

The Dizi and the Neighbouring Surma: A Case Study of Interethnic Relations in Southwest Ethiopia

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Abstract

The Dizi of southwest Ethiopia, whose relationship with the neighbouring Surma has been deteriorating in recent years, find themselves in difficult circumstances. In an inquiry of 3 separate focus group interviews involving 23 participants², about half of the informants reported they had one or more family members killed by the Surma over the last 10 years before February 1998. This simply shows the seriousness of the problem. A quick fix is not expected to such deeply troubled relationship. Sustained efforts are needed to bring about a negotiated and non-confrontational engagement of the two groups. This study underscores the importance of clan-based indigenous organizations in managing interethnic relations.

Introduction

Ethiopia is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country. There are over 80 linguistic groups inhabiting its territory. This ethnic differentiation has been often hailed as one of the country's cultural and historical treasures. The downside has been, however, that greater variability in the composition of the population (e.g. ethnic, religious orientations) and resultant internal divisions are a curse to Ethiopia's development rather than a blessing. Flaring up interethnic relations fuelled by parochial attitudes and disorientation in the current political process tend to exasperate some of the unintended consequences of ethnic diversity. This phenomenon is no less evident in the ethnically diverse South Region than elsewhere in Ethiopia.

In this paper I describe the prevailing patterns of interactions between the Dizi and their neighbours – sometimes cooperative and sometimes conflict-ridden and the conflict and violence is more intense and destructive in the case of some groups than others. The paper focuses on recent trends in interethnic relations between the Dizi on the one hand and the Surma and the Me'en, on the other. It explores based on data collected from the Dizi the long-running tension between the Dizi and the Surma despite attempts at different times to patch up such unfriendly relationship (e.g. through political means).

The elderly Dizi men with whom I held group discussions on the issue have stated in unequivocal terms that unless a solution is sought to their difficult circumstances through

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²Participants of the various focus group discussions (a total of 9 such focus group discussions involving 89 participants were conducted) were drawn from clan leaders, ordinary Dizi men and women, kebele and wereda government officials. The various instruments used in the collection of data on the Dizi and their neighbours have been discussed in greater detail in a report prepared and submitted to the House of Federation of the Ethiopian Government and can be made available for inspection on request.

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outside intervention (e.g. region officials) the prospect for engaging the ordinary Dizi in local development efforts is not encouraging. I argue that the way forward should be sought through negotiation and non-confrontational engagement of the two groups involving elders and clan leaders of the respective societies. The paper will try to provide some suggestions of how to go about dealing with the prevailing conflict and violence in the Maji area of which the Dizi are most affected.

The paper is organized as follows. I first discuss some theoretical issues regarding ethnicity. The intention here is to emphasize the socio-cultural dimensions of ethnicity, which are intelligible only in relation to interaction with other groups. I then introduce some general aspects of the Dizi society focusing on their environment, livelihoods and social organization. These factors have direct bearings on the Dizi-Surma relationship. The section that follows discusses the relationship between the Dizi and the neighbouring Surma. The symbiotic nature of the Dizi-Me'en relations is also discussed to draw some practical lessons in efforts to cultivate a positive interaction between the Dizi and Surma. Finally, I offer some suggestions that can be used in managing tensions and conflicts between the different ethnic groups.

Some theoretical issues in ethnicity: Its contextual and interactive nature

Categorization and classification of individuals into different groups is a feature of every society. The basis for such division or cleavages can be due to dissimilarities of biological or socio-cultural characteristics or a combination of both. The concept of ethnicity is usually reserved for human membership and identity based on language, religion, ancestry, place or country of origin. Yinger (1985, quoted by Ragin and Hein, 1993: 255) conceptualises ethnicity as a common origin resulting from shared cultural practices and identity based on some mixture of language, religion, ancestry, or race. More than one attribute may be used to distinguish one ethnic group from another.

For example, the Blacks as a minority ethnic group in the USA are identified, apart from their dark skin colour inherited from birth (primordialist view³) with artistic, sportive, and athletic attributes which are closely linked with their everyday life experiences (constructivist view⁴). On the other, the Whites tend to be associated with entrepreneurial, industrious or organizational skills that help create their identity as Whites. In some societies certain traits (religious divisions among the Iraqi Shiites and the Sunnis, for example) may serve as basis in forming group enclosures. These features however may be reinforced by physical characteristics (e.g. facial appearance) and may together form a group's ethnic identity.

An individual's ethnic identity is expressed in speech, style of dressing, feeling of ancestor origin, about history and place of origin and so forth. Ethnic identity is an act of

³This view recognizes genetic and kinship ties as basis for the determination of ethnic membership.

⁴The constructivists' position is that ethnicity is an aspect of the social interaction processes involved in social construction and everyday practice of individual members of the group.

formation of feelings and sentiments regarding a person's origin, background. It refers to a *sense of psychological connection to a group of people with a common heritage and place of geographical origin* (Branch et al. 2000) extending as far back as one's parents or grandparents' generation or even beyond. Some times ethnic identity can develop into an ideology thereby acting as a barrier to interethnic communication (e.g. Arabs Vs Israelis) and reducing cultural, value and political diversity of the group (Malesevic, 2004).

For Max Weber (1968) the sociological significance of ethnicity lies in its ability to facilitate formation of groups, especially in the political arena. Once formed, ethnicity provides a mechanism for political groups to organize and mobilize their resources for the purpose of defending their interests shared presumably by members of the ethnic community. Weber argues that *since the possibilities for collective action rooted in ethnicity are 'indefinite', the ethnic group, and its close relative nation, cannot easily be precisely defined for sociological purposes*. It is apparent from Weber's statement that ethnicity does not easily lend itself to sociological investigation because of the complexity of factors/traits involved in the formation of ethnic identity.

More recent anthropological and sociological literature on ethnicity is leaning towards treating the concept as a social and cultural construct learned through group interaction. Eriksen (2002) sees ethnicity as relating to *'aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive.'* Here, the notion of 'otherness' characterizing inter-group relations is a key to the maintenance of ethnic cleavages. The existence of one ethnic group presupposes other groups who share not only a common boundary and natural resources but also system of government. For example, the Dizi's perception of themselves as a distinct ethnic group is meaningful only in relation to the Surma or the Me'en who view the Dizi as being different. Individual members learn group traits through socialization in the same way they learn group values and norms.

Ethnicity as a culturally and socially constructed category is contextual and interactive with political and economic conditions as well as with historical circumstances. The contextual nature of ethnicity and ethnic relations is well illustrated by changing nature of identities. For example, an individual's ethnic identity is likely to be weaker when he/she migrates to the city and interacts with other ethnic groups. Also, interethnic marriages are likely to result in moderate 'hyphenated' identities, not necessarily sharing the mainstream identity of either ethnic group. As Ragin and Hein (1993: 258) noted *the socially situated nature of ethnicity is made even more complex by the many different ways it is situated ... and the many different ways it is mediated...*

The two authors stressed that ethnicity is situated nationally and politically and internationally and is mediated by economic inequality, by territory, or by language. Nowadays ethnicity has increasingly taken centre stage in national politics with different political parties trying to bank support on their respective ethnic groups⁵. The post election

⁵This view is closer to the instrumentalist approach to ethnicity which, as noted by Weber (1968), may explain how political acts of submersion under one regime are celebrated as heroic by those who demand for political representation and condemned as treason by those governing the nation states.

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crisis in Kenya in 2007 is a grim reminder of how ethnic allegiance interacts with national elections affecting political outcomes. The Rwanda genocide involving Tutsi and Hutu groups and the war in Bosnia between the Serbs and the Croats had been carried with the purpose of advancing the political interest of certain ethnic groups at national as well as international levels.

Ethnicity also interacts with historical factors and environmental resources as well as livelihood activities. For example, to understand why the Surma of southwest Ethiopia are feuding with the Dizi or why Somali and Afar groups do not sometimes see each other in friendly terms, we must take a longer historical, social, economic and environmental views that have been mediating interaction between these groups. The Surma accuse the Dizi of having opened the way for the penetration of the central government into the Maji area and thereby making the Surma more vulnerable to government scrutiny and control. However, the Surma being dependent on herding require more land and pastures and hence the economic necessity to expand their territory to the greener Maji highlands.

Similarly, the unfriendly relations between the Afar and the Somali can be in part explained by taking into account their socio-economic conditions, with both groups vying to acquire more land and water resources for their cattle.

Environment, livelihoods and social organization of the Dizi

According to Haberland (1984) the name Dizi refers to a group of people belong to the family of West Cushitic or Omotic languages. They occupy the South Westerly central plateau of the former Maji province, presently Dizi wereda. The wereda is bordered in the East by Omo River; in the West by Gambella, in the North by Me'en wereda, in the South by Surma wereda, and South Omo zone (for location see Figure 1). The agro-ecology of the area generally favours cultivation of crops twice a year.

The first national population census in 1984 put the population of Dizi at 20,066, and ten years later the 1994 population and housing census came up with 22,346 persons. Local sources produced different population figures at different times. For example, the Dizi zone⁶ agricultural office in 1996 estimated the population of the Dizi at 33,000. A figure twice the 1994 Census was given by the provincial administration of Maji in 1990 – 48,238 persons. Even as early as 1976 the administration estimated the population of Dizi to be 41,000. Evidently, local and official sources did not in any way match to each other⁷.

In terms of livelihoods the Dizi are practising oxen-based, small-scale farming. Corn and sorghum are the two principal annual crops widely grown in the Dizi country. Enset (or false banana) is also a major permanent garden crop of economic and cultural importance.

⁶Administrative and political reorganization following the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1995 resulted Maji zone being reduced to wereda under the Bench-Maji zone. The Dizi are not happy about this change.

⁷In 1998 I inquired Dizi wereda officials about this issue and they told me that because of the security problem the Dizi had with the Surma at that time the 1994 Census did not include the Dizi residing in some localities such as Gesena, Dami, Kafe, Tulgit and Gebessa Sholla.

For the time being the Dizi do not have problem of shortage of land (average arable land holding for annual crops is 5.48 ha) but average plot size is less than a hectare. The majority seem to be content with cultivating small plots due partly to acute shortage of oxen and also due to limited experience in farming. There is a very limited use of extension inputs.

In the area of social organization, territorially organized clan groups based on possession of common territory, and shared psychosocial myth about origin form the basis for the social arrangements of the Dizi. In the past a few powerful clan leaders who had seized control of land and free peasant labour presided over ordinary. Some clan chiefs (e.g. Adi-Kyaz, Adi area, South of Maji) also enjoyed symbolic recognition over other Dizi chiefs.

The German ethnologist, Haberland (1984) who perhaps was the first to undertake a systematic study of the social hierarchy of the Dizi society, identified 20 chiefdoms distributed from southeast to northeast. However, my informants told me that there are five additional clans, some which have been treated by Haberland as subdivisions.

The different chiefdoms are known by a combination of their respective clan names: Adi-kyaz used to be a well-known chiefdom around Adi area south of Maji; Kersi-kyam was another chieftain in the Kersi area southwest of Maji, Urr-burji (the rain caller) in Urr area north of Maji and so on. Three most common powerful traditional titles were: kyaz, kyam and burji, with kyaz considered to be the highest rank, according to Haberland (1984) and Fukui (1994). In practice, however, some chiefs (e.g. Urr-burji) have been regarded as more powerful than the mystically upheld Adi-kyaz because of their mediating role between nature and the Dizi.

Although chieftainship no longer carries economic and political importance for the Dizi, they still have strong spiritual affinity with their traditional chiefs. They still respect them, listen to them and follow them regarding matters affecting the community. The chiefs have continued to perform rituals of birth, marriage, death, and are active participants in the social and cultural life of the Dizi. Their role as arbitrators, negotiators and peacemakers was widely recognized by over 90 percent of the 223 respondents who responded to the question "*what roles do chiefs perform currently?*" Therefore, the Dizi social organization can play an important role in efforts to normalize relations with the Surma.

The Dizi and their Neighbours

Owing to history and geography more than a dozen of pastoral and agro-pastoral groups surround the Dizi. Most of these communities maintain amicable ties with the Dizi through exchange of goods and services on the market, marriage and rituals. For example, the Dizi in Bero area, Jeba burji, have a friendly relationship with the Sheko people in the western frontier. Both groups sell and buy items on the market from one another crosscutting group boundaries. Interethnic marriages between the two groups are not uncommon and comforting one another in times of grief and sorrow is also an inter-ethnic phenomenon. The Dizi regard their relationship with the Sheko people as an example of good neighbourliness.

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In the northwest boundary are the Bentch people. One of the Dizi chiefs, fitarwrari Kuri, was married to a Bentch woman who gave birth to a son by the name of Markos, who later served as district administrator for the Dizi and the Me'en. Jeba burji, another Dizi chief in Bero, was also married to another Bentch woman. Similar stories are told about the historically created marriage bond between the Dizi and the Me'en, or even between the Dizi and the Surma in an effort to cultivate good relations between Dizi and their neighbours.

The Me'en with a population of 35,541 (CSA, 1996) have become important lifelines for the Dizi markets. They produce teff, coffee, corn and sorghum for the market. The Me'en also supply the town people of Maji and Tum with butter and honey. These markets also offer the Me'en people an opportunity to buy those items not available in their localities such as clothes. An intensive interaction occurs between the two groups at the time of selling/ buying, sometimes extending to invitations for drinks of *borde or katical*, or leading to marriage arrangements. The two groups also exchange information on suspected cattle raid by other groups and assist each other in searching raided cattle.

However, relationships between the Dizi and the Me'en were not without problems. In the early 1980s the Me'en had revolted against the military regime trying to extend its tentacles of control from the centre into the periphery. At that time the Me'en refused to cooperate with the central government on matters of security, recruitment for the army, and control of bandits in the area. To revenge the unruly behaviour of the Me'en, the regime launched continuous attacks against the Me'en using a force stationed at Maji.

The Me'en, having sought cooperation of the Surma who at that time were not also in good terms with the government, in retaliation launched an all-out offensive destroying and looting Dizi houses, property and cattle along the way. Both groups labelled the Dizi collaborators with the central government. But Dizi elders do not want to talk about this any more perhaps due partly not to stir up things and partly to the fact that they have now more serious things to worry about than sticking to long past episodes. The greatest Dilemma confronting the Dizi as a group now is how to improve their soared relations with the Surma.

Dizi-Surma Relations⁸: Uneasy Affiliation

The Surma (numbering 20,572 people) occupy the southwesterly outpost of the country. There has been some parallel between their geographical remoteness and marginal participation in the political life of the country so that they, according to Abbink (1997:329), *saw themselves as a separate political unit*. This view must have partly contributed to their refusal in the past to recognize the legitimacy of the provincial administration stationed at Maji town.

⁸It needs to be stressed that because of the security situation in the Surma area at that time, the information used in this section was collected from the Dizi. It would be interesting to get an insight into the Surma version of events regarding Dizi-Surma relations.

The Surma have never been happy about presence of government administration at Maji trying to control their mobility and restrict their access to grazing land - both are important elements in the practice of agro-pastoralism. Most government forces of successive regimes that launched attacks against the Surma at different times had their base at Maji town or somewhere in the Diziland. Besides, educated Dizi men from the chiefs' families (fitwarari Adi-kyaz and fitawrari Kuri) served in different times as administrators not only for the Dizi but also for the Surma. This led the Surma to suspect the Dizi as government loyalists trying to spy on the neighbouring Surma.⁹

- The Surma have been retaliating the Dizi by raiding cattle, killing and kidnapping people on intermittent basis. It is said that whenever Surma cattle is raided by another stronger rival (e.g. the Bume on the Ethio-Kenya border) the Surma often look their stolen cattle in the Dizi backyards. According to an elderly Dizi man, the Surma regard the Dizi as a defenceless 'wife' – an expression alluded to the service functioning of a wife for a husband in traditional society.

Surma resentment toward the Dizi becomes energized in times of government crisis such as change of government. In the past two decades, the Surma launched two large-scale attacks against the Dizi. The first one was in the early 1980s in which they, after having allied with the Me'en, destroyed the localities of Kolu, Adi-Kyaz, Siski and Muye and looting property and raiding cattle as well as killing and kidnapping the Dizi. The second attack occurred when the transitional government was trying to consolidate its power after removing the military regime in 1991. The Dizi villages in Adi-kyaz, Siski, and Kolu were burned down and residents were forced to flee to Maji and Tum towns.

Every time the Surma strike (no one knows when) it causes a widespread sense of insecurity, panic and forced dislocation across the Diziland. The natural environment (i.e. dense vegetation) has also favoured the Surma in carrying out unsuspected attacks after which they disappear in the jungle. Dizi elders and women worry that their men and children will be ambushed, kidnapped or shot any time of the day and the fear becomes worse when Surma are seen around – the fear that the Surma are likely to launch an attack becomes intensified.

Table 1: Number of people killed by ethnicity and name of ethnic group perpetrating the killing, 1992/93 & 1994/95-1996/97

Violence on	Name of ethnic group perpetrating violence						Total	Percent
	Dizi	Surma	Me'en	Amhara	Others			
Dizi	40	39	-	-	1	80	63.5	
Surma	13	3	1	1	2	20	15.9	
Me'en	-	-	9	-	-	9	7.1	
Amhara	-	14	-	1	1	16	12.7	
Others	-	1	-	-	-	1	0.8	
Total	53	57	10	2	4	126	100.00	

Source: Dizi Wereda Police, Tum, 1998.

⁹ According to the Dizi, the Surma accuse the Dizi of cooperating with northern settlers and making the Surmaland vulnerable to external influences.

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Death statistics as reported to the Dizi Wereda Police indicate that the Dizi were prime victims with the Surma being major perpetrators (Table 1). The Dizi also stood second in taking the lives of their own people but according to Dizi elders this is a manifestation of the frustration the Dizi have to deal with in their relationship with the Surma. Dizi are normally peaceful people but their inability to do something about the escalation of conflict in the area has made them vulnerable to some self-destructive behaviour, according to the Dizi elders. They also attribute the Dizi's increased consumption of alcohol to the prevailing feelings of insecurity and hopelessness.

In three separate focus group discussions conducted in Gebarku¹⁰, Urr¹¹ and Tum¹² localities, each participant was asked if any family member or relative had been killed or wounded by the Surma over the last ten years. The responses are shown in Table 2. Out of 7 informants who participated in the discussion in Gebarku kebele (Kurit area) 4 reported they had one or more family members killed by the Surma; 4 out of 10 informants in Urr kebele reported they had one or more family members killed by the Surma, and 3 out of 6 participants in Tum reported they had one or more family members killed by the Surma. The gravity of the problem is also evident in the case of informant No 1 who was an administrator of Surma¹³ during the derg period.

Table 2: Number of people killed/wounded by the Surma as reported by participants of three focus group discussions

Informant	Victim's relation to the informant
1	Wife, grandson, brother's grandson, uncle's son & wife, half brother's sister's two sons & five daughters. A grand daughter & brother's wife wounded.
2	Brother & his wife, uncle, deceased uncle's son & his pregnant wife
3	Brother, two uncles & one of his deceased uncle's son
4	Half brother & another taken captive
5	Aunt's son
6	Sister
7	Aunt
8	Sister
9	Pregnant daughter and her husband
10	Tow sons
11	Son-in-law
12	Two nephews

Source: Results of three focus group interviews

¹⁰ The number of focus group participants was 7.

¹¹ The number of focus group participants was 10.

¹² The number of focus group participants was 6.

¹³ What makes unique the case of this informant is that he was appointed as district administrator for the Surma in the later years of the military regime, which again reinforces the view that Surma's attack might be politically motivated.

The conflict between the two groups is also manifested in the practice of livelihood strategies: the Dizi being settled agriculturalists normally require permanent plots to grow crops while the Surma as pastoralists prefer large area for animal grazing. Hence the quest for larger and productive grazing land could be at the centre of the conflict between the two groups. There is a claim, which the Surma make, according to the Dizi, that most of the area inhabited by Dizi belongs to them. It is not certain yet how serious the claim is. In any case, competition for resources (e.g. local gold fields) constitutes the underlying cause of the conflict.

However, it is not always the case that relations between the two groups have been conflict-ridden. The two groups have certain things in common. They have been interacting in selling and buying goods on local markets. Marriage ties have been also initiated and established at the highest level of the Dizi social organization with the late fitawari Adi-Kyaz married to a Surma woman. When the two most influential Dizi chiefs (fitawrari Adi-Kyaz & fitwrari Kuri) died their funerals were well attended by Surma chiefs and Dizi did the same when Surma chief, Wolo Zogy, died, according to Alemayu Markos, grandson of fitawrari Kuri. These examples of cooperation illustrate that the two groups can manage their conflict peacefully.

Managing and Containing the Conflict: A Negotiation-Based Approach

De Bono (1985) believes that the best way to end a conflict is to un-design the circumstance that led to the conflict. This is done through de-confliction – that is, to neutralize the emotion, energy and effort that went into the design of a conflict and to redirect attention away from confliction to discussion, negotiation and mutual understanding. A good starting point for de-confliction is to start identifying source of the conflict and building on common interests.

As stated above the Dizi and the Surma share many things together: Both inhabit a common geography and environment; depend for livelihoods on trans-boundary resources (e.g. traditional gold mines). The Surma buffer the Dizi against the Bumé of an Ethio-Kenyan pastoral group perpetually raiding the Surma and trying to penetrate into the hinterland. The Dizi in turn provide a gateway for tourists to the Surma country. The Surma also use markets located in the Diziland to socialize with other groups (e.g. Me'en), in addition to accessing some vital goods like food grains, clothes and salt.

Once such common interests are recognized, the next step is to bring the two groups into the negotiation table by establishing a two-way communication. *The negotiation metaphor ... is the most suited to making conflicts of interests ... more explicit and manageable* (Meegeren & Cees Leeuwis, 1999: 206). Negotiation as a dispute settlement strategy needs to involve the respective indigenous institutions, for both the Dizi and Surma still give allegiance to their chiefs. This helps negotiation to proceed on equal footings by encouraging horizontal communication among the participants. Also, the parties involved in the conflict can give serious attention to resolving the dispute through peaceful means and in the process transform feelings of negative ethnicity into positive force for mutual development.

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Once representatives of the two groups settle for discussion, negotiation can proceed by adopting two conflict resolution modalities: 'distributive' and 'integrative' approaches (Meegeren & Leeuwis, 1999). The former approach enables each group to maintain its own position but must be willing to share both gains and pains of the outcome of negotiation while the latter helps both groups try to hammer out their differences through a mutual learning-consensus building process involving pre-negotiation, negotiation and post-negotiation stages (Meegeren & Leeuwis, 1999). For each of these stages to be successful, certain activities (e.g. selection of the right participants, setting agenda, laying down options for 'win-win' situations, preparing a written document, formalizing agreements, etc.) have to be performed step-by-step.

Local officials of both groups can be involved in either creating the forum for negotiation or in facilitating negotiation provided that they had no role in the conflict. Given the ethnic-based nature of local governments, however, it is likely that some lower-level officials of the respective groups might have had a role in the conflict and may therefore maintain a deeply entrenched position in favour of some agendas set out by their ethnic group. In this case, it could be sensible to involve higher officials preferably from non-members of either ethnic group. *If the initiative comes from a person or organization relatively removed from the conflict (from a non-suspect side)... there is a greater probability that the various parties will participate (Puk van Meegeren & Leeuwis, 1999: 211).*

In the past, attempts to normalize relations between the Dizi and Surma have not been successful for various reasons. The Dizi put the blame on the Surma for not being ready for peace, even when an agreement is reached it is the Surma who often break the accord, the Dizi say. Part of the problem, it seems, is that disputes are not usually settled through a broad-based participation of the different groups in the respective societies. Negotiations must be initiated at different levels involving the different groups. Elders, adults and women being part of the conflict need to be involved in dealing with it. Local officials' role, on both sides, should be limited to creating favourable conditions for negotiations to take place.

Conclusion

The conflicts of the future are more likely to be between people rather than states over issues related to culture, ethnicity or religion, according to Mahbun ul Haq, Special United Nations Development Program advisor (quoted in Wright, 1994: 159). Such grim assessment of inter-group relations can be improved by encouraging non-violent and peaceful conversations and dialogue among groups involved in disputes.

The Dizi and Surma have been historically interacting through markets, marriage and utilization of transboundary resources as well as administrative and social services situated at Maji and tum towns. They have been sharing the limited social, economic and environmental resources found in the Maji area, though recent conflict has reduced the ability of both groups to deal with issues of common concern such as developing road infrastructures. The fact that relations between the two groups tend to deteriorate in time of

change of government implies conflicts are sometimes constructed/generated through local or clan power-play mediated through disputes over resources, territorial claims, livelihood sources and cattle raids. Competition for local power dominance between the Dizi and the Surma has recently become a contributing factor to the prevailing uneasy relations between the Dizi and Surma.

The Dizi are most affected by the absence of peace in the area. An elderly Dizi man once said Surma's attack on the Dizi is like food choking a throat – a description alluded to the sudden nature of the violence committed by the Surma against the Dizi. It would seem that the Dizi find themselves in a situation reducing their ability to effectively use their time and energy to improve their lives. The problem is further aggravated by Surma's unchecked access to automatic and semi-automatic rifles¹⁴ unlike the Dizi who are closely scrutinized by zone or region officials.

Restoring peace and stability through negotiation is a prerequisite for the development of the Maji area. There is a need to encourage the participation of indigenous clan-based institutions (for example, Kyaz and burji in Dizi) in dealing with disputes between the two ethnic groups. Elders of both groups and their respective social organization can play an important role, as noted by Habtamu (1998), in resolving ethnic conflicts. Levine (2008) says that *nearly all local traditions in the Greater Ethiopian culture exhibit some form of public action, through which persons express mutual respect, effective conflict resolution, and public problem-solving*¹⁵. In this regard, future research focusing on cross-cultural studies aimed at identifying and fostering local institutions can play a positive role in the development of healthy interactions between the two communities.

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¹⁴According to Dizi elders the Surma acquire weapons from the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army operating along the Ethio-Sudan border. The terms of deal seem to revolve around the fact that the Surma supply the SPLA with gold and cattle in exchange for weapons

¹⁵Levine considers the Hiyoda in Konso, the Gumi Gayo among the Borena and Guji Oromos and the Baito in Tigray as important local institutions for adjudicating disputes.

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