Nearly twenty years ago, the editorial of ROAPE’s first special issue (No. 30, 1984) on the Horn of Africa opened with the sombre comment: ‘Manifold, violent social conflict is the hallmark of contemporary history in the Horn of Africa.’ Civil wars were raging then in Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. The latter two states had fought their second war a few years earlier, and relations between them were extremely hostile. Each was patronised and armed by one of the rival superpowers that were running a cold war sideshow in this corner of Africa. Not unrelated to conflict, a biblical famine was ravaging the region for the second time within a decade. The editorial of the second ROAPE special issue (No. 70, 1996) on this region observed that some things there had changed for the better. One major conflict had ended when Eritrea gained its independence from Ethiopia, and both states now had a young, battle-tested and sophisticated leadership avowedly committed to peace and development. Foreign power interference had subsided with the end of the cold war, and a continent-wide wave of democratisation was seen lapping at the borders of the Horn. Interstate relations in the region had improved greatly, ambitious schemes of regional cooperation were envisaged, and demobilisation of armies and guerilla forces was in progress. Added to the expected peace dividend, foreign investment was anticipated to boost development now that socialism, previously the vogue in the region, had given way to the free market. The editorial also noted some things had changed for the worse. Conflict had caused the collapse of the Somali Republic – a first for Africa – and had spread to Djibouti and to parts of northern Sudan. The latter now claimed the dubious distinction of hosting Africa’s oldest conflict.

Regrettably, that hopeful period proved short-lived. Conflict is still the hallmark of the Horn and the subject of the present ROAPE special issue. That period came to a jarring end with the outbreak of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998, a bizarre affair involving two regimes which – to use an outmoded term – were till then considered ‘fraternal’. This was the fourth war fought by states in the Horn in the post-colonial era, a regional record for Africa.

Leenco Lata in this issue looks for the sense in what was dubbed a ‘senseless’ conflict. His search for the real causes of the Eritrea-Ethiopia war, as opposed to the claims of the belligerents, is like peeling an onion. Behind each layer of imputed causes lay another, deeper and more potent layer, while the level at which groups appear to be in confrontation descends from state to region to ethnic group and it sub-divisions. Was this a war between two states, between the Tigray region of Ethiopia and the highland region of Eritrea, between two branches of the Tigray ethnic group that spans the border, or between two closely related regimes? What is clear is that none of the imputed causes seems remotely worth the cost of a massive war fought by two of the poorest states on earth.

Predictably, the human and material cost of the war was considerable. Tens of thousands lost their lives, hopes for economic progress were blasted, and both
countries have been in the grip of famine ever since. The political consequences of the war for both regimes were unpredictable. The ruling parties in both countries suffered deep splits in their leadership, precipitated, if not caused, by the war. Both lost many of their founders and leading figures, and with them went the last vestiges of the collective leadership that had been a source of strength in the past. In both cases, the winning faction had control of the state apparatus and used it to crush opposition from within the party. Once more, revolution has eaten its children, after first crushing them with the apparatus of the state it, itself, created.

The split in the leadership and the widespread purges of the rank and file that followed, seriously limited the capacity of these parties to provide political support for the incumbent regimes, leaving them dependent on the state apparatus for their survival. Both regimes have many enemies. At least a dozen organisations are committed to the overthrow of the regime in Eritrea, although only one – the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement – is currently active inside the country. Half a dozen organisations have a similar goal in Ethiopia, where two of them – Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) – are waging low intensity insurgencies in the eastern and southwestern periphery of the country. The potential of these insurgencies is seriously limited by the fact that both Fronts suffer from crippling factionalism and unresolved leadership problems.

Medhane Tadesse and John Young in this issue trace the dramatic split in the leadership of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopia. It is not easy to establish the rationale for the fracture in an organisation renowned for the cohesiveness of its leadership. Differences over strategy in the war against Eritrea seem to have been a catalyst for the challenge launched by his senior colleagues to the growing autonomy of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. In the event he prevailed, but at the cost of seriously weakening his political base. Meles outmanoeuvred and isolated his opponents, and afterwards jailed a few of them for ‘corruption’, but did not attempt to annihilate them. President Issayas Afewerki in Eritrea saw off a similar challenge with much harsher methods. A dozen of his former comrades and senior colleagues are detained incommunicado in unknown locations, with their lives in peril because they are charged with ‘treason’. Debessay Hedru in this issue depicts the Kafkaesque political atmosphere that has descended on Eritrea, and dashed the extravagant hopes raised by victory in the war of independence against Ethiopia. The fact that a dozen years later Eritreans are seeking political refuge in Ethiopia is the height of irony. What is striking in both countries is the gullibility of veteran guerrilla fighters-turned politicians who relied on party regulations and ‘constitutional’ provisions to challenge comrades who controlled the state apparatus.

The regime in Sudan also suffered a split when Hassan El Turabi broke with Omar Hassan Al Bashir, depriving the military ruler of the politico-ideological cover offered by the National Islamic Front. The regime managed to overcome this setback thanks to the revenues provided by oil from the Southern region, a resource it has been able to exploit unhindered because of the unending fragmentation in the ranks of the Southern Sudanese rebels. John Young’s contribution in this issue portrays the kaleidoscopic nature of the conflict in Southern Sudan where, behind a facade of catholic Southern resistance against Northern Arab rule, a bewildering array of armed factions struggle for power and resources. ‘Commanders’ change sides easily and frequently, a situation that bodes ill for the future. Southern Sudanese factionalism not only plays into the regime’s hands and weakens the southern cause, it also raises serious questions about the prospects of future governance in an autonomous or independent Southern Sudan. The flames of conflict have spread to
parts of the North. Preoccupied with the war in the South, the regime in Khartoum has allowed a decades-old communal conflict in the far West to ripen into a regional insurgency led by the Darfur-based Sudan Liberation Army, while Beja rebels in the Northeast skirmish with government forces along the border with Eritrea.

Somalia remains a battleground for warlords, clan militias, and religious groups with fundamentalist leanings, where Ethiopia feels compelled to intervene forcefully on occasion to help friends and keep enemies at bay. State collapse in this case has lasted long enough to have acquired a semblance of normality, leading Ken Menkhaus in this issue to look for patterns that underlay and explain this unique state of affairs. Disaggregating the Somali debacle into three distinct crises – collapse of central government, protracted armed conflict, and lawlessness – he notes significant changes over the past dozen years, with conflict becoming more localised and less bloody, and criminality more constrained by customary law and private security forces. These trends are linked to changing interests on the part of the Somali elite, who now profit less from war and banditry and more from commerce and services, enterprises that require a predictable operating environment. The country’s elite would profit greatly from the revival of a recognised but ineffective ‘paper’ state. Interestingly, the inability of the elite to cobble together such a state is seen as a strategy of ‘risk aversion’. The Somali elite fear change in the operating environment that, though far from ideal, is one in which they have learned to survive and profit.

Somaliland is an oasis of relative peace and stability in a turbulent region. Mark Bradbury in this issue describes how this segment of the Somali nation managed to detach itself from the main body, and spared itself the fratricidal mayhem that continues in the south. He describes a functioning political process that is a mixture of the traditional and modern, and makes the case for international recognition of this mini-state; as did Ian Spears in the last ROAPE issue (No.95, 2003). Oddly enough, Somaliland’s achievement remains unrecognised and unrewarded by the international community which takes its cue from the United Nations. Instead, everything possible is done to frustrate its aspirations and to throw Somaliland back into the Somali cauldron.

To confound its problems further, the Horn has once more become a stage in a violent international struggle in which it has no stake; to wit, the war on terror. As a result, foreign interference in the region’s muddled affairs is now greater than ever. The American military are back in a region they suspect is seething with Islamic fundamentalism and crawling with Al Qaida agents. On their part, the regimes in the Horn are jostling each other to offer them bases at knockdown prices. A Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa was set up under an American general to run this sideshow that covers the land, airspace and coastal waters of Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Yemen. A force of about 2,000 personnel recently moved into Djibouti, whose regime won the first bid. Amedee Bollee in this issue details its motives and expected pecuniary benefit. The Americans are also in Sudan, where they have set up a mission to monitor a dubious cease-fire between the regime there and the Southern rebels. Staffed with retired US military officers, the mission has offices in Rumbek in Southern Sudan and Khartoum. American and European pressure and money have promoted parallel peace negotiations for Sudan and Somalia, whose background and prospects are discussed in this issue by Lionel Cliffe.

Seeing an opportunity for political profit as well, the embattled regimes in the Horn wasted little time in discovering ‘terrorists’ among their opponents and pointing them out to the Americans, hoping to see them listed in Washington’s index of...
proscribed organisations. If history is any guide, the war on terror is bound to exacerbate local conflicts, if only by pouring arms into the region.

The post-colonial history of the Horn is a tragic tale of endemic social conflict and political fragmentation. Who is to blame for this? Ali Iye in this issue points a finger at the region’s intellectuals who stand accused of betraying their mission and their people by rationalising and propagating every parochial and divisive issue history has bequeathed to the region. Incapable of transcending sectarian boundaries and hoary myths, they exacerbate social contradictions and tensions that lead to violent conflict. Intellectuals in the Horn enlist in every cause, no matter how absurd it might be, and offer their services to every regime and its opponents regardless of merit. The most serious accusation is the intellectual’s failure to produce knowledge relevant to conditions in the region that could serve as the basis for solutions of its many problems. Instead, imported ideologies are espoused without critical examination, and pre-packaged programmes are adopted without local input. The results have been uniformly disappointing, yet the mimetic process goes on.

In the context of development, conflict is considered the main obstacle to progress. Accordingly, Andrew Natsios, the head of USAID, recently directed all missions in Africa to carry out country ‘conflict vulnerability’ studies prerequisite to planning aid programmes. The cause and effect link postulated in the notion that conflict retards development is a glaring truism that can be turned on its head; to wit, lack of development leads to conflict. No lesser truism this, yet one that points to the heart to the matter. There may be a host of contributing elements in the generation of a conflict – as the Afar-Ise case presented in this issue by this writer shows – however, the prime cause and catalyst, more often than not, is a struggle for access to scarce resources, i.e. a struggle for survival. Lack of development means new resources are not produced and existing ones are becoming scarcer. In the Horn, state power is the most direct and effective means of gaining access to scarce resources. Consequently, a share of state power is most often the bone of contention at first instance, and most conflicts involve the state in one form or another. To demonstrate this intrinsic link one needs simply to lay maps of those parts of the region that are (a) the least developed, (b) politically excluded, (c) and conflict ridden, on top of each other. The match is nearly perfect, and it is no coincidence.
The Betrayal of the Intellectuals

Ali Moussa Iye

The world has evolved, yet in the Horn of Africa people continue to settle ancient scores amongst themselves. As at the time of the Crusades, they confront one another along the same battlelines and from the same ideological trenches. The intellectuals of the region have proved unable to emancipate themselves from the dominant discourses of their societies and cultures and their power structures. Intellectuals throughout the region have been seduced, suborned and instrumentalised by power. They have rallied to every flag of convenience raised by powerholders and powerseekers, in so doing, they have betrayed their calling and their people. What this region needs is intellectuals with integrity and the will to resist the temptation of power. It is time for the intellectuals of the Horn of Africa to launch a ‘liberation movement’ of and for themselves. A movement for the emancipation of critical thought and its use for the benefit of the common man and woman.

The intellectual loses his strength when he espouses power (Noam Chomsky).

The Horn is a land rich in paradox. It is a region whose renowned history instead of leading to better knowledge of its peoples, is a prime bone of contention among the region’s intellectuals. The Horn is a region whose resources have attracted all sorts of fortune hunters from afar since the earliest times, but whose people have endured the most catastrophic famines in recent history. This is a region where paleontological research attests to the antiquity of its inhabitants, yet most of them claim to have come from elsewhere. They hold on to hoary tales of exotic origin, as if they wish to extract themselves from Africa. The Abyssinians trace their ancestry to a tribe that crossed the Red Sea from Arabia. Somali clans claim Arab saints as their progenitors. Northern Sudanese look to Egypt as their place of origin. A myth of having come across the sea from India holds sway among the Oromo. Presumed to be the ‘lost tribe of Israel’, the Falasha from Ethiopia found a home in modern Israel.

The world has evolved, yet in the Horn of Africa people continue to settle ancient scores amongst themselves. As at the time of the Crusades, they confront one another along the same battlelines and from the same ideological trenches. Semites against Cushites, Christians against Muslims, highlanders against lowlanders, herders against farmers, tribe against tribe, clan against clan in an unending cycle of conflict.

Hoarding grandiose myths is not the exclusive preserve of the region. What aggravates the effect of this ‘opium of the people’ here is the absence of the requisite antidote, namely, intellectual emancipation and critical thought. The intellectuals of the region have proved unable to emancipate themselves from the dominant discourses of their societies and cultures and their power structures. The very people whose role is to question the beliefs of their societies, revisit their traditions and
debunk their prejudices; instead devote themselves to producing ‘scientific’ legitimisation of myths of prior origin, superiority and domination, which not only reinforce stereotypes and divide peoples, but also debase the value of indigenous scientific endeavour.

Intellectuals throughout the region have been seduced, suborned and instrumentalised by power. They have rallied to every flag of convenience raised by powerholders and powerseekers, be they marxists or capitalists, religious fundamentalists or atheists, military dictators or civilian despots. Regimes of every stripe can find intellectual support and rationalisation for any policy they choose to pursue.

Witness the chorus of intellectual disputation and sophistry that accompanied the bloody progress of the recent Ethiopian-Eritrean war. Not a single voice was raised on either side of the border to protest the mindless massacre of tens of thousands of people. In earlier conflicts between Somalia and Ethiopia, intellectuals on both sides manifested the same patriotic zeal. There are exceptions, of course, but they are a precious few and they serve to prove the rule. Intellectuals in the Horn of Africa have failed to fulfill their mission and have betrayed their people.

The precocious interest of foreign intellectuals in the affairs of the Horn has not helped. Besides subordinating themselves to the cultural prejudices and hegemonic goals of their own societies, they cannot resist ‘taking sides’ in politico-ideological contests in the region, offering ‘scientific’ support to one side or another and sowing confusion. Mesmerised by biblical and Quranic inferences, they are drawn to mythologies that attribute non-African origins to many people of the Horn, and to legends that highlight the external influence on civilisations that flourished in the region. This search for non-African paradigms is the legacy of the racist ideology that has justified slavery and colonialism.

Intellectual subordination to the geopolitical dynamics of the region – nationalism, ethnicity, secessionism, irredentism – has produced a body of knowledge contaminated with propaganda that is used to educate future generations. This constitutes a real threat to peaceful coexistence and viable sub-regional integration in the Horn of Africa. It will take very long indeed to ‘de-mine’ and ‘disarm’ such knowledge in order to challenge the demagoguery of intolerance, discrimination and exclusion that leads to war.

The new regional order, which follows the recent turmoil in the Horn offers intellectuals a new opportunity to revisit and revise the dominant concepts and paradigms in the region.

‘Liberation movements’ thrive in the Horn of Africa. There seems to be one for every ethnic group of any consequence in the region. What is badly needed is a ‘liberation movement’ for critical thought. For this to happen, we first have to overcome the methodological constraints, the ideological snares, and the psychological reflexes that limit our vision. Far from presenting an exhaustive analysis of this topic, I would like to list a few of these obstacles.

The Tyranny of Mythology

Addiction to mythology in the Horn of Africa has not only discouraged the production of objective knowledge on the history and culture of its peoples. It also serves as the ideological justification for intolerance, domination and oppression. On
the one hand, myth serves to legitimate ‘native rights’ on territory within the region while, on the other hand, it asserts the foreign origin of those who claim such rights. Furthermore, these myths would have us believe that no state or civilisation appeared in this region before the arrival of legendary heroes from abroad.

The popular history of Ethiopia begins with the spicy legend of Queen Saba and King Solomon whose natural son, Menelik I, is said to have brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia and founded Abyssinia. This myth was popularised by the ‘Solomonic dynasty’, whose last representative, Emperor Haile Selassie, reigned until 1974, to legitimise its monopoly of absolute power in Ethiopia. Propagated by intellectuals and artists in the service of Church and state until recently, this myth that claims a Jewish lineage for the Abyssinian ruling class, also claims a distinction for Ethiopia that separates it from the rest of Africa; a claim other Africans find difficult to comprehend. Legend also has it that the domain of the Solomonic dynasty extended as far as ‘the Indian Ocean’, according to the claim emperor Menelik II presented to the European powers late in the 19th century.

The Arab origin of the Somali is the stuff of legends that link their genealogy to that of the Hashemite tribe of the Prophet Mohamed. All Somali clan-families (Darood, Issak, Hawille, Issa, etc.) have their own versions based on the same scenario. The usual story tells of a Sheikh who leaves Arabia to settle on the other side of the Red Sea, where he impresses the local people with his knowledge and piety, marries the daughter of the clan chief, and assumes the leadership of the clan.

Myth is not peculiar to Ethiopians or Somalis. Indeed, it is common to most communities in the region. Its usefulness as a potential source of information for research is not in question here. The problem is the excessive interest accorded to the legends that locate the origin of peoples in the region outside Africa. Alongside official mythologies, there are also traditions with local reference points that offer useful indications regarding the origin, identity, history and culture of the inhabitants of the Horn of Africa. However, these traditions – sometime dismissed as ‘pagan’, have not aroused the interest of intellectuals in the region. Understandably, it is more rewarding to be concerned with the stuff of ‘higher cultures’ related to Christianity and Islam.

The Crusades Mentality
Religion was instrumentalised early on by competing powers in the Horn as an ideology of domination. In this respect, the region has yet to emerge from its middle ages. Aspiring rivals such as nationalism and marxism proved no match for it. Faith has been, and is still used to mobilise people in conflicts of all sorts, most of which have nothing to do with spiritual matters. Christianity and Islam have been at war with each other for so long in the Horn, that the mentality of the Crusade and Jihad is hard to shake off and continues to imprison peoples’ minds in an implacably antagonistic worldview.

Struggles for hegemony, territory, resources, or identity in the region invariably invoke religious legitimisation. The Ethiopian Empire was piously portrayed as a Christian island in the sea of Islam. Among those who fought to shake off its domination, many perceived themselves as taking part in a Jihad against infidels. Even within one religious community, competing factions invoke sectarian interpretations of the faith in support of their mission. As if all this weren’t enough distraction, a wave of evangelical Protestantism is sweeping southern Ethiopia like a
modern Crusade, intent on converting people of all faiths to its own fundamentalist brand of Christianity.

The Obsession with Territory
More often than not, conflict in the Horn of Africa is over territory. The borders that colonialism arbitrarily and haphazardly imposed on an already bitterly contested terrain enormously aggravate confrontations over land. The Horn is the setting for unending ‘wars of geography’ whose purpose is to redraw the regional geopolitical map. The result is a collective obsession with territory, a categorical imperative for rulers and subjects in the region. Relations between communities are reduced to territorial claims and counterclaims. Myth and metaphysics are invoked in support of such claims. Dreams of greatness that animate the peoples of this region are expressed in terms of territorial expansion. The Amhara obsession with the ‘sacred unity’ of Ethiopia, the Somali chimera of Pan-Somalism, the vision of ‘Oromia’, ‘Dankalia’, ‘Azania’ and others.

Disastrous wars are fought to retain or seize territory, which the rulers have neither the interest nor the capacity to develop for the benefit of the people. The obsession with territory wastes resources in a destitute region, and distracts leaders from the real challenge of economic and social development. The recent war between Ethiopia and Eritrea is a good example of this obsession. Both governments implicitly acknowledged – albeit for different reasons – that the real cause of the conflict had nothing to do with the few pieces of eroded land along their common border. Nevertheless, the explanation given to their people was precisely the issue of these pitiful scraps of land. As if this were the only argument their people could understand, the only cause for which they could be asked to make sacrifices.

The Feudal Spirit
It was said earlier that in some respects the Horn of Africa has yet to emerge from the Middle Ages. Proof of this is the feudal perception of power that prevails in the region. Autocracy claiming divine or historical legitimacy is the foundation of political power. Accordingly, the source of power, whatever it may be, is considered prior to the existence of the community and independent of its will. People are not perceived as subjects of their history, but as objects that form a design determined by the authority under whose rule fate has placed them. They are the flock that happens to graze on the estates of those who hold power. The community is not in a position to deliberate upon its fate, give voice to its concerns, still less to choose its government. The power-holders are not accountable to the people, only to the destiny that placed them on the seat of power. They have no constitutional obligations to their subjects, but only charitable duties. They are beholden only to history.

Political culture and practice throughout the region is infused with this mentality, regardless of regime and ideology. It is worth noting that in a region with innumerable territorial disputes, no referenda or popular consultations have ever been held. The livelihood of Ethiopia’s peasantry was put to risk more than once at the whim of its rulers, when they arbitrarily decreed far-reaching reforms of land tenure. Similar changes are currently the subject of heated debate in that country among politicians and intellectuals. No one has suggested the peasants themselves ought to be consulted. Theocracy was imposed on the people of the Sudan without so much as a warning, and the people of Eritrea have been told they are not mature enough to
have political parties and elections. Among the Somalis, warlords contend for
primacy like feudal lords.

The feudal perception of power has not allowed serious intellectual scrutiny to focus
on indigenous traditions of governance based on popular participation, democratic
procedure and consensus, such as the *Heer* of the Somalis, the *Gada* of the Oromos, the
*Baito* of the Abyssinians, and the *Dinkara* of the Afars. These could offer models of
governance that challenge the feudal heritage, and might facilitate the stalled process
of democratisation in the region.

**The Fundamentalist Conception of Conflict**

Another factor that affects relations between the peoples of the Horn is the
fundamentalist perception they have of each other. Despite their many affinities, or
perhaps because of them, each group has the tendency to regard its disputes with
others as utterly ineluctable, and somehow inherent in the differences that separate
them. The manichean dichotomy of religion (Good against Evil, God against Satan)
are transposed onto a temporal world of scarcity, where communities are compelled
to compete for resources in order to survive.

Cultural, religious, and ethnic distinctions are viewed in terms of a generic antithesis,
a primordial contradiction impervious to compromise. The very existence of ‘the
other’, his way of life, well-being and prosperity, are a perennial, mortal threat. Any
advantage gained by others correspondingly detracts from one’s own cause. Conflict
is a struggle to the end; that is, the end of ‘the other.’

This zero-sum mentality governs political behaviour at every level. Witness the way
the regimes in Ethiopia and Eritrea chose to resolve a dispute that everyone, save
themselves, considers petty. Witness the way the ruling parties in Ethiopia and
Eritrea resolved internal disputes over policy that emerged at their leadership level at
the conclusion of the war. In both countries, those who lost the argument also lost
their party membership, the state posts to which they had been elected or appointed,
and some found themselves in prison accused of corruption or treason.

This mentality can equally explain the intractable nature of the civil war in Somalia.
An important lesson can be drawn from the experience of a society which, despite its
vaunted homogeneity and national ethos, dissolved politically into clan segments.
Ethnic diversity is not necessarily a formula for conflict. Sometimes it may even be
easier to compromise and find common ground when a society is constituted of
diverse groups who are destined to live together. There are many examples of this in
Africa.

**In Search of an Alternative Vision**

Intellectuals in the Horn have a narrow vision that tends to exaggerate differences
between peoples and amplify discourses of exclusion. Now that everything which
could be done to widen the gap between communities in the Horn has been done, it is
time to look at the other face of the region’s reality. Beyond the imperative of
intellectual integrity, which compels us to revisit the mistakes of the past, the plight
of our region calls for a new approach. Intellectuals in war-torn societies can no longer
allow themselves the luxury of concentrating on issues that stir up hatred and
exacerbate division. It is their responsibility to rediscover what brings peoples
together, to reconstruct bridges that have been destroyed, and to highlight the common fate of all peoples in the Horn.

It is time for intellectuals to emancipate themselves from the narrow discourse of their rulers – past and present – the tales of wars of conquest and domination, of plunder, enslavement and extermination of ‘infidels’. It is time to overcome the reductive vision of history, which equates the complex evolution of societies with the petty intrigues of palace politics. Our approach to history must look beyond the footprints left by pretentious dynasties, and seek to find evidence of those more evanescent traces of peoples’ achievements. It is time to illuminate the web of interdependence and interaction, which in the past helped the peoples of the region to transcend their differences for mutual benefit. For example, the economic nexus that wove a regional web of trade, facilitated population mobility and inter-cultural dialogue. A focus on economic interdependence could encourage a degree of regional integration, the prerequisite to regional peace and development. The study of such economic rationality, which links peoples beyond their cultural prejudices and political confrontations, would help revise our perspective of inter-group relations in the Horn of Africa.

Intellectuals must focus on the common ideals that bring peoples together and help them transcend the barriers of prejudice and chauvinism. They should revisit historical acts of solidarity and generosity displayed by the peoples of the region. Recall how the Abyssinians sheltered followers of the Prophet Mohammed when they had to flee Arabia for a time, and the gratitude the Prophet expressed for this deed. A new intellectual vision must reinterpret the notion of ‘patriotism’ according to the ideas of humanist philosophers such as Habermas; a patriotism that insists on the defence of human values and rights wherever they are under threat, regardless of national or cultural boundaries. This is the kind of patriotism that is likely to reconcile, beyond their differences, all those who share the same values.

The Horn of Africa has had more than its fair share of liberation movements, warlords and saints. It has had enough of imported ideologies, ideologues, prophets of doom and salvation. It has produced more than its quota of bards and minstrels who sing the praises of autocrats in elevated and sophisticated tones. Enough intellectuals who offer their services to brutal regimes and betray their own raison d’être. What this region needs is intellectuals with integrity and the will to resist the temptation of power. What is badly needed are institutes or centres for research, reflection and academic exchange, which are genuinely independent of the power of the State. It is time for the intellectuals of the Horn of Africa to launch a ‘liberation movement’ of and for themselves. A movement for the emancipation of critical thought and its use for the benefit of the common man and woman.

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The Ethiopia-Eritrea War

Leenco Lata

The Ethiopia-Eritrea war of 1998–2000 stands apart from other contemporary conflicts in Africa in a number of critical ways. First, the multiplicity of its proximate and distant historical causes, coupled with its diverse forms of manifestation, renders fitting it into neat conventional categories a very challenging undertaking. Analysing and adopting policies and measures demands a prior ability to fit conflicts into known categories. Conflicts are commonly believed to fit into either the (1) inter-state (inter-national) or (2) the intra-state (domestic) categories. The latter is further divided into (a) inter-communal or inter-ethnic and (b) intra-communal or intra-ethnic. The main argument of this paper is that the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict defies attempts to fit it neatly into just one of these types.

The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict poses yet another form of challenge. Picking the most pivotal one/ones from among the array of the conflict’s stipulated causes also looks quite daunting. Border dispute, economic issues, the divergence of the ideologies of the groups ruling the two entities, differing visions and nature of state types, the contrast between democracy in one state and authoritarianism in the other, etc. are offered as some of the causes. But which one or ones is/are decisive, the resolution of which would pave the way for addressing all others?

A third source of complication needs to also be kept in mind when trying to understand the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict. The people currently ruling both Ethiopia and Eritrea began their political career by denouncing the western powers as imperialists. The extent to which this ideological thinking continues to linger and to influence their behaviour as state leaders cannot be definitively determined. There are indications of its survival at least among the rulers of Ethiopia. Furthermore, these leaders lack confidence in international organisations such as the UN and the OAU due to a number of historical reasons. These sentiments must hence be taken into account when trying to assess the long range effectiveness of intervention by the UN, OAU, US and EU.

Who are the Protagonists?

The best place to start discussing the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict appears to be clarifying who the protagonists are. The genealogical and ideological intimacy of the EPLF and TPLF leadership used to be taken for granted by those who love them as well as by those who hate them. The same sentiment applied to the friendship and cooperation that they enjoyed in the period prior to 1998. One commentator was in fact certain that the Eritreans were then behaving like Ethiopia’s co-rulers,1 of course, a clear portrayal of the latter as the surrogate of the former. It was mostly after these former comrades-in-arms were at loggerheads that scholars started unveiling the distant and recent
Richard Trivelli believes that uncovering the root causes of the present conflict requires some understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between the Tigrinya speaking people of the Eritrean highlands (Kebesa) and Tigray (Tigray is the name of one of Ethiopia’s federal states and is the homeland of Tigrinya speaking Ethiopians. Kebesa is the Tigrinya word for highland and refers to areas of Eritrea inhabited by Tigrinya speaking Christian Eritreans), and the former guerilla movements dominated by them and currently governing Eritrea and Ethiopia.

How the relationship between the two Tigrinya speaking communities evolved through the centuries fits into the distant historical category, which will be discussed next. This will be followed by a similar review of the history of relations between the two guerilla movements spawned by these societies.

Looking at the similarities and dissimilarities of the Kebesa and Tigray communities becomes germane because of the way this conflict is often understood. Although the war is officially between Eritrea and Ethiopia, ‘The people who are fighting each other should not be viewed as all of Ethiopia against all of Eritrea’, according to Chester Crocker. ‘It’s really Tigrayans and Eritreans going at each other’, he concluded. Surprisingly, prominent Tigreans and Eritreans concur with this view. Ghebru Assrat, former TPLF (Tigray Peoples Liberation Front) Politburo member, is certain that ‘only Tigray and not the whole of Ethiopia’ is being targeted by the Eritreans. And an Eritrean, Alemseged Tesfai, asserts that the war is due to Tigrean ambition to occupy the whole or parts of Eritrea ‘not for Ethiopia as a whole … but … to enhance the interests of Tigray’. Hence, the war in essence is between the Tigreans who dominate Ethiopia and the rulers of Eritrea and emanates from their conflicting interests and aspirations. Patrick Gilkes’ assertion that the leaders of both Eritrea and Tigray ‘come from the same Tigrean ethnic group’ would thus make it tempting to situate their dispute in the intra-ethnic category of conflicts.

Trivelli’s analysis of the evolution of relations between the Kebesa and Tigray peoples depicts a different picture. He identifies three distinct stages of identity change by reviewing these two communities’ history of association and disassociation: (a) until the 18th century, these two communities ‘maintained a strong feeling of being Ethiopian (Habesha) and, within this Habesha culture, of forming a distinct group different from the Amhara;’ (b) Developments between that time and the late stage of Italian colonialism in Eritrea, however, created a sentiment in which the ‘Eritreaness’ or Eritrean identity of the modern strata of Kebesa society manifested itself not as an identity distinct from the Habesha or Ethiopian identity, but rather as a distinct sub-category within the wider Habesha identity which was opposed to the other Habesha sub-category ‘Tigray’.

Trivelli’s inference that the Tigrinya speakers had evolved into two distinct groups by the late phase of Italian rule hence makes classifying conflict between them as inter-ethnic quite tempting. Trivelli’s thesis regarding the differentiation of the Kebesa and Tigray identities is questionable for a number of reasons. The 1950s Eritrean aspiration of uniting with Tigray to create a greater independent Eritrea, in particular, contravenes his conclusion. The third stage of identity differentiation that, he believes, soon eclipsed this one would tend to imbue the conflict with an inter-‘national’ character; (c) He believes another change of identity came about during the slow rise of Kebesa nationalism in the form of Eritrean nationalism starting in the
1960s. The self-identification that once distinguished Eritrean Habesha from Tigray (Amhara) Habesha was gradually replaced by one that opposed Eritrean identity to an Ethiopian one.9 Tigrean academic Alemseged Abbay doubts that this identity transformation has in fact been effected. He argues that the ordinary folk of the Kebsa still continue to identify more with Tigreans than with the other peoples of Eritrea just as ordinary Tigreans feel closer to the Kebsa people than to their fellow Ethiopian Amharas, Muslims or the Nilotic Kunamas. It is the post-victory Eritrean political actors’ ambition to create Eritreans and nurture Eritrean-ness that is driving ‘self-definition and boundary delimitation’ and which in particular is necessitating ‘marking the boundary with Tigray’, he argues.10 He enumerates policy decisions taken by Eritrean leaders to promote this disassociation with Tigray.11 One of the measures that he mentions, playing up the history of ‘conflict of any nature with the Tigrayans’,12 is what is relevant to the issue at hand. If one accepts Abbay’s views, the Eritrean political actors’ efforts to install an identity boundary were just starting when the war concerning the geographical border broke out. Hence, identity differentiation was not a factor that caused the war but it could very well become its end-result. Ruth Iyob echoes this stand when she states that the conflict highlighted ‘unresolved key issues of territorial demarcations (boundaries) and political demarcations (identity or citizenship).’13 Patrick Gilkes indirectly concurs with these two scholars by describing the Red Sea and Horn region as a zone where the process of fusion and fission remains incomplete.14 Hence, scholars from diverse backgrounds agree that the process of identity change was still inconclusive when the conflict erupted. Whether one of war’s end-results should be to render territorial and identity boundaries coterminous is a matter that raises fundamental practical and ethical questions.

As the two warring countries are ruled by forces that emerged from the ranks of the Tigrinya speakers of Eritrea and Ethiopia, war between them inevitably takes on an inter-state character. The UN and other inter-state bodies in particular would find it cumbersome to approach and treat it in any other way. However, there is a widespread opinion especially in Ethiopia that runs contrary to this stand. To the opponents of Eritrea’s independence, this war is strictly an intra-state affair. Hence, for them the conflict would come to a conclusion only when Ethiopia’s ‘traditional’ borders are restored not in the contested locality of Badme but at the Red Sea Coast. Therefore, they consider settling the present conflict through border delimitation illegitimate and a waste of time. Even those Tigrean rulers of Ethiopia who may go along with the dispute’s designation as inter-state would reject equating it with ‘inter-national’ due to their peculiar definition of the term nation. We now turn our attention to this and a discussion of the two movements spawned by Eritrean and Tigrean societies.

**Similar & Dissimilar Movements**

Eritrean nationalist thinking was inevitably influenced by the notion prevailing throughout the world concerning self-determination in the early 1960s. Self-determination then was universally understood to have ‘only the function of bringing independence to people under alien colonial rule.’15 In addition, ‘the peoples so entitled (i.e. to independence) are defined in terms of the existing colonial territories, each of which contains a nation (italics added).’16 Entertaining any other notions of ‘nation’ or ‘self-determination’ suffered additional stigmatisation, particularly in Africa after the disastrous Biafran attempt to secede from Nigeria. All Eritrean factions thus found it necessary to distinguish their invocation of self-determination from other cases in the rest of Ethiopia. Italian colonial rule was endlessly harped
upon as the legitimating factor for Eritrea’s entitlement to independent nationhood. ‘Secessionism’ was thereby made to apply strictly to other cases of self-determination’s invocation in Ethiopia. In the event, Eritrean attempt to absolve themselves from the accusation of secession by arguing that ‘Eritrea is no Biafra’ since its ‘borders were fixed and its national identity defined by colonial history, like the rest of colonial Africa’ persuaded very few, if any. Only when Eritrean military victory became imminent did the powers resort to the rationale of Italian colonial history merely to go along with the hitherto unprecedented breakup of an African state.

While Eritrean militants were busy invoking the then orthodox version of nationhood and self-determination, a different trend started emerging in the rest of Ethiopia. Finding a striking similarity between feudal Ethiopia and Czarist Russia, Bolshevik-wannabe Ethiopian student radicals started adopting Lenin’s policy on self-determination and Stalin’s definition of nation. They ended up embracing two central themes in Lenin’s approach to self-determination. First, struggles for self-determination are deemed legitimate only in so far as they are conducted under the leadership of a proletarian vanguard party. Second, the vanguard party should champion the right to self-determination in a manner that would avert state disintegration. In addition, Stalin’s definition of the nation as ‘a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture’ was embraced. As a result, entities commonly called tribes in Africa or ethnic groups elsewhere were designated as nations or nationalities in the Ethiopian leftist parlance. One other political strain should be mentioned to complete this line up of opinion. Oromo and Somali political activists differed from these and the Eritreans by arguing that Ethiopia is indeed a colony-owning African state. They cited the process of brutal Ethiopian conquest of their peoples and the resulting political, cultural, religious, domination as sufficient ground for drawing this conclusion.

Most of the movements that started appearing on the Ethiopian political scene from this period on, including the TPLF, adopted this definition of the term nation and embraced Lenin’s approach to the principle of self-determination. This was also the time when a large number of Eritrean Kebeisa educated youths were joining the Eritrean liberation movement. This period contrasted with the previous decade during which the movement drew its recruits primarily from the predominantly Muslim lowlands. Coupled with the introduction of marxism-leninism by the student radicals, this demographic change had important implications. Younger and more radical elements took control of the original liberation front, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), by deposing its traditionalist leadership. The change of leadership alone, however, proved insufficient to reassure a Kebeisa-centred faction (led by Isaias Afewerki) that harboured serious grievances regarding the treatment of recruits from its region. These Christian recruits were alienated by the earlier ELF leadership’s articulation of Eritrea’s cause as an Islamic struggle against Christian Ethiopia. Under the mood prevailing then, they were often looked upon as potential agents of the Ethiopian regime. The resulting schism eventually culminated in the emergence of several factions called Popular Liberation Forces (PLF) in 1970, which merged in September 1973 to herald the birth of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF). Although the two splinter groups, the ELF and EPLF (and their various Ethiopian allies) both professed marxism-leninism, fostering sustainable alliance between them proved unattainable.

To outsiders, the EPLF and TPLF appeared indistinguishable during the 1970s and most of the 1980s for they had more in common than with any other group. As so aptly
put by Elias Habte Selassie, ‘Such are the many parallel developments in the history and organisational culture of the two fronts that there were occasional confusion of identity among expatriates as to which is which.’ Elsewhere, I enumerate the factors that they commonly share. John Young, however, enumerates the differences that tended to overshadow these similarities. His conclusion that ‘the political differences between the TPLF and the EPLF during the years of struggle will be reflected in their present and future relations, and as a result they may be far more problematic than is generally imagined’ turned out to be uncannily prophetic. Here we will restrict ourselves only to those aspects that seem to have paved the way for the present conflict.

Richard Trivelli relates the story of oscillating mutually opportunistic and purely tactical alliances that the TPLF entered into with one or the other of the Eritrean fronts (ELF and EPLF) starting in mid-1970s. The TPLF came into existence in 1975 supported by and in alliance with the EPLF. When relations between it and EPLF soured a year later, the TPLF shifted its alliance to the rival Eritrean front, the ELF. It was back in alliance with the EPLF in 1979 and in conflict with the ELF. These two allies eventually joined forces to drive the ELF out of Eritrea in 1981. TPLF relations with the EPLF started souring once again in 1983 culminating in open rupture by 1985. Cooperation was resumed only in 1988 at a time when defeating the Derg regime started looking more promising than at any previous time. It was to take advantage of the regime’s deteriorating situation that the two fronts decided to put their differences aside and to resume joint military activities. Alemseged Tesfai describes how TPLF relations with Eritrea and Eritreans ‘started with love, turned to hate and, by independence, reverted back to love again’ only for hatred to become consummate after May 1998. Of course, it is highly possible that the Tigreans too depict Eritrean feelings towards them in a similar way. Trivelli tries to offer a plausible explanation for this volatility of relations between the two movements. He infers that the leaderships of the two Fronts failed to openly discuss their differences and to find their democratic resolutions. Hence, underlying political and psychological differences were merely papered over during periods of friendship. He blames the undemocratic way the Fronts were structured and led by people who ‘harboured the strong conviction that destiny had chosen them to achieve the liberation of their nations’ for this state of affairs.

The main political problems that inevitably surfaced during periods of discord and suspicion had to do with (1) divergent definition of the term *nation*, (2) differing premises regarding levels of entitlement to self-determination, and (3) the relevance of colonial experience in determining these two issues. EPLF leaders argued that the history of Italian colonial rule automatically qualifies Eritrea as a single nation entitled to independence, as mentioned earlier. Hence, Eritrea’s case was described as a ‘colonial question’ to be settled only by the achievement of independence. All other cases, however, were designated as ‘national questions’ to be resolved in a manner that preserves the unity of the rest of Ethiopia.

The TPLF’s adherence to Stalin’s definition of the term *nation* was what led to the earliest incident of discord with the EPLF. The TPLF’s initial manifesto of 1976 advocated the independence of a Greater Tigray nation, which, consistent with Stalin’s definition, embraced the Tigrinya speaking peoples of Tigray and highland Eritrea. Its implication for Eritrea’s integrity was obviously disturbing to the EPLF leading to a cooling of relations. Alliance between the two fronts was restored in 1979 when the TPLF re-designated the Tigrayan question as a ‘national question’. Friendship and cooperation lasted until 1983 when relations soured once again. At
this stage, the TPLF introduced another controversy when it began blurring ‘the
distinction between the colonial and the national question’ by arguing that referenda
are the only legitimate resolution for both cases of self-determination. The only time a
compromise of sorts led to the resumption of cooperation between the two Fronts
occurred after the defeat of the Derg regime in 1991. The TPLF then openly endorsed
Eritrea’s independence while EPLF leaders declared the postponement of their *de jure*
independence until after referendum two years later. However, private musings by
TPLF leaders and some of their one-sided policies towards Eritrea indicate their
expectation that this independence would be either temporary or would at least be
subordinated to the two groups’ long range joint economic and security interests. We
will return to this crucial issue later on.

TPLF exploitation of territorial dispute as a pretext for attacking its other erstwhile
Eritrean ally, the ELF, appears informative and relevant in view of what happened
later on. According to many knowledgeable people, the ELF was administering
Badme and its environs when it first entered into an alliance with the TPLF. The
fledgling TPLF in fact welcomed the extension of ELF operations into large parts of
western Tigray, roughly during 1975-1977, because it was eager to gain combat
experience by participating in joint actions. But when relations turned sour,
primarily due to some other disputes (enumerated by Young), the TPLF not only
staked claim on Badme and its environs but also took unilateral measures to uproot
ELF structures and to expel Eritrean peasants. The resulting rancor was endlessly and
stridently aired and steadily intensified as a rationale for TPLF siding with the EPLF
in the final showdown that resulted in ELF’s expulsion from Eritrea. The efficacy and
simplicity of harping on the emotive issue of the border dispute to rationalise going to
war to settle some other agenda had thus been added to TPLF’s increasing repertoire
of political machinations. It is also clear that the TPLF continued to administer the
said area thereafter until May 1998. Despite the seesawing of relations during this
entire period, surprisingly the EPLF never publicly demanded the repossession of a
territory that colonial treaties place within Eritrea. So the initial exchange of gunfire
that triggered the May 1998 incident did not take place at Badme *per se* but deeper
inside Eritrea proper, as we will elaborate later on.

**Stipulated Causes of the Conflict**

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, typifying the war that broke out between
Eritrea and Ethiopia in May 1998 as inter or intra-ethnic, inter or intra-state, inter or
intra-national seems to depend on the perspective of the designator. Coming during
the first decade of Eritrea’s separation, marked by the fluidity of its political and
communal identity, and due to conflicting expectations, it can perhaps best be
described as an inter-state war that is strikingly similar to intra-state conflict. In the
views of Negash and Tronvoll, the ‘war has most of the characteristics of a civil war
between one people spread out in two countries’. We will now proceed to enumerate
the stipulated causes of the conflict, which will demonstrate a similar complexity. The
discussion about causes, however, has to be prefaced with a look at one feature that
defines relations between the protagonists. One remarkable feature of TPLF/EPLF
opinions and impressions of each other has to be grasped to start appreciating the
complexity of the factors that led to war. How the TPLF perceives and portrays the
EPLF happens to be the exact mirror image of the EPLF’s perceptions and portrayals
of the TPLF. Let us look at a few examples to demonstrate this.

The Eritreans consider the TPLF-dominated Ethiopian regime immensely vulnerable
because of the ‘ethnic’ federal policy it has instituted in Ethiopia. To the TPLF, on the
other hand, the Eritrean regime’s refusal to emulate this policy is undemocratic and thus renders it highly vulnerable. TPLF’s contradictory espousal of democratic pluralism while in reality practicing a very narrowly based dictatorship is seen as a major source of weakness by the Eritreans. The TPLF, on the other hand, believes that the Eritrean regime’s more candid rejection of pluralism and more straightforward advocacy of guided democracy is a weakness that could be exploited both locally and internationally. The paucity of its natural resources is presumed to render Eritrea permanently dependent on Ethiopia, in TPLF perception. The Eritreans, of course, believe the converse due to Ethiopia becoming landlocked after Eritrea’s independence. Perhaps the most important factor that led to the war is the divergent impression regarding who owes whom more. TPLF leaders have no doubts that the Eritreans owe them their independence. And the Eritreans are in no doubt that the TPLF owes them its victory over the Derg and continued domination of Ethiopia. This should be kept in mind as we try to summarise the alleged causes of the conflict.

Divergence of approaches to governance is offered as one of the contributing factors to conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This is one of the causes stipulated by Paul Henze according to whom a commitment ‘to developing an increasingly open society’ exists in Ethiopia where the emergence of ‘a plethora of political parties and a lively private press’ is being tolerated. On the other hand, what exists in Eritrea is ‘an authoritarian one-party state.’ Only unabashed propagandists of the Ethiopian regime would wholeheartedly agree with Henze’s views. Other scholars depict an underlying similarity between the political systems in both Eritrea and Ethiopia. According to Patrick Gilkes, ‘the view of democracy still appears to be based more on a marxist theory of representation, with the vanguard party representing the will of the people as interpreted through the party’, in both systems. Others are much more forthright in emphasising the similarities of the political situation in the two countries. ‘Varying in the form demanded by the differing conditions in the two countries but not in substance, the political system in both countries is undemocratic, secretive and hostile to open public debate’, in Trivelli’s opinion. Elias Habte Selassie also draws a similar conclusion:

The leadership of both countries are a battle hardened lot in which military experience dictates the order of things, and the concept of democracy is a rather new word in their vocabulary and its practice has yet to see the light of day.

Hence, democracy versus authoritarianism cannot play a significant role in fomenting conflict between the two neighbouring states. On the other hand, the conflict’s causes could fester out of public view to suddenly result in violent exchanges exactly because of the absence of openness and democratic accountability in both states.

The Eritrean academic, Ruth Iyob, holds their contrasting natures responsible for Ethiopia and Eritrea going to war. In her view, Eritrea’s status as a diasporic state and that of Ethiopia as a regional hegemon sits at the heart of the conflict. Diasporic states emerge after extended periods of confrontation with (a) privileged groups exercising hegemony within a multi-cultural state, or (b) a hegemonic and/or conquest state pursuing a policy of assimilation or elimination of resistant populations. Ruth Iyob’s invocation of the diasporic image of a defensive Eritrean state threatened by a menacing regional hegemon, Ethiopia, has value despite suffering from considerable shortcomings. Its shortcomings emanate from the fact that endangered survival, wounded dignity, experiencing victimization and a psychology of living under siege are not exclusive to the Eritreans; nor is this a recent phenomenon. For centuries, Amharic and Tigrinya speakers (including those of the Eritrean highlands), that is,
Abyssinians, have had an image of their society as a Christian enclave surrounded by a sea of Muslims and pagans. Discussing more recent developments, Alemseged Abbay is convinced that harping on the Derg regime’s genocidal behaviour as exemplified by massacres at Hauzien (in Tigray) and She’eb (in Eritrea) was critical in easing mobilisation for liberation in both Eritrea and Tigray. Currently, there are communities both in Eritrea and Ethiopia who could enumerate their own Hauzien and She’ebs and who harbour a strong feeling that their sense of dignity is daily being assaulted by those exercising power. Hence, the feeling of victimhood and humiliation is threatening to become a pervasive phenomenon throughout the Horn of Africa region, contrary to Ruth Iyob’s attempt to restrict them to Eritrea. Zero-sum contests to amass not only wealth but also respect and glory are unfortunately spreading throughout the region, and sit at the heart of all the various forms of conflicts going on in the Horn of Africa.

Ruth Iyob’s employment of diasporic versus hegemonic state, however, is valuable for one important reason. The practical implication of being a diasporic or hegemonic state is indistinguishable. Imposing their will on weaker entities is presumed to be in the nature of hegemonic states. Similarly, hegemonic states cannot afford to practice democracy internally as this would run counter to their external undemocratic projection of force. The same features happen to apply also to a diasporic state. Democracy as a form of expression of differences is not a salient feature of diasporic states whose primary objective are survival and the redress of historical wrongs, concludes Iyob. People who are imbued with this feeling tend to believe that they have the mandate to change the rules of the game and also to pursue the policy of eliminating their opponents. Hence, in practical terms, the diasporic state is just as aggressive and undemocratic as a hegemonic one. This is the value of Ruth Iyob’s analysis.

The border dispute as the cause of the Ethio-Eritrean war deserves more attention because that is how it was presented in international litigation thus influencing how its resolution is being approached. Many in fact prefer to reduce the cause of the war to this single issue. For example, for Paul Henze the Eritrea-Ethiopia war happened simply because Eritrea invaded Ethiopia. On the contrary, ‘the conflict has really little to do with territory’ states Patrick Gilkes. US diplomats concur by asserting ‘the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea involves a longer background than a simple border dispute.’ Despite repeatedly agreeing with these opinions, the protagonists have found presenting border dispute as the ultimate cause of the conflict convenient in their litigation at international forums. Empirical data, in fact, do support those who dismiss territorial dispute as the ultimate and sole cause of the war. Empirical data, in fact, do support those who dismiss territorial dispute as the ultimate and sole cause of the war. By analysing incidents over a 40 year period (1950-1990), Birger Heldt concludes ‘that a territorial dispute is a virtually necessary – but not sufficient – condition for interstate war.” And in the views of another authority, territorial disputes are not so much a source of war as an excuse.

Hence, dealing with the excuse while leaving the underlying causes un-addressed does not augur well for sustainable peace between and within Eritrea and Ethiopia. The initial exchange of gunfire that triggered the war has to thus be seen in conjunction with two other matters in order to make some sense. These are the concerned regimes’ divergent expectations regarding Eritrea’s future, and how this impacted on their economic relations.

Two assumptions may have influenced the way Eritrean leaders conceptualised their new state’s future; (1) They fought harder and longer than any other movement and
their victory resulted not only in the attainment of their “independence and
sovereignty, intact and unconditionally” but also in the installation of a new regime
in the Ethiopian capital; (2) They have always considered the attainment of
independence as the highest form of self-determination. Their expectation regarding
what should follow their hard fought struggle’s culmination in the achievement of
independence impacts on all aspects of their internal policy and external relations. It
is possible that they expected a relatively higher level and faster pace of economic and
social advancement to naturally follow the attainment of the highest form of self-
determination, i.e. independence. In addition, convinced that ‘the natural history of
the people of Eritrea was interrupted by colonialism’, they anticipated completing
the process of national integration by performing ‘miracles in peaceful nation-
building’, perhaps to attain a national unity stronger than at any previous time.
Similarly, asserting that ‘Unless peace, justice and prosperity prevail in Eritrea, the
independence we won with heavy sacrifices will be meaningless’, they defined
‘building an independent and modern Eritrea’ as their new mission. All of this is laudable and would not
have mattered, if it were not countered by another expectation by those ruling
Ethiopia.

My own discussions with Prime Minister Meles in 1992 lead me to partly concur with
Alemseged Tesfai’s assertion that Ethiopian rulers’ preference was ‘to see, not an
independent Eritrea, but one linked to Ethiopia in a federal arrangement.’ The
Ethiopian Prime Minister offhandedly informed me of his expectation that Eritrea will
imminently rejoin Ethiopia, although the form of such a link was not put as explicitly.
The divergence of the two groups’ expectation regarding Eritrea’s future relation with
Ethiopia generated equally divergent views concerning the political, military and
economic policies they pursued once in power. Discussing the economic aspect of this
situation is much more informative.

One of a series of agreements concluded by the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia in
1993 had to do with economic relations. In the view of Alemseged Tesfai, this
agreement was mutually advantageous to both parties, if it did not in fact favour
Ethiopia. Discussing Ethiopian allegations of Eritrean abuse of the common currency,
he states, ‘How a country that uses someone else’s currency can be deemed an
exploiter is yet to be convincingly explained.’ Eritrean practice of manipulating the
exchange rate to amass hard currency is, however, attested to by many, including
Trivelli who writes the Eritrean government ‘openly violated the spirit of the
currency union by pursuing its own policy in regard to exchange rates of hard
currency within Eritrea.’ Tesfai does admit that conditions were much more
congenial for Eritrean investments in Ethiopia than the other way around, although
he blames it on the divergence of the two countries’ citizenship laws. Observers
mention other economic arrangements that favoured Eritrea. Trivelli mentions
Ethiopia’s decision to turn over to Eritrea 30 per cent of the Assab refinery’s output
thus serving as a source of hard currency savings as one of the arrangements that
favored Eritrea more than Ethiopia. What is most important is how the two sides
perceived the Ethiopian government’s motivation in entering into economic
arrangements that many would testify favored Eritrea. I find Trivelli’s explanation of
Ethiopia’s motivation quite plausible:

The TPLF leadership ... hoped that the benefits of the economic privileges given to Eritrea
and Eritreans would ultimately induce or even force the Eritrean leadership to re-enter into
some form of political union with Ethiopia.
Other policies that TPLF leaders were pursuing during this time show an attempt to send one clear signal to the Eritreans. They were attempting to portray Eritrean/Tigrean relations as being more intimate than the one existing with their ‘fellow Ethiopians.’ Arming Eritreans residing in Ethiopia while simultaneously disarming Ethiopian nationals can be cited as perhaps the most prominent of these signals. Even Eritrean sources assert that support by Eritreans residing in Ethiopia played a critical role in enabling the TPLF to prevail over its internal challengers. It is hard to figure out what the Eritrean leaders thought of TPLF motivation in pursuing economic and security policies that favoured Eritrea and Eritreans. We can only surmise that they might have considered it as a reward for their role in putting the TPLF in power in Ethiopia.

We thus can see two starkly contrasting visions placing the two sides on a collision course. The TPLF and Meles Zenawi seem to have adopted the plan of enticing Eritrea back into some form of linkage with Ethiopia, which would have derogated from Eritrea’s bona fide independence. The Eritrean leaders’ most cherished aspiration, on the other hand, happened to be consolidating Eritrean independence and national unity and turning Eritrea into a modern and prosperous nation. Nothing bears witness to the existence of two parallel visions more than how the economic role of Tigray and Eritrea was seen by the respective leaders. Alemseged Tesfai states:

The Ethiopian strategy [i.e. economic], as officially expounded, was based on the development of its agricultural potential and the building up of a chiefly agriculture-related industry.

On the other hand, ‘Eritrea had adopted an outward looking, export and free market-oriented strategy.’ Those who observed the way the economic roles of the two entities (Ethiopia and Eritrea) were being conceptualized in Asmara were led to conclude the following:

[T]he EPLF’s economic policy aimed for Eritrea to serve as the industrial centre to an Ethiopian hinterland that would provide raw materials and serve as a market for its finished goods.

The issue becomes more complicated because TPLF leaders aspired creating an identical relationship between Tigray and the rest of Ethiopia. They started working to turn Tigray into ‘an export-oriented enclave’, in total departure from the agriculture-related tasks they assigned to other regions of Ethiopia. Hence, it is the economic roles assumed by Eritrea and Tigray in relation to the rest of Ethiopia that became the underlying cause of the tension. Either Eritrea and Tigray merge and develop their industrialised economies with the rest of Ethiopia serving as a common hinterland, or the resulting competition would have made indefinite tension between them inevitable. The views of the peoples who were targeted to provide cheap raw materials, labour and market, of course, did not seem to matter.

The sudden upsurge of Tigray region’s economy by itself alone would have had significant repercussions for Eritrea and the rest of Ethiopia. And Tigray’s economic and social change is nothing but spectacular. An international airport, a university, the mushrooming of schools and clinics, the erection of numerous industrial establishments, became a reality in Tigray almost overnight. The social implication of the steep rise in construction and other economic activities is dramatic. Tigray, traditionally an exporter of unskilled labour particularly to Eritrea, entered a new phase when it could start becoming an importer. This can be deduced from Young’s report that daily wages of unskilled construction workers in Mekelle rose to eight Birr
by mid-1990s, 'double that received in Bahr Dar, capital of neighbouring and wealthier Amhara [italics added].' People in the rest of Ethiopia, of course, could not go beyond harboring envy about this dramatic change accompanied by grumbling for they lack the wherewithal to do something about it. What is more directly relevant for the topic under discussion is how it could impact on Eritrean thinking. Tigray practically demonstrated that remaining within Ethiopia by manipulating ‘self-determination’ as a policy of domination could be a means for effecting social and economic development higher than the one expected to follow independence in Eritrea. The wisdom of insisting on independence as the only reliable precursor to a relatively higher level of prosperity was thus practically demonstrated to be at least questionable.

Irony abounds in this whole drama. The Eritreans were in a better position to take central power in Ethiopia in 1991, perhaps with the Tigreans and other forces serving as their junior partners. Western powers were in fact urging them to do so, according to rumours circulating in 1990. They could not because of proximate and distant historical reasons: (1) Any moves they might have made in such a direction would have revived the memory of the divisive politics of the 1950s; (2) EPLF leaders had anyway become hostages of their decades-long rhetoric that portrayed independence as the most coveted and ideal outcome of liberation struggles. Hence, they had to settle for ruling over less than one-seventeenth of the population in whose liberation they played the leading role.

Where is Badme, the Flash Point?
One thing became self-evident within days of hostilities breaking out between Eritrea and Ethiopia: nothing short of the use of massive force was bound to change the positions assumed by the protagonists. The outbreak of hostilities was instigated by an exchange of gunfire on 6 May 1998 somewhere in the vicinity of a locality called Badme. The border in this general area was defined by the treaty of 1902. The relevant article of the treaty reads as follows:

![Map of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute]

**CENTRAL SECTOR**

PCA Delimitation line and Eritrean & Ethiopian claim lines

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**MAP 1**
Commencing from the junction of the Khor Um Hagar with the Setit, the new frontier follows this river to its junction with the Maieteb, following the latter’s course so as to leave Mount Ala Tacura to Eritrea, and joins the Mareb at its junction with the Mai Ambessa.

The line from the junction of the Setit and Maieteb to the junction of the Mareb and Mai Ambessa shall be delimited by Italian and Ethiopian delegates, so that the Canama (Kunama) tribe belong to Eritrea.58

Although the proposed delimitation was never carried out, the line connecting the Setit/Maieteb and Mareb/Mai Ambessa junctions started appearing as a straight line on all subsequent maps (Negash and Tronvoll believe that the straight line is due to Italian manipulation). What is the location of Badme in relation to this line? And where exactly did the incident of 6 May 1998 take place also in relation to this imaginary line? According to sketches provided by the Eritreans, Badme is located slightly to the northwest of this line. That it had been under Tigrean administration since the early 1980s was never contested by the Eritreans, and evidently was not the issue that led to the 6 May incident. According to the Eritreans, the initial exchange of gunfire occurred at a location that was newly designated as part of Tigray region. However, the Eritrean push of the 12 May 1998 evidently did not stop at just reversing the alleged new designation of the border, but went as far as Badme.

Alluding that they merely advanced as far as the border delineated by the relevant colonial treaties, the Eritreans subsequently stuck obstinately to the stand that they have not crossed Ethiopia’s internationally recognised borders. The Eritrean Foreign Ministry statement of 15 May 1998, which asserted ‘Eritrea has not violated the internationally recognised borders between the two countries to encroach on Ethiopian territory,’ became their main line of argument. And this was countered by the Ethiopian side’s similarly stubborn demand that the Eritreans vacate Ethiopia’s sovereign territory by withdrawing to the positions they held prior to 6 May 1998. The Ethiopian Parliament and Council of Ministers met on 13 May 1998 and passed a resolution demanding an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Eritrean invading forces, and warned that Ethiopia reserved the right to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The two parties were thus determined to base the legitimacy of their respective positions on irreconcilable premises. Borders defined by colonial treaties became the ultimate points of departure for the Eritreans, while the Ethiopians appeared convinced that ‘long-term administration of the border areas constituted ownership.’59

One very important absurdity has to be grasped to understand the issue of the border. The border dispute was dealt with as a strictly internal affair of the Tigrinya speakers of Ethiopia and Eritrea until the outbreak of hostilities in May 1998. The Tigray regional administration appeared to exercise the prerogative of determining the border without the involvement of non-Tigrean officials of the Federal Government. Observers now realise that maps released by the Tigray administration after 1993 evidently to perpetuate this ownership started showing the border ‘bulging beyond the straight line of the colonial boundary.’ And most of the fighting in 1998 and 1999 took place ‘between the colonial border recognised by Eritrea, and the boundary as marked on the new Tigrean maps.’60 Since the disputants were basing their respective claims on virtually parallel principles, proposing a settlement by finding a common ground between them proved impossible. The dispute was thus framed in such a way that settlement could be found only if one party chooses or is forced to back down. The mediation process was hence manoeuvred in such a way that any one trying to arbitrate had to tacitly or directly pass judgment.
International Response

Mediation efforts kicked off within days of the conflict breaking out, and continued to expand in scope and participation side by side with rising hostility and plummeting hopes for peaceful settlement. The first to undertake mediation was a group called the Facilitators made up of Vice President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Ms Susan Rice of the US Department of State and Ms Gayle Smith of the US National Security Council. The Facilitators shuttled between Asmara and Addis Ababa from 17 to 29 May 1998 and submitted their recommendations. The salient points of their proposal were that:

- the parties commit themselves to seeking the final disposition of their common border, determined on the basis of established colonial treaties and international law applicable to such treaties;

- an observer mission, organised by the Government of Rwanda and supported by the United States, be deployed to Badme as soon as possible;

- within 24 hours of the arrival of the Observer Team, Eritrean forces begin to redeploy to positions held before 6 May 1998, and that, immediately following, the civilian administration in place before 6 May 1998, return, etc.

The Ethiopians scored their first diplomatic victory when they succeeded in persuading the Facilitators to embrace the idea of Eritrean withdrawal ‘to positions held before 6 May 1998.’ But what exactly was the geographical location of this position? And who would determine what constitutes an acceptable extent of Eritrean withdrawal? Determining what constitutes satisfactory Eritrean withdrawal was implicitly made an Ethiopian prerogative once the Facilitators eschewed dealing with these details. Eritrea’s preference was for the Ethiopians to publicly declare the extent of their territorial claims by citing geographical coordinates, which could then be verified by making comparisons with the relevant articles of applicable colonial treaties. Not surprisingly, Ethiopia, on 4 June 1998, announced its acceptance of the Facilitators’ proposals. The Eritreans considered such a proposal a non-starter for two reasons. First, it would be contrary to their insistence that no internationally recognized boundary was breached and would thus amount to surrendering one’s territory. Second, acceptance of the principle of withdrawal would serve as a confirmation of Ethiopia’s accusation of Eritrean aggression. The Ethiopian authorities’ prerogative to determine the areas they administered until 6 May 1998 and to restore their administration figured in all later proposals.

The next body that took up the mediation effort was the 34th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 8 to 10 June 1998. The proposal adopted at this Summit also embraced the idea of Eritrean withdrawal from Badme and its environs to position they held prior to 6 May 1998. Coming at a time when deferring to regional organisations influenced its approach to African conflicts, the United Nations also found it politic to endorse the OAU proposals. The US Government which participated in the initial articulation of the proposals not only continued backing them, but also reinforced all subsequent OAU efforts to operationalise them. The EU too gave all out support to the OAU-led mediation effort. Rarely have influence and efforts been orchestrated in such a manner in the search for the resolution of an African conflict.
Two Key Stages in the War

The Ethiopia-Eritrea war surged on two more occasions after the initial exchange of gunfire in early May 1998. The first of these started in early February 1999, intensified towards the end of the month, coming to a halt only after Eritrea lost control of Badme village and its environs on the 27th. The subsequent period of lull lasted until 12 May 2000 when Ethiopia marked the second anniversary of the conflict’s eruption by resuming fighting along the entire frontline. Ethiopia’s success in this round of fighting eclipsed even the one scored in February 1999, with Eritrean defences being breached within days and Ethiopian troops advancing to capture Barentu on the 18th, Zalambessa on the 25th and Sanafe the following day. The hiatus between these rounds was marked with the protagonists switching positions regarding the mediation process spearheaded by the OAU. Eritrea’s refusal to fully embrace the OAU proposals ended when it voiced acceptance immediately after losing Badme. Then Ethiopia took up the previous Eritrean practice of asking endless clarifications, changes and improvements as a precondition for cessation of hostilities. The balance of forces had completely shifted in Ethiopia’s favor by the 29 May 2000 when proximity talks were convened in Algiers. The Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, which the parties signed on 18 June, reflected Ethiopia’s favorable disposition. Further talks continued during the remainder of the year, ending with the signing of a more comprehensive peace agreement on the 12 December 2000.

Agreement of 12 December 2000

The agreement that Ethiopia and Eritrea signed in Algiers on 12 December 2000 provided for the formation of the following three bodies: (a) One un-named body, to be created by the OAU in consultation with the two parties and the UN, was tasked with investigating the origins of the conflict (i.e. the incidents of July and August 1997 and 6 May 1998); (b) A Boundary Commission (later named the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission [EEBC]), constituted of two nominees of each side and a neutral president elected by the four (failing which the UN Secretary General would appoint one), was created to settle the border dispute based on each side’s claims and the relevant treaties; (c) And a similarly constituted Claims Commission was formed to arbitrate the loss, damage or injury by one Government against the other. The 4500-strong UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) was also created by UN Security Council resolution 1320 (2000) to facilitate the implementation of EEBC mandate. The UNMEE’s mandate would start by separating the armies of the belligerents by a 25-kilometre wide temporary security zone (TSZ) and would end with boundary demarcation according to the determinations of the EEBC.

The agreement clearly dispensed with any intimation of evenhandedness when determining how the TSZ should be created. Reflecting Ethiopia’s superior military performance, the agreement stipulated that Ethiopia would withdraw only from Eritrean territories taken after 6 February 1999 (the last round of fighting) to the positions that it unilaterally declares were under its administration prior to 6 May 1998. This confirmed Ethiopia’s original intention of making such a determination its prerogative. The 25-kilometre buffer zone would hence be carved out of areas recognised even by Ethiopia as Eritrean territory. What the two parties expect to achieve during the subsequent process of boundary delimitation and demarcation could be discerned from this disposition.

The expectation of the Ethiopian side would be influenced by two beliefs: all the territory they now hold was theirs prior to 6 May 1998 and it was regained at heavy
sacrifices both in human life and financial costs. As the result, Ethiopia would prefer the boundary falling somewhere north of the positions to which its armies withdrew to create the TSZ. It would perhaps tolerate the boundary coinciding with the lines currently held but would definitely find it unpalatable to cede territory that it regained with heavy sacrifices if the adjudication process so determines.

Eritrea, on the other hand, expects that border demarcation will lead to the Ethiopians vacating some of the positions they are currently holding. If this does not happen, the Eritreans would simply see it as a confirmation of the lessons which their distant and recent experiences teach them. These are: (a) The world accepts facts created on the ground, even when it is done in contravention of international obligations. Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia pursuant to UN Resolution 390 of 1950. However, the UN and other powers remained silent when Ethiopia unilaterally abrogated this resolution a decade later. Eritrean appeals to the UN and the world at large fell on deaf ears. (b) Furthermore, their more recent experience demonstrates the tendency of world powers to pressure the weaker side to make one concession after another. For example, although the Technical Arrangements were initially declared not to be subject to amendments, mediators asked Eritrea to accept innumerable changes demanded by Ethiopia at the time the latter was putting final touches to its last offensive.

EEBC Decision of 13 April 2002

Available information indicates that the EEBC and the Claims Commission continued to work well into 2002. There is no information, however, whether the third body tasked with investigating the so-called pre-1998 incidents has even been created. Similarly, the outcomes of the Claims Commission’s deliberation have not been publicised to date. A new threshold in perhaps permanently resolving the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict was crossed when the EEBC handed down its rulings on boundary delimitation on 13 April 2002. The difficulty of summarising the Commission’s determination in a work of this length appears evident. Regardless a few indicative remarks can be made.

As mentioned in an earlier section, one of the pivotal issues in the border dispute concerned the nature and actual location of the line running from the confluence of the Setit and Maieteb rivers to the junction of the rivers Mareb and Mai Ambessa. The parties’ claims showed the greatest divergence in this sector of the border. According to the Ethiopians, the location of the Setit/Maiteb junction lies only 20 kilometres east of the Khor Um Hagar town close to the Sudan border. The resulting border would follow a straight line running in a northeasterly direction to the Mareb/Mai Ambessa junction. The Eritreans, however, chose Setit’s confluence with another river called Maiten as the start of a straight which roughly runs in a northerly direction to the Mareb/Mai Ambessa junction. The Eritreans, however, chose Setit’s confluence with another river called Maiten as the start of a straight which roughly runs in a northerly direction to the Mareb/Mai Ambessa junction. A distance of some 80 kilometres lies between the location the Ethiopian side named Maiteb and the position the Eritrean side designated as Maiten. In the event, the EEBC rejected both starting points and picked the Tomsa/Setit junction as the starting point of the straight line to the Mareb/Mai Ambessa junction. However, this line is much closer to the Eritrean claim line than to the Ethiopian one. On the other hand, Eritrea appeared to be the party that got less than it claimed in the central portion of the border. In the less controversial eastern portion running through the Afar desert, the EEBC rejected the approach of both sides and adopted its own 60-kilometre-from-coast determination which effectively ran half way between each claim. The EEBC made adjustments to the border delimitation to grant Zalambessa to Ethiopia and to also let Tserona and Fort Cadorna fall inside Eritrea.
What followed the announcement of the EEBC ruling seems to confirm the difficulties inherent in the parties’ expectations we mentioned above. Ethiopia’s Council of Minister’s hastened to issue a statement on the very day the ruling was handed down expressing full acceptance. It catalogued all the locations that were reconfirmed as Ethiopian territory by the ruling including Badme, the flash point of the May 1998 fighting. It described the EEBC decision as a defeat that Eritrea suffered in the legal and peaceful struggle on top of its previous humiliating defeat in the battle front. The Eritrean statement a week later stuck to its terse tradition, and was prompted to ridicule Ethiopia’s declaration of acceptance by calling it ‘superfluous’ as the parties had agreed that the Commission’s ruling should be final and binding.61 The extent to which the Ethiopians could go to gloat was demonstrated by their statement of which stated ‘Ethiopia’s victory both in the military field and before the international court of justice left the regime in Asmara in utter shock, embarrassment and confusion.’62 Meanwhile, doubts were mounting as to who exactly was awarded Badme village, prompting one of the officials of Tigray to ask for clarifications.63 Contrary to the statement of the Ethiopian Council of Ministers of 13 April, it could actually end up in Eritrea according to the interpretation of the EEBC ruling by one expert.64 Ethiopia went on to ask for clarification, etc. Meanwhile, it started seeking ways of complicating the imminent process of demarcation. Some 210 people were moved into the contested area as part of a hastily put together project dubbed ‘voluntary resettlement.65 By 17 July, the EEBC was asking Ethiopia to dismantle the settlement at a place called Dembe Mengul as it lies ‘0.4 km west of the delimitation line’ established by the 13 April ruling.66 Ethiopia was again criticised on 11 November for failing to remove the settlers which constituted non-compliance with its obligations.67 Meanwhile, Eritrea’s relations with its other neighbour, Sudan, were being strained due to incidents of rebel fighting close to the common border. Ethiopia, while publicly hosting Eritrean opposition groups, appeared bent on forging a regional alliance against the Eritrean government. The leaders of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Yemen met in Sana’a at the conclusion of which their preparedness to jointly undermine the Eritrean government was publicised. The process of resolving one conflict seems to rekindle older ones and perhaps to brew new ones as well.

Conclusion

The main aim of this article has been to discuss how the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict defies attempts to fit it into conventional categories. Furthermore, fingerings its most critical cause is uncommonly difficult for it falls into a pattern peculiar to the region. The region’s inter-state and intra-state conflicts connect in a seamless manner and resonate with each other to a degree rarely witnessed elsewhere. In the words of Terrence Lyons, ‘The Horn of Africa region … has been the site of endemic inter-and intrastate conflict for decades.’ Furthermore,

The many conflicts are interlinked in a regional ‘security complex’, a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another.68

These interlinked conflicts could be resolved only by redefining sovereignty, the basis of citizenship and the meaning of borders.69 Other authorities also assert that conventional approaches to sovereignty, territorial integrity, nation, and nation-building need to be re-assessed to address and resolve the Horn’s conflicts.70

The leaders of the two countries, who love invoking the conventional concept of sovereignty ad nauseam, should perhaps start heeding the words of Boutros-Ghali. He
is emphatic that the theory of ‘absolute and exclusive sovereignty’ has never corresponded with reality. He thus admonishes state leaders ‘to understand this and to find a balance between the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an ever more interdependent world.’ He also advises that the self-determination of peoples and other important precepts such as sovereignty and territorial integrity should cease to be seen as standing in opposition. Heeding these admonitions appears imperative in the Horn in particular due to one fact.

The Horn of Africa, as the site where the processes of fusion and fission remain active, faces pressures for integration as well as disintegration. Reconciling these tendencies seems to require striking a balance between juridical state independence and the reality of the concerned peoples’ interdependence culturally, economically and environmentally. An imaginative re-articulation of relations between communities and their common states, and among states re-configured along similar lines, seems to be the only way to reconcile these tendencies. Negotiating such balance has important implications for how we approach and handle such concepts as (a) sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly borders, (b) independence/self-determination, and (c) nation-building. Jettisoning the urge to concentrate the exercise of sovereignty in a single institution or person and replacing it with the real need of sharing it vertically and horizontally seems to be in order. Thus portions of it need to be transferred to substate entities to empower grassroots communities, while other portions need to be shared at supra-state level to legitimate subregional, continental and global bodies.

Self-determination, which continues to be a live agenda in the entire Horn of Africa, also needs to be re-conceptualised as a principle that serves the purposes of simultaneous decentralisation and regionalisation. In a region marked with high degree of pastoral life style, borders should be de-emphasised and not perceived as Chinese walls. The notion of nation-building and the accompanying agenda of cultural homogenisation also need to be jettisoned.

The sordidness of the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict has unexpectedly exposed a silver lining . This war has made demands for democratic accountability and transparency as ubiquitous as accusations of dictatorial behaviour. The concerned state leaders routinely accuse each other as dictators and posit transparency and accountability as a precondition for normalisation of relations. Their respective oppositions have, of course, all along been leveling similar accusations against them while identifying the same pre-conditions for internal peace and stability. Now even former members of the groups ruling the two countries have joined this chorus. Accountability, transparency, and democracy gush from the lips of diverse groups pursuing divergent aims. All those in power, and others when they capture it, need to heed Rosa Luxemburg’s following words:

_Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently._

Everybody should perhaps heed also Demosthenes’s following advice to Athens of antiquity:

_There will be justice in Athens when those who are not injured are as outraged as those who are._

Speaking out only after one’s interests are affected may be futile as the recent experiences in Eritrea and Ethiopia have reconfirmed.
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Endnotes


2. Richard Trivelli, ‘Background notes on the Ethiopian-Eritrean war’ (all citations in this work are from personal communication later published in Afrika Spektrum, Fall Edition (1999)), p. 1.


4. From a mimeographed monitoring of TPLF radio broadcasts made available by the Eritrean Government.


7. Trivelli, p. 3.

8. Ibid. p. 9.

9. Ibid.


11. He mentions: (1) The Orthodox Church’s 1,600 year-old unity was ruptured; (2) The traditional Gregorian calendar was replaced with the Julian version although ordinary Kebeisa Eritreans still relate only to the former. (Ibid. p. 227).

12. Ibid. p. 204.


16. Ibid. p. 28.


21. John Young, The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: a History of Tensions and Pragmatism. The Journal of Modern African Studies 34, 1 (1996). He lists them as: (a) EPLF persistence in viewing the TPLF as a junior partner, (b) divergence of military strategy, (c) the existence of more internal democracy in the TPLF, (d) EPLF refusal to join the TPLF in denouncing the Soviets as social-imperialists, etc.

22. Ibid. p. 120.
24. Ibid. p. 9.
26. Ibid. p.11.
28. Ibid.
32. Trivelli, p. 22.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid. p. 10.
45. Ibid. p. 1.
46. Ibid. p. 2.
47. Ibid. p. 10.
50. Trivelli, p. 16.
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52. Trivelli, p. 17.


62. IRIN, 25 April 2002, ‘Asmara rejects ‘shock and confusion’ accusation’ (IRIN is the Nairobi-based Integrated Regional Information Network of the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)).


64. IRIN, 17 April 2002, ‘Interview with boundary expert Martin Pratt on border ruling’.

65. IRIN, 11 June 2002, ‘“Voluntary resettlement” in Badme’.


67. IRIN, 11 Nov 2002, ‘Ethiopia told to comply with border decision’.


69. Ibid. p. 95/96.


TPLF: Reform or Decline?

Medhane Tadesse & John Young

Founded and led by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, after a sixteen-year armed struggle against the military regime that had ruled Ethiopia since 1974. While not formally a marxist-leninist party, the TPLF nonetheless was devoted to these ideals and they figured prominently in the structure and functioning of the organisation. While the TPLF’s base represented the peasantry of Tigray, its leadership was dominated by young, radical intellectuals. Itself representing an ethnic group of relatively modest size, the TPLF formed a coalition of ethnically based organisations, the EPRDF, in 1989, to give itself Ethiopia-wide political scope and legitimacy. Once it came to power, the Front faced serious problems of adjustment, but managed to overcome them thanks to the coherence of its programme, the commitment of its cadres, and the cohesiveness of its leadership. In the face of dramatically changed international circumstances, the EPRDF moderated its policies, abandoning marxism and embracing the free market. It weathered an insurrection by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 1992-93, contained Islamist incursions from Sudan and Somalia, won the war against Eritrea (1998-2000), achieved a measure of economic progress, and took large steps towards state decentralisation and smaller ones towards democratisation.

Consequently, it was a shock when the TPLF Central Committee split in acrimony in March 2001. In the following months, many senior members of the Front’s leadership were purged, some were jailed, and the organisation went through convulsions that spread to other components of the EPRDF and the army. Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister, chairman of both the TPLF and EPRDF, emerged dominant and initiated what was described as a wide-ranging process of internal reform in the EPRDF. It is important to know what this crisis reveals about the nature of the TPLF specifically and Ethiopian political culture in general. It should be noted that, as is the case with other political movements in Africa, the EPRDF has effectively merged with the state, therefore, the crisis of the Front is in effect a crisis of the Ethiopian state.

Ultimately the authors conclude that while there were differences over policy and ideology among the leadership, of equal significance was a contest over power. This involved struggles over power between Meles and a dozen of his colleagues, between elements broadly associated with state organs and those associated with the party apparatus, and between Tigray-based TPLF officials and those around the prime minister. Ideological concerns and struggles for power merged in ways that can still not be completely understood, but it can be said with confidence that the result is a shift in power from Tigray to the central government in Addis Ababa, from the instruments of the party to the state, and from a group among the TPLF Central Committee to Meles Zenawi.
Unfolding Crisis

The seeds of the crisis in the TPLF were sown during the war with Eritrea. Relations between the Tigrayan and Eritrean comrades-in-arms during the mortal struggle against the military regime in Addis Ababa had their ups and downs (Young, 1996; Medhane, 1999). However, there were no evident differences within the Front’s leadership on that score until war broke out with Eritrea in 1998. Disputes then broke out over the conduct of the war, between those who advocated an all out effort against the regime in Eritrea and others, led by Meles, who were sensitive to pressure from abroad to limit the scope of the conflict and bring it to an early end. It is likely that such differences overlapped with personal considerations and hardened into factions. Critical in this early period were disagreements over recommendations made by the OAU on the Technical Arrangements to end the war. After a heated debate the Central Committee (CC) voted (17 to 13) to reject what the majority regarded as overly conciliatory proposals. Significantly, Meles was in the minority.

This was the first concrete expression of division within the leadership, and made clear the gap that had opened between Meles and senior colleagues in the Central Committee. Many observers now believe that bitterness over this issue was the catalyst of the crisis. Had the war not occurred then, the existing differences could have been ironed out and the party could have been spared the grief it was to endure.

A victorious Ethiopian offensive brought the fighting to an end in the spring of 2000, and launched a tortuous process of peacemaking that has still to be definitively concluded. The time had come to assess the regime’s performance after a decade in power, and to prepare the agenda for conventions that were to be held by both the TPLF and EPRDF. It was customary for the TPLF to hold far reaching, critical evaluations periodically. The Central Committee decided to carry out a multi-dimensional evaluation of the Front’s past performance, and to assess the dangers confronting the revolution (Renewal, Special Issue, No. 1).

In the summer of 2000, Meles presented a paper on ‘Bonapartism’ to the Central Committee, which charged that the TPLF’s leadership was decaying and becoming distant from its constituency. Four Politburo members prepared their own presentations which expressed concern about the influence of foreign powers in Ethiopia, proposed to assess the merits of class reconciliation versus class struggle, and to define what ought to be the nature of the proletarian party in Ethiopia.

Against this background, the Amhara branch of the EPRDF, the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), asked to participate in the proceedings because the TPLF was debating issues of national interest. Four Politburo members prepared their own presentations which expressed concern about the influence of foreign powers in Ethiopia, proposed to assess the merits of class reconciliation versus class struggle, and to define what ought to be the nature of the proletarian party in Ethiopia.

The TPLF CC met in January 2001 and went on to debate ‘Bonapartism’ for a whole month. Bizarre though this debate was, CC members realised the outcome would have a critical impact upon the TPLF. Tewolde Wolde Mariam, a leading dissident, was heard to say at the time that the Front would suffer whatever the outcome of the leadership wrangle; and that proved to be the case. Meanwhile, Meles’ allies in the
ANDM quickly endorsed his ‘Bonapartist’ thesis within their own organisation. At the end of February, it was approved also by the TPLF CC with a small margin of 15 in favour to 13 against.

The minority then walked out of the Central Committee and demanded the calling of a national convention to resolve the dispute, as provided by the TPLF constitution, and the establishment of a committee to investigate allegations of corruption in the TPLF leadership. It was a grave tactical error. By walking out of the Central Committee the dissidents violated the principle of democratic centralism and collective leadership, thus giving Meles a major tactical advantage. He moved quickly to suspend twelve of the dissidents for violating party rules, and dismissed them from their party posts. They, in turn, issued a statement claiming the crisis had its origin in disagreements over the conduct of the Ethio-Eritrean war (The Reporter, 26 March 2000).

Meles immediately called a conference of TPLF cadres in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, where he appealed to ethnic solidarity, intimating the survival of the Front and the future of Tigray were at stake. Once more the dissidents walked out of the meeting, and Meles again carried the vote. The dissidents appealed to the TPLF Audit Committee, which ruled on 11 March that their suspension was a violation of party rules. Meles overruled the Audit Committee and suspended several of its members from the Front. He claimed party rules apply only during normal times, and these were not normal times. The dissidents were next dismissed from the posts they held in the federal and state governments and from the national and regional assemblies to which they had been elected. Several of them were accused of corruption and imprisoned.

While Meles worked to consolidate support within the TPLF, the only party in the country with genuine grassroots organisation and strength, his opponents appealed to the leadership of the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Front (SEPDF), weak and subservient components of the EPRDF. Meles’ victory in the TPLF cadre conference had demonstrated that he held control of the EPRDF apparatus and, with the support of the ANDM already in hand, the OPDO and SEPDF were soon brought into line. But not without misgivings and hesitation that were to lead to widespread purging of their ranks soon afterwards. When the ANDM called a meeting of the EPRDF Politburo hoping to demonstrate solidarity with the Meles group, the OPDO leadership did not attend. Instead, it pressed for the reinstatement of four dissidents who had been dismissed from the TPLF Politburo. Massive purging decimated the cadre ranks of the EPRDF branches subsequently, with the exception of the ANDM. In the midst of this cleansing campaign, Kinfe Gebre Medhin, Chief of Security and Meles’ trusted aide, was murdered by a fellow TPLF officer, under circumstances yet to be fully clarified. This heightened the atmosphere of uncertainty and crisis in the ruling Front and the country.

Renewal

The purges were part of a process called Tehadso (‘renewal’). In theory, the task was to carry out the delayed ten-year assessment of the EPRDF and draw the necessary lessons. In practice, it became a massive purge designed to root out allies and sympathizers of the TPLF dissidents and others labelled as politically degenerate and corrupt elements. Narrow (ethnic) nationalism, was a target in the OPDO and the SEPDF, that is, the non-Abyssinian branches.
The ‘renewal’ spread from the EPRDF to the army in May. The expulsions included the respected Chief of Defence Staff, Lt.-General Tsadkan Gebre Tinsae, and other senior officers, presumably because they had failed to openly support Meles. There is no indication of a plot by the dissidents or elements in the army to remove Meles illegally, nor is there any evidence of a consensus to force him out of office legally. Clearly some wanted Meles to engage in self-criticism for what they considered his mistakes during the Ethio-Eritrean war, and to oblige him to return to the collegial form of leadership that was TPLF tradition.

The next step in the ‘renewal’ process was to hold cadre meetings, followed by congresses of the TPLF, ANDM, OPDO and SEPD, in July-August 2001. Orchestrated by the Meles group in close coordination with the ANDM leadership, the congresses (now purged of dissidents) unanimously approved motions condemning the dissidents for factionalism, violation of democratic centralism, threats to the existence of the EPRDF, anti-democratic behaviour, etc. Furthermore, the congresses endorsed new economic and political strategies that Meles formulated in many tracts he produced during this period. Although the dissidents contend that Meles had rejected revolutionary democracy, he did not openly deviate from what is basic dogma in both the TPLF and EPRDF. Meles continued to endorse revolutionary democracy, a political system he holds is different from liberal democracy, because it protects individual as well as group rights.

Nonetheless, these meetings served to shift the ruling party away from its long-standing radicalism in at least two critical areas. First, it was resolved that the EPRDF, in origin a coalition of peasants, workers and revolutionary intellectuals, would now open its ranks to the national bourgeoisie. Second, it was decided that the country would be integrated into the global economy (Renewal, November 2001). In a related move, the EPRDF endorsed a clear statement in favour of capitalism, thereby resolving abiding tension and confusion within the movement. Thus it would appear that while the TPLF crisis did not begin with serious ideological concerns, it did produce a significant shift in the ideological orientation of the party. The leadership claimed – with some justification – that it had brought clarity and unity of purpose to the EPRDF. Until this time, it was said, politics dictated everything. Afterwards everything would be dictated by the economy, or at least argued from that premise.

It is clear that the dissidents would not have swallowed such notions, and it is unlikely the majority of EPRDF delegates would have endorsed them, were the dissidents in attendance at these meetings. Approval was possible because Meles had assumed a dominant position in the leadership of the EPRDF, and the cadres had nowhere to turn. The dissidents maintain that Meles’s extensive international contacts led him to turn against his commitment to revolutionary ideals, and all that followed was a result of his masterful attempt to turn the TPLF against itself. Be that as it may, it is clear that the result of the ‘renewal’ process was to affirm the leadership of Meles and to marginalise his opponents.

But there are limits to how far the EPRDF can move away from its marxist-leninist origins. On one hand it has accepted the presence of a national bourgeoisie, on the other it has made clear its continuing support for the development of an autonomous national economy in which the state retains a major role. Moreover, in such key areas as national self-determination, land tenure, federalism, the vanguard status of the TPLF and EPRDF, support for the peasants, and lukewarm attitude to pluralism and civil society, the ruling party has not shifted position. Two years after the crisis there

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is little evidence in terms of policies and programmes to suggest anything more than marginal changes. The highly publicised post-crisis decentralisation programme to empower district level administration, the civil service reform, and the fight on corruption, which currently figure prominently in the government’s agenda, were not areas of contention with the TPLF dissidents.

**A Peasant-based Revolutionary Party**

While political and ideological differences go some distance in providing an understanding of the nature, course, and outcome of the TPLF crisis, other explanations must also be considered.

Studies of successful peasant-based revolutions show that they take place only when a discontented, urban-based petty bourgeoisie make common cause with a discontented peasantry, as was the case in Tigray (Young, 1997). These same studies conclude that upon achieving success, the leaders take up residence in the city – the focus of power – and become increasingly distant from their peasant base, eventually transforming themselves into a middle class with its own particular interests.

The skills acquired during armed struggles are not the same as those needed to administer a state, and many revolutionary parties have failed, or experienced major problems, in making this adjustment. Upon assuming state power, revolutionaries must take up new responsibilities and attempt to develop broader constituencies. They must also participate in an international system, which invariably involves further compromises and adjustments. The selfless life of the revolutionary in the countryside is exchanged for the self-centred life style in the city and involves integration into a wider urban society. Guerilla armies with a high degree of democracy and informality are transformed into conventional armies based on rank and privilege, thus further undermining the revolutionary ethos.

Many of these findings apply to the TPLF. The move of many TPLF leaders, who had lived with the peasants and shared their deprivations in the Tigrayan countryside, to Addis Ababa, exposed them to an alien material world divorced from the realities of peasant existence. Inevitably, some cadres were corrupted, yet many remained dedicated to the cause. In order to take effective control of the state apparatus, the Front had to appoint many of its cadres to positions of power and responsibility for which they were ill prepared. Power attracted careerists to join the ruling party. Attitudes to women, comradeship, communal living, religion, and the value of a simple lifestyle were increasingly challenged. The task of the TPLF army changed from attacking the state to defending it. Finally, a Tigrayan-dominated army had to be transformed into a national institution with fair participation of other ethnic groups.

The inevitable undermining of revolutionary values weakened the collective ethos of the TPLF, strained relations among its leaders, encouraged careerism and opportunism. Defending particular interests became a primary objective, and the party as an entity suffered. In the absence of democratic means to resolve the crisis, cadres were left with the stark choice either of supporting Meles or being purged. Assessment of the issues themselves sometimes became secondary to concerns of personal political survival. Changes in the political culture of the TPLF permitted a level of callousness and a disregard of organisational procedures that would not have been possible in the past.
Revolutionaries or Pragmatists?

Given weak states, uneven development, and incomplete integration, revolts in the African countryside are not uncommon. But the TPLF-led revolt was nonetheless unusual. Its leaders acquired their revolutionary ideals and understanding of marxism-leninism in the student movement during the fading days of the imperial regime. While imbued with the thinking of this movement, the future TPLF leaders rejected the prevalent notion of a proletarian revolution and a country wide struggle, in favour of a peasant revolution imbued with provincial Tigrayan nationalism (Young, 1997:92-118). Launched in February 1975, the largely student-led TPLF developed its ideology and programme in the most conservative province of Ethiopia, where the quasi-feudal ideals of the Orthodox Church and the imperial regime still had a strong hold on the people. The TPLF leadership made it clear in its thinking and practice that the struggle was as much against these local traditions and values as against the military regime in Addis Ababa.

The TPLF sought to counter the prevailing attitudes of secrecy and suspicion with a commitment to transparency best exemplified by the notion of gim gema. Roughly translated as ‘evaluation’, gim gema was designed to critically assess every aspect of the Front’s programme, the quality of its leadership, and the personal conduct of all its members; publicly at great length (Young, 1997b:95). This populist democratic practice became a cornerstone of the TPLF’s concept of governance, and it was introduced to all branches of the EPRDF and, after victory in 1991, into the various institutions of the state. Leaders of the TPLF invariably believed that gim gema was required to ensure that the movement maintained its revolutionary ideals and would not succumb to the temptations of state power. Typically, gim gema took one of two forms. A ‘hard’ version applied to TPLF cadres and made them accountable for both their performance and their personal behaviour. A ‘soft’ version applied to officials in institutions of government and focused largely on performance.

The TPLF never had the power to fully introduce gim gema into the federal government and a civil service which continues to be assessed by its own rules. It never solved the problem of giving gim gema a legal basis and refining it in light of the new conditions of administering a state. Gim gema should have served to ensure the ideological unity of the TPLF, and not become a means to punish individuals, as was often the case, because the process was too subjective. As one senior cadre noted, during the armed struggle party members were receptive to gim gema and personal criticism because they had little to lose materially, but after victory careers and social standing could be threatened. These inadequacies would come to the fore during the Front’s crisis.

Concerns with security in the context of a revolutionary struggle necessarily placed limitations on openness and debate and fostered secrecy, all of which were contrary to the kind of democratic culture the TPLF espoused. In addition, a small minority of TPLF leaders had a virtual monopoly of theoretical knowledge, and although informed about ideological and political perspectives, the rank and file was never equipped to engage their leaders in debate. In any case, the imperative need for unity discouraged dissent, thus undermining democratic values. These traditions remained strong in the TPLF and were evident in the crisis under discussion.

Revolutionary zeal proved inadequate in other areas too. Very early, the TPLF recognized the systemic discrimination of women in Ethiopian society, and a highly enlightened environment was created within the organisation. By the mid-1980s, probably more than one-third of its fighters were women, often escaping the
repression of their homes (Young, 1997:178-181). However, resistance by the patriarchal Tigrayan society represented by Church and Mosque led the leadership to weaken its commitment to women, even if the principle of gender emancipation was not renounced. A similar pattern can be discerned with respect to the reactionary forms organised religion takes in Tigray. The TPLF never challenged the basic tenets of Orthodox Christianity, and developed close working relations with many parish priests. As a result, productivity continues to suffer from prohibitions against working on Sundays and the innumerable saints’ days and the Church’s opposition to ploughing by women.

The Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), founded in the mid-1980s, to which all senior TPLF leaders belonged, and which was regarded as the vanguard organisation within the Front, was quietly dispensed with when the EPRDF acquired state power in 1991. In retrospect, a debate over the role of the national bourgeoisie that pitted chief ideologue Gidey Ziratsion against Meles Zenawai in the mid-1980s, and to some extent represented a struggle between reformist and revolutionary perspectives, was a harbinger of the struggle that is the subject of this analysis. In both instances reformist and pragmatic positions and their exponents won out. An element of ideological watering down may also have been necessary to take on board the various components of the EPRDF, which did not have the commitment to revolutionary change characteristic of the TPLF.

The TPLF was committed to collective leadership and strongly opposed any kind of personality cult; often there was confusion about who the chairman of the party actually was. Gradually two individuals, Tewolde W. Mariam, who was appreciated for his organisational skills and sober thinking, and Meles Zenawi, who was known for his quick intelligence and communication skills, assumed leading positions as an informal team that was to function remarkably well until the mid-1990s. One cadre has described this relationship as ‘the soul of the TPLF’. A crucial step was the decision to vest the leadership of the party and government to the same person – Meles. Apparently the TPLF leaders thought that *gim gema* and other informal means could ensure accountability, but giving such power to one individual does not seem consistent with notions of collective leadership. As one senior dissident cadre later ruefully said: ‘We thought he could be handled.’

Thus, the TPLF made compromises at every step, no doubt necessary to achieve its ultimate objective of gaining power but, at the same time, weakening its struggle against the feudal values and institutions that dominated, and still dominate, Ethiopian society. By turning away from the commitment to a full-scale transformation of the Ethiopian state and society, and by reducing its enthusiasm for *gim gema* and collective leadership, it sowed the seeds for the crisis of 2001.

**Tensions Between Party & State**

When the TPLF took over the administration of Tigray province in 1989 while the armed struggle continued, it faced no major problems or tension in the relations between party and local administration since, in fact, no distinction was made between them; the party itself ran the administration. This was not possible to do when the TPLF took over the state and reorganised it in the form of a decentralised federal system based on self-governing ethnic regions. TPLF cadres were dispersed through the federal and regional administrations, the military and security apparatus to ensure party dominance. The EPRDF had to establish regional governments where none had previously existed. In fact, it failed to create autonomous governance...
institutions with legal foundations. The party was clearly dominant, but faced problems with state functionaries who were not its members and elected officials who were not reliable. While the party operated on a level above the state, there was so much overlapping membership in the upper levels that most Ethiopians had difficulty distinguishing between the two. The Prime Minister was answerable to the party and not the parliament, an institution also controlled by the EPRDF.

In the face of limited development in the mid-1990s, the people of Tigray demanded greater engagement by the TPLF, a view endorsed by many senior party leaders. These same leaders also wanted Tigray and the TPLF to remain the focal point of decision-making in Ethiopia (Young, 1997b). Several senior party officials were reassigned to Tigray to take charge of a TPLF development offshoot named EFFORT. Prime Minister Meles, on the other hand, reigned supreme at the centre of the state, and acquired a high profile and support in the international arena; in both areas he acted with increasing independence from party control, relying mainly on a group of advisers of his own choosing.

The Ethio-Eritrean war was the catalyst that produced a challenge to Mele’s quasi monopoly of decision making. It appears that a majority in the TPLF wanted an aggressive military strategy to demolish the Eritrean war machine, to assert Ethiopia’s hegemonic role in the Horn, and to demonstrate that it would not be a pawn of the West in the region. This position also had significant support in the EPRDF. TPLF Politburo member Tewolde Wolde Mariam was leader of this hardliner faction, and it was he, not Meles, who was the most powerful person in the country during the war years, a situation that the latter has acknowledged. The conduct of the war was decided by the Central Command, of which Meles was a member and played an important, but not dominant, role. Meles represented a moderate approach, mindful of the economic and diplomatic damage the war was doing to the country. His opponents accused him of giving in to Western pressure and gambling with Ethiopia’s sovereignty.

These differences also overlapped and were exacerbated by personal ambition and animosities, all of which were to come to a head with the end of the war. Meles’ alliance with the ANDM, the formulation of the Bonapartist thesis, and the administrative measures enacted subsequently were all designed to reclaim power and influence that he had lost during the war. Thus the failure of the TPLF to clarify the relations between the party and the state after 1991 contributed to the rift among the leadership.

**Meles in the Leadership Nexus**

From the beginning of the armed struggle Meles was well positioned to advance in the leadership of the TPLF. First, until 1979 Meles was the head of the cadre school and served as an instructor. He also served as deputy in the Political Department to leading ideologue Abai Tsaheyeye, with the rank of associate Central Committee member, and in 1979 he became a full member of the Central Committee (Zeratsion, 2000). These two positions gave him a very influential role in developing the ideological orientation of the TPLF. Second, these roles also gave him a close relationship with, and understanding of, the cadres that was to prove beneficial in the future. Third, from this involvement he was well placed to respond quickly to crises with ideological explanations and perspectives. Meles’ work on political and ideological perspectives to the exclusion of military or other responsibilities
permitted him to acquire considerable knowledge, as well as the opportunity to train and organise cadres and disseminate his views. However, at all times Meles’ contributions took place within the context of the leadership.

The responsibilities he was increasingly assigned were also indicative of the respect with which he was held in the TPLF. Meles utilised these advantages to play a formative role in the creation of the MLLT in 1984-85 to develop the ideology of the TPLF, shift the orientation from Tigray to Ethiopia, and carry out the necessary research to better pursue the objectives of the movement, particularly in the military sphere. In retrospect, however, it can be seen that the MLLT also served as a vehicle for Meles to pursue his leadership aspirations. Thus, he pressed for the dominance of the Political Department, which was closely linked to the MLLT (Tesfay Atsibe and Kahasay Berhe, 2001). The Political Department in turn increasingly gained dominance over the foreign mission (of Seyoum Mesfin, currently Ethiopia’s foreign minister), the military committee (of Azegawie Berhe, the TPLF’s first leader), and Meles’ major political challenger, Gidey Zeratsion (then deputy leader of the TPLF). It was also against this background that he began to develop a close cooperative relationship with Tewolde, whose own considerable assets served to advance both the party and the more politically ambitious Meles.

A pattern thus emerges that can be seen in the current crisis. First, crises within the TPLF invariably break out in the leadership and have little impact on the base. Second, personal differences figure prominently along with ideological differences. Third, having claimed that the existence of the Front is at stake, Meles provides ideological perspectives to save the organisation. For example, in 1984-85 Meles put forward his thesis that the Front faced major dangers because of empiricism (the notion that the Front lacked scientific theories) and its acceptance of pragmatism (by which he meant opportunism). In the crisis under consideration he proposed the thesis of Bonapartism, according to which the TPLF had become independent of its peasant base. During the mid-1980s this approach led to the marginalisation of Gidey and Aregowie, and in 2001 it led to the dismissal of the present TPLF dissidents. Having achieved his objectives in both cases, these theses were quietly and quickly dropped. Fourth, in each inter-party crisis Meles assumed a leading role providing solutions, which at the same time enhanced his power in the organisation. Fifth, struggles over power invariably involved marriage alliances and family associations, which have a long history in feudal Tigray. The successive victories of Meles and his prominent role in all of the conflicts gained him enormous confidence and indeed his enemies affirm his intellectual and ideological superiority over ‘other’ members of the leadership.

But increasingly this superiority served to undermine the TPLF’s commitment to collective leadership at the expense of enhancing the role of Meles. Indeed, a critical component of the present crisis was the effort by those now identified as dissidents to maintain a system of accountability of Meles based on collective leadership. From this perspective three periods can broadly be identified: the first up until 1984 and the formation of the MLLT when the collective leadership was fully operational and there was a level of intellectual equality between the leaders; the second period which corresponded with Meles’ growing consolidation of power in the TPLF and continued until the outset of the current crisis (with the exception of the period of the Ethio-Eritrean war), and the third period currently in which Meles assumed a position of unchallenged supremacy.
Problems of Legitimacy

Although the TPLF established the EPRDF in order to gain a national base and legitimacy in Ethiopia, it never lost its minority identification, and this has always been a source of insecurity. The EPRDF parties and others designated as ‘allies’ – from Benishangul, Gambella, Afar and Somali regions – effectively watered-down the revolutionary content of the TPLF, and their weak performance in turn exacerbated the problem of legitimacy. Nowhere is this problem greater than in Oromia region. While the rebel Oromo Liberation Front has not posed a serious security problem since its aborted insurrection in 1992-93, it continues to challenge the regime politically, and the EPRDF does not appear to have a policy to confront the problem, or even the inclination to take it up seriously. The political and administrative weaknesses of many of these parties and the regional governments they control forced the TPLF to become more involved in their affairs than was politically desirable, thus furthering the widespread view that Tigrayans dominate every facet of government throughout the country, belying their own commitment to ethnic federalism.

The kinship between Tigrayans and Eritreans further encouraged disdain of the TPLF, which was held to have facilitated the establishment of an independent Eritrean state. Indeed, the commonly held view of the Ethiopian intelligentsia before the Ethio-Eritrean War, was that the TPLF was under the control of the EPLF (Medhane, 1999). The fact that some of the TPLF leaders, including Meles, do indeed have family ties to Eritrea, and that Eritreans did appear to have a privileged position in Ethiopia in the early years of EPRDF rule, further strengthened a virulent assault on the Front. Constantly accused of lacking a patriotic commitment to Ethiopia, the TPLF leadership sometimes found it necessary to take extreme actions to prove the contrary, such as the expulsion of Ethiopians of Eritrean ancestry during the war.

In addition, the rejectionist attitude of many Ethiopians means that many accomplishments of the TPLF are underestimated or not acknowledged. These views are reinforced by unrelenting propaganda from the Ethiopian diaspora abroad, whose majority is strongly opposed to the TPLF. Against this background it is difficult to see what the TPLF can do to achieve legitimacy in Ethiopia. A convincing victory in the Ethio-Eritrean War offered great possibilities for gaining legitimacy since the conflict had Ethiopia-wide support and should have made it clear that the TPLF is not beholden to the EPLF. But the untimely outbreak of the TPLF crisis had the effect of squandering this opportunity for political advance.

Culture in Ethiopian Politics

Culture did not determine the course and outcome of the TPLF crisis, but the pursuits of the key actors, their personal relations and values were framed by the Abyssinian, and in particular Tigrayan, culture of which they were products. Few analysts of Abyssinian society have not been struck by the distrust, suspicion and secrecy of its people and this figured highly in the crisis under examination. Molvaer in particular has emphasised these values in his study of social control in Ethiopia (Molvaer, 1994). Levine and others attribute this to the *rist* tenure system of the Abyssinians, where rights to land could be challenged by even close members of the family, thus making them objects of suspicion (Levine, 1967). Moreover, Abyssinian society historically was deeply divided by gender, region, class, allegiance to feudal nobles, and this segmentation even divided families. The land tenure system was destroyed by the revolution of 1974, but the limited degree of modernisation, low levels of urbanisation, and Ethiopia’s traditional isolation, mean that the values that were a
product of feudal society still have resonance in the society. Tigrayan political history in particular is dominated by local based conflict, civil war, divisions, betrayals and shifting alliances, which weakened the region within the Abyssinian power nexus and almost certainly was a major factor in Tigray’s marginalisation for almost one thousand years.

That such a culture could produce a highly disciplined, organised, and united movement like the TPLF is remarkable. But the crisis that broke out in the Front in 2001 makes clear that the leadership did not escape its past, notwithstanding gim gema and party values which stressed open debate and transparency. And perhaps this is not surprising when it is appreciated that senior members of the leadership, such as Azegawie Berhe, Sebhat Nega, Meles Zenawi, and Tewolde W/Mariam, were drawn from families of the lower nobility that were deeply imbued with the values of the traditional order. TPLF handling of inter-elite conflicts, including the one under examination where comrades were personally denigrated, humiliated, and punished is consistent with a pattern reaching deep into Tigrayan feudal history.

Implications

The crisis of 2001 is a watershed in the history of the TPLF; it changed the nature of the Front. Its members are becoming increasingly passive, no longer certain of their commitment, and it is doubtful whether they would be willing to endure the kind of sacrifices they willingly endured in the past to advance the interests of the party. The TPLF has lost leaders in the party and army of great integrity and experience, to the detriment of the organisation’s intellectual and organisational capacity. The working relationship between Meles and Tewolde, which many cadres today say was pivotal to the success of the TPLF, has been severed, almost certainly to the detriment of the TPLF in general and Meles in particular. Tigray is no longer politically united, and there has been a clear decline in support from the region, which was the backbone of the TPLF since 1975.

The crisis undermined the position of the TPLF within the EPRDF, and among the Ethiopian public there is growing awareness of the regime’s weakness. The fact that an objective in-depth assessment of the TPLF’s performance was not carried out because of the crisis, weakened the Front’s capacity to identify and correct its flaws, undermined a tradition of effective self-criticism, and bodes ill for the prospects of future assessments. The anti-corruption campaign in turn suffered from the widespread view that it is largely a vehicle to incriminate political opponents, further undermining the credibility of the regime. The dispute concerning strategy in the war against Eritrea served to raise questions about the integrity of the group led by Meles. Meles’ leaning for support on the ANDM gave that organisation greater leverage in the EPRDF. To the extent that this and other components of the EPRDF are enabled to play a greater role in this organisation it is to be welcomed, but to date they have not developed the requisite organisational and political capacity for a leading role.

A further set of implications relates to the reorganisation of the state, specifically the streamlining of federal ministries and procedures to facilitate development, decentralisation to districts, and reduce the role of TPLF cadres in the regions. In the aftermath of the crisis the party and state have largely united under a single leadership. Tigray is no longer the political and economic centre or model. Divisions within the leadership have fostered greater internal insecurity in the country, and this has been exacerbated by purges in the army and changes in the security services. The crisis has furthered Meles’ move to assume the role of an Ethiopian leader, rather than
a Tigrayan leader. This could be a healthy development, but it is limited by the fact that to date he still lacks legitimacy in most of the country. Nationalist sentiments of a pan-Ethiopia character are being given greater credibility and this again raises the spectre of Amhara chauvinism. And with the strengthening of the central government and the adopting of identical plans of governance by all the regions, questions are being raised about the meaning of ethnic-based federalism.

Meles’ leadership has been strongly endorsed in the West because he is seen as a moderate moderniser, open to rational argument, while his opponents are widely depicted as dogmatic hard-liners. The regime’s standing with the international financial institutions and the great power is high. There is every expectation that Ethiopia’s economy will continue to integrate in the global market. Banking, communications, and other restricted sectors will be opened to foreign capital.

Conclusions
The experience of the TPLF is broadly in line with that of other revolutionary movements with respect to the problems involved in the transition from a guerilla movement to a governing party, adjusting to party-state tensions, the decline in revolutionary zeal, adapting to the international state system, and the outbreak of divisions within the leadership, particularly over pursuing reformist versus revolutionary policies. However, the Front has not fully dispensed with the principles and values that have guided it since 1975. For example, the TPLF still endorses self-determination and devolution of powers to the districts, democratic centralism, rural land nationalisation, building a strong national economy, commitment to long-term planning, continuing use of marxist discourse and analysis, and a principle based foreign policy. Perhaps most significant is the commitment of the TPLF and EPRDF to the empowerment of the peasantry. Unlike virtually all other ruling parties in Africa, the EPRDF is not beholden to urban or financial interests and continues to be very protective of Ethiopia’s sovereignty. The willingness of the TPLF leadership to engage in a critical and far-reaching assessment of their performance of ten years in government speaks to their integrity and courage. However, their failure to effectively carry out that assessment, map out a way forward, and at the same time maintain the unity of the party and the EPRDF, makes clear their limitations as leaders.

Crucially the commitment to ethnic based federalism is increasingly in doubt. Even before the TPLF crisis, the Front appeared to be moving toward a more pan-Ethiopia vision, and this was strengthened by the war with Eritrea in which the banner of nationwide nationalism was raised. Meles’ weakness in Tigray and his alliance with the ANDM have furthered this change in direction. While giving support to a broader Ethiopian vision might seem admirable, it can only be pursued at the expense of ignoring the continuing reality of Amhara chauvinism, which not only places limits to the achievement of an Ethiopia that provides equity for all its ethnic groups, but also encourages an imperial vision when looking beyond the country.

The TPLF’s program of revolutionary change was repeatedly compromised during the years of armed struggle. These compromises were no doubt necessary to achieve a high degree of acceptance and commitment to the cause among Tigrayans, but they were achieved at the cost of undermining the transformative project. And by so doing they facilitated the weakening of the commitment to changing the position of women in Ethiopian society, altering the role of religion, dispensing with the MLLT, which had been established to serve as the vanguard in the revolution, and even
undermining collective leadership, an issue at the core of the present crisis. The outcome of party-state tensions has been resolved by effectively fusing the two focal points of power – the state and party. As a result of the defeat of the dissidents, the state is now unquestionably the dominant organ of governance in Ethiopia and the party is assuming the role of servant to the state. The same pattern can be seen in the regions. This should mean the growing importance of governance structures, including the parliament and national and regional assemblies, although to date the evidence is limited.

In examining the role of Meles it can be seen that he has become the unchallenged intellectual and ideological guide of the party and the government, and as a result has accumulated a disproportionate share of power in the Ethiopian state. As noted above, Meles has successively and effectively marginalised his TPLF opponents and concentrated power in his own hands and those of close colleagues. No doubt capable, his capacity is almost certainly exaggerated, and more ominously, there would appear to be few mechanisms to ensure his accountability. While even Meles’ opponents acknowledge his intelligence, many feel discomfort about the dependence of the government and the party on one man.

The restrictions imposed by Abyssinian culture largely encompasses all other explanations of the course and outcome of the crisis and the transformation of the TPLF. In effect, the idealism and revolutionary fervour of the TPLF cadres ran up against the brick wall of the deeply entrenched conservatism of Abyssinian culture. The heroic period of the TPLF is thus over. Although somewhat overstated, Genenew is essentially correct in arguing that, ‘the split has revealed that the TPLF is neither very different nor culturally distinct from other Ethiopian political groups’ (Genenew Assefa, 2001). Internal power struggles, the breakdown of collective leadership, the failure to resolve divisions between cadres carrying out party functions and those involved in the state, and the Front’s failure to achieve legitimacy, all figured in undermining the revolutionary character of the organisation. But the endurance and resistance of a conservative Abyssinian culture would in any case have markedly limited the kind of changes initially favoured by the TPLF.

On balance a sober reading of the Ethiopian situation suggests that the TPLF-EPRDF has many accomplishments to its credit. These include maintaining relative peace and security, major expansions in the areas of health and education, making limited steps towards democracy and transparency, and achieving measurable economic advances, particularly among the peasantry. Moreover, the commitment to national self-determination and the establishment of regional governments were probably the only measures that could have ensured the survival of the Ethiopian state in 1991 and still provide the best model for governance in Ethiopia. The EPRDF has also gained a high degree of international legitimacy and the support of IFIs, despite zealously protecting national autonomy. It has pursued a realistic and principled foreign policy in sharp contrast to the adventurist proposals of the various opposition groups. And although the TPLF’s handling of the crisis and the treatment of the dissidents is to be abhorred, it nonetheless represents a considerable advance over the conduct of past Ethiopian governments.

In the end, opposition weakness will likely ensure the continuing rule of the EPRDF. The opposition has not been able to formulate realistic alternative economic policies or approaches to national and regional governance. And to date the TPLF dissidents give little indication of any desire or capacity to challenge the dominance of Meles in the Ethiopian state. Indeed, the biggest threat to the survival of the EPRDF
government – as its leaders regularly acknowledge – is Ethiopia’s deeply entrenched poverty. Without major economic advances any Ethiopian government will be vulnerable. But the role of the TPLF in Ethiopian political life is in decline, the revolutionary fervour and zeal that motivated its cadres for twenty-six years has been dissipating since the outbreak of the crisis, and this will be to the loss of the country.

In retrospect, the period from the assumption of power in 1991 to the outbreak of the crisis a decade later can be seen as a period of transition, but one that could not be completed until basic questions of power and ideological direction within the ruling party had been resolved. With the TPLF’s dominance waning and the power of state leaders, and in particular Meles, clearly rising, a consolidation is underway. Having weakened his power base in Tigray during the course of marginalising his opponents, Meles is dependent upon his control of state organs, elements of the TPLF, his ANDM allies, and a small entourage. Thus the transition still continues. The TPLF is divided, the ANDM does not have deep roots among the Amhara, and the state bureaucracy has never been sympathetic to the EPRDF. Unless Meles can create a broader and presumably pan-Ethiopian base of power, which does not seem likely, his position and that of his followers will be insecure. And given the effective merger of first the TPLF, and now the Meles core, with the Ethiopian state, both face a crisis of legitimacy.

The TPLF and the EPRDF preserved the Ethiopian state when came to power in 1991 by carrying out far-reaching reforms, and in particular introducing ethnic federalism. And against the background of the TPLF-state crisis, the Front must again embark on a major reform programme, this time combining the achievements of its years in power with committed efforts at democratisation and reconciliation. Ethnic-based federalism, security of land for the tillers, protection of the interests of the peasantry, and the territorial unity of Ethiopia must all be ensured. The hegemony of the TPLF and EPRDF must end. The TPLF’s historical moment has passed and there can be no justification for such parties in a world where popular democracy and globalisation rule. Beyond that, almost all aspects of governance and the economy must be decided upon through democratic means.

The TPLF at its worst has followed Ethiopian traditions of control and direction at the expense of democratic decision-making, but at its best the Front has attempted genuine consultation and dialogue with the masses. It is these latter values that must be drawn upon if Ethiopia is to begin the process of moving beyond its authoritarian past and build a democracy that matches its unique character. To the extent that it has the capacity civil society must be involved, but given its weakness – a product of state and societal authoritarianism – a transitional government that includes key opposition elements must take the lead. The TPLF may not survive this process, and will certainly not survive as a hegemonic party, but it would be to its eternal credit and consistent with the values that a generation of its cadres fought and died for, if it initiated a process of genuine democratisation, and for the first time in Ethiopian history a government that not only gave up power willingly and peacefully, but actually facilitated the process.

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State Collapse in Somalia: Second Thoughts

Ken Menkhaus

Somalia’s protracted crisis of complete state collapse is unprecedented and has defied easy explanation. Disaggregating the Somali debacle into three distinct crises – collapse of central government, protracted armed conflict, and lawlessness – helps to produce more nuanced analysis. Significant changes have occurred in the nature and intensity of conflict and lawlessness in Somalia since the early 1990s, with conflicts becoming more localized and less bloody, and criminality more constrained by customary law and private security forces. These trends are linked to changing interests on the part of the political and economic elite, who now profit less from war and banditry and more from commerce and service businesses that require a predictable operating environment. The prolonged collapse of Somalia’s central government cannot be explained as a reflection of local interests. The country’s elite would profit greatly from the revival of a recognized but ineffective ‘paper’ state. The inability of Somalia’s leaders to cobble together such a state is best explained as a product of risk aversion. Political and economic actors in collapsed states fear a change in the operating environment which, though far from ideal, is one in which they have learned to survive and profit.

In October 2002, several hundred Somali politicians assembled for a national reconciliation process in the Kenyan town of Eldoret. An internationally sponsored meeting, it was the latest of over a dozen similar attempts since 1991 to broker a peace and restore central government in Somalia. The latest attempt boasts several improvements over previous efforts: greater support from external actors, enlarged representation of armed factions, and an agenda which emphasises a long-term process focused on resolution of key issues of conflict rather than mere haggling over power-sharing. Despite these laudable features, however, the talks immediately encountered a host of all-too-familiar problems that threatened to undermine the initiative (International Crisis Group, 2002b). While it is too soon to write off the Eldoret talks, it is more likely than not that this process will be added to the long list of unsuccessful efforts at national reconciliation in Somalia. Wagering on failure is a safe bet in the most protracted and comprehensive instance of state collapse in the contemporary era.

The failure of a decade of reconciliation and state-building efforts in Somalia poses a puzzle and a problem. Why is Somalia resistant to efforts to revive its central government? How do we explain the protracted nature of this extraordinary case of state collapse? These questions have special urgency in the context of the war on terrorism. Fears that Somalia’s situation could be exploited by international terrorists
have featured prominently in policy debates since 11 September 2001, and are of increased concern following the terrorist attacks in Mombasa, Kenya in November 2002.

The conventional wisdom on Somalia’s crisis offers several explanations. They include charges (a) that Somali leaders have been irresponsible and myopic in their quest for power and their stubborn refusal to compromise; (b) that collective fear of the re-emergence of a predatory state undermines public support for peace-building; (c) that the powerful centrifugal force of Somali clannism works against centralised authority, making quests to rebuild a Western-style state a fool’s errand; (d) that neighbouring states such as Ethiopia conspire to perpetuate state collapse in Somalia for their own reasons; (e) that external diplomacy has been consistently misinformed and incompetent in its mediation efforts. All of these have merit, and collectively encompass much of the political impasse in Somalia.

Still, there are ways to advance our understanding of Somalia’s enduring crisis. This article seeks to do that by drawing on tools of analysis which have not been systematically applied in the Somali setting. First, the article disaggregates the broad rubric of ‘state collapse’ into three inter-related but distinct crises: to wit (1) protracted collapse of central government, (2) protracted armed conflict, (3) lawlessness. This breakdown makes the interests of key actors easier to inventory and assess. As will be seen, certain actors may have a stake in perpetuating one of these crises, but not necessarily all three; an important fact to keep in mind if we are to comprehend the complex manoeuvering by Somali elites.

Second, the analysis explores the proposition that the prolonged crisis in Somalia is not simply a product of diplomatic incompetence, missed opportunities, and external intervention, but also an outcome which has been actively promoted by certain political and economic interest groups within Somalia. The idea that protracted state collapse and armed conflict are the desired outcome for key groups – an opportunity for profit, not a crisis to be solved – is a basic tenet of research in the political economy of war, and is documented in the growing literature on complex political emergencies in African and elsewhere (Berdal and Malone, 2000; Reno, 2000; Keen, 1998; Collier and Hoefller, 2002). As this article demonstrates, the analytical tools emerging from this approach are valuable in shedding light on Somalia’s crisis.

Third, special attention is paid in the article to the shifts that occur over time in the interests of various Somali actors in state collapse. There are advantages in moving beyond a static situation analysis of Somalia, because major changes have occurred in the dynamics of these crises and in the vested interests perpetuating them. In particular, interests in warfare and lawlessness are radically different today than in the early 1990s.

Finally, the article considers the extent to which risk-aversion and risk-management behaviour help explain otherwise puzzling choices made by Somali actors. It argues that zones of protracted state collapse tend to produce risk-averse decisions which result in sub-optimal outcomes (such as continued absence of central government) and missed opportunities.

**Disaggregating the Somali Crisis**

Part of the trouble encountered in analyses of Somalia is the tendency to lump multiple crises into a single syndrome. This shorthand has the defect of disguising
what are in fact a number of distinct critical situations which can and do exist independent of one another, have different dynamics requiring different remedies, and pose different types of threats. Specifically, three distinct crises – state collapse, armed conflict, and lawlessness – must be disaggregated to be better understood and diagnosed.

Complete & Protracted State Collapse
This is the most dramatic and unique feature of the Somali crisis. There has been no functional, central governing authority in Somalia since January 1991. Efforts to re-establish a central state have been both numerous and unsuccessful. The most promising attempt was the Transitional National Government (TNG), formed in August 2000. Unfortunately, it has failed to become even minimally operational, has not gained wide external recognition, and has become increasingly irrelevant. Even at the regional, district, and municipal levels throughout the country, formal administrations that have periodically appeared tend to have relatively short shelf lives.

The terms ‘failed state’ and ‘collapsed state’ have become throwaway labels to describe a wide range of political crises. In general, the terms describe a situation in which a central government has either lost presence in a significant portion of real estate (territorial collapse), or has lost the capacity to rule territory in which it has a physical presence (collapse of governing capacity), or both. By these criteria, quite a few third world countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, qualify as failed states. However, in almost all other instances, a weak, nominal central government has managed to maintain de jure sovereignty as a ‘quasi state’ deemed to exist because the United Nations and other states say so (Clapham, 1996:22). Somalia’s inability to preserve even a minimal figleaf of central administration over twelve years puts it in a class by itself among the world’s failed states. The fact that Somalia’s quarreling political elites have not been able to make such a cynical bargain among themselves is itself a puzzle. Somalia is, in an odd way, a failure among failed states.

The complete and sustained collapse of the central government in Somalia has spawned many problems. But it is not inherently linked to other concurrent crises in Somalia, such as criminality and armed conflict. Indeed, Somalia has repeatedly shown that in some places and at some times communities, towns, and regions can enjoy relatively high levels of peace, reconciliation, security, and lawfulness despite the absence of central authority. Moreover, a correlation between the existence of a functioning state authority and a state of peace and lawfulness is not obvious in the broader region. Somalis correctly point out that criminality and deadly armed conflict are generally worse on the Kenyan side of the border, despite the existence of a sovereign state authority there. Those tempted to use Somaliland as evidence to challenge this proposition may be baffled to encounter popular opinion in the northwest that claims Somaliland enjoys peace, reconciliation, lawfulness, and relative prosperity despite, not because of, the existence of a central government there. Those tempted to use Somaliland as evidence to challenge this proposition may be baffled to encounter popular opinion in the northwest that claims Somaliland enjoys peace, reconciliation, lawfulness, despite the absence of central authority. Moreover, a correlation between the existence of a functioning state authority and a state of peace and lawfulness is not obvious in the broader region. Somalis correctly point out that criminality and deadly armed conflict are generally worse on the Kenyan side of the border, despite the existence of a sovereign state authority there. Those tempted to use Somaliland as evidence to challenge this proposition may be baffled to encounter popular opinion in the northwest that claims Somaliland enjoys peace, reconciliation, lawfulness, and relative prosperity despite, not because of, the existence of a central government there. This is not to argue that a central state is unnecessary, or that the collapse of the state has not come at a high cost to Somalis. It is only to assert that one cannot attribute all of Somalia’s multiple woes to the collapse of the central government. A corollary to this observation is that strategies to address problems such as criminality and armed conflict, which presume that a revived central government is the solution, are inadequate and likely to result in disappointment.

In fact, it can be argued that attempts to revive a centralised state have actually exacerbated armed conflicts. In this view, state building and peace-building are two
separate and, in some respects, mutually antagonistic enterprises in Somalia. This is so because the revival of a state is viewed in Somali quarters as a zero-sum game, creating winners and losers in a game with potentially very high stakes. Groups (i.e. clans) which gain control over a central government will use it to appropriate economic resources at the expense of others, and will use the law, patronage, and the monopoly of legitimate use of violence to protect this advantage. This is the only experience Somalis have had with centralised authority, and it tends to produce risk-aversion and to instigate conflict rather than promote compromise, whenever efforts are made to establish a national government. The spate of armed clashes in 2002 that rendered south-central Somalia more insecure and inaccessible than at any time in the past ten years was partially linked to political jockeying in anticipation of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) sponsored peace talks. It is not the existence of a functioning and effective central government which produces conflict, but rather the process of state-building in a context of state collapse that appears to exacerbate instability and armed conflict in Somalia.

State-building exercises are a preoccupation not only at the national level; they have been a factor at the sub-national level as well. A quick inventory of these sub-national experiments reveals four levels of polities – transregional, regional, district and municipal. Only one – the secessionist state of Somaliland – has endured for more than a few years, though some have shown enough resilience and public support to warrant a closer look.

A number of regional and transregional authorities have come into existence in the past seven years, following the termination of the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM). Somaliland and Puntland are the only two entities that have achieved significant functional capacity. A number of others – the Rahanweyn Resistance Army’s administration of Bay and Bakool regions in 1998-2002, and the Benadir Regional Authority in 1996 – showed some initial promise. Strictly speaking, most of these regional and transregional polities are essentially clan homelands, reflecting a Somali impulse to pursue a ‘Balkan solution’ (i.e. ‘clanustans’). Puntland’s borders, for instance, are explicitly drawn along clan lines, encompassing the territory of the Harti clans in the northeast. Even authorities which appear to be based on pre-war regional units, often are thinly disguised clan polities. The periodic proclamations of a ‘Hiranland’, for instance, are really an attempt by the Hawadle clan to form their own autonomous political unit, even though it controls only to the eastern part of Hiran region.

In recent years, the fate of transregional and regional states in Somalia has been inversely related to the status of efforts to rebuild a national government. Transregional states in Somalia were at their high point in 1999, when both Somaliland and Puntland were operational and a nascent Rahanweyn administration in Bay and Bakool regions looked promising. The ‘building-block’ approach to Somali state-building, a policy favored by external donors at the time, actively promoted these incipient states. Once the Djibouti-led Arta peace process began to construct a national government in 2000, however, the regional states declined in importance. Now, with the demise of the TNG, the building block approach is regaining favour. Renewed efforts to form or consolidate regional states are likely in the near future – almost certainly in Puntland, Bay and Bakool, Middle Shabelle and possibly in Hiran, Gedo, and the Kismayo area. If these regional states emerge as ‘clanustans’, however, they will trigger conflict and even clan cleansing.
Thanks to decades of migration and settlement, much of the ethnic topography of south Somalia is more like the patchquilt of Bosnia Herzegovina than the ethno-state of Puntland. The building block approach is only viable in southern Somalia if regional polities are ethnically heterogeneous experiments in coexistence and power-sharing, rather than tools of ethnic hegemony.

The administrative units which have received little external support, but have produced the most effective day-to-day governance, have been at the municipal and (in Mogadishu) neighbourhood level. A variety of local polities have emerged in Somalia, the most common being a coalition of clan elders, businessmen and Muslim clergy to oversee the finances and administration of *sharia* courts. Certain features of these courts stand out. First, they have been widely embraced and supported by local communities as a means of restoring the rule of law. Second, they have usually (though not always) remained under the control of traditional, moderate elements. The clan elders, businessmen and sheikhs who control the courts are usually staunchly opposed to radical Islamists. These *sharia* courts should not be confused with radical fundamentalism, although in some instances *sharia* courts in Mogadishu have been run by the radical group al-Itihad (Le Sage, 2001; Menkhaus, 2002b:116).

Third, the *sharia* court system has remained eminently local in nature, rarely able to project its authority beyond a town or district, and rarely able to exercise jurisdiction over clans which are not parties to the court administration. The rule of law applies within, but not between, clans, though the courts often facilitate inter-clan relations. Fourth, the courts have proven to be fragile and very vulnerable to spoilers. Finally, they seem to come and go in cycles, and currently are in what appears to be a phase of ascendance, following a decline in the 1999-2001 period. Their current salience in parts of southern Somalia is linked to the failure of the TNG and the related rise of insecurity, and is a reflection of local efforts to provide core functions of governance in a context of state collapse (International Crisis Group, 2002a).

An enormous gulf separates the conception foreigners and Somalis respectively have of the state. Indeed, there is perhaps no other issue on which the worldviews of external and internal actors are more divergent than their radically different understanding of the state. For external actors, the conventional wisdom has it that a responsive and effective state is the essential prerequisite for development; a perfectly reasonable proposition enshrined in virtually every World Bank and UN development strategy. For Somalis, the state is an instrument of accumulation and domination, enriching and empowering those who control it and exploiting and oppressing the rest. These different perceptions of the state often result in external and national actors talking past one another in discussions about rebuilding the central government.

**Protracted Armed Conflict**

Somalia has been a zone of intermittent armed conflict since 1988. Armed clashes were most destructive and widespread in 1988-1992, when the country was in a genuine state of civil war. Since the UNOSOM intervention, armed clashes generally have been localised, brief, and much less costly in lives and property. Some regions of the country – most notably Puntland – were almost entirely spared from war in the 1990s, while other areas have enjoyed relatively long period of freedom from fighting since 1995. Armed conflict has not been coincident with state collapse in Somalia. Peace can and does exist despite the absence of a central state. Likewise, the establishment of a central government is not likely to eliminate armed conflict. Instead, it would transform some conflicts into insurrections or secessionist struggles,
pitting government forces against rebels of all sorts. Unfortunately, the trend toward diminished armed conflict was reversed in 2002. That year, multiple and in some instances serious clashes, from Gedo region to Puntland, produced casualty levels that again qualified the country as a zone of civil war (Bryden, 2003). As noted above, these conflicts have been triggered by many factors, one being the political maneuvering linked to the IGAD-sponsored peace talks in October of that year. Collectively they plunged southern Somalia into greater levels of insecurity than at any time since 1995 (Menkhaus, 2000d).

Not only has the intensity of warfare in Somalia varied since 1991-92, its nature has changed over that time as well. In the early 1990s, fighting was mainly inter-clan in nature, pitting large lineage groups against one another. Initially, this meant warfare between the largest clan-families in the south – the Darood versus Hawiye. Clan militias within the Hawiye and Darood always operated independently of one another, never establishing an integrated command. These wars were characterised by sweeping and fast-moving campaigns across southern Somalia, from the outskirts of Mogadishu to the Kenyan border. The warring parties often ceded or gained hundreds of kilometres of territory in a day, in fighting waged mainly off the back of battlewagons known as technicals. Both sides committed atrocities – massacres and rape – against civilians of enemy clans, or weak and defenceless clans caught in the middle of the war. Pillaging and looting of captured territory were an essential aspect of warfare, providing compensation for otherwise unpaid militiamen.

By late 1991, the centrifugal forces driving Somalia’s fragmentation led to a new, highly destructive phase, in which both the Hawiye and Darood clan-families waged deadly internal quarrels. In Mogadishu, the intra-Hawiye split between the Abgal (led by self-declared president Ali Madhi) and Haber Gedir (led by Madhi’s rival General Hussein Farah Aideed) erupted into warfare. Extensive and often indiscriminate use of mortars and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) leveled most of the capital’s center and caused thousands of casualties. Heavy fighting was waged over single city blocks. To the south, tension within the Darood culminated in clashes in and around Kismayo, pitting Ogadeni clan militias led by Colonel Omar Jess against a coalition of Marehan, Mijerteen and other clans in General Morgan’s Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM).

One of the most significant trends is the devolution of warfare to descending levels of clan lineage. With few exceptions, such as the Rahanweyn fight with Haber Gedir in Baidoa in 1996, most armed conflicts since 1995 are feuds among extended families. Clashes that periodically rock parts of Mogadishu are almost always within the Abgal or Haber Gedir clans, not between them. Indeed, recent clashes involve rival leaders and militias from within a sub-clan of the Abgal. Likewise, the Haber Gedir have long since ceased to be a cohesive political unit; splits between the Ayr, Sa’ad, Suleiman and other sub-clans animate most of the political intrigue and fighting within the Haber Gedir. Other clans followed suit. The Rahanweyn now fight among themselves, not against their hegemonic neighbours the Marehan and Haber Gedir; and the fighting which plagues Gedo region is an intra-Marehan affair (UN, 2002c: para 7-11).

The devolution over time of conflict to lower lineage levels has many implications. It means that warfare has become much more localised; clashes are contained within a sub-clan’s territory or neighbourhood. Conflicts are shorter in duration and less deadly, in part because of limited support from lineage members for internal squabbles, in part because elders are in a better position to intervene, and in part
because ammunition is scarce. Conflicts are somewhat less predictable, often precipitated by a series of incidents involving theft and other misdemeanors. Atrocities against civilians are now almost unheard of, as combatants are much more likely to be held accountable in subsequent clan reconciliation procedures. Pillaging and looting are no longer common, in part because little territory is gained or lost in localised clashes, and in part because commodities worth stealing are generally in the hands of businessmen with hire guards to protect them. "Warlords' have become less of a factor, as only a few have funds to pay a militia." Since 1999 businessmen in Mogadishu, who previously funded warlords of their clan, have refused to pay, and hire their own militias instead. Salaries are generally quite low; a dollar or two per day per militiaman. With few exceptions, gunmen fight for whoever will pay them, not for a clan or a cause – though when the clan is attacked, the elders will mobilise gunmen temporarily without compensation. The paucity of opportunities to loot and the low salaries offered to militiamen mean that the status and earning power of a gunman is not what it used to be. This has prompted a gradual, spontaneous demobilisation of militiamen, and reduced the incentives for the younger generation to take up arms as an occupation. It has, however, increased lawlessness, especially kidnapping for ransom – a topic discussed below.

International efforts to negotiate an end to conflict at this level are uncommon. Instead, reconciliation efforts are generally the domain of clan elders, with the international community simply suspending aid operations in battle zones until security for its staff is deemed adequate. The main exception is the role Ethiopia has unsuccessfully attempted to play in mediating armed clashes between its clients. Otherwise, external mediation tends to focus on state-building, not peace-building, despite the fact that the average Somali will benefits more immediately from restored peace than a revived central government.

**Lawlessness & Criminality**

The third crisis facing Somalia is lawlessness and criminality. An enduring stereotype linked to Somalia’s protracted state collapse is the ‘Mad Max’ anarchy of young, armed gunmen riding battlewagons and terrorising citizens. Concerns about transnational criminals or terrorists exploiting Somalia’s lack of law enforcement capacity have long been raised as a global security issue, a concern heightened in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. The collapse of the state has in fact created conditions ripe for lawless behaviour, just as outbreaks of armed conflict also create an environment conducive to opportunistic criminality (looting, rape). But Somalia has repeatedly shown that even in a context of state collapse and armed conflict, informal systems of governance can insure rule of law and exceptionally high levels of personal security. In fact, one of the most intriguing paradoxes of contemporary Somalia is how dramatically and quickly rule of law and personal security can change. A town or neighbourhood, which is notoriously bandit-ridden, can within a year boast stalls of street-corner moneychangers and open roads.

Where Somali communities have been able to establish and maintain a high level of lawful behaviour and personal security, this has almost always been accomplished either by clan customary law (xeer), enforcement of blood payments (diya) for wrongs committed, and in some instances the application of Islamic law by local sharia courts. The latter complements rather than replaces traditional sources of law. Several necessary but not sufficient conditions must obtain for customary law to successfully maintain order. One is the restoration of authority and responsibility of clan elders, who negotiate all disputes. A second is the establishment of a rough balance of power
within local clan groupings. The capacity of a lineage to seek revenge for a wrong committed is critical in inducing other clans to seek settlement of disputes through customary law. Very weak and powerless clans (including the minority or low-caste clans) rarely enjoy the protection of an enforced customary law; the best such lineages can do is seek client status with a more powerful clan and hope that that clan fulfills its obligations. In this sense, both lawful and predatory behaviour in contemporary Somalia is much better understood through the lens of international relations theory — as patterns of cooperation and conflict in a context of anarchy. Clans constantly seek a rough balance of power both to avoid being overrun and to enhance enforcement of customary law and routinized patterns of cooperation, reinforced by repeated adherence by all sides — what international relations theorists would call ‘regimes’.

Like armed conflict, lawlessness in Somalia has changed considerably over the course of the 1990s. The early years of civil war – from 1988 to 1992 – featured a level of impunity and gratuitous violence, which has long since, passed. Wholesale looting, rape, and murder associated with clan clashes simply do not occur. Violent crimes and thefts are much more likely to be addressed via customary law and blood payments than before, serving both as a deterrent to would be criminals and reassurance to communities that criminals cannot commit crimes with complete impunity. Neighbourhoods and towns have in some places organised the equivalent of ‘neighbourhood watch’ systems, sometimes absorbing former young gunmen into paid protection forces. Vigilante justice is not unknown against both individual criminals and gangs – often by their own kinsmen. Militia gangs which terrorised villages in the early 1990s have increasingly ‘settled down’, making arrangements to ‘tax’ a portion of village harvests in return for protection, and in some instances even marrying into local ‘occupied’ clans (Marchal, 1997). These protection rackets and Mafioso behaviour are hardly ideal, and sometimes engender local resistance, but do provide a more predictable security environment for local communities. In some cases, these arrangements have moved into a curious gray area between extortion and taxation, between protection racket and nascent police force.

Importantly, rule of law in Somalia was in the past never associated with formal judiciary and police. Most of the law and order Somalia enjoyed prior to the late 1980s – and Somalia was unquestionably one of the safest places in Africa – was a reflection of social contract more than the capacity of the police. Most Somalis took their legal disputes to a local sheikh or elder for mediation or adjudication, rather than to a court of law. The extensive and costly capacity-building efforts of international aid agencies to support police and judiciaries throughout Somalia often presume they are rebuilding a set of institutions when actually they are trying to make them functional for the first time.

Lawless behaviour in contemporary Somalia remains a serious problem, especially in the more troubled south. Ironically, the most egregious crimes (if measured in value stolen or lives lost) are committed by many of the top political and business leaders whom the international community convenes for peace conferences. This includes incitement of deadly communal violence for narrow political purposes, embezzlement of foreign aid funds, introduction of counterfeit currency into circulation (which, by creating hyperinflation, robs average Somalis of most of their savings), huge land grabs by force of arms, export of charcoal (illegal in the past government and highly destructive), and involvement in piracy, among others. This criminal behaviour tends to get less attention than street crimes – such as car-jackings, murders, and kidnappings – which are usually perpetrated by gangs or individuals and which are at epidemic proportions in some places, but which pale in comparison
to the cost of the ‘white collar crimes’ of their political and business leadership. One of
the most troubling and growing types of crime affecting both international agencies
and local Somalis is kidnapping. It is most common in Mogadishu, but not unheard of
elsewhere. Kidnapping falls into several different categories. The most common is
kidnapping for profit, and has exploded as a major criminal activity because
kidnapping currently is one of the few profitable ventures for Mogadishu street
criminals. This tends to target Somali nationals who are linked to a likely source of
funds, such as a job with an international agency or family members in the diaspora.
UN agencies have been especially plagued by kidnappings of national staff in recent
years. Somalis from weak or minority clans are especially vulnerable to this
predatory behaviour, which often yields only a small ransom (as low as a few
hundred dollars). Scarcity of employment and opportunities for looting has made
kidnapping an obvious alternative income-generating activity for armed gangs, a few
of who have come to specialise in kidnapping. There is evidence that in some cases
these gangs exchange kidnap victims to more powerful warlord for a fee, at which
point the warlord assumes the risk of negotiating for a ransom (Masciarelli, 2002).

A second type of kidnapping involves debtors who have defaulted on or repeatedly
postponed repayments. Somalis lend and borrow an extraordinary amount of money
to one another, as part of the extensive web of mutual obligations that are at the heart
of lineage-based societies. Not surprisingly, rates of default are also quite high.
Kidnapping in these cases involves the ultimate collateral – the debtor himself –
whose family must scrape together the funds to secure his release. Some high-
visibility kidnappings, including of some MPs and ministers in the TNG, have been
debt collection actions. Third, kidnapping is in some instances a political tool,
designed to frighten off international agencies or humiliate a political opponent by
demonstrating his incapacity to control an area he claims to administer. The dramatic
kidnapping of UN and international NGO staff members in north Mogadishu in
March 2001 was executed by a warlord and explicitly intended to humiliate the TNG
and expose its inability to provide international aid workers with security, in order to
scuttle a proposed establishment of a UN peacebuilding presence in Mogadishu. A
more recent form of kidnapping has involved militias targeting wealthy businessmen
from their own clan in order to finance armed attacks. Those businessmen once
funded the militias but have since 1999 refused to do so, which explains this otherwise
puzzling practice. Whatever the motive, internationals traveling and working in parts
of southern Somalia are now at a considerable risk of kidnapping, one of the main
reasons that aid agencies have cut back so substantially on the number of
international staff members in the field.

What is surprising is the fact that Somalia’s state of lawlessness has not attracted the
level of transnational criminality one might expect. In principle, the protracted
collapse of any formal law-enforcement capacity in Somalia should be an attractive
safe haven for a wide range of criminal elements – terrorists, smugglers (of drugs,
guns, people, and other contraband), money-launderers, pirates, and criminals on the
run – seeking to position themselves beyond the reach of the law. In reality, Somalia
has to date proven to be relatively inhospitable terrain for international criminals.
(Bryden, 2003; International Crisis Group, 2002a) Foreign criminals are at the mercy of
the same sources of insecurity which plague international aid workers – they are
prone to extortion, threats, and betrayal from Somali hosts seeking to profit from their
presence, and their activities and whereabouts poorly kept secrets among Somalis,
who are extremely alert to the agendas of foreigners in their land. Somalia is a
reminder that mafias and other organised crime flourish not where rule of law is
absent but rather where rule of law is thoroughly corruptible. Nonetheless, misuse of
Somalia’s lawless environment by external criminals and terrorists should and will remain an item of enduring concern. If it is proven that Somali territory was used as a base for the Mombassa terrorist attacks in November 2002, or that the Somali Islamist organisation Al-Itihad was involved in the attack, these concerns will become front-burner issues. The greatest threat of terrorist exploitation of Somalia’s collapsed state will almost certainly be not as a fixed operational base but as a short-term point of transit for men, money, and materiel into other states in the Horn of Africa (Menkhaus, 2002a).

Interest-driven Crises
Explanations of Somalia’s manifold, protracted crisis fall into two distinct but not entirely antithetical categories over this key question: does the crisis endure despite the fact that key Somali constituencies would benefit from peace and effective government, or because certain interests are served by prolonging it? Most diplomatic initiatives have presumed the former, an analysis which logically leads to certain prescriptive actions, ranging from civil society peace-building workshops to national reconciliation conferences – all designed to promote greater understanding and communication. The latter proposition, that is, that the protracted Somali crisis actually serves the interests and objectives of key actors, suggests there is a method to the madness, that a certain level of rationality, expressed in the pursuit of well-defined individual or group interests, is driving the Somali crisis. How feasible is it to conclude that Somalia’s threefold crisis of state collapse, armed conflict, and lawlessness has endured because that is the outcome key players seek?

When one considers the evidence of the past decade in light of the political economy of war theory, several things become clear. First, there is an impressive list of actors whose interests are served by protracted conflict and lawlessness, and who appear to promote both, actively and successfully. But there are not many Somali players who clearly benefit from complete state collapse, though some nonetheless scuttle efforts to revive a central state. The ‘war economy’ theory is thus of real use in explaining part, but not all, of the Somali debacle. Finally, the closer one looks at both actor interests and behaviour in Somalia in the past decade, the more apparent it becomes that the interests of some social and economic groups have changed considerably over time, prompting in some instances marked changes in behaviour toward state-building and peace-building projects. This malleability of interests in Somalia may present one of the most important opportunities for external actors seeking to promote peace and rule of law there. To the extent that interests, not identity, are increasingly at the root of Somalia’s crises, and to the extent that interests of key players can be shaped or reshaped, external actors may have more leverage to promote peace-building in Somalia.

A useful aspect of this approach is that it forces us to conduct an inventory of actors in Somalia, organised not only around the question ‘whose interests are served by conflict, state collapse, and/or lawlessness?’ but also around the question ‘whose interests matter?’ The latter question highlights the central issue of power or, more precisely, veto power.

There has in fact been a fairly substantial shift in the character of political actors in Somalia since 1991. Factions – the mainly clan-based political organisations such as the United Somali Congress, Somali National Front, and Somali National Alliance –
have virtually disappeared from the political landscape; a remarkable fact considering they were the centerpiece of reconciliation efforts for over six years from the early to the mid-1990s.9 Warlords and militia leaders are, almost without exception, much less powerful than they were in the early years of the crisis. Conversely, businessmen have emerged as a major political force in urban centres, and now operate with considerable, though not complete, autonomy from clans and warlords in pursuit of their interests. Clan elders have also gradually reasserted their authority, and civil society leaders play a more robust, though still modest, role.

Despite the rising and falling fortunes of specific actors, one fact has remained relatively constant. That is, there is a wide range of players who are not necessarily powerful enough to shape a peace accord or government, but who have the capacity to derail political projects they do not like. In the current Somali environment – one featuring a very high level of communal distrust and accumulated grievances, a zero-sum attitude toward revival of the central state, a highly-armed society, a corps of frustrated, unemployed gunmen, and a weakened and sometimes corruptible social authority of clan elders – it takes relatively little to scuttle peacemaking initiatives or to render an administration stillborn. Promising local and regional initiatives to seal a peace between warring clans or to operate a local sharia court have frequently been torpedoed by a small group of gunmen, a single warlord, or a faction of clan elders. Thus the answer to the question ‘whose interests matter?’ is that a broad section of Somali society possesses veto power over state-building, peace building, and law enforcement. This makes negotiation all the more difficult. It means that mediators need to insure that a proposed formula is acceptable to a wide range of actors, some of who may not have enough political legitimacy or clout to attend a peace conference but, nonetheless, retain enough power to sabotage the process. When one adds to this calculation the numerous external actors who possess the interests and capacity to spoil political initiatives they do not like (Ethiopia is the most obvious but not sole example), the task of brokering an accord becomes even more challenging.

Spoilers in Somalia come in three types. First are those who seek to undermine efforts at state-building or peace-building because they are not satisfied with their share of the pie. These can be individuals or whole clans. For instance, the Eldoret peace talks in Kenya were complicated by arguments over levels of clan representation. They are ‘situational’ spoilers, who in some instances have legitimate grievances, though in most cases their motive is greed, and who in theory can be brought in to a state-building venture with appropriate concessions. Second are the ‘intrinsic’ spoilers. These are actors with a vested interest in maintaining a state of lawlessness, state collapse, and/or armed conflict. War criminals are the most obvious candidates, but a host of others – young gunmen, merchants of war, individuals and groups holding valuable state assets – can also fall into this category. It is this set of interests that the political economy of war theory is best suited to explain. A final and more complex set of spoilers are those whose opposition to state-building and peace-building initiatives is driven by risk-aversion. While they could potentially benefit from peace, government and the rule of law, they face a high level of uncertainty about the impact such developments could have on their interests. As a result, they choose the sub-optimal but safe route of scuttling initiatives which might alter an operating environment which, while not ideal, is at least familiar and in which they find some benefit. Some of the major businessmen in Mogadishu, who are thought to be quietly subverting the TNG, fall into this category.
Interest in Protracted Conflict

The configuration of groups that has benefited from and promoted armed conflicts in Somalia has changed considerably over time. In the early years of the crisis (1990-92), a vast array of interest groups profiteered from armed conflict and the humanitarian crisis it provoked. Warlords used the threat of violence to maintain constituent support, sought conflicts and conquest to provide war booty for their militiamen, and provoked famine to attract relief agencies and food aid that became a major source of revenue. Militiamen fed their families by pillaging occupied villages and government buildings. Merchants of war profiteered from diversion of food aid, export of scrap metal, and gun sales. Some clans acquired valuable real estate in Mogadishu and the riverine region by armed conquest. Many features of protracted conflict depicted in the literature of the political economy of war closely match patterns of conflict in southern Somalia in the early 1990s; except for the fact that Somalia has not attracted the sort of external predatory interest, as did the mineral and timber-rich countries of Sierra Leone, Angola, and Congo.

In the post-UNOSOM period, the constituencies that benefit from war have shrunk. The fact that warfare in Somalia has gradually diminished in scope suggests a possible causal link between interests and conflict. Warlords’ capacity to foment conflict is reduced, though not eliminated, due to the loss of financial support from businessmen and from their own war-weary clans. Opportunities for looting are much more limited, reducing incentives for militiamen to fight. Most businessmen who initially profited from a war economy have made the transition to quasi-legitimate commerce in import-exports, telecommunications and transport, and in some cases hold valuable fixed assets which cannot be relocated in times of war. They thus have a greater interest in peace and paying customers, not armed clashes and famished people. Some still indulge in questionable or illegal business activities, but these are not well served by armed conflict. War, for the most part, is bad for business now.¹⁰

The net result of this shift in interests is that armed conflict today in Somalia tends to be driven less by economic interest and more by the parochial political agendas of individual leaders engaged in power struggles, usually within their own clans and sub-clans. Brief outbreaks of armed conflict are also triggered by feuds between militias and clans over car-jackings, murders, land disputes, taxes at roadblocks, water wells, contract disputes, but these are generally contained fairly by clan elders. This type of armed conflict follows a fine line between ‘war’ and criminality, since the armed clashes themselves are often a response to a crime committed, in a setting in where blood payment, collective responsibility, and revenge killings are the ultimate means of enforcement of customary law.

In sum, the interests perpetuating armed conflict in Somalia at present are far less potent and extensive than in earlier phases of the crisis, and interest in peace, or at least, suspension of armed conflict, has grown appreciably in the country. Warfare is no longer an ‘instrument of enterprise’, as it was in the early years of the crisis. The fact that Somalia today is gripped by more insecurity and armed clashes than at any time since 1996 disguises the fact that these are, for the most part, very parochial, politically-driven clashes serving the interests of an increasingly narrow circle of actors. Unfortunately, conditions in the country make it easy for small numbers of individuals and groups to incite armed clashes.
Interests Promoting Lawlessness

Interests served by the ongoing state of lawlessness in Somalia have also changed over time. Over the course of the 1990s, grassroots elements in the country have gradually asserted increased control over the young gunmen in their clans, and clan elders have recaptured their traditional role in enforcing customary law and managing disputes. Young gunmen (mooryaan) who once wore T-shirts emblazoned with the apt slogan ‘I am the boss’, can no longer make that claim, and are much more likely to be held accountable by their own clan for theft and murder. Indeed, the status of young Somali gunmen has plunged; mooryaan now inspire disdain, not awe, and fewer young men are taking up the occupation. As business opportunities and interests have changed from an economy of plunder to an economy based on extensive trans-regional and cross-border commerce and a service economy sustained by remittances, business groups at all levels have greater interest in a predictable, safe environment free of extortionate militia checkpoints, car-jackings and theft. Like most all services and commodities in Somalia, security has been largely privatized, with businessmen and others who can afford it hiring armed guards for their protection. In 1999, leading Mogadishu businessmen broke with the warlords, and refused to pay ‘taxes’ at militia roadblocks. Instead, they bought the militiamen away from the warlords, and sub-contracted out management of the militia to sharia courts. This was the moment when the business community realized that a certain level of security had to be assured as a ‘public good’, especially in keeping roads open for commerce. It was also a clear indication of the confidence businessmen had that they would win a showdown with the warlords whose interests were increasingly divergent from their own.11

It is worth pointing out that the business class has focused on a fairly narrow range of criminal activity it want to control or eliminate. The sharia courts and militia the businessmen financed in 1999-2000, until the establishment of the TNG, addressed street crime. They kept the seaport town of Merka safe, patrolled the main road between Merka and the warehouses at Bakara market in Mogadishu, and improved security from theft in south Mogadishu. They did not, and could not, address the Somali equivalent of ‘white collar crimes’ that some of the businessmen themselves are involved in. This is a crucial point which highlights the fact that the ‘rule of law’ and impunity from the law can exist at different levels simultaneously. Some of the most powerful constituencies in Somalia are those served by a rule of law which controls criminality by the underclass, but lacks the capacity to address ‘meta-criminality’ – war crimes, incitement of communal violence, expropriation of land and buildings by force, forced labor, distribution of counterfeit currency, money laundering, piracy, drug smuggling, illegal exportation of charcoal, embezzlement of foreign aid and tax money from the coffers of regional government and the TNG, to name a few. The local sharia courts fit this limited legal role rather well, which is one reason we can expect to see their reemergence. For regulation and prosecution of the sort of crime committed by political and economic leaders, a functional state with an autonomous judiciary and police capacity is needed.

Some constituencies are threatened even by the fairly narrow scope of the sharia courts, and work to undermine them. Gangs of bandits clearly stand to lose from the enforcement of laws against theft and extortion. Gunmen making a living by providing security to international agencies and wealthy businessmen would find their source of income threatened if crime is eliminated. Some warlords may quietly work to undermine sharia courts because it represents a rival political grouping of businessmen, elders, and clerics, and because even the modest level of regulation the
sharia courts provide exposes the complete absence of administration under the warlords. These groups represent only a small percentage of the population, but have often been able to veto local efforts to impose rule of law. Usually they do it by undermining local confidence in the sharia courts through clever manipulation of clannism, and sometimes a certain level of collusion between rival gangs or militias whose animosity toward one another is set aside in common cause against a greater threat. They are one of the reasons that criminality and extortion continue to plague much of southern Somalia, despite the best efforts of elders, sharia courts, and others.

Interests Promoting State Collapse

Here is where 'war economy' theory is weakest as an explanation in the Somali setting. If the most powerful interests in Somalia were to pursue their best interests rationally (in the sense of seeking optimal outcomes), then we would expect to see a scenario other than complete state collapse. We would instead predict collusion among the country's economic and political elites to create a 'paper state.' That would produce a state legitimate enough to win full external recognition, attracting all the benefits conferred upon such states, from World Bank loans to profits derived from property rental to diplomatic missions. It would dramatically increase the spoils over which various political predators could feast. But it would remain unable to enforce the rule of law at a level that would threaten the illicit interests of this elite. The paper state would allow virtually all of Somalia's top economic and political elite to have their cake and eat it too; to enjoy the benefits of a central state without any of the burdens. This was in fact the motive some suspect lay behind the creation of the TNG in 2000. Nearly all energy invested in the Arta process (which culminated in the creation of the TNG) focused on the division of anticipated spoils; namely, the share of seats in the parliament and cabinet by clan. And once the TNG was established, virtually all its energy was geared to soliciting foreign aid. Very little attention was paid to actual administration for the country, or more precisely the portions of Mogadishu which the TNG controlled. This appeared to many observers a fairly straightforward recipe for a paper state. For many of the top businessmen and politicians involved in the Arta process, the TNG was in essence a piece of paper on a fish hook, thrown into international waters to lure foreign aid which could then be diverted into appropriate pockets. The gambit ultimately failed. The TNG never received significant bilateral recognition, but it succeeded in netting enough aid (roughly $50 million over two years, mainly from Gulf Arab states) to make it a worthwhile, albeit short-term, venture for its principal figures. In fact, one of the final nails in the TNG's coffin was the explosion of domestic and international anger over allegations that most of the foreign aid was pocketed by top figures, a charge that led to the ouster of the Prime Minister in 2001. Public confidence in the TNG soured further by reports of a variety of 'sweetheart deals', in which inflated TNG contracts were tendered to business supporters as a way of allowing them a healthy return on their investment.

Ironically, the main objective of the TNG – attracting foreign aid – sowed the seed of its failure. The most promising source of foreign aid was the Gulf Arab states. This was immediately recognized by the TNG leadership, which went so far as to call for an 'Arab Marshall Plan' for Somalia. But the very act of courting aid from the Gulf states guaranteed that Ethiopia would view the TNG as an unacceptable threat (a beachhead for anti-Ethiopian Islamism in the Horn) and would exercise its 'veto' by supporting anti-TNG elements. Over the year 2001, Ethiopian-backed militias and coalitions succeeded in blocking TNG efforts to extend its presence beyond parts of Mogadishu, leading to a loss of confidence in the TNG within a year of its declaration.
But Ethiopia’s opposition to the TNG paper state cannot fully explain its failure. Elements inside Somalia have worked to undermine the TNG as well, including some which in theory stand to gain from a successful central state. Some political groups – the Puntland leadership, for example – opposed the Arta process because it was structured around criteria for representation that worked against regional administrations. Others opposed the TNG only when it became clear they would not receive top positions in it. Still others became obstructionists because that won them valuable support from Ethiopia. But a fourth set of actors appears to have opted to undermine the TNG not because it would clearly work against their interests, but because the TNG threatened to alter the operating environment in ways which made it difficult to predict the resulting impact on business and politics. For Mogadishu businessmen who made their fortunes in a setting of complete state collapse, the transition to an environment of state governance – even a paper state – proved too risky to accept. For businessmen operating the private beach port facilities at El Ma’an in north Mogadishu, for instance, the government re-opening the main Mogadishu seaport was bound to hurt their business. Even offers from the TNG to them to manage the Mogadishu port were turned down. Some other business interests covertly undermined the TNG out of fear it might evolve into a real state and put an end to lucrative but illicit business, or proceed to tax them without delivering basic security and services in return. This can only be understood as risk-averse behaviour in an environment of considerable uncertainty. It is not irrational, but rather ‘bounded rationality’, a willingness to seek sub-optimal but acceptable outcomes, rather than face the risks a revived state would entail. State collapse may be unpalatable, inconvenient, and undesirable on any number of grounds, but for some political and economic actors who have survived and thrived in a stateless setting, embracing a state-building agenda constitutes a leap of faith they are currently not willing to take.

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Endnotes
1. At one point up to 1,000 ‘representatives’ found their way to Eldoret and claimed a right to participate in the proceedings. The Kenyan diplomatic team had to intervene to reduce the number.
2. As of the time of this writing, several Somalis were arrested under suspicion of involvement in the terrorist attack, and suspicions were raised that the terrorists used Somalia as a base for the attack.
3. Some recent research applying the war economy theory to Somalia has been produced by Reno (2003) and Le Sage. (2002b).
4. The terms lawlessness and lawfulness are used here not in the strict sense of these words, which would be absurd given the absence of a sovereign state authority to enforce the law. They are meant instead to convey a sense of the extent to which commonly criminal behaviour (murder, robbery, extortion, kidnapping, etc.) is or is not taking place.
5. This is not to argue that all participants in the attempt to build the TNG were driven by such motives. Many of the people involved, including at the highest levels, were very respectable figures and sincerely hoped to establish a functioning government.
6. Indeed, one of the puzzling aspects of Somali warlordism is why so few of these militia leaders had the foresight to develop their own sustainable sources of funding. Most are forced to ask for support from businessmen and elders in their clans, or to rely on the sporadic support from a
foreign state. One example of warlord entrepreneurship is the Mogadishu-based militia leader Mohamed Qanyare, who has a diversified portfolio of business interests ranging from fishing to a private airstrip in the neighbourhood of Deynile. This has enabled him to pay the militia consistently and to remain independent of external patrons, clan elders, and businessmen, and has meant that he has come to enjoy a position of strength relative to less business-savvy warlords.

7. In some instances, kinsmen lose patience with the costs of crime by a member of their *diya* (blood compensation) group and have the individual imprisoned or executed. Vigilante justice is also associated with neighbourhood security groups and with the militia of private businessmen, who occasionally hunt down criminal gangs. One such posse killed six professional criminals in an attack outside of Mogadishu in November 2002.

8. The broader literature on contemporary war casts this debate in terms of ‘greed versus grievance’, see a summary of this debate in the introduction to Berdal and Malone (2000).

9. Most of the top political leaders of the defunct factions remain active in the political arena, however. Their power base is now either based explicitly on clan, or on a militia, or on a geographically fixed administrative entity such as Puntland.

10. This observation corresponds to historical research on shifting interests of warlords; see Tilly (1985).

11. It should be noted that some individuals wear both of these hats.

12. Here an important distinction needs to be drawn between different categories of businessmen in Mogadishu. A very small group – perhaps as few as three wealthy individuals – appear to have been wholly committed to the TNG for political, business, and clan reasons. A second category of businessmen supported the TNG tactically, viewing their financial contributions as venture capital which they expected to recoup once foreign aid flowed to the TNG. A third group supported the TNG only because they were forced to by social pressures, but were from the outset much less enthusiastic about the venture than media reports.

Bibliography


At the time this article was written – autumn 2002 – peace talks were underway between the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the Government of Sudan (GoS) in Machakos, Kenya. For the first time since the outbreak of the conflict nineteen years ago, the July 20th Protocol reached between the belligerents under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) at Machakos raised the possibility of a negotiated resolution of the conflict. Sudan’s civil war has been part of the political landscape of Africa for so long, that most people believe it to be intractable. Even more difficult to envisage is an effective government, autonomous or independent, in Southern Sudan. Therefore, it is time to consider the issue of governance in the South, taking into account the administrative and political capacity of the SPLM/A, as well as the challenge posed by a host of rival armed movements loosely grouped under the umbrella of the South Sudan Democratic Front (SSDF), plus a dozen or more tribal militias.

Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army

The conflict in Southern Sudan is a war of resistance. It has been going on for centuries in different forms; against the Turks, Egyptians, British and the Arabs of Northern Sudan. According to Clapham ‘where state structures are weak, and violence in pursuit of communal goals has been a normal feature of pre-colonial society, what is now defined as insurgency may merely be the continuation of such practices in the post-colonial era’ (Clapham, 1998:5). There is no doubt that the people of South Sudan feel they have been abused by the North and, despite the havoc caused by war, there is no sign of war fatigue, much less of surrender (Murphy, 2001). Feelings of anti-Arabism and anti-Islam are visceral in the southern region, and find expression in resentment against attempts by Muslims from the North to stop the Africans in the South from drinking and practicing Christianity and traditional creeds. The analogy to apartheid and white colonialism may be overdrawn, but these sentiments reveal a strong affirmation of the peoples’ African character and culture. They are also a rejection of the assumption that Arab culture is superior and destined to assimilate them. The war is fought to ensure that the Africans can live their lives as they see fit. As a result, most Southern Sudanese support independence.

However, this is not the expression of a deeply felt and fully developed nationalism. The war of resistance has not significantly weakened parochial ethnic and regional loyalties among the people. Nationhood requires more building blocks than just shared resistance to oppression, and for their part the SPLM/A and Southern
Sudanese intellectuals have done little in the fifty years since independence to develop a robust Southern Sudanese national consciousness and identity. With all its weaknesses and contradictions, the struggle waged by the people in Southern Sudan is genuine and widely supported. Even so, popular sentiment bears little resemblance to the ideals and rhetoric of the SPLM/A.

Indeed, it is striking how little the stated objectives of the SPLM/A appear to reflect the views of the mass of the population, but also the views of its own membership. Few give much credence to SPLM/A vision of a New Sudan that encompasses both North and South and assumes their coexistence in a reconstructed state. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that brought the SPLM/A together with Northern opposition to the regime in Khartoum is a practical expression of this vision. The presence of the SPLM/A in the Nuba Mountains, the South Blue Nile, and the northeast is another manifestation of the ‘New Sudan’.

However, the Nuba Mountains and South Blue Nile are peripheries of the North, made up of people whose loyalties are mixed and who do not identify wholeheartedly with the aspirations of the Southern Sudanese. Nor is it clear that the people of these borderlands wish to be part of a southern political entity, particularly if it became independent. What they share with the South is underdevelopment, political exclusion, and a desire to be free of cultural imposition from Khartoum. Largely Muslim, particularly in South Blue Nile, they are nonetheless relaxed in their faith. Many drink sorghum beer and are married to Christians or followers of indigenous creeds. Malik Agar, Regional Secretary of the SPLM/A for South Blue Nile, is not unusual in having a family that contains Muslims, Christians and others (Malik, 2001). If the people of these regions feel closer to the South now than at any time in the past, it is due the fundamentalist character of the Sudanese regime, which has pushed its particular version of Arabism and Islamism on them.

John Garang’s vision of a New Sudan that respects the rights of all its peoples is attractive to the politically sophisticated class in these borderlands. Under Yusif Kuwa, the late SPLM/A leader in the Nuba Mountains, a concerted effort was made to promote it by encouraging local culture and developing local government. However, the experience of the Nuba Mountains may be unique, because elsewhere the vision of New Sudan does not have much depth. The SPLM/A has carried out little political education, and less social reform, to gain popular support for it. Repeated attempts over nineteen years to bring the Fur of the West into the SPLM/A have had minimal success. Nor have the Beja of the East joined the armed struggle on a large scale. Rebel military successes in the northeast are mainly credited to the SPLM/A and Eritrean support.

In the Arab North support for the SPLM/A and its political ideals never reached beyond a small number of intellectuals associated with the Sudan Communist Party and the now defunct Sudan Alliance Forces (SAF). The major political parties in the North - Umma Party, Democratic Unionist Party, National Islamic Front – remain strongly opposed to the concept of a New Sudan, whose basic aim is to restructure the country’s power structure and end their dominance. SPLM/A military successes outside the South are confined to areas like the Nuba Mountains and South Blue Nile that are culturally akin. Johnson argues it was the SPLM/A’s retention of local civil administration, customs and modes of livelihood in areas like South Blue Nile that accounts for its success in building a base of support there (Johnson, 1998:72). No doubt this pragmatic approach has its advantages, but it has been achieved at the cost of sustaining very weak local structures of administration. Moreover, it does not
provide a model for a post-conflict system of governance, and it does not contribute to developing a broader sense of identity across the SPLM/A liberated territories. Nor does it contribute to the formation of a ‘New Sudan’. Few Southerners support any political project beyond their own territories and, to some extent, this includes their willingness to identify with the struggles of the people in the Nuba Mountains and South Blue Nile.

While the SPLM/A is officially committed to a Sudan-wide project, it continues to have major difficulties in promoting nation-building within the South itself, where politics are shaped by tribe and the movement has to operate within those confines. Majak Agot, then senior military commander for Bahr El Ghazel, noted: ‘The SPLM/A has to constantly be wary not to arouse tribal sentiments’ (Rumbek, 2002). Indeed, internal political disputes always risk developing a tribal dimension, sometimes with tragic results. When Riek Macher (Nuer) and Lam Akol (Shilluk) challenged the leadership of John Garang (Dinka) in 1991, it unleashed a war between the Dinka and the Nuer that cost in some 300,000 deaths.

There is little doubt that the SPLM/A is, as its critics claim, ‘Dinka dominated’, or that Bor Dinka hold a disproportionately large number of posts in its leadership. Of the thirteen members in the SPLM/A Leadership Council seven are Dinka – John Garang, Salva Kiir, Daniel Awet Akot, Lual Ding, Kuol Manyang, Nhial Deng and Deng Alor – and the rest – Abdel Aziz, Malik Agar, John Kong, Pagan Amum, Wani Igga, Samuel Abu John – are from other ethnic communities. Studies of revolutionary movements suggest that some groups invariably have a higher level of political consciousness and greater commitment to armed struggle than other equally oppressed groups. The issue is not that some ethnic groups have a greater willingness to take up arms, but whether their leadership ensures others are not excluded from the political and military hierarchy.

The problem in the SPLM/A is not that one tribe has assumed a dominant position, but that it has done little to fully embrace other tribes, thereby leaving it exposed to factionalism and strife. Such conflicts, and there have been many, are due to the fear of small tribes of being politically marginalised. Another factor that exacerbates ethnic tension is the weakness of the SPLM/A’s judicial system. In the early period of the war, its field commanders worked to undermine, if not eliminate entirely, the traditional authorities that performed judicial functions. After the SPLM/A’s 1994 Chukudum Conference, attempts were made to establish a formal judicial system and to work more closely with the traditional leadership. However, continued resistance by some military commanders, and the damage already done to tribal institutions has meant the system is not working well. When conflicts break out, it is usually civil society groups, and not the SPLM/A, that eventually bring them to an end. Conflicts between tribes are not due merely to lagging integration and modernisation, but also, as John Luk has forcefully argued, due to concern about ‘political control and hegemony fueled by failures to inaugurate representative, balanced and participatory governance systems’ (Luc, 2001:14). In other words, failures of SPLM/A governance are a significant factor in both the generation of such conflicts and their resolution.

Just as the SPLM/A has not come to grips effectively with tribalism, it has failed to resolve fundamental problems of leadership. It was eleven years after its founding that the movement held its first convention in 1994. This convention established the first formal structures of governance based on the National Congress, the National Leadership Council, the National Executive Council, and regulated the role of the Chairman and his Deputy. However, while a regime of accountability has been
established in theory, in practice it remains very weak. The National Congress has not met once since 1994, and the National Leadership and Executive Councils meet only occasionally. Dr. John Garang retains an overwhelmingly dominant position within the leadership, even when vast geography, poor communications, and the importance of local cultures and tribal units conspire against his ability to micro-manage.

Garang has the power to appoint and dismiss at every level of the military and civilian administration, and this power is largely not accountable. Though the divisions, factionalism, and challenges to Garang’s leadership, that produced so much blood-letting in the early years of the SPLM/A, have not been repeated lately, the foolhardy persons who contested the Chairman’s supremacy in recent years invariably found themselves marginalised. Garang controls the flow of information within the movement. In spite of the existence of formal structures and processes, Garang can assume the leading role in any sphere he chooses. While Salva Kiir is officially responsible for the conduct of military operations, Garang maintains direct contact with commanders in the field. Likewise, although Nhial Deng is responsible for the conduct of SPLM/A’s foreign relations, Garang assumes a dominant position in this sphere as well. He is able to micro-manage the peace negotiations, as shown by the fact that even trivial decisions at the bargaining table at Machakos could not be made without reference to him. Garang has complete control over the acquisition and distribution of armaments, a crucial mechanism for keeping independent-minded commanders in line. Lastly, although a decision was made in 1997 to draft a constitution for SPLM/A-controlled Southern Sudan and much effort was put into this exercise, in the end nothing was achieved that could limit Garang’s power. As a result, there is a yawning gap between the formal structures of authority and accountability and the capacity of Garang to operate independently.

**SPLM/A & Ideology**

The problems of institutionalising functional and accountable systems of leadership are linked to the lack of an ideological basis from which to direct the struggle. The SPLM/A had an early flirtation with marxism under the tutelage of the military regime in Ethiopia (1974-1991). This was so crude it led sometimes to the naming of entire tribes as ‘enemies of the people’, and classifying Southern politicians collectively as a ‘bourgeoisified elite’. In the event, neither socialism nor any other ideology took root. Neither the SPLM/A nor the Southern intellectuals have pursued ideology with sustained vigour. Splits in the movement have not been over ideological issues but over power, and they frequently become linked to tribe. Resistance to the North is the basis for the movement’s appeal to the people. This sometimes produces denigration of the Northern jalaba that verges on racism. For example, celebrating the union of the SPLM/A and SPDF in January 2002, the official organ of the movement saw this achievement as affirming ‘the old Southern Sudan adage that the only good Arab (Sudanese Arab) is a dead one is true’ (SPLM/SPLA Update, January 2002).

Downplaying ideology has served to promote the leadership role of Garang, and to strengthen the militarist nature of the movement which, in turn, gave short shrift to civil administration. The strong support the SPLM/A received from Libya, the Eastern Bloc countries, and the military regime in Ethiopia further reinforced the militarist mentality of its leadership, and raised hopes that the war could be won quickly, consequently it was not necessary to forge deep links with civil society. The policy of suppression practiced by successive governments in Khartoum also fed SPLM/A militarism. Even today, its human and material resources are mainly
devoted to the military struggle, the civil administration is weak, and NGOs (local and international) are assumed to be there to pick up the pieces and to provide a modicum of social services.

Lack of an ideology that expresses universal values means the movement does not cultivate close, supportive links with the people of Southern Sudan. Because of its weak linkage to the producing classes, the SPLM/A has had difficulty feeding and equipping its army. Popular campaigns are sometimes conducted to encourage the donation of goods and money, and the movement has a small number of its own farms. Only in rare instances does the SPLM/A have the capacity to institutionalise taxation. As a result, extortion is not uncommon. SPLM/A officials guarding isolated roads frequently ask travelers for ‘contributions’. Unable to adequately supply its fighters, the movement has permitted them to engage in private trade. Although this has proved controversial, many SPLM/A officers and ordinary soldiers are involved in trade. The price of goods is first quoted in Old Sudanese Pounds (OSPs), which is the unofficial currency of south Sudan. Khartoum’s new currency, the Dinar, was largely introduced to make life difficult for the SPLM/A and is not accepted in the South. But the OSPs are disappearing and those few still in existence are in poor condition. In the absence of the requisite number of OSPs, prices are quoted in Ugandan shillings, Kenyan shillings and US dollars in transactions that become baffling. Further complicating transactions, the exchange rate varies considerably across southern Sudan, Kenyan shillings are preferred in Eastern Equatoria, and Ethiopian Birr is the currency generally used in Upper Nile and South Blue Nile.

These peculiarities with respect to currencies do not seriously affect most southern Sudanese, since there is little in the way of a formal economy in the region. SPLM/A controlled southern Sudan produces a petty amount of exports. Some gold is exported by small producers from eastern Equatoria and the Kurmuk area of South Blue Nile (the former goes to Kenya and the later to Ethiopia), some shipments of timber from western Equatoria find markets in Uganda as does cattle, and there is a thriving black market in arms along the border areas with neighbouring states. Imports of goods from Kenya and Uganda and to a much lesser extent from western Ethiopia find buyers, and a small number of Arab traders supply markets in northern Bahr El Ghazel and Upper Nile with cloth and other basic items. Even with the war, a few Arab traders have remained in the south and are vital to the economy. SPLM/A commanders are active in the cattle trade, transport of fuel and other commodities. What economy exists in the South, however, is largely subsistence and based on barter. Indeed, it is striking how little trade there is and how few people have access to money. Johnson notes that the informal economy in the south is ‘often virtually the only economy’, and goes on to say that ‘the income is divided between the Movement, its leaders and local people in a disproportionate percentage. Part of the current crisis of confidence in SPLA leadership is the perception that the leaders spend too much time outside of the South seeing to their personal business ventures’ (Johnson, 2002:21). Moreover, the importance of external aid, over which the SPLM/A can exert considerable influence, encourages the growth of patronage networks.

The condition of the roads is deplorable, even in western Equatoria where security has been good for almost a decade. Efforts are being made to mobilise voluntary labour to carry out basic repairs, but these are few and haphazard, and the capacity of the SPLM/A to either recruit or conscript is limited. Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), which operates from bases in northern Kenya and Uganda, is for the most part dependent upon flying relief into the territory. Some grain from the traditionally surplus producing areas of western Equatoria is purchased by OLS, but because of
poor transport and infrastructure this trade has not achieved its potential. The stakes are so high it would seem worth the effort of encouraging commercial production, but SPLM/A priorities clearly lay elsewhere. Although Yei, Yirol, Rumbek, and other towns came under the movement’s control in 1997, their rehabilitation has also not captured the attention of the SPLM/A or its humanitarian wing, the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA). This is surprising because they have become significant market centers for adjacent rural populations.

**SPLM/A & Civil Society**

Civil society in Southern Sudan is undeveloped and weak, and functions under restrictive conditions imposed by war. Liberation movements like the SPLM/A typically attempt to co-opt civil society and make it subject to their own requirements, of which the military struggle is paramount. Nevertheless, the SPLM/A has not fully co-opted Southern civil society as weak as that is, partly because it did not have the capacity to replace it with its own affiliated structures. Contrary to the widespread view that civil society in Southern Sudan lacks autonomy and is subject to the requirements of the SPLM/A, a significant section of it retains a degree of genuine autonomy, more than could reasonably be expected under the circumstances.

With considerable foreign military support during its early period, the SPLM/A had high expectations of winning a quick military victory, consequently it paid little attention to political work in general and to civil society in particular. This did not change until the early 1990s, when the SPLM/A faced a number of major setbacks. First came its expulsion from Ethiopia after the overthrow of the military regime there in 1991, then the split with the Nuer under Riek Macher and the latter’s rapprochement with Khartoum. With the movement facing military and political collapse, the SPLM/A had to make some effort to rally the support of the people, and the people’s wish was for a genuine role for civil society. This was the major achievement of the SPLM/A 1994 National Convention at Chukudum. It is from this date that the emergence of civil society within the liberated territories is traced, and efforts to harness it in support of a viable civil administration can be dated.

Development in this sector since then has been slow and uneven. In part this is due to resistance from elements in the SPLM/A leadership, particularly its military commanders, who do not want to share power with civilians. It is also due to the fact that development in this sector is externally driven by international humanitarian intervention, and does not have deep roots. Moreover, with support from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Uganda the SPLM/A was able after 1995 to reverse the military advances of the government. Success on the battlefield, as much as the factors listed above, help to explain the long delay in holding a second national convention. At the same time with the expansion of SPLM/A territories, it became increasingly apparent that the military cannot run the civil administration alone and must utilise the resources of civil society. A major obstacle to further developing this relationship is the movement’s wariness of the possible political challenge civil society may pose.

However, there are definite limits to the SPLM/A acceptance of civil society initiatives and especially criticism. It boycotted the ‘People to People’ Conference organised by the New Sudan Council of Churches in June 2001 in Kisumu, Kenya. It has not involved civil society in the margins of the peace negotiations at Machakos.

Some dissidents have been brought into the process because of their affiliation with Riek Macher. Others like Peter Nyot and Peter Adwok, leading members of the Federation of Sudanese Civil Society Organisations (FOSCO), a newly-established...
umbrella body of southern Sudanese NGOs, were not. Nor has the movement embraced the diaspora, and in particular groups like the South Sudan Civic Forum.

The Nairobi Declaration of January 2002 that marked the return of the Sudan Peoples Defence Forces (SPDF) to the SPLM/A promised to reform the system of governance in the liberated territories. Specifically, the Nairobi Declaration called for the immediate establishment of technical committees to make recommendations on political structures and the streamlining of humanitarian institutions. The committees were quickly formed and launched an ambitious agenda that included proposals for a penal code and systems of local government to be put to a national convention scheduled for May 2002. In the event, the work of the committees has not been completed, the national convention has not been held, the reintegration of the SPDF has not been officially sanctioned, and SPDF leader Riek Macher does not at the time of writing hold a position within the SPLM/A, nor does he have a role in the Machakos negotiations (Riek, 2002). Whether the failure to hold the convention is due to it being overtaken by events on the peace front, a lack of finances as the SPLM/A leadership contends, or an effort to pre-empt the reforms as some critics maintain, is not clear. But an historic opportunity for positive change is passing.

In his nineteenth anniversary statement, Chairman Garang declared ‘the movement will continue to build the Civil Authority of New Sudan in all the liberated areas, as the executive organ of civil society responsible for implementing policies of the SPLM and the New Sudan. This will develop into the Government of the New Sudan as we acquire more sovereignty’ (Garang, 2002). The SPLM/A is moving to institutionalise systems of governance, is giving more attention to civil society, is developing a legal foundation in Southern Sudan, and is beginning to accept the need of responding to the legitimate concerns of its constituents. But it has started late and is moving slowly. And the present weakness of governance in the liberated territories bodes ill for the future. The Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front in Ethiopia, and the National Resistance Army in Uganda all developed systems of administration during their struggles that they were able – with some alterations – to use as the basis for post-conflict national governments. The SPLM/A has no such system on which to base a post-conflict government, either within a united Sudan, or as an independent entity. And hence its relations with civil society, which could assume a supportive role, are crucial.

Lacking a coherent political philosophy and a functioning system of civil administration, beset with unresolved problems of leadership and volatile relations with a host of rival movements, as well as difficult relations with civil society, it might be concluded that the SPLM/A is not well prepared to assume the responsibilities of governance, whether in an independent state or within a united Sudan. The achievement at Machakos appeared to come a surprise to the SPLM/A leadership; hopefully it will inspire hard thinking about governance. The skills the SPLM/A has demonstrated at the bargaining table make clear its capacity. A general conclusion is that the SPLM/A and the southern Sudanese intelligentsia have not provided their community with wise leadership. Nevertheless, despite decades of neglect, there is a large number of skilled southern Sudanese who could make a major contribution, if political obstacles can be overcome.

The South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF)

Armed forces or militias, which have not been formally recognised, have proven a serious threat to peace processes in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo,
Somalia, the Balkans and elsewhere. And such may also prove to be the case with respect to the IGAD sponsored Sudan peace negotiations currently underway in Kenya. At the time of writing plans are afoot, but still very much in flux, to have the South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF) join the main parties – SPLM/A and the Government of Sudan – in the peace talks. The SSDF includes established liberation organisations as well as tribal militias. They and the government are anxious to end their pariah status and gain recognition of their interests, at a time when the unfolding peace process can change the political configuration of Sudan.

Origins of the SSDF

Sudan’s first civil war ended when the rebel movement Anya-nya signed the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972. Even before that agreement ended in acrimony in 1983 and prior to the emergence of the SPLM/A, the so-called Anya-nya II took up arms in eastern Upper Nile in 1978. Nonetheless, the start of the second civil war is usually dated to 1983, when Southern soldiers at the garrison town of Bor refused to obey orders to move to the North. Instead, they first went to the bush, and then fled east where they gained the support of the Ethiopian military regime. Rivalry between Anya-nya II and the SPLM/A led to the defeat of the former and the merger of some of its members into the SPLM/A, while a rump Anya-nya II survived as a militia supported by the regime of General Jafaar Nimeiri. Paulino Mantieb, a Bul Nuer, leads this group based in Mayoum in western Upper Nile.

The predominantly Dinka component of the SPLM/A was ill-disciplined, and its practice of living off the land caused resentment in areas it occupied. In Equatoria, there was concern about the SPLM/A policy of eliminating local leaders, its use of harsh methods of recruitment, and the misbehaviour and corruption of some of its commanders. As a result, local communities began forming militias to defend themselves. They were formed among the Bari, Mundari, Didinga, Toposa and other peoples of eastern Equatoria, the Murle in south-eastern Upper Nile, the Fertit in western Bahr El Ghazal. and some of the Dinkas from Bahr El Ghazel. They were armed by a government that was only too happy to gain allies against the SPLM/A, and were known as the Friendly Forces.

Unlike the Muslim and Arab militias that operate in the North, the relationship of these militias with the government is strictly tactical and defensive. Their members share the sensibilities and goals of other Southerners, including those that took up arms in the SPLM/A, against the forceful imposition of Islam and Arabism. Where they diverge from the SPLM/A is their rejection of the ‘New Sudan’ concept promoted by John Garang, and their unequivocal support of national self-determination for the South. Their scope is limited, and they remain local level organisations whose chief objective is defence of their own communities.

The largest cluster of armed forces originated in the 1991 split of the SPLM/A into the SPLM/A-Mainstream led Dr. John Garang (Dinka) (sometimes called the Torit faction), the SPLM/A-United of Dr. Riek Machar (Nuer), and the so-called Nasir faction led Dr. Lam Akol (Shilluk). While demands for intra-movement democracy figured in the dispute, what critically separated the two camps was Garang’s goal of a united ‘New Sudan’, and Machar’s insistence on Southern self-determination. The result was a wide-ranging and brutal war between Nuers and Dinkas. Ultimately, the better supplied SPLM/A-Mainstream won, forcing Riek and Lam to turn to Khartoum for support, and an agreement was signed in 1992. In the same year, Riek and Lam parted ways, with the latter retaining the name SPLM/A-United and the
former forming the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM). Further splits occurred with the Equatorians forming the Equatoria Defence Forces (EDF). Having effectively joined the government camp, SSIM, SPLM/A-United and the EDF signed a Political Charter in 1996 and moved their headquarters to Khartoum. The following year, the SSIM together with EDF and three smaller break-away groups – SPLM Bahr El Ghazal Group, South Sudan Independence Group and the Bor Group – signed the Khartoum Agreement, and Lam’s SPLM/A-United signed the Fashoda Agreement which, in fact, is an addendum to the former.

The Khartoum Agreement committed the government to hold a referendum on self-determination for the South after an unspecified interim period. This pledge was included in Sudan’s 1998 constitution (Articles 137-138). The Agreement also brought together the various splinter factions into the South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF) and its political wing, the United Democratic Salvation Front (UDSF). For Khartoum, the major significance of these developments was not only to seriously weaken the SPLM/A, but also to permit the development of the oil industry in the Nuer-populated Unity State. The SSDF is a crucial element in the security of the South, and is particularly significant to the defence of the oil fields.

The implementation of the Khartoum Agreement was obstructed by the government. Riek established a regional government (the Coordinating Council of Southern Sudan) in Juba, with ministers imposed upon him by Khartoum. His choice for governor of the oil-rich Unity State, Taban Deng, was blocked by Khartoum’s support of Paulino Mantieb, the dominant military leader in the region who broke from Riek in 1998. Taban was not able to assume the position of governor, and had to flee the state capital of Bentiu to save his life after four of his cabinet ministers were killed. Paulino Mantieb won that battle, and the outcome was another split with the formation of the South Sudan United Movement (SSUM).

The process of fission in the SSDF continued. After a gun battle in Khartoum in June 1998 that resulted in two deaths, a Nasir Group under the veteran Gordon Kong took form. Other Nuer commanders – Simon Gatwitch (in Waat), Gabriel Tang (north-east Upper Nile), Both Teny and Taban Juch (in Akobo), and Thomas Mabior (in northern Jonglei) – followed suit and acquired a measure of autonomy in their fiefdoms. They were imitated by Dinka commanders like Tom Mum in the Fashoda area and Sabry Ashouly in Akoka. Tito Bihl, a Nuer commander who had been the deputy to Taban Deng, refused to accept the leadership of Paulino Mantieb and divided Unity State between them, keeping the name SSIM. All these men continued to proclaim allegiance to the Khartoum Agreement, but operated independently and had separate lines of logistical support with the government.

Meanwhile, Taban Deng first returned to Khartoum to become Deputy Minister of Roads and Bridges, then fled to Nairobi and set about trying to unite the SPD with the SPLM/A. Riek also gave up on the Khartoum Agreement, took up residence in Nairobi, and tried to re-build his shattered SSIM under the name Sudan Peoples Democratic Forces (SPDF). Lacking resources, he failed in his efforts to regain control of his former commanders in the field, most of who retained their ties with the government. They had varied motives for not following Riek’s eventual return to the SPLM/A. Some presumed their alliance with the government served to affirm its continuing commitment to the Khartoum Agreement. Nuer resentment of Dinka domination of the SPLM/A, and concern that return to that movement would see them marginalised, was also a factor. Above all, government supplies of food, munitions and weapons, served to keep them in line. However, the risk that they
would rebel or return to the SPLM/A is ever present. The ease and frequency of such shifts is illustrated in the career of Peter Gedet, who was first a member of the SPLM/A before going to Khartoum with Riek Macher, then left Riek and joined SSUM. Afterwards he rebelled against Paulino Mantieb and re-joined the SPLM/A, where his exceptional skills as a local level military commander and the fact that he gained the support of many Nuers in his home area in Unity State, seriously threatened the operation of the oil fields. A decision by John Garang to replace him led to his defection back to Paulino in November 2002.

Current make-up of the SSDF

Probably the largest component of the SSDF is the South Sudan Unity Movement (SSUM) under the personal control of Paulino Matieb. Paulino is chief of staff of the SSDF and a major-general in the Sudanese army; one of only four members of the SSDF who hold senior rank in the Sudanese army. The fact that Sudan’s Military Intelligence communicates and supplies each SSDF component separately means his authority is largely symbolic. He has direct control only in western Upper Nile; even there his authority is challenged by ambitious local commanders.

Beyond the SSUM, but still within the fractious Unity State, is the South Sudan Independent Movement (SSIM), of Tito Biel and James Leah. To the east, in the Nasir area is the Nuer force of Gordon Kong, also nominally under Paulino. Further east are a host of local commanders, who acknowledge Paulino and Gordon, but have considerable autonomy.

Probably the most politically effective group within the SSDF is the Equatoria Defence Forces (EDF) that operate in the area around Juba and Torit. This group is made up predominantly of fighters from the Lotuku and Lokoya communities, but includes also Acholi, Mahdi, Loluba, Bari, Zande, and others. Like all the components of the SSDF, a majority of its members are former SPLM/A fighters. The EDF represents an attempt to establish a regional defensive organisation in an area inhabited by many ethnic groups. In 1997 it signed on to the Khartoum Agreement, and began a period of collaboration with the government that continues.

Another signatory to the Khartoum Agreement is the Bor Group, which was formed by the late Aron Thon Arok in the mid-1990s. Like many SSDF groups, most of its members were originally in the SPLM/A and left the organisation for various reasons. The activities of the Bor Group are restricted to the town of Bor and to matters of self-defence.

Kawach Makuei, who signed the Khartoum Agreement on behalf of the South Sudan Independence Group (SSIG), was a very senior member of the SPLM/A before running afoul of Garang, after which he was held in an SPLM/A prison between 1984 and 1993. After he was released he formed the SSIG, which is based in Aweil. Another component of the SSDF was formed by the late Kerubino, which is currently operating in southern Bahr El Ghazel under John Macamdit. Yet another group is the so-called Mobile Forces, which were formed in 2001 drawing members from all SSDF components.

The Shilluk SPLM/A-United led by Lam Akol is not a member of the SSDF, and has not been involved in fighting since Lam joined the government as Minister of Transport – a post he kept until late 2002. Subsequently, Lam became a leading figure in the newly-established Justice Party, which claims a country-wide membership and
espouses democracy and self-determination for the South. Lam remains an ardent advocate of self-determination. Awad Jago is the field commander of the Shilluk forces based towns of Fashoda and Tonga in the Malakal region.

A much smaller organisation is the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), a largely Nuer organisation established in the late 1990s. Like SPLM/A United, the SSLM is outside the SSDF, but retains ties with it, shares many political sentiments, and has a similar relationship with the government.

Under the leadership of Gatluak Deng, the chairman of the Khartoum sponsored Southern Coordinating Council, various militias were brought into the SSDF at a conference in Juba in April 2001. The result was to significantly increase the size and stature of the SSDF. The biggest of these is the Mundari Forces led by Kelement Wani, who is one of the few surviving officers of Anya-nya I and a major-general in the Sudanese army. He is also a member of the ruling National Congress Party and an advisor to the SSDF, thus again illustrating the fluid character of these organisations and their leaders. Made up largely of former SPLM/A members, the Mundari militia took form in the mid-1980s as a self-defence organisation, but is now a major component of the SSDF and critical to the defence of Juba. Also operating around Juba are the Bari Forces of Bahr Jebel led by Paulino Lonyumbek.

Several ethnic groups in Equatoria have their own militias that are nominally linked to the EDF and the SSDF. They include the Didinga, Toposa and Mahdi. Elsewhere, the Murle in Jongley, the Fertit around Wau, and the Dinka north of Aweil have formed militias armed by the government and engaged in fighting against the SPLM/A.

**Future Prospects**

As the above overview makes clear, the SSDF is a conglomeration of groups spawned by the SSIM, SPLM/A-United, EDF, and a host of tribal militias. They are linked by a shared commitment to a Khartoum Agreement that is no longer operational, even if the government has not officially disowned it. This agreement and the cover of the SSDF, however, give them a sense of identity, a rationale for their tactical alliance with the government, and a sense of security in that others will come to their defence if they are attacked. The SSDF also serves a rallying point for a large group of Southerners who are currently outside the formal IGAD peace process, but are demanding that their interests be recognised. However, the finely tuned government policy of dividing Southerners, the practice of its Military Intelligence in dealing with each group separately and not permitting the SSDF to establish a cohesive and effective organisation, the strong attachment to tribe and clan in Southern Sudan, and the ambition of political and military leaders, all conspire against the SSDF emerging as a united, forceful exponent of Southern interests.

The SPLM/A accusation that all these groups are government stooges has been effective internationally to the extent that, if it is known at all, the SSDF is a pariah. The opportunist manipulation of the SSDF and the allied militias by the government has contributed much to this perception. But now the birds are coming home to roost. An effective military instrument in time of war, the SSDF is a serious problem in the unfolding peace process. Resentful at being left out of the process, and fearful of decisions being made that will effect its interests, the SSDF poses a major challenge to the prospects of peace.
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Interviews

In preparation of this article interviews were conducted over the period from the middle of January 2002 to the end of March with the following: Dr. Lam Akol, Cdr. Paulino Mantieb, Cdr. Peter Gedet, Cdr. Gordon Kong, Eng. Joseph Malwal, Mr. Peter Sule, Dr. Theophilious Ochaing, Brigadier (rtd.) Gatlauk Deng, Dr. Riek Gai, Cdr. James Gatdual, Cdr. Martin Kenyi, Mr. Kelia Riai, Mr. Kwach Makuei, Cdr. Benson Kuany, Mr. Kurt Martin, Major-General Kelement Wani, General Ismael Konyi, Abdel Bagi, Major-General Atom al-Nour, and Cdr. Garhouth Gatkouth.

Malik Agar, SPLM Regional Secretary South Blue Nile, Kurmuk, 22 March 2001; Majak Agoot, SPLM/A military commander, Bahr El Ghazel, Rumbek, 22 March 2002; Lual Deng, SPLM official and President of IDEAS, 15 March 2002; Salva Kiir, Deputy Chairman, SPLM/A, Yei, 24 March 2001; Riek Macher, Chairman, SPDF, Nairobi, 20 September 2002; Atem Yaak, Nairobi, 17 September 2002.

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Eritrea: Transition to Dictatorship, 1991-2003

Debessay Hedru

Eritrea’s image in the early 1990s as a peaceful and well-ordered state was coloured by the euphoria of independence following a military victory over the formidable army of Ethiopia. Against all odds, the country seceded in 1991 and attained international recognition in 1993. Emphasis on self-reliance and hard work made it easy to overlook the ingrained authoritarianism and basic intolerance of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) leadership. Eritreans and foreign observers believed the promise made by the victorious guerrilla leadership that Eritrea would learn the lessons of post-colonial African history and would not repeat its mistakes. The EPLF, renamed the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) in February 1994, reiterated this promise so frequently and eloquently that even the most cynical of persons was inclined to hope Eritrea would be spared the nightmare of dictatorship.

What kind of a country is that which everyday throws its sons and daughters to the furnaces of war? Whoever is spared from that is thrown in jail because they pronounced truth and demanded justice. Whoever escapes that fate is stranded in the diaspora, always suffering the distance, missing his country and living in the hope of returning (from a letter sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Mohammed Nur Ahmed, former ambassador of Eritrea to the People’s Republic of China).

Ten years later, the lament of the Eritrean diplomat cited above testifies to the broken promise. In the new millennium, Eritrea is known as a rogue state ruled by a rigid dictatorship. Following a reckless war with its giant neighbour Ethiopia that lasted two years (1998-2000), Eritrea has become a place where comrades-in-arms of a lifetime have turned on each other, heroes of yesterday are the ‘traitors’ of today, and brother dare not trust brother. Imprisonment and disappearances designed to keep the population in line are common, while famine is stalking the countryside. Once again, Eritreans are seeking refuge abroad, this time fleeing oppression from their own government, and those who fled Ethiopian oppression earlier, are not planning to return.

Why did Eritrea fall from grace? What happened to the celebrated heroes who fought for freedom? What happened to the promise of peace, democracy and prosperity? Who is to blame? The answer lies in the fact that the people willingly conferred absolute power on the leadership of a guerrilla movement that won their freedom from Ethiopian occupation, and then deprived them of liberty. Values such national unity and focus on a single goal (i.e. independence), translated into uncritical loyalty and
unquestioning obedience. Eritreans became prisoners of the warrior culture that brought them independence. By the end of the first decade of independence, values such as dialogue, compromise and consensus needed to build a democratic society came to be regarded as symbols of weakness, even treason.

**Constitutional Games**

A turning point in the transition to dictatorship came with the drafting of a constitution, a process that took three years (1994-1997) to complete. The launching of this process seemed to vindicate the hope that Eritrea would move towards democracy. The Constitutional Commission of Eritrea (CCE) was chaired by Bereket Habte Selassie, a distinguished academic who had served as the EPLF’s international spokesman since the early 1980s. The Commission included EPLF officials, prominent Eritreans from the diaspora, and a few veterans from other nationalist organisations, including the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), who had made their peace with the regime. Great pains were taken to portray the CCE as an independent body, popular participation was a carefully orchestrated exercise, and opinions were gathered from public gatherings throughout the country.

Forged during the long armed struggle, the authoritarian culture of the EPLF set definite limits to the debate. Dissenting views were either ignored or interpreted to fit the tradition of democratic-centralism that is part of EPLF’s culture. Debate on multiculturalism, ethnic identities and rights, and religion that may have challenged the EPLF’s passionate commitment to an Eritrean national culture and identity was constrained. CCE members who brought up issues related to ethnic group rights, especially historically marginalised communities like the Kunama, Saho, Afar, and Hedarb were told they should not aspire to copy the ‘ethnic federalism’ of neighbouring Ethiopia, an innovation the Eritrean leadership regards as anathema. ‘Sub-nationalism’, that is, ethnicity / tribalism, is a political crime in Eritrea. Indeed, the CCE adopted an anthem that vowed to combat this crime. It was made quite clear that ethnic group concerns that challenge the EPLF/PFDJ’s version of a mythical, homogeneous, national Eritrean culture would not be tolerated.

The issue of social identities (family, religion, language, region) and political identity (Eritrean) was never addressed openly, then or later. As early as 1973, identities deriving from ethnicity, region, clan and religion were denigrated by the EPLF as ‘sub-national’ (tribal) and ‘sectarian’. Current PFDJ ideology requires that social identities be effaced to accommodate the consolidation of a unifying national identity. The CCE avoided choosing an official language by proclaiming Arabic and Tigrigna as ‘working’ languages. These are the languages of choice of the two dominant population groups in Ethiopia – the Muslim communities of the Red Sea coast, and the Christians of the highland respectively – and have been the working languages of all nationalist movements in Eritrea.

The debate about language concerns the wish of minority ethnic communities to choose a language of instruction deemed to be appropriate for the future of their children. EPLF education policy requires the use of the ‘mother-tongue’ (ethnic language) as the language of instruction at the elementary level, to be followed by instruction in English. This way the thorny question of the wider impact of Arabic as an international language of commerce and culture is avoided. Islamic communities would prefer Arabic as the first language of education to be followed by English, something they believe would make their children more competitive. These communities fear the present curriculum puts their children at a disadvantage in
comparison with Tigrigna-speakers, who are fluent in one of the country’s two working languages.

Likewise, discussion of political pluralism that may have touched on the status of rival nationalist organisations banned from returning to Eritrea was muted. Those who raised this issue were accused of sectarianism. Statements like ‘the time is not yet right’ often closed off debate on the model of democracy suitable for Eritrea. Issayas Aferwerki, the popularly revered leader of the EPLF, was often heard to say that the western model of liberal democracy is not suitable for his country, and speculated vaguely about a system rooted in local tradition and customs. Such statements were taken on faith by a public that was not ready to question the motives of its warrior heroes, nor sophisticated enough to know that power corrupts. In retrospect, the constitution-making process was a public relations exercise. And not a very successful one at that, because it did excite the political imagination of many Eritreans who were to be bitterly disappointed before long.

The establishment of the Special Court in 1996 was the first sign of the sort of democracy envisioned by the EPLF. This court, whose members answer only to the President, deals with economic and political crimes. It dealt severely with EPLF fighters who mutinied on the eve of independence in 1993, refusing to serve longer without pay, with supporters of the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, and with former officials of the Ethiopian administration in Eritrea. Most of these people were arrested without due process, and their families were not notified for long periods, if at all. Some were abducted from neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan. Persons who had been tried and freed by the civil courts were later re-arrested and sentenced by the Special Court.

There was no disquiet when this court was established in the midst of the constitution-making exercise, because it was presented as necessary to combat corruption. It was only later, when it became known how this court operates in secrecy, the harsh sentences it metes out, and the fact that there is no right of appeal against its decisions, that concerns were voiced. The standing of the civil courts plummeted as the public became aware that real power lay in the Office of the President, and people began to petition his staff directly.

The protracted constitution-making process came to an end in May 1997, when a bulky document was ratified by the National Assembly – an appointed body packed with EPLF cadres and supporters – then consigned to the deep freezer. Before the ink on it had dried, anonymous articles criticising the CCE Chairman appeared in government-controlled newspapers; a private press had not yet appeared. Many stories and articles were published in the same papers that disparaged the history of rival nationalist organisations. Since these organisations are the only existing political groups that can compete with the ruling party, the articles were harbingers of what could be expected in terms of political pluralism.

Restriction of religious freedom and cultural autonomy, justified as combating fundamentalism and ‘cultural pollution’, were other straws in the political wind. Revivalist sects of Islam and Pentecostalism came under attack by the state. Immediately after independence, communities seeking to build mosques were regarded with suspicion as jihad sympathisers. Jehovah Witnesses were harshly persecuted for refusing to participate in the independence referendum and later on in military service. The 1994 targeting of Islamic communities as jihadists and the stripping of Jehovah Witnesses’ rights became a pattern repeated in 2002 with the
closing of two inter-faith congregations, the Kalae-Hiwot and Kdus Yosef. These were justified as the need to limit the mushrooming of non-traditional churches which are not older than forty years. The banning did not elicit any opposition from the Christian and Muslim population. Religious leaders of the majority churches have become increasingly visible at official functions, creating the impression of a politicised clergy. They compete for prestige and resources, and such rivalry is used by the regime to play them against each other, so that there is no effective inter-faith solidarity to fight for religious freedom.

The majority of Eritreans, be they Christian or Muslim, appear to have grown accustomed to government imposed limitations of the freedom of worship. The few who object, do so in whispers and behind closed doors. Since Eritrea remains a society where Muslims and Christians co-exist politically but in the main are socially segregated, there is always room for divide-and-rule tactics.

Adopted in 1997, the Constitution remains in the deep freezer. The regime makes no secret of its belief that the people are not ready for democracy. Nonetheless, national elections – sans political parties - were scheduled twice only to be canceled without explanation. An official declaration on 1 January 2003 claimed that:

in accordance with the prevailing wish of the people it is not the time to establish political parties, and discussion of their establishment has been postponed (Hadas Ertra, 1 January 2003).

How ‘the prevailing wish of the people’ was ascertained was not stated. By way of diversion, local elections in the six administrative Zoba (zones) were held in 2003. All candidates were EPLF/PFDJ loyalists picked by the party machinery in line with the tradition of democratic centralism.

Generation Clashes

Independence brought neither peace nor prosperity to Eritrea’s youth. Instead, it brought state regulation of their lives ranging from school to workplace. A National Service introduced in 1994 obliged men and women, aged 18-40 years, to serve 18 months for military training. University and secondary school students are temporarily exempted from the draft, but are sent to work in agricultural and construction projects in the countryside during summer. Youth resentment grew as the period of military service was repeatedly extended; the rural areas were particularly affected by the loss of labour power. Eritrea’s wars against its neighbours led to further militarisation of society, and worsened the disaffection of the younger generation, creating a conflict between them and the veterans of the war for liberation. Early marriages and increased use of the veil by young Muslim women became noticeable in the countryside, prompting the regime to denounce these practices as unpatriotic. By 2001, marriage no longer exempted young women from military service, pushing them into pregnancy, because having children exempts them. By mid-2001, reports of sexual abuse of female conscripts by army officers began to circulate, first informally then in the private press. The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), a PFDJ adjunct, stridently upheld the official line claiming that cases of abuse were isolated, thus leaving the abused without any institutional backing for an investigation of their complaints.

It fell to university students to translate the disaffection of their generation into a political manifesto. Until July 2001, their demands were apolitical and were directed
at administrators who replicated the EPLF tradition of rule by command. They asked for fairness in examinations, enough chairs in classrooms, clean dormitories, and the like. They also persevered against the President of the University who pressured them to join the government-controlled National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS), and fought hard to establish their own, autonomous Student Union (SU). The SU charted its own agenda by calling for the abolition of National Service and summer work camps. Subsequently, student demands began to focus on issues of freedom of thought, expression and movement. The students had already taken a page from the history of Eritrea’s struggle for independence, and began to organise clandestine cells to support the reformists’ call for the implementation of the Constitution.

The first public statement challenging the regime came from Semere Kesete, the President of the Student Union. In July 2001, he gave a speech at his graduation ceremony denouncing summer work camps as forced labour. Hundreds of students responded by boycotting the camps. Semere’s arrest a month later made him the hero of an emerging political opposition. The Chief Justice issued a writ of habeas corpus requiring the police to bring Semere to open court, rather than the Special Court. The writ was ignored, and the young rebel remained in custody, while some 3,000 of his colleagues were rounded up and dispatched to labour camps. The death there of two students from heat stroke further galvanised student opposition. The Chief Justice was summarily dismissed from his position, after he publicly criticised executive intervention in the affairs of the judiciary.

These events were reported in the fledgling free press that had emerged during the constitution-making period. Its editors, reporters and artists belonged to a generation that came of age after the end of the struggle for liberation and is not overawed by the nationalist mystique. They boldly pushed against the barriers to establish the first free press the country has known since the 1940s. The diversity of views voiced in some ten weekly and fortnightly publications found an eager audience in a population ready to embark on the path to political pluralism as guaranteed by the Constitution. The majority of reporters and editors were detained and dispatched to labour camps during the last quarter of 2001.

Sometime later Semere escaped to Ethiopia. His path was followed by other youth who fled to avoid conscription, army deserters, and journalists who fled Eritrea when the regime brought to a close an all too brief period of freedom for the press. When their papers were banned, only the official newspaper was left in Eritrea.

Women in Independent Eritrea

Women’s participation in the struggle for independence is a story often told and much exaggerated by the EPLF and its supporters abroad. Indeed, female participation was extensive and significant in the struggle for independence, and much was said and done to improve gender relations within the nationalist movement. Yet, in essence, the guerilla war machine used female power without necessarily altering traditional views of their role in society. Few women occupied command positions, and their presence in the decision-making bodies of the EPLF remained token throughout.

The presence of women from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in the CCE reinforced Eritrea’s international image as a country where women’s equality had been established during the war for independence. In reality, Eritrean society rejected the gains made by women during the war, and the EPLF/PPDJ did little to empower
them. The Constitution paid tribute to the participation of women in the war of liberation, but made no specific provision to protect their rights. The women who asked for constitutional guarantees were scolded for wanting to copy the Ethiopian constitution, which contains articles enshrining women’s rights. Women, including former fighters, have no role as political actors in Eritrea. The body that officially speaks for them – the NUEW – remains an integral part of the EPLF/PFDJ, although it presents itself as a non-governmental organisation. BANA, an alternative organisation set up by women fighters, has collapsed.

Dissidents Turned Reformists
How did the challenge to the authority of the President arise? Who were those who called for reform after three decades of unquestioning loyalty to Issayas Afewerki? At the forefront of this movement were veteran comrades of the President who had lost ground steadily in the decision-making process to a clique of relative newcomers that formed around Issayas after independence. Issayas’ supremacy throughout the long war of independence notwithstanding, he had worked with a group of male colleagues of solid standing within the movement, who had to be convinced rather than be dictated to. The remarkable solidarity of this group over three decades of war is testimony to his political talent. This relationship began to fray after 1991, when Issayas became increasingly dependent on the state apparatus as his power base and less on the EPLF/PFDJ. He surrounded himself with people of no great standing in the movement and largely dependent on him, who could be relied upon to carry out his orders, no matter how quixotic they seemed. His former comrades, on the other hand, were kept hopping from one administrative post to another, leaving few marks in any field, while the EPLF/PFDJ itself was being transformed into another bureaucratic apparatus attached to the state. Ultimately, Issayas was to use the state apparatus to crush the opposition that emerged within the PFDJ.

As the rift between Issayas and his former comrades widened, the latter began to feel the consequences of the cooling of relations in the bizarre tactic of ‘freezing’ (medeskhal). A ‘frozen’ official is stripped of his functions, yet not dismissed formally or demobilised from military service, continues to collect his salary and may even occupy his office. Numerous EPLF veterans whose loyalty to Issayas is not absolutely certain are currently in this limbo. The latest and best known is Sebhat Ephrem, longtime military chief of the EPLF and Defence Minister of independent Eritrea. A reshuffle in the autumn of 2002 placed four army generals loyal to the President in charge of both military and civil administration in the four zones into which the country was divided. Since they report directly to Issayas, General Sebhat was left holding a post devoid of authority and responsibility.

The split in the Eritrean leadership is traced directly to the displacement of former comrades from the centre of power, where Issayas now stands alone towering over a clique of minions. The nature of decisions made there and the manner in which they were made public, also served to provoke dissidence and to raise the cry for reform. The mindless provocation that led to the disastrous war with Ethiopia is the best example. That other cabinet officials were not informed, let alone consulted, is proven by the fact that the Eritrean Foreign Minister arrived in Addis Ababa to consult with the Ethiopians on the very day the border clash occurred, and was given the news there.

The issue of accountability was raised at a PFDJ Central Committee meeting in August 2000, after a cease-fire was declared in the war with Ethiopia in mid-year.
Some members asked for an assessment of the conduct of the war, and also requested that the National Assembly, which had not met for sometime, be convened. At a meeting of the National Assembly the following month, a significant number of its members supported a motion asking the President to convene the Assembly regularly. They also stressed the need to assess the EPLF/PFDJ’s governance of the past decade, including the practice of ‘freezing’. Lastly, they asked for the implementation of the Constitution to serve as the guide in rectifying past errors. These sessions produced a common focus for those who had become dissatisfied with the slide towards dictatorship, their goal being to move towards a constitutional government after the end of the war.

At a subsequent meeting of the National Assembly in September 2000, the dissidents succeeded in forcing the President to agree to schedule national elections for December 2001, and to appoint committees to draft legislation regulating political parties and elections. The Minister of Local Government, Mahmud Sheriffo, was appointed chairman of the committee for political party legislation. He, in turn, appointed the Minister of Justice, Fawzia Hashim, the Attorney-General, Moussa Naib, the Minister of Trade & Industry, Haile Woldetensae, the Minister of Energy and Mines, Tesfay Gebreselassy, and the Director of Investment, Ahmad Taha Badouri, to this committee.

In October 2000, a group that included former CCE members and its chairman, but no high ranking Front members, met in Berlin to draft a letter addressed to Issayas voicing their concerns and asking for reforms. Signed by thirteen persons, it was published on the Internet. This was the first crack in the façade of unity and discipline so highly prized by the regime, and it was greeted accordingly. The signatories were condemned for acting during time of war, for writing the letter in a foreign language, and for proposing an international meeting to recommend internal political reforms. A month later, some of them met the President in Asmara, but failed to persuade him of the need for reform. Eight journalists who wrote reports of the so-called ‘Berlin Manifesto’ were arrested in Eritrea. This was the first salvo of a regime assault on the free press. The government press lashed out against the critics, accusing them of being power-hungry, corrupt and treacherous. The Eritrean public, which has a very high regard for Issayas, appeared to agree that his critics could have waited for a better time.

In January 2001, in a precautionary move, the President formed a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the political crimes of ‘sub-nationalism’ and ‘defeatism’. This commission included the Minister of Justice, Fawzia Hashim, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Said Abdella, and the Deputy Police Commissioner, Simon Gebredengle. Its mission was to counter the reformists’ activities and intimidate their supporters, and to orchestrate support for their eventual condemnation as ‘traitors’.

The reformists responded with a public relations campaign, giving interviews to the private newspapers and providing responses to Commission of Inquiry insinuations and insults. Newspaper sales – both government and private – skyrocketed in the spring and summer of 2001, indicating keen public interest in the political clash between old comrades now turned political foes.

When the first draft of the political party legislation was completed in March 2001, the committee Chairman circumvented PFDJ’s practice of democratic centralism by submitting the document directly to the members of the National Assembly. This deprived the President of an opportunity to censor the draft, and amounted to a
personal affront from a subordinate who, until that moment, had been a trusted comrade. It was also proof that the reformists had penetrated the upper echelons of the PFDJ hierarchy. Dismissed instantly from all his posts, Sheriffo promptly issued a press release accusing the president of impropriety; another first in the reign of this regime.

The reformists worked to recruit colleagues in the PFDJ Central Committee and the National Assembly to their cause. Their objective was to use the rules of the PFDJ Charter, the procedures of the National Assembly, and the provisions of the ratified Constitution to push through a no-confidence vote on the President, and thus open the way to national elections. Regime supporters, on the other hand, moved to identify and isolate the leading critics, and to dissuade others who seemed inclined to side with them. Tried methods of co-optation and intimidation served to undercut the reformists’ efforts. By mid-summer 2001, they had to face the fact they could not count on significant support in the National Assembly or the PFDJ Central Committee, and sought to appeal directly to the populace.

In May 2001 they issued an ‘Open Letter to the PFDJ’, appending copies of their correspondence with the President. The letter was intended for party members, but immediately found its way to the Internet. Fifteen men and one woman signed the letter. Among them were several of the best known EPLF veterans and comrades of Issayas since the founding of the Front in the mid-1970s. They included Mahmud Sheriffo, former minister of local government; Haile Woldetensae, former foreign minister; Petros Solomon, former security chief and foreign minister; Mesfin Hagos, former defense minister, Germano Nati, former governor of Gash province; four former ambassadors – Hamid Himid, Adhanom Gebremariam, Beraki Gebreselasy, Haile Mankerios – four former generals – Berhane Gebregziher, Ukbe Abraha, Stefanos Seyum; Astier Fisehazion – ELF veteran Mohamed Berhan Blatta, and Salah Kekiyah, the only female signatory and former vice-minister of foreign affairs. All were members of both the Central Committee of the PFDJ and the National Assembly.

The ‘Open Letter’ and subsequent declarations made by the reformists confirmed what the people had suspected, that is, the President controls and manipulates the legislative body, intervenes in the function of the judiciary, and has the only voice that matters in the party and the regime. The free press provided his opponents with a forum where probing and blunt questions by young, bold journalists elicited revealing responses about the conflict within the PFDJ. Ministers and generals gave interviews to the private newspapers, and raised a range of issues the public was unaware of. Errors of the past, the mistreatment of female soldiers, the need to revise the language policy, and to allow people a voice in their government, were openly discussed. Two army generals – Berhane Gebregziher and Ukbe Abraha – openly criticised the practice of ‘freezing’. Top ranking EPLF officials and government minister like Mahmud Sheriffo, Petros Solomon and Haile Woldensae, who were themselves soon to be frozen out of their offices, referred to past misuse of power and the need to acknowledge mistakes and correct them. They lobbied confidently and quite openly for their cause under the watchful eye of the regime. The summer of 2001 was a time of hope in Eritrea, when many voices mingled in a lively debate about the country’s political future.

While the regime’s critics had yet to gain significant public support, they had succeeded in putting the issue of reform on the public agenda. Throughout, the attitude of the Eritrean people remained ambivalent. Issayas’ immense popularity is not easily dented. Despite his autocratic temperament, he has not lost touch with the
common people. Nor has he lost the talent for outwitting and outmanoeuvring opponents that kept him at the helm of the EPLF/PFDJ for four decades. Active hostilities with Ethiopia enabled him to charge the opposition with defeatism and treason, and to raise the spectre of an Ethiopian re-occupation of Eritrea.

Understandably, Eritreans found it difficult to credit the newly-found commitment to reform of those who, after all, were the founders and leaders of the regime. Many saw this dispute as a power struggle at the top, which was the essence of it. Unaccustomed to public airing of differences among the elite, and uncomfortable with the promises of the regime’s critics, most Eritreans reserved judgment.

People were becoming concerned, however, about the split and its potential consequences. In July 2001, a reconciliation committee made up of 52 elders sought to bring the two sides together to talk over their differences. They were supported in this effort by the private newspapers. However, Issayas rejected it out of hand, and some of its members found themselves talking to security officials. Eight members of the Committee of Elders were later detained and one of them, Hedad Kerar, passed away in prison in 2003.

In August 2001, the reformists played their last card, issuing a document addressed to the public. The ‘Open Paper to the Eritrean People: Important and Urgent Issues’ summarised earlier statements and rebutted the regime’s accusation of treason. To prove their innocence, they asked for a public inquiry with access to the minutes of National Assembly sessions. To refute regime accusations of ‘sub-nationalism’ leveled against them, they asked Eritreans to note that their movement was multi-ethnic and included persons of all faiths. They warned that if the political system was not opened up immediately the country’s descent into tyranny would be inevitable. To prevent the loss of freedom and to rectify mistakes, they called for a number of measures to be taken. Key of which were the following:

- neutrality of the armed forces in the ongoing political struggle between those who seek openness and those who fight to keep the status quo;
- stop the forced conscription of women in the military until further consultation with the people;
- release prisoners held without due process, and notify their families of their whereabouts or execution;
- establish a Public Trust Fund to administer PFDJ funds, and extricate the PFDJ from business activities if it chooses to function as a political party along with other parties;
- direct election of representatives by their communities, instead of PFDJ appointment, in zone, district and village bodies;
- establishment of fair electoral laws to enable all citizens to participate without discrimination, whether they support or oppose the PFDJ;
- dissolve the Special Court, amend the Press Law, protect judicial autonomy, and set a date for the transition towards a constitutional government;
- conduct relations with neighbouring countries on a basis of mutual respect and formal agreements.
This was an open challenge to the regime and Issaya's own position. As August 2001 drew to a close, the reformists were subjected to a campaign of vilification that accused them of defeatism and treason during the war with Ethiopia. Heavy security surveillance and open threats failed to intimidate them, and they continued to meet and plan.

Finally, on 18 September 2001, eleven of them were arrested and detained in undisclosed locations; three others who signed the letter were abroad at the time. No charges were laid against them before a court of law, but in a speech to the National Assembly in February 2002 Issayas indicted the prisoners for 'committing treason by abandoning the very values and principles the Eritrean people fought for.' The Assembly responded by condemning them 'for the crimes they committed against the people and their country.' Two years later, their whereabouts remain unknown. Given the harshness of the regime's language, and the preemptive condemnation by the National Assembly, there is fear that some of them may have been executed.

Many others, including journalists, members of the Committee of Elders, and suspected sympathizers were detained in September 2001. Some three thousand students were rounded up and taken to remote camps in the interior for a month. All private publications were banned. Arrests and 'freezing' have continued ever since. A steady stream of young Eritreans – students, soldiers, journalists, civil servants, former PFDJ cadres – crossed the borders to Ethiopia and Sudan seeking political asylum. The mothers of some of them are in prison for helping them escape.

This political drama was enacted against a background of sharp economic decline and widespread famine. The war dislocated external trade and brought Eritrea's urban economy, such as it was, to a standstill. Prices rose steeply, while many households whose males served in the army were left without income. Foreign aid was suspended when the regime fell out with European Union over its treatment of dissidents, and with the United States when it arrested local employees of its embassy and charged them with espionage. Drought over the last couple of years left three quarters of the population without food, and only a massive international humanitarian effort prevented a major famine.

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Anatomy of a Conflict: Afar & Ise
Ethiopia

John Markakis

Bloodshed at Galalu

23 March 2002: Dawn came that day to find a group of about thirty Afar warriors lying in ambush alongside the road to Djibouti. Newly re-surfaced, Ethiopia’s sole link to the sea cuts a straight dark line through the desiccated Alligedhi plain. No vehicles were on the road at that early hour. Lorry drivers avoid night travel, preferring to spend evenings in the shantytowns that dot the road, where they find food, drink and women for sale. A bridge nearby takes the road over the dry bed of the Galalu, a seasonal stream that brings rainwater from the Asebot Mountains to the south. Rain had not fallen in many months, and the emaciated animals on the plain were herded to the Awash River, the area’s only permanent source of water some distance to the west. A single well on the Galalu streambed keeps water throughout the year, a precious resource for pastoralists in this parched land, and a bone of violent contention in times of drought.

The Afar warriors were young, some still in their teens. Most of them belonged to the Dala clan and had been selected by the elders for the task. They were armed with Kalashnikov automatic rifles worth US$75 apiece. Their leader, a twenty-seven year old from the Ali Sara sub-clan, had telescopic sights mounted on his rifle. The site of the ambush was cluttered with construction material and tools used in the building of a new district centre for the Afar Borimadaitu district. The old centre in the marshland by the Awash River was isolated by floods and plagued by malaria. Somali pastoralists who also use the Alligedhi plain strenuously opposed the siting of the new centre adjacent to the road. They claim it was intended to bar their access to the Awash River.

Before the sun had shown itself, a group of about fifty Somali warriors approached Galalu. They were from the Ise clan and came from the direction of Gadamaitu, a shantytown 25 kilometres south of Galalu. The Ise are neighbours and traditional enemies of the Afar, eternally feuding over pastureland and waterpoints. ‘We are born with it and die with it’ said an Ise elder referring to this legacy. Although it lies well within the Afar regional state, Ise tribesmen and traders from northern Ethiopia inhabit Gadamaitu. Afar have no place there and resent it mightily. Gadamaitu has no water of its own. It has to be brought from the Awash River by truck through Afar territory; a hazardous enterprise in times of active hostilities between the two groups. Ise herdsmen also rely on the well on the Galalu streambed, and have to fight the Afar for access in times of drought.

Burnished ebony in colour, with sharp features and lean frames, it is not easy for an outsider to distinguish Afar from Ise at a glance. Closer inspection reveals their skirts
have different patterns, their goats different colours. However, they share many things as well, including women they take in marriage from each other. Nowadays, however, they are prone to stress their differences and the issues that divide them. Also armed with Kalashnikov rifles, the approaching Ise band was led by a Gadamaitu community leader well known to and despised by the Afar. He led the Ise opposition to the establishment of the district centre at Galalu and, according to the Afar, twice before had sent Ise warriors to destroy the buildings there and loot the materials. The Afar warriors were there to repel a third attack, and this morning they believed they saw it coming. The Ise later denied this was their intention, claiming their objective was the well at Galalu that was barred to them by the Afar.

The Afar opened fire when the Ise got within range, catching their enemy by surprise. A battle ensued and continued for several hours, before an Ethiopian army detachment arrived from a nearby base. The Ise quit the battlefield, leaving thirteen of their men dead, including their leader, to be taken away by the soldiers. The Afar did not admit to any losses in this battle. Three Afar herdsmen who happened to come upon the retreating Ise band were killed that day. Fatalities have mounted on both sides ever since.

What is the cause of such bloodshed? Is it an ‘ethnic’ conflict? a ‘resource conflict’? a ‘conflict of identities’ of ‘cultures’ of ‘values’? It is all these and much more. The account that follows traces the various elements in its complex composition.

The Setting

The Awash River Valley in eastern Ethiopia is home to the Afar, a nation of pastoralists who number about one million. The only river in that country that flows eastward, the Awash is the lifeline of the people who inhabit the southern portion of the Afar regional state, providing them with their only permanent source of water and valuable dry season pastureland. The Afar mode of livestock production is based on transhumance, with the herds ranging far from the river during the wet season and returning to it during the dry period. During the year they range from the Asebot Mountain and the Awash National Park in the south, to the foothills of the highlands in the west, and the line of hills in the southeast that separate them from their Somali neighbours. In the outer limits of their roaming the Afar come into contact - and frequently clash - with several neighbouring groups; the sedentary cultivators Ittu. Nole, Argoba, and the mobile pastoralists Kereyu, Gurgura, Ise. Clashes are more frequent during periods of drought, and 2002 was a year of severe drought that ended in famine. Afar conflict with the Ise Somali is the most serious, because the latter are contesting the exclusive claim of the former to the grazing lands of the vast Allighedi plain east of the Awash river.

The Legacy of the Past

Prior to the conquest of their homeland by the Abyssinians at the end of the 19th century, the Afar were loosely grouped into several sultanates whose combined territory ran from the shore of the Red Sea in the east to the foothills of the escarpment in the west, the Dire Dawa region in the south, and the vicinity of Massawa in the north. In the imperialist scramble, in which Abyssinia took a prominent part, Afar land was divided between Ethiopia, Italy (Eritrea) and France (Djibouti). The Afar sultanates were dismantled, with the partial exception of Ausa in Ethiopia that retained a modicum of autonomy until the demise of the imperial regime (1974). The
Afar regard the loss of independence and native leadership as the root cause of their nation’s subsequent decline into impoverished obscurity.

Decline was accompanied by considerable loss of territory. Since the beginning of the colonial period the Afar have been pushed northwards by their Somali neighbours who outnumber them three to one within Ethiopia. The spearhead of the Somali expansion, as the Afar see it, is the Ise clan, who now occupy Shinile zone in the Somali regional state. The second largest Somali clan in Ethiopia, after the Ogaden, the Ise are involved in trade, transport as well as livestock production, and are a dynamic and sophisticated group with connections throughout the region. By contrast, the Afar remained isolated, unsophisticated and restricted to raising livestock. Part of the Ise expansion was in the Djibouti enclave, formerly a purely Afar area, where now the former outnumber the latter and are the ruling ethnic group. Within Ethiopia, the Ise pushed the Afar from Dire Dawa northwards to claim the eastern portion of the Alighedi plain and came within sight of the Awash river; which the Afar believe is the Ise ultimate goal. The Afar have neither forgotten nor forgiven the loss of their land, nor have they given up hope of reclaiming it. The ceding of a sizable portion of Afar land in the north to Eritrea when the latter became independent in the early 1990s was a repeat of the colonial partition, and a particularly painful one because it cut off the Afar in Ethiopia from the port of Asab in Eritrea.

**External Intervention**

In the past, the conflict between the two groups was mainly over water, pastureland and access routes; a purely pastoralist confrontation. However, it was not fought entirely on their own. In fact, forces from the outside intervened to tilt the balance against the Afar.

The first of these was the Djibouti – Addis Ababa railway that was completed in 1919. Began in Djibouti by the French, it employed Ise as transporters, workers and guards, who later settled in the lowland region crossed by the railway and is now the Shinile zone, the Ise home in the Somali regional state. Two decades later came the Italians, who recruited large numbers of Somali, many Ise among them, for their invasion of Ethiopia from the south. The Ise fought for the Italians and received arms and training in return, as well as a lucrative market for their animals. They used the arms against the Afar to gain access into the Alighedi plain for their enlarged herds. In turn, the Afar joined Ethiopia, the losing side, and suffered retaliation by the Italians.

In the 1960s, commercial cultivation was introduced in the Awash valley. It was promoted by the imperial government, which gave concessions on riverside land to foreign and domestic investors who produced mainly cotton with irrigation. The Afar were neither consulted nor compensated. However, the Sultan of Ausa and some elders established their own plantations and became wealthy in record time. The pastoralists lost access to large portions of the river and riverside pastureland on which they depend to weather the dry season. This loss undermined the sustainability of livestock production. In the terrible famine caused by drought in the early 1970s, the Afar lost many lives and the bulk of their livestock.

In the early 1970s, the Siad Barre regime in Somalia trained a guerilla force for the eventual invasion of Ethiopia. The Western Somalia Liberation Front had several divisions, one of which was intended to occupy and annex Djibouti, and was composed mainly of Ise clansmen. The Djibouti part of the plan was abandoned, but
when the invasion of Ethiopia came in 1977, the Ise, well armed and trained, once again pressed their advantage to push further into Afar territory.

The Ethiopian counterattack and expulsion of the invaders the following year was enthusiastically supported by the Afar, but proved only a temporary setback for the Ise, who were pushed southwards to the railway line. They were soon to establish a strong presence on the southern portion of the road to Djibouti that traverses the Afar region. The road was built in the early 1970s. Several of the construction camps along it evolved into truck-stop hamlets devoted to providing services for the traffic. The military camps that dotted the area provided additional custom for traders, tavern and hotelkeepers and prostitutes. Until then the only settled site in the region was Gewane, an Afar settlement dating from the Italian period. Ise clansmen initially employed by the German construction company settled in two of these hamlets; Gadamaitu and Adaitu. They became involved in the truck-stop trade, in smuggling goods across the border with Djibouti and Somalia, as well as in raising livestock in the vicinity. Ise herders used these towns as gateways to roam northwards towards the Awash River. Meaningfully, the Ise call Gadamaitu Garba Ise (‘Shoulder of the Ise’, i.e., support to lean on). Few Afar settled there, and they departed when hostilities between the two groups broke out. A third Ise truck-stop hamlet, Undofo, appeared in the mid 1990s.

The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has ruled Ethiopia since 1991. In order to defuse conflicts that undermined previous regimes, it restructured what was a highly centralised state into a federation whose self-administering constituent units are ethnic groups. Each state is subdivided into zones and districts. The Afar got their own regional state as did their Somali neighbours. The boundary that divides these two regions was not defined at the time, mainly because both groups have conflicting claims in the Alligedhi plain and on stretches of the road to Djibouti. It was left for the administrations of the two regions to resolve the issue, but they failed to do so. The issue remains unresolved and a potent source of conflict.

**Contributing Factors**

Asab on the Red Sea was the main seaport for Ethiopia until 1998, handling most of the import-export trade, with Djibouti playing a secondary role. The war with Eritrea that erupted that year deprived Ethiopia of Asab, making Djibouti the landlocked country’s sole outlet to the sea. The road to Djibouti that crosses the Afar region and the railway that crosses Ise land became vital links, and traffic on them multiplied manifold. The road became a new and valuable source of revenue, and the truck-stop hamlets on it became beehives of activity. Many highlanders settled there and engaged in the service and trade sectors.

Contraband, an old trade, now acquired new dimensions, given the collapse of state control of the borders between Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somaliland and Somalia, the result of the political upheavals of the late 1980s and early 1990s. A veritable common market emerged along the eastern and southern sections of the Ethiopian periphery, where people and goods move freely without benefit of passports, visas or customs checks. The few customs posts that exist are easily evaded. Contraband trade flourished, bringing manufactured goods from many parts of the world, especially China, through the ports of Djibouti, Berbera in Somaliland and Bossaso in Puntland.
Not surprisingly, it is Somali people, and especially Ise, who became involved in this trade, since they can move freely among their own kin throughout the region. They control the camel caravan trade in contraband, renting animals and their services as guides, porters and guards, to bring the goods to the towns they control on the road to Djibouti, especially Gadamaitu, from where they are channeled to the highlands by vehicle and the railway. They work closely with highlanders, many of them Tigrayans, who operate in the same towns. Rumour has it that the third party in this trade are the military who are stationed in the area and whose job is to control illicit commerce.

**Proximate Factors**

As in the past, the Afar remained aloof from non-pastoralist affairs and realised scant benefit from the activities, licit and illicit, on the road that traverses their territory. Nevertheless, they became increasingly concerned about the tightening Ise grip on the three towns, and their role in supporting Ise herder incursions west of the road towards the Awash River. This concern led to increasingly frequent clashes between Afar and Ise herdsmen over waterholes, a resource that has become scarcer with time, and these clashes became deadlier through the use of automatic weapons. There is no traditional conflict resolution mechanism that binds the two groups, and the involvement of the regional officialdom proved ineffective. As a result, grievances accumulated on both sides and tension rose steadily during the 1990s.

The Ethiopian-Eritrean war (1988-2001) was fought partly in northern Afar and caused havoc among the population there who had to abandon their land and move south with their animals, increasing the burden on already congested and desiccated pasturelands. The subsequent abandonment of Asab as the main port for Ethiopian trade affected adversely the Afar, if only because the road to the port crosses their territory. On the other hand, Ethiopia’s trade shifted to Djibouti, and the road to that port also crosses Afar territory.

In 2000, Saudi Arabia imposed a ban on animal imports from the Horn; the second one in recent years, due to the outbreak of Rift Valley fever. The ban hit the Ise particularly hard, because they are major exporters of sheep and goats to the Arabian market. It caused overstocking and overgrazing in Shinile zone, and compelled Ise herdsmen to range deeper into Afar territory towards the Awash River, where they met increasingly hostile reception on the part of the Afar.

The Afar regional administration came under increasing pressure from two sides. On one side, the federal government demanded that it put a stop to the violence and reach an agreement with its Somali counterpart for a final resolution of the issue that divides them. The issue itself is the demarcation of the border between the two regions. When the federation was formed in the mid-1990s, the territory of each region was roughly but not precisely, nor officially, delineated. As in the case with other contested boundaries throughout Ethiopia, it was left for the regional authorities themselves to settle. They proved unable to do so. For one thing, both regions were in continuous political turmoil until the EPRDF intervened to impose a single party formula. While the Afar region gained a degree of political stability in the late 1990s, the Somali region has still to do so.

The Afar regional administration came under pressure on the other side by the people who demanded the expulsion of the Ise from their land and the marking of the
boundary between the two regions. The Afar base their case on history, claiming land that now hosts quite a few Ise, most significantly the three hamlets – Gadamaitu, Adaitu, Undofo – on the road to Djibouti. The Somali counter with a demand for a referendum, with the obvious expectation that the three hamlets would become part of their region. They moved to preempt the issue by claiming administrative control of these settlements by integrating them into districts of the Shinile zone, although they lie within Zone Three of Afar region. They appointed residents of these towns to the district councils in Shinile zone.

As long as it did not pose wider security problems, the federal government allowed the situation to fester. The war with Eritrea and the loss of Asab in 1998 turned the road and railway to Djibouti into lifelines for Ethiopia, and it was then that the federal government paid attention to the problem. It appealed to both sides to refrain from hostilities, promising a resolution of the issue after the end of the war. Conferences were held, committees were formed representing both sides, and agreement was reached to maintain the status quo until the end of the war. When the war ended, the federal government was distracted by the split in the ruling party, the TPLF, and no action was taken until serious bloodshed leading to the closing of the road to Djibouti occurred in the spring of 2002.

**Trigger Factors**

Under pressure from the people and elders in Zone Three, the Afar regional administration sought to reinforce Afar claims on the road to Djibouti by moving some district capitals in Zone Three from the vicinity of the river onto the road itself. The intention was to checkmate the Ise and block their access to the river. Accordingly, it was decided to move the capital of Borimadaitu district from the marshland near the river to a site adjacent to the road. The site is on the Galalu, a seasonal stream that provides water from shallow holes in the dry season, and also supports a well with a permanent supply of water. The justification given for the move was the isolated and malaria-ridden marshland of the previous site. Galalu is a few kilometres from Gadamaitu, and the Ise leaders of this town protested what they considered a violation of the agreement to maintain the status quo.

What followed is difficult to describe precisely, since the versions of the parties involved differ diametrically. What is certain is that the Ise resolved to prevent the construction of the district administration headquarter at Galalu. The Afar, on the other hand, determined to proceed, and gathered a force of about thirty armed men to protect the site. Asked why this task was not given to the police, the Borimadaitu district administrator said this was an ‘affair of the people’ not of the administration. At dawn on 23 March 2002, a group of about 50 armed Ise arrived at the site and fell into a well staged ambush, with 13 killed and 10 wounded before the battle ended several hours later.

Clearly, the Afar had surprised their enemy with novel military tactics. An Ise elder later complained this was ‘unprecedented’, not the sort of fighting they are used to wage with the Afar. Inevitably they suspected outside intervention. The Afar, in turn, claimed to have captured Ise fighters with Djibouti identity cards. They did acknowledge having sought assistance from Ugogomo; a shadowy Afar armed organisation based in the Danakil Depression. Afar youth went there earlier to be trained and returned along with members of that organisation to Zone Three to train others.
Following the fight at Galalu the road to Djibouti was closed on several occasions, and at least one truck driver was reported killed, prompting his colleagues to stage a strike that caused a shortage of fuel in Addis Ababa. This moved the government to action.

**State Peacekeeping Action**

In 1998, the federal government had held consultations with the political leadership of the Afar and Somali regions in an effort to contain the problem and keep the road to Djibouti open. The Afar leadership was divided. The regional vice chairman and two zonal administrators asked for a regional boundary between the Afar and Somali regions to be drawn, something the federal government was unwilling to consider at the time. The Afar regional chairman sided with the federal government, and the other three officials soon found themselves eased out of their posts.

In the end, an agreement was reached to arrest and bring to justice known killers from both sides and to return looted livestock. Elders were recruited to assist. The conflict subsided for a time afterwards, though each side accused the other of not fulfilling the terms of the agreement. On 1 May 2000, Neina Tahiro, a popular Afar politician elected to the federal House of Representatives, was murdered on the road. Afar blamed Ise, and went on a murderous spree in Gadamaitu and Gewane killing 19 Ise.

The federal government now decreed the establishment of so-called ‘Integrated Security and Peace Committees’ at district, zonal and regional levels, involving administrators from both regions, selected elders from both sides, local security officials and military officers. Security officials chaired the committees at district level, while an army captain from the local garrison chaired the committee in Zone Three, the focus of the conflict, in Afar region. Tahiro Hamadu, the father of Niena Tahiro, was appointed a salaried adviser, and Niena’s wife was sent to the federal House of Representatives as his replacement.

Replica committees, composed of Afar and Ise, federal security and military personnel, were set up to administer the hamlets of Gadamaitu, Undofo and Adaitu. Courts were set up to administer justice there, and police were hired to assist them. The committees were also tasked with bringing criminals to justice and arranging for compensation and return of looted livestock. It was agreed that both Afar and Ise should have open access to the Allighedi plain until the regional border was finally defined. The zone committee met many times in the following two years, and arranged for the return of looted animals and the arrest of some culprits. Even so, each side continued to accuse the other of not fulfilling their obligations, and the court in Gadamaitu never functioned.

A flurry of meetings followed the outbreak of violence in March 2002. They were held in Awash and Dire Dawa under the chairmanship of the Minister of Federal Affairs, and in Addis Ababa under the Prime Minister. Afar and Somali administrators and elders, military and security officials, as well as central government representatives attended. These meetings proved inconclusive. The rival parties restated their claims, and government pleas for restraint were repeated. The federal government faced the dilemma of having to choose between the contrary solutions demanded by the rival parties. A return to the territorial status quo ante, demanded by the Afar would alienate the Somali, while a referendum, desired by the Somali, would further upset the Afar. Moreover, current EPRDF policy is to lower barriers between regions and ethnic groups rather than to raise new ones.
The only specific measure taken concerned security on the road to Djibouti, the government’s main concern. It was forbidden for armed persons to come near or to cross the road. If challenged, they must lay down their arms. If they refuse, they would be shot. The army was ordered to enforce this measure.

Since then, a number of people have lost their lives in the vicinity of the road. Many more have died in numerous clashes between Afar and Ise herders at various places in Zone Three. In the four months that followed the battle of Galalu, the Shinile zone administration recorded some 50 Ise deaths and many wounded. As the drought persisted into 2003, half the Afar population was menaced by famine, and many people were forced to move outside their homeland with their remaining livestock. As a result, violence spread and intensified throughout the region. In January 2003, a clash between Afar and Kereyu inside the Awash National Park left 40 dead. Conflict has not only spread and intensified, it has also become unconventional. For instance, women and children are no longer spared, as in the past. In November 2002 peasant highlanders massacred 38 Afar women and children as they returned from the market, in retaliation for the murder of a highlander by Afars.

Comments

Unravelling the fabric of this dispute, we become aware that many threads are woven to form an intricate pattern. Tracing some of them to their origin, we venture not only outside the present time, but also to places and events beyond the pastoralist domain. We realise that that external forces play a significant and sometime decisive role in events within the pastoralist zone, conflicts included. To paraphrase Marx, the history of the pastoralists is not all their own making.

To grasp this point, one needs to look at some of the contributing factors to the conflict described above. The transport routes that have become bones of contention for the Afar and the Ise are not of their own making, nor were they made for them. They are not traditional resources, nor are they linked to livestock production. Yet, they represent resources essential to pastoralist welfare and are worth fighting over. Trade, licit or illicit, was always a pastoralist economic sideline. In this particular case, however, contraband trade has become an economic mainline for the Ise. While contention over familiar resources such as land, water, and access routes still figures prominently in pastoralist conflict, newly introduced resources have become additional bones of contention. These may involve local administrative status, the siting of livestock markets, abattoirs, veterinary services, schools, hospitals, off the range employment opportunities, as well as transport routes, trade and related services.

The multifarious nature of resources that become objects of contention, as well as the extraneous origin and control of some of these, pose a serious obstacle to conflict resolution efforts. One problem is to identify them all and trace their extensions beyond the pastoralist domain, that is, to define the context. Past that lay the problem of reconciling conflicting claims on resources whose ownership and right of control are vested in institutions outside the pastoralist domain and beyond its jurisdiction; more often than not, the state.

Ultimately, conflict prevention and management is the responsibility of the state. By and large, the state in the Horn of Africa has failed to meet this responsibility. A basic reason is that it does not have adequate resources in place for the task. State presence in the pastoralist zone is generally nominal, except in areas where state security
requires a higher profile. Moreover, there is no political incentive for greater involvement, since pastoralist communities carry little political weight at state level. As a result, conflict within and between these communities is often ignored and allowed to run its course. Unless, that is, it impacts on wider state concerns, such as border security, movement on major transport routes, control of trade, livestock epidemics, or it connects with and reinforces threats by armed opposition movements to the state or regime. When it takes place, state intervention focuses on symptoms not causes and is not sustained.

Conflict resolution attracts non-state actors – NGOs, churches, international aid agencies – with experience and resources in the pastoralist zone. Because conflict usually is linked to resource scarcity, whether as a cause or consequence, efforts to resolve it tend to focus on relieving scarcity through the traditional pastoralist mode of production: by developing water resources in order to expand pasture, providing veterinary services, improving access to markets, and the like. However, as shown above, certain resources that sustain pastoralist welfare are not necessarily linked to livestock production, moreover, in some instances these are increasing rather than diminishing.

However varied the contested resources may be, they have a common denominator. They represent material values that enhance peoples’ security and welfare. Competition over material values undoubtedly is the root cause of conflict in the pastoralist zone. Does this mean that values embedded in identity and culture are not involved? Undoubtedly they are, and because of the distortion inherent in labels such as ‘ethnic conflict’, it is important to delimit the role they play.

In the case examined here, the use of the ‘ethnic’ label distorts the issue by raising the level of the dispute above its actual setting. The confrontation is between one Somali clan and several Afar clans in the Allighedhi plain, and the reasons for it are outlined above. Both sides are involved in collateral conflicts with third groups, including ethnic kindred, for similar reasons. The role of the ethnic factor is illustrated by the intervention of Ugogomo on the Afar side, undoubtedly motivated by ethnic solidarity. It should be noted that Ugogomo is a modern political movement (one of its top leaders resides in London) whose frame of reference is the Afar nation. Its intervention, especially if it provokes a similar reaction from the Somali side, could turn what is a dispute between two pastoralist groups into a veritable ‘ethnic conflict.’ As shown above, however, ethnicity is not among the causes of the dispute.

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Somaliland: Choosing Politics over Violence

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Since breaking away from Somalia in 1991, the people of Somaliland have charted a different path from Somalia away from violent conflict towards constitutional politics. Unrecognised by the international community, political reconstruction in Somaliland has largely been an internal affair. While lack of formal recognition has had its costs, it has also given Somalilanders the opportunity to craft a system of government rooted in their local culture and values that is appropriate to their needs. For the past decade this has comprised a system of government that fuses traditional forms of social and political organisation with Western-style institutions of government. In December 2002 Somaliland took the first step towards changing this system by holding multi-party elections for district councils. These were followed in April 2003 by presidential elections. This paper describes the process of political transition in Somaliland and the first democratic elections in this region for 33 years.

Somaliland today is building a society founded on peace, justice and the rule of law. In 2003 we will complete a long and difficult transition from a traditional, clan-based political system to a stable multi-party democracy by holding the first general elections to take place on Somaliland’s soil for over 30 years (Somaliland Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002)

On 15 December 2002, over 450,000 people in Somaliland (north west Somalia) cast their votes in a multi-party election for district councils. In April 2003 they turned out again vote for a president. The elections, the first in this region since 1969, were a crucial part of the transformation of Somaliland’s post-war system of government, from a clan-based power-sharing system to a constitutional government based on multi-party democracy. Held at a time when the rest of Somalia was engaged in the 14th internationally sponsored Somalia peace conference in Kenya, the successful staging of democratic elections is potentially very significant for the future of Somaliland and the political entity (or entities) that emerge from the remnants of the Somali state. They establish a positive precedent for what is feasible elsewhere in Somalia, should conditions allow. Given the premium that Western governments now place on democratic practices as a standard of ‘good governance’, Somaliland’s achievement in holding what one seasoned election observer described as ‘possibly one of the most peaceful elections in Africa for 20 years’, makes it harder for the international community to ignore the aspiration of people in Somaliland to be taken seriously as an independent state. Furthermore, the election of district councils creates an opportunity to establish an alternative state architecture to that inherited at independence in 1960, by establishing a more decentralised structure of governance.
State Collapse

Of all the civil wars and humanitarian crises in Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia which dented the post-Cold War optimism in the early 1990s, state collapse has no where been more profound than in Somalia. Even before its ‘collapse’ the Somali state had essentially ‘failed’, as the number of people benefiting from state policies diminished and internal security declined (Brons, 2001). However, after the government of General Mohamed Siyad Barre was overthrown in 1991 the Somali state effectively ceased to function as an administrative, ideological, juridical and territorial entity. All state legislative and judicial institutions disintegrated, along with the army, banks and government-run welfare services. The civil war fought between clan-based militia challenged the ideological basis of the Somali state as an ethnically homogenous society (Ali J. Ahmed, 1995). The fragmentation and localisation of political authority challenged the unity and territorial integrity of the Somali Republic.

The social cost of state collapse has been enormous, leading to famine in 1992-1993, widespread displacement and the destruction of public services. As analysts have described, however, the impact of state collapse has varied from one region of Somalia to another. In the absence of central government, Somalis have fashioned ‘a range of governance systems – some effective, some destructive’ (International Crisis Group, 2002:11). These include warlord fiefdoms, long distance trading enterprises, Islamic-based organisations and nascent state-like polities where a degree of consent has been established between rulers and ruled (Brons, 2002:244). The latter includes the ‘Republic of Somaliland’ formed in 1991 in the northwest and ‘Puntland State of Somalia’ formed in 1998 in the northeast. There have also been attempts by the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA) to establish a regional administration in the south-western regions of Bay and Bakool since 1992, and a national peace conference held in Arta, Djibouti, led to the establishment of a Transitional National Government (TNG) in Mogadishu in 2000.

The optimism generated among many Somalis and foreign diplomats by the formation of the TNG proved to be short lived. Despite gaining acceptance in the UN, the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the League of Arab States, the TNG has failed to establish any meaningful authority in Somalia (Le Sage, 2002). By October 2002, when IGAD launched the 14th Somali national peace conference in Kenya, fighting in Puntland and in Bay and Bakool meant that conflict in Somalia was more widespread than any time since the mid-1990s.

In contrast, in the twelve years since the Barre regime was overthrown, Somaliland has emerged as the most stable polity within the territory of the former Somali Republic. Indeed, since 1996, it has been one of the most stable regions in the Horn of Africa (Bradbury, 1997). However, for all international political and development policies the de jure borders of the Somali state remain unchanged.

The Creation of Somaliland

The ‘Republic of Somaliland’ was founded on 18 May 1991, when the leaders of the Somali National Movement (SNM) and elders of northern clans, meeting at the ‘Grand Conference of the Northern Peoples’ (Shirweynaha Beelaha Waqooyi) in the town of Burco, revoked the 1960 Act of Union that had joined the former colonial territories of Italian Somalia and the British Somaliland Protectorate. The new Somaliland,
which incorporates the five former regions of northwest Somalia, encompasses the territory of the former British Protectorate, whose borders with Djibouti to the north, Ethiopia to the west and Somalia to the east were established by international treaties signed between 1888 and 1897 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002). Its people are ethnic Somali, sharing with Somalis in Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti a common language, an adherence to Sunni Islam and a traditional livelihood system based around nomadic pastoralism. The majority of people in Somaliland come from three main ‘clan families’ – the Isaaq, Dir (Gadabuursi and Ciise), and Harti/Darood (Warsangeli and Dubbahante) – of whom the Isaaq are the largest.

Secession was never a publicly stated objective of the SNM. From its foundation in 1981, its primary objective was to remove the Barre government from power, with a future vision of a united Somalia, albeit with a more devolved form of government. The SNM leadership maintained this policy for several months after Barre was ousted from Mogadishu by the United Somali Congress (USC) in January 1991. However, the war against Barre, the common experience of persecution by the regime and life as refugees had served to forge a political identity among the Isaaq people from whom the SNM mostly drew its support. When the USC declared a government in Mogadishu, Isaaq fears about southern domination were revived. The SNM leadership, therefore, bowed to popular pressure in Burco by declaring that Somaliland was severing its ties with the south. At that time the declaration was supported by elders representing the Dulbahante, Warsangeli and Gadabuursi.

The Somaliland authorities have subsequently developed their legal arguments in support of their independence claim (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002). This has two aspects: the existence of Somaliland as a geopolitical entity from 1897 when the British Protectorate was established; and the recognition of its independent sovereignty between 26 June 1960 when Somaliland was granted independence from Britain and 1 July 1960 when it united with Italian Somalia to form the Somali Republic. The Burco proclamation, it argues, was not an act of secession, but a ‘voluntary dissolution between sovereign states’ based on the perceived failure of that union’ (Ibid. p. 9). The option of reunification in some form at some future date is not totally ruled out. However, successive Somaliland governments have steadfastly made recognition of Somaliland’s independence status a precondition for participation in Somalia-wide peace conferences.

After twelve years Somaliland’s sovereignty remains unrecognised by Somalis in Somalia or by any foreign government. Internally its territorial integrity is disputed by some of the Warsangeli and Dubbahante people in eastern Sanaag and Sool regions who are divided in their affiliation to Somaliland and Puntland to the east. Some of the Gadabuursi and Ciise in Awdal region in the west also remain ambiguous about Somaliland. At the same time, these clans have been represented in successive Somaliland administrations and at different times have played a key role in the formation of Somaliland.

The relative stability sustained over the past decade has made it possible to restore much of Somaliland’s urban infrastructure, municipal services and systems of education and health that were destroyed during the war. International aid organisations, who have been active in Somaliland since 1991, have done much to help restore essential services and infrastructure, clear land mines, re-integrate displaced populations, promote indigenous welfare organisations, and more recently to strengthen government bodies. Somaliland no longer generates refugees. Instead most of those who took refuge in neighbouring countries during the war have
returned to Somaliland. Commercial activity has revived and there has been a progressive development of civil society organisations, including the media, community development and social welfare organisations and human rights groups. As result of the better security, human development indicators in Somaliland are generally better than in other regions of Somalia (Bradbury et al. 2001).

The lack of formal international recognition has its costs. Without it Somaliland does not qualify for bilateral donor assistance or the support of international financial institutions for reconstruction. It has discouraged foreign investment and constricts trading practices. The meagre international assistance received, however, has meant that reconstruction has largely been achieved from the resources and resourcefulness of Somalilanders themselves (Bradbury, 2003). The main source of finance has been remittances from the Somalis living abroad. Since 1998 these have replaced income from livestock exports as the mainstay of the economy.6

Post-war reconstruction has brought many challenges. A ban on imports of Somali livestock by Gulf countries since 2000 on health grounds has deprived the Somaliland government of a major source of revenue. The war has exacerbated a process of urbanisation that was temporarily reversed during the conflict, with many former refugees opting to resettle in centres such as Hargeisa, Burco or Borama rather than returning to a nomadic mode of living. Peace and relative prosperity is also attracting migrants from the south and neighbouring countries. This is placing a strain on the infrastructure and the environment, and is creating tensions over the ownership and management of resources. However, the achievement of re-establishing security and constructing a nascent state has increasingly served to forge a separate Somaliland identity, a feeling of self-reliance and a belief that Somaliland is becoming a reality.

Political Reconstruction

As in any post-war country, building a legitimate and accountable system of government has been a particularly complex challenge in Somaliland. The lack of international recognition means that Somaliland has not had access to forms of governance support that many post-conflict countries receive. Unlike the south, it received minimal external support for peace-building and political reconstruction until the district elections. Political reconstruction has therefore largely been an internal affair. The declaration of a new political entity provided a unique opportunity to break with the corrupt and unrepresentative practices of the past, and international isolation has given Somalilanders the opportunity and the challenge to craft a system suitable for their needs. Although it was the stated aim of the SNM in 1991 to establish an elected government, progress towards this has been slow. For the first twelve years Somaliland has functioned without political parties, instead fusing traditional forms of social and political organisation with Western-style institutions of government.

Today Somaliland has many of the attributes of a state, with a constitution, a functional parliament and government ministries, an army, a police force and judiciary, and many of the symbols of statehood, such as a flag, its own currency, passports and vehicle licence plates. Furthermore, although Somaliland has been unable to secure international recognition, there is a creeping informal and pragmatic acceptance of Somaliland as a political reality. International organisations such as the UN and the European Union work with the administration as responsible authorities. The administration has developed low-key bilateral relations with Djibouti and Ethiopia, with regional bodies such as IGAD and the African Union and with several
European states (UNOCHA, 2001, March; 2002, April). The presence of South African observers at the recent elections also points to a deepening relationship with the South African government. In many respects Somaliland has become what Spears (2001) describes as a ‘state within a state’.

The process of constructing political institutions has not been without difficulties. Between 1992 and 1996 Somaliland was twice enmeshed in internal conflicts that threatened its survival. These crises were resolved through numerous clan conferences that were locally financed and managed. Since 1997 Somaliland has experienced a period of peaceful development during which time a general consensus was reached to move towards a democratic system of government. The election of district councils in December 2002 was the first step toward this.

Somalis’ previous experiment with parliamentary democracy lasted only nine years, between 1960 and 1969. For some 21 years democracy was put on hold as the country was governed by a single party headed by General Mohamed Siyad Barre. Consequently, prior to the local council election only a few people in Somaliland had a memory of the last time they voted. The district council and presidential elections, held at a time when other Somalis were engaged in the 14th national peace conference in Kenya, were perceived by many Somalilanders as a test of their ability to govern themselves and the credibility of Somaliland.

The SNM Government, 1991-1993

Following the defeat of government forces in 1991, responsibility for peace-making and reconciliation initially fell to Somaliland’s clan elders. The first important peace conference took place in February 1991 in the port town of Berbera. This proclaimed a formal cease-fire and established the SNM’s policy of peaceful coexistence among the clans in Somaliland.7

Somaliland’s first government was established in May 1991 at the Burco Conference. This administration was based on the SNM’s organisational structure, with its Chairman, Abdulrahman Ali ‘Tuur’ appointed as Somaliland’s first executive President and the SNM Central Committee functioning as its first parliament. Given a two year mandate, the administration was tasked with accommodating non-Isaaq communities into the government, developing a constitution and preparing Somaliland for an elected government. However, the new government had little opportunity to establish its authority. Bereft of a revenue base with which to rebuild an administration, a decimated infrastructure, and with a large number of people displaced from the south or in refugee camps, the government had little capacity to deal with the growing number of freelance militia who were making a living through robbery and extortion. Furthermore, while the Burco conference restored relations between the Isaaq other northern clans, it failed to heal schisms within the SNM and among the Isaaq that had developed during the war (Bradbury, 1997).

The first test for the putative state came in 1991, when wartime rivalries within the SNM erupted into fighting in Burco. This was followed in March 1992 by fighting in Berbera when the government sought to establish control over the port and its revenue. In the absence of a government capable of mediating local conflicts, Somaliland’s elders were increasingly being called upon to deal with them and to take on administrative and security functions (Bradbury, 1994). When the Berbera conflict threatened to push Somaliland into a protracted civil war, Somaliland’s elders stepped in to re-establish peace through two major clan conferences (shir beeleed)8 in
the towns of Sheekh and Borama. The Sheekh conference was significant for several reasons. First, resolving the conflict over Berbera port and confirming its status as a public asset, ensured that future Somaliland governments had a source of revenue with which to build an administration. Second, the conference established a framework for the participation of clan elders in Somaliland’s post-war system of governance by creating a national council of elders – the *guurti*. In Somali pastoral society, a *guurti* is traditionally the highest political council comprising titled and non-titled clan leaders. At Sheekh the *guurti* of Somaliland’s different clans were constituted as a national *guurti* and given responsibility for controlling the clan militia, preventing acts of aggression against other communities, and for defending Somaliland (Farah and Lewis, 1993:84-87). This framework for internal security, which was consolidated in the subsequent Borama conference, was important for what Brons (2002:250) has described as a ‘society-rooted process towards state formation’. Third, the intra-Isaaq nature of the Berbera conflict required the mediation of non-Isaaq elders, in this instance the Gadabuursi *guurti*. Their participation at Sheekh indicated that the influence of the SNM was declining and that if it was to be sustained, Somaliland needed the buy-in of non-Isaacs.

**The Borama Conference**

The *shir beeleed* in Borama, which lasted for five months between January and May 1993, was a defining event in Somaliland’s post-war politics. In this conference, an electoral college of elders who made up the national *guurti*, oversaw the peaceful transfer of power from the SNM government of Abdulrahman ‘Tuur’ to a civilian government headed by Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal, who had been Somalia’s last civilian Prime Minister before the 1969 military coup. Critically, the Borama conference produced an interim Peace Charter and Transitional National Charter. The Peace Charter re-established the basis for law and order by setting out a code of conduct (*xeer*, unwritten contracts, laws, agreements or social codes between clans) for the people of Somaliland in accordance with their traditions and the principles of Islam. The National Charter defined the political and institutional structures of government for a transitional three year period, until a constitution could be adopted (Bradbury, 1994; Farah, 1993).

In the post-war context, the Borama conference was important for the way in which issues of representation and power-sharing were dealt with, by institutionalising clans and their leadership into the system of governance. The National Charter established what has become referred to as a *beel* (clan or community) system of government. Described as a ‘dynamic hybrid of Western form and traditional substance’ (Academy for Peace and Development, 1999), this consisted of an Executive (*Golaha Xukuumadda*) with a President, Vice President and Council of Ministers, a Legislature, comprising a bicameral parliament with an Upper House of Elders (*Golaha Guurtida*) and a House of Representatives (*Golaha Wakiillada*) and an independent Judiciary. The Charter also established state offices such as an Auditor General, as well as regional governors and mayors. The role of elders was formally recognised by giving them responsibility for selecting a president, for ensuring state security by managing internal conflicts and demobilising the militia, and by incorporating the *guurti* into the Upper House of the new legislature. The purpose of this was to act as a check on the executive and the representatives.

The *beel* system of government established at Borama recognised kinship as the ‘organising principle’ of Somali society (Lewis, 1969). In essence government became a power-sharing coalition of Somaliland’s main clans. Presidential appointments to
the executive were made to ensure a clan balance. In the Upper and Lower houses of the legislature seats were proportionally allocated to clans according to a formula that had been agreed at an SNM Congress in 1990. In this system minority clans were also allotted seats in parliament. At the same time, however, the patrilinial clan system meant that women were excluded from representative politics, because it was ambiguous whether a woman would represent the clan of her husband or that of her father.

The inclusion of traditional leadership in the state apparatus has its antecedents in British colonial rule, when clan elders were incorporated into the administration as salaried chiefs in order to extend control over the rural areas. Under post-independence nationalist governments, who viewed the ‘problem of tribalism’ as an impediment to unity and modernisation, the traditional leadership became marginalised from politics (Lewis, 1988:167). The SNM challenged this by incorporating a guurti of Isaaq elders into its organisation structure. The purpose was twofold: to mobilise support for the struggle and to lay the basis for a more participatory form of democracy in a post-Barre era. Indeed, the National Charter reflected much of what was proposed in the SNM’s constitution for a post-Barre government. That is, a government built on Somali cultural values, the elevation of xeer to the national level, the incorporation of elders in a two-chamber legislature, and combining traditional Somali egalitarianism with the requirements of good central government (Samatar, 1988:142). The beel system of government established at Borama was intended to be in place for only three years. It lasted a decade.

The Egal Administration, 1993-1997

During its first 18 months Egal’s new administration made considerable progress in establishing the institutions of government, demobilising the militia, creating a revenue system, and providing a secure environment for economic recovery. However, little progress was made on drafting a new constitution and the state remained politically vulnerable to shifts in power relationships between the clans. As the government sought to extend its administrative control dissatisfaction grew among certain Isaaq clans with the formula for sharing political power adopted at the Borama conference. This, combined with political opportunism by certain politicians, pushed Somaliland into civil war. Although the war was largely fought along clan lines, Somaliland’s independence was threatened when part of the opposition to the Egal administration declared their support for a federal Somalia. The war lasted from November 1994 to October 1996, displacing over 180,000 people and causing severe damage to Burco and Hargeisa.

The war was ended through a second national reconciliation conference (shir garameed), held in Hargeisa between October 1996 and February 1997. At the conference the electoral college of elders extended the government’s tenure in office for a further four years, re-selected Egal as president and increased opposition and minority seats in the house of parliament. An interim constitution was also adopted to supercede the Borama charters and to provide the basis for a multi-party system of government.

The Hargeisa conference, like the Sheekh and Borama conferences, was financed and managed without foreign support. In several respects, however, it differed from Borama. It was largely financed by the government; the voting delegates were twice the number at Borama; a number of women were permitted to observe proceedings; and the leadership of the government did not change. Critics charged the government
with manipulating the conference and thus undermining the viability of using a *shir beeleed* as a vehicle for political change in the future. However, since 1997 Somaliland has experienced a period of uninterrupted security. During this period the administration has extended eastwards, the economy has grown and foreign assistance has increased, as aid agencies have chosen to invest in peaceful areas of Somalia.

**Choosing Politics over Violence**

The political economist William Reno (2002) has commented that, contrary to much contemporary conflict, Somaliland illustrates how changes in the global economy does not inevitably produce predatory war economies and the end of political order. There are several explanations why Somaliland has not followed the path of the south into protracted civil war. The political system adopted at Borama which integrated traditional authorities in the state administration guarded against the re-emergence of authoritarian rule (Bradbury, 1994; Brons, 2002). It has been argued that due to the particular experience of British colonialism these are more entrenched and stronger in the pastoralist communities in the north compared to southern Somalia (Reno, 2002). The Sheekh and Borama conferences were only two of 33 clan peace conferences that took place in Somaliland between February 1991 and 1996 (Academy for Peace and Development, 2002).

This explanation, however, overlooks the influence of other factors. These include the different political experience of northwest Somalia within the Somali Republic, the legacy of democratic practices within the SNM, the relatively good relations between the northern clans, a different resource base than the south, and the lack of international intervention in Somaliland in the early 1990s, which in the south had served to strengthen the power of the warlords. The experience of the war in the north was also very different from the south. It was fought mostly within Isaaq territory and the SNM did not try to extend it to other clan areas. Some individuals from non-Isaaq clans fought with the SNM, while some elders worked to maintain social and economic relations between the clans and neutralise the potential for violence. The war served to create a political community among the Isaaq which was reinforced by the experience of self-organisation in the refugee camps in Ethiopia. This consciousness influenced the SNM’s decision to declare independence (Brons, 2002:204-207).

The creation of Somaliland also reflected a broad consensus on the need for some form of government to manage internal conflict and external relations. This consensus is apparent from the financial support given to peace conferences by communities and business people. The SNM’s stated vision of a government which integrated traditional authorities in the state administration was adopted at the Borama conference. This established a political system that guarded against the re-emergence of authoritarian rule. A lack of public revenue and international aid has prevented the state from taking on a more developmental role; communications, transport and banking services, for example, are all organised privately. While this has had costs for those people who fall through the social safety net provided by the kinship system, it has at the same time served to keep the centre of power weak.

**The Constitutional Referendum**

The interim constitution adopted at the Hargeisa conference set out a schedule for the legalisation of political parties and the holding of democratic elections. It was four years, however, before a referendum was held on the new constitution. In 1999 Egal
linked the transition to multi-party democracy with Somaliland’s desire to gain international recognition, arguing that the international community would not recognise Somaliland’s independent status unless it adopted such a system. However, a major impetus for implementing the constitution was the formation of Puntland in 1998 and the TNG in 2000. Puntland, which claims authority in areas of eastern Somaliland, and the TNG, which claims sovereignty throughout Somalia, directly challenged the legitimacy of Somaliland.

With Article 2 of the constitution affirming Somaliland’s independent status, the constitutional referendum of 31 May 2001 was effectively a vote on the status of Somaliland. The Somaliland government reported that 1.18 million people voted, with 97.9 per cent approving the constitution. The government’s figure for the turn out is questionable, especially in the light of the subsequent elections and only limited voting took place in eastern Sanaag and Sool regions. Nevertheless, international observers concluded that on the whole the conduct of the referendum adhered to internationally accepted standards and it is not disputed that the great majority of the public endorsed the constitution. This reaffirmed people’s aspiration to maintain Somaliland’s independence and legalised the formation of political parties to contest elections to district councils and national government. It also affirmed the right of women to vote and hold political office, although women had not been consulted in drafting the constitution.

On 6 August 2001, the Somaliland parliament legalised the formation of political organisations, and scheduled presidential elections for February 2002. The same month Egal announced the formation of Somaliland’s first political organisation – the Democratic United Peoples’ Movement (UDUB). A further six organisations registered by the end of September 2001.

Despite the endorsement of the constitution there was a great deal of public uncertainty over the move towards the multi-party politics. UDUB was widely perceived to be the ‘government party’, financed by government resources. The demarcation of constituency boundaries, the process of voter registration and citizenship were all contentious. There was concern that under these conditions a free and fair election would not be feasible and that the move to reshape the political system was simply a ruse by Egal to ensure his political survival.

Egal’s opponents accused him of becoming increasingly autocratic and corrupt and lacking commitment to Somaliland independence. In August 2001 Egal narrowly survived a motion in Parliament to impeach him (UNOCHA, 2001). The same month a powerful group of clan sultans with strong backing in the east of the country challenged the president’s authority, calling for UDUB to be dismantled and for a shir beled to be held to decide on the future of the country. When several of the sultans were arrested while visiting Hargeisa, Somaliland was taken to the brink of another civil conflict. This was averted through the mediation of political, religious, business and civil society leaders. In January a compromise was reached whereby the Upper House extended the term of the administration for a further year to allow time for more political organisations to register and for elections to be organised.

On 3 May 2002 Egal died unexpectedly during surgery in South Africa. In line with the constitution, his Vice President, Daahir Rayaale Kaahin, from the Gadaburuusi clan, was immediately named as his successor. Egal’s sudden death generated an outpouring of nationalist sentiment. Respected as an elder statesman and for having steered Somaliland through several difficult years, his funeral in Berbera was
attended by both his supporters and opponents. His death also tested the robustness of Somaliland’s constitution and governmental institutions. The smooth transition of power to his Vice President proved that the state was stronger than one individual. Egal’s death also served to level the political ‘playing field’ and persuaded former opposition groups to rejoin the electoral process by forming political parties.

From Community Politics to Multi-party Politics
The constitution defined a new political system for Somaliland. That is, a democratic, multi-party system, in which the head of state, parliament and district councils will be directly elected by the public through a secret ballot, instead of through electoral colleges of elders. The constitution, however, limits the number of parties able to contest national elections to three. To become an accredited party, political organisations contesting district council elections had to gain 20 per cent of the votes in four of Somaliland’s six regions. This was intended to ensure that the national parties represented a cross section of clans and avoided the emergence of religious or clan-dominated parties as happened in 1969 when over 60 parties contested the election.

The dispute between Egal and the opposition over the political transition can, on one level, be read simply as a power struggle between old political rivals, combined with ongoing fissions within the Isaaq. His most ardent opponents came from what was perceived as the radical wing of the SNM, who found support in the east of the country, particularly around Burco, where people felt marginalised from the centre of power in Hargeisa. To some extent this reflected a division between Isaaq clans from around Hargeisa and from the east. At the same time the clash also reflected genuine public anxiety about moving from a clan-based political system to a multi-party system of government.

The power-sharing system of government established at Borama has proven critical to the process of reconciliation and recovery in Somaliland, succeeding where numerous efforts in Somalia have to date failed. Some Somalilanders therefore argued that it was unnecessary to change a system which had worked for twelve years – a period longer than Somalia’s previous experience of democratic government. For many people the peace and stability enjoyed during this period had provided the bedrock for reconstruction and was more important than efficient government. Given the lack of civic education, low level of literacy and an undeveloped civil society, some people were uncertain whether Somaliland was ready for multi-party democracy. They were circumspect about the implications of changing from a system based on consensus decision-making to one of hierarchical authority based on majority rule. This seemed to be more of a concern for those on the periphery of Somaliland than those at the centre (Academy for Peace and Development, 2002:28). Furthermore, Somalia’s previous experience with parliamentary democracy in the 1960s had been discredited by increasing levels of patronage. Egal, who was Prime Minister at that time, was held partially responsible for a situation in which the National Assembly, ‘had been turned into a sordid market place where deputies traded their votes for personal rewards with scant regard for the interests of their constituents’ (Lewis, 1972).

Others were more critical of the beel system, believing it to be ‘unequal to the task of modern government’ (Academy for Peace and Development, 2000:35). For the modernisers, the stand taken by the Sultans was perceived as a reactionary attempt to retain authority and power within society. They also argued that the role of elders had
become more complex as they increased in number, and they were less representative as politics became more urban-centric. The *beel* system was criticised for lack of transparency, nepotism and corruption, with individuals from more powerful lineages favoured in government appointments. The political imperative to maintain a clan balance in government undermined the feasibility of creating a meritocratic system of government appointments. The politics of kinship also stifled issue-based politics.

Furthermore, it was argued that the *beel* system discriminated against the participation and representation of women in politics. There were no women in the parliament and only two women had held ministerial posts since 1991. Consequently women were forced to express their political views and advocate for their rights through independent women’s organisations (Gardner et al. 2003). In contrast, the principle of universal suffrage enshrined in the constitution gave women the right to vote and hold public office. Establishing a constitutionally based democracy was, therefore, seen as a means of resolving thorny issues of representation, equity and decentralisation.

**District Elections**

The first stage of the electoral process involved the election of 379 Councillors to 23 district and municipal councils in Somaliland’s six regions. The reason for starting with a district election was to determine which three parties would contest the presidential and parliamentary elections. It would also test whether Somaliland was capable of holding presidential and parliamentary elections. The local elections were contested by six organisations: ASAD, HORMOOD, Kulmiye, SAHAN, UCID and UDUB, who were able to demonstrate adequate support in six regions.

In December 2001 an independent Somaliland Electoral Commission (SEC) had been created to oversee the electoral process. Their preparations for the elections revealed a number of problems. The electoral commissioners lacked experience of managing an election. The political organisations had no experience of running an election campaign or resources to mount one. None of them gave consideration to the selection of women candidates. There had been no voter education and the media lacked experience of covering elections.

There was a lack of trust between the parties and between the parties and the SEC. UDUB was criticised for using government resources to support its campaign. A lack of clarity over the demarcation of districts led to accusations against the government of gerrymandering. The participation of Sool and eastern Sanaag represented a particular challenge, due to the ambivalence of people in those regions towards Somaliland. Ten days prior to the elections an attempt was made to assassinate President Kaahin while visiting Sool by forces loyal to the administration in Puntland.

The lack of a census and an electoral register was particularly problematic. Only Somaliland citizens over 16 years of age were eligible to vote. But as citizenship was defined by membership of a clan which was in Somaliland during the British rule, this potentially franchised people in both Ethiopia and Djibouti. Efforts to register voters and issue them with polling cards proved impossible to administer, so the government estimate of 1.18 million voters in the referendum was used as a planning figure (Gers & Valentine-Selsey, 2002). Instead of registration cards it was decided to use indelible ink on election day as proof of voting, with eligibility to be corroborated by a local elder.
The SEC’s strategy for dealing with these issues was to involve the political organisations and other stakeholders in defining the process, and to appeal for external support (European Union, 2002a). Each step in the process, such as the use of indelible ink, was debated at length. The political organisation placed observers in every polling station and each vote was counted in front of them. These efforts to ensure transparency hampered the efficiency of the elections, but ensured that nothing was hidden and that the process was a collective effort.

Civil society organisations played an important role in addressing some of the issues. NEGAAD, an umbrella body for women’s organisations, undertook civic and voter education and together with the Women’s Political Forum lobbied the political organisations to include women among their candidates. Together with COSONGO, an umbrella body for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), they also trained some 400 domestic observers. The Somaliland Academy for Peace and Development (APD) worked with the political organisations and the SEC to produce a Code of Conduct. This recognised the primacy of the law, established acceptable campaigning practices and procedures for resolving disputes, and committed the organisations to accept the decisions of the SEC. Adherence to the code was monitored by a cross-section of community activists, religious leaders and business people who formed an Integrity Watch Committee. Other organisations, including religious groups, campaigned for the election to be conducted peacefully. From its side, the government contributed funding, materials and human resources, including 2,283 police. On election day all government vehicles were put at the disposal of the SEC.

The delegation of the European Commission in Nairobi responded to the SEC’s appeal for assistance by assigning technical consultants to work with it, and funding voter education and the training of over 3,000 election workers and domestic observers. The US International Republican Institute provided some capacity building support to the political organisations. This readiness of these international bodies to support the election contrasts sharply with the lack of international support for previous peace conferences in Somaliland or the 2001 referendum. For the European Commission, whose assistance was premised on its support for democracy and good governance in Somalia, the district election was considered an essential step in a transition from a clan-based system towards a ‘more democratic’ system of governance (EU, 2002b).

The District Election Results
Voting took place on 15 December 2002 at 726 out of 800 polling stations. Due to security concerns voting did not occur in two districts in Sool region, in three districts in eastern Sanaag, and in parts of Buuhoodle district in Togdheer region. A total of 440,067 valid votes were counted and 332 District Councillors were elected (Gers & Valentine-Selsey, 2002).

Polling day passed without any major security incidents. Foreign nationals observing the elections concluded that the voting and vote counting was carried out in a transparent manner and, by and large, in line with internationally recognised electoral norms. The observers remarked on the self-discipline among the voters, the political organisations and the electoral officials in dealing with problems that arose on polling day and noted the high participation of women voters. Some procedural problems that were identified were attributed to a lack of experience and capacity among electoral officials and a lack of voter education. The high level of illiteracy, for example, meant that many voters were unable to read the ballot papers and had to
publicly name the organisation they wished to vote for. Therefore, the adherence to a secret ballot was not followed in all cases. Allegations of ballot stuffing in at least one region, if true, would not have substantially affected the outcome. Prior to the election it had been anticipated that UDUB and Kulmiye would emerge as the winners, with any of the other four organisations having an equal chance of coming third. On 23 December the SEC declared that UDUB, Kulmiye and UCID had won the right to form political parties to contest presidential and parliamentary elections.

UDUB, founded by Egal and headed by his successor Kaahin, was the clear winner receiving 41 per cent of the total votes and exceeding the required threshold by gaining 20 per cent of votes in five regions (see Table 1). Interviews with voters on the election day suggest that UDUB’s success was based on concern to maintain the status quo in Somaliland and name recognition. UDUB’s greater financial resources and its association with the government also enabled it to attract strong local candidates. In Awdal region, where the incumbent President comes from, UDUB received more than half of all the votes cast.

### Table 1: Result of the District Council Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Organisations</th>
<th>W/G</th>
<th>Saxil</th>
<th>Togdheer</th>
<th>Awdal</th>
<th>Sanaa</th>
<th>Sool</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UDUB</td>
<td>70,989</td>
<td>13,502</td>
<td>18,330</td>
<td>58,939</td>
<td>16,574</td>
<td>1,055</td>
<td>179,389</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KULMIYE</td>
<td>29,923</td>
<td>5,309</td>
<td>17,476</td>
<td>13,679</td>
<td>13,701</td>
<td>3,070</td>
<td>83,158</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCID</td>
<td>30,676</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>4,821</td>
<td>3,422</td>
<td>7,229</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>49,444</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAHAN</td>
<td>14,748</td>
<td>2,054</td>
<td>15,234</td>
<td>4,499</td>
<td>11,356</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40,538</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HORMOOD</td>
<td>29,104</td>
<td>1,188</td>
<td>8,283</td>
<td>4,722</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40,538</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASAD</td>
<td>10,943</td>
<td>2,281</td>
<td>9,283</td>
<td>8,727</td>
<td>6,655</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>39,596</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>186,383</td>
<td>27,234</td>
<td>66,598</td>
<td>100,495</td>
<td>53,096</td>
<td>6,261</td>
<td>440,067</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Somaliland Electoral Commission

Kulmiye came second with 19 per cent of the popular vote. Headed by the experienced politician and former SNM chairman, Ahmed Mohamed ‘Siilaanyo’, Kulmiye gained more than 20 per cent of the vote in both Sanaag and Togdheer regions, the home of Siilaanyo’s clan. With a well organised campaign, it also proved capable of winning substantial support in all regions, and attracted considerable support among women voters. The decision to award the third place to UCID (the Party for Justice and Democracy) was contentious as the organisation failed to obtain 20 per cent of the vote in any region and beat SAHAN to third place by a small margin of only 1,500 votes. Some 60 per cent of UCID’s votes came from Hargeisa, where the sub-clan of its chairperson Faisal Ali Warabe live.

The Presidential Election

The district elections prepared the ground for presidential and parliamentary elections. According to the constitution this should take place a month prior to the end of the government’s term in February 2003. However, the delay in holding the district council elections, the need for additional electoral legislation and the lack of preparedness among the parties meant the timetable was amended. The tenure of the administration was extended for a second time for a further three months, with 14 April set as the date for elections. The original intention had been to hold presidential and parliamentary elections concurrently. However, the electoral bill ran into trouble over the demarcation of parliamentary constituencies when it was presented to
parliament. Gadabuursi elders and parliamentarians refused the bill on the grounds that it would give them fewer parliamentary seats than they held under the existing arrangement. As a compromise it was agreed to only hold a presidential election until the constituency issue could be resolved. The tenure of parliament was therefore extended for a further two years, and in line with the constitution the House of Guurti was extended for a further three years.

To organise a presidential election within four months of the district election was no easy task, given the limited experience, technical know-how and human and financial resources available to the SEC. The Somaliland government committed US$1 million to the election (UNOCHA, 2003), but as the European Commission was not prepared to finance the election there was less international assistance available than there had been for the district election. A few donor governments independently supported some of the costs for technical assistance and voter education, but a lack of coordination affected preparation.

Based on the experience gained from the district council election, the number of polling stations was increased from 800 to 900, a one year prison sentence was introduced for people caught double voting, senior polling station staff were moved to stations away from their home areas to reduce possibilities of vote rigging and political party representatives were given additional training. Civil society organisations again provided training for polling station staff, domestic observers and party representatives, while the Integrity Watch Committee worked with the parties to recommit themselves to the Code of Conduct. Efforts were made by the SEC to ensure democratic practices were followed by the parties. It issued guidelines to restrict UDUB’s use of government vehicles for campaign purposes and also admonished the government for appointing regional ministers of state without portfolio – dubbed ‘ballot box ministers’ – to curry votes. The SEC, however, had few powers to control the parties’ campaigns. The appearance of new Somaliland shillings prior to the election led some people to accuse the government of buying votes for UDUB. However, it is estimated that Kulmiye spent more money on its campaign than UDUB, raising money from the business community and the diaspora.

Talk but no Substance
One difficulty faced by voters was in identifying the differences between the parties. Following the district elections, the scramble by politicians for posts in the new national parties and the alliances of convenience that were formed highlighted the opportunistic nature of politics and created a certain cynicism among many voters. In terms of stated policies there was little of substance to choose between the parties. Somaliland’s independence was a central tenet of each party, and they all espoused a liberal economy. In general terms UDUB campaigned on a banner of continuity and stability. Kulmiye promised a cleaner and leaner administration and a greater role for women in government. UCID also committed itself to enhancing the participation of women and promised a more welfarist government with increased investment in health and education, which appealed to youthful voters. For the most part, however, it was the personality of the leaders, their key supporters and clan loyalties which influenced voter choices.

Polling Day
Voting took place on 14 April at 782 out of 900 polling stations. Two districts in eastern Sanaag and three in Sool did not vote. Some 488,543 valid votes were cast, an
increase of just over 10 per cent on district elections, which was smaller than had been anticipated by the SEC (IRIN, 2003). As in the district elections, polling was conducted peacefully, with no reported security incidents.

International and domestic observers gave a generally favourable report on the free and transparent manner in which the voting was conducted. Various irregularities were noted, however: the management of different polling stations varied greatly; the ban on the transportation of voters was neglected in some locations, especially Burco; the screening of voters by age was not always enforced; and multiple voting by individuals was common in places. The fact that some polling stations ran out of ballot papers early in the day, also indicated that some stuffing of ballot boxes occurred. Although the SEC was later criticised for lack of preparation and for purchasing ink that could be easily removed, there is evidence that the parties sought to circumvent procedures by transporting supporters from one station to another and by offering incentives and facilities for voters to vote more than once. While technical and procedural problems can be improved with more experience, training and supervision, inculcating internationally accepted democratic practices, such as one-person-one-vote, among politicians and voters will be much harder.

A Close Run Election

In staging the elections, the authorities and public in Somaliland again demonstrated a commitment to the idea of multi-party democratic politics. The outcome, however, presented a harsh test for Somaliland’s aspiring democracy. The preliminary results, announced by the SEC on the afternoon of 19 April, gave UDUB a narrow victory over Kulmiye by a margin of only 80 votes (see Table 2 over). The result caused consternation among Kulmiye supporters and surprise among UDUB supporters, both of whom had anticipated a Kulmiye victory. The announcement triggered small protests in Burco and Gabiley where Kulmiye have strong support, raising concerns in Somaliland and internationally that the situation would turn violent. Further opportunities for public expressions of dissatisfaction were prevented by the government which invoked emergency laws31 and imposed a ban on peaceful protests and anything that might look like an opposition rally.

Given UDUB’s marginal lead, Kulmiye had every right to question the result. The Kulmiye leadership did contest the results and presented evidence of mathematical errors in the SEC’s final calculations. To his credit the chairman of Kulmiye did not accuse the SEC or the government of malpractice. He resisted intense pressure from within his party to form an alternative government, stating that he had no intention of taking Somaliland down the path of Mogadishu, and committed Kulmiye to a peaceful resolution of the crisis. He also accepted, after some persuasion, to follow the constitutional process and contest the results at the Supreme Court. Kulmiye, however, continued to reject the outcome even after they were reconfirmed by the Supreme Court. It was not until 9 June, three weeks after Kaahin had been sworn as president, and following the mediation by a committee of sultans, that Kulmiye conceded victory to UDUB.

Throughout the election the SEC’s approach had been to consult with the parties in order to ensure maximum transparency, and up to the final results they were generally commended for their work (African Rights, 2003a). In the final count and announcement of the results the SEC, however, made some critical errors. By agreeing to meet with parliamentary representatives prior to the announcement, the impression was conveyed that the government through parliament had unduly
influenced the outcome. The SEC’s insistence that they did not have the authority to amend the result in the light of arithmetical errors appeared as intransigence, although the option of a recount was also not seriously considered by the parties. The SEC, however, had no choice but to follow the Electoral Law (Articles 64 and 65) which states that it was for the Supreme Court to deliver a final verdict. To have done otherwise would have led to an unending dispute between the parties.

The Supreme Court

The task of the Supreme Court, as set out in Article 65 of the Somaliland Election Laws, was to review whether the elections were conducted in accordance with the law, that calculations were correctly made and to consider any complaints. As Jama (2003) has noted, the conduct of the Supreme Court in producing a verdict on the elections was crucially important for democracy in Somaliland and the legitimacy of the government. It needed to demonstrate that its decision was well reasoned and in a way that would add to constitutional law and practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Kulmiye</th>
<th>UCID</th>
<th>UDUB</th>
<th>Valid votes</th>
<th>Invalid votes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Woqooyi</td>
<td>Hargeisa</td>
<td>50,606</td>
<td>37,892</td>
<td>57,341</td>
<td>145,839</td>
<td>3,333</td>
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<td>Gabiley</td>
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<td>2,208</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>81,585</td>
<td>47,951</td>
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<td>45,515</td>
<td>1,373</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>504</td>
<td>2,021</td>
<td>4,065</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>4,182</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>16,607</td>
<td>5,976</td>
<td>43,347</td>
<td>65,930</td>
<td>2,466</td>
<td>68,396</td>
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<td>2,234</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sheekh</td>
<td>1,716</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>4,718</td>
<td>6,912</td>
<td>166</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>10,271</td>
<td>5,976</td>
<td>43,347</td>
<td>65,930</td>
<td>591</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Burco</td>
<td>54,213</td>
<td>5,085</td>
<td>21,562</td>
<td>80,860</td>
<td>680</td>
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<td>13,714</td>
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<tr>
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<td>115,064</td>
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<td>no votes</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taleex</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>no votes</td>
<td>no votes</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>9,785</td>
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<td>11,334</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>no votes</td>
<td>205</td>
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<tr>
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<td>23,359</td>
<td>57,938</td>
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<td>187</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party Total</td>
<td>205,515</td>
<td>77,433</td>
<td>205,595</td>
<td>488,543</td>
<td>10,096</td>
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<td>42.08</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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</table>

Source: Somaliland Electoral Commission
On 11 May, after three days of listening to submissions by all the parties and the SEC, the Supreme Court pronounced its verdict in favour of UDUB, increasing their victory to a margin of 214 votes. Kulmiye immediately questioned the decision, raising concerns about the competence of the court, whose verdict, based on a new set of figures, did nothing to clarify matters (African Rights, 2003b). Kulmiye’s questioning of the court’s competence was not without foundation. Somaliland’s weak judicial system and its political manipulation have become an increasing concern among Somalilanders. The English language weekly The Somaliland Times has described the system as:

Chronically corrupt and grossly under-qualified Judges, coupled with frequent interventions by the Executive Branch in the Judiciary process, have effectively reduced Somaliland courts to an open market where Justice is sold to the highest bidder (The Somaliland Times, Issue 25, June 2002).

One of Kaahin’s decisive acts during his interim premiership was to make extensive changes to the Supreme Court and these were generally welcomed by the public. However, his appointment of the chair of the Supreme Court and all six new judges gave the impression that it was not independent of the Executive. Furthermore, the judges had little or no experience in constitutional matters. However, given that all the parties had fought the elections with the institution in place, Kulmiye’s had few grounds on which to question the court’s competence at this stage. On 16 May Kaahin was formerly sworn as the first directly elected President of Somaliland, with a five year term of office.

Implications of the Elections

In January 2003, the UN news information service noted that the year ahead held ‘opportunities and dangers’ for Somaliland, predicting that the presidential elections could ‘either demonstrate Somaliland’s political maturity, or lead to fighting’ (UNOCHA, 2003). In Somaliland it was also anticipated that the presidential elections would prove more difficult to manage than the district elections. Nevertheless, Somaliland has demonstrated over the years a remarkable ability to deal with challenges that threaten its stability. Fears that Somaliland would go the way of Puntland, whose constitutional crisis led to two years of conflict from 2001-2003, have so far proven unfounded. From the day that the election results were announced the public made clear its opposition to a return to violence as a way of dealing with political process. Civil society through forums such as the Integrity Watch Committee stepped in to mediate and advise the parties to settle the matter peacefully. There was little support for mass protests and a preference to acquiesce in favour of sustaining the peace. The government’s actions in invoking emergency laws, controlling the media, harassing opposition sympathisers and allegedly expanding its internal security forces are of concern (African Rights, 2003b). However, the lack of public protest also reflects the limited power of political entrepreneurs to mobilise the public. In a country where the government, of whatever hue, can offer little in terms of public services, the public perhaps have little reason to support politicians. And, given the marginal difference in the vote, neither party could claim an overwhelming mandate or moral victory. Both the district and presidential elections highlighted a number of issues that will be pertinent to the new elected administration in Somaliland.
Voting Patterns

The absence of a census, voter registration or a post-election voter survey makes it difficult to analyse voting patterns. However, several aspects are worth noting. First, the regional distribution of votes illustrates a demographic and socio-political division between western and eastern Somaliland. The non-participation of eastern Sanaag and Sool regions in the elections accounts for the significantly lower turnout of voters in the east. However, the fact that the western regions of Woqooyi Galbeed (Hargeisa region), Awdal and Saxil accounted for over 60 per cent of all votes cast in both elections, reflects the concentration of Somaliland’s population in the west (see Chart 1). Furthermore, the fact that over 40 per cent of all votes counted were in Woqooyi Galbeed dramatically illustrates the urban drift towards Hargeisa and its growing dominance as the capital. In the district elections, for example, UCID gained third place almost entirely as a result of the votes it polled in Hargeisa. Better transport and infrastructure, shorter distances for voters to travel, better media coverage, more intense campaigning and voter education also facilitated a higher turnout in the west.

The regional differentiation was less pronounced in the presidential elections, with Kulmiye polling strongly in Woqooyi Galbeed, but it is still apparent with UDUB polling better in the west and Kulmiye polling better in the east (see Chart 2). The regional pattern of voting to an extent reflects historic socio-economic disparities between Somaliland’s regions. The higher turn out in the west is indicative of the fact that the elections were largely urban events, with limited campaigning and voting taking place in rural areas. This has tended to be the case with elections since the first political parties were formed in the Somaliland Protectorate (Academy for Peace and Development, 2002). If, as is commonly assumed, a significant proportion of the population is nomadic, then a large part of the population was effectively disenfranchised. To an extent this also accounts for the lower voter turn out in eastern Somaliland where the population is more nomadic than in the west. The new government will face an important challenge to rectify this apparent regional disparity, by ensuring a more equitable distribution of development investment between the regions.

Second not unexpectedly, the regional voting patterns also reflect clan preferences among voters. In the district elections UDUB won nearly 60 per cent of the votes in Awdal where Kaahin’s clan comes from, while Kulmiye gained 20 per cent of the vote in Togdheer, Sanaag and Sool regions where Silanyo’s clan comes from. The preference is clearest during the district elections, with voting for ASAD, HORMOOD, SAHAN and UCID all reflecting local clan support. With little to choose between the organisations in terms of policies, it would appear that people were either voting for the personality and leadership skills of the party chairperson and candidates, or their clan.

Representation

Through democratic elections responsibility for selecting a government was moved from an electoral college of elders to individual voters. Given the relatively small
number of invalid votes (2 per cent) in the both elections, the results can be considered a fair representation of voter opinion. The district election results, however, suggest that the introduction of a multi-party system has not necessarily solved the problem of representation. In the district elections UDUB gained the largest number (32 per cent) of district council seats, with Kulmiye coming second (21 per cent). Following the elections candidates from the three losing parties were expected to join one of the accredited national parties. By June, the SEC had still not been able to compile a complete list of party members on the district councils. Information available from 15 out of the 32 councils, however, indicates that the majority of councillors from the losing parties joined UDUB. Based on these councils UDUB increased its share of council seats to 55 per cent, with Kulmiye 29 per cent and UCID 16 per cent. In these 15 councils UDUB has a majority in 11 councils, and shares an equal number of seats with Kulmiye in two others, while Kulmiye and UCID enjoy majorities in only two councils. Furthermore, the majority of mayors selected by the councils are members of UDUB. The district and presidential elections have therefore given UDUB sweeping authority over Somaliland’s political institutions.

A feature of the power-sharing beel system has been its inclusiveness in terms of clan representation. Since 1991 non-Isaaq clans have been represented in both the executive and legislative wings of government, and after the 1997 Hargeisa conference minority groups also gained representation in the legislature. The three party system may encourage the emergence of multi-clan alliances, but at a local level people appear to have voted along clan lines. As a consequence, the clan composition of local councils reflects the representation of the clans in these towns. It would appear, however, that one consequence of the majoritarian voting system is that minorities have no representation on any of the new councils.

One criticism levelled at the beel system has been the way that it has excluded women from representative politics – an anachronism in a modern state. During the elections women in large numbers exercised their right to vote. However, while votes continue to be cast along clan lines, the chances for women to be elected remain slim. Very few women were put forward by the political organisations as candidates and those who were stood little chance of being elected as they were put low in the candidate list. Consequently, one of the most striking outcomes of the district elections is that only two women from over 2,000 candidates were elected onto municipal councils. Accordingly, women who constitute a majority of the adult population and the voting public, and who contribute significantly to local government revenues through small businesses will have no voice in these councils.

Despite these set backs, there is a growing recognition among the parties that women represented a very sizeable vote that cannot be ignored. As a consequence it is likely that parliamentary seats will be allotted for women in the future. Significantly also, following his electoral success Kaahin appointed a woman, Edna Adan, to the post of Foreign Minister, the most senior post held by a woman in any Somali government.
Finally, while the three party system is intended to prevent each sub-clan forming its own party, this arrangement is considered by some to be an infringement of their democratic rights. Although 30 per cent of the electorate voted for SAHAN, HORMOOD and ASAD in the district elections, legally they were unable to contest the national elections. While the constitution safeguards the right of political association, it at the same time denies individuals who do not wish to vote for one of the three parties the right to express their preference. When a woman candidate sought to challenged this by running as an independent presidential candidate, the Supreme Court barred her from the election.

**Sool & Eastern Sanaag**

The biggest challenged to the legitimacy of the Somaliland elections arises from the non-participation of the Warsangeli in eastern Sanaag and the Dulbahante in Sool. During the elections, threats from the authorities in Puntland and supporters of Puntland left the SEC with no option but to ‘postpone’ elections in those regions. This has important implications for Somaliland. First, the potential size of the vote in these areas could have affected the outcome of the elections. Kulmiye could reasonably have expected to do better than UDUB in Sool, while UDUB could have expected to do better in eastern Sanaag.

Second, the positive image projected by having a non-Isaaq president in Somaliland, is undermined by the lack of participation by most Warsangeli and Dulbahante. While the holding of elections were seen by many voters as strengthening Somaliland’s independence claim, in terms of participatory democracy the elections effectively served to shrink the Somaliland polity and to make Somaliland politics more exclusive. The Warsangeli and Dulbahante are represented in parliament and individual politicians have held senior positions within Somaliland’s administrations, including the Foreign Ministry, Speaker of Parliament, Chair of the Electoral Commission, and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The non-participation of the populations in these regions will be compensated by appointing Warsangeli and Dulbahante to positions of authority. However, the lack of political structures in those regions weakens the Somaliland government’s claim to represent those regions.

**Decentralisation**

The elections also drew attention to the issue of the decentralisation of government and political power. After decades of centralised authoritarian rule, war and state collapse in Somalia resulted in a radical decentralisation and localisation of authority. The 1993 Borama Charters and the subsequent Somaliland constitution sought to institutionalise a decentralised system of government, as a way of preventing a return to authoritarian rule and strengthening popular participation in government. Prior to the district elections, however, state power and resources were largely concentrated in central government, although the practical writ of the government outside Hargeisa and the west was fragile. It was only after 1997 that Egal was able to extend his administration to Sanaag region, while its authority in eastern Sanaag and Sool remained weak.

The election of district and municipal councils that are accountable to the local electorate holds great potential for creating a form of government that is responsive to local needs and one that will prevent the recentralisation of political power. However, the development of functional councils will depend on the ability of the new
councillors to implement their responsibilities and on a commitment by central government to support them in this task through legislation and resources.

Conclusion
International observers of the Somaliland elections were fairly unanimous in their views that they were, on the whole, among the freest and most transparent democratic exercises ever staged in the Horn of Africa (Bryden, 2003:8). In a region more commonly associated by the international community with civil war, the holding of multi-party elections creates an opportunity for progressive change in the politics of the Somali region. The direct election of local councils has the potential to change the architecture of governance, by establishing a more decentralised form of government. The popular election of a non-Isaaq president also settled the debate about whether a non-Isaaq president would be accepted in Somaliland. Although the outcome of the presidential election initially threatened to destabilise Somaliland, the constitutional process was seen to have been adhered to. The election served to reinforce the internal legitimacy of Somaliland’s political leaders and their credibility as spokespersons for Somaliland.

At the same time many problems and institutional weaknesses were highlighted during the elections. Clearly the parties and public have difficulty abiding to the standard ‘democratic rules’. While the SEC has come under criticism, it is the parties and the public who must ultimately take responsibility for the conduct of the poll. The efforts by the parties to influence the results and their failure to offer genuinely alternative policies do not set a good precedent for the future of multi-party politics. UDUB’s success in the presidential elections, despite the narrowness of its victory, together with its control over district councils, gives the party a virtual monopoly of power in Somaliland. Indications that the government may be curbing civil liberties as a way of asserting its authority and consolidating its power is worrying (African Rights, 2003b), although the government’s actions to manage the post-election tensions should not be exaggerated. For the multi-party system to survive and to prevent a slide into one party rule, it will be important that a strong opposition parties exist. The holding of parliamentary elections will provide a test for the strength of the opposition and Somaliland’s multi-party democracy.

After more than a decade of civil war, the Somali state survives as a juridical entity because the international community deems it so, not because it is recognised as such by all Somalis. In Somaliland in the northwest people are seeking to create a new and separate political entity. The lack of recognition and support for reconstruction, while detrimental in many ways, has given people a certain freedom to craft an indigenous model of modern African government that fuses indigenous forms of social and political organisations within a democratic framework. Given the minimalist role of government in people’s affairs, the notion of a Somaliland state appears to be rooted in the popular consciousness, rather than imposed from above. The incorporation of non-state social institutions into Somaliland’s political institutions means that politics has been more representative than in the past and it has given the Somaliland administration a popular legitimacy that Somalia’s previous governments lacked.

While the integrity of Somaliland is contested externally and internally, for most people in Somaliland the desire to be treated separately from Somalia is very real. The elections were a further expression of peoples’ desire and ability to manage their own affairs. Whether Somaliland will ever receive international recognition is ultimately beyond the control of people in Somaliland. However, in the prevailing international
political climate, where ‘collapsed’ and ‘rogue’ states are considered threats to
international (i.e. Western) security, the case of Somaliland offers a positive
alternative, with a rich experience and lessons that may be of benefit others.

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Endnotes
1. The Rahanweyn, a grouping of agro-pastoral clans, are the main inhabitants of these regions. The
RRA ‘liberated’ the region from the forces of Hussein Aideed in 1999 with the assistance of Ethiopia.
2. A sixth region, Saxil, was created in 1996.
3. During these five days several states recognised Somaliland’s independence.
4. The legality of the Act of Union is also disputed by some (Academy for Peace and Development,
2000:15).
5. The Warsangeli and Dulbahante form part of the Harti/Darood federation of clans together with
the Majeeretan in Puntland. The unity of the Harti/Darood provides the basis for Puntland’s clan-
based approach to federalism in Somalia and Puntland therefore incorporates Sool and eastern
Sanaag within its borders.
6. Since 1997, international assistance to Somaliland has grown relative to the south, but remains
extremely small. In 2000 the international assistance to the whole of Somalia was estimated to be
around US$115 million. This compares to estimates of up to US$500 million in remittances to
Somaliland alone (Bradbury, et al. 2001).
7. That is, the Isaaq, Gadabuursi, Ciise, Dulbahante, Warsangeli and their numerous sub-clans.
8. Shir are councils of clan elders. Beel refers to a temporary settlement of nomadic pastoralists, a
community or ‘clan family’, and is used to describe the clan or community-based system of
government created at Borama. Shir beeleed is a clan or community conference.
9. The failure to resolve ownership of the port in Mogadishu has been a major stumbling bloc for
reconciliation in the south.
10. Somali pastoral society has no political or administrative officers. Several clans, however, do
have titled leaders, known as suldaan (sultan) among the Isaaq, or garaad among the Darood. A
guurti includes elders selected for their knowledge and wisdom.
11. See note 8.
12. In 1988 the SNM was weakened by the government’s response to its attacks on Hargeisa and
Burco. The SNM responded by creating a guurti of elders to mobilise support from the Isaaq.
13. In 1995 Somaliland’s first president Abdulrahman ‘Tuur’ joined General Mohamed Farah
Aideed’s government in Mogadishu as a Vice President.
14. Observers came from the Initiative and Referendum Institute of South Africa.
15. In Somali, tub is the forked central post of the nomadic hut.
16. After the Borama conference the first two vice presidents of Somaliland came from the Gadabuursi.
17. Commonly referred to as the ‘Red Flag’, this group opposed the first government of Abdulrahman
‘Tuur’ and had participated in Egal’s first government before losing ground after the Hargeisa
conference.
18. That is, the Habr Awal, Egal’s clan, from Hargeisa and the west and the Habr Jelco from around Burco.

19. There has been a significant increase in aqil and sultans over the past decade.

20. Eight organisations were initially registered, but two chose to amalgamate with others.

21. The seven Commissioners were nominated by the President, the Upper House and opposition parties for five years. Two of the Commissioners were prominent members of civil society and included one woman.

22. Since 1991 the government had created one new region (Saxil) and twenty new districts.

23. The governments of Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Britain contributed to the EC project, while the United Nations kept its distance from the process.

24. One person was injured in Awdal region when police fired over the heads of a crowd of youths who were trying to force their entry into a polling station.

25. See www.cir.org. Foreign observers were present from the EC, the British Embassy in Ethiopia, the Royal Danish Embassy in Kenya, Sweden, South Africa and Britain.

26. The literacy rate in Somalia is amongst the lowest in the world, with only 22% of men and 17% of women able to read and write (Bradbury et al. 2001).

27. The purpose of this is to prevent a power vacuum emerging.

28. One polling station in Awdal region also did not open.

29. The largest delegation came from South Africa, with others from Ethiopia, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Canada, and Britain. The presence of foreign correspondents also gave the election wider coverage in the international media.

30. This problem is not new. Elders report that double voting was widespread in the 1969 election.

31. The emergency laws were introduced without parliamentary approval by former president Egal at a time when several of the Kulmiye supporters held positions in the government.

32. The number of disputed votes by Kulmiye and UDUB were very small; on 22 April after recalculating the votes, Kulmiye claimed to be ahead by 76 votes.

33. It is commonly estimated that over 50% of the population of Somalia and Somaliland are nomadic pastoralists (Bradbury et al, 2001).

34. Interestingly the turn out in both elections was less than half the 1.18 million people that the government claimed to have voted in the constitutional referendum. Assuming that 488,543 represented a 50% turn out of eligible voters (taking into account that 87 polling stations did not open) and assuming that eligible voters (those 16 and above) make up 50% of the population, this would suggest a population for Somaliland of about 1.9m. If, as some observers believe, the voter turn out was as high as 70 per cent, then this would put Somaliland’s population closer to 1.4 million.

35. SEC, personal communication.

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14. /15. Ibid.


18. The unimpeded access agreement was between the government, the SPLM/A and UN Operation Lifeline Sudan, ‘Meeting Held on the Implementation of Clause 5 of the Machakos MOU on Unimpeded Humanitarian Access,’ Nairobi, 25-26 October 2002.
Sudan: Women & Conflict in Darfur

Adan Azain Mohammed

Tribal fights have claimed thousands of lives in recent years in Darfur region of western Sudan. Competition over scarce and diminishing resources is the usual cause of conflict, pitting nomads against nomads, nomads against cultivators, migrants from Chad across the border against local inhabitants, and Arabs against Fur. While men do the fighting, some women have the role of appraising men’s conduct in war. They can make or break a man’s reputation with their poems and songs that praise aggression and bravery and ridicule timidity and cowardice.

Women’s position in Darfur is not substantially different from that of women in other regions of northern Sudan. In general, communities are male dominated and women are subordinated to men by custom and law - they have no voice in choosing their first husband, no right to divorce their spouse, they inherit smaller shares than men, and the word of a man in court equals the word of two women. Women do not participate in public discussions, nor assume leadership positions.

Even so, some women are feared by men. All tribes have their ‘shame culture’ and cowardice ranks highest in it. The attributes of the ideal man are toughness, generosity, courage and willingness to stand by his kinsmen in times of danger. Women influence men’s behaviour by flattering these attributes and mocking their opposite in song and deed. Although almost all women take part in this, it is the ‘Hakkama’, literally the ‘arbiter’, who plays the dominant role.

Traditionally, to qualify as Hakkama a woman must belong to a respectable family, must have a strong personality and leadership qualities and, of course, be able to compose poems and songs. The title of Hakkama is bestowed in a special ceremony with feasting and dancing. A Hakkama must not compose songs for money, but may accept gifts.

Today few Hakkama would satisfy these requirements, particularly the ban on accepting payment. Even in colonial times Hakkama could be bribed. A district commissioner for southern Darfur reported in 1933: ‘I have known three Nazirs [paramount chiefs] give extravagant bribes to one of these Hakkama who threatened to sing songs against their meanness’ (Lampen,1933).

Hakkama poetry is primarily concerned with conflict. But it can also serve other purposes, such as to flatter wisdom and generosity, or mock foolishness and avarice. Songs can be made to praise or damn individuals, groups and tribes. Hakkama Hummura, interviewed in Daein in 1998, recited a poem she composed to flatter the Nazir and men of her tribe:

The Nazirate is his own, coming to him from ancestors’s seed;
The Nazir is brave like a tiger, he owns a big drum and war horses;
He is the dreadful viper that frightened the magician.
My tribesmen have been mobilized for fighting. I am anxious ... and unable to sleep;
Their plan is written down and sealed without the foe knowing about it; Since the time of English rule, they have not been pacified.

Typically, Hakkama poems and songs extol manliness. Man is exhorted to be brave, maintain a raiding horse and always be ready to take vengeance. Inter-communal disputes are not inevitably violent. On occasion, however, Hakkama may incite violence. The following examples illustrate how women in general, and Hakkama in particular, throw oil on the fire, as it were.

In 1998, several Rezaigat herders were killed in the vicinity of Wau town by Southern Sudanese rebels led by Cherubino Bol who also looted animals. While the Rezaigat men mulled over the incident, the women of the tribe sought to force the issue. Rezaigat women who sold tea in town, decided not to add milk to the tea if the buyer was a Rezaigat man of fighting age. When asked why, they replied: ‘We don’t have milk any more. Cherubino’s people took away all the milk cows.’

In 1979, a youth of the Salamat tribe was killed by a group of Taaisha tribesmen. Because the killers surrendered themselves to the police, there was no immediate retaliation. Salamat women were dissatisfied with their men, and made their feelings known a short time later during a major celebration attended by several tribes. On that occasion, instructed by their Hakkama, Salamat women refused to dance with men of their tribe, calling their manhood into question. Two days later, Salamat warriors raided Taaisha villages and ignited a major conflict.

During the Mahriyya-Bani Halba conflict in 1975, a Mahriyya Hakkama insulted the Bani Halba by saying:

**Oh Bani Halba! you are but dancers of your Um Digaina, and gum Arabic producers.**

If Abu Tommura [a militia leader] sets his eye to the rifle point, you are going to be killed like Summaina

A Bani Halba Hakkama retorted saying:

**Yes, these dancers are my people. They are the right hand for me. When our militia leader came out with his dreadful spear, the Mahri threw away his rifle. Why did he do that?**

Hakkama of Arab nomad tribes insult their sedentary foes calling them ‘Abid’ (slave) and Nuba. This is how one Baggara Hakkama taunted the Masalit:

**My tribesmen! hit hard the slave who misbehaves in this place. His women are but slaves, busy with their Jangal dancing. I want him here to cut firewood for me. And I want his sister to wash my clothes.**

A tribal chief, firing his gun in the air, answered her:

**Oh! Hakkama, feel good. What is wrong with the Nuba. Regarding their wealth, they accumulate it for us to take away. Regarding their crops, They plant them for us to take by force and eat. Oh! Hakkama, feel good. There is nothing wrong with the Nuba.**

State authorities are well aware of Hakkama capacity to incite conflict, and have at times tried to control them. In 1981, while peace negotiations were in progress between the Taaisha and the Salamat, the regional authorities banned war songs, and summoned Hakkama of both tribes to Nyala where they were kept until peace was concluded. In 1992 the regional governor of Darfur decided to give Hakkama reorientation training so that they would compose peace-making songs rather than perpetuate the war culture. In 1997, the Hakkama of Darfur were requested by the regional government to compose peace poems to facilitate reconciliation between the Rezaigat
and the Zaghawa. Hakkama Halima Ahmad Mahmud composed the following poem:

The Zaghawa and the Rezaigat are like one bone not separated by a joint. 
We want these problems to be solved, they create social discomfort.
What happened between us will have to be corrected.
And thanks to God, the mediators have come.

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Reference

Djibouti: From French Outpost to US Base
Amedee Bollee

When President Ismail Omar Guelleh was elected in April 1999 to succeed his uncle Hassan Gouled Aptidon, who had been President of the Republic of Djibouti since independence in 1977, he faced four basic issues: two domestic and two external. First, how to retain the monopoly of power his Somali subclan1 has enjoyed since the French handed power to them, and to do this in the face of an Afar armed insurrection and a growing demand for democratization from the whole population.2 Second, how to manage an economy bankrupted by the 1991-1994 civil war with the Afar rebels of FRUD (Front pour la Restauration de l’Unité et de la Démocratie). Third, how to keep Djibouti’s balance in an unstable regional environment. Fourth, how to deal with the French who do not like him, as much they did his uncle, but whose military presence (3,200 soldiers plus dependents) and economic aid are essential to the country’s economy. We will deal with these four issues in succession

Retaining the Monopoly of Power

In September 1999, President Guelleh had his main political rival, Moussa Ahmed Idriss, arrested under some vague accusations.3 During the long years as his uncle’s chief of staff and trusted advisor ‘IOG’, his nickname in Djibouti, had many roles. One of them was chief of the Service de Documentation et de Sécurité (SDS), the Djiboutian secret service. He built up and retained a formidable network of informers and strong-arm men. He had journalists and trade unionists arrested and intimidated. Killings were very rare and usually unintended. There were mistakes, as when the French judge Borrel ‘committed suicide’ by dousing himself with gasoline, set himself on fire and then jumped off a cliff on 19 October 1995. The influential Djibouti lobby in Paris (the military and a handful of journalists, lawyers and businessmen, not to mention a segment of the Corsican mafia) managed to ride out the storm, and Borrel’s ghost hardly twitches any more.

The shooting war with the Afar largely ended in 1994 when a faction of FRUD accepted to lay down their arms in exchange for a handful of government jobs. Some of their top leaders (Ali Mohamed Daud, Ogoreh Kifle Ahmad) got ministerial positions, but the rank-and-file got almost nothing. Another faction of FRUD, called ‘FRUD-Armé’, refused the 1994 offer and waged light skirmishes supported by Eritrea (see below). Headed by veteran Afar politician Ahmed Dini, this faction came to terms with Guelleh in February 2000. Ahmed Dini convinced his supporters to lay down their arms in exchange for
promises of ‘justice’, ‘decentralization’ and ‘equal opportunity’. The next few months were to show what these promises were worth. FRUD-Armé never got a reward for its surrender, and Ahmed Dini waited in vain for a ministerial post. When the law on multiparty politics was passed in September 2002, its members joined six other parties in creating the ad hoc Democratic Union. The Union was never anything more than a loose umbrella over a number of ill-organized opposition groups, of which FRUD-Armé was the strongest. The first multiparty elections in Djibouti’s history were held on 10 January 2003. The government’s Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progres (RPP) got 62.5% of the vote and all of the 65 Parliament seats. The public is so used to ‘the way things are done’ that there were hardly any protests. Ahmed Dini tried to take the government to court to get the elections annulled, but did not get far.

Surviving in an Unstable Regional Environment

The main problem arose from the Ethio-Eritrean war. Djibouti’s role as Ethiopia’s entrepot became crucial after the Eritreans cut Ethiopia off from access to the port of Assab. The Port Autonome de Djibouti (PAD), which handled about 1.7m tons of freight in 1997, had to handle 3.1mt in 1998. Half of that was freight to Ethiopia, including weapons and ammunition. The temptation was strong for Eritrea to try to cut that umbilical cord, and it tried to make use of unreconciled FRUD-Armé groups in the north. The French became nervous and reinforced their military presence which, for budgetary reasons, they had been thinking of reducing. French Mirage fighters flew over Djibouti’s border with Eritrea, and surveillance planes scanned the waters of the Red Sea. Eritrea’s defeat in 2000 put an end to Asmara’s manoeuvres in Djibouti, and FRUD became moribund.

The other issue was Somalia. Djibouti had the good luck to share a border with the only part of Somalia that had managed to extricate itself from the collapse of that state and attain relative stability. The main preoccupation of the Djiboutian regime was how to profit from this fortunate situation. There were periodic rows with Somaliland, mostly about trade. Hargeisa resented the predatory behaviour of some Djibouti businessmen who used the relatively smooth and well-running machinery of the breakaway state to extract large profits from services such as banking and contractually locked imports. Somaliland was only one of the possibilities for profit offered by the collapsed state next door. Djibouti launched its own ‘peace initiative’ in the spring of 2000. With the support of IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority for Development), it managed to assemble in Arta a hodgepodge group of delegates assumed to represent Somali society. The conference lasted from mid-April to mid-August and gave birth to a misshapen creature, the Transitional National Government of Somalia (TNG). For a while great hopes were staked on it. Unfortunately, the TNG never managed to control more than a few square blocks in Mogadishu, and soon sunk to the level of one faction among many.

With Ethiopia the situation was quite different. Djibouti’s powerful neighbour is both a threat and a client who depends on the port for its economic survival. This produced an ambiguous relationship; all the more so because Ismail Omar Guelleh was born and raised in the town of Dire Dawa in Ethiopia where he recently built a house, speaks fluent Amharic, and has strong, albeit ambivalent, feelings towards this country. In November 1999, he visited Ethiopia and addressed its Parliament in Amharic. He has tried, without much success, to get the Ethiopian forwarding companies to
pay their debts, and imposed new taxes both on solid freight ($0.50 per ton) and on oil products ($1 per ton). These figures were fiercely haggled over in bilateral negotiations. All in all, the relationship remains like that of an old marriage; not much love but considerable mutual dependence.

Avoiding Bankruptcy

Djibouti has no natural resources apart from salt. Its exports amount to some $2.5m per year, its debts are $400m. It derives 70% of its income from the harbour, the railway to Ethiopia, and French spending and economic aid. Some 58% of the inhabitants are unemployed, and a 1% rate of economic growth can hardly keep pace with population increase. Which means that the regime is perennially searching for additional funds. In October 1999, the IMF decided to give Djibouti a $26.5m Enhanced Structural Adjustment Fund (ESAF) loan. This was to be disbursed in carefully monitored tranches of $3.5m at a time over three years, and was hedged in by many conditions: tax increases and more efficient collection, a balanced budget, privatisation of the more glaringly corrupt and inefficient parastatals, and a slimming down of the civil service, particularly the army that had grown to over 100,000 men during the FRUD war and was gobbling up an inordinate 25% of the budget. In October 2000, an unpublished report by IMF auditors stated that ‘the lack of reliable day to day accounting in the operations of the Djiboutian state throws doubts on the reliability of the globally computed figures’. In February 2001 the IMF finally gave up and suspended further payments. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) presented by the Djiboutian government in June 2001 was rejected by IMF/IDA the following December for being too weak. Thus, the economic situation was precarious as always. However, completely unforeseen events abroad were to come to the rescue.

From French Outpost to US Base

France has kept Djibouti afloat since independence in 1977 by pouring money into a state that lacks economic foundations. The amounts have not been enormous by international standards, but given the minuscule size of its population, they make Djibouti by far the biggest per capita recipient of French foreign spending. The military base costs about $160m per annum, not all of which goes to Djibouti. Then there are about $10m of scheduled local military spending, and about $25m in economic aid. However, this is not sufficient, and the Djiboutian government has been dreaming for years of finding another wealthy patron. It courted Libya and the Arab League, Italy and Iraq, but did not succeed. Then came 11 September and a huge opportunity for Djibouti. The first contacts were made by the US as early as 20 September, and US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense Mike Westphal arrived in Djibouti on 19 November 2001. Eager to send its Kriegsmarine into warm waters it has not seen since the last war, Germany signed a Memorandum of Understanding in early January 2002 to take part in the ‘war on terrorism’. By the end of that month, German soldiers had landed in Djibouti.19 In October of the same year there were 700 US troops at Camp Lemonier, and the US Army decided to create a Combined Joint Task Force under Major General Frank Sattler. The US Navy sent its ultra modern command ship Mount Whitney to anchor off the coast of Djibouti as a terrorist-proof electronic nerve center. Brigadier General Tommy Franks came to Djibouti four times during 2002, but never found the time to meet with his French counterpart, General Jean-Pierre Kelche. The French were furious because President Guelleh kept squeezing them for more cash. On 20 January 2003, Guelleh went to Washington on a state visit and clinched an undisclosed deal worth about $30m a year. In addition, the US installed a Voice of America transmitter...
in Djibouti designed to enlighten the Arab masses on the merits of democracy, and was promising to establish a USAID mission. In February, the French gave in and agreed to increase annual payments for the military base from $20m to $34m a year. The previous year President Guelleh had asked for $50m and was turned down.

The ‘war on terror’ has proved a bonanza for the mini-state on the Red Sea. How long it will last no one can tell. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld came to Djibouti in December 2002 to announce the US forces would stay there for ‘several years’. But he was careful not to sign anything. Washington sees Djibouti as a convenient and cheap platform where it can deploy troops for possible hit-and-run raids into Somalia and Yemen. There are rumours of expeditions further afield, possibly towards Sudan if Khartoum does not bow to demands to settle the war in southern Sudan. US strategic thinking is different from the French, and does not wallow in nostalgia for a lost empire. When the ‘war on terror’ plays itself out, the Yankees will depart as swiftly as they arrived. For now, the Djiboutian elite is looking forward to a few fat years and the French are sulking, but like a spurned yet faithful lover, they are likely to stay. After all, a French Army colonel serving in Djibouti makes about twice his home salary, and the difference is almost entirely made up of non-taxable bonuses.

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**Endnotes**

1. The Issa/Mamasan: This sub-clan has solidly locked all access to power and resources. Its members have been quite adept at co-opting a handful of other Somali (including non Issa) and the odd Afar. The Prime Minister, for example, who has no power but a certain capacity for patronage, has been an Afar since independence. When 70 years old Barkat Hamadou resigned for health reasons in 2000, he was promptly replaced by another Afar, Dileyta Mohamed Dileyta.

2. The Ethio-Eritrean war had started a year earlier and was in full swing. As for neighbouring Somalia, eight years after the fall of Siad Barre it still did not have a central government.

3. He released him after a few months in jail, a tactic frequently used with opponents. First a heavy blow to show who is the boss (one man was killed and several wounded during Musa Ahmed Idris’ violent arrest), then let the victim simmer in jail for some time, and when he has been softened up bring him out and offer him a consolation prize commensurate with his nuisance capacity.

4. Cigarettes were the main bone of contention. Abdulrahman Bore, a big Djiboutian businessman and friend of the President, had an import monopoly for the most sought after brand in Somaliland, Benson & Hedges. Disagreement periodically led to the closure of the border, which reopened soon because both sides were loosing money. Bore put up nearly $2m to keep the lengthy peace conference at Arta alive, but his relationship with the President became definitely less friendly when he was not reimbursed.

5. They are perennially late in paying their bills and are usually something like $2m in arrears at any given time. But to be fair one must say that getting foreign exchange from the Ethiopian Central Bank is not an easy matter, especially in these postwar lean times.

6. Since the population is only 650,000, all these soldiers could not have been Djiboutians. There was a good number of Somali and even Oromo mercenaries among them.

7. French companies have in the past been the main beneficiaries of military contracts in Djibouti, although this has changed under financial stringency. Yemenia and Daalol, rather than Air France, are now the preferred mode of transportation for the French military. A portion of the spending trickles out to the Djiboutian public, especially in the top layers. There were bitter complaints in 2001 when the French Armed Forces started a program of building and equipping which aimed at making them increasingly self-sufficient. The loss to local businesses was big.

8. Iraq was on the verge of setting up a military base in Tadjourah when the first Gulf war broke out in 1990, saving the Djiboutian government embarrassment.

9. There were visits also from Great Britain and Spain. They did not produce anything, but the display of interest was important in helping the Djiboutian leadership gauge the situation.
Food Crisis in Ethiopia: Drought or Poor Economic Policies?

François Piguet

Serious malnutrition is affecting the peoples of southern Ethiopia in 2003, after a year of crisis in the Afar and Harerge regions. For two successive years rain has been insufficient and the crisis became evident in May 2002, with unusual movements of livestock in the Afar region. This is one of the most neglected pastoral areas although it is crossed by the strategic highway linking Addis Ababa to the port of Djibouti. Very soon animals began to die in large numbers (from 20 to 50% of the cattle herds, including even camels) and pastoralists had difficulty in surviving in a region where there was no water. Was the spectre of the Ogaden famine of 2000 about to repeat itself? Since the summer of 2002, the crisis has struck the Afar triangle, which is given over to transhumant pastureland, and it then expanded in concentric circles to the Afar agro-pastures: first to the west, affecting the Oromo of Wollo and the Kereyu, a rival pastoral group along the border of the Awash National Park, and then more markedly to the east, in Harerge.

Diminishing water and forage resources have revived all the conflicts among the different groups of Ethiopian pastoralists. In March, the Afars returned to their territorial warfare against the Issa, located further to the east, while the latter exercised heavy pressure from the more arid zone of Shinile, itself severely affected by the drought. At the same time, there were increased incidents to the west between the Kereyu, the Oromo of Wollo and the Tigrayans, who for some years now have been trying to appropriate the profits from the salt resources of the Danakil depression, situated to the north of Afar land. Hence, apart from the drought, the Afars are involved in many conflicts which are limiting their mobility and access to pastureage during the dry season.

During the second half of 2002, the areas affected by both drought and a fragile economic situation have spread still further, reaching the point where the population can no longer lift itself above the poverty line even in good years. As well as the effect on livestock in the whole of Harerge and Arsi, farmers themselves began to suffer food shortages. This was indeed paradoxical, given the exceptional harvest in 2001 of over 12m tons of cereals in the country.

Is this not yet another example of famine being ‘presented’ to the world as due to so-called natural causes with the three-fold objective of attracting international assistance, «dominating» peripheral regions in latent rebellion, and uniting the Ethiopian people in the struggle against natural disasters – at the same time as there has been tensions along the Eritrean frontier (Brunel, ACF, 2001). The present food crisis will come back in successive stages, as the new areas in the east and south-east of Ethiopia are affected. A somewhat artificial «statistical waltz» is set in motion, with the government on one side tending to blow up the figures and talking about 15m rural people affected, while the humanitarian agencies and donors do their best to minimize the estimates. Nevertheless, by the end of the first quarter of 2003, the numbers of the vulnerable population requiring aid have risen to 12.6m (DPPC, 2003). In fact, there are abnormally high rates of severe malnutrition in the south of the country, while in some Afar districts these figures are now being hotly disputed, with the methodology used in these nutritional surveys being challenged (DPPC, 2003).

In October 2002, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi warned the international community that a major crisis
was imminent and referred to the famine of the sabat saba (77 in Amharic, according to the Ethiopian calendar), the year of the 1984-85 famine. Since then, all official speeches are studded with references to an absolute catastrophe. Photographs, sometimes of a previous period, have accompanied the first press reports, as it is important to mobilise people through their emotions and play on the Christian tradition of charity: to achieve this, anything goes!

In fact the reality is not so different, even if it is cleverly manipulated by the camera lenses that play down human responsibility and emphasise natural destiny. Ethiopia is one of the 17 countries in the world considered to be a major food risk (Brunel, ACF, 2001).

The Structural Causes of the Crisis

In 2002, after 18 months of collapse in agricultural prices as a result of both the record harvest of 2001 and massive food aid following the crisis in the Ogaden of 2000, the peasants had difficulty building up their reserves. Worse still, while the harvests were good, many had to sell their productive capital, particularly their ploughing oxen, in order to reimburse the credits ‘imposed’ by experts from the Ministry of Agriculture working hand in glove with the agricultural inputs companies which were partially linked to political circles and enjoyed a virtual monopoly. As part of the ‘extension package’, contracts were offered to all the peasants, without taking into account the different agro-ecological zones. The prices of inputs were systematically fixed at high levels for the hybrid seeds and fertilizers indispensable if these varieties of non-reproductive cereals are to reach maturity. In other words, the so-called modernisation agricultural policies were just another way of syphoning off the hypothetical revenues of the farmers in favour of the town. The experiment came to a sudden end and the subsistence peasants, who now had to deal with the drought as well as debt that could not be paid off, adapted their strategies. Most of them now steer clear from agricultural innovation which, in their eyes, bears all the marks of a fool’s market. However, the fact that they are not using the inputs that could ensure high yields – either because they have been excluded from the programmes because of payment default, or because they wish to protect themselves from such experiments – bodes ill for the next harvest. Some peasants exhausted their last reserves by buying seeds from small local merchants, and tried to sow them three times a year, in order to make the most of what the heavens might provide. Now there are many farmers who have no seeds left.

Another serious problem is the typical marketing system in Ethiopia, which goes against the interests of the farmers. Markets are highly segmented and can be schematically divided into a ‘donkey economy’, representing small-scale trading at the local level, and the 6% of the traders who have been able to spread their activities thanks to their lorries. This is known as the ‘Isuzu economy’, from the name of the most common small lorry used in the country. All through the year 2002 there has been a deterioration in the terms of trade, affecting mainly the pastoral nomads whose animals are emaciated and in poor health. Furthermore, the second Saudi embargo on livestock imports has had disastrous effects, particularly in the Somali region. On the other hand, the price of food products spiralled spectacularly as from the end of the 2001-2002 agricultural season. Peasants who used to sell part of their harvest at this time, only did so as they lack storage and conservation facilities, but above all because taxes and credit repayments have to be made in this period. Whether the year is good or bad, peasants sell at prices that have been driven down by the over-supply caused by the rigidities of the administrative system. Later, these same peas-
ants have to buy the food necessary for their subsistence at high prices. And, of course, in periods of crisis, the effects of this institutionalized unequal exchange system are even more marked. The rains returned in 2003, which gave some respite to the herdsmen and engendered the hope for better conditions for the crops. However, there was a dramatic lack of seeds. Only the «industrial» seeds that could not be reproduced by the peasants, in other words those that came in the «extension packet», were available. Selected and certified local seeds were virtually unobtainable. Apart from the provisions of a few agencies like CARE and the ICRC, which had organized programmes for distribution of adapted seeds, the needs of the population were not met. Only seeds of unknown origin were available on the markets at high prices, without any guarantee of yields. Already in 2002 some ears of grain resulting from the harvesting of hybrid seeds were collected here and there.

As for revenue from cash crops, they suffered from the continuing drop in the international price for coffee, which is the main export crop. On top of this, in the Harerge the coffee bushes fell victim to the fungus-caused coffee berry disease (CBD) that is difficult to treat. Increasing numbers of peasants have abandoned coffee in favour of qat, another commercial crop. However, the price of this alcaloid plant, a ‘soft’ drug widespread throughout the Harerge, has also deteriorated on the market because of the drought, combined with a drop in external demand as Somaliland reactivated local production of qat. And finally, as from October 2002, the measures taken by the Ethiopian authorities to stop the clandestine trade in the north-east of the country have had severe repercussions on the incomes of the population, the great majority of whom go in for qat.

Food Crisis in Ethiopia: Drought or Poor Economic Policies?

2003: The ‘Green Famine’ hits Southern Ethiopia

In southern Ethiopia, there was a collapse in the production of the Abyssinian banana, which is essential to the food security in the region with the highest population density in the country. It is indeed in this richer agricultural region, stretching from Gurage to Wolayta, that new pockets of famine have developed, with alarmingly high levels of malnutrition. In May 2003, the Swiss Médecins sans Frontières estimated that some 4,000 children were suffering from different forms of malnutrition and, as a consequence, MSF opened three nutrition centres, while other agencies (World Vision International, Concern and the Catholic Church) have started similar programmes.

The high population growth in the south, adverse weather conditions impacting on agriculture, and the negligence of the authorities towards the local people, must all bear their share of responsibility for the situation. However, this apparent negligence may pay off, as it enables the authorities to launch the ‘famine machine’ aimed at donors obsessed with the post-war situation in Iraq. International aid which, according to Ethiopian officials, has not done enough, should now make a new effort on behalf of southern Ethiopia. And the sudden revival of the crisis which has been going on for a year has also highlighted the fact that only assorted corn soya brand cereals have been distributed. Apart from the beneficiaries of distributions by the Red Cross and a few NGOs possessing stocks of oil and legumes, very few Ethiopians have balanced food rations. According to the CARE representative in Harerge, this lack of nutritional diversification is not altogether unconnected with the sudden increase in malnutrition levels. While the Ethiopian authorities regularly accuse the donors of not doing enough, the latter, not without hypocrisy, are attacking each other. On one
There is the United States, the great cereal producer, which has delivered 715,000 tons of cereals, according to an embassy communiqué (May, 2003) – a charitable spurt that has completely disregarded the negative effects of such assistance on the local markets, while the American cereal producers themselves benefit from indirect subsidies. On the other side, the European Union was accused of not having given what it had pledged, although it had adopted a multisectoral approach to so-called food security, which was to pay special attention to the structural causes of the crisis. The EU had made local purchases of cereals in zones that had an excess supply, but it did not always have the necessary means. Funds were lacking or Brussels delayed releasing them, in addition to which the supplies ordered locally were not available or were diverted from their original destination. The EU also maintains a system for subsidising its agriculture to the detriment of farmers in the south.

The manipulation and bargaining between donors and Ethiopian recipients helped to inflate the statistics, but the severity of the present crisis should not be underestimated. It has many causes, most of them economic: in fact the climate was only one factor revealing the dysfunctions and weaknesses of the Ethiopian economy, particularly in the two dominant sectors of agriculture and livestock farming. The economy used to be linked to the Eastern bloc and, in its hurry to adopt the veneer of liberalism demanded by the major donors, legislation left plenty of loopholes for manipulation and embezzlement. Some say that there should be still more liberalism in order to get rid of these evils. Indeed it would be desirable to give more freedom to the small producers, particularly giving them guarantees of ownership for the plots of land they cultivate, while imposing a minimum of regulation on the large producers and traders. As a first step there should be greater transparency in commercial activities through the regular distribution of information about the going prices. This would help the country to emerge from the crisis, but the Ethiopian authorities adopt measures that point in the opposite direction.

Briefly, this is a crisis that has been created mainly by poor economic policies, whatever the Ethiopian officials say as they cling, in spite of everything, to the excuse of the calamitous climatic causes of the present crisis. The gaps in the information handed out and an obsession with quantity have contributed to the real reasons for the crisis being overlooked. And, what is certain, is this massive food aid mainly benefits a government that is all too happy to acquire virtually free stocks of cereals. However, while oil made in the US was largely available in the markets up until April 2003, it was woefully lacking in the distributed rations. In other words this has been assistance that has mainly consisted of cereals, and is more self-interested than generous.

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Endnotes

1. After a so-called fever epidemic in the Rift Valley, in September 2000 the Saudi authorities imposed an embargo on all imports of livestock from the Horn of Africa. Already in 1998, a first embargo of 17 months had been imposed for similar reasons. There is concern about the health of these animals, but in general Saudi Arabia is trying to restrict African imports, favouring animals originating in Argentina, Australia and New Zealand, where influential Saudis have invested in ranches.

2. This was mostly the Katomani maize, developed in Ethiopia and Kenya. It is an improved, non-hybrid seed that is drought-resistant. Its yields are smaller than the hybrid varieties but it always produces something at least and the peasants can thus dispose of their own seeds, without depending on the market or the services of the Ministry of Agriculture.
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**Sudan: Prospects for Peace**

*Justice Africa*

As President Omer al Bashir celebrates fourteen years in power, and Dr John Garang marks twenty years since the release of the (first) Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) Manifesto, mediators and external actors hope that a full peace agreement can be reached on 14 August or thereabouts, following final rounds of talks in Kenya. They are banking on a Draft Framework Agreement, put together by the IGAD Secretariat with the full involvement and support of the US, Britain, Norway and other key international backers, which can be finalised after the forthcoming talks in July. The chances of success in this enterprise are relatively good: a Framework Agreement for Peace in Sudan may well be signed in August or early September.

Should the IGAD strategy succeed, the mediators will find that they are only half way up the mountain. Implementing the Agreement will be at least as difficult as obtaining the signatures of the principals. Should the strategy fail, it seems there is no ‘plan B’ other than returning to the de facto tolerance of the human suffering and destruction that has been the sorry lot of most Sudanese for two decades. Despite the optimism, the IGAD mediators and their international backers should consider a ‘Plan B’ for both parties until parties resume talks, that could include among other options, a no fly zone and Rapid Deployment Force for the protection of civilians in the war zone.

**IGAD’s Final Push**

The IGAD mediators are in the stage of the ‘final push’ for a settlement when the peace talks resume in Kenya, on 6 July for three weeks. In parallel there will be negotiations on the marginalised areas of Abyei, Nuba and South Blue Nile, which are in the ‘North’. The July talks will be on the general framework agreement, focusing on trade-offs and exploring with the parties their aspirations, fears, grey areas, red lines and probable guarantees. These talks will be followed by a closed session held between the mediators (IGAD Secretariat) and the external actors (principally US, Britain and Norway) to thrash out the final details of the Draft Framework Document to be presented to the two parties in late July. The plan is that the final session of the talks will be essentially a ‘take it or leave it’ round, with negotiation possible only over the details of the settlement. The delegations will then take the Framework Agreement back to their leaderships, who, it is hoped, will be ready to sign. It is planned that the only negotiations left will be security arrangements and the three contested ‘marginalised’ areas. Procedural matters around the final signing ceremony are expected to begin in August.
High-ranking delegations from the two parties visited Washington and other key capital cities, where they consistently received the message that the time has come for peace. Both delegations (the Government of Sudan (GoS) led by the foreign minister, the SPLM led by John Garang), were focusing on real issues rather than posturing. John Garang met with the UN Secretary General for the first time.

The IGAD Special Envoy General Sumbeiywo visited Khartoum in early June to discuss the key outstanding issues with the GoS. He also visited South Kordofan and Blue Nile. This was an opportunity for the GoS and its supporters to reaffirm in public their hardline position on the Islamic status of the capital and that these two regions are integral parts of Northern Sudan. They also stressed the need for rapid elections, and for a referendum to confirm the peace agreement and ensure popular participation in the agreement. The IGAD Special Envoy met with an array of senior figures, but not with President Bashir himself. It seems likely that Bashir prefers not to take a public leading role in the peace process at this stage, to avoid being drawn into staking positions on key controversial subjects such as the national capital. This will make it easier for him to propose or accept last-minute compromises.

General Sumbeiywo visited Southern Sudan on 23-27 June for a similar round of discussions with the SPLA leadership. The SPLA also insisted that he visit the SPLA-controlled areas of the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, because he had visited the GoS-controlled parts of those provinces. It is likely that there will be agreement on the dates for the forthcoming talks, as the SPLA made it clear that it will be reluctant to extend the MoU for the cessation of hostilities beyond August. (It was agreed on 30 June to extend it to end of September – Ed.).

The GoS approach is to be strongly in favour of peace and pragmatic on many issues. But there is still a hard line on key issues, notably Islamic law in the capital and the status of the marginalised areas. The GoS appears to be counting on the fact that it will be seen as sufficiently flexible on other issues, for the mediators to support its position on its non-compromise issues. IGAD’s ‘final push’ approach may work to GoS advantage if this strategy means that all the pressure is on the SPLA at the last moment. If the mediators’ proposals are not consistent with the GoS red lines, however, the prospect of a last-minute breakdown cannot be ruled out.

The SPLA continues generally to favour a peaceful solution to the conflict, but not peace at any cost. The existence of the two armies during the interim period, among other things, seems to be an essential ingredient of peace from its perspective. Unanimity is apparent within the rank and file of the SPLA on this issue. It is also a point of strong consensus within Southern Sudanese civil society and among ordinary Southern Sudanese, both inside and outside Sudan. This is the red line that the SPLA will find it impossible to cross. Hence, the possibility of the SPLA leadership abandoning the peace process at the last moment, cannot be ruled out. There are strong constituencies in Washington DC that would support the SPLA subsequent to any breakdown of the peace talks, especially if the breakdown were seen to be related to issues of civilian protection.

Security Issues

One key issue is the national army. It seems inevitable that, for the interim period, there will be two separate armies, in line with the SPLA position. The issue in dispute will then be at what level in the command structure will there be an integrated command? The mediators (and the GoS) are unwilling to contemplate
two Commanders in Chief. Thus, President Bashir would find himself (nominally) as C-in-C of the SPLA, although the chain of command would pass through the Vice President.

The SPLA is demanding that it has a military presence in the capital. A sizeable unit under separate SPLA command will be problematic for the GoS. However, the GoS has to accept such a presence otherwise its existence in Southern Sudan will be questionable. Moreover, non-presence of SPLA in the capital will not encourage the Southern leadership to be in Northern Sudan including the capital. Their security and protection of the agreement will be at risk. Unconstitutional change of government during the interim period must not be underrated. A probable compromise proposal for the security of the national capital is that a special force will be set up to provide security for Southern leaders. This will be akin to stationing a smaller SPLA force in Khartoum, though it may not necessarily be presented in this way. The SPLA is also raising the issue of the status of fifteen different national security organs. This issue has implication on human rights and the rule of law during the interim period.

Peace & Conflict among the Southern Groups

Khartoum is trying to strengthen its hand in the South, in pursuit of its preferred option of a single national army. It is doing this by dismantling the armed forces that signed the 1997 Khartoum and Fashoda Agreements. These agreements, which were subsequently incorporated into the Constitution, provided for two armed forces in Sudan during an interim period leading up to a referendum. Khartoum is regretting these agreements now. The armed forces of the factions that broke away from SPLM, the SPLA United and SSDF, have independent command structures. The GoS is instead strengthening the militias that it controls more directly. It may argue that these form part of the national army, but located in the South.

The issue of non-SPLA armed forces in the South remains unresolved, despite the best efforts of a range of non-partisan Southern groups. An All Upper Nile Peace Conference has just concluded. It was organised under the auspices of the Sudan Peace Fund/PACT, with the aim of building consensus among the people of this region, which is the most divided in the whole country. The conference convened in mid-June with only the SPLA leadership in attendance, but without the leaders of other Upper Nile political and armed factions. It needs to be clarified that this process is not led by the Christian councils, NSCC/SCC, and does not amount to hijacking a successful Sudanese led process. There is great unease within Upper Nile and PACT/USAID will have many questions to answer as to the motives of this conference. Is it a genuine peace process? Or is it an exercise in solidarity with one of the armed groups by funding the congress in disguise? Or merely an exercise in spending money? Even the assumed joint organisers, Inter-Denominational Church Committee, did not attend the Upper Nile Peace Conference; they were delayed in Khartoum. The GoS only permitted six out of 68 invitees from GoS-controlled areas to attend, and it has notably prevented the attendance of the veteran Southern leader Abel Alier. Whatever the doubts and results of the conference it is a step towards wider dialogue in the footsteps of the earlier Wunlit and Liliir conferences. Meanwhile, the SPLA’s own Upper Nile Congress is also scheduled to convene at the same place immediately after the Upper Nile Peace Conference.

The Southern leadership consultation conference planned by the NSCC and SCC on behalf of civil society, postponed in May due to the SPLA leadership’s last-minute boycott, is still a popular
demand among many Southern Sudanese. Many Southerners see South-South leadership dialogue as the only guarantee of a peaceful and sustainable interim period in Southern Sudan. The NSCC is still awaiting clarifications from the SPLA leadership regarding the conference. A new date will be fixed in the light of SPLA leadership response to the NSCC. The Upper Nile Peace conference cannot by any means be considered as an alternative to the South-South leadership conference or dialogue. The international community including IGAD should persuade the SPLA leadership to enter into open and transparent dialogue with other southern political and armed groups before signing the peace agreement. SPLA dialogue with the other Southern groups will be the guarantee to a stable interim period in Southern Sudan and smooth exercise of the self-determination referendum.

The SPLA attack and capture of Akobo on 6 June underscored the ongoing divisions in Upper Nile. The town was captured from the SSLM, one of the groups due to attend the All Upper Nile Peace Conference. The SSLM claims that the attack cost 75 lives, including both officers and men of the SSLM and civilian women and children. The SPLA has dismissed the attack as a local militia feud, but in fact it was led by SPLA commanders Johnson Gony, Moses Chol Rit and Doyak Chol. The GoS is likely to retaliate. Dr Riak Gai, Chairman of the Southern Sudan Coordination Council, has visited nearby militia centres of Pibor and Waat, which indicates preparations for a counter-attack.

Meanwhile, there is ongoing fighting in eastern Upper Nile in Nasir Province. The GoS-backed militia, under Cdr Chol Gaka, captured Mading, killing SPLA troops and civilians. The SPLA responded with a counter-attack that recaptured Mading, wounding Cdr Gaka and killing his deputy. Meanwhile there are also skirmishes in western Upper Nile, between the SPLA and Cdr Paulino Matiep, in the vicinity of the oilfields.

These violations of the ceasefire underline the importance of monitoring teams during the implementation phase. Will there be an international observer force or monitoring mission? If this is to be provided through the UN system then there are a number of hurdles to be cleared. Although a debate at the UN Security Council can be called at short order, first the mediators (and parties) must have a precise idea of what they will be requesting. After a UNSC resolution, it will take some time for the UN to put together a force and deploy it in Sudan. The IGAD Secretariat and the troika should begin to put in place relevant mechanisms for immediate deployment of whatever international force the parties have already indicated to accept.

The National Capital

A second key issue is the status of the national capital. This is the most politically sensitive issue at the moment, with the potential for derailing the peace process. At the Cairo meeting last month, the SPLA, DUP and Umma Party presented a common position on a capital city subject not subject to Islamic law. The precise geographical definition of the capital territory was not specified, so that implicitly it could be a small enclave confined to the central part of Khartoum and exclude Omdurman and other parts of the Three Towns. The word ‘secular’ was not expressly used. However, the strongly hostile response to this proposal by the National Congress and senior government figures suggests that it will be extremely difficult to get GoS consent of any proposal for a secular capital under any wording. The NCP insisted that Khartoum should remain Islamic at any cost.

The spark for the GoS’s rejection of the Cairo Declaration and the prospect of a
non-Islamic capital was a 'Working Paper' signed in London between the SPLA and the Popular Congress Party (headed by the detained Hassan al Turabi) on 3 June. This was not specific on the Islamic character of Khartoum but implied that it should be a 'single' national capital, with its status to be decided democratically. This meeting touched the GoS's most sensitive nerve: its support among the Islamist movement. The GoS's response must be understood in the context of thus far unexplained factional discord within the Islamist movement. Various Islamist groups responded with extremely vociferous denunciations of the Cairo Declaration, including threats of selective assassination of eleven prominent secularists by a fringe extremist organisation calling itself the Society of Muslims-Koranic Battalion. Northern political parties and civic groups organised a solidarity rally aimed at keeping Khartoum Islamic. The GoS cracked down hard on students and civil society organisations planning a counter demonstration in favour of the Cairo Declaration: their proposed 'Khartoum Declaration' would have isolated the GoS and its position. These opposition groups are still determined to meet and produce this resolution. The crackdown has been implemented with a viciousness not seen for some years, indicating more the depth of infighting within the Islamist movement than the sensitivity of the issue itself.

The Egyptian factor may be significant in any ultimate resolution of this issue. The Cairo Declaration could only have been signed with the clear assent of the Egyptian government. President Husni Mubarak’s trip to Khartoum last month and his second planned trip may well be intended in part to pressure the GoS on this issue. The issue is still unresolved, and different proposals are under discussion among the mediators and external supporters. The most probable compromise position to be forwarded by the mediators is that, within the capital territory, rights will be based on citizenship alone, and that individuals will be able to choose whether they are subject to Islamic law or secular law. There are many difficulties with this formulation—and indeed with any attempt to find a compromise between two fundamentally incompatible legal systems. It remains to be seen whether such a compromise will be acceptable to either party. Another compromise would be to propose a shari’a-free enclave, but limit it to a small area of the centre of the city.

Accountability

Another dimension to the intra-Islamist dispute has been the re-surfacing of the issue of accountability for human rights abuses. On several occasions the PCP has made it clear that it is ready for an examination of the human rights record of the NIF government, and has leaked some information from its dossiers and threatened to publish more. It does this confident that those it is naming are neither security officers in government now or are dead.

On its side, the GoS has launched a fierce counter-attack on the record of Hassan al Turabi, accusing him and his supporters being responsible for oppression, totalitarianism and human rights abuses when he was in de facto ruler. However, this approach runs the risk of making President Bashir look foolish: was he not President during the time when Turabi was allegedly pulling the strings? The human rights card is likely to be a played ruthlessly as the Islamists continue their infighting.

Power Sharing

Various formulae for power-sharing have been broached. The GoS prefers two Vice Presidents (one to be Ali Osman Mohamed Taha), and failing that, a single VP who cannot succeed the President in case the Presidency becomes vacant. It may also consider the proposal
floated by Mulana Mohamed Osman al Mirghani for a five-man Republican Council, that would keep both Bashir and Ali Osman at the summit of power. The SPLA’s preferred position is a rotating presidency, which the GoS will not accept, but failing that, is ready to accept a single Vice Presidency with enhanced powers (including virtually exclusive authority over the South). The SPLA is demanding a broad-based government that includes the NDA.

The mediators are likely to settle on the following: the President will be from the North and there will be a single Vice President from the South. The VP will not be able to assume the Presidency: should the President be incapacitated, then it will fall upon the ruling party in the North to nominate as successor. Similarly, the VP will not take over the position as C-in-C of the national army. Elections will be held for all constitutional positions before the mid-term of the interim period, with the same formula holding: President from the North, VP from the South.

The formula of President from the ruling party of the North and the VP from the South is quite compatible with a variant of the Republican Council proposal. A State Council of five, with representation across parties and regions, could have these two pre-eminent constitutional positions reserved for North and South. This would have the advantage of ensuring greater buy-in to the agreement from parties that command widespread popular support across Sudan, such as the Umma and DUP.

The Marginalised Areas

The issue of the marginalised areas is perhaps the most difficult issue still outstanding. This is one area in which the GoS is resolutely uncompromising. It will not bring Abyei, Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile into the main negotiating process which, it maintains, is solely concerned with the South. The GoS is ready to discuss these areas, even in the same location at the same time, with a simultaneous agreement to be signed. But it is not ready to accord this agreement the same legal status as the overall Framework Agreement. In addition, its substantive concessions on the three areas are very minor. For Abyei, it is ready to contemplate a referendum, but on the other two areas there is no compromise. However, the parties have renewed the Nuba ceasefire agreement for a further six months.

A conference was organised on the issue of Abyei, by the Sudan Peace Fund (based in Nairobi) in early June. This turned out to be an exercise in solidarity with the SPLA, in which the participants mandated the SPLA to negotiate on their behalf. It asserted that Abyei is part of Southern Sudan demanded immediate restoration of the area to Bahr el Ghazal. This outcome was foregone after the GoS prevented invitees from GoS areas from attending.

Popularising & Implementing an Agreement

Popularising the agreement remains an important component of the peace process. To date, the negotiating process and the content of draft agreements remains a closely guarded secret. Even some of the members of the delegations to the peace talks confess to being in the dark about what is being discussed and agreed. The population at large, including senior commanders of the armed forces on both sides, are even more at a loss. For that reason, there is widespread caution about the peace process, and considerable scepticism about what is being achieved. Trust has not been built, and the process for democratic affirmation of the peace may be more uncertain than the parties expect. Implementing the agreement will be as big a challenge as negotiating it. The GoS and National Congress Party are actively preparing for the challenge
of peace. Various sectors of the party base are being actively mobilised, including the youth, women and the ‘special entity’ of the Islamist movement. This mobilisation was critical in sparking the popular demonstrations in favour of an Islamic capital. This demonstrates that GoS supporters are strongly under the impression that it is possible to have peace on their terms, and is an indicator that some issues may remain explosive even after formal agreement is reached. The GoS has also been active in briefing the leadership of the army on the peace process, with a high-level delegation visiting garrisons and the Gabiet training school in eastern Sudan. In the South, the SPLA is pursuing contacts with the Arab League (and has invited its Secretary General to visit Southern Sudan). Many international organisations are gearing up for post-conflict operations.

The Southern population both in GoS and SPLA areas are in the dark on the peace process. In absence of information rumours abound among Southerners wherever they are. Fortunately, the ordinary people in Southern Sudan are yearning for a just peace. They even have their red lines: There must be at least two separate armies in South Sudan. Another issue of importance is demilitarisation of the towns Juba, Malakal and Wau. The security in these towns should be provided by the police under international monitoring. International presence in various forms during the interim period should be guaranteed by peacekeeping forces and monitors. People insist that the North cannot be trusted and therefore there must be firm international guarantees to the peace agreement.

Social & Economic Issues

Social and economic issues are relatively uncontroversial in this stage of the peace process. The SPLA is still insisting that its New Sudan Pound should be a recognised currency. At the minimum, it will have to agree that the New Sudan Pound is a denomination of the Sudanese Dinar. The key socio-economic issues will arise in the post-conflict period.

HIV/AIDS is recognised by both parties and the mediators as an extremely important post-conflict issue, but has not yet been incorporated into the peace process. At present, HIV prevalence in Sudan is unknown due to reliance on just four surveillance sites, none of which are in conflict zones, and an official figure of 2.6% is almost certainly too low. It is expected that the end of the war will see a substantial return of refugees and displaced people, increased internal movement and trade, and widespread demobilisation of former combatants. The fear is that these conditions will facilitate a rapid spread of HIV. The implications of this include sickness and early death among all sections of society, most particularly the scarce educated people who will be needed to run an administration of Southern Sudan. A generalised HIV/AIDS epidemic would place a heavy burden on the country’s inadequate health infrastructure and contribute to impoverishment and food insecurity.

Sudan’s national economy has been posting good GDP growth in recent years, averaging 5-7%. Its inflation has been coming down. The Bretton Woods Institutions have been, overall, favourably impressed with the government’s economic management. However, this has been possible due largely to the oil windfall and the fact that Sudan’s debt management strategy has been simply not to pay what it is due. It has even had difficulty in repaying the relatively modest repayments due on its debt to the IMF.

Generous debt relief must be an integral part of a post-conflict package in Sudan. The country’s international debt of $22bn is, proportionately, one of the largest in the world. Most of this debt is accrued
arrears on debts run up in the 1970s. Unusually for a highly-indebted poor country, this debt is owed to a large range of lenders including not just the ‘Paris Club’ of OECD governments, but also banks, Arab governments and Eastern European countries. The complexity of the debt will make a comprehensive debt agreement more difficult, because putting Sudan on the fast track for HIPC debt relief will only address a portion of its debt burden.

**Darfur**

Darfur has been militarily quiet during the last month. The GoS is divided as to how to respond to the insurrection, with some leading figures advocating force and others advising negotiation. The GoS is unable to focus on the Darfur crisis with the singlemindedness that it warrants, making it likely that a policy of force will prevail. The army will however be incapable of defeating the rebels, and any excesses that it perpetrates will merely escalate the resistance. As the rainy season progresses, however, military activities on both sides will be constrained. Arrests of students and activists have intensified. The humanitarian needs in the area will escalate as long as the conflict continues.

The SLA has many issues to resolve. It is led by young and relatively inexperienced politicians, who followed the SPLA pattern of beginning its military activities before their political agenda had been clarified. As a result it is now rapidly trying to cope with a huge influx of recruits to its numerous camps. At the same time it is working hard to establish good working relations with the various Darfur leaders outside the country, many of whom it distrusts. The SLA is overwhelmingly led by Fur and Zaghawa, with Masalit and other ‘Zurga’ (black) leaders and groups rapidly mobilising. It also faces the challenge of how to deal with the Darfur Arab Alliance, which has traditionally turned to Khartoum for support, but which shares many of the same grievances over the neglect of the region.

**The External Partners**

President Bush is visiting Africa in July but it seems very unlikely that he will go to Kenya and play any personal role in the peace talks. One reason for not visiting Kenya is the ongoing security alert related to the presence of al Qa’ida operatives in the area. A second reason is the uncertainty over the endgame of the peace process, so that it cannot be guaranteed that Bush would be present at the required moment, or indeed that the peace deal will be successfully concluded. It is more probable that Senator Danforth would attend any final signing. However, most Sudanese are hoping that President Bush himself will be ready to bless a peace agreement.

While the State Department is wholly committed to the peace process, and President Bush has indicated that peace is his policy, the US posture on Sudan still remains ultimately ambivalent. However, it is remarkable the degree to which the US is part of a very wide array of international partners with a very similar approach to Sudan. This coalition has been an extraordinary asset in the peace process. It has compensated for any US foibles. The more it can remain in place to oversee the implementation of any deal, the better.

The ad hoc multilateralism of the external partners has been pivotal to the success of the peace process thus far. To a significant extent, the peace process gained momentum when all the key international players began to coordinate their approaches, giving the parties no option but to concur or to pull out altogether. While the key leverage has come from the US, Britain’s Special Envoy has provided the crucial elements of diplomatic persistence and understanding. It is important that this combination
of coordination, leverage and experience remains even after the signing of any peace agreement: the implementation phase will also prove to be difficult.

Conclusion

Peace has never seemed closer in Sudan. But the last leg of the peace marathon may be the most difficult. Infighting among the Islamist movement remains a threat. The GoS is standing firm on the issue of Islamic law for Khartoum, and the mediators and external partners may not necessarily be in a position to wring the final concessions out the GoS, having gone so far along with the peace process, and being so clearly committed to a peace agreement in the near future. A 'plan B' for pressuring the parties, especially the GoS, will need to include quickly-implementable measures for protection of civilians in the war zones should there be a sudden irruption of fighting.

If a peace agreement is signed on schedule, the challenges ahead will be no less daunting. Many of these issues need to be addressed now. The international community, both governments and NGOs, should begin to support various Sudanese specialised conferences focusing on the issues that need to be tackled during the pre-interim period once the peace agreement is concluded. Six months pre-interim period may not be a long time for fund-raising and conducting informed consultations on issues of constitutional drafting and other relevant issues.

Peace in the Horn this Year?

Lionel Cliffe

Just over a year ago a Briefing in ROAPE 91 drew attention to a possible 'critical watershed in the Horn of Africa ... (marked by) a set of separate but related initiatives (which) has the potential for moving the log jam which has impeded peace prospects in the region'. Three key areas that were all simultaneously reaching critical moments 'with the potential to help resolve major belligerent situations or plunge them deeper into war' were identified:

- The international Mediation Commission on the Eritrean-Ethiopian border which made public its findings in May 2002;
- A reconciliation conference bringing together all major factions in Somalia started in Kenya in April 2002;
- In Sudan, several peace initiatives were coming together into one main, hopefully final, push.

The intervening months have indeed seen significant progress. With regard to Somalia and Sudan, there have been cease-fire agreements, and formal peace talks have continued throughout the period, both under the auspices of the regional body, the Inter Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD). Indeed each had set targets for the completion of the talks by the time of this writing, mid-2003. If there were to be an end to the 20 year civil war in Sudan, and a permanent end to faction fighting and some kind of reconstruction of the state in Somalia, plus a return to 'normality' in relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, these would constitute enormous steps toward reversing the endless internal and inter-state violence that has beset the region for almost 50 years. It is thus
worth taking stock of just what progress has been made by these conventional means of peace-making, and what hazards still loom ahead.

Eritrea-Ethiopia Relations

The Border Commission (EEBC), an independent body set up under the auspices of the Permanent Arbitration Commission (PAC) based in The Hague, Holland, composed of legal experts proposed by each side with a neutral chairperson, did indeed announce its findings in April 2002. Its very detailed and thorough report (see Philip White’s accessible summary in ROAPE 92) interpreted the various treaties between Ethiopia and Italy painstakingly but with sensible flexibility to take into account realities on the ground - for instance, by drawing boundaries around rather than through the middle of border towns. The findings were initially accepted by both sides. In fact they had agreed in advance to accept them as ‘final and binding’. Having done this ‘delimitation’ exercise, all that seemed left to do was to begin the process of demarcating the actual border markers on the ground - for instance, by drawing boundaries around rather than through the middle of border towns. The findings were initially accepted by both sides. In fact they had agreed in advance to accept them as ‘final and binding’. Having done this ‘delimitation’ exercise, all that seemed left to do was to begin the process of demarcating the actual border markers on the ground – although that would require prior de-mining of the areas concerned, and agreements about troop deployment. It was to be done by the EEBC, under the protection of the UN Mission (UNMEE) that separates the two sides and monitors implementation of the peace agreement. But the scheduled start date of May 2003 has been put back and work has yet to begin. It had been optimistically thought that removing the (stated) bone of contention would lead to a gradual normalisation of relations, albeit there was a clear need for clear definition of items such as cross-border trade and movement, economic relations and citizenship.

The main obstacle has been the Ethiopian government’s reluctance to accept the findings of EEBC, in particular its continuing claim to Badme, the original flash-point for the war, which has assumed symbolic significance – and which the first official Ethiopian statements of April 2002 celebrated as being theirs: ‘all our claims have been met’. Ethiopia came to a different realisation eventually and then made a submission to EEBC for ‘clarification’. These claims were rejected earlier this year. But now the government says it wants to raise the issue with the UN Security Council. Present indications are that international opinion is all too worried about the unfortunate precedent that non-acceptance or reversal by the UN would set. Of course Eritrea has not helped; despite its own desperation for peace and normal relations, it has as usual eschewed any diplomatic path, which it could have pursued by for instance keeping a low profile on the issue. Instead it has never lost an opportunity to chortle about Badme at Ethiopia’s expense.

It is not clear whether the regime of Meles Zenawi is digging in its heels as a public show of mollifying the protests of ‘centrists’ who still nostalgically refuse to accept the hiving off of Eritrea from the old empire and of disillusioned former supporters of the ruling party among Meles’ own Tigray people. Or does the stance really mean a possible return to war, or at least an unresolved and uneasy ‘peace’? The latter would do most immediate harm to Eritrea, and continue current Ethiopian policies of ‘putting Eritrea in its place’, but would also be a long-term time-bomb for Ethiopia and the region.

Meanwhile, demarcation is held up. Official relations are still frosty. There is a lot of xenophobic posturing in the media and in the globalised internet sites maintained by each country’s diaspora. The continuing tensions between the states are being played out in the region as a whole and continue to sour other conflict situations, including those discussed below. Somalis, for instance, are still complaining that their country is the
site of a ‘proxy war’. The only hopeful signs are a few indicators that the ordinary people living athwart the border, wherever the markers are erected, are getting back to small trade and business deals, visiting in-laws and other relations.

Somalia’s National Reconciliation Conference

Promised for April 2002, peace talks did get under way in Kenya in October, under the auspices of IGAD. They received explicit backing from the UN Security Council and the African Union (AU), each of them appointing special representatives. They brought together the Transitional National Government (TNG), which had emerged from the Djibouti-sponsored talks at Arta in 2000, and the rival alliance of war-lords, formed with the backing of Ethiopia, the Somali Reconciliation & Reconstruction Council (SRRC), as well as representatives of the ‘government’ of the semi-autonomous north-eastern region of Puntland.

The auguries were not good, however. The TNG President Salat said he was not optimistic and did not attend the opening; the unilaterally declared independent government of Somaliland refused to attend. Analysts of some of the previous 16 international conferences suggested the lessons of their failure were not taken on board. However, the gathering did deliver a draft agreement in October 2002, which provided for a cessation of all hostilities, some outline of a future agreement and modalities for conducting the talks. A Technical Committee was set up by IGAD from the member countries bordering Somalia – Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya – under the leadership of a Kenyan diplomat. In addition, six specialist committees of the Conference itself were created to consider proposals on such matters as a federal structure, economic recovery, land and property disputes, demobilisation and disarmament and conflict resolution. The immediately previous gathering at Arta in neighbouring Djibouti had learned something from the 15 previous failed reconciliation conferences, held under international or neighbour state’s auspices, by convening for the necessary protracted period and by inviting civil society actors, seeking to marginalise the warring faction leaders who were seen as the main threat to peace. It got some consensus that allowed the setting up of a Transitional National Assembly and in turn a Transitional Government (TGS or TNG). But these efforts were not sufficient to gain widespread acceptance. Predictably perhaps given the representation at Arta, several warlords showed they could not be easily sidelined and stayed out of the new set up, and indeed formed a new alliance, the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC), to challenge the TNG.

The IGAD conference sought to bring together the TNG and SRRC, and hopefully the self-proclaimed autonomous regions, Puntland and Somaliland, plus ‘peace-lords’ from civil society and representatives of the clans. It has held four sessions hosted by the Government of Kenya (GOK), whose special representative was chief mediator: at Eldoret from mid-October (thus the whole initiative is sometimes referred to as the ‘Eldoret Process’), and in Nairobi in January, in April and again in June. The process is mainly funded by the EU, US and the Arab League, who have all put pressure on the delegates, although they have only limited leverage over faction leaders who feel they are not properly represented.

Since the first session which lead to the signing of the agreement in October 2002, several events have continued to underline the precarious nature of the talks. The Cessation of Hostilities that all of the factions signed up to has perhaps kept clashes between the main clan factions in check, since October 2002, but
not those between rival leadership groups of these factions. There have been many violations of the cease-fire agreement, indeed signs are that there has been more outbursts of violence and in areas quiescent for some years since the agreement. Some analysts suggest that the flare-ups have even been fed by the agreement, as factions jockey for an edge or for control of a greater area before a peace agreement. More marked have been fights between rivals for the leadership of factions, even over who will form the delegation to the Nairobi talks. The TNG itself has been rent by disputes as to who should represent them, and the President even recalled some delegates in March 2003. At one stage in early 2003 the TNG and other factions were denounced for holding separate talks with selected factions aimed at securing peace around Mogadishu city, but it claimed these were not alternatives to the Kenya talks, and they did return to them. The Mogadishu talks did involve dialogue with other factions, but otherwise the rivalry between TNG and the SSRC has often been conducted through open conflict in the streets of Mogadishu (50 people were killed in one clash in the suburb of Medina in March 2003). UN agencies estimate that 25% of the city’s people are internally displaced (IDPs) as a result of these and former battles.

Puntland, which had set up an administration covering a large territory in the north-east corner and had been stable, underwent serious clashes in 2002 between followers of the president, Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf, and his deputy who tried to unseat him. Fighting continued into 2003, and part of the contestation involved representation in Nairobi: Abdullahi Yusuf in fact stormed out of meetings in March 2003 over the issues of inadequate and illegitimate representation of Puntland. Factional fighting also spread in 2002 to what had been a smaller enclave of relative peace around the town of Baidoa – again between rival leaders of existing factions.

Simultaneously with the Eldoret Process, the self-declared but unrecognised state of Somaliland, which created its own haven of security and a functioning administration in the mid-1990s, managed an orderly succession when President Egal died in 2002. It did also conduct local government elections in October 2002 and the first multi-party elections for President took place in April 2003, earning plaudits from independent observers, including one from South Africa, that it was ‘free and fair’. These events have all gone ahead peacefully; the only, continuing tensions are experienced in the eastern regions of Sool and Sanaag, claim to which is also made by Puntland, which seeks identity and legitimacy on a clan basis rather than territory like Somaliland. Somaliland has refused to be present in Nairobi, unless as representing a sovereign state, which would imply recognition; arguing they quit the Somalia Republic before the fighting of the 1990s and are in no way responsible for the continuation of conflict. This attitude – that they have the peace and reconciliation the conference is seeking and that they are not a party to the ongoing conflicts – is perhaps understandable. But whatever political entity comes out of the talks will have to define its relationship to the existing entity called ‘Somaliland’. Moreover, as the Horn of Africa Bulletin (Vol. 14.5, 2002) editorialised at the outset, ‘it is vital … that any ongoing peace efforts for Somalia do not destabilize what has already been achieved in and for Somaliland’.

Given the lack of confidence in the Process initially and the continuing conflicts violating the cease-fire agreement, progress has been slow. Months have been spent mainly on debating representation, which outside the warlord factions is on a clan basis. Civil society actors have also received invitations, but these bodies, women’s groups especially, have felt excluded. Indeed fist-fights occurred at Eldoret over the representa-
tion of civil society. The self-declared autonomous areas of Puntland and the Southwest State (the Baidoa area) have been in attendance but disputes about their legitimate delegates have followed factional fighting in these areas.

These representational disputes and the knock-on effects they have in the areas concerned are also predictable on the basis of previous experience of Somali reconciliation conferences. Who gets to attend them is an arbitrary business; they are not selected on any representational basis other than self-assertion, and final accreditation is largely up to the hosting government or the mediating institution. The Arta conference delegates list ultimately reflected the Djibouti government’s interests, but those interests did include a strong commitment to restoring peace in their large neighbour, for immediate border security reasons, but maybe partly to have a local power which could off-set the close, but perhaps slightly choking, embrace of the other powerful neighbour, Ethiopia. In the Eldoret conference, it was IGAD states and especially the Technical Committee, that had a significant say.

Accreditation, like the agenda and other conference procedures in the hands of the three TC countries, was itself a contentious matter, as they each had very definite interests in outcomes. Djibouti backed the TNG, its ‘own’ product’, whereas Ethiopia had been solidly behind SSRC. Kenya was not disinterested either, its calculations influenced by the significant Somali minority in the country and the many refugees; but it was seen as more even-handed. Its role and especially the skill and diplomacy of the vastly experienced second Kenyan mediator, Bethwell Kiplagat, have been instrumental in the progress made. But undoubtedly, some of the initial delay in starting the talks and in building up early momentum was a result of the lack of consensus between the mediators. They have had their minds concentrated, however, as have the delegates and the factions, by pressure from the external sponsors. The ultimate test as to the legitimacy of the delegates will come when they return to whatever constituencies they claim to represent to get approval for and implementation of any agreement. Crucially, will it be inclusive enough for the militias to disarm? Will elders and other ‘peace-lords’ in civil society have enough clout to hold them to the agreements.

Given the unpropitious beginnings and the tensions along the way, what is surprising is that the talks have in fact run their course over a long period. They have even reached the point where Ambassador Kiplagat contemplated reaching a comprehensive agreement and the formation of a new, all-inclusive government by 18 June. Although this deadline has been put back until early July, there is considerable optimism among the IGAD mediators. They recognise that credit for this has to be shared with the pressure applied by external actors, both regional and global.

Western powers have shown a lack of interest in involvement in Somalia since the UN forces withdrew in 1993, and even now seem ready to spend more energies on Sudan (see below). True they have some rather mixed motives, including the US and its Coalition’s concern about Somalia as a breeding ground and sanctuary for Islamist terrorists groups, (the US has a naval blockade patrolling the long Somali coast-line, and has a base in Djibouti), as well as humanitarian and political concerns to settle this state-less abscess. But for whatever reasons, they have put on pressure. For instance, the UK delegation turned up the heat on the TNG and other delegates when they seemed to be exiting the talks in March. The EU has consistently backed the talks. Of course, the western powers all have the leverage of implied promises to aid the implementation of a peace process and the process of eco-
economic and social reconstruction. However, this carrot may not be as large as some of the faction leaders imagine. A process driven along by these non-African forces does, however, run the risk of merely coming up with another quick-fix. The existence of a wider transitional government would not on its own signify the reconstruction of the state. One area where some of the delegates are bidding for continued western involvement is in the setting up a cease-fire monitoring mechanism (which doesn’t exist to scrutinise the October 2002 agreement) and one that would have sufficient teeth actually to conduct a disarmament process. Disarming and demobilising the militias is clearly a priority task, reinforced by one strong ‘lesson’ coming out of the evaluations of the failures of the international community in the early 1990s: that there had been a possibility for getting militias to hand over weapons that was missed at the time.

Regional actors are part of the problem as well as acting through IGAD to seek a solution. Neighbouring states have been accused for the last few years of involving themselves in a partisan way in conflicts, by supplying weapons and other supplies, backing certain factions and even ‘invading’. The assertion that much of the fighting in Somalia was a ‘proxy war’ has once again been made in a UN Security Council report of March 2003 on the non-compliance with the sanctions on arms supplying. Ethiopia is alleged to be continuing its sponsorship of the TNG’s rival axis, the SRRC. Ethiopia’s enemy in the 1998-2000 war, Eritrea, had initially backed Aideed’s faction, which later joined SRRC, but then made a ‘tit-for-tat’ switch to back TNG and other factions against Ethiopia’s coalition, the SRRC. Djibouti backs the TNG, which was in a sense its own creation. There is at least some balance therefore in IGAD’s Technical Committee. But reaching agreement this year and then ensuring its implementation will depend on the IGAD members acting together, rather than looking to score short-term gains in their own conflicts by exacerbating antagonisms in Somalia.

The possibility of the current IGAD talks reaching an acceptable and implementable outcome is still tenuous. The mediators and the external sponsors have displayed the requisite stamina as have the delegates. But the strategy of going for a single process to produce an all-inclusive state in formation is itself risky. It was the formula pursued by all the failed conferences especially of those up to the mid-1990s. But after several years, the accepted wisdom of regional and international actors shifted to favour a bottom-up approach, which bolstered the various local and provincial authorities that had evolved out of chaos with the hope that they would in their own time seek a modus vivendi between themselves. The Eldoret Process goes back to the old formula. If it does reach some agreement, the bolstering of local administrations may still be the most useful arena for outside aid and their inter-relationships should be negotiated rather than enforced by a tenuous national authority, if peace is to be restored. But whatever doubts anyone may have, there is great danger if these hopes of an agreement in 2003 are dashed. The risk of major resumption of fighting in many parts of the country will be very great. It would then be very hard to mount an alternative process in the foreseeable future.

Sudan Peace Talks

The peace talks on Sudan, also held in Kenya under IGAD auspices, were also poised at a critical stage in June 2003, with promises of an agreement being in place within days. A detailed description of the state of play and of how the various processes have reached this stage is offered in the Briefing from Justice Africa. Some comments about the broader historical and geo-political background might help to contextualise it.
IGAD first set up a Committee to deal with the internal war in Sudan as long ago as 1995. For years the only success it could claim was the mere fact that it remained in existence and that it marked the acceptance that it was legitimate for a regional African body to concern itself with the ‘internal affairs’ of a member state, challenging the absoluteness of the sovereignty clause in the OAU Charter. Its role became more acceptable as some of the members – Uganda as it became more concerned with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Eritrea and Ethiopia as their war left them each with the risk of being exposed on two fronts – began to heal the former rifts in their relationships with the Government of Sudan (GoS). The initial success of getting an agreement between GoS and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) at the meeting in Machakos in Kenya in July 2002 still came as a surprise. But this marked the beginning of sustained negotiations up to the present optimistic announcements.

This success is partly a result of almost all regional and international actors finally giving their backing to the IGAD process, rather than the several other initiatives that have been in the offing over the last few years. In particular the Joint Egyptian-Libyan Initiative did have mileage and though parallel in some respects, it challenged the long-asserted IGAD Principles that the Southern Sudan should have the right of self-determination, and that the country should be a secular state. For Egypt the last thing they want is the prospect of an independent state in the source area of the White Nile. These IGAD Principles have been preserved in some sense by compromises that there be a six year interregnum before a Southern referendum, during which there would be two administrations in the country, and by the GoS insisting on Islamic sharia law in Khartoum. As in Somalia’s case, the success so far also owes much to sustained and united international pressures. Observers close to the IGAD mediators have told me that it is only pressure that has kept the two sides on track. Although most governments are supporting the process, the main actors are US, UK and Norway each of which has appointed a Special Representative to the talks. Their role, with the IGAD mediators, has become pro-active in the last months; having listened to the position of the two sides they are working out their own suggested compromise formulae and offering these drafts to each side in separate talks with only limited face-to-face meeting. As with Somalia, there are mixed and even questionable motives at work. In particular, the rabid US Christian fundamentalism, which is the main electoral strength behind Bush, has been involved in propping up the revolt in the South for many years. In the recent developments they have exerted much pressure to ensure that the interests of the ‘Christian’ South and the demand for a non-Islamicist state should not be ignored. This might have happened if western interests were confined to the issue of oil. In this context and especially after the declaration of the ‘war on terrorism’, GoS has taken the opportunity to try to come on side and change its status, in US classification, as a ‘state supporting terrorism’ Such are the contradictions of the current world disorder that some very strange bed-fellows have come together, and for their own convoluted reasons might help to deliver some degree of peace in Sudan.

Among the many other contradictions that must make one cautious about the outcome, one arises from the fact that the IGAD Process limits itself to the one fundamental conflict between GoS and SPLM. While this has been the main locus for violence and the main cause of suffering, the IGAD has made it difficult to take on board the distinct, but related fighting in the three ‘marginalised’ areas which are geographically part of the ‘North’ (the Nuba mountains, the southern Blue Nile and Abyei), the huge
western province of Darfur which is experiencing widespread disruption, and the cleavage between the present GoS and other political movements centred in the North.

Conclusion

Whatever the limitations of the two peace processes taking place in Kenya, and the doubts about their feasibility, they undoubtedly represent the best chances for some reversal of decades-long violence and instability in Somalia and Sudan. These conflicts, and the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, have also destabilised other countries of the Horn region and complicated the task of peace-making.

Sudan: Oil & War

Jemera Rone

The twenty-year conflict in Sudan has been marked by gross human rights abuses – two million dead, four million displaced since 1983 – and recurring famine and epidemics. In the government’s eyes, the centuries-long residents of the southern oilfields pose a security threat to the oilfields: ownership of the south’s natural resources is contested by southern rebels led by the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The government has helped to create this ‘security’ situation by forging ahead with oil development in southern territory under circumstances in which its Nuer and Dinka residents have no right to participate in their own governance and in which the government has historically ridden roughshod over their rights, even before oil was discovered. The abuse most connected to oil development in southern Sudan has been forcible displacement – by military means – of tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of residents in order to provide a ‘cordon sanitaire’ for international oil companies.

Most of Sudan’s oil wealth lies in southern Sudan, the part of Sudan that has been fighting the repressions of central governments for thirty-seven years. The first company to attempt to develop the southern oilfields was Chevron, a US oil giant, which discovered oil in southern Sudan in 1978. It conducted considerable exploration but did not reach the next stage because separatist (Nuer) rebels attacked its operations in early 1984 at its southern headquarters in Western Upper Nile. Chevron suspended its southern operations after three expatriate workers were killed. It never returned and sold its concession in 1992.

A small Canadian company, Arakis, purchased Blocks 1, 2, and 4 concessions in Western Upper Nile in 1993, and in 1996 Arakis took in China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) and Petronas of Malaysia – both state oil companies – as partners. They owned 25%, 40% and 30%, respectively. Sudapet Limited, the Sudanese national oil company, had 5%. Together they formed the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Corporation (GNPOC). Although Arakis had been working these proven oilfields in Sudan since 1993, by mid-1998 the Sudanese oil industry still remained in rudimentary form, producing only for local consumption. The country still imported most of its petroleum needs. The Sudanese government was not satisfied.

Enter Talisman Energy Inc., Canada’s largest independent oil and gas producer, which acquired Arakis and its main asset, 25% of GNPOC, on 8 October 1998. Talisman, with its superior technology and experience, brought major improvements, which benefited the war-stressed and cash-poor Sudanese gov-
ernment. It took only one year after Talisman joined the consortium to boost development of the fields in Blocks 1 and 2; to finish a 1,540-kilometer pipeline to the Red Sea; to build a new marine terminal for oil supertankers; and to pump and export the first crude oil from Sudan. In August 1999, less than a year after Talisman came on board, the first oil was exported, earning the Sudanese government $2.2m. Since that time, oil export has amounted to 20-40% of all government revenues.

Talisman estimated that, over the life of the Block 1 and 2 fields alone, the government of Sudan would earn approximately $3-5bn, depending on the international price of oil.1 Because of Talisman’s successful exploration, reserves in GNPOC’s concession were discovered to be much larger than previously thought – not 403.6m barrels (1998) but by April 2002, current proven plus probable ultimate recovery of the GNPOC concession were estimated at 1bn barrels of crude oil.2

Talisman’s tenure in Sudan was besieged by complaints of its complicity in human rights abuses, made by church groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), UN rights officials, and some governments. Canadian NGOs, which had been campaigning for the Canadian government to force Talisman’s predecessor, Arakis, to pull out of Sudan because of the Sudanese government’s gross human rights abuses, wrote to Talisman and publicly called for the company to stay out of Sudan.

UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Sudan Dr. Leonardo Franco presented a report to the UN General Assembly on 14 October 1999, in which he noted that a May 1999 government ten-day assault on Block 1 had caused many people to become displaced.3 Talisman rejected this report as ‘hearsay’ but in late 1999, after months of pressure from the Canadian government, it finally signed the International Code of Ethics for Canadian Business, committing the company to the ‘value’ of ‘human rights and social justice,’ and ‘not to be complicit in human rights abuses,’ among other things.

Talisman justified its presence in Sudan on the grounds that it undertook community development programs for the (dwindling) population. It also made the unsubstantiated claim that ‘development’ would bring peace. But, although Talisman provided clean water to several communities, these and other charitable contributions amounted to only a fraction of 1% of Talisman’s pre-tax revenue.4 Talisman spent about $1m in fifteen Sudanese community development projects in 2000, most of which were located in the northern part of Sudan. In 2001, it spent less: $819,541.5

Talisman’s defense of its presence was challenged also by civilian political opposition in the north, particularly the United Sudanese African Parties (USAP), which issued a declaration in 1999 calling on the government to suspend immediately all oil operations and accusing Talisman of full awareness:

that what the Dinka and Nuer national groups are currently experiencing in their invaded land is brutal death, wanton destruction of their homes and huge unprecedented displacement of whole families and clans. Their ancestral land has instead become a theatre of war, fueled with inputs from oil interests in Canada, China, Malaysia and some European countries.6

A Canadian government-sponsored human rights delegation concluded in 2000 that Sudanese government helicopter gunships and Antonov bombers have taken off from the company airstrip at its headquarters in Block 2 at Heglig ‘with their payloads of death and displacement.’ The Sudanese army also made military use of the excellent road system
installed by the oil companies to move their heavy equipment; armored personnel carriers were able to reach the government’s targeted villages by surprise.

The activities of international oil companies in Sudan did not produce improvements as companies predicted, particularly in human rights. A national state of emergency was declared in December 1999 and still continues. The war increasingly focused on the oilfields and became more brutal as the government built and bought new weapons with its oil resources and used them against civilians. On 30 October 2002, Talisman announced that it had agreed to sell its Sudanese interests to a subsidiary of India’s national oil company, for a net return on investment of 30%. Talisman’s Chief Executive Officer said of its departure, ‘Talisman’s shares continue to be discounted for perceived political risk in-country and in North America to a degree that was unacceptable for 12% of our production.’

Talisman oil production did very well in Sudan: as the lead partner, it increased GNPOC production from 150,000 barrels per day (b/d) to a projected rate for 2002 of some 240,000 b/d. But there would be an end to what Blocks 1, 2, and 4 could produce; in 2002 Talisman disclosed that its projections indicated a peak in production at 250,000 b/d lasting until 2007, and a drop off until the concession provided only 50,000 b/d in 2020. This meant that the government of Sudan would need to bring other southern oilfields into production, if it wanted to offset the projected revenue loss as Blocks 1, 2, and 4 were depleted.

The completion of the pipeline to the Red Sea in May 1999 meant that adjacent Block 5A would be commercially viable. Lundin, the lead partner, held 40.4% of the concession, and the Malaysian state oil company Petronas held 28.5%; OMV (Sudan Block 5A) Exploration GmbH, owned by OMV AG, the largest company on the Vienna stock exchange held 26.2%; and Sudapet Limited held 5%. Lundin estimated there were 115m barrels in reserve in Block 5A, but nothing has been produced so far.

These investors were enticed into Sudan by the prospect that the civil war had ended or that a government with oil revenues would be able to protect their interests. This appearance was created by government machinations. It had taken advantage of a 1991 split in the SPLM/A – which broke into two factions somewhat on Dinka/Nuer ethnic lines – to begin covertly aiding the mostly-Nuer breakaway faction led by Nuer leader and SPLA commander Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon. The Nuer were the key ethnic group as far as oil development was concerned. Nuer territory extended to most of the main southern oil basins, the Muglad and the Melut, with Dinka being the second largest ethnic group in these regions.

In 1996, Riek Machar signed a Political Charter with the government and in 1997, the Khartoum Peace Agreement. It provided for a referendum on self-determination, a widely held southern aspiration. But the referendum, to be held four years after conditions were right, has never been held. The Nuer leaders, particularly Riek Machar, complained loudly about the government’s failure to honor the agreement. The Khartoum Peace Agreement of 1997 was what the government needed to show foreign oil investors that it had supposedly put an end to the war that had driven Chevron away. But the northern government fundamentally mistrusted southerners. It would neither rely on southerners as firm allies nor allow them to grow too powerful. It directly provisioned various commanders under Riek Machar, win-
ning them away from him (note: these were in effect long before the oil war). Students and others in the north were called upon to join Islamist militias, including one known as the ‘Protectors of the Oil Brigade, that it deployed to the southern oil areas.

When pro-government Nuer militias began attacks in late 1997 into the territory of Riek Machar, supposedly a government ally, the government dismissed the fighting as ‘tribal clashes’. But the government did not lift a finger to stop it and continued to separately arm the anti-Riek Machar Nuer factions.

Many Nuer were fed up with the role of Riek Machar: he was still part of the government despite its refusal to honor the Khartoum Peace Agreement and to give Riek Machar’s forces the right to control the Block 5A oilfields. Most important was Riek Machar’s inability to protect his Nuer people, however, whose displacement from the oilfields was accelerating. Government soldiers and Islamist and pro-government Nuer militia thus encountered resistance in Block 5A by Riek Machar’s commanders (nominally their allies) in May 1999. The resistors used their guns to try to prevent the Sudanese army and Islamist militias from occupying the only Block 5A exploratory rig, at Thar Jath (Ryer).

This fighting, followed by government displacement of tens of thousands of Nuer over the next few months from Block 5A, provoked a series of realignments by various Nuer commanders. Riek Machar abandoned the government in January 2000 and started another political-military group, but it did not have sufficient financing. The Nuer in the SPLA and the Riek Machar Nuer forces, who had been cooperating militarily, started fighting each other in June 2000. The Machar followers then went to the government for arms ‘to defend ourselves’ from the SPLA – an all-too-common practice. Added to this were the Nuer militias that had stayed with the government throughout the war, who fought the SPLA and, when he was in opposition to the Sudanese government, Riek Machar. After countless civilian deaths, Riek Machar and the SPLA announced their reunification (after eleven years) in January 2002.

The fighting between these various Nuer factions, aligning and realigning, from 1999 to 2002 took place in the larger context of oil development in the GNPOC and Block 5A concessions, where the government sought to foment fighting among southerners and displacement of their people, to prevent rebel control of the oilfields and to gain control of the territory for oil development. The government’s dry season military offensive in 2000 in Block 5A was to capture land for the construction of a secure road leading to these oilfields and a nearby Sudanese army garrison, while the SPLA and government-armed Riek Machar’s forces fought among themselves.

In the ensuing months of fighting, tens of thousands of civilians in the Block 5A and adjacent Block 4 oil areas were uprooted – again. This was accompanied by looting, killing, forced recruitment of child soldiers and rape. By 28 July 2000, thousands of civilians were on the move from both the pro-government militias and the rebel forces. Relief workers in a plane flying over a fifty-kilometer swathe of land in Block 5A encountered few people, huts or cattle; as far as the eye could see, these experienced workers reported, everything had been burned to the ground. Many thousands were seen with their cattle and mats camped on the banks of the Jur River to the west. A separate mass of some 60,000 people made it north to the relative safety of Bentiu, a garrison town. Such fighting continued as no side managed to prevail militarily in Block 5A and areas of the GNPOC concession were periodically under attack by the SPLA. It is no wonder that explorations in Block 5A were sus-
pended twice due to insecurity, last in January 2002, when Lundin took ‘a precautionary measure to ensure maximum security for its personnel and operation.’\textsuperscript{12} By this time, however, Lundin appeared to have learned from its experience. After a Christian Aid report, \textit{The Scorched Earth: Oil and War in Sudan}, was issued in March 2001, many demanded that Carl Bildt, former Swedish prime minister and then UN special envoy for peace in the Balkans, resign from his membership on the board of Lundin or resign from his UN peace commission. He refused, but thereafter pursued an individual peace effort. When the peace negotiations began to bear fruit, Lundin stated that its suspension of operations in Sudan would not be lifted until there was a lasting peace in Sudan. OMV said in 2002 it was concerned about the human rights allegations and would conduct its own human rights evaluation.

The Displaced

The UN special rapporteur on Sudan reported to the March/April 2002 session of the UN Commission on Human Rights that ‘the overall human rights situation has not improved’ since 2001.\textsuperscript{13} He stated his belief that:

\begin{quote}
oil exploitation is closely linked to the conflict which … is mainly a war for the control of resources and, thus, power.\textsuperscript{14} He further stated, ‘oil has seriously exacerbated the conflict while deteriorating the overall situation of human rights’, and said that he had received information whereby ‘oil exploitation is continuing to cause widespread displacement …’.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

According to the United Nations World Food Program and others, as of March 2002 an estimated 174,200 civilians remained displaced as a result of the conflict between the government, its proxies and rebel factions in the oilfields of Western Upper Nile/Unity State (roughly Blocks 1, 2, 4, 5A). Numbers are at most estimates, but this count did not include many others who fled to areas inaccessible to relief organizations, or to northern towns such as Khartoum. There were countless campaigns in which thousands, up to 80,000 in one campaign in eastern Block 1 in October 2001, were displaced. Some returned home, most did not. Some had been displaced two or three times before.

Government Revenue from Oil & Expenditures on Arms

By 2002, the government had apparently reached a strategic balance point. It was able to generate enough income from the GNPOC concession (some $500m a year or 20-40% of government revenues) to purchase more helicopter gunships and armaments that enabled it to target, clear population and secure the next oil concession area with roads and garrisons. Thus, the strategy might be reproduced successively until all oil areas and transport corridors could be cleared of southerners and brought under heavy government guard – protecting the oil that paid for the guard.

Before the oil project went on-line, Sudan’s economy had been in serious difficulty. In 1990, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had issued a declaration of non-cooperation against Sudan due to the government’s unpaid IMF debt and debt service. Sudan agreed to resume payments to the IMF in 1997 and made progress in IMF fiscal reforms that ultimately led the IMF to lift its declaration on 27 August 1999 – just days before Sudan exported its first crude oil.\textsuperscript{16}

Oil revenues rose from zero in 1998 to almost 42% of total government revenue in 2001, making the all-important difference in projected military spending. The president of Sudan announced in 2000 that Sudan was using the oil revenue to build a domestic arms industry. The military spending of 90.2bn dinars ($349m) for 2001 soaked up more than
60% of that year’s oil revenue of 149.7bn dinars ($580.2m). Cash military expenditures, which did not include domestic security expenditures, officially rose 45% from 1999 to 2001. This was reflected in the increasing government purchase and use of helicopter gunships. Russia admitted it had exported to Sudan twenty-two armored combat vehicles and twelve attack helicopters in 2001.

Peace Talks
Under President Clinton, the US government adopted a policy of isolating the Sudanese government, placing it on the State Department list of states supporting terrorism in 1993. In 1997, a US executive order barred any US person (including corporations) from doing business with the government of Sudan or its entities, with an exception for gum arabic. On 6 September 2001, President Bush named former US Senator John Danforth as his special envoy for peace in Sudan. Days later, on September 11, Islamic militants belonging to al Qaeda attacked New York and Washington, DC. With terrorism becoming the main focus of US foreign policy following these attacks, the Sudanese government – which had hosted al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden from 1990-96 – moved quickly to improve bilateral relations, publicly offering to cooperate with the US to combat terrorism.

Senator Danforth devised a four-point plan to test the willingness of the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A to come to a peace agreement. By March 2002, the two parties agreed to all four points and began to comply with some of them, thus convincing the US administration that they were sufficiently committed to peace that the US should become deeply involved in the international diplomatic push for peace.

The peace talks, pending under auspices of the regional Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) since 1994, were taken up again in 2002. On 20 July 2002, in Machakos, Kenya, the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A signed a protocol agreeing to settle two of the most contentious issues in the Sudanese conflict: self-determination for the south and the role of religion in the state. This Machakos protocol was reached under IGAD as a first step in the peace process. In it, the government agreed to a referendum for southern self-determination after a six-and-a-half year interim period – following the signing of a final peace agreement. The government also agreed that for the interim period shari’a or Islamic law would not be the basis for law in the south, which could have its own legislation.

In September 2002, after the Sudanese government walked out of the peace talks, only to return six weeks later – following an evident power struggle within the Islamist ruling party. Upon government of Sudan return to the talks, all-parties agreed to a cessation of hostilities. A memorandum of understanding dated 15 October 2002 provided for a period of tranquility during the negotiations by ceasing hostilities in all areas of the Sudan and ensuring a military stand down for their own forces, including allied forces and affiliated militia – extended in time to 31 March 2003. On 26 October the government and SPLM/A agreed with the UN-coordinated umbrella relief agency Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) that neither of the warring parties would impede humanitarian access. According to the parties and to the mediator, they also reached an oral agreement for free elections at all levels throughout Sudan within three years of signing the peace agreement.

The second round of IGAD negotiations commenced in October 2002, focusing on revenue and power sharing during the six-year interim period. This round of talks adjourned, however, without any protocol signed. The parties met in Washington, DC and agreed that they would
appoint a single committee to draw up a proposal for a budget and structure for the first one hundred days of the pre-interim period, with the technical assistance of the World Bank.

The government failed to appear at peace talks scheduled for 15 January 2003 (to discuss the status of three areas in rebellion outside the historical south: Abyei, Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile), insisting that the talks related only to the south. The talks resumed in late January and the future of the three rebellious areas outside the traditional south remained unknown. The next agenda item for the peace talks will be security arrangements for the interim six and a half-year period. In those discussions the parties will decide on deployment of troops and police during that interim period. The government-backed militias, now organized under the umbrella of the South Sudan Defense Forces (SSDF), however, are not party to the talks, and the government has not included SSDF political counterparts, which are technically in the government, in its delegation to Machakos. The mostly Nuer militias remain a stumbling block both for the SPLM/A, which lays claim to govern the entire south, and for the government, which does not trust the SSDF because they are southerners and continue to insist on the right of self-determination as outlined in the Khartoum Peace Agreement of 1997.

In late December and early January 2003, after re-defections of two commanders from the SPLA/Riek Machar forces to the government, conflict broke out again in Western Upper Nile/Unity State; both the SPLA and the government complain that this fighting violated the ceasefire. Note that the only denounced breach of the ceasefire has been in the oilfields.

If peace is finally reached, it should provide that there will be no more fighting or displacement of civilians from the oilfields and that the displaced may return to their homes, with compensation for the losses suffered and international monitoring of the parties’ respect for human rights.

Jemera Rone, Human Rights Watch Africa Program Counsel, Washington, DC. Reprinted with thanks to ACAS.

Endnotes
4. Talisman Energy, Annual Information Form, 5 March 2001, p. 55. The pre-tax revenue was $1,816m in 2000, of which $183.6m was attributable to its Sudan operations (ibid.). The comparable amounts were pre-tax revenue of $1,296m in 2001, with $391m derived from the Sudan operations. Talisman Energy, Annual Information Form, 5 March 2002, p. 49.

Endnotes continued on page 478.
The Black Book of Sudan reviewed by Abdalla Osman El Tom & M. A. Mohamed Salih.

Writing on politics in Arabic by Sudanese authors is often published unattributed or under a nom de plume. The Black Book of Sudan is one such publication that appeared recently and caused a stir, both for its content and the manner of its distribution. The authors opted to remain anonymous, calling themselves ‘The Seekers of Truth and Justice’. The place of publication has also been withheld.

A one-off distribution of the book took place at Friday prayers in Khartoum and other cities in the country, evading the regime’s tight grip on information circulation. Reportedly, top officials had copies on their desks on the same day. One man said:

As I was coming out of the mosque, somebody handed me a copy of this book. I left it in my car and forgot about it. Suddenly everybody started talking about the Black Book. It was three days later when I realised I was one of those who received a copy.

Within weeks of its release, The Black Book (al-kitab al-aswad) had become the topic of discussion throughout Sudan, a success unparalleled in the recent history of the country. Unhindered by copyright restrictions, distribution took a life of its own through spontaneous photocopying that accounted for the bulk of the copies in circulation. The owner of a photocopying shop in Khartoum is reported to have said:

This book came to us from heaven. I made no less than 100 copies for our customers. We sometimes charge more due to the risk involved in duplicating illegal documents.

The authors spell out their thesis in the following passage:

This publication unveils the level of injustice practised by successive governments, secular and theocratic, democratic or autocratic, from the independence of the country in 1956 to this day (all translation is by the reviewers).

They then set out to prove it with an impressive statistical presentation of relevant data. By and large these data is carefully selected and presented, though on occasion they are loosely defined. For instance, in Table 1 ‘representation’ is said to apply simply to ‘national government’ level.

According to Table 1, Northern Region with a population of 5.4% of the total had 79.5% of central government positions, a striking illustration of political dominance by a minority. The book claims that three ethnic groups in the Northern Region – Shaygia, Jaalieen, Danagla – in effect dominate the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Pop.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Representation %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>1,026,406</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>58 (79.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>2,222,779</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>4,908,038</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>2 (2.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>4,407,450</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>12 (16.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>6,072,872</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The authors classify the occupants of cabinet office in the five national governments, from 1956 to 1964, by region. Northern Region’s share is above 50% throughout and occasionally exceeds 70%. Lest this be considered a hangover from colonial trends, the authors compile similar data for governments since 1964. All heads of government since independence came from the Northern Region, while several attempted military coups failed simply because their leaders were not from that region; for instance, in 1977, 1980, and 1991.

The authors give some credit to Sadiq El Mahdi’s (1986-1989) democratic government for increasing the share of marginalised groups. This is taken to mean that liberal democracy goes some way towards redressing the imbalance of representation.

Considerable space is devoted in the Black Book to the composition of the incumbent regime to test its claims to fair representation. The data presented reveals a striking conformity to the established pattern. Once power was consolidated, a return to normal politics is evident in the distribution of ministerial posts.

The demise of Turabi (December 1999), the spiritual leader of the National Islamic Front (now Popular National Congress) was a cause for euphoria for many Sudanese people. The authors of the Black Book, however, see little cause for celebration, as their thesis remains intact for the subsequent period. This is attested to by the regional share of positions at the Presidential Palace and the Federal cabinet, as well as state governors, commissioners and state ministers, as shown in tables 5 and 6.

Using similar statistical support, the authors arrive at the same conclusion regarding the legislative bodies in the Sudan. While the domination of the Northern Region was not shaken by elections during the brief periods of democratic rule, the authors believe that democratic procedures gave marginalised areas increased representation. In the case of appointed legislative bodies, the authors conclude that many of those appointed in non-northern regions are in fact people of northern origin residing elsewhere.

**The Legal System**

The Black Book acknowledges the important role played by the Sudanese legal profession in defending justice and equality. However, it shows that the legal profession also is subject to the insidious

### Table 4: Revolutionary Command Council (1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>no. reps.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: Presidential Palace & Federal Cabinet Posts 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>no.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>no.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
influence of northern power brokers. In the words of the authors:

the leadership of the legal system at the
departmental level of the Minister for Justice and the
Attorney General has been controlled by
the executive powers which are character-
ised by nepotism and discrimination among
the members of the nation (p.28).

Table 7 shows the regional affiliation of
the heads of the legal system in inde-
pendent Sudan.

The Media

The mass media in Sudan have not
escaped the attention of the authors of
the Black Book. They too are described as
-dominated by the Northern region and
playing its tune. This, the book claims, is
evident at every field, including news,
art and music, which manage to project
the culture of the north and portray it as
the national culture at the expense of the
rest of the Sudan (pp.28-33). The authors
assert that the Jihad itself has not escaped
the northernisation process:

Examine with us the documentary films
on Mujahideen produced by the Popular
Defence Forces and (national) charity
corporations. Look at the pictures and
scrutinise the names. Wouldn’t you be
convinced that all the Mujahideen in the
Sudan are from the Northern Region?

That the defending army and its martyrs
who fall every day are likewise from the
same region? However, regional involve-
ment in Jihad and the sacrifice it entails
are different according to the data pro-
duced in the Black Book

Wealth Distribution

It comes as no surprise to read that a
power monopoly has led to the monopo-
isation of resources in the Sudan. Ac-
cording to The Black Book the Ministry of
Finance is a Northern Region preserve,
and the result is a gross misallocation of
development investment among regions.

No (non-northern) State has ever ex-
pended more than 36% of its allocated
budget, while actual expenditure of the
two northern States has never dropped
below 60% of their annual approved
allocations. This has put the northern
States in position to attract extra funds
originally destined for other States (p.39).

The book bemoans the fact that eight
development schemes were scrapped
recently, none of which was in the north:

These schemes were not sold or privatised
but simply cancelled, despite the fact that
they were developmental in nature and
had an impact on the life of ordinary
citizens. Since independence, not a single
major development scheme has been im-
plemented in Western region (p.43).

Oil production has introduced a new
dimension in the Sudanese economy.
The so-called National Council for the
Distribution of Resources was formed to
deal with this new resource. According

<p>| Table 6: Governors, Commissioners &amp; State Ministers (2000) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>no.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>no.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>no.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>no.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>(excluded)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Table 7: Sudanese Attorney Generals |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>no.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tion in its membership is in Table 9 above. Needless to say, the authors of the book see in this a confirmation of their thesis.

**Comment**

The appearance of the *Black Book* sparked a frantic investigation by the security branch to find its authors. It was rumoured that several junior officials were fired from their posts in the presidential palace due to the appearance of the Book on the desks of top officials, including the President. Writers, journalists, academics and publishing houses were investigated and computer software, typewriters, etc. were checked. The search was fruitless and the authors remain unknown. Needless to say there is no shortage of speculation about their identity.

Certain features of the work are worth noting. The language of the *Black Book* reflects an Islamic perspective shared by Islamic parties in the country. Sudan is clearly perceived in an Islamic context. The grievances of the western region receive disproportional attention compared to other regions, including the South. There is no sympathy for the minority groups within the Northern Region that are said to be dominated by the ‘Powerful Three’: Shaigia, Jaaliyeen, Danagla.

The material in the latter part of the book is somewhat disorganised and carelessly presented. Some claims are not substantiated, or are attributed to secondary sources, i.e. newspapers. Occasionally, the authors rely on anecdotal testimony lacking corroborating evidence. Finally, they often fail to distinguish between government policy and the eccentric behaviour of individual officials.

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One of the many unfortunate side-effects of Somalia’s prolonged period of state collapse is a shortage of good, field-based analyses of the country. Most of the academics who conducted extensive fieldwork in Somalia in the 1980s have understandably moved on to other, safer endeavours. What little is known about Somalia’s current politics and economy is based mainly on the accounts of journalists and reports of aid agencies. The number of academics who continue to pursue research in Somalia is very low. Worse still, the bulk of research on contemporary Somalia is concentrated in and on the safer regions of the northeast (Puntland) and northwest (Somaliland). The more conflict-ridden zones of southern Somalia have been inaccessible to all but a handful of researchers. And no portion of southern Somalia has been more dangerous in the 1990s than Kismayo and the Jubba regions along the Kenyan border.

The publication of Peter Little’s new work *Somalia: Economy without State* is thus welcome on a number of counts. It constitutes an attempt to integrate pre-war and post-collapse fieldwork on
southern Somalia; it focuses on an area of Somalia – the Jubba regions – about which little is known; and it sets out to address an important and particularly elusive aspect of the Somali collapse, the dynamic and complex economy which has evolved despite the absence of a central government. In particular, Little hopes that his fieldwork can help to answer an especially puzzling aspect of contemporary Somalia – the disjoint between the apparent recovery and dynamism of the economy and the intractable political impasse in the country. In so doing, the author aspires to generate analysis of use to the broader, comparative study of economic adaptation in zones of state collapse. The book takes its place among a small collection of works on the contemporary Somali economy: Jamil Mubarak’s *From Bad Policy to Chaos in Somalia: How an Economy Fell Apart* (1996); Michel Del Buono and Jamil Mubarak’s unpublished paper, ‘A Conceptual Understanding of the Somali Economy’ (1999); Roland Marchal’s numerous (mainly unpublished, but invaluable) studies of the Somali business class and the Mogadishu economy, including *A Survey of Mogadishu’s Economy* (2002); research documents on aspects of the economy produced by the War-Torn Societies Project; and various UN and NGO studies produced in the 1990s, which are synthesized in the two UNDP *Somalia Human Development Report* publications of 1998 and 2001.

To his credit, Little takes an empirical approach to the question of the Somali economy, avoiding the trap so many journalists have fallen into of either glorifying Somalia’s stateless entrepreneurism or portraying Somalia as a doomed basket-case of unending humanitarian crises. The reality of economic survival, production, and adaptation in the absence of a central government is far more complex.

The most important contribution of this study is its focus on risk management and risk calculation in an economy with no central government. Little’s interviews with Somali traders documents the many risks these merchants must consider in moving cattle across the border into the Kenyan market – insecurity, banditry, bribery, livestock disease, fluctuating prices, and access to everything from transportation to fodder. Understanding how Somalis are calculating and managing risk is, in the view of this reviewer, essential to making sense of otherwise puzzling economic and political choices. Little’s documentation of the use of both lineage identity and new communication technology in reducing risk is also an important and welcome contribution.

Different sections of the book will appeal to different audiences. For Somali specialists and aid agencies working on the country, the portions of the book drawing on the author’s interviews with Somali traders in Garissa, Kenya in 1996 and 1998 bring original data to bear on a variety of subjects and will be of greatest interest. The book also makes accessible Little’s excellent pre-war research on pastoral production and trade in the region, previously available only in unpublished reports. For generalists seeking to understand Somalia’s stateless economy and to cull insights for comparative purposes, the long section of the book devoted to pastoral activity in the Jubba regions and cross-border cattle trade into Kenya will be more detail than they care for, but chapter six – entitled ‘Life Goes On’ – provides a synthesis of secondary sources reviewing the overall Somali economy. All readers will benefit from the extensive bibliography provided in the book.

There are a number of potential criticisms of the book. First, the author extrapolates about the entire country of Somalia based on his research on single region, the Jubba border area with Kenya. This tactic is justifiable, if and only if, the region in question is typical of Somalia
as a whole. Alas, on a number of counts, the Jubba regions are quite atypical of the Somali situation both economically and politically, a fact which unravels some of the book’s theses. Because the region abuts the Kenyan border, and is the centre of Somali cattle (as opposed to camel, goats, and sheep) production, it has been in a unique position to turn away from the rest of Somalia commercially, becoming a major source of cattle imports for the profitable Kenyan market. The rest of pastoral Somalia has been far less fortunate, and is in a state of growing crisis as a result. Politically, too, the Jubba regions are unique. Kismayo city has produced very unusual patterns of alliances and military conquest, while the rest of the Jubba hinterland has been quite isolated from political trends and conflicts besetting most of the rest of Somalia. The Jubba regions are, by any standard, the exception rather than the rule in contemporary Somalia, and care must be taken in generalising to the rest of the country.

Second, the book extrapolates about the entire Somali economy based on the author’s field research on a single sector – the livestock trade. Here again, this tactic would be justifiable if that trade was representative of the broader Somali economy. In this case, the approach is generally successful, in that many of the issues the livestock traders have had to cope with – insecurity, currency fluctuations, and so on – are in fact a useful window onto the broader national economy. But the cross-border livestock trade into Kenya is only one, relatively small slice of the overall economy in Somalia. The roaring transit trade in consumer goods which passes into Kenya from Mogadishu mainly via Mandera is not researched in the author’s fieldwork; nor is the extensive and complex role of Dubai as Somalia’s financial and commercial capital. Remittances as the basis for Somalia’s robust consumer market deserve more treatment, as does the fact that Somalia’s economy has, in a very real sense, devolved into a labour reserve for the Gulf states and the west, with its own people becoming the country’s single greatest export. And the livestock trade out of the northern port of Berbera is fundamentally different from the very decentralised trade across the Kenyan border, a fact which does not garner enough attention in a book which presents itself as a study of the entire Somali economy.

Another potential criticism of the book is that the author did not do any fieldwork inside Somalia in the 1990s; all of the post-war interviews were conducted in Kenya. In theory, this is not a problem, provided the interviewees constituted a representative sample of businessmen from throughout the country. Given chronic insecurity inside Somalia, it is certainly understandable that researchers would not want to risk traveling there. But the absence of fieldwork on the Somali side of the border does in fact create some minor problems for the author, mainly in the realm of important research questions not broached and interviews with broader sections of the population not held. Observations about the Kismayo political impasse, for instance, are thin and sometimes inaccurate, mainly because the traders interviewed in Garissa themselves have limited access to the city.

In the end, the book’s main shortcoming is the result more of marketing than of research. The bulk of the material presented in the book is very strong and will be of interest to Somali specialists, development economists, and the aid community. Little has conducted, and presents, research on the cross-border pastoral production and trade in southern Somalia which is meritorious in its own right. It could – and should – have been presented as a focused study of the dynamics of cross-border trade, risk management, and adaptation in a zone of state collapse. But the book promises coverage of the entire Somali economy,
an objective Little’s more regionally and sectorally-focused research is simply not in a position to deliver. The result is a bifurcated book, split between a long section on the Jubba cattle trade and then a shorter, derivative section devoted to an overview of the entire national economy. Even the most casual reader will find this jarring.

This reviewer suspects that the problem is rooted in the academic publishing industry, which is increasingly unwilling to publish manuscripts which are seen as too narrow in focus, even though it is precisely the more focused research which often produces the most valuable insights. Hence more and more authors are compelled to stretch their research beyond what it can actually cover in order to appear marketable. Little’s book is hardly the first to do this in the Somali context. Two other noted anthropologists, Catherine Besteman (Unraveling Somalia: Race, Class, and the Legacy of Slavery, 1999) and Anna Simons (Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone, 1995) took very worthwhile but narrow, pre-war fieldwork and extrapolated across all of post-war Somalia. The result was unnecessary misreadings, errors, and subsequent criticisms, all of which could have been avoided had the studies been presented for what they are, not what a publisher insists is necessary to sell books. Having said this, readers will be well-served by a close look at Little’s insightful study into pastoral production, risk management, and cross-border trade in a stateless setting.


2002 saw the publication of three edited collections which, severally and together, offer important new resources from a range of disciplines for the understanding of politics and the state in Ethiopia in the 21st century. Their publication offers a useful opportunity to take stock of the state of knowledge about Ethiopian political life under ethnic federalism, the contribution of these volumes, and issues they raise for future research.

Each of the three collections deals centrally but in different ways with two interwoven themes. These are, the relations between the Ethiopian state, government, and ruling groups (collectively ye mengist) and the various populations they seek to administer or control; and secondly, the interaction of two competing ‘knowledge systems’: the ‘traditional’ and the modern, or modernist, as exemplified in cultures, structures, actors, or ideologies. Two of the books (James et al., Bahru & Pauswang) include contributions dealing with the period of the Dergue and the EPRDF government; Pauswang et al. deal exclusively with the period since 1991. They explore the overlapping but distinct interfaces which influence Ethiopian conceptions of ‘us and them’ in relation to a wide range of factors and perspectives: state and non-governmental association and mobilisation, including villagisation, resettlement, and development schemes, alongside NGO, church, and informal groupings; encounters with militia and cadres, as well as with tourists and missionaries;
the resources, markers, and pitfalls of political ethnicity, alongside ongoing struggles for resource control; elections and the formal apparatus of democratisation, alongside individual human rights, and collective undertakings.

This is territory which has long proved treacherous. The state/society, traditional/modernist interfaces in Ethiopian politics are less points of precise balance or neat distinction, than wide, shifting, and multiple chasms strewn with failures of understanding, trust, and interaction – not least on the part of those researching them. Both the considerable value, and the occasional shortcomings, of these volumes reflect their determination to strike out on such difficult, contested, and conceptually slippery terrain.

In the last decade of the imperial regime, the pioneer of political analysis, Perham’s seminal study of The Government of Ethiopia (1969 [1948]) was re-issued, and her groundwork extended in two important but divergent ways. Whilst Clapham (1969) illuminated the workings and institutions of the imperial government over the critical period of centralisation and modernisation of the middle twentieth century, Markakis (1974) explored the patterns of socio-economic forces for change in the wider society over the same period. This exemplary series of imperial-era studies of the Ethiopian state was overtaken, in the wake of its overthrow, by a much larger, and often considerably less satisfactory range of studies of the bloody events of the change of government, and the new revolutionary regime. Much was written too soon afterwards for satisfactory evaluation of either.

The ruthlessness with which the military government silenced its critics through the Red Terror of the late 1970s, and the escalation of the civil wars in the north through the 1980s, offered a domestic research environment inimical to political analysis. After two decades, it did prove possible to update understanding of the new institutions, structures, dynamics and policies of the central government (Clapham, 1988), whilst work on the socio-economic forces, which raged around it with increasing violence, had often to be carried on outside the country’s borders (Markakis, 1987). Interestingly, neither approach devoted particularly extensive analysis to the political force, the TPLF/EPRDF, which would emerge a few years later to lay claim to the Ethiopian state. Meanwhile, a lot of other ink had been spilled to polemical rather than analytical effect. Perhaps for this reason, single-authored book-length studies of the EPRDF regime have been remarkable by their absence.

English language history on Ethiopia, too, has had its limitations. The publication in 1986 of Donham & James’ edited collection, marked a shift away from widespread absorption with the elite narratives of highland Christian Abyssinia (or, in Donham’s phrase, the ‘metanarrative of the nation’). It also marked the beginning of a very fruitful collaboration between history and anthropology, which allowed for the elaboration of popular experiences of processes of social, economic, and political development from all over the country, as an alternative way to ‘shape stories and distinguish periods’. The late 1980s also saw the emergence of another set of voices seeking to articulate stories at variance with the ‘official’ perspective of the Ethiopian state, namely those which grew from the nationalist movements in Eritrea and Oromia. Whilst many nationalist accounts – particularly in politics – intended primarily to contribute to the polemics of the period, Oromo studies in particular also produced history and anthropology of lasting value.

Over the last four decades, then, a contested research environment throughout the Horn of Africa, and one often hostile to an overt focus on state power and its
operation, has resulted in a situation where much of the most informative work on political relations (particularly from the points of view of citizens) is to be found in social anthropology and ‘historical ethnography’ (work which includes, amongst many others, Abbink (1991) (2000), Donham (1999), Hogg (1993) (1997), Schlee (1989) (1994), and the various contributors to Donham & James (1986 [2002]), Fukui & Markakis (1994), and Pankhurst & Freeman (2001)). It is in the nature of much of this work that, in the traditions of the ethnographic monograph, it is often tightly focused on one or a number of specific research communities and locations. Whilst many of the authors cited offer analysis which transcends their temporal, geographic, or ethnographic focus, one of the drawbacks of this literature is that its rich resources have not always been utilised, and are not always easily usable, to inform political analysis at the level of the state. Over a decade ago Abbink called for a methodological shift to overcome these problems, and for a broad and comparative study of the ‘pattern of interaction of [the] politically and culturally dominant elite and the designated nationalities’ (1991:12). Edited collections of detailed case studies seem to be emerging as an interim strategy to meet Abbink’s challenge, and bring scrupulous scholarship to bear on the national perspective.

James et al. is an exceptionally successful project of this kind, thanks both to the high quality and fresh insights of its contributions, and a tight and rigorous editorial policy, which has resulted in an elegant, coherent, whole which is more than the sum of its parts. Donham and Clapham’s excellent introductory essays, Triulzi’s concluding reflections on historiography, and Donham’s lucid and suggestive introductions to the book’s three sections, transform a series of discrete studies into an illuminating commentary on the Ethiopian state’s relations with its people. Conceived as a successor volume to Donham & James (1986 [2002]), and informed by Scott’s influential Seeing Like a State (1998), the projects of spatial and social ‘encadrement’ undertaken by the Dergue, and the changed processes by which a new government has, since 1991, continued to seek the ‘capture’ of its citizens, provide a unifying theme. A second strand in this consideration of political ‘remapping’ is the shifting and multiple nature of the centre-periphery relationship, which is considered here not only in terms of political space and power, but also in terms of patterns of interaction and of local knowledge.

Dergue-era studies in the first section of the book look at the Hor (or Arbore) in the far South West and the Aari slightly further north, at Northern Shoa and Tigray under the TPLF, at villagisation of Guji Oromo and resettlement of Welleyes in Wellega. A second section includes five studies of groups in what is, under federalism, the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples’ National Regional State (SNNPNRS): Suri (or Surma) in Maji, Muguji (Kwegu) in Lower Omo, Majangir in the Kaffa/Sheka area, Konso, and Anywaa on the Sudan border. The section concludes with a portrait of the ‘ethnographic landscape’ in Gondar, and the series of cases with James’ study of the shifting insecurities and relations amongst communities on the Sudan-Ethiopia border as political events shifted at the national centres.

An advantage of the plural perspectives presented here is that a range of different kinds of relationship is illuminated along the faultlines of state/society, tradition/modernity: little is taken for granted about who and what fall into each category. The studies of the period from 1991 collectively represent some of the best available ethnography on events under ethnic federalism, informed by long-standing engagement. Only occasionally is there a lack of nuance. Hammond’s account of the reversal of
the normal centre-periphery relation between towns and rural areas in Tigray during the 1980s sheds light on an otherwise hidden period; it seems unlikely, however, that the inversion was quite so seamless that town populations became mere ‘adjuncts’ of the Dergue garrisons (pp. 92, 97). And can we really have the confidence in the positive impact of TPLF/EPRDF economic planning for agriculture and industry the account seems to claim (p.114)? Marcus’ detailed analysis of the revival of the Tewahedo Church in Gondar as an expression of political resistance is highly suggestive, but one wonders to what extent Gondaris would share the assumptions about the significance of public space which inform her conception of ‘the cityscape as symbolic structure’ (p. 239). Elsewhere, groups of actors – such as Ahmed Hassan Omer’s ‘three important political forces’ of peasantry, resistance, and Derg army – seem to be categorised as discrete, and independent variables, in a way which, in this instance, perhaps obscures the likely complexities of EPRDF’s passage through Northern Shoa in 1990/91 (p. 89).

I mentioned above that ethnographic work has often been frustratingly difficult to deploy in the service of state-level political analysis, and for all the book’s virtues James et al. do not quite transcend this problem. In an introductory chapter, Clapham notes that ‘rather than seeing these groups as the essential building blocks of the wider state, [the contributors] see them as partly created by the processes of shared political history’ (p. 29). It is unfortunate that sustained analysis of the local level activities of the state and state actors under the two regimes studied, is virtually absent from this collection. Whilst the central policies of the two regimes are succinctly set out (Clapham, p.96f), and the various casts of local characters emerge vividly from the case studies, some of which explore the role of ‘mediators’, the profile, motivation, interests, ideals, interaction, affinity and activities of different kinds of local state officials and civil servants remain surprisingly opaque.

A much more overtly political approach is adopted by Pausewang et al., in a collection of election-monitoring studies originally published by the University of Oslo two years previously (Pausewang & Tronvoll, 2000). Whilst the 2000 version found it not ‘at all clear […] that [the 2000 elections] represent any evident trajectory towards increasing levels of democracy’ (2000:viii), this publication reaches significantly more pessimistic conclusions, building on two additional studies which describe the 2001 elections in Addis Ababa and the SNNPNRS in terms of the ‘shattered promises’ and ‘blighted seeds of democracy’. Pausewang et al. is constructed along very different epistemological premises than James et al., its research having been commissioned not only to understand, document, and report the views of participants in specific situations, but – much more controversially – also to evaluate and eventually pass judgement on the state of Ethiopian democracy. The verdict is gloomy, and the problem inexorably traced to Ethiopia’s political party structure:

> When all resources and means of communication, control, administration, distribution and taxation are in the hands of the ruling party through the government, there is little room for free and fair competition (p. 241).

The contributions to this volume present the detailed, impressively honest, and frequently disturbing findings of unofficial monitors of the May 2000 elections in Addis Ababa, Burie and Ankober in Amhara, Mekelle and Wukro in Tigray, Dembi Dollo in Oromia, Gedeo, Sidama, and Hadiya in the SNNPNRS. A number give unparalleled insights into the events in locations well known to the researchers, powerfully suggesting that political repression is systematic. Particularly
strong are the social anthropologist Tronvoll’s account of the bloody events in Hadiya which triggered the only significant rural electoral defeat of the ruling party since 1991, Aalen’s work in Tigray, and Pausewang’s in Gedeo. They make, as Clapham’s introduction notes, ‘fascinating’ reading. There remains, however, a series of related problems that dog the book, of which the methodological introduction the editors provide suggests they are conscious.

Each of the accounts is (appropriately) presented in the form of a personal narrative of the relatively brief monitoring visit made. The anecdotal feel is enhanced by frequent references to ‘my informants’, or ‘the people we spoke to’, with, invariably, little further information about the social, economic, or political profile of the interlocutors. This makes it difficult to assess the validity or scope of the conclusions drawn from their views, particularly in view of the lessons this kind of fieldwork teaches. One is that those of us who carry out research in Ethiopia’s small towns and rural areas often collude in the emergence of a prominent solution to our need to find out, and quickly, ‘what the people think’. Without local language proficiency, and an understanding grounded in protracted participant observation, we gravitate towards easily available interlocutors: those present in the small towns and hamlets accessible to our vehicles, who speak if not English at least Amharic, and who are willing to be seen drinking tea in the company of foreigners. Time and again, these are men of higher than average education and socio-economic status. Vansina has stressed the importance of not extrapolating research findings to encompass whole ethnic groups, but of tying conclusions to specific encounters (1990:20); how much more important, in such intrinsically contested circumstances, to balance anonymity of informants with an analytical anchoring of who is saying what, why – and even when.

The editors incorporate a number of caveats regarding the contested nature of democracy, and the difficulty of measuring it. Nevertheless, they conclude that in Ethiopia ‘people have begun to understand what democracy can mean’ (p. 239). Perhaps a shortcoming of the book is that the reader glean little precise sense of the various things that it may mean – either for the members of the government and ruling party, or for Ethiopia’s various communities and their more prominent or marginalised members. Individual Ethiopians’ experiences of democracy, their relevant individual ‘knowledge sets’ about it, do not coincide: it is unlikely that the resulting beliefs they have about it will have much in common. A more nuanced investigation of this situation – undoubtedly beyond the scope of an election monitoring project – would greatly enrich this study.

A second editorial caveat relates to the shortcomings of electoral performance as a means of assessing democratic credentials, and here too profound questions must remain about the interpretation, scope, and significance of their findings. Pausewang et al. present much that is useful, and much that is new. The sum of the book’s parts, however, eventually falls well short of the enticing promise of its title to present a political portrait of Ethiopia since the Derg.

The third collection, Bahru & Pausewang, is different again in origin, resulting from a collaboration between Christian Michelsen Institute and the then embryonic Addis Ababa-based Forum for Social Studies, designed severally as a means of institutional support to FSS, a source of research funding, and a motor and vehicle for Ethiopian public debate on democratisation (Dessalegn Rahmato, p. 5). Working on the premise that ‘a slightly more innovative approach to democratisation has been the fostering of civil society organisations and the guaranteeing of human rights’
(Bahru, p. 7), its contributions consider three relevant arenas. They are: the traditional system of governance constituted by seera in different communities; peasants and the state in the management of power and resources (land, agricultural development, and perceptions of power); and alternative loci power, including civil society organisations, the press, women, devolved government, and oral ‘literatures’.

On the face of it, this structure is clear and of interest, and a number of the individual contributions to this volume present new and important findings. Bahru Zewde (17:ff), for instance offers a characteristically precise and illuminating study of seera amongst the Gurage, raising important points about the specificity of rural/urban dynamics in this particular case. The series of studies of peasant/state relations offers many insights into peasant attitudes towards state projects: of land reform, for instance, that it was designed ‘for the lumpen, in sharp conflict with the dominant industrious peasant ideology’ (Ege, p. 85); or of collective catchment development, that ‘returning home in the evening, [the farmers] would get furious when they saw what others had been doing on their fields’ (Pausewang, p.95). Meheret Ayenew’s study of wereda decentralisation in Dessie and Oromia is an excellent review of experience and constraints (p.130ff). Many of the other contributions are informative, and, in the case of Fekade Azeze’s collection of political jokes and poems, entertaining.

As with many edited volumes, however, what is less clear is that this one reads as a whole. A number of the contributions might have been improved were their findings more closely tied to what seems to be the central theme of democratisation; and more vigorous editing might also have modified a number, which, as they stand, closely repeat and add little to the findings of earlier papers.

Donald Donham’s introduction to James et al. (p. 6) draws on Scott’s notion that new maps allied with state power ‘tend to call forth the reality assumed’ (1998:3). Two-thirds of the forty articles included in the three publications reviewed deal with an ethnically-identified case study. This in itself suggests that academic research has been happy to collaborate in the bringing forth of an understanding of Ethiopian politics viewed through the prism of ethnic federalism – albeit one critical of ‘the EPRDF regime’s image of Ethiopia as an assemblage of distinct ethnicities’ (Clapham in James et al. p. 27). There is a sense in which the proliferation of such edited collections on Ethiopian politics itself reinforces these atomising tendencies, militating against sustained comparative investigation of the interface between state and society, between traditional and modern (for instance, Donham, 1999).

If patterns of state administration can be seen to have had an impact on research, this is all the more true of patterns of available research funding. Well-funded election observation seems to provide a prominent solution for research into the well-being of democracy, as NGOs offer an obvious vehicle for studying the health of associational life. There are good reasons why European governments and universities should seek to support the institutional development of Ethiopian academic departments, research institutes, or intellectual fora. Should such funding continue to predominate, to the point of ‘bringing into being’ our understanding of Ethiopian politics, the results might be less desirable.

References


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She wanted to study Sudan, but having no background was not qualified for research, so I suggested an MA in London and thought little more about her. She was tall and striking, and as I was later to discover my student was not her only Sudanese gentleman friend; indeed the connection with the country had started by a chance meeting with one of my former Sudanese students in Oxford. However a year or so later I heard that she had indeed gone on to take an MA, and done quite well. It was to be an example of Emma’s tenacity and sense of adventure that shines out from this book. I saw her occasionally thereafter at meetings in London; but though I never saw her again once she left for Nairobi and thence to southern Sudan, I was to hear numerous reports of her, especially when she met and married the leading southern rebel fighter, Riek Machar.

With Emma’s Sudanese lovers came in time love of a kind for Sudan, and especially the children of war-torn southern Sudan. Whatever one may come to feel about her judgement, she had enormous determination that she turned to the organizing of an educational charity, Street Kids International. By one means or another – sometimes flashing her eyes at the pilots of UN relief planes going back and forth from Kenya to southern Sudan, at others walking miles on her long legs through a forbidding landscape – she covered vast distances setting up schools and distributing pencils and papers to youngsters who otherwise would have had no education at all. Her devotion to the cause and her endurance were remarkable; especially amidst the horrors of war and famine with which she was so often surrounded.

Her tenacious pursuit of Riek Machar is one of the many striking themes of the book. It was love at first sight for Emma; but Riek was away most of the time fighting mainly in his Nuer homeland of Upper Nile and seemingly inaccessible. Yet true to form, she persuaded a would-
be fiancée to undertake a perilous drive from Nairobi through the almost inaccessible swamps of Nuer land, there to discharge her driver and eventually to marry her guerrilla fighter on his home territory. The charge of betrayal is one really for Riek himself. He was one of the leaders who broke away from the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) in 1991. It was a murky split with involvement of the Sudan government, which was to arm Riek’s faction, and even LONRHO’s Tiny Rowland, as he pursued the potential wealth of Sudan (as he had been doing since the 1970s). It was to lead not only to charges of betraying and weakening the SPLA, but also to intensification of ethnic conflict between Nuer and Dinka, including the Bor massacre. Briefly the SPLA called the conflict ‘Emma’s War’ even suggesting that it was no coincidence that the split and the fighting occurred shortly after she married Riek. That the word betrayal might also apply to Emma lies in the denial that she showed to the violence following the split, to the sometimes brutal behaviour displayed by Riek’s faction (though no worse than the other parties to the conflicts), and to the misappropriation of relief supplies that helped to keep the fighters going.

Death came to Emma in 1993 when she was only 29, and in a rather mundane way for one who had survived so much conflict in the southern Sudan. She was carrying Riek’s child when the car she was driving was hit by another vehicle on the outskirts of Nairobi. With speedy assistance and good medical care she might have survived, but not beside a busy road in Kenya. Her body was flown to Riek’s home town of Ler in Upper Nile for burial in a ceremony attended by large crowds. Death had been all around her throughout her time in southern Sudan. Perhaps a million had died directly or indirectly in conflict before she arrived, and a similar number more would die before this book appeared. Amidst it all the striking Emma had gone her way pursuing her roles of aid worker and then wife amidst enormous suffering, and she could turn her hand to all kinds of assistance; as Scroggins puts it she had discovered that she was ‘good at war’.

Was it worth it? Riek certainly survived. He already had a Nuer wife before Emma came on the scene, who was left behind in Bradford where he had studied; and after Emma’s death he was to take up with an American adventurer. His politics were equally flexible as he later entered into a formal agreement with the Sudan government, before abandoning it and re-joining the SPLA from which he had split shortly after his marriage to Emma. War continued, though in 2002 a serious bid to end it was launched.

This is a book as much if not more about war and Western relief efforts as it is about Emma. But then she was there for only a short period of the long conflict, and her efforts for good or ill but a passing engagement. Through Emma’s story Scroggins captures the war and the relief efforts, which she reported for years before and after Emma’s involvement, very effectively. Emma’s mother has already published a book on her daughter, but while she has more of her letters and writes a very personal story, she could not know southern Sudan as vividly as it is portrayed here. Some Sudanese may feel that amidst all their suffering this is an undue focus on one British young woman: my only criticism is that it lacks an index which, with this wealth of material, it requires.

The author sets out the background of the book, its purpose and the methodology used in writing it in the following quotations:

“This book draws on my own research as an historian as well as my experience working with various agencies in the relief effort in the southern Sudan.” (p.xi).

“… all reasonable care has been taken to verify accounts and sources, even when those sources cannot, for obvious reasons, be publicly acknowledged.” (p.xi).

“This book attempts a broad explanation of the origins of the Sudan’s multiple and recurring civil wars, and why those wars have not ended.” (p.xiii).

Furthermore, as the southern Sudan has been the subject of many ahistorical misconceptions, some preliminary explanation of terms describing both politics and religion is necessary. (p.xvi).

The book may be conveniently divided into two parts: the period extending from the Turco-Egyptian Sudan up to the end of the first civil war in 1972, and the period from the conclusion of the Addis Ababa Agreement to the present. It gives a reasonably good summary of the first part, and a controversial account of the second. It is the second part, which is supposed to present to the reader new historical facts and insight that will be the subject of this review. Unhappily, the author adds his own ‘ahistorical’ bit when he fails ‘to verify accounts and sources’ as he promised. The following examples are a testimony to this.

**The Addis Ababa Agreement & After**

The author avers that: ‘there were no clear provisions in the Agreement for the status of the army after that period’ (p.41). The period referred to the five years stipulated in the Addis Ababa Agreement prior to the total integration of the absorbed Anyanya and the Sudanese Army. Contrary to the author’s statement above, it was quite clear that that period marked a transition to the total and complete integration of the absorbed Anyanya into the Sudanese Army. The Addis Ababa Agreement was a unitary one and there was no question of a different arrangement. The 1983 census placed the population of the Southern Sudan at about 7 million (Bahr el-Gharzel, 2.8; Equatoria, 2.2 and Upper Nile 2.0) (1) and not six (6) as the author puts it (p. 51).

According to the author, ‘the issue which divided the ex-Anyanya from the Anyanya-2 was acceptance of the Addis Ababa Agreement’ (p.60). The is erroneous as the Anyanya-2 was formed mainly from the ex-Anyanya who had accepted the Addis Ababa Agreement but became disillusioned with its implementation. Therefore, the issue was not acceptance of the Agreement as almost all the Anyanya did so. The few leaders who didn’t, such as Gordon Mourtat Mayen, went into voluntary exile.

The claim that Akwot Atem ‘had never accepted the Addis Ababa Agreement’ (p. 61) is wrong. Not only did Akwot Atem accept the Addis Agreement, but was at one time Minister of Public Service in the Regional Government in Juba and was also a member of the southern Regional Assembly representing Bor North constituency.

Col. John Garang was neither the ‘then head of the staff college in Omdurman’ (p. 61), nor does he ‘come from Aborom, just South of Kongor’ (p. 98). Col. John Garang was the head of the Military Research Department. The assertion that ‘Gai Tut and Akwot Atem continued to operate independently in their respective home areas of Waat and Kongor. On their own their forces had little impact on the SPLA and became a threat only when they received military support from the Khartoum Government’ (p. 66) is not true. In the first place, Gai Tut...
never crossed the Ethiopia – Sudan border, for he was killed in a battle with the SPLA in March 1984 at Adura (Thieyjak) inside Ethiopia (2). Akwot Atem was killed not long after by Abdalla Chuol, when he suggested rejoining the SPLA rather than consider being assisted by the Khartoum Government. D.K. Matthews is not a Gaajak (p.68), nor does the Eastern Jikany Nuer extend to Akobo district (p. 69, footnote).

The sweeping statement that 'all the parties received funds from the Umma Party, the DUP or NIF' (p. 73), is also not true. The reference is to the southern Sudan parties during the third democratic era (1985-1989). The Sudan African Congress (SAC) is one such party, which did not receive any funds from the sources listed. Johnson’s claim that SAC ‘made a very dismal electoral showing’ (p. 73), is off the mark. SAC contested elections in four constituencies (two in Upper Nile and two in Khartoum) and won two of them. This, by any standard, cannot be described as dismal.

The Second Civil War

The assertion that the Political-Military High Command of the SPLF/A ‘in 1987 it became a double-tiered structure of full (or permanent) members and alternate commanders with limited voting rights and duties’ (p. 91-92), is a mix-up. Alternate commander is a military rank in the SPLA. The second tier of membership in the PMHC is alternate member which was introduced in 1985 and not in 1987, as put by the author. The supposed rights and duties of members of the PMHC are explained elsewhere (3). Contrary to what the author maintains, alternate members of the PMHC do indeed have the full rights both to demand and attend its meetings.

Arok Thon Arok was never senior to Garang in the Sudanese army as the author claims (p.92). The statement of the author that ‘in theory, for instance, all sentences of death imposed by the SPLA-supervised courts were supposed to be referred back to the high command for confirmation. In practice sentences were imposed and carried out by local commanders, with or without the benefit of courts. Kerubino Kuanyin Bol, Arok Thon Arok and Lam Akol - who all subsequently denounced Garang for dictatorial behaviour – are reported to have carried out summary executions of their own troops, acts for which they were never held accountable’ (pp.92-93), is a typical case of how he falls victim to unsubstantiated and unverified accounts of events. First, the death sentences are not imposed by SPLA-supervised courts but by SPLA-constituted General Courts Martial (GCMs). Second, sentences of GCM are not referred to the high command but to the Chairman and Commander-in-Chief of the SPLM/A for confirmation.

Confusion may have been caused by what took place in 1987. For practical reasons, at that time the Chairman and Commander-in-Chief delegated his power of confirming death sentences to a number of zonal commanders, for six months, including the commanders of Northern Bahr el Ghazal (Daniel Awet Akot) and Northern Upper Nile (Lam Akol). These zonal commanders received and did confirm death sentences referred to them by legally-instituted GCMs (in my case, there was only one such sentence all over that period). These cannot be described as summary executions. The latter means carrying out the death sentence without due process of law.

It is not true that Riek Machar complained in 1991 that ‘Garang had excluded him and other commanders from diplomatic missions’ (p.93, footnote 6). It will be recalled that Riek has continuously been on diplomatic missions since he arrived in Nairobi from Western Upper Nile in 1990. In my case, I was the one who requested to be reassigned in the field in December 1989 when the new Junta in Khartoum suspended OLS in November of the same year. This fact and other
related issues are explained fully in my last book (4).

Contacts with the Government

The account given by Johnson of the Nasir Move passes judgement on personalities he hardly knows anything about (p.94), relying fully on accounts written by disgruntled elements who are, at best, part-time SPLA officers and have not crossed the international borders into Southern Sudan to take part in the liberation struggle. Of course, the account given is mere conjecture. A first hand full account of the events leading to the Nasir Declaration and what followed will soon be available (5).

This area is covered in a full sub-section (7.2.3) of the book. The account on relief distorts the facts. For one thing, the relief operation on the SPLA side was still being run by Elijah Malok, the Executive Director of SRRA by then, who visited Nasir together with James Jonah in July 1991. It was he who negotiated the delivery of relief to the Nasir area, including the UN-operated Nile barge and airdrops. How then could Khartoum have ‘manipulated the relief emergency to put further pressure on the Nasir commanders’ (p. 96)? It goes without saying that Elijah Malok continued as head of SRRA till the split took place in August 1991. Then the person appointed by SPLM/A – Nasir to head its SRRA branch was Dr. Achol Marial and not Taban Deng Gai. Later developments on the relief issue (p.150) must be taken in their correct perspective. We learn for the first time that Dr. Riek Machar is married to Taban’s sister.

It is absurd to claim that the ‘Nasir commanders’ established direct contact with Khartoum government (p. 96) (whether through the Governor of Upper Nile or otherwise) at anytime prior to the Nasir Declaration. Hence, all the narration that follows is baseless. So are the accounts under sections 7.3 and 7.4. In the attempt to discredit the Nasir Declaration many of its opponents have tried hard to ‘prove’ that the move was either ‘foreign-inspired’ or ‘Khartoum-sponsored’ or both. Yes, there have been contacts with the Khartoum government, but only after the Nasir Declaration.

The author stresses that ‘The SPLA never officially changed their name but were referred to in various documents as ‘SPLA-Torit’ or ‘SPLA-Mainstream’ (p.98, footnote). In fact, the SPLA for sometime did indeed call itself officially ‘SPLA-Mainstream’ (refer to the Entebbe Communiqué signed by Dr. John Garang himself and Dr. Ali el-Haj in February 1993 in which the expression ‘SPLA-Mainstream’ is mentioned four times).

A claim is made that Lam was ‘assisted by Tiny Rowland of Lonrho (an early supporter of the SPLA) and met the government’s representative, Ali al-Hajj Muhammad. As a result of these contacts, money from the government was channelled into the Nasir faction’s operation through Lonrho’ (p.99). It is true that our stay in Nairobi was fully supported by Tiny Rowland of Lonrho, who also continued to support the ‘SPLA-Mainstream’ financially and made his jet plane available for the trips of its leaders. Were they also receiving the money of Khartoum ‘channelled through Lonrho’? The following question arises. Given the claim that the SPLA-Nasir had established ‘direct contact’ with Khartoum, why would the latter channel money through Lonrho rather than give it directly? Furthermore, it was not only Lam Akol who ‘was flown to Nairobi in September 1991’ (p.99). It was the whole delegation of the SPLA-Nasir that was flown out for reconciliation talks with SPLA-Mainstream. The reasons given for the failure of reconciliation talks between the two factions could not be further from the truth. At no time was the SPLA-Nasir ‘convinced that Garang’s faction was in imminent collapse’ (p.101). Also, the merger of
the two factions in Abuja was not ‘largely at the urging of the Nigerians’. It was a genuine and sincere initiative of some members of the two delegations as is fully explained elsewhere (5). The proposals referred to in the book were submitted before the merger of the two delegations. The Legitimate Command of Armed Forces is presented in more than one place as separate from ‘the NDA coalition of political parties’ (p.103). Everybody knows it is part and parcel of the NDA and a founding member as well.

The Frankfurt Agreement 1992

The author discusses the Frankfurt Joint Statement of January 1992 under section 8.1 (pp.112-114). The opening statement that ‘collaboration between the Nasir faction and Khartoum was publicly formalized with the agreement between Lam Akol and Ali al-Hajj Muhammad at Frankfurt in January 1992’ (p.112), is odd, for the simple reason that if that was the case then the document should have dealt with the alleged ‘collaboration’. It was not an agreement between two persons, but between two delegations. On the SPLA-Nasir side the delegation comprised eight members (Dengtiel Ayen, Telar R.T. Deng, John Luk, Taban Deng Gai, D.K. Matthews, Costello Garang, Gatwic Yiec and Lam Akol).

The assertion that the Frankfurt statement is vague or silent about Southern independence, comes up repeatedly in the book (pp. 124,174, 202- 203). ‘This two-page public document, which was released, made no mention of independence, containing only a vague reference to deciding the ‘special political and constitutional status’ for the South in a future referendum.’ (p.112).

The relevant text in the Frankfurt statement (point 1) is as follows: ‘There shall be a transitional period (to be agreed upon) from the day of signing an agreement between the Sudan Government and the SPLM during which South Sudan shall enjoy a special constitutional and political status within the united Sudan after which period the people of the south shall exercise their right to freely choose the political and constitutional status that accords with their national aspirations without ruling out any option’.

Johnson truncates the document. It is the underlined part of the Frankfurt joint statement that he omits. The Chairman of the Abuja Peace Talks, a renown political scientist, read this text to the plenary session on the 1st of June 1992, and ruled that if the text was authentic then southern independence was one of the options on offer (6). This comes from one of the Nigerians who are well known for their opposition to secession. The Frankfurt joint statement also received positive comments at that time (7).

The claim by the author that: ‘His offer (meaning, Ali al-Hajj) to table the full text of the agreement, which had not been previously released, and which detailed the extent of collaboration between SPLA-Nasir and the government, was declined by Lam Akol’ (p.112), is spurious. First, the document has been published (8, 9, 10) and does not contain mention of the so-called ‘collaboration’. Second, the facts are turned upside down. It was the SPLA-Torit delegation in the person of its official spokesman at the talks who flatly refused to let ‘the full text of the agreement’ tabled. Another person who declined Ali al-Hajj’s offer was Bari Wanjii (5, 6). In fact, it was Lam Akol who ordered the secretary of the SPLA-Nasir delegation to distribute the signed text of the Frankfurt Joint Statement to members of the three delegations, the Chairman of the talks, its Secretariat and journalists. This was done, and it was this text that the Chairman of the Conference read when controversy over the inclusion of referendum as an item of the agenda arose.

A meticulous verbatim day-by-day record of the Abuja Peace conference on Sudan was prepared by the Nigerian Secretariat.
to the conference (6). This was made available to all members of the delegations that took part in the talks and is now a public document available to all and sundry. However, the author chose to ignore this primary source. The book alleges that:

the Nasir faction abided by the unpublicized terms of the agreement, allowing the Sudanese army safe passage through their territory to attack the SPLA. (p.112)

Now we have ‘unpublicized terms of the agreement’, whereas the author had previously stated that the same agreement ‘detailed the extent of collaboration between the SPLA-Nasir and the government’, details that were shown to be non-existent when the document became public. This is a version of the oft-repeated myth by the opponents of the SPLA-Nasir that the Frankfurt meeting involved secret agreements. The eight members of the original SPLA-Nasir delegation to Frankfurt meeting have fallen out with each other since and, hence, these ‘unpublicized terms’ should have been exposed by now.

As to ‘allowing the Sudanese army safe passage’ there is no evidence to the allegation. The matter is dealt with in detail elsewhere (5). But it suffices to say that a similar Sudanese army military convoy (code-named ‘Jund El-Watan El-Wahid’ – Soldiers of the One Nation) passed through the same areas in 1988 - when the SPLA was still united – with little or no resistance. Who allowed passage then?

The allegation that ‘William Nyuon was offered financial inducements by the leaders of the government and Nasir delegations to leave the SPLA’ (p.113) ignores the developments that were taking place towards unity that had started in Abuja. Indeed, Nyuon fell out with John Garang later in September 1992, precisely on the issue of unity (5). Johnson gives two different versions at different places as to how the political prisoners (Joseph Oduho, Kerubino Kuanyin, Arok Than Arok and others) gained freedom. In one version they were released by William Nyuon (p.113), in the other they escaped (p.119).

The case of Uncle Joseph Oduho was different. He was already a free man since December 1991.

The attack on Malakal: The book asserts that: ‘Revealingly, the attack (on Malakal) was hailed by Garang’s SPLA as a positive contribution to the liberation of the South, and hastily repudiated by the Nasir commanders, who then relapsed into an embarrassed silence’ (p.113).

The fact is that SPLA-Nasir hailed the attack on Malakal as a big victory (11), and Dr. Riek Machar cut short his trip to Ayod and proceeded to Malakal to direct the operations there himself. History cannot be cheated. It is in the same vein of concoction that the author alleges that Dr. ‘Achol Marial Deng is reprimanded for broadcasting news of the attack and resigns’ (p.203). There is no grain of truth to all these incredible claims. In fact, Dr. Achol was ordered by Dr. Riek Machar to make the broadcast on the BBC. His resignation which took place much later was for a different reason altogether (5).

The Case of Joseph Oduho: The author maintains that there was rivalry between Joseph Oduho and myself for leadership (p.113, text and footnote, 203). In the first place, I never put my name forward to be considered for the leadership of the Movement. As a matter of fact, I offered to step down from the second position in the hierarchy of the SPLA-Nasir to open room for Joseph Oduho, Kerubino Kuanyin, William Nyuon and Arok Thon. I made this known to them during the Nairobi unity talks. Joseph Oduho was not under my authority at Panyagor for me to be able to abandon him to his fate or otherwise. We were all guests of Dr. Riek Machar, the leader of the Movement.
Attempts at reconciliation between the Southern factions (p.120). The author cites the money channeled by Khartoum to the Nasir faction via Lonrho and the money provided by the government to Nyuon as ‘the real obstacle on which such talks (reconciliation talks) foundered’. He then proceeds to cast doubt on the seriousness of the Nasir delegation to the unity of the two delegations in Abuja.

On the reconciliation talks in October in Washington he concludes: ‘Lam’s presence at the meeting was widely seen as Khartoum’s guarantee that no breakthrough would be made, but it seems that Riek himself had assured the government that the meeting would fail. A document was produced, but Riek avoided signing it’ (p.120).

Serious allegations impinging on people’s reputation cannot be made through statements qualified by such terms as ‘widely seen’ or ‘it seems’. I was not actually in the said meeting, and the author knows this very well as he, himself, was present at the Washington conference. Furthermore, a breakthrough was indeed made and Riek did not avoid signing it. The hitch was on how Riek and Garang were to identify themselves on signing the document. This issue was resolved., and the document was issued by the US Congress stating the points agreed upon by the two parties.

The Fashoda meeting of August 1993. It is alleged by Johnson that: ‘The government countered Petterson’s intervention with its own additional security agreements with Lam at Fashoda in August and Faustino Atem at Bentiu in October’ (p.120). The same allegation is repeated in the Appendix (p.204).

True, there was a meeting between two delegations from the SPLA-Nasir and the government at Fashoda chaired by the newly installed Collo (Shilluk) Reth. It reviewed progress on the Nairobi Peace Talks of June 1993, but never agreed on anything, security or otherwise (5).

The Seriousness of SPLA-United in Constitution-making: It is alleged that all the constitution drafts came out of Riek’s laptop computer (p.125). This claim, ascribed to Emma McCune, is not borne out by the facts as we know them. She never contributed to drafting ‘Constitutions for an independent southern Sudan’. Southerners are quite capable of doing this on their own. The only document I know Emma had an input in was the constitution of Southern Sudan Women Association (SSWA).

Disintegration of SPLA-United: The book fails to deal even in passing with the first split in the SPLA-United in February 1994, apart from an entry in the Chronology of Events (p.205) which reads: ‘Riek Machar dismisses Lam Akol from the SPLA-United (12 Feb); Lam Akol returns to Kodok in government-held part of Upper Nile’. The insinuation is that Lam had surrendered to the Government; for how would he return to a government-held area without doing so?

References
2. Ibid., p.203.
3. Ibid., pp.205-209.
7. Sudan Update, June 1992
8. The Sudan Democratic Gazette, March 1992