

**Gizachew Wondie**

**‘Indigenous’ versus ‘Non-indigenous’  
People’s Rights in Ethiopia. Political  
Participation of ‘Non-Indigenous’ People  
in Bambasi Woreda**

**Master's Thesis**

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**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE  
CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

**‘Indigenous’ and ‘Non-indigenous’ People’s Rights in Benishangul-Gumuz  
Regional State: The Right to Political Participation of ‘Non-Indigenous’  
People in Bambasi Woreda**

By

Gizachew Wondie

A Thesis submitted to the Center for Human Rights, College of Law and Governance  
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## **Abstract**

*The right to political participation, as stated under the UDHR and ICCPR, is a basic right of human beings that influence the inter-relation and interaction of human beings. Ethiopia, as signatory of these international human right instruments, the FDRE constitution stipulates the right to political participation right of all Nation, Nationalities and People of the country without any discrimination. However, regional states, like Benishangul-Gumuz, had face serious criticism that ‘non-indigenous’ people are face serious problem in the enjoyment of their right to political participation. Hence, this research has aimed to assess the political participation of ‘non-indigenous’ people of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State: case study of Bambasi woreda. It looks and measures the participation of ‘non-indigenous’ people in public decision making and assess the ‘indigenous’ vs. ‘non-indigenous’ composition of institution of Bambasi Woreda administration and normative instruments for the accommodation and consideration of the right to political participation of ‘non-indigenous’ people. In investigating reliable data, the researcher utilizes qualitative research approaches unstructured in-depth interview, key informant interview and field observation as data collection instruments with different documents and articles. As finding of the study reveals, the right to political participation has been shortened by normative and institutional constraints that range from the federal up-to kebele administration level. Hence, it is highly recommended that there must be a structural change that helps to establish an inclusive normative and administrative institution that range from the reconsideration of ‘non-indigenous’ people up to constitutional amendment and re-institutionalization of the administration.*

## **Key Terms**

Indigenous, Non-Indigenous, Political Participation, Right to Political Participation

## **List of Abbreviations**

ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
HoPR	House of Peoples Representatives
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
NEB	National Electoral Board
OPDO	Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization
PA	Peasant Association
ANRS	Afar National Regional State
TRS	Tigray Regional State
BGRS	Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State
SRS	Somali Regional State
SEPDF	Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Front
SNNPRS	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State
TPLF	Tigray Peoples Liberation Front
UDA	Urban Dwellers' Association
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
WCIP	World Council of Indigenous Peoples

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## CHAPTER ONE

### RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Ethiopia has a long history of statehood with the ancient civilizations of the Abyssinian, Axumite Empire and the Zagwe Dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Minding this, Zemelak argued, Ethiopia was one of the most decentralized states from the period of ancient civilization up to the late 1850.<sup>2</sup> However, Edmond Keller argues, though it is not effective and had breakages (like period after the fall of Axumite civilization, and ‘Zemene Mesafint’), the process of centralization were back rooted to the ancient period of Axumite civilization.<sup>3</sup> However, the then centralization process of Axumite civilization were very loose which mostly ended with an ‘imaginary empire’ but not central government.<sup>4</sup> For example, According to Assefa Fisseha, the process of centralization of state power, which began since the reign of Emperor Tewodros II in the 1850s, marked the beginning of Ethiopia’s nation (empire) building.<sup>5</sup> Alem Habtu argues, the southward expansion of the Ethiopian state was completed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under Menelik II which also attributed to the completion of the formation of centralized state.<sup>6</sup> However, Zemelak argues, despite their desire, three monarchical governments (Tewodros II, Yohanes IV and Menilik II) were unable to establish a centralized government because of the technological and economic factors, the impenetrable terrain and an entrenched culture of regional and local consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Hence, he generalize that the formation of strong central government was realized in the period of Emperor Haile Selassie through his own first written constitution of 1931 in which the emperor use to strip the regional

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<sup>1</sup>Kidane, M., 1997. New approaches to State Building in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism. *African Studies Review*, Volume 40, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Zemelak, A., 2011. Law democracy and development: local governments in Ethiopia: Still an apparatus of control? Volume 15, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Keller, E., 2005. Making and Remaking State and Nation in Ethiopia. *Nationalism and the African States*, 3(1), p. 88.

<sup>4</sup>Assefa, F., 2007. *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity in Ethiopia: A comparative Study*. Revised ed. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Enterprise. P.15

<sup>5</sup>Assefa, F., 2007. *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity in Ethiopia: A comparative Study*. Revised ed. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Enterprise. P. 16

<sup>6</sup> Alemante, G., 2011. Federalism, Human Rights and the EPRDF Constitution: The Bad, the Ugly, and the Evil. *Ethiopian news and information update (world press)*,P.11

<sup>7</sup>Zemelak, A., 2011. Law democracy and development: Local governments in Ethiopia: still an apparatus of control? Volume 15, p. 4.

and local lords of their traditional privileges from the local community.<sup>8</sup> He also argues, the local and provincial administration reform through promulgation of Decree No 1/1942 was the most drastic formal measure of centralization of local autonomies and authorities since the period of 1942.<sup>9</sup> Hence, Zemelak concludes, following this period, the local and provincial administrative units become clear extension of the central government and the local and regional administrators were not only appointed by the Emperor but also required to act as his agent.<sup>10</sup>

Following the fall of the Imperial rule, Derge had continued with centralized administration process. Derge attempted to deal with issues of self-administration by establishing lower level local governments elected by dwellers of their areas. For example, according to Smith Lahra, Derg established two local level institutions: the Urban Dwellers' association (UDA) and the Peasant association (PA) in kebele (sub-district), Woreda (rural district) or Kefitegna (urban district) and city or regional level as autonomous institutions to run their own affairs, solve their own problems and directly participate in political, economic and social activities.<sup>11</sup> Zemelak also argues, these institutions, despite their establishment, were degenerated into apparatus of repression and terror in which the UDA and PA was renamed in to "*public safety squad*" and "*peasant defense squad*" respectively to eliminate political opponents.<sup>12</sup>

The move to the adoption of constitutional federalism was only a beginning of the process of decentralization that was taking place since 1991, which ushered after the fall of the military regime.<sup>13</sup> The newly established government, TGE, recognized the right to self-determination of each ethnic groups of the country which latter further strengthened even after the new federal

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<sup>8</sup>Zemelak, A., 2011. Law democracy and development: Local governments in Ethiopia: still an apparatus of control? Volume 15, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Zemelak, A., 2011. Law democracy and development: Local governments in Ethiopia: still an apparatus of control? Volume 15, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Zemelak, A., 2011. Law democracy and development: Local governments in Ethiopia: still an apparatus of control? Volume 15, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>Lahra, S., 2008. the politics of contemporary language policy in Ethiopia. *journal of Developing societies* , 13(2), p. 208.

<sup>12</sup> Lahra, S., 2008. the politics of contemporary language policy in Ethiopia. *journal of Developing societies* , 13(2), p. 208.

<sup>13</sup>Tsegaye, R., 2004. State constitutions in Federal Ethiopia: A preliminary observation. *A summery for the Bellagio*, 22-23 March .p. 9.