

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SECURITY ISSUES OF AFRICA

# Ethiopia

Social and Political Issues



Logan Cochrane  
Editor

NOVA



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**ETHIOPIA**

**SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES**

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**LOGAN COCHRANE**

**EDITOR**



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## PREFACE

The chapters in this book were written at a time of significant, rapid change in Ethiopia. Some issues that have emerged during this period of transition – such as mass displacements of people, rising ethnic conflict and a rise in the illegal trade of weapons – are not featured. Keeping track of these developments requires a different form of publishing, which operates on a much shorter timeline (e.g., Cochrane and Zewde, 2019; Cochrane and Mandefro, 2019; Cochrane and Kefale, 2019). We had initially envisioned that this edited volume would include a section on economic issues, but did not receive submissions in that area. Fortunately, Cheru, Cramer and Oqubay (2019) have recently published *The Oxford Handbook of the Ethiopian Economy*, which readers can refer to for coverage of economic issues.

I vividly remember a conversation I had with Zerihun Mohammed and Asnake Kefale in early 2018. The future of Ethiopia looked bleak. Civil war seemed possible. Around that same time period, I had written that new ways of governance might be unrealistic (Dejene and Cochrane, 2018). The collection of chapters in this book focus on challenges; ones that largely preceded the changes in 2018 and 2019 as well as ones that will continue into the future. It is, however, worth noting the positive changes that have taken place: peace with Eritrea, the release of political prisoners and journalists, the return of opposition parties to the country and to political life,

representative appointments of gender and regions in positions of political power, a clamp down on corruption, a plan for free and fair elections in 2020. Alongside those changes, new challenges have emerged as well. Many of these changes occurred after much of the research presented in this book was undertaken, and as a result these changes are not covered in depth.

This book is presented in four sections, respectively covering issues related to governance, health, gender and land. Several chapters cross multiple thematic areas. Many of these chapters present original research and raise important questions. Not all of the chapters present answers; that was not the objective per se. Many do, however, present potential options and pathways through which the identified issues might be engaged with in the months and years to come. None of the issues are simple, none can be addressed with a top-down technical approach. If anything, this collection highlight the complexity of the challenges being encountered in Ethiopia. Given the uncertainties that exist amidst this period of transition, the people and government of Ethiopia have little room for miscalculation. It is hoped that this collection supports the generation of new ideas, perspectives, and potentially priorities.

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*Chapter 1*

**FREEDOM OF MOBILITY IN  
AN ETHNIC-BASED FEDERAL STRUCTURE:  
THE ETHIOPIAN QUANDARY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Ethiopian experiment with ethnic-based federal system is arguably precipitated by historical grievances that the various ethnic communities had with successive Ethiopian regimes. However, the system that has been put in place to address such historical ills is producing serious impediments for the free mobility of citizens within and across state lines and thereby posing a threat to peaceful coexistence. This chapter is an attempt to provide theoretically and contextually grounded analysis

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attributing the current crisis partly to the constitutional adoption of contradictory conceptions of freedom of mobility and the attendant land ownership rights.

**Keywords:** freedom of mobility, land ownership, liberalism, ethno-nationalism, securitization, boundary- maintenance, social closure, urban-industrial society, agrarian society

## INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of modern Ethiopia as a nation-state, its political history has been punctuated by conflicts with varying degree of intensity, ranging from passive resistance to violent confrontations. Successive regimes, up until 1991, tried to suppress the unique cultural identities of the country's more than eighty distinct ethno-linguistic groups and at the same time tried to assimilate them into the dominant culture (Keller & Smith 2005). In doing so, these regimes singularly focused on building a highly centralized unitary state and did not see it fit to accommodate the demands of the various ethnic groups for autonomy or self-governance.

Explaining why the regimes in pre-1991 era had turned deaf ear to the notion of autonomy under some form of federalism, Kymlicka (2006) notes that security fears played an important role in the resistance to federalism during these periods. One worry was that the ethnic Somalis were more loyal to Somalia than to Ethiopia, and would collaborate with a possible Somali invasion. Another worry was that Egypt was supporting various minority insurgencies, particularly amongst Islamic minorities, as part of the goal of creating a pan-Arabic and/or pan-Islamic hegemony in the Horn and Red Sea area. More generally, Ethiopia had often seen itself as surrounded by potential enemies, and worried about the extent to which its minorities would be loyal in the event of war with its neighbors. According to Kymlicka (2006), these are almost textbook examples of the 'securitization' of state-minority relations, and history suggests that states almost never accept

multination federalism under these conditions, except as a result of violent insurgency or international pressure.

From the outset, Emperor Haile Selassie and the ruling elite vigorously pursued an assimilationist nation-building process (that had been initiated by Emperor Menilik) by using the Amharic language and Orthodox Christianity, among others, as an instrument to forge a common Ethiopian identity (Keller 1981; Messay 2019). Regardless, the emperor cultivated both at home and abroad a myth that Ethiopia was a multi-ethnic but unitary nation-state.

However, by the early 1970s, Ethiopia's poverty, gross inequalities, political and economic underdevelopment laid bare the lack of a foundation for such a myth (Keller & Smith 2005). This phenomenon led to protests and violence that ended the reign of the Monarchy and brought about the military dictatorship of Mengistu H/Mariam in early 1970s. But before looking at the era of the military regime, it is important to briefly touch upon the international and geopolitical context of the time and how such a context had shaped the nature of political struggle in Ethiopia.

Due to the changing international environment following the end of the Second World War, the subsequent decolonization movement set in motion in the Third World, and the Cold War ideological divide that structured the world into two contending camps, the political struggle in Ethiopia took on a new dimension. Armed with new theoretical and conceptual tools derived from Marxism and Leninism, the emerging Ethiopian intelligentsia started articulating the nature of Ethiopia's problem. Although the Ethiopian intelligentsia of the time invariably shared the existence of oppression, exploitation and marginalization of the Ethiopian masses, they differed on defining the nature of such oppression, exploitation and marginalization. While some of them wished to articulate the problem in terms of class, some others, such as the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP), were keen to define the problem largely from the national perspective, i.e., taking the "national question" as the primary analytical category. The "national question" was conceived as the existence of national oppression and the need for bringing an end to such oppression by ensuring national self-determination for the various ethnic groups constituting the Ethiopian state.

The disagreements among the Ethiopian intelligentsia on the nature of Ethiopia's problem later proved consequential. Unable to narrow their differences, the cohort turned against each other. The military took advantage of the chaotic situation and seized power. After brutally decimating its rivals, the military junta consolidated its power. Less than two years after the overthrow of the monarchy, the new leaders committed themselves to *scientific socialism* and proceeded to reorganize society to achieve this end. One of the defining features of Ethiopia's brand of *scientific socialism* was the illegitimacy of ethnicity as a political organizing principle (the military regime shared the concerns of the Monarchy's 'securitization' of state-minority relations, i.e., the fear that minorities may not be loyal to the state in case of war with neighboring states). Instead, the ruling regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam thought it best to group the public into mass organizations on the basis of their economic or social roles. In doing this, the Mengistu regime failed to effectively address *the national question*. In a final effort to legitimize itself and its programs, the regime created the Worker's Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984, and in 1987 constitutionally established the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE). The new national assembly, attempting to diffuse discontent among regionally-based nationality groups, created twenty-four administrative regions and five autonomous regions (Keller 1995).

The *Derg*, (aka the committee) thus, strived to create a regular Communist *peoples* republic in the name of the *toiling masses*, and aimed at reorganizing the Ethiopian society into a collective and classless socialist utopia. It carried out land reform, uprooted the landed aristocracy, nationalized all land and private property, created a state economy, allied with the Soviet camp, ruled with brute military force, and denied political freedoms or an independent civil society. It instituted a discourse of ethno-regional rights for minorities (*nationalities* in Stalinist vein) but accorded them little autonomy. The economy soon faltered, agricultural policies were a disaster, democratic practices non-existent, and armed resistance movements were a plague until the demise of the *Derg* in May 1991 (Abbink 2009).

In the aftermath of the military overthrow of the Mengistu regime, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) - a coalition of four ethno-nationalist fronts- assumed control of power, marking the beginning of a new political dispensation that has radically reorganized the Ethiopian state. Since the armed struggle had ostensibly been waged on the grounds that despite the fact that Ethiopia was constituted by diverse ethno-linguistic communities, the Ethiopian state, instead of reflecting such diversity, had for long subjected these communities to oppression and had forced them to endure the life of deprivation and indignity (Aregawi 2008). In fact, what had traditionally been billed as the Ethiopian state was nothing more than a state that had effectively been captured by and been the mirror-image of a particularistic group, namely the Amhara ruling class. In other words, the argument was that the existing Ethiopia was not hospitable to the various ethno-linguistic groups that constituted it. Thus, with some variations, the objective of the struggle was to dismantle the system that had legitimized the domination of a particularistic group over the various ethno-linguistic groups and thereby build a new Ethiopia where all the constituent ethnic groups would enjoy equal treatment and respect; to put it differently, it could be said that the armed struggle was arguably aimed at giving birth to a new *Ethiopia* that would be suitable for ethnic diversity.

As Horowitz (1985) argues, among power-sharing options available to the leaders of deeply divided societies, some form of federalism is believed to reduce conflict between and among culturally defined groups since it provides for the exercise of both self-rule and shared rule. In order to address the hitherto sense of domination, marginalization and exclusion felt by the various ethno-linguistic communities constituting the Ethiopian state, the new EPRDF government devised a federal system that is structured along ethno-linguistic cleavages. It decided, in less than two years, that the country would be administratively and politically reorganized, creating what are largely (but not exclusively) ethnically based national/regional governments or states (Keller & Smith 2005). It was the belief that providing Ethiopia's ethnic groups the right to self-determination would lead to peace and provide a new basis for the unity of the country that served as the main reason behind the federal restructuring of the country since 1991.

Ethnic communities were promised that they could exercise their right to self-determination up to secession in the *New Ethiopia*. To this end, the 1994 constitution placed sovereignty in ‘*nations, nationalities and peoples*’ of Ethiopia rather than ‘*we, the people*’ that is common in other democratic constitutions. The constitution has also provided for the adoption of democratic form of governance through which ethnic self-determination and self-development would be mediated. In the new dispensation, each titular group or a group of titular groups was empowered to control a regional state. In this manner, the new constitution recognized the centrality of ethnic cleavages in regulating access to power and resources. The assumption was that if ethnic groups were to exercise self-rule in their respective federal sub-units and participate, via their representatives, in the federal government, it would engender the sense of inclusion on the part of constituent ethnic communities and thereby create a fertile ground not only for better inter-group relations but also for the emergence of one strong politico-economic community. However, when one interrogates as to how the new system has practically been faring vis-à-vis its lofty promises, one cannot help but feel more perturbed than reassured (ICG 2009, 2019; Abbink 2009).

It is true that as is the case with any federal system, the Ethiopian federal arrangement empowers the constituent groups to exercise both shared rule and self-rule. Despite all the imperfections one could legitimately cite in the way these rights have been exercised, there is no denying the fact that the participation of ethnic groups in the federal, regional and local governance, i.e., in both shared rule and self-rule, has become a reality in the new political dispensation. The new order has created opportunities for the hitherto marginalized ethnic groups to gain recognition and to develop confidence in their language and culture, and to exercise a modicum of self-governance. The new federal arrangement has also improved access to resources and power for the hitherto neglected communities. What is more, it has provided ethnic communities with better access to public services, such as healthcare, educational opportunities, civil service jobs, justice system, etc.

In spite of the positive developments noted above, however, the new federal arrangement has also produced and continued to produce its own serious deleterious effects. It has, for example, intensified and elevated



conflicts, especially at the state and lower levels, between various ethnic groups across a vast swathe of the country. The new federal arrangement has also contributed to the emergence of fierce ethno-political competition, exclusionist discriminatory practices, and conflicts over territory, resources, power and budgets (Keller and Smith 2005; Assefa 2006; Vaughan 2006). As Abbink (2009, 13-14) notes, “indeed, in looking at the number of local-level communal clashes – many violent –... it can be said that a conflict-generating dynamic was perpetuated. New conflicts appeared between groups previously not known for having problems.” However, these conflicts had largely been confined within the regional subunits and remained local as to be able to pose a serious threat to the central government.

As is well known, the new political structure instituted by the EPRDF was the outcome of an armed struggle rather than a democratic political mobilization. As such, it was from the very beginning beset by asymmetrical power relations. As the armed struggle had been spearheaded by the TPLF, the political organizations that constituted the new governing coalition were themselves creatures which the TPLF brought into existence in anticipation of its impending military victory. In other words, the governing front (EPRDF) was constituted from the start by a coalition of *unequals* (Abdissa 2016). In fact, it could be argued that there were three hierarchical levels in the EPRDF power structure: the nucleus party (TPLF), the three parties in the governing coalition (ANDM, OPDO & SEPDM) and the allied parties that would ostensibly control the five peripheral regional states. Since both the parties in the governing coalition and in the ‘allied’ category owed their very existence to the nucleus party, their continued access to power and resources was predicated more on their loyalty and deference to the nucleus party than their loyalty to the constituencies they purportedly represented (Abdissa 2016).

Following the sudden death of Prime Minister Melese in 2012 and the subsequent appointment of Hailemariam Desalegn to the post, power struggle intensified between the parties that constituted the ruling coalition. With the ‘strong man’ gone, especially ANDM and OPDO who had covertly been resentful of the dominance of the TPLF in the governing coalition were

now emboldened to assert themselves and challenge the status quo. On the other hand, the TPLF was determined to maintain its overwhelming dominance in the political, economic, military, and security domains as usual. Locked in such bitter power struggle, the governing coalition lost unity of purpose and thereby undermined the authority and effectiveness of Prime Minister Hailemariam's government. The paralysis and perceived incompetence of the government in addressing the growing economic hardships, corruption, mismanagement and abuse of power shattered public confidence in the legitimacy of the system and triggered an outcry.

Specially in the last four years, intense public protest, initially spearheaded by the 'Qeeroo' (youth) due to a real or perceived sense of economic and political marginalization of ethnic Oromos, has quickly spread across Oromia, the Amhara region and other areas and rocked the nation, eventually forcing the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam on February 15, 2018 and the appointment of Dr. Abiy Ahmed as the new Prime Minister on April 2, 2018. Since taking power, Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed has taken series of important reforms at a rapid pace (ICG 2019; Andreas and Samuel 2019). But in spite of and/or because of these reforms, ethnic conflict has intensified more in many parts of the country, including in the urban areas (ICG 2019; Tewele & Kursha 2019). The rule of law has been seriously tested with mob justice being carried out not infrequently, and with gun-toting vigilante groups mushrooming in various corners of the country, jeopardizing the security of citizens.

According to the report by the Geneva-based group, Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, IDMC, the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia deteriorated significantly in the first half of 2018, resulting in a total of 1.4 million internally displaced persons. That number has reached 2.4 million in early 2019, making Ethiopia a country with the world's biggest internally displaced population (Tewele & Kursha 2019). It is safe to say that after more than a quarter of a century long experiment with the new federal system, Ethiopia's problems have increasingly become intractable, prompting one to wonder why a system that was ostensibly meant to effectively redress historical ills has produced such pathological signs. How does one account for such state of affairs?

On various occasions in the past, studies have attempted to address problems associated with the new federal system from different perspectives. For example, some studies (Assefa 2006) attributed the problem to the mismatch between constitutionally proclaimed principles and political practice. Some others (Merrera 2006) linked the problem to the contradictory interpretations of Ethiopian history by elites, which have made difficult the creation of national consensus on the modality of democratic governance and the political rules of the game. Still some others (ICG 2009) attributed the problem to a lack of commitment on the part of the governing elite to institutionalize a genuinely democratic system of governance. These studies tend to take the constitution as a given and see the problem as emanating from implementation rather than from the constitution itself. However, this author contends that neither the institutionalization of a genuinely democratic governance nor the achieving of congruity between constitutional principles and practices could effectively address freedom of mobility problems citizens are facing in today's Ethiopia unless one starts to see the constitution as the locus of the problem. In fact, it is the contention of the author that under the current condition, the remedies these studies proposed would potentially lead to further institutionalization of ethnic cleavages and the aggravation of the problem of citizens' displacement and the resulting curtailment of free movement of citizens within and across state lines.

The problem associated with freedom of mobility of citizens in today's Ethiopia can better be explained by explicating the contradictory conceptions of mobility and land ownership by liberals and ethno-nationalists, and by articulating how such contradictory conceptions were encoded in the constitution. As is well known, "...land is of supreme social, economic and even political significance in Ethiopia. Land ownership or access to land has traditionally meant social and economic security. For some it has also meant power and privilege. The land question was perhaps the most critical underlying factor contributing to the revolution of 1974" Keller (1981, 534). As an agrarian society, the livelihoods of more than eighty percent of the Ethiopian population depend, directly or indirectly, on land. And freedom of mobility of citizens is closely related to ownership

rights, particularly that of land. Hence, addressing problems associated with freedom of mobility involves the explication of the contradictory conceptions of ownership of land by liberals (pan-Ethiopianists who espouse individual right) and ethno-nationalists (those who espouse group right). Finally, tackling freedom of mobility problems would also involve examining how the Ethiopian constitution addresses such contradictory conceptions with regards to both mobility and land ownership. And this chapter is an attempt to provide theoretically and contextually grounded analysis linking the current crisis in relation to freedom of mobility of citizens and the attendant land ownership issue to such contradictory conceptions, and the way the constitution mediates these conceptions. To this end, the chapter addresses the following specific research questions:

- How do actors with liberal views and ethno-nationalist views conceive freedom of mobility and land ownership?
- How does the Ethiopian constitution address freedom of mobility and land ownership issue?
- How does the provision of the Ethiopian constitution with respect to freedom of mobility and land ownership, directly or indirectly, shape the behavior of the political actors?

## **METHODS**

In order to address these research questions, different strands of methodological approaches were employed. First, secondary sources, such as extant literature on freedom of mobility and land ownership, were extensively consulted in order to establish solid theoretical grounds on how these key concepts were conceptualized from liberal and ethno-nationalist theoretical viewpoints. Second, upon a close reading of the Ethiopian constitution, textual analysis was carried out so as to shed some light on how the constitution addresses freedom of mobility and land ownership issues. Third, insights from author's personal observations of Ethiopian politics over an extended period of time were also used to inform the study. The

author is a regular follower of Ethiopian politics, has on various occasions, exchanged views with various political actors as well as civil society members on Ethiopia's pressing political challenges, and has been writing political commentaries for the last four years. The insights gained from such engagements were used as valuable inputs in the study.

The chapter proceeds as follows: the first section discusses the conception of freedom of mobility from liberal and ethno-nationalist perspectives. The second section focuses on the liberal and ethno-nationalist conceptions of land ownership. The third section examines the Ethiopian context through the theoretical lenses discussed in section one and two. The last section summarizes the discussions and suggests the way forward.

## **CONCEPTION OF FREEDOM OF MOBILITY**

### **Liberal Conception**

According to Walzer (1990), there are four types of mobility: geographic, social, marital, and political mobility. As is known, the concept of freedom of mobility or freedom of movement is associated primarily with liberal thought. In the liberal view, the four mobilities noted above represent the enactment of liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Walzer 1990). According to Mau (2010), liberal states are best understood as states organized around liberal principles, such as freedom of choice for individuals, individual liberties, a distinction between public and private, the rule of law and individual rights, and a market economy.

Liberal states are by their very nature bound to principles which put constraints on the way they can enforce social closure. In liberal states, individuals are endowed with rights vis-a-vis the state, and states cannot act like despotic regimes which seek full control of their citizens and of all types of inward and outward mobility (Mau 2010). Liberalism is, most simply, the theoretical endorsement and justification of free movement (Walzer 1990). Thus, in liberal societies, freedom of movement within a state's territory is a socially and politically well-entrenched standard (Mau 2010).

Liberals view the free movement of people as beneficial to individual freedom and the pursuit of individual life projects: The right to go where you want can be considered an important individual freedom. In other words, they believe that freedom of movement has an intrinsic value alongside other values, such as freedom of thought, speech, and association. They argue that freedom of movement presents what Baubock (2009, 7) calls a “core value of what it means to be free.”

As articulated in Rawls’ (1971) *Theory of Justice*, the first principle of justice states that each person has to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties. And the freedom of movement is listed among other basic liberties, such as freedom of occupation, the right to personal property, freedom of association, and rights to political participation. Freedom of movement is also a precondition for the exercise of other liberal values, such as equality of opportunity, which Rawls (1971) calls the second principle of justice. From liberals point of view, life prospects and opportunities ought to be roughly equal across states and should not depend on the particular political jurisdiction in which someone is living. According to Mau (2010, 342), liberals believe that fair and equal access should allow everyone to attain desirable social positions on the basis of merit and qualification and all should have a reasonable opportunity to acquire these skills. Mau (2010, 342) goes on to argue that geographical access is directly linked to equality of opportunity, as individual life chances, and opportunities ultimately depend on whether people are restricted to certain geographical spaces. Here,

social mobility can be understood as akin to geographical mobility, because movement in space allows people to leave uncomfortable social situations and positions and to pursue alternative life projects (whether successful or not). Denying exit and access would deprive people of fundamental opportunities and undermine their freedom of choice. Indeed...freedom of movement would enable people to move to places where they can improve, or at least change, their living conditions.

## **Ethno-Nationalist Conception**

In contrast to the liberal conception of freedom of mobility or freedom of movement, the ethno-nationalists' view of mobility or movement is constraining or limiting, owing to ethnicity's proclivity for boundary-maintenance and social closure as opposed to the penchant for openness. This can best be explained by looking at the most important features that characterize ethnicity. According to Kaufmann (2000), there are four important features of ethnic community which seem to conflict with liberalism. These are symbolic boundary-maintenance; exclusive, inflexible and thick ethnic mythomoteurs; the use of ancestry and race as group boundary markers; and the desire among national groups to revive or maintain their ethnicity. Arguing further, Kaufmann (2000) notes how the task of boundary-maintenance is central to ethnicity. From Kaufmann's (2000, 1092) perspective, "Without the entry barriers and assimilation pressures which boundary-maintenance entails, members of an ethnic group would not possess markers by which to identify one another. Boundary symbols also serve the ontological function of providing meaning and existential security to ethnic individuals." In this regard, Kaufmann is in sync with Walzer on the importance of boundaries to the ethnic process, since Walzer (1983, 39) notes that "The distinctiveness of cultures and groups depends upon closure and, without it, cannot be conceived as a stable feature of human life. If this distinctiveness is a value, as most people ... seem to believe, then closure must be permitted somewhere."

As Kaufmann (2000) argues, the mythomoteur of an ethnic group includes not only the group's symbolic boundary criteria, but all the elements of its Weberian 'ideal type.' Similarly, in mythic terms, ethnic groups are wedded to particular ethno-histories (oral or written), which tell stories about the group's origin, travails and golden age, just as its 'ethnic maps' outline the group's homeland in all its poetic contours (Smith 1986). Over time, particular stories and figures come to be welded together into a single *gestalt*. In this sense, ethnicity manifests a drive towards selection, particularity and differentiation (Kaufmann 2000). What is clear in the preceding discussion is that while liberals, with their full embrace of

freedom of mobility, oppose social closure, ethno-nationalists see boundary-maintenance and social closure as sacrosanct. Thus, there exists observable tension between liberalism and its conception of freedom of mobility, on one hand and ethno-nationalists quest for self-determination and security of their ethnic community, on the other.

## **CONCEPTIONS OF OWNERSHIP WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO LAND**

Another area that is closely connected to freedom of mobility and where there seems to be tension between liberals and ethno-nationalists is the conception of ownership, particularly with reference to land. In the following sub-section, the discussion of the nationalist and liberal conceptions of land and of its ownership is in order (in this chapter, the terms ‘nationalist’ and ‘ethno-nationalist’ are used interchangeably).

### **Nationalist Conception of Land**

A political theorist Levy (2000) contends that contemporary normative theorists of nationalism and ethnicity typically conceptualize nationhood and ethnicity as primarily cultural. That is, they have to do with ways of life, with languages spoken and tales told and values embodied and worth recognized. According to Levy (2000), from the perspective of such normative theories, nationhood and ethnicity are not understood as political matters; nor are they thought to concern material goods in any important way. In contrast to such normative conceptualizations of nationalism and ethnicity, Levy (2000, 197) advances the following argument:

...nationalism and indigenous ethnic politics cannot be well understood without reference to at least one material good: land. Nationalist and indigenous movements conflict... with liberal societies about the control and possession of land but also about its social meaning,



the kind of good that it is. Culturalist accounts of ethnicity may be more easily reconcilable with liberalism...; but a liberal political theory which is concerned to mitigate or minimize ethnic conflicts must develop a framework for thinking about disputes over land.

According to him, many ethnic conflicts, nationalist movements, and claims made by indigenous minorities are centrally about land. This is not to deny that they are also about language, religion, a sense of identity, or a way of life; but they are often about how those things relate to possession of, or power over, particular pieces of land. Levy (2000) adds that nationalism celebrates a people's history and culture, but it also celebrates their land. Moreover, it celebrates the link between the two. What is more, Levy (2000, 204) further contends that:

Nationalism thinks about...homeland in certain recurrent ways. It elides [ignores] the distinction between sovereignty and ownership; all of the land belongs to *this* people, from whom it cannot be taken away. Nationalism typically conceptualizes land as place, not property. *This* piece of land is part of the patrimony of *this* nation. Perhaps it is of particular historical or religious importance. Perhaps the beauty of this spot is a cause for national pride, or perhaps this kind of terrain is taken to embody something about the nation.... Even when the particular piece of land has no such distinctiveness, however, it remains national soil. A people is in some way particularly well-suited to this piece of land. It is where one's ancestors are buried, an important and recurring image.

The political movements of ethnic groups and/or indigenous peoples are about land more than any other issue- about the right to prevent or at least benefit from development on their traditional lands, about the restoration of lands from which they have been dispossessed, and about securing against future losses (Levy 2000).

## **Liberal Conception of Land**

According to Levy (2000, 206-207),

Liberalism has a very different image of what land is. Land is, in general, fungible [or exchangeable] with other goods. It is alienable- it can be bought, sold, used as collateral for credit, leased, rented, and so on. It is divisible, both in space and in the rights that accrue to it; a plot of land might be divided in half, or its subsurface mineral rights might be owned separately from the surface, and so on. It circulates, as money and other goods circulate; sometimes it is held by one person, sometimes by another. Sometimes it is put to one use, sometimes to another. A piece of land can generally be exchanged for another piece, if not necessarily one of the same size, or exchanged for cash. Moreover, there is no necessary tie between particular persons and particular places.... Land, in short, is property, not place.

And such decoupling of people and land makes mobility an unproblematic exercise in liberal societies.

As discussed earlier, Walzer (1990) has characterized liberal society as importantly marked by four mobilities. These are geographic, social, marital and political. Of these, the first two- geographic and social- are closely related to the flexibility of land. The ability to sell the piece of land on which one currently lives and go elsewhere and buy a new one has always been tightly related to geographic mobility in liberal societies. Since by social mobility Walzer (1990) means not only changes in income but also changes in the way income is earned from one generation to the next, the fungibility of land with other goods has made a tremendous difference here as well (Levy 2000). Thus, a free, democratic, commercial society is thought of as more than simply a state that respected rights of various kinds. It is a society of a particular kind, one characterized by mobility, the rise and fall of elites based on achievement, and certain fluidity (Levy 2000). Thus, the liberal and nationalist/indigenous conceptions of land have conflicted in a number of ways over the years, and as a result, liberals and nationalists often tend to talk past each other on the issue of land (Levy 2000).

## **MAKING SENSE OF THE ETHIOPIAN CONTEXT THROUGH THESE THEORETICAL LENSES**

It seems that there exists tension in the Ethiopian constitution between the liberal and nationalist conceptions of freedom of mobility and the issue of land ownership. With reference to citizens' freedom of movement, the 1994 Ethiopian constitution under Article 32, sub-article 1, for example, states the following: "Any Ethiopian or foreign national lawfully in Ethiopia has, within the national territory, the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence, as well as the freedom to leave the country at any time he wishes to." In connection to the right to property, Article 40, sub-article 1, provides the following: "Every Ethiopian citizen has the right to the ownership of private property. Unless prescribed otherwise by law on account of public interest, this right shall include the right to acquire, to use and, in a manner compatible with the rights of other citizens, to dispose of such property by sale or bequest or to transfer it otherwise." Thus, with respect to freedom of mobility and property ownership, these two constitutional provisions could be said to be consonant with the liberal conception of freedom of movement and the right to property. At least at a theoretical level, these provisions seem to legitimize the freedom of mobility of citizens across regional state lines and their right to make decisions as to where they should live, exercise their right to own property, make a living, and etc.

On the other hand, Article 40, sub-article 3, states 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. Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange." Under the 'Rights of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' codified in Article 39, sub-article 1 provides the following: "Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession." These provisions seem to reflect the ethno-nationalist view of ownership right and of the freedom of movement, albeit in an indirect way

in the latter's case. If land is a common property of 'nations, nationalities, and peoples' - a code name for ethnic collectives- and is not subject to sale or to other means of exchange, citizens cannot exercise their rights enshrined under Article 32, sub-article 1 and under Article 40, Sub-article 1.

As discussed earlier, the task of boundary-maintenance is central to ethnicity, as it plays an important role in establishing markers by which to identify one another. What is more, boundary symbols serve the ontological function of providing meaning and existential security to ethnic individuals. As Walzer (1983, 39) notes, "The distinctiveness of cultures and groups depends upon closure and, without it, cannot be conceived as a stable feature of human life." And boundary-maintenance and social closure is the antithesis of freedom of mobility. In order for ethnic collectives to exercise their constitutionally given "an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession," there is no question that they would have to focus on strengthening boundary-maintenance and social closure. The more they do this, the more it constrains citizens' right to freedom of mobility and to property ownership (especially the ownership of land). Because the constitution fuses into one two contradictory conceptions of freedom of mobility and ownership rights, it has given political actors the opportunity to exploit these contradictory conceptions to serve their particularistic interests. In such a manner, it has contributed to the progressive deterioration of situations as the continued evictions, expulsions and displacements of citizens in various parts of the country indicate. As is often the case, the evictions, expulsions and displacements of citizens from regional states are carried out on the grounds that they (the victims) do not belong to the titular groups that ostensibly 'own' these regional states, and by doing so, ensure ethnic boundary-maintenance and social closure.

In order to address these contradictory conceptions with respect to freedom of mobility and the issue of ownership, it is important to start with the examination of the realities on the ground in today's Ethiopia. As is well known, the liberal conception of mobility and its attendant ownership issue is largely predicated on a predominantly urban-based industrial society's context. Such a society is composed of laborers, professionals, business people, industrialists, etc., whose livelihood does not depend on land. In an

environment of competition, they freely move from one place to another in search of a better opportunity. They go wherever life takes them and in their new destination, they can own property, they can rent it, they can buy and sell it, they can pass it onto a third party, and so on, as long as they have the means. Thus, in an urban-based industrial society, citizens and land are significantly decoupled. On the other hand, in a rural-based agrarian society like Ethiopia where more than eighty percent of the population lives in the countryside, the overwhelming majority of citizens' livelihoods depend on land. What defines them is not mobility; it is holding onto their land. For them, mobility is a luxury as they lack requisite skills, training, knowledge, etc., that are marketable. As a result, many of them often live and die without traveling beyond thirty to forty kilometers radius from their abode. With the ever increasing population growth, soil fertility challenge and the conditions of climate change, and the self-serving nature of the political elites, there is an increasing tendency in ethnic hinterlands to jealously guard the rural land against perceived "encroachers" who happen to be ethnic "Others" who have moved to these areas on different historical periods and settled there for a long time.

Here focus is made on the rural context because if one carefully examines mobility-associated problems in urban and rural contexts, he/she would easily notice significant differences. Most of the evictions, expulsions and displacements carried out in different regional states since 1991 (unless in an exceptional situation) are, for example, based in rural areas as could be seen from Ethiopian Human Rights Council's (HRCO) Annual reports published since 1991. However, with all its constraints (such as holding a political office), citizens' mobility in urban areas, i.e., cities across regional states is relatively healthy. In other words, the evictions, expulsions and displacements of citizens based on ethnic identity is almost a rare occurrence in cities across the regional states. Citizens could still own property, engage in business activities, earn wages for their labor, take professional jobs (regulated by supply and demand) and make a living (*save the experiences in the last couple of years where such evictions and displacements have become common in urban areas as well, due to the overall deterioration of the political environment*). Relatively speaking, there is a decoupling of

people and land in the urban context, as boundary-maintenance and social closure is much weaker. Here, we can see the applicability, albeit with a qualification, of the liberal concept of freedom of mobility and of ownership of land. In the rural context, however, the phenomenon appears to be quite different. Here, boundary-maintenance and social closure is intense; the desire to secure ‘ethnic homeland’ and maintain the ethnic character of one’s territory is more acute. As a result, the liberal view of freedom of mobility and of ownership of land does not seem to hold much ground in the rural context; instead, it is the nationalist view that appears to have a field day here.

This phenomenon appears in sync with the analysis of a German sociologist, Ferdinand Tonnies, with reference to the earlier forms of European social organization and European society as it existed in the late nineteenth century. In his analysis, Tonnies (1887, as cited in Baran & Davis 2015) proposed a simple dichotomy- *gemeinschaft*, or folk/traditional community, and *gestellschaft*, or modern industrial society. According to Tonnies (1887, as cited in Baran & Davis 2015), in *gestellschaft*- modern industrial society- people are bound together by relatively weak social institutions based on rational choices rather than tradition. *Gestellschaft* represents “the framework of laws and other formal regulations that characterized large, urban industrial societies. Social relationships were more formalized and impersonal; individuals did not depend on one another for support---and were therefore much less morally obligated to one another” (Fukuyama 1999, 57-58).

On the other hand, in *gemeinschaft*, or folk/traditional communities, people were bound together by strong ties of family, kinship, tradition, and rigid social roles, as basic social institutions were very powerful (Tonnies 1887, as cited in Baran & Davis 2015). As Fukuyama (1999, 57) argues, *gemeinschaft* “consisted of a dense network of personal relationships based heavily on kinship and the direct, face-to-face contact that occurs in a small, closed village. Norms were largely unwritten, and individuals were bound to one another in a web of mutual interdependence that touched all aspects of life.” Although the Ethiopian society taken at large can be characterized as a rural-based agrarian society, there is a distinction to be made along

urban-rural divide. Historically, modernity has not been uniformly experienced among the Ethiopian society as development has often had urban-bias (e.g., almost all the industries built in Ethiopia are concentrated in a few urban areas). As a result, the rural society in today's Ethiopia mainly resembles the preindustrial European society, which Tonnies has described as '*gemeinschaft*;' whereas the urban society of today's Ethiopia, more or less, shares the features of the modern industrial society of the late nineteenth century Europe, which Tonnies described as '*gestellschaft*.' Hence, it is hardly surprising that with respect to freedom of mobility and ownership of land, the liberal view seems to prevail in the urban areas, whereas the ethno-nationalist view appears to resonate in the rural context.

## CONCLUSION

The Ethiopian experiment with ethnic-based federal system is arguably precipitated by historical grievances that the various ethnic communities had with successive Ethiopian regimes. The constitution, which has codified the terms of coexistence among constituent social groups in a view to effectively addressing such historical ills has unfortunately produced some serious impediments for peaceful coexistence. This phenomenon is partly attributable to the constitutional adoption of contradictory conceptions of freedom of mobility and of the attendant ownership rights in general and land ownership rights in particular.

It is not uncommon to hear, on public and private media outlets, the victims of ethnic-based evictions and expulsions appealing to the liberal aspect of the constitution by accusing the ethnic perpetrators (ethnic majorities that ostensibly own the region or district) of flagrantly violating their constitutional rights to the freedom of movement within the Ethiopian territory and their rights to ownership of property including land. On the other hand, the ethnic perpetrators (through their actions, if not through their public pronouncements) equally appeal to the ethno-nationalist conception of freedom of movement and of the issue of ownership codified in the same constitution to legitimize their actions. In order to address this problem, it

is imperative that political elites should first recognize the existence of such contradictory conceptions in the current constitution and take concerted effort to find a way to reconcile or at least to narrow down the contradictions in a manner that would promote peaceful coexistence. In order to do this, there should be elite consensus on the need to revisit the constitution and make the necessary amendments.

Secondly, it is also important to recognize the fact that in order to fully translate the liberal view of freedom of mobility and of the attendant issue of ownership, with particular reference to land, priority should be given to bringing about industrial transformation and urbanization, and the creation of an urban-industrial society where citizens' livelihoods do not depend on land. However, this does not happen overnight regardless of how much one desires it. This means that as Ethiopia strives to industrialize as speedy as humanly possible, it should be recognized that it will still continue to be a largely rural-based agrarian society for some time to come. Similarly, it is crucial to recognize that in a rapidly modernizing Ethiopia, clinging to a rigid form of boundary-maintenance and social closure is untenable and counterproductive. Thus, Ethiopians need to find a way to contain the deleterious effects of the nationalist's view of mobility and land ownership, on one hand, and to acknowledge the limits of the liberal conception of free mobility and ownership rights in a predominantly rural-based agrarian society of today's Ethiopia, on the other.

This means that there should be concessions to be made on both sides of the isle, i.e., between the pan-Ethiopianists or liberals camp and ethno-nationalists' camp. With a long term view and broader national interest in sight, elites drawn from a cross-section of society should enter a grand bargain in a give-and-take process and create a win-win situation that would eventually promote peaceful coexistence as a society. And failure to commit oneself to making such concessions in time by both camps would likely exacerbate the already precarious political situation and thereby put the integrity of the Ethiopian state at serious risk.



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*Chapter 2*

**LANGUAGE USE IN MULTILINGUAL  
ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF SOUTHERN  
NATIONS NATIONALITIES  
AND PEOPLE'S REGIONAL STATE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article provides a descriptive account of language use in Ethiopia by focusing on language use patterns in education, media and administration in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State (SNNPRS). Key informants from the regional media, education bureau, Hawassa University and the Council of Nationalities of the SNNPRS provide unique insight into the layers of complexity related to language use. The findings show linguistic rights granted to the ethno-linguistic groups enabled several languages to be codified; it enabled ethno-linguistic groups to use their language in all walks of life; it helped

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some groups to reconstruct their intra-group identity. The linguistic rights, however, have brought no changes for some ethno-linguistic groups as their languages still remains oral and not used institutionally. The lack of language policy and planning has created irregular language use and development patterns in institutions. Languages have also been used as a means for ethnic groups to claim administrative independence. This has been a source of conflict among different dialect speakers of similar languages. Some dialect speakers claim that their language variety is different, and that they do not understand the other dialects of the language. Some dialect speakers decline from using any of the other dialects institutionally lest its use may cause a challenge to intergroup identify. This study suggests language use policy and language planning actions in Ethiopia.

**Keywords:** diversity, Ethiopia, multilingualism, policy, rights

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CPD	Continuous Professional Development;
EPDRF	Ethiopian People Democratic Republic Front;
EPA	Ethiopian Phonetic Alphabet;
KI	Key Informant;
KII	Key Informant Interview;
L1	MT;
L2	Second Language;
MoE	Ministry of Education;
MoCT	Ministry of Culture and Tourism;
MT	Mother Tongue;
MTE	Mother Tongue based Education;
SNNPRS	Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State;
TVET	Technical, Vocational Education Training.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper attempts to provide an overview of language use patterns in education, media and administration of the Southern Nation, Nationalities

and Peoples' Regional state. The study is significant in that it uncovers the irregularities in language use with implied inequality of languages and the language users. These in turn have effects in education quality, socio-economic development and maintaining basic human rights.

The paper is meant for diverse readers as it is less technical, and uses less profession jargons. Because it covers wider topics: education, media and administration in relation to language use, transdisciplinary researchers and readers may find it worth reading. The findings will cross-sectionally help language planners, educators, administrators, human rights activists and politicians as language use is important to all these agents.

## **Background**

Ethiopia is a mosaic of languages and cultures (Awoke 2007) with diverse ethnic groups living adjacent or interspersed. The exact number of languages and ethnic groups is debated and dynamic ranging from 75 to 98 (Wedekind 2002; Yonattan 2014; Záhorkík and Teshome 2009). The language use situations and ethnic grouping of the country is not static, being influenced by a range; the very number ethnic groups is dynamic and varying due to number of factors such as migration, urbanization and education. Not all ethnic groups in the country align with the languages they speak. Hudson (2012; 1999) identified the dynamic nature of ethnicity and language by comparing the 1994 and 2007 Ethiopian census and reported that the “2007 census reported 85 Ethiopian ethnic groups vs. 80 of the 1994 census, and the 2007 census reported 87 Ethiopian mother tongues vs. 77 of the 1994 census” (Hudson 2012, 204). The complexity can be attributed to different factors, such as language death (Ex: Masmás and Ethiopian Murle/Alangach) which cause the existence of ethnic groups without language; problem of differentiating language and dialects, which is affected by politics and attitude (Hudson 2004); ethno-linguistic group that were considered one may be divided; thus, become different groups as it was experienced by the Silte, which was considered Gurage (Fekede 2015, 6).

Similar to debate on the number of languages and ethnic groups, there is no consensus on the classification of Ethiopian languages particularly with internal sub-classifications, it is ever changing. The languages spoken in Ethiopia belong to two super families: Afro-asiatic and Nilo-Saharan. Afro-asiatic consists of six sub-families; of which, Semitic, Cushitic and Omotic are spoken in Ethiopia. The Omotic language was initially considered part of Cushitic until it is considered separate sub-family of Afro-asiatic. The Omotic language showed several linguistic features different from Cushitic including tone. It is also spoken only in Ethiopia unlike the other language families spoken in the country. Of the Nilo-Saharan super family, some of them are spoken in Ethiopia. All the three sub-families of Afro-asiatic and a few languages of Nilo-Saharan are spoken in the SNNPRS where this study focuses.

Regarding linguistic rights in Ethiopia, it is worth highlighting the issue in three Ethiopian constitutions; namely, the 1955 constitution of Ethiopia, which was revised in the 1931 ([www.Chilot.me](http://www.Chilot.me)), the 1987 constitution of People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Negarit Gazette 1987), and the 1995 constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia ([www.wipo](http://www.wipo)).

According to the 1955 constitution, the "official language of the Empire [Ethiopia] was Amharic" (Article 125). The Ethiopian constitution in the Dergue regime (1974-1991), which was redrafted in 1987, stated that the "People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shall ensure the equality, development and respectability of the languages of the nationalities" (Article 2(5)) and that "Ethiopians are guaranteed freedom of speech, press, assembly, peaceful demonstration and association" (Article 47). It specified the official language in Article 116, as: "Without prejudice to article 2 sub article 5, of this constitution, in the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia the working language of the state shall be Amharic". The 1995 constitution of the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Republic Front (EPDRF) made no significant changes with regard to linguistic rights granted in 1987. The main linguistic issues stated in the 1995 constitution, in Article 5, include:



1. “All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition.
2. Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government.
3. Members of the Federation may by law determine their respective working languages”.

In Article 29(2), it adds: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice”.

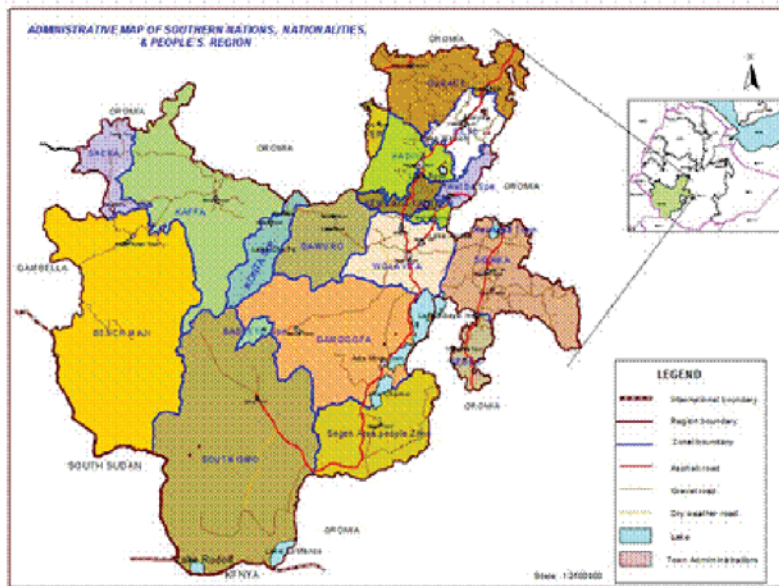


Figure 1. Administrative map of SNNPRS (Source: SNNPRS Finance).

The linguistic rights given to everyone in Article 29(2) is restated as a group right in Article 39 as “every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history”.

Regional states of the federation have been organized based on settlement, language, identity claim and consent as stated in Article 46: “States shall be delimited on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the peoples concerned”. The SNNPRS has been different in this regard since it has 56 ethnic groups and languages. Thus, the

delimitation of this state does not satisfy the linguistic, identity and consent criteria, and in fact after two decades, some of the ethno-linguistic groups have recently claimed separate regions, zone administrations, etc, based on group identity and language. Figure 1 shows the administrative map of SNNPRS.

## **Methods**

The scope of the article is limited geographically to the SNNPRS where 56 languages of Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic and Nilo-Saharan sub-families are spoken, and temporally to the period from 1994 to the 2018.

The research follows cross-sectional descriptive design and qualitative methodology. It draws upon key informant interviews and document analysis, including policy documents and available data in the education bureau and in the media. Three KIs from each of the four institutes; namely, Council of Nationalities of the SNNPRS, South Television and Radio, Bureau of Tourism and Culture, and Hawassa University were selected purposefully based on their knowledge of the region as well as institutional language use. The KIs were largely used to verify and triangulate the data from different sources, collected documents and available statistics in the regional bureaus.

## **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

There are about 56 nationalities<sup>1</sup> and 19 Cushitic, 25 Omotic, 10 Nilo-Saharan and 2 Semitic languages<sup>2</sup> in SNNPRS. In fact, a few of the

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<sup>1</sup>A nationality is used in the sense used by the Council of Nationalities of the SNNPRS. It may refer to ethnic group or 'nation' though the very existence of a 'nation' in the country can be questioned.

<sup>2</sup>The two Semitic languages, Silte and Guragina, were considered one at least politically until the Silte group claimed Separate identity and was considered a separate group. The so called Guragina language also consists of 11 dialect clusters with different levels mutual and/or unidirectional intelligibility.

nationalities speak more than one language and/or dialect; some others have lost their language, and shifted to another language. Therefore, the number of languages spoken in the region does not necessarily correspond to the number of ethnic groups.

## **Language Use in Education**

Language use in Ethiopian education since 1994 has been one of the most contested policy issues (cf. Seidel and Moritz 2009; Daniel and Abebayehu 2006). Based on the 1994 Ethiopian constitution, the Ministry of Education ratified an Education and Training Policy (ETP) in which language use in education is a part. The core issues stated about language use in the ETP education are expounded as follows:

“Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages. Making the necessary preparation, nations and nationalities can either learn in their own language or can choose from among those selected on the basis of national and countrywide distribution. The language of teacher training for kindergarten and primary education will be the nationality language used in the area. Amharic shall be taught as a language of countrywide communication. English will be the medium of instruction for secondary and higher education. Students can choose and learn at least one nationality language and one foreign language for cultural and international relations. English will be taught as a subject starting from grade one. The necessary steps will be taken to strengthen language teaching at all levels” (MoE, 1994, 23-24).

Of the 56 languages recognized constitutionally in the SNNPRS, 29 languages (53.7%)<sup>3</sup>in the SNNPRS are used as a medium and/or taught as subject; the rest 26 languages (46.3%) are not yet in school use for several

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<sup>3</sup> At country level, 46 languages are used as a medium, a subject or both.

reasons, such as dialect variation, lack of educated persons to teach the language, major languages dominating the minor languages use, etc. Amharic is used as medium in most of the schools where mother tongues are not used as a medium, such as Gurage. Some languages use their neighboring dominant language, such as Mao people using Kafenoono. English is taught as a subject in all grade levels, and it becomes a medium of instruction from grade 5 to the university. That is, bi(tri)-medium is used in schools in the region. The number of languages used in education in the region since 1994 has been ever increasing; the bar graph in Figure 2 shows the number of languages since 1994-2018, based on their genetic relationships:

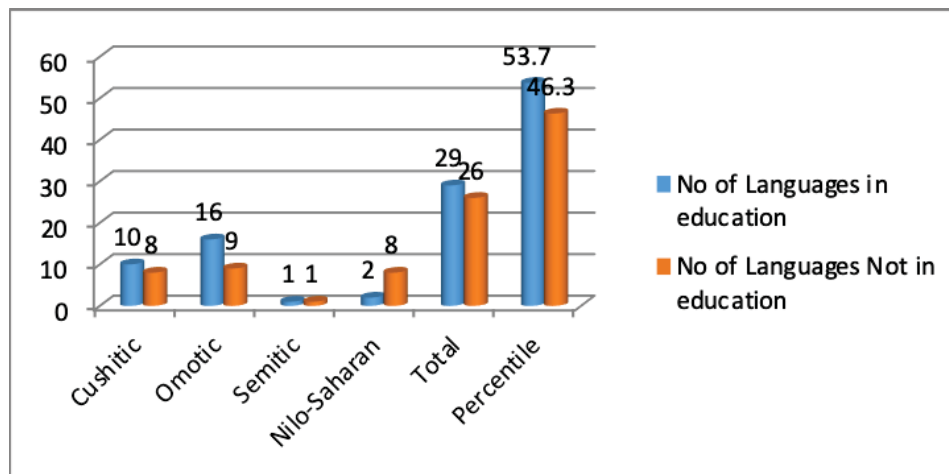


Figure 2. Mother tongues in & outside school system in the SNNPRS.

The numbers of languages used in education (29) are only slightly higher than those that are not used (26). This may be an issue regarding equity and fairness.

Associated with language use in education are (i) script choice (ii) language use pattern in the bi(tri)lingual model and (iii) quality of education, discussed in what follows.

### *Script Choice*

Since there is nothing stated in either the constitution or education policy about script choice, ethno-linguistic groups began using different scripts to

write their language, mainly Latin or Ethiopic. This made Ethiopia not only multilingual, but also a multi-script user. Prior to 1994, the script for most Ethiopian languages, if they were written for any purpose, used Ethiopic script though this has not been constitutionally restricted. Figure 3 shows the current script use pattern:

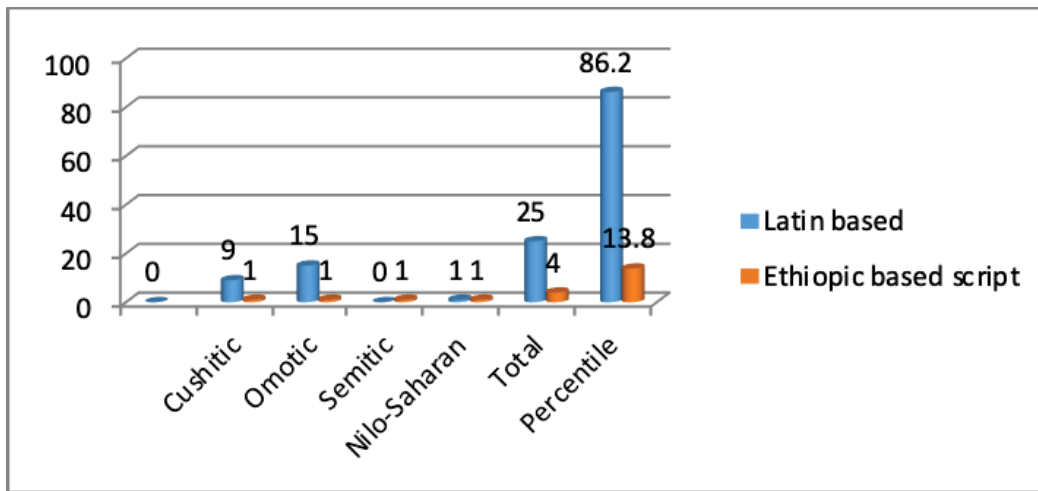


Figure 3. Script choices in the SNNPRS.

Of the 29 languages used in mother tongue education in the SNNPRS, only 4 (13.8%) languages (Silte, Qabena, Basketo and Surma) use Ethiopic script. The rest, 25 (86.2%) languages use Latin script. Thus, script choice to a large extent is tending to Latin. Latin based orthography preference by the majority, according to KIs, is because Ethiopic script does not handle length, gemination and a few unique symbols. What is more, as to the KIs, there was a negative attitude towards Amharic language, which was considered the language of the rulers who dominated other ethnic groups. The attitude towards Amhara people was associated to the Amharic language and at the same time to the Ethiopic script with which Amharic is written.

According to the KIs, there have been complaints on the Latin-based script, which was chosen in favor of Ethiopic, elsewhere in the region. One of the challenges is that students confuse some sounds of the mother tongues with English, which is also in the school system. For instance, the letter ‘c’ is pronounced either as a/k/ as in the word *cat* or /s/ as in the word *city*, but

in most of the mother tongues in the SNNPRS, /c/ represents /tʃ/, an alveo-palatal ejective sound. Similarly, the English sound /x/ represents an alveolar ejective /tʰ/ as in Sidaama. It is confusing because /x/ represents /z/ or clusters of /ks/ as in the initial and the final /x/ in Xerox in English, respectively. A second challenge is that Latin script use has created an intergeneration gap: adults cannot read the languages written with Latin script though some can read and understand when the language is written in Ethiopic. KIs also reported that the Latin-based script is difficult for second language learners who would like to study mother tongues written in Latin if they come from non-Latin based script use tradition.

### *Language Use Pattern in Education*

Since the language use policy with regard to development direction of mother tongues is not specified, the pattern in which mother tongues are used in the school system in SNNPRS is not uniform.

There are different bilingual education models (Hornberger 1996; Fekede 2008; Benson 2004). Five of the most commonly recognized language use models are: (a) *submersion* which mainstreams non-native speaking students into regular L<sub>2</sub> classrooms with the aim to assimilate the L<sub>1</sub> learner to L<sub>2</sub> which may result in subtraction of the L<sub>1</sub>. (b) *transitional* bilingual education model that teaches content area with the mother tongue language but teaching the student another L<sub>2</sub> and/or L<sub>3</sub>. The objective of this program is assimilation and L<sub>1</sub> reduction like the submersion model. (c) *maintenance* bilingual education in which learners are transitioned into L<sub>2(3)</sub> content classes, & continue receiving content in L<sub>1</sub>, that is, they become literate in both languages; the main aim of this type of education is to promote bilingualism and biliteracy with aspired result of linguistic pluralism or an additive bilingualism. (d) *enrichment* or developmental bilingual model in which L<sub>2(3)</sub> and L<sub>1</sub> content classes may be separated initially, but the goal is to have the students of both language background studying content classes in both languages; the goal is development of biliterate and bilingual individuals with expected result of pluralism or additive bilingualism. (e) *immersion* is the case where majority language speakers learning an L<sub>2</sub> with large numbers of minority language(s) speaking

children, such as Oromo language speakers learning Amharic with all other Ethiopian language speakers; the aim of this model is pluralist with expected result of additive bilingualism.

Generally, based on their goal, the bilingual education models assume either *assimilation or additive bilingualism*. In the assimilation goal to L<sub>2</sub> or pluralism, L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> function together with the results in subtraction of L<sub>1</sub>; *submersion* and *transition* models serve this purpose. The pluralist goal results in *additive bilingualism* because both L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> are maintained and/or developed, the *maintenance, enrichment, and immersion* models have these roles.

Now, based on these classifications of bilingual education model, let us look into the trends of bilingual education in Ethiopia in general and in the SNNPRS in particular.

The bilingual education in Ethiopia falls into two categories. This is demonstrated with languages in the SNNPRS to be more focused. Most of the languages, 18 (62.06%), including Dizi, Zayse, Konso, Benchenon, Meenit, Shekinono, Oyda, Qabena, Libdo, Gidicho, Basketo, Yemsa, Koorete, Dashitte, Halaba, Tenbaro, Surma, Aari tend to follow *transitional bilingual education model*. So far, they are used as a medium and/or taught as subject in grades 1-4. From grade five to a university, the medium is English, which is also taught as a subject; Amharic which is taught as a subject from grades 1-4 continues until it may be dropped by students in grade 10. The goal and outcome seem *assimilation and subtractive*, respectively. However, since the students learn English as a foreign language, and there is no native like control of the language, the students cannot assimilate to English. There is some tendency for some students to be assimilated to Amharic without subtraction of the students' mother tongue due to the classroom language use.

The other 11 languages, (37.93%), can be grouped into the maintenance bilingual education (MBE) model as L<sub>1</sub> is used as a medium in grades 1-4, and students are shifted to English medium in grade five to the university levels, and at the same times the L<sub>1</sub> is taught as a subject from grades 1-10 (Kamabata and Konta), from 1-12 (Silte, Kafinono, Dawro, and Gedeofa),

and in the university in Diploma and BA programs (Sidamufo, Wolayta, Hadiyyisa, Gamo and Gofa and in 2018 Kambata and Dawro).

The general trend, however, seems for most languages to go for the MBE model. The languages that already moved into the MBE are the one that have begun MT education earlier, and have already developed capacity of human and material resources that are required for MT education. The languages in the transitional bilingual education model are the one that began MT education more recently, yet they are attempting to increase the grade level in which their  $L_1$  is taught as a subject. It seems, it is a matter of time, finance, and other material and human resource for all the languages in the SNNPRS to follow the MBE model, unless and otherwise there is revision in language use policy of Ethiopia. In fact, the education road map of 2018, which is in progress, proposes a flexible language use policy in education while proposing MT use in grades 1-6, Amharic as language of wider communication is to be taught from grade 1-12, and English to be taught as a subject from grade one, and to be used as a medium of instruction from grade seven to the university level.

### *Quality of Education*

The main purpose of using mother tongues in education is to improve education quality by making language use easy. It has been voiced by UNESCO that mother tongue or native language is *natural instrument of thought and communication* (UNESCO, 1953). In fact, there are other sociological reasons for introducing MTs to school systems, such as maintaining group identity, language maintenance and political independence discussed in section 2.4.

Despite the aspired goal of making education easier, thereby improving its quality, it was found that quality of MTE is at risk due to a number of factors. Methodologically, the way mother tongues were taught needs improvement. A survey report of early grade reading assessments (Smith et al. 2012) showed that students in the SNNPRS performed low in reading in their mother tongue. This has been attributed to the curriculum materials and teaching methods used. Recently, a new curriculum was developed to tackle the problem in seven mother tongues across Ethiopia. Three languages:



Wolayta, Hadiyya, and Sidama in the SNNPRS were parts of the pilot program. Materials were prepared and trainers were trained in these three languages. The curriculum was piloted since 2014. If effective, this will be transferred to the other mother tongue teaching programs in the region.

It was reported by the KIs from the Bureau of Education in the region that the government has been working hard to train teachers in in-service and at regular programs. Most teachers having certificates from teachers training institute have been upgraded to diploma level and those who had diploma to the first-degree level. There is a continuous professional development (CPD) as well.

Despite these efforts, KIs reported, there are complaints that teachers recruited for trainings for due teaching of mother tongues are the last resort (recruited after the high scorers have joined preparatory schools and the Technical, Vocational Education Training (TVET) program). According to the KIs, this has two main problems:

- i) Trainees with poor education background complete with poor teaching skills and knowledge thereby creating vicious circle in education quality.
- ii) As government has to re-train to upgrade the skills of poorly trained mother tongue teachers, it incurs more expense.

Another problem mentioned by KIs is that the education bureaus in different zones do not clearly and timely report the progress of curriculum in mother tongues, which are often developed in the respective zones. On the other hand, the Education Bureau of the SNNPRS is not well informed when some MT education programs are launched, so there are a few ways of making follow ups.

Another missing link mentioned by the KIs is that orthography development takes place by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The Education Bureau on the other hand recognizes the MT languages only when they are used as a medium or a subject in schools. Thus, there are no ways for the two stakeholders to work together beginning from the orthography development and syllabus design to the use of the medium. It was reported

that in some cases, ethno-linguistic groups develop their language orthography by themselves without the knowledge of MoCT and MoE; and then they begin the mother tongue education program for subsequent negotiation with Education Bureau of the Region for recognition and license. Mareqo mother tongue education program in the Gurage Zone is one of the cases in point.

The participants of the study further reported that students could not use English as a medium after they have learnt it for four years (grades 1-4) as a subject. Thus, using English as a medium in grade 5 seems implausible (Birhanu 2009; Fekede and Hailu forthcoming).

Due to all the factors outlined here, the envisaged improved quality education is not well achieved in the region; implying that MTE implementation strategies need revisiting and strict follow ups.

## **Language Use in Media**

The 1994 Ethiopian constitutional linguistic right and the follow up language use in different media has brought significant changes in language use patterns. Several government-owned media, community radio and television, and private owned radio and television, which were not allowed prior to this period, came into use. In the SNNPRS alone, 47 of the officially recognized 54 languages are used in media at different levels and varied distributon of air time.<sup>4</sup> What is more, some of the ethno-linguistic groups whose language is not used institutionally as in media and schools, such as Gurage, use the airtime assigned for them to broadcast information about their localities, but they use Amharic. With regard to Gurage, it was reported that Amharic is used as an option because a particular Gurage dialect choice and use for institutional settings is found to be a problem.

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<sup>4</sup> At country level, 55 MTs are used in community radio, 25 in FM radio, 5 in national and foreign radio broadcast, 5 in TV entertainments, 8 in News casting, and 9 in relegates (Alemayehu, 2016).

**Table 1. Languages in Media in the SNNPRS**

Cluster	Area set	Area coverage
1	Wolkite	Hadiyya, Halaba, Gurage, silte and Yem
2	Waka	Dawro, Wolayta, Konta, Kembata, and Tembaro
3	Arbaminch	Gamo, Gofa, Oyda, Gidicho, Zayse, Darashe, Konso, Ale, Basketo, Mashole, Mossiye, and Kosome
4	Jinka	Dasenech, Ari, Maale, Dime, Bana, Tsamay, Hamer, Nyangatom, Dasenech, Arbore, Kara and Bodi
5	Fisha Genet	Gedeo, Kore, and Burji
6	Mizan	Bench, Sheko, Dizi, Me'enit
7	Bonga	Kefa, Sheka, Na'o, chara, and Majangir
8	Sidama	Sidama only

The access for media is made possible through clusters of stations and substations connected in the form of relay (shown in Table 1). The ethnolinguistic groups are enjoying listening to information in their own language. It was found by KIs that media in their own language is particularly useful for those who do not understand language of wider communication, such as Amharic. They add, it also helps to maintain languages and cultures by providing institutional support. Several setbacks in the programs have also been mentioned. because the air time given for some ethnolinguistic groups is too short, an hour or two, they have to transmit just developmental issues such as agriculture and health only; hence, entertainment in their language is marginalized. Some ethnic groups suffered from script challenges; they have airtime for media use yet the language is not codified and has no orthography. They had to write news in Amharic and transliterate it with a latin-based script, which is less consistent, to suit their personal news casting.

Another importance of mother tongues in media is that some of the local languages, 29 of the 49, are also used in education. Some of the languages used in media to transmit education include: Hadiyyissa, Kambatissa, Gedeoffa, Kontatswa, Qabena, Dawro, Wolayta, Sidamuafu, Siltigna, Mareqo, Gamo and Gofa.

A few of the major problems in media use mentioned by the KIs include: journalists leaving job for better pay and place of work; short area

coverage, and lack of journalists for some languages which are not yet in use institutionally. It was reported that expansion works were done in Hossana, Sawla and Sheka to solve area coverage problems.

## **Language Use in Administration**

The most common function of language is its use in administration and communication of different domains: media, home, market, churches and mosques. Administration is a domain in which language is used to govern as in parliament, court and other political affairs. Language of administration is chosen largely based on political decision at national, regional and zonal levels.

Language use in administration since the 1994 declaration of linguistic rights in the SNNPR has been shaped and reshaped based on linguistic needs on one hand and sociological factors, such as ethno-linguistic identity and language maintenance on the other (cf. Cochrane and Yeshtila 2018). We shall consider some of these changes in language use patterns in administration.

To begin with, the language of administration in the SNNPRS was Amharic. On the other hand, the administrative language of Sidama Zone, whose administrative capital is also Hawassa like that of the SNNPRS, was Sidaamufo. The different administrative language use within the same town, Hawassa, has been both an opportunity and challenge. It was an opportunity for Sidama native speakers as they could understand their language, institutionalize it, maintain it and use it as means of expression of self-identity. It has, however, been challenging for non-native speakers of Sidama and those who do not speak Sidaamufo as a second language. This meant having to hire translators even to write an application in Sidaamufo. All site maps for Hawassa town were issued with Sidaamufo, education in elementary school had to be offered in Sidaamufo and non-Sidaamufo speakers had to learn without a choice of the language. The situation has created burden on non-native children in school and non-native adults in all administrative positions. Due to these challenges, the language use in

Hawassa has been reversed to Amharic language use. Now students have an option to choose either Amharic or Sidaamuafso as a medium of education, particularly in towns, such as Hawassa and Yirgalem.

Following Sidama, other linguistic groups such as Wolayta, Kembata, Hadiyya and Gedeo became languages of administration. Since these languages are dominantly spoken in their respective zones, and the zones are largely inhabited by native speakers, the challenges that were observed in the Sidama Zone were less.

Non-native speakers had the rights for translation only in courts; and in other administrative situations they had to pay a cost in all the zones where MTs are used for administration. According to the KIs, language use in administration has particularly been helpful in the court where many customers understand only the local languages, and in providing health education in hospitals and clinics. Judges, however, found the local languages partly problematic for two reasons. First, some judges do not understand the local language. Second, court decisions in most cases have to be translated to Amharic, particularly when the case has to be reported to the higher court.

Despite the associated drawbacks, language use in administration has been preferred by native speakers for two main reasons: linguistic and in-group identity and language maintenance. For instance, the KIs asserted that their language is part of their identity and that they have to use it in administration, education and media. In fact scholars affirm that language expresses social identities (Fought 2006, 21-23), “is a profound indicator of identity, more potent by far than cultural artifacts such as dress, food choices, and table manners” (Wardhaugh 2006, 6), and “is among the most salient dimensions of group identity” (Sachdev 1995, 42).

A few of the participants also emphasized that using their language in administration is a constitutional right and that they want to exercise it.

Despite the language use rights in administration, only 10 out of 56 ethno-linguistic groups have managed to use their language in administration. KIs provided several reasons for this. Some ethnolinguistic groups preferred Amharic as language of administration because it is all inclusive and accommodative. Some zones, such as Gurage had more than

one ethnic group; hence, it is impossible for them to use all their languages and had better use Amharic.

The language use status in the SNNPRS in the three domains; MTE, media and administration is summarized in Table 2:

**Table 2. Language use status in the SNNPRS**

<b>Domains of Use</b>	<b>No of Languages</b>	<b>Percentile</b>
Mother Tongue Education	29	53.7%
Media	49	90%
Administration	10	18.5%

The summary table shows that 90% of ethno-linguistic groups had air time assigned for them for broadcasting though some of them are not using their mother tongue. More than half, 53% of the languages are used in education at different levels. The least, 18.5%, of the languages are used in administration.

## **Language and Politics**

Language in politics is a kind of interface in that all language use is associated with political power. All decisions of language use, including national official language, language of wider communication (*lingua franca*), and language uses in different domains and geographical areas are the result of political orientations. In this section, our focus is on language used as marker of identity, specifically for the sake of political independence of different administrative levels. Several ethno-linguistic groups have made requests for administrative autonomy, such as a separate ethnic based regional government (e.g., Sidama), or a different ethnic based administrative zone (e.g., Konso), and separate ethnic based district (e.g., Dent'a and Kucha) in the SNNPRS, and only a few of them have managed to achieve their goal. Table 3 presents some of the independence requests

made by ethno-linguistic groups, the language claimed as a mark of identity, and the result obtained:

**Table 3. Language and independence request**

SN	'Ethnic group'	Language	Result
1	Silte	Siltigna	Became independent
2	Wolane	Wolenigna	No
3	Dent'a	Kizigna	No
4	Donga	Kizigna	No
5	K'ucha	K'uchigna	No
6	Dorze	Dorzign	No
7	Gezo	Gezogna	No
8	Menja	_____	No

The 'ethnic' groups in Table 3 requested the Council of Nationalities of the SNNPRS. Some of them went to the Federal State's Council of Nationalities when their case was declined. The context the ethnic groups that made the requests are as follow.

Silte has been part of the Gurage Zone, and after fierce struggle to be 'Silte' by reconstructing a separate identity, it was recognized as a different group and became an independent zone. Language was the main criteria used for being different, though there were other factors, such as being a Muslim, claimed to have originated from Harar, and other political factors. Wolane is a district in the Gurage Zone, and the people speak one of Guragina varieties, Wolane. Wolane still claims that its language is different, and deserves a different identity with aspirations of administrative independence.

Dent'a is a group that lives in Hadiyya Zone. It used to consider itself Hadiyya, but it recently has claimed a different identity, Dent'a Dubamo. The people claim that they originated from Amhara region and their forefather was Dubale, which became Dubamo in Hadiyya. They claim that they originally spoke Amharic, but over time they developed their own language, Kizigna, a mix of Kambata and Hadiyya.

The SNNPRS council of nationality studied their language and found that it was not different from the language of Hadiyya. Dissatisfied with the decision, the Dent'a group went to the Federal State's Council of Nationalities for reconsideration of the decision made by the council of nationalities of the SNNPRS. The Federal Council of Nationalities made a study on the languages of Dent'a. It was found that 'Dent'a language' shared much lexicon with Kembata than with Hadiyya, yet the similarity among the three was (70%). The claimed Dent'a identity and administrative autonomy was denied by the Council of Nationalities of the Federal Government as well.

Donga are group of people living in Kembata-Tenbaro Zone and speak Kembattisa, the language of Kembata. The people claimed a different identity, having Amhara origin, and requested independent recognition. Like Dent'a, they claimed that they had a language Kizigna, which is no longer spoken. It is not clear whether Dent'a and Donga have a similar origin, as they both claim Amhara origin, a similar language named Kizigna. Though Donga is recognized as a different group in identity, administrative independence was not granted.

K'ucha, Dorze, and Gezo belong to Ometo language clusters of Omotic languages. All the three argued that their language variety is different and claimed separate administrative and ethnic autonomy. None of them were granted the claimed ethnic identity and the administrative autonomy.

Of all the groups who requested independence, Menja was the only one that does not have its own language to claim. It speaks the Keffa language, Kafenono, which is spoken by Keffa people. The Menja are despised minorities who are largely excluded from the majority due to their food habits. As these groups do not have their language which identify them as different linguistic unit on one hand, and the dominant power of the majority Keffa on the other, the Menja were not recognized as independent groups administratively.

In short, language has been used as a political weapon to claim in-group identity and administrative independence though the result in most cases was not positive. Currently, most Ethno-linguistic groups of the SNNPRS are requesting separate linguistic based *regional identity*. So far, Sidama,



Gurage, Hadiyya, Wolayta and Keffa have officially requested a separate regional autonomy.

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Discussion**

The Ethiopian constitution grants each nationality the right to develop and use its language. This is a great opportunity because there are countries that limit language use rights to one or a few major languages. Now, ethno-linguistic groups have developed self-confidence to use their language. However, the open-ended language use grant has been questioned by several authors particularly with regard to official language choice and use (cf. Midega 2014).

In the Ethiopian context, once a mother tongue is in the education system, the Ministry of Education at the national or regional level supports the efforts, such as in teachers training and material development.

Bringing 29 languages in 25 years of time into school use is a great success. These languages now have orthographies, textbooks, dictionaries of different sorts, and primers for some of them. These partly guarantee language development, thereby keeping the languages from endangerment. There were several problems to mother tongue use in education. It was expected that mother tongue use improves education quality; however, this has not been achieved (cf. Smith et al. 2012). Language use patterns in education have been irregular. Script choices have been based on political motivations rather than pedagogical advantages; it largely attempted to use a Latin-based script, and tried to avoid Ethiopic, which was associated with politically dominant groups. It was reported that Ethiopic cannot handle gemination, length and some sounds unique to particular languages in the country. Teachers recruited for mother tongue education training were those who could not join other programs, such as technical and vocational education and nursing.

Language use in media was relatively a success story though there is no equity in air time assigned, and that some ethnic groups could not use their mother tongue but a lingua franca.

Language use in administration was limited to a few languages, and it has been evaluated both positively and negatively. On positive side, it has partly solved the problem of local languages speakers who do not understand the lingua franca of the country, Amharic. The setback is that local languages and/or dialects have been used with political motives with unintended consequences of ethnic conflicts (cf. Inglehart and Woodward 1972 and Fishman 1972 for misuse of languages).

## **Recommendations**

Based on the finding, we recommend the following:

- Based on the Ethiopian constitution's linguistic right, a clear language use policy that include language status and language use patterns in all domains should be made available.
- For intergroup communication, national unity, and inter-regional mobility, there should be a national official language.
- There should be language use implementation strategy at national, regional and zonal levels.
- The direction of mother tongue use and development patterns need to be fixed, and teachers' recruitment and trainings should be improved.
- Ethiopian linguistics should develop Ethiopian Phonetic Alphabet (EPA) and orthographic convention to solve the existing problems in using Ethiopic.
- Bureaus of Tourism & Cultures, Education, and Information & Communication should support nationalities whose languages are not used institutionally to guaranty equity, access and fairness.

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