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A Study of Recurring Inter-group Conflict in Ethiopia: The Case of Guji and Gedeo, 2018.

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This work is dedicated to the members of the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups,
who are the ones suffering under this conflict.

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Abstract

In April of 2018 violent conflict broke out between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia, after 20 years of apparent stability. It is well established that many conflicts recur over time. This study aims to better understand why the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups got into violent conflict again in 2018, after 20 years of relative stability. The key objectives are to shed light on what the main causes of the conflict are, why the conflict took place at this specific time, and whether it relates to the 1995 and 1998 conflicts between the same two groups.

In the field semi-structured interviews were conducted with 37 informants from both groups, with an aim to interview people with different relations to the conflict, such as government officials, aid workers, IDPs and locals. The key findings of this thesis suggest that the issues at the core of the conflict revolve around territory and self-rule, under the ethnic federalism. In conclusion these causes shows large similarities with causes identified by previous researchers in the 1995 and 1998 conflict, indicating that this is a recurring conflict. It appears that these same core issues have resurfaced over an alleged proposal for a new referendum, regarding the administrative border, with certain elite actors as a driving force.

Key Words: Ethiopia, Conflict, Recurring Conflict, Communal Conflict, Inter-group conflict, Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Federalism, Ethnicity, Elites.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This research project is a 40 credits master thesis as part of a Master of Philosophy in Peace and Conflict Transformation, at the University of Tromsø, Norway. The fieldwork was conducted as part of a fieldwork exchange program between UiT and Dilla University in Ethiopia.

In 2018 Africa was once again listed as the continent with the highest number of armed conflicts in the world. (*Conflict Barometer 2018*, p. 1) The continent of Africa has been plagued by conflicts of various kinds ever since the colonial rule of the continent came to an end, and in particular internal conflicts have been prominent. There are no indicators that this trend is slowing down as the number of internal conflicts have increased sharply in the last decade. (Bakken & Rustad, 2018, p. 13).

Ethiopia, a country situated in the north-east, on the horn of Africa, has also experienced its fair share of conflict in the recent decades. Notably, it is clearly one of the more stable states on the horn of Africa, an otherwise fragile region. On the other hand Ethiopia is an extremely diverse country, made up of more than 80 recognized ethnic groups (Temesgen, 2015, pp. 1-2). In the 30 year period of 1989-2018 there was a total of 54 internal armed conflicts registered in Ethiopia ("Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Gedeo-Guji)"). The same stats suggest that Ethiopia was the country with the second highest number of "battle-related Deaths from Internal Armed Conflicts" in the same period, only second to Syria (Knomea, 2020). That in itself is an indicator of the serious problems that Ethiopia are facing, namely violent inter-group conflicts, which are argued to make up the biggest threat to the stability of the current government, not to mention a major threat to the security of the peoples in the conflict affected areas and in the country overall (Yusuf, 2019).

In 2018 one such inter-group conflict broke out in southern Ethiopia. Violence erupted between the Guji and Gedeo neighbouring ethnic groups, after 20 years of relative stability. The Uppsala conflict data programme here reported 25 battle related deaths in the conflict between Guji and Gedeo in 2018, but the numbers are uncertain and potentially much higher, as the estimate is in fact somewhere between 24 and 97 deaths ("Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Gedeo-Guji)"). Over the course of the year, nearly 1 million people fled their homes, and the entire community faced grave consequences in the form of lost lives, destruction of property, agriculture and lost resources overall (Mules, 11.08.2018).

1.1 Motivation

When I first came across this conflict I was writing my proposal for the fieldwork exchange program with Dilla university, looking up suitable research topics in the country. It all started with a short rapport from the UN organization IOM (international organization from migration), which stated that near 1 million people were displaced in this conflict. I was quite frankly shocked by the number and the severity of the situation, but even more so by the fact that I had not heard anything about it. This was not too long after the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar, where nearly 800 000 people were displaced, that situation had received massive media attention (OCHA). I stay updated and follow the news regularly, and was extremely surprised that a displacement scenario possibly larger than the one in Myanmar had gone relatively unnoticed globally. And so my interest in the situation was peaked.

Initially I had plans to study the internal displacement area of the conflict, but when I arrived in the field the situation had changed (as is often case, the information available online was already outdated at this point) and most of the displaced persons had been returned to their place of origin. That meant it would be much more difficult to study the displacement situation, with my limited means of access and transportation. Therefore I had to rethink my original plan.

Ever since I had stumbled upon this conflict there was one thing that puzzled me, namely that I was not able to find out why this displacement scenario had taken place. The (limited) information online simple stated that it was an ethnic conflict or communal violence, but the information remained focused on the displacement situation. This gave me the impression that more research on the conflict itself was in-fact needed. Sure, there was research on the 1995 and 1998 conflicts between the two groups, but no in-depth research appeared to have been conducted on the conflict of 2018. Later this was reinforced by my informants whom often stated that they didn't know the real cause of the conflict. In other words my motivation changed to generate better understanding of the causes behind the displacement, namely the 2018 conflict between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups, where I identified a gap in available research at the time.

1.2 Problem Statement

Conflict between ethnic groups in Ethiopia is nothing new, the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups respectively got into conflict both in 1995 and 1998. In fact, Ethiopia overall saw an increase

in intergroup conflicts in the 1990s, which have been linked to the implementation of the new system of ethnic federalism (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 2). The Guji and Gedeo conflict is one of several inter-group conflicts that erupted in Ethiopia in 2018, some researchers have tentatively linked this to the political changes that took place at the national level at the same time. (Yusuf, 2019, pp. 3, 7)

Even so, there is a lack of in-depth research on the 2018 conflict, at least academically. Most research on the topic is years old, and therefore obviously focuses on the conflicts from the 1990s. The newer events have yet to be considered in depth in academic research, and so the material available is mainly reports from humanitarian organizations and news articles related to the displacement scenario. An in-depth review of this existing literature will take place in Chapter 3 of this thesis, further illustrating the gap in available research.

When faced with an outbreak of conflict, we must ask “why did violent conflict break out between the Guji and the Gedeo in 2018?”. New research is needed into this new situation, to understand why it has come about and what really happened. It is especially peculiar, because the groups have been in conflict before. The fact that new conflict between the two groups suddenly broke out again in 2018, after 20 years of seemingly peaceful and stable relations, means more research is required to see if and/or how this new situation ties to the previous conflicts. This thesis suggest that is an indicator of recurring conflict, which is often caused by certain core issues remaining unresolved (S. Gates, H. v. M. Nygård, & E. Trappeniers, 2016). Such unresolved issues can lay dormant for a long period of time. It is therefore necessary to consider not only the causes for the conflict, but also why this conflict broke out specifically in April 2018, hence what sparked the outbreak of violence.

1.2.1 Research Objectives

This study therefore aims to better understand why the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia got into violent conflict again in 2018, after 20 years of relative stability. What the main causes of the conflict are, why the conflict took place at this specific time, and whether they relate to the 1995 and 1998 conflicts.

1.2.2 Research Questions

In order to meet the research objectives, as well as to answer the problems stated above, the research questions are as follows:

1) What are the core issues in the conflict between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups?

2) Why did conflict break out in April 2018 specifically?

3) How does the 2018 conflict relate to the previous conflicts between the two groups?

1.3 Scope of the Study

This thesis does not aim to produce results that can be generalized, but simply to provide in-depth insight into the conflict between Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia, as the title of the project suggests. This is of course part of a larger national context that will be briefly touched upon, but this thesis does by no means aim to tackle the very present problem of intergroup conflict in Ethiopia. The study is a follow up on previous research on Guji-Gedeo intergroup relations, in response to the new development in the situation. That will be elaborated upon in the literature review section of Chapter 3 of this thesis. Therefore the thesis aims to supplement the existing literature on the groups relationship, with a focus on the 2018 conflict.

Timewise this study is limited to the period from 1991 to 2019. Starting in 1991 when the current government got into power, and the administrative system of today's Ethiopia was drawn up. And ending in August 2019, which also marks the end of my fieldwork, and thus a natural ending point in the timeframe of this study. Any events taking place after this date will not be included in the data-collection for this thesis. It should be noted that the paper focuses primarily on the 2018 conflict. Setting the timeframe back to 1991, is mainly based on an assumption that one cannot leave the events of the 1990s out of the discussion, as the 2018 events should be considered in connection to the previous conflicts between Guji and Gedeo.

1.4 Relevance and Importance – Significance of the Study

Explained in the simplest terms fieldwork started with a goal to find out what happened between Guji and Gedeo in 2018. Initially there was a lack of research, leaving several questions unanswered, as outlined in the sections 1.1 and 1.2 above. It should be noted that these events are relatively recent and, while unknown to me, there is a possibility that similar studies have or are taking place. However at the time the study was conducted there was a clear research-gap, that this thesis attempts to fill.

In short, intergroup conflicts have devastating effects on the societies in which they occur, they might even come to have a destabilizing effect on the entire nation or region if not managed properly. Violent inter-group conflicts have severe consequences, in the form of for example; loss of life, destruction of property, lost education, violence and trauma overall (Collier, Hoeffler, & Rohner, 2009, p. 1). These grave consequences clearly underlines the relevance of such research in the field of peace studies. It is absolutely crucial to understand why such conflicts break out, after all one cannot hope to tackle the problems without in-depth understanding of the causes and the context in which conflicts occur.

The current lack of research clearly marks the research gap this thesis works within. On the basis of the 2018 eruption of conflict there is clearly a need for new research to account for these recent events. This study is largely a follow up on existing research on the inter-group relations between Guji and Gedeo, in light of the new events of 2018, as I have already stated. This thesis therefore aims to supply existing research on Guji and Gedeo relations, taking into consideration how this new eruption of violence links to the previous conflicts. Ultimately it is of importance to consider why the two groups keep getting into conflict, it is now the 3rd time since the restructuring of the country in 1991, and the ones suffering are the people inhabiting the two zones.

As a side note, the research on the Guji and Gedeo conflicts this far has largely been executed by Ethiopian researchers (as will be illustrated in the literature review in chapter 2). Thus, while I might lack certain local understandings, my outlook is somewhat different and could therefore contribute something new to the topic overall. At the same time there are certain issues associated with researching as an outsider, the role of the researcher will be further elaborated upon in the methodological framework in Chapter 4.

1.5 Outline of Thesis

This thesis is made up of 7 chapters:

First, Chapter 1 gives an introduction of the thesis topic, in the form of a problem statement, the objectives of the study and the research questions to be answered, as well as an account for the scope and relevance of the study itself.

Chapter 2 follows up with a more detailed contextual background for the study. Incorporating brief historical and political accounts for the current national context in Ethiopia, as well as an

account of Guji-Gedeo intergroup relations the chapter is concluded by an account of the 2018 conflict.

Chapter 3 consists of a short review of existing literature on relevant topics, aiming to outline the findings of previous research.

Chapter 4 is the methodological framework, which attempts to account for the methodology, methods and tools used in data-collection and analysis, concluded by an account of the role of the researcher and ethical considerations.

In Chapter 5 a conceptual framework is outlined, of which will guide the following analysis. In particular the concepts of relevance violent conflict, communal conflict, conflict recurrence and ethnicity.

In Chapter 6 the data will be analysed thematically, under the following themes: Land, Referendum, Grievances, Minority Rights, Elite Instigation, Ethnic Federalism, National Context and Ethnicity.

Lastly, Chapter 7 makes for a brief conclusion. Here the key findings of the study are summarized, thus ensuring that the research objectives are met and the research questions have been properly answered.

Chapter 2 Context

With the research questions from last chapter in mind, this chapter will provide the reader with some relevant background information, to better grasp the case of this study. Starting with a brief introduction to key events of Ethiopia's history, followed by a description of Guji-Gedeo relations, and a short recaption of the 1995 and 1998 conflicts between the two groups. The last section consists of a brief account of the current national context, in which the 2018 conflict between Guji and Gedeo took place, and an outline of the 2018 conflict itself.

2.1 Background

Ethiopia has an extensive history, as one of the world's oldest countries, and there is not enough space within the framework of this thesis to cover it entirely (Henze, 2001, p. 1). This historical background makes up the foundation for the events of today, and one can hardly hope to understand any conflict without some understanding of the historical context in which it takes place.

The Ethiopian State of today was consolidated during the 19th and 20th centuries. Through a combination of conquests and resistance towards the European states' intensifying colonization in the region. Notably, Ethiopia is the only African country that, despite a few years under Italy during World War II, was not colonized. Ethiopia beat the Italians in battle twice in 1896 and 1935, and thus has a distinctly different history compared to most other African states, which were colonized (Mehretu & Crummey, 2019).

In the last half of the 20th century, Ethiopia went through major changes. The last Ethiopian emperor – Haile Selassie – ended his rule in 1974, when the military staged a coup and a socialist dictatorship (DERG¹) was established. The DERG regime suppressed ethnic identities and implemented radical land reforms, in coordination with the Marxist ideology (Mehretu & Crummey, 2019). The current Ethiopian state structure can be traced back to the end of the DERG regime in 1991. This brought the coalition Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to power – which they have held since (Temesgen, 2015, p. 52)

¹ Also spelled Dergue, means "committee" in Amharic (language of the Amhara ethnic group), it was the name of the socialist military dictatorship that ruled Ethiopia in this period (Clapham, 2004, p. 73).

Following the regime change, the EPRDF took a different approach compared to previous governments. Most important for this thesis, they implemented the administrative system of Ethnic Federalism, which we will return to shortly (Temesgen, 2015, p. 50).

2.1.1 Ethnicity in Ethiopia – the Nationalities Question

Today Ethiopia is made up of more than 80 recognized ethnic groups (Temesgen, 2015, pp. 1-2). It is argued that the empires conquests in the beginning of the 20th century created an “asymmetrical power relationship” between the ethnic groups in the south and the Amhara and Tigrayan ethnic groups in the north (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, pp. 1-2). The southern groups were subject to long-lasting exploitation and “*denied access to political power, economic resources, and cultural autonomy*” (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 2).

In the 1960s the “nationalities question”² rose. It manifested in ethnic-based movements opposing the longstanding order of suppression of certain ethnic groups, seeking ethnic and cultural recognition, as well as self-determination (Halabo, 2019, p. 17). This history lays the fundament for the role ethnicity plays in the Ethiopian society today, from this point in time ethnicity became an aspect in the political movements (politicized ethnicity)(Halabo, 2019, pp. 17-18). However, it was only with the EPRDFs rise to power in 1991 that this issue of the ethnic groups was formally addressed, with the Ethnic Federalism they sought to govern the country through recognition of the ethnic groups (Aalen, 2006, pp. 245-246).

2.2 Ethnic Federalism

The EPRDF completely restructured the country, administratively, politically, and economically, after they gained power in 1991. In the EPRDFs Ethiopian constitution from 1994, it was outlined that the country would be organized after a system of Ethnic Federalism. Federalism as a concept refers to sharing of power between several relatively autonomous units, often to uphold the primary ideals of shared rule and self-rule. (Abbink, 2006, pp. 392-395) In the Ethiopian context that means power is divided between the national government and nine recognized regional states, in addition to two city administrations (see appendix 1),

² The “inequalities in power, cultural prestige and resources between the various ethno-linguistic groups” in the country (Abbink, 2006, p. 390).

as listed in Article 47 of the constitution (*Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 1994).

Several countries in the world are organized after forms of federalism, with varying success (Temesgen, 2015, p. 50). What is unique with the Ethiopian form of government is that the federalist structure is based on ethnicity. In other words, the administrative units are created on the basis of ethnic groups, identified through linguistic and cultural criteria (Tefari, 2012, p. 64). And so, with the introduction of Ethnic Federalism, ethnicity officially became a dominant aspect in the country's structure of administration, as well as within the political sphere. It is therefore essential to have a relative understanding of the Ethnic Federalism if one hopes to understand any political phenomenon in Ethiopia today (Abbink, 2011, p. 597).

To provide some more detail on the country's administrative structure, the regions separated into lower administrative units (zones), once again on the basis of ethnicity. Of relevance to this thesis are: The Oromia Region, which the West-Guji zone is part of, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region which encompasses the Gedeo zone. At a lower level the zones are separated into smaller districts, called Woredas (See map of West-Guji and Gedeo in Appendix 2). The lowest level of administration are the Kebeles, which can be small villages or neighbourhoods (Temesgen, 2015, p. 50).

Since it was implemented in the beginning of the 1990s, Ethnic Federalism has been subject to much debate, in and outside of Ethiopia. The Ethnic Federalism was expected to reduce ethnic conflict through the emphasis on self-rule and to avoid the dominance of certain ethnic groups, as well as to hinder disintegration of the entire country due to ethnic opposition, through the recognition of ethnic identities (Abbink, 2006, pp. 395-396; 2011, pp. 597, 605). It also marked the introduction of democracy in Ethiopia, which was seen as a major development at the time (Abbink, 2006, p. 598).

In the end, this thesis does not aim to evaluate ethnic federalism, but the reader might note that statistics do suggest that localized inter-group conflict has increased in Ethiopia after 1991, and that research has linked this development to the implementation of the Ethnic Federalism (Aalen, 2006). Much more could be said about ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, it is a complex system to say the least. We will explore this further in the literature review (Chapter 3) and in the analysis (Chapter 6), to see how the Guji-Gedeo conflict fits into this structural framework.

2.2.1 Land and border under Ethnic Federalism

It is also necessary to mention the issue of land under the Ethnic Federalism, to illustrate how the system affected the relationship between the Guji and Gedeo neighbouring ethnic groups directly in the early 1990s. Previously, under the emperors, a longstanding feudal system of land ownership was in place (Haddis, 2016, p. 2). Then the 1975 land reform nationalized all land, making all the land state owned. Under this system rights of land use are distributed to farmers (Lavers, 2018, p. 463). The Ethiopian constitution's article 40 states that all citizens (peasants) have the right to obtain land (*Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 1994).

This system of nationalized land ownership is rather contradictory to the 1994 Ethiopian constitutions understanding of ethnic groups as groups with defined territories. With the implementation of the ethnic federalism in 1991, a process began to draw borders between different ethnic groups, to form the ethnic based administrative units, and hence it was necessary to determine which groups the land “belonged” to. In the case of Guji and Gedeo, this was made increasingly complicated both by the groups' close relationship and by previous resettling schemes that in reality had changed who lived on the land.

These resettling schemes were directed by the government throughout the 20th century, for various purposes. First the argument was that the government would benefit from the farming of coffee that the Gedeo practiced, rather than from the Guji's traditional livestock herding. It was only as a consequence of the 1960 Gedeo uprising³ one saw larger scale resettling schemes directed by the government. Here Gedeo households were resettled into Guji areas, as “*a means of controlling both groups and weakening the uprising*” (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 14). Then again in the 1980s, under the DERG regime, another round of resettling took place. This time the purpose was in fact related to the high population density in Gedeo, but also part of the regimes strategy to weaken “*ethnic-based movements by mixing groups*” (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, pp. 13-14). This has complicated the issue of land and who has rights to the land in the area, combined with the ethnic federalism and the creation of the

³ A protest against the feudal system, that was in place in the area, at that time (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, pp. 13-14).

administrative zones this makes up an important context for the later conflicts between Guji and Gedeo.

2.3 The Guji and Gedeo Ethnic groups

Guji and Gedeo are neighbouring ethnic groups, situated in the southern part of Ethiopia. The two groups have a long history together, and share an understanding of common mythical ancestry,⁴ referring to each other as brothers and sisters (Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 75)

Traditionally, the Guji are primarily pastoralists, and the Gedeo are mainly farmers. As neighbouring groups, they inhabit parts of the same territory, and research finds that the two groups have experienced conflict over resources prior to 1991 (Kinfemichael, 2014, pp. 77, 88-89). But mostly (and in contrast to other groups in the area), previous studies suggest that their lifestyles were quite complementary. Evidence suggests that the two groups had relatively good relations, with prominent trade-dependency and intermarriages. Any conflicts were usually resolved through local indigenous traditions of conflict resolution (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2007, pp. 37, 53).

Culturally the Guji are part of the traditional indigenous Gadaa system⁵ of the Oromo ethnic groups⁶. The complex Gadaa system deals with the political, social and economic areas of Oromo communal life (Boru, 2016, p. 66). The Gedeo are organized under the Baallee system⁷, which guides life in a very similar way (Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 74). Both systems are present throughout all of life, from birth to death, and still hold a strong position in Guji and Gedeo societies⁸ (Kinfemichael, 2014, pp. 72-74). Hence, no cultural or social phenomena could be understood without mentioning them. In the end, these systems, as well

⁴ According to the myth Guji and Gedeo are brothers from the same father, Gedeo is the older brother and Guji the younger (Interview 36).

⁵ Democratic system of governance of the Oromo ethnic groups (Boru, 2016)

⁶ Oromo makes up the biggest ethnic group in Ethiopia, situated in the south of the country (Boru, 2016; Kinfemichael, 2014).

⁷ The Baallee system incorporates large parts of the Gadaa system. While the Gedeo are not part of the Oromo ethnic groups, it is said that they inherited the system from their Guji neighbors, and it is an indicator of their strong historical relationship (Boru, 2016).

⁸ The Gadaa system was abolished by the government in the past, as part of the suppression of the ethnic groups. Among the Guji the system still holds a strong position today, while its role has declined among many other groups. (Kinfemichael, 2014, pp. 71-72)

as the cultures of Guji and Gedeo, are much more complex than this thesis has the space to cover⁹.

There is one other aspect of high relevant for the Guji-Gedeo inter-group relations: the Gondoro ritual. The Gondoro, which is a part of the Gadaa system, is a ritual used to settle more serious disputes (such as homicide) within and between Guji and Gedeo¹⁰ (Boru, 2016, p. 66). In the local languages Gondoro means for something “not to happen again” (Interview 10). As brothers with common ancestry the two groups have an understanding that they should not kill each other. A myth exists among the groups that if Guji or Gedeo kill each other a curse will be placed upon the killer and his family, the groups strongly believe that the curse brings sickness like paralysis, leprosy, and other “misfortunes in life and death” (Kinfemichael, 2014, pp. 75, 88-89). The Gondoro ritual, led by elders from the two groups, is what lifts the curse; in other words it works as a mechanism of conflict resolution among the two groups (Boru, 2016, p. 65). The importance of the Gondoro becomes apparent in the next section.

2.3.1 1995 and 1998 conflicts

Despite their historically good relations the two groups got into violent conflict both in 1995 and in 1998. These conflicts were of a different character than any previous smaller disputes over resources between the two groups (Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 77). After implementation of the ethnic federalist system, Gedeo became a zone under the Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples region (SNNP), and Guji became part of the Oromia region (see Appendix 1 for map), in other words they are separated by a zonal and a regional border (Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 62).

Initially, the Guji were separated between the Gedeo zone and the Borana zone¹¹, causing great discontent among the Guji, as they allegedly became “minorities on their own land” and

⁹ The reader may consult the following literature for more information on the topic: (UNESCO, 2016) (Jalata, 2012) (Desalegn, 2019) (Boru, 2016) (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012) (Kinfemichael, 2014).

¹⁰ Also used by other Oromo tribes (Boru, 2016; Kinfemichael, 2014)

¹¹ Borana is part of the Oromia region. Guji later separated from Borana all together, and became the separate zones west-Guji and east-Guji (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012)

therefore lacked “self-rule” as a minority group in both zones (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 18). Consequently, a wish for the Guji in the Gedeo zone to reintegrate with the Guji in the Borana zone emerged. In the process of implementing the 1994 constitution, several referendums were held across the country to determine where administrative borders should be drawn in cases where conflicting claims over territory were raised. The idea was that this would give the inhabitants of the disputed area the opportunity to decide which region the area should belong to¹². But in reality the process did not go smoothly (Kinfemichael, 2014, pp. 78-79). The case of Guji and Gedeo is one instance in which the dispute ended in violence.

The Guji hoping to reintegrate into the Oromia region, within the same zone as the rest of the Guji population, brought the issue up to the national government, which resulted in a referendum of the kind outlined above. The referendum was based on a bare majority vote (50%+1), complicated by resettling plans executed by the previous governments that had supposedly changed the population ratio in certain areas. It has later been argued that this form of referendum favoured the Gedeo (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 22).

And so, in spring 1995 conflict broke out among the Guji and Gedeo over dissatisfaction with the ongoing referendum on where the border between Gedeo and Borana should be drawn. The Uppsala conflict database states that the fighting caused the death of around 1000 people, as well as destruction of property and displacement of over 60 000. Violence ended when federal police troops intervened ("Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Gedeo-Guji)").

In 1998 politicians from the both zones pushed for another referendum to settle the territorial dispute once and for all. Critically, the referendum was opposed by the general population at the time. In turn, this increased tensions among the two groups once again, and at the July

¹² To manage conflict, the most relevant institution under the current system is the House of Federation [HoF], which is ‘composed of representatives of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’. Article 48 in the Ethiopian constitution lists the procedures that the HoF should follow when border disputes arise between the regional states, when the states themselves are unable to reach an agreement. Under Article 48 the HoF should give a final decision within two years. If negotiation between the involved parties fails the solution has usually been to hold a referendum, for the people themselves to decide (*Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 1994).

conference in Bule Hora town (at the time called Hagere Mariam) tensions exploded into violence (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 23). The Uppsala conflict database estimates that over a few days more than 700 people were killed. This time the national police was unable to contain the situation. Eventually elders from both groups, as well as from neighbouring ethnic groups, intervened in the situation and were able to end the violence through Gondoro¹³ ("Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Gedeo-Guji,)"). It is here worth noting that according to the Uppsala conflict database neither conflicts have been «terminated». In fact none of the referendums were completed, due to the outbreak of conflict (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 25). The causes of these conflicts will be further discussed in the literature review.

2.4 Ethiopia, 2018

The year 2018 brought major political changes to the state of Ethiopia. In April 2018 a new prime minister – Dr. Abiy Ahmed, also from EPRDF – was elected, following a crisis within the government. Protests towards the government had been ongoing since 2014, culminating in the unexpected resignation of the former Prime minister – Hailemariam Desalegn – in February 2018. Prime minister Abiy has since pushed for a number of reforms, most relevant are the return of exiled political opposition, the opening of blocked webpages and TV channels, and the ceasing of disputed territory to Eritrea ("Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister,"). Ethiopia was, in other words, going through a liberation process, which has been celebrated both nationally and internationally. Although critics argued that it was too much too soon (T. Gardner, 2019). The main concern among experts seemed to be that the sudden opening of political space might cause instability and lead to the eruption of formerly repressed inter-group conflicts, an issue we will return to shortly ("Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister,").

Alongside this political liberation process, Ethiopia was the country in which most people got displaced in 2018, which also gained international attention. The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) estimated that there was over 2.2 million IDPs in Ethiopia as of February 2019. This number had steadily increased over the last few years, but raised sharply

¹³ The Gondoro was not executed after the 1995 conflict, so this was the first time the government recognized the importance of these traditional institutions in conflict management.

throughout 2018. The most significant cause for displacement in the country, according to the DTM, was inter-group conflicts (DTM, 2019a).

At the same time, Ethiopia has increasingly faced displacement due to climate disasters, which is estimated to have displaced 508,723 persons in the same period (DTM, 2019a). The country is increasingly affected by climate change, in the form of both floods and drought. This not only displaces people, but consequently put increasing strain on already limited resources – which some researchers argue could contribute to conflict (Yishak, 2019). Along the same lines one might also note that Ethiopia also ranked 9th among countries with most refugees in 2018, most originating from the neighbouring countries in the otherwise unstable region. Factors like disasters, conflict, displacement and masses of refugees all put increasing strain on the country's already struggling economy (Jeffrey, 2019). In the last few years Ethiopia has faced rising unemployment, and high inflation has caused a decrease in living standards and widespread poverty. Such factors are in turn argued to create conditions more favourable for conflict, and while not directly related to this study, the reader should take note of the overall context in which the Guji-Gedeo conflict takes place (Yusuf, 2019, p. 10).

2.5 The 2018 Guji-Gedeo Conflict

Looking closely at the conflict induced internal displacements in 2018, nearly one million people were displaced in one conflict only (DTM, 2019b). The Guji-Gedeo conflict was in other words responsible for nearly half of the internally displaced persons in Ethiopia in 2018. Making this conflict in itself the number one cause of internal displacement in Ethiopia that year, which underlines the severity of the situation and the need for more research on the conflict itself.

Information regarding the conflict is rather limited, both with regards to what happened and the causes behind these events. What we do know is mostly based on reports from humanitarian organizations and news articles, hence there is an apparent lack of academic research on the situation. Data from my time in the field will therefore supply this section, where I could not find information elsewhere. Here we will talk briefly about the conflict and what actually happened in 2018 (and 2019) – without touching too much on the causes, as they will be discussed in the following literature review and in the analysis.

My data suggests that violence first broke out in Kercha Woreda in West-Guji, in April of 2018, and then spread to other areas (Interview 8). Yarnell writes in a field report for Refugees International in November 2018 that the *“precise trigger of the violence remains unclear”*, which is precisely the gap this thesis attempts to fill. What we do know about the character of the violence is that *“armed mobs and youth groups attacked villages, forcing people to flee their homes”* (Yarnell, 2018). Other articles and reports have characterised it as communal violence – in which people were targeted and displaced on the basis of their ethnicity (T. Gardner, 2019). At the time of conflict, the violence was intense; houses, crops, and property were destroyed to prevent people from returning. And there were frequent reports of killings, rape, and other crimes (Interview 10, 21 & 34).

It appears that violence broke out between the groups in April of 2018, after two decades of relative stability, forcing *“around 300 000 people to flee their homes”* (Yarnell, 2018). At the time *“government authorities made some arrests after a brief investigation and declared the situation resolved, leaving people to begin returning home. A few months later, in June, violence erupted once again on an even more intense scale. Over 800,000 people were forced to flee”* (Yarnell, 2018). According to my own data there was a third round of displacement in March 2019 (Interview 22).

Like Yarnell suggests above the rounds of displacement were linked to the government’s premature attempt to settle the conflict, which led people to return to their homes, only to be displaced again (T. Gardner, 2019). The government was also involved in the execution of the Gondoro ritual in an attempt to settle the conflict. The Gondoro was executed twice during the conflict, as the first attempt was unsuccessful, it was argued that the attempt had been premature and that the ritual lost legitimacy when the government (rather than the Gaadda leaders) ordered it (Interview 10).

The displaced persons could be split into three groups: Gedeo displaced from West-Guji, Guji displaced from Gedeo, and people displaced within the zones (Interview 22). In other words, violence and displacement took place in both zones and among both groups. During displacement, a majority of the IDPs lived with local communities, while others lived *“in ad hoc collective centers, such as schools, disused or unfinished buildings”* (Schlein, 2018). These collective sites were reported to be *“extremely overcrowded”*, sanitary conditions were often poor, and food, water, and shelter was limited (Schlein, 2018). Evidently the situation was greatly challenging both for the displaced persons and for the host-communities, who

shared their resources to support the IDPs (Interview 25). The dire humanitarian situation is outside the scope of this thesis, but the severe consequences of this conflict should be noted.

2.5.1 The Qeerroo

During my time in the field, in the summer of 2019, the government was in the process of returning the IDPs to their places of origin as the conflict had officially ended. But in reality some areas were still facing violence and instability. According to my informants this was because of “the Qeerroo”. These groups have many names, “Qeerroo” is the local name, but my informants also referred to them as local militias, rebel groups, guerrilla groups or “unidentified arms groups” (Interview 2, 22 & 34). And they are groups of young men, who arguably were responsible for much of the violence in the 2018 conflict.

The Qeerroo is said to have been engaged in the protest towards the previous government in the past (Schemm, 2018). A Washington Post article mentions this, arguing that the groups have certain grievances with the government and the local administration in particular, “*the Qeerroo feel that the local administration remains corrupt and unresponsive and that the central government is not addressing their economic demands*” (Schemm, 2018). And these grievances appear to remain even after the change in government and the reforms implemented by the new prime minister. During the time of the conflict it was argued that these groups, in some areas, controlled the local government and acted as a form of “*self-appointed police force*” in the process of displacing people from the other ethnic group (Schemm, 2018). Multiple informants also suggested that these groups were affiliated with the OLF¹⁴, though to what extent remains unknown.

When Yarnell in the previous section mentioned “*armed mobs and youth groups*” that “*attacked villages, forcing people to flee their homes*” he was likely referring to the Qeerroo (Yarnell, 2018). These groups of young men were responsible for much of the violence and displacement that characterized the 2018 conflict, though the character of the violence differed from place to place.. Throughout fieldwork I came across a number of accounts of

¹⁴ The Oromo Liberation (OLF) front is a political party from the Oromia region, working for the “right to national self-determination” for the Oromo people. The group has engaged in armed attacks in the past, and has been labeled as a terrorist group by the government (“Thousands of Ethiopians hail return of once-banned Oromo group,” 2018).

these groups, in particular from people who had been or were still displaced. For example, I spoke to a group of displaced persons in Dilla town in late August of 2019, at that time where all IDPs (officially) had been returned to their places of origin. These people, who were from Kercha woreda, did not feel it was safe to return there. They expressed fear of the Qeerroo who they claimed continued terrorizing people in the area (Interview 34).

On the basis of my own data, the Qeerroo continued violence in certain areas after the Gondoro was executed and the conflict had officially ended (Interview 2, 22 & 34). It is worth noting that around that time the government was getting engaged in the fight against these groups, putting in some efforts to stabilize the situation and prosecute the perpetrators (Interview 12, 20 & 35).

In the end, it is clearly within the context outlined in this chapter that the recent situation in the Guji and Gedeo zones must be analysed. This chapter has given a brief introduction into the historical background and context of Ethiopia overall, as well as the relationship between Guji and Gedeo more specifically. Some of these points will be elaborated upon in the conceptual framework and the analysis of the thesis.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

As the research questions suggest this thesis aims to shed light on the 2018 conflict, and in particular the causes of said conflict. In this chapter I present the findings of previous research, to get an overview of the academic literature on the topic. This chapter considers the causes identified in the 1995 and 1998 conflicts between the two groups, then the last part of the chapter will consider the available literature specifically on the 2018 conflict.

3.1 The 1995 & 1998 Conflicts

Much research can be found on inter-group conflicts in Ethiopia, as the issue has been prominent for decades. These conflicts are often categorized as “ethnic conflicts”, a label that some researchers have attributed to the conflicts between Guji and Gedeo as well (*Conflict Barometer 2018*, p. 22; Dagne, 2013; Yusuf, 2019). While it is indeed a conflict between two ethnic groups, it might be simplistic to label ethnicity a main cause. Lubo Tefari argues that in reality “these conflicts considered as inter-ethnic in the Horn of Africa are driven by multifarious complex interrelated variables, rather than pure ethnic hatred and antagonism.” (Tefari, 2012, p. 63). Many studies have raised similar claims, arguing that local border and territory conflicts in Ethiopia have often been incorrectly generalized as “ethnic” conflicts, while in reality the conflicts are much more complex (Abbink, 2011; Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012).

That is one critique this thesis addresses, as my findings have no indications that ethnicity and ethnic differences is a major factor in the Guji-Gedeo conflict. The claim that ethnicity in itself is not the core issue is well supported by the understanding of common ancestry and intermarriage among the two groups. In addition, the groups still consider each other brothers and sisters, and share many rituals under the Gaddaa system. The thesis returns to this issue in the conceptual framework.

Rather than ethnic differences, researchers have identified a number of other factors as causes for the 1995 and 1998 conflicts. On one hand some researchers have raised the argument that a main cause was in fact competition over resources (Hussein, 2002; Tefari, 2012). This notion has been criticized by other researchers, on the grounds that writing the Guji and Gedeo conflict off as traditional resource competition is far too simple (Dagne, 2013; Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2007, 2012). In reality, both conflicts were much more severe than any

former dispute over resources had been, simply illustrated by the number of deaths and displacements that occurred. Research suggests the conflicts were rather over political, social and cultural issues, as will be further outlined in the rest of this section.

Other than that, the academic literature is largely in agreement on the factors leading to and the causes behind the 1995 and 1998 conflicts. First of all, research suggest that traditional resource conflict between the two groups, while it existed in the past, became a border conflict with the implementation of the Ethnic Federalist system in the 1990s (Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 63). That is the analysis of Girum Kinfemichael, an Ethiopian researcher, who studied the Guji-Gedeo conflicts with a focus on conflict resolution.

Shibru Abate Dagne concludes in his PhD thesis from Andhra University that “*despite the underlying assumption by many that ethnic federalism will improve relations among ethnic groups of the country and lessen conflicts, the formation of ethnic federal arrangements brought about violent conflicts among the long-time friendly (‘brotherly’) peoples of the Gedeo and the Guji*” (Dagne, 2013, p. 281). In other words, there is an argued link between the ethnic federalism and the Guji-Gedeo conflicts. The thesis will return to this shortly.

Kinfemichaels and Dagne’s arguments above is largely complementary to the main findings of the Ethiopian researcher Asebe Regassa Debelo (2007), who studied the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups and their relationship extensively. In his study of the conflicts Regassa creates a complex picture of the changing relations between Guji-Gedeo in the early 1990s. Shortly explained, he attributes the causes for conflict partially to territorial integrity and self-rule, and partially to contention of the border issue. Throughout his work he too states that the Guji-Gedeo did co-exist peacefully and complementary to one another, despite their differences. But the ethnic federalist system, that was introduced in the early 1990s, launched the issues of territory and self-rule, which made the placement of the border a factor for conflict. (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2007, pp. 73, 96-97, 100-103) Regassa’s findings are supported by most following studies on the Guji and Gedeo conflicts, such as the ones by Dagne and Kinfemichael.

In a newer article, Regassa states that the Guji-Gedeo conflicts of the 1990s were “*essentially over sorting out the rights each group was constitutionally granted in the new political dispensation in Ethiopia*” (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 2). Here he enters into a debate

that has dominated studies of inter-group conflict in Ethiopia since the early 1990s, namely the role of ethnic federalism in emerging inter-group conflicts.

3.1.1 Ethnic Federalism

Seeing that several researchers links the previous conflicts to the implementation of the ethnic federalism, as a point of change in the relationship between Guji and Gedeo, it seems necessary to consider what research suggest the issues with ethnic federalism are. The chapter will focus on critique that is relevant for the Guji-Gedeo context. We introduced the system of ethnic federalism briefly in the background. In academia there has been debate about its role in intergroup conflicts in Ethiopia over the last three decades or so. Increasing critiques towards the “project” have emerged, and multiple researchers have argued that there are fundamental flaws both with the system itself and in the way it is implemented across Ethiopia, that might directly or indirectly cause conflict.

Under this new system, as the argument goes, the emphasis placed upon ethnic identity overrides other long-standing aspects of identity, such as religion and citizenship, which previously worked as bridges, helping to moderate and limit conflict (Temesgen, 2015, pp. 49, 51). Ethnicity has become the basis for recognition and power, and consequently differences between groups are emphasised. The groups’ distinctiveness is of importance rather than coexistence and similarities (e.g. religion, common history etc). This altogether, create an environment in which ethnic groups are in competition with each other, and those are favourable conditions for conflict in themselves.

First of all, with the implementation of ethnic federalism, ethnicity has become the primary basis for mass-mobilization in Ethiopia. It is argued that Ethnic Federalism created “an incentive” for actors to strengthen ethnic differences and increasingly “mobilize on ethnic grounds” (Aalen, 2011, p. 180). In other words, “...*the politicization of ethnic identity as the primary vehicle for claims and entitlements to economic resources and political power*” (Tefari, 2012). Under ethnic federalism, ethnicity is directly linked with access to resources, politics, and power, which has caused concern among some researchers, who argue that “mistrust and hatred among ethnic groups grow out of the EPRDF's theory of governance” (Taye, 2017, p. 53).

Second, there is critique of the “*territorializing of ethnicity*” that comes with ethnic federalism. (Tefari, 2012, pp. 3, 5) The 1994 Ethiopian Constitution understand ethnic groups

as groups with defined territories, and hence a group's territory is closely tied to recognition and the group's rights (*Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 1994). In the past ethnic groups could "share" the same land. With Ethnic Federalism physical administrative borders were drawn on an ethnic basis, and one group became the ethnic majority in that area. In reality the ethnic majority has monopoly on the official culture in that zone, for example with regards to the language of education (Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 67). This way the zones become "mono-ethnic". But in reality all people from a group do not live within the administrative borders of that group's territory.

A main aspect of the ethnic federal system was the promised recognition of ethnic groups, and the right for these groups to develop their own culture, which many were lacking before 1991. In reality though, research has found that the minority issue remains (Abbink, 2006, 2011). In fact, there is an apparent lack of minority rights protection within the new system, for example access to resources and opportunities overall is granted to those who live within their "designated ethnic homelands" (Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 67). For people who live outside of their group's designated area, or for groups who are minorities in their zone, such rights are not guaranteed. And critics argue there is a high risk of discrimination of minority ethnic groups due to the structure of the ethnic federalism. (Temesgen, 2015, p. 51) (Kinfemichael, 2014, pp. 67-68) (Abbink, 2006, 2011) This is evident in the Guji-Gedeo case. Previously they co-inhabited a large area, after the administrative border was drawn there are now large minorities in both zones.

With the lack of minority rights under the ethnic federalism, conflicts over territorial demarcation between administrative units have appeared. Abbink argues that an effect of the restructuring of the country is that territories have become "mono-ethnic", meaning that they can no longer be shared between multiple groups, as the "sovereignty" of the unit remains with the majority group. (Abbink, 2011, p. 604) Along these lines it has been a main concern among researchers that the ethnic federalism does not manage conflicts, rather it appears to pit groups against each other, as supposedly have been the case for the Guji and Gedeo.

Lastly, research has criticized how ethnicity under the ethnic federalism is used as a tool for mobilization and control by elites both at a federal and local level, with the aims to oppress the population, as well as for their own political and economic gains (Dagne, 2013, pp. 280-282; Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 65). In the Guji-Gedeo conflicts too, it is argued that the Ethnic Federalism permits local elites to use the system for their own gain, failing to uphold the ideal

of self-rule, and allowing for discrimination of minorities as already discussed (Kinfemichael, 2014, pp. 403-404).

Research on the 1995 & 1998 conflict found that elite actors played a decisive role in the outbreak of violent conflict, for example evident in the way they pushed for a new referendum in 1998 – against the wishes of the general population. Overall, the Guji and Gedeo population opposed the 1998 referendum, expressing wishes to co-exist peacefully. The local governments were the ones who pushed the referendum forward, this way instigating renewed conflict, as part of their own “political game” (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2007, pp. 81-82). Regassa hence argues that while the 1990s conflicts were over territorial integrity and self-rule, the elites were the ones driving the referendums that sparked the violent conflicts (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2007, pp. 100-103). This study too finds that the structure of the ethnic federalism plays a role in the 2018 conflict, this will be discussed in detail in the analysis.

3.1.2 Resolution of the Conflicts

There is a saying that “*the seeds of war often is sowed during war*” – in other words how conflicts come to an end are often relevant for the outbreak of conflicts in the future (Scott Gates et al., 2016, p. 1). This thesis argues end of the previous conflicts are of relevance for the 2018 conflict, hence we will briefly consider this aspect. With regards to the Guji-Gedeo conflict, there is some disagreement among researchers on the outcome of the previous conflicts.

On the one hand Regassa writes in his 2012 article that “*the Guji-Gedeo case can be cited as a positive story that highlights the efficacy of the indigenous system in building sustaining peace,*” referring primarily to the Gondoro executed after the 1998 conflict (Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2012, p. 25). While it is difficult to predict the future, this seem increasingly doubtful after the outbreak of conflict between the two groups in 2018. An examination of the 2018 conflict is needed to establish whether it is linked to the conflict issues from the 90s. If so one can hardly claim that the resolution was successful. On the other hand Kinfemichael (2014) more cautiously argues that “given the unresolved dispute over the contested borders of the Guji and Gedeo peoples, one could not rule out the possibility of conflict again in those localities” (Kinfemichael, 2014, p. 92).

This thesis strongly sides with those arguing that the conflicts were not properly settled and attempts to show precisely how the 2018 conflict is linked to the previous two conflicts. this

study argues that the 1995 and 1998 conflicts in themselves play a direct role in the 2018 conflict, which will become increasingly apparent in the Analysis Chapter. As a last point, existing research is in strong agreement that the local institutions, and the Gondoro in particular, must be recognized and supported to achieve sustainable peace between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups (Dagne, 2013; Kinfemichael, 2014; Asebe Debelo Regassa, 2007, 2012). A notion this study is in full agreement with.

3.2 The 2018 Conflict

There is a lack of research on the more recent events that have taken place between Guji and Gedeo, most academic research dates back years, and thus focus on the events of the 1990s. The information that does exist largely consists of accounts and reports created by various humanitarian organizations and news agencies, and they focus primarily on the following displacement situation, not the conflict itself.

For example, the Human Rights Watch writes in a report of Prime Minister Abiy's first year in office that "Guji aggression against Gedeo forced thousands of people, mainly Gedeo, to flee their homes..." ("Ethiopia: Abiy's First Year as Prime Minister, Review of Conflict and Internally Displaced Persons," 2019) While such events took place, this statement is somewhat simplistic, not taking into account why these events took place, nor what the causes of conflict were. It also appears to place blame on one side only, while displacement in reality took place amongst both groups. In such statements the lack of available research becomes a problem.

Tom Gardner, who did extensive journalist work in the area, summed the situation up this way: "*The conflict looked, on the surface, like a Malthusian eruption – in which population outstrips food supply. Gedeos and Guji Oromos share some of the country's most densely populated farmland, and both groups are fast growing in number. But gruesome reports of lynchings, rapes and beheadings, and of complicity among local officials, police and militia, makes it seem more like organised ethnic cleansing than an ordinary tribal clash.*" (T. Gardner, 2019) He, in other words, touches upon population growth and ethnicity as key issues. This thesis, as mentioned, does not find ethnicity to be a key cause of the conflict. However, Gardner's observation of violence towards people on the basis of their ethnicity will be considered in the analysis. The Human Rights Watch and Gardner talks more about the nature of the conflict, and do not consider the causes behind these scenarios.

In the available material on the Guji-Gedeo 2018 conflict some possible causes are suggested, for example, several articles suggest that the conflict is related to land and resources. An article from Reuters suggests that *“the fighting is one of several ethnic conflicts fuelled by grievances over land in Ethiopia, Africa's second largest country by population”* (Obulutsa, 2018). Along the same lines, another news article from VOA states that *“disputes over borders and the allocation of pasture and water resources have long been a source of tension between people in Gedeo and West Guji”* (Schlein, 2018). This thesis, similarly to arguments raised by researchers studying the previous conflicts, urges that this explanation is far too simple. The news article from VOA does however also mention the border dispute as a potential cause, the border issue stands out as a relevant factor in the findings of this thesis.

In a report for Refugees International, on the situation in Ethiopia in 2018, Mark Yarnell suggests that *“intercommunal violence stemming from unresolved grievances has broken out in several parts of the country”* (Yarnell, 2018). This is possibly getting closer to the actual causes of the conflict, though he does not elaborate on what these potential grievances are. Either way the hypothesis appears to be that the issues in the conflicts are not new, but rather old grievances that have re-emerged. To uncover the nature of these grievances more research is necessary.

On the other hand, there have also been some tentative attempts at connecting the Guji-Gedeo conflict to the ongoing changes at the federal level (T. Gardner, 2019; Mules, 11.08.2018; Yusuf, 2019). Semir Yusef for example argues that political liberalisation at the federal level and weaker state power has caused re-eruption of several conflicts in 2018, the Guji-Gedeo conflict being one of them. (Yusuf, 2019, p. 10) Similarly to Yarnell, he suggests that old unresolved grievances re-emerged with the liberalisation of the country, and that certain actors took advantage of the national situation to fuel conflict between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups (Yusuf, 2019, p. 8). But precisely what these grievances are remains unclear.

These reports and news articles are, so far, insufficient to explain the events that took place in the Guji and Gedeo zones in 2018. These suggested causes are not built on in-depth academic research nor are most of them (seemingly) supported by evidence. The lack of research available on these matters underlines the research gap this thesis is seeking to fill, namely to investigate what happened between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups in 2018, and hence what caused the outbreak of violent conflict. Several of these suggested causes do come up in the data collected in this study, and so we will return to some of these points in later chapters.

3.3 Conclusion

There is a certain overlap between this literature review, and the background, the conceptual framework, and the analysis – in the sense that topics mentioned in this chapter will be elaborated upon or expanded in other sections. This chapter simply shows what previous research has found on this topic, to give a foundation of relevant literature, for this study to build upon.

When this study was conducted, no in-depth research appeared to have been executed specifically on the causes of the 2018 conflict. As I have stated multiple times in this chapter. That said, some time has passed since the data was collected and, while the researcher is not aware of any similar studies, it is entirely possible that other research has been conducted in the meantime.

Chapter 4 Methodological Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect upon the methodological framework of the thesis, as well as to account for the methods and tools used for data collection and analysis.

The thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the core issues in the conflict between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups?*
- 2) Why did conflict break out in April 2018 specifically?*
- 3) How does the 2018 conflict relate to the previous conflicts between the two groups?*

With these research questions in mind, this chapter sets out to explain the methodological approach and the methods used in the project. The first section accounts for the methodology in itself, followed by the methods of data collection and analysis. Then comes a brief discussion of certain aspects related to the fieldwork itself: study area, sampling of informants, and use of field assistants and translators. The last section accounts for the researcher's role and position, in other words the reflexivity, as well as ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

4.1 Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative study of an intergroup conflict in Ethiopia. Seeing that it focuses on one case and does not seek to produce results that can be generalized, but rather aims to gain deeper insight, is a clear indication that the qualitative research approach is well suited for this study.

Qualitative research is known to emphasise the context and the research process, which allows for greater flexibility in the study itself. The approach is also characterized by an aim to generate in-depth insight and an idea of seeing through the eyes of the people being studied, which is in line with this study (Bryman, 2012, pp. 398-403). These characteristics are further reflected in the methods associated with qualitative research, as illustrated throughout in this chapter.

4.2 Methods of Data Collection

The main method of data collection in this project was semi-structured interviews with various actors involved in the conflict and displacement situation of 2018. The decision to

conduct interviews was made with consideration to my research questions, which required in-depth insight into certain social phenomena. The best way to gather such information is to speak with people directly involved. In other words, it was important to hear from people themselves, and interviews are well suited for the gathering of such detailed data. An argument in favour of the qualitative research approach is that methods of a qualitative nature, and interviews in particular, are especially well suited for contextualizing, describing, interpreting and gaining in-depth insight (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020, pp. 9-15).

Much like qualitative research overall, interviews in more unstructured forms are criticized for not giving results that can be generalized outside of the sample group (Bryman, 2012, p. 12). This, as established, was not a goal for this project. On the other hand, less structured interviews can provide a deeper understanding of the informants' overall perceptions, thoughts, emotions, opinions, and motivations. In addition, research methods like less structured interviews also allow the researcher to keep a more open mind regarding what he or she needs to know about so that concepts and theories can emerge out of the data (Bryman, 2012, p. 12). Because I – the researcher of this project – was an outsider, which is discussed later in the chapter, it only seemed right to take such an open approach.

The discussion around less structured interviews goes both ways, some researchers are concerned with any form of structure in interviews, as it *“will not allow genuine access to the world views of members of a social setting or of people sharing common attributes are likely to favour an unstructured interview”* (Bryman, 2012, p. 472). Seeing that I already had a clear topic in mind and knew to some degree what I wanted to research, the unstructured form of interview seemed a little too vague. On the basis of these considerations I chose to do semi-structured interviews as they *“[allow] more specific issues to be addressed”* (Bryman, 2012, p. 472). Semi-structured interviews were well suited for this study as they kept some structure and consistency – for the researcher to ask certain specific questions – but also gave the opportunity to follow up on any other points of interest that might emerge (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). I did utilize an interview guide, to maintain some consistency throughout the data collection.

When discussing sensitive topics, like in this thesis, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews proved very useful. It allowed me to learn from my participants as they took the time to elaborate and explain cultural and historical events of which I, as an outsider, was lacking knowledge. The less structured form of interviewing also allowed the participants to

better express what they themselves believe to be important – which is not always what we as researchers expect to find (Hennink et al., 2020, pp. 116-117).

4.2.1 Study Area

The decision to do research in Ethiopia was reached when I got the opportunity to partake in a fieldwork exchange program between the University of Tromsø and Dilla University in Ethiopia. Dilla is located in the Gedeo Zone so I chose to focus my research on the ongoing situation between Guji and Gedeo, seeing that I had the opportunity to do extended fieldwork in the area. The fieldwork exchange agreement granted me economic support through UiT and practical support in the field from Dilla University. Without this support, the execution of this project would not have been possible.

At the point of arrival in the field, the situation was already radically different from what I had studied up on beforehand, meaning that the situation was changing rapidly so the information available online was already outdated. For example, by the time I arrived most of the displaced persons had already moved back to their place of origin, making it increasingly difficult to get in touch with them. Thus, some time was spent reorienting myself and waiting for the necessary support letters from Dilla University and the local government.

It was of importance to gather data from both of the involved groups, that entailed some traveling across the Gedeo and Guji zones. Primarily I collected data in the towns of Bule Hora, Dilla, and Yigetcaffer. Some interviews were also executed in more local areas of Gedeb woreda, as well as Garba and Yericho villages (see map in Appendix 2). This travelling was both time consuming and inconvenient, as I was mostly reliant on public transport. Despite that, moving around to these different places was crucial to ensure that I gathered diverse and reliable data.

As I will touch upon later in this chapter, my traveling was limited by practical concerns as well as the security situation in the field. I knew from the start that I wanted to gather data in Dilla and Bule Hora – being the main towns in the Gedeo and West-Guji zones. But otherwise the places visited were picked while I was in the field, based on practical and security related considerations and was largely dependent what was feasible at the time. For example, I would not have been able to visit more remote areas if not for assistance from NGOs, who let me travel with them, observe their work, and put me in contact with locals there.

4.2.2 Study Population

With the decision to do semi-structured interviews in mind, the selection of my interview subjects started out somewhat purposely, as I aimed to collect diverse data from various involved actors in order to shed light on different narratives and opinions. With the aim to gather diverse data from as many categories of people as possible, I was able to speak to representatives from the following groups: government officials, NGO workers, IDPs, returnees, and elders from local communities. I also aimed for diversity within these groups, by interviewing women and people in more remote areas, when possible.

In order to gain in-depth data, I executed a total of 37 interviews during my time in the field, of which three were group-interviews (see Appendix 3 for a more detailed list of participants). The interviews lasted from about 10 minutes to over an hour, depending on the informant's answers and available time. In the end, who I was able to speak with largely depended on feasibility, because of the sensitivity of the topic, as well as mobility and security issues. With this in mind, as a starting point, my specific informants were mostly chosen through the snowballing method my arrival in the field.

“Snowball sampling is a sampling technique in which the researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research. These participants will then suggest others and so on.” (Bryman, 2012, p. 424)

Meaning essentially that I went around to NGOs and government offices to see who was willing to speak to me, and my informants then often referred me to other people with relevant knowledge or involvement in the situation.

4.2.3 Fieldwork Assistants and Translators

During my time in the field I made use of both fieldwork assistants and translators. In the process of gaining access I did also receive support letters both from Dilla University and the Guji Zonal Administration Office in Bule Hora. This was of great help when I approached my informants, as these support letters gave me some credibility as a researcher.

Some of my interviews were executed with the assistance of local fieldwork assistants. These were primarily students from Dilla University that the fieldwork exchange representatives at Dilla University put me in contact with. Although the use of fieldwork assistants are

somewhat disputed they were crucial for me as an outsider to gain access and communicate with people in the field. They also offered great assistance and advised me on the practical execution of the fieldwork – such as the security situation, moving around in the field and finding informants. My fieldwork assistants also worked as translators when the informants did not speak English. The use of fieldwork assistants and translators is cautioned against by critics, especially when they are not professionals, for example because data might get excluded or lost in translation (Bryman, 2012, p. 151). I did consider this, and I cannot be sure that is not the case for my interviews too, but due to the language barrier I would simply not have been able to conduct the interviews without them. An advantage of recording the interviews is that I am able to go back and check the translation (or have someone with proficiency in the language do so) if any problems were to arise.

In addition to the support from Dilla University and their students, I also received some assistance from various humanitarian organizations working in the area. Some of the aid workers I initially interviewed assisted me by allowing me to travel with them, by facilitating interviews with local actors they had previously worked with, and even helping with translation in these interviews if necessary. To ensure the anonymity of my informants, the specific organisations are not listed here.

4.2.4 Data Analysis

All of my interviews were recorded, to ensure that the information was relayed correctly later, and then stored on a password protected USB-device to ensure confidentiality. The next step was transcription, which was a very lengthy process considering the number of interviews. After transcription, the data was coded thematically, and from there a thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Used across many fields, a thematic analysis is “*a method for identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set*” (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 2). This approach was well suited for my study because I was attempting to identify different opinions and perspectives across my data, which is precisely in line with the thematic form of analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 578). Due to the amount of material collected in the field, I made use of the program NVivo to organize, code, and analyse my data.

4.3 Reflexivity, Reflections, and Ethical Considerations

Reflexivity requires researchers to “*self-critically examine one’s own beliefs and assumptions*” as well as “*ones relationships with those whom one studies*” (Bryman, 2012, pp. 393-394). In other words, reflexivity underlines the importance for a researcher to reflect upon and be critical of their own role in the research, which is what I will attempt to do in this section.

4.3.1 Researcher’s Role

The objectivity of research is subject to much debate within academia. Bryman argues that there is a “*growing recognition that it is not feasible to keep the values that a researcher holds totally in check*” (Bryman, 2012, p. 39). With values, he means “the personal beliefs or the feelings of a researcher” which can affect the researcher and his or her research in many ways. Having accepted that a researcher cannot be fully free of values, the researcher should therefore reflect over potential biases in their own research and consider how they might have affected the research process. In this section I will first consider how I – as the researcher – have affected the study in itself. Secondly, I will discuss some issues in doing research as an outsider. Lastly, follows a reflection on my role in the data-collection process, and in particular my interaction with the informants.

It should already be obvious that the researcher affects all parts of the research process, such as the “*choice of research area; formulation of research question; choice of method; formulation of research design and data-collection techniques; implementation of data collection; analysis of data; interpretation of data; and conclusions*” (Bryman, 2012, p. 39). I outlined my personal motivation for doing this specific study in the Introduction Chapter (see section 1.1) of this thesis, that section shows how I – the researcher – have affected this study from the very start, when I chose a research topic.

4.3.1.1 Researchers Background

From the very beginning, researchers tend to focus on what they themselves find significant, which is affected by their own opinions and lives (Bryman, 2012, p. 405). Researchers are shaped by their lives and that affects how they interpret what they see around them. I have an academic background in History and Political Science, and currently I am enrolled in a master’s program in Peace and Conflict Transformation. With a background in history, for example, I tend to place an emphasis on the context of events. On this same note, it is very

likely that my upbringing and education in Norway – a wealthy western country – affects the way I interpret what I see around me, and thus also this study.

4.3.1.2 Doing Research in Indigenous Contexts

In this discussion I would first like to shed light on some of the issues of doing research in indigenous communities. In academia there is an ongoing debate on doing research in indigenous contexts, and what ethical, epistemological, and methodological issues that brings about. Webster and John (2010) correctly point out that there is a past *“history of exploitive research that contributed little to no benefit, or worse, research that caused damaging effects for Indigenous peoples and their communities”* (Webster & John, 2010, p. 175). They also state that *“dilemmas stemming from the often incongruous fit between methods of collecting, analysing and presenting data that characterise the Western academic tradition and Indigenous ways of knowing, communicating and sharing knowledge”* (Webster & John, 2010, pp. 175-176).

The last point is of particular concern when the researcher is an outsider, meaning that they are not from that indigenous group, because important understandings might be lost, either because the researcher fails to understand or because the academic framework in which the research is executed does not account for it. The common western-dominated scientific approaches do not always fit into the indigenous contexts. For example, for the Guji ethnic group, *“peace is broadly understood as a continuous flow of relationships between the people and their human and nonhuman environments... Peace is not a free gift, because maintaining it requires continuous and earnest negotiation, social actions, and cooperation among many stakeholders who possess political, cultural, and spiritual powers”* (Asebe Debelo Regassa & Jirata, 2018, p. 210). This differs from the common western approaches to peace that often have a simpler (negative) understanding of the concept (see section 5.5). Hence, if one were to study peace among the Guji the more common academic conceptualizations of “peace” might lead to oversights and information getting lost in the process.

4.3.1.3 Doing Research as an Outsider

There are many challenges associated with researching as an outsider and to studying cultures different from your own. The study of the “other” remains a debated subject among researchers, and brings with it certain dilemmas for the researcher to reflect upon, some of which have been mentioned already. DeLuca and Maddox state that *“one can only*

understand the Other through reflecting on its similarity to, and difference from, the Self” (DeLuca & Maddox, 2016, p. 286). Therefore, they argue in outsider research *“any representation is only partial and based on the specific limitations of the particular researcher’s positionality and perspective”* (DeLuca & Maddox, 2016, p. 286) In other words outside researchers are limited by their positionality in their understanding of the “other”.

From the start, I too had concerns about doing fieldwork in a community that was very different from the one I grew up in. I believe one cannot hope to fully understand complex cultures in such a short period of time, and it is entirely possible that I – as an outsider – failed to grasp key cultural aspects to the situation that might have been obvious to an insider. To address this issue, I studied academic literature on the groups culture and history beforehand, and I was able to learn a lot from my informants who patiently explained when my knowledge was lacking.

Another key challenge was that I do not speak the local languages, which caused some misunderstandings and posed a barrier when interacting with my informants, as I could not speak with them directly, I used translators to tackle this issue. At the same time though, my outsider position appeared to make some people more positive towards my research, with regards to partiality and bias. I was not affiliated with either of the involved groups, and some of my informants did express hope that I could therefore be more objective in my research. Ethnic identity plays a large role in Ethiopia (see Chapter 5), but as an outsider I had no affiliation with either of the groups,¹⁵ and thus I could approach the situation with an open mind. Like I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, previous research seems to have been executed predominantly by Ethiopian researchers, so perhaps I can offer some different insights.

From the beginning, I tried to approach this project with an open mind, and to be respectful towards my informants, in the sense that they were the “experts” on this situation and I was simply there to learn from their knowledge. After all, an aim was to see through their eyes, and how they saw the world around them, how they understood (or did not understand) the conflict was key. As an outsider this was especially important.

¹⁵ Other than the fact that my fieldwork exchange was arranged through Dilla University in the Gedeo zone.

I brought many characteristics with me to the field, that likely affected the study and my interaction with the informants. I am a young, unmarried, white woman from Norway. My appearance in itself clearly set me apart from the people in the research area, they could immediately identify me as an outsider. In my interaction with people in the field, I got a feeling that my different appearance affected the way people approached me. For example, people were quite curious about what I was doing in the area, and especially as a young woman.

Still, it is not enough to reflect on my background and how that has affected the research; it is also necessary to consider my interaction with the informants and how I – as the researcher – might have affected them and their responses. Bryman states that the responses of the participants during interviews would also be affected by the researchers characteristics, such as age, gender, and appearances (Bryman, 2012, p. 405). With regards to my research, as a foreign researcher people seemed to consider me “important”, at least it appeared that way to me. That was a strange feeling because I was younger than most of my informants, and they certainly knew more about the situation than I did. Still most people were positive towards my research, and certainly my appearance and the characteristics mentioned above might have affected their willingness to speak with me and to take part in the study – a point we will consider in the next section.

4.3.1.4 Power Dynamics

It is also necessary to consider the power dimensions between me – as the researcher – and my informants. Muhammad et. al argues that researchers “*represent centers of power, privilege, and status within their formal institutions, as well as within the production of scientific knowledge itself. Researchers also may have power and privilege from their class, education, racial/ethnic backgrounds, or other identity positions*” (Muhammad et al., 2015, p. 1046). We have discussed several characteristics already, that gives me – the researchers – privilege and power, such as my education, upbringing and nationality. I also recognize that my life is different from the life of my informants – some more than others – for example apparent in the way I was able to travel across half the globe to do research in Ethiopia. I spoke to many different people during my time in the field and my relationships with my informants differed from person to person. There was, for example, a difference in my relations with the foreign aid workers I interviewed compared to the displaced persons who had lost their home and were in an extremely difficult situation at the time.

Like I stated above, I did sometimes get the sense that my appearance and other privileges affected the way people interacted with me. It was clear that I – as the researcher – had an effect on their answers and their attitude towards my project. For example, identifying me as an outsider, many informants took the time to explain historical and cultural matters that they thought I needed to understand – in particular related to the groups historical relations – I have tried to reflect these emphasises in this thesis.

Furthermore, people took time out of their busy days to speak with me, I was treated respectfully, and people appeared to take me and my project quite seriously. This was likely affected by all the characteristics mentioned above, such as my affiliation with foreign and local universities or my foreign nationality. Because of these power dynamics it was especially important that people did not feel obligated to participate in my study or to answer any questions, to address this I spent time before each interview to go through the consent form, inform them of my study and their rights. During my time in the field I was able to see the potentially harmful effects of research when I asked employees at a government institution to participate in the study, and they refused because they had gotten into trouble when they participated in an interview in the past. I was also particularly careful when I approached people whom might have experienced trauma, emphasising that they should only answer the questions they were comfortable with.

That brings us to one last question, what I can give back? To my informants, to Dilla University, but most importantly to the communities that this project studied. My thesis is dedicated to the people of Guji and Gedeo, ultimately because they are the ones suffering the consequences of this conflict. That underlines my hope – and the aim of this thesis – that the research and the findings from this project can be a steppingstone for future research and decision-making regarding this conflict and its resolution.

4.3.2 Researcher's position

As a researcher, I would position myself in the epistemological position of interpretivism and the ontological position of constructivism. The interpretivist position is characterised by – in contrast to the scientific ideals of quantitative research – placing an emphasis on “*the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants*” (Bryman, 2012, p. 179). While the constructivist position, broadly speaking, argues that “*social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals,*

rather than phenomena out there and separate from those involved in its construction” (Bryman, 2012, p. 377).

This position is quite typical for qualitative researchers and has largely been illustrated throughout this chapter. The interpretivist position has identified itself particularly through the methods applied, which shows how the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and opinions of the participants. Furthermore, the constructivist approach *“recognizes that the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher’s interaction within the field and questions about the data”* (Bryman, 2012, p. 575). That is perhaps best illustrated by the inductive approach this project has taken on, in which such considerations have emerged on the basis of the fieldwork.

4.3.3 Ethical considerations

All of my interviews were recorded on a recording device and then transcribed to ensure that I relayed the information correctly. All data was safely stored on a password protected USB device, to ensure confidentiality and protection of privacy. In most cases written consent was collected, although in a few cases oral consent had to suffice as the translator relayed to me that the informants could not write or could not read and therefore did not feel comfortable signing the consent form. In reality, I had few problems with gaining consent from the informants, most informants understood the importance of the consent form. Even recording the interviews was not an issue, when the reason was explained to the informants.

That said, I did decide to keep my informants anonymous. Still, I had to list them in categories based on characteristics that might affect their answers, e.g. ethnic group belonging, such categorization was also necessary to identify any repeating narratives or perspectives. In the appendix one can therefore find a more detailed list of the informants, in which the informants are numbered and listed based on: their location and occupation or ethnic group belonging, gender and other relevant characteristics. No names were collected outside of the consent forms, and no names will be relied in this thesis. That decision was reached due to the sensitivity of the topic, I could not take the risk of any of my informants getting into trouble over anything they have told me. I also hope that might have encouraged them to speak openly about the situation.

Furthermore, when speaking with locals, and in particular IDPs and returnees, who had recently experienced hardships and trauma, I tried to the best of my abilities to follow the “do

no harm” principle (Bryman, 2012, pp. 135-138). Still there is always the possibility that a researcher might end up causing trauma for the informants. That was a major concern for me. It was therefore important that the informants did not feel obligated to share anything, and I proceeded with caution when approaching people directly involved with the conflict. In the end, my experience was that my informants expressed gratitude and relief that someone came to listen to their stories and the challenges they had or were facing. Though, I did note that several of my informants mentioned a need for more psychosocial support due to trauma.

4.3.4. Limitations and challenges

During my time in the field I encountered a number of challenges, of which several were mentioned in this chapter already, this thesis was further limited by a range of factors. For example, a major challenge was the periodic lack of internet, which made communication and orientation in the field increasingly difficult. As the government of Ethiopia on several occasions turned the internet off nationally, sometimes for weeks at a time, it was often impossible to look things up, send emails or gather information online while in the field. This certainly did complicate my stay in the field. I overcame this by downloading material when I could, and by asking my contacts or informants when something was unclear

Otherwise, my fieldwork was limited in terms of mobility, as I mostly had to rely on public transport, and therefore was unable to visit more remote or distant places. I did fortunately get a ride with a couple of aid organizations, but many of the organizations were also lacking transportation and could not bring me along. The most notable limitation in relation to mobility was certainly that I was not able to visit Kercha, the area where violence supposedly first broke out back in 2018. This was mainly due to security issues in the area, even the aid-organizations had to suspend their activities for a while due to the presence of an armed group in the region, and so it was not safe for me to travel there either. I did my best to overcome this challenge. Fortunately, I was able to interview some aid workers that worked in the area, as well as some displaced persons from Kercha, who were unable to return due to the security situation. In addition, I had scheduled an interview with a government official from the local government in Kercha, that had been in office in 2018 and would have information about the events that took place there. Unfortunately, my fieldwork assistant informed me that he got arrested on the day we were supposed to hold the interview, for reasons unknown to us.

Another limitation would be language, as touched upon previously in this chapter. Aside from the need for a translator, which, as established, can affect the data-collection, language limited

this research in a number of ways. Because I do not speak the local language there is a lot of information I could not access, ranging from local texts and books about the groups' culture and history, to government documents, statistics, and so on. Even during some of the interviews conducted in English, my informants struggled to express themselves and get the point across, as it was not their first language, nor mine. So, the language barrier was certainly there. I did my best to overcome this with the use of translators and by confirming with the informants when something was unclear.

Time could be labelled another limitation, as it did limit the collection of data. I spent a relatively long time in the field, over a month, and thus conducted a large number of interviews. But, as mentioned in the introduction chapter, data collection must end at some point, and so in this study it is limited to the time I spent in the field. Events that have taken place after I left the field will not be taken into account.

4.4. Summary of key points

This chapter has discussed the methodology and methods utilized in the project. I have here accounted for the data-collection and analysis process as well as my position as a researcher to ensure the reflexivity of the project. The chapter concluded with some ethical considerations and limitations of relevance for the study. It is necessary for a researcher to reflect on the methods and methodology of their research, in order to account for how the project has been executed and show reflexivity, which is crucial for the credibility of the research.

Chapter 5 Conceptual framework

The theories and concepts used in this thesis were derived inductively, which is the case for many qualitative studies, meaning that they were picked and developed as outcomes of the research process (Bryman, 2012, p. 412). In addition, this thesis does not aim to confirm or reject any theory in particular. Instead it will use different concepts and theories to answer the following research questions:

- 1) *What are the core issues in the conflict between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups?*
- 2) *Why did conflict break out in April 2018 specifically?*
- 3) *How does the 2018 conflict relate to the previous conflicts between the two groups?*

Because this thesis attempts to cover several aspects and perspectives on the conflict, one theory in itself cannot provide a sufficient explanation. Thus, this chapter consists of a conceptual framework, to better frame research and guide the various parts of the analysis. The conceptual framework will lend from previous research, theories and findings to define key concepts and explain relevant phenomenon for this study specifically. Due to the limited space, the focus have been to pull pieces and points of literature that are especially relevant for this specific study.

The chapter will start with a brief discussion of communal conflict, which is the subject of this research, considering why groups get into (violent) conflict in the first place. Then follows a conceptualization of peace, and an account of the conflict recurrence phenomenon. The next section considers the concept of ethnicity, and the role of ethnicity in the Ethiopian context. All the various concepts outlined in this chapter attempt to provide a conceptual framework that will give a foundation for the discussion of the collected data in the analysis chapter (Chapter 6).

5.1 Communal Conflict

“Conflict” as a term is used in different ways across disciplines and traditions. Most definitions agree that, at the very least, conflict includes two or more parties, that are in some sort of disagreement (“«Conflict»,”). More specifically though, conflicts come in many different forms. Attempts at classifying conflict are often based on various characteristics, such as where the conflict takes place or who the actors are. For example, researchers often divides conflict into internal/intra-state conflict and inter-state conflicts, in which the former

takes place within the borders of the state, while the latter takes place between states (Frère & Wilen, 2015, pp. 1-2). The conflict studied in this thesis is internal, as it takes place within the borders of Ethiopia, and will be further classified as a communal conflict.

Communal conflicts can be defined as defined as “...*violent conflict between non-state groups that are organized based on communal identities*” (Brosché, 2015, p. 4) From this short definition there are several points that need some clarification. First of all, conflicts can be violent and non-violent, the difference being that “*violent conflict involves at least two parties using physical force to resolve competing claims or interests*” (Frère & Wilen, 2015, p. 2). Furthermore, the actors involved in communal conflicts, are non-state groups. That implies that none of the parties have state-power, for example, neither control the military. That said, the state might still be involved in the conflict, as a supporter or as part of the resolution process, that is the case for the Guji and Gedeo in which the state has been heavily involved in the settling of the conflict (Interview 6, 17 & 21).

A key point in the definition is that in communal conflicts the groups are organized on a basis of communal identities, which could be understood as “subjective group identification” based on for example a common history, culture or core values (Elefversson & Brosché, 2012). For the Guji and the Gedeo this communal identity would be their ethnic groups. Communal conflicts are normally (but not always) “local”, meaning limited to a smaller (specific) area, compared to civil wars and other forms of intra-state conflict (Elefversson & Brosché, 2012). The Guji-Gedeo conflict, was largely limited to the two groups and their zones. What is clear from the definition is that the nature of communal conflicts is different from other forms of conflict. Aside from being more localized, there is normally a lower level of organization, communal conflicts can also appear brief and sporadic compared to other forms of conflict (Elefversson & Brosché, 2012).

Here another clarification is needed. In this thesis I refer to some people as “local” or “local actors” with that I mean to imply that they are from the specific area, community or neighbourhood that is being discussed. The “local” is a disputed topic in peace research at the moment (Bräuchler & Naucke, 2017, pp. 422-423), in this case it is simply meant to illustrate to the reader that said person is from one specific place and hence have in-depth knowledge, information or insight on the situation in this specific area.

The majority of communal conflicts appears to have taken place in Africa. Further research on the issue is needed to explain why that is the case, in fact researchers of communal conflict argue that this particular form of conflict so far is understudied in academia (Elefversson & Brosché, 2012). However, environmental scarcity in combination with weak state structures, patronage systems and politicised ethnic identity have been proposed as factors of relevance (Elefversson & Brosché, 2012).

5.1.1 Why Do Groups Get Into (Violent) Conflict?

Having clarified the type of conflict we are dealing with in this study we still know little about why groups get into conflict in the first place. Bottom line Johan Galtung attributes conflict to groups incompatible goals (J. Galtung, 2009, p. 108). However, conflict arises in different contexts, over a range of different “causes”.

Gurr argued in 1993 that there traditionally were two competing perspectives on analysis of violent conflict: The relative deprivation theory *which “treats discontent about unjust deprivation as the primary motivational force of political action”* and the group mobilization theory that *“emphasizes the calculated mobilization of group resources in response to changing political opportunities”* (Gurr, 1993, p. 167). Having said that, the arguments are tied together, in conflict both can often be present. Whether the causes of the conflict is related to “grievance” or “opportunity” there is a feeling of deprivation involved (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998; Hoeffler, 2011).

Lischer, on the other hand, argued in her 1999 article that *“communal war results from two types of change – increases in fear and increases in the feasibility of gaining aims by force”* (Lischer, 1999, p. 331). Shortly explained she claims that fear (or insecurity) can become a trigger for (violent) conflict when *“an oppressed group perceives a heightened threat to its cultural or physical survival”* (Lischer, 1999, p. 331). In this case it is fear of domination or extinction that causes conflict, and in particular when the group thinks they can reduce or avoid the risk through use of violence. The other point, “increasing feasibility” for violence, can relate to *“shifts in relative military capability, heightened international legitimacy, and false optimism”*. Lischer suggests that the combination of *“a security dilemma and the ability to act determines when, and if, simmering ethnic tensions will erupt into violence”* (Lischer, 1999, pp. 331-333).

The point is, whatever the reason, people do not get into conflict randomly – there are rationale and motivation behind the outbreak of conflict. To uncover the driving forces of conflict and to consider the motivation of the people involved is key to understand any conflict. These theories attempt to say something about why (violent) conflict break out, and what motivates people to take up arms. Some of these theories were originally intended for civil wars, but have since been used on various forms of conflict, such as communal conflict. Even so, conflict often break out over very specific issues, different to each conflict. Research on communal conflict specifically have this far suggested that these conflicts are diverse in nature, still some researchers have attempted some overarching grouping of causes.

For example, Uexkull & Pettersson identifies overarching categories, arguing that communal conflicts revolve around territory and/or authority, with a residual third minor category made up of lootable resources and conflict over religious issues. The least common category “lootable resources” in most cases (in the African context) means fighting over livestock, but other identified resources are for example timber or food relief. Conflicts over “authority” includes conflicts where the parties’ main goal is to control the other party. Authority can be divided into the subcategories “formal”, often taking place in connection with elections, and “informal” which relates to the leadership of a group or a community (Uexkull & Pettersson, 2018). The last category, “territory” was identified as the most common, linked to 68% of the conflicts, in the study of communal conflicts between 1989 and 2011. This links to two sub-categories, first there is “land-use” conflicts where water or agricultural lands are the contention issues. The second and most common sub-category is “territorial issues”, Uexkull & Pettersson specifically points out that these conflicts often revolves around “*the borders of administrative districts, such as... the border of districts that are dominated by different ethnic groups*” (Uexkull & Pettersson, 2018, pp. 960-961).

Similarly Brosche and Elefversson 2012 outlines several different types of communal conflicts, largely along the same lines as Uexkull and Pettersson. A first category in which communal conflicts occur over political issues – in relation to national or local elections. And a second category in which disagreement over land is the central issue. Here they identify a number of under categories, such as herder-farmer conflicts and “... ‘sons of the soil’ conflicts, where the indigenous perceive themselves as the rightful owners of the land (Elefversson & Brosché, 2012, pp. 33-35). These conflicts take place between “*original inhabitants of a locality against more recent settlers. Similarly related to control over land, but fought along another identity dimension*” (Elefversson & Brosché, 2012, pp. 35-36).

Having said that these categories are often interconnected, Torbjörnsson points out that *“the majority of communal conflicts in Africa are over land... and conflicts belonging to other categories often originate in issues over land”* (Torbjörnsson, 2016, p. 16). That is because *“conflicts over authority often have a land component as power means access to land and vice versa. Resource conflicts are also often connected to land”* (Torbjörnsson, 2016, p. 16). As we will see in the analysis chapter even in the case of the Guji-Gedeo conflict, most of the identified themes are in some way related to the issue of “land”.

Brosche and Elfversson makes an interesting link between “authority” and “land” conflicts when they point out that *“communal conflicts can be an effective way of gaining access to land as the number of people displaced often is huge, even when the number of deaths is fairly limited”* (Elfversson & Brosché, 2012, p. 38). In these cases the authors argue, *“ruthless political entrepreneurs”,* can use *“the local populations’ grievances for land”* to instigate conflict. Similarly Torbjörnsson argues *“Elites, politicians or businessmen often use grievances for their own greedy purposes. There are countless examples of people in power manipulating local grievances for their personal enrichment.”* (Torbjörnsson, 2016, pp. 18-19) In other words, specific actors might play a decisive role in violent conflicts, and must be identified to understand the motivations behind the outbreak of conflict.

Another interesting study was executed by Brosche 2015, in which he argues that weak states and government bias is linked closely to communal conflicts turning violent (Brosché, 2015). Communal conflicts take place within the state, and the states involvement is crucial. If the state is not able to handle a raising conflict it is more likely to turn violent. The same is true if the state shows a bias towards one party (Brosché, 2015). And especially if people have experienced conflict in the past. If they feel cannot rely on the state to maintain security, or the state has failed to do so in the past, they might resort to violent self-help tactics. *“A history of inter-group violence, grievances, and fear reduce the sense of security and encourage resort to self-help tactics”* (Hazen, 2013) In other words, such conflicts should be considered in connection with the overall national context in which they take place.

Ultimately, there are many contesting theories on how we can understand violent conflict. The key points of this section is that violent conflict break out over a range of different (interconnected) causes, be it economic, political or cultural. Furthermore, people or groups do not fight each other randomly, there are motives and goals behind violent conflict. An understanding of the causes behind any conflict, and the processes of mobilization leading up

to the outbreak of violence are necessary if one hopes to understand any violent conflict. That is precisely what this thesis attempt to do with the Guji-Gedeo conflict of 2018, the causes and the processes leading up to the conflict will be discussed in depth in the analysis chapter (Ch 6) of this thesis.

5.2 Peace

One can hardly talk about conflict without some understanding of what peace is, it is therefore necessary to briefly define the concept of “peace”. Peace in itself is an abstract concept, which makes it hard to define. Johan Galtung suggests that any understanding of peace at the very least means an “absence of direct violence between states, engaged in by military and others in general; and the absence of massive killing of categories of humans in particular” (J. Galtung, 2012, p. 75). Such absence of direct violence Galtung labels “negative peace”, and for a long time this was the general understanding of peace, meaning that when there was not war there was peace. However, Galtung argued strongly that violence is not only direct physical violence. Violence can also be experienced in cultures or structures of the society overall (e.g. as gender or poverty) – he calls this cultural and structural violence. In order to achieve a “positive” form of peace all three forms of violence must be absent (J. Galtung, 2012, pp. 75-76). Over the last few decades this understanding has gained recognition internationally – and among researchers there is now relative agreement that absence of direct violence does not necessarily equal peace.

Peacebuilding is not within the scope of this thesis, however it is necessary to properly conceptualize peace in order to understand conflict. This study understand peace in a positive way and argue that the negative understanding of peace does not create a sustainable peace. With sustainable peace, shortly explained, I mean a “lasting peace”. The following section on recurring conflict should make it particularly clear that the absence of direct violence is not necessary peace, and that putting an end to violent conflict does not mean that the conflict issues are resolved nor that any sort of sustainable peace has been reached.

5.3 Conflict Recurrence

Statistically it is argued that 60% of all conflicts recur, and after 2018 it would only be right to consider the fact that the conflict between Guji and Gedeo potentially is recurring (S. Gates, H. M. Nygård, & E. Trappeniers, 2016, p. 1). This is, after all, the third time the groups have been in conflict. The findings in this thesis suggests that the concept of recurring conflict

is highly relevant in this case, that will become more obvious in the next chapter – in which the causes for conflict are analysed.

PRIO suggests that the conventional rule among researchers is to use a “two-year rule”. Meaning that two years of peace means the conflict has “ended”. That appears to imply a negative understanding of peace, as two years without violence equals peace. *“If the fighting resumes after less than two years, the conflict is defined as on-going. If a conflict starts again after a two- year period of no conflict, the conflict has recurred”* (S Gates et al., 2016, p. 3). Furthermore, the recurred conflict must involve the same parties that were involved in the first conflict. *“Such cases are considered to be ‘recurring conflict’. A conflict involving a new actor(s)... is regarded to be new conflict”* (S Gates et al., 2016, p. 3). The case of Guji and Gedeo fits these criteria, as conflict broke out after 20 years of relative stability, among the same parties – Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups – as in 1995 and 1998.

In cases of recurring conflict unresolved grievances are (often) present in the society. *“Recurring conflict is symptomatic of unaddressed grievances, and lasting peace will not be achieved until these issues are addressed”* (S Gates et al., 2016, p. 4). The conflict can lay dormant for a long period of time, and at the surface the society can be in a state of seeming stability or peace. Then the conflict breaks out again, usually over some of the very same issues (as they remained unresolved), and this illustrates how the society was not truly at “peace”. Even though violent conflict was absent, the unresolved conflict issues remained under the surface.

There is still some disagreement over what factors lead to conflict recurrence. It is suggested that the outcome and settlement of previous conflict(s) play a significant role (S Gates et al., 2016, p. 1). The next chapter of this thesis precisely attempts to identify the causes for conflict, and determine how they in any way relate to the previous conflicts. In the Guji-Gedeo case it is therefore a key point that the previous conflicts have not been fully settled – as briefly discussed in chapter 2 (literature review).

5.3.1 Root Causes and Proximate Causes for Conflict

When dealing with recurring conflicts the idea of separating causes for conflict into root/structural causes and proximate/immediate causes can be useful. *“The structural causes of conflict are long- term or systemic causes of violent conflict that have become built into the norms, structures and policies of a society”* (Herbert, 2017, p. 6). The root causes then are the

causes at the core of the conflict, the long-lasting causes that often do “recur” in recurring conflicts.

“The proximate causes of conflict are more recent causes that change more quickly, can accentuate structural causes and lead to an escalation of violent conflict” (Herbert, 2017, p. 6). The proximate causes are short time/immediate factors that spark each outbreak of (violent) conflict. This is particularly relevant because in recurring conflict the root causes can lay dormant for many years, before something (the proximate causes) makes (violent) conflict erupt again. The following chapter will attempt to identify both the core issues of the conflict (the root causes), meaning the main issues the conflict is fought over, and the immediate causes, meaning the specific factors that caused violence to break out between Guni and Gedeo in 2018.

5.4 Inter-group Conflict in the Ethiopian Context

This far we have looked at inter-group conflict generally. Studying inter-group conflict in post-1991 Ethiopia, as is the context of this study, there are some particular factors that must be conceptualized and understood. The most notable one is “ethnicity”. The role of “ethnicity” in the Ethiopian society is well illustrated with the Ethnic federalism, as we discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis the introduction of Ethnic federalism officially linked ethnicity and politics together, which had major consequences for the ethnic groups inhabiting the country. Ethnicity arguably became the main basis for mobilization for political issues, at the same time it is the main factor for group identification in Ethiopia (Tefari, 2012). Thinking back to the section on communal conflict, it was established that the parties are organized on the basis of some kind of “communal identity”, in this case that is “ethnicity” and their ethnic groups common identity. Therefore, to understand the nature of the conflict as well as the involved persons motivations, some understanding of “ethnicity” as a concept is necessary.

5.4.1 Ethnicity

The term “ethnic” can be traced to the Greek word “ethnos”, which over time had been used in association with race, tribe, people, group or in other words a community of common descent. More recently, shaped by the colonization period, the term became associate with “us” and “them”, in which “us” was the majority – seen as non-ethnic – and “them” was the minority, for example immigrants or indigenous people, seen as “ethnic” (Reuter, 2017). In

academia today ethnicity is understood in different ways across different traditions and disciplines, and a general definition is so far lacking, thus the concept is subject to much debate.

At the very least, ethnicity has to do with identity and identification. Back in 1985 Horowitz defined ethnicity as a term which “*designates a sense of collective belonging, which could be based on common descent, language, history, culture, race, or religion (or some combination of these)*” (Horowitz, 1985, pp. 13-14). Eriksen turns the argument around, stating that “*the term ‘ethnicity’ refers to relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive...*” (Eriksen, 2010, p. 10). In other words he argues it is not about the groups common identity, but about their identity in contrast to other groups (“us” and “them”), or rather ethnicity is not within but between groups. Either way ethnicity has to do with group identity, and refers to a group with certain common characteristics, that makes them perceive themselves different from other groups. Like other factors of identity, ethnicity is created and re-created through social interaction, in which a perception of the groups common identity and distinctiveness from other groups emerges (Eriksen, 2010, pp. 1-2).

There are many ways to understand and conceptualize ethnicity and the creation of ethnic identity. Within the discourse three main perspectives can be identified. On the one hand the primordial view, in which ethnicity is ascriptive, seen as “*something naturally inborn, fixed and stable*” (Aalen, 2006, p. 247). On the other hand the constructivist understanding of ethnicity perceives ethnic identity as something socially constructed, that can be changed and formed in various ways (Williams, 2015, p. 149). Lastly the instrumentalist approach argues that ethnicity is “*neither inherent in human nature nor intrinsically valuable*” (Varshney, 2009, p. 9). Within the instrumentalist view ethnicity is simply understood more as a strategic tool, for people or coalitions looking for economic or political gain, and thus a way of restricting resources and power to a minority (Williams, 2015, p. 148)

In the Ethiopian case, the constitution of 1994 in its definition of ethnic groups takes a primordial approach to ethnicity. Article 39 in the constitution states that a nationality (ethnic group) is “*a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory*” (Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1994). And thus defines ethnic groups as “clearly distinguishable cultural groups”, in which all members of the state

“must” be part of an ethnic group, in line with the primordial approach (Aalen, 2006, p. 247). This understanding of ethnicity has implications for how matters related to the ethnic groups are handled, some of which we will return to in the analysis.

5.4.2 The role of Ethnicity in Ethiopian Inter-group Conflict

Inter-group conflicts in Ethiopia tends to be classified as “ethnic conflicts”, that is also the case for the Guji-Gedeo conflicts, we will therefore consider this approach first.

“The term “ethnic conflict” is often used loosely, to describe a wide range of intra-state conflicts that are not, in fact, ethnic in character” (Brown, 2010, p. 93).

Ethnic conflict, much like ethnicity itself, has been subject to disagreement over how it should be defined. Looser definitions, like the one above, simply call it a dispute over an issue (political, economic, social, cultural or territorial) between two or more ethnic groups (Brown, 2010, p. 93). A criteria of which the Guji Gedeo conflict does fit, seeing that it is in fact a conflict between two ethnic groups. However, definitions like this in reality makes any conflict between ethnic groups an “ethnic conflict”, whatever the conflict issues might be – which in a way defeats the purpose of the labelling and categorizing conflicts altogether. Other definitions are more precise, incorporating the goals and motivations of the involved actors. For example Stephen Wolff explains that in ethnic conflicts:

“the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions. Whatever the concrete issues over which conflict erupts, at least one of the conflict parties will explain its dissatisfaction in ethnic terms—that is, one party to the conflict will claim that its distinct ethnic identity is the reason why its members cannot realise their interests, why they do not have the same rights, or why their claims are not satisfied” (Wolff, 2006, p. 2).

Even in this case ethnicity is often not the root cause of the conflict. As Wolff’s definition suggests it is necessary to study the actors, their motivations and the causes of a conflict between ethnic groups to determine to which degree it is actually “ethnic”. All intergroup conflicts in Ethiopia could technically be identified as ethnic (though they in reality are diverse in nature and cause), since all citizens must belong to an ethnic group, and when groups get into conflict that will be between two different ethnic groups. The decision to define the Guji-Gedeo conflict as a communal conflict, rather than an ethnic conflict, comes

from the findings of this thesis – in which ethnicity is not a root cause. This decision builds on the informants emphasis on the fact that ethnicity is not a core issue in the conflict, the concept of communal conflict better reflect this approach to the situation.

It is then established that ethnicity is not the cause of the conflict, whether or not one classifies it as an ethnic conflict. With that in mind, it is time to consider what role ethnicity does play in the conflict. While not a main cause, “ethnicity” is still a factor of relevance in ethnic group conflict, in particular because of its role in the Ethiopian society. Since ethnicity has been politicized in Ethiopia, as we discussed in the background, we should ask how this affects inter-group conflicts in the country.

Much like there are different ways to look at ethnicity as a concept, there are different ways to understand the role of ethnicity in conflict. First of all, ethnicity in itself is not violent, nor is ethnicity in itself a cause of conflict, as the primordial approach to ethnicity claims (Reuter, 2017). In this case this is simply evident by how the Guji and Gedeo despite their differences lived together relatively harmoniously for decades before the 1990s. This is an important premise for this thesis, which should become clear in the following paragraphs, in which we consider other approaches to ethnicity and conflict.

From a constructivist perspective “*violent conflict is caused mainly by social and political systems that lead to inequality and grievances and do not offer options for the peaceful expression of differences*” (Reuter, 2017). In this case the system is ethnic federalism, which we discussed in the background chapter. This constructivist perspective can be identified simply in the way critics argue that the system pits the ethnic groups against each other. A constructivist approach focuses on how the ethnic federalism causes grievances, and how the system does not provide sufficient peaceful to resolve issues and conflicts. We will discuss the role of the ethnic federalism more in-depth, in connection to the 2018 conflict, in the analysis.

Lastly the instrumentalist perspective on ethnicity in conflict argues that “*(ethnic) conflict arises if ethnic groups compete for the same goal—notably power, access to resources, or territory. The interests of a society’s elite class play an important role in mobilizing ethnic groups to engage in ethnic conflicts. Ethnic conflict is thus similar to other political interest conflicts*” (Reuter, 2017). This perspective on ethnic conflict is particularly interesting for this study, because of its emphasis on the role of society’s elites. We briefly mentioned that

specific actors might work to instigate communal conflict (see section 4.1.1), furthermore ethnicity is often linked to conflict specifically because of its strong potential for social mobilization (Wolff, 2006, pp. 5-6).

Considering inter-group conflicts in post 1991 Ethiopia, several prominent researchers have made a case for the instrumentalist approach to ethnicity and conflict. In that case “*conflicts take place because leaders strategically manipulate ethnicity for the sake of political power, or for extracting resources...*” (Varshney, 2009, p. 9) Such conflict arise “*...over scarce resources driven by the aims of political leaders for political or economic gains or a deliberate manipulation based on a rational decision to incite or encourage ethnic violence*” (Williams, 2015, p. 148). This notion of ethnicity being used as a tool by the elites to mobilize the masses for their own interests and cause conflict, has been linked to many inter-group conflicts in Ethiopia after 1991, and also to the previous conflicts between Guji and Gedeo (see Chapter 3). Which illustrates the way ethnicity can be used to cause conflict, without the cause of the conflict actually being ethnicity in itself.

Like stated in the literature review chapter of this thesis, previous research has argued that ethnicity in Ethiopia has been politicized, and even more so under the ethnic federalism, when ethnicity officially became as the basis for recognition and a way to address political issues. Under this system, researchers argue, ethnicity has been used (by elites) to mobilize people for (political) goals – in line with the instrumentalist approach mentioned above (Taye, 2017, p. 52). Hence, both the constructivist and the instrumentalist approaches are helpful to understand the conflict at hand, and it appears that we would lose important dimensions to the conflict by leaving one out.

This lengthy discussion on ethnicity and inter-group conflict is necessary to understand the dynamics of ethnicity in conflicts in Ethiopia, as a means of group identity, in its role in the administrative structure, and as a tool for mobilization as well as to pursue political goals. This is fundamental if one hopes to understand the motivations behind conflict, as well as how people are mobilized for conflict in Ethiopia today. The analysis in the next chapter will consider what role ethnicity played in the 2018 conflict between Guji and Gedeo.

Lastly, when discussing ethnicity and conflict in Ethiopia it is necessary to clarify that there should be a distinction between the understanding of ethnicity as a component of identity, and ethnicity as a political tool the way it is used under the ethnic federalism.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter sought to outline some key concepts and theoretical approaches that will guide the analysis of this research project in the following chapter. The focus was mainly on inter-group conflict, and what causes conflict between groups in the first place, as that is the key aspects necessary to answer the research questions of this theses. Furthermore, the chapter considered the recurrence of conflicts, an issue that related to the key findings of this project and is highly relevant to explain why the same parties get into conflict again and again. The chapter also discussed the concept of ethnicity, and the role of ethnicity in inter-group conflict in Ethiopia today. Ethnicity plays a large role in the Ethiopian society, and is frequently linked to conflicts in the country. In the case of Guji and Gedeo, however, the conflict should not be attributed to ethnicity only. The groups lived together for a long time, in seemingly peaceful relations and, as will be discussed in the next chapter of this thesis, a number of other factors plays a role in the conflict. Still ethnicity makes for a useful tool to understand particular dimensions of the conflict, the analysis will make use of both the constructivist and the instrumentalist perspectives to ethnicity and conflict.

In the end, this chapter have only briefly listed the most relevant theoretical aspects, a more extensive discussion will take place in the analysis. With the concepts and theoretical aspects outlined in this chapter the data collected in the field will be discussed in detail, with the ultimate goal of answering the research questions as listed in the beginning of this thesis, and provide the reader with a better understanding of the 2018 conflict between Guji and Gedeo.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Based on data collected through interviews in the field, this chapter untangle and discuss various factors leading up to the 2018 conflict between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups. While the focus of the study is on the 2018 conflict, it quickly becomes clear that the conflict is closely tied to the previous conflicts between the groups, local informants in particular placed an emphasis on historical events when discussing the conflict. Hence, the analysis considers the 2018 conflict in a broader context. A discussion of the interconnected elements takes place in the last part of the chapter, with the aim of concretizing the main points and findings of the project. Finally, the aim of this chapter is to present discuss the collected data in order to answer the following research questions:

- 1) *What are the root causes of the 2018 conflict between the Guji and Gedeo Ethnic Groups?*
- 2) *Why did conflict break out between the two groups in April 2018?*
- 3) *How does the 2018 conflict relate to the previous conflicts between the two groups?*

As outlined in the methodology chapter (Ch 3), this thesis makes use of a thematic analysis, which means that *“the researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly”* (Bryman, 2012, p. 578). The data collected in the field was coded thematically during transcription, and the following main themes were identified: Land, Referendum, Grievances, Minority Rights, Elite Instigation, Ethnic Federalism, National Context and Ethnicity. The chapter is divided according to these themes, in other words they guide the structure of the chapter. The conceptual framework from the previous chapter will be used as a theoretical basis, in the discussion of the data.

6.1 Land

Most conflicts are made up of a number of interconnected factors. When analysing conflicts it is therefore necessary to untangle these different causes and discuss each factor individually, to later understand how they all fit together. When I asked my informants what the core issues of the conflict between Guji and Gedeo really were the answers were diverse and complex. The conflict clearly consists of multiple factors and there is a long history leading up to the outbreak in 2018. As a starting point for this analysis, several informants mentioned “land”, as an important issue in the conflict.

“It is about land. This is mid-Africa, it is land. Normally in other countries it is the herders and the agriculture, like in Congo, here it is all about populations and land.” (Interview 7, Guji NGO-worker)

The issue of “land” was predominantly mentioned as a contextual factor or cause, meaning that the informants would point to land and then go on to explain other issues in which land was a relevant factor. Therefore, it makes sense to consider this issue first, to later understand how it connects to the other identified themes. The reader will recall that we discussed the issue of land, and the Guji Gedeo lifestyle in a previous chapter (Ch 2, Context), this first section builds upon this information.

6.1.1 Land Scarcity

“Ownership or access to land is a key to the well-being and livelihood of many African families. Land is the single most important asset. It is a key social and economic asset, crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in decision making, providing a secure place to live and a site for economic and social activity” (Gizaw & Woldetsadik, 2013).

Ethiopia has a predominantly agrarian economy, which makes land one of the most important resources, as most people need land to make a livelihood (Haddis, 2016, p. 1). The value of the land was similarly expressed by an elder in the Guji zone *“...the coffee, the false banana, the breeding of cow, all of this need what? All takes place on the land”* (Interview 13). In other words, land is crucial for production and livelihood, both for farmers and livestock herders in the Guji and Gedeo zones. At the same time Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, with approx. 108 million people in 2018, of which more than 70% are under 30 years old, indicating a high population growth in the last few decades (ETHIOPIA, National Human Development Report 2018: Industrialization with a Human Face, 2018, p. 7).

Farming is the primary lifestyle in the Gedeo zone, the farmers mainly produce coffee and Enset (false banana). At the same time, the Gedeo zone is one of the most densely populated areas in all of Ethiopia (Senishaw, 2018). A government official in Yigetchaffer Woreda in the Gedeo zone, underlined the issue land scarcity presents for the local administration and the people within the zone. According to the informant the average amount of land per household in the area is very low (less than 0.5 hectare). Furthermore, a large number of people in the area are “landless” and hence unable to make a proper living for themselves and their families. Lack of land, the informant said, was a “painful” issue for them (Interview 23).

6.1.2 Resettling Schemes

This “land issue” in Gedeo is nothing new and has been present for a long period of time, it was mentioned in research executed in the area as far back as the 1950s, and arguably has come to affect the lifestyle and history of the Gedeo. It has also affected the relationship between the Gedeo and their neighbouring groups (Senishaw, 2018).

In the background (Chapter 2) we discussed how previous research has found that the Ethiopian government has supported Gedeo expansion into Guji areas since the beginning of the century, through resettling schemes for different purposes. These resettling schemes, dictated by the government, have resettled Gedeo into areas that were previously inhabited mainly by Guji over time. This has had longstanding consequences for the two groups up until today.

Gedeo inhabitants in the Guji zone were often referred to as “*guests*” by my informants, who strongly felt that despite the longstanding presence of the Gedeo the land still belonged to the Guji. Even so, as my informants patiently explained, the Gedeo minorities in Guji might have lived in the area for 40 or 50 years (some even longer), many of them born and raised there (Interview 2). Yet, it appears they will always be considered as “*guests*” because of their ethnicity. Here, the 2018 conflict shares some common features with ‘sons of the soil’ type conflicts. As stated in the previous chapter such conflicts break out when the indigenous inhabitants perceive themselves as the rightful owners of the land, and therefore get into conflict with settlers (Elefversson & Brosché, 2012, pp. 33-35). This will be increasingly clear in section 5.3 where local inhabitants outline the motivation and rationale behind the violence that took place in their community.

6.1.3 Pastoralists and Land Rights

The Guji and the Gedeo lived together with close relations and much contact. Expressed through, for example, intermarriages, trade dependency, and sharing of certain cultural practices. In the background it was outlined that the Gedeo traditionally practiced farming, while the Guji on the other hand are traditionally pastoralists, focusing on livestock production. Research shows that pastoralists are often at a disadvantage when it comes to property rights and other political decisions (Hazen, 2013). That seems to have been the case for the Guji as well, as research strongly suggests that (governmental) decisions on land have tended to favour the Gedeo over the Guji. This is well-illustrated by the government’s

resettling schemes into the Guji zone, as well as the decision to hold a bare majority vote in the previous referendums, which some argue favoured the Gedeo.

It is necessary to take note of the importance the land holds in this context, and how all these events have made it increasingly difficult to determine who “owns” the land. The history has blurred traditional demarcation between the groups, who already had close relations, which had consequences for the events that took place in 1995, 1998, and again in 2018. This project does not aim to say anything about who actually has a claim to the land, but it was obvious during interviews that conflicting claims came up (Interview 2, 19, 23, 30 & 33). We will revisit this issue in later sections.

In the previous chapter we saw how Torbjörnsson suggested that most communal conflicts in Africa originate in issues over land (Torbjörnsson, 2016, p. 16), that argument appears true in this case. Land and dispute over land is a contextual factor affecting the recent conflict between Guji and Gedeo. As outlined, land is a particularly valuable resource in Ethiopia overall. However, land scarcity and dispute over land in itself is not enough to cause the conflict, the groups lived together in the past despite minor disputes over resources. Much like previous research has suggested, it would be too simple to write this conflict off as a dispute over land or resources. This thesis suggests that access to land might work as a motivating factor of sorts, however there are other issues at play that bring the conflict forth.

6.2 Referendum Rumours

With these contextual factors outlined, before we discuss the core issues any further, it seems necessary to look at what actually happened between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups in 2018. With regards to the outbreak of conflict, one particular issue stood out. By far the most common theme, mentioned by the overwhelming majority, was a “referendum proposal” from the Gedeo minority in parts of west-Guji, in spring of 2018.

This is a complicated issue, subject to much uncertainty. What we do know is that a letter was sent to the Oromia government, from the Gedeo minority in Kercha Woreda in the West-Guji Zone (Interview 16). The Ethiopian government has not disclosed the content of this letter, leaving large uncertainty around the letter itself. There was agreement among my informants that the letter at the very least was concerned with the rights of the Gedeo minority in the Guji zone, and in particular the use of their language – Gedeuffa (Interview 1).

“The people (Gedeo) complained, they raised this political question. Because our number is almost the same, almost 50 percent, we want to learn by our language... It is not their native area you know; it is the Gedeo that are living in Guji. But the working language is restricted, even in church or in preaching our working language is the Oromia language. Everything is decided by the Guji. It is the Gedeo that wanted to live by their language...” (Interview 28).

The Gedeo minority in some parts of west-Guji is large, over 40 % informants suggested (Interview 2, 11 & 28). Still, my informants explained, the general working language in the Guji zone is Oromiffa, the language of the Guji people. Oromiffa is used in education, in churches, and in all other official institutions in the zone (Interview 1). Minority groups under the ethnic federalism have limited opportunities to express their culture in the public space, an issue in itself, that we will return to in a later section. And that was apparently the problem they were addressing in the letter going out to the Oromia Zonal Government in the beginning of 2018.

However, soon after, rumours that the letter also included a proposal for a new referendum spread. Among my informants there was inconsistency in what this supposed referendum proposal had included. It seemed like the information was mostly founded on rumours, seeing that the government had not disclosed the actual content of the letter to the public. Still, the general idea was that the Gedeo minority in certain areas had grown quite big, and so they proposed a referendum with the aim to include some areas currently in west-Guji into a new “special woreda”, under the SNNPR with the Gedeo zone. The areas in question according to my informants were parts of the woredas Kercha, Hambella Wambena and Bule Hora, which are mainly areas close to the Gedeo border (Interview 30).

“After they came to this place, they asked up to Bule Hora woreda, that is 3 woredas. “we have to learn by our own language, our culture is blocked”, and they wrote this kind of letter to Oromia government. Then Oromia government wrote a letter to the Zonal office (in West-Guji) - how you can respond to this? After the community heard that - this conflict re-erupted” (Interview 29).

This caused outrage among the Guji population, who feared that they might lose this land to the Gedeos if such a referendum was held. The fear led to aggression and violence, and that was arguable why the 2018 conflict broke out. The referendum was seen as the main proximate cause of the conflict, among my informants.

“What has probably triggered this conflict was related to the initiative of the Gedeo to call for a referendum to see if (parts of) West-Guji could become a Gedeo region, this has triggered reaction...” (Interview 35).

In this situation there is a serious lack of verified information, which is a large issue in itself. For example, what the “referendum letter” contained is not actually known, so the violence that followed appears to be founded upon rumours that spread through the zones. One can wonder, if the letter included no such proposal, a disclosure of the content might effectively have calmed the situation down. I did ask some of my contacts at the zonal government in West-Guji about the content of the letter. The reply was that the issue was too sensitive to discuss. Local academics informed me that other researchers had received similar answers (Interview 10). It was in other words not possible to further verify this information. The uncertainty around this issue makes it difficult to draw definite conclusions, but the fact remains that the potential content of this letter was a cause in the conflict.

It is of importance that my Gedeo informants denied that the letter had included such a referendum proposal, many took the time to explain along these lines: *“The Gedeo do not ask to take land from Guji, but want democratic rights and to learn in their own language”* (Interview 1 Gedeo official). One informant even reached out after the interview to clarify this specifically, showing that it was considered an important point among the informants. Within the collected data this was a point where a clear and consistent difference in opinion – between informants from the two ethnic groups – could be identified. In other words the Guji informants consistently claimed that the letter contained a referendum proposal, while most for the Gedeo informants either denied the existence of such a proposal, or underlined that they had no interest in the land.

This referendum proposal was the most prominent proximate cause of conflict reported to me in the field, this letter and the rumours surrounding it were said to directly have sparked the violence that broke out in April of 2018. Having said that, there is much more to this referendum, and to the outbreak of conflict.

6.3 Grievances with Past Events

Within my data there were certain common narratives that emerged within specific groups. A perception among many of my Guji informants was that the Gedeo wanted to take their land. In Box 1 some direct quotes from the informants are listed. This section has to do with their

understanding of the situation, and so it is important to hear from the informants directly. The content of these quotes will be further discussed below.

Box 1: “Land Grab” Strategy?

“But as commonly known the reason (for conflict) is that in the Gedeo society they have very small lands, therefore they wanted to settle in the West-Guji land, and take the area, and to claim a special zone...”

(Interview 6)

“The first cause to get into conflict is land scarcity, the population increases and the interest in land increased. In Gedeo the population is high, they have great interest in the land. Due to this the two groups have interest to fight each other” (Interview 27).

“The displacement crisis started, it exploded in April after a referendum had been called for to annex woredas that are under the Oromia region to SNNP region. What I know is that this is a strategy that the Gedeo ethnic group has been doing for a while. They go to a certain area that is right next to their area or region, then they have a lot of babies so they grow very big, the number of population become bigger than the current one that is already there, then they ask for referendum, and then they are the majority and they annex it. It happened for Gedeb and it was going to happen for Kercha I think. So when the referendum was called for, the conflict started to push the all Gedeo ethnic people back to the Gedeo zone, who had been here for maybe 20 years or more. The problem started on the border, but escalated to every area...” (Interview 7)

“Know that the Gedeo people are those of who lived with Guji people for so many years, but you know these Gedeo people... are densely populated and there is scarcity of land. So dependent on this issue some minority groups just make up a political issue to confiscate the land, they raised this as a political issue and cause some conflict ideas within their society. Especially, to achieve this also... they preach in the church about the topic of conflict and just they move peoples for conflict. This is with minority groups. This is the case for the conflict at the time. But you know Guji and Gedeo tribe live for a long time, for so many years. But you know this conflict is not raised within this manner for a time, the magnitude is different this year. But the cause of the conflict is those minority people, who raised the topic of conflict to confiscate the land” (Interview 5).

These quotations show that there was a perception among some informants that the referendum was part of a deliberate strategy to gain control of land, motivated among other things by land scarcity in the Gedeo zone (Interview 27). This narrative was particularly strong among local Guji informants, who explained their motives and feelings around the events of the 2018 conflict in their area. They expressed feelings of insecurity and mistrust, faced with the fear that the Gedeo would hold a referendum and “take” their land as they argued had happened in the past. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, land was an identified issue. In this section it becomes apparent that there are clear grievances with

previous decisions related to the land and the border. Those grievances become increasingly more apparent in these interviews with the local population.

Box 2: Local informants in Garba town in West-Guji

“Generally, this society is just brotherly and sisterly, we have been living together for many years, Guji and Gedeo. Displacement took place before this, in 1995 and 1998. But at that time, it was not this much because the Gedeo, those who are living close to the Guji, were small in numbers. As their number has increased, they get into this society in Guji and they started to ask for the land (referendum), they started to say “we are so many in numbers so we have to have our own land and our own woreda”. For example, the place known as Birbisa Bera which is 50 kilometers from Garba it was the place of Guji. That place is now totally occupied by Gedeo... Last year they asked referendum, in order to get 3 woreda. They said that we have to conduct referendum, because the number of population the Gedeo residents are much more than Guji. So then the locals in Guji said that... in those places we have shifted our land, we left our land for them. 20 years ago Birbisa Bera was that of Guji. Now they come here, and they asked our land - because of this we cannot be tolerant. Because of this we fought each other, the main reason is because of land he said...” (Interview 29)

“This society (Guji), as you know have the Gaddaa system, many of those ritual lands (are now) in Gedeo. We have left all those lands, even around Yigetchaffer (now part of the Gedeo zone) we have ritual land, we were there during the DERG regime. Now we are pushed here, and now they even come after Garba. They are pushing us forward. Bule Hora Woreda, Hambela Kambela and Kercha, around 3 woreda they said the referendum should be carried out in these three woredas, because the number of Gedeo living in these 3 woredas might be more than that of the Guji. So the Guji said that even though we left our land for them, they asked another question (referendum)... There are 5 or 6 kebeles, those kebeles are the place where Gaadda system take place, all those kebeles have already been occupied by Gedeo. There is such kind of grief in the community...” (Interview 30).

“Ritual places which were before under Guji, are now under Gedeo. Because they lost all that, and those who live with us don't live peacefully. They (Gedeos) rise this question in order to expand their land, this raised some grief in us, and in the new generation (the youth)” (Interview 31).

“...generally it is not something targeted and it is not something planned. When they raised such a question the society could be not tolerant... It is because of only this, but its not planned, it is not to burn or to do bad things. Simply, as soon as they raised the question, because the people still carry some grief in them...” (Interview 29).

I spoke to a total of three elders in the same community, all of whom expressed these similar grievances. In this case I think the informants expressed their feelings best themselves, in the quotes above. They placed an emphasis on the events of the 1990s, saying that the Guji had lost land to the Gedeo in the past, and therefore they could not be tolerant when news of a

new referendum proposal spread. There was clearly a strong sense of grief and frustration for the land they felt they had lost in the past, and in particular certain areas with cultural value (ritual places under the Gaadda system). Grievances over these past events seemed to make up the motivation for the violence that took place in their community in 2018.

In the previous chapter it was suggested that conflicts might turn violent when a group feels that their survival is threatened, and that argument is very much relevant for this narrative. Lischer suggested that fear (or insecurity) can become a trigger for (violent) conflict when *“an oppressed group perceives a heightened threat to its cultural or physical survival”* (Lischer, 1999, p. 331). This fear of domination or extinction can cause conflict, especially when the group thinks it can reduce or avoid the risk through use of violence. *“A security dilemma and the ability to act determines when, and if, simmering ethnic tensions will erupt into violence”* (Lischer, 1999, pp. 331-333). Among the Guji informants quoted above, one can identify feelings of insecurity and a perception of threat associated with the Gedeo and the potential new referendum. In this case the rumours of a new referendum presented such a security dilemma, which then led to violence and displacement.

These grievances and insecurities were thus a partial cause of the violence that erupted in 2018 – it appears the locals felt that they had to take action, or they might lose land again. This the elders explained was the reason why people were displaced and Gedeo property destroyed in their area in 2018. They did not deny that it had happened and seemed to feel that they could not be tolerant in this case.

It was suggested in the conceptual framework that history can also have an effect on whether a conflict turns violent. *“A history of inter-group violence, grievances, and fear reduce the sense of security and encourage resort to self-help tactics”* (Hadiz, 2013). This is particularly true if the state cannot ensure security of its people. When people cannot trust the state to handle an issue, they are more likely to resort to self-help. The Guji and Gedeo have been in conflict twice before, and that has an effect on the 2018 situation. The informants clearly place an emphasis on what has happened in the past, and the land they feel that they have lost. Previous governmental decisions, it is argued, have favoured the Gedeo. When the rumours of a new referendum spread it appears that the Guji took the situation into their own hands precisely like this theory suggests.

As a concluding comment, this data is particularly important, if one hopes to understand the conflict. Insight into the reasoning behind the violence and displacement that took place in 2018 is absolutely key to understanding the situation. Based on the information on this topic, it is evident that the conflict and displacement of 2018 is directly linked to the 1995 and 1998 conflicts and must be considered in connection to those events. Lastly, when outlining such a narrative, it is important to remember that this is one perspective on the situation. Recall from previous chapters that violence took place on both sides, and people from both groups were displaced in the conflict, so the narrative of the conflict might be different in other communities.

6.4 The Role of the Elites

As shown in the previous section, some informants expressed suspicion towards the Gedeo, practically claiming that they were seeking to expand their land as a strategy of some sort. My Gedeo informants – both in Gedeo and in the Guji zone – expressed no such ideas, and were quick to underline that they had no such intention. Most denied the existence of the referendum altogether and argued that they just wanted to live in peace. Among my informants a majority pointed out that if there was such a strategy it was not the work of the whole group, but rather a selected few.

This was another key point that emerged during the data collection process. Informants on both sides were of the opinion that this conflict was not actually between the peoples of Gedeo and Guji. Near all of the local informants took the time to clarify this, and the informants clearly considered it an especially important point. Rather, the informants pointed to certain actors within the two groups, that had contributed to the outbreak of conflict.

“Generally, the main issue is this; we have lost our land and those here are not living with us peacefully and they are asking things like referendum, in order to get an extra land. But, when I say this, it is not all of the community. There are some people who instigate this, like politicians, (they instigate conflict) in order to get their own benefit, there are such people” (Interview 31).

Generally, the argument was that certain elite actors on both sides had an interest in conflict between the two groups and would manipulate the people for this. Informants pointed specifically to landowners, politicians, and religious figures, as the instigating actors. While it is clear that different types of people were involved, these actors can all be referred to as

“elites” in the society. The argument remains that these people were manipulating people for their own interests. In general it was said that that these actors raised conflict for their own benefit, whether it was land and money, or politics and power. The role of these actors played was well explained by one informant:

Box 3: Elites

“There are different actors here, for example different politicians, literate men. From both Gedeo and the Guji, people say “we are learned, we know the politics we know the economy”. They pulled the people to get into conflict, because they have some interests in the resources. The other one is different: the churches, the church leaders. They played great role, they take their agendas there, and they began to preach about what you call ethnicity, about politics, about the difference in church. Since they began to preach about this the people began to separate from each other ... There are such political actors from both sides, from both Guji and Gedeo. For example, if you take Gedeo: they mobilize the people, and they would say “you have to expand your land, your borders goes to here” - around Bule Hora. “You can expand your borders”, they say, and they mobilize the people for this. If you take the side of the Guji they mobilize the people, and they say “you lost your land, the Gedeo is taking your land, so just you have to struggle and you have to fight against them”. So, there are two sides here. The people cannot understand these political issues, so the people get into conflict directly without any understanding” (Interview 2).

In the 2018 context the involvement of some religious leaders was specifically emphasised by the informants. In these conversations the Mekane Yesus and Kale Heywet churches came up repeatedly. An aid worker whom had worked in Kercha Woreda explained that *“most of the people who are followers of... in ethiopia we call them Kale Keywet and Mekhane Yesus - it is a religious group. So, the Guji mainly adhere to the Mekhane Yesus, the Gedeos mainly Kale Heywet. So if you go to one Kebele where there are both Gedeos and Guji you will (often) find two churches, one Kale Heywet and one Mekhane Yesus” (Interview 33).*

This conflict first sparked in Kercha Woreda, and the same informant further explained how these religious actors had instigated conflict between the Gedeo and the Guji population in the area:

Box 4: Religious Actors

“It was Sunday. I heard that in one of Kale Heywet churches for the Gedeo, which is in one kebele in Kercha - one of their priests preached, the people say that he said – “I saw it in my vision that this area, this territory, belongs to the Gedeos”. So, after it was said that peoples when they go out from the church, they started to chant and celebrate and they erected the SNNPR flag, and then started the conflict. That is the way everything started. They erect not the Oromia flag, but the flag of SNNPR - and everything started. That is the immediate cause I heard from the protestants there (in Kercha)” (Interview 33).

“I heard these two issues are at the centre of conflict, question of referendum and also religious involvement. There was false professing in the church, which says that “the land you have at hand now is yours”. That God said it, it was that kind of prophecy in the church, and that was the other cause of conflict” (Interview 10).

This misinformation or manipulation from the elites appears to have taken place on both sides. According to my informants these actors played a big role in spreading the rumours of the referendum proposal and creating fear among the Guji population that the Gedeo were out to take their land. Hence, they were argued to be a main driving force in the escalation of the conflict into violence. In other words, specific actors might play a decisive role in violent conflicts and must be identified to understand the motivations behind the outbreak of conflict.

“...the main problem was the speculating. The Guji were speculating and telling those who don't know the information. “The Gedeo are taking away your (land)”, because the Gedeo are communicating with the government officials in order to get rights... at that time, they started the conflict” (Interview 22).

In the previous chapter it was suggested that *“elites, politicians or businessmen often use grievances for their own greedy purposes. There are countless examples of people in power manipulating local grievances for their personal enrichment”* (Torbjörnsson, 2016, pp. 18-19). And that is precisely the point here. These actors exploit grievances and insecurity in the population for their own benefits, consequently raising the conflict.

In the conceptual framework it was also noted how ethnicity might not be a cause in the conflict, but rather could be used as a tool by certain actors to mobilize for and instigate conflict – in line with the instrumentalist approach. In this case, *“conflict arises if ethnic groups compete for the same goal—notably power, access to resources, or territory. The interests of a society's elite class play an important role in mobilizing ethnic groups to engage in ethnic conflicts”* (Reuter, 2017). Here conflict erupt between rational actors over scarce resources, often with elite actors as a driving force. In the discussion of the role of the elites this view is particularly useful.

As neighbouring groups, the Guji and Gedeo are competing for the same resources, under the ethnic federalism (an issue further discussed in section 6.6). The motivations of the instigating actors were not elaborated upon by the informants, but certainly it appears to be related to factors like land and power. For example, if the referendum was held, and the border shifted, elites on the winning side would likely stand to gain both land and political power (see

section 6.6). This is in line with the arguments outlined in the conceptual framework in which it was argued that “*conflicts over authority often have a land component as power means access to land and vice versa*” (Torbjörnsson, 2016, p. 16).

The Ethnic Federalism has led to “*...the politicization of ethnic identity as the primary vehicle for claims and entitlements to economic resources and political power*” (Tefari, 2012). In other words, mobilization of ethnic groups has become the main way to address political issues or gain access to resources. As mentioned in the conceptual framework, ethnicity and ethnic identity is particularly well suited for mobilization of groups of people. Rhetoric along the line of “*This land belongs to the Gedeo, you have to expand your borders*” on the one hand and “*The Gedeo will take your land, you have to fight them*” on the other, clearly illustrates how the instigating actors made use of the groups ethnic identity to mobilize.

In the literature review (Chapter 3) several points of critique towards the Ethnic Federalism was raised. It was suggested that Ethnic Federalism created “an incentive” for actors to strengthen ethnic differences and increasingly “mobilize on ethnic grounds” (Aalen, 2011, p. 180). This has been raised as a weakness in the Ethnic Federalism that can lead to conflict between groups. Namely, that the way ethnicity has been politicized makes it easy to pit groups against each other, which then lead to conflict. Under ethnic federalism, ethnicity is directly linked with access to resources, politics, and power, which has caused concern among some researchers, who argue that “*mistrust and hatred among ethnic groups grow out of the EPRDF's theory of governance*” (Taye, 2017, p. 53). One can clearly see that the instigating actors of the 2018 conflict played on existing grievances and insecurities to increase the groups suspicion towards each other, and to mobilize for conflict.

6.5 No Group Hatred

Despite the suspicion and mistrust identified among some informants outlined in the previous sections, near all my informants took the time to point out that the conflict was not between the Guji and the Gedeo societies. This is complementary to the idea that some specific actors might have instigated the conflict. Well explained by one informant here:

“The cause of the conflict has different stories. It is difficult to say why this conflict has re-erupted, at this particular time, it is still an unanswered question. But in my view, I think the conflict is not between the two communities, not between the masses, the conflict is triggered

with certain interest groups who has used the communities to flare up the issue, and then once the community went into emotion then maybe this conflict has spilled into other areas. The reality on the ground, when you see is that these communities have lived together for generations, they have intermarried. Even when this conflict happened and many of the IDPs fled away, there are some communities who still remained behind, being from the other ethnic. This shows that the link between the communities are very strong. And the fight was not designed by the communities themselves, it is rather some interest groups putting their interest on the mass” (Interview 8).

This point came up repeatedly during the data collection, with informants from both groups, and it was clear that the informants felt that it was important to clarify this for me, an outsider. I spoke to a returnee from Garba, in the West-Guji zone who had been displaced from to Gedeb in the Gedeo Zone for 11 months. He too, despite being displaced and having his property destroyed by the native population, argued along the same lines:

“...the problem here is the referendum. He is from Gedeo, he said that “my family came to Guji in 1965, after the ethiopian calendar. My parents lived here, my family lives here, for over 40 years. We live together peacefully; we treat each other like brother or sister. Maybe some conflicts, but it is not serious like this one. This conflict is because of this referendum. But he said, what we need to know is - this referendum is not organized all by the Gedeo community, this is organized by the (land)owners and by coordinating with the religious leaders, and instigating the community. The frontrunner is generally those business people and the owners, generally they cooperate with the religious leaders. But not all the community” (Interview 32).

When I asked if he thought there would be conflict in the future, he replied that such a question (referring to the referendum) must not be raised again, and that he simply wished to live in peace with his neighbours (Interview 32). Illustrating the opinion that most people gave to the same question, namely that they wanted to live in peace. Similarly, within my data multiple informants relied stories of the many ways the communities and people helped each other during displacement crisis: *“Surprising(ly) the Guji society helped the Gedeo and... This indicate that there is no conflict among the communities, the conflict is of some individuals and investors, those to realize their own interest” (Interview 6).*

This brings us to one last point. The letter sent to the Oromia government, the supposed referendum proposal, was – according to my informants – not supported by the entire Gedeo minority in West-Guji. According to the informants, it was composed by specific actors – as discussed above. And so, while some of my Gedeo informants expressed a wish to use their language and their traditional clothes and exercise their culture, “*we want to teach our children in our language and we want to show our cultural clothes*” (Interview 23). They did not express support for a new referendum (Interview 1, 16 & 23). Here the reader should think back to the referendums of 1995 and in particular 1998 (outlined in chapter 2) which previous research has argued were driven forth by the elites against the will of the general population. The 2018 referendum proposal appears to be similar in nature.

When discussing the causes of the 2018 conflict, and in particular the proximate causes, it is important to take note of the role “rumours” and insecurity play in the society. While all the informants took the time to clarify the groups’ common ancestry and the fact that there was no hatred towards the other group, there still seems to be some mistrust between the two – apparent in how easily conflict broke out when the referendum rumours spread. This insecurity is noticeable in the groups growing suspicion towards one another, perhaps most apparent in the perception that the 2018 referendum proposal was part of a strategy of land expansion from the Gedeo. It is not surprising that such suspicions develop after several conflicts have occurred. From this section it should be clear that elites on both sides had a driving role in the outbreak of violence, most apparent through the church’s preaching and general misinformation of the people as mentioned above. It is worth pointing out that the lack of verified information in this situation, as discussed earlier, makes it easier for these actors to exploit the insecurities in the population and fuel the conflict.

6.6 Ethnic Federalism

Having discussed a range of different factors leading to the outbreak of conflict in 2018, this thesis identifies several structural issues at the core of the conflict. Existing research has well covered the role of ethnic federalism in the 1995 and 1998 conflicts. To repeat, the main argument was that the implementation of ethnic federalism changed the relationship between the Guji and the Gedeo and brought about new factors for conflict. The main issues were said to revolve around self-determination and the division of the two groups under ethnic federalism (as outlined in Chapter 2). My data suggests that the same issues were also present in the 2018 conflict.

Few informants would or could discuss the system in detail, some because of their position others because they didn't "know politics" (as many would say). At the same time, the information that the informants provided – as discussed so far – clearly links back to structural factors under the ethnic federal system. There seems to be specific issues with the system, and/or the way it is implemented, that is causing issues among the Guji and the Gedeo neighbouring ethnic groups. Throughout the data collected in this project one can identify two main points: Disagreement over the Administrative Border and the Issue of Minority Rights. The previous themes have already touched on some aspects of these issues.

6.6.1 Ethnic Federalism and the Border Issue

Previous research established the border as one of several root causes in the 1995 and 1998 conflicts between Guji and Gedeo. During the data collection period of this project the same issue came up again and again. The literature suggests that the border issue was never truly resolved, as none of the previous referendums were completed, and these findings confirm that. The supposed referendum proposal that sparked the 2018 conflict shows how the conflict still manifests in disagreement over the border between Guji and Gedeo.

The implementation of the ethnic federalism is said to have changed the relationship between Guji and Gedeo. While their lifestyles in the past had largely been complementary and they inhabited parts of the same areas, a border now had to be drawn between the two groups. The reader will recall the issues related to land discussed previously in this chapter, these tie closely to the disagreement over the border. As stated in section 5.1 (land), drawing a border between the two groups was difficult for several reasons, such as the previous government's resettling schemes, the Guji's pastoralist lifestyle, and the groups' intermarriages, trade-dependency, and otherwise close relations. Nonetheless, the Ethnic Federalism makes it necessary to draw such borders between the groups, in order to create ethnic administrative units.

"...the only situation here is because the rule the law says when there is a number of people (they) have the right to ask for referendum to change the situation of an area, they have the right to do it, and then when they ask for referendum officially it the government has a year to make the referendum. So, as long as this is possible they might still have the option of changing the geo-political situation in this area, and try to do another referendum in a couple of years. And if they do so it is going to become a problem, and if they learn the lesson from this time they might get armed too" (Interview 7).

Looking back at how the previous referendums were executed under a model of 50%+1 majority, the equation is simply that the largest group in an area would win a referendum. This is a problem because demographics – as discussed – can and do change over time. Furthermore, under this system the proposal for more referendums might rise again in the future, in fact it is the right of the people under the ethnic federalism. Article 39 of the Ethiopian constitution gives the ethnic groups the right to self-determination and secession (*Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 1994). The idea that the border could be changed creates a sense of insecurity and instability among the groups.

Within the categories of communal conflicts discussed in the conceptual framework, the 2018 conflict between Guji and Gedeo best fits the category of “territorial conflicts”. Uexkull & Pettersson specifically point out that this form of conflict often revolves around “*the borders of administrative districts, such as... the border of districts that are dominated by different ethnic groups...*” (Uexkull & Pettersson, 2018, pp. 960-961). That is consistent with the findings of this thesis, as the conflict does revolve around the border issue. To this day there is obvious disagreement over the border, it is clear that the issue remains unsettled.

6.6.2 Minority Rights Under the Ethnic Federalism

Even so, the real issue is not necessarily the border itself. That is apparent if one considers how the groups managed to coexist in the past. Rather, my findings suggest, the issue relates to the consequences of the placement of the border. Certainly the issue of land is present in the form of land scarcity as well as grievances with previous decisions on demarcation. However, the disagreement over the actual border appears less important, as there traditionally was not such a border between the two groups. They inhabited some of the same areas in a relatively complimentary way of life.

As discussed previously, with the implementation of the ethnic federalism the administrative units became mono-ethnic, and that seems to be at the core of the conflict. Due to the nature of the ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, which is linked to language and culture, the placement of the border in many ways becomes a zero-sum game (Ramsbotham, 2011). Here being a minority in the zone means losing the opportunity to be educated in your own language, openly practice and develop your culture. Seeing that the administrative zones are constructed on basis of ethnicity, the majority ethnic group in reality holds the (administrative) “power” in that zone. That includes the official language and expression and practice of culture in the public space.

While the ethnic federalist system was meant to recognize ethnic groups and avoid the domination of certain groups over other – this research finds that the rights of minority groups are still very much an issue. In this case, the issue was linked to the large Gedeo minority residing in West-Guji. This was mentioned briefly in section 5.3 and 5.5, when the content of the referendum letter was discussed. The majority of my informants agreed that the rights of the Gedeo minority in West-Guji had been a part of the letter, and hence was linked to the conflict. To discuss the issue, I will first present some direct quotes, to let the informants themselves present the issue. Then the issues will be discussed.

Box 5: The Minority Rights Issue

“The main cause was regarding the border and the indigenous people (Guji) dominating the local people (Gedeo). They are not able to communicate with their mother tongue or local language, and when they reported it to the woreda government official they (the Guji) started violence against the Gedeo people... killing by beheading them and with gunfire and different things...” (Interview 22)

“The Gedeo was communicating with the government officials in order to get rights. Because they are dominated, they are asking the government to speak in their language, their mother-tongue language” (Interview 22).

“Near to two million (Gedeo) people have been living in Oromia region, but they cannot practice any kinds of Gaddaa system or their own identity. They lose their own identity, therefore they appeal to Oromia Regional Government to practice their own culture and learn in their own language... somewhere some Gedeo use the cultural clothes of Gedeo, which is forbidden... this is the immediate cause for this conflict... You cannot wear it...” (Interview 16)

To sum it up, in particular *“language is a central issue. Gedeo want to learn Gedeuffa, but in Guji zone there is only Oromo language”* (Interview 1). But it is also about the expression of culture, such as wearing the group’s traditional clothes, or practicing cultural rituals – and ultimately the groups identity and community overall (Interview 16).

On the other hand, a Guji informant, explained that the Gedeo had to develop their own culture in the Gedeo zone only. *“They (the Gedeo) have their own culture, if everyone want to develop their own culture and language... they have to develop in their own land. Here, maybe if they come for another reason, for business or something like this, they can do such activity, but they have to develop their own culture there in their zone”* (Interview 29). In other words, the Gedeo have their own zone and should practice their culture there. He further explained that this was necessary to ensure their Guji culture.

The Ethnic Federalism does not state that minority groups should be suppressed, but that appears to be the consequence of the implementation of the system, in this case. Under this system recognized ethnic groups get some self-determination. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the group's identity and distinctiveness from other groups. Furthermore, a distinctive territory becomes increasingly important under the Ethnic Federalism. For Gedeo culture in the Guji zone to grow strong could be seen as a threat. As discussed in previous sections, there is a bigger picture of insecurity in which the locals feared that the Gedeo would take the land, through a referendum. If such a referendum was held, and the Gedeo were a majority in the area, they could become a minority themselves. So, to suppress the minority culture might be seen as necessary, to ensure the majority group.

This stands out as a major flaw in the ethnic federalist system, in which the majority group in a zone dominates and minorities in reality have limited rights. The ethnic zones in Ethiopia are not homogenous, as we can see in this case. And the current structure is clearly a major part of the cause behind this inter-group conflict. It is hard to say if this is a flaw in the ethnic federalism itself, or in the way the system is executed here. Regardless, in the case at hand in this project, the ethnic federalist system clearly makes up a structural cause of the conflict.

The constructivist approach to ethnicity and conflict – as conceptualized in the previous chapter – argues that *“violent conflict is caused mainly by social and political systems that lead to inequality and grievances and do not offer options for the peaceful expression of differences”* (Reuter, 2017). And that is precisely what can be identified through the minority rights issue and the border issue. Both illustrates how the ethnic federalism – in this case – causes inequality and grievances, while at the same time failing to provide mechanisms to resolve these issues peacefully.

On the one hand this conflict appears to have been pushed forward by certain actors using the system for their own interests, by spreading incorrect information to the population and by raising the referendum proposal that ultimately sparked the conflict. However, the issue at the core of the conflict seems to be the groups' rights under the ethnic federal system. As other researchers have argued before me, the system appears to pit the groups against each other, we can clearly see this in the 2018 conflict. These findings are largely similar to the root causes identified for the 1995 and 1998 conflict, in other words meaning that the same conflict issues are still present. Based on this we can identify the conflict as a recurring conflict, an interesting finding that will discuss further in section 6.9.

6.7 The National Context

In light of these findings it certainly does seem like the core issues were not resolved back in the 1990s, just like KinfeMichael (2014) and the Uppsala Conflict Database suggest. Still the groups lived in seeming peace – or at the very least stability – for two decades. This far we have established that the main proximate cause that sparked the conflict was the letter sent in spring 2018 – and the rumours that it included a proposal to hold another referendum in some parts of west-Guji. We have also established that this letter – and hence the conflict itself – was driven forth by elites more so than the Gedeo population itself. Even so, one can wonder why these events took place specifically in the spring of 2018.

While difficult to prove, some of my informants did suggest a link to the ongoing events at the national level. As several informants stated, the violence broke out within days of the new president, Dr. Abiy, coming to power (Interview 1). The argument seemed to be that unrest and instability within the national government helped bring up underlying conflicts around the country, which to some degree is supported by the outbreak of multiple conflicts in 2018 (Yusuf, 2019). Multiple informants did draw this link, as apparent by the citations below.

Box 6: The National Context

“The question was not last year, the question was for a long time, but the conflict came last year... after the prime minister came to power, within five days the conflict started” (Interview 16).

“I understand, this has been ongoing for a long time. But why do you think it broke out specifically in April last year? ...the main thing that caused this conflict to break last year is that there is a political crisis. A political national crisis” (Interview 2).

“So then there has been conflict before, why do you think conflict broke out again specifically in April last year? I think the prime minister, Dr. Abiy, coming to the position or power... Soon after the war started” (Interview 1).

“You said a lot about the root causes of the conflict. But why do you think it broke out specifically in April last year? Yes, particularly, conflict between Guji and Gedeo starts whenever there is problem at the centre. For example, in 1995, there was restructuring of the state along ethnic federalism, in 1998 there was also conflict within the ruling party at the centre. In 2018 there was also serious disagreement within the ruling party, which brought a new president from the other political parties to the power in Ethiopia. After the coming of new prime-minister to the power in Ethiopia, conflict erupted in so many places in Ethiopia. It is politically motivated” (Interview 10).

The new prime minister, Dr. Abiy, entered office in April 2018 following a period of crisis in the government. He took a new approach to his role. Of particular relevance is the political liberalisation, by allowing opposition back into the country, and working towards democracy. Consequently, other groups have made use of this liberation to request for referendums to withdraw from their zones or regions. An example would be the election held in Sidama in autumn of 2019 ("Ethiopia: Abiy's First Year as Prime Minister, Review of Conflict and Internally Displaced Persons," 2019). In the case of Guji and Gedeo, it is certainly possible that the period of political instability followed by liberalisation could have brought forth motivation among the instigating actors to raise this conflict again. In this case by sending the much discussed letter, by the spread of rumours, and by mobilising people for conflict.

Clearly the core issues of this conflict are not new, they have been present at the very least since the 1995 and 1998 conflicts. Hence it is certainly possible that the timing of this conflict outbreak relates to the national context. Several informants did link the Guji-Gedeo conflict to the events taking place within the national government at the same time (Interview 1, 2, 10, 16 & 18). But as we do not know the content of the letter that sparked the conflict, it is not possible to draw a definite link between these events. If nothing more, the timing is peculiar, for violence to break out within days of the new prime minister getting into power.

In the end it is necessary to consider this, as the conflict cannot be analysed removed from the national context. In conclusion, the events at the national level might link to the conflict, but evidently it is not a core issue, rather it might have contributed to the outbreak of conflict at that specific time. Though, more evidence is needed to prove such a link.

6.8 Ethnicity

The last theme to consider is the role of ethnicity. It was argued in the conceptual framework of this thesis that one should not simply classify the conflict between Guji and Gedeo as an ethnic conflict without carefully considering the conflict in its entirety. This might undermine knowledge and understanding of the real causes or issues at hand, which in turn leaves the true core issues unresolved. Like discussed in the previous chapter, the conflict is indeed between two ethnic groups, which according to simpler definitions would make it an ethnic conflict. As further suggested, ethnic conflicts are often not over ethnic issues. And as should be apparent by the causes discussed in this chapter ethnicity does not appear to be a main cause in the conflict between Guji and Gedeo either. No informants suggested ethnicity as a

main cause for the 2018 conflict, and so it was the least common theme. Rather they pointed at a range of other factors, as seen throughout this chapter.

Even so, the violence among Guji and Gedeo in 2018 clearly was ethnic based, meaning that people were targeted on the basis of their ethnicity. Such violence was experienced by minorities on both sides. Ultimately it resulted in a displacement crisis in which several hundred thousand people fled their homes due to fear of being targeted by such violence, due to their ethnic group belonging. This becomes increasingly clear when speaking to locals, and in particular people who were themselves displaced. Out of the informants that had been displaced most stated that they did not understand why the conflict had broken out, that the violence had erupted suddenly, making them flee out of fear. From the direct quotations bellow, it appears that the violence was something sudden, and perhaps unexpected, for these informants.

Box 7: Displacement

“Between Gedeo and Guji, when you talk to the people it seems they are not aware how it sparked. They tell you like: my neighbour started to ruin my house, started to shoot at me, cut the hand of my kid. So, it seems that there is an “ethnic spark”, but it doesn’t seem like people are aware of what the source was or how it started” (Interview 12).

“Why did they have to leave their home? He said those indigenous people in the lands of Kercha just started violence against us, burning houses, killing children and elders” (Interview 34).

“At the time suddenly we saw the home burning, and most of the people went to Yigetchaffer. But a person who can’t run, have problems to go. Elders stayed here and they killed them, around here you know. And everyone can’t take his property, his property stayed here and burned with the home” (Interview 20).

“We had a meeting here with our leaders and Oromo leaders here, about conflict. Because the conflict was started in around Kercha. And that issue we discussed not to make conflict here. But after the meeting, the next day, someone started to fight at the border of Gedeo and Guji. But the source... we don’t know what happened over there, because this case happened in Kercha. We don’t know what happened. They migrated our people from Kercha, and here the people are living peacefully, but suddenly they start shoot at our people, which means... generally we don’t know the cause at that time. Because they are selecting our community from theirs, and they start burn homes and gunshot, just like that” (Interview 20).

Despite the causes of the conflict not being ethnic the role of ethnicity was present in all the interviews, for example in rhetoric of “us” and “them”. Or in the form of grievances or goals expressed on the grounds of ethnicity. One can also observe some suspicion towards the other

group, among some informants, which is hardly surprising after three violent conflicts have occurred between the two. By mobilizing ethnic identity for political causes, as the elites have done here, it is certainly not surprising that suspicion and mistrust between the two groups are growing. As stated previously critics have suggested that hatred and mistrust grow out of the Ethnic Federalism, the data to some degree supports this.

In the end, my informants still insisted that there was no hatred between the groups, they were brothers and sisters, and wanted to live together in peace. As discussed in depth already. That makes it difficult to attribute the conflict itself to any form of primordial antagonisms among the groups. This argument is strengthened by the strong emphasis many informants placed on elite instigation of the conflict, as we discussed in detail in section 6.4. Ultimately, that is the reason why the conflict was classified as a communal conflict rather than an ethnic conflict, in the previous chapter. People being targeted because of their ethnicity is a clear indicator that ethnicity is indeed a factor in the conflict, although not so much as a cause.

More so ethnicity has been a tool, used by the instigating actors, much like the instrumentalist approach suggests. Furthermore, the root causes of the conflict have been identified as structural. In other words, the structure of Ethnic Federalism has created an environment, from which conflict issues between the two groups have grown. In the conceptual framework it was suggested that the instrumentalist and the constructivist approaches both provide useful insights into the conflict between Guji and Gedeo. In a consideration of the role of ethnicity, this is particularly relevant. It is through these mechanisms that ethnicity comes to play a role in the inter-group conflict between Guji and Gedeo. This is not a conflict in which primordial ethnic hatred can be found. Rather ethnicity – under the Ethnic Federalism – is emphasised in a way that causes the groups to compete over power and territory. These issues were not present in the same way before the implementation of the Ethnic federalism, and for these issues to still be causing conflict several decades later is reason for concern.

6.9 Discussion

Throughout these sections central themes were discussed in depth. Themes that came up repeatedly in the data-collection process were identified early on, these have worked as guiding topics for the different sections of the analysis. They were supplied with direct quotes from the informants and a theoretical basis from the conceptual framework.

Throughout the chapter I have shed light on different factors and perspectives on the situation. Furthermore, it was a particular concern to respect the informants, by highlighting things they felt strongly about and making space for their own words throughout the chapter. After this detailed discussion of the different themes, this section aims to finally answer the research questions of this thesis. The last section of this chapter presents a short discussion in which the main points are repeated and tied together, with each of the research questions in focus.

1) What are the root causes of the 2018 conflict between the Guji and Gedeo Ethnic Groups?

It is difficult to pinpoint the core issues in this complex conflict, in reality the interviews with my informants were long and complex, rarely one simple cause or issue was mentioned alone. According to my findings the root cause of the 2018 conflict between Guji and Gedeo were made up of several interconnected factors, of which the first relates to territory, in the form of continued disagreements over the administrative border between the zones. And the second relates to self-rule under the ethnic federalism, illustrated through the issue of minority rights and the implications of the administrative borders.

Throughout the analysis these structural causes were identified at the heart of the 2018 conflict between Guji and Gedeo. To sum it up shortly, the politization of ethnic identities in Ethiopia and the drawing of borders of administrative units on the basis of ethnic identity has created conflict between the two groups. The problem at the core seems to be related first and foremost to “self-rule”, in particular the rights of minorities under the ethnic federalism appears to be an issue here. It is clear that the ethnic zones are dominated by the majority ethnic groups, who dictates the official language and expression of culture in that area. This clearly causes some grievances among the Gedeo minority in West-Guji who wished to be educated in their own language, to wear their traditional clothes, and practice their culture.

At the same time there are clear grievances with the border that was drawn in the late 1990s, Guji informants felt that they had given up land to the Gedeo and that these past decisions had favoured the Gedeo. Here the “territory” issue comes in. Under the ethnic federalism it appears that the border between the two zones in theory can be changed if another referendum was to be held in the border areas. This idea creates fear and insecurity among the groups. A consequence of such a referendum – if the Gedeo won – would be that Guji in these areas would become a minority themselves, and consequently lose a number of rights. This way the conflict revolves around rights. Both these issues persist as part of, or as consequences of, the

Ethnic Federal system – and hence they are structural in nature. Such structural systems causing conflict among ethnic groups, is precisely what the constructivist take on ethnicity and conflict seeks to highlight.

Having pinpointed some of the root causes it is extremely curious why the conflict broke out specifically in the beginning of 2018, remaining dormant for 20 years. This leads us to the next question this chapter have attempted to answer:

2) Why did conflict between the two groups break out in April 2018?

This thesis finds, based on interview data from 37 informants in the field, that the supposed referendum letter sent out in the spring of 2018 is the main spark of the conflict. The rumours of a request for referendum from Gedeo inhabiting parts of the Guji zone created fear among the Guji that they would lose more land to the Gedeo, which led to the outbreak of violence and mass displacement. All the root causes listed above manifest themselves in this letter, and it is clear that the threat of another referendum brought grievances to the surface, on both sides.

However, the majority of the informants argued they wanted to live in peace together. The main perception among my informants was that the conflict was driven by elite actors, landowners, religious leaders and politicians were specifically listed. In other words, people who have something to gain from conflict between the two groups. These people clearly instigated the 2018 conflict between the two groups, through the spread of misinformation, by urging people to take up arms, as well as through the referendum proposal itself, which sparked the conflict. Here insecurity and lack of verified information is a prominent issue, making it possible for these actors to exploit underlying grievances to mobilize for conflict.

Lastly, one cannot exclude the possibility that events at the national level did play a role in the outbreak of conflict at this specific time. This chapter argues that the interference of elites is a main driving force for conflict, the findings suggest that these elites mobilized people for conflict by spreading false information and manipulating people to take up arms. It is certainly possible that the conditions at the national level played a role in their decisions to raise the identified conflict issues again at this specific time. More research is required to prove such a link, but several informants did connect the crisis at the national government, the new prime minister and his more liberal approach to the outbreak of conflict in April 2018.

3) How does the 2018 conflict relate to the previous conflicts between the two groups?

That the 2018 conflict is related to the 1995 and 1998 conflicts should be obvious at this point. According to PRIO's definition of recurring conflict, the conflict must break out between the same parties after minimum two years of peace (S Gates et al., 2016, p. 3). That is clearly the case – as a period of 20 years separate the 2018 conflict from the previous conflict between Guji and Gedeo. Furthermore, grievances related directly to the outcomes of the previous conflicts have been identified as a core issue, in fact the 2018 conflict appears to be a continuation of unresolved issues from the 1990s. That is in line with PRIO's suggestion that conflict recurrence is often tied to the outcomes of previous conflict (S Gates et al., 2016, p. 3). Lastly, and perhaps most critically. The identified root causes are largely complementary to the ones found by previous researchers in studies on the 1995 and 1998 conflicts, indicating the conflict is recurring over (mostly) the same issues.

In particular, my findings are complementary to those of Regassa 2007 and 2012, in which he argued that the conflicts in the 1990s had to do with settling and determining rights under the new system, as that still seems to be the case. The issue of minority rights, and the disagreement over demarcation between the zones, indicates that the very same issues are still present. These core issues remain unresolved, even though more than 20 years have passed, and that is a concern. Conflict recurrence is a major issue, as well as a future threat to the security in the area. Having identified that these core issues are still present, they must be resolved, or conflict is likely to recur again in the future, over the very same issues.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Key Findings

This study have attempted to shed light on the 2018 conflict between the Guji and Gedeo, by answering the following research questions:

- 1) *What are the root causes of the 2018 conflict between the Guji and Gedeo Ethnic Groups?*
- 2) *Why did conflict between the two groups break out in April 2018?*
- 3) *How does the 2018 conflict relate to the previous conflicts between the two groups?*

Throughout the analysis a number of interconnected factors were identified and discussed in length. And so, while all these factors play into the conflict, the analysis concluded that the very root causes of the conflict revolved around territory and self-rule. These were identified throughout the previous chapter, in the border issue and the minority rights issue. Both appears to be linked to the ethnic federalism, and hence are structural in nature.

It was possible to identify some narratives across the data. Among the persons interviewed in this study it was clear that the local Guji informants tied their motivations and the causes for conflict closely to the previous conflicts and in particular past decisions on the administrative border and the land. One could identify clear grievances that linked directly back to the previous conflicts. They expressed concern that a new referendum would take place and that the border would be changed– in other words, for them the conflict was over border and land.

Among my Gedeo informants the perception was rather that the conflict revolved around minority rights and self-rule. The informants, and in particular the Gedeo whom lived in or near west-Guji, was of the opinion that they simply wanted the rights to use their own language and express their culture. Otherwise they wanted to live peacefully together. With the constructivist approach to ethnicity and conflict in mind: These grievances is brought forth by the system of ethnic federalism, and its failure to secure the rights of minority groups – as well as to provide a final solution to the border issue. This argument plays into the long-standing academic debate on whether the Ethnic Federalism causes conflict between ethnic groups in Ethiopia, on the basis of the findings of this research project, that appears to be true in the case of Guji and Gedeo.

Even so this conflict came about mainly because of a letter that was sent from the Gedeo minority in west-Guji to the Oromia zonal government. There was agreement among the informants over the fact that this letter did include the minority right issue of the Gedeos. What brought about conflict, though, was rumours that the letter also included a proposal for a new referendum. The general idea being that the Gedeo minority in west-guji might be close to 50%, hence they could win a referendum under the 50%+1 vote system. The consequence would be that the border between the zones would change. It was this letter and the following rumours that sparked the conflict in the beginning of 2018.

Even so, most Gedeo informants denied that the letter contained such a proposal. It was possible to identify that certain actors had worked to instigate violent conflict between the groups. A majority of the informants suggested that elites had exploited grievances and insecurities in the population, to mobilize the people for conflict. Here, it appears, ethnicity was used as a tool to mobilize for political issues. This is in line with what the instrumentalist approach to ethnicity and conflict would suggest. Other researchers have found this to be the case in many conflicts in post 1991-ethiopia – linked to ethnicity officially being politicized under the ethnic federalism. This led to the violent conflict, and the mass-displacement of nearly one million people.

The spark of the situation, in 2018, showed similarities to the conflicts of the 1990s. Certain elites pushed for a referendum, and manipulated the people for their own interests to get into conflict. These actors were the driving force behind the re-eruption of the conflict in 2018. At the same time some informants suggested a link to the events ongoing at the national level at the same time, it is entirely possible that the timing of the conflict does link to this national context. Though more evidence is needed to prove such a link.

Regassa argued that the 1995 and 1998 conflicts were about determining the groups rights under the new system of ethnic federalism. And the findings of this thesis suggest that this has yet to be achieved. Conflict broke out over – largely – the same root causes 20 years later. It is still about the border and the self-determination, under the ethnic federalism. With the root causes being largely the same, as well as the conflict fitting the requirements for recurring conflict that were outlined in the conceptual framework, this thesis identified the conflict as recurring.

7.2 Why This Study?

A few other researchers have studied the Guji-Gedeo conflict, and seems to be in relative agreement over the root causes of the conflict, so one might wonder why another study was needed. The simplest answer is that those studies took place before 2018, and hence the 2018 conflict was not considered. An eruption of conflict requires new research into this new situation. It is necessary to identify what has happened, what caused conflict to break out, and al if and/or how this new situation relates to previous conflicts in the same context. This thesis is meant to supplement previous research, by looking at the newer 2018 conflict and its connection to the two previous outbreaks of violent conflict in the area.

While it was not an aim to replicate previous research, I do find that a lot of the root causes identified in previous research are still valid and present in the 2018 conflict. Those findings were quite surprising to me as a researcher, and certainly not something expected. During data-collection it quickly became clear that the 2018 conflict was in fact closely connected to the previous two conflicts between the same parties. But it was only during thematic coding I came to realize that many of the identified issues were similar to those identified in the previous conflicts. The identification of these persisting root causes is perhaps the most notable finding in this project. For conflict to re-emerge after over 20 years of stability is concerning, because it indicates that the structural root causes are not resolved. If these issues are not settled it is entirely possible that conflict will recur in the future. Ultimately it is the people of the two zones whom suffer under this recurring conflict. And for their sake it is crucial that this conflict is handled properly, so that it will not recur again.

7.3 So What Now?

During my time in the field it was still much too early to evaluate the settling of the conflict, as the situation had just entered into the “early recovery” phase (Interview 8 & 35). Even so the aspects of resolution, peacebuilding and sustainable peace were discussed with the informants, to grasp the situation entirely. As this thesis comes to an end, I wish to highlight that this conflict has come about – recurred – because the core issues are not properly resolved, and sustainable peace will not be reached if they are not sorted out.

There are already a number of peace promoting factors at work within and between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups. Both the government and the involved humanitarian actors are involved in the resolution and peacebuilding. But most noticeably, there are mechanisms

present within the groups own indigenous systems. For example, they held the Gondoro in 2018. These indigenous mechanisms have widespread support in the community, at least among the informants of this study, and should be supported. However, Gondoro was executed after the 1998 conflict too, but conflict over the same issues still recurred in 2018.

Due to the structural nature of the root causes in this conflict, it appears that some sort of structural changes are needed. For example, the conflict tend to manifest over issues related to the border. As long as this issue remains unresolved, and referendums can be called if the population ratio in the area changes, the same actors might push for referendums in the future, leading to more conflict over the very same issues. Like suggested in the conceptual framework, structural reforms are likely needed to solve the underlying core issues that cause recurring conflict (S Gates et al., 2016). For future researchers, I would highly encourage more research into the resolution and peacebuilding aspect of this conflict, such research would be a valuable asset in the process towards sustainable peace.

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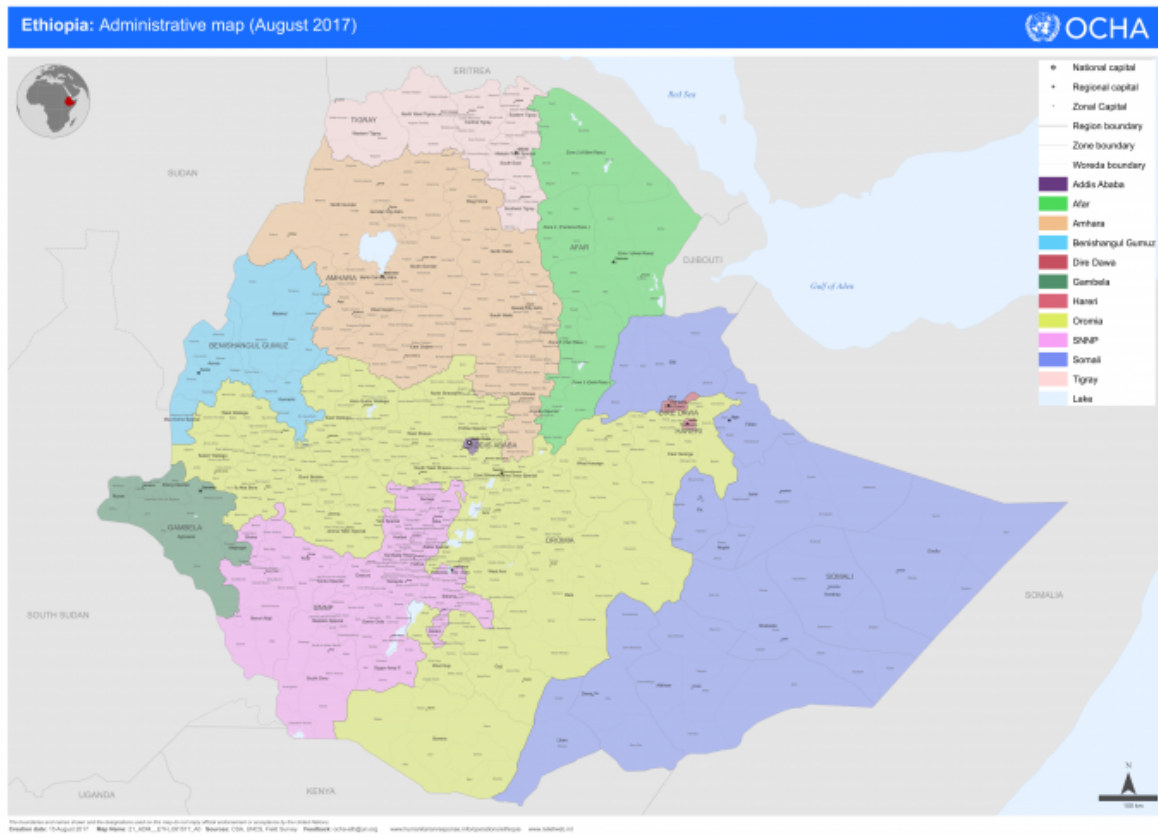
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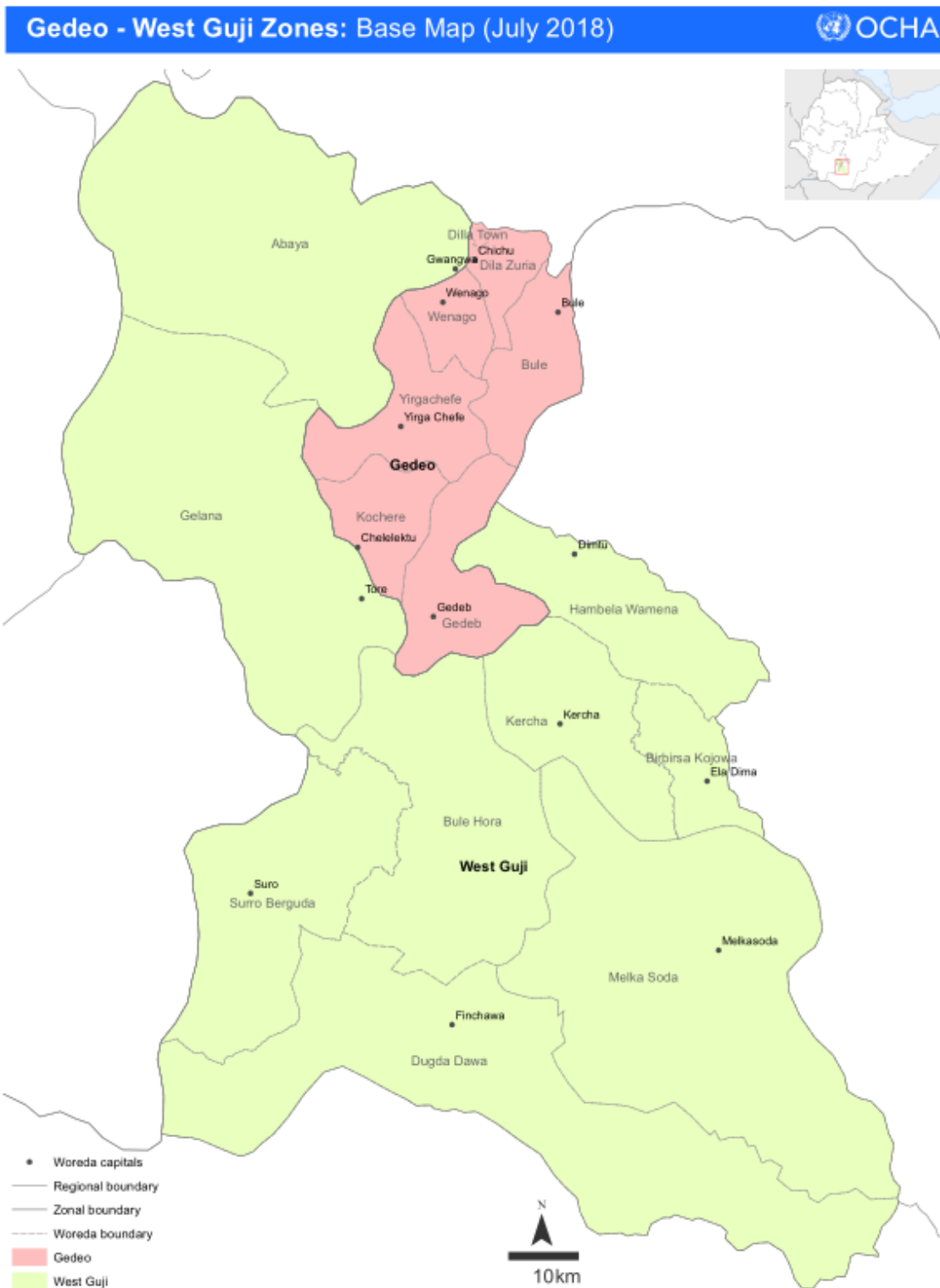
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Appendix 1 The Federal Regions



<https://reliefweb.int/map/ethiopia/ethiopia-administrative-map-15-aug-2017>

Appendix 2 Gedeo and West-Guji



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
 Creation date: 9 July 2018 Map Doc.:21_ADM_Gedeo_WestGuji_070918_A4 Sources:CSA Feedback: ocha-eth@un.org www.unocha.org www.reliefweb.int

<https://reliefweb.int/map/ethiopia/ethiopia-gedeo-west-guji-zones-base-map-july-2018>

Appendix 3 List of Informants

Interview	M/F	Occupation	Place	Date	Comments
Interview 1	M	Gov	Gedeo, Dilla	04.07.19	Zonal Office
Interview 2	M	Gov	Guji, Bule Hora	11.07.19	Culture and Tourism Office
Interview 3	M	Gov	Guji, Bule Hora	12.07.19	Zonal Office, Security (Translator)
Interview 4	M	Gov	Guji, Bule Hora	12.07.19	Zonal Office, Security
Interview 5	M	Gov	Guji, Bule Hora	12.07.19	Zonal Office
Interview 6	F	Gov	Guji, Bule Hora	13.07.19	Women, Youth and Children Office (Translator)
Interview 7	M	Aid Worker	Guji (Foreign), Bule Hora	15.07.19	
Interview 8	M	Aid Worker	Guji, Bule Hora	17.07.19	
Interview 9	M	Gov	Guji, Bule Hora	17.07.19	Disaster, Risk Management Office
Interview 10	M	Scholar	Guji, Bule Hora	18.07.19	Bule Hora University

Interview 11	M	Aid Worker	Guji, Bule Hora	19.07.19	
Interview 12	M	Gov	Guji, Bule Hora	20.07.19	Woreda Office, Disaster Risk Management (Translator)
Interview 13	F	Aid Worker	Guji (Foreign), Bule Hora	24.07.19	
Interview 14	M	Local	Guji, Bule Hora	24.07.19	Elder (Translator)
Interview 15	M	Aid Worker	Gedeo, Dilla	30.07.19	
Interview 16	M	Aid Worker	Gedeo, Dilla	31.07.19	
Interview 17	M	Local	Gedeo, Dilla	01.08.19	Elder (Translator)
Interview 18	M	Aid Worker	Gedeo, Dilla	02.08.19	
Interview 19	F	Gov	Gedeo, Dilla	02.08.19	Women, Youth and Children Office (Translator)
Interview 20	M	Gov	Gedeo, Dilla	05.08.19	Disaster, Risk Management Office (Translator)

Interview 21	M/F	Returnees	Gedeo, Yericho Kebele	08.08.19	Group Interview– (8) 2 - Women representatives (F) 1 – Abba Gadda (M) 4 – Elders (M) 1 – Community Representative (M) (Translator)
Interview 22	F	Gov	Gedeo, Yigetchaffer	09.08.19	Women, Youth and Children Office (Translator)
Interview 23	M	Gov	Gedeo, Yigetchaffer	09.08.19	Disaster Risk Management Office (Translator)
Interview 24	M	Gov	Gedeo, Yigetchaffer	09.08.19	Culture and Tourism Office
Interview 25	M	Gov	Gedeo, Dibandibe	10.08.19	Kebele leader (Translator)
Interview 26	M	Aid Worker	Guji, Bule Hora	12.08.19	
Interview 27	M	Aid Worker	Guji, Bule Hora	12.08.19	
Interview 28	M	Local	Guji, Bule Hora	12.08.19	Group Interview– (4) 1 – Abba Gadda (Guji)

					2 – Elders 1 – Religious Leader
Interview 29	M	Aid Worker	Guji, Bule Hora	13.08.19	
Interview 30	M	Local	Guji, Garba	14.08.19	Elder (Translator)
Interview 31	M	Local	Guji, Garba	14.08.19	Elder (Translator)
Interview 32	M	Local	Guji, Garba	14.08.19	Elder (Translator)
Interview 33	M	Local/Returnee	Guji, Garba	14.08.19	Gedeo Returnee (Translator)
Interview 34	M	Aid Worker	Guji, Bule Hora	14.08.19	
Interview 35	M/F	IDPs	Gedeo, Dilla	17.08.19	Group Interview– (4) 2 – Women 2 – Men IDPs from Kercha (Translator)
Interview 36	M	Aid Worker	Gedeo, Dilla (Foreign)	21.08.19	
Interview 37	M	Gov	Gedeo, Dilla	22.08.19	Culture and Tourism Office

