

“Secessionism in Africa” panels convened by Wolfgang Zeller and Jordi Tomas,  
Nordic Africa Days 2010 Åbo/Turku Finland, 30 September – 1 October 2010

### ***The Ogaden at the Heart of Transnational Conflict in the Horn***

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#### **Abstract**

*On April 24 2007, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) hit the headlines with an audacious attack on an oil exploration facility at Abole in the northeast of the Ethiopian Somali State (ESR), killing 65 Ethiopians and 9 Chinese. The military crackdown that ensued, coincident with Ethiopia's military operations in Somalia itself, drew international condemnation. It was a stark reminder of how far things had changed since the optimism of the early-1990s, when politics in the ESR, under a new federal dispensation, were briefly described as the country's most open, even democratic (Markakis, *The Somali in Ethiopia*, 1997). At the time of writing in mid-2010, peace negotiations over the Ogaden are again in the media. This paper explores the historical failures of successive Ethiopian and Somali regimes and movements to reconfigure the toxic constellation of Ethio-Somali relations: it locates the intractable issue of the fate of the Ogaden as a continuing source of poison at the geographical heart of the Horn of Africa. Seen from Ethiopia, the Ogaden is a periphery: geographically, economically, socially and politically. Ethiopian counter-insurgency has long attempted to detach its Somali links by force, cutting trade and other cross-border clan networks. For Ogaden clan members across the globe, meanwhile, the Ogaden region remains the natural heart of the Somali world, and its brutal impoverishment a source of deep grievance. After a historical review of a dispute that has rumbled on since 1948<sup>1</sup>, the paper considers the complex contemporary strategies, narratives and motivations of Ogaden nationalists and of Ethiopian government actors, federal and regional. It explores the contradictory demands of the audiences to which they seek to play, from communities to diplomats, in the region and internationally. It analyses the multiple facets of an invidious constellation of constraints and interests that has reinforced conflict both within the ESR and beyond its borders, and that threatens to implicate and vitiate attempts to bring change to the wider region.*

#### **Introduction**

If Africa has a “secessionist deficit” (Englebert & Hummel, 2005), the Horn of Africa has surely done more than its share to redress this imbalance. In a year in which elections finally transferred power in a still-unrecognized Somaliland<sup>2</sup>, and Southern Sudan hurtles towards a referendum which few doubt will deliver a vote for independence<sup>3</sup>, it is worth remembering that the two largest and bloodiest wars between African states in contemporary times have both been intimately connected with secessionism in the region. The Ethio-Eritrean War of 1998-2000 erupted only a few years after a 30-year conflict resulted in Eritrean independence *de facto* in 1991 and *de iure* in 1993.<sup>4</sup> It shattered the much-vaunted peace dividend, re-opened depths of bitterness in and between both countries, and re-fuelled the long-standing regional catechism that “my enemy's enemy is my friend”. The Ethio-Somali war of 1977-78, meanwhile, represented the high-water mark of Somali irredentism, the spectacular attempt to wrest by force almost a third of Ethiopia's territory, centring on the Ogaden<sup>5</sup> (Gebru Tareke,

<sup>1</sup> Note that the text currently presented here focuses on this first half of the paper set out in the abstract.

<sup>2</sup> See Hoehne in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> See Schomerus in this volume.

<sup>4</sup> See Diaz in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> The name Ogaden, usually associated with the period of British Military Administration during and after World War II, was historically ill-defined, referring roughly to the central areas of the current Ethiopian

2000). It drove tens of thousands from their homes to remain as refugees over decades, poured new poison into the suspicion between the two states, and scarred the military and political elites of both. Civilian, military and insurgent deaths during these two wars, and the multiple conflicts which blazed in between them, have been estimated as in excess of a million (Gebru Tareke, 2009; de Waal, 2009).

If Eritrea provides a rare example of an African secessionist movement that succeeded in its goal of winning national independence, secessionism in the Ogaden has met with less success. There are suggestions, meanwhile, that the two projects, so different in many ways, continue to be intertwined. This month, in a story that – if true - illustrates some of the complex interconnectivity of regional geo-politics, senior Somaliland officials reported that they had surrounded 200-300 rebels of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), along with evidence that they had been trained in Eritrea and transported by boat to Somaliland, from where they were attempting to cross into Ethiopia (Garowe Online, 2010). The ONLF denies the allegations (Malone, 2010); the new President of the Ethiopian Somali Regional State (ESR), Abdi Mohamoud Oumer, meanwhile, endorsed the claims, adding that 123 had been killed and a further 90 surrounded (BBC, 2010).

This paper traces the politics of the Ogaden since its forcible incorporation within the Ethiopian Empire state by Menelik II at the end of the nineteenth century, paying particular attention to the way in which regional and international factors have influenced actors and events. James Mayall and Mark Simpson argue that whilst ethnic difference *per se* does not explain prolonged secessionism, differential treatment of (ethnic) groups within a single territory (often during the colonial process), and subsequent government attempts to “eliminate cultural diversity and monopolize access to power” emerge as key drivers, which *may* be reinforced by economic grievances, and confessional divisions. They conclude, however, by stressing the seminal importance of a regional environment that is “strongly supportive of separatist nationalism” (Mayall & Simpson, 1992) (p.10). Whilst the prevailing “balance of power” (cold war or post-cold war international relations) is likely to be antipathetic to secession, prior to and more fundamental than this is the “pattern of power - in which geographical contiguity leads naturally to hostility”:

“The evidence of the Horn of Africa suggests that for the pattern of power to provide a life-line of support for secession, there needs to be a historical confrontation at its heart, not merely of states but of cultures and world views. In other words, it is not merely that ethnicity is not enough to explain protracted secessionism, nor is geography.” (Mayall & Simpson, 1992) (p.22)

Talk of “historical confrontations” can often seem unfortunately resonant of Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” discourse, recently critiqued again in an effective series of articles on the Horn of Africa (Prunier, 2009; Ostebo, 2009; Hansen, Somalia - Grievance, Religion, Clan and Profit, 2009) in (Hansen, Mesoy, & Kardas, The Borders of Islam: Exploring Samuel Huntington’s Faultlines from Al-Andalus to the Virtual Umma, 2009). In line with these authors’ emphasis on local empirical nuance, this paper investigates and problematises the historical resources and experiences that shape the dynamics and variation of the confrontations in play in the Ogaden, in the wider context of the Horn.

### **Historical resources: conquest, colonies and Somalia irredenta**

“Ahmad Gran is for the Somalis a symbol of their past conquests; similarly, Muhammad Abdullah has become for modern Somalis a symbol of a national unity transcending tribal lines but true to Islam and the Somali’s love of independence.” (Hess, 1964) (p.415)

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Somali Region, but importantly excluding the Haud grazing areas, along its north-eastern border with Somaliland and Puntland, and (apparently) some other non-Ogadeeni-inhabited areas to the north and south. Following common convention, I use ‘Ogaden’ to refer to the territory, and ‘Ogadeen’ of the clan. Somali orthography is not followed, with names rendered in forms in which they are commonly found in English [change?].

### *The Adal Emirate and Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi*

Modern Ethiopia's relations with its eastern periphery and neighbours are profoundly influenced by the telling and retelling of the history of the 16<sup>th</sup> century invasion of Imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi of the Adal Emirate at Harar, more commonly known in the Ethiopian highlands as Ahmed 'Gragh,' or 'Gurey' in the Somali areas<sup>6</sup>. Whilst Imam Ahmed and his force went to war with Christian Abyssinia primarily as Muslims, they are widely identified as ethnic Somalis (Muth, 2003). Ahmed's army destroyed a series of churches across a wide area of the highlands, reaching Lalibella, Axum, and the island monasteries of Hayk and Tana, and was defeated only with the help of a Portuguese expedition of 400 musketeers. Attitudes to this history are often treated as a litmus test of incompatible Somali and Ethiopian nationalisms: whilst in the lowlands Ahmed 'Gurey' is usually seen as a Somali national hero (complete with a post-independence statue erected in Mogadishu), for many in the highlands Ahmed 'Gragh' represents the archetype of the 'Muslim threat' to Ethiopia. As always with national symbols, the historicity of the story is less important than the contours and considerable power of its ubiquitous – and polarized - retelling (Henze, 2000).

### *Imperial incorporation of the Somali-lands*

What is now the Ethiopian Somali Region (ESR) was forcibly incorporated into the expanding Ethiopian Empire state by Menelik II in the 1880s, part of a process that was explicitly competitive with European scrambles in the region. The imperial process was cemented in a series of agreements, concluded in the context of ongoing pressure (commercial and territorial) from Ethiopia's colonial neighbours. The Anglo-Ethiopia treaty of 1897, delimited the boundary between British Somaliland and Ethiopia (Bahru Zewde, 1991) (p.119). Whether or not the British intended to cede the strategic Haud dry season grazing lands to Ethiopia (Lewis, A Modern History of the Somali, 2002) (p.59), this was the effect of demarcation of the treaty boundary conducted in 1934. Meanwhile the Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1928, which established the border between Ethiopian and Italian Somali areas as parallel to the coast at "21 leagues" (73.5 miles) from the sea, was rapidly undermined when in 1930 Italy constructed and manned a garrison at Wal Wal, well within Ethiopian territory. Ethiopian protests and clashes in December 1934 saw discussion of the 'Abyssinia crisis' at the UN.

### *The Dervish Movement: a prototype of Ogadeen nationalism?*

As a result of these late-nineteenth century competitive colonial processes, the other Somali-inhabited areas were parceled between France (Djibouti), Britain (Somaliland Protectorate, Northern Frontier District of Kenya) and Italy (Somalia). Reunification of these territories has been a goal of Somali nationalism ever since, and in its first iteration from 1900, the Ogadeen Sayyid Mohammed Abdilleh Hassan led a 20-year Somali rebellion, the Dervish movement, against both Ethiopians and Europeans (Hess, 1964). Early in the century, the movement had disrupted trade in the Ogaden and in British Somaliland. Many of its followers were from the Ogadeen clan, and their allegiance was consolidated by the Sayyid's judicious marriage alliance with a powerful Mohammed Zubeir clan family. By 1913 and the death of Menelik, Mohammed Abdilleh had consolidated a wider area of control, moving south across British, Ethiopian and Italian Somali areas, building forts including at Wardheer and Korahe in the Ogaden. By 1916 the Italians reported with alarm that he was negotiating a marriage alliance with the recent Muslim convert, the new Ethiopian Emperor *Lij* Iyasu, months before the latter's downfall.

When the British finally routed the Dervish forces in 1920, many escaped to the Ogaden, and, in a refuge taken by many subsequent Ogadeen insurgents, the Sayyid camped near Korahe on the Fafan River. He is remembered regionally as the "forerunner of contemporary Somali nationalism" (Hess, 1964) (p.433). In the Ogaden, meanwhile, his Ogadeen nationalist and Mohammed Zubeir credentials also resonate, with the memory of his expansion of Ogadeen raiding well into Ishaq areas of the British Somaliland protectorate. Following the defeat of the Sayyid in 1920 and his death in 1921, British Ishaq clans in turn moved deep into Ogaden, where they were increasingly seen by the Ogadeen as 'sub-imperialists' (Barnes, The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery, c.1888-1848, 2005) (Ch.4,p.25). Their effective penetration was a further indication of the weakness of the Ethiopian state, even in the Jiggiga

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<sup>6</sup> 'Left-handed' in Amharic and Somali.

region, and its abject failures of border protection. “During the twenties and thirties the British and the Italian territorial administrations were first and foremost rivals for the economic and political returns of Somali clans. Moreover when Hayla-Sellase’s government failed Somali clans were quick to capitalise.” (Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery*, c.1888-1848, 2005) (ch.5)

#### *Internal and external challenges to Ethiopian rule in the Ogaden*

In a nuanced and original investigation of the extent to which “Ethiopia was able to ‘rule’ the very unruly Somali periphery”, Cedric Barnes investigates “what effects the subversive influence of surrounding European rule of other Somalis had on Somali clans under Ethiopian rule” (Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery*, c.1888-1848, 2005) (intro). Whilst the characterization of Menelik’s state as “military-fiscal” (Tsegaye Tegenu, 1994) has been widely discussed and critiqued, it nevertheless identifies its enduring internal locus of tension: the forceful consolidation of a peripheral tax base to feed the centre simultaneously entrenched decentralized (military) centres of authority. Ras Mekonnen established the garrison town of Jigjiga in 1891, on the northern flanks of the escarpment near the strategic Marda Pass. In contrast with other newly incorporated areas of the Ethiopian empire, few highland settlers followed the army into the Somali lowlands, contenting themselves with land in the higher altitude and lucrative grain belt around Jigjiga. With the exception of small garrisons at Kebridehar and Degahabur, the state had little presence south of the town. Externally, meanwhile, the eastern periphery was vital to the modern Ethiopian state’s political and economic communications with the outside world, and visibly key to the consolidation of its sovereignty (Bahru Zewde, 1991; Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery*, c.1888-1848, 2005). The “increasing political and economic articulation of the eastern periphery with neighbouring colonial states, especially the growth of markets and improvement in infrastructure there, progressively weakened Ethiopian sovereignty and precipitated the Italian invasion.” (Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery*, c.1888-1848, 2005) (Intro)

#### *1936-1940 Italian Imperial East Africa*

On 4 May 1936 Haile Selassie I left Djibouti aboard a British vessel bound for Europe; the following day, Mussolini declared in Rome that “Ethiopia is Italian: Italian in fact [...] Italian in law.” (Steiner, 1936). The Ethiopian Somali areas with the exception of Jigjiga, which were separately incorporated with Harar, were united with Italian Somaliland. The border between the two areas disappeared, boosting movement and trade. Roads between Harar, Dire Dawa and Jigjiga, as well as from Jigjiga to the British Somaliland border and towards Mogadishu were greatly improved by the Italians, notably linking previously divided Darood clan families and territories, those of the Ogadeen amongst them. Many Somalis had fought with the Italian invading force, and Italian imperial policies favoured Muslim areas, which had or were likely to support them against the Christian Ethiopian Emperor. Concessions included the reduction of taxation and the return of land taken by highland settlers: their initial popularity, however, seems to have been mitigated by bureaucratic restrictions that strangled trade in Jigjiga, Dire Dawa and Harar and muzzled exports to the coast (Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery*, c.1888-1848, 2005) (ch.6). If the Italian occupation of Ethiopia was, neither a colonial nor and economic success for Italy, it had a dramatic effect on Ethiopia.

It was ironic that the Italian occupation since 1935, which had underlined the failure of Hayla-Sellase’s attempted transition [of Ethiopia into a modern centralised, bureaucratic, and above all ‘national’ state], had done much to achieve these very ends.(Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery*, c.1888-1848, 2005) (ch.6)

#### *1941-1948: the British Military Administration and the “Reserved Areas”*

In 1941, when the Italians were expelled, the areas they had occupied and colonized were placed under British Military Administration, and the northern border with the British Somaliland Protectorate was also abolished. At this point, the balance of power in the long-standing rivalry between the Ishaq clans dominant in British Somaliland, and the Ogadeen to the south shifted again: between 1943 and 1944 the British pursued an aggressive campaign of disarmament against the Ogadeen. From an Ethiopian perspective, meanwhile, extended

British administration gave multiple causes for concern. At a very basic level, little economic support was forthcoming for post-occupation reconstruction or consolidation. The designation of the railway line, Harar, a corridor to Jigjiga, and the area along the border as a “reserved area” was particularly galling: this period saw a dramatic increase in grain prices, and the lucrative grain trade around Jigjiga remained outside the control of the Ethiopians. Secondly, although Anglo-Ethiopian agreements in 1942 and 1944 explicitly recognized Ethiopian sovereignty in the Ogaden and the reserved area, and “although the British never denied Ethiopian sovereignty of the Ogaden, by virtue of its continuing government from Mogadishu, its future became implicitly bound up with the disposal of ex-Italian Somaliland” (Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery, c.1888-1848*, 2005) (ch.6). The British presence and ongoing administrative arrangements, rendered explicit the coexistence of two different conceptualisations of the future of Somali-inhabited areas in Ethiopia: whilst the integration of the periphery – both in the north and in the east - was increasingly important to the nationalism of the restored imperial government, the Ogaden was also a “key location of Somali political, economic, and ultimately national aspirations” (Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery, c.1888-1848*, 2005). These were soon to be further and dramatically fuelled by the British.

### *The Bevin plan for a Greater Somalia*

This issue of the fate of the Ogaden came to a head in June 1946 when the then British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin proposed that British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland and the Ethiopian Somali areas or Ogaden be united in one UN trusteeship, preferably under British administration. The proposal was controversial for two reasons: firstly because of Britain’s legal recognition of Ethiopia’s rights in the Ogaden in 1942 and 1944, mentioned above; and secondly because the Four Power Commission, which had been established three months earlier in April 1946 had a mandate only to consider the disposal of Italy’s former colonial possessions (namely Eritrea and Italian Somalia). Haile Selassie I had lobbied for the return of the Ogaden and of Eritrea to Ethiopia in 1945 (Ethiopian objections could be taken for granted), and the plan was also immediately opposed by the other three of the Four Powers, namely France [check] the USA and USSR. Nevertheless, a number of British administrators in the region continued to endorse the idea, and it quickly resonated with the Somali Youth Club, driving its popularity, politicization, expansion, and reincarnation the following year as the Somali Youth League (SYL). (Barnes, *The Somali Youth League, Ethiopian Somalis, and the Greater Somalia Idea, c.1946-1948*, 2007)

### *Somali Youth League*

The Somali Youth Club (SYC) was founded under British rule in Mogadishu on 15 May 1943. The SYC was, from the outset, a broadly and culturally nationalist organization, dedicated to the idea of ‘Somalia for Somalis,’ but seeking good and close relations with the British Military Administration in order to achieve this. A particular focus of friction with the British related to the SYC’s determination to the breaking down of clan barriers between Somalis, and its resentment of the British strategic use of clan divisions in its approach to ‘indirect rule’ in the region. SYC became abruptly politicized and politically active in 1946 when the Bevin plan for the unification of all Somali areas was put forward. Its membership grew from around 1,000 primarily in Mogadishu, to more than 25,000 across the region in a matter of months, as the Greater Somalia issue galvanized the public mood (Barnes, *The Somali Youth League, Ethiopian Somalis, and the Greater Somalia Idea, c.1946-1948*, 2007). In early 1947 the SYC changed its name to the Somali Youth League, and became explicitly politically nationalist and anti-Ethiopian. Of particular concern to the Ethiopian state centre was the rapid spread of SYL popularity to what Ethiopia regarded as the much better integrated Ethiopian towns of Dire Dawa and Harar. SYL leaders, including its head in Jigjiga, Makhtal Tahir, as well as others, seem to have continued their ambivalent attitude towards the British and the Ethiopians, shifting ground according to their audience, and often apparently playing a double game against both. Whilst Makhtal himself apparently refused to co-operate with the Ethiopians, “for many of the Ogaadeen clans, the return to weak Ethiopian rule was better than unification under the British who they saw as strong rulers – ‘if you give your stick to a blind man you will be able to take it back later.’” (Barnes, *The Ethiopian State and its Somali periphery, c.1888-1848*, 2005).

### *1948 & 1954: Restoration of Ethiopian Rule*

The Ogaden, then, was finally returned to Ethiopian rule in 1948. Only the Haud and a small corridor to Jijjiga of “reserved area” were retained under the British Military Administration, which finally returned them to Ethiopia in 1954 – something which then became a focus of limited northern Somali nationalist resentment. In 1956, the Ethiopian government reorganized the administration of the area, creating a new Ogaden Administrative Region centred on Kebridehar [check details], and incorporating areas to the west of the Wabe Shebelle River into Bale *teklay gezat*. When the Emperor visited the area in 1957, Somali elders lobbied the government for schools, clinics, roads, water, and government employment, and 8 million Ethiopian Birr was allocated for the purpose (Markakis, *National & Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 1987). Hoping to increase clan loyalty as neighbouring Somalia moved towards independence, in 1960 the Ethiopian government appointed Somali administrators in 4 *awraja* and 23 *wereda*, and appointed a series of others as advisors in the Ogaden. One Somali was made a Deputy Minister in the Ethiopian Government. A range of commentators agree that Somalis living in Ethiopia seemed to have little interest in or commitment to Somali nationalism as compared with their neighbours (Touval, 1963; Lewis, *Modern Political Movements in Somaliland*, 1958), with most acquiescing in the return of Ethiopian rule, and showing more concern to secure the imperative of unhindered movement than with which state claimed their territory.

### *1960 and after: Somali independence and irredentism*

In 1960 Somalia became independent with the union of the former British and Italian Somali territories, and one of the first steps of the new government was to grant citizenship to all Somalis in the Horn of Africa. The five-pointed star on the new Somali national flag declared its irredentist intent to unite all five Somali-inhabited territories: those considered in the Bevin plan (British, Italian and Ethiopian Somalia areas, the latter now referred to as *soomaali galbeed* or ‘Western Somalia’) with the Issa areas of Djibouti, and the Kenyan Northern Frontier District. Radio Mogadishu provided strong irredentist encouragement, broadcasting the popular song “I shall not feel well until we go to war to unite the Somali” (Markakis, *National & Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 1987; Legum, 1963) (p.505). Somalis from Ethiopia who visited the Somali Republic for trade or education came under the influence of the irredentist rhetoric.

In 1963 an organization called Nasrullah (Nasir Allah, sacrifice for the sake of Allah) was established in the Ogaden, apparently to fight for independence from Ethiopia (Markakis, *National & Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 1987)<sup>7</sup>, but with a strong religious rationale to its mobilization, and involving highly respected clerics amongst its leaders. Mohammed Mealin Seid comments that Nasrullah drew on religious tropes already familiar from the conceptualisations of Ethiopians framed by Ahmed Gragn/Gurey and Mohammed Abdilleh:

“The Somalis began to consider other Ethiopians as their primary enemy and vice versa. Since the wars that spurred this enmity were strongly driven by religious undertones, religion was prominent in how the two sides framed each other. Socioeconomic and political factors both aggravated or eased tensions between the two.” (Seid, 2009)

In 1963 a rebellion in Ethiopia’s Bale province, to the south/west of the Wabe Shebelle River was triggered by the abrupt imposition of new taxes (Gebru Tareke, 1991). As the conflict dragged on it became enmeshed with the irredentist agenda of the Somali Republic who offered limited cross-border support. The Somali and Ethiopian military clashed on the border in 1964, and a settlement of the conflict was mediated by the OAU in March. Less than a year later in early 1965, Wako Gutu, one of the leaders of the Bale rebellion, and remembered as the “father of Oromo separatism” reportedly obtained a limited number of weapons from Somalia early in 1965 (Ottaway & Ottaway 1978:92ff).

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<sup>7</sup> Markakis also mentions a second organization, the Ogaden Company for Trade and Industry (check 1987 reference or 2007 report p.70)

### *The Western Somali Liberation Front*

The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) seems to have taken initial shape in 1973. The “creeping coup” which saw the removal of the Ethiopian imperial regime in 1974, and establishment of the *Dergue*<sup>8</sup> military government in 1975 “stirred Somali nationalism to a fever pitch” (Markakis 2007:72 – check other references). In 1975 the Somali Government reorganized the WSLF, putting it under the command of the National Army in Hargeisa, and organizing military training in Somalia and North Korea. Six months later it also established the Somali Abo Liberation Front, SALF, designed to operate west of the Wabe Shebelle (under the Somali Army Command in Baidoa), with its more ambivalent Somali – Oromo identity, and the involvement of Wako Gutu and Sheikh Hussein amongst other veterans from the 1960s. “Trained, armed, organized and otherwise supported by the Somalia State, the fronts were ancillaries of the Somali army” (Gebru Tareke, 2000) (p.340). As a result, the goals of the WSLF remained unclear, oscillating between independence for the Ogaden/Western Somalia, and autonomy within a wider Somalia. The SALF, meanwhile, seems to have been established simply to counter the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), whose territorial claims crossed those of the WSLF and Somali Government. The lack of autonomy of the WSLF from the Somali government was to haunt the organization, and the various strands of Ogaden nationalism to this day. From 1975 to 1977 the two organisations pursued a guerrilla strategy apparently aimed at pressuring the Ethiopians to negotiate, and wearing down Ethiopian troops before the intervention of the regular Somali Army. The WSLF was “universally and enthusiastically welcomed in Somali areas” (Gebru Tareke, 2000) (p.641), whilst the highland settlers fled, leaving a significant proportion of the eastern rural population under the WSLF by late 1976.

### *1977-78: the Ethio-Somali Ogaden War*

Gebru Tareke has commented that the political and military circumstances in which Somalia invaded Ethiopia in 1977 “could not have been more alluring”: although Ethiopia’s forces outnumbered Somalia’s by around 47,000 to 35,000, they were logistically and organizationally disadvantaged, and heavily stretched in Eritrea. Meanwhile, what looked like an unstable new government was riven by factionalism as the Red Terror peaked (Gebru Tareke, 2000) (p.638). The Somali invasion began on 13 July 1977, and on 12 September in a crushing strategic and psychological blow (it was the third anniversary of the Ethiopian ‘Revolution’), Jigjiga fell to the Somalis, where it remained until 5 March 1978. The rapid Somali advance in the lowlands, however, slowed as assaults on the towns of the Harar plateau slow and failed, and Harar and Dire Dawa held out. Ethiopian resistance turned to stalemate, and eventually the balance of outside intervention swiveled as the Soviets and their allies came in behind Ethiopia in January 1978 and a dramatic *volte face*. Somali failure to take Harar on 22 January 1978 became the tipping point of the war, and was the first time that Cuban troops fought with the Ethiopians. By the time Jigjiga was retaken, the war was almost over. “The invasion was almost universally welcomed by the Somalis of Eastern Ethiopia, who cherished the 8 months of occupation as a liberation” (Gebru Tareke, 2000) (p.607). Many still talk with enthusiasm of life in Jigjiga during this period (interviews 2009, 2010). Tens of thousands of Somalis fled to Somalia ahead of the returning Ethiopians.

If Ethiopia won the war, it lost the peace (Gebru Tareke, 2002). Operation Lash<sup>9</sup> was launched in mid-1980, to eradicate the insurgents (the OLF, Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO) and Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) as well as WSLF and SALF), and expel the Somali army. Whilst villagisation became a mechanism of control in agricultural and highland areas, the use of proxies was a strategy in the Somali lowlands. The Majerteen-based Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), established in 1979 with Ethiopian support and weaponry to fight Siad Barre’s regime, also attacked the WSLF and the Ogaden in support of the Ethiopian military. The military occupation of the Ogaden was brutal and total, and the region remained under Emergency Military Rule from Harar (Hurso) and Kebridehar (Iz) until 1991, and the collapse of the *Dergue* regime. In April 1988, each faced with growing internal threats, Mengistu Haile Mariam and Siad Barre signed a Peace Accord, in which the government of Somalia renounced its claims on the Ogaden.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Committee’ in Amharic: shorthand for Provisional Military Administrative Committee.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Ringworm’ in Amharic: designed to consume the insurgents as ringworm consumes human hair.

### *1984: The formation of the Ogaden National Liberation Front*

In the wake of the rout in the Ogaden war, frustration at the WSLF's dependence on Mogadishu and its manipulation by the Somali government fuelled a reappraisal amongst the organisation's Ogadeen nationalists. The invasion by the Somali Army was itself seen as an attempt to undermine the WSLF's effective campaign of popular liberation. Siad Barre's execution of 14 WSLF commanders in the wake of an abortive military coup in Mogadishu a month after the withdrawal from the Ogaden precipitated a further attempt to "loosen the regime's grip on the organization" (Markakis 2007: 73) at its second congress in 1982. The meeting claimed the right and goal of "self-determination," and briefly replaced its chairman. Nevertheless, in May 1982, the Somali government integrated all of its armed units within the Somali Defence Force, and by the time of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 16 June 1983 the WSLF "was already a phantom organization" (Markakis 2007:74).

The dissident Ogadeen nationalist faction emerged from the WSLF youth wing, established in 1979 and led by Mohammed Sirad Dolal. In August 1984 a leadership of six (Abdullahi Mohammed Saadi, Sheikh Ibrahim Abdellah, Mohammed Ismail Omar, Abdurahman Yusuf Magan, Abdurahman Mahdi, and Abdi Gelle) secretly formed the ONLF, only declaring its existence in March 1986 from Kuwait. The organization defined the issue of the Ogaden as one of unfinished "decolonisation," committing itself to the "liberation of Ogadenia by all possible means." It denounced the notion of Greater Somalia, asserting that by turning the issue into one of irredentism or secession it had undermined the potential for international and continental support. Unsurprisingly, then, the ONLF vigorously denounced the 1988 Ethio-Somali Peace Accord as "treachery". The definition and delimitation of both "Ogadenia" and "liberation," meanwhile, continue to be matters of great controversy.

### **More resources: federalism, self-determination and decolonisation**

#### *1991-1994 Ethnic federalism and the ONLF in government*

Dramatic political changes followed the collapse of the military governments in Ethiopia and Somalia in early 1991. As the Somali State disintegrated, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) sought to usher in a federal system based on the principle of "self-determination of Ethiopia's nations, nationalities and peoples, up to and including secession." It made strenuous efforts to persuade the ethno-national groups that had opposed the *Dergue* to participate in the new political system (Vaughan, 1994). WSLF leaders, led by Sheikh Abdinasser Aden, were discovered "hiding from Hawiye revenge" in a Mogadishu basement, and brought with Sudanese assistance to Addis Ababa, where they accepted the new Charter, renamed the Front the Western Somali Democratic Party (WSDP) and were given two seats in parliament. Wako Gutu and his colleagues agreed to divide the SALF into two: an Oromo and a Somali organization.

The ONLF, meanwhile, proved more reluctant, ambivalent and divided about participation in the new Ethiopian federal dispensation. Meetings with the EPRDF in London and Khartoum had reportedly resulted in an agreement not to enter one another's territory; when the EPRDF then moved to Jigjiga, some elements of the diaspora-based ONLF leadership called for the continuation of armed struggle. Sheikh Ibrahim remained in Saudi Arabia, and a delegation sent to Addis in mid-1991 was reportedly advised to "merge with the WSLF." The ONLF did not participate in the July 1991 Addis Ababa Charter Conference. In January 1992, however, the organization held its first national congress in Gerbo in Fiq zone, which elected Sheikh Ibrahim Abdellah, who had by this time arrived from Saudi Arabia, as Chairman. He was known for his sophisticated Islamic education, strong religious views, and uncompromising resistance to Ethiopian rule in the Ogaden: he moved through Somalia between ESR and the Gulf, keeping out of the way of the Ethiopian state. Nevertheless the ONLF congress voted to participate in the forthcoming regional elections, citing the rights of self-determination and secession afforded by the Charter. The organisation's position remained "ragged and confused" (interviews), with a London-based representative announcing the following year that it would not participate in elections - only weeks before it did so.

As electoral competition advanced, two key faultlines emerged amongst more than a dozen political organisations: between the dominant Ogadeen and the other smaller Ethiopian Somali clans for overall control of the ESR (Markakis, *The Somali in Ethiopia*, 1997); and amongst the Ogadeen clans over the issue of secession from Ethiopia, with the ONLF for, and the WSDP against. The vote in early 1993 delivered the largest share, but not an outright majority to the ONLF, and “the results, including violations, were a fair reflection of local realities” (Markakis 2007:77). The new regional assembly renamed the region which had been known as Ogaden “Somali,” and when its first choice of regional capital (Dire Dawa) was rejected by the federal government, chose Gode deep in the Ogadeen heartland. Although the ONLF seemed in the ascendant, internal ambivalence about the Ethiopian federal Charter arrangement, and recognition of Ethiopian sovereignty, continued to dog the organisation. Abdillahi Mohammed Saadi, a founder member of the ONLF, became the first regional President, albeit apparently not elected as an official ONLF’s official representative, because of ongoing differences of view with the Chairman over co-operation with Ethiopia<sup>10</sup>. He was forced to resign 7 months later, after inter-clan and federal manoeuvring and amidst allegations of corruption and criminality, in the first iteration of a regular pattern which left the ESR “in governance limbo for fifteen years” (Markakis 2007:79).

### *The ONLF’s return to armed struggle*

On 26 January 1994, the ONLF with the support of 8 other Ethiopian Somali organisations declared themselves in favour of self-determination for Ogadenia. A month later, when Sheikh Ibrahim was due to address a rally in Wardheer, rising tension erupted into violence, and many were killed including senior members of the ONLF. The Sheikh escaped, and other ONLF members went into hiding or were killed by security forces. Regardless of the violence, the ONLF-led ESR assembly on 24 March 1994 resolved to negotiate self-determination and a referendum on secession with the federal government, who reacted swiftly and negatively. A month later the ESR President and 9 others had been imprisoned. From that point on the ONLF was split between a group of those who had been in the ESR government who were willing to continue to co-operate with EPRDF, and those in favour of the return to armed struggle, a division sealed when on 27 May 1995 the ONLF ‘legal wing’ denounced the leadership in exile, and on 6 June that leadership signed an agreement in London to co-operate with the OLF against the EPRDF. Some argue that the division was a result of federal manipulation (interviews), but this was clearly not the only driver (Samatar, 2004) (Brydon, 1995). The ‘legal wing’ of the ONLF now found it increasingly difficult to operate, in competition with the newly formed and centrally backed Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL), led by Abdul Mejjid Hussein, a prominent Ishaaq. It came away from elections in June 1995 with 30 out of 139 seats in the ESR assembly, and continued to hemorrhage frustrated members overseas. The rump was finally amalgamated with the ESDL to form the new Somali People’s Democratic Party (SPDP) in June 1998, in another round of heavy federal intervention. Meanwhile, also in 1998 the ONLF held its second congress, replacing Sheikh Ibrahim Abdellah with the current chairman, ‘Admiral’ Mohammed Omar Osman, and bringing into the leadership alongside him a series of other former Generals of the Somali Republic.

### *Tadamun al Islaam and al-Itihaad al-Islaamiyya*

Two Islamic organisations, which drew mainly on support from the Ogadeen clans, were also established in the region in 1991: the radical militant Ogaden Islamic Union, or Ogaden al-Itihaad al-Islaamiyya (AIAI), and the more traditionalist Islamic Solidarity Party – Western Somalia – Ogaden, also known as “Tadamun” (solidarity) (Markakis, *The Somali in Ethiopia*, 1997). Tadamun Al Islaam was led by Abdirahman Yusuf Magan, one of the six founder members of the ONLF in 1984, and Mohammed Moalim Osman. Unlike AIAI, Tadamun did participate in elections in 1992, winning 7 seats (Markakis, *The Somali in Ethiopia*, 1997) (p.567). Tadamun was “mostly composed of religious traditionalists” (Perouse de Montclos, 2000), and represented conservative rather than radical Islam. It joined ranks with the WSLF/WSDP in 1994.

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<sup>10</sup> see UN. (2003). *Confidential Internal Report*. Addis Ababa: UN.; also Samatar, A. I. (2004). Ethiopian Federalism: Autonomy versus Control in the Somali Region. *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), 1131-54.

Al-Itihaad al-Islaamiyya (AIAI) was “by far the largest [Somali] Islamist armed organization in the early 1990s.”<sup>11</sup> When AIAI was first established in the Ogaden in 1991, it was reportedly invited into the political process by the ONLF, but refused to participate in elections in 1992, in line with the teaching of the wider international movement dedicated to the promotion of Wahabbism. The leading member of the AIAI in the Ogaden was Osman Abdisalaam, a learned religious figure, educated in Arabic, and the movement was linked with Hassan Turki in southern Somalia. AIAI drew on support in territory it controlled in Gedo and Bakol regions, including Dolo, Bladhawa, Bourdoobo and Koweibo, from where it conducted raids into the ESR. Some AIAI elements also seem to have had a degree of facilitation from General Mohammed Farah Aideed, who controlled the wider region in Somalia at that time<sup>12</sup>. Clan dynamics inherent in the relationship with Aideed contributed to AIAI’s fragmentation into three different groups: “the Ethiopian branch [was] the most radical and already had endorsed a more Jihadi stance against the Ethiopian regime and enjoyed a warm relationship with the ONLF” (Marchal, 2009).

“Heightened militarism on the part of the Ethiopian wing of the AIAI was no doubt linked to the fact that the AIAI in Ethiopia was fighting for very different objectives than the AIAI wing inside Somalia. The Ethiopian wing of AIAI was part of a long-standing irredentist armed insurgency by Somali Ethiopians. The movement’s aim of imposing an Islamist state over all of Somali-inhabited East Africa required armed violence against one of Africa’s largest and most seasoned militaries. By contrast, the AIAI wings inside Somalia were preoccupied with expanding their control in a country where they faced no government at all.” (Counter Terrorism Centre at West Point, not dated) (p.43).

Immediately after Aideed was killed, and less than a month after the July 1996 attempt on the life of Ethiopian Somali federal minister and then Chairman of the ESDL, Abdul Mejjid Hussein, ENDF forces ousted AIAI from the area around Luuq, killing many of its members<sup>13</sup>. The period of bombings in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, and mining of rural roads in ESR came to an end. From January 1997 AIAI turned its attention to political and welfare activities, and the emerging Islamic Courts movement in Somalia, retaining a presence where it could, but not very evident on the Ethiopian side of the border. A decade later, in 2004-5 AIAI Ogaden reemerged in a new guise, allied with WSLF personnel within the United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF).

### *Intensification and regionalization of conflict*

In the ‘cold war’ period that followed the Ethio-Eritrean conflict of 1998-2000, the Eritrean government intensified the support it gave to a number of movements fighting the Ethiopian government, including the ONLF. Internally, the scope and depth of this new alliance with Asmara was controversial, notably for a generation of leaders scarred by the experience of WSLF’s manipulation by Mogadishu. Relations with Eritrea seem to have been central to the division that developed after 2001 between Admiral Osman and Dr Mohammed Sirad Dolal, then Foreign Spokesperson in London. Although this view is disputed (interviews) Dr Dolal was widely seen as more critical of the alliance with Eritrea fearing that (as the patronage of WSLF of the Somali government of Mohammed Siad Barre had done) it could threaten to undermine the struggle for an independent Ogadenia by complicating it with other regional

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<sup>11</sup> “set up in 1983 by the merger of four groups, it already had developed due to the mobilization of the Somali diaspora and its ideological agenda was reshaped by the internal conditions in Somalia [...] and the growing influence of Salafi ideology, due to the involvement of many migrants established in the Gulf who generously funded the movement” Marchal, R. (2009). A Tentative Assessment of the Somali Harakat Al-Shabaab. *Journal of East African Studies*, 3 (3), 381-404.(p.5).

<sup>12</sup> Although not all commentators agree that Aideed was close to the radical Islmaists, some further believe that he channeled support from bin Laden’s al-Quaeda. See for instance Counter Terrorism Centre at West Point. (not dated). *Al Qaeda’s (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa*. Retrieved May 2009 from Counter Terrorism Centre at the US Military Academy, West Point: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/Al-Qa%27ida%27s%20MisAdventures%20in%20the%20Horn%20of%20Africa.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> It is reported that the bodies of a number of foreign fighters, with passports, were discovered in this operation.

dynamics. The split became irrevocable when a meeting in Asmara in June 2006 (at which Dr Dolal was not present) agreed to remove him from the leadership, and was sealed in 2007, when the two factions made separate claims to represent the ONLF, each denouncing the other. Dr Dolal retained some support in the Diaspora, notably from Germany-based communities including former ONLF Treasurer Salahaddin Ma'o, who during 2008 posted damaging financial material on the internet, seeking to discredit Admiral Osman.

In logistical terms, meanwhile, Eritrean and other support significantly boosted the military capacity of the ONLF in the region. With the government in Addis Ababa distracted by post-election security in 2005 and 2006, ONLF consolidated its forces and incorporated newly trained recruits, some flown in through Dusamareeb, whilst the cross-border airstrip was controlled by the Islamic Courts Union in mid-2006. By early 2007, even Ethiopian National Defence sources acknowledged that their own estimates put numbers of armed and trained ONLF fighters in the region at 2,500-3,000, over and above the irregular support of clan militia (interviews). On April 24 2007, after more than a decade of low-intensity conflict, the ONLF hit the headlines with an audacious attack on an oil exploration facility at Abole in the northeast of the ESR, killing 65 Ethiopians and 9 Chinese. The attack highlighted issue of exploration of natural resources in the Ogaden. Attempting to ensure that commercial companies working under licence with the government do not begin to extract oil and gas and other resources from the region was an explicitly articulated intermediate objective of the organization throughout 2009 and 2010: "If Ethiopia gets the oil and becomes self-sufficient they are 80 million and we are only 5-6 million. It will be our death warrant. So we are very adamant about this: we will not allow our oil to be exploited." (Interview, ONLF Spokesperson)

The Ethiopian military crackdown that ensued, coincident with its military operations in Somalia itself from December 2006, drew international condemnation, and an outpouring of Ogadeen and wider Somali support for the ONLF's resistance to the "Christian invader". A report by Human Rights Watch the following year graphically set out the fears of international observers about the strategies pursued by the contending parties, and the impact of the conflict on the population of the region (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

### *The UWSLF and the 2010 peace negotiations*

In January 2009, Dr Dolal who had returned to the region in November 2008, was killed by Ethiopian troops in Denaan in the company of UWSLF fighters, with whom he was reported to be co-operating. UWSLF and government sources have claimed subsequently that the military were tipped-off by informants associated with Admiral Osman's ONLF, and these suspicions have been used by various Ethiopian government groups in an attempt to exacerbate divisions between the two important Ogadeen Mohammed Zubeir sub-clans: Dr Dolal's Rer Abdilleh and the Admiral's Rer Isaaq. This was a strategy vigorously spearheaded through 2009 by two SPDP Ogadeen politicians: Regional President Dawoud Mohammed, and Security Chief Abdi Mohammed Omar, who replaced him as President in mid-2010. Its explicit articulation by Ethiopian politicians, as in August 2010, infuriates many Somalis inside and outside the region. Another controversial counter insurgency strategy of this period was the replacement of the (largely highland) Ethiopian National Defence Forces with a newly established Somali "Special Forces" police, which changed the dynamics of conflict, pitting Somali against Somali, increasing reported levels of brutality as well as concomitant community and diaspora pressure for peace.

Little was known about the UWSLF until the organisation entered into negotiations with the Ethiopian government earlier in 2010. It surfaced in 2006, when two aid workers were briefly taken hostage, apparently unintentionally (Human Rights Watch, 2008), and in November 2008 pledged to co-operate with the ONLF and a Front for the Independence of Oromia (UWSLF, ONLF, & FIO, etc., 2008). In February 2009, the UWSLF were mentioned in connection with the detention of two Italian nuns who had been kidnapped in El Waq in November 2008:

"There are UWSLF forces stationed in the former Italian-held Somalia to fight Ethiopian troops that invaded the country in 2006 in support of the extremely weak federal transition government. Their base is Bardere, on the road from El Wak to

Mogadishu, and that is where they took the nuns. To get to Bardere, you have to cross the Giuba river and there are at least three bridges. The Americans keep a discreet eye on them via satellite but a barge can slip across the river at night.” (Corriere della Sera, 2009)

The organization is led by Sheikh Ibrahim Dheere, and maintains an active Foreign Relations Spokesman in Denmark. In June 2010 the organization signed an agreement with the Ethiopian Government, renouncing its commitment to armed struggle. Whilst still committed to the implementation of Ethiopian constitutional Article 39, giving the right to secession, “when the time is appropriate” the organization now plans to engage in economic activities and religious proselytism in the region, rather than joining the government or political campaigning (interviews). At the time of writing UWSLF and the Salahaddin Ma’o faction of the ONLF emerge as engaged in negotiations with the Ethiopian government, whilst the ONLF led by Admiral Osman apparently continues the struggle by violent means.

## Conclusions

The historical review sketched above has sought to establish that Mayall and Simpson’s requirements for chronic secession are very clearly in place in the the Horn of Africa, in relation to the Ogaden. Ethiopian Somalis experienced and in many ways continue to experience differential treatment at the hands of the Ethiopian state, experiences often thrown into sharp relief by those of their fellow Somalis under neighbouring colonial and independent jurisdictions. Ethiopian centralism under imperial and military regimes explicitly sought to eliminate cultural diversity. Whilst this may have changed under Ethiopian federalism, questions remain over the pattern of access to power. Economic grievances, and confessional divisions have emerged as clear drivers of Ogaden secessionism, morphing and reforming under different historical circumstances. The over-riding importance of the regional environment, meanwhile, emerges with particular clarity in this pastoral context. The practical prospect of *Somalia irredenta* may have diminished with the collapse of the Somali Republic, but the resentment of perceived Ethiopian policy towards Somalis has not. Likewise, new “enemy’s enemies” have become friends, as regional relationships shift and strain.

The ongoing conflict between the ONLF and the GoE is only the latest round in “a century-old conflict between highland rulers of Ethiopia and Somali/Ogadeni secession movements”. Viewed from this longer-term perspective, EPRDF is only the “current post-holder” in a series of highland governments, and as such “it is in charge of and logically interested in maintaining Ethiopian cohesion and uses its armed forces to that end” (UN, 2003) (p.21). At the nub of the ONLF’s shifting and disparate aims and objectives has always been the desire for a referendum on the Ethiopian Somali or Ogadeeni political dispensation. It was the dispute over a referendum on independence in 1994 that pushed the core of the ONLF back into armed struggle in 1995. If there is ever to be a shift from violent to political means of addressing the issue, some such assessment of popular opinion will have to be part of the process. Yet, how is a government in Addis Ababa to reconcile this with the overriding impetus to ‘maintain Ethiopian cohesion’? Any Ethiopian government would find it a challenge. Ironically, it is particularly difficult for this government (with its commitments to “self-determination for nations, nationalities, and peoples”) to do so. In the early 1990s, EPRDF facilitated Eritrean independence and introduced constitutional Article 39 in the teeth of vigorous resistance, only to find itself hobbled by a brutal war with its newly independent neighbour at the end of the decade, and stunned by the violence of electoral (and non-electoral) opposition to the system of ethnic federalism that crystallized in 2005. As a result of these developments, and with Ethiopian nationalism more sensitive than ever, a sustainable political solution to the situation in the Ogaden requires a degree of political courage, creativity, and conviction that has seemed less and less in evidence in the polarized Ethiopia of post-2005.

Amidst all the claims and counter claims, lurid rumours, frank fabrications, and extravagant propaganda associated with the struggle for the Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia, currently fought between the Government of Ethiopia and the ONLF, and until recently the UWSLF, only a few things are known for sure. One is that this conflict will be resolved only by some

kind of political settlement, and not through military or violent means. Another is that, in the meantime, over and above those killed or injured, it is the poorest stratum of the inhabitants of the ESR who are being further impoverished and marginalized by its continuation.

On the face of it, over the last few years it has seemed unlikely that either the GoE or the ONLF would push for a negotiated settlement. The military crackdown that followed the 2007 Awole attack, coincident with Ethiopia's military operations in Somalia itself, drew international condemnation. Until recently, both sides have been publicly committed to seeking an outright military victory. In 2009 and 2010 ESR and federal officials repeated that the ONLF 'has been defeated' over the period since early/mid-2007, and that what remains is only a 'mopping up' operation against a number of small, scattered, acephalous guerrilla groups, with the organization militarily 'entirely destroyed'. ONLF sources, meanwhile, asserted that their numbers and support had grown exponentially over the same period, to the extent that they were confident of 'comprehensively defeating' the military forces of the Ethiopian state within the next five years.

Regardless of the extent to which the two sides genuinely believe them, neither of these sets of claims will be borne out by events. Instead, there is reason to believe that, without an inclusive and comprehensive settlement, this conflict could continue, at significant if lower levels of violence, for a long time: the state of "neither peace nor all-out war" (UN, 2003) (p.29), the best that has been achieved for more than a century, which continues to undermine Ethiopia's attempts at social and political transformation, blighting the lives of its citizens, and shaming the ideals of all of those involved.

Firstly, although contemporary conflict in the Ogaden is, at one level, a straightforward secular nationalist 'self-determination' struggle (secessionist or not) for control of the Somali-inhabited - or Ogadeen-inhabited - areas of Ethiopia, it isn't just that. It is mixed up in the perceptions of those involved with a whole series of other complicating dynamics to do with demographics, clans, territory, natural resources, trade, histories of Abyssinian colonialism and pan-Somali irredentism, human rights violations, Islamism, terrorism, and the regional balance of power.

Secondly, as had always been the case in the histories described in this paper, the conflict is not being fought between two disciplined, monolithic, and consistent parties – whether thought of as Government and Front, clan and 'coloniser,' Christian and Muslim - each with a stable base of popular support lined up behind it. There are intricate ranges of interests, influences, factions and alliances on both sides and moving between them. They are in continuous flux temporally and spatially, and their shifting constellations look very different at local, regional, national, and international levels. Thus whilst it seems clear that widespread assumptions about the macro-level "historical confrontations" in play in this case do indeed fuel chronic secessionism, nevertheless these confrontations perhaps do rather less to account for the micro-sociology of conflict and the desire for peace, as experienced by communities and individuals.

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