

**From Kings, Colonies and Nations:
Lessons from Ethiopia in Building
Multination Federalism in Burma**

By David Fisher Gilbert

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Political Studies, the University of Auckland, 2009.**

Declaration

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief and in accordance with the policies of the University of Auckland, this dissertation is my own work, all sources have been properly acknowledged to the full extent of my indebtedness, and this assignment contains no plagiarism. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work or any version of it for assessment in any other Department or Faculty or for any award offered by the University of Auckland, its partner institutions, or any other institution. I further declare that I understand the plagiarism policy of the University of Auckland and the Department of Political Studies, including the penalties for which I am liable should my work be found to contain plagiarised material.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

This study evaluates whether the adoption of an ethnic-based federal system in Burma, as proposed by core opposition groups, could lead to a sustainable peace after the end of the military dictatorship. This is approached through a comparison with Ethiopia. Ethiopia was chosen because it is the only recent example of an attempt to establish a fully ethnic-based federal system after a civil war. A critical examination of Ethiopian and Burmese histories highlights key problems arising from competing narratives of state and nation, which question the basis of the two countries. An inability to address this crisis of state identity and history is a key factor in sustaining separatist conflict in Ethiopia, despite the remaking of the state into a multinational federation that provides constitutional guarantees for ethnic self-determination. A similar problem seems likely arise in Burma during and after a democratic transition if questions of history and state identity are not addressed. Another key lesson from the Ethiopian experience is the possibility of territorial federalism contributing to a further ethnicisation of conflicts over land and resources, a problem that might be alleviated through non-territorial autonomy. Multination federalism may offer an alternative solution to the problem of protection for minority groups in countries like Burma and Ethiopia that have already experienced the trauma of failed nation-building projects. But lessons from the failings of Ethiopian federalism suggest the need for further measures to prevent violent disintegration in Burma if this direction is pursued there.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to Joe Atkinson, who has consistently provided me with invaluable feedback over the course of the year. I also wish to acknowledge Alan Robson, Virginia Shaw, Ron Gilbert and Violet Cho for their input and encouragement. However, any errors are of course my own.

Table of Contents

Chapter One	
Introduction	1
Chapter Two	
Clearing Away the Underbrush	5
Chapter Three	
Burmese History: Divide and (mis)Rule	9
Chapter Four	
Historical Ethiopia: Narratives of Identity	20
Chapter Five	
Multination Federalism in Ethiopia: ‘We the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’	34
Chapter Six	
Contemporary Burma: ‘Genuine’ Federalism and the Shadow of Panglong	42
Chapter Seven	
Ethiopia and Burma: Comparative Lessons	60
Chapter Eight	
Conclusion	66
Bibliography	69

List of Figures

Figure 3.1	
Map of Burma	11
Figure 3.2	
Ethno linguistic map of Burma	12
Figure 4.1	
Map of Ethiopia	23
Figure 4.2	
Map of Oromia	29
Figure 5.1	
Map of Ethiopian federal regions	36
Figure 6.1	
Map of Burmese states and divisions	46
Figure 6.2	
Map of Monland	57

Chapter One

Introduction

In late 2004 in the Thai Burma¹ borderlands, a meeting was held involving representatives of key opposition groups, some of whom had been at war for over fifty years. Those at the meeting agreed that constitutional problems were central to Burma's crisis and that in order to seek solutions, it would be necessary to draft a set of principles to provide a framework for the writing of a shadow constitution in-exile. This was a response to the constitutional drafting process led by the military government inside the country, which effectively excluded opposition groups. In the background was the ongoing civil war that started at independence, and ethno-histories of suffering that trace conflicts back millennia. The desired solution, formulated in the borderlands at that and many other meetings since, was for Burma to become a multination federation in which key ethnic groups would be granted their own states, with a high level of political and cultural autonomy.

In other parts of Southeast Asia there were precedents for the inclusion of ethnic political processes in post-independence state reconstruction, but elsewhere in the region ethnic issues were not as central as they are in Burma. The issue of ethnic integration arose prominently on the post-authoritarian political reform agendas of the Philippines and Indonesia during the democratization that followed the downfall of the dictatorships there. In both cases ethnically based demands had been by-passed during

¹ In 1997, arguing the name Burma is associated with British colonialism, the Burmese military government changed the name of the country to Myanmar in an effort to establish its nationalist credentials. Because the name change was imposed by the military regime there is widespread consensus in the Burmese opposition movement against it and thus 'Burma' continues to be widely used. Burma and Myanmar derive from the same word in Burmese language, although in the pre-independence nationalist movement, the term Myanmar was used to refer to ethnic Burmans, while Burma was used to refer to the population as a whole. This essay follows the opposition usage of Burma instead of Myanmar. The term 'Burman' will be used as an ethnic category. For more discussion on this, see Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded. ed., Nias Report Series (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 149.

the transition to independence, leading to serious conflict prior to the imposition of authoritarian rule. The situation in Burma was somewhat different because attempts were made to accommodate ethnic demands prior to independence, even though they ended in failure and civil war. In both the Philippines and Indonesia, resurgent separatist and autonomy movements in the post-dictatorship period were addressed ad hoc as local crises rather than as issues requiring a fundamental reformulation of the basis of national integration. This limits the relevance of their responses to the situation in Burma.

By contrast, a structured but weak federal system was implemented in post-independence India. Federalism in India has been gradually strengthened in attempts to contain the demands of ethno-linguistic communities. Ethnic and religious crises in the Punjab, Kashmir and the Northeast have continued to simmer but none pose a threat to the foundations of the state. Indian federalism has evolved over time and therefore differs from the constitutional proposals for immediate strong federalism embodied in the demands of Burmese opposition groups.

This essay is an attempt to evaluate the likelihood that multination federalism, as articulated in the opposition shadow constitution, could provide a long-lasting solution to ethnic conflict in the country. To this end it is useful to find a case study where a multi-nation federal system has been adopted as part of a negotiated democratization program. Examples of such a process are rare anywhere, and are not found in Southeast Asia or South Asia. The best available example is consequently, to be found in Ethiopia.

In spite of its cultural and geographic distance from Burma, there are a number of key factors that make Ethiopia a rich case for comparison. Like Burma, Ethiopia does not have a history of liberal democracy. Ethiopia is one of the few countries in the Global South where federalism was established on ethnic lines, and the only one in which ethnic autonomy and secession is a constitutional right. Ethiopia also has a history of ethnic conflict and traumatic nation-building projects, out of which multination federalism emerged as a solution to civil war. Both countries are also struggling with the legacy of building a nation-state from older monarchical systems, which are often seen as mono-ethnic. The meaning of 'nation' is thus historically contentious in both countries, and differing narratives of nation feed contemporary

conflict. Lastly, both countries are poor, and poverty is a factor in violent ethnic conflicts and the sustainability of solutions. This study will begin by briefly surveying key literature related to ethnicity, nation and multination federalism. It will then examine historiographical problems in narrating 'nation' in Ethiopia and Burma, and ways in which this contributes to conflict. This leads into a discussion of contemporary political conditions that gave rise to the adoption of multination federalism in Ethiopia and the advocacy of multination federalism amongst the Burmese opposition. An examination of key constitutional documents in both countries illustrates this. It will then be possible to draw comparative lessons from Ethiopia about the potential for multination federalism to bring sustainable peace to Burma.

While there are many components of nation-building, this essay focuses primarily on those related to ethnic identity and conflict settlement. That is because in both Burma² and Ethiopia,³ ethnicity is commonly identified as a key element in civil conflict and consequently is a central concern in democratisation. In literature on nation-building, a number of factors are often discussed, such as economic development, democratic institutions, inequality, education, security, the role of international donors and the destabilising effects of regional conflicts.⁴ It is not

² Alan Smith, "Ethnicity and Federal Prospect in Myanmar" in *Federalism in Asia*, ed. Baogang He, Brian Galligan, and Takashi Inoguchi (Cheltenham, UK Edward Elgar, 2007), Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed, 1991), Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict*, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008).

³ Lovise Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000," (Bergen, Norway: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2002), J Abbink, "Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia: Some Problems and Prospects of Ethno-Regional Federalism," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 24, no. 3 (2006), Kjetil Tronvoll, *Ethiopia, a New Start?* (London: Minority Rights Group, 2000).

⁴ See, for example Verena Fritz and Alina Rocha Menocal, "Understanding State-Building from a Political Economy Perspective," (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2007), James Dobbins et al., *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building* (Santa Monica, California: RAND National Security Research Division, 2007), Dennis A. Rondinelli and John D. Montgomery, "Regime Change and Nation Building: Can Donors Restore Governance in Post-Conflict States?," *Public Administration and Development*, no. 25 (2005), Betty Bigombe, Paul Collier, and Nicholas Sambanis, "Policies for Building Post-Conflict Peace," *Journal of African Economies* 9, no. 3 (2000), PF Diehl, D Druckman, and J Wall, "International

possible to address all of these factors in this essay. However issues of ethnicity overlap with democratisation, education, rights, land and natural resource exploitation and in an illiberal regime, conflicts over these issues can become ethnicised if there are no democratic mechanisms in place for peaceful settlement. Democratisation and ethnic conflict resolution are thus linked. This essay will therefore focus on the role of ethnicity in conflict and democratisation in Burma and Ethiopia, and ways in which ethnic grievances can be addressed through democratic reforms.

Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution: A Taxonomic Analysis with Implications," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 1 (1998).

Chapter Two

Clearing Away the Underbrush

Over the last fifty years, ethnicity, nation and nationalism have become important areas of study within political science, anthropology, sociology and area studies. The definitions of the key terms remain contentious. *Nation*, according to Smith, denotes 'a named population occupying an historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members'. *National identity* is 'the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern'.⁵ *Nationalism* is 'a political movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a populations, some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential *nation*'.⁶ Smith's definition of nation corresponds to general notions of *ethnicity*.⁷ However a deeper understanding of ethnicity as a *process* of identity formation is provided by Barth, who argued that the key to ethnicity is boundaries between the in-group and out-group. Ethnicity only means something in relation to an 'other' and while central symbols and language can be deeply rooted, boundaries shift.⁸ According to Connor, it is important to properly distinguish between nation and state; and nationalism and statism.⁹ He argues that multi-ethnic entities like Burma and Ethiopia are states rather than nations. Therefore, it is wrong to refer to nationalism when talking about states unless the state is also an ethnically homogenous nation. Instead, Connor proposes using the term 'statism' when

⁵ John Breuilly, "Dating the Nation: How Old Is an Old Nation?," in *When Is the Nation? Towards an Understanding of Theories of Nationalism*, ed. Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac (London: Routledge, 2005), 16-17.

⁶ Smith cited in Ibid.

⁷ LA, "Ethnicity" in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, ed. Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009).

⁸ Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 1998).

⁹ Walker Connor, "The Dawning of Nations," in *When Is the Nation? Towards an Understanding of Theories of Nationalism*, ed. Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac (London: Routledge, 2005), 40-42.

referring to feelings of affinity with state structures and symbols.¹⁰ In this paper, Smith's definitions of nation and nationalism will be used. However following Connor, nationalism will be distinguished from *statism*, as this provides greater clarity.

Scholarship on nation, nationalism and ethnicity has resulted in a large body of literature that can be divided into three positions. The meaning of *primordialism*, the oldest position, includes disparate elements. The term covers biological determinist arguments that ethnicity and nation come from people's innate urge to continue their genetic legacy or their urge to form exclusive collectives. Primordialism also refers to beliefs that ethnicity and nations are firmly rooted in ancient history, barely changing over time.¹¹ In contrast, *social constructionism* and *instrumentalism*, both modernist theories, are based on the idea that nations and nationalism are recent, post-enlightenment constructions. Instrumentalists argue that ethnicity is constructed by elites to serve elite political and economic interests.¹² Combining elements of primordialism and modernist approaches, Smith developed a composite notion of 'ethno-symbolism'. He argues that there are three key assumptions behind the development of nations:

First is the centrality of symbolic elements – myths, memories, traditions, values, rituals and symbols... A second assumption is that many of these elements derive from prior ethnic and ethno-religious symbols, myths, memories and traditions among the same or related populations... The third assumption is that such ethno-symbolic elements, though subject to change, can resonate among populations for long periods of time, even before the age of modern *nationalism*.

Smith maintains a fundamental connection between ethnicity and nation but elaborates some key differences:

What is required for a nation to emerge is the... development of the key elements of 'ethnicity' as an intrinsic part of the process of nation formation. However, equally important for the formation of nations are institutional processes: hence the central role accorded to the creation and spread of a distinctive public culture and to the dissemination of public laws and shared customs, and to the vehicles of transmission of law and culture.

The complexities of Burma and Ethiopia suggest that no single paradigm provides full explanatory power. Thus what is needed is a blended approach. Ethnicity and nation

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Milton J. Esman, *An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict* (Oxford: Polity, 2004), 30-32.

¹² Ibid., 32-40.

are socially constructed, with changing forms and boundaries, and these notions have been the object of elite manipulation in contemporary Burma and Ethiopia. However changes to many of the ethnic categories in both countries take place slowly and the continuity of these categories is best explained as a result of enduring and ancient symbolic elements.

Multination federalism at its broadest denotes a system where sub-state ethnic groups have territorial autonomy and power is shared between ethno-regions and the central government.¹³ For Kymlicka, a major advocate for multination federalism, the system 'involves a serious redistribution of political power and economic resources'.¹⁴ He argues that multination federalism must include three key elements: territorial autonomy, official status for minority languages and control of public institutions at the state or regional level. A useful practical definition of federalism is of 'a decentralised political system possessing a constitutional government in which constituent territorial units are involved in a politics of accommodation... [and] regional autonomy and representation are not only more developed but are constitutionally guaranteed'.¹⁵ So when multination federalism is a true federation, constituent territorial units are designed to represent ethno-nations, as is the case in Ethiopia and, in key opposition proposals for conflict settlement, in Burma.

Multination federalism is a contemporary federal model that has only arisen within the last fifty years as Western liberal democracies began to abandon policies of assimilation for sub-state ethnic groups and started looking at models of accommodation. Notable examples are Canada, Spain, Belgium and Switzerland. This is in contrast to older forms of federalism, as practiced in the United States and Australia, where constituent states do not embody ethno-regional identities. For Kymlicka, multination federalism is the best system for resolving civil wars in multi-

¹³ Will Kymlicka, "Western Models of Multination Federalism: Are They Relevant for Africa?," in *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 34-5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵ Graham Smith, "Mapping the Federal Condition: Ideology, Political Practice and Social Justice," in *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*, ed. Graham Smith (London: Longman, 1995), 7.

ethnic countries like Burma and Ethiopia, although he warns of serious problems in adopting a federal system under the threat of force.¹⁶

For post-conflict situations like Ethiopia and Burma, the ability for a multiethnic federation to provide high levels of rights and legitimacy for ethnic difference is of central importance. In countries that have been the site of separatist struggles and centre-periphery conflict, multination federalism provides a means to restrain the centre while also alleviating secessionist tendencies. However there are pitfalls with this approach. These include the possibility of a multination federation creating increased division with the institutionalisation of ethnic boundaries, the possibility of a weak centre and strong sub-state units, greater mistrust between ethnic regions and the centre and the danger of secession.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kymlicka, "Western Models of Multination Federalism: Are They Relevant for Africa?," 52.

¹⁷ Valerie Bunce and Stephen Watts, "Managing Diversity and Sustaining Democracy: Ethnofederal Versus Unitary States in the Postcommunist World," in *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, ed. Philip G. Roeder and Donald Rothchild (2005), 136-7.

Chapter Three

Burmese History: Divide and (mis)Rule

Burma (and as we shall see, Ethiopia) suffers from polarising disjunctures in historical narratives. These historical narratives are fundamentally connected to ideas of what the form of the present and future state should be, as can be seen by the preambles of three different constitutions: a) the current Burmese constitution, b) the opposition-in-exile shadow constitution and c) the opposition Karen State constitution respectively. The prominent place of history in these texts, and the marked differences of historical interpretation, demonstrate the challenge of historical memory for contemporary Burmese politics.

In this chapter it is argued that Burmese histories can be divided into two competing historical paradigms, using a classificatory system borrowed from Ethiopian historiography.¹⁸ These consist of an 'anti-colonialist' and a 'Burmanist' stream. The anti-colonialist paradigm applies to ethnic minority histories that emphasise separateness, sovereignty over a territorial area and the loss of freedom after colonisation by the Burman monarchy, as can be demonstrated by the foregoing quote from the Karen constitution. These accounts serve contemporary political demands for self-determination and separatism, calling state legitimacy into question and problematising national identity. In contrast, the Burmanist paradigm can be used to classify histories that emphasise the 'natural' and/or glorious expansion of the state to outlying areas, demonstrating an historical basis for state legitimacy, as is seen in the foregoing quote from the Burmese constitution. The Burmanist paradigm has served successive national governments and their supporters since independence, providing justification for actions against separatist movements and political suppression under the guise of maintaining 'national unity'.

¹⁸ Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000.", Merera Gudina, "Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History: The Need for a Consensus," in *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton (Oxford: James Currey, 2006). These texts use the terms, 'Ethiopianist' and 'colonialist' to refer to the two paradigms. In order to apply this framework to Burmese history, the terms 'Burmanist' and 'anti-colonialist' will be used.

While similarities can be drawn between some key elements of Burmese and Ethiopian history and historiography, a fundamental difference is the fact that Burma was colonised by the British, a foreign imperialist power, rather than by internal groups as was the case in Ethiopia. This has had a painful and lasting impact on the development of the Burmese state. The resultant traumas of legitimacy and national identity can be seen in the preambles of the current and shadow national constitutions. A brief history of Burma will be sketched, drawing attention to the two historical paradigms, with a focus on Karen histories as a case study of the anti-colonialist paradigm at work. It is necessary to precede this with a look at Burma's ethno-linguistic composition.

Situating Burma geographically and ethno-linguistically

Geographically and ethno-linguistically Burma is located in Southeast Asia, at the junctions of East and South Asia, bordering Bangladesh, India, China, Lao and Thailand (see figure 3.1). It is the second biggest country in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, with a land area of 677,000 square kilometres.¹⁹ Burma is geographically diverse, with dry lowland plains in the centre, tropical rainforests in the south and east, forested highlands in the periphery and the eastern end of the Tibetan plateau in the north. Burma has an estimated population of 48 million, although this is very approximate since there have only been two censuses since independence, the last being in 1983.

Burma has a high degree of ethnic diversity, with 135 indigenous 'races' officially classified by the government,²⁰ although all such classificatory systems are controversial, given the subjective nature of ethnic identity. Peoples from Tibeto-Burman, Mon-Khmer and Tai linguistic groups mainly settled the area of present-day Burma (see figure 2.1). Burmans remain the majority group in the central plains, consisting of an estimated 60% of the total population. Unlike Ethiopia, except for the years of British colonial rule, Burmans have maintained demographic and political

¹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma," Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>.

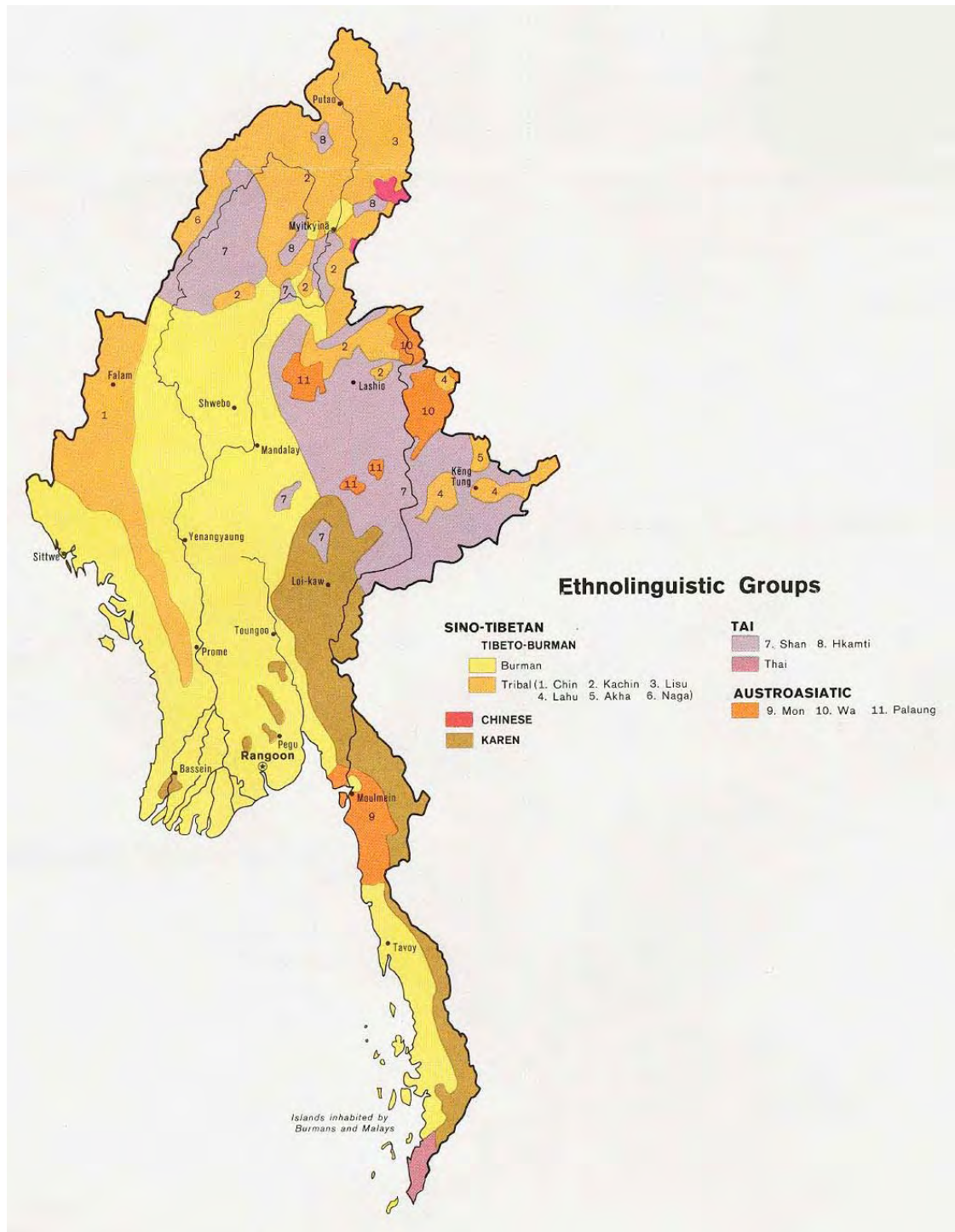
²⁰ Tin Maung Maung Than, "Dreams and Nightmares: State Building and Ethnic Conflict in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Ethnic Conflicts in Southeast Asia*, ed. K Sanitwong and W. S. Thompson (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies, 2005), 67.

Figure 3.1: Map of Burma



This is a general reference map of Burma, showing neighbouring countries and topography. Taken from the United Nations Cartographic Section, no date.

Figure 3.2: Ethno-linguistic map of Burma



This map shows Burma's ethno-linguistic distribution, although due to the lack of demographic figures, its accuracy is questionable. Taken from the Perry Casteneda Library Map Collection, the University of Texas at Austin, 1972.

control over the centre for at least the last thousand years. The other key ethnic groups, and corresponding language families, are Shan (Austro-Tai), Arakan (Tibeto-Burman), Karen (Tibeto-Burman), Mon (Mon-Khmer), Chin (Tibeto-Burman) and Kachin (Tibeto-Burman). Of these, Shan, Arakan and Mon have literary traditions and have had kingdoms that were eventually conquered by Burman kings. Chin, Kachin and Karen come from largely animist, tribal societies with oral traditions. Demographically, Shan are the most populous minority group at 8.5% of the population, followed by Karen at 6.2% and Arakan at 4.5%.²¹

Pre-colonial Burma: In search of a nation

Ancient Burmese history, unsurprisingly, is obscure and contested. As can be seen from the constitutional preambles above, there is little agreement on the origins and shape of ancient Burma, and the way diverse ethno-linguistic regions interacted with each other. As is the case with Ethiopia, it is politically important for elites to show historical legitimacy for state unity and self-determination, making ancient history politically contested. The first polity to correspond to much of contemporary Burma is that of the 'Pyu'. Based in central Burma, the Pyu dominated the area from approximately the 2nd Century BC to the 9th Century AD.²² The term Pyu denotes a people thought to have identified as Tircul, and whose language, along with Tibetan, founded the Tibeto-Burman family.²³ Conventional Burmese history posits a Mon kingdom in lower Burma, which had a lasting impact on the development of the Burmese state by introducing Buddhism, the alphabet, temple architecture and irrigation to the first Burman kingdom of Pagan around the ninth century.²⁴ This has

²¹ Robert H. Taylor, "Do States Make Nations? The Politics of Identity in Myanmar Revisited," *South East Asia Research* 13 (2005): 268.

²² Michael Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña: The Legend That Was Lower Burmāāa* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 16.

²³ G. H. Luce, *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma: Languages and History*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²⁴ See South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict*, 6-7, John Frank Cady, *A History of Modern Burma* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1960). South places Mon civilization as central in mainland Southeast Asian history, writing that 'significant aspects of the language, art and architecture, political and legal arrangements, and the religion of the great Thai and Burman civilisations were

been contested by historiographer Aung-Thwin, who, through a re-examination of historical evidence, claims there was no kingdom in lower Burma before Pagan, and that upper Burma 'civilized' lower Burma, through the Pyu.²⁵ The Pyu era is commonly identified as the first of four unifications of Burma prior to colonisation, with Pagan being the second.²⁶ Histories often place Kachin and Karenni lands outside these unifications.²⁷ The fate of Pyu civilization is also obscure. Conventional histories have shown that the Pyu polity was destroyed by Nan Chao (Chinese) invaders.²⁸ However, Aung-Thwin also questions this, given the number of cities and apparently large population of the Pyu, instead arguing that Pyu people, culture, technology, religion and architecture were subsumed by Burman Pagan.²⁹ The re-evaluation of Pyu is problematic for the origins of the Burmanist paradigm. The historical writing of Aung-Thwin and Than Tun referenced here contradict contemporary government-sponsored histories, as seen in the Burmese Constitution, that give greater importance to Burman civilization. The state narrative is one of glorious kings, descending from India before the time of Buddha and adopting Buddhism when it first came into existence.³⁰ This is alluded to in the new Burmese Constitution:

a) From the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, which will come into effect after the 2010 elections: *Myanmar is a Nation with magnificent historical traditions. We, the National people, have been living in unity and oneness, setting up an independent sovereign State and standing tall with pride. Due to colonial intrusion, the Nation lost her sovereign power in 1885. The National people launched anti-colonialist struggles and*

derived from Mon society, which acted as a vector in the transmission of Theravada Buddhism and the Indianised political culture of the region' (p.7). Cady identifies Mon and Indian influence on the Pagan kingdom but he does not come to a final conclusion as to whether Pagan kings were influenced directly from India, a southern Mon civilisations or both.

²⁵ Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña: The Legend That Was Lower Burmāāa*, 36-40.

²⁶ Than Tun, "Myanmar History: A Humanities Approach," *Asian Research Trend: A Humanities and Social Science Review* no. 4 (1994).

²⁷ Bertil Lintner, *The Kachin: Lords of Burma's Northern Frontier*, People and Cultures of Southeast Asia (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Asia Film House, 1997).

²⁸ Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña: The Legend That Was Lower Burmāāa*.

²⁹ Ibid., 36-40.

³⁰ Than Tun, "Myanmar History: A Humanities Approach," 1, Thant Myint-U, *The River of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History of Burma* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008).

*National liberation struggles, with unity in strength, sacrificing lives and hence the Nation became an independent sovereign State again on 4th January 1948.*³¹

It serves as an example of the blending of history, religion and mythology with nationalist ideology and entrenches the problem of historical narrative in the establishment of a federal system.

Colonialism and divide et impera

A major difference between Ethiopian and Burmese history that fundamentally altered the development of ethnic identification, state construction and nationalism was the British colonisation of Burma, completed in 1885. Ethnic identity and nationalism in Ethiopia developed from internal tensions, influenced by political developments in Europe. In contrast, change in Burma was sudden, with British invasion, three wars, annexation and the rapid severing of traditional authority. This had a traumatising effect even at the local village level, as it destroyed traditional relationships between village heads and the urban gentry, which had previously ensured physical security and aid in the event of such crises as a bad harvest.³²

To control its new territory, British colonial authorities used divide and rule, creating a diarchy where the largely ethnic minority peripheral areas were placed under a separate administration to that of the central plains. Karen, Chin and Kachin subjects were considered 'loyal' and were privileged in the army and bureaucracy, further alienating the Burman majority. This was partly a result of early successes by missionaries, who converted large numbers of Kachin, Karen and Chin (after being denied permission to preach to Burman Buddhists) and established mission schools, providing education that could be utilised by the colonial authorities. This division, projected into ancient history, is written into the shadow federal constitution in-exile:

b) From the preamble of the second draft of the exiled-opposition drawn Constitution of the Federal Republic of the Union of Burma: *In the land of this Federal Union, many different nationalities have lived, each with their own sovereignty and independence, ever since ancient times. Although each nationality lived independently for most of its history, they all fell under the long*

³¹ Ministry of Information, *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar* (Yangon 2008), 4.

³² Michael W. Charney, *A History of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.

*occupation and servitude of the British colonialists. In order to regain its own freedom more quickly, each nationality joined with the others so as to obtain independence from the colonial power together, and they thus formed a Federal Union at the Panglong Conference in the year 1947.*³³

There are interesting parallels between this and the official constitution, both of which evoke ancient history and ‘unity’ during the anti-colonial struggle. The fundamental difference is that the official constitution places the origins of the state in early history while the opposition preamble situates state origins in British colonialism.

Karen were the first in Burma to convert in substantial numbers. The 19th century American Baptist missionaries were the seminal influence in generating a Karen ‘narration of (oppressed) nation’, writing what Rajah has called ‘conjectural histories and naïve ethnological accounts of Karen ‘tribes’.³⁴ The Karen constitutional preamble serves as a striking example of this narrative of nation, originating in 19th century Baptist missions, which condemns Burman Kingdoms and celebrates colonial intervention:

c) From the second draft of the exiled opposition drawn Constitution of Kawthoolei (Karen State): *The earliest settlers of the Irrawaddy Delta, the Sittang Valley, southern Salween Valley, Tanessarim region and in the adjoining hill areas of those regions, we, the Karen people, had lived in freedom and in peace, before the advent of feudalism... In the successive eras of feudalism, we the Karen people had been ruthlessly exploited and systematically prevented from advancement in all the fields of human activities. When the system of oppression and subjection was removed, we made rapid advances in the areas of economic affairs, education, health, sports, politics and culture, through industriousness and self-reliance, in a matter of 60 years. However, after independence from the British, the political immaturity, intolerance and above all racial chauvinism, or ultra-nationalism of those in power had led the country to civil war, and the Dark Age of oppression, subjugation and exploitation, again, for more than half a century. In this Dark Age, the Karen people had to face immense sufferings, unlike at any time in the history.*³⁵

³³ Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee, *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of the Union of Burma (Second Draft)* (Mae Sot, Thailand Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee, , 2008), 83.

³⁴ Ananda Rajah, "A 'Nation of Intent' in Burma: Karen Ethno-Nationalism, Nationalism and Narrations of Nation," *The Pacific Review* 15, no. 4 (2002): 522.

³⁵ No author, *The Second Proposed Draft of Future Constitution of Kawthoolei (Karen State)* (Chiang Mai, Thailand United Nationalities League for Democracy 2006), 5.

This Karen ethno-nationalist historical view descends from a hegemonic discourse created through journalism, travel, missionary and other colonial writing in which the pre-colonial kingdom was painted as barbaric, enabling colonisation to appear in the guise of humanitarian intervention. This dichotomy has had a lasting impact in Burma and many other post-colonial societies, as the 'beliefs of the conquerors were taken up by the indigenous collaborators who served the new European overlords and [were] reiterated by many first and second-generation nationalist leaders'.³⁶ As a result of colonialism, therefore, ethnicity and religion became the defining identifiers within Burmese society and politics. Taylor summarises the lasting impact of this:

This ascriptive conceptual mode for intellectually mapping the structure of Burma has been so widely accepted by Burma's political elite that they, like the Europeans who created it, have tended to accept the broad ethnic categories as embodying living social formations with political prerogatives...In this century, ethnic categories have taken on a life of their own, shaping the political thought and behaviour of central and regional elites.³⁷

This mode of mapping can be seen in both anti-colonialist and Burmanist historical paradigms, perpetuated in cabinet level discussions in Naypyidaw down to history lessons in the 'liberated area' schools of Karen refugee camps. What is striking, when compared to Ethiopia, is how in a relatively short period of time, European colonialist intervention largely shaped contemporary ethnic identities and the conflicting historical paradigms that ensnare Burma today.

Unsurprisingly, historical memory from the periphery differs markedly from that of the centre. As space is limited, it is only possible to briefly discuss Karen history, as an example of the anti-colonialist paradigm at work. Karen nationalist history reads teleologically, as a Manichean fable of a purely good people, shackled by duplicitous Burmans, leading to a long and continuing period of immense suffering (with a respite during British colonialism) before a future redemption, possibly available in multinational federalism. One of the most influential Karen history books, written by Saw Aung Hla before independence, places Karen people at the centre of ancient Burma. He argued that there were three indigenous tribes in central Burma first

³⁶ Michael Adas, "Imperialist Rhetoric and Modern Historiography: The Case of Lower Burma before and after Conquest," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1972): 176.

³⁷ Cited in South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict*, 9.

– *Pyu, Sa* and *Kar ya*. These were Karen tribes, with *Pyu* evolving into the Karen sub-group ‘*Pwo*’. The three tribes were supposed, by Saw Aung Hla, to be the first to settle in Burma about 3000 years ago.³⁸ This formulation influenced the view of the Karen National Union, the main group fighting for self-determination, that the Karen established the country *Kawthoolei*, but then lost their independence, first to Mon and then Burman kings:

Many Karens had to flee for their lives to the high mountains and thick jungles, where communications and means of livelihood were extremely difficult and diseases common. We were thus cut off from all progress, civilization and the rest of the world, and were gradually reduced to backward hill tribes. The rest of the Karens were made slaves.³⁹

While Karen now live throughout eastern Burma, the Yangon area and the Irrawaddy delta (as well as west and northwest Thailand), ‘*Kawthoolei*’ has been reduced to a smaller area in eastern Burma as a result of government policies related to the boundaries of Karen State, as well as concessions by Karen separatists. However histories like the one excerpted above continue to support the more ambitious irredentism of many nationalist leaders.

Karen popular history continues in the constitutional preamble above with an account of oppression after independence and the start of continuing armed struggle against the revived oppressors of the Burmese state. This neatly fits into the anti-colonialist paradigm of an independent Karen nation fighting for freedom against recolonisation in modern Burma. This historical essentialism has been criticised on a number of counts, which parallel some of the problems with Oromo histories in Ethiopia as discussed below. A key point is the reification of contemporary primordial ethnic categories. Scholars taking a constructionist view of ethnicity have argued that in pre-colonial Burma, one’s position in the tributary system (whether one was a prince or slave), and one’s location was more important than one’s mother tongue.⁴⁰ As Taylor puts it, ‘political relationships were based on protection and service, not

³⁸ Saw Aung Hla, *K’nyaw Ali Ta Sisoh Tehsoh* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Images Asia, 1999), 55 (unofficial translation).

³⁹ Karen National Union, "History of Karens and the KNU," http://www.karen.org/knu/KNU_His.htm.

⁴⁰ Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power*.

symbols backed by coercive power'.⁴¹ Essentialist ideas of 'Karen-ness' can also be tenuous given the diversity of groups included under that identifier. Karen commonly refers to around twenty sub-groups, with different linguistic, geographic, cultural and political backgrounds. While Christian S'gaw Karen are a minority, estimated at 15-20 percent, they have dominated colonial and post-colonial Karen politics, effectively recasting 'Karen' in their image.⁴² This demonstrates the contingency of historical memory and the instrumental nature of contemporary ethnic identity. As demands emanating from the differing historical paradigms in both Burma and Ethiopia are so intractable, the search for middle ground, historical connectedness and moderation will be a necessary part of ethnic conflict resolution.

⁴¹ Taylor, "Do States Make Nations? The Politics of Identity in Myanmar Revisited," 266.

⁴² Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma: Diverse Voices, Uncertain Ends* (Washington D.C.: East-West Center, 2008).

Chapter Four

Historical Ethiopia: Narratives of Identity

The term 'Ethiopia' does not denote a unitary identity, culturally or historically. The task of attempting to contextualise contemporary Ethiopian politics is therefore extraordinarily problematic. The history of Ethiopia, like Burma, has been written and rewritten by contending forces as ideological positions that are often irreconcilable. Three dominant ideological goals can be summarised as a) the solidification of multination federalism, b) the replacement of multination federalism with a unitary system and c) ethnic separatism. Current conflicts are fed by particular histories, which serve as the justification for the contemporary federal system. The contested narratives of 'Ethiopia' thus parallel those of Burmese history. One approach to Ethiopia's history is to look at rival 'Ethiopianist' and 'anti-colonialist' paradigms, as discussed above in relation to Burma.⁴³

The Ethiopianist paradigm, like the Burmanist paradigm, embraces histories that justify and/or celebrate the expansion and consolidation of the state and promote the goal of a unified or re-unified national identity. In this paradigm, violence associated with expansion is justified as a normal corollary of state formation.⁴⁴ In contrast, the anti-colonial paradigm is a label for histories that emphasise the northern Semitic elite as imperialist oppressors, who conquered and colonised independent or autonomous areas. Within the anti-colonialist paradigm, there are further divisions between narratives using critical constructionist and primordialist concepts of ethnicity. The conflict between the Ethiopianist and anti-colonialist paradigms help us understand why multination federalism was adopted and the reasons for the continuing ethnic conflict.

⁴³ Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000.", Gudina, "Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History: The Need for a Consensus." These texts use the terms, 'Ethiopianist' and 'colonialist' to refer to the two paradigms. In place of the later, the term 'anti-colonialist' will be used here for greater clarity.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Mapping Ethiopia

Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa, bordering Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti (see figure 4.1). The region is an area of ongoing political conflict, with civil wars taking place in Somalia and Sudan. Ethiopia became a landlocked country in 1993 after Eritrean independence and now consists of an area of 1.1 million square kilometres. The country is geographically diverse, with highlands stretching from the centre to the north, semi-desert plains in the east and lowland plains in the west and south. According to 2005 World Bank statistics, 33.9% of Ethiopia is agricultural land, much of which has been susceptible to water shortages and drought. This is one of the causes of the famines that the country is popularly associated with in the Global North. It has a population of 85.2 million people, making it the second most populous state in Africa after Nigeria.⁴⁵

Ethiopia is ethno-linguistically diverse, with 84 languages in usage.⁴⁶ The area was settled at different times by people from a number of language families: Semitic, Omotic, Cushitic, Komuz, Nilotic, Berta and Kunama.⁴⁷ The centre of power has traditionally been in the northern highlands, with leadership passing between Amhara and Tigrayan contenders. The majority of Amhara and Tigrayan people are Christian with the consequence that church authority has been closely linked with political authority throughout Ethiopian history. Both Amhara and Tigrayans are minority peoples in contemporary Ethiopia, with the former making up only 6% and the latter around 30%.⁴⁸ Amhara and Tigrayan are, in fact, descended from a single ethnic group, thought to have originated from intermixing with Arab migrants, perhaps in the first millennium BC.⁴⁹ Amhara, Tigrayan and a number of other smaller but culturally and linguistically close groups are known collectively as Habesha. According to Donham,

⁴⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Ethiopia," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html>.

⁴⁶ David Appleyard and Martin Orwin, "The Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia," in *Language and National Identity in Africa*, ed. Andrew Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 268.

⁴⁷ Tronvoll, *Ethiopia, a New Start?*, 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6-7.

⁴⁹ Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia : State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder, Colorado: L. Rienner, 1993). Note: Before Common Era (BC) and Common Era (AD) are used here as a secular alternative to Before Christ (BC) and Anno Domini (AD) respectively.

the term Habesha was historically used by Tigrayan, Amhara and other Christian Semitic groupings as a common identity only when differentiating themselves from slave groups and Muslims.⁵⁰

Ancient Ethiopia: Kings and colonies

The term Abyssinia, a former name for Ethiopia, is thought to have derived from the term Habesha, whereas Ethiopia was a term from Ancient Greek, used to refer broadly to Africa and East Asia and was only adopted as the name of the state in the early 20th Century. ‘Habesha’ is used in some anti-colonialist histories as it reinforces the outsider-status of non-Habeshas and serves as a reminder of their exclusion from state power. Oromo popular scholar Asafa Jalata regularly uses the term ‘Habasha’ in contemporary writing interchangeably with the terms Abyssinian and Ethiopian. He calls into question the legitimacy of the Ethiopian state and the term ‘Ethiopia’: ‘Abyssinian leaders, confusing mythology with historical reality, began to claim Ethiopian identity and to argue that their territories once included all regions that classical geographers and historians described as Ethiopia.’⁵¹ Jalata makes a point of only using the terms ‘Ethiopia’ and ‘Abyssinia’ to refer to Amhara and Tigrayan people and their territory, approximately a fifth of the present-day boundaries of the state. This is a separatist position, which sees the break-up of Ethiopia as the best solution to the country’s problems. It also serves as an example of how the most fundamental political/historical terms like ‘Abyssinia’, ‘Ethiopia’ and ‘Habesha’ are disputed.

⁵⁰ Donald L. Donham and Wendy James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History & Social Anthropology*, Eastern African Studies (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 23.

⁵¹ Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia : State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992*, 4.

Figure 4.1: Map of Ethiopia



This is a general reference map of Ethiopia, showing neighbouring countries and topography
 Taken from the United Nations Cartographic Section, no date.

The most populous ethnic group in the country are the Oromo, making up between 30 and 50 percent of the country, with figures being highly disputed.⁵² The majority of Oromo people live in central and southern Ethiopia, in a region called Oromia, and speak Cushitic languages. Oromo people are diverse, comprising 16 main tribal groups, with linguistic differences between them.⁵³ The majority are Sunni Muslim with smaller animist populations and they share an oral tradition. The Oromos are indigenous to the Horn of Africa, but are thought to have migrated into their present areas of Ethiopia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The third most populous group in the country are the Ogadeni (Western Somali) people, who live in eastern and southern Ethiopia and have a population of over 4 million.⁵⁴ Ogadenis speak a common Cushitic language, and are thought to have derived from the mixing of Somali and Oromo people. The majority are Shi'ite Muslim. The south-eastern corner of Ethiopia, now encompassing the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, is the most ethnically diverse area of Ethiopia with more than 50 ethnic groups mostly comprising of Cushitic and Omotic speakers. This area includes large animist populations, considered inferior by many Ethiopian Christians and Muslims. Oromia, Ogaden and the Southern Nations' region are locations of contemporary violent conflict.

Conventional histories of Ethiopia reinforce the Ethiopianist line by their tendency to focus on the glory of Habesha emperors, starting with Menelik I in approximately 1000 BC.⁵⁵ In Ethiopian legend, he is the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, and subsequent emperors have claimed their descent from him. The first kingdom that can be seen as a precursor to modern Ethiopia was Axsum, established around 2000 years ago, covering the highland areas of Northern Ethiopia and both African and Arabian sides of the Red Sea coast. Axsum's capital was in the

⁵² For examples of these discrepancies, see Ibid., 1, Tronvoll, *Ethiopia, a New Start?*, 6.

⁵³ James Minahan, *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations : Ethnic and National Groups around the World*, vol. III (Westport, Conn. ; London: Greenwood, 2002), 1468-9.

⁵⁴ ———, *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations : Ethnic and National Groups around the World*, vol. IV (Westport, Conn. ; London: Greenwood, 2002), 2065.

⁵⁵ In this dissertation, I have chosen to prefix dates with Before Common Era (BC) and Common Era (AD), rather than the Christian-centric BC and AD. BC corresponds to BC and AD corresponds to AD.

present-day region of Tigray and it derived much of its wealth from trade.⁵⁶ An important legacy of Axsum was the use of Ge'ez as the local spoken and written language. Ge'ez was the original Semitic language of the area, from where Tigrinya and Amhara languages derive. Ge'ez was thus the language used to translate the bible and other Christian texts in the fourth century when Axsum adopted Christianity and it is still used as the language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church today.⁵⁷ Axsum remains a celebrated entity in Ethiopianist writings.

The process of what is critically termed 'Abyssinianization' or 'Amharisation' in anti-colonialist paradigm writing has its origins in this period. This was a three-stage process involving the spread of Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity and the *rist* system of hereditary land ownership from the centre outwards.⁵⁸ The Axsumite Empire slowly declined as new Islamic empires gained control of the Red Sea area. Axsum was eventually overtaken in the thirteenth century AD by a new kingdom in central Ethiopia called Amhara. The Amhara Kingdom continued the Christian tradition and used Amharic as the *lingua franca*, as it is today.⁵⁹ The early Axsum and Amhara kingdoms are important for understanding contemporary Ethiopian politics because they set in place a pattern of Tigrayan/Amhara Christian elite expansionist rule over what were classed as inferior Muslim and animist groups. As the Amhara kingdom expanded, colonized peoples were forced to Abyssinianise, a practice that has continued into contemporary times.⁶⁰ This is what Abyssinianisation meant according to Jalata:

The colonisation and destruction of various population groups in their homeland (that Habeshas later called Abyssinia) and the expropriation of their lands and other economic resources, the establishment of military colonies, the evangelisation of the remnants of the colonised population groups, and their

⁵⁶ Ben Parker, *Ethiopia, Breaking New Ground*, Oxfam Country Profile. (Oxford, UK: Oxfam, 1995).; , Andrew Simpson, *Language and National Identity in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁷ Simpson, *Language and National Identity in Africa*.

⁵⁸ Donham and James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History & Social Anthropology*, 10-11.

⁵⁹ Asafa Jalata, "The Process of State Formation in the Horn of Africa in Comparative Perspective," in *State Crises, Globalisation and National Movements in North East Africa*, ed. Asafa Jalata (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

⁶⁰ Appleyard and Orwin, "The Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia."

cultural assimilation were the continuous process of marginalisation and Abyssinisation. The Abyssinian monarchical kingdom and the Orthodox Church played leading roles in the process of colonisation, Abyssinisation/Christianisation and marginalisation or destruction of indigenous peoples.⁶¹

Separatist histories that criticise Abyssinianisation sustain ethno-nationalisms and contemporary conflicts. The suffering of Abyssinianised peoples in historical narratives strongly cements feelings of marginalisation and discontent. Histories like this continue to arouse anger within marginalised ethnicities in ways that support political unrest. Similarly, narratives that recount suffering of minority groups in Burma have played an important role in ethnic unrest there.

Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchism to Marxism

The history of the contemporary Ethiopian state conventionally starts in the mid-19th century, with the rule of Menilek II. An Amhara, Menelik II expanded the Kingdom to the modern boundaries of Ethiopia, so an examination of his rule is fundamental for understanding current political problems. Menilek II's conquests are described by Lovise Aalen: 'He defeated powerful traditional kingdoms, some of them had not been under the rule of the central highlanders before, such as the Oromo, the Wolaita, the Sidama, the Gurage and the Kafa'.⁶² Menilek's other lasting legacy was his defeat of Italian invading forces at Adwa in 1896, successfully keeping Ethiopia independent of European colonial rule and creating an African exception mythologised for 'stemming the tide of colonialism'.⁶³ Counter-narratives question Menilek's anti-colonial credentials. Jalata explains the period very differently: 'Because of their collaboration with the European imperialists, the Habesha (Ethiopian) rulers were allowed to buy firearms and participate in the scramble for Africa'.⁶⁴ In current Ethiopian politics, parties such as the All Amhara People's Organisation, which have an Ethiopianist view of history, use the defeat of the Italians at Adwa, and the fact that Ethiopia was never fully colonised, as a source of great pride. To anti-colonialists this

⁶¹ Jalata, "The Process of State Formation in the Horn of Africa in Comparative Perspective," 4.

⁶² Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000."

⁶³ Bahru Zewde cited in Parker, *Ethiopia, Breaking New Ground*, 10.

⁶⁴ Jalata, "The Process of State Formation in the Horn of Africa in Comparative Perspective," 16.

celebration glosses over the process of internal colonisation experienced by groups on the periphery, such as Ogadenis.

Menilek II was succeeded by Emperor Haile Selassie who ruled Ethiopia for much of the twentieth century, until he was overthrown in a violent revolution in 1974. Haile Selassie, a prime investment of the Ethiopianist outlook, continued the centralised, unitary rule of his predecessors and attempted to modernise the state through the construction of transportation and communication networks, bringing the periphery closer to the centre. The state identity was Amhara and Christian, so as government was systematised in more remote parts of the country, like Ogaden and the Southern region, there was pressure for minority groups to learn Amharic language, adopt Amharic names and convert to Christianity. This was particularly important for people with ambitions to work in government or business.⁶⁵ As in the histories of Menilek II's reign, Ethiopianist accounts of Haile Selassie emphasise his ability to unify and modernise Ethiopia. Histories belonging to the anti-colonialist paradigm criticise him as an imperialist despot who illegitimately occupied other nations' land.

Opposition to Haile Selassie's reign grew throughout the sixties and early seventies with increasingly vocal discontent coming from students, peasants, intellectuals and members of the ruling government, expressing a variety of ideological positions.⁶⁶ A core group of dissidents were university students in Addis Ababa, who were heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninism. While the most prominent sector of resistance was the urban-based student movement, linked to trade unions, some activists went into the hills to build a mass peasant-based organisation in Tigray. They launched an armed struggle in 1975, the 'Tigrayan uprising', which eventually spread throughout the country.⁶⁷ While some liberal discourse was espoused by members of the ruling elite who sought reform, the bulk of discontent against the royalist government was Marxist-Leninist in nature.⁶⁸ Within the student and peasant movements, class and ethnic politics were combined, creating what Gudina calls the

⁶⁵ Tronvoll, *Ethiopia, a New Start?*, 14.

⁶⁶ Zewde Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*, 2nd ed., Eastern African Studies (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 209-26.

⁶⁷ Kjetil Tronvoll, *War & the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia : Making Enemies & Allies in the Horn of Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2009), 47.

⁶⁸ Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*, 209-26.

‘national oppression perspective’: ‘The Amhara nation was identified as the oppressor, while the Oromo and Tigrayan nations and several other ethno-linguistic groups were characterized as the oppressed... formulated within the larger class struggle thesis rather than along simple ethnic lines.’⁶⁹ While containing these mass-based growing opposition movements was a challenge to the government, the real threat came from within the royalist military, from where the 1974 coup was instigated.

After Haile Selassie was deposed, Mengistu Haile-Mariam came to power at the head of a military committee, popularly known as the Derg (meaning committee in Amharic). During Mengistu’s dictatorship, the state’s adoption of Marxian rhetoric extinguished the critical power of such discourse amongst opposition groups. This gave rise to ethno-nationalist ideologies, as a tool for anti-government mobilisation. It was under the opposition to the Derg that anti-colonialist paradigm tellings of history became important, as they gave credence to separatist rebellions, most notably the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front, the Western Somalia Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Front. Gudina is critical of the way the anti-colonialist paradigm is used by the Oromo Liberation Front, hereafter referred to as the Oromo Front, arguing that Oromo have historically mixed with Amhara and Tigrayans and often married emperors. He believes Oromo independence would mean the end of Ethiopia.⁷⁰ Gudima problematises historical accounts that stress marginalisation and separation, as his view of history is one of linkages between Oromo and other groups. This can be contrasted with Hassan’s political standpoint in his study of Oromo history, one of the few academic books on the subject:

The independent existence of the Oromo was brought to an end abruptly and rudely by the creation of the modern Ethiopian empire during and after the 1880s. The conquest and annexation of their territory not only deprived the Oromo of their sovereignty but also of their history, because the creation of the empire consolidated myths and untruths long held and circulated.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Gudina, "Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History: The Need for a Consensus," 122.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 128-9.

⁷¹ Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

In contrast to Gudina's account, one could read this thinking that the Oromo had no connection with the Abyssinian heartland. The argument therefore follows that the historical wrong of Abyssinian colonialism must be righted through independence. Hassan's history is a history of separateness, showing how Oromo lived and organised their communities economically and politically as an independent entity. History serves ideological purposes in contemporary Ethiopian politics and Hassan's account is constructed to fit a particular view of nationhood. The Oromo Front today is fighting in order to assert this historical paradigm of separatism (see figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Map of Oromia



This is a map showing the territorial demands of the Oromo Liberation Front for Oromia. Note the greater size of Oromia compared with the current federal borders, including a border with Tigray and the inclusion of Dire Dawa and Harar, which are currently separate regions. Also note that Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city, is included as the capital of Oromia, referred to using the Oromo name Shaggar. Taken from the Oromo Liberation Front, 2005.

Ethnic identities are socially constructed and hence can be fluid and change over time. It is common for some activists and historians to project contemporary, primordial ethnic categories back into time, such as the tellings of Oromo history discussed above. There are, however, histories that could fit into the anti-colonialist paradigm but take a more critical, constructionist approach to ethnicity than ethno-nationalist accounts. Donham, Appleyard and Orwin, for instance, stress the fluid nature of the term 'Amhara' as an identifier, since it has been possible for people to in effect, become Amhara and benefit from it, by simply speaking the language and adopting Christianity.⁷² Lieberman has made a similar argument in relation to Burma, that in pre-colonial times, moving into the dominant ethnic group was as easy as changing clothes.⁷³ Other histories emphasise a core/periphery split, one of the most famous being *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*:

The story of the making of imperial Ethiopia, is now relatively well-told... But another story remains untold, for there were many 'others' who helped make twentieth century Ethiopia. These other Ethiopians lived their lives mostly in the periphery rather than at the political centre.⁷⁴

This view from the periphery has been criticised for portraying an 'imagined' nation, based on ethno-cultural ideological constructions.⁷⁵ However *Southern Marches* clearly de-essentialises the category 'Amhara', conceptualising it as a 'particular position at the centre of the core-periphery structure.'⁷⁶ This idea is not only a threat to Amhara nationalism, but also to other ethno-nationalisms, since ethno-nations like Oromo depend on a fixed idea of 'Amhara' in order to construct opposing identities. This gives credence to Barth's premise that ethnicities are defined and maintained by their boundaries.

⁷² Appleyard and Orwin, "The Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia.", Donham and James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History & Social Anthropology*.

⁷³ Victor B. Lieberman, "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 3 (1978): 457.

⁷⁴ Donald L. Donham and Wendy James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia : Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, African Studies Series (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University press, 1986), 3.

⁷⁵ Allesandro Triulzi, "Battling with the Past: New Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography," in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, ed. Wendy James (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 276.

⁷⁶ Donham and James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History & Social Anthropology*, 12.

Although its motivations were different to the feudal Amhara and Tigrayan elites, the Derg generated a more radical centralised state than had been possible under the imperial system. In spite of far-reaching land reform measures, which benefited many poor Ethiopians, the radical state centralism of the Derg can be seen at one level as the most extreme level of the Ethiopianist paradigm through the simultaneous appropriation and negation of anti-colonialist discourses. In seeking ‘total power’, Mengistu and his regime killed ‘thousands of Ethiopia’s best-educated and idealistic young people’; a period termed the ‘Red Terror’.⁷⁷ According to Marcus, this was done in the name of ‘dogmatic purity, the broad masses, democracy, national integrity and civilian rule’.⁷⁸ The failure of the violent Derg regime to maintain power, coupled with the destruction of feudal Amhara and Tigrayan elite, removed traditional inhibitions to decentralisation and opened the way for the development of the current federal system. There is an interesting resonance between the actions of the Derg and the departure of the British from their usual practice of seeking to exercise indirect rule when they acquired total power in Burma. There, the spectacular burning of official records in Mandalay Palace effectively voided aristocratic privileges entrenched over the preceding centuries, erasing some of the informational content feeding into the Burmanist paradigm.⁷⁹

Post-Derg Ethiopia: The rise of ethnicity

On May 21, 1991, Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe, ending the 14-year Derg regime. A large part of the country was by then controlled by armed opposition groups. The biggest was the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, hereafter referred to as the Ethiopian Front. Seen as a mask for the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (henceforth the Tigrayan Front), which set it up, it was led by Meles Zenawi, with heavy Tigrayan representation at the top. The Ethiopian Front was established in 1989 with the goal of widening armed opposition against to the Derg. Importantly it did not include the Oromo Front, who refused to join the coalition due to their view that Amhara and Tigrayans were ‘historical oppressors, collectively the enemy of the

⁷⁷ Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 196.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ U. Thant Myint, *The Making of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3-4.

people it represented'.⁸⁰ While the Tigrayan Front used Marxian discourse, a key departure from other groups in the country was the emphasis on ethnicity as the basic organising unit over that of class. In the Tigrayan Front's first manifesto issued in 1976, principles of self-determination were prominently outlined, including the right to independence for ethnic nationalities.⁸¹ This involved a transformation of popular Tigrayan ethnic identity to that of an oppressed minority, which necessitated the suppression of the historical position of the Tigrayan elite as traditionally privileged within the Abyssinian state.⁸² This new ethnic ideology proved to be an effective mobilising tool, and the Tigrayan Front could position themselves at the apex of the resistance and thus the rightful inheritor of the transition.

The official process of transition to a multination federation started with a national conference in Addis Ababa in July 1991, after negotiations with US Government representatives for an Ethiopian Front take-over of the country (bar Eritrea). In accordance with Ethiopian Front ideology, the national conference was largely organised along ethnic lines and involved the exclusion of Tigrayan Front adversaries, although the Oromo Front did actively participate. Some organisations for unrepresented groups were set up by the Ethiopian Front for the conference, which increased the party's influence.⁸³ The conference passed a National Charter, set up the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and contentiously ruled in favour of Eritrean independence. The Charter included human rights guarantees and provisions for a range of ethnic rights including the right to secession, something that worried many Ethiopians who were concerned that the 'notion of government based on ethnic lines dangerously undermined unity based on an official culture or a common identity'.⁸⁴ The Transitional Government was headed by Zenawi, with a Council of Representatives dominated by what has been characterised as Tigrayan Front/Ethiopian Front 'puppet parties'.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 230.

⁸¹ Ibid., 223.

⁸² Tronvoll, *War & the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia : Making Enemies & Allies in the Horn of Africa*, 47-9.

⁸³ Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000," 7.

⁸⁴ Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 232.

⁸⁵ Tronvoll, *Ethiopia, a New Start?*, 15-16.

Two key events during this period were the cartographic redrawing of Ethiopia in November 1991, and the beginning of the decentralisation of power through local and regional elections in 1992. The new map, designed largely by Ethiopian Front and Oromo Front representatives, involved 15 new regions, based on ethnicity, with a small territory for the capital. This symbolised a radical departure from the past when the capital was the centre of a unitary system. The elections were notable for negative reasons: bitter competition between the Oromo Front, which sought greater self-determination and secession, the All Amhara People's Organisation, which sought a greater Amhara role in the state and the centralisation of power, and the Ethiopian Front, which was fighting for an ethnic-based federal system. With widespread allegations of intimidation, the Oromo Front withdrew from the elections, left the Transitional Government and resumed armed struggle. The All Amhara People's Organisation similarly decided to boycott the poll. The Ethiopian Front won the barely contested 1995 elections with 96.6 percent of the vote.⁸⁶ While the Transitional Government put in place basic elements of multination federalism, the radical new system was cemented in 1994/5 with an election for the constitutional assembly, which was again boycotted by main opposition parties. This resulted in Ethiopian Front domination of the constitutional drafting process.

An overview of Ethiopian history is crucial in understanding the reasons for the adoption of multination federalism, and the continued instability within the state since then. These historical debates are played out in popular discourse, in political mobilisation and in armed struggle. Gudina blames nationalist and separatist histories for the continuing conflict and instability in Ethiopia: 'As a result of contradictory interpretations of Ethiopian history by competing ethnic elites, however, the perennial Ethiopian quest for peace, democracy and development remains as elusive as ever'.⁸⁷ In order for there to be peace in Ethiopia, and likewise in Burma, there needs to be broad agreement around the meaning of national identity, and whether or not the state is a legitimate identity.

⁸⁶ Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000," 7.

⁸⁷ Gudina, "Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History: The Need for a Consensus," 119.

Chapter Five

Multination Federalism in Ethiopia:

‘We the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’⁸⁸

The Ethiopian Constitution was designed with ethnicity as a basic organising unit of the state, as can be seen by the first line of the preamble: ‘We the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia’. The preamble is used to take note of the problem of history, through the aim of ‘rectifying historically unjust relationships’.⁸⁹ Arguably the most controversial aspect of the constitution is the ‘rights of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ under Article 39, which starts with a guarantee that ‘every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession’.⁹⁰ The stipulated process for secession involves a two-thirds majority vote in the legislative body representing the territory seeking secession, followed by a federal referendum. As well as the right to secession, there is a clause providing the right to ‘self-government’ and the right of ethnic groups to establish their own states. The meaning of ‘Nation, Nationality and People’ in the constitution is primordial and territorial, as seen by the definition under Article 39, which specifies the need for a ‘common psychological make-up...[and that the people] inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory’. The rights to self-determination fall within the longest part of the constitution, which is devoted to human rights and includes new generation rights related to development and environment.

The constitution established a bicameral legislature – a House of Peoples Representatives (Lower House) and a House of Federation (Upper House). Unusually, while the Lower House is meant to be elected by the people of Ethiopia ‘as a whole’, special provisions are made for ethnic minority representation, including a quota of seats, similar to the reserved seats for Maori candidates in the New Zealand legislature.

⁸⁸ Ethiopian Parliament, "The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia," (Addis Ababa 1994).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

How these ‘minorities’ will be selected is not specified. In contrast, the Upper House is wholly ethnic-based, set up so that ‘each Nation, Nationality and People shall be represented...by at least one member’.⁹¹ Rather than being designed as a check and balance, the House of Federation’s main role is to rule on issues related to ethnicity, and to act as a sort of constitutional court. The constitution also enshrined the devolution of powers from the centre to ethnic regions under Article 52: ‘all powers not given expressly to the Federal Government alone, or concurrently to the Federal Government and the States are reserved to the States’.⁹² As stated earlier, the constitution came into force after the 1995 elections, which returned the Ethiopian Front to power by a landslide. Key opposition groups boycotted the elections, amidst allegations of Ethiopian Front-supported intimidation and a serious lack of media access.⁹³ The country became the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (see figure 5.1).

Multination federalism in Ethiopia: Some pitfalls

While Ethiopia has not so far fragmented in response to the right to secession clause, as some critics predicted it would, the new system has not brought about peace. The divergence between constitutional principles and political reality has been noted by academics and opposition figures alike.⁹⁴ Three common questions get asked when trying to explain this discrepancy: What are the ‘real’ intentions of the Ethiopian Front? Are they sincere in their aims for decentralisation and democratisation? Is

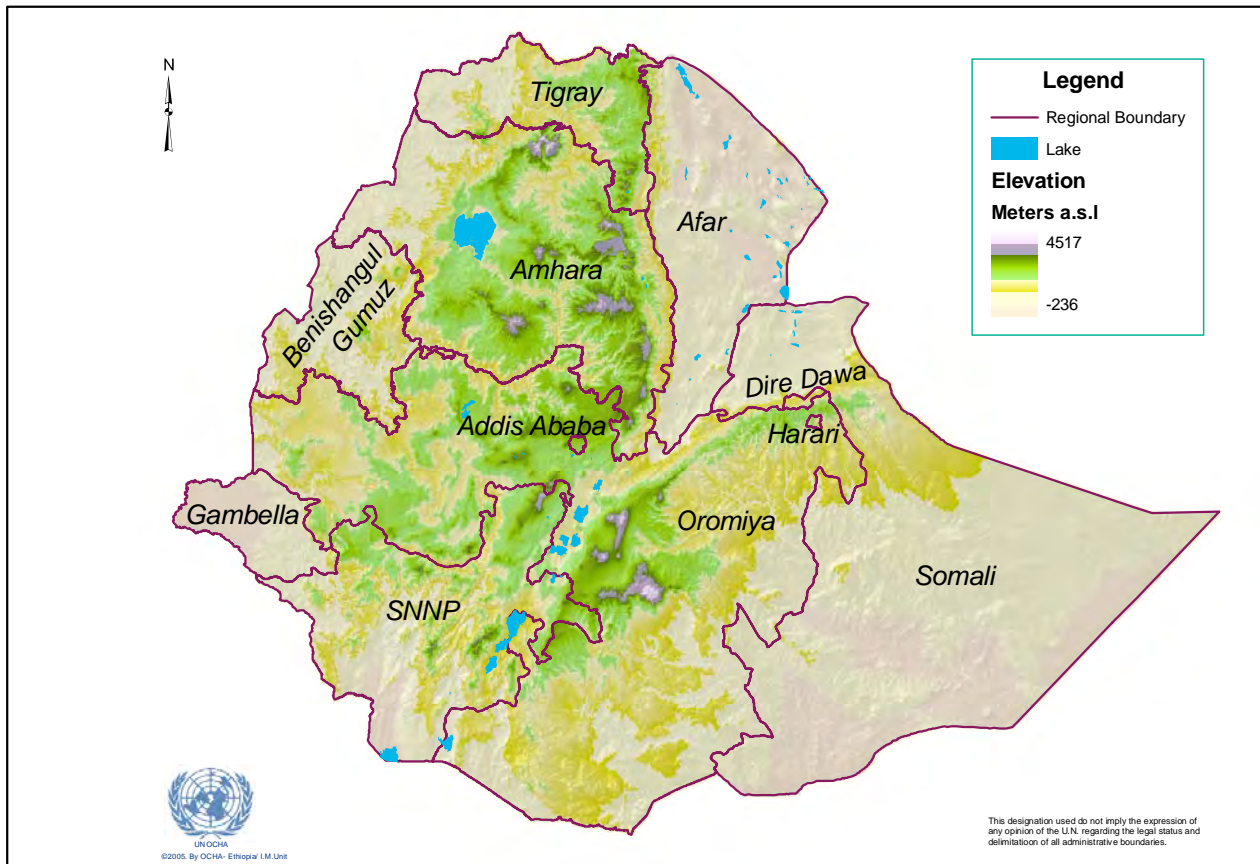
⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Eva Poluha, "Beyond the Silence of Women in Ethiopian Politics," in *Multi-Party Elections in Africa*, ed. Michael Cowen and Liisa Laakso (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 64-5.

⁹⁴ Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000.", Minasse Haile, "The New Ethiopian Constitution: Its Impact Upon Unity, Human Rights and Development," *Suffolk Transnational Law Review* 20, no. 1 (1997), Tronvoll, *Ethiopia, a New Start?*, Assefa Fisheha, "Theory Versus Practice in the Implementation of Ethiopia's Ethnic Federalism " in *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*.

Figure 5.1: Ethiopian federal regions



This map shows the current borders of the federal regions. Note that the western Somali region, also known as Ogaden, is part of Ethiopia, although it has been claimed by neighbouring Somalia on the grounds of shared ethnicity. Taken from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, no date.

multination federalism simply a form of divide and rule, allowing the Tigrayan Front to remain on top?⁹⁵ The human rights record of the Ethiopian Front government is one obvious mark that leads to a questioning of government sincerity and commitment to the constitution. Despite comprehensive human rights clauses, long lists of abuses are regularly noted in the country, including the imprisonment of opposition politicians and activists, abuses against civilians in conflict areas, harassment of journalists and torture.⁹⁶ This allows critics to interpret multination federalism and human rights law as ideological discourses disguising continued authoritarian rule, either to maintain the

⁹⁵ Merera Gudina in Tronvoll, *Ethiopia, a New Start?*, 20.

⁹⁶ Amnesty International, "Ethiopia," Amnesty International, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/ethiopia/report-2009>.

colonial system⁹⁷ or to destroy national unity⁹⁸ depending on the historical paradigm being deployed. Thus while multination federalism has brought about changes at all levels of Ethiopian society, the strong ideological biases of most contemporary studies means there is no consensus about their overall impact for good or bad. Donham sees the state as an extensive patronage network, emanating from the centre down, hidden behind an ideology of human rights:

In converging with international expectations and rhetorics of democracy... [the Ethiopian Government] has come to mirror global discourses on rights, reparative group rights in particular. What this mirroring has allowed, in many cases, is a co-optation of local (male) elites. In this new context, political leaders – even at the village level – have become increasingly conscious of acting upon a stage in a kind of theatre of ‘ethnicity’.⁹⁹

According to critics like Donham, the continuing trend is for people and parties loyal to the Tigrayan Front elite to benefit and gain power at local, regional and national levels. However those that criticise the Ethiopian Front government can expect to lose their privileges quickly. Thus the Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Coalition was expelled from the Transitional Government in 1993 after signing a protest statement against the Ethiopian Front’s manipulation of smaller political parties.¹⁰⁰

The connections between ethnic identity, power and territory have altered the dynamics of ethnicity in the country in problematical ways. The new link between ethnicity and power necessitates making choices about ethnic group affiliation based on instrumental calculations. An example of this is in the electoral system. Ethnically based political parties, which have mushroomed since the fall of the Derg, have marginalized pan-ethnic parties oriented to dealing with national level issues, particularly where these relate to equitable resource allocation and the like.¹⁰¹ For Vaughan, who has done extensive fieldwork in the Southern Region, ethnicity has

⁹⁷ Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia : State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992*.

⁹⁸ Haile, "The New Ethiopian Constitution: Its Impact Upon Unity, Human Rights and Development."

⁹⁹ Donald L. Donham, "The Promise of 1991: Re-Shaping the Future and the Past," in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, ed. Wendy James, et al. (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 154.

¹⁰⁰ Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000," 8.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

become a defining criteria for access to resources and as such, increasing numbers of ethnic sub-state units are created in order to gain local economic privileges:

Multination federalism in Ethiopia has 'ethnified' Ethiopian politics in the banal sense that, amongst those who are aware of its provisions, federalism has made the ethnic group ('nation, nationality or people') a salient category...for the mediation of access to state resources and decision-making.¹⁰²

This connection between power, territory and ethnicity is also seen in the difficult place citizens without ethnic affiliation occupy in the new system. An example is in the status of the regions Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, both of which are multi-ethnic territories without a dominant ethnic identity. Consequently, they are denied representation in the Upper House. Trying to fit ethnic groups into territorial boundaries in a multi-ethnic state is thus a highly problematic process. Furthermore, in a large city like Addis Ababa, ethnic affiliations also tend to be weak. This can be explained largely because modernised populations are less inclined to define themselves in traditional ethnic identity terms, because many people belong to more than one ethnic group as a result of cross ethnic marriage and because social linkages are functional rather than traditional. The development of ethno-nationalist identities reverses this trend and traps the state and the increasingly disparate societies that make it up into historically based discourses that are usually reactionary and culturally exclusive.

As power has been decentralised, so too have conflicts. Instances of violent conflict were measured in a study by Abbink:

The majority of conflicts now dubbed 'ethnic' in Ethiopia are about boundaries between territorialised ethnic groups. Fights about identity are being waged in order to establish the borders of districts and zones, and the 'identity' professed by local people is the deciding element.¹⁰³

It therefore appears that, even if it has not yet resulted in wholesale fragmentation, multination federalism in Ethiopia has led to the creation/recreation of ethnic conflicts and the ethnicisation of conflicts. It has also led to the marginalisation of some

¹⁰² Sarah Vaughan, "Responses to Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia's Southern Region," in *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 202.

¹⁰³ Abbink, "Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia: Some Problems and Prospects of Ethno-Regional Federalism," 10.

multiethnic areas, as well as the alienation of citizens who do not possess or do not desire ethnic identities.

Ethnicity and economics

In Ethiopia, numerous conflicts around issues of land, water, jobs, representation and a host of other matters are now seen through a lens of ethnicity. Thus ethnic and historical grievances are played out over misdistribution of resources and exacerbated by export-led growth. Ethiopia has very limited natural resources, although there are some reserves of gold, copper and natural gas. Agriculture is the most important part of the economy, employing 80% of the workforce and accounting for half of the Gross Domestic Product.¹⁰⁴ The nation's best agricultural land is located in Oromia, the largest federal region. According to the Ethiopian constitution, the government owns all rural land and leases it out to farmers and business, a continuation of the land reform policy implemented under the Derg. This is a key cause of local conflict as both federal and regional governments can confiscate and redistribute land.¹⁰⁵ Ethiopia's Gross National Income per capita was a meagre US\$220 in 2007, well below the US\$952 average for sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁰⁶ Social indicators show the endemic poverty in the country. In the Human Development Index (the United Nations' measure of overall wellbeing as defined by purchasing power parity, life expectancy and key educational data) Ethiopia is ranked close to the bottom, at 169 out of a total of 177 countries. Ethiopia rates even worse in the United Nation's Human Poverty Index, being ranked 105 out of a total of 108 developing countries.¹⁰⁷ Agricultural exports are a major part of the Ethiopian economy, with coffee beans being the most important product.

The Ethiopian government's focus on export-oriented economic growth has deepened endemic problems like the erosion of food sovereignty, environmental

¹⁰⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Ethiopia."

¹⁰⁵ Abbink, "Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia: Some Problems and Prospects of Ethno-Regional Federalism," 8.

¹⁰⁶ World Bank Group, "Ethiopia at a Glance,"
http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/eth_aag.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ UNDP, "2007/2008: Human Development Report Ethiopia," United Nations Development Program,
http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_ETH.html.

degradation from cash cropping and poverty from the inherent instability of commodity prices in the global capitalist economy. African studies scholar Mengisteab has identified the 'excessive extroversion [export-led growth] of African economies' as one of the core reasons why ethnic conflict has continued, despite the federal system.¹⁰⁸ Being landlocked has added to the country's economic disadvantages through making it reliant on Eritrean and Djiboutian ports. Access to the former was lost due to political tension between the two countries, costing Ethiopia an estimated one percent of its Gross Domestic Product due to additional transportation costs and tariffs, adding to the astronomical costs of its conflict with Eritrea.¹⁰⁹ This is an ongoing cause of grievance amongst exponents of the Ethiopianist paradigm, who were against the voluntary secession of Eritrea.

Resource scarcity contributes to systemic conflict throughout the Horn of Africa and to a lesser extent Burma. Mengisteab notes that centralised control of revenue-generation gives the federal government a strong role in financial redistribution, thus increasing control over the regions.¹¹⁰ Similarly, a study by Keller and Smith cited a lack of 'financial capabilities' as a key reason for continued conflict and the gap between the idea and reality of multination federalism.¹¹¹ Corruption must also be taken into account. Economic benefits for Tigrayan Front/Ethiopian Front leaders, as a result of the new system, has been well documented, including what Marcus has characterised as an 'oligarchy carefully chosen for its political reliability...whose cooperation is necessary for the success of any foreign investment'.¹¹² Economic scarcity, centralised control and corruption are therefore important explanatory factors in continuing conflict in the country and the dissatisfaction with multination federalism. Poverty and maldistribution of scarce

¹⁰⁸ K Mengisteab, "Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism: 10 Years After," *African Issues* (2001): 20.

¹⁰⁹ Alemayehu Geda and Befekadu Degefe, "Conflict, Post-Conflict and Economic Performance in Ethiopia," in *Post-Conflict Economies in Africa*, ed. Augustin Kwasi Fosu and Paul Collier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2005), 136.

¹¹⁰ Mengisteab, "Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism: 10 Years After," 23.

¹¹¹ Edmond J. Keller and Lahra Smith, "Obstacles to Implementing Territorial Decentralization: The First Decade of Ethiopian Federalism " in *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, ed. Philip G. Roeder and Donald S. Rothchild (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 291.

¹¹² Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 237.

resources, exacerbated by global capitalist exploitation, prove a receptive environment for ethnic and territorial tensions, and thus, in turn, feed into economic inefficiency, environmental degradation, and social unrest.

Chapter Six

Contemporary Burma:

‘Genuine’ Federalism and the Shadow of Panglong

It is difficult to write about post-independence Burma without resorting to melodrama, given the classically despotic nature of the dictatorships that have ruled that country for most of the last sixty years, and the well-documented human rights abuses that have been committed by the military.¹¹³ Burma was granted independence in 1948 by the British, with a new constitution and ‘quasi [ethnic]-federal structure’, but it was a unitary system in practice. The lack of meaningful devolution of powers led to immediate accusations of discrimination against ethnic minority territories and the perceived dilution of ethnic rights in the union system.¹¹⁴

The failed quasi-federal system was based on meetings between Burmese nationalist and minority ethno-nationalist leaders at the town of Panglong in the period leading up to independence. Aung San, the independence leader, succeeded in facilitating agreement for ethnic minority areas to come together under a union for the purpose of gaining independence, something alluded to in the shadow federal constitutional preamble above. Today the Panglong Agreement has mythic status amongst ethnic minority leaders and what is referred to as the ‘spirit of Panglong,’ defined as ‘a voluntary union of equal partners,’ is articulated in support of ‘genuine’ federalism.¹¹⁵ It is also celebrated in the tragicomic displays of ‘ethnic unity’ staged annually by the military regime on Union Day. The many inadequacies of the Panglong Agreement were compounded by the absence of Mon, Karen and Karenni representatives, for whom contingent agreements had to be made. In one assessment,

¹¹³ In cinema studies the term melodrama refers to a narrative structure based on hero-victim-villain polarities. For examples of the application of melodrama as a tool for discourse analysis in political studies, see M Blain, "Power, War, and Melodrama in the Discourses of Political Movements," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 6 (1994), MD Hagan, "Human Rights Melodrama: A Literary Analysis of Reports of Police Violence against Hungarian Roms," *Journal of Human Rights* 5, no. 4 (2006).

¹¹⁴ Smith, "Ethnicity and Federal Prospect in Myanmar ", 189.

¹¹⁵ Chao-Tzang Yawngghwe and Lian H. Sakhong, *The New Panglong Initiative: Rebuilding the Union of Burma* (Chiang Mai: UNLD Press, 2004), 16.

this resulted in 'a Constitution as lopsided and riddled with inconsistencies as any treaty drawn up in the era of British rule. In short, it was a recipe for disaster'.¹¹⁶ Aung San, who had barely managed to hold the agreements together, was assassinated months before independence, along with six other leading politicians.

Burma's first constitution: Aung San's legacy

Given the absence of agreement on the form and boundaries constituent parts of the Union would take, the post-independence constitution appears more like a transitional document than the solid foundation needed for a fledgling state. Semi-autonomous units were only specified for Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karen and Karenni groups, a fraction of those seeking autonomy. The constitution specified the setting up of State Councils for Chin, Kachin, Shan and Karenni areas to advise the Union Government and parliament.¹¹⁷ The members of the Council were to be made up of representatives of those ethnic groups who have seats in the Upper House. However, for Shan and Karenni States, which have local monarchical structures, the Constitution specified that members of the Upper House be nominated by indigenous princes, rather than by popular vote. From amongst unelected representatives, one is chosen by the Prime Minister to be the minister of their state, with executive authority to rule over unspecified affairs in their territory. The process of election for state representation serves as a striking example of how ethnonationalist demands can be inherently conservative, and accommodating such demands were in this case detrimental to individual rights. While State powers remained undelineated, article 91 stated that the Union Parliament has the power to grant administrative, cultural and economic power to regions, an example of the impatience of nationalist leaders who wanted to gain independence before reaching an agreement on state structure and the division of powers. In the end, these limited autonomy measures did little to appease claims for self-determination, since division of powers and the overall state structure was purposely vague, and there was little protecting regions from centralised control.

Out of ethnic minority arrangements made in the 1947 Constitution, those relating to Karen people were the most problematic. Specifications for Karen

¹¹⁶ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 79.

¹¹⁷ Constituent Assembly of Burma, "The Constitution of the Union of Burma," (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationary, 1948).

autonomy were left to a 'Special Commission' appointed by the President. While the Commission was to be tasked with delineating Karen boundaries and ruling on final status within the Union, the Karen Council was given significantly more power than the Councils representing other ethnic groups, as it was to be a 'special region' rather than a state. According to Article 181, the Karen State Council was granted power over 'the general administration of the Kaw-thu-lay [Karen] Special Region...[and] all matters relating to schools and cultural institutions for Karens.' However according to article 180, if the Special Commission finds the majority of Karen want to form a state, then special rights specified would be lost and Karen State would become equal with Shan State, which is what in fact eventuated.¹¹⁸

In addition to clauses specific to minority ethnic groups, the Constitution also controversially included a right of secession clause.¹¹⁹ This was instrumental in gaining agreement from minority leaders to enter into the Union. However according to article 202, no state can secede from the Union within the first ten years, which was, perhaps not coincidentally, when power was handed over to a military caretaker government. Other general rights clauses were also included, such as racial equality (article 13), religious rights (article 20) and the provision of ethno-linguistic cultural and educational rights (article 22). However without viable state structures to ensure these rights were adhered to, they meant little.

Burma got independence to Aung San's schedule but almost simultaneously descended into civil war, with the Karen National Union being the first to take up arms, followed by Arakan, Kachin, Shan and a plethora of ethnic groups as well as Communists and other political renegades. Burma's parliamentary-based institutions could not come up with a political or military solution to the disparate conflicts and after a decade of defeat and frustration the civilian Prime Minister, U Nu, handed over power to a military caretaker government led by General Ne Win. In 1962, Ne Win and the military consolidated their hold on power by abandoning any pretence of a constitution in favour of a martial law regime. They justified this action as necessary in order to prevent the country from fragmenting. The military has stayed in power ever since, casting itself as the protector of the nation.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

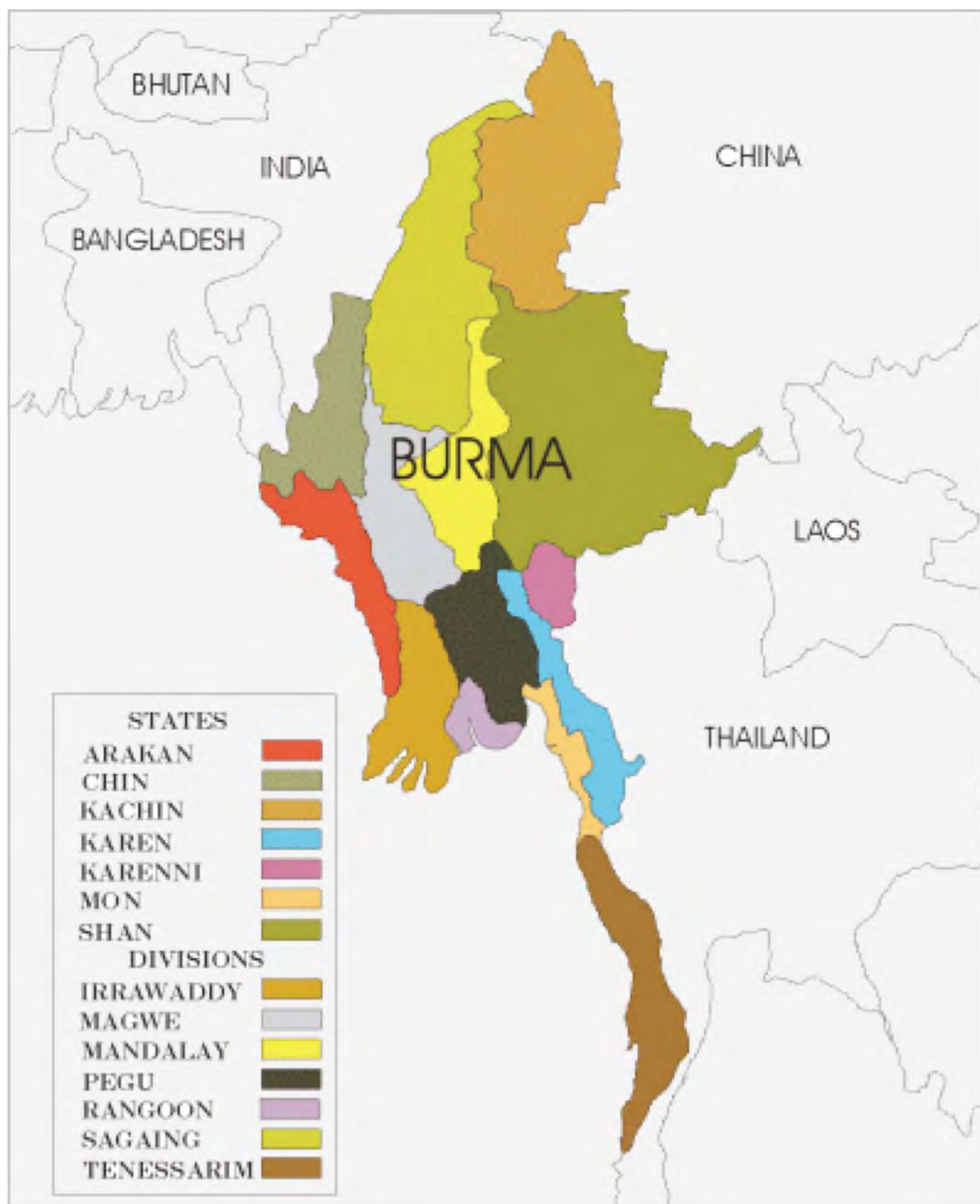
Burma's second constitution: Burmese Way to Socialism

In 1974, after twelve years of martial law, a new constitution was promulgated declaring Burma a one-party socialist state. Arguably the most significant legacy of that constitution was the delineation of Burma into 7 ethnic minority states and 7 ethnically mixed or Burman dominated divisions, the map that stands today¹²⁰ (see figure 6.1). However unitary rule was solidified under a totalitarian, centralised state structure. Ethnic minorities were only given limited and largely symbolic rights. The constitution enshrined a Burmanist view of history, demonstrated in the first line of the Preamble: 'We, the people residing in the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma have throughout history lived in harmony and unity sharing joys and sorrows.' Article 2 professed Burma to be a multi-ethnic state, while article 8 forbade exploitation 'of one race by another.' Freedom of religion, language use and culture were granted in article 21. However, a clause was added, stating these rights were acceptable 'provided that the enjoyment of any such freedom does not offend the laws or the public interest.' The limitations on individual and collective rights were further restricted in Chapter XI, with a prohibition on 'acts which undermine the unity and solidarity of the national races' (article 153) and the possibility that 'laws may be enacted imposing necessary restriction on the right and freedoms of citizens to prevent infringements of the sovereignty and security of the state' (article 167).¹²¹ This fundamentally undemocratic constitution has been the key text structuring and maintaining military rule in Burma. This notorious document completed centralised rule over ethnic minority areas and continues to fuel violent ethno-nationalism and war.

¹²⁰ Burma Socialist Program Party, "The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma," ed. Printing and Publishing Corporation (Rangoon 1974).

¹²¹ Ibid.

Figure 6.1: Map of Burmese States and Divisions



This map shows Burma's seven states and divisions, using the pre-1989 spelling system. Taken from Kaladan News Group, 2008.

Movement and repression: 1988 and the aftermath

In 1988, after 26 years of military rule and severe economic mismanagement, a mass, student-led uprising erupted throughout urban areas of the country. Ne Win, who had held power for 26 years, stepped down. However, after a power vacuum lasting more than one month, the military violently reasserted control, killing an estimated 3000 protestors.¹²² The new regime called itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council, which later changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council, henceforth called the Council. The Council's avowed aim was to bring stability back to the country although some areas remained under the control of ethnic insurgent groups. The government claimed it would hand over power after elections in 1990, although ominously the crackdown from the uprising continued, with arrests and torture remaining widespread.

The uprising revived dormant nationalist and democratic movements in central Burma, and led to a plethora of new groups aspiring to a role in national politics. As the crackdown continued, urban activists were now faced with a choice: going underground and continuing their work inside Burma; going to the hills in the periphery to work with ethnic insurgent groups in armed struggle; or going into exile to continue political activism. Those who went to border areas formed alliances with ethnic insurgent groups, many of whom had been isolated from urban politics for decades and were thus initially suspicious of the influx of young Burman and ethnically-mixed people into their 'liberated areas'.

The political dynamics were markedly different from those in urban Burma, due to the dominant position ethno-nationalist groups held in the border areas. Ethno-nationalist leaders and democracy activists thus had to learn to accommodate each other, which altered the political discourses of the two groups. The cautious acceptance of these political refugees by a majority (though not by any means all) ethno-nationalist leaders indicated that a future basis for ethnic conciliation still existed in Burma. Nonetheless this newfound cooperation remained shaky, with the new arrivals constrained by the necessity of maintaining an alliance with ethno-nationalist

¹²² Philippa Fogarty, "Was Burma's 1988 Uprising Worth It?," BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7543347.stm>.

groups due to the weakness of their own position and because of the never-ending quest for 'unity'. This dependence also explains the lack of criticisms of the ethno-nationalist constitutional proposals from statist opposition activists.¹²³

Inside the country, the Military Council went ahead with the planned election. The National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide 82% of the seats. The military had not expected such an embarrassing result for their candidates. In a panic they declared that instead of relinquishing power, they would continue to rule while a new constitution would be drawn up by those elected representatives who were acceptable to the military, supplemented by a miscellany of handpicked delegates. The military complemented these measures by suppressing the victorious National League for Democracy Party and arresting Aung San Suu Kyi, leaving it without any legitimacy and alienated from almost all sectors of Burmese society. This total loss of legitimacy by the ruling power effectively discounts it as an agency of political change and, ironically, has cleared the way for a more comprehensive reformulation of the country's political institutions than would otherwise have been possible.

The National Convention, which began in 1992, has been rejected by the National League for Democracy who walked out of the process after it became evident that their only purpose was to legitimate a military imposed solution. Ethnic insurgent leaders and Burmese democracy activists outside the National League for Democracy have also rejected the process. The only ethnic minority representatives included in the drafting were those who signed ceasefires with the military government. Even their slight influence was greatly diluted by the military appointees who dominated the process. Alan Smith gives a scathing analysis of the resulting 'roadmap':

The military-managed regime transformation must be seen for what it is, a process through which a military, long and much experienced in holding state power, either directly or indirectly, is seeking to entrench elements of a political system that serve its interests and perpetuate its values but within a framework other than the present total control, with which it is apparently 'uncomfortable'.¹²⁴

¹²³ Personal conversations between the author and activists involved constitution drafting, Chiang Mai, Thailand, November 2008 to January 2009.

¹²⁴ Smith, "Ethnicity and Federal Prospect in Myanmar ", 188-9.

In 2007, the National Convention completed the drafting process and the new constitution of the Union of Myanmar was passed in a managed referendum, which was widely perceived as illegitimate.¹²⁵ The new constitution, while maintaining a semi-federal structure for the country, makes no mention of federalism and is unitary in practice. The conclusion of this unusually long process will come in 2010, with an election for the new *pyitaungsu hluttaw* (Union Assembly) and local legislatures. It will be the first election held in the country for 19 years. However there is little optimism within academic and activist circles that the election will result in significant changes, since the National League for Democracy is banned from running, Aung San Suu Kyi remains in house arrest and, at the time of writing, there are over 2000 political prisoners in detention.¹²⁶ In the absence of a tri-partite dialogue between ethnic opposition leaders, the National League for Democracy and military authorities, opposition groups have developed their own constitutional federal solutions from the relative safety of the Thai Burma borderlands.

Constitutional politics in-exile

The Thai-Burma borderlands has been the site of a number of constitutional-drafting exercises since the 1988 uprising. The first of these began in 1990 by the Democratic Alliance of Burma, an umbrella of ethnic insurgent and post-1988 democracy groups. Democratic Alliance leaders saw the importance of producing a document to parallel what was about to take place inside Burma, so they set about on an early federal draft.¹²⁷ In 1992, some ethnic minority and democracy activists held a crucial meeting in Manerplaw, the unofficial 'capital' of the opposition movement in a liberated part of Karen State. There, plans were made to form a united organisation, which was named the National Council of the Union of Burma. At that meeting, representatives drafted the Manerplaw Agreement, a key multinational federalist

¹²⁵ Altsean Burma, "2010 Elections: A Recipe for Continued Disaster," (Bangkok: Altsean Burma, 2009), Human Rights Watch, "Vote to Nowhere: The May 2008 Constitutional Referendum in Burma," (Washington D.C.: Human Rights Watch, 2008).

¹²⁶ Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), "Summary of Current Situation," <http://aappb.org>, ———, "Planned 2010 Elections Not Credible If Opposition Remains in Prison," (Washington D.C.: Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), 2009).

¹²⁷ National Council of the Union of Burma, *Commentary on the Future Constitution of the Federal Union of Burma* (no place 1998).

document, proclaiming that ‘only when a true federal structure is established based on the desires and aspirations of all the indigenous nationalities will Burma stand united and stable.’¹²⁸ The National Council continued the constitutional process that the Democratic Alliance started, however the drafting stalled as a result of a lack of ethnic minority representation. Ethno-nationalist forces, seeking to consolidate future power within minority states instead proceeded to draft state level constitutions before agreeing to a federal document.¹²⁹

In 2004, a committee was set up by representatives of ethnic and democracy groups in-exile to draw up principles for a future federal union and constitution, largely superseding the National Council document a decade earlier. They came up with principles based on the ‘unbiased historical facts, objective truth and principles’ of the Panglong meetings that established the Union of Burma in 1947. The principles agreed to included an elaboration on multinational federalism, self-determination, minority rights, multi-party democracy and secularism, which were essentially a repetition of key points in the Manerplaw Agreement.¹³⁰ Federalist principles were again stated in another meeting of ethnic minority representatives in 2005, which came up with the following conclusion:

The political crisis in Burma is not ideological confrontation between a democracy and totalitarianism, but a constitutional problem rooted in the question of self-determination for non-Burman nationalities who joined the Union of Burma as equal partner in 1947 at Panglong Conference and therefore, the best way of solving the political crisis in Burma is to establish a genuine Federal Union (sic).¹³¹

A Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee (referred to after as the Drafting Committee) was formed to draft a constitution for a ‘genuine’ federal union, working closely with the already existing state constitution committees. The Drafting Committee Constitution is currently in its second draft, which has largely superseded

¹²⁸ Sein Win et al., "The Manerplaw Agreement ", ed. National League for Democracy-Liberated Area National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, Democratic Alliance of Burma, National Democratic Front (Burma1992).

¹²⁹ Telephone conversation with anonymous informant from the Karen National Union, October 10, 2009.

¹³⁰ Ethnic Nationalities Council, "Federal Constitution Drafting Process," Ethnic Nationalities Council, <http://encburma.org/fcdcc.htm>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

but heavily borrowed from the National Council document of a decade earlier. The opposition federal and state constitutions are important as symbolic documents which articulate a specific vision of how the Burmese state should be structured, the form of federalism demanded and the underlying principles. It is pertinent to compare this with the constitution produced by the military government's National Convention.

Burma's third constitution: Entrenchment of military rule?

The Constitution of the Union of Myanmar is a complex document, consisting of 457 sections over 194 pages. The first section of the constitution covers 'Basic Principles', which are a continuation of the military's fear, since independence, of ethnic fragmentation, secession and state collapse. The first of these are termed 'consistent objectives':

- (a) non-disintegration of the Union;
- (b) non-disintegration of National solidarity;
- (c) perpetuation of sovereignty;¹³²

While Burma is defined in the constitution as a location 'where multi-National races reside', it is clear from these objectives that ethnic autonomy and multiculturalism are processes that the military will tightly control. Thus, in contrast to the 1947 constitution and the current Ethiopian constitution, the tenth basic principle listed is that 'no part of the territory...shall ever secede from the Union'.¹³³

The system that the new constitution establishes continues many precedents set by the 1947 and 1974 constitutions. The shape of Burma will remain the same, with seven states and seven divisions, although there will be six semi-autonomous sub-state areas for ethnic minority groups including Wa, Kokang and Naga. This recognises those current autonomy arrangements that came out of the successful ceasefire settlements with armed insurgent groups while making no concessions to the ethnic conflicts involving groups that have not surrendered.¹³⁴ It sets up a presidential system,

¹³² Ministry of Information, *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ For critical discussions of the ceasefire processes, see Oo Zaw and Min Win, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, Policy Studies, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), Martin Smith, *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*, Policy Studies, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007).

rather like that of Indonesia under Suharto, where a key number of representatives are directly appointed by the military (25 percent for Burma, around 20 percent in Indonesia). The legislature is bicameral, and for the first time there will also be legislatures for each state and division, although the constitution of course limits their powers. The power of the resulting parliament is weak because the military is not under civilian rule. Instead, there is a powerful National Security Council that appoints the commander-in-chief. A majority six of the eleven members on the council are directly appointed by the military, ensuring the perpetuation of military control of military affairs, and largely, in effect, civil government.¹³⁵

As in the Ethiopian Constitution, there is an extensive section expediently covering unthreatening human rights at a very detailed level. These include provisions dealing with rights for expectant mothers, protection against trafficking, rights to conduct scientific research, and so on. The section also includes a number of rights for ethnic nationalities, as in clause 348, which outlaws discrimination based on race, culture and religion; and clauses 354 and 365, which outline rights to maintain and develop different linguistic, literary and cultural traditions. However, unlike the Ethiopian constitution, which reproduces rights discourse from international standards, the Burmese constitution has been drafted in isolation and contains many glaring inconsistencies with global norms. These inconsistencies are generated by ‘get out free’ clauses that give the military immunity from possible future charges for war crimes (clause 382), and warn that minority rights are only granted when they are not ‘detrimental to national solidarity’ (clause 365). The citizenry have a duty to ‘uphold non-disintegration of the Union...[and] national solidarity’, which further highlights the regime’s paranoia about national fragmentation, and the underlying ideology of the need for the military to maintain unity, which has marked its institutional and historical self-justifications since independence.

The Burmese constitution is grossly insufficient when judged by global democratic and human rights standards. However international standards are hardly the right measure to judge the constitution by. First and foremost, it has been designed as a process to entrench military rule and protect elite privilege, while providing the

¹³⁵ International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: Towards the Elections* (Brussels International Crisis Group, 2009).

appearance of civilian rule. Unlike Ethiopia, it has not been drafted with the aim of creating a new system, but rather as a de facto continuation of an old one, with the military at the centre. While much of the ethnic and democratic opposition is calling for a boycott of the upcoming election, due to the illegitimacy of the process, the International Crisis Group provides a more qualified evaluation. In a recent report, they argued that it should be seen in the context of a gradual transition from total military dominance of the political process. In this light, a 25 percent allocation of seats for military personnel in parliament is an improvement on the present situation. The report also argues that the constitution lacks rigidity, thereby allowing space for transition if conditions are right.¹³⁶ While it is unlikely that the new constitution and the 2010 elections will have a short term impact on ethnic insurgency, greater provision for religious, linguistic and cultural rights could be positive for indigenous civil society that operates under military rule.¹³⁷ However the constitution is still predicated on Burma being a unitary state, with only limited autonomy measures for minority ethnic groups, far from the model of decentralisation and self-determination outlined in the opposition shadow constitutions. It clearly shares little with the 'spirit' of Panglong: 'a voluntary union of equal partners.'¹³⁸

A federal constitution in exile

In contrast, the Drafting Committee constitution can be viewed as a detailed articulation of what a future Burma should look like and the arrangements considered necessary to end the protracted ethnic conflict, from the point-of-view of the non-state actors involved. Representatives of key ethnic insurgent groups led the drafting process, in alliance with democratic opposition groups in exile. The second draft will be discussed here, as it was the most up-to-date at the time of writing.

The constitution establishes a Westminster-type system, with a bicameral legislature, comprising of a Chamber of People's Representatives (representative of

¹³⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁷ For discussions around issues related to civil society inside Burma, see Jasmin Lorch, "Civil Society under Authoritarian Rule: The Case of Myanmar," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 25, no. 2 (2006), International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: The Role of Civil Society," (Bangkok: International Crisis Group, 2001).

¹³⁸ Yawngghwe and Sakhong, *The New Panglong Initiative: Rebuilding the Union of Burma*, 16.

population) and a Chamber of Nationalities (representative of states). At the apex of the system is a president, whose duties are largely ceremonial, except for the fact that they include being Commander in Chief of the military, with the subsequent power to declare a state of emergency. The president is elected by the lower house from candidates nominated by state legislatures, with a clause that the position has to rotate amongst states and therefore ethnicities. A simple majority in the Chamber of Nationalities has to approve all bills passed in the lower house, giving the upper house a more central role in the political process compared with Ethiopia. The constitution outlines the form of the Union, including the establishment of a secular state, where each constituent unit has 'full rights of self-determination' and 'equal political powers'.¹³⁹ The document goes on to ensure rights to self-determination and equality of states through a broad range of measures.

One controversial aspect is the re-mapping of Burma into at least ten states (abolishing the seven divisions), with one state being allocated for Burmans. Irrawaddy and Tenasserim, which are currently divisions, are renamed 'Nationalities States' in order to account for the absence of a dominant ethnic group in those areas.¹⁴⁰ The majority Burmans would therefore be represented in the House of Nationalities by a single ethnic state, on equal footing with other ethnic states. Like the Ethiopian Constitution, ethnic minority groups have the right to form a new state, and a process to do so is outlined, involving a referendum and approval by the local and federal legislatures. Sub-state minority groups also have a right to demand autonomous regions and groups can claim native title over an area of land. As in the Ethiopian Constitution, the Drafting Committee document has an extensive Bill of Rights, attuned to international legal norms, including important linguistic and cultural rights. The document also outlines exclusive powers of the federal legislatures; concurrent powers and, like the Ethiopian Constitution, gives all non-specified powers to states. Amongst the concurrent powers in the Drafting Committee Constitution is the 'exploitation, production and sale of aboveground and underground natural resources within the territory of the Member State'.¹⁴¹ This constitution therefore calls for a

¹³⁹ Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee, *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of the Union of Burma (Second Draft)*, 85.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

radically different polity to what has been thus far practiced in Burma. It calls for a system of multinational federalism, based on territorial ethnic autonomy, which is closer to the Ethiopian Constitution than any constitution in Asia.

State constitutions in-exile

As the absence of state constitutions at independence has been identified as a factor in the lack of regional autonomy, the state constitution movement in exile has worked alongside, and preceded, the Drafting Committee process. As a result, draft shadow constitutions have been produced for most states, although there has been considerable disagreement within Shan and Arakan State drafting committees because of the difficult sub-state, ethno-national tensions there.¹⁴² According to Williams, a US lawyer and Drafting Committee advisor, the state committees were set up in reaction to the National Council constitution, which he argues, 'would have overconcentrated power in the central government and the Burman majority'.¹⁴³ He thus characterises the state documents as a means to 'shift power to the minorities'.¹⁴⁴ However the National Council document features strong regional institutions, significant decentralisation of power and rights to self-determination, all of which were re-written into the Drafting Committee document.¹⁴⁵ Ethno-nationalist leaders' rejection of the National Council document probably had more to do with a suspicion of the key role played by Burman activists than a critique of centralisation.¹⁴⁶ The drafting of state and local constitutions separately contributed to the discrepancies between both the state and federal documents, and between the state documents themselves, since there was no national template to which the regional documents could be referred.

¹⁴² Personal conversations between the author and activists involved constitution drafting, Chiang Mai, Thailand, November 2008 to January 2009.

¹⁴³ David Williams, "Constitutionalism before Constitutions: Burma's Struggle to Build a New Order," *Texas Law Review* 87, no. 7 (2009): 1679.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ National Council of the Union of Burma, "Future Constitution of the Federal Union of Burma," ed. National Council of the Union of Burma (No date,). See articles 2, 24, 26, 34, 38 and 130-133, which establish strong ethno-national states and ethnic rights.

¹⁴⁶ For a historical analysis of core factions within the Burmese opposition movement and the effect this has on prolonging military power, see Mary Callahan, "Myanmar's Perpetual Junta: Solving the Riddle of the Tatmadaw's Long Reign," *New Left Review*, no. 60 (2009).

The agendas of meetings for both the national document and the ethnic state documents were shaped so as to keep any over-riding discussion about the form of the Burmese state off the agenda. When models for federalism were discussed, examples tended to be drawn from global north countries like Canada and Switzerland where ethnic tensions are low. More relevant cases like that of Ethiopia, which would have raised issues about the whole shape of the project, were not raised. Furthermore, attempts to draft a constitution for a future 'Burman State' have been conspicuously absent, which partly reflect unaired grievances about this process amongst statist activists. The whole process, in short, took place under the assumption that the Union of Burma should be a federation of strong ethnic states.¹⁴⁷

The conflicts and contradictions that have arisen within the exiled movement is a sign of likely hurdles in the future, when an attempt for an inclusive constitutional drafting process is made inside Burma. The most problematic issues concern state borders, resource rights, and the power and composition of armed groups. Using the Karen State shadow constitution as an example, some of these divergences can be seen in the draft text. In Article II, Section 17, it is stated that 'Kawthoolei State includes present Karen State, Ternasserin Division (sic) and certain adjoining areas.'¹⁴⁸ This is a provocation against the territoriality of Mon State, which is one of the main 'adjoining areas.' It is also a challenge to the multiethnic composition of Tenasserim Division, which is a proposed 'Nationalities State' in the Drafting Committee Constitution. Similarly, the back page of the opposition Mon State Constitution shows 'Old Monland', which swallows up Karen State and parts of central Burma (see figure 6.2).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ No author, *The Second Proposed Draft of Future Constitution of Kawthoolei (Karen State)*, 11.

¹⁴⁹ Mon National Affairs Conference, "Consitution of the Rahmonya Mon State (Draft)," (Mon National Affairs Conference, 2005).

Figure 6.2: Monland



This map, drawn by Mon nationalists, shows the current boundaries for Mon State, the territory claimed by the main Mon ethno-nationalist group and the territory that is thought to have belonged to the old Mon monarchy. Taken from the New Mon State Party (no date).

Rights to resources are also a major area of contradiction between the state and federal draft constitutions. Under Section 41 of the draft Karen State Constitution, the state has exclusive power over natural resources, land ownership and land use. This is in conflict with Article 104 of the Drafting Committee Constitution, in which state and federal legislatures have concurrent power over resource exploitation.

A third problematic area is defence. In Article 103 of the Drafting Committee Constitution, the federal legislature has exclusive power over the defence forces, the federal police and military service. Under Article 165, military service is mandatory for all citizens, a precedent set in the 1974 Constitution. In contrast, the Karen State constitution places internal and border security exclusively under the state legislature. Under Section 83, all citizens of the state have to serve in the Karen State Militia. In the Chinland Constitution, as well as including a provision for compulsory state militia service, there is also a section covering duties for citizens of the state. These include:

- c. to preserve and strengthen social solidarity, particularly when it is threatened;
- d. to preserve and strengthen the right of Chinland to self-government and territorial integrity;
- e. to contribute to the defence of Chinland in accordance with this Constitution and the law;¹⁵⁰

While the Karen State constitution does give exclusive power of defence to the federal level, the Chin Constitution stipulates in Article 220 that ‘the Armed Forces of the Federal Union of Burma shall not be stationed in Chinland without the approval of two-thirds of both houses of the Chinland Legislative Assembly’. The inclusion of these powers and duties related to state militias and defence clearly demonstrate the significant level of distrust between core parties. This is unsurprising given that representatives of ethno-national armed groups played such a central role in drafting these documents following decades of conflict. For many of these opposition figures, power comes from the fact that they command armies, and giving up those armies to a national state in which they have little trust is, unsurprisingly, a difficult proposition. That groups in the exiled opposition have not yet been able to agree to consistent state and federal constitutions, especially in the key areas of territorial boundaries, natural

¹⁵⁰ The Chin Forum, "The Fifth Initial Draft of Chinland Constitution," (The Chin Forum, no date), 24.

resources and military power, show the difficulties ahead if Burma is to become a multination federation. Many of these issues have been prefigured in the Ethiopian experience.

Note on economic and resource politics

In Burma and in exile politics, economic mismanagement and resource exploitation are key areas of discontent. Burma is somewhat richer than Ethiopia, with a ranking of 138 in the 2009 Human Development Index, while Ethiopia is close to the bottom in the 171st position.¹⁵¹ Although Burma is rich in natural resources, including natural gas, timber, tin, copper, zinc and precious stones, it is primarily those in the military class and their collaborators who benefit from resource wealth.¹⁵² Inequality, corruption and economic mismanagement by Burma's military government have been key areas of discontent amongst citizens. The catalyst of the 1988 uprising was the sudden demonetisation of the *kyat*, while the 2007 monk-led protests began as a response to a state-imposed hike in fuel prices. Within ethno-nationalist politics, the exploitation of resource rich ethnic areas by the military and their cronies, exacerbated by linked patterns of human rights abuses, has been a major focus of campaign and advocacy work, with groups commonly arguing that resources in ethnic minority areas should be controlled by and/or benefit those ethno-nations.¹⁵³ This has given the issue of ethnic-based resource control and rights a prominent place on the agenda of democratic groups in recent years and ensured they will be an early part of any future program of democratisation.

¹⁵¹ UNDP, "Human Development Report 2009 - HDI Rankings," <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>.

¹⁵² Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma."

¹⁵³ Recent examples include Shwe Gas Movement, *Corridor of Power: China's Trans-Burma Oil and Gas Pipelines* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Shwe Gas Movement, 2009), Pa-O Youth Organization, *Robbing the Future* (np 2009), Kachin Development Networking Group, *Valley of Darkness: Gold Mining and Militarization in Burma's Hugawng Valley* (no place: Kachin Development Networking Group, 2007).

Chapter Seven

Ethiopia and Burma: Comparative Lessons

A core problem facing both Burma and Ethiopia is the contested nature of state and nation. Both states are multi-ethnic but descend from kingdoms which are now widely perceived as belonging to a single dominant ethnic group: Amharas and Tigrayans in Ethiopia and Burmans in Burma. As has been discussed, the perceived ethnic identity of these kingdoms is fuelled by the projection of contemporary primordial-based ethnic identities back into history. These histories are more about ethnic boundary creation and maintenance than recitals of historical fact. From critical historiographies, it appears that ethnic categorisation in Burma and Ethiopia was only one of many identifying factors, like class and religion, that ethnic group affiliation was somewhat fluid, and that their continued persistence is a result of historically rooted symbolic elements.¹⁵⁴ In both countries, ancient monarchies are celebrated in some nationalist histories while being condemned in ethnic separatist histories. Oromo and Karen ethno-nationalist histories, as examined in this paper, have created artificial boundaries between the state and their own irredentist concepts of nation. While Ethiopia has now experienced more than a decade of multination federalism, it has not been able to break down ethno-national boundaries to create a transcending civic state identity. If the challenge of state identity has so far eluded Ethiopia, there is a strong likelihood that Burma will face similar difficulties.

For the problem of state identity to be addressed there needs to be an attempt at reconciling conflicting histories and seeking some common ground, as Gudima has argued in relation to Ethiopia. An example near to the minds of many politically active Burmans are the ethnically tainted terms 'Burma' and 'Myanmar'.¹⁵⁵ One option could

¹⁵⁴ Lieberman, "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma.", Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña: The Legend That Was Lower Burmāāa*, Donham and James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History & Social Anthropology*, Gudina, "Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History: The Need for a Consensus.", Triulzi, "Battling with the Past: New Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography."

¹⁵⁵ Personal communications with Burmese ethnic minority activists

be to replace either term with a non-ethnic word, such as the name of a geographical feature. By way of example, Kenya was named after Mount Kenya, while the word Indonesia derives from Latin and refers to the 'Indian Islands'. Although a Latin/colonialist term, in the case of Indonesia, is not ideal, it is far better than a term culturally entrenched in a dominant ethnic group, such as 'Java'. In the case of Indonesia, the lingua Franca adopted by anti-colonial activists was spoken mainly outside the country, a fact that did not prevent it becoming the national language after independence. Both Ethiopia and Burma adopted the language and much of the symbolism of the ethnically dominant group.

In practical terms, rethinking things like the name of the country and the national language is fraught with problems, largely due to the injustices that have been perpetrated in the name of 'national unity', in both Burma and Ethiopia, which have created a high level of mistrust and antagonism between marginalised ethnicities and the state. For example Lian Sakhong, a Chin politician and academic who played a key role in the Drafting Committee process, rejects outright the idea of building a multi-ethnic 'nation' in Burma:

Nation-building belongs to what social scientists call "subjective values", that is, culture, language, religion, ethnicity, homeland, shared memories and history, etc., which differentiate one group of people from another – values that cannot be shared objectively. Thus, the nation-building process is impossible to implement in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious plural society like the Union of Burma.¹⁵⁶

While he is talking about 'nation' rather than 'state', many of the values he lists are required for a state identity. In Burma and Ethiopia, there are shared memories, cultures and histories that can be emphasised without, at the same time, negating diversity. Walton, in an evaluation of the Panglong Agreement, came up with similar conclusions regarding the need for the development of an inclusive state identity:

Although the space for critical discussion remains severely limited within Burma itself, it will be necessary for the Burmese people to collectively discover a

¹⁵⁶ Lian H. Sakhong, "A Struggle for Democracy, Equality and Federalism in Burma: An Ethnic Perspective " in *Between Isolation and Internationalization: The State of Burma* ed. Johan Lagerkvist (Stockholm Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2008), 346.

meaningful foundation for a national community, a task that seems monumental in a country whose very name remains contested to this day.¹⁵⁷

As with Ethiopia, finding a 'meaningful foundation' for Burma is a daunting task but it is necessary. It rests on the transformation of the state from a unitary to a liberal democratic system where there is space for open dialogue about the nature and future of the state. Kymlicka has argued that multinational federalism has worked in the Global North because liberal democratic values are firmly entrenched, so citizens do not need to fear conflict and the possibility that their rights will be abused if they raise fundamental issues about national integration.¹⁵⁸ If it is necessary for liberal democracy to develop in order for a multi-ethnic state identity to succeed then it is likely that democratisation in Burma and Ethiopia will be fraught with problems that could take decades to fix. But this is unduly pessimistic. The Ethiopian transition to multinational federalism lost credibility as a result of the controlling position of the Tigrayan Front. Stakeholders in a future Burmese transition to federalism can still take lessons from Ethiopia regarding the need to address conflicting histories during transition, and the necessity of developing a de-ethnicised unifying state identity. Moreover Burma still has the advantage over Ethiopia in possessing a political leader, in the form of Aung San Suu Kyi, who is widely respected across ethnic lines.

A key problem that besets Ethiopian federalism, that is also likely to create conflict in a future democratic Burma, is the division of natural resources. In Ethiopian multinational federalism, resource scarcity fuels ethnic divisions, as Vaughan found in her study of the Southern region.¹⁵⁹ At a local level, ethnicity has been used instrumentally in order to access power and resources from the state, which is perhaps unsurprising when ethnicity is the primary organising unit. This is important to consider in relation to Burma. Ethnic categories like Karen, which includes approximately twenty sub-groups, are internally contested and a system that is based on ethnic categorisation could heighten divisions even at a local level. If economically beneficial, it is foreseeable that elites from Karen sub-groups, for example, could separate to demand their share of resources.

¹⁵⁷ M. J. Walton, "Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 6 (2008): 909.

¹⁵⁸ Kymlicka, "Western Models of Multination Federalism: Are They Relevant for Africa?," 40-42.

¹⁵⁹ Vaughan, "Responses to Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia's Southern Region."

Furthermore, the territorially based character of Ethiopian and Drafting Committee multinational federalisms can lead to heightened conflicts that are exacerbated by competition for resources. Ethiopia and Burma are highly ethnically diverse, and many core ethnic groups, like Oromo and Karen, do not fit into neat territorial units. The Oromo Front in Ethiopia, for example, rejects the contemporary borders of Oromia, arguing for larger territory, as seen in figure 3.1. Within the Burmese exiled state and federal constitutions, there are similar contradictions stemming from competing irredentist territorial claims by ethnic elites. These are compounded by demands for the control of natural resources and in the case of Ethiopia, arable land. A territorial-based multinational federalism thus creates two major problems: one is the flawed nature of territorialising ethnically mixed and dispersed populations. The second is how to equitably share resources between state and federal authorities. While control of resources at least needs to be a concurrent power, additional arrangements are needed to lessen the centrality of territorial ethnic states, which have clearly not produced desired results in Ethiopia.

One possibility could be to develop a system of non-territorial autonomy or what Rothchild and Roeder refer to as *ethnocrorporatism*.¹⁶⁰ Non-territorial autonomy can co-exist with a territorial system and provide education, cultural and language rights, as well as political representation, for ethnic minority identifying citizens, regardless of where in the state they reside. For example, a Karen education ministry could be set up which would have authority over schooling in any area where there are significant Karen populations. An Upper House can also ensure representation for ethnic groups without territorial limitation. Systems like this were previously adopted in Estonia for German and Jewish minorities and in the Ottoman Empire for Jewish and Christian groups.¹⁶¹ The New Zealand system can also be characterised as a type of non-territorial autonomy: Maori citizens vote for reserved seats in parliament,

¹⁶⁰ Philip G. Roeder and Donald S. Rothchild, "Power Sharing as an Impediment to Peace and Democracy " in *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, ed. Philip G. Roeder and Donald S. Rothchild (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 33.

¹⁶¹ J Coakley, "Approaches to the Resolution of Ethnic Conflict: The Strategy of Non-Territorial Autonomy," *International Political Science Review/ Revue internationale de science politique* 15, no. 3 (1994), Roeder and Rothchild, "Power Sharing as an Impediment to Peace and Democracy ", 33-4.

regardless of where they live. While this still creates problems dividing rights and power to ethnic categories, it could potentially lessen tensions that could arise from a reliance on territorial states. In order to deal with conflicts over land and resources, democratic, judicial or semi-judicial mechanisms need to be established so individuals and groups can resolve grievances peacefully and in a less politicised arena.

A major pitfall with multination federalism in Ethiopia, which would also be likely in Burma, is the reification of ethnicity in the political system. Ethiopian federalism has been designed on ethnic categorisation, which is a flawed, highly subjective process given the constructed and overlapping nature of ethnic identities. In both countries, centuries of intermixing have created a heterogeneous population so people who claim to be Burman, Amhara, Oromo or Karen have often descended from more than one of group. Multination federalism in Ethiopia has alienated multi-ethnic groups, and marginalised pan-ethnic parties, which have struggled in a system that privileges groups working singularly for 'their own'. In Burma, many Burmans do not have an ethnic identity in the way that minority groups do. Opposition groups who might be characterised as 'Burman' claim to be working for the whole country, regardless of ethnicity, such as the 'All Burma Students' Democratic Front'. Creating an ethnic-based federalism with a Burman State strengthens a Burman-identified elite and the development of an ethnicised community, as has happened with Amhara, giving little space to those who reject a singular ethnic classification. This highly problematic development in Ethiopia, which has fed mistrust and weakened state unity there, is an important lesson for Burma. Moreover, as noted earlier, the resulting ethnic discourses can sometimes reify historical artefacts that are dysfunctional in a democratic state, as in the case of Mon and Ethiopian royalists.

An important difference between Burma and Ethiopia is the demographic make-up of the country: Burmans are a majority of the population in their country while in Ethiopia, Amhara and Tigrayans are in a minority with no single group predominating. This adds credence to claims that Tigrayan elites use multination federalism to divide and rule, thus maintaining their hegemony. This would not necessarily be the case in a future democratic Burma, since Burman elites would not need to fear the loss of power in an election. Kymlicka sees the lack of a demographic majority in many African states as a key factor in why multination federalism has not

been more widely adopted on the continent.¹⁶² This could favour an agreement for a form of multination federalism in Burma.

A final important difference between the Ethiopian experience and what future developments in Burma will likely look like is the power dynamics in the democratic transition process. This fundamentally affects the degree to which ethnic minority demands are accommodated. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian and Eritrean Fronts forced a military victory against the Derg, causing the government to collapse and allowing the Tigrayan leaders to take charge of the transition process. Since their core demands were ethnically-based, they effectively had a free hand to reconstruct the country along ethnic lines, without needing to accommodate to Derg or Amhara elite positions. In contrast, Burmese ethnic insurgent groups are militarily weak, only managing to control small areas of land in the periphery of the country. There is no chance that there could be any military victory against the Burmese army. The Burmese military elite will therefore probably be an inescapable component in any democratisation process, as will the pan-ethnic National League for Democracy. This will inevitably limit arrangements for regional autonomy and the power allocated to ethnic categories under any future democratic system.

¹⁶² Kymlicka, "Western Models of Multination Federalism: Are They Relevant for Africa?," 47.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Burma and Ethiopia are testimony to the tragedies of nation-making in post-colonial states. In Ethiopia, the adoption of multination federalism has not proved a solution to ethnic conflict. In fact the new system has promoted, rather than minimised, ethnic antagonisms. This provides a cautionary example for the development of a possible multination federalism in Burma along the lines proposed by opposition groups. One of these lessons is the importance of the need to address divergent historical narratives of nation, and the contestation of state identity. In both Burma and Ethiopia, contradictory histories feed contemporary conflicts. These are heightened by the association of state identities with elite ethnic groups: Amharas and Tigrayans in Ethiopia and Burmans in Burma. If issues like this are to be transcended in Burma, the process of national reformulation needs to highlight commonalities and inclusion over ethnic differentiation and exclusion.

A potentially explosive element is the problem of the territorial-basis of ethnic federalism in the form assumed by the Drafting Committee proposals for Burma. This system has fostered the continuation of ethnic conflict within Ethiopia. To lessen the likelihood of this taking place in Burma, non-territorial solutions are needed which decrease the importance of state borders, empowering citizens to achieve self-determination and representation wherever they are living. This will not solve the problem of conflicting interests arising out of ethnic minority demands for control of natural resources, but at least it can isolate the territorial issue of resources from non-territorial factors such as education, linguistic and cultural rights and political representation.

Ethno-nationalist demands for natural resource rights in Burma, as seen in the draft state constitutions, reflect a fear of continued resource exploitation and reallocation from the periphery to the centre. These fears are based on inequitable development policies imposed by successive central governments since Burma's independence. Creating a federation of states with decentralised land and resource

rights are an obvious way of beginning to deal with this problem. However, both to generate operating revenue and in the interests of social justice, the state will always need to reallocate some resources from ethnic minority areas to the centre and from resource rich regions to resource poor ones. What is therefore essential is the development of a liberal democratic system, where citizens and groups can voice grievances and resource allocation can be openly negotiated. Structures set in place for conflict resolution need to be judicial or semi-judicial to de-politicise key issues like natural resource exploitation.

The Ethiopian experience demonstrates the problem of reifying ethnicity in a multination federalism. A balance needs to be found between individualist liberal-based rights for all citizens and the allocation of rights to ethnic groups per se. It is crucial to look at ways to prevent the marginalisation of non-ethnic citizens and parties, and an ethnicisation of 'Burman' identity. This will no doubt be easier in Burma than in Ethiopia, given the fact that Burmans are in the majority, and the National League for Democracy, the most influential democratic organisation, is pan-ethnic.

No Burmese constitution to date has been drafted in an open and democratic way. The first constitution was largely the result of negotiations amongst nationalist and ethno-nationalist elites and British colonial authorities, with the primary aim of expediting independence as quickly as possible. The subsequent 1974 and 2008 constitutions were drafted under military rule. The constitutions in exile have been drafted by insurgent groups and non-governmental organisations, all of whom have limited democratic legitimacy, since, due to ongoing civil war, they cannot be elected by the populations they claim to represent. Furthermore, the exiled documents were drafted under circumstances that rendered wide public participation impossible. What is missing from this constitutional history is the sort of democratic process that could attenuate ethno-nationalist fears. If citizens can trust that the state will not impinge on their rights, and that disagreements can be arrived at through peaceful negotiations and followed through on, then violent conflict and separation can be avoided. The responsibility for achieving this will be on both Burman and pan-ethnic leaders. All sides must be committed to an inclusive process for transition, be prepared to effect reconciliation and demonstrate a willingness to invest trust in state mechanisms.

Multination federalism will be a key part of any future Burmese transition to democracy and peace settlement. What is important is to recognise this and accept multination federalism as a starting point for wider democratic and ethnic autonomy measures.

Bibliography

- Aalen, Lovise. "Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000." Bergen, Norway: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2002.
- Abbink, J. "Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia: Some Problems and Prospects of Ethno-Regional Federalism." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 24, no. 3 (2006): 389-413.
- Adas, Michael. "Imperialist Rhetoric and Modern Historiography: The Case of Lower Burma before and after Conquest." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1972): 175-92.
- Altsean Burma. "2010 Elections: A Recipe for Continued Disaster." Bangkok: Altsean Burma, 2009.
- Amnesty International. "Ethiopia." Amnesty International, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/ethiopia/report-2009>.
- Appleyard, David, and Martin Orwin. "The Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia." In *Language and National Identity in Africa*, edited by Andrew Simpson, 267-90. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma). "Planned 2010 Elections Not Credible If Opposition Remains in Prison." Washington D.C.: Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), 2009.
- . "Summary of Current Situation." <http://aappb.org>.
- Aung-Thwin, Michael. *The Mists of Rāmañña: The Legend That Was Lower Burmaāa*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.
- Bahru, Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*. 2nd ed, Eastern African Studies. Oxford: James Currey, 2001.
- Barth, Fredrik. "Introduction." In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, edited by Fredrik Barth, 9-38. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 1998.
- Bigombe, Betty, Paul Collier, and Nicholas Sambanis. "Policies for Building Post-Conflict Peace." *Journal of African Economies* 9, no. 3 (2000): 323-248.
- Blain, M. "Power, War, and Melodrama in the Discourses of Political Movements." *Theory and Society* 23, no. 6 (1994): 805-37.
- Breuilly, John. "Dating the Nation: How Old Is an Old Nation?" In *When Is the Nation? Towards an Understanding of Theories of Nationalism*, edited by Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac, 15-39. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Bunce, Valerie, and Stephen Watts. "Managing Diversity and Sustaining Democracy: Ethnofederal Versus Unitary States in the Postcommunist World." In *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, edited by Philip G. Roeder and Donald Rothchild, 133-58, 2005.
- Burma Socialist Program Party. "The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma." edited by Printing and Publishing Corporation. Rangoon, 1974.
- Cady, John Frank. *A History of Modern Burma*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1960.
- Callahan, Mary. "Myanmar's Perpetual Junta: Solving the Riddle of the Tatmadaw's Long Reign." *New Left Review* no. 60 (2009): 27-63.

- Central Intelligence Agency. "Burma." Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>.
- . "The World Factbook: Ethiopia." <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html>.
- Charney, Michael W. *A History of Modern Burma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Coakley, J. "Approaches to the Resolution of Ethnic Conflict: The Strategy of Non-Territorial Autonomy." *International Political Science Review/ Revue internationale de science politique* 15, no. 3 (1994): 297.
- Connor, Walker. "The Dawning of Nations." In *When Is the Nation? Towards an Understanding of Theories of Nationalism*, edited by Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac, 40-50. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Constituent Assembly of Burma. "The Constitution of the Union of Burma." Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationary, 1948.
- Diehl, PF, D Druckman, and J Wall. "International Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution: A Taxonomic Analysis with Implications." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 1 (1998): 33-55.
- Dobbins, James, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, and Beth Cole DeGrasse. *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*. Santa Monica, California: RAND National Security Research Division, 2007.
- Donham, Donald L. "The Promise of 1991: Re-Shaping the Future and the Past." In *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, edited by Wendy James, Donald L. Donham, Eisei Kurimoto and Alessandro Triulzi, 151-54. Oxford: James Currey, 2002.
- Donham, Donald L., and Wendy James. *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia : Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, African Studies Series. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University press, 1986.
- . *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History & Social Anthropology*, Eastern African Studies. Oxford: James Currey, 2002.
- Esman, Milton J. *An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict*. Oxford: Polity, 2004.
- Ethiopian Parliament. "The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia." Addis Ababa 1994.
- Ethnic Nationalities Council. "Federal Constitution Drafting Process." Ethnic Nationalities Council, <http://encburma.org/fcdcc.htm>.
- Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee. *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of the Union of Burma (Second Draft)*. Mae Sot, Thailand Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee, , 2008.
- Fisheha, Assefa. "Theory Versus Practice in the Implementation of Ethiopia's Ethnic Federalism " In *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by David Turton, 131-64. Oxford: James Currey, 2006.
- Fogarty, Philippa. "Was Burma's 1988 Uprising Worth It?" BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7543347.stm>.
- Fritz, Verena, and Alina Rocha Menocal. "Understanding State-Building from a Political Economy Perspective." London: Overseas Development Institute, 2007.

- Geda, Alemayehu, and Befekadu Degefe. "Conflict, Post-Conflict and Economic Performance in Ethiopia." In *Post-Conflict Economies in Africa*, edited by Augustin Kwasi Fosu and Paul Collier, 125-42. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2005.
- Gravers, Mikael. *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power*. 2nd ed., rev. and expanded. ed, Nias Report Series. Richmond: Curzon, 1999.
- Gudina, Merera. "Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History: The Need for a Consensus." In *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by David Turton, 119-30. Oxford: James Currey, 2006.
- Hagan, MD. "Human Rights Melodrama: A Literary Analysis of Reports of Police Violence against Hungarian Roms." *Journal of Human Rights* 5, no. 4 (2006): 401-15.
- Haile, Minasse. "The New Ethiopian Constitution: Its Impact Upon Unity, Human Rights and Development." *Suffolk Transnational Law Review* 20, no. 1 (1997): 1-87.
- Hassen, Mohammed. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Human Rights Watch. "Vote to Nowhere: The May 2008 Constitutional Referendum in Burma." Washington D.C.: Human Rights Watch, 2008.
- International Crisis Group. "Myanmar: The Role of Civil Society." Bangkok: International Crisis Group, 2001.
- . *Myanmar: Towards the Elections* Brussels International Crisis Group, 2009.
- Jalata, Asafa. *Oromia & Ethiopia : State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992*. Boulder, Colorado: L. Rienner, 1993.
- . "The Process of State Formation in the Horn of Africa in Comparative Perspective." In *State Crises, Globalisation and National Movements in North East Africa*, edited by Asafa Jalata, 1-29. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Kachin Development Networking Group. *Valley of Darkness: Gold Mining and Militarization in Burma's Hugawng Valley*. no place: Kachin Development Networking Group, 2007.
- Karen National Union. "History of Karens and the KNU." http://www.karen.org/knu/KNU_His.htm.
- Keller, Edmond J., and Lahra Smith. "Obstacles to Implementing Territorial Decentralization: The First Decade of Ethiopian Federalism " In *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, edited by Philip G. Roeder and Donald S. Rothchild, 265-91. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Kymlicka, Will. "Western Models of Multination Federalism: Are They Relevant for Africa?" In *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by David Turton, 181-207. Oxford: James Currey, 2006.
- LA. "Ethnicity " In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, edited by Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan. Oxford Oxford University Press 2009.
- Lieberman, Victor B. "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma." *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 3 (1978): 455-82.
- Lintner, Bertil. *The Kachin: Lords of Burma's Northern Frontier, People and Cultures of Southeast Asia*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Asia Film House, 1997.

- Lorch, Jasmin. "Civil Society under Authoritarian Rule: The Case of Myanmar." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 25, no. 2 (2006): 3-38.
- Luce, G. H. *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma: Languages and History*. 2 vols. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Marcus, Harold G. *A History of Ethiopia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Mengisteab, K. "Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism: 10 Years After." *African Issues* (2001): 20-25.
- Minahan, James. *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations : Ethnic and National Groups around the World*. Vol. IV. Westport, Conn. ; London: Greenwood, 2002.
- . *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations : Ethnic and National Groups around the World*. Vol. III. Westport, Conn. ; London: Greenwood, 2002.
- Ministry of Information. *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*. Yangon 2008.
- Mon National Affairs Conference. "Consitution of the Rahmonya Mon State (Draft)." Mon National Affairs Conference, 2005.
- National Council of the Union of Burma. *Commentary on the Future Constitution of the Federal Union of Burma*. no place 1998.
- . "Future Constitution of the Federal Union of Burma." edited by National Council of the Union of Burma, No date,.
- No author. *The Second Proposed Draft of Future Constitution of Kawthoolei (Karen State)*. Chiang Mai, Thailand United Nationalities League for Democracy 2006.
- Pa-O Youth Organization. *Robbing the Future*. np 2009.
- Parker, Ben. *Ethiopia, Breaking New Ground*, Oxfam Country Profile. Oxford, UK: Oxfam, 1995.
- Poluha, Eva. "Beyond the Silence of Women in Ethiopian Politics." In *Multi-Party Elections in Africa*, edited by Michael Cowen and Liisa Laakso, 60-74. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Rajah, Ananda. "A 'Nation of Intent' in Burma: Karen Ethno-Nationalism, Nationalism and Narrations of Nation." *The Pacific Review* 15, no. 4 (2002): 517 - 37.
- Roeder, Philip G., and Donald S. Rothchild. "Power Sharing as an Impediment to Peace and Democracy " In *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, edited by Philip G. Roeder and Donald S. Rothchild, 29-50. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Rondinelli, Dennis A., and John D. Montgomery. "Regime Change and Nation Building: Can Donors Restore Governance in Post-Conflict States?" *Public Administration and Development* no. 25 (2005): 15-23.
- Sakhong, Lian H. "A Struggle for Democracy, Equality and Federalism in Burma: An Ethnic Perspective " In *Between Isolation and Internationalization: The State of Burma* edited by Johan Lagerkvist, 335-50. Stockholm Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2008.
- Saw Aung Hla. *K'nyaw Ali Ta Sisoh Tehsoh*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Images Asia, 1999 (unofficial translation).
- Sein Win, U Tin Aung, Saw Bo Mya, and Nai Shwe Kyin. "The Manerplaw Agreement ", edited by National League for Democracy-Liberated Area National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, Democratic Alliance of Burma, National Democratic Front. Burma, 1992.

- Shwe Gas Movement. *Corridor of Power: China's Trans-Burma Oil and Gas Pipelines*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Shwe Gas Movement, 2009.
- Simpson, Andrew. *Language and National Identity in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Smith, Alan. "Ethnicity and Federal Prospect in Myanmar " In *Federalism in Asia*, edited by Baogang He, Brian Galligan and Takashi Inoguchi, 188-212. Cheltenham, UK Edward Elgar, 2007.
- Smith, Graham. "Mapping the Federal Condition: Ideology, Political Practice and Social Justice." In *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*, edited by Graham Smith, 1-28. London: Longman, 1995.
- Smith, Martin. *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*. London: Zed, 1991.
- . *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*, Policy Studies,. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007.
- South, Ashley. *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict*, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series. London ; New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Taylor, Robert H. "Do States Make Nations? The Politics of Identity in Myanmar Revisited." *South East Asia Research* 13, (2005): 261-86.
- Than Tun. "Myanmar History: A Humanities Approach." *Asian Research Trend: A Humanities and Social Science Review* no. 4 (1994).
- Thant Myint, U. *The Making of Modern Burma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Thant Myint-U. *The River of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History of Burma*. London: Faber and Faber, 2008.
- Thawngmung, Ardeth Maung. *The Karen Revolution in Burma: Diverse Voices, Uncertain Ends*. Washington D.C.: East-West Center, 2008.
- The Chin Forum. "The Fifth Initial Draft of Chinland Constitution." The Chin Forum, no date.
- Tin Maung Maung Than. "Dreams and Nightmares: State Building and Ethnic Conflict in Myanmar (Burma)." In *Ethnic Conflicts in Southeast Asia*, edited by K Sanitwong and W. S. Thompson. Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies, 2005.
- Triulzi, Allesandro. "Battling with the Past: New Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography." In *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, edited by Wendy James, 276-88. Oxford: James Currey, 2002.
- Tronvoll, Kjetil. *Ethiopia, a New Start?* London: Minority Rights Group, 2000.
- . *War & the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia : Making Enemies & Allies in the Horn of Africa*. Oxford: James Currey, 2009.
- UNDP. "2007/2008: Human Development Report Ethiopia." United Nations Development Program, [http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty fs ETH.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_ETH.html).
- . "Human Development Report 2009 - HDI Rankings." <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>.
- Vaughan, Sarah. "Responses to Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia's Southern Region." In *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by David Turton, 181-207. Oxford: James Currey, 2006.
- Walton, M. J. "Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma." *Asian Survey* 48, no. 6 (2008): 889-910.

- Williams, David. "Constitutionalism before Constitutions: Burma's Struggle to Build a New Order." *Texas Law Review* 87, no. 7 (2009): 1657-93.
- World Bank Group. "Ethiopia at a Glance."
http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/eth_aag.pdf.
- Yawnghwe, Chao-Tzang, and Lian H. Sakhong. *The New Panglong Initiative: Rebuilding the Union of Burma*. Chiang Mai: UNLD Press, 2004.
- Zaw, Oo, and Min Win. *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, Policy Studies,. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007.