaselassie Mazebe, Addis Ababa February 2015.

evidenced by the retaliation of Highlanders mobs against the Majang on September 11, 2014. This has further affects the Majang relation with their neighbors.

In MNZ, it appears that there is no meaningful social engagement between the indigenes Majang and the Highlanders. The aforementioned social distances between the two groups has its own implication. For instance, it makes communication between the two groups challenging which paved the way for violence. As will be discussed in chapter 7, minor violence in one locality led to indiscriminate killing of all members of the other group. This may lead to break down of inter-group peace. There is no recognized set of traditional conflict resolution mechanism between the two groups.

The aforementioned socio-economic and political gaps have also affected intermarriage between the indigenes Majang and the migrant Highlanders, which is one of imperative institutions to create peaceful relationship among diverse people. Especially, it is an indispensable instrument to alleviate violent conflictual relations between various groups. Marriage relation between the two groups was more or less absent. The researcher has done an inventory in the Majang Nationality zone in this regard. According to the inventory, there is little marriage relationship in Majang zone between the Highlanders and the Majang. In the Zone, there were 12 marriages in Majang between the two communities. According to the inventory, the Majang are male-givers while the Highlanders are female givers. It is only one Majang woman wedded to a highlander. Most of the Majang who are married with Highlanders are also zone and regional level higher officials who reside in the towns. In addition, these Majang officials have another Majang wives,

mostly in the rural areas⁵⁹. In contrast, most of the Highlanders are from the low profile of the community. Majang-Highlanders marriage at rural level is nearly nonexistent.

When asked why inter-marriage between the two communities is rare, they provided various factors. Interview findings indicate that a Majang woman marrying a highlander man would be disowned by her family, and would constantly be harassed and scolded within Majang community. The case one of the Majang woman informant, who lives in Meti with her highlander husband clearly illustrate the situation. One Majang female, named, Tihut has married a Highlander teacher in Meti. She has faced a serious criticism from her family and community. Tihut told to the author that, “Most members of my family did not accept our marriage. The social sanction is very harsh but I do not care as long as I love him”. Additionally, the Majang to preserve their ethnic purity and ownership of the zone, discourage inter-marriage with Highlanders. Actually, the Majang are unwilling to let their girl to marry a Highlander⁶⁰. In this regard, conversation with Highlanders revealed that the highlander men were also afraid of the Majang officials to marry Majang woman. They said, “the leadership is very unhappy. They will come to you in various circumstances and hurt you”. Meles Woyisa too remarked, “In the past there has been no marriage between the two groups. The Highlanders were also scared of the Majang that they could kill us when they get drunk. In the past, they used to kill each other when they get drunk. Moreover, the Highlanders emphasized that HIV/AIDS is rampant among the Majang⁶¹. Besides, informants indicate that dowry is very expensive in Majang community, which can cost up to 15,000 ET Birr. The amount of payment is growing year after year. The

⁵⁹ Interview with Meskerem Eshetu, highlander married to Majang, Meti, 16 May 2013; Kiki Sidama, Meti, May 2013; Ms Yayesh Goshene, 04 July 2014.

⁶⁰ Interview with Ali Zenabu, Meti, 16 March 2013.

⁶¹ FGD with Highlanders, Meti, July 2014.

Highlanders have to pay very high bride price by the Majang families. A Majang men could easily marry a highlander women because of little bride wealth obligation⁶². That means there is an incentive for Majang men to marry highlander women. In fact, many highlander women are not willing to marry Majang men for ‘racial’ reason⁶³.

Furthermore, interview with the two groups indicated that the two groups also despised each other. This has further inflamed the Majang-Highlanders relations. A highlander named Negussie Abreha pointed out: “still our people did not marry with the Majang. We do not have an interest. They do not have either. No one marry Majang among settlers”⁶⁴. The Highlanders emphasized their difference lifestyle. The Highlanders are farmers while the Majang are shifting cultivators and hunters. Moreover, they added, “the Highlanders are a hard working people. Therefore, it is very difficult for the Majang women to cope with the Highlanders and work as the Highlanders women”. Informants also stressed that Highlanders consider themselves superior to the local population in terms of literacy, culture, language and way of life⁶⁵. In this regard, a Majang informant, 72, who lives in Kumi, is stronger in his comments, “The Highlanders do not see the local people as equal and despised Majang culture and way of life. They consider, for example, our forest-based culture as backward”. Corroborating this, Sommer (2005:22: 23) wrote that the Highlanders have a tradition that is not free from the concept of supremacy towards the local population. In view of the above facts, one of the key tools for social integration is missing in Majang-Highlanders relation.

⁶² Interview with Alemayehu Muse, Meti, July 2014.

⁶³ FGD with Highlander women, Meti, 2013.

⁶⁴ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 17 March 2013.

⁶⁵ Interview with Moges Tefera, Meti, 2014; Semeneh Gardew, Meti, 2014.

Above all, the other factor that further enhanced the social distance between the two groups is the continued large influx of highlander migrants into Majang zone. That means the indigenes people strongly resented the highlander's unprecedented migration in terms of magnitude since 1991. This inexorable migration has threatened Majang people survival. The Majang, therefore, have begun to develop a sense of extreme dislike against the Highlanders. As a result, the Majang want to evict the Highlanders. These indigenes attitudes manifest themselves in their speech in different occasions. Recently they are adopting a way of saying which quotes "let Highlanders be returned to where they came from in the same foot they came to our areas", "Highlanders did not come here carrying a land, let them leave from our land". This situation is straining the already complicated difference of the two communities that could trigger bloody conflict. One Majang in an extreme anger said, "We were swarmed by the greedy and shrewd highlander's people. They almost took Godere *Woreda* and now, they are taking land in Mengesh *Woreda* in a alarming pace. They deprived our right to access to the forest and our survival. We do not want to see them in our land." The extreme form of this was manifested in the 11 September 2014 violent conflict incident that further worsened their relationship. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 7.

In general, the previously mentioned discussions show that the Highlanders rather than integrating with the local community, they discriminated and despised them in their own homeland. The discussion also reveals that the differences in terms of culture between the two groups are just too vast. The above discussions speak not only the mere existence of the very fact of ethnic boundaries between these people but also the massive social distance that may have led to mistrust and stereotyping and which have a potential for ethnic acrimony and ultimately

violent conflict. The 11 September 2014 deadly conflict could be a very good example (see chapter 7).

5.4 The Magnitude and Quandary of Migration and Land Acquisition

In the past, as has been noted above, land was abundant in Majangland. Thus, since land shortage is not an issue for the Majang, when alien people come and start to settle near their settlement, they prefer to go to other unoccupied area. Now, things are different. The Majang are facing a problem, which they had never experienced in the past. In what follows, the researcher assessed, mainly from the perspective of the host community, the major predicaments and challenges caused by the influx of highlander migrants.

5.4.1 Tenure Insecurity

Since the 1950's, a number of Majang in this area have been dispossessed of their land by the Amhara, Oromo and other highland peoples⁶⁶. During the *Derg* period, the 1984 resettlement programme was responsible for the great displacement of the indigenous people. This event served as a key factor for the current relentless influx of Highlanders. Regrettably, the precise official figures as to the number of displaced local people are not obtainable.

Currently, the study revealed that highlander's invasion of their land has caused displacement of thousands of the Majang from their traditional ancestral land. After the 1991 land is becoming a very scarce resource due to the remarkable increase in the number Highlanders and illegal

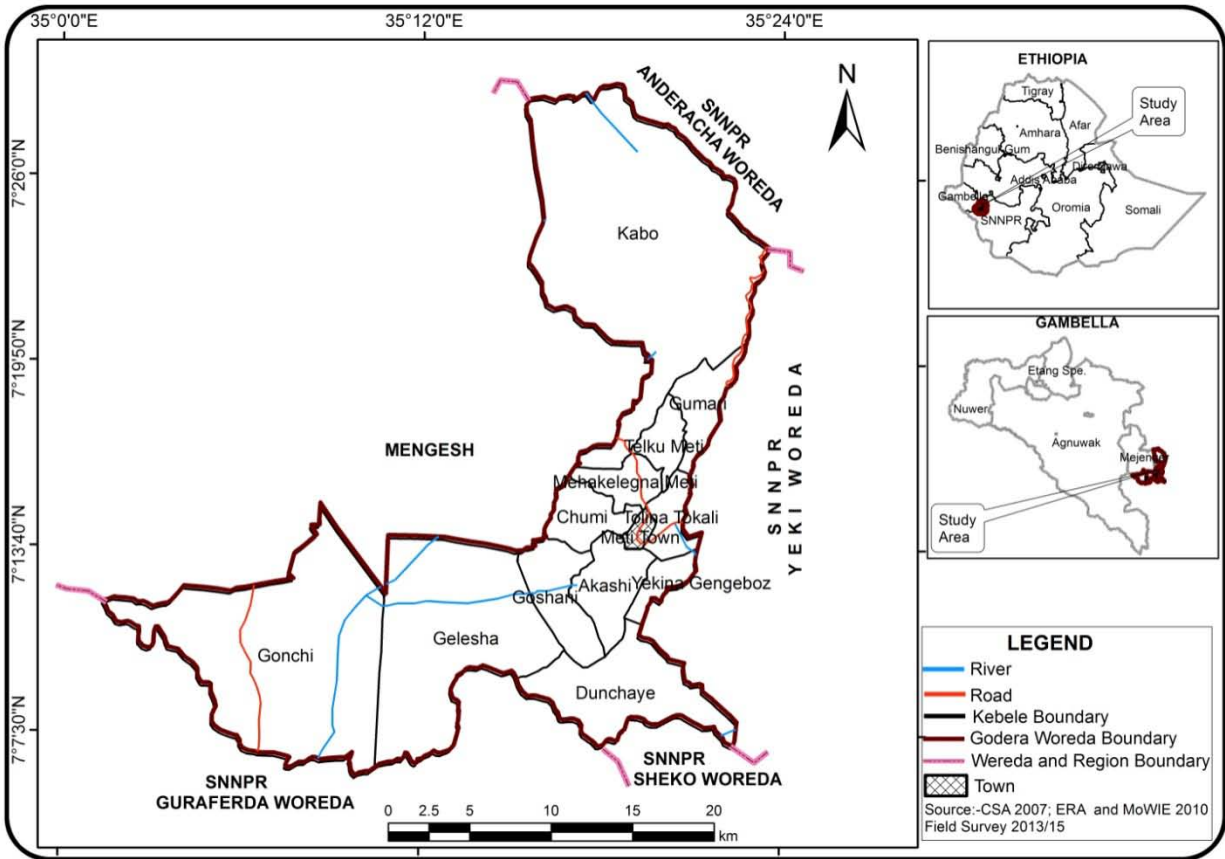
⁶⁶ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 2.

invasion of Majangland. According to local informants, Highlanders are displacing and alienating the host people and are causing environmental, political, economic and social disorder to them. Some Majang informants say, “We have suffered a lot in the hands of the greedy Highlanders. They are the ones who exploit the forest more intensively than us”⁶⁷.

More or less, in all *kebeles* of Godere *Woreda* the number of Highlanders is by far greater than that of the Majang. Out of 14 *kebeles*, immigrant Highlanders become the dominant land users in 9 *kebeles*. Particularly, forestland acquisition is in a very delicate situation in Chemi and Goshene *kebeles* in Godere *Woreda* where the Majang have already been completely displaced or have been left only with small plots of land. The Majang are currently found only in five out of the 14 *kebeles* of the Godere *Woreda*.

Figure 5: Map of *kebeles* in Godere *Woreda*

⁶⁷ Interview (name withheld), Meti , April 2013.



As figure 6 above and table 5 below show, Kabo and Gumari, the largest kebeles in MNZ in terms of land size and population, are under the control of Highlanders and investors. The only surviving thick forests in Chemi (Mersha forest) and in Goshene (Gengebeti forest) have been cleared for coffee cultivation in the last three years. In these *kebeles*, those few surviving Majang’s have very small land holdings only for their residence. In Chemi, the number of Majang may be slightly higher than highlander’s but still most of the land is under the possession of the highland migrants.

Table 5: Godere *Woreda* population distribution

No.	Kebele	2008	2014
1	Meti 01	2710	4971
2	Meti 02	2713	4157
3	Kabo	5686	8986
4	Gumari	4759	6713
5	Mehakelegna Meti	3022	4129
6	Teliku Meti	2148	3916
7	Tolina Tokali	2990	4397
8	Gengeboz	1273	1809
9	Akashi	2357	4914
10	Gelishi	1300	2223
11	Dunchayi	1344	3459
12	Chemi	955	1380
13	Goshene	276	2156
14	Gonchi	312	543
	Total	31,845.00	53,753.00

Source: Majang *Woreda* water and Sanitation, and Health Bureau

Likewise, Mengesh *Woreda* has been affected by Highlanders forestland encroachment. Up until 2005, Mengesh *Woreda* was exclusive Majang settlement area. In fact, most of Mengesh *Woreda* is not that much suitable to coffee cultivation. It is suitable for sesame and rice production. At this moment since sesame and rice are attractive exportable commodities, the Highlanders aggressively controlled lots of land within a short period of time. However, after 2005, Highlanders aggressively entered deep into the *Woreda*. The former regional President (Umodi Obong) noted, “Now illegal immigrants are heading their way to Mengesh *Woreda* for unlawful consumption of well-known jungle forest resources in the country⁶⁸”. Highlander immigrants land acquisition exists in all areas but *kebeles* such as Gubati, Shone, Dushi, Kumi and Yari are the worst affected places. Rice production is the dominant form of cash crop plantation in Mengesh *Woreda* introduced in 2008 by the Highlanders. For instance, Gubati *kebele* was an exclusive Majang settlement area. However, Gubati is almost under the total highlander’s dominance now. Informants indicated that there is only one Majang coffee farmer in Gubati. First, the inhabitants of Gubati were displaced by the government coffee plantation from Abiy 01, 02, 03, and 04 and moved to Gubati *kebele*. In Gubati, again, the employees of the company, and then the other new immigrant Highlanders followed them, and bought almost all-local community’s farmland. Now, though the chairperson of the *kebele* is a Majang, 99% of the residents are Highlanders. Then, the local community was displaced and settled in Dushi *kebele*. Again, the Highlanders, largely employee of the company, followed them and invaded the area, and pushed them to Kumi and Yari *kebele* within the last 8 years. Let us see the case of Yari Kebele as best illustrative example for the pace and extent of forestland acquisition.

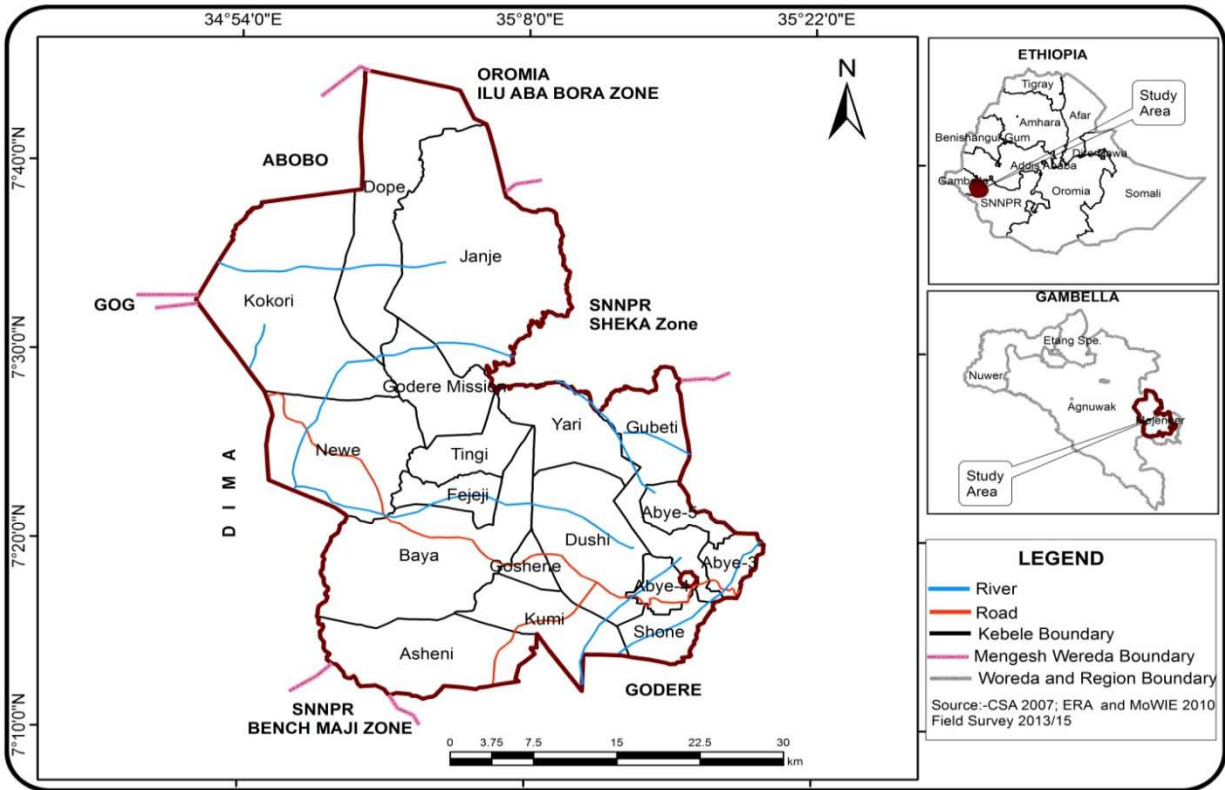
Land Acquisition in Yari Kebele

⁶⁸ Obong, *The Untold Majang Ethnic Minority Group Massacre...*

Since 2010, Yari become an area where the worst land acquisition with significant population exists. The local community lost their farmland to immigrant Highlanders. In fact, before 2010, there was no *kebele* called Yari. It was one of the densest forest parts of Mengesh *Woreda*. It was established as new administrative *kebele* after massive highlander's concentration in the area. According to official data, there are more than 18,000 people (almost equal with *Woreda* population) in Yari *kebele*. Pact report indicates that while the illegal settler's accounts for more than 10,000, the native community does not exceed 600⁶⁹. Therefore, all these people settled there by converting the dense forest into farmland and by displacing the local community. Key Majang informant in Yari *kebele*, 56 years old, says, 'I saw the dense forest and its resources disappearing bit by bit within the last three years.' From Yari, again they were displaced into peripheral areas such as Fejeje, Tengi, Kokori and so on within four years. With an increasing trend, the Highlanders are also entering into the rest of the *kebeles*. For instance, in Kumi, Goshene, Fejeje, Ashene, Baya, Tengi, Godere mission, Newi, Gonji, Dipi and Kokori they are taking land in an increasing trend. *Kebeles* such as Abiy 01, 02, 03, and 04 are also under the total possession of Green Coffee Estate SC. In Mengesh *Woreda*, therefore, almost all the fertile areas of the Majang are under the control of the Highlanders.

Figure 6: Administrative Map of *kebeles* in Mengesh *Woreda*

⁶⁹ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 181.



Indeed, the current trend shows considerable increase of migrants lots of Highlanders arriving in Majang every other day⁷⁰. As shown in table 1, the number of population is almost doubled within six years, especially in the highlander dominant *kebele*'s. The researcher also witnessed this fact. In this respect, in an eloquent figurative speech, Ato Yimam Faris (July 2014) said, "See this river. Does this river stop flowing? Can we stop it? No, we cannot. Highlander's migration into our land is just like this. It is beyond our capacity."

In fact, almost all fertile lands and dense forest coverages are becoming under the dominant control of migrants and employees of MCFs. At the height of the forestland grab, many of these Highlanders cleared the forest to grow coffee as well as for timber and, as a result are turned to

⁷⁰ It is important to note now that migration is not technically illegal but illegal land acquisition are unjust at least from the point of view of the Majang.

the so-called “investors”. Astonishingly, without backing of any legal document some of the Highlanders have possession of unregistered 200-300 hectares of coffee land as farmers in different localities⁷¹.

As has been described in chapter 1, the Majang people consider their land and resources as collective assets⁷². In fact, the Majang have a unique form of right to trees on which beehives are hanged and which everyone respects. In essence, the forest is a common property but individuals hold rights to particular trees on which their hives are put⁷³.

Recently, however, the researcher’s observation and the above discussion show that there was a general trend of promoting individual land ownership at the expense of collective land rights. Land acquisitions drastically change the land tenure system. The illegal sale of land by the local people to the ever-increasing migrant Highlanders had diminished the land available to the local people, to such a degree that indigenes families failed to provide land to grown up children. A key informant confirmed, “Though land is not a saleable commodity in federal Ethiopia, forestlands have become *de facto* legal and profit-making material goods in our area”⁷⁴. The temporary economic benefit for the local community has led to a rising commercialization of forestland. Surprisingly, the local leadership was also part of the problem. It has been the *kebele* leaders who have been legalizing the land deals. Essentially, the Highlanders have the courage to clear forestland getting some green light from the local political elite. This is against the government rhetoric that the government owns land to protect peasants from eviction from their

⁷¹ FGD with Majang, Meti, 2014; Interview with Sentayehu, An expert in Mengesh *Woreda* Bureau of Agriculture, Meti, June 2014.

⁷² That is why land certification and registration has not been undertaken in MNZ yet.

⁷³ Dessalegn, *Land to Investors...*, 22.

⁷⁴ Interview with Alemayehu Wawaye, former head of MNZ, Meti, March 2013.

land. It states that private ownership of land would force peasants to sell their land out of distress jeopardizing their livelihoods⁷⁵. Such a situation has dramatically changed land ownership from the local community to the dominant highlander migrants.

The previously mentioned problems are also corroborated by quantitative data's. As has mentioned above, MCF has also been attracting considerable highlander migrant employees who are partaking in the land dispossession. For instance, Green Coffee Estate SC has employed about 7000 Highlanders. Consequently, land is now becoming scarce for the indigenous people due to huge population pressure. Majang who possess land more than one hectare are very few⁷⁶. For example, according to the 2011 projected population, the Gambella region with the surface area of 34049 Sq km the population density is 10.5 persons per kilometer. While Gambella Zuria is has a population density of 4 people per kilometer, Lare 53.4, Abobo 5.9, Jakawa 38.3 that of Godere and Mengesh *Woreda* is 76.2 and 14.3 persons per kilometer respectively⁷⁷. Thus, Godere and Mengesh *Woredas* of the MNZ have the largest population density in the region. This has resulted in imbalance in land possession. Majang is witnessing a high proportion of mainly significant individual Amhara farmers and Tigranyan domestic investors⁷⁸. Official statistical data's also confirmed that there is a visible gap among Gambella *Woredas* as well as between the indigenous people and the immigrants. For example, about 64% of male headed households and 67.9% of female headed households in Godere *Woreda* possess from 0.51-1 hectares while in Abobo, Gog, Jor have better area of farm land ranging from 1-1.2 hectares⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ Alulaand Piguat, *Migration, Resettlement...*, 230.

⁷⁶ Interview with Godere *Woreda* agriculture expert, Meti, July 04 2014.

⁷⁷ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 35.

⁷⁸ Oakland Institute confirmed that in contrast to other countries affected by extensive land acquisitions, Ethiopia show a high proportion of domestic investors, predominately Tigrinya. Oakland Institute, *Omo local Tribes under Threat. A field Report from the Omo Valley* (Ethiopia: Oakland, 2013).

⁷⁹ *Ibid*: 117-118.

MNZ respondents feared that private investment and continued immigration might uproot them from their possession⁸⁰. Indeed, with the current trends of land acquisition, the future will be difficult for the indigenous community to get access to land. The socio-economic survey results of part Ethiopia also indicate that 70% of respondents from MNZ fear that they might lose the land they possess in the future while 95% of Gog, Jor, Wantewa and Abobo are confident to say that they will continue to possess the land they have now in the future⁸¹. The indigenous Majang perceived intrusion of highlander land grabbers as an act of aggression on their habitat, livelihood and forest-based way of life. Hence, the Majang employed various methods to re-take their land and preserve the forest.

5.4.2 The Ecological Damage and Livelihood Impacts

The impact of land acquisition by Highlanders in the zone's natural resources is also profound. As has been noted above, the Highlanders, occupying the most fertile areas, encroached deeply into the Majang forestland and exploited the forest more intensively than the host community did. Despite the fact that the very survival of the Majang as a group is linked with the wellbeing of the forest, this intensive land exploitation has left most of the Majang territory barren. The forest and soil fertility has for the last decades been unabatedly depleted at an alarming rate. The local people complained that the Highlanders had indiscriminately cut trees to clear land for farming⁸². Most of the Highlanders interviewed also admitted that they have cut trees in order to clear land for coffee cultivation. In this regard, the Zone plant science experts pointed out that

⁸⁰ Ibid: 115.

⁸¹ Ibid: 113.

⁸² Interview with Dawit Admasu, Meti, June 2014; Koba Kotali, Meti, 11 May 2013, Farish, kebele head, Chemi, 17 May 2013.

the Highlanders have also started to replace the indigenous forest with *Bahirzaf* (eucalyptus tree), which significantly reduces the fertility of the soil⁸³.

Besides, logging is the main cause of deforestation and a chief lucrative economic activity in its own right since it requires only a modest investment of labor and capital to be turned into profit⁸⁴. There is an anecdotal evidence that there are lots of legal and illegal sawmills in MNZ operated by the Highlanders⁸⁵. The inhabitants are complaining, “our forest population has been reduced by highlander’s illegal timbering activities. They use forest as if it would last forever”⁸⁶. Loggers from the highland are rapidly destroying the forest⁸⁷. As a result, it becomes very difficult to find food in the forest. Besides, destructive overuses of the limited resources, persistent competition additionally aggravate the ecological degradation in the areas.

Figure 7: Map of MNZ forest Coverage from 2001-2013

⁸³ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 17 May 2013.

⁸⁴ FGD with Highlanders, Yari, 11 May 2013.

⁸⁵ Workshop, Meti, 2013.

⁸⁶ Interview (name withheld), Chemi, 19 May 2013.

⁸⁷ Interview with Aschalew Sheferaw, Meti, 18 March 2013; Yoriyam Teka, Yari, 19 May 2013.



The ecological effects of such deforestation activities are profound. It brings substantial changes to the way of life to Majang communities. The clearing process alters all microclimate, hydrology, and soil mechanics. One key agriculture expert in MNZ underlined, “Deforestation is warming and drying the soil and is making the surface of the land hotter. Without the moderating effects of the forest canopy to shade the ground and protect it from wind, the temperature in general is fluctuating more widely.⁸⁸” The expert added:

The land is generally cleared and it not only reduced the number and size of trees but also increased the sterility of the soil. Soil is normally blessed with fertility from forest. Fertile soil in the forest is there because the forest kept it there. It is this fact that led the Majang to practice shifting agriculture by slashing and burning. We have lived and co-existed with

⁸⁸ Interview (name withheld), Meti, May 2013.

*the forest for centuries in this way. This being the case, soil changes when its close relative – forest - is removed*⁸⁹.

In-depth interview with experts and elders revealed that small streams of water have dried up and the age-long animal and plant species have dwindled as the Highlanders took the very fertile, forest coverage and water sources of the MNZ. People emphasize that deforestation led to climatic disruption such as erratic rainfall which adversely affected coffee, millet and corn production⁹⁰. The frequency of rain has now reduced to once a month. As has been noted above in Majang, the rainy season used to start in mid-January but now it does not even begin in April⁹¹. This is also the effect of global warming but deforestation is accelerating the weather fluctuation at alarming rate.

The disappearance of many species of wild animals such as antelope, warthog, buffalo, etc. and that of trees is also a sign of new ecology for the local community and a termination of the century old Majang traditional practice of hunting, gathering, and production of traditional medicine in MNZ. One of the key informants stated, “We used to practice shifting cultivation in Godere *Woreda*. Now, due to the increase in Highlanders population, slash and burn cultivation was replaced by settled farming more so by the highlander population than the indigenous Majang.”⁹²

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Forest management workshop participants, Meti, 2013.

⁹¹ FGD with Majang and Highlanders, Meti, 27 April 2013.

⁹² Interview (name withheld), Goshene, 2014.

Since 1991, the predominantly shifting cultivators and hunter-gatherer Majang with the systematic forest land appropriation is changing fast and resulting in severe limitations of mobility and access to forest resources. The people used to have the opportunity to utilize the forest in several ways. To begin with, they used it as a basis of their livelihood. Access to land and forest has had a symbolic value as a means of identification with one's ancestor, village, and the group. The people had the opportunity to shift cultivation and easily mobilize from place to place. However, the predicament of the highlander population explosion in the Majangland has caused the deprivation of access of the Majang to land and its resources. The transformation of Majang forestland into individual ownership critically limits the people's livelihood. In earlier times, it was not difficult to find another place for one's homestead owing to a general abundance of land⁹³. Conversely, at present restricted to smaller areas, they are forced to abandon their century-old traditional practices of shifting cultivation, apiculture, hunting and so on. It also limits their cultural practices. Increasing commercialization of land is making land scarce to the local community.

For instance, the Majang area produces the region's well-known 'Ethiopia's liquid gold' of red honey. The Majang use honey for medicine, traditional honey-wine and as a market commodity. Now key informants indicated, "There is a substantial decline in honey production as a result of deforestation and competition by honey farm investors in neighboring SNNPRS"⁹⁴. For example, because of the mechanized flower farm owned by an Ethiopian billionaire, Mohammed Al-amoudi, and the modern techniques the farm uses in neighboring Sheka Zone, the local farmers

⁹³ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 140-141.

⁹⁴ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2013.

have lost their bees⁹⁵. In effect, the widespread disappearance of honeybees and flower plants affected the Majang people and decreased productivity significantly. A key informant said, “As you know, apiculture is our typical way of life. The Highlanders came and chopped the trees down; the forest deteriorated and the bees went away. So, we no more have honey which was an important cultural and commercial item for us”⁹⁶. Since the Majang depend on forest bee keeping, deforestation and other ecological damages became a threat to their lives.

Majang zone was one of the few centers of the nations bio diversity with tropical high dense forest. Its size is now diminishing from time to time. A key Majang informant who spent his entire life in the forest said:

Few Majang may get jobs and government positions and become salaried white collar as a result of federal self-governance, but I do not think this will be so with the majority of us. I think the Majang are the losers of all things considered. Though the land belongs to us owner nationalities, we do not have the land to inherit to our children. We do not have adequate land and forest to grow millet, go for hunting and collect honey; we do not have food to eat. Certainly, the old ways of living and the culture will be lost⁹⁷.

5.4.3 Identity and Social Crisis

⁹⁵ Interview with Akitute Teslonke, Goshene, 05 July 2014; Interview with Ms Etalemi Taye, Goshene, 13 May 2013.

⁹⁶ Interview (name withheld), Chemi, April 2013.

⁹⁷ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 12 May 2013.

One of the things that the Majang are known for is their forest-based customary life. The increase in forestland acquisition by the Highlanders made the Majang marginalized and some of these people have been forced to abandon their forest livelihoods and century-old tradition. For example, slash and burn cultivation and bee-keeping activities have been enormously curtailed and their pattern highly distorted. This is caused by the destruction of the forest by Highlanders. Besides, this life style has also been stereotyped by the Highlanders⁹⁸. The life style is considered as ‘backward’.

This has created not only livelihood crisis but also identity crisis as well as social disorder on the side of the indigenous Majang. When driven out of the forest and displaced from their land, they are forced to compromise their identities. It affects the ability of small farmers to generate income and provide for their families. Those who had been displaced and made to live in towns and settlement villages had to adapt to new and often difficult circumstances. The Majang who managed to be integrated into the modern way of life are extremely few. The majority are still struggling with the social pressure to adapt to the modern way of life with no proper livelihood shift. They have continued to be victims of not only social uncertainty but also grinding poverty. Since the native land becomes the Highlanders immigrants, the local people are migrating to towns without proper skills for employment.

As a result, prostitution, robbery and unemployment is increasing. For example, they are almost absent in the zone economy. For instance, according to data obtained from the Godere *Woredas* Trade and industry Bureau (2013), 99% of the traders and those engaged in business activity are

⁹⁸ Interview with Solomon Terefe, Mekane Yesus, Meti, 30 June 2014; Interview with Aklilu Mamo and Wondemagegn Haile, MoFA, Addis Ababa, 18 february 2015.

Highlanders. It makes them continue to be victims of not only social uncertainty but also prone to biting poverty. The situation forced some of them to commit crimes⁹⁹. Furthermore, the health risk of local community increased significantly due to food insecurity. A typical example is prostitution, which is reportedly on the rise, leading to an increased prevalence of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is becoming threat to the local community. According to data obtained from the zone HIV Secretariat while the national and regional average of HIV/AIDS prevalence is 1.5 % and 6.5 % respectively, the MNZ is more than 13 %¹⁰⁰.

Moreover, the ultimate consequence of migration of Highlanders on the Majang is that they abandon their land and retreat places which are not settled. As the Highlanders successfully occupy the Majang forestland in Godere *Woreda* in the east, the latter are pushed down to increasingly remote mountain and forest areas into the west, i.e. Mengesh. This pattern of retreat starts from today's Yeki *Woreda* in Sheka Zone and Godere *Woreda* in MNZ gradually to the mountains of today's Feje, Dope, Kokuri, Janje of Mengesh *Woreda*. What is more, the government, with little consultation, is moving the people from the forest to a village¹⁰¹. This in turn has pushed the local community into economically and physically marginal areas which deprived them of their livelihood. The Majang displacement and retreat to the periphery meant more deforestation, which gradually pushed them further into less fertile areas, and more confrontation with their neighbors as has happened with the Anywaa. Let us illustrate this with an example. There was a case between Ali Zanabu, a highlander immigrant farmer from Wollo and Amanuel Kerkan, a Majang farmer over a farmland in Chemi *kebele*. When the Majang man was young, his father (Kerkan) had concluded a contract of land sell with a highlander. When he

⁹⁹ FGD with Majang officials, Meti, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ MNZ, HIV Secretariat, 2014.

¹⁰¹ FGD with Majang, Meti, April 2013.

grew up, he was left with nothing to plough. He asked the highlander to return the land which he had tricked it from his father. Ali refused to return the land. Ato Amanuel Kerkan sued Ali in Chemi *Kebele* claiming the possession of the land in Chemi *kebele* Peoples Tribunal in 2012. Amanuel is a Majang who move and live in Goshene *Kebele* due to the absence land to plough in Chemi *kebele*. He is one of the sons of Kirkan Shiguti's several wives. Ali is a highlander originally from Wollo who reside in Majang for more than 28 years. He came to Godere (Meti) in 1982 in search of his wife and he started to live in Meti town working as a tailor. He described his story of land acquisition to the author as follows:

Meti was a very small town. There were very few Highlander. There was no Majang in Meti. They were only in the rural area. While I was doing my job as a sailor in Meti town, the Majang approached me and asked me whether I am interested to buy land. Then, since land is a valuable commodity, I have agreed with them and they took me to Chemi kebele. It was in 1996. I bought about 3 hectares of land from Gimbaru Kirkan, Gimbaru wife and his father Kirkan Shiguti. In fact, it was very cheap that I bought it by 1,500.00 ET Birr. The land was covered by sugarcane, banana, coffee and other fruits and vegetables. We have signed an agreement before elders and witnesses. Besides, our agreement was ratified and legalized in Godere Woreda First Instance Court. At that time, the Chemi Kebele allowed the Majang to sell land whether it is cultivated nor not. Land was extremely abundant at that time. Sometimes, the kebele leadership also gave land free if you gave them small gifts. I buy it because it has coffee and other fruits. Until now, it is in my possession.

After looking the case, the *Kebele* Peoples Tribunal ruled against Ali¹⁰² in 26 September 2012. The *Kebele* People Tribunal ordered the defendant to return the supposed extra land to the plaintiffs. The decision of the *Kebele* under No. 52/07/05 reads as follows, “We have seen the case of land ownership in our *kebele* between Ali and Amanuel. We found that Ali took 70 by 100 extra lands more than the land he bought from Kirkan Shiguti. Hence, we hereby decided that Ali has to return the extra 70 by 100 land to Amanuel. ” They have sent a copy of the decision to the defendant, to Godere *Woreda* Court, Head of the Chemi *Kebele* and the plaintiffs.

However, Ali refused to give the land to the plaintiffs and filed a plea to the Chemi *kebele* Tribunal. Ali said, “The *kebele* decided without due process of law. They gave verdict only based on the accuser’s information. They refused to see my appeal and discarded my application. They simply imposed me to give the land sided for the Majang”. He added, “I have legal documents, which indicate my ownership status of the land that had been ratified by Godere *Woreda* Court. In addition, I have receipt vouchers that show that I have paid land tax to government for 16 years. The plaintiff did not pay any land tax to government.”

Afterward, Chemi *Kebele* Tribunal referred the case to Godere Bureau of Justice. The Justice Office sends a letter to the Chemi *Kebele* to investigate the case with the presence of the conflicting parties and village elders or eyewitness. The *Kebele* Tribunal investigates the case and sends a report back to the Justice Office that Ali took an extra 70 by 100 land. Accordingly, Godere *Woreda* Justice Office passed a verdict on June 10, 2012 under no. 7/550/04 based on the Chemi *Kebele* Tribunal report. The office decided that Ali Zenabu has taken an extra land beyond their contract with Kirkan Shiguti, thus we hereby ruled that the defendant must return

¹⁰² Chemi *Kebele* Tribunal decision on the case of Amanuel and Ali, 26 October 2005/2012 No. 52/07/05.

the land that belongs to the plaintiffs¹⁰³. Once more, according to Ali, “Godere *Woreda* Justice Office ruled against me without looking at my documents and fair modus operandi. Accordingly, the Chemi *kebele* ordered Ali to give the land to Amanuel.

Nevertheless, Ali again refused to give the land. Rather he asked the *Kebele* an appeal. The *Kebele* however rejected the appeal and ordered Ali to return the land. Then Ali applies to Godere *Woreda* Justice Office and to Godere *Woreda* Court. Ali told to the author, “The judge of the *Woreda* was first reluctant to write a letter to the *Kebele* executive since they feared them. Then, the *Woreda* Court Persecutor wrote a letter accepting my appeal. It says that the applicant has a constitutional right to have an appeal to court decision.” Finally, Ali, “reluctantly the *kebele* allowed me to see my petition and I went to *Woreda* First Instance Court. Nevertheless, the Court replied to me that the case is beyond our jurisdiction.”

Then after, Ali also applied to the Majang Zone High Court. The application said, “The Chemi *Kebele* decided against me without due process of law and refused to give me an opportunity to take part in the proceedings. It ordered me to give a land that I legally possess for 16 years. Anyone has the constitutional right to present a case in a court of law. So, I request your good office to allow me to present my case before court.” Accordingly, the Majang Zone Prosecutor has written a letter¹⁰⁴ to Godere *Woreda* Administrative Office. The letter says, “The *Woreda* Administrative Office is the highest executive authority. Hence, it should give solution to the

¹⁰³ A letter from Godere *Woreda* Justice Office to the Chemi *Kebele* Peoples Tribunal, on June 10, 2004/2012 under no. 7/550/04 .

¹⁰⁴ A letter from Majang Zone Prosecutor to Godere *Woreda* Administrative Office, on 15 October 2005 under no. 47/0106/05.

problem. If it becomes beyond the jurisdiction of the *Woreda* Administrative Office, the case should be referred to the formal court.”

Finally, they chose elders from the Majang and Highlanders for negotiation. Ali said “I become desperate that I could not obtain a solution from the court of law, I agreed to solve the issue via Shimeglina (elders)”. They reached an agreement that the defendant, Ali to pay 10,000.00 ET Birr to the plaintiffs. They also give a copy of their agreement to the Godere *Woreda* Justice Office and the Office endorsed it.

In the end, the highlander by giving small money aborts the court case in negotiation and ensured the possession of the land. Whereas the Majang man migrated to other remote areas. There are ample similar cases all over MNZ. The researcher raised the issue of land grab by the Highlanders as a problem to the defendant. The defendant, however, deny the allegation by saying, “It is essentially a problem but if you do not welcome me, I do not enter into House. No single Highlanders took land by force in Majang. The Majang do not have the culture to plough in their land. There is no land developed by the Majang. They know the law very well better than the Highlanders do. They did not use government opportunity.” Another long resident highlander Ato Zerihun too said, “The Majang are saying that this is our land. If they accuse you, you do not have a choice, you have to give them some money. Most of the time, the issue of land is resolved by negotiation through community elder’s”¹⁰⁵.

5.4.4 Political and Social issues: Fear of Highlanders’ Domination

¹⁰⁵ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 9 March 2013.

In the 1990's the Highlanders were a minority. The Majang constituted a majority both in Godere and in Mengesh *Woreda*. In the 2000s the Highlanders outnumbered the Majang in many *kebeles* and now become a majority in the Zone, especially they control Godere *Woreda* urban and rural lands. Theoretically, the Majang own the zone and are the 'political majority' at present. However, there is a widespread fear that the Highlanders' rather numerical majority would jeopardize the former's political leadership. As has been stated, the Highlanders have already come to make up 80% of the area's population. The swiftly changing demographic imbalance generated a political anxiety among Majang politicians. In addition, the continued influx of the Highlanders has created its own problem since the politics of number has a significant role in power sharing. If the situations continues, the Majang will be a political minority in their zone that will cause a major threat that trigger conflict¹⁰⁶.

Indeed, following the 2003 decision of the House of the Federations, the Highlanders are now demanding political participation and representation and this has caused further political insecurity for the indigenous Majang.¹⁰⁷ At present, 2014, the Highlanders have almost one-third representation in the Zonal Council¹⁰⁸. Concerning highlander's representation and appointment, the government used it as a very good opportunity for its purpose. In the name of the highlanders, the government appointed its own cadres down to local level. This has been one of the government methods to control both the highlanders and the indigenous community and leadership¹⁰⁹. Yet, highlanders have no political representation based on their demand and

¹⁰⁶ FGD with government officials, Meti, 29 October 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Previously, the National Electoral Board prohibited the non-indigenous Highlanders from running for office. Later, based on the Highlanders' appeal, in March 2003 the House of Federation allowed the non-indigenous Highlanders to be elected to public offices.

¹⁰⁸ Majang Zone Council, 2014; Interview with Girma, MNZ election Board, Meti, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

aspiration. It has been the government coalition parties represented in the region selected by the respective parties. Both the highlanders and native community has been unhappy about this government strategy.

Now, the migrants are openly demanding the power of the political leadership based on their numerical majority¹¹⁰. The new political power that the highlanders seek to wield will further strengthen their economic standing while undermining Majang's political power and increasing their livelihood vulnerability. Moreover, in the eyes of the local community, the Highlanders are closely associated with the Federal Government, which represents the central state. This is because Ethiopian state building is closely connected with Tigrayan and Amhara Semitic speaking people of the northern highlands who played a dominant role in the country's history¹¹¹.

Besides, as Amharic is the official language of the federal government and the working language of the region, those who master it as a mother tongue do have the advantage in communicating with the political elites at the centre of the country. In fact, the Highlanders are now dominant in the civil service. Therefore, such demographic size and control of the civil service and the business sector have induced demographic anxiety and political insecurity among the Majang. It is also from this perspective that the Majang view the Highlanders as a threat to their survival. Besides, land is a source of power though immigrants occupy land for economic interest. Within the Gambella region, the Majang have sought the creation of a second *Woreda* in order to increase their political representation as well as extract more from the regional pie. This bore

¹¹⁰ FGD with Majang officials, Meti, 2014.

¹¹¹ Sommer, *Transforming Conflict ...*, 22.

fruit in February 2007 when the decision was made to create a second Majang *Woreda*, Mengesh. The creation of the Mengesh *Woreda* is also related to Majang-Highlanders tension. In Majang zone, in general, and in Godere *Woreda*, in particular, the Highlanders constitute the majority, whereas the Majang exclusively inhabits the new Mengesh *Woreda*¹¹².

As a result, the continued influx of the Highlanders, with the tacit consent of the EPRDF, is increasingly interpreted by the Majang as a grand design by the government and the Highlanders to weaken Majang people culture and identity. There is an alleged evidence that now the government is promoting Highlanders resettlement to increase the volume of coffee production for export¹¹³. Besides that, although highly exaggerated, the local people argued that the government tacitly endorses highlander influx into the low land area for national security interest to protect the border with South Sudan¹¹⁴.

5.5 Summary and Conclusion

Generally, this chapter has sketched the inter-regional migration phenomenon and its impact on the indigenous Majang people in the context of ethno-federalism in MNZ. The study concludes that though there was hope that ethno-nationalist friendly federalism would ensure identity security for the indigenes of the Majang, in effect their political life, economic rights and societal security have come under constant threat and hence the Majang feel an existential threat in their interactions with the Highlanders. In this regard, many observers also pointed out that currently while the government policy of developmental state is manifested in the form of large-scale land

¹¹² see Dereje Feyissa, *The Interface between National...*,102.

¹¹³ FGD with Majang, Meti, 2014.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

lease, resettlement, and mega hydro dams, ethnicity and minority rights are pushed to the background¹¹⁵. Land acquisition and land commercialization in MNZ also contradicted with what the constitution makers have envisioned.

This case study is a telling example of the government's 'pragmatic' approach to ethnicity and its willingness to abandon its basic federal principle of protecting and promoting the rights of minority ethnic groups when faced with developmental challenges. In short, inter-regional migration and the resultant extensive land acquisition is undermining the federal project which is premised on ethno-cultural justice. In other words, the existence of ethnic-federalism does not automatically resulting in the protection of the Majang people because they lack the real power structure to challenge the encroachment. What is more, it seems that the government has a 'tacit consent' for Highlanders to get hold of land in MNZ and its policy of MCF (see the next chapter for details) has also facilitated migratory tendency.

Hence, as already illustrated, conflict has become a dangerous reality that must be resolved in the MNZ and it has created an indigene-migrant divide waiting to explode, sooner or later. In fact, earlier discussions clearly indicate that both groups are experiencing mutually reinforcing adversary image of what Buzan (1993:46) calls "societal security dilemma". If necessary measures are not taken immediately, the Majang culture will vanish completely. The people may be frustrated and several unwarranted conflicts and violence may ensue. Yet, the Regional and Federal Governments have failed to appropriately manage the problem.

¹¹⁵ For example see Barata, *Minority Rights, Culture...*, 68.

Therefore, since Highlanders' illegal land acquisition has presented an existential threat to the Majang people, inter-regional migration needs to be factored into the security agenda. In the Majang political discourses, highlander migrants are presented as threat to the Majang identities. This study recommends that appropriate social intervention policies (Inter-regional migration policy) should be in place to ensure that the people are able to fully exercise their rights and control over their lands. Actually, the constitution is clear enough in this regard but it lacks appropriate regulation and institutional frameworks vital for implementing its provisions and establishing secure forestland resource tenure for the Majang. There is lack of clear and officially enforceable rights over forestland possessions. We need to find a balance between individual 'jang' land ownership and communal land ownership.

There is an urgent response from concerned state authorities and non-state actors to help the Majang live as a viable group in the age of federalism. It seems negligent to see the highlander migrants displacing indigenous minorities from their ancestral lands within the context of 'ethnic federalism'. First, they have to be assisted to help their continued existence as a distinct group and live in accordance with their cultural patterns. To do so, self-rule, which is the benefit of federalism, should be put in place in practical terms. This includes better education, awareness creation since the Majang are paralyzed by the historical and cultural constraints and low level of education and consciousness. Second, ensuring stable forestland tenure would require the creation of a system whereby the present illicit seizing of land can be prohibited and prevented. Partly this can be done by demarcating an exclusive Majang forestland zones. By doing so, the vulnerability of the Majang to a growing Highlanders' demand for land will also be minimized. The recent arrival of Highlanders from Gojjam and Wollo in the area is making the local

community more insecure. Therefore, efforts are needed to have a more regulated population movement and the government should device a mechanism to avoid the effects of the existing cunning seizure of the Majangland by economically powerful migrants. Actually, migration by itself is not illegal. As per Article 41 of the FDRE Constitution, “Every Ethiopians has the right to engage freely in economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his choice anywhere within the national territory”. Nevertheless, the influence of individual rights on group rights, especially the right of indigenious minority and marginalized groups needs attention and wide-ranging impacts of the migration on the host community have to be reasonably debated.

Chapter 6

The Majang and New Forms of Insecurity: The Advance of Mechanized Commercial Agriculture

6.1 Introduction

Currently, the problem of land leasing for commercial purpose is a hotly debated issue in federal Ethiopia. Land is an essential asset and a means to sustain livelihood. It is the ultimate source of wealth, power, the natural capital for production and the foundation on which civilization is based¹. In African context, there are communal lands such as forests, grasslands, hunting and gathering areas, grazing areas, lakes, and rivers and so on that belong to the indigenous people². These collective possession rights are vested in a community without option of individualization³. Above all, for the indigenous people land, forest and its resources are everything. Forestland is central importance to indigenous Majang people culture, sense of identity and survival as a community. To quote; "... land is means more than just another factor of production. Land is inhabited by human beings with values and their own cultures, both of which are often very far from the concerns of stock investors, agronomists, and international companies"⁴. Indigenous local people are not only the marginalized community in development activities but also victims of development programs such as large-scale development programs.

¹ Pact Ethiopia, *Land use land cover and change detection...*, v.

² Cousins, 2000:160; cited in Barume, *Land Rights of Indigenous peoples in Africa...*, 178.

³ Barume, *Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa...*

⁴ Altare Caroline, *Sugar Cane and indigenous people* (France: Sup Agro, 2010), 21.

The Majang are in defense of their traditional life in the face of modernization process. It is to prevent the destruction of modes of production and to design livelihoods adapted to the context and balanced with it. Commercial farming disowns their traditions under rapid conditions of globalization.

In fact, as has been stated in chapter one, studies on land transfers for commercial agriculture and their economic, social and environmental impact in Ethiopia have been quite limited⁵. For instance, so far, the impact of commercial agriculture on the livelihood of the local community in Gambella region has not been seriously considered or addressed empirically. Especially, very little is known about what happens to the Majang people in relation to commercial agriculture. This chapter thus, investigates the negative impacts of the transfers of huge tracts of land for use by commercial agriculture on the livelihoods of the Majang people living in several local communities of Gambella Region. The broader aim of this chapter is to examine how commercial farming influences the life of the local communities. It aims to provide an analysis of the advance of commercial farming and its impact on the indigene Majang people in the study area. It also exposes the real and potential socio-economic, cultural and political impacts. Moreover, the objective is to address the tension between the investors and the local community. As this chapter assesses the major problems caused by commercial farming, the next chapter examines Majang community and leadership response and the resultant tensions and violent conflicts in the study area for the last two decades. This section is, therefore, devoted to the issue of land acquisition by foreign and domestic investors. It also interrogates the role of the new actors both state and non-state actors (funders) in the rush for land acquisition in Ethiopia. As such, it seeks to contribute in the understanding of the recent increase in the magnitude of land

⁵ Dessalegn, *Land to Investor...*, 4.

acquisition and its repercussions in the MNZ. Specifically, the following questions underpin this chapter: Is there any new land acquisition development in MNZ that has threatened the Majang people continued existence so far? If yes, what kind and of what scale of land acquisition threats? Whose interest do mechanized commercial agricultural investment policies tend to serve? What are the major driving forces behind such surging demand for extensive demand for farmland?

In what follows, findings of this study is thematized and discussed. The chapter is organized into five major sections other than the introduction. Section two and three, very briefly, introduces and review government policy of commercial farming and the role of international actors regarding commercial farming in general respectively. Section four and five discuss the expansion of commercial farming in Gambella Regional State and in MNZ in particular. Section six presents the predicaments caused by the advance of commercial farming on the local community with particular emphasis on livelihoods. Finally, the chapter ends through summary and conclusion based on the foregoing discussions.

6.2 Global and National Context of Extensive Land Acquisition for Commercial

Farming

Land acquisition is a worldwide event. There have been recent developments in the international political economy of agriculture and the environment that has provoked the rush to land grab. In fact, it is ignited for the most part by the food crisis but as studies indicate wide varieties of factors are behind the land rush. For instance, Shapard (2011) identified three key driving forces;

securing food supply, acquiring energy and manufacturing resources, and generating profits from private investment⁶. After the 2008 food price and supply crisis, many countries in the Middle East and Asia have reexamined their domestic food security policy. One of their major long-term strategies for food security is to get hold of extensive foreign land for food production, especially in developing countries⁷. Indeed, ‘global land grab’ has food security element arising from high commodity price and severe supply shortage in the global market especially for those who are dependent on the global food market⁸. Secondly, investors are targeting vast tracts of land for access to agro-fuels and other energy and raw materials for manufacturing goods and demands. Oil dependant countries have introduced a new agro fuel production by incorporating biodiesel and bio-ethanol with traditional transport fuels⁹. Third, attributable to the above-mentioned two factors extensive farmland acquisition has become attractive investment. In view of that, since 2008 there is an increased attention from investors on farmland as a vital investment to generate considerable returns¹⁰. In the same manner, Borras et al (2013) associates global land acquisition with the change in the global political-economic context that has given the rise to ‘flex crops and commodities’, the rise of BRICS and middle-income countries the revalued role of nation-states¹¹. The authors argued that nowadays ‘national states are engaged in systematic policy and administrative initiatives aimed at capturing so-called ‘marginal lands’ for large –scale investment’¹². National states have taken key legal and administrative steps that give them

⁶ Shepard Daniel, ‘Land acquisition and potential implications for world Food Security’, in M, Behnassi et al eds., *Sustainable Agricultural Development*, (Springer Science Business media B.V, 2011), 26-27.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Pearce, *Gambella, Ethiopia...*,vii.

⁹ Shepard, *Land acquisition and potential...*, 27-28.

¹⁰ Ibid: 28.

¹¹ Saturnino M. Borras Jr. Jennifer C. Franco and Chunyu Wang, ‘The Challenge of Global Governance of Land acquisition: Changing International Agricultural Context and Competing Political Views and Strategies, Globalizations’, 10:1, 161-179, (Routledge: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 162. Accessed on 02 December 2014<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2013.764152>.

¹² Borras et al, *The Challenge of Global Governance of Land...*, 167.

absolute authority to facilitate and carry out land deals. Borras et al (2013) identified five national states role in this regard, namely, (1) invention/justification of the need for large-scale land investment; (2) definition, reclassification and quantification of what is ‘marginal, under-utilized and empty’ lands; (3) ‘identification’ of these particular types of land; (5) ‘acquisition /appropriation’ of these lands; and (5) ‘reallocation/ dis-position’ of these lands to investors¹³.

Numerous reports and researches have blamed international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the European Union and its member states, to have stimulated and facilitated the phenomenon of land acquisition in developing countries. The world leaders gathered at the FOA in Rome June 2008 forwarded a response to the international food crisis. One of the strategies is to boost production by investing in the agricultural sector and rural development¹⁴. To achieve the aforesaid strategy, there are also “Invisible Hands” that play significant role in land acquisition, i.e., the ‘International Actors’. As a result, international institutions aggressively entered into less developed nations land acquisition opportunities.

The coming of new international actors is creating double pressure on the Majang people. In the one hand, various International institutional such as World Bank, UN, and European Union have attempted to integrate indigenous people in development agendas. On the other hand, experts and researches indicated that international financial institutions such as World Bank are agents of land grabbers. In a number of cases, international donors support to Governments continues even when violations of indigenous peoples’ rights are taking place¹⁵. For instance, Barume (2010:73) pointed out that ‘pressure from international donors can sometimes contribute to loss of lands by

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid: 30.

¹⁵ Baruma, *Land Rights of Indigenous peoples in Africa...*, 74

indigenous people.” He has also provided evidence that Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and World Bank are at the center of the stages in contribution to land alienation of indigenous people in Kenya and Tanzania. These institutions ‘have played and continue to play an important role in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of these countries land laws and policies impeding on native communities’ land rights.’¹⁶”

The international Financial Corporation (IFC), the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, is another typical example in fomenting extensive land deals in agriculture¹⁷. It provides credit and non-lending assistance to governments¹⁸. It also plays ‘a catalytic role, by mobilizing additional capital through loan syndication and lessening the political risk for investors, enabling their participation in a given project’¹⁹. A study by Oakland Institute also indicated that the rush to land acquisition has also been supported by the world financial institutions.²⁰ Furthermore, it is reported that it acts as a technical advisor, serve as a financial source to investors, and host governments²¹. The IFC also manages another multi-donor service of the World Bank Group, Foreign Investment Advisory Service (FIAS) that facilitate private investment in developing countries agribusiness and the land market²². In the context of land acquisition, IFC and FIAS encourage land leases and purchases by assisting private investors interested in agribusiness in developing countries. For instance, in 2008 alone, the IFC spent 1.4 billion \$USD in agribusiness

¹⁶ Ibid: 73.

¹⁷ Shepard, *Land acquisition and its Potential...*, 36.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The Director of the Oakland Institute told to VOA Amharic news agency, “One of the actors that are not really very visible is the International Finance Corporations (IFC) which gives loan to private investors. Amharic. voanews.com-January 8/2014.

²¹ For a detailed account of the issue see, Oakland Institute and Grain: www.oaklandinstitute.org; www.grain.org-[accessed](#) on 21 February 2013.

²² Shepard, *Land acquisition and potential...*, 36.

supply chain²³. Besides, they have managed to influence many countries to reduce or eliminate laws that prohibit foreign ownership of land. Moreover, they contribute to building infrastructure necessary for private economic action in the developing world²⁴. They promoted an agribusiness, which is ‘large scale and capital intensive.’²⁵

The European Union (EU) is also involved in the global land grab both directly and indirectly. It is directly involved through the supply of European capital to corporations in the acquisition of land. It involves indirectly through the suite of EU policies (such as the renewable Energy directive, EU investment policy, EU land policy, the common agricultural policy, etc) that are transforming land into a global commodity²⁶. For instance, the targets set by energy policies in the European Union to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are reportedly to have stimulated private investment in bio-fuel production overseas. It has also been reported that the European Union may have facilitated land acquisitions in the affected countries, through its support of land policies, investment environment and trade policy reforms. This has further fueled land grabs around the world²⁷.

There are also other international actors such as BRICS countries, powerful middle-income countries (MICs), and OECD countries and Gulf States in food rule making dynamics. The emergence of these new players that have ambitious need to change the power balance by ‘reshaping international rules that govern the production, distribution, and consumption of food

²³ Ibid: 37.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Fact Sheet of Hands off the Land, ‘The European Union and the Global Land Grab’ a joint project of TNI, FIAN International, IGO in Poland and FDCL in Germany.

²⁷ Ibid.

and other closely related commodities...'²⁸ Besides, these countries show an increasing share in the production, distribution, and consumption of these commodities²⁹. For instance, Brazil government keenly supports Brazilian companies to participate in global land acquisition such as in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Mozambique³⁰.

Thus, this land grab has new actors coming to the scene, i.e., International Financial Institutions. Indeed, International Financial Institutions are sponsoring a 'new form of agricultural neo-colonialism'³¹. To solve the international food crisis, the developed countries eye is on the developing nation's vast land. In consequence, the indigenous land is serving as a breadbasket of the developed nations.

Countries response to the above international context varies. S.M. Borras et al (2013) have identified three trends and tendencies in this regard. The first response is to regulate land grab to facilitate land deals who believe that large-scale land deals are a desirable phenomena³². To this end, these states enacted land laws and policies that make land deals 'faster, cheaper, and clearer land titling'³³. To mitigate some collateral damages, they rely on deploying a variety of good governance instruments³⁴. The second response tried to relate land deals to mitigate negative impacts of and maximize opportunities based on the twin assumption of the inevitability of land acquisition and the impossibility of redistributive land and rural development policies to promote

²⁸ Borras et al, *The Challenge of Global Governance of Land...*, 164.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Galeano, 2012; Sauer and Leite Pereira, 2012; Urioste; 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2012; cited in Borras et al, *The Challenge of Global Governance of Land*, 168.

³¹ Oakland Institute, *Omo local Tribes under Threat...*

³² Borras et al, *The Challenge of Global Governance of Land ...*, 169.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid: 169.

small-scale farming³⁵. This tendency considers large-scale investment as an opportunity for increased investment in agriculture in the midst of state neglect of the rural sector³⁶. This tendency also deploys a number of international governance instruments to support its position: strengthened property rights to protect the land rights of people, environmental and labor standards, greater community consultation, and particularly the use of transparency instruments such as free, prior, informed consent³⁷. The third tendency is the ‘stop and rollback land acquisition’ position. The fundamental assumption in this current is that the contemporary expansion of production for food, bio-fuels, feed, and others is not really meant to solve the world’s hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation, but to further capital accumulation for the insatiable corporate hunger for profits³⁸. This third tendency also deploys these international governance instruments but in order to ‘expose and oppose’, stop, and rollback land acquisition³⁹.

Conversely, Shepard pointed out, “many African nations, especially sub-Sahara Africa, view this demand as an important, timely opportunity for the continent’s economic development”⁴⁰. He further noted, “...these less developed nations are hopeful that land deals will bring much needed investment in infrastructure and agricultural technology as well as increased employment.” For instance, Ministry of Agriculture in Sudan, has stated, “Sudan can feed the whole world thanks to our millions of hectares of fertile land.”⁴¹ Likewise, Ministry of Agriculture in Ethiopia has

³⁵ Ibid: 169-170.

³⁶ Ibid: 170.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid: 171.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Shapard, *Land acquisition and potential...*, 29.

⁴¹ Sudan’s Rural, 2009; cited in Shapard, *Land acquisition and potential...*, 29.

also stated, “We have huge untapped land for Investors.⁴²” There is a huge debate going on whether foreign land acquisitions in less developed countries have a merit to the host country and the investors. In this regard, there are two strands of argument. Some argued that land investment has a win-win potential in which food insecure nations increase their access to food resource and ‘host’ nations benefit from investment in the form of improved agricultural infrastructure and increased employment opportunities⁴³. In sharp contrast, others argued that land investment which is based on monoculture and export oriented agriculture jeopardize international food insecurity⁴⁴. The approach to increasing food security through large-scale intensive agriculture has ‘little to do with food security for the world’s most vulnerable’⁴⁵. It further argued that this capital-intensive approach would definitely have an undesirable effect on rural livelihoods given that this will displace the rural communities and undermine food sovereignty⁴⁶.

To benefit from the aforementioned global political-economic context, the government of Ethiopia has undergone a policy shift and has passed laws and regulations. As mentioned in chapter two, the present government has developed a constitution that entrenched ethnic groups as sovereign entities in the federation,⁴⁷ lands and natural resources rights with the establishment and implementation of the FDRE⁴⁸. The 1995 FDRE constitution provides protection for both communal and individual rights to land. By taking into account their unique way of life and communal ownership of land, the constitution also guarantees pastoralists the right to free land

⁴² Tefera Deribaw, Ministry of Agriculture: MEET-ETV Talk Show 16 May 2014.

⁴³ Shapard, *Land acquisition and potential...*, 26.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid: 40.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Article 8 of the FDRE Constitution.

⁴⁸ Article 39 of the FDRE Constitution.

for grazing and cultivation as well as the right not to be displaced from their own lands⁴⁹. It also calls for protection of peasants against eviction from their possession⁵⁰. Moreover, to protect minorities from external encroachment, the constitution prohibits land sale or other means of exchange⁵¹. In this regard, the government is required by law to consult peoples with respect to policies and projects affecting people living in the local communities⁵². What is more, the constitution has also obliged the federal government to provide special assistance to ethnic groups least advantaged in economic and social development⁵³.

Undeniably, this radical approach is an important pledge for ethnic minorities in Ethiopia designed to address historical injustices related to land use, tenure and ownership. Besides, it has brought the government closer to local communities to promote empowerment of the people in local communities. For instance, local empowerment for the isolated Majang community is expressed in the establishment of MNZ. It has given the Majang people the opportunity to administer their own affairs, the power to preserve their unique life style and identity, history and culture.

Though the FDRE constitution integrates the rights of minority peoples into development programs, the process has encountered several problems which stem from the government principles like ‘national interest’ and its policy of developmental state. In fact, the state reserves the power to expropriate or undertake development activities on alleged public interest grounds despite their impact on some people, including formerly disadvantaged peoples.

⁴⁹ Article 40 (5) of the FDRE Constitution.

⁵⁰ Article 40 (4) of the FDRE Constitution.

⁵¹ Article 40 (3) of the FDRE Constitution.

⁵² Article 43(2) and 92(3) of the FDRE constitution.

⁵³ Article 89(4) of the FDRE Constitution.

These policy and practices are further complicated by international institutions indirect participation in the rush to land acquisition to address their food insecurity concern after the 2008 food crisis.

Currently, Ethiopia is transitioning towards federal governance system, which embraces cultural diversity and self-governance. This period is climaxed with development of two agriculture policies. The first one is the government land policy that was considered “peasant friendly” that favors smallholders 1991-2000⁵⁴. The second is the government strategic focus that has shifted slowly from smallholders to MCF since 2000’s. The former EPRDF Agricultural Development–led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy focuses primarily on smallholder agriculture and to some extent the expansion of MCF⁵⁵. Likewise, currently with government back up within the Growth and Transformation Plan 2011-2015 (GTP) framework has aggressively entered into land leasing for MCF. The economic rationale of such shift has been principally motivated by the primacy given for exports and foreign earnings to stimulate economic growth in the country⁵⁶. This policy shift has been designed in the context that small-scale farming is the main source of livelihood for more than 80 % of Ethiopians and 12 million people face at least periodic food insecurity⁵⁷. The EPRDF government has adopted commercialization of agriculture and acceleration of private sector development policies to boost development in the country⁵⁸. The government considers commercialization of lands as an important mechanism for agricultural

⁵⁴Dessalegn Rahmato, *Land to Investors: Large-scale Land Transfers in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, Forum for Social Studies, 2011), 11.

⁵⁵ In fact, the strategy had also focused on improved productivity in smallholdings.

⁵⁶ Dessalegn , *Land to Investors...*, 11.

⁵⁷ Darryl Vhughn and Aman Gebre, ‘Large-scale Acquisitions of Land in Ethiopia’, Policy brief, project developed by World resources Institute, Landesa Rural Development Institute, and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Focus on Land In Africa, 2013), 1.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, *Ethiopia: Building on Progress. A Plan for accelerated and Sustained Development* (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2006), 46.

modernization and the improvement of productive efficiency that may increase economic growth⁵⁹.

Consequently, the government has begun to lease huge tracts of lands to MCF. In the new GTP, the government has a plan to lease 7.5 million acres for mechanized commercial farming by 2015⁶⁰. It is important to note that data regarding the size of land acquired by investors is contradictory. It is reported that Ethiopia, despite receiving more than 700,000 tons of food and £1.8 billion in aid last year, leased more than 3 million hectares of land to foreign investors⁶¹. According to a recent Land Coalition's Land matrix report, Ethiopia has attracted at least 56 land investments covering slightly more than 2.4 million hectares of land between 2000-2011⁶². The government has positioned itself as a solution to the country's development endeavor, pointing out that of 74.3 million hectares available suitable for MCF⁶³, only 2.2 million ha are currently used⁶⁴. The government has leased huge tracts of land at extremely low lease rate and five years tax holidays. The government to attract foreign investment enacted a proclamation and a regulation. Pursuant to the Investment proclamation 280/2002, the objectives are to increase foreign exchange earnings by encouraging growth in export industries, transfer of technology and knowhow and to render foreign investment play its role in the country's economic development⁶⁵. The ensuing investment regulation No. 84/2003 further outlines exemptions from income tax and payment for custom duty to foreign investors that have created a very attractive

⁵⁹ Dessalegn, *Land to Investors...*, 4.

⁶⁰ Fred Pearce, 'Gambella, Ethiopia: Tragedy in the Commons' in Fred Pearce (ed.) *The Land Grabbers: The New Fight over Who owns the Earth* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2012), 9.

⁶¹ John Vida, 'Ethiopia at centre of global farmland rush'. The Guardian - (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/21/ethiopia-centre-global-farmland-rush>).

⁶² ILC Land Matrix, 2012: cited in Vhughn and Aman, *Large-scale Acquisitions of Land in Ethiopia...*, 1.

⁶³ Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, *Agricultural Investment potential of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2009), 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Investment Proclamation No. 280/2002 part 2, Article 4.

investment climate⁶⁶. Besides, The Ethiopian Investment Agency (EIA) has very much simplified land deals procedures. In view of that, Ethiopia has become one of the biggest destinations of foreign MCF.

The new trend to boost earning through MCF exhibits the characteristic element of ‘spatially differentiated agrarian policy’⁶⁷. In the lowland, so-called developing regional states such as Gambella the “state policies” rely on a more naked assertion of the plenipotentiary powers of the state to allocate land and determine its use⁶⁸”. In stark contrast, in the central highlands “the mechanism of social change has been greater market dependence rather than forced dispossession and displacement⁶⁹”. In other words, social form of market dependence has taken a differentiated pattern of smallholder commercialization in the highlands and large-scale enclosures in the lowlands⁷⁰. Despite environmentally and culturally sensitive areas, the government aims to transform the “underdeveloped periphery into an agro-industry powerhouse⁷¹”. In this regard, Markakis (2011), a renowned scholar in Ethiopian political history, noted that developing regions since their annexation by King Menelik II around 1900 have been disadvantaged in the context of systematic land appropriation to consolidate his power and to exploit minerals and agricultural products⁷². He added that the highlanders have never accepted the lowland people’s communal ownership of land and its resources and their mobile lifestyle. Both the highlander people and the state consider their way of life as ‘backward’ and

⁶⁶ Council of Ministry’s Regulations on Investment incentives and investment areas reserved for Domestic Investors.

⁶⁷ Fouad Makki, ‘Development by Dispossession: Terra Nullius and the Social-Ecology of New Enclosures in Ethiopia’, in *Rural Sociology* (Cornell University, Rural Sociological Society, 2013), 89.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid: 8.

⁷¹ International Rivers, ‘The Downstream Impacts of Ethiopia’s Gibe III Dam. East Africa’s “Aral Sea” in the Making’ (International Rivers, 2013),3, available at URL: http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia_files_news_files/0747_impact_of_gibe_3_final_eb.pdf [03.03.2014].

⁷² John Markakis, ‘Ethiopia: The Last Two frontiers’, (Oxford: James Curry, 2011).

their land tenure system as ‘wasteful use’ and their communal land as land ‘without master’⁷³. Unfortunately, until now such highlanders and the government perception of pastoral lifestyle continues to be ambivalent. This is manifested in the government policy of MCF that contradicts with indigenes lowland people life style and land tenure system. Besides, while the government, which has done 95% of land certification in highland areas⁷⁴, it has not done the same the Gambella Region.

6.3 Commercial Agriculture Projects in Gambella: Epicenter of Investment

At present Ethiopia’s transition towards federal governance, which is open to cultural diversity and self-governance, entered its de facto twenty-four years and de jure twenty years. Yet, as various scholarly works indicate, ethnic-groups have experienced identity insecurity, especially in the ‘emerging regions’ in the hands of the government. ‘Emerging regions’ or lowland areas are one of the domains where the phenomenon of land acquisition and indigenous people societal insecurity is more common. Peripheral regions also delegated the federal government to administer their land. This move of the federal government is against the constitutional principle of up-ward delegation. The State Minister of Agriculture says, “The peripheral regions cannot handle the issue of large-scale agriculture”⁷⁵.

GNRS is a typical example in this regard which is on the forefront of land acquisition. An extensive tracts of land in the region have been leased out to domestic and, more importantly,

⁷³ Hagman, T. and Speranza, I. New Avenues for Pastoral Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. *European Journal of Development Research* (2010), 22.

⁷⁴ Tefera Deribaw, Ministry of Agriculture: MEET-ETV Talk Show 16 May 2014.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

foreign investors to promote commercial agriculture. Land transfers to commercial farming have taken place in unprecedented scale in the last ten years. The region transferred 1.2 million hectares of land to the federal land bank, which is seen by government authorities as spare land available for commercial purposes⁷⁶. At least, 300,000 hectares of land has been transferred to both domestic and foreign investors in the region. Saudi Star (500,000 ha), Kuruturi (100,000 ha), Ruchi Soya (25,000 ha), BHO (27,000 ha) can be mentioned as an example⁷⁷. Commercial farming in the region focus on high value export commodities such as coffee, rice, soya beans, sesame, bio-fuel plants, cotton, and so on. Gambella has made land deal which was to lease 3000 hectares for 50 years to the South-Korean multinational Daewoo, to grow maize and palm oil for export. Until June 2010, 500,000 ha of land transferred to commercial farmers⁷⁸. One foreign critic describes Gambella as “the scene of the great grain robbery...⁷⁹” in Gambella, the rental fee charged for agricultural land is 20-30 ET Birr/ha/year (2-3 USD)⁸⁰.

These huge tract of land transferred to the investors is the land of the local community they possessed it for centuries. The indigenous communities see the aforementioned commercial projects as a threat since they depend fundamentally on the ecosystem and surrounding natural resources for their continued existence⁸¹.

6.4 Commercial Farming in Majang Nationality Zone

⁷⁶ Dessalegn, *Land to Investors...*

⁷⁷ Dessalegn, *Land to Investors...*, 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Frederick Kaufman, ‘The Man Who Stolen the Nile: An Ethiopian billionaire’s outrageous Land grab’ Letter from Gambella (Harper’s Magazine, July 2014), 36.

⁸⁰ Dessalegn, *Land to Investors...*, 20.

⁸¹ Ibid: 27-28.

According to the Zonal Bureau of Agriculture report (2013), forest dominates the landscape that covers about sixty-three percent of the total land size of the zone. Majang contains one of the most forested areas and the last bastion of the tropical rainforest in Ethiopia⁸². The forest is incredibly rich in biodiversity and wildlife. Godere Rivers and several streamlines, which are tributaries of the Nile Rivers, irrigate the area. For this reason, the area is one of the most fertile lands in the region. Melca project coordinator indicated that according to aerial map there are three ecological zones in MNZ. The first one is watershed or transitional zone, which has been under the influence of large-scale commercial agriculture. Second, a buffer zone, which become under the influence of small-scale commercial agriculture. Third, core areas, which are dense forest with individual immigrants, influence. The tables below show details of the names of companies and the hectares of land they claim to have obtained from the government for investment provided to help clarify the level of the land acquisition. Unfortunately, the MNZ has no land use plan. There is no clear identification of farmland, forestland, and investment area. The zone has also no investment office.

The traditional livelihood sources of the indigenous Majang people are forest linked. The Majang have lived for centuries making a living through shifting cultivation, bee-keeping and hunting⁸³. They are solely inhabitants of the forest⁸⁴. About 90 percent of the Majang live deep in the thick forest⁸⁵. Thus, most of the Majang people are employed in the forest activity. Indeed, wild edible plants and animals are part of the regular meal of most indigenous people house and valuable foods in time of famine and crisis in MNZ. It is not only a source of food but also a source of

⁸² Dereje, *The Interface between National...*, 104.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 12.

⁸⁵ CSA, *The 2007 Population and Housing Census ...*, 83-85.

marketable products, mostly honey. According to pact report (2012), there are about 29,345 beehives in the Godere *Woreda* alone⁸⁶. Livestock population except poultry is the lowest economic activity of the indigenous population except for few highlanders⁸⁷. Overall, forest constitutes their habitats and their routine activities include collection of honey, hunting and gathering and the practice of shifting cultivation⁸⁸. The forest also serves as source of traditional medicine and place of worship⁸⁹.

Recently, the area under study is facing the challenges of high rate of deforestation due to the intrusion activity of MCF. Findings of this study indicate that, MCF has increased so quickly and dramatically that almost ninety percent of the farms obtained land within the last five years. Up until 2009, there was very few MCF. The zone has so far attracted at least 25 investment projects and logging companies. Apart from logging areas, unregistered landowners, so far the zone has permitted a registered total area of 21,523 hectares of land with a lease period of 50 years⁹⁰. Local people suggest that the size of the land under investors control is wider and larger than what has legally been registered. Up to date no one could tell exactly how much land from the area under study has been leased to the investors given that the whole ongoing process on land deals are surrounded by mystery and lack of transparency. The remainders are also in the process of being converted into MCF.

Extensive land acquisition in MNZ is motivated by several factors. The area is suitable for cash crop production, particularly for Arabic Coffee production. According to the Atlas of Ethiopia on

⁸⁶ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic....*, 16.

⁸⁷ Ibid: 132-133.

⁸⁸ Dereje, *Interface between National and Regional Level Decisions....*, 13.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Data obtained from MNZ and Federal Investment Commission.

livelihoods, MNZ is also suitable for production of coffee, honey, cereal and agro-fuels among other zones in Gambella region⁹¹. Accordingly, the main interest of MCF as well is growing high value export commodities such as coffee, Tea and Allied Crops, rice, bio-fuel plants and trees for lumber or timbering. The rise of these crops in global market has further incentivized the land rush. For instance, there is a favorable coffee price in the international market. Coffee is one of the major export commodities for Ethiopia. There is also a soaring interest for agro-fuels and hence investors are engaged in planting jatropha plant to produce biodiesel for export. Table 5 shows the status of land investment in MNZ.

The first commercial farm in MNZ is a government owned Tapi Coffee Plantation that was established in 1988 in Abiy 03, Abiy 04, Kabo, Gelishi and Gubati *kebeles*. In November 2012, the company becomes a joint private and government company of Green Coffee Agro-Industry (51%) and Government Development Organization (49%) named “Green Coffee Estate Share Company”. Informants indicated that now the government is studying the issue to transfer it wholly to private companies⁹². The company has land possession in Gambella region and SNNPRS. While the company’s 70 percent land is located in Godere and Mengesh *Woreda* of MNZ in Gambella, the remaining 30 percent is found in Yeki *Woreda* of Sheka Zone of SNNPRS.

Previously, the company owned 8,933.00 hectares of coffee land. However, according to local residents, the company is expanding its land size aggressively up to 2 km into in all directions.⁹³

Since previously the government owned the company, there is no memorandum of understanding

⁹¹ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 12.

⁹² Interview with Ato Milkamu , Abiy 03, 1 July 2014.

⁹³ Dereje, *The Interface between...*

between the company and the local administration. As a result, it is immune from local accountability⁹⁴.

Table 6: Licensed Agricultural Projects in MNZ

No	Name of the Company	Licensing Office	Land size in ha	Category	Location (Kebele)	Activities engaged	Year
1	Verdanta Harvest P.L.C	Ethiopia Investment Commission (EIC)	3112	Foreign	Gumari and Kabo	Tea	2010
2	Albert Menjot Palm Oil Company		1000	Foreign	Gelishi	Palm Oil	
3	Sirage Negawe	Gambella	43	Domestic	Chemi	Coffee	14 Nov.1997
4	Siraj Negawo	Gambella	150	Domestic	Shone	Coffee	18 Nov.2005
5	Gebremedhin Tsegay	Gambella	700	Domestic	Kabo	Coffee	2011
6	Kinfe Berha	Gambella	240	Domestic	Yari and Kabo	Coffee	2011

⁹⁴ Ibid.

7	Yigzaw Bezabeh	Gambella	700	Domestic	Kabo	Coffee	2011
8	Tekalign Tadesse	Gambella	355	Domestic	Kabo	Coffee	2011
9	Haile and others S.C	Gambella	-	Domestic	Kabo	Coffee	2008
10	Domestic Association for Coffee Production	Gambella	2000	Domestic	Kabo	Coffee	
11	Samuel Teshome	Gambella	800	Domestic	Kabo	Coffee	
12	Alemu Kassa	Gambella	40	Domestic	Chemi	Coffee	
13	Getachew Tafese	Gambella	-	Domestic	Akashi	Coffee	
14	Kabo Medical Association PLC	Gambella	-	Domestic	Kabo		
15	Kassa PLC	Gambella	300	Domestic	Duncha yi	Coffee	2014
16	Green Coffee Estate S.C		8933	Domestic	Abiy 1,2,3,4, Kabo	Coffee and Allied crops	1996
17	Majang Agro Industry	Gambella	3000	Domestic	Ashene	Sesame and rice	2013
18	Mr. Mike	Gambella	Unidentified vast area	Foreign	Kumi	logging	2012

19	Ethio-Coffee and Tea Plantation and Marketing PLC	EIC	-	Foreign (Saudi Arabia)		Coffee	19 March 1998
20	Hussien Abdu	Gambella	-	Domestic	Godere	Coffee	04 Nov. 1996
21	Success development S.C	Gambella	-	Domestic	Godere	Coffee	08 Sep.1998
22	Teshome Tamerat	Gambella	-	Domestic	Godere	Spices, pulses and oil crops products	11 Apr. 2006
23	Shaki Agro. Ind. PLC	Gambella	-	Domestic	Godere	Agricultural Products	09 Oct. 2007
24	Gemadru Agro Forestry PLC	Gambella	-	Domestic	Godere	Agricultural Products	09 Oct. 2007
25	Nole Feresmay PLC	Gambella	-	Domestic	Godere	Fruits &Honey	12/17/2007
26	Asaye Tsegaye	Gambella	-	Domestic	Godere	Honey	7/10/2008

Source: MNZ and Woreda Bureau of Agriculture, Federal Investment Commission, July

2014

Currently, the company has employed 6533 people with their family members out of which 2085 are permanent, 52 contract and 4396 temporary laborers⁹⁵. However, there is no single indigenous person employed in the company⁹⁶. Though it principally produces coffee, the company also produces palm oil, spices, fruits and honey. Out of its 8933 hectares of land 6403 hectares has been covered by coffee, 100 hectares by palm oil, 85 hectares by various spices, 53 hectares by fruits, and 335 hectares by forest⁹⁷. On average, the company yearly produces about 35,000 Quintals of coffee. The company has also palm oil plantation in Abiy 04 and Gelishi *kebeles*. The company sold Arabica specialty coffee to both domestic and foreign markets. The others products such as palm oil, fruits and spices are provided for domestic market.

In addition to Ala-Mudien Investment, Mohammed Alamudi's mechanized flower farm and modern techniques in neighboring Sheka zone, Green Coffee Estate PLC also engaged in modern Honeybee Investment. Both the local community and the families of the workers obtained education and health services as part of its corporate social responsibility. In 2014, many students graduated from preparatory school⁹⁸. The company also distributed high quality coffee seedlings to the local community.⁹⁹ Verdanta construct a road from the main road in Kabo *kebele* to the project site but this is also for its own transportation and benefits. Yet, it is insignificant based on its pledges¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁵ Interview with the company Head of Finance Ato Milkamu, Abiy 03, 1 July 2014.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Green Coffee Estate PLC Brusher, 2013.

⁹⁸ Interview with the company Head of Finance Ato Milkamu, Abiy 03, 1 July 2014.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Verdanta PLC have pledged to build education and health facilities in MNZ and to give higher education scholarship to 50 Majang students in India. Interview with Yimama Faris and Alemayehu Wawaye, Meti, 2013.

The largest foreign land lease in MNZ is by the Indian M/s Verdanta Harvest P.L.C. In April 2010, the company obtained permission from the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture for establishing ‘Tea and Allied Crops’ plantation. It has leased 3,112 hectares of land in Gumari and Kabo *kebele* for 50 years¹⁰¹ in the highly contested traditional homeland of the local community without the consent of the people¹⁰². The area was once as ‘reserved forest area’ in 2005 by the Zone Bureau of Agriculture recognized the area. Accordingly, Pact Ethiopia also established three forest associations to protect and manage the forest¹⁰³. Gumari *kebele* has one of the few surviving thick forest in MNZ. It is one of the 31 *kebeles* of the Godere *Woreda* that borders with the Sheka Zone of SNNPRS. Formerly, the area was the exclusive settlement place of the ‘Sabu people.’ Gradually, the Shekicho people controlled the area. The Shekicho people preserve this dense forest through their traditional forest management called *kobo*.

There are also mechanized domestic investors largely engaged in coffee cultivation. The prominent domestic investors are Mr. Getachew Mr. Sirage, Mr. Gebremedhin, Mr. Kinf Berha, and Mr. Yigzaw. For example, Majang Agro Industry in Ashene *kebele* engaged in Sesame and rice took 3000 ha of land¹⁰⁴. Mr. Sirage also took unknown size forestland in Chemi *kebele* as well as in Shone *kebele*. Mr. Yigzaw K/M and Mr. Gebremdhin each took 7000 ha of critical forestland in Kabo *kebele* for coffee in 2011¹⁰⁵. The land transferred to some of these investors is predominately forestland that was under the owner of the community. There are also numerous medium and small-sized investments scattered throughout Majang engaged in growing coffee,

¹⁰¹Gambella National Regional State, A Letter from the President of the region to Godere *Woreda*, Gambella, 19 November 2011.

¹⁰² The researcher own observation is that it was not consented, like so many other leases.

¹⁰³ Interview with Dejen from Godere *Woreda* Bureau of Agriculture, Meti, 22 June 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Data obtained from Godere *Woreda* Bureau of agriculture, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

and annual crops such as maize, sorghum¹⁰⁶. Besides, local people confirmed that new employees of MCF are penetrating deep into the vast unoccupied forestland and seized large tracts of land with little restraint. For instance, now most of MNZ *kebeles* such as Kabo, Yari, Shone, Akashi, Gumari, Goshene, Gubati, etc are undertaking clearance of the forest to MCF's. More *kebeles* will likely be displaced due to the signing of further land deals.

There was a timber production for economic utilization of the forest in Meti town. From 1998 to 2004, there was a commercial utilization of forest with big sawmills¹⁰⁷. There is also one logging company in MNZ. The foreign investor who owns the company, Mr. Mike, obtained legal license from Gambella region. The company is engaged in a logging operation in Kumi *kebele* in Mengesh *Woreda*. Informants indicated that there is no clear legal agreement and follow up how the investor engaged in sawing in the forest. Actually, old age trees could be harvested for commercial timber to obtain economic benefit. This could generate reasonable economic benefit without disturbing the existing natural balance of the forest. This economic benefit has to be for the local community. Besides, either the government or the investor is not involved in substituting the old tree by new trees through enrichment plantation. Dunchayi *kebele* forest is deforested by logging. They transported the timber at night to Tapi town¹⁰⁸. Charcoal production is also rampant. Besides, about 46.9 % and 23% of the forest in Godere and Mengesh *Woreda* respectively have been exposed to burning hazards for investment and other activities¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Yared from Godere *Woreda* Bureau of Agriculture, Meti, 12 May 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Pact Ethiopia, *Land use land cover...*, 13.

¹⁰⁸ The May 2013 workshop participants (110) organized by South West Ethiopia Forest protection and development Forum.

¹⁰⁹ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 138.

The picture painted here gives an impression about the extent to which the people of Majang have been marginalized socially and economically. This goes to confirm the assertion made earlier in this study that the Ethiopian government has not respected the rights of indigenous Majang, an assertion, which brings government's action into disrepute. In what follows, we examine the predicaments resulted from MCF against the people of Majang.

6.5 Commercial Farming and its Impact on Majang Livelihood

There are three basic general economic values of forest, namely; extractive values such as timber and non-timber products, non-extractive values including watershed (hydrological) functions, soil nutrient cycling, soil conservation, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, recreation and tourism and preservation values such as genetic, species and habitat resources¹¹⁰. It might be too early to assess the full impact of commercial farming in MNZ. However, available evidence already suggests its potent threat to Majang livelihood. The government's problematic land leasing policy under which it owns and frequently lease farm and forestland creates livelihood insecurity to the Majang people. In accordance with the government objectives, mechanized agricultural projects are implemented to benefit the people. For the Majang, however, the projects instead of creating jobs and bring benefits to the local community, they are taking the chunk of the forestlands that plays the central role of the people's livelihood¹¹¹. Up until now, hardly any economic or other benefits are accruable to the Majang people from commercial farming except for the provision of some rudimentary social services. For example, infrastructural and social

¹¹⁰ Lampietti and Dixon, 1995; cited in Mizan and Huddersfield *The Extent and Economic Costs of deforestation...*, 3.

¹¹¹ FGD with Majang, Meti, 2014; Interview with an expert in MNZ Bureau of Agriculture, Meti, 2013; Interview with Akililu Mamo, Addis Ababa, 18 February 2015.

investments that benefit the local community are almost absent. Besides, though above-mentioned projects have opened employment opportunity to more than 8000 people in the area, almost all the employees are outside the zone from highlander Ethiopia¹¹². In fact, working for the land they own for century as a daily laborer with a very low wage is not acceptable in the mind of the local community¹¹³. Besides, the Majang have a very low working habit.¹¹⁴ The study indicates that there is little sign that the broader goals of the government such as employment and infrastructure creation, technology transfer and enhanced foreign currency earnings, have been realized¹¹⁵. In this section, the researcher reviewed the main livelihood tribulations caused by commercial farming in MNZ.

6.5.1 Displacement and Land Tenure Insecurity

To start with, commercial farming has brought land tenure threat to the local indigenous people. The government claims that the land leased is based on the ‘empty land’ regions have submitted to the federal land bank. In relation to this, recently state Minister of Agriculture has indicated at an interview with ETV that:

These are bushes, savannah grassland areas. We tried to identify dense forestland, settlement, parks lands. The land leasing does not cover forest areas. It excludes forests, reserved areas. We have already excluded corridors of wild animal movement. Whenever

¹¹² There is also a similar experiences of Anywaa in Gambella region that ‘the government mainly intends to access the resources for the benefit of investors and the state, not improve the lots of the people. The options local people have are bleak: join the ‘neo-slave’ labour reserve (the established new villages) or give up any claims to resources on one hand and face the consequences of resisting on the other’ (SMNE; cited in Dereje Feyissa and Fana Gebresenbet, *The Articulation between Local Land-based Identity Discourses and the Global Indigenous Movement: The Case of the Anuak of Western Ethiopia* (Unpublished, 2015), 14.

¹¹³ FGD participants remarked that the companies pay in comparison with the minimum wage set by the government FGD, Goshene, 2014.

¹¹⁴ Interview (name with held), Meti, June 2014.

¹¹⁵ Missele Fisseha, *A Case Study of the Bechera Agricultural development Project Ethiopia* (CGIAR, 2011).

we found the interest of large-scale Commercial Agriculture conflict with natural resources, we always compromise LSCA. We give priority to the conservation of natural resources¹¹⁶”.

However, practically it has leased out huge tracts of communal land such as forests, water resources and wild habitats to agricultural commercial investors¹¹⁷. As a result, the developing regional states such as Gambella have experienced livelihood insecurity, in the hands of the government. A study also confirms, “the Ethiopian government is not demonstrating the capacity to ensure that its people are not harmed by foreign agricultural investment projects¹¹⁸. Gambella Region is a typical example in this regard which is on the forefront of large scale commercial farming which transferred 1.2 million hectares of land to the federal land bank in 2011¹¹⁹. Specifically, Majang Nationality Zone (MNZ) has experienced serious problem of land acquisition that they never seen before since the early 1990s¹²⁰.

The government however still justifies large scale commercial agriculture based on the trickle down effects to smallholder farmer:

The farmers are now strong because their income has increased. They have the power to influence the market. There is an attitudinal change in commercial thinking. Besides, they have land use ownership rights. In highland areas, we have done 95% of land certification. This gives them use, rent, inheritance rights except selling. Use right is secured and protected by the constitution and other proclamations and grabbing is not a

¹¹⁶ Tefera Deribaw, Ministry of Agriculture: ‘MEET-ETV Talk Show’. Addis Ababa, 16 May 2014.

¹¹⁷ Dessalegn, *Land to Investor....*

¹¹⁸ Shepherd, *Land acquisition and its Potential ...*, 43.

¹¹⁹ Dessalegn, *land to Investor....*, 51.

¹²⁰ Sato, *Christianization through Villagization....*, 569-570.

*solid politics. It is geopolitics. Land acquisition is not an issue in Ethiopia. No! We do not need to displace people. We have huge untapped arable land. We have 72 million hectares of arable land. We do not need to displace a single farmer*¹²¹.

At worst, the Gambella regional government has delegated the federal government to deal with large scale commercial farming for lacking the capacity to administer the land transfers. As other scholars pointed out, this is unconstitutional: “There is no express clause permitting the states to delegates their powers to the Federal Government¹²². The indigenous Majang was not aware of this upward transfer of right. It was simply imposed by the federal government. Further, the identification of land for federal bank land reserve was not conducted with the participation of the people. This shows the absence of transparency responsiveness, and rule of law. The government uses this power as a means of interference with nationalities communal land not as a means of protection. A recent study by pact Ethiopia also shows:

*Lack of defined property rights towards natural forest and forestlands, and failure of government legislations to recognize traditional natural resources ownership rights created suspicion of the sustainability of the use and management of natural resources in the long run and induced over exploitation of the resources in the area*¹²³.

Thus, though the use right is secured and protected by the constitution and other proclamations, the government is giving the usufruct rights of small farmers to commercial farmers displacing

¹²¹ Tefera Deribaw, Ministry of Agriculture: MEET-ETV Talk Show 16 May 2014

¹²² Assefa Feseha ‘Ethiopia’s Experiment in Accommodating Diversity: 20 Years balance Sheet’. *Ethiopian Journal of Federal Studies*, 1(1):103-153(2013), 120-121.

¹²³ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 15.

quite large number of the smallholders. In the context of Majang this has meant the transformation from small traditional ‘jang’ holdings and communal lands into small and large-scale commercial farming. Many Majang interviewed said the land transferred to investors and federal land bank belongs to the local community. The local communities are also displaced from their fertile farmlands and pushed into remote unproductive places¹²⁴.

The Majang first experienced displacement when the Tapi State Farm displaced people from land belonging to entire four fertile *kebeles* without their knowledge, financial compensation and provision of alternative livelihoods¹²⁵. The first displacement experienced by the Majang was in the 1950s with the introduction around Tapi of coffee as a large-scale cash crop. This is notoriously remembered by the locals as responsible for the great displacement that took place in the study area. Unfortunately, the accurate figures as to the number of displaced local people are not available. Local people estimated that the Tapi Plantation Company has displaced about 4000-5000 indigenous people in Abiy 03, 04, 05, and Gubati *kebeles*. Likewise, at this time the Indians Verdanta PLC is displacing significant local communities from their traditional lands. The establishment of Verdanta commercial farming directly affected more than 340 households and 420 households in Gumari *kebele* and Kabo *kebele* respectively¹²⁶. The map shows that the whole Kabo *kebele* sub-*kebeles* such as Gisho Beri, Worqamba, Dochia, and Dawi are included into the company land holding¹²⁷. The *kebele* officials told to the author that the area is a farm and residence land of 794 local people. In addition, a number of Majang in other areas have been

¹²⁴ FGD with Majang, Meti, 2014.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Interview with an expert in Godere *Woreda* Security Administration, Meti, 2014.

¹²⁷ Interview with Dajen, Kabo, 18 June 2014.

dispossessed of their lands peoples by local investors¹²⁸. Already in 2011, approximately 1000 households were evicted from their land following a land lease agreement between the government and highlander investors to establish a coffee plantation in Yari, Shone and Kabo *kebele*¹²⁹. The majority of the informants were displaced by MCF confirmed that they were displaced from their land without their informed consent and compensation. Furthermore, according to FGD participants the government is moving the people from the forest into a village with little consultation or under strong pressure to prepare land for investors in the name of villagization¹³⁰.

This land tenure insecurity clearly undermines not only indigenous people customary land rights but also their most important source of livelihood and identity marker. The government is harming its people by evicting them from their traditional land even before an investor comes on to the land¹³¹. The future will be difficult for the indigenous community to get access to land. Dessalegn (2011:8) argued, “Land dependency creates insecurity, “dis-empowers” individuals and communities, and enhances the hegemonic authority of the state.” Besides, land acquisition is shifting from local people control to foreign and domestic investors. This affects the food self-sufficiency of the forest dependant host communities. Government is out-sourcing food and export commodities at the expense of the most food insecure local communities in Majang. The government instead of using the fertile land to enhance local people food production; it has passed to foreign and domestic investors to boost up export-commodities. It appears that the

¹²⁸ Stauder, *The Majangir...*, 2.

¹²⁹ FGD with Majang, Meti, 2014. See also appendix 1, Gambella Regional States Land and Environmental Authority, ‘A letter written to Majang Nationality Zone’ ‘Land dispute between Kinfe Berha, and Yari and Kabo *Kebele* people’, April 07, 2014. No. 989/05/96. (unpublished letter).

¹³⁰ FGD with Shekicho, Kabo, 11 May 2013.

¹³¹ Shepherd, *Land acquisition and Potential...*, 43.

government is disregarding the ever-growing burden of Majang landlessness and livelihood insecurity in MNZ.

The issue of human insecurity associated with large scale commercial farming deeply felt by ordinary Majang is also shared by local government officials in MNZ, as the following statements by an expert in the Bureau of Agriculture indicates:

*Nowadays one of the greatest problems for local farmers in MNZ is land insecurity. Before addressing our problem with highlanders land acquisition, the government is putting another burden on our small zone. It is totally unfair and unconstitutional for the government to be leasing land to investors when local communities do not have enough land and our forest at disappearance. The government has to deal with our concern with the highlanders.*¹³²

6.5.2 Ecological Damage

In addition to displacing local community for their ancestral land, commercial agriculture has caused environmental degradation including deforestation, tremendous loss of biodiversity, soil fertility depletion, loss of productivity and change in rainfall pattern and so on. Commercial farmers have exploited the forest more intensively than the host community could exploit. This intensive land exploitation has left many of the Majang territory completely deforested. The destruction of the forest means hastening of adversity that puts the local community livelihood at

¹³² Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2014.

jeopardy. Eventually, the clearing process will alter all microclimate, hydrology, and soil mechanics.

The fertility of forestland is highly dependent on forest soil that practically exists only with the presence of foliages and litters drop down from the trees in the area¹³³. For example, trees that are necessary for soil fertility such as *Ficus sycomoros*, *Milletia ferruginea*, *Ficus vasta*, *Ficus* sure are endangered due to deforestation for timber and agricultural land. One key agriculture expert in MNZ underlined, "...The soil is blessed with a gift of fertility from a forest. Fertile soil in the forest is there because the forest kept it there...This being the case, soil changes when their close relative forest is removed"¹³⁴. Currently, soil degradation and soil erosion poses a serious problem affecting productivity.

In-depth interview with experts and elders revealed that small streams of water are dried up, the edge-dwelling animal and plant species are turned down given that commercial farmers took the very fertile, forest coverage and water sources of the MNZ. Clearing of forests has changed the flow of water. For example, the Verdanta Harvest P.L.C took an area, which is the origin of about 12 streams flowing to Gilo and Alwaro rivers. The forest is the source of several micro and 'critical watershed' in Godere *Woreda*. In fact, since the area is the micro-watershed in the region, it has also a wide impact on the surrounding areas as well. In addition, the type of crop selected by the company is not forest-friendly since tea plantation involves greater de-forestation as it is a sun-loving plant¹³⁵". It is the water shed to several tributaries such as Atafi, Geji, Fan,

¹³³ Pact Ethiopia, 'Forestry and wildlife', *Gilo Sub basin of Gambella Integrated Land Use Planning Study Project* (Addis Ababa: Gambella Land utilization and Environmental protection Authority, 2012), 33.

¹³⁴ Interview, Meti, May 2013.

¹³⁵ Interview with Yared, Godere *Woreda* Agricultural Expert, Meti, 06 June 2013.

Abolemu, Gendori, Shayi Rivers micro watersheds, and to Zie ‘critical watershed’ in Godere *Woreda*¹³⁶. In addition, the forest generally contributes to reduce global warming by storing carbon dioxide or condense green house gas emission. Secondly, the forests have local and regional significance in watershed service. It contributes to reduce sediment load in the Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Sudan and Egypt and to balance the volume of water¹³⁷.

Various experts and the Environmental Impact Assessment of Verdanta Harvest PLC show that the investment has an immense impact on the ecology¹³⁸. The EIA report mention the soil loss by erosion, disruption and damage to natural vegetation patterns, disruption of natural habitat, wild animal species and communities, loss of visual landscape value, pollution effects to land and water due to fuel oil leakage, debris due to utilization of farm chemicals, etc, as an adverse environmental impacts of the investment¹³⁹. Based on the EIA guidelines¹⁴⁰, the project is also categorized as projects (Category I) that are expected to cause significant adverse impacts on the environment that requires full-scale EIA study Yet, implementation of the environmental management plan by the Verdanta Harvest P.L.C was very poor¹⁴¹. Inspection report by a team of experts from Environmental Unit (EU) of MoA- Agricultural Investment Support Directorate (AISD) indicates, “Any Project is expected to implement the EIA accordingly and obey the code of practice for agricultural investment from the first day of starting project activity till end of

¹³⁶ Interview with Sahilu, Meti, June 2014.

¹³⁷ Mizan and Huddersfield, *The Extent and Economic Costs of deforestation...*, 7.

¹³⁸ In relation to this, the former president (Omote Obong) remarked that due to lack of proper feasible study by the ministry of agriculture, the entire Forest area was given of the said investment company. Interview, Addis Ababa, 2013.

¹³⁹ Environmental Impact Assessment Report, 64.

¹⁴⁰ Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines classifies development projects into three categories based on the expected level of impacts they can pose on the environment. Category I projects are those projects that expected cause significant adverse impacts on the environment and requires full-scale EIA study. Category II projects are those projects with medium impacts and require initial impact assessment. The guidelines categorize projects that are expected to have no meaningful adverse impacts and that do not require EIA study as Category III projects.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Environmental Impact Assessment Case Team Leader, 24 February 2015, Addis Ababa.

lifetime of the project. In this regard Verdanta Harvests PLC is not on the right track ¹⁴²”. Additionally, the report reveals, “Goderi Mountain is not protected from deforestation and degradation, the project cleared tree nearby to build camp site which is not appropriate ¹⁴³”.

Yet, the deforestation has also affected the moisture loving plants such as coffee since coffee shed plants such as *Albizzia gumifera*, *Albizzia lebec*, *Albizzia grandiractata*, *Milletia ferruginea*, *Grevillea robusta* are endangered due to old age and cutting for several reasons ¹⁴⁴. Coffee farm disturbs the biodiversity of the virgin forest since all the under story of multidimensional species of plants have to be cleared in order to plant coffee ¹⁴⁵. Besides, it is wiping out endangered plant and animal species ¹⁴⁶. The disappearance of many species of wild animals such as antelope, warthog, buffalo, bush back, birds and trees thus is also a sign of new ecology for the local community and a termination of the century-old traditional practice of hunting and gathering, and production of traditional medicine in MNZ.

Figure 8: Forestland cleared for Verdanta Harvest P.L.C Tea Plantation in Gumari *kebele*

¹⁴² Agricultural Investment Support Directorate Report, 2013.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ FGD with plant science and agricultural extension experts, Meti, 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Pact Ethiopia, *Forestry and Wildlife...*, 33.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Shibiru Zerihun and Melkamu Abike, Meti, June 30 2014.



Source: Photo by the author 09/11/2014

Majang also begin to feel that deforestation leads to weather fluctuation as well as climatic disruption such as erratic rainfall that adversely affects coffee, millet, corn production¹⁴⁷. The rain has now been reduced to once in a month. As has been noted above in Majang, the rainy season starts in mid-January but now the season begins even in April¹⁴⁸. Pact Ethiopia report also revealed “The rainy season was longer staying for at least 10 months time in the area 20 years ago but now it remains with 6 month rain¹⁴⁹”. The shortening of rainy season, have adverse effects both on the environment and on the livelihood of the community in the area¹⁵⁰.

Moreover, these plants flowers are very important for honey production that decreases its productivity. Now key informants indicated, “There is a substantial decline of honey production

¹⁴⁷ FGD with plant science and agricultural extension experts, Meti, 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 136-137.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

caused by deforestation and a competition for the local farmers from the honey farm of investors in neighboring Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS).¹⁵¹ For example, in consequence of Mohammed Al-amoudi's mechanized flower farm and modern techniques; the farmers' have lost their bees. Pact Ethiopia report (2012) also indicated, "The major problem encountered regarding beekeeping in the district is deforestation which led to loss of some important flowering trees which were used for honey production¹⁵²". In effect, the widespread disappearance of honeybees and flower plants worried the Majang people, which decrease productivity significantly. All forest sources of food such as *Meti, kokoman, Luya, cacha, Geboza* is critically under steady menace. MoFA study report indicated that due to the forest species important for beekeeping like Geteme, Salties, Butigi, Croton are cut down, Godere honey production has decreased by 55%¹⁵³. All these are happening partly due to policy and decision makers who very often fail to recognize the value of forest in supporting local livelihoods. Generally, 'forests are often undervalued'¹⁵⁴. Mizan and Huddersfield (2009) pointed out that "The highland forests of south-west Ethiopia are one such area where deforestation is occurring at an increasing rate because the true values of the forests are not recognized.¹⁵⁵" For instance, environmental impact assessment have been deliberately neglected or superficial carried out and absence of transparent monitoring process. The FDRE Investment Proclamation No.769/2012 provided that any investor 'shall give due regard to environmental protection'. However, though MNZ is environmentally sensitive area, environmental

¹⁵¹ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2013.

¹⁵² Pact Ethiopia, *Socio-economic...*, 16.

¹⁵³ Ministry of Federal Affairs, *A Study Report on the Issues of Development and Good Governance Challenges and Solutions in Majang Zone Gambella Regional State* (Gambella: MoFA, 2005), 27.

¹⁵⁴ Mizan and Huddersfield, *The Extent and Economic Costs of deforestation...*, ii.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

assessments are either totally absent or insufficient¹⁵⁶. The government gives priority to commercial farming rather than preserving the forest. A quantitative study of the extent and economic costs of deforestation in south-west Ethiopia also indicate, “ ... the value of benefits from land converted from forest to farm land is much lower , being less than 10% of the value of keeping the forest”¹⁵⁷. Besides, many studies indicate that ‘...traditional forms of agriculture are imperative for the health of economies in many developing countries’¹⁵⁸.

The aforementioned impact of commercial farming, i.e., landlessness, the ecological damage and decrease in productivity seriously affects indigenous people livelihood. For instance, the soil loss and fertility in turn causes decline in crop yields and the local community becomes liable to food insecurity. For example, in most cases owing to inadequate and erratic rainfall, the crops wilted and dried up and productivity has become very low¹⁵⁹. In addition, indigenous peoples, selling their land to immigrant highlanders for pathetically low prices their food security are diminished. Leasing huge tracts of forestland to investors has caused indigenous people to lose the privileges to access to land, forest and forest resources. At present due to restriction to smaller areas, the indigenous people have lost the opportunity to practice their century old tradition of shifting cultivation, easy mobility, hunting and gathering, apiculture, and its pattern highly distorted.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with an expert in agriculture office, Ato Yared, 20 May 2013, Meti. Based on the region investment implementation proclamation the investor shall obtain permit and environmental assessment certificate from the regional investment agency. In this regard, Majang zone investors partly have no permit and do not have environment assessment certificate. Based on the discussion held with the community participating in the study, the zone agriculture and investment was not based on study and participation of the people, which expose the area to adverse conditions. For instance, Mr. Michel has engaged in lumber production was mentioned. The present investment in the zone was not based on appropriate consideration of the area weather condition, human resource, biodiversity, and solving the area social, environmental and economic problems by a planned investment participating the people. In this regard, many forestlands were converted to agricultural land. The investors in the area do not create a chance to benefit the community rather than taking land for be keeping and using for shifting cultivation. The area executive body does not implement the proclamations and laws set at national and regional level for investment, land and environmental protection, and leadership support.

¹⁵⁷ Mizan Teferi and Huddesfield, *The Extent and Economic Costs of deforestation...*, 13.

¹⁵⁸ Shepard, *Land acquisition and potential...*, 38.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid: 136-137.

Unfortunately, the reserve land is considered by the government as vacant and therefore do not allow the indigene communities to use for shifting cultivation, subsistence hunting and for harvesting forest products. Out of pains and disappointment, an old key Majang informant who spent his entire life in the forest has this to say:

...Though the land belongs to us owner nationalities, we cannot inherit land to our children. We do not have adequate land and forest to grow millet, go for hunting and collect honey; we will not have food to eat. MCF clear vast forestlands and extinguish wildlife. Certainly, the old ways of living and the culture will be lost.¹⁶⁰

An expert in the Zone Bureau of Agriculture shares the same concern as well. The expert described the impact of commercial agriculture on the local people and the environment as follows:

It is a very complicated problem for the Majang people. Our forest and plots of land have been unlawfully grabbed. It is not only an agricultural land but also it is the place the Majang go for hunting and honey collection. The companies do not care because they have a license from the government. If the investors continue to clear land for tea and coffee plantation, there would be no space to grow millet. For the Majang, honey, millet and hunting are very important activities to their culture and livelihood. Now, we do not have sufficient land and forest to grow millet, go for hunting, and collect honey. Therefore, we will not have food to eat eventually. In short, Majang is a community pushed to the edge¹⁶¹.

¹⁶⁰ Interview (name withheld), Yari, 12 May 2013.

¹⁶¹ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 16 May 2013.

The government is leasing land without careful assessment of local context. Indeed, findings show that commercial farming has placed many burdens on the indigenes Majang people and rendered most hopeless and vulnerable. The government has failed to provide sufficient mechanisms to protect local rights and take account of local interests, livelihoods and identities. All these inevitably affect their livelihoods. As such, commercial agriculture is basically serving the interest of the national government to boost export and the companies at the expense of local livelihoods.

6.6 Summary and Conclusion

According to the constitution and other land laws, the land belongs to the NNP's and the state. Yet, the way investments operate in Majang is problematic. Despite this unprecedented political empowerment, with the introduction of multicultural federalism, the Majang people have faced with livelihood and identity insecurity due to land displacement because of the advent of large-scale commercial agriculture. Increased land acquisition by MCF is threatening the community. As key findings revealed the Majang people are under threat of eviction

There is hardly any evidence that shows the local community is benefiting from commercial farming. Overall, drawing largely upon first-hand empirical evidences, this chapter argues that though there is the Ethiopian government ideology of protecting minority nationalities, practically it has undermined the Majang land rights and core values through its development policy. The other criticism may be the orientation of the commercial farming. It is not local

oriented agriculture. Thus, it is not an inclusive development project. It excludes the local community from both the development process and the outcome of the projects. The land of the indigenous community feed the rich foreign community while they are inducing food insecurity of the indigenous community. There is no clear map, territory and size of the existing commercial farms. The land deals lack proper information, transparency and responsiveness to the local community. This in turn is creating confusion, tension and conflict between the investors and the community. Therefore, the main argument of this thesis is that agricultural investments are undertaken without the informed consent of the community by disregarding their culture are creating simmering tensions and sometimes violent conflict between the investors and the local communities.

The study attempted to establish the relationship between land acquisition, livelihood insecurity and conflict. Ethiopian government's policy of 'development by dispossession'¹⁶² has firmly affected Majang people's livelihood. The aforementioned analysis revealed that MNZ is a vivid example of the most affected places in Ethiopia by large-scale commercial farming. The government is trying to accelerate 'national development' at the expense of the livelihood of the people in the local communities. Extensive land dispossession has brought deleterious effects on people's livelihoods and the local economy with, in the long term, a harmful impact on the Majang way of life. It has weakened the Majang cultural practices by limiting the land available for traditional shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering, bee keeping which forms the basis of Majang livelihood. The chapter also indicates a lack of effective consultations with the community in the planning and implementation of development projects that adversely affect their lives. The land is supposed to be controlled by the local people. Nevertheless, the local

¹⁶² *Makki, Development by dispossession...*

people is not aware of the land deals the government is signing with the investors. In stark contrast, when the local communities have reacted and tried to assert their rights, they have suffered intimidation, physical abuse, imprisonment by the investors, federal, regional and local government officials. The government land lease policy has extinguished their land tenure rights. It is a clear violation of the constitutional rights of indigenous people in relation to their rights to land and land use. Hence, constitutionally entrenched devolution of power and self-governance has gone astray. Consequently, extensive land possession contributes to an escalating conflict between the local community and the commercial farmers (see chapter 7).

It is an important development, which calls for greater attention in the Majang Nationality Zone. Thus, the government must allow the local community to practice their livelihood and century old tradition without tenure insecurity. To address Majang livelihood threats, the government has to look at other alternative strategies of development. Forest-friendly programs such as tourism industry, modern apiculture could very much be part of government's development agenda in building the region. The commercialization of land in terms of commercial farming in the context of federalism and its wide-ranging impacts on the host community has to be reasonably debated. This would mean reversing the threatening environmental catastrophe and livelihood impact of large-scale commercial farming making it more environmentally sound and socially responsible and inclusive.

Chapter 7

Majang Response to New Forms of Insecurity

7.1 Introduction

As clearly indicated in the introductory chapter, the indigenes in Majang are considered as forest linked subsistence farmers. To secure their livelihoods and tradition, the Majang depend on the forest and need large tracts of forestland. They have been farming this forestland for generations. However, as stated in the previous chapters the continued influx of highlanders and commercial farming has resulted in Majang people societal insecurity. Extensive forestland acquisition from multiple actors has shifted land ownership of food producing lands from the indigenes to outsiders within the last two decades. Socio-economic gap between the Highlanders and the host community has widened. Now, the Majang occupy less than an average 1 hectares of land, let alone their communal forestland. Consequently, the majority of the local communities now face food shortage. Yet, extensive land acquisition from several sources has still relentlessly continued. This situation has led to escalating conflicts. The combined effect of all these causes resulted in the emergence of successive conflicts in MNZ. Some of the disputes transformed into a protracted conflict. As will be discussed in the subsequent sections, the Majang are now in a position of defending themselves. That is to say, especially after 11 September 2014 highlanders assault on the Majang, it appears that the local community started to defend themselves.

Frustrated by the government's lack of responsiveness to their demands of social protection, the Majang took their own measures that range from petition to government bodies to deadly violent conflicts. This chapter deals with indigenous communities' reaction to previously mentioned problems and government management of the conflict. In other words, it examines conflicts between the land grabbers and the host communities and government response. In this regard, the chapter examines four cases on the impact of land acquisition on the relation between the host community and the outsiders i.e., between the indigenes and the highlanders and between the indigenes and the investors. First, it looks at how uncontrolled inter-regional migration and the ensuing land acquisition affected the relations between migrant highlanders and the host community. Second, it examines how the process of land leasing for commercial purpose without the informed consent of the local community affected relations between the host community and the investors. The last section provides summary and conclusion.

7.2 The Influx of Highlanders and Forestland Acquisition: Majang Response

The peace and security situation in Gambella remains fragile and volatile, following its regional status since 1991. For the last two decades, and Gambella region in particular has experienced problematic increase in the amount and occurrence of violent conflicts. The Gambella Region has been badly affected by indigenous group's political activism and ethnic violence for the past decades. Interethnic relations between the indigenous and the highlanders have been extremely tense. Gambella is perhaps the region where interethnic relations are more frequent than in all other parts. As such, it is described as "one of the most conflict ridden regional states in federal

Ethiopia.¹” Predominantly, the frequency of violent conflict between the Anywaa and the Highlanders, and recently Majangir-Highlanders simmering tension and conflict has been creating fear, anxiety and instability in the region. As a result, not only the indigenous groups but also the highlanders have felt insecure. The effects of these conflicts have posed immense challenges to the new political leadership of the Gambella regional state installed since 2013. The political culture of ethnic tolerance has clearly been shaken when this problem results in hundreds of people dying and hundreds of thousands become internally and externally displaced. One of such conflicts is the dispute between indigenous and highlanders groups at local level. The indigenes face with highlanders relentless forestland encroachment, used various land claiming strategies such as evition, petition, court litigation, and ultimately violent conflict. The subsequent sections presents such reclaiming instruments and the resultant conflict. In this section, therefore, the researcher investigated the Majang security threat and their relation with the immigrant highlanders. It addresses the key question of *what* kind of patterns and dynamics of indigene-settler relation being observed in the study area after the introduction of federalism.

7.2.1 Simmering and Escalating Tension between Majang and Highlanders

In the last two decades, evidences show that highlander’s intrusion into indigenes forestland has reached climax. Currently, one could state that MNZ is perhaps the area where indigenous and the highlander’s relations are increasingly becoming very tense and could at any time degenerate into an explosive conflict. Even though underreported, apprehensive and occasionally open aggressive relation between the local community and the highlanders has escalated in the last two decades owing to the issue of access to and control over the forestland.

¹ Dereje, *A National Perspective on the Conflict in Gambella...*, 641.

The illegal forestland acquisition, and land sale of forestland and farmland by the local people and the leadership to the ever-increasing highlanders had diminished the land available to the indigenes people. Interview, group discussions and observation also prove that the indigenes families failed to provide land to grown up children. The growing land scarcity raised the issue of land retrieving the land that had been passed onto the highlander's years before either legally or illegally. The highlanders refused to return the land, which they said they had developed for years and on which they were completely dependent. These polarized positions have generated both potential and actual violent conflicts. The real potential for conflict is the contradictory bases of entitlement over forestland. In this respect, there is a deep-seated acrimony and hatred of the highlander residents in the study area. The Majang appears to have developed various strategies for reclaiming their lands. As a result, land related disputes between the indigenes and the highlanders have become one of the major headaches of the administration². The Majang also appear to use any opportunity to put forward their case of land acquisition. In what follows, a brief description of Majang land reclaiming strategies and land governance challenges will be provided.

First, the leadership has attempted identification and eviction of illegal land grabbers. In fact, the local government has attempted to stop land acquisition. The Zone leadership has attempted to evict illegal land grabbers. For instance, in 2005, the Majang examined and identified many illegal land grabbers supported by audio-video evidences. The illegal land-grabbers evidences, the forest situation and about 4000-5000 caught and collected machetes were also televised in

² Interview with officials in the Zone Security Administration Affairs, Meti, March 2013.

Ethiopia Television³. Based on the evidence, several highlanders were also arrested. However, later according to the former officials, “The regional government punished those who attempted to identify and take measures against illegal land grabbers. Some of the expertise and appointed officials were demoted to remote areas as a punishment. Few of them were dismissed from their job.⁴”

Later, the local militia attempted an eviction of the Highlanders in the Summer of 2010. However, they were also sacked from their job by the regional government⁵. Furthermore, the first major action to remove 10,000 illegal highlanders from the forestland was unleashed in 2009/2010 by the zone leadership though without success. When asked why the region failed to stop illegal land acquisition in MNZ, the Former President Obong, mentioned the following three factors:

The problem lies with three basic factors: First, involvement of the Majang leadership in selling of land resources to the highlanders in the Zone. Second, capacity problem of the regional administration to dismantle the land grabbing in the zone. Third, the failure of the Federal government and Southern nation, nationalities and regional state of Ethiopia to support the region to stop illegal land grabbing due to their political interest. when the region begins to stop such illegal case, both Federal government and south nation, nationalities and people’s used to intervene in the region through political wings to stop temptation against the illegal act of highlanders and making a political compromise⁶.

³ Interview with Netsnet, Meti, 2013.

⁴ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2013

⁵ Interview with Netsnet Mekonen, Meti, 2013.

⁶ Interview with Obong, former President of Gambella Region, Addis Ababa, 2013.

The highlanders besides their economic power, they also threatened the local community and the leadership supported by ‘*tenkaye*’ sorcerer. They threatened the community to kill or inflict with disease. The well-known witchcraft is Yehiyes⁷, from Gojjam, who is believed to have killed many people⁸. The highlanders used his spiritual power to threaten the local community. Indeed, the Majang has feared his spiritual power⁹. This shows that the Highlanders have augmented their economic power and political influence with ‘occult power’.

The highlanders fiercely opposed the eviction plan of the zone administration. On their part they argued that it is the crop that they bought grown in the land. According to the Highlanders who participated in the discussion, they bought the land with the acknowledgment of the existing residents and according to legal contract. They argue that there is no evidence that corroborate they forcefully occupied the land. One highlander quoted that how would a person come in to a house unless invited. They underlined that like any Ethiopian they have a constitutional right to live in any place, which includes acquiring land legally having the right to work and earn a livelihood.

However, they stated that after investing their labor and time, it is not appropriate to instruct evacuation from the land. They stated that they have valid Land Holding Certificate acknowledged by the *Woreda*, *Zone*, and *Kebele* administrations. Therefore, it is clearly a violation of the law to evict highlanders. They threaten and intimidate us to leave what they claim is their exclusive land. Therefore, the Federal and Regional governments should take an

⁷ Though the Majang zone high court find him guilty of killing people, and sentenced him 17 years, he appealed to the regional court and released without any punishment. Interview with Majang Zone Council Officer, Meti, 2013.

⁸ Interview (name withheld), Goshene, April 2013.

⁹ Interview (name withheld), Chemi, April 2013.

immediate and appropriate action. The land we occupy is our legal holding. They say that there is no reason that we should leave the land. They underline that they would rather die than leave the land they have worked on all their lives. The Majang management members after being silent when the community was saving and exchanging land, it is surprising that they have issued the instruction to leave the land. The highlands claim that the Zonal administration is the major player and participant in the land sale and exchange process. They say that the administration is exclusively responsible for all the problems that occurred in the past. Recently they are adopting a way of saying which quotes “let Highlanders be returned to where they came from in the same foot they came to us”, “Highlanders did not come here carrying a land, let them leave from our land”. This situation is straining the already complicated difference of the two communities. Deadly confrontation is inevitable. In February 2014, Speaker of the HoF, Honorable Kassa Tekelebirhan, went to Majang in connection to this problem. His response and explanation supports Highlanders’ position but it was not welcomed to the Majang. Instead of providing sustainable and clear response he roughly summed up by saying, “it is better for you to live in agreement with the Majang like it was before. Any person has the right to leave anywhere and produce a property.”

An advisor to the Ministry of Federal Affairs told to the author, “the zone has no plan to evict highlanders. It rather has a plan to register people who have more than four hectares as investor. Recently, the federal House of the Federation Speaker, Kassa, also told to the leadership that people have the right to acquire land up to four hectares as a farmer. But, those people who have land more than four hectares have to be registered as investors.¹⁰” Likewise, Yimam, vice-administrator of MNZ, echoes the same idea. He said, it is difficult to evict highlanders. It will

¹⁰ Interview with Tasew, an expert of the MOFA, Meti, 02 July 2014.

cause a very deadly conflict. The best option is to share the land and to preserve the forest for the indigenous people.” However, most of the informants and FGD participants underlined that they want to get back their lost ancestral land. They argued that the highlander immigrants are there illegally. They are not legal owners of Majang land. Majang women and girl told to the author, ‘God created only one land. There is no another land. This land, that God gave us, has been invaded by highlanders.’ An educated Majang also told to the author;

While a native person has 1-4 hectares of farmland, the highlander farmer has up to 300 hectares of farmland. It is not only very unfair but also illegal. In MNZ, the eviction of highlanders like in Oromia in Wollega and SNNPRS is inevitable. A situation of Zimbabwe what Mugabi did is inevitable in Ethiopia as well¹¹.

Second, in addition to this tense situation, the land related dispute assumes different dimensions. The first dimension relates to the villagization program (2011-2014). Currently, the government is doing ‘voluntary resettlement’ for the benefit of the pastoralist, semi-pastoralists and others. The state is implementing to address Majang food security and other social service problems through villagization program. It is not a new program. As has been mentioned in chapter three, the Derg regime also attempted to resettle the rural dispersed community through its villagization schemes. The idea and the aim of the program are very interesting. However, it has to be done by taking into account of the community core values and way of life. The government should come up with programs that are in line with their way of life. The Majang have a simple life in the forest. Thus, transforming the Majang from simple life to modern and complicated settled life is a big problem for the community.

¹¹ Interview with Netsanet Mekonen, Meti, June 2014.

One of the Gambella region's strategies of villagization is to resettle the local community in the same site where the Derg villagization was implemented. These villagization sites are Dunchayi, Gonchi, Gelishi, Chemi, and Goshen. These sites were one of the loopholes for highlander's entrance into Majang land next to Tapi Coffee plantation. Highlander immigrants used these sites to expand their territory deep into Majang forestland. In Nuer and Anywaa, the area is still empty. They left it without selling it. In contrast, the Majang sold the land to the highlanders and went deep into the forest. Now, the highlanders have already occupied the whole areas of the former settlement sites. The area is a cultivated area covered by various cash crops and houses. The plan was to resettle 1,165 family heads in these kebeles. It was 256 in Goshene, 265 in Chemi, 408 in Gelishi, 437 Dunchayi and 149 in Gonchi. The zone gives 4 hectares of land to each family head. These are not a new villagization. It is rehabilitation. It was in this context that the Zone leadership attempted to resettle the local community in the previous villagization places¹².

The highlanders complained that the Majang officials are deliberately using villagization as a 'tool' to evacuate them from long held, legal and cultivated land where they spend a lot of their money and life though there are ample free areas for the program. Really some of the villagization sites fall within the newly emerging Highland settlement areas amidst traditional Majang territories. In Dushi and Chemi, for the villagization site the zone officials cleared land covered by plants of the highlanders¹³. For instance in Dushi, they cleared, a 22 years cultivated coffee. The highlanders criticized the leadership that though there are lots of free areas for

¹² Majang using their political owner to address their sense of insecurity and vulnerability. So they do make attempts but by and large they are not successful. This is one point that show the fact that the Majang could not translate their political power to ensure human security.

¹³ Interview with Takeal Degefu, Gambella, 2013.

villagization in the zone, they are clearing highlander crops deliberately on which they spend their entire life¹⁴. In Chemi and Dunchi about 56 family heads of highlanders were displaced¹⁵. Some highlanders in Goshen were also imprisoned¹⁶.

As the Majang politicians sought to implement the national villagization agenda, the Highlanders in some of the villages confronted them where the tension quickly erupted into violent conflict. Evidence showed that two people died and several people were arrested in the resettlement sites of Dushi and Chemi *kebeles* in 2012 because of the conflicting land claims. One Majang told to the author,

It was very difficult to move from Meti to Gelishi and vice versa. The highlanders were waiting for us armed with a machete for some time. It was after the president of the region came and discussed about the issue that the tension eased. After this incident, the highlanders have taken the case to the federal government and up till now (November 2013) it is a pending issue. Moreover, the homicide rate between the two groups in various localities such as Yari, Shone and Kumi kebeles has increased. A telling example is Yari kebele where because of land related disputes, highlanders and the local people have been fiercely chopping off each other with machete every day The Majang also thinking of setting fire on highlanders cultivated farmland¹⁷.

¹⁴ Interview with Tegegne, Meti, 2014.

¹⁵ Interview with Yared, Meti, 2013.

¹⁶ Here the Majang political leaders are appropriating the government villagisation program as an ethnic security device.

¹⁷ Interview with former Member of Parliament, Meti, 15 April 2013.

Apart from the aforementioned forms of controversy, the other offshoot of land related disagreement that added fuel to the problem was the highlander's demonstration in Meti against the murder of 19 highlanders by armed gunmen near the town of Bonga. Almost all the casualties were students of Gambella Health College and families of the 1984 highlander settlers. The attackers also kidnapped five highlander female passengers during their assault and injured some other passengers. The suspects were allegedly indigenous Anywaa armed groups¹⁸. The color border which puts the Anywaa and the Majang together and the Highlanders suspect the Majang are also involved in the attack by giving information.

The highlanders were extremely angry and held a demonstration in Meti town on 03 March 2012. The protest was without the knowledge of the administration and hence unlawful. The demonstrators consider this incident as conspiracy by the indigenous community against the highlanders to scare and force them out of the region as the attackers did not kill the Majang who were in the bus. In fact, this incident further strained the already damaged Majang-highlanders relation in the study area. Following this sturdy event, the government took some measures to ease the tension. It paid 90,000.00 ET Birr as compensation for the families of the victims. Most of the perpetrators were also caught in South Sudan and 19 of them were imprisoned. According to state media, the leader of the armed group, Ethiopian-born American Omot Odol Ojulu was also killed on 02 March 2013 as he was arranging to carry out more attacks. Officials also told the author that the Commissioner of the Regional State Police Force, Umanu Gela, who was suspected of taking part in the killing, was also arrested based on the information obtained from Ojulu's laptop computer¹⁹.

¹⁸ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2013.

¹⁹ Interview, Meti, 15 October 2013.

Third, the ordinary people, who were conscious of their political right of ‘owner nationality’, have also started to reclaim the land from the highlanders either through negotiation or by the use of force and court litigation. Some of the returnees who served in the military and participated in the Ethio-Eritrea war reported that they had made an attempt to go back to their village, but faced problems in getting access to what had been their land. They found that their land has been taken over by highlanders. The youth refused to recognize the land contract and their families have started to breach land contractual agreements. As a result, there are quite a lot of land related court cases and appeal to the zone and *Woreda* administration that have created sharp tensions between the two groups of people²⁰. The Majang who sold their land seek a redress through their political power whereas the Highlanders seek to maintain their economic interest by networking with rent-seeking local politicians. Land related court cases and disputes were more intricate, and in some cases resulted in physical injury and devastation of belongings.

As was noted above, land related disputes between the Majang and the Highlanders are one of the major challenges the zonal administration has faced. The study also found out that land related controversies are made worse by the inter-institutional tension between the judiciary and the zone administration. Many factors seem to contribute to the tension. It has been often reported that the zone leadership orders the zone judiciary to stop adjudicating land related disputes, especially between the local community and the highlanders. Primarily, while the

²⁰ In this regard, Ato Meles Weyiso (Meti, 2013) said, “The Majang are demanding a land which is held by the Highlanders for more than 16 years. They are also taking land by force. If you go to government, no one will hear you. The Court, justice office, the administration is all for them. They will not give you any solution. Your claim may not have an end. It is boring and frustrating. Many youths who could not get land to sustain their livelihoods started to reclaim lands that their parents had sold and leased to share croppers. This caused considerable land dispute in many of the *kebeles*”.

people view the court personnel, who are largely highlanders, as unfamiliar with the local culture, the highlanders in their own view the zone administration, who are from the indigenes, as the supporter of the local community. The highlanders also believe that the administration always decides in favor of the local indigenous community. The Majang, in their part, argue that in MNZ judges are extremely corrupt. Therefore, it is a great disadvantage for the poor Majang to go to court against the rich. Specifically, the highlanders have the ability to pay to bribe judges. In fact, the Majang have lost trust on the judiciary system. For this reason, while they prefer to go to the administration and traditional arbitration, the highlanders prefer the court.²¹ The fact that public institutions are viewed as impartial by both groups implies that there is a strong likelihood for each community to take the law into its hands. Institutions are failing to mediate conflicts neutrally.

The judiciary argued that the intervention of the executive pertaining to land ownership litigation is against the law. Besides, people have the constitutional right to file their cases in the court and it is unconstitutional to deny them bring their case to justice. Now, since courts are already crippled by the intervention of the executive, they are simply referring the cases to the administrative body. In contrast, the zone administration believes that formal court decision has a winner-takes-all approach which may further aggravate the tension between the litigators. For this reason, they believe the arbitration by the zone administration for a win-win solution provides a better solution. For instance, if the Highlander has already cultivated the land, the administration would give to the Majang a new substitute of unoccupied land that the court cannot do. They added that land is an administrative matter. It is the property of the people and

²¹ That is why as a legal officer in Godere *Woreda* First Instance Court told the author, “If you send a court order to a Majang to appear before a judge or magistrate, he would not come.” Interview (name withheld), Meti, March 2013.

the state. Hence, it is appropriate for the executive to take proceedings concerning land. They refer the constitution to justify their action-land is government property. In addition, court proceedings are not only costly but also time taking while land is an important property which needs urgent decision since the livelihood of rural people depends on annual crop produce. A key informant from the zone administration argues; “Now, the *kebele* people’s tribunal is also doing great inland related disputes²².” Highlanders, however, complained, “*Kebele* people’s tribunals are entirely staffed from the Majang community and they are ruling in Majang’s favor²³.” This institutional controversy, indeed, shows how the executive is dominant over the other government.

Regrettably, the local leadership, which is supposed to offer protection and support, has also been weakened by the rich Highlanders and the ruling party. They have often permitted land selling deals to their own economic gain. In fact, in 2013 the regional political leadership collected all the stamps from the *kebele* administration, as they were viewed as the main perpetrators in ‘legalizing’ land deals. Yet, corruption related to land selling at this time is rampant since the highlanders are in a superior financial situation to easily entice ordinary Majang to sale their lands and the leadership to endorse the deal. Thus, lacking support from either the federal and regional government or from the local leadership, the ordinary people genuinely fear for their future.

On the other hand, there is a different argument for land entitlement by the Highlanders. The highlanders argued that there are no single Majang taxpayers in MNZ. Interview reveals that the

²² Interview (name withheld), Meti, 20 April 2013.

²³ Ibid.

latter are aware of their constitutional right to engage freely in any economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his/her choice anywhere in the national territory²⁴. This is a constitutional argument for land entitlement by the Highlanders. In this regard, the highlander remarked, “The Majang have still abundant land. They are jealous of us when we have money and wealth through the cultivation of coffee and other commercial crops. The youth create a problem. They do not want to work. They only want government work and salary.” The highlanders argue that they have bought land covered by plants. Nevertheless, experts in the zone contend that the Majang farmers have no as such huge farmland. The highlanders have bought a forestland. According to experts, this argument, therefore, does not hold water. The highlanders argued that they are “tenants” of the Majang. The Majang live by its land, while the highlanders by its sweet.

Currently (2014) federal and regional government established an investigative committee on illegal land invasion. The committee sometimes has arrested few individuals suspected of clearing forest and brokering land deals. In fact, the government does not want to evict the highlanders. First, the highlanders have a legal document authenticated by *kebele*, *Woreda* and zonal officials. Secondly, they have an individual right to live a place of their choice. Above all, these highlanders have developed the area. They cultivated cash crops such as Coffee. It is in line with the government’s preoccupation with boosting export. The local community is very weak in this regard. The Ethiopian government is a developmental state. The highlanders go in line with government priority and interest. Second, in May 2014, the speaker of the House of the Federation visited MNZ based on their petition. He talked to representatives of the indigenous people and the highlanders. While the highlanders complained the prevalence of insecurity, the Majang demanded the return of their traditional land. Some Majang demanded sharing of the

²⁴ Article 41 of the FDRE constitution.

land equally. The Majang raised questions related to the 1985 settlers. They said that they are creating a problem for the leadership and the community. In fact, sharing of the land has already started by the *kebele* leadership. Honorable Kassa replied, “Indeed the indigenous people are owners of the area. Thus, the immigrants and the local community must live in tolerance and harmony. There is no problem of land. There is ample unoccupied land in the zone. The problem is how to use this land in agreement.” However, the response of the Speaker was not only very general and ambiguous, but it also reflects the widely held view of the state and the highlander’s that see communal lands as ‘empty land’. In fact, the local indigenous people were not satisfied with the Speaker hazy response.

These extensive land acquisition and competition for forestland created intra-kebele boundary conflict. There have been many boundary conflicts between *kebeles* associated with land selling and territorial encroachment. For example, there is a boundary dispute between Akashi (the dominant site of the 1985 settler’s highlanders) and Goshene (Majang majority) *kebeles*. These settlers are selling land to other new immigrants. Especially there is boundary claim and counter claim around Gengebati sub-kebele. Besides, about 25 family head highlanders evicted from Gosheni villagization site in 2011 have also resettled in Gengebati sub-kebele. These created serious controversy between the two *kebeles*. Gosheni *kebele* leadership has complained to the Godere *Woreda* administration about Akashi territorial expansion due to land acquisition. In Akashi, disappointed indigenous people also destroyed the cultivated farmland of highlander farmers. They demanded clear boundary demarcation. Hence, Highlanders-Majang conflict is also taking the dimension of an inter-*Kebele* conflict.

There are also boundary disputes between highlander dominated Mehakeligne Meti and Majang dominated Chemi *kebele*. An expert in the agriculture sector told the author that the federal and the regional government gave training to some experts to measure land in MNZ for land certificate. In fact, the agriculture Bureau started land measurement in 2011 with the financial support of sustainable land management project. The bureau has measured land in highlander's *kebeles* in Akashi, Mehakeligne Meti and Gengeboz. However, an indigenous *kebeles* such as Chemi, Dunchayi and Gelishi acutely refused any land measurement, demarcation, and certification. The indigenous people are very suspicious of land certification and measurement from four angles. First, they consider their farm and forestland as Majang communal land. Secondly, they suspect that the government would lease it to the investors. Thirdly, they do not want any land certification processes that automatically give the immigrant highlanders land related rights. Finally yet importantly, this individual land certification may forbid them to sell forestland. In this regard, Aklilu's (2014) key finding indicates that, land certification is considered as a welcoming measure in farming community. But, a good deal of uncertainty remained in the mind of the peasant. Such insecurity include uncertainty about fair and proportional compensation in the case of loss of land or evicted household for public use projects, uncertainty about future land redistribution and an ever expansion of private commercial investments throughout the region and in particular districts where a threat for peasants exists²⁵. The study also observed that, land certification has positively contributed in reducing land related dispute. However, there was a tendency of increasing land dispute cases even after certification because absence of clear and workable land laws,

²⁵ Aklilu Mamo, *Assessment of Land Certification and its Implication on the Tenure Security of Holders: the Case of Godere Woreda, Gambela Region* (Hawassa: HAWASSA UNIVERSITY, College of Agriculture, 2014).

directives and regulation in district area, which was created serious problem in dealing with land dispute, which was a key finding of the study²⁶.

The aforesaid incidents and discussion clearly show that while the Majang have a strong interest of evicting the highlanders because of a genuine security concern, the highlanders also show equally strong resistance to such moves and exhibit interest not only in participating in the economic and political life but also in determining their right to reside in the zone and expand their land holdings. An interview with some members of the latter reveal that they are aware of their constitutional right to engage freely in any economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his/her choice anywhere in the national territory (Article 41 of the FDRE constitution). Overall, it seems certain from the above discussion that although the above-mentioned responses does help, it is not capable of solving the problem of highlanders land acquisition. First, while the indigenous people seek to redress land acquisition through their political power, the highlanders seek to maintain their economic interest by networking with rent-seeking local politicians. Corruption related to the lucrative land selling at this time is rampant in MNZ because the highlanders are in a superior financial position to entice easily ordinary Majang to sale their lands and the leadership to endorse the deal. Second, on September 2013, the zone enacted a strategic plan to stop land selling and destruction of the forest. Yet, it is not sufficiently clear and is not a comprehensive policy framework that govern the indigenous efforts to evict highlanders²⁷. The regional leaders, regional and federal member of parliament must work to protect it but they failed to do so. The researcher has read almost all minutes of the Zone council meetings. They have raised the issue of land acquisition, pass a resolution and vow to stop it.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with Tasew, MOFA, Meti, June 2014.

But, they have failed to implement the resolution effectively. Third, there was no land measurement and land certification as well though some measures taken in that direction. Thus, it was difficult to identify land under farmers, forest, and investment. As a result, farmers having more than 20 hectares of land are paying tax as farmers.

7.2.2 Majang-Highlanders Violent Conflict Incident: September 2014

Until recently, Majang-highlanders relation was relatively peaceful except for the land disputes and minor conflicts. Yet, the Majang have been in constant conflict and frustration with illegal settlers from the north; they were losing their land at an alarming rate as commercial investors cleared their forests and illegal settlers continued surging. They have endured several incidents of this kind in the past in Tapi town and the surrounding villages where many lives were lost. Eventually, the Majang had to retreat to Godere district. In June and July 2014 land acquisition conflicts, some Majang were killed, their cattle looted, and some leaders and elders thrown into jail in different parts of the district²⁸. As mentioned above, no large-scale violent conflict has been there between the two groups except the small-scale protests of 2012 and a few sporadic homicides in some *kebeles* such as Yari and Gelishi. However, the Majang-highlander conflict has now become a serious matter. What happened in Meti town in September 2014 is a reminiscent of the 2003 Anywaa-highlanders brutal violence.

In September 2014, MNZ witnessed a large-scale conflict with a high number of casualties. The conflicting parties were the indigenous Majang and the highlander migrants in the zone. The

²⁸ Gambella Nilotes United Movement (GNUM), *Stop killing Majengers as means to acquire their God-given land-Ethiomeia.com - An African-American news and views website, 2014.*

major driving force of the conflict was the relentless forestland acquisition by immigrant highlanders. The highlanders, forcefully displaced the Majang from their ancestral land²⁹. According to the same source, the Majang forestland has been systematically distributed to illegal immigrants and settlers by the Federal government watch dog advisers at the regional and national levels³⁰.

The September 2014 conflict was a series and violent one in MNZ. It originated in Goshene and Yari *kebeles* and spread to other *kebeles*. The immediate cause of the conflict was the death of a Majang man in Goshene *kebele*. He was found dead at the end of July but the killers were not identified. In response the Majang burned a highlander's house in the same *kebele* and shot and wounded a highlander girl. The highlanders reacted and on September 9, 2014 attacked a Majang and seriously hurt his hand in Akashi *kebele*. The attackers were found and imprisoned. The wounded Majang was from Goshene *kebele*. In the night of the same day, Goshene Majangs shot six highlanders from one family and injured them seriously. The victims were taken to a hospital but two of them died immediately. On September 10, 2014, the highlanders in Goshene, Akashi and other *kebeles* were displaced but sheltered in Meti Town Meeting Hall. That night there happened exchange of fire in and around Gengebati *sub-kebele*, particularly around the Mereshi forest area and four highlanders died instantly. The Majang armed with spears, machete and AK47 also attacked highlanders in rural *kebeles* such as Akashi, Bogi, Goshene, Chemi, Gelishi and Yari. Many highlanders had been massacred in the attack. The Majang also burned down the houses of the highlanders in Goshene. Some sources indicated that more than 35 people were killed and several others seriously injured. The Federal Police brought to Meti Town Health Post

²⁹ Obong, *The untold...*2014.

³⁰ *ibid.*

bodies of men, women and children who were badly mutilated and burned in the rural *kebeles* such as Goshene. Some of the highlanders managed to flee to Meti and Bonga towns while some of the Majang fled to the nearby forest.

On the morning of September 11, highlanders visited their injured fellows and saw the corpse of the deceased. They became furious at the sight of the corpse of a burned pregnant woman and brutally retaliated the Majang who were blamed for the killings. The security tried to calm down the situation. Nevertheless, this was not possible and the mob of highlanders first attempted to free the highlanders imprisoned in the police station; in fact, they managed to do so. The highlanders around the police station also attacked Higeru and her child, a Majang civil servant woman who was unaware of the conflict. They seriously injured her son but she was saved with the help of a highlander. The Majang police who saw Higeru and her son attacked inhumanly become very angry and aggressively confronted the highlanders.

Afterwards, highlanders from the hospital and others were angered by the death of so many children, women, family members, relatives and friends, and they in hundreds marched in Meti armed with sticks, machete, spears and iron bars. They violently and furiously attacked innocent civilian Majang particularly the Majang officials; they brutally killed them and burned down their houses and property. The Gambella Nilotic Union Movement (GNUM) reported that more than 17 Majang were dead and the killing was indiscriminate against children, women and men³¹. According to eyewitness report, at least 20 people were murdered when fighting erupted in Meti town on that day alone. Some people estimate the figure at 30. For instance, the Zone High Court President, Tsegay, was killed on that day and his wife and children were wounded

³¹ GNUM, *Stop killing Majengers....*.

severely and taken to Aman Hospital for treatment. The Head of Godere *Woreda* Security Administration, Mr. Alazar was also killed. Almost all of the Majang in Meti town fled to the nearby *kebeles* and to the forest. Some of the key officials took refuge in the Federal Police camp in the town and saved their lives. Their houses were set on fire and their properties were looted by the alleged angered highlanders mob³². Moreover, the Majang villages were set on fire and the Amhara settlers with the help of government military forces looted their properties³³. The conflict was out of control of the Federal Police Force who were only 30³⁴. The exact figure of casualties is yet to be established.

More than 15,000 people were displaced from the rural *kebeles* and camped in a private elementary school while some Majang officials camped around Godere *Woreda* Stadium protected by the Federal Police and the national defense forces. The researcher rented a house close to the primary school and that gave him the opportunity to talk to displaced communities. The Federal and the Regional Government have sent some aid for the displaced community. On the other hand, residents of Meti are leaving for Tapi, Jimma and other nearby towns. They were extremely terrified, annoyed, and above all, children and women were traumatized by the brutal killings they have witnessed. An elderly Highlander man of 54 from Yari *kebele* told the author the following story:

We have lived peacefully together for long. Recently, however, they were becoming very aggressive. In fact, we do not expect such kind of brutal attack from the Majang given that

³² Obong, *The untold...*

³³ Ibid. According to key informants and the researcher observation, the Highlanders did not get support from the military.

³⁴ Interview with MNZ Security Officer, Meti, October 2014.

*they are so peaceful, calm and Christians. Now, they killed us mercilessly and brutally. They organized themselves along groups and attacked us with machete, knife, gun and so on. They have a prior deliberate plan for this attack. We were not ready. This is our country as well. We will respond as well. We have hands and machete like them. In fact, the government took our guns earlier. We do not have guns like them*³⁵.

Actually, there were adequate signals and symptoms suggesting a mounting tension. Informants indicated that the Federal Government detected the danger and deployed Federal Police in Meti town on 28 July 2014 to prevent the violence³⁶. Yet, it was an inadequate response to prevent a massacre in the troubled MNZ. Gatluak - the President of the region -Toto Hawaryate - the Speaker of the Regional Council, and Ashene Astien – head of the ruling party in GNRS, were also in MNZ to calm the tense situation down. The zone and *Woreda* offices also announced to the civil servants that they should start work though most of them fled on foot to the nearby Tapi Town in SNNPRS. About four hundred members of the National Defence Force and the Region’s *Leyu Hayele* police (Special police force) were immediately deployed in the area. This appears to be in response to the appeal by the local authorities in Meti for Federal intervention after the crisis got out of control. However, clashes in the remote region have still continued and sporadic attacks and killings have been reported in September. The conflict has further expanded to Mengesh *Woreda* as well. Actually, the National Defence Force has been deployed and temporary camps have been established in Yari, Kumi, Shone, Goshene, and Gelishi *kebeles*. The conflict is still spreading to other villages. According to unverified information, the Majang also killed five Federal Police members as they were patrolling some conflict prone *kebeles*.

³⁵ Interview (name withheld), Meti, 24 September 2014.

³⁶ Obong, *The untold...*, .

On September 22, 2014, the Security ordered all *kebele* militia to hand over guns. Accordingly, all *kebele* militias except those in Majang dominated *kebeles* returned their weapons. This has created resentment on the side of the Highlanders. As usual, on September 24, 2014 the Zonal council changed the *Woreda* and zonal leadership. They appointed Majang's who were working in Gambella and were not involved in the conflict³⁷. The government also labeled the Majang who were behind the trouble as 'narrow-minded' and the highlanders who were behind the trouble as 'anti-peace' elements. Subsequently, the Federal and Regional Security arrested almost all zone, *Woreda* and *kebele* Majang leadership in Addis Ababa and some rich highlanders. On September 24, 2008, elders in the area and the Regional and Federal personnel started a peace deal between the conflicting parties. However, On September 28, 2008, an armed Majang killed a member of the national defence force and wounded several others in Yari *Kebele* as they were patrolling. The deceased was buried in Meti town.

It seems that the Majang organized and planned the attack earlier. For instance, most of the residents of the town left before the eve of the New Year³⁸. Informants also indicated that the attack by the Majang was a pre-planned one. On the other hand, the Diaspora-based Gambella Nilotes United Movement (GNUM) in its website stated that the Majang were unaware of the pre-planned massacre³⁹. GNUM also strongly condemned the massacre of members of the Majang people by both the Federal Police Forces and the illegal settlers (highlanders) in Meti town. GNUM underlined that the government has been relentlessly pressing the ethnic group to

³⁷ Interview (name withheld), Tapi, 24 September 2014.

³⁸ In Ethiopia, the New Year starts in September 11.

³⁹ GNUM, *Stop killing Majengers...*,

give up their fertile land to the highlanders and to the commercial investors⁴⁰. GNUM stated that the Ethiopian Federal Police and the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) have been there to make sure they flush out the indigenous people from their ancestral land in favor of the highlanders⁴¹. The party stated that the indigenous Nilotes are not enjoying freedom and equality as they continue to suffer discrimination because of their color and race⁴². The party argued that “They are seen as inferior, low grade citizens and sub-humans who do not deserve any right to own properties and show prosperity as other citizens - even on their own lands”⁴³. The Majang, according to the party, had lost control over their ancestral land and forest resources in Godere *Woreda* and Yeki *Woreda* due to the Satanic policy of EPRDF-led government that did not give guarantee to this minority group in the true sense in the last two decades. The former Regional President also noted, “Now illegal immigrants are heading towards Mengesh *Woreda* for unlawful consumption of well-known jungle forest resources in the country”⁴⁴.

In October 2014, with the intervention of local elders, religious leaders and Minister of Federal Affairs, the violence has abated and some of the displaced highlanders and local communities returned to their homes. However, it was reported that in the nearby Guraferda of the SNNPRS, tensions between the Majang and the highlanders increased igniting a conflict that lasted for five days and destroyed property and claimed the lives of many people⁴⁵. Only after the Federal Police intervened did the killing cease. Local people reported that about 35 members of Federal Police lost their lives in the confrontation. These violent incidents show that collective violence

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Obong, *The untold...*, .

⁴⁵ Interview (name withheld), Tapi, June 2014.

often begins with a small-scale inter-personal dispute and then escalates. While the immediate cause of the violence is multitude, the risk of escalation may be very high when some set of systemic conditions prevail, in this case, deep-seated simmering tensions and land ownership imbalance between the Majang and the highlanders.

In fact, various explanations have been put forwarded to explain what really caused the violence. The Majang employ a theory of conspiracy to explain the violence. They stated that it is a government and Highlanders conspiracy to evict the Majang from their land since they occupied a very fertile forestland. According to key informants, the federal government ignored their petition since it has an implicit interest that the highlanders occupy their land. One of the regional officials emphasized;

The main cause of the Highlanders -Majang conflict was an unethically utilization of land by the investment farms. It is and failure of the federal and regional government (Ministry of Agriculture) to stop the illegal operation of commercial farms against the wellbeing of the Majang community or lack of implementing social responsibility as per the business plan of the commercial farms to the Majang community. In other words, it was lack good government within the zone⁴⁶.

In contrast, the highlanders explain the violence differently. According to the highlanders, the root cause of the conflict is the Majang's illegal claim of highlanders land in MNZ and their chauvinist attitude. The state, on its part, relate the cause of the conflict from external sources such as Eritrea and 'ginbot sebat' to sabotages by anti-peace and anti-development and rent-seeking peoples to lack of good governance.

⁴⁶ Interview with former President of the region, Omote Obong, Addis Ababa, 2013.

Government Response

A charge was filed against the Gambella's Special Police Force commander along with other 17 high-ranking officials that are suspected of killing, causing minor and serious physical injury and displacing the Highlanders, who have travelled legally and settled in Majang Zone various locations in the Gambella Region. The charge file instituted by the federal Prosecutor at the Federal Higher Court 19th Criminal Bench on 31/12/2014 states that the suspects⁴⁷ conducted meetings and discussions with the *Woreda* Officials as well as the community from April 2014 up to July 2014 in Majang Zone, Godere *Woreda*, Meti Town regarding the land usage between the region's residents and the highlanders⁴⁸.

The charges alleged that in the meetings repeatedly called by the suspects, the suspects deliberated in an agenda entitled "The highlanders should share the farm land and coffee plantations in the Majang Zone with the Majang ethnic group and if they are not willing to do so they should leave the area"⁴⁹. The charge also presented that the members of the ethnic group that are commonly known as the "highlanders" refused the instruction issued by the suspects.

⁴⁷ The suspect of the crime are Commander of the Gambella Special Police force, Commissioner Yakob, Sheraton Takikan, Head of Administration of the Majang Zone, Mr. Tinsael Konzen Head of Administration of the Godere Zone, Mr. Yonas Markos, his deputy Mr. Getachew W. Tleika, Commander of of the Godere Woreda Police, Deputy Inspector Abiyot Rocket Korke, Head of the Majang Zone Crime Prevention Sector Inspector Matewos Matot, Administrative and Social Affairs Advisor for the region's president, Mr. Abraham Micheal, Advisor of the Godere Woreda Administrator, head of the Godere *Woreda* Militia Office Mr. Fikere Tefera, head of the Zone's Security Office Mr. Yimam Faris, head of Mite Municipality procurement and finance Mr. Dingetu Repas, head of the Godere Woreda health Office Mr. Yishak Abrham, House Speaker of the Zone's Council Mr. Simon Kgnan and other a total of the 37 suspects.

⁴⁸ The Reporter News, Headline reads; "Gambella's Commander of Special Police force along with other high ranking officials are charged with" Date of issue 04/01/2015

⁴⁹ The Reporter, "Gambella's Commander of Special Police force along with other high ranking officials is charged with". Addis Ababa: 04/01/2015.

Up on the knowledge of the refusal of the Highlanders, the suspects organized and armed some of the police and militia members who are also members of the Majang ethnic group, and began an attack on the highlanders with their own participation from 24/07/2014 up to 18/01/2015 and created bloodshed and conflict among the highlanders, as provided by the Prosecutor⁵⁰. The charge also presented that the number of death in the Majang Zone, in particular in Mengesh and Godere *Woredas* until the date of the charge is 79. Twenty-seven people have also been subject to serious and minor body injuries, 273 houses have been burned to the ground and 13,034 people has been displaced from their houses⁵¹.

The prosecutor's statement of charge further provides that the suspects and their accomplices who are yet to be arrested, killed citizens using sharp objects, fire arms and Kalashnikovs during the conflict between members of Majang Ethnic group and the Highlanders in addition to causing physical injury and burning properties to the ground. The statement of charge provided by the prosecutor further alleged the suspects have killed five 17 years of children and adults by a round of bullet as well as slitting their throats in addition to burning a pregnant woman in her 8th month as well as other residents after forcing them to get into the house and locked them in⁵².

The prosecutor filed 30 charges individually and jointly on the suspects and presented the file to the bench on 05/01/2015. However, the statement of the charge has not been served to the suspects. The reason for non-delivery of the statement of charge to the suspects quoted is because the charge incorporates names of witnesses of the crime which pose risk in the safety of the witnesses if their identity is revealed⁵³.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

As we have tried to look in to the issue in the above paragraph, the government is not addressing the problem being inflicted on the Majang community. Instead of resolving the issue at grassroots level, focusing on temporary resolution will only fuel the problem. These have opened the door for recurrence of the problem. In particular, some authorities present the issue as the simple one by saying and labeling the aggrieved people as “rent-seeking people” “agents of foreign enemies”, “terrorists”, “messengers of Genibot sehati”, “narrow headed forces”. They claim that the problem of the community is simple and thereby failing to give the proper response to the problem.

7.3 Majang Response to Commercial Agriculture - Escalation of Violent Conflict

As it has already been mentioned, the local communities way of life is tied to forest and hence; any threat to the forest poses threat to the Majang. Evidence from the field indicates that in almost all areas under investments there are clashes and conflicts between investors and communities. As it has been discussed earlier, the Majang traditional way of life is under threat from aggressive encroachment into forestland. This strain resulted in a heightened tension and sometimes-violent conflict between the local community and the investors. They are starting to realize what the commercial agriculture boom is doing to their livelihood and identity, and resistance is growing. Indeed, findings show that commercial farming has placed many burdens on the indigenes Majang people and rendered most hopeless and vulnerable. In response to their plights because of unfair treatment meted out to the Majang people was resistance and persistent violent conflicts. There have been several court cases, petitions, simmering tension and conflict

between the local community and the investors. The following section provides case studies on the conflict between Majang and investors.

7.3.1 The Case of Gumari Kebele vs. Verdanta Harvest P.L.C

There has been simmering tension between the Verdanta Harvest P.L.C and local community in Gumari kebele, which occasionally erupted into violent conflict. From the outset, the communities in Godere *Woreda* strongly resisted the granting of 3112 hectares of prime forestland⁵⁴ to establish a tea plantation to the Indian company Lucky Exports. The government is legally bound to obtain the ‘free, informed and prior consent’ of the indigenous people pursuant to article 43(2) of the federal constitution but it has not taken place with the local community. They reacted with violence against the company belongings. Before the violent conflict occurred in October 2013, the people in Gumari *kebele* organized a series of proactive meetings without the recognition of the *Woreda* authorities to discuss the matter and decided to take their case to the federal government in 2011/12. The community was able to send an envoy to Addis Ababa to take the case to the former President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia⁵⁵. Ato Tamiru, the *kebele* chairperson, was in Addis Ababa for almost three months for complaint on behalf of the Gumari *kebele* people.

⁵⁴ Gambella Regional State (GRS). 2004. ‘Letter of clan leaders and elders addressed to the president of the Ethiopia Government’, 26 *ginbot* 1996 (unpublished letter).

⁵⁵Ibid.

The then President wrote a strong letter to the Environmental Authority and the Ministry of Agriculture protesting the transfer of forest land to an investor echoing the concerns of the communities concerned⁵⁶. The letter stated that

The Gambella peoples national regional state government Majang Zone Godere Woreda Gumari kebele administration in their letter dated 09/12/2010, requested the suspension of the 3012 hectare of land that is under the protection and conservation of Pact Ethiopia and sustainable land management project to an Indian company called Verdant Harvest PLC for agriculture investment without the acknowledgment of natural forest experts found federal to Woreda levels. Residents of the Woreda have previously presented similar petition to the federal environmental protection authority in writing and in response to the request the authority and in the letter dated 07/11/2009 under ref No. 818-4/1124 the authority advised and notified that conditions should be facilitated to protect the forest since the country would benefit more for carbon trading rather than agriculture at this time when Ethiopia is negotiating in the rest of the world representing Africa. Therefore, reminding the resolution that we have reached recently, while reminding this is the time that our country is negotiating with the rest of the world representing Africa through our Prime Minister, I kindly request the Excellency to develop the forest by the participation the community⁵⁷.

This triggered debate even within the government among different sectors. The Environmental Authority argued that the remaining little forestland should not be turned into agriculture as its long term negative impact on the community and the country is greater than the income

⁵⁶ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Office of the President, “A Letter to the Environmental Protection Office”, (Addis Ababa, 26 April 2011) (unpublished letter).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

generated from tea plantation. In contrast, the Ministry of Agriculture on its part argued that the land leased to the investor is not a forestland but a bush that will have no negative impact on the community if cultivated. Nevertheless, in reality, Gumari forest is the densest portion of the Godere forest, which some scholars termed as the ‘Water Tower’ of the region. It is the water shed of several tributaries such as Atafi, Geji, Fan, Abolemu, Gendori, and Shayi Rivers micro watersheds, and to Zie ‘critical watershed’ in Godere *Woreda*. It is the main source of water to the MNZ. In addition, one agriculture expert stated that “investments must have been hundreds of meters away from the rivers. But, the Verdanta company owner refused the agriculture experts endeavor to demarcate the boundary about hundreds meter away from rivers”⁵⁸. Melca Majang coordinator pointed out that the problem arises due to the allocation of land based on a very old map and data. The Ministry of Agriculture is granting land based on the old data, hence forest areas are considered as bush areas⁵⁹.

Likewise, there had been a debate within the MNZ between the Zone Administration and the Zone Bureau of Agriculture as well. The Zone Bureau of Agriculture argued that the type of crop selected by the Verdanta Harvest P.L.C is not forest-friendly. Experts underscored that coffee is a moisture loving plant that needs a shade but tea plantation involves greater de-forestation as it is a sun-loving plant”⁶⁰. The interview made with experts revealed that though the Zone’s Bureau of Agriculture has refused the leasing of land to the Indian company, the zone administration supported by the former president of the region forced the bureau experts to sign the agreement. There is also anecdotal evidence that the investors have bribed the zone leadership by giving several favors. Then after, the local authorities have detained a number of

⁵⁸ Interview with Sahilu, Meti, June 2014.

⁵⁹ Interview with Shibiru Zerihun and Melkamu Abike, Meti, June 30 2014.

⁶⁰ Interview with Godere *Woreda* Agricultural Expert, Meti, 06 June 2013.

activists suspected of being protest leaders⁶¹. Subsequently, despite strong opposition, the investor continued clearing the forest and the regional and zonal governments continued their pressure on the community to accept the land use change and to silence them⁶².

The people representative, Mr. Tamerat, was quoted in the media as saying that “Though the government has no right to grant land to the investors without our consent, we were not consulted in the process. We are ostracized by our own government”⁶³. Other local informants also said that consultations have not taken place directly with the affected peoples prior to approval of the projects and with the objective of achieving informed consent, as required by the federal constitution (article 43(2)). In 2010, the regional, zonal and *Woreda* officials tried to have a meeting with the local community. Nevertheless, they summoned only GPLM party members and supporters. Then, the region investment office reported to the federal government that the community had given its consent and the area is neither a forest nor a bush⁶⁴. The leadership also sacked the *kebele* chairperson due to his strong opposition of the granting of a prime forestland to investment and his appeal to the federal government. This in turn created tension and enmity between the local community and the leadership. The community strongly argued that it is the people who have the power to appoint and dismiss the chairperson, not the GPLM party. Afterwards, the chairperson was re-appointed again.

⁶¹ Dessalegn, *Land to Investors...*, 31-32.

⁶² Interview (name withheld), Meti, 2015.

⁶³ Amharic. voanews.com-January 8/2014.

⁶⁴ Interview with Dejen, expert in the Godere *Woreda* bureau of Agriculture and environmental unit, Meti, 22 June 2014; Interview with Addis Negashi, an expert in environmental Impact Assessment, Addis Ababa, 24 February 2015.

Consequently, forced eviction of the people who have lived on this land for over hundreds of years caused violent conflict between the local residents and the investors. First, the newly raised tea seedlings on the nursery site were ripped up by unknown group of people but suspected to be the discontented members of the community in 2012. The company cleared two hectares of forestland and planted tea seedlings in 2012. The company reported the case to the zone and the leadership has given a strong warning to the community. Some people argued that the zone leadership strongly wanted to lease the area because it is largely the residence of the highlanders and the neighboring Shekicho people. Previously, these people even demanded secession from the region to join SNNPRS due to the absence of any region development endeavors in the area⁶⁵.

In 2013, the company cleared 30 hectares of forestland and has started to plan tea. While doing their activity one of the Rollers crashed a child and killed him. This has added fuel to the already strained relation between the community and the investor. Afterward, these grievances translated into a violent incident on 20 October 2013 and an unidentified people again fired on the security guards of the company, set fire and burned the storehouse, fuel two tractors and one excavator. They destroyed buildings and machinery. According to Verdant officials, the attackers destroyed worth an estimated \$140,000⁶⁶.

Following this incident, nine members of the Gumari *kebele* leadership have reportedly been arrested and physically abused by the *Woreda* and regional governments for they failed to expose

⁶⁵ This is another interesting layer of the conflict – Majang leadership leasing land to the investors to ‘punish’ the Highlanders but ultimately undermine Majang’s livelihoods. This might be the unintended consequences of their action.

⁶⁶ Interview with Manojet Barkatakey, Verdant Harvest PLC Manager, Tapi, 23 June 2014.

the criminals. Besides, experts in the Godere *Woreda* Bureau of Agriculture who previously firmly opposed the forestland transfer have apparently been detained. Such government repression has driven leaders of the community into exile such as the *Kebele* chairperson of Gumari *kebele*. Now, the federal government has deployed federal police force in the area.

Employees of the Bureau of Agriculture were also arrested in relation to this incident. They are accused of giving land to the local community within the territory of the company. The 18 members committee was established and instructed by the zone officials to demarcate the cultural site of the local community. The members were one from Zone experts, 4 from Godere *Woreda* experts, 3 Godere *Woreda* leaderships and the *Woreda* council head as the leader of the committee. The company owner was also with them to observe the land demarcation. Then, they demarcated 79 hectares of land as a cultural site and heritage. They reported their final decision and the demarcation site to the *Woreda* council. Actually, they gave land to the local community since the land is a traditional shrine/ place of worship for the local community based on the community application and strong demand. The area is a place of burial of the local community chiefs called *balabat* Bishof. The *balabat* children and grand children are the one who strongly resisted investment in their shrine place. There is alleged evidence that they were suspected for the attack of the Verdanta Company. One of the jailed officials told to the author that the region has arrested 18 people after the company owner accused the whole committee members. They were imprisoned in Gambella town prison from December 2013 to March 2014 when they were bailed out after four-month arrest. Ato Tamerat who later fled to the US was also released on bail on financial guarantee⁶⁷. Recently, the Kabo *kebele* leadership discovered that 70 percent of the company land, according to the Map, located in Kabo *kebele*. The company owner asked the

⁶⁷ Telephone Interview (name withheld), 22 March 2014.

Gumari kebele to grant the land based on the map of the company. The map shows that the whole Gisho Beri, Worqamba, Dochia, and Dawi sub-kebeles included into the company land holding. The *kebele* officials told to the author that the area is a farm and residence land of 794 local people.

The owner of the company, Mr. Verdanta argued that some powerful groups want to take land from the company in the ‘name of culture’ with the support of some local officials⁶⁸. He underlined that the company has good relation with the local community except few “thieves” and “robbers”. Due to this robbery, “We cannot control the land. The government too cannot control the land. The government failed to finalize the boundary issue and guarantee security for the company function for the last three years. As a result, still we have cleared 169 hectares and cultivated tea/planted only in 105 hectares of land.” The manager underscore that “Everything is fine at federal level. The Zone, *Woreda* and *kebele* leadership are very corrupt. Hence, corruption is one of the challenges of the company. Local leaders are selling land in my territory in all direction up to 200,000 ET Birr. The situation is very difficult for investors”⁶⁹. In fact, such violent attacks on foreign farms will undoubtedly ruin the country image and policy of commercial agriculture. This was not the first incident in the region. For instance, armed groups killed five workers on a farm developed by a Saudi Arabian company in 2011. The author asked the manager about the benefit to the local community and he replied; “First we have to establish ourselves in a peace situation. Everything is perfect only on paper. In fact, there are some people employed in our company though all of them are from outside. The Indians are only two”⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ Interview with Manojet Barkatakey, Verdant Harvest PLC Manager, Tapi, 23 June 2014.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

There are also reports of violent confrontations between the company armed guards and the local community. Local residents said that the investors' guards have fired several rounds of bullets to scare the residents and forcibly occupy land belonging to local people repeatedly. Local people added that though they reported to the local militia, *kebele* officials and Majang zone police, thus far they did not take any action. The Federal Police are still there and there remains the threat of further confrontation and violence.

7.3.2 Tension between Local Community and Domestic Investors: The Case of Kinfe Berha Coffee Plantation in Kabo and Yari Kebele

Kabo *kebele* is one of the 31 *kebeles* of the Godere *Woreda*. There are four sub-kebeles namely Gishoberi, Worqamba, Dachio, and Dawi. The *kebele* has the second largest town in the zone. There are about five ethnic groups with 10,000 population resided in the *kebele*. The *kebele* also has one of the last largest remaining forests in MNZ called *Teti* forest. The forest is near to Gumari forest. Yari is one of the *kebeles* of Mengesh *Woreda* with a population of about 18,000. There are a number of domestic investors in Kabo *kebele*, particularly around *Teti* forest. The Shekicho, Kefficho, Tigrayans, Amhara and Oromo live in the *kebele*. Some highlander's officials engaged in cash crop production such as coffee in Kabo *kebele*. These are Kinfe Abreha, Yigzaw, and Green Coffee and so on.

The aforesaid investors have very serious problem with the local community. Especially, Knife Abreha has serious controversy and resistance with local farmers in Kaki sub-kebele for the last four years. Kinfe has leased more than 240 hectares of land for coffee production in Kabo and Yari *kebeles* based on the Godere *Woreda* administration permission. The area is a very fertile

and suitable climate for coffee cultivation. More than 150 local farmers applied to the *kebele*, *Woreda*, zonal and regional officials for cultivation. Actually, previously the local community organized and took 2000 hectares of land for forest. However, later the zone administration forbids the association that forest could not be taken as investment project. Now, according to eyewitness account, the area has been occupied by illegal land grabbers.

Local people said that the investor guards fire gun at the local community to scare them to leave the area. Local people told to the author that the investor is threatening the local community by using his participation in the fight with the Derg regime as a former TPLF fighter. He cleared local farmers cultivated cash crop such as coffee trees and main source of food called *enset*. He displaced about 56 families from their residence and farmland. Some people were kicked and wounded by him and his followers. One *kebele* official told to the author that the investors are abusing the local community let alone benefiting them. Investors are rather coming with mechanized agricultural machines with gun. Until now, there is no final decision. The investor has no clear location and boundary. The federal and regional governments are creating enmity with the local community and the investor⁷¹. The farmers have legal document from the *kebele*. The community reported the case to the *kebele* quite a lot of times. Nevertheless, he is beyond the local official's capacity. He does not want to be responsive to *kebele* leadership and militia. He has disregarded call letters of the *Kabo kebele*. He prefers to have direct relation with the *Woreda* and zonal officials. Then, the *kebele* wrote a letter to the Godere *Woreda* and the MNZ administration office but the *Woreda* prefer to keep quiet.

⁷¹ FGD with Representatives of the local community, *Kabo*, 18 June 2014; Interview with Dejen, Andenet, abnew, Meti, June 2014.

The investors argued that the land leased to him was unused land. It was the *Kebele* management members and some rent-seekers that created problem between the investors and the local community⁷². The *kebele* chairperson, Tsegay Geleta, was accused of illegal land selling several times but he bribed local officials⁷³. Likewise, experts in the security office told to the author that the area was an “empty land”. There were only five people within the investor land around Kaki sub-kebele. The local people entered illegally after the land was leased to Mr. Kinfе Berha. These people came from Gecha in Sheka zone after the land was leased. An expert in the Godere *Woreda* agriculture office, member of the committee who gave the land to the investor, also said that the land was unoccupied and uncultivated free land. In addition, the *kebele* has no mandate to grant land more than four hectares to farmers. If it is more than four hectares of land, they have to register as investor and have license. Experts stated that the land was given to the investor with the presence of 6 police, 2 militia, *kebele* chair and vice-chair and two people from the *Woreda* Bureau of Agriculture. He paid tax for three years without cultivating the land due to the controversy. He lost significant money. The *Woreda* officials also took the gun of the guards. Thus, he has been unable to protect his land from illegal land grabbers.

Representatives of the people from Yari and Kabo *kebele* presented their grievances to the *Woreda* and zone administration. The MNZ security administration investigated the issue based on the community compliant. The security administration head in a letter wrote to the Majang Zone Administration on 30/03/06 EC, stated that the land leased to Kinfе Berha for coffee plantation is an area where local community settlement and farm land (see appendix 1)⁷⁴. The

⁷²Interview with Kinfе, Meti, 2014.

⁷³ Interview (name withheld), Kabo, 18 June 2014.

⁷⁴ Majang Nationality Zone security Administration, “A Letter to Majang Zone Administration” No. 628/mze/656 On 30/03/06 EC (In Amharic).

former committee report was incorrect and based on wrong information. This was verified by the zone leadership visit of the area. The letter underlined that the two *Woredas* should find an immediate solution to the problem. The office also recommended that the two *Woredas* must give the investor another unoccupied land as a substitute⁷⁵. However, the zone administration failed to give proper and immediate solution to the conflicting parties.

Then, representatives of the community took the case to the regional government land management authority⁷⁶. The Gambella Region Land Utilization Administration and Environmental Protection Authority wrote a letter, which says that the land that was given to Kinfe Berha Coffee Plantation in Yari and Kabo is the farmland of the community for long. The land leasing is thus illegal. The letter underscore that the delay of the solution has been creating tension between the local community and the investor. Accordingly, the Majang Zone Security and Administration Affairs Department after undertaking research towards the case through experts; the coffee development land granted to Kinfe Berhe has already been under the possession of people of the *Kebele* and earned asset as researched by experts (see appendix 1 for details)⁷⁷.

For that reason, the Zone Administration must provide another substitute land to the investor and solve the issue of good governance immediately before it reaches to crisis level based on the zone security office and Mengesh *Woreda* Administration. The office also demanded report of

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The Gambella Region Land utilization Administration and Environmental Protection Authority, 'A Letter to Majang Zone Administration', No. 989 m.a.05/06 on 07/08/06. (In Amharic).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

the solution immediately. Yet, the issue is left unaddressed. The zone and *Woreda* officials rather were busy in intimidating the local people who took their case to the regional government⁷⁸.

There is also land ownership dispute between the local people and domestic investors, Mr. Yigzaw and Mr. Gebremedhin, in *Kabo kebele*. There is an alleged evidence that some local people are attacked by machete. Mr. Tekaligne guards in Teti even crossed their boundary and threatened the local people by gun⁷⁹. Overall, there is no peaceful relation between the local community and the investors. Key informants underlined that in the near future violent conflict may erupt between the local community and the investors unless government gives immediate solution⁸⁰.

7.4 The Nuer regional political leadership and Majang Human security: An outlook

In Gambella regional politics, the Anywaa have been the dominant political actors. They appointed five Presidents since the regional inauguration. Now, after long period of fighting and patience, the regional presidency become under the Nuer. This Nuer coming to power happened together with the liberation of South Sudan. Some people remarked that the EPRDF appointed a Nuer president to appease the South Sudan leadership. It is the reflection of the typical manners of the EPRDF pragmatic approach. It is part of a wider geopolitical game. Right away, the Nuer Diaspora also celebrated this appointment under the banner, “Nuer Dream comes true” in Addis Ababa at Hilton hotel. More than 2000 Diaspora and some local Nuers participated in this meeting. The Majang are jokingly saying, “If the Nuer become president after 21 years, then the

⁷⁸ Interview with Peoples Representatives, Tapi, June 2014.

⁷⁹ FGD, *Kabo*, June 2014.

⁸⁰ Interview (name withheld), *Kabo*, June 2014.

Majang will become president in 2033.” This new presidency has its own implication in the regional politics. Regarding the Majang, it has lots of impact on the dynamics of Majang current problem and security challenges.

The Majang take the selection of the Nuer as a president as a very good opportunity. Nevertheless, some people considered it as both as an advantage and a disadvantage for the Majang. The advantage is that the Majang will become free from Anywaa dominance and the ensuing regional government negative interference in MNZ autonomy. In addition, the Majang hope that there would be a fair share of regional resource and federal budget grant and subsidy. Further, the Majang may obtain better political appointment in the region. For instance, the new President appointed one Majang in the Regional police commission senior managerial position for the first time in the region since 1991. They have also a very strong hope that they would be the next president of the region.

In contrast, some people argued that Nuer in power is a disadvantage for the Majang. The Nuer believes in territorial expansion and settlement. This Nuer interest is coincidence with highlander’s interest of land acquisition. In this regard, Dereje (2011: x), mentioned unlike the Anywaa, who have a ‘radical notion of territoriality’ the Nuer have a ‘flexible concept of localization’ allowing immigration at various levels. As a result, the Nuer administration may turn a blind eye on Majang’s concern of highlanders land acquisition. The Nuer themselves have a very strong interest to expand their territorial possession and control in Anywaa territory.

7.5 Summary and Conclusion

Land acquisition from various corners is in rapid expansion. Besides, violent conflicts between the local community and the land grabbers have become more frequent that threatened the life of the indigenous people. Therefore, with its subsequent land encroachment, the Majang have felt very much marginalized politically, their territory now invaded by external forces such as investors and Highlanders. This frustration has led to some armed fighting with the neighboring people and government⁸¹.

It is also noticeable that the way of resolving the conflict has brought its own problem as well. Sometimes the government arranges counter-demonstration and simplifies people's demands. That is to say, the government at all level has a reductionist and a labeling approach to the Majang people's legitimate demand. As we have tried to look in to the issue in the above paragraph, the government is not addressing the concern of the Majang community. Instead of resolving the issue at grassroots level, focusing on temporary resolution will only fuel the problem. This has opened the door for recurrence of the problem. In particular, some authorities present the issue as the simple one by saying and labeling the aggrieved people as "*Tsere selam hylochi*" (anti-peace elements), "agents of foreign forces", "terrorists", "messengers of Genbot 7", *tebab hylochi* "narrow headed forces" etc. They claim that the problem of the community is simple and thereby failing to give the proper response to the problem. The major activities that are being performed by the government is intimidation and blackmailing. It gives emphasis to repression by arresting, threatening and sometimes killing. The discussions of peace-making have been spoiled by such words of labeling. This has further aggravated the problem. Beside

⁸¹ Vaughan, [*Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia*](#)..., 268.

repression, the government has developed a political culture of covering up of conflicts. In fact, politicians exploited these localized conflicts to further their own agendas. There may be petty jealousies over the successes of highlanders.

The commoditization of land is conflictual and could cause or generate unending inter-ethnic conflict. Nevertheless, until now no viable solution has been put in place to the aforementioned problems in MNZ. Hence, uncertainty about the threat of further confrontation and violence may erupt unannounced due to the highlanders' continuous and persistent land acquisition problem posed to the local community. The machete, the basic tool of clearing the forest/bush is still there. Almost all people move with a machete in their hands. Thus, lacking support either from the federal and regional government or from the local leadership, the indigenous people truly feared for their future. There seems to be a tension between the individual rights of highlanders and the group rights of the indigene local community. The highlanders are aware of their constitutional right to engage freely in any economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his/her choice anywhere in the national territory⁸². That is why while the indigenous people have a strong interest to evict the highlanders from their traditional land arising from a genuine security concern, the highlanders also show equally strong resistance and interest to reside in the zone and expand their land holdings. If the necessary steps are not taken immediately, the people can be frustrated and many unwarranted conflicts and violence may ensue. The government should take confidence-building measures to reduce the effect of the prevailing 'societal security dilemma' between the Majang and the highlanders and the investors.

⁸² Article 41 of the FDRE constitution.

Chapter 8

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this concluding chapter, we sum up the major debates and findings, attempt to draw some conclusions, provide possible recommendations, and end with by proposing research agenda for further inquiry. It proceeds in four sections. The first section reiterated the research questions that we formulate at the beginning of this study and outlines the major debates and the findings of the research. Section two draws major conclusions. The third section proposed Majang friendly reforms for an effective protection of the vulnerable Majang community. Then, the chapter ends with recommendation for further research.

8.1 Summary of the findings

The study was set out to assess the record of accomplishment of federalism at local level by taking a case study of the Majang people, in particular in the MNZ. The central problem addressed in this study was why the Majang feel insecure at a time when they are politically empowered. The 1995 FDRE constitution tries to address the concern of formerly disadvantaged groups based on a territorial empowerment to protect them from powerful group's encroachment. This entails an investigation of the practice of federal experiment at local level. The operational reality matters a lot.

Our particular concern was to examine how the Majang community were/are impacted by the federal state restructuring process, mechanized agricultural investment, inter-regional migration, and the ensuing land alienation, deforestation, and how their coping and adaptive strategies affected inter-ethnic/group relations, peace and governance issues in the context of 'ethnic federalism'. The study has also sought to understand whether extensive land acquisitions by multiple actors pose existential threat to the indigenous Majang people.

Trying to answer these questions automatically draws one's attention to the nature of the relationship between Majang and their neighbors; Majang and highlanders and Majang and investors. To address these questions, we have ventured into an intensive examination of MNZ as case study within the context of extensive land acquisition. This helps us to uncover the situation of the formerly disadvantaged ethnic groups in federal Ethiopia and thereby provide a better solution for the local reality of the Ethiopian federal experiment in the last two decades.

We designed appropriate methodology to properly address the problem. Accordingly, the empirical data presented in this dissertation stems from open and semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observation the researcher conducted in MNZ, and Gambella town, SNNPRS and Addis Ababa from January 2013 to March 2014. During these periods, the researcher regularly discussed state restructuring, Highlanders migration, commercial agricultural investment, conflict and other related issues with diverse stakeholders such as political leaders, civil servants, victims of displacement, community elders and local NGO's. To substantiate the primary data sources, the researcher has also made use of secondary sources, both published and unpublished. Federal and regional Constitutions, proclamations,

directives and decisions of the government were evaluated. Besides, the speeches of community and religious leaders and politicians such as government officials, MPs that reflect and shape the public opinion at local, regional and national level was analyzed. Documents like reports, minutes and letter exchanges were reviewed. Some newspaper articles were also consulted. The qualitative data obtained was also examined and narrated through thematic content analysis.

A summary of findings of this study are presented under the headings of the chapters. Chapter three outlined the history of the people under study which has served as a background for the subsequent chapters. It provided Majang memories of exodus, oppression and slave raiding by their state and their neighbors based on oral narratives and some secondary references. The origins of Majang's people are strongly debated, and many theories have been proposed. Some say they have been here as long as the Majang landmass has existed. Others believe that they came here from somewhere else, most probably from lands to Majang's south. Despite these varying opinions, there is, however, unanimous agreement that Majang's people were the first human inhabitants of present-day Majangland. In studying the historical context of the research, this research found out that in relation with outsiders, the Majang were also at a disadvantage. They had been victims of slave raiding, land alienation and domination.

Chapter Four studied the process of federal restructuring and its anomalies, i.e., aspects of ethnic empowerment and its limitations. The study found out that the last twenty-four years federal experiences have mixed results in this regard. On the positive side, in sharp contrast with previous regimes, the 1995 constitution provides unprecedented power of self-rule to the formerly isolated Majang community. The Majang people were empowered in the cultural,

political and economic arena. From the point of view of ethnically organized peoples, this was a great accomplishment in itself. Indeed, compared to past governments, the achievements registered in social services sector were encouraging. However, much has to be done to meet the basic services such as potable water, education, health facilities, road etc. For instance, still there is no proper all weather roads that connects the Zonal capital, Meti, with Gambella town, and Meti with Tapi. Besides, the progress in economic aspect is not satisfactory. In ethnic political empowerment, it was expected that economy was one of the main components of empowerment. Nevertheless, the actual reality in the zone showed that political empowerment does not translate into economic empowerment. There is a disjunction between political empowerment and economic empowerment.

Moreover, the study found out that during the state restructuring process, the Majang people territorially disintegrated, in particular, they lost their prime territory of *Yeki Woreda* to their powerful neighbors, Shekicho. This political process of state restructuring has generated Majang narratives of territorial loss. The chapter argues that the state restructuring caused their territorial fragmentation and social dislocation and local tyranny. In this regard, the Majang political elites and ordinary citizens have seen the federal system as an opportunity to regain their ancestral lands. Accordingly, the Majang have used historical settlement, place names and settlement to lay claim to the areas opened up by the ethno-federal reform. Yet, politically the zone administration could not achieve the most wanted establishment of 'Greater Majang'. The loss of *Yeki Woreda* to SNNPRS has significantly undermined Majang people political strength and unity. Besides, the Majang encountered relentless territorial encroachment from the Shekicho 'irredentist' politicians and ordinary citizens.

In fact, the issue is not only political fragmentation but also local tyranny in the hand of Shekicho political elites. The study also reveals that the Majang have faced with local tyranny within SNNRS and Gambella regional state, especially from the Anywaa who always feel superior to the Majang. The Majang feel that they are being deprived of the right to administer themselves. To put an end to this discrimination, the Majang and Sheko attacked the Shekicho and highlanders in June-July 2014. Overall, the chapter argued that the return of their land has been one of the issues at the center of conflict in the study area. Taking a number of issues into account, the indigene Majang deserve to live together in one political administration unit.

Chapter five presented and analyzed Highlanders' migration and land acquisition and its detrimental impacts on Majang's livelihood and identity. In fact, the main threats for Majang come from migration. Although the federal system has arguably left out highlanders in the area politics, the highlanders have been quite resilient in their efforts and power to acquire land and entice local leaders. The legal framework (such as land use proclamation) put in place in an effort to protect Majang land and to resolve land related disputes since 1991 have been very weak and have had negative effect on the local community. Highlanders relentless influx and land appropriation disrupts the continuity of the Majang. After the 1991 land is becoming a very scarce resource due to the remarkable increase in the number Highlanders and illegal invasion of Majangland. This illustrates the fact that the Majang have been still dominated by the highlanders despite the constitutionally sanctioned self-rule. As a result, the Majang now believe that marriage, highlanders land acquisition needs to be defended and protected against highlanders aggressive encroachment.

Chapter Six examined the expansion of commercial agriculture and its impacts on the local community. Indiscriminate land leasing and clearing for commercial farming in MNZ is in rapid expansion. The study found out that commercial agriculture is weakening the Majang cultural practices by limiting the land available for traditional shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering, bee-keeping which forms the basis of Majang livelihood and identity. In the MNZ, the threat from extensive land acquisition manifests itself in the government policy of commercial agriculture, which endangers the Majang people culture and continued existence as a community. Government through its policy of commercial farming violates the sovereignty of the indigenous Majang. The case of Ethiopia is interesting because it exposes contradictions that surround the land acquisition phenomenon. Foreign investments in agriculture are said to be made in the name of food security but the produces have been for export.

In chapter seven, we provided Majang's response to forestland encroachment since 1991. How they sought to contain encroachment by highlanders, investors using their administrative power in their territory and in their neighboring *Woredas*. We found that now forestland illegal invasion have faced tough resistance from the local community. Under conditions of scarcity of land and commercialization of forestland, violent conflicts between the local community and the land grabbers have become more frequent. In addition, local communities are hardly ever provided with enough information concerning prospective or established commercial farming expansions to make an informed choice. Most of the time, land has been allotted to commercial farming without concern for customary uses and forms of land tenure. As detailed in the preceding

chapters, these have threatened the life of the indigenous people. Consequently, resistance and opposition by local communities and indigenous people tend to arise.

The indigenous people and local communities are adopting various approaches to voice their opposition to immigrant highlanders, powerful neighbors and state-sanctioned land leasing. The indigenous people responses range from appeal to government to armed resistance. The government rather than addressing the basic demand of the indigenous people become agent of insecurity through its policy of commercial farming and repression of any opposition to its policies. For instance, when the local communities have reacted and tried to assert their rights, they have suffered intimidation, physical abuse, and imprisonment by the federal, regional and local government officials. In the face of brutal government response, the indigenous people feel powerless and pushed to the edge of extinction. How many people have to die before the government understands and responds to the indigenous people demand? This indisputably enhances what the Dessalegn (2011:4) says; “dominance of the state at the expense of citizens and grassroots communities”. Most of the investors are also forced to stop their plantation activities due to the escalation of conflict. Due to absence of clear administrative boundary and timely solution to societies grievances caused violent conflicts. The implication of these finding is clear; development must take into account consent of community at local level. Land acquisition without the interest of the indigenous people benefits investors, traders, immigrant highlanders, national government at the expense of the indigenous peoples.

8.2 Conclusion

Recently, there are a number of studies on the Ethiopian federation, but appraisal of negative or positive changes in the everyday life of the local minorities is not sufficiently examined within the framework of ethnic federalism. In this regard, the study shows that the lived reality of the federation involves certain paradox.

The Majang people were characterized by having for centuries experienced oppression, slave raiding and land alienation by successive Ethiopian rulers and their powerful neighbors. They, nevertheless, continue in attaching a prime significance to their ancestral forestland. For the Majang lands are not just commodities but the base for their way of life, identity, and survival as a distinct ethnic group. Forest constitutes the core of Majang identity. Majang collective identities have important ties to a particular landscape (i.e. physical appearance of a territory, its climate ecology and resource-base) which is itself threatened. Their culture is highly adapted to a way of life that is strongly conditioned by that landscape. Yet, Majang access to these forestlands is constantly being threatened by powerful neighboring ethnic groups and the state policy of commercial agricultural investment and other extracting activities, thereby putting their very existence in jeopardy. Analysis of the impact of federalism on the social, economic, and political life of the minority Majang people shows that the federal order has turned out to be even an era of quandary.

As the empirical chapter revealed, though the forest is the major source of livelihood and a sign of the identity of the indigenous people, it is under the threat of disappearance due to pressures from various corners. Among the threats to the forest are deforestation for coffee and other plantations, neighboring people intrusion into Majangland territory, expansion of highlander's

agriculture and settlements, logging and expansion of small-scale and large-scale agricultural investments. Land acquisition by multiple actors has brought new and often contested forms of rights on land as well as intensification of boundary disputes. The land laws, the manner in which they have been implemented and court decisions relating to land disputes have had negative implications for security of land tenure and peace in the study area.

This entails that the Majang lose their culture and life, hence Majang is a community pushed to the edge. As this study has shown, the incumbent government policy of protecting ethnic minorities has been more acutely tested in MNZ. The principle of owner nationality, while officially proclaimed as the basis for granting regional ownership rights, in reality provides the justification for political marginalization in Majang inhabited areas.

The study has useful details and shows the tension between self-rule and threat of extensive forestland encroachment. The constitution appears to be generally true in its stated commitment to national self-determination. Government also believes that federalism gives protection to NNPs; however, an analysis of the Majang's people phenomena for the last two decades refutes this government argument. The 20 years old constitution and the current reality are a bit different. This is affirmed by Van der Baken (2013: 56) study of SNNPRS, who stated, "...a serious tension between constitutional provisions on the rights to territorial autonomy and the predominant political tendency in the region."

The paradox of Ethiopia's federalism is that, despite the existence of extensive self-rule based on ethnicity, extensive encroachment to Majang forestland has posed a serious threat to them. The

relentless land acquisition by multiple actors seriously weakens and endangers Majang culture, identity and core-values. It is argued that the people of Majang in Gambella are faced with a serious “existential threat” to their survival as a group because of the spread of land acquisition by illegal migrant highlanders and government-backed investors. With government emphasis on policy of developmental state manifested in the form of large-scale land lease, ethnic identity and NNP’s rights are pushed to the background. Overall, the Majang face uncertain future. Extensive encroachment into Majang forestland, indeed, is causing Majang people to suffer greatly. Threats become more intense and Majang vulnerability are more numerous and potentially serious in consequence.

Moreover, land acquisition contributes to a growing conflict between these groups. Recent conflicts between investors and the indigenes and highlanders and the indigenes indicate a new area of conflict. Another constraint, which is particularly clear from the case in this study, is government repressive response when the Majang tried to protect their land right. When their land rights are being denied and their forest threatened, they resisted as best as they can. Nevertheless, they lack the power to defend it. They face a number of challenges when they seek legal redress and often resorted to violent conflict.

Overall, this study argue that isolated indigenous peoples inhabiting the southern rain forests lacked the political and social, and economic means to mobilize in order to defend their traditional ways of life from encroachment. The Majang are losing their forest to outsiders. Weak Majang political institutions to defend their territory and political rights benefit the highlanders and the investor to get hold of Majang land. These phenomena show that even after ethno-

linguistic territorial sovereignty, formerly disadvantaged and vulnerable ethnic groups still have had limited capacity to establish jurisdictional authority in their territory. The process of federalization did not provide the context for empowering NNPs by increasing Majang's social, economic and political competence. The federal system empowers the minority Majang to administer their own affair and feel secured; practically they become powerless in the face of powerful neighbors, influx of highlanders and large-scale commercial agriculture. They have experienced dispossession, forced removals and discrimination. Politically and economically weak Majang are confronted with powerful neighboring people and the state. The state, rather than protecting disadvantaged NNP's enforce its political and economic interests by taking advantage of the present global land rush for commercial investment.

The state disregards the Majang people right of self-rule as co-founders and co-owners of the federation in a federal democracy. The government allocation of indigenes land without their informed consent is indeed very unlawful. In both material and cultural sense, Majang way of life is closely related with their surrounding landscapes, above all the forest. Generally, there is a big gap between reality and the political hope that was promised in the beginning of federalism. The government does not value communal ownership of land, which is inconsistent with the very essence and principles of the Ethiopian federalism such as self-rule. The land considered by the government as vacant is, indeed, the land used by the local community for seasonal shifting cultivation, subsistence hunting and for harvesting forest products. In contrast, the government takes advantage of the current global rush to land grab to enforce its political and economic interests. Consequently, in Majang, the institutions that reproduce culture are constrained to operate. Overall, it appears that the Majang faces a bleak future.

In Ethiopia, there is absence of clearly defined property rights towards natural forest and forestlands. As a result, the minority Majang peoples' rights are neither adequately guaranteed by law nor adequately protected in practice. Even when customary rights might be recognized in the federal and regional Constitution, they may be relegated to a secondary position when overlapping with national development, environmental and land laws, as is generally the case for mechanized commercial farming. As the case study clearly illustrated, combined with the recent economic growth and expansion of industrial activity, the rights of the minority peoples is one of the challenges the institutional framework 1995 constitution cannot help resolve. Indeed, the case of Majang illustrates the repercussion of weak resource rights of Majang in the face of dominant state.

Taken as a whole, the Majang could not translate their political power to ensure human security. The existence of ethnic-federalism does not automatically protect the Majang people. That is to say, while ethno-linguistic territorial based federalism offers a wide range of power to ethnic groups, many factors contribute to societal insecurity of minority ethnic groups. Why is it that federal empowerment did not work for the Majang? As has been demonstrated in several of the empirical chapters, the following three factors can be identified for Majang vulnerability to external encroachment in the context of 'ethnic-federalism'.

The first factor is that the Majang lack the real power structure to challenge encroachment. As the discussions in chapter four demonstrated that the government follows a double standard, based on ethnic groups power relations, strength, etc... Besides, federalism and modernity arrived at the same time with tremendous negative and positive effects and they are inseparable

in terms of their effects. An economically growing and modernizing Ethiopia has created significant challenge to the forest-based and less developed Majang people. In this regard, the Majang are paralyzed by the historical and cultural constraints and low level of education and consciousness.

Second, although the federal system has arguably left out highlanders in the area politics, the highlanders have been quite resilient in their efforts and power to acquire land and entice local leaders. Because the highlanders are in a superior financial situation to easily entice ordinary Majang to sale their lands and the leadership to endorse the deal. Thus, lacking support either from the federal and regional government or from the local leadership, the ordinary people genuinely fear for their future. Above all, the government tacitly endorses highlander influx into the low land area to increase export production and for national security interest to protect the border with South Sudan.

Third, the Majang supposed to be empowered are undermined by the ruling party pragmatic approach to NNP's rights. Majang federal ownership powers have been undermined by the government sponsored MCF and rent-seeking local political elites. It appears that the government itself is indeed a 'rent seeking' government given that it aspires to achieve growth at the expense of the local community. Besides, the central government, ruled by Highlanders coalition party, prejudiced perception of 'unoccupied land' 'backward lowland' seems another contributing factor for the reluctant implementation of NNP constitutional forestland rights. This is also affirmed by Asnake (2000: 12) study of Ethiopian federal experience regarding self-

determinations, who stated that the monopolization of power by the ruling party as one of the factors that hamper the progress of the federal system in the right track.

8.3 Policy Implication: The Paradox between Constitutional Form and Operational Reality

This study has used empirical findings to show that federalization policy and the subsequent government development strategies are not making the anticipated impact. The arguments for this justification suggest the need for policy review which should ensure protection for the vulnerable minority people. As already indicated, the abstract constitutionally guaranteed rights of indigenous Majang people have not thus far been translated into concrete reality. The Majang federal experiment in this regard shows that the ethnic-based federation now seems 'identity-blind'. In this regard, the study confirmed Barata's (2012: 68) observation that currently while the government policy of developmental state manifested in the form of large-scale land lease, resettlement, mega hydro dams, take the centre stage, ethnicity and minority rights are pushed to the background. This case study is a telling example of the government 'pragmatic' approach to ethnicity and its willingness to compromise its basic federal principal of protecting and promoting the rights of minority ethnic groups when faced with developmental challenges.

There are four policy implications that need to be underlined to protect the Majang people existential threat. First, the Majang people in the Ethiopian context did not obtain special treatment and legal framework to protect their core values and identities despite the constitutional provisions to do so. Besides, the government should come up with special constitutional rights to minority people such as Majang who have unique attachment to their

landscape. Second, the government must abandon its hegemonic economic and political policy and allow a real autonomy to take root at local level. Hence, the way forward appears to be work towards protecting Majang forestland and people from external threats through practically and full empowerment of the Majang ethnic group. Third, the study shows a serious need for a political will to respect the right of ethnic groups to administer their own affairs without undue government interference and manipulation. This is because, as the study demonstrated there is the continuation of the historical trend of highlanders dominance over the peripheral lowlanders. Hence, the way out seems to be work towards reversing such historical trends and respecting the culture and way of life of the lowlands as distinct and legitimate community. Finally yet importantly, there is also an over emphasis of national development at the expense of minority ethnic groups. The existing development policies in place have been imposed and implemented from above without considering peoples way of life and interest. The state land ownership right seems to really be used as a tool of dispossession. In this regard, Shepherd (2011) makes the observation that; “The Ethiopian government is not demonstrating the capacity to ensure that its people are not harmed by foreign agricultural investment projects.” As Makki (2014: 89) too rightly describe it, it is a ‘development by dispossession’. These government policies have to be adequately debated and renegotiated.

The broad findings summarized above illustrated the pervasiveness of the existential threats in terms of both real and perceived among the Majang. Indeed, they deserve special attention. Unless a responsive structure is established for the aforesaid problems and challenges, it may create a huge problem for the federation. Therefore, based on these research findings, the study put forwarded the following list of proposals in line with their priority of significance.

8.3.1 Securitization of Inter-regional Migration

This study has shown that highlanders illegal land acquisition presented as posing an existential threat to the Majang people. In the Majang political discourses as well, highlander migrants are presented as a threat to the Majang societies' identities. Essentially, to make sure stable forestland tenure would require the creation of a system whereby the present illicit seizure of land can be prohibited and prevented. In particular, the federal government needs to take the following major actions:

- Inter-regional migration needs to be factored into the security agenda. This study recommends that appropriate social intervention policies (such as inter-regional migration policy) should be put in place to ensure that peoples are able to fully exercise their rights and control over their lands. Actually, the constitution is clear enough in this regard but it lacks appropriate regulation and institutional frameworks vital for implementing the constitutional provisions and establishing secure forestland resource tenure for the Majang. Therefore, the findings of the study indicated that indeed the Majang have an identity security problem which points the need to be factored into the security agenda, to be precise, securitized. Actually, as per article 41 of the FDRE constitution “Every Ethiopians has the right to engage freely in economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his choice anywhere within the national territory”. Nevertheless, the influence of individual rights on group rights, especially the right of indigenous minority and

marginalized groups needs attention and the migration wide-ranging impacts on the host community have to be reasonably debated.

- We need to find a balance between individual ‘jang’ land ownership and communal land ownership. Partly demarcating an exclusive Majang forestland zones can do this. By doing so, the vulnerability of Majang to a growing highlanders demand for land will also be minimized. The recent arrival of Highlanders from Gojjam and Wollo into the area is making the local community more insecure and so efforts are needed to stop highlander’s migration and that the government should device a mechanism to avoid if not to manage the detrimental effects of the existing cunning seizure of Majangland by economically powerful migrants.
- In addition, the government should take confidence-building measures to reduce the effect of the prevailing ‘societal security dilemma⁸⁵³’ between the two communities. The study found out that there is a huge economic inequality between the immigrants and the local community that is steadily getting wider. There is huge gap in terms of land possession, economic power, education, etc. In this regard, the government should work on how to put more resources available for the local community. Besides, how the local community effectively uses this money also needs greater attention. For example, the coffee bean became value-added and the local community gained nothing from this value. The Majang and highlanders conflict is more of a socio-economic conflict. It is not as such an ethnic conflict. Hence, the government has to promote mutually beneficiary interaction between the indigenous Majang and their neighbors in order to improve the quality of life of

⁸⁵³ According to Buzan(1993:46), societal security dilemma refers to conditions when societies experience processes in which perceptions of ‘the others’ develop into mutually reinforcing ‘enmity-pictures’ leading to the same kind of negative dialectics as with the security dilemma between states.

everyone and to protect the minority peoples. Peaceful and constructive dialogue between the indigenous Majang and the highlander migrants to tone down the current tension is required. Partly this can be done by sufficiently representing the politically minority highlanders in the *Woreda* and zonal council without threatening the indigenes ownership status such as introducing indigenes veto power that affects their critical interest.

- Enhancing Majang people's well-being and the federal democratic process can be achieved through strengthening the local leadership. The government should support leadership capacity building endeavors to create effective local leadership. Put another way, the federal and the regional governments should help to strengthen the capacity of representative councils, the executive and the judiciary. Principally, the zone council should have the capacity to ensure its autonomy. For example, to elect and appoint its own leadership and representatives. The *Woreda* and Zonal Leadership needs to take the following major actions:

- ✚ The local leadership needs to take legal action to check on powers of local leadership over land such as enact a regulation that prohibit legalizing land deals. Except in ad hoc basis, the zonal administration did not have a clear policy and plan to stop illegal land acquisition. A land act should be designed to protect and secure indigenes access to forestland. The land law must also set up a land tribunal at local levels in order to advice the illiterate local community on land deals and resolve land related disputes at grassroots level.

- ✚ Support and invest in community sensitization initiatives (Drawing on the Local CBO such as Majang Forest Development and Protection Organization have emerged in MNZ with the aim of sensitizing the community to their rights to protecting land commoditization and lobbying the zone administration for policy and regulatory reforms.
- ✚ The local leadership must demarcate and effectively protect an exclusive Majang forestland zones. Concisely, the above recommendations need a step-by-step approach such as first preventing land acquisition and then demarcating exclusive Majang forestland zones and applying a reforestation strategy.
- ✚ In 2011 study based on integrated land use study made by the support of Pact Ethiopia shall be implemented which concerns Gilo Catchment and it covers Majang zone completely, which shall be implemented based on law.

8.3.2 Appropriate Policy Interventions: Introducing Majang and Forest friendly Investment

Projects

This research provides solid evidence that land acquisition by multiple actors and its existential threat to the Majang is real. Besides, these trends are likely to continue. Particularly due to their high production value for agriculture, the remaining forest areas are likely to be targeted. Now, how to fix Majang problem of insecurity and existential thereat is the appropriate question. Increased deforestation will immediately have negative impacts on the indigenous society as agricultural crop yields drop in the face of population increase and rising birth rate with migrants. Public officials have generally shown a bias in favour of companies and have

attempted to intimidate village residents to stop making complaints. The current pattern of land acquisition is expected to continue for the coming years. The growing demand for ethanol, coffee and other cash crops and government huge tracts of reserve land for investment will take more land from the indigenous forestland, which may further worsen the situation. In view of the aforementioned facts, it is predictable that attack against foreign investments in MNZ is very likely because of hostility on the part of displaced populations and government ongoing suppression against the indigenous minorities. If the necessary steps are not taken immediately, the indigene people culture and source of livelihood will completely vanish, the people can be frustrated and many unwarranted conflicts and violence may ensue.

To address Majang security threats or at least to keep the status quo, the government has to look at other alternative strategies of development. It needs a harmonious and all-inclusive review of existing investment, development and land laws. Majang and forest friendly investment projects have to be encouraged to save the forest and people. Forest-friendly programs such as tourism industry, modern apiculture could be very much part of government's development agenda in building the region. In fact, the study area was part of honey producing belt in Ethiopia in the GTP. Honey is forest loving investment. It go in line with the country's climate resilient green growth, which gives due emphasis on protection of the forest. Investors in the area shall prepare evaluation report for environmental impact and certify the use of resources for the benefit of the community by observing obligation, paying tax, and the farmers shall have a way of technology transfer.

8.3.3 Expanding indigenous people's territorial and resource rights

This study has extensively explained the lack of clear and officially enforceable rights over forestland possessions. The study shows that state land ownership right seems to really be used as a tool of dispossession. Besides, government policy of developmental state seems to actually violate the constitutional principles and the right of indigenous people. Hence, a robust harmonizing intervention is imperative. Put another way, further efforts are desirable to make sure that people are able to fully exercise their right to preserve their culture within the framework of an Ethiopian federation that is respectful of ethnic identity. The federal government has to solve this problem at the level of policy. The federal government needs to take the following major actions:

- ✚ Appropriate policy interventions should be put in place to ensure that people are able to fully exercise their rights and control over their lands. Such a policy should be geared towards laying down the legal and institutional frameworks vital for establishing secure forestland resource tenure.
- ✚ The government has to fully harmonize government policies for economic development with the local community's culture and way of life. In other words, the government has to do both social and environmental impact assessment for any development endeavor in any locality.

8.3.4 Establish Greater Majang Zone

- a. Grant Majang that are fragmented into three regional state their own greater Majang zone which will provide them better political voice at local, regional and federal level.
- b. enhance the protection of the Majang rights who are currently minority in two regional states (Oromia and SNNPRS).

Overall, the aforementioned suggestions could help to alleviate Majang existential threat and contribute to the success of the federal democracy. Yet, this suggestion will not bring the desired successes alone. The federal and the regional government should make an effort to make a real and successful federal political system by enforcing political autonomy of groups at local level.

8.4 Agenda for Further Research

This study looked at Majang security threat from their neighbors, highlander immigrants and large-scale commercial agriculture. However, the degree of this debate is all embracing and complicated. To generate achievable policy strategies and development targets to minority empowerment, there is a need for more studies to further the problem in Majang inhabited areas. Exploring the following as potential research can make possible the realization of this purpose:

- The security threat of the highlanders and the investors in their relation with the host community has not been treated very well. The study indicated that insecurity threat is mutual. The highlanders and the investors as well have also insecurity anxiety. Therefore, the researcher recommends further research in this area.
- The political status of highlanders and its implication in the federal context;

- State and non-state actors response to mitigate Majang security challenges; and
- There has been very limited anthropological and sociological, political, social, economic research on minority community within Majang call *Shabuye* community which is otherwise treated in this dissertation as part of the wider Majang society. In recent years, the Shabuye have also raised the issue of a distinct identity from the Majang, though they share the same predicaments as the Majang do.

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List of Interviewed Persons

No.	Name	Place and Date of Interview	Ethnic Group	Remarks
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1	Interview (name withheld)	18 and 26 June 2014 Meti and Kabo,	Shekicho	Kabo resident farmer
2	Interview (name withheld)	Kabu, June 18, 2014	Shekicho	Kabo resident farmer
3	Interview (name withheld)	kabu, June 18 ,2014	Shekicho	Kabo resident farmer
4	Manojet Barkatakey	23 and 24 June 2014, Tapi	Indian	Manager of Verdanta Harvest PLC at the time of data collection
5	Interview (name withheld)	23 June 2014, Tapi	Highlander	
6	Interview (name withheld)	23 and 24 June 2014, Tapi	Sheko	
7	Interview (name withheld)	June 24,2014 Tapi, and 24 and 26 June 2014, Tapi	Sheko	Yeki Woreda Security and Administration Expert
8	Demelashi Alen	26 June 2014, Tapi	Shekicho	Yeki Woreda Cabinet member
9	Interview (name withheld)	23 June 2014, Tapi	Majang	Police
10	Interview (name withheld)	23 June 2014, Tapi	Majang	Police

11	Interview (name withheld)	24 and 26 June 2014, Tapi	Sheko	Police
12	Sahile	22 June 2014, Meti	Guragi	Agriculture Expert
13	Aschalew Shefraw	March 18, 2013, June 22, 2014, Meti	Highlander	Godere <i>Woreda</i> Security Officer
14	Solomon Terefe	30 June 2014, Meti	Highlander	Mekane Yesus Shabuye Sang Development Project coordinator
15	Interview (name withheld)	12 May 2013, Meti		
16	Interview (name withheld)	9 March 2013, Meti		
17	Shibiru Zerhun	30 June 2014, Meti	Highlander	Project coordinator of Melka Ethiopia Majang Project
18	Melkamu Abike	30 June 2014, Meti	Majang	an expert in Melka Ethiopia Majang Project

19	Melkamu Kifeyale	July 1, 2014, Abiye 03	Highlander	an expert in Green Coffee Estate Share Company Abiye 03
20	Tasew Alero	02 July, 2014, Meti	Highlander	Zone adviser from Ministry of Federal Affairs at the time of data collection
21	Interview(name withheld)	02 July 16, 2014 and June, Meti		a former head of the Godere <i>woreda</i> Administration office
22	Dejen	04 July 2014 and 22 June 2014, Meti	Highlander	an agricultural expert in Godere <i>woreda</i>
23	Akitude Teslonke	05 July 2014, Goshene	Majang	a resident farmer
24	Ayalew Yimer	05 July 2014, Goshene	a highlander	Farmer
25	Ms Mesert	2 July 2014, Shone	Highlander	plant science expert in Shone <i>kebele</i>
26	Yalew	July 04, 2014, Meti	Highlander	a displaced highlander

				farmer from Gilishi
27	Ms Yayesh	04 July 2014, Goshen	Highlander	a displaced highlander women farmer from Gilishi
28	Kassa Yilma	06 July 2014, Tapi	Highlander	a displaced highlander farmer from Yeki kebele of Yeki woreda
29	Interview (name withheld)	24 June 2014, Tapi	Majang	
30	Interview (name withheld)	25 June 2014, Meti.	Majang	
31	Negussie Berhe Berhula	17 March 2013, Meti	Highlander	1984 Settler from Tigray
32	Honorable Wagina Taro	18 March 2013, June 2014, Meti	Majang	Former HOPR's Member of parliament, Head of Majang Zone Education Bureau
33	Jaleta Bulte Negere	19 March 2013, Meti	Highlander	Secretary of MNC Council at the time of datat collection

34	Yared Kidanimariam	12 and 16 May 2013 and 06 June 2013, Meti	Highlander	Godere woreda Plant science Expert
35	Ms Etalemi Taye	12 May 2013, Meti, 13 May 2013 Goshene	Highlander	Agriculture extension expert
36	Yimami Faries	22 May 2013 and 2014 Meti	Majang	Vice-administrator of MNZ at the time of data collection
37	Afera Alemu	13 and 14, May 2013, Meti	Highlander	1984 Highlander Settler
38	Alemseged Hailemariam	13 May 2013, Goshene	Highlander	Agriculture extension expert
39	Interview (name withheld)	2013, Meti		
40	Interview (name withheld)	April 2013, Chemi		
41	Esay Gnawer	13 May 2013, Goshene	Majang	Student
42	Natsenet Mekonen	13 May 2013 and June 2014, Meti	Sheko	Former Official in MNZ
43	Alemayehu Ocha Tadesse	17 May 2013, Chemi	Highlander	Farmer

44	Farish	17 May, 2013, Chemi	Majang	Chemi Kebele manager at the time of data collection
45	Achame Achemo Adeo	18 May 2013, Kabo	Shekicho	Farmer
46	Yoriam Teka	19 May 2013, Yari	Majang	Yari Kebele Chairperson at the time of data collection
47	Koki Sidame	May 2013, Meti	Majang	Shoe polisher
48	Ms Tihut Biniam Bekele	2013, Meti	Majang	Health Extension worker
49	Semneh Gardew	2013, Meti	Highlander	Legal Advisor to Majang Zone Nationality Council
50	Ms Selamawit	10 May 2013, Meti	Highlander	Farmer
51	Abebe Berhane	10 May 2013, June 2014, Meti	Highlander	Former Secretariat of Godere <i>Woreda</i> Council
52	Tanget Yeodin	14 March 2013, Gelisha	Majang	One of the very few surviving Tapa'd in MNZ
53	Interview (name withheld)	16 May 2013, Meti		

54	Alemayehu Waway	March 2013, Meti and 28 December 2014, Addis Ababa	Majang	Former Head of MNZ and an expert in Gambella Region
55	Interview (name withheld)	20 April 2013, Meti		
56	Dawit Admasu	April 2013, Meti	Majang	Head of MNZ Bureau of Justice
57	Interview (name withheld)	April 2013, Chemi		
58	Interview (name withheld)	18 June 2014, Kabo		
59	Afewerk	March 2013, Meti	Highlander	An expert in Godere woreda Trade and Industry Bureau
60	Interview (name withheld)	17 May 2013, Meti		

61	Moges Tefera		Highlander	Vice-Mayor of Meti City administration at the time of data collection
62	Interview (name withheld)	19 May 2013, Chemi		
63	Koba Kotali	May 11, 2013, Meti	Majang and Sheko	Head of South west Ethiopia Forest protection and Development Forum
64	Ayehu Berhan	16 May, 2013, Meti	Highlander	An expert in MNZ Finance
65	Meskerem Eshetu	16 May, 2013, Meti	Highlander	An expert in MNZ Finance, married to a Majang
66	Interview (name withheld)	17 March 2013, Meti		
67	Tadios Lomkoy	11 and 12 March 2013, Meti	Majang	Former Head of GPLM in MNZ
68	Sahilu	June 2014, Meti	Highlander	An expert in Godere woreda Bureau of

				Agriculture
69	Interview (name withheld)	2014 Goshene		
70	Alemayehu Muse Aderman	09 March, 2013, July 2014, Meti	Majang	Primary School Teacher
71	Interview(name withheld)	July 2014, Meti	Majang	Farmer
72	Dajen	04 July 2014, Meti	Highlander	Plant Science expert in Godere <i>woreda</i> Bureau of Agriculture
73	Kiros	17 February 2015, Addis Ababa	Highlander	Conflict and Early warning expert in the MoFA
74	Tesfaselassie Mezgebe	17 February 2015, Addis Ababa	Highlander	Director of Conflict Early warning and Early Response Directorate in the MoFA
75	Wondemagen Haile	18 February 2015, Addis Ababa	Highlander	Advisor in the MoFA
76	Aklilu Mamo	18 February 2015, Addis Ababa	Highlander	An expert in the MOFA
77	Hailemariam	23 February 2015, Addis Ababa	Highlander	Ethiopia land

				administration office expert
78	Aklilu Woldemariam Habte	20 February 2015, Addis Ababa	Highlander	Director of Information and Investment Promotion Directorate, Ethiopian Investment Agency
79	Addis Negashi	24 February 2015, Addis Ababa	Highlander	Environmental Impact Assessment Case Team leader,
80	Interview (name withheld)	June 2014, Meti		
81	Fikere Tefera	07 March 2013, Meti	Majang	Former Meti town Mayer
82	Meles Wayiso	March 2013, Meti	Highlander	
83	Yacob Tanget Yeoden	12 March 2013, Gelesha	Majang	Farmer
84	Interview with a Sheko civil servant	07 July 2014, Tapi		
85	Interview (name withheld)	2014, Meti		

86	Yisak Woldu Tewo	15 March, 2013, Kumi	Majang	
87	Ali Zinabu	16 March, 2013, Chemi	Highlander	Farmer
88	Interview (Name withheld)	May 2013, Meti		
89	Redat Genrekidane	16 March, 2013, Meti	Majang	Expert in Meti Health Center
90	Interview (name withheld)	4 April 2015, Addis Ababa	Sheko+Anywaa	
91	Ashene Asten	2 March 2015, Addis Ababa	Majang	Former Speaker of Gambella regional State Council
92	Interview (name withheld)	2013, Meti	Majang	
93	Interview(name withheld)	February 2013, Gambella	Nuer	
94	Yimam Muhe	November 2014, Meti	Highlander	Expert in MNZ Bureau of Education

95	Yacob	2013, Kumi	Majang	
96	Interview (name withheld)	June 2014, Tapi	Sheko	Civil Servant
97	Interview (name withheld)	2013, Kumi	Highlander	
98	Interview (name withheld)	March 2015, Gambella	Majang	Former member of federal Police
99	Interview(name withheld)	2013, Goshene	Majang	
100	Interview(name withheld)	June 2014, Kabo	Majang	
101	Interview (name withheld)	June 2014, Shone	Highlander	
101	Interview (name withheld)	23-24 June 2014, Tapi	Sheko	Displaced farmer from Tsanu
102	Interview (name withheld)	June 2014, Tsanu	Sheko	Displaced Farmer

103	Interview (name withheld)	February 2013, Gambella	Anywaa	Civil servant
104	Omote O. Obong	February 2013, Gambella, 2013 Addis Ababa, and Skype interview, March 2014	Anywaa	Former President of Gambella and Vice-Minister of MoFA
105	Girma	2013, 2014, Meti	Highlander	MNZ election Board at the time of data collection
106	Sintayehu	June 2014, Meti	Highlander	An expert in Mengesh Woreda Bureau of Agriculture
107	Tenisayi	12 March 2013, Meti	Majang	Head of MNZ Bureau of Health at the time of data collection
108	Interview (name withheld)	June 2014, Meti	Shekicho	Meti resident
109	Interview (name withheld)	July 2014, Meti	Highlander	Civil servant in Meti (female)
110	Zerhun Fenta	27 February 2013, Meti	Highlander	Meti resident
111	Takeal Degefu	2013, Gambella	Highlander	
112	Interview (name withheld)	March 2013, Meti		

113	Interview (name withheld)	April 2013, Meti		
114	Interview (name withheld)	June 2014, Shone	Majang	
115	Interview (name withheld)	February 2013, Gambella		
116	Interview (name withheld)	02 July 2014, Meti		
117	Interview (name withheld)	June 2014, Meti		
118	Interview (name withheld)	12 May 2013, Yari		Farmer
119	Tegegne	2014, Meti	Highlander	Farmer

List of Focus Group Discussions

1. FGD with the Majang (5 members), Meti, March 2013.
2. FGD with the Sheko (5 members), Tapi, 24 June 2014.
3. FGD with Majang in Yeki *Woreda* (5 members), Tapi, 24 June 2014.
4. FGD with Sheko and Majag in Tapi (6 members), Tapi, 23 June 2014.
5. FGD with Shekicho (5 members), Kabo, 2013.
6. FGD with Majang (6 members), Meti, 2014.
7. FGD with Highlanders (5 members), Yari, 2013.
8. FGD with the Majang (6 members), Chemi, 2014.
9. FGD with Highlanders (6 members), Meti, 2013.
10. FGD with Highlanders (5 members), Chemi, 2014.
11. FGD with Highlanders (5 members), Meti, 2014.
12. FGD with Highlanders (5 members), Gelishi, June 2014.
13. FGD with Highlanders (6 members), Kumi, June 2014.
14. FGD with Majang (7 members), Meti, July 2014.
15. FGD with Highlanders (5 members), Meti, July 2014.
16. FGD with Highlanders (4 members), Yari, 11 May 2013.
17. FGD with Majang and Highlanders (7 members), Meti 27 April 2013.
18. FGD with Majang officials (5 members), Meti, 2014
19. FGD with Majang (5 members), Meti, April 2013.
20. FGD with Majang officials (4 members), Meti, 29 October 2013
21. FGD with Shekicho(5 members), Kabo, 11 May 2013.
22. FGD with plant science and agricultural extension experts (4 members), Meti, 2014.
23. FGD with Representatives of the local community (6 members), Kabo, 18 June 2014

