

The Inter-regional Migration Phenomenon: Response of the Indigenes of Majang Nationality Zone in Gambella Region, Ethiopia

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This paper investigates the phenomenal rise of migration and its detrimental effects on the indigenes of Majang Nationality Zone in Gambella National Regional State in the context of 'ethnic-federalism'. The Majang's identity is inherently attached to specific forestland environment and its resource endowment. Nevertheless, recent trends show that they have come under a serious threat of Highlander land grabbers leading not only to the displacement of significant number of the people of Majang but also destruction of their forestland, water sources and wild habitats at most frightening rate. The research reveals that the invasion of the highland migrants has not only deprived the capability of indigenous Majang for livelihood source, for cultural continuity and survival as a community but also led to persistent migratory problems. Based on first-hand empirical evidence collected from the study area and secondary data, this study concludes that the indigenes' political life, economic rights and social security have come under constant threat and hence the Majang feel an existential threat in their interactions with the Highlanders. This study, therefore, recommends inter-regional migration policy reforms to avert the existing evident reality in the Majang Nationality Zone.

Background

Like most African States, Ethiopia is a country of peoples diverse in numerous ways such as religion, ethnic group, culture, socio-economic ways of life, language, tradition, and governance (Tsegaye, 2010:53). This diversity is, however, not an outcome of colonial imperialist design; it is partly the result of the late 19th century territorial expansion of the empire of Abyssinia (Van Der Beken, 2008). For the largest part of the 20th century, the Ethiopian power holders made every effort for the creation of "one nation" out of many without considering the diversity (*ibid*). The policy had the plan to assimilate various cultures into the dominant one. This trend was reversed in 1991 with the coming to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (hereafter the EPRDF) (Young, 1999:321). In the aftermath of the overthrow of the *Derg* regime in 1991, ethno-nationalist liberationist fronts, historically marginalized and vulnerable ethnic groups, called for reasonable and contextual governance system

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that can lay the basis upon which equality, respect for identity, enjoyment of cultural rights, autonomy, peace, security of survival etc., can flourish. To this end, in the constitution-making process, an emphasis was put on ethnicity as a tool for managing age-old inter-ethnic conflict and oppression and Ethiopia formally established ethnic-based constituent units. Indeed, the implementation of ethnic-federalism has created a new political space for historically marginalized ethnic groups to attain local self-governance. Above all, it empowered them with the necessary political and bureaucratic resources to protect their identity, culture and sources of livelihood. However, new political dynamics have been unleashed as highlander migrants'² land grabbing curtailed effective protection of minorities and pacification of sub-national units, especially in the 'emerging regions'. 'Emerging regions'³ of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (hereafter the FDRE), as abodes of multi-ethnic groups and less densely populated, are the very domains where societal insecurity with inter-ethnic phenomenon of post-1991 Ethiopia has become apparent. Gambella National Regional State (hereafter the GNRS) is a typical example in this regard.

Ethnic-federalism as a mechanism to manage diversity has been in place for twenty years, but the record is not even. It has prolifically transformed some post-1991 societies into peaceful areas by providing solid cause for effective self-governance and peace-building but in others it severely failed to do so. Critics of Ethiopian version of federalism have argued that it is merely an opportunity for EPRDF dominance which fell short of its rhetoric, and in some cases produced additional, unforeseen problems that hampered the achievement of effective self-governance and sustainable peace (See for example Merera, 2003). Meanwhile, others contend that performance by the EPRDF, though not sufficiently federal, has thus far provided tangible internal peace, significant social and economic development and security for the great majority of the population and saved the state that was on the brink of collapse (See for example, Alem Habtu, 2010). Thus, an obvious lack of consensus exists among scholars and federal practitioners on the potential effectiveness of ethnic-federalism in managing diversity and peace-building in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, it is clear enough that both arguments have some elements of truth. There are positive developments in relation to accommodating ethno-nationalist groups but there are also challenges. The case of Majang in Majang Nationality Zone evidences one of such challenges.

2 The Majang specifically call the highlanders 'Galen'. According to my informants, Galen means 'red people' who tricked and swindled the Majang to grab land since their first contact (Interview, Meti town, May 2013).

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

The Zonal Setting

Majang Nationality Zone (hereafter the MNZ), belonging to the GNRS is a self-governing sub-national unit in the Gambella Regional State. The MNZ was established after 1991 with the Majang designated as the 'owner/indigenous/titular' nationality. The Zone has its own autonomous executive, judiciary and legislative nationality council. Located in the south western part of Ethiopia about 302 kilometers to the south of Gambella town, it is a home to various ethnic groups such as the Majang⁴, the indigenes of the area, and the highlanders, the non-indigenous ethnic group. Pursuant to Article 46 (1) of the GNRS Constitution, the term "indigenous" refers to five ethnic groups, i.e. the Nuer, Anywaa, Majang, Komo, and Upo while the rest are otherwise non-indigenous. Generally, the latter are also referred to as "highlanders"⁵ as the local people call them. In terms of size, while the highlanders constitute 80 per cent of the zone's population, the Majang are only 20 per cent (CSA, 2008). The zone has two administrative *woredas*, namely, Godere *woreda* and Mengesh *woreda*, and 32 *kebeles*. It is bordered on the west by Gog and Abobo districts of GNRS, on the North and East by Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) and on the South by Dimma District of GNRS.

The Majang land exists in the transitional zone between the southwestern highlands of Ethiopian plateau and the savannah lowlands of the Sudan-Ethiopia border (Stauder, 1971:10). The climate is tropical characterized by warm temperature, high relative humidity and abundant rainfall. The area is watered by streamlines which are tributaries of the White Nile Rivers: Gilo and Alewero. The area has its rainfall season (*kirmet*) from May to October and its dry season (*bega*) between December and February (ibid: 11). The vegetation is uniformly broad-leafed tropical rainforest characterized by large trees (ibid: 11-12). It is one of the 58 national forest priority areas of Ethiopia and the last remaining tropical rain forest in the country. It is also extremely rich in biodiversity and significant in terms of socio-cultural, economic and ecological values it holds for the indigenous community (Dereje, 2007a:104).

4 The Majangir are known by their neighbors by the various names 'Mesango', 'Masongo', Mesengo, 'Ujang' and 'Tama'. Recently, the Majangir Zone National Council has formally changed the name of the ethnic group from Majanjir to Majang in July 2011. The rationales behind changing the name are basically two. First, the name or the term Majangir does not have any meaning in the Majang language and hence it does not fully describe and represent the identity of the people. Second, Majanjir is a derogatory name given by the neighboring people such as the Oromo. See Minutes of the Zone Council Meeting, July 2011.

5 Gambella is a lowland region that sharply contrasts the neighboring western highlands. This is the reason why the migrants are called highlanders. The highlanders are referred to as "red people", as opposed to the indigenous "black" people. The highlanders largely migrated from Amhara, Tigray, Oromia and SNNRS. See Dereje, 2008, 123.

The Majang: Identity and Livelihood

"The Majang out of the forest is like a fish out of water". – A popular saying among the Majang

There are quite a lot of indications and evidences of the unique bond between the indigenous Majang people and Majang forestlands. For instance, out of the total population of the Majang, only 10% reside in urban areas (CSA, 2008). According to the information obtained from the Zonal Bureau of Agriculture, majority of them live deep down in the thick forest which covers about 63% of the total land size of the zone. In this regard, the Majang self-description is related to the forest in an existential term: "The Majang out of the forest is like a fish out of water". Pearce (2012: 6) also emphasized that in the GNRS "...their land is like their blood. It is everything. And to lose it would be to lose their identity." Dereje (2007b:1) too emphasized, "Forest is where they dwell, collect honey, hunt and practice shifting cultivation, and obtain traditional medicine and worship." Stauder (1971:2) also noted that Majang culture is well adapted to the particular environmental condition of Majangland. Though social changes are happening among the Majang community, the Majang keep and strengthen their cultural tradition particularly their rich traditional life of the forest (Sato, 1997:574-575). Kurimoto (1994:906) also pointed out that while the Anywaa are 'people of the savannah', the Majang are 'people of the forest'. The name Majang itself is also coined from the two words, 'ma' means let us go and 'jang' means in the bush. So, Majang literally means 'let us go to the bush' (Interview, Gelishi kebele, April 2013). Thus, the area is an 'ecological niche' merely well suited to the modes of livelihood of the Majang (Stauder, 1971:2). Beyond doubt, forestland and its resources are fundamental elements of the Majang identity and their main source of livelihood. In other words, the very survival of these people is linked with the wellbeing of the forest.

Nevertheless, land grabbing⁶ by 'outsiders' has threatened the Majang people, their land and the forest, two of the most essential values for their physical and cultural survival. Dereje's (2007b:1) excellent summary of the problem of land grabbing in MNZ shows that land is "...one of the resource frontiers in the country which is being used with increased intensity as the population grows and deforestation occurs." Sato (1997:569) too indicated that the new challenges and developments that the Majang have faced after the *Derg* regime is the large-scale wood cutting by several private companies. These new developments entailed severe consequences for the local community by depriving them of ac

6 'Land grab' in this context refers to the immigrants rush for farm land in MNZ for the purpose of producing cash crops such as coffee and some for subsistence agriculture.

cess to forestland, displacement, deforestation and above all endangered cultural continuity. In this respect, although the new ethno-linguistic federal dispensation has given rise to new hopes for the protection of the minority people, the existing reality indicated that the Majang people remain in grave threat of identity crisis attributable to the huge highlanders' migration and illegal land grabbing. For that reason, the Majang see forestland intrusion by the highlanders as an act of violence on the Majang culture and livelihood.

Because of a long history of isolation and exclusion, the study area is characterized by a remarkable data gap. To the best of the author's knowledge, with the exception of selected field reports by Dereje, a short briefings by Sato (1997) and Kurimoto (1994) research on political developments in the MNZ since 1991 have been rare and scanty in empirical information. Besides, sufficient attention has not been given to the issue of collective land rights of the communities in the study of land grabbing in lowland areas. Most studies in the Gambella region have focused on Anywaa and Nuer, but little is known about what is happening to the Majang people in MNZ. Noteworthy exceptions are Dereje (2007a), Tewodros (2007), Dessalegn (2011), and Pearce (2012) which dealt with the Majang phenomena but still in a fragmented manner. Absence of a focused and critical examination of the problem initiated the need to explore their situation to help ease their threat which thus far has not been seriously considered. Thus, the aim of this article is to examine: (1) How the phenomenal rise of migration negatively impacts on the identity and livelihoods of the local communities in MNZ and; (2) How land grabbing undermines the federal project which is premised on ethno-cultural justice.

The empirical data presented in this article were generated from open and semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation the researcher conducted in MNZ, Gambella town and Addis Ababa from February 2013 to November 2014. During this data collection period, detailed discussions were made about migration and other related issues with diverse stakeholders such as political leadership, civil servants, the youth, victims of displacement, and elders. Besides, to substantiate the primary data sources, the researcher also used both published and unpublished secondary sources. Documents like reports, minutes and letter exchanges were reviewed. All the research participants voluntarily consented to participate in the study but their names were withheld to keep them anonymous. To ensure the accuracy of the data collected, for most parts, interviews and group discussions were audio-taped.

The article is divided into five sections. The first section provides the background to the study area, the general conditions of the Majang people and their attachment with land and its resources. Section two presents a brief account of development of highlanders' migration and land grabbing in MNZ. Section

three provides the place of Ethno-national identities in Ethiopian federation. The fourth section depicts the predicaments caused by highlander migrants in MNZ as perceived by the host community. The final section contains the conclusion based on the arguments made in the discussions.

A Brief Account of Development of Highlanders' Migration in MNZ

The history of GNRS is very much connected with the process of state formation in Ethiopia and associated migration of people from the northern plateau to the less densely settled "peripheries" (Sommer, 2005:12). MNZ has not been an exception to this process. The history of migration and settlement of highlanders in MNZ can be categorized under three consecutive periods: the Imperial period, the Derg period and the post-1991 period. In this section, a brief account of each is provided.

The Imperial Period (1889-1974)

The inclusion of the Gambella region into the Ethiopian state at the end of the twentieth century introduced a new category of people of largely Amhara and Oromo origins referred to by the local people as "highlanders" (Medhane, 2007). In fact, the first category of highlanders that met the Majang people was the Oromo to sell their farming products and to hunt Buffalo. Then state officials and their families, and few traders followed them. King Menelik II annexed Gambella at the end of the 19th century to ensure a steady source of revenue and to strengthen his political and military position in the "centre" (Bahru, 1991). Besides, the highlanders came also to raid the Majang for slaves. Stauder noted that bands of highlander raided these people for slave until the 1930's and even in some instance afterwards (Stauder, 1971:4). The Majang reacted to these raids by fleeing or hiding, as highlanders were much superior to them in number of rifles and bullets (ibid). It was the ecological conditions, tse-tse fly zone, and the thick cover of forest that protected them from the raiders (ibid:4-5). Later in the 1950's, the introduction of coffee as a large-scale cash crop near Tapi saw the arrival of some highland peoples operating behind the authority of the Ethiopian government (ibid: 4). In this period, it was just around Tapi that these settlers rested among the Majang (ibid:5).

The Derg Period (1974-1991)

Some of the highlanders who currently live in the MNZ came in the 1980's as part of the resettlement programme of the *Derg* regime with the informed consent of neither the local population nor the new settlers. The rank of the highlanders have been enlarged in due course by spontaneous migrations of highlanders through family networking in search of economic opportunities, especially ac

cess to land. The presence of vast and uninhabited tracts of land in the area encouraged more highlanders to come. From this respect, Stauder points out that the Majang culture is also an incentive for encroachment for they have a distinct way of life largely based on forest, and they retreat into the forest whenever an outsider approached them. In addition, the Majang lack vibrant organized political institutions in their history (ibid). Even during the Derg period "...except for the coffee-growing areas around Tapi where highland Ethiopians have settled among the Majangir, the national government has not established administrative or police posts within Majangirland" (ibid: 5).

Post-1991 Period

In fact, until the 1990's the Majang were the dominant land users in their area. The Majority of the highlanders who currently inhabited the MNZ, however, are new comers after 1991. After this period, a favorable coffee price in the international market and profitable timber production was recognized by Dereje (2009) as the most important factor for a heightened encroachment on the forestland in this zone. Still, in the early 1990's the Majang culture of retreating from immigrants by moving into new forestland has enabled the highlanders to acquire unoccupied land. In addition, due to the fewer number of educated indigenous people, highlanders have been encouraged to come to the area and work as civil servants after the 1990s (ibid). Furthermore, to a certain extent, because of the Majang low level of skills, plantation companies have attracted significant highlanders. For instance, during the field observation almost all of the technical skill and even daily laborers of the Verdanta Harvest P.L.C and the Green Coffee S.C are Indians and highlander Ethiopians. Officially, the Green Coffee S.C employed 7,000 highlander laborers. At the height of the forestland grab, many highland civil servants, employees of the plantation companies, and traders cleared the forest to grow coffee and became the so-called investors. Astonishingly, some of the highlanders have possession of as large as 400-500 hectares of coffee land in different localities though they were registered only as farmers (Interview, Meti town, May 2013). The current trend shows considerable increase in migrants; everyday hundreds of new highlanders arrived in Majang. In this respect, one Vice-administrator of MNZ provided a description of the extent of the problem of highlanders migration, saying; "See this river. Does this river stop flowing? Can we stop it? No, we cannot. Highlanders migration is just like this." Official statistical data's also confirmed the aforesaid reality in the study area. For example, according to the 2011 projected population, the Gambella region with the surface area of 34,049 Sq km has a population density of 10.5 persons per kilometer. Relatively, it is one of the regions with the lowest population density in Ethiopia. Details show that density per kilometer was 4 people for Gambella

Zuria, 53.4 for Lare, 5.9 for Abobo, 38.3 for Jakawa, 76.2 for Godere *woreda* and 14.3 for Mengeshi *woreda* (Pact Ethiopia, 2012:35). Thus, Godere and Mengeshi *woredas* of the MNZ have the largest population density in the region.

Ethnic-federalism and Inter-ethnic Relations in Ethiopia: Analytical Framework

To its credit, the incumbent government has developed an advanced constitution based on the ideology of federalism and ethnic federation as a political institution that accommodates the identity of ethnic groups by keeping them within their own territorial units (Assefa, 2008). Literatures also provide that ethnic-based federal arrangement is supposedly the best way to create a separate space for minority communities to flourish (see for example, Roeder, 2009:207). One of the foundations of the Ethiopian experiment with ethnic federalism is its focus on minority rights and human rights in general (Barata, 2012). In this regard, the FDRE Constitution is considered as an example of “the most minority rights friendly constitution on the African continent” (Barata, 2012:64). Besides, in Ethiopia the exposure to ‘modernity’ of historically marginalized indigenous people coincides with ethnic-federalism.

There are sufficient indications that show ‘Ethnic-federalism’, a popular way of labeling Ethiopian federalism, as provided in the constitution by design ideally serves the purpose of providing self-government and ethno-cultural security. In Ethiopia, in contrast to western multi-national federations such as Canada and Switzerland, ethnicity is singled out as a salient instrument to restructure the state in a top-down approach that seeks congruence between ethnic and intra-federal boundaries to maximize ethnic homogeneity. Policies are also pursued which differentiate the status rights of citizens according to ethnic affiliation at the expense of excluding those internal and external groups who are considered not belonging to it (For extended discussion see Kymlicka, 2006;). The use of ethno-linguistic criteria as a basis of state formation and party organization is also one of the distinctive features of Ethiopian federal dispensation (see Tsegaye, 2010:93-94). These are partly the reasons why the Ethiopian federal political system is labeled as ‘ethnic-federalism’.

The makers of the 1995 Ethiopian constitution envisioned that inter-ethnic relations might threaten the security of ethnic groups in certain localities. To avert this, the Ethiopian ethnic-federation protects minority ethnic groups by securitizing ethnic identity and ethnic-relations through its policy of ‘owner nationalities’ based on what anthropologists refer to as a ‘primordial’ view of ethnic identity (see Dereje, 2008:140). The catch phrases ‘owner nationalities’ is used to designate the indigenous people of an area and ownership of land to

ethnic groups. Provisions of the 1995 FDRE Constitution, which is a contract agreed upon among the Nation, Nationality and Peoples (hereafter the NNP), makes this instantly recognizable. The weight attached to the preamble, Article 8, 39, 46 and 47 of the Constitution put on the NNP of Ethiopia reflect this reality. For instance, Article 8 places sovereignty on NNP of Ethiopia. The FDRE Constitution under Article 39 legally recognizes the rights of the NNP to preserve their languages, cultures, identities and history, including the right to secession. Indeed, NNP are authors and beneficiaries of the 1995 constitution (Fasil, 1997).

In view of that, the regional Constitution of Gambella under Article 46 provides that the Nuer, Anywaa, Majang, Komo, and Upo who inhabited the area are the indigenous 'owner nationalities' of the region. Accordingly, zones, *woredas* and even *kebeles* are identified as belonging to a particular ethnic group. The GNRS is divided into three zones and eight *woredas* organized more or less on ethnic lines: the Anywaa zone, the Nuer zone, and the Majang Nationality zone. Hence, the Majang are 'owner nationalities' of the MNZ. The other indication of government policy of inter-regional migration security is its policy of the prohibition of inter-regional resettlement in federal Ethiopia. Thus, the conception of 'owner nationalities' has served as an instrument 'to essentialize ethnic identities' (Kymlicka, 2006:57) in federal Ethiopia. The following section empirically appraises inter-regional migration and local experiences in light of Majang people's experience.

Ramifications of Highlanders' Migration in MNZ

The remarkable increase in number and illegal invasion of Majangland by highlanders has destructive consequences both on the Majang peoples and on the ecology. According to local informants, highlanders are displacing and alienating the host people and are causing environmental, political, economic and social disorder to them. Some Majang informants say, "We have suffered a lot in the hands of the greedy highlanders. They are the ones who exploit the forest more intensively than us" (Interview, Meti town, April 2013). In what follows, the researcher assesses, mainly from the perspective of the host community, the major problems caused by the influx of highlander migrants.

Insecurity of Tenure Status: Displacement and Socio-Economic Disorder

Despite the fact that the very survival of the Majang as a group is linked with the wellbeing of the forest, highlander's invasion of their land has caused displacement of thousands of the Majang from their traditional ancestral land. In the past, land was not a problem in the Majang territory. They "have not been threatened over their lands; and they have never been organized to defend their territories" (Stauder, 1971:2). Gradually, the people faced a kind of problem they had never

experienced before.

The first displacement experienced by the Majang was in the 1950's with the introduction around Tapi of coffee as a large-scale cash crop. The establishment of coffee plantation without the knowledge of the host community and the compensation paid for their land are notoriously remembered by the locals as responsible for the great displacement that took place in MNZ. A number of Majang in this area have been dispossessed of their land by the Amhara, Oromo and other highland peoples (Stauder, 1971:2). During the *Derg* period, the 1984 resettlement programme was responsible for the great displacement of the indigenous people. This event served as a key factor for the current relentless influx of highlanders. Particularly, forestland grabbing is in a very delicate situation in Chemi and Goshin *kebeles* in Godere *woreda* where the Majang have already been completely displaced or have been left only with small plots of land. The Majang are currently found only in five out of the 14 *kebeles* of the Godere *woreda*. In Mengeshi *woreda*, land grabbing is acute in Yeri, Gubeti, Shone, Dushi and Kumi *kebeles* where almost all the fertile areas of the Majang are under the control of the highlanders. What is more, the government, with little consultation or strong pressure, is moving the people from the forest to a village (FGD, Meti town, April 2013). This in turn has pushed the local community into economically and physically marginal areas which deprived them of their livelihood. Regrettably, the precise official figures as to the number of displaced local people are not obtainable.

The increase in land grabbing by the highlanders made the Majang marginalized and some of these people have been forced to abandon their forest livelihoods and century-old tradition. When driven out of the forest and displaced from their land, they face difficulties in compromising their identities. Those who had been displaced and made to live in towns and settlement villages had to adapt to new and often difficult circumstances. The Majang who managed to be integrated into the modern way of life are extremely few. The majority are still struggling with the social pressure to adapt to the modern way of life with no proper livelihood shift. They have continued to be victims of not only social uncertainty but also biting poverty. Besides, the Majang displacement and retreat to the periphery meant more deforestation which gradually pushed them further into less fertile areas and more confrontation with their neighbors as has happened with the Anywaa. A key Majang informant who spent his entire life in the forest said:

Few Majang may get jobs and government positions and become salaried white collar as a result of federal self-governance, but I do not think this will be so with the majority of us. I think the Majang are the losers of all things considered. Though the land belongs to us owner nationalities, we do not have the land to inherit to our children.

We do not have adequate land and forest to grow millet, go for hunting and collect honey; we do not have food to eat. Certainly, the old ways of living and the culture will be lost (Interview, Meti town, 12 May 2013).

The Ecological Damage

The impact of land grabbing by highlanders in the zone's natural resources is also profound. As has been noted above, the highlanders, occupying the most fertile areas, encroached deeply into the Majang forestland and exploited the forest more intensively than the host community did. This intensive land exploitation has left most of the Majang territory completely barren. The forest and soil fertility has for the last decades been unabatedly depleted at an alarming rate. In this regard, the Zone plant science experts pointed out that the highlanders have also started to replace the indigenous forest with *Bahirzaf*, eucalyptus tree, which significantly reduces the fertility of the soil (Interview, Meti town, 17 May 2013). Logging is the main cause of deforestation and a chief lucrative economic activity in its own right since it requires only a modest investment of labor and capital to be turned into profit (FGD, Kabu *kebele*, 11 May 2013). There is an anecdotal evidence that there are lots of legal and illegal sawmills in MNZ operated by the highlanders (Workshop, Meti town, 2013). The inhabitants are complaining, "Our forest population has been reduced by highlander's illegal timbering activities. They use forest as if it would last forever" (Interview, Chemi *kebele*, 19 May 2013). Loggers from the highland are rapidly destroying the forest. As a result, it becomes very hard to find food in the forest. Besides, destructive overuse of the limited resources, persistent competition and resulting conflicts additionally aggravate the ecological degradation in the areas.

The ecological effects of such deforestation activities are profound, extending even to the climate change itself. It brings substantial changes to the way the ecological communities experienced atmospheric phenomena. The clearing process alters all microclimate, hydrology, and soil mechanics. One key agriculture expert in MNZ underlined, "Deforestation is warming and drying the soil and is making the surface of the land hotter. Without the moderating effects of the forest canopy to shade the ground and protect it from wind, the temperature in general is fluctuating more widely" (Interview, Meti town, May 2013) The expert added:

The land is generally cleared and it not only reduced the number and size of trees but also increased the sterility of the soil. Soil is normally blessed with fertility from forest. Fertile soil in the forest is there because the forest kept it there. It is this fact that led the Majang to practice shifting agriculture by slashing and burning. We have lived and co-existed with the forest for centuries in this way. This being the case, soil changes when its close relative – forest - is removed (ibid).

In-depth interview with experts and elders revealed that small streams of water have dried up and the age-long animal and plant species have dwindled as the highlanders took the very fertile, forest coverage and water sources of the MNZ. People emphasize that deforestation led to climatic disruption such as erratic rainfall which adversely affected coffee, millet and corn production (Workshop, Meti town, 2013). The frequency of rain has now reduced to once a month. As has been noted above in Majang, the rainy season used to start in mid-January but now it does not even begin in April (FGD, Meti town, 27 April 2013). Actually, this is also the effect of global warming but deforestation at such an alarming rate has accelerated the weather fluctuation. The disappearance of many species of wild animals such as antelope, warthog, buffalo, etc. and that of trees is also a sign of new ecology for the local community - a termination of the century-old traditional practice of hunting and gathering, and production of traditional medicine in MNZ.

Livelihood and Poverty Impacts: Deprivation of Access to Forest Resources

The people used to have the privilege to utilize the forest in several ways. To begin with, of course, they used it as a basis of their livelihood. Access to land and forest has had a symbolic value as a means of identification with one's ancestor, village, and the group. The people had the opportunity to shift cultivation and easily mobilize from place to place. However, the predicament of the highlander population explosion in the Majangland has been the deprivation of access of the Majang to land and its resources. The transformation of Majang forestland into individual ownership critically limits the people's livelihood. In earlier times, it was never difficult to find another place for one's homestead thanks to a general abundance of land (Stauder, 1971:140-141). Conversely, at present restricted to smaller areas, they are forced to abandon their century-old traditional practices of shifting cultivation, apiculture, hunting and so on. It also limits their cultural practices. Increasing commercialization of land is making land scarce to the local community. It is land grabbing from the powerless indigenous community. Communal land is hardly respected.

For instance, slash and burn cultivation and bee-keeping activities have been enormously curtailed and their pattern highly distorted. The Majang area produces the region's well-known 'Ethiopia's liquid gold' of red honey. The Majang use honey for medicine, traditional honey-wine and as a market commodity. But now key informants indicated that "there is a substantial decline in honey production as a result of deforestation and competition by honey farm investors in neighboring SNNPRS" (Interview, Meti town, 2013). For example, because of the mechanized flower farm owned by an Ethiopian billionaire, Mohammed Al-amoudi, and the modern techniques the farm uses, the local farmers have lost

their bees. In effect, the widespread disappearance of honey-bees and flower plants worried the Majang people and decreased productivity significantly. A key informant said, "As you know, apiculture is our typical way of life. The highlanders came and chopped the trees down; the forest deteriorated and the bees went away. So, we no more have honey which was an important cultural and commercial item for us" (Interview, Chemi *kebele*, April 2013). Since the Majang depend on forest bee-keeping, deforestation and other ecological damages became a threat to their lives.

Tenure issue: Threats to Communal Land Rights of the Majang People

As has been described above, the Majang people consider their land and resources as collective assets and as a function of the group. That is why land certification and registration has not been undertaken in Gambella yet. For instance, the Majang have a unique form of right to trees on which beehives are hanged and which everyone respects. In essence, the forest is a common property but individuals hold rights to particular trees on which their hives are put (Dessalegn, 2011:22). Recently, however, the researcher's observation is that there is a general trend of promoting individual land ownership at the expense of collective land rights. A key informant confirmed, "Though land is not a saleable commodity in federal Ethiopia, forestlands have become *de facto* legal and profit-making material goods in our area" (Interview, Gosheni *kebele*, 2013). The temporary economic benefit for the local community has led to a rising commercialization of forestland. Surprisingly, the local leadership is also part of the problem. It has been the *kebele* leaders who have been legalizing the land deals. Essentially, the highlanders have the courage to clear forestland getting some green light from the local political elite. Such a situation has dramatically changed land ownership from the local community to the dominant highlander migrants.

Political and Governance issue: Fear of Highlanders' Domination

Theoretically, the Majang have the 'political majority' at present. However, there is a widespread fear that the highlanders' rather numerical majority would jeopardize the former's political leadership. As has been stated, the highlanders have already come to make up 80% of the area's population. The swiftly changing demographic imbalance generated a political anxiety among Majang politicians. If the situations continue, whether or not the Majang should be exclusive "owners" of the MNZ will be challenged and would become a growing threat (FGD with government officials, Meti town, October 29, 2013).

Indeed, following the 2003 decision of the House of the Federations, the highlanders are now demanding political participation and representation and this has caused further political insecurity for the indigenous Majang⁷. At pre

sent, 2013, the highlanders have almost one-third representation in the Zonal Council. Moreover, in the eyes of the local community, the highlanders are closely associated with the Federal Government which represents the central state. This is because Ethiopian state-building is closely connected with Tigrayan and Amhara Semitic speaking people of the northern highlands who played the most dominant role in the country's history (Sommer, 2005:22). The highlanders have a tradition that is not free from the concept of supremacy towards the local population (ibid: 23). Besides, as Amharic is the official language of the country and the working language of the region and the nationality zone, those who master it as a mother tongue do have the advantage in communicating with the political elites at the centre of the country (Dereje, 2007b). In fact, the highlanders are now dominant in the civil service. Therefore, such demographic size and control of the civil service and the business sector have induced demographic anxiety and political insecurity among the Majang. It is also from this perspective that the Majang view the highlanders as a threat to their survival. Besides, land is a source of power though immigrants occupy land for economic interest.

The Majang Response: Escalation of Violent Conflict

In the last two decades, evidences show that *highlander's* vicious intrusion into the Majang forestland has generated both potential and actual violent conflicts. Currently, one could state that MNZ is perhaps the area where indigenous and the highlander's relations are increasingly becoming very tense and could at any time degenerate into an explosive conflict. Even though underreported, apprehensive and occasionally open aggressive relation between the local community and the highlanders has escalated in the last two decades owing to the issue of access to and control over the forestland.

Consequently, now the bona fide potential for conflict is the contradictory bases of entitlement over forestland. In this respect, there is a deep-seated acrimony and hatred towards the highlander residents in MNZ. Cognizant of their rights as 'owner nationalities', the Majang resorted to land litigation measures to reclaim their land in a court of law. Although the highlanders bought their land from individual Majang, in the eyes of the latter the land belongs to them as a traditional communal property. Besides, they argued that according to the new federal dispensation, land is owned both by the state and the people, and it is not a commercial commodity for sale. As a result, land related disputes between the Majang and the highlanders have become one of the major headaches of the administration (Interview with officials in the Zone Security Administration Af

7 Previously, the National Electoral Board prohibited the non-indigenous highlanders from running for office. Later, based on the highlanders' appeal, in March 2003 the House of Federation allowed the non-indigenous highlanders to be elected to public offices.

fairs, Meti town, March 2013).

Although there is no adequate action to remove illegal highlanders, the Majang leadership has attempted to restore their traditional land using a range of political and administrative measures. There were some attempts made to drive out the highlanders from the zone. The first major action to remove 10,000 illegal highlanders from the forestland especially from Yari, Kumi and Shone *kebele* was unleashed in 2009/2010⁸. However, such efforts have had very little success for the highlanders regained their holdings. It was not a radical measure. This incident clearly shows that while the Majang have a strong interest of evicting the highlanders because of a genuine security concern, the highlanders also show equally strong resistance to such moves and exhibit interest not only in participating in the economic and political life but also in determining their right to reside in the zone and expand their land tenure. An interview with some members of the latter reveal that they are aware of their constitutional right to engage freely in any economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his/her choice anywhere in the national territory (Article 41 of the FDRE constitution).

The ordinary people, who are conscious of their political right of 'owner nationality', have also started to reclaim the land from the highlanders either through negotiation or by use of force. Some of the returnees who served in the military and participated in the Ethio-Eritrea war reported that they had made an attempt to go back to their village, but faced problems in getting access to what had been their land. They found that their land has been taken over by highlanders. Now, there are quite a lot of land related court cases that have created sharp tensions between the two groups of people. The Majang who sold their land seek a redress through their political power whereas the highlanders seek to maintain their economic interest by networking with rent-seeking local politicians. Land related court cases and disputes were more intricate, and in some cases, resulted in physical injury and devastation of belongings. Regrettably, the local leadership, which is supposed to offer protection and support, has also been weakened as they have often permitted land selling deals for the sake of their own economic gain. In fact, in 2013 the regional political leadership collected all the stamps from the *kebele* administration, as they were viewed as the main perpetrators in 'legalizing' land deals. Yet, corruption related to land transaction is rampant at this time since the highlanders are in a superior financial situation to easily entice ordinary Majang to sell their land and the leadership to endorse the deal. Thus, lacking support from either the federal and regional government or from the local leadership, the ordinary people got truly worried about their future.

8 Eviction of 'outsiders' in federal Ethiopia is not a new phenomenon in Majang. For example, Amhara settlers were evicted from Oromia Region, Eastern Wellega Zone, Gidda Kiremu woreda and some of them resettled in a new settlement (Jawi woreda in Amhara region) and some of them repatriated to ancestral home in 2000. See Tesfaye Tafesse, 2007.

The study also found out that land use controversies are made worse by the inter-institutional tension between the judiciary and the zone administration. Many factors seem to contribute to the tension. It has been often reported that the zone leadership orders the zone judiciary to stop adjudicating land related disputes, especially between the local community and the highlanders. First and foremost, while the local people view the court personnel, who are largely highlanders, as unfamiliar with the local culture, the highlanders view the zone administration, who are from the indigenes, as supporters of the local community. The highlanders also believe that the administration always decides in favor of the local indigenous community. The Majang, on their part, argue that in MNZ judges are extremely corrupt. So, it is a great disadvantage for the poor Majang to go to court against the rich. Specifically, it is the highlanders who have the capacity and ability to bribe the judges. In fact, the Majang have lost trust on courts. For this reason, they prefer to go to the administration or to resort to the traditional arbitration while the highlanders prefer to take their cases to the court⁹.

The judiciary argued that the intervention of the executive in land ownership litigation is against the law. Besides, people have the constitutional right to file their cases in the court and it is unconstitutional to deny them bringing their case to justice. Now, since courts are already crippled by the intervention of the executive, they are simply referring the cases to the administrative body. In contrast, the zone administration believes that formal court decision has a winner-takes-all approach and hence may further aggravate the tension between the litigators. For this reason, they believe arbitration by the zonal administration is a win-win solution. For instance, if the highlander has already cultivated the land, the administration would give to the Majang a new substitute of unoccupied land that the court cannot do. They added that land is an administrative matter. It is the property of the people and the state. Hence, it is appropriate for the executive to take proceedings concerning land. In addition, court proceedings are not only costly but also time taking while land is an important property which needs urgent decision since the livelihood of the rural people depends on annual crop produce. A key informant from the zone administration argues, "Now, the *kebele* people's tribunal is also doing great in land related disputes" (Interview, Meti town, 20 April 2013). Highlanders, however, complained, "*Kebele* people's tribunals are entirely staffed with the Majang community and they are ruling in Majang's favor" (Interview, Meti town, 23 April 2013). This institutional controversy, indeed, shows how the executive is dominant over the other

9 That is why as a legal officer in Godere Woreda First Instance Court told the author, "If you send a court order to a Majang to appear before a judge or magistrate, he would not come" (Interview, Meti town, March 2013).

branches of government.

In addition to this tense situation, land related dispute assumes different dimensions. The first dimension relates to the on-going government's villagization programme. The highlanders complained that the Majang officials, in the presence of ample free land for villagization, are deliberately using the programme as a 'tool' for evicting them from their long-held legal and cultivated land on which they spent a lot of money and sacrificed life. Some of the villagization sites fall within the newly emerging highland settlement areas amidst traditional Majang territories. As the Majang politicians sought to implement the national villagization agenda, the highlanders in some of the villages confronted them and the tension quickly erupted into violent conflict. Evidence showed that following conflicting land claims in 2012 two people died and several others were arrested in the resettlement sites of Dushi and Chemi kebeles. After this incident, the highlanders have taken the case to the federal government and up until now (November 2013) it is a pending issue. Moreover, the homicide rate between the two groups in Yari, Shone and Kumi *kebeles* has increased drastically in recent years. A telling example is Yari *kebele* where because of land related disputes, highlanders and the local people have been fiercely chopping off each other with machete every day (Interview with former MP, Meti town, 15 April 2013).

Apart from the aforementioned forms of controversy, the other offshoot of land related disagreement that added fuel to the problem was the highlander's demonstration in Meti against the murder of 19 highlanders by armed gunmen near the town of Bonga. Almost all the casualties were students of Gambella Health College and families of the 1984 highlander settlers. The attackers also kidnapped five highlander female passengers during their assault and injured some other passengers. The suspects were alleged indigenous Anywaa armed groups.

The highlanders were extremely angry and held a demonstration in Meti town on 03 March 2012. The protest was without the knowledge of the administration and hence unlawful. The demonstrators consider this incident as conspiracy by the indigenous community against the highlanders to scare and force them out of the region as the attackers did not kill the Majang who were in the bus. In fact, this incident further strained the already damaged Majang-highlanders relation in the study area. Following this sturdy event, the government took some measures to ease the tension. It paid 90,000.00 ET Birr as compensation for the families of the victims. Most of the perpetrators were also caught in South Sudan and 19 of them were imprisoned. According to state media, the leader of the armed group, Ethiopian-born American Omot Odol Ojulu was also killed on 02 March 2013 as he was arranging to carry out more attacks. Officials also told

the author that the Commissioner of the Regional State Police Force, Umanu Gela, who was suspected of taking part in the killing was also arrested based on the information obtained from Ojulu's laptop computer (Interview, Meti town, 15 October 2013).

September 2014 Majang-highlanders Violent Incidents

Until recently, Majang-highlanders relation was relatively peaceful except for the land disputes and minor conflicts. Yet, the Majang have been in constant conflict and frustration with illegal settlers from the north; they were losing their land at an alarming rate as commercial investors cleared their forests and illegal settlers continued surging. They have endured several incidents of this kind in the past in Tapi town and the surroundings villages where many lives were lost. Eventually, the Majang had to retreat to Godere district. This year alone in June and July 2014, land grabbing conflicts were instigated by the government and some Majang were killed, their cattle looted, and some leaders and elders thrown into jail in different parts of the district (GNUM, 2014). As mentioned above, no large-scale violent conflict has been there between the two groups except the small-scale protests of 2012 and a few sporadic homicides in some *kebeles* such as Yari and Gelishi. However, the Majang-highlander conflict has now become a serious reality and is no more a perception. The 2003 Anywaa-highlanders brutal violence that took place in Gambella town happened again in Meti town.

In September 2014, MNZ witnessed a large-scale conflict with surprisingly high number of casualties. The conflicting parties were the indigenous Majang and the highlander migrants in the zone. The major driving force of the conflict was the relentless forestland grabbing by immigrant highlanders. The highlanders, allegedly supported by the EPRDF led government, forcefully displaced the Majang from their ancestral land (Obong, 2014). According to the same source, the Majang forestland has been systematically distributed to illegal immigrants and settlers by the Federal government watch dog advisers at the regional and national levels (ibid).

The September 2014 conflict was a series of sporadic clashes and mob violence in MNZ. It originated in Goshene and Yari *kebeles* and spread to other *kebeles*. The immediate cause of the conflict was the death of a Majang man in Goshene *kebele*. He was found dead at the end of July but the killers were not identified. In response the Majang burned a highlander's house in the same *kebele* and shot and wounded a highlander girl. The highlanders reacted and on Tuesday, September 9, 2014 attacked a Majang and seriously hurt his hand in Akashi *kebele*. The attackers were found and imprisoned. The wounded Majang was from Goshene *kebele*. In the night of the same day, Goshene Majangs shot six highlanders from one family and injured them seriously. The victims were

taken to a hospital but two of them died immediately. On Wednesday, September 10, 2014, the highlanders in Goshene, Akashi and other kebeles were displaced but sheltered in Meti Town Meeting Hall. That night there happened exchange of fire in and around Gengebati sub-*kebele*, particularly around the Mereshi forest area and four highlanders died instantly. The Majang armed with spears, machete and AK47 also attacked highlanders in rural *kebeles* such as Akashi, Bogi, Goshene, Chemi, Gelishi and Yari. Many highlanders had been massacred in the attack. The Majang also burned down the houses of the highlanders in Goshene. Some sources indicated that more than 35 people were killed and several others seriously injured. The Federal Police brought to Meti Town Health Post bodies of men, women and children who were badly mutilated and burned in the rural kebeles such as Goshene. Some of the highlanders managed to flee to Meti and Bonga towns while some of the Majangs fled to the nearby forest on Wednesday night.

On the morning of Thursday, September 11, highlanders visited their injured fellows and saw the corpse of the deceased. They became furious at the sight of the corpse of a burned pregnant woman and brutally retaliated the Majangs who were blamed for the killings. The security tried to calm down the situation. Nevertheless, this was not possible and the mob of highlanders first attempted to free the highlanders imprisoned in the police station; in fact, they managed to. The highlanders around the police station also attacked Higera and her child, a Majang civil servant woman who was unaware of the conflict. They seriously injured her son but she was saved with the help of a highlander. The Majang police who saw Higera and her son attacked inhumanly become very angry and aggressively confronted the highlanders.

Afterwards, highlanders from the hospital and others were angered by the death of so many children, women, family members, relatives and friends, and they in hundreds marched in Meti armed with sticks, machete, spears and iron bars. They violently and furiously attacked innocent civilian Majangs particularly the Majang officials; they brutally killed them and burned down their houses and property. The Gambella Nilotic Union Movement (GNUM) reported that more than 17 Majangs were dead and the killing was indiscriminate against children, women and men (GNUM, 2014). According to eyewitness report, at least 20 people were murdered when fighting erupted in Meti town on that day alone. Some people estimate the figure at 30. For instance, the Zone High Court President, Tsegay, was killed on that day and his wife and children were wounded severely and taken to Aman Hospital for treatment. The Head of Godere *Woreda* Security Administration, Mr. Alazar was also killed. Almost all of the Majang in Meti town fled to the nearby *kebeles* and to the forest. Some of the key officials took refuge in the Federal Police camp in the town and saved their lives. Their

houses were set on fire and their properties were looted by the alleged angered highlanders mob (Obong, 2014). Moreover, the Majang villages were set on fire and the Amhara settlers with the help of government military forces looted their properties (Ibid). The conflict was out of control of the Federal Police Force who were only 30 (Interview, November 2014, Meti). The exact figure of casualties is yet to be established.

More than 15,000 people were displaced from the rural *kebles* and camped in a private elementary school while some Majang officials camped around Godere *Woreda* Stadium protected by the Federal Police and the national defense forces. The researcher rented a house close to the primary school and that gave him the opportunity to talk to displaced communities. The Federal and the Regional Government have sent some aid for the displaced community. On the other hand, residents of Meti are leaving for Tapi, Jimma and other nearby towns. They were extremely terrified, annoyed, and above all, children and women were traumatized by the brutal killings they have witnessed. An elderly man of 54 from Yari kebele told the author the following story:

We have lived peacefully together for long. Recently, however, they were becoming very aggressive. In fact, we do not expect such kind of brutal attack from the Majang given that they are so peaceful, calm and Christians. Now, they killed us mercilessly and brutally. They organized themselves along groups and attacked us with machete, knife, gun and so on. They have a prior deliberate plan for this attack. We were not ready. This is our country as well. We will respond as well. We have hands and machete like them. In fact, the government took our guns earlier. We do not have guns like them (Interview, 24 September 2014, Meti).

Actually, there were adequate signals and symptoms suggesting a mounting tension. Informants indicated that the Federal Government detected the danger and deployed Federal Police in Meti town on 28 July 2014 to prevent the violence (Obong, 2014). Yet, it was an inadequate response to prevent a massacre in the troubled MNZ. The President of the region, the Speaker of the Regional Council, Toto Hawaryate, and the GPLM party head, Ashene Astien, were also in MNZ to calm the tense situation down. The zone and *woreda* offices also announced to the civil servants that they should start work though most of them fled on foot to the nearby Tapi Town in SNNPRS. There were only 30 members of the Federal Police. About four hundred members of the National Defence Force and the Region's *Leyu Hayele* police (Special police force) were immediately deployed in the area. This appears to be in response to the appeal by the local authorities in Meti for Federal intervention after the crisis got out of control. However, clashes in the remote region have still continued and sporadic attacks and killings have been reported in September. The conflict has further expanded to Mengeshi *Woreda* as well. Actually, the National Defence Force has been

deployed and camps have been established in Yari, Kumi, Shone, Goshene, and Gelishi *kebeles*. The conflict is still spreading to other villages. According to unverified information, the Majang also killed five Federal Police members as they were patrolling some conflict prone *kebeles*. Thus, people are dying here and there from both sides.

On September 22, 2014, the Security ordered all *kebele* militia to hand in guns. Accordingly, on September 23, 2014, all *kebele* militias except those in Majang dominated *kebeles* returned their weapons. This has created tension on the highlanders. As usual, on September 24, 2014 the Zonal council changed the *woreda* and zonal leadership. They appointed Majangs who were working in Gambella and were not involved in the conflict (Interview, 24 September 2014). The government also labeled the Majang as 'narrow-minded' and the highlanders as 'anti-peace' elements. Subsequently, the Federal and Regional Security arrested almost all zone, *woreda* and *kebele* Majang leadership in Addis Ababa and also some rich highlanders. On September 24, 2008, elders in the area and the Regional and Federal personnel started a peace deal between the conflicting parties. However, On September 28, 2008, an armed Majang killed a member of the national defence force and wounded several others in Yari *Kebele* as they were patrolling. The deceased was buried in Meti town.

It seems that the Majang organized and planned the attack earlier. For instance, most of the residents of the town left before the eve of the New Year¹⁰. Informants indicated that the attack by the Majang was a pre-planned one. On the other hand, the Gambella Nilotes United Movement (GNUM) in its web-site stated that the Majang were unaware of the pre-planned massacre (GNUM, 2014). GNUM also strongly condemned the massacre of members of the Majang people by both the Federal Police Forces and the illegal settlers (highlanders) in Meti town. GNUM underlined that the government has been relentlessly pressing the ethnic group to give up their fertile land to the highlanders and to the commercial investors (*ibid*). GNUM stated that the Ethiopian Federal Police and the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) have been there to make sure they flush out the indigenous people from their ancestral land in favor of the highlanders (*ibid*). The party stated that the indigenous Nilotes are not enjoying freedom and equality as they continue to suffer discrimination because of their color and race (*ibid*). The party argued that "They are seen as inferior, low grade citizens and sub-humans who do not deserve any right to own properties and show prosperity as other citizens - even on their own lands" (*ibid*). The Majang, according to the party, had lost control over their ancestral land and forest resources in Godere *woreda* and Yaki *woreda* due to the Satanic policy of EPRDF-led government that did not give guarantee to this minority group in the true sense in the last two decades. The former Regional President also noted,

10 In Ethiopia, the New Year starts in September 11.

“Now illegal immigrants are heading towards Mengeshi woreda for unlawful consumption of well-known jungle forest resources in the country” (Obong, 2014).

Now (October 2014), with the intervention of local elders, religious leaders and Minister of Federal Affairs, the violence has abated and some of the displaced highlanders and local communities returned to their homes. However, rumors were there that in the nearby Guraferda of the SNNPRS, tensions between the Majang and the highlanders increased igniting a conflict that lasted five days and destroyed property and claimed the lives of many people. Only after the Federal Police intervened did the killing cease. Local people reported that about 35 members of Federal Police lost their lives in the confrontation. These violent incidents show that collective violence often begins with a small-scale inter-personal dispute and then escalates. While the immediate cause of the violence is multitude, the risk of escalation may be very high when some set of systemic conditions prevail, in this case, deep-seated simmering tensions and land ownership imbalance between the Majang and the highlanders.

Conclusion

This paper has sketched the inter-regional migration phenomenon and its impact on the indigenous Majang people in the context of ethno-federalism in MNZ. The study concludes that though there was hope that ethno-nationalist friendly federalism would ensure identity security for the indigenes of the Majang, in effect their political life, economic rights and societal security have come under constant threat and hence the Majang feel an existential threat in their interactions with the highlanders. In this regard, many observers also pointed out that currently while the government policy of developmental state is manifested in the form of large-scale land lease, resettlement, and mega hydro dams, ethnicity and minority rights are pushed to the background (for example, see Barata, 2012:68). Land grabbing and land commercialization in MNZ also contradicted with what the constitution makers have envisioned. For instance, one of the arguments of the proponents of state ownership of land during the constitution-making process was that:

...it will become difficult to reconcile private ownership of land with the rights of pastoralists to the use of land on which they traditionally had inalienable grazing land. Similarly, letting the sale and free transfer of land rights will have the effect of endangering the identity, livelihood, and cultural survival of ethnic and cultural minorities within the country (Seyoum, 2010:55).

This case study is a telling example of the government's 'pragmatic' approach to ethnicity and its willingness to abandon its basic federal principle of protecting and promoting the rights of minority ethnic groups when faced with developmen

tal challenges. In short, inter-regional migration and land grabbing undermines the federal project which is premised on ethno-cultural justice. In other words, the existence of ethnic-federalism does not automatically protect the Majang people because they lack the real power structure to challenge encroachment. What is more, it seems that the government has a 'tacit consent' for highlanders to get hold of land in MNZ and its policy of LSAI has also facilitated migratory tendency. There is an alleged evidence that now the government is promoting highlanders' resettlement in the interest of national security.

Hence, as already illustrated, conflict has become a dangerous reality that must be resolved in the MNZ and it has created an indigene-migrant divide waiting to explode again, sooner or later. In fact, earlier discussions clearly indicate that both groups are experiencing mutually reinforcing adversary image of what Buzan (1993:46) calls "societal security dilemma". If necessary measures are not taken immediately, the Majang culture will vanish completely. The people may frustrate and several unwarranted conflicts and violence may ensue. Yet, the Regional and Federal Governments have failed to appropriately manage the problem.

Therefore, since highlanders' illegal land grabbing has presented an existential threat to the Majang people, inter-regional migration needs to be factored into the security agenda. In the Majang political discourses, highlander migrants are presented as threat to the Majang identities. This study recommends that appropriate social intervention policies (Inter-regional migration policy) should be in place to ensure that the people are able to fully exercise their rights and control over their lands. Actually, the constitution is clear enough in this regard but it lacks appropriate regulation and institutional frameworks vital for implementing its provisions and establishing secure forestland resource tenure for the Majang. There is lack of clear and officially enforceable rights over forestland possessions. Essentially, ensuring stable forestland tenure would require the creation of a system whereby the present illicit seizing of land can be prohibited and prevented. Partly this can be done by demarcating an exclusive Majang forestland zones. By doing so, the vulnerability of the Majang to a growing highlanders' demand for land will also be minimized. The recent arrival of highlanders from Gojjam and Wollo in the area is making the local community more insecure. So, efforts are needed to stop highlander's migration and the government should device a mechanism to avoid the effects of the existing cunning seizure of the Majangland by economically powerful migrants. Actually, as per Article 41 of the FDRE Constitution, "Every Ethiopians has the right to engage freely in economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his choice anywhere within the national territory". Nevertheless, the influence of individual rights on group rights, especially the right of indigenous minority and marginalized groups needs at

tention and wide-ranging impacts of the migration on the host community have to be reasonably debated. In addition, the government should take confidence building policy measures to reduce the effect of the prevailing 'societal security dilemma'.

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