

Nationalism and Secession in the Horn of Africa
A Critique of the Ethnic Interpretation

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to assess the relevance of existing theories about the origins of nationalism and investigate more specifically the claim that nationalism is rooted in ethnicity. It does so by examining the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland, which proclaimed their independence in May 1991 after seceding from the states to which they were formerly united. Having explained in the introduction why International Relations needs to take a closer look at the causes of nationalism, the second chapter proceeds to review some of the main theories about the origins of nationalism. It retraces the history of the primordialist-modernist debate, discusses the main contentions of the ethnonationalist approach and presents some of the factors singled-out by recent scholarship as propitious for the emergence of nationalism. Given that most of the theories about the origins of nationalism presented in chapter two centre on Europe, chapter three surveys the literature on the rise of nationalism in Africa in order to determine whether any additional factors need to be considered before analysing Eritrea and Somaliland. Chapter three also includes a discussion of the anthropological literature on ethnicity in Africa and questions the ethnonationalist claim that ethnic groups are pre-modern. Using as a framework the factors identified previously, chapter four offers a historical account of the emergence of nationalism in Eritrea. Chapter five does the same for the case of Somaliland. As the analysis provided in chapters four and five illustrate, the claim that nationalism and secession have ethnic roots is not empirically substantiated by the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland. The thesis concludes by discussing the practical implications of these findings with regard to the right of secession and proposals for boundary adjustment in Africa. It also highlights the ways International Relations may contribute to our understanding of the causes of nationalism.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In May 1991, Eritrea and Somaliland proclaimed their independence after seceding from the states to which they were formerly united.¹ In the wake of events that accompanied the end of the Cold War, the birth of these two new states may have gone somewhat unnoticed. Yet this was a momentous event, not only for Africa, but also for international society more broadly. At decolonisation, African states had pledged their commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states inherited upon achieving independence.² In doing so, they were reaffirming the prevailing interpretation of national self-determination that had granted them their independence and which was understood to apply only to overseas possessions.³ In accordance with this interpretation, and as tragically illustrated by the failed attempts of Katanga and Biafra, secessionist movements were forcefully quelled. And, with the exception of Bangladesh in 1971, no clear-cut example of state creation by secession occurred during the Cold War period.⁴ Such intransigence stemmed from the fear that granting recognition to secessionist movements would prompt similar demands elsewhere and would thus eventually lead to the disintegration of states.

¹ While Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia was formally acknowledged in 1993, Somaliland's secession from Somalia has not been recognised by the international community of states. Eritrea and Somaliland are considered here as secessions because they conform to the definition given below.

² This was formally enshrined in article 3.3 of the Organisation for African Unity's Charter and was more forcefully reiterated at the Cairo Summit of 1964. See: Brownlie, Ian (ed.), *Basic Documents on African Affairs*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, pp. 3 and 360.

³ As expressed in the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV). For the full text of Resolution 1514 (XV), see: Brownlie, Ian (ed.), *Basic Documents in International Law*, 3rd Edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 298-301; and for Resolution 1541 (XV), see: Brownlie, 1971, *op. cit.*, pp. 368-71.

⁴ Mayall, James, *Nationalism and International Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 61.

It is against this background that the watershed events of the early 1990s must be considered. Since the end of the Cold War, a number of new states have been created as a result of the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia and Somalia. Does this new surge of state creation indicate that international society is now succumbing to the pressures of ethnic separatist movements? Are these expressions of the ethnic tidal wave that is said to be sweeping the world? These are the underlying questions this thesis seeks to address by examining more specifically the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland. Insofar as secession is considered to be the 'logical conclusion' and 'purest expression' of nationalism, closer investigation of these two cases should indeed yield valuable insights as to the causes of a phenomenon that is forecast to become 'the most common reason for war in the post-Cold War era'.⁵ Given their implications for international order and stability, it only seems appropriate, for International Relations scholars in particular, to understand what motivates nationalist demands and prompts a people to secede.

1.1 – Focus and scope of the thesis

Strictly defined, secession is the formal act by which a territory and its inhabitants withdraw or separate from an already existing state with the aim of establishing themselves as a distinct, independent and sovereign state.⁶ Several attempts have been made to identify the circumstances under which secession is more likely to

⁵ Mandelbaum, Michael, 'Is Major War Obsolete?' *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 3, Winter 1998-99, p. 31.

⁶ For similar definitions see, Heraclides, Alexis, *The Self-determination of Minorities in International Politics*, Frank Cass & Company Limited, London, 1991, p. 1; von Hippel, Karen, 'The Resurgence of Nationalism and Its International Implications,' *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Autumn 1994, p. 186.

occur.⁷ But, as Allen Buchanan remarks, there is ‘no positive theory of secession at present’.⁸ One reason for this may be that many of those investigating this phenomenon, although by no means all, assume ethnicity to be a necessary if not a sufficient condition for secession.⁹ Indeed, according to Donald Horowitz, secession should be regarded ‘as a special species of ethnic conflict.’¹⁰

The interpretation of secession as the expression of ethnic demands derives from the conception, best expressed by Walker Connor and Anthony Smith, that nationalism is rooted in ethnicity and that ‘true’ nations are ethnic-nations.¹¹ This view, which we have chosen to label the ethnonationalist approach, has informed much of the study of nationalism and secession since the so-called ‘ethnic revival’ of the 1960s and 1970s. Its influence in the context of Africa is illustrated by proposals for the ‘ethno-national adjustment’ of the boundaries of states.¹² According to such

⁷ For a discussion of these see: Heraclides, 1991, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-20; and Premdas, Ralph R., ‘Secessionist movements in comparative perspective’, in: Premdas, Ralph, S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe and Alan B. Anderson (eds), *Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1990.

⁸ Buchanan, Allen, *Secession. The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec*. Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford, 1991, p. 3.

⁹ See for example: Horowitz, Donald, ‘Patterns of Ethnic Separatism,’ *Comparative Study of Society and History*, Vol. 23, No. 2, April 1981, pp. 165-95; Horowitz, Donald, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA., 1985; Mayall, James, and Simpson, Mark, ‘Ethnicity is not Enough: Reflections on Protracted Secessionism in the ‘Third World.’ *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol. 33, Nos 1-2, 1992, pp. 5-25; Shehadi, Kamal S., *Ethnic Self-determination and the Break-up of States*, Adelphi Paper No. 283, Brassey’s Ltd for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, December 1993; Levine, Alice, ‘Political Accommodation and the Prevention of Secessionist Violence,’ in: Brown, Michael (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., 1996, pp. 311-40; and Van Evera, Stephen, ‘Hypothesis on nationalism and war,’ in: Brown, Michael *et al.*, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict. An International Security Reader*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, pp. 26-60.

¹⁰ Horowitz, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹¹ Connor, Walker, *Ethnonationalism. The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994; Smith, Anthony D., *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981; Smith, Anthony D., *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.

¹² The need to redraw Africa’s boundaries according to ethnicity has been argued by: Amadife, Emmanuel N., and Warhola, James, W., ‘Africa’s Political Boundaries: Colonial Cartography, The OAU, and the Advisability of Ethno-National Adjustment,’ *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1993, pp. 533-54; Davidson, Basil, *The Black Man’s Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, Currey, London, 1992; Jackson, Robert H., and Rosberg, Carl L., ‘Popular Legitimacy in African Multi-Ethnic States,’ *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 22,

proposals, the crises that have plagued Africa since independence will only be resolved once the ‘artificial’ boundaries of its states are redrawn to reflect Africa’s ‘traditional’ ethnic communities. While it is true that Africa’s states were initially carved up by the Western colonial powers ‘with little regard for ethnic or national settlements’,¹³ to what extent is this the real source of Africa’s problems? Is it the case that the main challenges to Africa’s colonial boundaries have been motivated by the need to rectify ‘the historical accidents resulting from the manner in which the state system was built – a manner which until recently took scant notice of ethnic ties and national susceptibilities’?¹⁴ Is it right to portray Eritrea as an ‘ethnic movement’,¹⁵ or as a case of ‘ethnic separatism’?¹⁶ Is it accurate to describe the collapse of the state of Somalia in the early 1990s and Somaliland’s subsequent secession as the products of ‘ethnic war’?¹⁷

To answer these questions, this thesis proposes to reverse the conventional causal chain, ethnic group/nation → nationalism → secession, that informs much of the literature on nationalism and secession, and which was expressed by Smith as follows:

Nationalism derives its force (...) from the inner resources of specific ethnic communities, as well as the perceptions and sentiments that they inspire. History and culture are the wellsprings of these inner resources, for they can

No. 2, 1984, pp. 177-98; Zartman, William, ‘The Politics of Boundaries in North and West Africa,’ *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1965, pp. 55-73.

¹³ Herbst, Jeffrey, ‘Challenges to Africa’s Boundaries in the New World Order,’ *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Summer 1992.

¹⁴ Smith, Anthony, ‘Ethnic and Nation in the Modern World,’ *Millennium*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Summer, 1985, p. 139.

¹⁵ Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁶ Smith, Anthony D., *National Identity*, Penguin books, 1991, p. 104.

¹⁷ Schultz, R.H. Jr, ‘State disintegration and ethnic conflict: a framework for analysis,’ *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 541, September 1995, pp. 75-88; Horowitz, Donald, ‘Democracy in Divided Societies. The Challenge of Ethnic Conflict,’ *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 4, October 1993, p. 22.

indicate much about the *likelihood* of ethnic consciousness developing into ethnic nationalism and, *hence*, into secessionist movement.¹⁸

Rather than assuming what causes secession this thesis will investigate instead what secession has to tell us about nationalism and the nation. Specifically, it will try to answer the following question:

- (1) Are Eritrea and Somaliland's respective claims for national self-determination rooted in age-old feelings of ethnic belonging, or do they instead corroborate the view that nations are modern creations?

Answer to this question is not only of academic or theoretical interest but also has practical implications. In addition to the above, two subsidiary questions will guide our enquiry:

- (2) To what extent do the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland challenge the conventional interpretation of the right of self-determination and thus confirm the need to redraw Africa's artificial boundaries so that they may more appropriately reflect 'traditional' identities?
- (3) And, how, if at all, can International Relations contribute to our understanding of nationalism?

Indeed, as will be shown in the following chapter, most of the theories of nationalism have been developed by historians, sociologists and political scientists, and have tended to assume that the causes of nationalism are essentially domestic. But is that really the case? And why has International Relations offered so little in the way of an explanation of nationalism?

¹⁸ Smith, Anthony D., 'The Ethnic sources of Nationalism', in: Brown, Michael (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1993, p. 28. Our italics.

1.2 – *Nationalism and International Relations*

Nationalism has always occupied an ambiguous position in International Relations. The terms ‘nation’ or ‘national’ prevail in many of the discipline’s key-concepts – the nation-state, transnational relations, the national interest or the principle of national self-determination – and even in its own name. Wars, crises, economic competition or co-operation have often been put down to nationalism. Yet in spite of its apparent terminological prevalence and its impact on world politics, nationalism, it has been claimed, remains, if not all together outside, at least in the periphery of International Relations.¹⁹ The reason for this is frequently explained by reference to the discipline’s traditional concern with inter-state relations and its tendency to equate ‘nation’ with ‘state’. International Relations’ state-centric focus has thus regularly prompted accusations of ‘terminological negligence’ and suggestions that the discipline might more aptly be renamed: Inter-State relations. One of the most virulent denunciations of this ‘terminological chaos’ was formulated by Walker Connor in 1978.

The error of improperly equating nationalism with loyalty to the state is the consequence of a much broader terminological disease that plagues the study of global politics. It would be difficult to name four words more essential to global politics than are state, nation, nation-state, and nationalism. But despite their centrality, all four terms are shrouded in ambiguity due to their imprecise, inconsistent, and often totally erroneous usage.²⁰

¹⁹ IR’s lack of concern with nationalism has been noted by: Mayall, James, ‘Nationalism in the study of international relations’, in: Groom, A.J.R. and Light, Margot (eds), *Contemporary International Relations: A Guide to Theory*, Pinter, London, 1994, p. 182. Lapid, Yosef and Kratochwil, Friedrich, ‘Revisiting the National: Toward an Identity Agenda in Neorealism,’ in: Lapid, Yosef and Kratochwil, Friedrich (eds), *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, Lynne Rienner, London and Boulder, 1996; Griffiths, Martin and Michael Sullivan, ‘Nationalism and International Relations Theory,’ *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1997, pp. 53-66. Pettman, Jan Jindy, ‘Nationalism and After,’ *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, Special Issue, December 1998, pp. 149-164.

²⁰ See, Connor, Walker, ‘A Nation, Is a Nation, Is a State, Is an Ethnic Group, Is a...’ reprinted in: Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 91. This article was first published in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1978.

Before discussing whether International Relations' disregard for nationalism can be attributed to its traditional concern with inter-state relations and its tendency to equate state and nation, it is necessary first to examine more closely the claim that 'mainstream IR' has excluded the 'national problematic' from its research agenda²¹ and that by doing so it has 'missed nationalism' altogether.²²

a) *The study of nationalism in International Relations*

To adequately appraise such assertions, one would first need to determine which scholars are to be considered as representative of 'mainstream' IR. A first year IR student or a non-IR scholar could easily be forgiven for assuming, on the basis of the more recent publications in the discipline, that Kenneth Waltz *is* mainstream IR. Any list will no doubt be determined by one's own theoretical inclinations, generation, or even one's own national, if not institutional, affiliation, and could thus be criticised for being partial, incomplete or too-encompassing. While acknowledging how difficult it may be to come up with an agreed list of whom is to be considered as 'belonging' to IR, let alone mainstream IR, there surely must be more to realism, neo- or classical, than Kenneth Waltz.

Among those who lament orthodox IR's neglect of nationalism, many will nonetheless duly acknowledge E.H. Carr's contribution to the topic.²³ In fact, as Mayall notes, Carr has done more than merely contribute to the study of the subject. Indeed, it was under his chairmanship that the Chatham House Study Group undertook one of the first systematic studies on the international problems posed by

²¹ Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²² Pettman, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²³ Carr, E.H., *Nationalism and After*, Macmillan, London, 1968. First published in 1945.

nationalism during the inter-war period.²⁴ Therefore, while the academic study of nationalism may generally be said to have begun with the pioneering works of historians such as Carlton Hayes²⁵ and Hans Kohn,²⁶ International Relations was by no means lagging far behind. Few, on the other hand, will mention Hans Morgenthau's treatment of nationalism in *Politics Among Nations* or more specifically in 'The Paradoxes of Nationalism.'²⁷ Conscious of the threat nationalism posed to world order, and critical of its capacity to bring about a more peaceful change, Morgenthau sought to understand its prevalence, its contradictions and the role played by power politics in this process. Nationalism, he wrote, is both in its logic and experience,

a principle of disintegration and fragmentation, which is prevented from ensuing anarchy not by its own logic but by the political power which either puts a halt to its realization at a certain point, as did the peace settlement of 1919, or else uses it for its purposes up to a certain point, as did the unifiers of Germany and Italy in the nineteenth century.²⁸

Rather than a means towards a just order, the application of the principle of nationalism or national self-determination, Morgenthau argued, only brought about a situation where yesterday's oppressed became today's oppressors. Raymond Aron, another of the discipline's forefathers, also dealt extensively with nationalism, its relationship to industrialisation and to the global inequality of progress.²⁹ But, whereas for Morgenthau nationalism was an idea intrinsically bound to the triumph

²⁴ Mayall, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 182. Mayall is here referring to Carr, E.H., (ed.), *Nationalism. A Report by a Study Group of Members of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Oxford University Press for the RIIA, London, 1939.

²⁵ See for example, Hayes, Carlton, *Essays on Nationalism*, New York, 1926, and *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, Macmillan, New York, 1948 (first published in 1931).

²⁶ Kohn, Hans, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of its Origins and Background*, Macmillan, New York, 1945 (first published in 1922), and *The Age of Nationalism*, Harper, New York, 1962.

²⁷ Morgenthau, Hans, 'The Paradoxes of Nationalism,' *The Yale Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, June 1957, pp. 481-96.

²⁸ Morgenthau, 1957, *op. cit.*, pp. 484-5.

²⁹ Aron, Raymond, *Progress and Disillusion. The Dialectics of Modern Society*, Pall Mall Press, London, 1968, in particular chapter 3 – Racism and Nationalism.

of individual liberty and whose origins lay in the French King's betrayal of his nation in 1791, for Aron, it was associated with 'both democratic ideology and industrial modernization.'³⁰

Also, and not merely because he occupied the Aaron L. Binenkorb Professorship of International Studies, but mainly for the approach he developed, Benedict Anderson might also be included here as one IR scholar who has clearly not neglected nationalism.³¹ By looking at the way nationalism was modularised and spread throughout the world, Anderson provides a theory of nationalism which may easily be seen to fit within the expansion of international society model.³² Also concerned with the processes that underlay the expansion of states, Fred Northedge analysed the relationship between imperialism and the principle of nationality, whose contradictory forces, he wrote, were responsible for the disequilibrium built into the international system.³³ In an era when international organisations are once again considering the codification of national minorities' rights,³⁴ it may be appropriate to recall here Inis Claude's *National Minorities. An International Problem*,³⁵ and Alexis Heraclides' *The Self-determination of Minorities in International Politics*.³⁶ While references to national character have fallen into disrepute, there have been a number of studies which examine the role played by ethnic interest groups in the foreign

³⁰ Aron, 1968, *op. cit.*, p. 45. The similarities between Aron and Gellner's analysis are striking, yet neither makes any reference to the other.

³¹ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1991. The first edition was published in 1983.

³² Bull, Hedley, and Watson, Adam (eds), *The Expansion of International Society*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984.

³³ Northedge, F.S., *The International Political System*, Faber and Faber, London, 1976.

³⁴ Jackson Preece, Jennifer, 'National minority rights vs. state sovereignty in Europe: changing norms in international relations?' *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 3, No. 3, November 1997, pp. 345-64.

³⁵ Claude, Inis, *National Minorities. An International Problem*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1955.

³⁶ Heraclides, *op. cit.*, 1991.

policy decision-making process.³⁷ In a somewhat related area, the recent proliferation of studies on ethnic conflicts may also be seen as a testimony that nationalism and ethnicity are being seriously considered by the discipline.³⁸ Another barometer of the phenomenon's increasing topicality, *Millennium, Journal of International Studies*, devoted two special issues to the topic of nationalism, in 1985 and in 1991.³⁹ More recently, and also from within IR, William Bloom's analysis of nationalism in international relations seeks to bridge the levels of analysis by drawing from the insights of psychoanalytical theory about identity formation and mass psychology.⁴⁰ Due mention should finally be made of F.H. Hinsley's important work on nationalism and the international system,⁴¹ a project which was further elaborated by James Mayall in his analysis of the impact of nationalism on international society.⁴²

As this cursory review illustrates, it is unfair to suggest that the discipline of International Relations has 'missed' nationalism as such. Nevertheless, while the effects of nationalism on international relations have regularly been considered and studied, few of the aforementioned scholars were able to foresee,⁴³ as Aron cautiously yet presciently did, nationalism's continued importance in the late twentieth century.

³⁷ See for example, Halley, Lawrence, *Ancient Affections: Ethnic Groups and Foreign Policy*, Praeger, New York, 1985; and Goldberg, David H., *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups: American and Canadian Jews Lobby for Israel*, Greenwood Press, New York and London, 1990.

³⁸ See, for example, Shurke, Astri and Noble, Lela Garner (eds), *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations*, Praeger Publishers, New York and London, 1977; Brown, Michael (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993; Moynihan, Patrick, *Pandemonium. Ethnicity and International Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993; and Esman, Milton J., and Telhami, Shibley (eds), *International Organizations and Ethnic Conflict*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995.

³⁹ Special Issue: The Nationalist Challenge, *Millennium*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Summer 1985; and Special Issue: Reimagining the Nation, *Millennium*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Winter 1991.

⁴⁰ Bloom, William, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.

⁴¹ Hinsley, F.H., *Nationalism and the International System*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1973.

⁴² Mayall, *op. cit.*, 1990.

⁴³ Mayall being a notable exception.

During the final third of the 20th century, ethnic conflicts over social, political or racial dominance – in turn or simultaneously – appear to be more likely than the continuation of the class struggle in the Marxist sense.⁴⁴

Instead, Carr predicted that the nation as a political organisation would become obsolete in the era of industrial world economy, and Morgenthau saw nationalism as ‘having had its day’ in the atomic age. Neglected, perhaps not, but nationalism was seen by many IR scholars, as a phenomenon whose impact on the world would progressively diminish. This belief, according to Mayall, was not so much due to International Relations scholars’ state-centric focus, but rather the result of their commitment to the ‘concept of universal rationality’ which hampered both Liberals and Realists in their analysis of nationalism.⁴⁵

While this assessment is corroborated by Carr and Morgenthau’s analysis, there appears nevertheless to be another reason for International Relations’ failure to foresee nationalism’s pervasiveness. That is, its tendency to consider the domestic and international realms as separate and independent from one another. And this is illustrated by International Relations’ implicit or explicit acceptance of a certain division of labour whereby the discipline focuses on the consequences of nationalism and its role in contemporary international politics, leaving to others the task of identifying its causes.⁴⁶ This, more than any other factor, would explain why International Relations has offered little in the way of an explanation of what nationalism is and why it arises. But can IR contribute to our understanding of nationalism, a phenomenon deemed to be quintessentially domestic? For even those who lament IR’s neglect of nationalism, and call for its study in IR, assume that the origins of nationalism are internal and do not, therefore, provide any clues as to the

⁴⁴ Aron, 1968, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ Mayall, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁴⁶ For a ‘pragmatic’ justification of this division of labour, see: Mayall, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

study of its causes might be approached from an International Relations perspective.⁴⁷ What this thesis suggests is that IR not only can but should do so, and this by revealing the international dimensions of nationalism. Since, as was stated earlier, secession is the logical outcome nationalist claims to self-determination, and given that it results in the creation of a new state (one of IR's foremost units of analysis), it may be considered as a good starting point for IR's investigation of the causes of nationalism. To do so, it is necessary to consider what the principle of self-determination entails and what its relationship to nationalism and secession is.

1.3 – Secession and national self-determination

The fact that secession is such a rare occurrence has frequently been interpreted as indicative of the fact that the principle of sovereign territorial integrity prevails over that of national self-determination, and that justice in the international system is therefore subordinate to order. Frequently used to describe any attempt by a national minority to exercise its right to self-determination, secession, it is argued, challenges the Westphalian normalisation of state sovereignty.⁴⁸ Yet, insofar as it is the expression of a desire to establish an independent state, secession does not as such challenge the statist foundation of the current world order. Indeed quite the opposite, secession reasserts the continuing centrality of the sovereign state as an international actor. On the other hand, because secessionist movements directly imperil the integrity if not the existence of the state from which they seek to break away, they tend to be viewed with hostility. Since a successful secession may set a precedent that in turn may inspire similar secessionist movements elsewhere, even the most

⁴⁷ In addition to the authors mentioned in footnote 16, see: Haas, Ernst, 'What is nationalism and why should we study it?' *International Organization*, Vol. 40, No. 3, Summer 1986, pp. 707-44.

⁴⁸ Pettman, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

isolated case risks posing a threat not only to the existing territorial status quo but more broadly to international order. Given that such fears are founded on the assumption that claims for national self-determination and secession are ultimately made by ethnic groups and given the multi-ethnic composition of most states, fulfilling such demands would indeed seem suicidal.⁴⁹ Hence the reluctance of established states to support secessionist claims.

While demands for self-determination are understood to be motivated by nationalist concerns, nationalism and secession are also often seen to be the result of the principle of self-determination.

Without a recognised and widely accepted doctrine of self-determination, few secessionist movements would arise. It is the availability of this doctrine and its enshrinement in the international moral order as a right that has facilitated, if not created, many separatist movements.⁵⁰

Elie Kedourie, who argued in 1960 that nationalism was itself ‘largely a doctrine of national self-determination’, more famously expressed this view.⁵¹ Yet the relationship between nationalism, secession and self-determination is fraught with ambiguities. Often understood to be the only internationally ‘sanctioned’ option allowing a people ‘legally’ to justify separation, the principle of self-determination of peoples is doubly problematic. First, debate as to what exactly is understood by self-determination has led to it being interpreted to mean anything from complete sovereignty to relative autonomy. Second, by referring to peoples, not individuals, the principle while seemingly giving moral-legal recognition to a community fails to define

⁴⁹ Many discussions of nationalism and secession stress the fact that most of today’s states are multi-ethnic and provide figures of the numbers of ethnic/linguistic groups that may one day make secessionist demands, thus showing the high potential for disruption. See, for example: Johnston, R.J., Knight, David B., and Eleonore Kofman, *National Self-Determination and Political Geography*, Croom Helm, London, New York and Sydney, 1988, pp. 6-7; Shehadi, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 3; Van Evera, 1994, p. 32; Levine, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

⁵⁰ Premdas, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

it. This ambiguity is perhaps best reflected in the way the meaning and implication attributed to the principle of self-determination have evolved since its inception. As Tom Franck notes,

the normative structure inevitably changed as the context within which the secessionist issue arose underwent profound historic change. These contexts, in brief, were the disintegration of the Spanish-American empire, the defeat of Imperial Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Sublime Porte, the rise of anti-colonialism and nationalism in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its system of satellites. Each context came at a different time and place and posed quite different political, cultural and social problems. Each context, perceived as a crisis of international order, gave rise to a topical prescription one specifically conceived as a response to that particular crisis, yet employing broadly normative terms.⁵²

Before discussing how self-determination was interpreted in response to these four momentous occasions, which have been described as the great waves of state creation,⁵³ it may be necessary briefly to recall the origins of the notion of self-determination.

a) The origins of self-determination

Both Kedourie and Isaiah Berlin attribute the birth of national self-determination to Kant's principle of self-determination. Whether such paternity was inevitable, as argued by Kedourie,⁵⁴ or a misfortunate accident, as argued by Berlin,⁵⁵ self-determination came to mean for the collectivity what it meant for the individual: liberty. The doctrine of self-determination appeared in the eighteenth century as the basis upon which a new order, following the demise of the great empires, would

⁵¹ Kedourie, Elie, *Nationalism*, Fourth Expanded Edition, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1993, p. 23.

⁵² Franck, 'Postmodern Tribalism and the Right to Secession,' in: Brölmann, Catherine, Lefebvre, René, and Zieck, Marjoleine, *Peoples and Minorities in International Law*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1993, pp. 4-5.

⁵³ Mayall, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁵⁴ Kedourie, *op. cit.*, 1993.

⁵⁵ Berlin, Isaiah, 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism,' Berlin, Isaiah, *The Sense of Reality. Studies in Ideas and their History*. Chatto & Windus, London 1996, pp. 232-48.

eventually emerge. Intrinsicly linked with the idea of democracy, self-determination was to correct the arbitrariness and injustices of dynastic rule. In theory, self-determination could be said to refer to the practice by which individuals freely express their political will by choosing their own government and, at this stage, reference to nationalism appears by no means necessary. The problem arises when the principle of self-determination is put into practice.

The French Revolution, by claiming that sovereignty lay ultimately in the nation, linked the expression of political free will to that of a collective entity: the nation. Yet, what was then understood as the nation did not entail a culturally or linguistically defined community. According to Connor Cruise O'Brien, the French Revolutionaries' use of *la nation* or *la patrie* ought to be compared with Spinoza's use of the concept of state, in both cases these are meant to refer to 'a system of government of a people.'⁵⁶ Reference to a cultural conception of the nation was irrelevant at this stage, as the French Revolution was not aimed at overthrowing a foreign rule but one that was deemed to be illegitimate. The nation stood here in opposition not to another nation but to *l'Etat* or *les Etats* in power. Moreover, as historians have shown, France had not achieved at the time of the Revolution the degree of cultural homogeneity often attributed to it.⁵⁷ Hobsbawm, for example, notes that at the time of the French Revolution, only half of French citizens spoke French, and only 12-13% spoke it 'correctly'.⁵⁸ The association between self-

⁵⁶ O'Brien, Connor Cruise, 'Nationalism and the French Revolution', in: Geoffrey Best (ed.), *The Permanent Revolution. The French Revolution and its Legacy, 1789-1989*, Fontana Press, London, 1988, p. 22.

⁵⁷ Weber, Eugene, *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France. 1870-1914*. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1978; and Braudel, Fernand, *The Identity of France, vol. I: History and Environment*, Collins, London, 1988.

⁵⁸ Hobsbawm, Eric, J., *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 60.

determination and nationalism, understood in cultural terms, would appear later, as the result of the internationalisation of the Revolution.⁵⁹

When the Revolution shifted into its expansionist phase, culminating with the Napoleonic conquests, self-determination in the conquered territories and more evidently in the German territories, became associated with cultural nationalism.⁶⁰ Self-determination meant not so much the acquisition of democratic rights as it entailed the overthrow of French foreign rule.

What appeared to the donors as a liberating universalism was seen by the recipients as an alien imperialism, evoking counter-nationalism. By the end of the nineteenth century such nationalism had spread throughout Europe.⁶¹

Understood as 'liberation' from an alien rule, self-determination was thus equated with nationalism. And, while remaining essential to the definition of self-determination, the acquisition of democracy was after the Napoleonic era to become a by-product of nationalism. Henceforth, democracy was perceived to be achievable only under conditions where foreign rule no longer prevailed and only among people who belonged to the same nation. Nowhere, was this more strongly expounded than in John Stuart Mill's writings on nationalism and representative government in 1861. For Mill, democracy was dependent upon common nationality, whether defined by race, language or shared history: '...it is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of governments should coincide in the main with those of nationalities.'⁶² Advocating what could be defined as a right to secession, he

⁵⁹ Morgenthau traces nationalism's birth to 1791, the year the King of France betrayed his own country by plotting against it with foreign monarchs. In so doing, 'the absolute monarchy failed the test as defender of the nation and its territory,' and nationalism became 'an integral part of individual liberty.' Morgenthau, 1957, *op. cit.*, p. 482.

⁶⁰ Berlin, Isaiah, 'The bent twig: one the rise of nationalism,' in: Berlin, Isaiah, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas*. John Murray, London, 1990, p. 246.

⁶¹ Howard, Michael, *The Causes of War*, Unwin paperbacks, London, 1983, p. 26.

⁶² Mill, John Stuart, 'Of nationality, as connected with representative government', *Representative Government*, Chapter XVI - in: *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1972, p. 362.

further stated: ‘Where the sentiment of nationality exists in any force, there is a *prima facie* case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart.’⁶³ Since most of the plebiscites that were conducted in the nineteenth century were aimed at achieving self-determination from an autocratic rule, which often also happened to be a foreign rule, nationalism and democracy became increasingly intermingled. In the words of Cobban:

we are bound to conclude that the association between nationalism and democracy, and therefore the theory of self-determination itself, may have been the result, not of their innate interdependence, but of historical accident.⁶⁴

b) Secession: uti possidetis or self-determination of minorities?

Despite its ascendancy as the legitimising principle for political organisation, the principle of national self-determination was not as such invoked when the former Latin-American colonies of the Spanish Empire were granted their independence. Instead, the dissolution of the Spanish Empire was conducted along, and gave rise to, the other cardinal principle of international relations, territorial integrity or the entitlement to *uti possidetis*.⁶⁵

Uti possidetis is derived from a Roman private law concept, which holds that pending litigation, the existing state of possession of immovable property is retained. Translated into international law, the phrase means that irrespective of the legitimacy of the original acquisition of territory, the existing disposition of the territory remains in effect until altered by a freely negotiated treaty.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 360-1.

⁶⁴ Cobban, Alfred, *National Self-Determination*, Oxford University Press, London, 1945, p. 7. It could be further hypothesized that it is this accidental collusion between foreign and autocratic rule which was to lend to nationalism its meaning as a liberation struggle against a foreign rule, whereas revolution would be used for those cases of liberation struggle against a non-foreign rule.

⁶⁵ Franck, 1993, *op. cit.*, 6.

⁶⁶ Young, Crawford, ‘The Heritage of Colonialism,’ in: Haberson, John W., and Rothchild, Donald, (eds), *Africa in World Politics. Post-Cold War Challenges*, 2nd Edition, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado and Oxford, 1995, footnote 12, p. 38.

Following the norm of *uti possidetis*, the Latin-American colonies thus achieved their independence and sovereignty within the former administrative boundaries established by Spain, and renounced any territorial claims outside their own territorial jurisdiction. The adoption and application of the norm was made possible by the fact that these newly independent territories formerly belonged to the same empire and by the fact that most of their inhabitants, at least those who had a voice in the process, were all ultimately descendants of the same culture. In that respect, there was no reason to appeal to culture to justify the claim to national self-determination.

By contrast to this period, the second wave of state creation, which resulted from the dissolution of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires was, at least originally, premised on a cultural conception of the right to national self-determination. President Wilson's proposition, in his fourteen points and four principles, that the principle of self-determination ought to be enshrined in international law, reflected an increased belief in the democratic legitimacy of the principle and a firm conviction that it provided the basis upon which peace would ultimately be achieved.⁶⁷ Self-determination had indeed acquired a new impetus in the wake of World War One and the Russian Revolution, when reference to self-determination of peoples became the foremost legitimising principle. Although the Western Powers were reluctant to introduce any right of national self-determination as part of the Peace Treaty, they had cornered themselves into accepting it.

The Western powers had not called the force of nationality into being; they had rather reluctantly recognized it when it appeared and used it, not to win the war, but to hasten its last stages. In so doing, and in the propaganda they poured forth, they had committed themselves to the principle of self-

⁶⁷ This belief was already very much present in the minds of Mazzini and other nationalists in the early XIXth Century.

determination. Under pressure from Woodrow Wilson they had, perhaps, gone farther than they intended.⁶⁸

While the principle of self-determination was perceived to be central to the Peace Conference, it is remarkable how little the principle was in fact applied on the ground. First, it should be noted that the principle of national self-determination was never considered with regards to the colonies. Moreover, in Europe itself, it quickly became clear that the principle of self-determination was more difficult to implement than originally anticipated. Language, which had been hitherto considered as the obvious indicator of nationality, revealed its limits on closer investigation as too many exceptions came to challenge its validity as a reliable criterion. In addition to these technical difficulties, there were fears of further ‘balkanisation’ that could threaten security in Europe. While Great power interest can thus be invoked, as Morgenthau does, it is important to note that the relatively restricted application of the principle of national self-determination owed much to the ambiguous meaning of the nation itself.

The exact implications of national self-determination – relative sovereignty within a state or outright secession – were resolved only a year after the end of World War one, in a statement which clearly established the relative unimportance of the right in international law. The committee of Jurists explicitly indicated in 1920 that Positive International Law

did not recognize the right of national groups, as such, to separate themselves from the state of which they form part by the simple expression of that wish, anymore than it recognizes the right of other states to claim such a separation.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Cobban, 1945, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ ‘Report of the International Committee of Jurists...upon the Legal aspects of the Aaland Islands Question’, *League of Nations Official Journal*, Special Supplement, No. 3, October 1920, pp. 5-6; quoted in Cobban, 1945, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Self-determination as secession was a principle to be applied in times of crisis, but in ordinary times its relevance was to be limited. The overriding prevalence of state sovereignty and territorial integrity was thus further asserted and reinforced, not merely for power political reasons, but also because of the sheer impracticality of the principle thus defined and the injustices it risked creating in turn. The clause that was included in Woodrow Wilson's original draft of the Covenant of the League of Nations and which provided for the possibility of territorial adjustment, 'pursuant to the principle of self-determination,' never found its way in the Covenant's final draft and was instead reduced to the non-committal form of Article X.⁷⁰

During the inter-war period, national self-determination was not totally dismissed and did find some form of expression in a number of treaties, which included provisions for the protection of minorities.⁷¹ Yet again, no general article ensuring the rights of all minorities in all member states was ever incorporated into the League's Covenant.⁷² Several years later, Hitler's appeal to the rights of German-speaking minorities to justify his invasion of Austria and Czechoslovakia demonstrated how minority rights could be invoked by a belligerent state to lay irredentist claims on its neighbours.⁷³ Following WWII, reference to minority rights within international law was dropped altogether and no provisions for it were to be made in the United Nations Charter. And, it was only with the adoption of Article 27 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, that minority rights were once again formally reintroduced in international law.⁷⁴ As will be discussed

⁷⁰ Cobban, 1945, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

⁷¹ For listing, see F. Caporoti, *Study on the rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities*, UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1979/384/rev. I.

⁷² Lerner, N., 'The Evolution of Minority Rights in International Law', in: Brölmann *et al.*, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁷³ Mayall, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁷⁴ The article stipulates that: 'In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with other members

further, below, subsequent developments in international law on minority rights have attempted to further guarantee their protection but always within the state where they reside and hence with no mention of any right of self-determination.

c) Decolonisation: self-determination as uti possidetis

The principle of self-determination acquired a new meaning and impetus after WWII with the movement for decolonisation. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, nationalist movements world wide (and Eritrea represented one such example) framed their struggle for national liberation in anti-colonial terms, for it was seen as providing the necessary international legitimacy and legality to their claims for self-determination and independence. It is again necessary to note that no such provision was originally made in the UN charter, even within the Trusteeship system:

the concept of self-determination, as envisaged by the drafters of the Charter, did not refer to the right of dependent peoples to be independent, or indeed even to vote.⁷⁵

Moreover, as article 77 of the UN Charter illustrates, the provisions included in the trusteeship system only applied to three categories of territories. The first category, which was to comprise the great majority of the Trust's territories, included those already held under mandate, i.e., territories taken from the defeated powers after WWI. The second category included those territories which were detached from enemy states as a result of the Second World War.⁷⁶ The third category included territories voluntarily placed under the trusteeship system by states responsible for

of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language.' See: Brownlie, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

⁷⁵ Higgins, Rosalyn, 'Comments on: Post-modern tribalism and the right to secession,' in: Bröimann, Catherine, Lefeber, René, and Zieck, Marjoleine (eds), *Peoples and Minorities in International Law*, Martin Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1993, p. 29.

⁷⁶ It may be here appropriate to note an important anomaly to this clause. The Italian colony of Somalia, which had been granted the status of trusteeship under this category, was nevertheless entrusted to its former colonial over ruler, Italy.

their administration. Suffice it to say that no such case was ever considered. Even Chapter XI, which referred to all those colonies and non self-governing territories not placed under the Trusteeship system, and whose inclusion in the Charter was the result of the growing anti-colonial movement, remained cautious, invoking a right to self-government but not to self-determination.

The interpretation of self-determination as independence from colonial rule was in effect a subsequent development unsupported by any pre-existing legal framework. It emerged with the adoption in December 1960 by the United Nations General Assembly of resolution 1514 (XV), also known as the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, and resolution 1541(XV), frequently referred to as the 'salt-water principle'. Resolution 1541(XV) declared that self-determination was applicable only

in respect of a territory which is geographically separate and is distinct ethnically and/or culturally from the country administering it.⁷⁷

It further specified that self-determination was applicable specifically to the 'relationship between the metropolitan State and the territory concerned.'⁷⁸ The right of self-determination was thus applied in much the same way as it had been during the decolonisation of Latin-America and independence was granted only within the boundaries of those territories inherited upon achieving independence. As a result, the principles of national self-determination and of territorial integrity/*uti possidetis* were incorporated alongside one another. Defined as de-colonisation from European control, the right of self-determination was thus confined in its expression and secession appeared to be henceforth restricted. Has anything changed since then?

⁷⁷ Reprinted in: Brownlie, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Who is entitled to the right of self-determination? And what does self-determination entail?

d) Self-determination today

On the face of it, it would seem that not much has changed since the 1960s. Indeed, contrary to what might at first seem to be implied by the inclusion of a principle of self-determination in the UN Charter, there are in fact no provisions for secession in current international law whether in the Charter or in the Human Rights Conventions.⁷⁹ While mention is made, in articles 1(2) and 55 of the UN Charter, to self-determination, this is not done with reference to independence or secession. Neither does the tendency to equate minorities and peoples, thereby allowing the right of self-determination of peoples to refer also to minorities, appear to be supported or sanctioned in any international legal framework. While provisions for the rights of minorities exist, they are distinct and independent from those addressing the rights of peoples to self-determination. Indeed, according to Rosalyn Higgins, the right of self-determination is nowhere juxtaposed to the concept of minorities:

Minorities as such do not have a right of self-determination. That means, in effect, that they have no right of secession, to independence, or to join with comparable groups in other states.⁸⁰

Although from this we may deduce that the peoples who are entitled to self-determination are not minorities, it remains unclear who the said people are. As for the notion of self-determination itself, there is a debate amongst international lawyers. Some have suggested that a distinction be made between external and

⁷⁹ Higgins, Rosalyn, *Problems and Process. International Law and How We Use it*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 111-28. The same point is made by Franck, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁸⁰ Higgins, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

internal self-determination.⁸¹ While the former would include the right to secession and irredentism, the latter would refer to the right to exercise self-determination within the boundaries of an existing state, i.e., the right to democratic representation. As far as its application is concerned, the right of self-determination, while no longer confined to the 'salt water' principle, appears nevertheless to remain bound to the norm of *uti possidetis*. The dismantling of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia all took place within the same guidelines which governed the decolonisation of the Spanish Latin-American Empire. The international community's intent to restrict any new state formation to this principle was explicitly expressed in its response to the dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia and its desire to see the new successor states emerge within the boundaries of the former administrative boundaries of their constituent units.⁸²

The resurgence of ethnic conflicts throughout the world has reopened the debate as to whether there ought to be a right of secession enshrined within international law so as to hamper the violence which generally accompanies the birth of new states.⁸³ Should secession be internationally regulated so that it is not left at the mercy of haphazard power struggles? The problem with this, is that rather than avoiding taking a position on the matter, it sanctions violence and successful warfare as the criterion for sovereignty. For 'even if international law does not authorise secession, it will eventually recognise the reality once it has occurred and been made

⁸¹ See, for example: Klabbers, Jan, and Lefeber, René, 'Africa: Lost Between Self-Determination and Uti Possidetis,' in: Brölmann, *et al.*, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁸² Weller, Mark, 'The International Response to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia,' *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 86, 1992, pp. 569-607.

⁸³ For a discussion of the ethical questions raised by this issue, see, Bucheit, Lee C., *Secession: The Legitimacy of Self-determination*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1978; Buchanan, 1991, *op. cit.*; and Mayall, James, 'Self-determination Reconsidered: Should there be a Right to Secede?' *The Oxford International Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1, Winter 1993, pp. 4-6.

effective.’⁸⁴ If indeed we are to lay the basis for a restrictive international right to secede, i.e., one that does not merely grant independence to all those seeking it, how are we to distinguish those cases warranting independence from those which do not? As was the case with the issue of self-determination in the pre-WWI period, there is currently a belief that secession can be attributed to an identifiable ‘people’. While ‘language’ was the determinant criterion then, today it is ‘ethnicity’, as illustrated by existing proposals for Yugoslavia’s ethnic partition.⁸⁵ But are such proposals justified?

1.4 – Argument and structure of the thesis

As its sub-title indicates, this thesis takes issue with the ethnic interpretation of nationalism and secession. It does so by presenting a three-pronged critique of the ethnonationalist approach. First, it highlights in chapter two, the internal inconsistencies in the works of Walker Connor and Anthony Smith, two of the most prominent representatives of the ethnonationalist approach. Chapter three’s discussion of the anthropological literature on ethnicity in Africa leads us in turn to question the assumption that ethnic groups are pre-modern, an assumption upon which the ethnonationalist model is founded. Finally, by showing why the ethnic interpretation is not substantiated by the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland, chapters four and five challenge the ethnonationalist approach’s empirical contention.

⁸⁴ Higgins, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁸⁵ Kaufman, Chaim, ‘Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars’, in: Brown, Michael, Coté, Owen R., Lynn-Jones, Sean M., and Steven E. Miller, (eds), *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1997; Mearsheimer, John, ‘Shrink Bosnia to save it’, *New York Times*, March 31, 1993; Mearsheimer, John J. and Pape, Robert, ‘The Answer: A partition Plan for Bosnia,’ *The New Republic*, June 14, 1993, pp. 22-28; and Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Van Evera, ‘Autonomy for Kosovars is No Longer an Option’, *International Herald Tribune*, Tuesday, April 20, 1999.

In arguing that excessive reliance on ethnicity as an independent variable is misguided, this thesis seeks to illustrate how International Relations may contribute to the study of nationalism, in terms not just of its consequences, but also of its causes. Rather than seeing nationalism as a paradoxical trend in an era of increased globalisation, as the ethnic interpretation assumes, it follows James Mayall when he writes:

the two trends [nationalism and globalization] are not contradictory but symbiotic, appearing in the world together and constantly reinforcing one another ever since.⁸⁶

If nationalism is thus seen, not as antithetical but as concomitant to internationalisation, then it should be investigated as a phenomenon whose sources are not only internal but also international. The argument is that, if International Relations has anything to contribute to the study of nationalism, it is precisely through the use of its traditional objects of enquiry such as the state, international society, transnational movements and war.

While the approach adopted here is not state-centric, in the sense of the notorious billiard-ball model, it will nevertheless focus on the state, and more specifically on what Anderson has named the 'modular nation-state.' Anderson's notion of the modular nation-state enables us to view nationalism's world-wide prevalence, not as a fortuitous, haphazard collection of isolated domestic events, but as the result of the diffusion and internationalisation of an idea that first emerged in the Americas and in Europe, and was then imitated elsewhere. The objective will therefore be to highlight the ways in which nationalism and secession may themselves be defined and constituted by the state which, once 'modularised' as the

nation-state, was exported throughout the world through the expansion of the society of states. Although the spread of nationalism is described here as a purely uni-directional process, it is by no means assumed to be so. Indeed, the ‘resurgence’ of nationalisms in the West in the late 1960s and 1970s can be explained as an imitation of the decolonisation process in Africa and Asia. An illustration of this is provided by the title given to one of the first pamphlets advocating Quebec’s secession from Canada: *Nègres blancs d’Amérique*.⁸⁷

The following chapter will review the theoretical literature on the origins of nationalism and thus explain the nature of our main question – i.e., whether the secessions of Eritrea and Somaliland confirm the ethnic interpretation or corroborate instead the view that nations are modern creations. It will present the primordialist-modernist debate that has come to characterise this field of enquiry, it will outline the main contentions of the ethnonationalist approach, and it will identify the factors singled-out by ‘modernists’ scholars as propitious for the emergence of nationalism. As will be shown, most of the theories on the origins of nationalism presented in this chapter tend to focus on Europe. In order to determine whether or not any additional factors need to be considered when analysing the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland, chapter three will review the literature on the rise of nationalism in Africa. Given the centrality of the concept of ethnicity, not only theoretically but also with regard to proposal for boundary adjustments, this chapter will also include a discussion of the anthropological literature on ethnicity in Africa. Indeed, many of the theoretical

⁸⁶ Mayall, James, ‘Globalization and the Future of Nationalism,’ in: the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership, *The End of the Century. The Future in the Past*. Kodansha International, Tokyo, New York and London, 1995, p. 447.

⁸⁷ Vallières, Pierre, *Nègres blancs d’Amérique: autobiographie précoce d’un “terroriste” québécois*, Éditions Parti pris, Montréal, 1968.

breakthroughs in the study of ethnicity have been made by anthropologists investigating its meaning in the African context.

Equipped with the theoretical frameworks outlined in the two aforementioned chapters, chapters four and five will proceed to examine the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland. These chapters will attempt to provide comprehensive historical accounts of the emergence of nationalism in Eritrea and Somaliland and assess the relevance of the theoretical models previously identified. The conclusion will then return to the three questions raised at the outset of the thesis. It will first explain why ethnicity is of little heuristic value when it comes to understanding the secessions of Eritrea and Somaliland and will evaluate the relative merits and shortcomings of the modernist approach. Second, it will discuss whether or not these two cases challenge the existing interpretation of self-determination and justify the need to redraw Africa's boundaries. Third, it will suggest how International Relations may contribute to our understanding of the causes of nationalism by highlighting the international dimensions of nationalism. Finally, it will discuss some of the implications of the thesis' critique of the ethnic interpretation.

Chapter 2 – Theories of nationalism

This chapter reviews the main theories about the origins of nations and nationalism against which the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland will later be examined. More specifically, it introduces the main debate that has come to characterise this field of enquiry. Indeed, much of the literature on the origins of nationalism is of a polemical nature and positions have tended to polarise around what has come to be defined as the primordialist-modernist debate.¹ The question posed at the onset, as to whether Eritrea and Somaliland corroborate the views that nations are ethnically rooted or modern creations, reflects this debate.

The first section of this chapter begins by presenting the history of the modernist-primordialist debate, retracing its origins and the main points of contention. The second section then turns to the ethnonationalist approach. This approach emerged in reaction to the modernist position which dominated the study of nationalism until the nationalist ‘revival’ of the 1960s and 1970s. Although the main proponents of the ethnonationalist approach claim to endorse a modernist stance on the origins of nationalism, it will be argued that given their understanding of ethnicity their position is ultimately a reformulation of the primordialist position. The third section introduces some of the more recent research on nationalism. It examines more specifically three of the factors singled-out as propitious for the formation of nations: written language, the state and war.

¹ For a comprehensive review of the works published before 1970, see: Smith, Anthony D., *Theories of Nationalism*, 2nd edition, Duckworth, London, 1983, first published in 1971. Recent reviews include: Smith, Anthony D., *Nationalism and Modernism. A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998; McCrone, David, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, and Ericksen, Thomas Hylland, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Pluto Press, London and Boulder, Colorado, 1993.

2.1 – *The primordialist-modernist debate*

Despite the vast number of publications devoted to the study of nationalism, theoretically and empirically, there is no agreed definition of what the nation is. Is the nation identifiable through objective criteria and if so, what distinguishes it from other social groupings? Is it instead a social contract that is constantly re-negotiated through daily plebiscite and which thus expresses the will of individuals?² The tension between these two conceptions of the nation – organic and voluntaristic – was more recently translated into the debate as to whether nations are expressions of age old feelings of belonging, rooted in language, ethnicity, or territory, or are instead modern constructs, inventions or imaginations. These contrasting views of the nation have been reflected in the scholarly literature on nationalism and have developed into what has been commonly referred to as the primordialist – modernist debate.³

The implications of the debate as to whether nations are a modern construction or the emanation of a perennial ethnicity are not merely academic. One of the most frequent ways nationalists attempt to discredit their ‘opponents’ claims to nationhood, and hence to political sovereignty or independence, is by challenging their historical foundations. Indeed, and somewhat inexplicably, there has been a

² This position, advocated by those who adopt a more ‘subjective’ or voluntaristic view of the nation, was first formulated by Ernest Renan in 1882. Renan, Ernest, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* Calmann-Levy, Paris, 1882.

³ This debate has sometimes also been referred to as the essentialist – instrumentalist or constructivist debate. While the adjective essentialist is to some extent accurate, the equation implied between modernism and instrumentalism is somewhat more problematic. One could very well endorse a primordialist view of nations yet resort to an instrumentalist explanation. In this respect elites and politicians would be instrumental in awakening the slumbering nation. As for the word constructivism, although it appropriately depicts the intellectual position of those modernist who argue that nationalism precedes the nation (Gellner and Hobsbawm, for example), it is problematic because of the recent post-modern connotation this concept has acquired. Smith has also portrayed this debate as the archaeological Vs gastronomical views. See: Smith, Anthony D., ‘Gastronomy or Geology? The role of Nationalism in the Construction of Nations,’ *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1995, pp. 3-23.

tendency to equate antiquity with authenticity. The genuineness of one's claim to independent nation-statehood will thus tend to be measured with respect to its historicity. Thus, in the same way that opposing groups contest the validity of each other's historical claims to nationhood, theorists of nationalism debate the historical reality or authenticity of nations.

Primordialists insist that nations have existed since time immemorial. They are accredited with the "sleeping beauty" thesis according to which each nation that has not yet manifested itself is only awaiting for the appropriate leader, or circumstance, to re-awaken. This organic view of nationalism holds that peoples are naturally divided into nations. It was first articulated by the German Romantics, namely, Johan Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), generally described as the first European writer to develop a comprehensive philosophy of nationalism, and Johan Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), most famously remembered for his fourteen *Addresses to the German Nation*.⁴ Among those who uphold a primordialist conception of the nation are many nationalists themselves and a number of socio-biologists, historians and social scientists; although, as we will later see, few scholars now uphold such an extreme essentialist conception of nationalism.

The modernist position emerged in reaction to the organic and atavistic conception of the nation put forth by nationalists and primordialists. They argued instead that nationalism was a recent phenomenon rooted in the ideals of the Enlightenment. The French and American revolutions, where the notions of citizenship, popular participation, democracy and liberalism were for the first time explicitly put forth, are seen as landmarks in the establishment of the nation as the sole legitimate structuring feature in modern politics. The shift from agrarian or

feudal to industrial or capitalist societies is also considered to be of foremost importance as the dynamic factor responsible for the advent of nations and nationalism. Industrialisation entailed greater social mobility and rationalisation which, in turn, allowed for the expression of the enlightenment ideals.

a) *Early modernists*

In order to understand why the study of nationalism has become polarised around the primordialist and modernist positions, it is necessary to briefly review its history. Nationalism was first introduced as a subject of academic inquiry by Carlton Hayes (1882-1964) and Hans Kohn (1891-1971). Hayes and Kohn analysed nationalism as it crystallised following World War I and formulated the main tenets of the modernist position. Kohn conceived of nationalism as having arisen from a dialectical relation with the modern state, the political form to which it gave a meaning.

“Nationality is a state of mind corresponding to a political fact”, or striving to correspond to a political fact. This definition reflects the genesis of nationalism and modern nationality, which was born in the fusion of a certain state of mind with a given political form. The state of mind, the idea of nationalism, imbued the form with a new content and meaning; the form provided the idea with implements for the organized expression of its manifestations and aspirations.⁵

According to Kohn, the emergence of nationalism in the West was preceded by the formation of the state and was essentially a political process instigated by the bourgeoisie’s need for a territorially based centralised market. Nationalism, as it originated in Western Europe, was imbued with contractual and voluntaristic notions of popular sovereignty and citizenship as expressed during the French Revolution.

⁴ Snyder, Louis, L., *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, St James Press, Chicago and London, 1990.

⁵ Kohn, Hans, *The Idea of Nationalism*, Macmillan, New York, 1945, p. 18.

This territorial and civic conception of political association contrasted with the form of nationalism that subsequently emerged in Eastern Europe, or more specifically in Germany; a nationalism possessing a more ethnic content, as expressed in the Romanticist vision of the German nation/*volk* of Fichte and Herder.⁶ This latter form of nationalism, which according to Kohn, was more authoritarian, collectivist and organic, appears in largely agrarian societies. Here, it was not the bourgeoisie which was responsible for igniting the nationalist trend, as only a few traders composed the bourgeoisie of these mainly peasant societies. Nationalism, as it emerged east of the Rhine, was instead the creation of an intelligentsia which forged the conception and content of the nation.

Kohn's distinction between western and eastern nationalism is important for it has inspired the now commonly used dichotomy: ethnic vs. civic nationalism. It was also the first to highlight the different forms nationalism took in different parts of Europe.⁷ By contrast to Kohn's spatial dichotomy, Hayes provided an evolutionary typology of nationalism. Hayes' main argument was that nationalism had moved from initially being a positive force to becoming a negative and exclusive doctrine, from 'a blessing to a curse'.⁸ He thus distinguished the liberal and humanitarian forms of nationalism developed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the integral nationalism that arose with imperialism.⁹ Despite their differences, both historians concurred: nationalism was modern and had originated in Europe. In so claiming, Kohn and Hayes laid the basis for what was to become known as the modernist paradigm.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Gellner was to push this distinction further in his model of "time-zones" in Europe. See: Gellner, Ernest, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1994.

⁸ Hayes, Carlton, *Essays on Nationalism*, New York, 1926.

⁹ Hayes, Carlton, *The Historical Evolution of modern Nationalism*, New York, 1931.

Following Kohn and Hayes pioneering efforts, it seemed that nationalism, both as a social phenomenon and as the subject of academic inquiry, had receded to the backdrop of most people's concern. While nationalism had indeed been relegated to the bottom of many university syllabi, it would nevertheless be inaccurate, as Hobsbawm contends, to claim that there is little need to examine the literature that appeared prior to the theoretical watershed of the 1980s.¹⁰ On the contrary, it is necessary to revert to some of the works published in the 1950s and 1960s, in order to understand where the present positions emerged from, as some of the most influential works on the topic were published in that period.

b) Classical modernism

In 1953, Karl Deutsch set out to develop a theory of nationalism that would expand on the more qualitative accounts hitherto provided, by devising testable and quantifiable hypotheses. By claiming that cultures were rooted and sustained by communication,¹¹ Deutsch argued that nationality was more than a mere 'sentiment' or 'frame of mind' without any tangible causes, but was predicated upon the development of effective communication networks which allowed members of a community to feel a sense of commonality.¹² By analysing and measuring a number of indicators (such as the development of the communications networks, urbanisation, student population), one could ascertain a society's degree of cultural cohesion. Smith dismissed the pertinence of Deutsch's theorising for our understanding of nationalism on the grounds that the latter was mostly concerned

¹⁰ Hobsbawm, Eric J., *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 1-6.

¹¹ Deutsch, Karl, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An inquiry into the foundations of nationality*, MIT Press, New York, 2nd ed., 1966 [1953].

¹² Deutsch, 1966, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

with the problem of nationality rather than with nationalism per se.¹³ Yet this exclusion seems somewhat unwarranted given that most of the present debate is premised on the answer that is given to the question: what is the nation? Furthermore, Deutsch's insights led to the publication of an important body of literature often referred as the 'nation-building' school of nationalism.¹⁴ Analysing the process of 'nation-building' in the newly independent countries, these scholars saw here evidence that nations were not only modern, but also that they could be constructed by political elites and with adequate means of communications to mobilise the mass.

Another landmark of 'classical modernism' is Elie Kedourie's 1960 publication, *Nationalism*. Kedourie asserted that nationalism was not 'some inarticulate and powerful feeling which is present always and everywhere.'¹⁵ Rather, he contended, nationalism was a 'doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century'.¹⁶ He sought to demonstrate this by retracing the emergence of this particular way of conceiving politics in the history of ideas and, more specifically, in Kant's notion of self-determination.¹⁷ In doing so, Kedourie was formalising and further substantiating the assumption that had guided much of the earlier works of historians of nationalism for whom nationalism was a product of the French Revolution. As regard to the spread of the nationalism outside Europe, Kedourie demonstrated how dissatisfied and alienated third world western-educated

¹³ Smith, 1971, *op. cit.*, footnote 17, p. 304.

¹⁴ Deutsch, Karl, and Foltz, William (eds), *Nation-Building*, Atherton press, Chicago, 1963.

¹⁵ Kedourie, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁷ As was noted in the introduction, Isaiah Berlin also traced the idea of national self-determination to Kant. For a comprehensive and illuminating presentation of the transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism and its implications for future conceptions of the nation, see: Thom, Martin, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, Verso, London and New York, 1995.

elites imported the doctrine to their respective countries.¹⁸ It was in response to Kedourie's analysis of nationalism that Ernest Gellner was to provide the modernist position with its most radical and systematic formulation in 1964.¹⁹

Gellner agreed with Kedourie that nationalism was '*logically* contingent, i.e., that it had none of the naturalness attributed to it'.²⁰ Yet he disagreed with the implication that it was therefore *sociologically* contingent. Gellner believed that Kedourie had overemphasised the role of ideas and from this, he provided an account of the emergence of nationalism grounded in the revolutionary socio-economic transformations that occurred through industrialisation.²¹ Nationalism, he argued, was a functional response to the shift from agrarian to industrial societies and was the result of industrial society's need for a socially mobile, substitutable and literate working force. Workers' mobility could only be insured through the development and dissemination of a common, context-free, standardised language. And the development of a common language in turn, provided industrial society with its main cultural attribute, a culture which Gellner argued became 'exo-socialised' modern man's main object of loyalty.²²

Nationalism, therefore, was not the product and expression of a pre-existing nation, for it was nationalism which engendered the nation. The cultures nationalism 'claims to revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition'²³ and are necessary to satisfy the needs of industrialisation. Contrary to what had hitherto been maintained by Liberals and Marxists, increased industrialism

¹⁸ Kedourie, Elie, 'Introduction,' in: Kedourie, Elie (ed.), *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, Frank Cass, London, 1971.

¹⁹ Gellner, Ernest, 'Nationalism' in: *Thought and Change*, Weidefeld and Nicholson, London, 1964.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.151.

²¹ This theory was further developed in: Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1983.

²² Gellner, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

could therefore not be expected to induce the demise of nationalism for it was industrialism itself which had been responsible for its advent. Nationalism, in short, was a sociological necessity in the age of industrialism.

While they approach nationalism from different angles and disciplines – Deutsch's focus on communications theory, Kedourie on the history of ideas, and Gellner on industrialisation – these authors all agree that nations and nationalism are neither organic nor primordial and are instead the products of transformations that occurred during the eighteenth century. For this reason they are generally grouped together as belonging to the modernist school. Modernist accounts dominated the theoretical literature on nationalism until the 1970s, that is until the nationalist revival brought about the return of the primordialist position. This is not to say that modernism fell into disrepute, quite the contrary. As will be seen later, the early 1980s saw the publication of some of the most influential works on nationalism, all of which embraced the modernist paradigm but sought to either temper it or push further some of its claims.

c) The 'primordialist' critique

The so-called resurgence of nationalisms in the 1970s, which modernist theorists had, according to their critics, failed to foresee, brought about a return of primordialist theories of nationalism, albeit in a somewhat modified form. Rather than speaking about the primordality of nations, these critics of modernism argue instead either that some nations have pre-modern historical roots, this group being referred to as the perennialists, or that they have ethnic roots. Among the latter, that is those who uphold the ethnic roots of nationalism thesis, one can distinguish between those who define ethnicity in biological terms and those who define it in

cultural terms.²⁴ The most prominent advocates of the ethnic roots of nationalism thesis, namely Walker Connor and Anthony Smith, reject biological conceptions of ethnicity. While they concede that nationalism and nations are modern,²⁵ they nevertheless challenge the fact that nations are created or invented by modernity *ex nihilo*. Modernity for them is not a constitutive factor, but a catalyst which transforms existing pre-modern ethnic communities into nations. Because they uphold a modernist view of nations and nationalism, scholars such as Connor and Smith do not consider themselves to be primordialists. Smith could to some extent be considered as a perennialist, but to avoid further confusion and because of his focus on ethnicity, he alongside Connor, are best described as *ethnonationalists*. Given that scholars trying to come to terms with nationalism, namely in the field of International Relations, have frequently endorsed their views, it is necessary to discuss their position in greater detail.²⁶ But before we turn to these two authors and expound the main contentions of the ethnonationalist approach, let us briefly consider the perennialist critique of modernism.

²⁴ van den Berghe, Pierre, 'Race and ethnicity: a sociobiological perspective, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1978, pp. 401-11; van den Berghe, Pierre, 'Ethnicity and the sociobiology debate,' in: Rex, John, and Mason, David (eds), *Theories of Ethnic and Race Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 246-63. The best known exponent of cultural primordialism is Clifford Geertz. Geertz, Clifford (ed.), *Old Societies and New States*, Free Press, New York, 1963, Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Fontana Press, London, 1973; see also: Shils, Edward, 'Primordial, personal, sacred and civil ties,' *British Journal of Sociology*, No. 7, 1957 pp. 13-45; and Fishman, Joshua, *Language and Nationalism: Two Integrative Essays*, Newbury House, Rowley, MA, 1972.

²⁵ According to Connor, national consciousness is modern and made possible by the increased communications networks (their nature and density) but also, and more importantly, by the popularisation of the notion of self-determination of nations, whose origins he traces to 1865, date at which the expression appeared as part of the Proclamation on the Polish Question. See Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 38 and footnote 27, p. 60. Connor reiterates this view when he concludes in an article originally published in 1991: 'In any event, claims that a nation existed prior to the late nineteenth century should be treated cautiously.' Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 224. Smith, Anthony D., *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981; and *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.

²⁶ Most of the articles published on nationalism or ethnicity in World Politics or in International Security refer to these two authors more than any other scholar of nationalism.

Perennialists may be defined as those scholars, mainly historians, who trace the origins of some nations not to eighteenth century modernity but earlier, either to the Middle Ages or Antiquity.²⁷ Seton-Watson's division between old and new nations, that is between pre-1789 and post-1789 nations, best illustrates this view.²⁸ Perennialists tend to agree that nationalism, as an ideology is the product of eighteenth century political history, but uphold that nationalism as a sentiment predates it. The argument is that nations have in certain cases existed before the emergence of nationalism as an ideology and can therefore not have been created by it, as Gellner contends. Perennialists aim not so much to provide an alternative theory of nationalism, but show exceptions to the modernist paradigm. Insofar as they are able to do so convincingly, then it can be said that they do challenge the assumption that nationalism created the nation.

Although intuitively attractive, there are nevertheless several problems with this position. First, there is the question as to whether these authors are not retrospectively reading into history, and misrepresenting and thus mislabelling pre-modern communities by calling them nations.²⁹ This in turn raises the question as to when is a nation? Indeed, some perennialists have suggested that nationalism as a sentiment could be said to exist even if confined to a portion of the nation's population. Hastings, for instance, argues that one can speak of nation even when the majority of its population, namely the peasants, do not share a feeling of belonging to it, as long as a portion of the elite that goes beyond the ruling-class believe it.³⁰ The

²⁷ See for example: Armstrong, John, *Nations Before Nationalism*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1982; and Hastings, Adrian, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

²⁸ Seton-Watson, Hugh, *Nations and States*, Methuen, London, 1977, pp. 6-13.

²⁹ This is the critique Susan Reynolds addresses to Seton-Watson. Reynolds, Susan, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984.

³⁰ Hastings, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

fact that nationalism as a sentiment is not shared or felt by the majority of the people who are encompassed within the said nation, namely the peasants, is not seen as invalidating his thesis. But can one then really speak of a nation? Is nationalism after all not a mass phenomenon? As we can see, the perennialists raise more questions than they provide answers.

To summarise the positions thus far presented we can say that primordialists claim that humanity is naturally divided into nations and that the nation is an organic community and nationalism its expression. Modernists argue instead that nations and nationalism are products of modernity. Ethnicists agree with modernists to say that nationalism and nations are modern, but disagree with the statement that nationalism creates the nation. Finally, perennialists say that some Western nations emerged prior to the eighteenth century socio-economic and ideological revolutions even though the nationalist sentiment might have been restricted to a small part of the nation's population.

2.2 – The ethnic roots of nationalism³¹

The way in which contemporary discussions of nationalism have been affected by the study of ethnicity is noteworthy. Kohn's western/eastern dichotomy has been resuscitated in the civic/ethnic diad, Connor speaks of ethnonationalism and Smith assigns to the *ethnie* a determining role in the emergence and formation of the national project. But why the need to introduce an additional concept to our understanding of nationalism? Why ethnicity?

³¹ The author had the privilege of being able to discuss these issues with Professors Connor and Smith during the academic year 1994/95. Although I have included references to the relevant sources, much of the discussion that follows is based on these interviews.

There seem to be at least two explanations for this: first, is the popularisation of the concept of ethnicity, notably in the social sciences,³² second, is the need to find an explanation for nationalism's emotional appeal, the passion it fosters. This passion, it is believed by ethnicists, cannot be aroused by inventions or creations. If such was the case why would other forms of associations or 'identities', which are so evidently constructed not be able to generate similar emotional loyalty and dedication? Simply stated why is one willing to die for one's nation but not for one's class? The answer is that there must be something particular about nations if individuals are ready for such sacrifice.

a) *Nationalism's emotional appeal*

Published in 1972, Walker Connor's article 'Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying' set out to diagnose the failures of American academia with regard to the study of nationalism.³³ As the title indicates this was a critique explicitly addressed to Deutsch and his followers and their incapacity to predict the resurgence of nationalism in the 1970s. According to Connor, the 'nation-building school' was plagued by a series of theoretical misassumptions, namely their belief that modernisation leads to assimilation, which culminated in their refusal to contend with the 'true nationalism', i.e., ethnonationalism. By not acknowledging nationalism's ethnic roots, modernists had underrated the emotional appeal of

³² Because the academic history of ethnicity is intimately bound up with the evolution of anthropology in Africa, it will be discussed in the next chapter. For descriptions of the popularisation of the concept of ethnicity, see Glazer, Nathan, and Moynihan, Daniel, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1975; Chapman, Malcolm, McDonald, Maryon, and Elizabeth Tonkin, 'Introduction,' in: Chapman, Malcolm, McDonald, Maryon, and Elizabeth Tonkin (eds), *History and Ethnicity*, ASA monograph 27, Routledge, 1989, pp. 1-21; Amselle, Jean-Loup et M'Bokolo, *Au coeur de l'ethnie. Ethnie, tribalisme et Etat en Afrique*, Editions la Découverte, Paris, 1985, and Ericksen, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³³ Connor, 'Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?' in: *Ethnonationalism. The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994, pp. 29-66. This article was originally published in *World Politics* in 1972.

nationalism and thus failed to foresee and explain its re-emergence. Smith opposed modernist accounts of the origins of nations and nationalism for reasons similar to those of Connor. He pointed to the fact that nationalism, rather than waning under the pressures of economic modernisation, had on the contrary gained a new impetus.³⁴ Top-down nation-building had not stifled bottom-up ethnic nationalism. Moreover, if nations, as argued by modernists, were merely a product of industrialisation's needs and were created by political or intellectual elites, how could one explain that the masses respond so readily and so emotionally to the nationalist appeal?

Both Connor and Smith emphasise nationalism's emotional strength, a strength which it is assumed cannot be conveyed by 'something' that is 'merely' political and quite recent. Thus, while nations and nationalism are, they agree, modern, their emotional appeal cannot be explained if they are considered to have been constructed *ex nihilo* by modernity. In order to reconcile their modernist understanding of nationalism (as political consciousness) with their primordial conception of nationalism (as a cultural sentiment), they introduce the notion of ethnicity. Ethnicity is thus seen as a pre-modern cultural community which provides the modern nation with its foundations, or as Gellner would later say, a navel.³⁵ A pre-modern ethnic *substratum*, or *ethnie*, must, according to Smith, be present if a nation is to have any chances of success, any emotional resonance or magnetism. Underlying the arguments put forward by Connor and Smith is the assumption that if something is

³⁴ This critique would of course not apply to Gellner.

³⁵ Gellner, Ernest, 'Reply: Do nations have navels?' *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 2, No. 3, November 1996, pp. 366-70.

capable of generating such passions it must not only be deeply rooted, but also ‘tangible’.³⁶

The argument according to which nations are premised on ethnic groups can therefore be seen as an attempt to provide an objective foundation to the concept of nation, and thus refute the argument that nations are mere inventions. By referring to the concept of ethnic group, Connor is attempting to ground a subjectivist definition of the nation, to what he perceives to be a ‘scientifically’ accepted notion of ethnicity, hence his appeal to the ‘pristine usage’ of the term by anthropologists and ethnologists.³⁷ His definition of the nation must be subjective since Connor acknowledges that no objective criteria enables one to define the nation. Indeed, according to Connor it is the ‘self-view of one’s group, rather than the tangible characteristics, that is of essence in determining the existence or non-existence of a nation.’³⁸ Self-consciousness is what therefore defines a nation. And, ‘in the absence of such popularly held conviction [that one constitutes a nation], there is only an ethnic group.’³⁹

b) *Ethnic groups and nations*

But what is an ethnic group? After all, this question is of some importance if, following Connor, the purpose is to predict which groups are more likely to voice nationalist claims, or at least resist complete ‘psychological’ assimilation.⁴⁰ Or, if

³⁶ Smith’s reference to Europe’s inability to stir up passions is thus explained: ‘the *abstraction* of “Europe” competes on unequal terms with the *tangibility* and “rootedness” of each nation.’ Smith, Anthony D., *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 13, our italics. Connor and Smith cautiously, and perhaps wisely, avoid using the term ‘real’, preferring that of ‘tangible’. Yet this might only underscore their view that ethnic groups and nations are ultimately objectively definable.

³⁷ Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

following Smith, we are to explain ‘why and where particular nations are formed.’⁴¹ In his 1972 article, in which he attacks the nation-building approach,⁴² Connor fails to provide a clear definition of what he understands by an ethnic group, except as we have seen, to say that it is a nation that has not achieved self-consciousness. Such a definition risks becoming tautological unless, the ethnic group, upon which the ‘true’ nation is founded, is clearly defined.

Although he refuses to openly acknowledge it, we must assume that Connor nevertheless believes that ethnic groups do possess ‘tangible’ characteristics since they are ‘very apparent to the anthropologist or even the untrained observer.’⁴³ This definition, which indirectly introduces the idea that ethnic groups are after all objectively identifiable, is evidently problematic. It assumes that certain enlightened observers have the capacity to identify such ethnic groups, even when the groups themselves are incapable of doing so, or at least not in those terms (since they have not achieved self-consciousness). Connor moreover, does not consider the possibility that these observers might be wrong, or that, as anthropologists have themselves suggested, that this identification process has itself given a community an ethnic identity.⁴⁴

Responding perhaps to earlier criticisms, and conscious of the need to define a concept which is central to his whole edifice, Connor proceeds in a later article, published first in 1978, to provide a clearer definition of the ethnic group.⁴⁵ In his characteristic manner, he begins by criticising sociologists for ‘violating’ and thus

⁴¹ Smith, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁴² Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-66.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ As will be seen in chapter three’s discussion of ethnicity in Africa.

⁴⁵ Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-117.

diluting the original meaning of the ethnic group by including all sorts of minorities, political or religious communities.

One should instead follow ‘anthropologists, ethnologists, and scholars concerned with global comparisons [who] have been more prone to use ethnicity and ethnic groups in their pristine sense involving a sense of common ancestry.’⁴⁶

Yet, Connor once again carefully refuses to give a definition which rests on what he terms ‘tangible differences,’ that is, one that is based on an enumeration of criteria such as language, religion, territory or mode of life. Instead, he prefers to speak of a sense of common ancestry, a reference which could either be understood as a covert biological reference or, on the contrary, as a subjective feeling.

Notwithstanding the fact that this definition, contrary to what he asserts and as will be more amply discussed in the next chapter, is not upheld by the majority of anthropologists or ethnologists, Connor more significantly avoids to fully contend with the definition he is appealing to and which is left in the footnote. Here, the ethnic group is defined as being composed of

those who *conceive themselves* as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry, *real or fictitious*, and who are regarded as such by others.⁴⁷

To begin with, it is difficult to see how this definition is in practice less-encompassing than that which he accuses ‘sociologists’ of using. Moreover, the distinction between *self-defined* and *other-defined*, which Connor posits as being the main difference between a nation and ethnic group, appears to be overridden by this definition. Indeed, if one were to fully endorse the ‘ethnologists’ pristine usage’ of the term, one would have to conclude that a nation is a subjectively defined community grounded on an ethnic group, that is also subjectively defined. Connor’s

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, in footnote 24, p. 115, our italics.

attempt to demonstrate the ‘reality’ of ethnonationalism would thus be somewhat hampered. If the ‘ethnic roots of nationalism’ thesis is to have any predictive capacity, it must postulate the existence of objective criteria, if not it risks being tautological. Thus, rather than elucidating the terminological chaos he decries, Connor seems to only further contribute to it.

Influenced by the work of Connor, but conscious of its limitations, Smith attempted to provide a clearer definition of ethnic communities, or as he calls them *ethnies*. *Ethnies* are ‘named populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity.’⁴⁸ We see here that Smith, like Connor, is also appealing to the notion of common ancestry, but he goes beyond by providing a definition that seeks to combine both objective and subjective elements. It is important to note that Smith wishes to purge any biological reference from his conception of the *ethnie* and distinguish it from the category of race, hence the stress on its cultural dimension. In so doing, Smith is trying to provide nationalism with a more honourable face and further substantiate the argument that Nazism is not the logical extension of nationalism.⁴⁹ Yet he fails to acknowledge the history of the concept of ethnicity itself and its close association with that of race.⁵⁰

Not surprisingly, the term ‘ethnic’, in its modern usage became more widespread after the Second World War, when references to race or racial attributes became historically loaded and the term ‘ethnic’ seemed more acceptable. Yet,

⁴⁸ Smith, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ It is Smith’s contention that contrary to what is often upheld, notably by modernists, nationalism does not necessarily entail intolerance, exclusion and ultimately genocide. On the relationship between Racism and nationalism, see, Smith, 1983, *op. cit.*, notably chapters 3 and 4.

⁵⁰ The word ethnic, ‘is derived from the Greek term *ethnos* (which in turn is derived from the word *ethnikos*), which originally meant heathen or pagan. It was used in this sense in English from the mid-fourteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, when it gradually began to refer to ‘racial’

whether one uses race or ethnic group, the reference to either is often made to establish exclusive criteria. Given their potential implications (ethnic cleansing and/or genocide), it is important to emphasise that, in the same way that geneticists and anthropologists showed the scientific precariousness of racial categories, ethnicity is a far more ambiguous and fluid category than previously alleged and that it is also susceptible to history. To be fair, Smith does acknowledge that the *ethnie* is itself subject to historical changes, yet as his distinction between ethnic categories and communities indicates, he ultimately upholds the existence of 'some visible cultural differences or "markers", which might help to divide populations into fairly well-defined groupings or ethnic categories.'⁵¹ Indeed, in a manner reminiscent of Connor's, he speaks of a 'perceptive observer' capable of distinguishing an ethnic category from another.

Ethnicists such as Smith and Connor acknowledge the modernity of nationalism – as a specific political ideology – and thus depart from the more radical primordialists in this regard. Yet their conception of the nation nevertheless appears to rest on a primordial conception of the ethnic group, especially in the case of Connor for whom the ethnic group is taken as an ahistorical socio-psychological given. Smith's position is somewhat more complex, insofar as he acknowledges that ethnic groups are also subject to historical transformations, his position may arguably be said to be closer to that of the perennialist than Connor's. On the other hand, Smith's definition, despite its merits, fails to clearly establish a distinction between *ethnies*, casts, religious sects, clans or tribes, all of whom could be said to uphold myths of common descent. As will be discussed with reference to Somalia, the

characteristics.' Ericksen, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 4. See also: Chapman, Malcolm, (ed.), *Social and Biological Aspects of Ethnicity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 15.

ambiguity of the concept thus defined impairs the heuristic value of the ethnic interpretation. More importantly, Smith's definition fails to clearly identify the difference between the nation and the *ethnie*, and thus to fully account for the specificity of the nation with regard to the *ethnie*.

Ultimately, the 'ethnic roots of nationalism thesis' is a reformulation of the nationalist's 'sleeping beauty thesis,' the only difference being that the term nation is replaced with that of ethnic group. A nation is an ethnic group that has been awoken.

c) Ethnicity and cultural authenticity

Fundamentally, what is at stake here is the issue of cultural authenticity, as illustrated by Connor's reference to the 'true' nationalism. Enshrined in Connor and Smith's critique of the modernist position is their belief that 'modernists' do not take nationalism seriously. Smith's critique of the modernist-instrumentalist approach was triggered by Gellner's comment that nations are mere inventions: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.'⁵² This was understood as implying that there was something 'false' about them and it is precisely on this issue – whether nations are invented, constructed or fabricated – that the current debate is predicated.⁵³

The recourse to the ethnic group or the *ethnie* is an attempt to demonstrate that nations are not artificial creations, that they are actually grounded in authentic, genuine, cultural communities which pre-date the era of nationalism.⁵⁴ Yet, as

⁵¹ Smith, Anthony D., 'War and ethnicity: the role of warfare in the formation, self-images and cohesion of ethnic communities,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, October 1981, p. 379.

⁵² Gellner, 1964, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁵³ Smith, Anthony D., 'The Nation: Invented, Imagined, Reconstructed,' *Millennium*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Winter 1991, pp. 353-68.

⁵⁴ As will be seen in the next chapter, this question of authenticity is at the core of many proposals for territorial revision in Africa. Indeed, the failures of many African states are frequently attributed to the

Anderson remarked 'communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.'⁵⁵ The nation's specificity is that it is imagined (in the sense that members of a nation will never meet most of their fellow-members), it is imagined as limited, as sovereign and as a community. To this last characteristic we may add that it is imagined as cultural, and this is what makes according to Gellner, modern society so different from its predecessors, this is nationalism's specificity. In industrial society, man

is obliged to carry his identity with him, in his whole style of conduct and expression: in other words, his 'culture' becomes his 'identity'. And the classification of men by 'culture' is of course the classification by 'nationality'.⁵⁶

Contrary to what Smith and Connor suggest, modernists do not deny the existence of human cultural groupings prior to the advent of modernisation, nor even that in some cases cultural and political units might have even converged. What they seek to explain is why it has become necessary for all political units to be grounded in a specific culture. What they contest is the fact that such groupings would be self-consciously formed around cultural criteria prior to the age of nationalism. As Gellner remarked:

The modern nationalist consciously wills his identification with a culture. His overt consciousness of his own culture is already, in historical perspective, an interesting oddity.⁵⁷

The modernists' objective is therefore to understand why and when the fact of belonging to a nation, or any culturally defined homogeneous community, became felt as an imperative and obvious support of one's own sense of identity, and to

artificiality of the colonially-drawn boundaries, that is their lack of congruence with what are seen as traditional, and hence authentic, ethnic communities.

⁵⁵ Anderson, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Gellner, 1964, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁵⁷ Gellner, Ernest, 'Nationalism and the two forms of cohesion in complex societies', in: *Culture, Identity and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 10.

unmask the reasons and processes which have led to the saliency of culture as *the* universal socio-political organiser. In other words, how belonging to a culture became to be seen as inherent attribute of humanity. As will be argued in the following chapter, the history of ethnicity reveals that ethnic groups, like nations, are themselves products of this new way of thinking and thus of modernity.⁵⁸ Again, this is not to suggest that distinct communities did not exist before the age of nationalism, the argument rather is that it is only then that they came to conceive themselves in such terms and with the political implications it entails.

While Smith is right to point to the fact that some of the grand theories developed by modernists do not enable us to predict which nations will emerge and on what basis, it may perhaps be fair to say that such was not their objective. Instead they attempted to explain how nationalism, as a universal idea, had emerged from modernity and imposed itself as the norm. Moreover, as the above critique suggested, ethnicists in our view also fail to come up with a valid framework for prediction. While not suggesting that this is an inherent flaw, predictability may after all not be the best test of a theory's validity, it is nevertheless problematic in so far as this was the point of departure of the ethnicist critique of modernism.

2.3 – What makes a nation?

As the ethnicists were mounting their critique of the modernist approach, the early 1980s saw the publication of what were to become some of the most influential works in the study of nationalism. Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The*

⁵⁸ Or as Sami Zubaida states, that ethnicity is a product not the cause of nation-ness. See: Zubaida, Sami, 'Nations: old and new. Comments on Anthony D. Smith's "The myth of the 'modern nation' and the myth of nations,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 330.

Invention of Tradition were all published in 1983.⁵⁹ It is also in this period that what Smith refers to as the 'state-to-nation' perspective began to crystallise as illustrated by John Breuilly's *Nationalism and the State* (1982), Anthony Giddens' *Nation-State and Violence* (1985) and Michael Mann's *The Social Sources of Power* (1986).⁶⁰ These two groups of scholars elaborated some of the themes developed by classical modernists and attempted to explain nationalism's geographical spread.⁶¹

By contrast to earlier modernist accounts which were mostly concerned with the emergence of nationalism as a universal phenomena, later studies attempted to identify what factors were responsible for the emergence of particular nations, something the 'ethnicists' sought to do, although as we have argued, somewhat unsatisfactorily. This section discusses two of the factors more frequently cited by these scholars as necessary for the emergence of nationalism: language and the state. Given that war is introduced by some of those scholars who examine the relationship between state and nationalism, this section also assesses the role played by war in nation-formation. More importantly, although the impact of war on nation-formation remains somewhat understudied in the literature on nationalism, its relevance with respect to the cases examined, Eritrea and Somaliland, and for International Relations more broadly warrants its inclusion here.⁶²

⁵⁹ Gellner, *op. cit.*, 1983; Anderson, *op. cit.*, 1983; and Hobsbawm Eric and Ranger, Terence, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge university Press, Cambridge, 1983.

⁶⁰ Breuilly, John, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester University Press, 2nd edition, 1993; Giddens, Anthony, *The Nation-State and Violence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985; Mann, Michael, *The Sources of Social Power*, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.

⁶¹ Anderson's description of the origins of nationalism somewhat diverges from mainstream modernist accounts, in that he traces nationalism's origins not so much to Europe as to the Americas.

⁶² It is necessary to note here that many of the authors considered speak of the role played by educated elites. This is an attempt to integrate agency into what are fundamentally structural accounts. Since the role played by elites is best studied with reference to a particular context, it will be discussed in the following chapter.

a) *Written language*

Language has always occupied a prominent place in discussions about nations and nationalism. Max Weber, for instance, while recognising the importance of other factors such as religion, traditions or customs, regarded language as the strongest source of national consciousness.⁶³ The German Romantics, Herder and more importantly Fichte, were the first to attribute to language a central role in the definition and self-expression of the *Volksgeist*. More than a mere characteristic among others, language, specifically written language, was understood to be not only the vehicle of the nation but its actualisation. In the first of his fourteen *Addresses to the German Nation*, Fichte argued that the Germans constituted a distinct people by the mere fact that their language had not been latinised and had thus conserved its primordial thinking. Language was believed to reveal the essence, the inner self of the nation. The German Romantics thus saw the world as divided into various nations, or more precisely, language groups, a division which they perceived as natural and organic. Community of language, particularly when incarnated and elevated through literature, in turn defined the nation.⁶⁴

This was very much the view that informed earlier understandings of nations. As was recounted in the introduction, the application of the principle of national self-determination following WWI was initially conceived of with reference to language. Language was indeed thought to provide the criterion, or marker, that enabled one to identify and distinguish nations. Yet the validity of the principle of ‘one language, one nation’ proved inadequate when subjected to closer scrutiny. As historical

⁶³ Beetham, David, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 128.

⁶⁴ On the centrality of language in the German Romanticist movement see: Kedourie, 1993, *op. cit.*, chapters 4 and 5.

research on medieval Europe indicates, the nature of the 'link' between language and nationality is 'ill-defined'.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it appears that at some point some languages and cultural identities became crystallised and provided the nation with its apparent 'naturalness'. The process by which this came about is what Gellner and Anderson sought to explain.

The democratisation and universalisation of literacy constitutes for Gellner one of the primary conditions 'in which nationalism becomes the natural form of political loyalty.'⁶⁶ But by contrast to the views propounded by the German Romantics, language for Gellner does not constitute an innate attribute of the nation or a pre-existing independent variable from which one can proceed to explain why the world is divided into nations. After all, as Gellner noted:

[t]he linguistic distinctiveness of the Scottish Highlands within Scotland is, of course, incomparably greater than the cultural distinctiveness of Scotland within the UK; but there is no Highland nationalism. Much the same is true of Moroccan Berbers. Dialectical and cultural differences within Germany or Italy are as great as those between recognized Teutonic or Romance languages.⁶⁷

The crystallisation of certain languages, for many disappeared in the process, must instead be understood as the result of industrialisation's need for a homogeneous literate population. Industrial society's reliance on a mobile and interchangeable workforce for its perpetuation generates the need for a standardised written medium, 'a context-free' means of communicating, a task that is undertaken by the educational system. Indeed, the educational system ensures that the language is not only 'standardised' and recorded but that it also is transmitted throughout all members of society. This is why, Gellner concludes:

⁶⁵ Schultze, *States, Nations and Nationalism. From the Middle Ages to the Present*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge, Ma, and London, 1996, p. 105. Asking an ethno-linguist what the difference between a language and a dialect was, I was told: a language is a dialect with an army!

⁶⁶ Gellner, 1964, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁶⁷ Gellner, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

in general (abstracting from local complications) modern loyalties are centred on political units whose boundaries are defined by the language (in the wider or in the literal sense) of an educational system.⁶⁸

The development of written language is also central to Anderson's account of the emergence of nationalism; although for him it is the logic of capitalism, rather than functional needs of industrial society, which is responsible for the emergence and spread of written vernaculars. Technological innovation, that is the invention of the printing press, and the emergence of capitalism combined and provided the impetus for the expansion of print languages. As was the case of many other sectors and products, the book became under the thrust of capitalism a standardised product for mass consumption. To be profit-earning, print capitalism could not exploit every oral vernacular, of which there was a considerable number. Economic rationality dictated a lower limit as 'these various idiolects were capable of being assembled, within definite limits, into print languages far fewer in number.'⁶⁹

By encoding languages within a fixed script, print not only enabled their diffusion outside their previous individual carriers but led by the same token to the crystallisation of cultures, 'which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation.'⁷⁰ Once established, print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness by: (1) creating particular and distinct 'language-fields', (2) giving a new 'fixity' to language, and (3) creating 'languages of power'.

Both Gellner and Anderson thus consider the standardisation of common languages and the development of literacy to be a product of modernity and an essential ingredient for the development of nationalism. But while they are

⁶⁸ Gellner, 1964, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁶⁹ Anderson, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.44.

essentially concerned with refuting the Romanticists' claim that language is a 'primordial' given, they nevertheless seem to assume that it is an essential ingredient of the nation. Yet to what extent is this really so? What about those cases which do not conform to the monolingual model? Discussing the cases of Switzerland and Canada, Warburton has shown how it is possible for a nation to be in the absence of a common national language.⁷¹ While the Canadian case presents some difficulties, and the Swiss case can be seen as exceptional, they nevertheless illustrate how nations may arise from multi-lingual societies. Thus, while language may facilitate the emergence of nationalism in many cases, it would appear that linguistic homogeneity is not always a necessary component of nations.⁷²

If, notwithstanding the above comment, linguistic homogeneity is nevertheless seen as an important condition for the nation, how is this homogeneity achieved? And more importantly how is mass literacy realised? We indicated earlier how for Gellner, the standardisation of language arose out of industrial society's need for a mobile working force and how the educational system was instrumental in this process. Indeed, the most important unit for the diffusion of literacy is the educational system, and it is through this educational system that men are made citizens.⁷³ This educational system, to be functional, has to be set up and sustained by an important institutional agency, a task, argued Gellner, that can only be fulfilled by the state, for 'only the state can do this.'⁷⁴ But while Gellner highlights here the role of the state in the diffusion of language and hence on nationalism, his theory fails to

⁷¹ Warburton, T. Rennie, 'Nationalism and Language in Switzerland and Canada,' in : Smith, Anthony D. (ed.), *Nationalist Movements*, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1976, pp. 88-109.

⁷² This point was to some extent acknowledged by Anderson, as he turned to consider the emergence of nationalism outside Europe, and will be discussed shortly.

⁷³ Gellner, 1964, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁷⁴ Gellner, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

consider its significance in more detail. In order to understand the centrality of the state in relation to nationalism, we must turn to another group of scholars.

b) States and administrative units

Gellner remarked that nationalism, by upholding that the boundaries of the state ought to be congruent with those of the nation, presumes the *a priori* existence of the state. Nationalism, he wrote, ‘emerges in a milieu in which the existence of the state is very much taken for granted.’⁷⁵ It must not be deduced from this that Gellner is implying that the state creates the nation, a claim Hobsbawm seems more ready to make when he writes: ‘Nations do not make states and nationalism but the other way around,’ although he fails to develop this idea further.⁷⁶ Gellner indeed, considers state and nation to be two distinct phenomena:

In fact, nations, like states, are a contingency, and not a universal necessity. Neither nations nor states exist at all times and in all circumstances. Moreover, nations and states are not the *same* contingency. Nationalism holds that they were destined for each other; that either without the other is incomplete, and constitutes a tragedy. But before they could become intended for each other, each of them had to emerge, and their emergence was independent and contingent.⁷⁷

That said, Gellner does open the question as to whether ‘the normative idea of the nation, in its modern sense, did not presuppose the prior existence of the state.’⁷⁸ We will recall that Kohn had similarly argued that the origins of nationalism were intrinsically bound with that of the modern states. If this is indeed the case, then it appears that we must turn to the state, the modern state, in order to understand the specificity of such a phenomenon.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Hobsbawm, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Gellner, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

A particular strand within the modernist approach has investigated the centrality of the state in its relation to nations and nationalism. Represented by such scholars as Breuille and Mann, this approach sees the emergence of nationalism as a result or as a characteristic of the modern state and political action.⁷⁹ Rather than invoking socio-economic processes such as industrialisation and capitalism, these authors focus on the political dimension of nationalism. Discontent with the state, or the growing chasm between state and society, constitutes Breuille's analytical point of departure. Nationalism, for him, must be treated as a form of politics whose apparition and shape is determined by the modern state: 'the key to an understanding of nationalism lies in the character of the modern state, which nationalism both opposes and claims as its own.'⁸⁰

To illustrate how the modern state gives rise to nationalist politics, Breuille delineates what he considers to be the modern state's main characteristics. These features are articulated around the notion of sovereignty, defined both internally and externally. Internal sovereignty depends on a negotiation between the rulers and the ruled, whereby the latter accept to give up some of their liberties. This can be understood as a form of contract where the transfer of sovereignty is itself premised on the development of a modern state system based on the notion of territoriality. Historically, the changing character of the state is attributable to the growth of the modern European monarchies, their centralising tendencies and international rivalries:

By the early modern period a few monarchies had acquired enough control over matter such as taxation, the church and justice as to be able to conceive of themselves as sovereign in something like the modern sense.(...) Such powers had only been achieved through a process of negotiation between the ruler and

⁷⁹ Smith, 1998, *op. cit.*, pp- 7-77.

⁸⁰ Breuille, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

the political community of the core territory under his sway. Only on the basis of some consent from that community, to which various rights and liberties were conceded, was the monarch able to establish and enforce some kind of sovereign power. One of the reasons why consent was forthcoming was the need to defend the territory against the rise of similar states.⁸¹

The universalisation and territorialisation of the state allowed for the idea of external sovereignty to crystallise and, consequently, the notion of internal sovereignty evolved. Three elements needed to be present for opposition to the state to be framed in nationalistic terms: the sovereign territorial state, a world made up of such states in competition with one another, and the idea of a civil society or private sphere, which would in turn be defined in terms of its culture. On this last point Breuilley reverts to socio-economic explanations as they provide an account of how national identities crystallised. And while his account can be said to provide a political theory of nationalism it would be inaccurate to say that he provides a political account of the origin of the nation.

Mann on the other hand, argues that both 'nations and nationalism have primarily developed in response to the development of the modern state.'⁸² Analysing the 'state-subverting' nationalisms which emerged in the Habsburg empire, he points to the fact that the two main challenges to the central state came from those regions which shared the 'most powerful provincial political organisation' i.e., the Austrian Netherlands and Hungary. That each possessed at least one of the cultural attributes such as language or religion is not denied. Yet what is more telling is the fact that

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 373-74.

⁸² Mann, Michael, 'A political theory of nationalism and its excesses,' in: Periwal, Sukumar, (ed.), *Notions of Nationalism*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 1995, p. 44.

virtually everywhere, nationalist movements focused on existing political units, provinces with distinct assemblies or administrations centred on old political units.⁸³

Thus, he concludes, more than language, economic development or ethnicity, 'the presence or absence of regional administration offers a much better predictor. This suggests a predominantly political explanation'.⁸⁴

Mann's conclusion would thus appear to represent an important challenge to the ethnonationalist approach insofar as predictability is concerned. Yet, on numerous occasions, Mann punctuates his argument by cautioning the reader that his is not a 'single-factor explanation' and invoking the existence of 'local-regional ethnic communities'. And, it would therefore seem that Mann's argument in fact complements rather than challenges Smith's suggestion that nations have a pre-modern ethnic core. Yet such is not exactly the case. By contrast to Smith, Mann traces the emergence of these 'local-regional ethnic communities' to what he terms the religious proto-nationalist phase. Since, according to Mann, this phase began in the sixteenth century and was triggered by processes similar to those highlighted by Gellner and Anderson, it is not as such pre-modern. Yet, insofar as Mann needs to appeal to socio-economic factors to explain this proto-nationalist phase, his explanation of the emergence of nationalism is not entirely political.

Mann's emphasis on the role of provinces or regional administrations as a propitious condition for the emergence of nationalism brings us back to Anderson. If 'the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation,'⁸⁵ this was for Anderson still

⁸³ Mann, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸⁵ Anderson, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

insufficient for nationalism to emerge. After all, the lack of isomorphism between particular print-languages and the formation of nation-states, namely in the Americas and in Africa, indicated that language in itself did not a nation make. Here, Anderson's theory somewhat departs from other conventional accounts of the origins of nationalism which focus on Europe. Indeed, according to Anderson, if one is to understand the specificity of nationalism, it is necessary to turn to the Americas. In a way that foreshadowed the emergence of new states in Africa and Asia, the new South American Republics achieved their independence within the former administrative units established by the Spanish Empire from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.

The original shaping of the American administrative units was to some extent arbitrary and fortuitous, marking the spatial limits of particular military conquests. But, over time, they developed a firmer reality under the influence of geographic, political and economic factors. The very vastness of the Spanish American Empire, the enormous variety of its soils and climates, and above all, the immense difficulty of communications in a pre-industrial age, tended to give these units a self-contained character. (...) In addition, Madrid's commercial policies had the effect of turning administrative units into separate economic zones.⁸⁶

But how did these 'artificial' administrative units come to be conceived as fatherlands?

Answering this question led Anderson to discuss the decisive role played by the dissatisfied 'Creole functionaries' and by the local 'print-journalists'. These Creole functionaries, recruited on the basis of talent rather than of birth, encountered fellow travelling-companions during their 'pilgrimage' throughout, but also only within, the administration's territory. Because of the metropole's discriminatory policies, their ascending 'pilgrimage' was inhibited. Subordination and exclusion thus triggered the request for national independence. The print-journalists for their

part provided the means by which these administrative units could be imagined as communities. Indeed, according to Anderson, the development of the press, like the development of popular fiction, dramatically contributed to the sense of belonging to an imagined community.

[T]he newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life. As with *Noli Me Tangere*, fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.⁸⁷

As we can see here, Anderson's focus on print-capitalism, and more specifically on the development of the press, is congruent with Deutsch's emphasis on the expansion of a communication's infrastructure and mass literacy as a necessary basis for nationalism.

Print-capitalism had an additional and important impact on the capacity for the nation to become an 'imagined community': the reproduction and diffusion of the geographical map.

Much has been said about the impact of the invention of printing on literacy and ways of reading, but less has been written about the equally momentous impact of print upon the circulation and communication of visual information within areas such as science, engineering, botany and, of course, geography.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36. Anonymity of membership as a key feature of the nation is also discussed by Gellner: '[Renan] correctly singled out one, perhaps the crucial trait of a nation: the anonymity of membership. A nation is a large collection of men such that its members identify with the collectivity without being acquainted with its other members, and without identifying in any important way with sub-groups of that collectivity. Gellner, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸⁸ Brotton, Jerry, *Trading Territories. Mapping the early modern world*. Reaktion books, London, 1997, p. 35. Mercator's wall map of Europe was printed in 1544 and was subsequently reproduced and distributed throughout the continent. His world map was published in 1569. *Ortelius's Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, a comprehensive Atlas of the World, containing a total of seventy maps, depicting the regions of America, Asia, Africa and Europe was published in 1570. It was 'without doubt the most comprehensive and up to-date geographical text to emerge within the sixteenth century.' Its novel format thus made the earth 'portable'. Brotton, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 171. See also, Throwers, Norman, *Maps and Civilization. Cartography in Culture and Society*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996.

In the second edition to *Imagined Communities*, Anderson added a chapter which further explored the way three institutions of the colonial state contributed to the imagining process: the census, the map and the museum. These three elements shaped the grammar of nationalism, and provided a totalising classificatory grid. The effect of this grid was, in Anderson's words, to make everything 'bounded, determinate, and therefore – in principle – countable'.⁸⁹ The census created a new demographic topography, upon which the state relied to organise education, the law and the police, the bureaucracy and the organs of the state. Of particular importance for our present discussion is the role he attributes to the mercatorian map which by fixing previously fluid borders enabled the country to be imagined as territorially bounded.

Instantly recognizable, everywhere visible, the logo-map penetrated deep into the popular imagination, forming a powerful emblem for the anticolonial nationalisms being born.⁹⁰

The 'map as logo' can thus be described as a symbol of the nation, providing the geo-political body with a visual support and a seemingly tangible representation around which the nation's members rally.

The fact that each of the new South American republics achieved independence with the administrative limits traced by the Spanish Empire suggests that it may after all not be necessary to appeal to atavistic feelings of belonging, to account for the existence of nationalistic feelings. If nationalism can thus stem from political or institutional arrangements, then, contrary to what is asserted by those who adopt a more pre-modernist line, it may not be necessary for a nation to be grounded in antiquity for its members to feel a sense of common belonging. Following Max

⁸⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1996, Revised Edition, Verso, London, p. 254.

⁹⁰ Anderson, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

Weber one could therefore conclude: 'It is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organised, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity.'⁹¹ But how can a state or an administrative unit generate the level of passion necessary for its citizens to feel a sense of attachment of such magnitude that they may be willing to sacrifice their lives for it? Although by no means a sufficient or even necessary condition, war, it would seem, can be an important catalyst in this process.

c) *War and nationalism*

The study of nationalism and war, notably in International Relations, frequently assumes that nationalism is the independent variable, in other words, that nationalism causes or is one of the causes of war.⁹² Yet, as some historians have suggested, the inverse relationship might also be considered.⁹³ War does indeed frequently appear to be an important factor in the process by which a nation is formed.⁹⁴ This should perhaps not be altogether surprising, after all, as Michael Howard notes,

Self-consciousness as a nation implies, by definition, a sense of differentiation from other communities, and the most memorable incidents in the group memory usually are of conflict with, and triumph over, other communities. It is in fact very difficult to create national self-consciousness without war.⁹⁵

Few scholars of nationalism, with the notable exception of Smith, have studied the impact of war on the formation of national identity. Nevertheless, there has been a growing interest in the way war contributed to the emergence of the modern

⁹¹ Weber, Max, 'Ethnic Groups', in: *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, Chap. 5, edited by Roth and Wittich, Bedminster Press, New York, 1968.

⁹² See, for example: Van Evera, Stephen, 'Hypothesis on nationalism and war,' *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1994, pp. 5-39; and Coker, Christopher, *War and the illiberal conscience*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1998, p. 93.

⁹³ See for example: Johnson, Douglas, 'The making of the French Nation,' in: Teich, Mikuláš, and Porter, Roy, *The National Question in Europe in Historical Context*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 35-62; Hilton, Rodney, 'Were the English English?' in Samuel, Raphael, *The Making and Unmaking of British Identity*, Vol. I, Routledge, London, 1988.

⁹⁴ Schulze, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁹⁵ Howard, Michael, 'War and the Nation-State,' *Daedalus*, Vol. 4, 1979, p. 108.

European state.⁹⁶ Pursuing this line of enquiry, Michael Mann and Barry Posen have investigated the way nationalism arose out of the modern state's need for increasingly large standing armies. But before we discuss the works of these two scholars, let us consider Smith's overview of the impact of war on ethnic and national consciousness.⁹⁷

Exploring 'the impact of different kinds of war and warfare on the formation, imagery and cohesion of some ethnic communities in the pre-Roman ancient world, Revolutionary Europe and in the century of total warfare', Smith claims that:

the historical consciousness that is so essential a part of the definition of what we mean by the term 'ethnic *community*', is very often a product of warfare or the threat thereof, even where the war concerns third parties.⁹⁸

Similar investigations of the way external conflict fosters social cohesion have been carried out in the field of social anthropology.⁹⁹ While, most anthropologists do not deny, as Smith also cautions, that war can have the opposite effect and undermine intra-group solidarity, they nevertheless 'acknowledge that external conflict can reinforce the internal solidarity of a group.'¹⁰⁰ More recently, and of particular interest, are those anthropological studies which have focused on the impact of war, and more precisely warfare as it was transformed by European expansion, in shaping non-western ethnic or tribal identities.¹⁰¹ David Turton and Katsuyoshi Fukui, for

⁹⁶ For a review see: Kestnbaum, Meyer and Theda Skocpol, 'War and the Development of Modern National States,' *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1993, pp. 661-74.

⁹⁷ Smith, Anthony D., 'War and ethnicity: the role of warfare in the formation, self-images and cohesion of ethnic communities,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, October 1981, pp. 375-97, which will be more amply discussed below.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

⁹⁹ See for example, Murphy, Robert, 'Intergroup hostility and social cohesion,' *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 59, No. 6, 1957, pp. 1018-35; Otterbein, Keith, and Charlotte Swanson Otterbein, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth: A cross-cultural study of feuding,' *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 67, No. 6, 1965, pp. 1470-1482; and Ferguson, R. Brian (ed.), *Warfare, Culture and Environment*, Academic Press Inc., 1984.

¹⁰⁰ Ferguson, Brian, 'Introduction: Studying War,' in Ferguson (ed.), 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁰¹ Ferguson, R. Brian and Whitehead, N.L. (eds), *War in the Tribal Zone*, Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1992; and James, Wendy, 'War and "ethnic visibility": The Uduk

example, have pointed ‘to the functional role of conflict in defining and maintaining group boundaries that serve to delineate “ethnic identity.”’¹⁰² Although their argument resembles that put forward by Smith, it is important to note here a significant difference.

Whereas Smith presupposes the existence of ethnic *categories* which are then transformed through war into ethnic *communities*, Turton questions ‘the usefulness of treating it [the ‘ethnic construct’] as the logical prerequisite and sufficient condition for the existence of a group.’¹⁰³ In other words, warfare can take place between groups that may or may not be initially ethnically distinct or thus defined. Without wanting to venture into what is perhaps ultimately a problem of definition, it is nevertheless important to note that warfare between groups whose differences are not apparent (even to the ‘most perceptive observer’) do indeed take place. These conflicts, particularly if frequent and recurrent, may in turn provide the basis for a lasting differentiation. Indeed, recollection of past battles frequently provides a group with powerful collective memories which, if needed, can always be invoked to mobilise its members. This explains why groups, that otherwise share similar characteristics to that of their neighbours, may nevertheless uphold distinct identities. Mann’s argument could in fact be seen to complement Smith’s analysis, as he seems to suggest that nations have a pre-modern ethnic core.¹⁰⁴

of the Sudan-Ethiopia Border’ in: Fukui, Katsuyoshi and John Markakis, *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, London: James Currey, 1994.

¹⁰² Fukui, Katsuyoshi and John Markakis, ‘Introduction’, in: Fukui and Markakis, 1994, loc.cit., p. 6. See also: Turton, David, ‘War, peace and Mursi identity’ in: Fukui, Katsuyoshi and David Turton (eds), *Warfare among East African Herders*, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, 1979, pp. 179-210;

¹⁰³ Turton, David, ‘Mursi Political Identity and Warfare: The Survival of an Idea,’ in: Fukui and Markakis, 1994, loc.cit., p. 17. In arguing that warfare takes place between ethnic categories, Smith somewhat undermines his own argument against those who claim that ethnicity and nationalism are inherently aggressive or bellicose; Smith, 1981, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-7.

¹⁰⁴ The following chapter will discuss the process by which groups may become ethnically defined.

Having briefly shown how war may have shaped pre-modern ethnic communities, Smith then proceeds to examine the way war might have shaped modern national consciousness and imagery. His discussion leads him to focus on the role played by modern warfare in what he identifies as the eighteenth century ethnic revival. Indeed, Smith argues, whereas in 'the pre-Roman world, ethnic communities played a vital role in both cultural life and politics, in early modern Europe, by way of contrast, the ethnic factor was generally muted and submerged.'¹⁰⁵ Then, a change in the incidence and nature of warfare triggered the eighteenth century ethnic revival. This change, which Smith quoting Michael Howard attributes to the development of state power and military practice, has been more systematically investigated by Michael Mann and Barry Posen.

Mann agrees with Gellner and Anderson that literacy is of foremost importance for the development of the 'necessary infrastructure through which culture might be more broadly shared'.¹⁰⁶ But he nevertheless considers socio-economic factors not to be directly relevant in themselves to the shaping of the nation.

True, the emergence of industrial capitalism expanded the interaction networks and the literacy of civil society, enabling identities to stabilize over large social spaces. But there is little in the capitalism of this period to encourage a distinctively *national* civil society.¹⁰⁷

The key as to why such a distinctive national identity emerges lies, for Mann, in the state, and more precisely in the political economy of the state as it prepares for war. The dramatic growth in the military activities of states in the eighteenth century,

¹⁰⁵ Smith, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

¹⁰⁶ Mann, Michael, 'A political theory of nationalism and its excesses,' in: Periwal, Sukumar, (ed.), *Notions of Nationalism*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 1995, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

which had been slowly introduced since the sixteenth century Military Revolution, meant an increase of its requirements. These began to impinge upon, and affect more and more social life, through both taxation and mobilisation. 'From being fairly insignificant, states now loomed over the lives of their subjects, taxing and conscripting them, attempting to mobilize their enthusiasm for its goals.'¹⁰⁸

Posen's analysis of 'the competitive relationship between France and Prussia/Germany, during the period from the Seven Years War (1756-1763) to the eve of the First World War' is in many ways comparable to Mann's study. But whereas Mann focussed more specifically on the internal dynamics of the state, and on the impact of war on civilian dissent, Posen suggests 'a theory of nationalism based largely on international military competition.'¹⁰⁹ Posen begins by stating that 'it is not merely coincidental that nationalism seems to cause intense warfare,' since nationalism 'is purveyed by states for the express purpose of improving their military capabilities.'¹¹⁰ Although prior to the French Revolution, French and Prussian military thinkers were already exploring the ways they could ensure better motivated soldiers, the critical moment lies with the introduction of mass armies. According to Posen:

Once the French Revolution, and later Napoleon, proved the efficacy of this pattern of military organization, others who valued their sovereignty were strongly encouraged to do imitate their example. It is this imitation, I argue, that helped to spread nationalism across Europe.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ Posen, Barry, 'Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power,' in: Comaroff, John L., and Stern, Paul C. (eds), *Perspectives on Nationalism and War*, Gordon and Breach Publishers, Luxembourg, 1995, p. 170. This article was first published in *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Fall 1993, pp. 80-124

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 137. Tilly has similarly argued that the rise of modern national states was a response to and a justification of the need to establish larger standing armies in order to survive in Europe's system. See: Tilly, Charles, 'Introduction', in : Tilly, Charles (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975.

Posen therefore attributes the emergence and spread of nationalism, both within the state and, when imitated, to other states, to the military revolution and to the anarchical conditions of the international system. This is why 'nationalism can be expected to persist wherever the military security of states depend on mass mobilization.'¹¹² This analysis of the role of the mass army replaces in effect Gellner's industrial need by the state's military requirement as the main force behind the emergence of nationalism and the spread of literacy.

In order to guarantee soldiers technical utility and commitment to war, the army needed to ensure they had acquired the minimal literacy skills and ideological basis. This, according to Posen, was achieved by the state mainly through education:

States promote compulsory primary education to spread literacy in a standard version of the spoken language to enhance the technical military utility of their soldiers. In doing so, they spread the "culture" and the version of history that are central to the national identity. Culture means mainly a written language, but also a shared set of symbols and memories.¹¹³

Tellingly, education in Prussia after the Napoleonic wars was compulsory only for males. Although, neither French nor Prussian curricula explicitly stressed French or German nationalism before the 1860s, great importance was given to martial values and heroic episodes of military history, initially at least in regimental schools.¹¹⁴ National identity was thus forged not only through the spread of a common standardised written language but also by opposition to the 'enemy'. Each state responded to the other by perfecting the 'nation in arms', new developments were introduced: short-service conscription ceded the way to obligatory military service,

¹¹² Posen, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹¹⁴ For a similar description see: Bernard, Nadine, 'Le nationalisme et la guerre en France (1871-1914)', in: Institut de Sociologie, Centre de Sociologie de la Guerre, *Le Nationalisme. Facteur Belligère*, Établissements Émile Bruylant, Bruxelles, 1972, pp. 177-283, in particular: pp. 218-41.

and military training increasingly included 'patriotic' education. The army through mass conscription became the cauldron of the nation.

Indeed, one of the great lessons learnt from the Napoleonic experience was the need to ensure that society as a whole was represented in the army. Obligatory military service ensured that men from all over the country were not only brought into contact with each other and with other regions of the state, but were also forced to live together for a given period of time. The bonds that thus developed between soldiers provided the emotional dimension to the abstract idea of the nation that was propagated through the educational system. The shared experience of subsequent wars further reinforced these bonds through the common encounter with death and provided these soldiers with collective memories written in blood. War thus provided nationalism with its emotional dimension and with symbols and myths. The idea that war, and more importantly the repeated experience of war, shaped the nation as a community of belonging and sacrifice, was intrinsic to Renan's definition of the nation. While conflict may not be *the* determining factor in the emergence of the nation, the role war plays, in exacerbating differences and spreading national identity among individuals who until then had only a vague understanding of the meaning and implications of their national belonging, cannot be overlooked.

Conclusion

By showing why the ethnonationalist approach ultimately constitutes a variant to the primordialist approach, this chapter has argued that the primordialist-modernist debate to the study of nationalism still prevails. On the one hand are those who, following Smith and Connor, consider ethnicity to be the 'independent and causal force' behind nationalism, modernisation being 'only a catalyst and amplifier of

existing forces.’¹¹⁵ On the other hand, are those who, following Gellner, see nations as created by nationalism, itself a product of the changes brought about by modernity. These changes can in turn be attributed either to: (1) the idea of national self-determination (Kedourie and Berlin), (2) socio-economic transformations (Gellner’s industrialisation, Anderson’s print-capitalism or Deutsch’s networks of communication), or (3) to the emergence of the modern state, particularly in conditions of war (Breuilley, Mann, and Posen). Along with ethnicity, these factors will therefore constitute the framework for our analysis of the emergence of nationalism in Eritrea and Somaliland.

As our discussion suggested one of the main objects of contention is that of the determinacy of the causal relation that binds state, nationalism and nation. For Smith, as for most scholars who uphold an ethnicist stance, nationalism is the ‘process by which *ethnies* become nations and then go on to claim either autonomy in a more federalised state, or outright independent statehood.’¹¹⁶ In other words, the claim for independent statehood, i.e., secession, is viewed as the result of the nationalist demands made by a given ethnic group. This view is contrasted to that upheld by modernists for whom the bonds that unite the modern state and the nation are indissoluble. Although state and nation may be according to some modernists two distinct phenomena, they are nevertheless co-determined, implying that the study of one can be achieved only partially without the definition of the other. Accounts of their origins and their subsequent spread are thus necessarily intertwined.

¹¹⁵ Smith, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. xxii. Adopting Connor’s metaphor in its more strictly chemical sense, modernisation can be seen as a catalyst which extracted culture from a solution in which it previously lay unseen and indiscriminate; but in addition, it also combined this ‘precipitate’ with another element – the state – producing the nation compound. The new element thus formed, the nation, is as distinct from pre-modern cultures, as salt is from sodium.

¹¹⁶ Smith, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

Most of the theories presented in this chapter have tended to focus on Europe, upheld to be the cradle of nationalism. Unless one endorses a strict primordial understanding of nationalism, which few authors do, nationalism is indeed generally seen as a phenomenon which first emerged in Europe and subsequently spread to the rest of the world. Indeed, according to Anderson, by the turn of the XIXth century, the nation-state had become a 'blue-print' available for 'pirating', and by the turn of the XXth century, the sole legitimate international norm.¹¹⁷ Rather than explain the emergence of nationalism in different parts of the world as more or less simultaneous, haphazard and isolated occurrences, this thesis will endorse the view that nationalism is a unique historical event which spread throughout the world as part of the process of the expansion of international society.¹¹⁸ Its appearance in Africa is therefore seen as representing one of the stages in this world-wide chain reaction. But, while the factors deemed to be necessary for the emergence of nationalism in Africa may be on the whole similar to those identified in the European context it is nevertheless necessary to identify the vectors responsible for its spread to that continent.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, 1991, *op. cit.*, pp. 67 and 113.

¹¹⁸ Watson, Adam, 'European International Society and its Expansion', in: Bull and Watson, 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Chapter 3 – Nationalism and ethnicity in Africa

This chapter seeks to determine whether the factors previously identified as responsible for the origins of nationalism also account for its emergence in Africa and whether any additional factors need to be considered before examining the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland. Indeed, many of the theories examined above focussed specifically on Europe. The extent to which the conclusions derived from the European context are applicable to the study of nationalism in Africa needs therefore to be further investigated.

The first section of this chapter presents the factors generally deemed to have been responsible for the rise of nationalism in Africa, a process that led to the continent's eventual decolonisation. It reviews the legacies of Western colonisation and discusses the impact of the African-American struggle for racial equality, highlighting the roles played by Western-educated elites and missionaries in the march towards national self-determination. This interpretation of decolonisation as nationalism, proclaimed by many African political leaders themselves, is contested.¹ And it is here that the study of nationalism in Africa mirrors the ethnonationalist-modernist debate discussed in the previous chapter. Those for whom anti-colonialism was an expression of African nationalism account for its emergence in terms broadly similar to those put forth by modernists. Industrialisation, education, the colonial state and the ideas of national self-determination are singled out as having laid the foundations for the emergence of nationalism in Africa. Those who on the other hand uphold, as does Smith, that the anti-colonial movement was not a 'true' nationalist movement, discredit such explanations on the grounds that the newly independent

¹ Tamarkin, Mordechai, 'Nationalism and nation-building in Black Africa: Fateful connections,' *Canadian Review of Studies of Nationalism*, Vol. XX, nos. 1-2, 1994, pp. 83-91.

states failed to justify their demands for national self-determination with reference to ethnonationalism.²

In the same way that the ethnonationalist approach had sprung up in the aftermath of the ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s and in reaction to the failure of prevailing modernist theories to account for its resurgence, ethnicity was introduced to the study of Africa in the 1980s as a challenge to the viability of post-independence nation-building policies.³ Indeed, much of the work published by the nation-building school that Walker Connor so vehemently criticised pertained to Africa.⁴ The crises that afflicted many of Africa's states, it was diagnosed, were a direct consequence of their 'artificiality', that is, their lack of congruence with 'true' nations. If these crises were to be overcome, it was further argued, the existing territorial status should be reconsidered and Africa's 'artificial' boundaries adjusted so that they reflect more appropriately 'authentic' or 'traditional' ethnic identities.⁵ But to what extent do ethnic identities more genuinely reflect African communities and traditions?

The second section of this chapter will attempt to provide an answer to this question by looking specifically at the anthropological literature on ethnicity in Africa. The reason for this is twofold. First, more than any other discipline, anthropology has investigated the nature and meaning of ethnicity in Africa. Any adequate understanding of this issue cannot avoid, therefore, considering the insights yielded by this discipline. Second, our focus on the anthropological literature on

² Smith, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 108. See also, Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³ Tamarkin, Mordechai, 'Culture and Politics in Africa: Legitimizing Ethnicity, Rehabilitating the Post-Colonial State,' *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Autumn, 1996, p. 364.

⁴ Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-6. Emerson, Rupert, 'Nation-Building in Africa,' in: Deutsch, Karl, and William Flotz (eds), *Nation-Building*, Atherton Press, Chicago, 1963.

⁵ Amadife and Warhola, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 533-54; Davidson, *op. cit.*, 1992; Jackson and Rosberg, 1984, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-73; Zartman, 1965, *op. cit.*, p. 55-73.

ethnicity is also motivated by a need to pursue further the discussion about the ethnic origins of nations introduced in the previous chapter. As was intimated then, those authors endorsing the 'ethnic origins of nations' thesis generally fail to consider the existing anthropological literature on ethnicity, this, in spite of the fact, that the 'ethnic group' is traditionally considered as anthropology's preserve. Since much of the theoretical debates that have led to a rethinking of the concept of ethnicity in anthropology have been undertaken by scholars doing research in Africa, it seems appropriate to include a discussion of these in this chapter. As will be shown, the assumption that underlies the ethnonationalist approach, i.e. that ethnic groups are pre-modern, has been challenged by anthropologists. It is hoped that a more substantial discussion of ethnicity will clarify our understanding of nationalism, especially, though not exclusively, in relation to Africa.

3.1 – The emergence of nationalism in Africa

The study of nationalism in Africa was prompted by the emergence of anti-colonialism. Indeed, calls for independence were couched in terms of national liberation. But why did nationalism manifest itself at that particular moment? What factors triggered its emergence?

a) The colonial legacies

Various factors have been put forward to explain the emergence of nationalism in Africa and, to a great extent, many of the accounts provided mirror those highlighted in the broader theories of nationalism presented in the previous chapter. In 1954, James Coleman identified four types of factors which he saw as having contributed to the rise of nationalism in Africa: a) economic transformations, i.e., the change

from a subsistence to a money economy, growth of a wage-labour force, rise of a new middle class; b) sociological factors, i.e., urbanisation, social mobility and Western education; c) religious and psychological factors, i.e., Christian evangelisation, and neglect or frustration of Western-educated elements, arising mainly as a response to discrimination and racism; and d) political factors, i.e., the eclipse of traditional authorities and the forging of new 'national' symbols; this last element being intrinsically bound to the modern state structure.⁶

When the European powers partitioned the African continent in the late 19th century and established their respective colonies, they brought with them and sought to implant the modern state structure. The boundaries drawn by the colonial powers not only indicated their respective areas of sovereignty, but also delimited the territory within which economic and social interchange would take place. It thus identified the people upon which their administrative structure, legal system and education policies would be imposed. The colonial state was modelled on the modern European state which, as we saw in the preceding chapter, had slowly crystallised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was defined by its territorial configuration, its bureaucratic nature, its coercive monopoly and, last but not least, the idea of nationhood. Indeed, as our study of Eritrea and Somaliland will show, the modern state was to be Europe's most important and enduring legacy to Africa.

In addition to creating the geo-political structures, with their distinct legal personalities, upon which nationhood could take hold, the colonial period also introduced in Africa, to varying degrees, those elements of modernisation which were identified in the first chapter as necessary conditions for the emergence of a

⁶ Coleman, James S., 'Nationalism in Tropical Africa', first published in *American Political Science Review*, vol. 48, No. 2, June 1954; reprinted in Sklar, Richard L., (ed.), *Nationalism and Development*

nation: industrialisation, extensive communications infrastructure, urbanisation and mass-education.

Colonial rule introduced a money or exchange economy in Africa (...) a "rudimentary capitalist economy" - which has gradually commercialized and, more recently industrialized much of the economic activity of African peoples, and has also individualized or decommunalized it. With the rise of agricultural production for the market, the growth of trade, mineral production, and other industries such as transport, and the growth of government administration and social and professional services, the traditional African society has been shaken to its roots.⁷

Despite limited financial investment by the metropolitan governments in their colonies, developments in the area of communications were important. Indeed, by the 1920s, 'the railway map of Africa had virtually assumed its modern shape.'⁸ Urbanisation, considered to be one of the best indicators of modernisation, is also one of the most important factors contributing to the rise of nationalism. During the colonial period cities and towns in Africa grew not only in size but also in numbers.⁹ Urbanisation, insofar as it indicates a shift from a predominantly agrarian society to one centred on trade and industry, tends to be accompanied by considerable social changes.¹⁰ One of the main features of this shift from a predominantly self-sufficient subsistence economy to a money economy is the creation of new middle class and a wage-labour force. As will be discussed in the next section, the impact of urbanisation on nation formation in the African context is somewhat paradoxical. While on the one hand, urbanisation may have allowed for the emergence of a sense of nationhood among the upper strata, it also appears to have become the locus for

in Africa. Selected Essays, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1994, pp. 26-28.

⁷ Kilson, Martin L., Jr., 'The Analysis of African Nationalism,' *World Politics*, No. 10, 1958, p. 489.

⁸ Oliver, Rolland, and J.D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa*, 6th edition, Penguin Books, 1995, p. 191.

⁹ See Hodgkin, Thomas, *Nationalism in Tropical Africa*, Frederick Muller Ltd., London, 1956, p. 63 onwards for a description of the urban explosion in Africa

¹⁰ Forde, Daryll, (ed.), *Social implications of Industrialization and Urbanization in Africa South of the Sahara*, Unesco, Paris, 1956.

ethnic identity formation. Perhaps what needs to be emphasised here is that urbanisation seems to have entailed a crystallisation of identities around a culturally defined identity.

A further consequence of modernisation and the colonial state's need for indigenous administrative cadres, was the rapid growth of a state-led education system.

A typical example was the founding of Achimota College in the Gold Coast in 1924, where Western subjects were balanced by traditional African ones, providing a popular environment for the new generation of nationalists, among them Kwame Nkrumah. French policies of assimilation, especially in Senegal, also encouraged the early growth of an educated African elite and even the Belgians felt compelled to change their erstwhile purely 'vocational' approach to African education and belatedly foster an *evolué* elite in the Congo.¹¹

Education was to a great extent, colonialism's most direct contribution to the emergence of nationalism in Africa, for with education came literacy and it was thus that European ideas were diffused to Africa.

Europe brought in its wake literacy as an ideal and as a technical feasible goal. Widespread or universal literacy, as an indispensable concomitant of industrialism, was in Europe itself quite a recent phenomenon, but the very industrial system which demanded it facilitated its spread far beyond the shores of Europe, since books and newspapers printed cheaply could now as cheaply be scattered by steamship and railway to the four corners of the earth. The ideas which such publications transmitted came to be known in the first place to those who could read European languages (...).¹²

Indeed, as Anderson noted, it was those bilingual and literate Western educated elites that were to play a central role in the rise of nationalism in the colonial territories.

[T]he intelligentsias' vanguard role derived from their bilingual literacy, or rather literacy and bilingualism. Print-literacy already made possible the imagined community (...). Bilingualism meant access, through the European language-of-state, to modern Western culture in the broad sense, and in

¹¹ Smith, A.D., *State and Nation in the Third World. The Western State and African Nationalism*. Wheatsheaf Books Ltd., London, 1983, p. 45.

¹² Kedourie, Elie, 'Introduction,' in: Kedourie, Elie (ed.), *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, Frank Cass, London, 1971, p. 27.

particular, to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century.¹³

Through Western style education systems, Africans learned to read the European languages which enabled them to access and assimilate Western ideas like freedom of speech, the rule of impersonal law, independence, democracy, Marxism, and more importantly, nationalism.¹⁴ Modern-style education dispensed in colonial state schools had thus created and shaped a new group of Africans, the western educated elites, imbued with the ideals of democracy and nationalism. And, it is this group which would express African nationalist aspirations in the years to come.

As Coleman points out, one should not assume a direct correlation between the degree of literacy and the manifestation of nationalism. The case of Belgium Congo, who in 1951 could boast one of the highest levels of literacy compared to other colonial territories but where 'overt nationalism' remained underdeveloped, illustrates this.¹⁵ Instead, one should focus on the number of Africans who had access to secondary and university education, at home or abroad, as it is from this category that most nationalist leaders came. Mention should also be made here of the role of mission-schools, which provided much of the education in Africa, particularly in those cases where the colonial administration policies towards educating indigenous population remained underdeveloped. Indeed, it appears that '[w]ith few exceptions, the westernised African elites leading nationalist and terrorist movements and claiming power in the new order are products of mission schools.'¹⁶ Again, as will be

¹³ Anderson, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

¹⁴ Watson, Adam, 'European International Society and Its Expansion,' in: Bull and Watson, 1984, *op. cit.* p. 31. See also Hodgkin, Thomas, 'The relevance of 'Western' ideas in the derivation of African nationalism,' in Pennock, J.R., (ed.) *Self-Government in Modernising Societies*, Prentice-Hall, 1964; and Kedourie, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Coleman, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁶ Coleman, James S., 'The Problem of Political Integration in Emergent Africa,' first published in 1955 in the *Western Political Quarterly*, reprinted in R. Sklar (ed.), 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 77; and Bascom, William, 'African Culture and the Missionaries,' *Civilisations*, vol. 3, No. 4, 1953, pp. 491-501.

discussed in the following section, missionary education might have also been responsible for the crystallisation of identities not at a national level but at an ethnic one, particularly in those cases where the missions opposed the central colonial administration. Although what is significant is not so much at which levels identities finally crystallised – this is in itself contingent upon other factors – as the fact that identities did indeed crystallise and this around culturally defined criteria.

The second way in which Western education and literacy influenced emerging African elites was through the growing awareness of being discriminated against by the colonial masters. Having absorbed European ideals of equality and democracy, educated Africans, and particularly those having studied in the metropole, became increasingly frustrated and disillusioned by the treatment they received. Barred from attaining the higher echelons both in the colonial administrations and universities, the intelligentsias realised the discrepancies between such ideals and their application in the colonial context.

The revulsion which educated Asians and Africans felt at a racial discrimination so opposed to the character of imperial rule, and so much at variance with what their European rulers had led them to expect, was gradually turned into disaffection; and this disaffection was clothed in an ideology which at once explained their predicament and restored their self-esteem.¹⁷

Nationalism in Africa, as the expression of African elites discontent with the European colonial administration, confirms Isaiah Berlin's 'bent twig' hypothesis, in so far as it represents a 'reaction to the oppression and humiliation brought about by foreign rule.'¹⁸ It also parallels Anderson's account of the emergence of nationalism as the result of dissatisfied 'Creole pioneers'.

¹⁷ Kedourie, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁸ Berlin, Isaiah, 'The Bent Twig. On the Rise of Nationalism,' in: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, John Murray, London, 1990, p. 251.

Colonialism had thus laid the foundations for the emergence of nationalism in Africa. It had implanted the state structure upon which the idea of a nation would then take hold and introduced major changes in Africa's socio-economic make-up. But while educated Africans' discontent was brewing, more was needed for it to be voiced in the language of national self-determination and for nationalism to acquire full force as a political movement. The final impetus towards political mobilisation would come from the Black consciousness movements that had emerged in the early 1900s in the United States and the West Indies.

b) The Black-American movement and the movement for independence

According to Hans Kohn and William Sokolsky, 'African nationalism received much of its initial impetus from America.'¹⁹ African nationalism was indeed initially a demand for racial equality, a struggle already taking place in the New World. Especially influential were the writings and political ideas that emerged during the Abolitionist era.

In order to rationalize and defend slavery, slave-owners and racist intellectuals put out some of the most racist writings that have ever been produced in modern history. African-American leaders took the challenge and seized the opportunity to write about ancient and medieval African history showing the glories, achievements, civilizations, empires and cultures of Africa. (...) In subsequent years, Africans in Africa would learn, from such writings, about their own (Africa's) past achievements, cultures and civilizations. Armed with such ideas and evidence, Africans at home fought against colonialism and racism more effectively and confidently than before.²⁰

Many Americans and Caribbeans, descendants of the slaves who had been brought to the New World, saw Africa as their homeland to which they would eventually return. While some immigrated to Africa, others visited the continent as teachers or

¹⁹ Kohn, Hans and Sokolsky, Wallace, *African Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Van Nostrand Company, Princeton, 1965, p. 21.

preachers. Noteworthy is the influence of African-Americans who went to Africa as missionaries and the role played by Christian churches not only in mobilising local populations but also in creating a transnational network between Africans from the Old and the New continents.²¹ Finally, and perhaps most famously, are the roles played by the Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) and American historian William E. DuBois (1868-1963), generally considered to be the spiritual fathers of Pan-Africanism, and who called for the liberation of African people from their colonial masters.

In its early stages, Pan-Africanism was intimately associated with the African-American demands for racial equality and was therefore a transnational rather than national movement. The first Pan-African Congress was convened in Paris in February 1919 and was chaired by William DuBois.²² Its aim was for Africa's voice to be heard at the Versailles Peace Conference.

Fifty-seven delegates from fifteen countries attended, including twelve delegates from nine African countries. Special visas having been refused by the United States and colonial powers, attendance was limited. So, too, was the conference's effectiveness. The resolutions of the Congress, it might be noted, did not call for Pan-African *union*, but rather for *self-determination* (...).²³

It is significant that this first meeting should have occurred at the end of the first World War, when the principle of national self-determination acquired international clout. There were to be three other such Pan-African Congresses, all under the leadership of DuBois. These were held in London (1921), in Lisbon (1923) and in New York (1927). As it became clear that Garvey's 'Back-to-Africa' movement was

²⁰ Shiroya, O J E, *Dimensions of Nationalism: The African Context*, The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, Nairobi, 1992, p. 11.

²¹ Shiroya, 1992, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-19.

²² Although largely unnoticed, a first Pan-African meeting, protesting against the treatment of Africans in South Africa and Rhodesia, had been held in London in 1900 under the instigation of H. Sylvester Williams, a West Indian barrister. Kohn and Sokolsky, 1965, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²³ Kohn and Sokolsky, 1965, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

doomed to failure - the majority of Black Americans refusing to relinquish their American citizenship - Pan-Africanism entered its second stage.

The fifth Pan-African Congress, held in Manchester, U.K., in 1945, marked a turning point for the Pan-African movement. It signalled the shift from it being mainly an American/Caribbean movement led essentially by DuBois, to an African dominated political organisation. After the Second World War, Pan-Africanism became the purview Africans educated abroad and it was them that would initiate the movement for decolonisation.

As a preponderance of members attending the Congress were African, its ideology became African nationalism a revolt by African nationalism against colonialism, racialism and imperialism in Africa - and it adopted Marxist socialism as its philosophy. Like Garveyism, the first four conferences were not born of indigenous African consciousness. Garvey's ideology was concerned with *black* nationalism as opposed to *African* nationalism. And it was this Fifth Pan-African Congress that provided the outlet for African nationalism and brought about the awakening of African political consciousness. It became in fact, a mass movement of Africans for the Africans.²⁴

African nationalism, as it emerged at the 1945 Manchester conference, nevertheless remained Pan-African in essence as participants to the Congress condemned the artificial nature of Africa's territorial division.

World War Two was an important catalyst in the march towards decolonisation. It revealed the fragility of European hegemony as India, Pakistan, Burma, Indonesia and Indo-China progressively secured their independence in the aftermath of the war.

At the same time, the war had brought many Africans into much closer touch with events and currents of opinion in the outside world than ever before. Many West Africans had served on term of equality with British soldiers in other parts of the world, notably in the Burma campaign.²⁵

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁵ Oliver and Fage, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

With the creation of the United Nations, the newly independent states' membership became determining in the anti-colonial cause already propounded by the American Republics and the communist states. Influenced by the decolonisation process that was beginning in Asia, African nationalists began to question their status.

c) Independence and uti possidetis

When calls for independence finally crystallised, it was not so much the territorial state itself which came under attack as the authority of those who ruled that state. The new African elites, educated and inspired by Western models of democracy and representative government, attempted to mobilise the masses and gain broad-base support. For then, as in its beginnings in Europe, nationalism was intrinsically tied to notions of popular sovereignty and democracy. In the words of Thomas Hodgkin,

African nationalism, in its many manifestations, [is] an historical movement, necessarily and characteristically African, yet revealing definite points of resemblance to the nationalisms that have emerged in other parts of the world. These resemblances seem the more natural if the rise of African nationalism is thought of as the final stage in a chain reaction, deriving its operative ideas originally from the French Revolution - the doctrine of the Rights of Man interpreted as the Rights of Nations.²⁶

Emphasis was given to the fact that national self-determination meant self-determination of the people, the nation opposing not so much another nation as it did the colonial autocratic ruler, the white European overlord. Understood as a reaction to European imperialist oppression, Hodgkin described as nationalist:

any organisation or group that explicitly asserts the rights, claims and aspirations of any given African society (from the level of the language-group to that of 'Pan-Africa') in opposition to European authority whatever its institutional form and objectives.²⁷

²⁶ Hodgkin, 1956, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Hodgkin's broad definition reflected the multiplicity of Africa's nationalist manifestations in the early period of the anti-colonial movement. Certain nationalist leaders (Leopold Senghor, Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita) expressed, at one time or other, their desire for independence to be achieved within broader French administrative federations, such as l'Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) and l'Afrique Equatoriale Française (AEF). Similar federations, associations or Congresses were found throughout Africa.²⁸ Conflicting interests and lack of popular attachment to the wider geographical units may account for these projects' failures. But what seems more important is the fact that when the colonial power finally realised the need to prepare their colonies for self-government, they did so within the framework established by the colonial state. The adoption in 1956 of the Loi-cadre in French colonial Africa thus 'located the vital institutions of African political autonomy at this echelon' and ensured that political life would germinate at the state level.²⁹

The colonial state thus became equated not only with its physical attributes (territory and population) but also with its bureaucracy, the nervous centre from which stemmed all decisions affecting the country. And it was this state which was coveted by the new elites, this state from whose bureaucracy they had been excluded by the colonial administration and whose control became equated with control over the whole country, its peoples and riches. National self-determination found its ultimate expression, not in continental Pan-Africanism or broader regional units, but in the states Africans inherited from the colonial powers. The first indications that pan-Africanism had been overruled by the nationalism of individual states came

²⁸ Tordoff, William, *Government and Politics in Africa*, 3rd Edition, Macmillan Press, 1997, pp. 52-3.

²⁹ Young, Crawford, 'The Heritage of Colonialism', in: Haberson, John, and Rothchild, Donald (eds), *Africa in World Politics*. 1st Edition, Westview Press Inc., Boulder, Colorado and Oxford, 1991, p. 21.

during the first assembly of African independent states held in Accra in 1958. It was then that N'Krumah, who ironically until then had led the movement towards pan-Africanism, expressed the need to respect the independence, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the newly created states in the interests of peace.³⁰ By then, it was clear that Europeans had been very successful in implanting the territorial state in Africa and had been 'able to draw sharp boundaries, not only in political and economic reality, but also in the psychic identity and cultural vision on the new elites.'³¹ When African states finally achieved their independence, national self-determination, in conformity with the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 1514 and 1541, expressed itself within the boundaries of the territories defined and administered by the colonial powers. Adopted in 1963, the Organisation of African Unity's Charter stipulated, in Article 3(3), that member states adhere to the principle of 'respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State and for its inalienable right to independent existence.' Despite some opposition from Ghana, Morocco, the Somali Republic and Togo,³² the territorial sanctity of the states inherited upon achieving independence was more forcefully reiterated at the Cairo meeting of Heads of State and Government in 1964. The adoption of the 1964 OAU Cairo Resolution on Border disputes Among African States 'formally adopted *uti possidetis* as the absolute rule of the region'.³³ It was then that the representatives of Africa's states pledged 'to respect the frontiers existing on their achievement of

³⁰ Touval, Saadia, *The Boundary Politics of Independent Africa*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1975, p. 54; and Young, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³¹ Smith, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

³² Clapham, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-8.

³³ Franck, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

national independence.³⁴ *Uti possidetis* was henceforth hailed as the corner stone of post-colonial Africa's peace and stability.

Interpreted as the ultimate expression of African peoples claims for self-determination, decolonisation was thus automatically associated with nationalism. And while the heterogeneity of Africa's newly independent states was acknowledged, their lack of stability in the aftermath of independence was seen as temporary. Scholars described the mechanisms by which African states would in time achieve internal cohesion through the implementation of appropriate nation-building strategies by an effective leadership.³⁵ But, in the decades that followed independence, it became more and more obvious that African states had failed to develop economically and achieve political stability. Not only were they mired in a state of seemingly unradicable underdevelopment but they were also plagued by civil wars which in turn impeded any attempt at economic reform.

Following the failures of modernisation and nation-building policies, ethnicity or tribalism, which until then had for the most part been seen as a parochial and disruptive force, was reintroduced in the 1980s and put forward as the basis upon which African polities should be built.³⁶ Indeed, by upholding the colonial status quo, African states through the OAU had, according to Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg, stifled Africa's 'traditional' national identities:

The legitimisation and enforcement of existing ex-colonial international boundaries in Africa is undoubtedly the supreme purpose of the O.A.U., but very few of those boundaries have substantial indigenous African referents, so we cannot conclude that the O.A.U. is maintaining traditional African national

³⁴ See, 'OAU Resolution on Border Disputes Among African States,' Brownlie, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

³⁵ Emerson, Rupert, 'The Problem of Identity, Selfhood, and Image in the New Nations: The Situation in Africa,' *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3, April 1969, p. 306.

³⁶ Amadife and Warhola, 1993, *op. cit.* pp. 533-54; Davidson, 1992, *op. cit.*; Jackson and Rosberg, 1984, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-73; Zartman, 1965, *op. cit.*, p. 55-73.

identities. In fact, it is denying them. (...) Only Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, and Somalia might be included in the category of “nation-states”.³⁷

If any solution to Africa’s economic and political ordeals was to be found, it rested on the redrawing of the continent’s state boundaries so that each state may reflect more genuinely ‘traditional’ African ethnic identities. Only then would African states recover from the legitimacy crisis that afflicted them.

Since much of the debate about the viability of African states now revolves around proposals for ethno-national adjustment, it is important to understand the meaning of ethnicity in the African context. As was indicated above, much of the work that has been carried out on ethnicity in Africa has been done by anthropologists. And it is to their works that the next section now turns. Much of the discussion that follows, while making reference to Africa, constitutes a broader critique of the pre-modern and static conception of ethnicity that underpins the ethnonationalist approach.

3.2 – Ethnicity in Africa: a colonial invention?

At the beginning of the 19th century the term ethnography was restricted to the classification of populations according to language. At the close of the century, it achieved a wider meaning to encompass the study of man as a social being.³⁸ Although the term ‘ethnologie’ can be traced back to 1839, when the French scholar W. Edwards formed the Société d’ethnologie, the French word ‘*ethnie*’ (derived from the Greek term ‘ethnos’), upon which Anthony Smith builds his theory of

³⁷ Jackson and Rosberg, 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

³⁸ Ausenda, Giorgio, ‘Postscript: Current Issues in the Study of Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Humanitarian Intervention, and Questions for Future Research,’ in: Turton, David, (ed.), *War and Ethnicity. Global Connections and Local Violence*, University of Rochester Press, San Marino, 1997, p. 218.

nationalism, only appeared later in 1896.³⁹ The fact that the concept of ethnicity appeared at that particular point in time is, as Amselle and M'Bokolo note, in itself significant:

L'apparition et la spécification tardives des termes de "tribu" et "ethnie" conduisent d'ores et déjà à poser problème sur lequel nous reviendrons, celui de la congruence entre une période historique (colonialisme et néo-colonialisme) et l'utilisation d'une certaine notion.⁴⁰

Before the introduction and popularisation of the concept of ethnicity, the tribe was deemed to be 'the basic unit of analysis for anthropology' with 'political unity, speech uniformity and geographical continuity' as 'outstanding characteristics.'⁴¹ Tribes were at the end of the last century and the beginning of the 20th century defined within an evolutionary conception of human socio-political organisations where they stood at one end of a continuum that placed them in opposition to 'civilizations'. Often used interchangeably with such terms as 'primitive societies', they were then to some extent identified with notions of race.⁴² Following the Second World War, racial doctrines fell into disrepute, and, concomitantly, the concept of tribe became increasingly challenged both epistemologically and ethically. Although the term 'ethnic' - in its modern sense - was introduced in Europe at that time, thus replacing the notion of race, the term 'tribe' continued to be used in the African context.

³⁹ Amselle, Jean-Loup et Elikia M'Bokolo (eds), *Au cœur de l'ethnie. Ethnie, tribalisme et État en Afrique*, deuxième édition, La Découverte & Syros, Paris, 1999, p. 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Southall, Aiden, 'The Illusion of Tribe,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. V, No. 1-2, January/April 1970, p. 31, quoting: C. Wissler, *Man and Culture*, New York, 1923.

⁴² The relationship between ethnicity and race is important and complex. Both are sometimes used indiscriminately and interchangeably (the category Afro-Americans is perhaps the best example of such terminological confusion.) According to several authors, ethnicity may still be used today as a euphemism for race, bearing in mind that this reflects a perception and not an objectively identifiable social group. For a thorough discussion of these issues see: Banks, Marcus, *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, particularly chapters 3 and 4.

a) *From tribes to ethnic groups*

Reacting against the evolutionary and functionalist theories that then dominated their discipline, a group of anthropologists, collectively referred to as the Manchester School, proceeded in the 1950s and 60s to investigate the impact of urbanisation on the peoples of the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).⁴³ Their objective was to illustrate how tribal identities could only be understood in relation to their context. It had indeed transpired from their investigations, that tribal identities acquired particular saliency in urban contexts for it was there that individuals were confronted on a daily basis with members of other communities. In the rural areas such exacerbation and demonstration of tribal differences were, for all intents and purposes, unnecessary, since the frequency of contacts between members of different tribal groups tended to be relatively small. Tribal identities appeared to be relative and situational, in that an individual's behaviour was determined by how and where he would meet a member from another tribe. Some members of the Manchester school predicted that tribal distinctions would disappear under the forces of modernisation and described this process as detribalization.⁴⁴ Others, on the other hand, upheld that such distinctions would not only be maintained but further enhanced in the newly urbanising centres, albeit in a form different from that of the original rural context. Mitchell described this as the process of 'retribalisation.'⁴⁵

⁴³ Gluckman, Max, *The Judicial Process Among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1955; Mitchell, James Clyde, *The Kalela Dance*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1956; and Epstein, Arnold L., *Politics in an Urban African Community*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1958.

⁴⁴ See for example Wilson, G., *An Essay on the Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia*, Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Livingstone, 1942.

⁴⁵ Mitchell, *op. cit.*, 1956; and Mitchell, James Clyde, 'Theoretical orientations in African urban studies,' in Banton, Michael, (ed.), *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, Tavistock, London, 1966.

In order to make sense of the highly complicated social context in which they now found themselves, individuals enhanced their ethnic identities and stereotyped others. This provided them with a 'cognitive map' which allowed them to determine which type of relationship they entertained with members of different communities. These differences were not always perceived in such stark contrasts as a distinction between us and them, but could, at times, also be perceived in a continuum as 'more like us' or 'less like us.'⁴⁶ The Manchester School's findings disproved previously held conceptions of the tribe as a static self-contained and insulated unit. What they suggested instead was that tribes were fluid and dynamic entities whose self-definitions were influenced by their relationships with other ethnic groups. In addition to this, the Manchester School highlighted the importance of colonisation on indigenous self-definitions, and stressed the need to distinguish the rural tribal identifications from those tribal (or ethnic, as they would be referred to subsequently) identities found in the cities. In so doing, they laid the foundations that would lead to a reconceptualisation of the ethnic category in social anthropology.

✎ In 1969, Fredrick Barth published an edited volume, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*,⁴⁷ which built upon and confirmed some of the Manchester School's insights. His work is seen as a turning point in anthropological studies of ethnicity as it breaks with former conceptions that equate ethnic groups with cultural units. For Barth, the sharing of a common culture should be viewed not as a 'primary and definitional characteristic' of the ethnic group but as 'an implication or result' of its organisation.

⁴⁶ Thomas Hylland Eriksen has referred to these variations in principles of exclusion and inclusion as 'digital' or 'analogic', see Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives*, Pluto Press, London and Boulder, Colorado, 1993, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁷ Barth, Fredrik, (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The social Organization of cultural Difference*, Pensumtjeneste, Oslo, 1994, (originally published in 1969).

The important thing to recognize is that a drastic reduction of cultural differences between ethnic groups does not correlate in any simple way with a reduction in the organizational relevance of ethnic identities or a break-down in boundary-maintenance processes.⁴⁸

It is therefore not the 'cultural stuff' which it encloses that defines the ethnic group but its boundary, and this is determined by the way the group establishes a distinction between itself and others. As one of the contributors to Barth's volume asserts,

the organization of ethnic identities does not depend on cultural diversity *per se*, as generally assumed in anthropology, but rather on the assignment of particular social meaning to a limited set of acts.⁴⁹

Thus a group will not distinguish itself from another *because* it is culturally different, but will emphasise a cultural characteristic, however tenuous, in order to differentiate itself from the other. Culture was therefore not the cause, but an effect of ethnic differentiation.

By focussing on the process of boundary-maintenance, one could then explain why ethnic groups persisted in spite of the flow of personnel across them and in spite of changes in their cultural contents.

Above all, Barth tried to show that ethnic groups are socially constructed (subject to environmental constraints) and that the content of the group - in terms of both culture and personnel - has no *a priori* existence or stability. That is to say, it is not so much the group which endures as the *idea* of the group. Moreover, he claimed that the physical and ideological contents of the group should not be investigated in isolation - this would give a misleading impression and tend to confirm notions of stability and internal, bounded coherence. Instead, attention should be focused on the *boundaries* of the group.⁵⁰

Barth's aim was, as it had been for the Manchester School, to challenge the previously held conception of tribes or ethnic groups as static and self-contained social units. Ethnic groups therefore could no longer be viewed as cultural units

⁴⁸ Barth, Fredrik, 'Introduction,' in Barth (ed.), 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁹ Blom, Jan-Petter, 'Ethnic and Cultural Differentiation,' in Barth (ed.), 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁵⁰ Banks, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

whose distinctiveness depended upon their geographical and social isolation. Instead, they were the product of contact, as they formed and persisted through their interactions with other ethnic groups. However path-breaking, Barth's study was nevertheless problematic. While he acknowledged the fluidity and relational dimension of ethnic groups, he nevertheless seemed to take the ethnic category as a given and immutable fact of social life, a problem which subsequent anthropological studies would raise and address.

While these developments were taking place in British and Norwegian anthropology, American scholars were providing a similar critique of the concept of tribe. In an article published in 1970, 'The Illusion of Tribe', Aidan Southall attacked the use of the concept of tribe as being anachronistic.⁵¹ Tribes, he argued, were particular socio-political organisations defined by a set of specific characteristics: political autonomy, economic self-sufficiency and illiteracy. But when the state structure expanded further into the remotest parts of the globe, there were no longer any 'areas of the inhabited earth unclaimed by one sovereign state or another.' And, as tribes were absorbed under the power of an ever-encroaching state, they lost their political autonomy, one of their foremost distinguishing features. Progressively, tribes became increasingly involved with the wider market economy and lost their economic self-sufficiency. Finally, under the influence of mainly European missions, many of the tribe members became not only literate but often adopted new religious beliefs. All these factors therefore combined to shed tribes of their main attributes, thus rendering them obsolete.

It is a melancholy paradox of anthropology that effective study of such social systems dates only from a period so late that they had already ceased to exist in

⁵¹ Southall, 1970, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-50.

this full sense, so that an element of reconstruction has always entered into the study of them in these terms.⁵²

If the concept of tribe was to be used 'in the full sense of this meaning,' according to Southall, it could not be applied offhandedly to describe what was in essence a different and more recent mode of social organisation; and this in spite of the fact that 'many of its members may retain vivid and even nostalgic memories of its former full existence and may continue to be strongly influenced by the values belonging to this former state.'⁵³

Southall thus suggested that the term 'tribe' should be 'applied only to the small scale societies of the past which have retained their political autonomy, and that the new associations derived from them in the contemporary context should be referred to as ethnic groups.'⁵⁴ In doing so, he endorsed the distinction made by the Manchester school between 'rural-tribes' and 'urban-ethnic groups'. According to Southall, the two terms – tribe and ethnic group – therefore did not reflect the same phenomena. Whereas tribes were used, when strictly defined, to describe a type of political organisation, understood in the evolutionary framework of the day, as less developed or less complex than, for instance, chieftancies or states, the concept of the ethnic group was associated with socio-cultural or linguistic characteristics. Thus, for example, one could 'find' an ethnic/linguistic group subdivided into tribes each reflecting different political units and each having acquired sufficient autonomy from each other. The ease with which the concepts of ethnicity and tribalism came to be used interchangeably perhaps denotes the assumption made in the age of nationalism, that politics and culture ought to be congruent.

⁵² Southall, 1970, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48

While these debates about the meaning of tribalism were affecting anthropology both methodologically and theoretically, a terminological shift had been taking place in the popular usage. Throughout the 1960s, references to tribalism had become increasingly viewed with suspicion for they seemed to imply an attribution of 'backwardness.' The recourse to the concept of tribe in Africa became both offensive and untenable given that the concepts of ethnic groups or nationalities were more frequently being used in European and other contexts. As scholars sought to explain the failures of the American 'Melting Pot' and account for the recent 'ethnic revival,'⁵⁵ the 1960s and early 1970s saw a proliferation of studies on ethnicity which reflected growing concerns about the limits of integration of migrant and minority populations in the Western world.

Most scholars dealing with ethnicity tended to criticise primordialist positions and favour instead instrumentalist approaches, describing ethnic groups as a new type of pressure group organised for political purposes. But while they viewed ethnicity as a new phenomenon arising from the vicissitudes of multi-cultural urban life, these scholars seldom challenged the idea that ethnicity was a universally applicable category. Since all peoples were believed to belong to an ethnic group and act accordingly, many scholars assumed, like Barth, that all people could unproblematically be classified according to ethnicity. Nevertheless, in spite of it being both ethically and empirically progressive, the semantic shift from tribe to ethnic group did not lead to a fundamental change in perceptions. Ethnic groups continued to be understood, as tribes had been, as archaic and self-contained static social units,

⁵⁵ See for example, Glazer, Nathan and Moynihan, Daniel P., *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1963 for the 1st edition and 1970 for the revised edition; and Smith, A.D., *op. cit.*, 1981.

an assumption which was to be further challenged by a number of anthropologists in the 1980s and 1990s.

b) Ethnic labels as colonial creations

The studies carried out in the 1960s and 1970s had resulted in a reconceptualisation of the ethnic group as a form of social organisation whose definition was relational and contextually determined. Yet, few scholars had systematically investigated previous suggestions that ethnic groups were a recent phenomenon whose occurrence had to be accounted for. And it is this neglected dimension of the ethnic phenomena that the studies published in the 1980s and 1990s attempted to address. Rather than analysing the synchronic effects of ethnicity in a comparative scheme, scholars decided to concentrate on the formation of ethnic consciousness as a diachronic process. Their aim was to put back African ethnicities in the general history of the continent, or to quote Richard Fardon, to concentrate on the process of ‘African ethnogenesis.’⁵⁶ Although a number of scholars had in the past analysed the historical formation of ethnic groups in Africa, their work had remained marginal, if not marginalised, from the mainstream disciplinary currents. Indeed, many of the ethnographical studies cited by Southall and Ardener were clearly historically informed, as were those of the Manchester School.⁵⁷ Since much of the current research draws from these scholars’ insights, we will first review some of their arguments more closely.

⁵⁶ Fardon, Richard, ‘African ethnogenesis’: Limits to the Comparability of Ethnic Phenomena,’ in: Holy, Ladislav (ed.), *Comparative Anthropology*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1987, pp. 168-88.

⁵⁷ Southall, 1970, *op. cit.*; Ardener, 1989, *op. cit.*

Both Southall and Ardener criticised the tendency among many anthropologists and colonial administrators to mistakenly cluster together groups of peoples and describe them as constituting homogeneous cultural units.

The named tribes which appear in the literature frequently represent crystallisations at the wrong level, usually a level is too large in scale because foreign observers did not initially understand the lower levels of structure or failed to correct the misrepresentations of their predecessors, or because some arbitrary and even artificial entity was chosen for the sake of easy reference, despite the realisation that it was fallacious and misleading.⁵⁸

To support this assertion, Southall provided a series of examples which illustrated how anthropologists and colonial administrators had often identified as tribes, peoples who, after closer investigation, should not have been brought together under the same ethnonym. The criteria they had selected for classificatory purposes indicated a bias towards what were deemed to be common cultural or linguistic characteristics. The units thus defined reflected more the observer's preconceptions, or academic and administrative taxonomic needs and beliefs, than the group's own self-definition and/or actual functioning.

Although Southall argued that tribes or ethnic groups only existed in the minds of anthropologists and colonial administrators, he did not imply that African peoples had no organisational system, only that they structured their social interactions along different lines, namely those of kinship and locality.⁵⁹ Prior to colonisation, groups were both fluid and complex as they formed and unformed according to different purposes and situations. Individuals could claim different allegiances depending on whether they were considering these for the purposes of marriage, religion, cattle-rearing or war. As Eriksen has remarked:

⁵⁸ Southall, 1970, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Categorical labels with no social significance are likely to be unimportant, and in pre-colonial times groups were politically organised along lines of kinship and personal loyalties and usually did not require categorical labels of greater scope.⁶⁰

Like Southall, Ardener also believed tribes or ethnic groups to be the product of an arbitrary labelling process which did not reflect the ways the people concerned viewed themselves. Not only did the labelling process betray the biases of those who effected them, but they also influenced the way others perceived and understood politics in Africa. Assuming that established categories reflected social reality, commentators were inclined to describe any outbreak of hostilities as resulting from age-old tribal antipathies.

Ardener illustrated how such misperceptions and misrepresentations had hampered any proper understanding of the issues at stake during the Biafra war when the Ikwerrri 'section' suddenly seceded from the Ibo 'tribe'. The Ibo had been identified and depicted as a culturally homogenous collectivity – an ethnic group or a nation in current terminology – which included among other groups the Ikwerrri. So, when the Ikwerrri declared themselves 'not Ibo', according to Ardener, this was received with a bewilderment comparable to that which may have been triggered if a stretch of Southern England had declared itself 'not English'. There was much debate at the time in the Nigerian and English press over whether the Ikwerrri did in fact speak Ibo. The linguistic criterion had indeed been singled out as a factor which would account for the recent dissension. But as Ardener pointed out, 'the very definition of speaking Ibo (which is a continuum of dialects) made this finally a fruitless discussion.'⁶¹

⁶⁰ Eriksen, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9.

⁶¹ Ardener, Edwin, 'Social Anthropology and Population', in: Chapman, Malcom, *Edwin Ardener. The Voice of Prophecy and Other Essays*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 111. This article was originally published in 1974. Ardener further adds: 'Some of you will know that in the nineteenth century the

Ethnicities, Ardener concluded, had to be understood as subjectively defined by the peoples themselves and could therefore not be expected to have any 'imperative relationship with particular 'objective' criteria.' But why had the Ikwerrri suddenly declared themselves to be distinct from the Ibo? As Marcus Banks remarks:

the Ikwerrri clearly didn't just succumb to some ground swell of internally generated identity crisis and 'realize' that they were not Ibo after all. The Ikwerrri section fissioned off in the midst and presumably as a consequence of and reaction to wider nationalist forces in the context of a civil war.⁶²

Although Banks suggests here that the war and the surrounding nationalist tendencies may have had an impact on the emergence of Ikwerrri separatism, neither he nor Ardener developed this theme further.⁶³ Instead, Ardener pointed to the fact that 'one of the causes of the Biafran war lay in disputations over the Nigerian census.' By drawing attention to this factor, Ardener was alluding to the importance of the labelling process in giving a people an identity. He illustrated how a group could be given a name for statistical purposes, bearing in mind that 'enumerations were made for the purposes of tribute, tax and military service.'⁶⁴ Who was to be included in this group depended upon the taxonomic criteria which had been 'determined in armchairs in Europe'.⁶⁵

Ardener had, in an earlier paper, discussed the importance of external classification on self-identification.⁶⁶ He had shown how definitions of colonial taxonomic spaces were in fact far from neutral and how they determined the scale of what would be considered as a people. The colonial administration needed to classify

term 'Ibo' had been acceptable to only a handful of the millions who later gladly bore it, even after the Ikwerrri secession.'

⁶² Banks, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁶³ A lacuna, which as we saw in chapter two's discussion of war, more recent anthropological studies have sought to address.

⁶⁴ Ardener, Edwin, 'Language, Ethnicity and Population,' in: Chapman, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 117. This paper was first delivered in 1972.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

the population under its control in a 'rational' orderly fashion. Given that the scale of these groups tended to vary considerably, the colonial administrations combined peoples who may otherwise not have been brought together. Who was to be brought under the same ethnonym, would depend upon the taxonomic scale which prevailed in the colonial power's other possessions. The arbitrariness of the process was illustrated, by discrepancies among the colonial administrations. Under German rule, the relatively small Ekoi-speaking area of the West Cameroon-Southern Nigeria border had been divided up into three distinct 'ethnic groups'. But when West Cameroon 'came under British administrators, some of the latter (e.g. Talbot), being more at home on the Nigerian scale, classified the whole 'Bantu' group together, for population purposes.'⁶⁷ While underscoring the role played by the 'administrator-turned-scholar' in the classification of ethnic groups, Ardener nevertheless acknowledged the part played by some of the more powerful African leaders in the labelling process.

In the colonial period, then, the scale of the units in the prevailing ethnic taxonomies was far from uniform. The accepted scale was, in a sense, a result of the arbitration between foreigners and the politically important groups. The Yoruba and Bini kingdoms set the scale for southern Nigeria, but this was itself set in some ways by the imperial scale of the Fulani-conquered north. It should not be forgotten that the still unsuccessful search for Ekoi unity was preceded by the Ibo case, the successful outcome of whose progress from label to population was not self-evident. It is by continuous series of such contrasts and oppositions (to which, I repeat, both foreigners and Africans contributed) that many (and in principle all) populations have defined themselves.⁶⁸

But if ethnic categories had in pre-colonial times no social significance for the peoples in Africa, as argued above, when did such identification occur? Why this shift in the 'foci of collective loyalty'? For surely the mere labelling of a people, as

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-71.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

described by Ardener, could not provide sufficient reasons for such an identity to be endorsed. Although Africans might have previously not thought of themselves in ethnic terms and even rejected the various ethnic labels that were appended to them, they nevertheless did eventually endorse the ethnic criterion. In fact not only did they accept the logic of ethnicity but also, in many instances, the categories delineated by anthropologists and colonial administrators did acquire through time a life of their own and were endorsed and adopted by the peoples themselves. One of the ways of understanding why ethnicity has achieved such prominence, is to analyse how it came about 'by focussing on the fact of the invention of 'essentialist categories' but also on the process and agency by which such invention is accomplished.'⁶⁹

c) *The crystallisation of ethnic identities*

As we have seen, anthropologists had slowly come to define the ethnic group as a colonial creation. These insights were to be further pursued by historians. Terence Ranger, in his contribution to *The Invention of Tradition*,⁷⁰ not only asserted that ethnic identities in Africa were colonial inventions but what is more, that such inventions of traditions were the product of nineteenth and twentieth century age of European imperialism, mass politics and cultural nationalism. Although, in a subsequent article, Ranger made some amendments to his original argument and switched from the notion of invention to that of imagination of tradition, he nevertheless remained convinced that colonisation had introduced a new form of collective self-consciousness in Africa which broke with previous pre-colonial forms

⁶⁹ Ranger, Terence, 'The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa,' in: Ranger, Terence and O. Vaughan (eds), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa*, Macmillan, London, 1993, p. 62.

⁷⁰ Ranger, Terence, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,' in: Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

of identities.⁷¹ Ranger described how nineteenth century Europeans had ‘invented traditions’ for themselves upon their arrival in the African continent. Then, they attempted to transpose their framework to African societies. But the problem was that European ‘invented traditions’ were ‘marked by their inflexibility’. As illustrated earlier, African societies were anything but inflexible, allegiances were characterised by their fluidity and determined according to the context. Unsettled by the ‘chaos’ they encountered, Europeans ‘decided to organise’ the continent.

Everyone sought to tidy up and make more comprehensible the infinitely complex situation which they held to be a result of the ‘untraditional’ chaos of the nineteenth century. Peoples were to be ‘returned’ to their tribal identities; ethnicity was to be ‘restored’ as the basis of association and organization.⁷²

The colonial period was therefore marked by a crystallisation of traditions, which froze previously shifting identities and broke with the dynamic nature of pre-colonial indigenous structures. But as Ardener had pointed out, such crystallisation could not have occurred without African participation.

The British wrongly believed that Tanganyikans belonged to tribes; Tanganyikans created tribes to function within the colonial framework...[T]he new political geography...would have been transient had it not co-incided with similar trends among Africans. They too had to live amidst bewildering social complexity, which they ordered in kinship terms and buttressed with invented history. Moreover, Africans wanted effective units of action just as officials wanted effective government...Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to.⁷³

Tribes or ethnic groups had thus become the prevailing form of socio-political identification because of colonial imposition. Yet how were such groups defined? Upon what basis did these identities crystallise?

⁷¹ Ranger, 1993, *op. cit.*

⁷² Ranger, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

⁷³ Iliffe, John, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p. 324, quoted in Ranger, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

The case of the Luyia in Kenya is particularly instructive, as it provides a clear illustration of how such ethnic identities might emerge.

It may be said that the Luyia people came into existence between approximately 1935 and 1945. Before that time no such group existed in its own or anyone else's estimation. It was clearly due to the reaction of the younger and more educated men to the exigencies of the colonial situation. It arose out of previous attempts at intertribal or supratribal organization and unity such as the North Kavirondo Central Association and Bantu Kavirondo Taxpayer's Association and led to further important organizations such as the Abaluyia Union, which came to represent the Luyia away from home, especially in the big towns such as Nairobi in Kenya and Kampala in Uganda. This new supertribe was closely linked to the colonial administrative and territorial framework of the North Kavirondo District (subsequently renamed North Nyanza District).⁷⁴

What transpires from this case is the extent to which the colonial state played a determinant role in the formation of Luyia identity. The geographical unit delimited for administrative purposes provided the people within its territory both with a bounded new identity, and with a framework and legitimate channel for an effective expression of their political grievances within the colonial state.

As more and more empirical evidence from individual case studies was gathered, it became clearer that ethnic groups were a relatively recent occurrence, and that many, as the Luyia, had crystallised on the basis of a colonial administrative unit.⁷⁵ Indeed, as argued by Amselle, the main 'contribution' of colonisation was the freezing of the previous process of 'ethnogenesis' described by Fardon and others.⁷⁶ To return to the metaphor used at the end of the previous chapter, ethnicity, like the

⁷⁴ Southall, 1970, *op. cit.*, p. 34, quoting the works of Wagner, Günter, *The Bantu of North Kavirondo*, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, London, 1949; and Ogot, Bethwell A., *History of the Southern Luo*, Vol. 1, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1967.

⁷⁵ Fardon, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 182; and Fardon, Richard, *Raiders and Refugees, Trends in Chamba Political Development. 1750 to 1950*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London, 1988.

⁷⁶ Amselle, Jean-Loup, 'Ethnies et espaces: pour une anthropologie topologique,' in Amselle et M'Bokolo (eds), 1999, *loc. cit.*, p. 38; see also in the same volume, Dozon, Jean-Pierre, 'Les Bété: une création coloniale,' pp. 49-86.

nation, was a new compound composed perhaps of previous identities but nevertheless radically different from them. The catalyst in this process was the modern colonial state structure, for whom the census, the map and the museum were, as Anderson described, its main grammatical components. Given the discrepancies in ethnic awareness, geographical circumscription could not have been the only factor responsible for the crystallisation of ethnicity.

Seeking to further document the modern historical formation of Africa's ethnic identities, Leroy Vail's edited volume begins by presenting some of the predominant interpretations of ethnicity in Africa, assessing their relevance and short-comings.⁷⁷ These approaches, he contends, although all partially valid, remain somewhat ahistorical. Despite the fact that Vail fails to include or even acknowledge many of the studies reviewed above, his contribution to the discussion is nevertheless important insofar as he attempts to provide a framework for analysis. The model he proposes, which is based on the findings of the various contributions to this volume, seeks to place 'the study of ethnicity within the unfolding history of a set of societies which are genuinely comparable.'⁷⁸ Three variables – agents or conditions – are identified as having contributed to 'the creation and implanting of the ethnic message.' First, are the intellectuals, 'a group of culture brokers'. They include European missionaries, European anthropologists or historians and local intellectuals. Second, are the African intermediaries, called upon by the colonial administrations for the implementation of 'indirect rule' strategies. Finally, is the social dislocation brought about by increased urbanisation, which created a need

⁷⁷ Vail, Leroy, 'Introduction,' in: Vail, Leroy (ed.), *The Invention of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, James Currey, London, 1989.

⁷⁸ Vail, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

among ordinary people for cohesiveness and the unifying ideology of 'so-called traditional values.'

As already intimated in our earlier discussion of the emergence of nationalism in Africa, missionaries played a crucial role in the education of many leading African nationalist elites. Insofar as missionaries were among the first to systematically record indigenous vernaculars and 'tribal' histories, they were also responsible for introducing tribal/ethnic consciousness among the peoples they evangelised.

The existence of a vernacular literature - a potentially divisive factor, considering Africa's linguistic mosaic - is the result of painstaking missionary scholarship and sponsorship.⁷⁹

As illustrated by P. Harries' study of the emergence of ethnicity among the Tsonga-speakers of South Africa, the missionaries' attempts at tribal labelling were influenced by practical and ideological concerns - such as the need to codify different dialects into a single written language which would facilitate their work as well as by competition between different missions.⁸⁰

European missionaries, assuming that Africans properly belonged to 'tribes', incorporated into the curricula of their mission schools the lesson that pupils had clear ethnic identities, backing up this lesson with studies of language and 'tribal custom' in the vernacular. (...) Thus, mission education socialized the young into accepting a tribal membership, and to be a member of a 'tribe' became 'modern and fashionable through its close association with education.'⁸¹

By singling out those elements and symbols which would go into the definitions of these identities, the missionaries thereby crystallised and provided the bases for the

⁷⁹ Coleman had already alluded to the role of missionaries: Coleman, 'The Problem of Political Integration in emergent Africa,' first published in 1955 in the *Western Political Quarterly*, reprinted in R. Sklar (ed.), *Nationalism and Development in Africa. Selected Essays*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994, p. 77. See also, Welmers, William E., 'African languages and Christian missions,' *Civilisations*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1953, pp 545-561.

⁸⁰ Harries, P., 'Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism; The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa,' in Vail, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁸¹ Vail, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

‘imagined cultural identities’ which mission-educated Africans would then utilise for their own purposes. The missionaries’ role in the formation of ethnic identities is highlighted by the fact that:

In those societies where missionaries did not work, or where they did work but did not introduce education along western lines, or where African intellectuals emerged only at a late period or not at all, the development of ethnic ideologies was either stalled or never occurred. The unevenness of education in Southern Africa largely determined the unevenness of development of ethnic consciousness (...). In many locales it is only today, after the post-independence expansion of education and the emergence of local intellectuals, that the process of creating such ideologies and ‘forging traditions’ has emulated what happened earlier in other societies.⁸²

It may well be that one of the reasons why nation-building was doomed to failure lies in the simultaneous formation of competing identities within the same territory. And, it could thus be argued that the state needs not only to control the monopoly of coercive violence, but also the monopoly of education (language and history) if it is to achieve domestic sovereignty. But while evidently necessary, foreign and local intellectuals’ promotion of cultural identities were not a sufficient factor for the emergence and appeal of ethnicity.

A second element contributing to the enhancement of tribal/ethnic identities was provided by the colonial administration’s adoption and implementation of indirect rule policies. If ‘language in the form of written discourse’ as provided through schooling ‘was central in specifying the forms of culture, indirect rule provided the institutional framework for articulating these forms.’⁸³ Europeans resorted to divide and rule tactics because they reduced their administrative costs (so-called ‘traditional’ leaders were less expensive than European administrators), and because it prevented the formation of unified concerted attempts to overturn their

⁸² Vail, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

colonial rule. Indeed, as was indicated earlier, administrative imperatives led to the grouping the peoples ruled into tribal or ethnic categories which corresponded little to indigenous experience and which reflected Western conceptions and expediency. Nevertheless:

As time passed and circumstances changed, the label came to designate a level of social interaction which can also function as a group in conflict situations. Africans found it convenient, if not advantageous, to belong to a recognized 'tribe' when dealing with the colonial state. The 'invention of tribes' in the colonial setting, therefore, is not simply an administrative expedient employed by alien rulers, but also a native response to a drastically altered socio-economic and political environment.⁸⁴

One such drastic transformation was urbanisation. Indeed, and in accordance with the Manchester School's findings, most scholars now consider 'the colonial urban setting to be the cradle of contemporary ethnicity.'⁸⁵ This language of ethnicity subsequently spread to the rural areas. Vail describes for instance, how tribal ideology, employing the 'old language of kinship', provided migrant urban workers with some form of guarantee that both their lands and women would be 'safely kept' during their absence by the local 'chiefs'.⁸⁶

As we can see from this discussion, the factors singled-out by Vail as conducive to the crystallisation of ethnic identities – missionaries, education, colonial administration and urbanisation – are similar to those identified earlier with regards to the emergence of nationalism in Africa. This should perhaps come as no surprise since the anthropological studies reviewed in this section all agree that the crystallisation of ethnic identities in Africa is a product of colonisation:

Empirical evidence shows clearly that ethnic consciousness is very much a new phenomenon, an ideological construct usually of the twentieth century, and not an anachronistic cultural artefact from the past. As an offspring of the changes

⁸⁴ Fukui and Markakis, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Vail, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

associated with so-called 'modernization', therefore, it is unlikely to be destroyed by the continuation of these same processes.⁸⁷

Indeed, prior to colonisation, identities in Africa appear to have been more fluid. The colonial administration's need to 'map' the populations under its control led it to establish categories whose contours were in many cases substantially different from those that previously prevailed. As Amselle summarises, this process took one of three forms: 1) the transformation of pre-colonial political units or "toponymes" into ethnies; 2) the semantic transposition to new contexts of "ethnonyms" used before colonisation; or 3) the creation *ex nihilo* of ethnies.⁸⁸ Whereas some of the ethnic groups established bore some resemblance to previously existing identities, others were therefore created out of nothing. A statement which is congruent with Gellner's claim that the cultures nationalism 'claims to revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition.'⁸⁹

d) The emotional appeal of constructed ethnic identities

To say that ethnic groups and nations are modern occurrences is not to deny their importance or appeal. It is evident that some groups in Africa have achieved an ethnic or national self-consciousness and that this consciousness dictates their political demands. Indeed, contrary to what Connor and Smith suggest, the fact that identities, national or ethnic, are modern constructs does not undermine the emotional appeal they may generate. Nowhere has this been more tragically illustrated than in the case of the Hutu and Tutsi conflict in Central Africa.

Often portrayed as a paradigmatic case of ethnically driven conflict, specialists have argued that it is inaccurate to view the Hutu-Tutsi conflict as the result of age-

⁸⁷ Vail, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Amselle, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

old hatreds.⁹⁰ Far from being clearly differentiated, Hutus and Tutsis share similar cultural attributes, speak the same language and have a common political history. The history of the Hutu-Tutsi polarisation is instructive and is traced to colonial practice. The colonial powers, Germany and then Belgium, imbued with racial attributes what were three land-owning statuses, Tutsi, Hutu and Twa. This classificatory scheme was first established by 'Mgr Leon Classe, the first Roman Catholic bishop of Rwanda and the individual most responsible for shaping colonial policies there,'⁹¹ illustrating once more the role played by missionaries in the delineation of ethnic identities. The classification was then formalised and enforced through administrative policies.

In the 1930s, the Belgians conducted a census and issued an identity card for each individual, which specified whether they were Tutsi, Hutu or Twa. Such was the slender basis for the racial typology that the census-takers were obliged to use ownership of cows as a criterion; those with ten or more were Tutsi, those with less were Hutu in perpetuity.(...) The cards still exist today - they are the means whereby road-block militiamen know whom to kill and whom to spare.⁹²

Yet again, the mere labelling process could not have been a sufficient cause for future hostility. Racial distinctions are invoked not for the mere purpose of classification but also for that of hierarchisation. It was assumed during colonisation that the Tutsis were a superior race to the Hutus. This in turn informed economic and educational policies as well as the privileging of the Tutsis as the politically dominant group.

⁸⁹ Gellner, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁹⁰ Prunier, Gérard, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, C.Hurst and Co., London, 1995; Lemarchand, René, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

⁹¹ de Waal, Alex, 'The genocidal state,' *Times Literary supplement*, July 1 1994, p. 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*

On the basis of a cow or two hinged the status of overlord or serf, and with it access to education and every other privilege bestowed by the administration.⁹³

Racial distinction provided the basis for unequal treatment. And, following Berlin's account of the emergence of nationalism, injustice would breed a sense of humiliation, frustration and resentment. The result was the 1959 Revolution, which brought the Hutu majority to power and led to the massive Tutsi exile. In Burundi, the Tutsi repression of 1972 contributed to forge 'a sense of shared fate among organizationally distinct Hutu of the north center and those of the south-Imbo, a process that one observer describes as "enforced ethnicity".'⁹⁴

The spiralling violence, which had come to characterise these two groups' relationship from the 1950s onwards and which culminated in the 1993 Rwandan genocide, led to their further crystallisation in ethnic terms.

Political conflict, punctuated by intercommunal violence, has created distinct and mutually opposed Hutu and Tutsi identities, which for all the hesitations of social scientists, are identifiably "ethnic".⁹⁵

The cases of the Hutu and Tutsis tragically indicate that constructed identities can have a very powerful emotional appeal. They also illustrate how conflict and war, as was intimated in the previous chapter's discussion of war and nation-formation, can be a powerful catalyst in the process of identity formation. Indeed, as Turton has noted, and this not only in the case of Africa, 'it often appears that it is the atrocities themselves which have created, or at least raised the saliency of, the differences described.'⁹⁶

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Chazan, Naomi, Mortimer, Robert, Ravenhill, John, and Rothchild, Donald, *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, Second Edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 1992, p. 107.

⁹⁵ de Waal, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Turton, David, 'Introduction,' in: Turton, David (ed.), *War and Ethnicity. Global Connections and Local Violence*. University of Rochester Press, San Marino, 1997, p. 3.

A great part of this chapter has been devoted to the anthropological literature on ethnicity. This endeavour stemmed from a need to address what was seen as perhaps one of the main shortcomings in the study of nationalism: the lack of interdisciplinary communication. It may well be that one of the reasons why our understanding of ethnicity and nationalism appears to have reached a stalemate, or failed to progress significantly, resides in the fact that most of the scholars working on this topic have tended to ignore research conducted in other disciplines. Anthropologists are in no way immune from this critique. But since they have devoted much attention to the problem of ethnicity, it seemed that any attempt to analyse the question of nationalism and ethnicity in Africa, had to take their views into consideration.

Our examination of the anthropological literature on ethnicity in Africa has allowed us to draw some broader implications for the study of nationalism. The fact that ethnic identities are modern products whose emergence is related to the same factors that have led to the formation of nations, forces us to reconsider the distinction established in the literature between ethnicity and nationalism. Indeed, if ethnicity is the result of the politics of the modern state structure and ethnic identities are constructed by the state's administration, then it may be difficult to argue that they are different phenomenon, if only in their origins. Both, to borrow Anderson's term, can be considered as 'imagined communities' whose definitions are determined by the nature and the needs of the modern state.

Insofar as ethnicity, like nationalism, is a modern phenomenon, it would appear to be difficult to postulate the existence of ethnicity as a prerequisite for the nation and hence for the nation-state. For if ethnicity's origins and logic are intrinsically

linked to the state itself, it cannot be expected to provide an a priori external basis from which to build a state. As Bayart remarked:

Si l'ethnicité ne peut offrir le repère fixe et originel auxquels renverraient les champs politiques postcoloniaux, c'est qu'elle est elle-même constamment en train de se faire et qu'elle se fonde largement dans le phénomène étatique dont elle est censé donner la clef explicative.⁹⁷

Moreover, given that ethnic groups in Africa arose during the colonial period under the impulse of and in relation to the state introduced in that period, ethnicity might need to be considered as an ideological consciousness defined by its relationship to a particular state, that is the nation-state. As Richard Fardon has argued, it would appear that:

ethnicity is something the ethnically self-conscious are aware of having, and that this self-consciousness only becomes apparent in a modern political context that includes the nation state as an international norm.⁹⁸

As the recent anthropological literature shows, a proper understanding of ethnicity must take into consideration the nature of the state against which it is defined.⁹⁹ Indeed, ethnic categories are not merely the result of outsiders' impositions but are the negotiated outcome between the peoples concerned and the administrative authorities. As ethnic identities continue to emerge and crystallise, this point is important to bear in mind.

Conclusion

Our analysis of nationalism and ethnicity in Africa has revealed that both are the result of the transformations brought about by colonialism and are therefore

⁹⁷ Bayart, Jean-François, *L'État en Afrique*, Fayard, Paris, 1989, p. 75.

⁹⁸ Fardon, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁹⁹ See for instance the contributions to Amselle and M'Bokolo, *op. cit.*, 1985; Ferguson and Whitehead, *op. cit.*, 1992; Fukui and Markakis, *op. cit.*, 1994. The latter attribute the introduction of the study of the state in the anthropological literature on ethnicity to James, Wendy and Donham, Donald, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, Cambridge university Press, Cambridge, 1986.

relatively modern. If ethnic groups in Africa are not more ‘traditional’ or ‘authentic’ than the nation-states inherited from colonialism, then, the assumption that underlies proposals towards ethno-national adjustment of Africa’s boundaries, i.e., that they would more appropriately reflect traditional or indigenous identities, appears to be unfounded or at any rate logically unsustainable. Again, this is not to deny the validity or potency of ethnic claims. After all, the fact that people themselves believe and uphold such identities and act accordingly is what matters. What we are in fact arguing is that it may be careless to offhandedly dismiss claims made by peoples who might not be able to prove their ethnic antecedents in an obvious way. Indeed, although this might not be their intent, proponents of the ethno-nationalist thesis seem to cast aside as unfounded claims made by groups not considered to be ‘true’ nations.

Without denying the importance of specifically indigenous patterns of development, the extent to which the changes that occurred in Africa from 1800 onwards were a consequence of Western incursions is noteworthy.

The crucial point here is not that nationalism appears at a certain point in time after the “Western impact,” but rather that the transformation the latter brought about has been an indispensable precondition for the rise of nationalism.¹⁰⁰

Following Rupert Emerson, one would thus be tempted to conclude that ‘Africa, is the continent *par excellence* to sustain the thesis that colonial governments, given appropriate circumstances, may be the major instruments in shaping nations.’¹⁰¹ This is not to suggest that Africa is exceptional in this respect but that perhaps it illustrates more markedly than other cases the *international dimensions* of the national and ethnic phenomena. Indeed, it may well be that the processes described in this

¹⁰⁰ Coleman, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

chapter, while more salient in the African context, could also be uncovered elsewhere.

The following chapters will assess the extent to which the factors identified as having contributed to the rise of nationalism in Africa might explain its emergence in Eritrea and Somaliland. As was indicated in the introduction to this chapter, these factors correspond and build upon those singled out by the modernist approaches to nationalism reviewed in chapter two. Combining these factors with those identified in our discussion of the emergence of nationalism in Africa, particular attention will be given to the following when discussing the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland.

- 1) economic factors, indicated by industrialisation, urbanisation and the development of networks of communication;
- 2) sociological factors, such as the level of education as indicated by the number of state-run or mission-schools, literacy and more specifically the rise of an educated elite;
- 3) political factors, that is the existence of a modern state administration with a geographically demarcated territory and its attempts to instil a sense of nationhood;
- 4) ideological factors such as the prevalence of Western ideas of democracy and national self-determination;
- 5) psychological factors such as discrimination and exclusion, and more importantly the impact of war on identity formation.

Finally, and more importantly, notwithstanding the above discussion about the modernity of ethnic identities, we will investigate the extent to which Eritrea and Somaliland's claims to national self-determination were ethnically motivated.

¹⁰¹ Emerson, Rupert, 'Nationalism and Political Development,' *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 22, No.

Indeed, the ethnonationalist empirical contention is that ethnicity is the main cause behind today's nationalist claims and hence behind secession. The fact that states have regularly been challenged by ethno-regional movements seeking greater autonomy or even independence is invoked in support of proposals to redraw Africa's boundaries.¹⁰² But have demands for territorial revision really been made in the name of ethnicity?

1, February 1960, p. 14.

¹⁰² Amadife and Warhola, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 535, and Jackson and Rosberg, 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

Chapter 4 – The Formation of Eritrean Identity

In May 1993, after thirty years of war against Ethiopia, Eritrea's formal recognition as Africa's fifty-third state¹ was sanctioned in a referendum supervised by the United Nations. Eritrea's prolonged challenge to the ancient Ethiopian Empire, the only state in Africa not to have been colonised by a Western power,² was perceived by other African states as a classical example of the nationalist threat against which they had sought to protect themselves.³ Eritrea's claims were thus opposed from the outset since it was feared that its success might encourage nationalist uprisings within Ethiopia as well as elsewhere on the African continent. How then, in spite of it facing one of Africa's most powerful armies and international society's tacit stance against secession, did Eritrea succeed in its bid for independence?⁴

An immediate answer to this could be, because Eritrea won the war against Ethiopia. The Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) sealed its military victory over the Ethiopian army when it entered and liberated the capital city of Asmara on 26 May 1991. More broadly, it could also be argued that the changing international context brought about by the end of the Cold War provided a propitious context for Eritrea's independence. The impact of the Soviet Union's disintegration was directly felt when Ethiopia's Mengistu regime, deprived of Soviet military and financial

¹ Using UN membership as a criterion.

² Except for the period between 1935 and 1941 when Ethiopia was under direct Italian rule.

³ As will be discussed below, the OAU charter was adopted only a year after Ethiopia's incorporation of Eritrea.

⁴ Eritreans themselves have refused to qualify their struggle as secessionist, defining it instead as a case of arrested decolonisation. Nevertheless, we will define Eritrea's struggle as secessionist. First, because as we stated in the introduction, our definition of secession does not assume what motivates it. Indeed, many other secessionist movements in Africa can, and sometimes do, similarly define their struggle as one of incomplete decolonisation. And second, because it has been considered as such both by the international community and in the theoretical literature. See for example, Clapham, Christopher, *Africa and the International System, The Politics of State Survival*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 115; and, Rothchild, Donald, 'Secessionist Movements,' in: Krieger, Joel

support, collapsed under the combined assaults of the EPLF and Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF). Furthermore, the early 1990s augured well for future nationalist movements as the creation of fifteen new states appeared to signal greater international leniency towards secession.

But why did Eritrea fight so tenaciously for its independence? For if the factors mentioned above account for how and when Eritrea eventually seceded from Ethiopia, they do not explain why Eritrea was so determined in its quest for self-determination. Throughout the war, the legitimacy of Eritrea's claim to independence hinged on whether or not it constituted a nation. Ethiopia maintained that, prior to Italian colonisation, Eritrea formed an integral part of the Abyssinian Empire and thus could not historically defend its claim to nationhood. This position was encapsulated by the notion of a Greater Ethiopia, endorsed by several Western politicians and commentators.⁵ Eritreans, on the other hand, declared that colonisation had created them as a distinct nation and that they were therefore justified in their demands for self-determination. The arguments invoked by each side mirrored academic debates on the definition and origin of nations and for this reason Eritrea represents a paradigmatic case for students of nationalism. Is Eritrea a 'true nation'⁶ rooted, as primordialists would contend, in an ethnic substratum that provides it with cultural cohesion and authenticity? Or is Eritrea, as modernists would purport, a recent creation shaped by industrialisation, capitalism and state formation?

(ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Politics in the World*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1993, pp. 818-19.

⁵ The best example of this is Levine, Donald N., *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1974.

⁶ This expression is used by Walker Connor to refer to ethnic nationalism. See: 'Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?' *World Politics*, Vol. 24, April 1972. Reprinted in: *Ethnonationalism. The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 42.

These are the questions addressed in this chapter. After demonstrating in the first section, why Eritrea does not qualify as a case of ethnic nationalism, the chapter proceeds to show, against the backdrop of some of the modernist theories of nationalism, how Eritrean nationhood was forged by a succession of events of which its creation as a colonial state was the constitutive moment and war its subsequent catalyst. In the final section, we will provide a brief account of Eritrea's history since independence indicating how the nation-building process has been carried out in this period. But before we proceed it is necessary to indicate that any attempt to recount Eritrea's history is steeped in controversy. Although the polemical nature of the literature on Eritrea creates some methodological problems, it is also quite revealing of the way historical events are selectively retained and forgotten for the purposes of nationalist mythology.

4.1 – Eritrea: a case of ethnic separatism?

Eritrea has often been cited as a case of ethnic nationalism.⁷ A.D. Smith for instance, considers Eritrea, alongside the Basques in Spain and the Moro in the Philippines, as examples of 'ethnic schism' which have 'spilled over into movements for outright separation.'⁸ Ted Gurr similarly classified Eritrea as a case of ethnonationalism. Yet, contrary to what these authors suggest, Eritrea's claim to self-determination and hence its national identity cannot simply be reduced to ethnicity. First, it is important to note that Eritrea does not constitute an ethnically homogeneous community. It

⁷ See for example: Smith, Anthony D., 'Ethnic and Nation in the Modern World', *Millennium*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Summer 1985, pp. 127-142; Horowitz, 1985, *op. cit.*; Gamst, Fredrick, 'Conflict in the Horn of Africa', in: LeCron Foster, Mary and Rubinstein, Robert (eds), *Peace and War: cross-cultural perspectives*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, NJ, 1986; Khatami, Siamak 'Ethnic Nationalism and Political Conflict: A Comparative Study of the Basque Country and Eritrea,' *Scandinavian Journal of Development Alternatives*, Vol. 9, No. 4, December 1990, pp. 49-61; Gurr, Ted, *Minorities at Risk: Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, US Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 1993; and Connor, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

includes at least nine recognised ethnic groups, which following the Soviet terminology adopted in the 1960s and 1970s, are referred to as nationalities.⁹ Although it is common practice to describe these ethnic groups as easily identifiable linguistic communities, the reality on the ground is somewhat more complex. For the time being, suffice it to say that the argument that holds that Eritrea constitutes a homogeneous and ethnically distinct community is not borne out by the facts. But before we proceed with a description of Eritrea's ethnic composition, it is necessary to address two other variants of the ethnic interpretation.

a) A critique of the ethnic interpretations of Eritrean nationalism

According to A.D. Smith, the fact that Eritrea constitutes a multi-ethnic society does not in itself disprove the ethnic roots of nationalism explanation; all that is needed is the presence of one core ethnic group, which provides the basis for nationhood and rallies the remaining groups to its cause.¹⁰ The argument, in the case of Eritrea, is that the nationalist movement was defined and instigated by one—of Eritrea's dominant ethnic group, namely the Tigrinya.¹¹ Although the Tigrinya are numerically preponderant¹² there are two problems with Smith's argument. First, as will be discussed more fully in the third and fourth sections of this chapter, the Tigrinya were not the first, or at any rate not the only group in Eritrea to call for independence. Second, the Tigrinya are generally described as ethnically linked to

⁸ Smith, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁹ These are: the Afar, the Bilen, the Hadareb, the Kunama, the Nara, the Rashaida, the Saho, the Tigre and the Tigrinya. Provisional Government of Eritrea, *Brief Notes on Eritrea*, Published by the PGE Mission to the United Kingdom, October 1992.

¹⁰ This argument was put forward to the author by Professor Smith during a seminar.

¹¹ As will be explained, there is disagreement as to how one should refer to this group. This is the terminology now used by the current Government of Eritrea.

¹² The Tigrinya are believed to represent 50% of Eritrea's population. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Fact Book 1998*, <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook>

the Tigrayans¹³ of Ethiopia. They speak the same language (Tigrinya, which like Amharic derives from the ancient Ge'ez), practice the same religion (Orthodox Christians), and share other cultural traits. In fact, until recently, the Tigrinya were referred to as Eritrea's Tigrayans, a designation which is still used by several scholars and commentators.

If Eritrea's quest for independence had indeed been ethnically motivated, why then did the Tigrinya not opt for a solution that would have reunited them to their fellow 'Tigrayans' stranded across the border in Ethiopia? After all, the blueprint for such an option had been previously laid out. First, during the fascist occupation from 1936 to 1941, when under the Italian East African Empire the Tigrinya-speaking people were grouped under a single province, which roughly encompasses today's Eritrea and Tigray.¹⁴ And then, although never implemented, under British administration when a plan for a Greater Tigray was advocated. Yet, except for the demands made by some Tigrinya separatists in 1947,¹⁵ Eritrean nationalists made no irredentist claims over Ethiopia's northern province of Tigray whose boundaries are contiguous with those of Eritrea. It is moreover paradoxical, as Christopher Clapham has noted, that the main challenges to Ethiopia's unity should have come from those regions whose history is more closely bound to that of the Ethiopian state than those of the southern or western regions.

This must in itself cast doubt on explanations of regional conflict which ascribe it simply to ethnic opposition to an Amhara internal colonialism; but it equally makes it necessary to look at the pattern of political incorporation of northern

¹³ We used here the designation Tigrayans, rather than Tigreans, so as not to create any confusion with a third homonym, the Tigre of Eritrea.

¹⁴ Negash, Tekeste, *No Medecine for the Bite of a White Snake: Notes on Nationalism and Resistance in Eritrea, 1890-1941*, Uppsala University Press, Uppsala, 1986, p. 59. The logic behind this 'ethnic' partition is explained by one of Italy's former governors to Ethiopia: Zoli, Corrado, 'The Organization of Italy's East African Empire,' *Foreign Affairs*, No. XVI, 1937, p. 84.

¹⁵ Trevasakis, G.N.K., *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, 1941-52*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1960, p. 76.

Ethiopia itself, and at the reasons for the evident failures of incorporation in, especially Eritrea and Tigray.¹⁶

Tigrinyan sense of ethnic identity, if it ever existed, would therefore seem to have been overridden by an Eritrean sense of national commonality. Not only have Tigrinya-speaking Eritreans made no attempt to integrate the Tigrinya-speaking Ethiopians, but in addition, they have sought to further distance themselves from the latter by adopting the slightly different name of Tigrinya instead of Tigrayan.¹⁷ This process of separation was taken a step further when, in September 1994, Eritrea's Orthodox Church, to which most Eritrean Tigrayans belong, ceased to be a diocese of Ethiopia's Orthodox Church and established closer links with the Coptic Church in Egypt. A final indication that Eritrea's secession cannot simply be attributed to Tigrayan ethnicity is to be found in the current political situation. It must indeed be noted that the heads of state of Eritrea and Ethiopia, Isaias Afewerki and Meles Zenawi, are both of Tigrayan origin, both of whom oversaw Eritrea's separation from Ethiopia and both of whom have been, since May 1998, at war with each other.¹⁸

The second variant of the ethnic interpretation of Eritrea's nationalism holds that Eritrean identity can be traced back into pre-colonial history.¹⁹ This line of argument has been delivered by some Eritrean nationalists as a counter-response to those who have attempted to legitimise Ethiopia's claim over Eritrea by referring to

¹⁶ Clapham, Christopher, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 205.

¹⁷ The adoption of the designation Tigrinya also avoids the possibility of further confusion with Eritrea's Tigre.

¹⁸ The Eritreans have accused the regional administration of Tigray in Mekkele of being responsible for the outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea. According to the Eritrean Government, Tigray's regional administration issued a map in which the boundaries between the two countries had been modified without prior notification. The gap between the two 'Tigrayan' communities has further widened since the outbreak of the 1998 border war.

¹⁹ Davidson, Basil, 'Eritrea: A Historical Note,' in: Bereket Habte Selassie et al., *Behind the War in Eritrea*, Spokesman, London, 1980; Bereket Habte Selassie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of*

the two countries' common history prior to the arrival of the European powers in the Horn of Africa. The relative paucity of historical accounts prior to colonisation allows each side to interpret and manipulate the available facts to support their respective arguments.

Nevertheless, it is possible to say that, before Italian colonisation, the territory which now constitutes Eritrea was never under one continuous single authority. While Eritrea's coastal position made it vulnerable to the various external influences that followed one another throughout the centuries (Greeks, Ottomans, Egyptians and Europeans), this would have had little impact on the formation of Eritrean identity.²⁰ Not only were these influences limited to a narrow portion of what is now Eritrea's territory, but also throughout this period, the history of Eritrea's highlands continued to be bound to that of Ethiopia's Tigray. To summarise, as Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux note:

no distinct and united area corresponding to Eritrea was at any time an independent entity in the pre-colonial period. An Ethiopian entity did exist, but the extent and centre of the Christian kingdoms of the interior varied considerably over the centuries. In other words, neither 'Eritrea' nor Ethiopia as presently constituted existed in the pre-colonial period.²¹

Given that neither Eritrea nor Ethiopia, as presently constituted, existed in the pre-colonial period, it would therefore seem hazardous to attempt any explanation of Eritrean nationalism by referring to ancient history. Indeed, 'the Eritrean nationalist claim that a separate "Eritrean" entity could be traced several centuries back is as

Africa, Monthly Review, New York, 1980; Okbazghi Yohannes, *Eritrea: A Pawn in World Politics*, University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1991.

²⁰ For a description of the successive Wolde-Yesus Ammar, *Eritrea. Root Causes of War and Refugees*, Singbad Printing Co., Baghdad, 1992.

²¹ Halliday, Fred and Molyneux, Maxine, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, Verso, London, 1981, p. 175. For a similar account see, Donham, Donald, 'Old Abyssinia and the new Ethiopian Empire: themes in social history,' in: James, Wendy, and Donham, Donald (eds), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 42.

untenable as Ethiopia's territorial claim over modern Eritrea.²² Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how the myth of an ancient Eritrea, despite its dubious historical foundations, is being propounded by some Eritrean scholars to legitimise Eritrea's claims to independence and further highlight its distinctiveness from Ethiopia.²³ The underlying assumption being that if a political entity can trace its roots in the dawn of times, its claims are more credible and legitimate. The future success of such myths will of course depend on the extent to which they can be made relevant and endorsed by the whole of Eritreans.

That said, Eritreans themselves have on the whole rarely based their claim for independence by reference to a common ethnicity or a distant common past.

In contrast to constructions of the past offered by greater Ethiopian discourse, which conflates ancient and contemporary empires, Eritrean nationalism does not typically appeal to deeply-rooted historical identity, but begins with Italian colonialism and stresses the development, through several stages, of a new identity based on common experience.²⁴

From the outset, Eritreans defined their nationalist aspiration as emanating from their shared colonial experience and presented the question of independence essentially in territorial and international legal terms, arguing that Eritrea's right to self-determination should be decided on the same grounds as those of the other ex-African colonies.

²² Wolder-Yesus Ammar, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²³ Longrigg's *Short History of Eritrea*, one of the first accounts to speak of a pre-colonial Eritrea, has recently been republished and is often quoted as reference in the Eritrean Government's official publications. Longrigg, Stephen, *A Short Story of Eritrea*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1945.

²⁴ Sorenson, John, 'Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, September 1991, p. 309.

b) *Eritrea's ethnic makeup*

Eritrea is, as indicated earlier, a multi-ethnic society. Although these groups are now spoken of as if they were self-evident and well defined entities,²⁵ this was not always the case. Indeed, following the argument developed in the preceding chapter, it would appear that Eritrea's nationalities have to some extent been shaped by events and that here too the European presence left its imprint.

The first accounts we have of Eritrea's ethnic composition come from Italian anthropologists and civil servants.²⁶ It was on the basis of these accounts that the Italian administration established the categories that were to be used in its censuses. Because of the discrepancies that surfaced between various accounts, the census categories were modified over time. Although attempts were made in certain circumstances to respect the groups' self-definition, it is interesting to note how certain criteria, namely language, were eventually singled out for classificatory purposes. The explanation provided by Senator Ferdinando Martini, civilian Governor to Eritrea from 1887 to 1907, to justify the categories delineated in the census is in this respect particularly revealing of the equation that was made between a people and a language.

I due dati [razze e lingue parlate] naturalmente sono conseguenza uno dell' altro, poiche ogni razza ha una lingua propria, e quindi il numero degli abitanti che parlano una lingua corrisponde generalmente al numero degli individui che alla razza corrispondente appartengo.²⁷

²⁵ See for example, Cliffe, Lionel, 'Forging a nation: the Eritrean experience,' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4, October 1989, pp. 131-147.

²⁶ See for example: Munzinger, Werner, *Studi sull' Africa Orientale*, Roma, 1890, and *Dei costumi e del diritto dei Bogos*, Roma, 1891; Contini Rossi, Carlo, *I principi di diritto consuetudinario dell'Eritrea*, Roma, 1916; Pollera, Alberto, *I Baria e i Cunama*, Roma, 1913, and *Le popolazioni indigene della colonia Eritrea*, Firenze, 1935.

²⁷ Martini, Ferdinando, *Allegati alla Relazione sulla Colonia Eritrea*, Atti Parlamentari, Roma, 1913, p. 14.

Although there were numerous problems with this linguistically defined typology, it nevertheless informed subsequent classifications. David Pool for instance has listed eight different 'linguistic' groupings.²⁸ Yet this categorisation has certain limitations. Pool, for instance, fails to take into account the fact that among those he describes as Saho-speakers are people who speak Tigre, and others Tigrinya.

While the Italian administration classified Eritrea's peoples according to language, the British administration, which took over from the Italians in 1941, favoured instead the religious dimension. This was indicated by the adoption of the Highland-Christian/Lowland-Muslim dichotomy. As will be explored further in the following section, it could be hypothesised that the British dichotomy reflected more their own interests and intentions than a perceived reality. It was indeed on this basis, that certain sections of the British administration justified their plan to partition Eritrea between Sudan and Ethiopia during the negotiations that were held on the future of Eritrea in the 1940s. Frequently depicted during the war for independence as one of the major rifts in Eritrean society, the Highland-Christian/Lowland-Muslim distinction is not entirely born out on the ground. The Kunama, who inhabit the lowlands of the Gash-Setit province, illustrate this point most clearly. Although most of its members appear to have retained some aspects of their traditional religion, many have converted to Christianity (Catholicism), but only few to Islam. The Djiberti could also be mentioned as another exception to this dichotomy, although Tigrinyan-speakers, these highlanders are Muslim.

Between 1905 and 1939, the Italian administration carried out a total of seven censuses. It is interesting to compare the ethnic categories delineated for this purpose with those established by the British administration in 1952 and those listed by the

²⁸ Pool, David, 'Eritrean Nationalism,' in: Lewis, I.M. (ed.), *Nationalism and Self Determination in*

current Eritrean administration. All of them include the Tigrinyans, the Tigre, the Saho, the Afar and the Kunama. But while the Italian classification comprises eight to eleven categories (depending on the census year), the British lists seven, while the Eritrean lists nine. The discrepancies can be attributed to three factors. Firstly, the subsequent adoption of self-referential naming; this is the case of the Nara, which were formerly known as the Baria. The Baria have frequently been associated with the Kunama, both of whom live in north-western Eritrea. By contrast to their neighbours who are considered to be of Semitic/Hamitic origin, the Kunama and the Baria are commonly defined as Nilotic or Negroid,²⁹ and have thus at times been grouped together, despite the fact that the Baria converted to Islam.³⁰

The privileging of group name, instead of language attribute also explains why the classifications differ; this is best illustrated by the Hadareb, commonly referred to as the Beja, a language spoken mainly in Sudan but also by the Hadareb. Depending on whether or not language is retained as the distinguishing criterion, the Hadareb will either be mentioned or not in the census. Interestingly, both the Hadareb and Beja categories are absent from the British administrative statistics. Finally, the third factors that accounts for the aforementioned discrepancy is the fact that some, previously unmentioned, groups have appeared (the Bilen, the Rashaida), while others have disappeared (the Bogos) from the censuses.

The case of the Bogos is particularly instructive in that it illustrates the processes by which the linguistic criterion has progressively been favoured to the detriment of any pre-existing political self-classification. In a 1891 study, *Dei*

the Horn of Africa, Ithaca Press, London, 1983, p. 10.

²⁹ Ethiopiawi, 'The Eritrea-Ethiopian Conflict', in: Suhrke, Astri and Noble, Lela Garner, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations*, Praeger Publishers, London and New York, 1977, p. 128.

³⁰ Mourant, A.E., *et al.*, 'The blood groups and haemoglobins of the Kunama and Baria of Eritrea, Ethiopia,' *Annals of Human Biology*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1974, pp. 383-392.

Costumi e del diritto dei Bogos, Werner Mutzinger describes how the Bogos ruling caste were known as Shumagle while the serfs were known as Tigre.³¹ Although according to some sources, Bilen and Bogos would refer to the same people,³² the reference to the Tigre as being the serfs of the Bogos somewhat obscures this interpretation.

We indicated earlier that the Tigre was one of the groups upon which there seemed to be some agreement. It is therefore somewhat surprising that most of the difficulties encountered when attempting to define the various ethnic groups in Eritrea appear to be linked to this particular category. The often cited Beni Amer, one of the most influential groups in Eritrea, are often said to belong to the Tigre although they are also included in the Beja group;³³ so do the Habab (or Haddab), the Mensa and the Maria.³⁴ For census purposes, the Italians considered them as a single group on the basis of common language despite the fact that some of these people did not necessarily all speak Tigre³⁵ and that they did not constitute a unified political unit. The picture is further complicated by the fact that Tigre not only refers to a language but 'also refers to the predominant but exploited class of serfs that were dominated by the aristocracy (*nabtab*) found amongst these groups.'³⁶ Tigre would thus have been a category of serfs serving under, or exploited by, one of the above

³¹ Negash, Tekeste, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea: Policies, Praxis and Impact, 1882-1941*, Almqvist and Wiksell International, Stockholm, 1987, p. 7.

³² *La Colonia Eritrea. Manuale d'Instruzione Italiano-Tigrai. Ad uso delle scuole indigene per cura Della Missione Cattolica*, Tipografia Franciscana, Asmara, 1917. It might be useful to mention here that the people described in the manual do not necessarily coincide with the categories established for the censuses. The description given tends to reflect more the socio-political groupings than a classification based on language, thus many groups appear here that are not mentioned in other sources. Location, language spoken and numbers are given for the various groups discussed.

³³ Tekeste Negash seems to consider Beja and Beni Amer as interchangeable categories, compare 1986, p. 39 and 1987, p. 134. See, Longrigg, 1945, *op. cit.*, in Appendix B, Table of Bani Amir Constituent Tribes, where it is shown that the various tribes speak either Tigre or Beja.

³⁴ Here again the picture is further complicated if one refers to Trevaskis, 1960, *op. cit.*, p. 14, where the Maria and the Mensa are included among the Saho.

³⁵ Tigre, like Tigrinya and Amharic, is also derived from the ancient Ge'ez.

mentioned tribes. This might in turn account for the confusion that surrounds any description of the aforementioned Beni Amer for it would appear that the two or three castes (i.e.: the ruling cast or Nabtab, the serfs and slaves) might have spoken different languages. Here again it is difficult to know if the exploited groups did actually speak a different language and constitute a self-perceived ethnic group (Tigre), or if this distinction was only subsequently established for political purposes.

It emerges from our discussion that Eritrea's ethnic categories are not as clear-cut and easily definable as might have been originally thought. Although some of the aforementioned groups shared the same language, religion or other cultural traits, they might not have considered themselves as one, or at least, not until recently. Indeed, their respective identities appear to have evolved and undergone changes under the influences of migrations, intermarriages, and processes of fusion and fission. As Lionel Cliffe writes:

The "givens" of cultural homogeneity and common history do not predetermine the way that ethnic group participates politically, how they define and redefine their political consciousness in the process, or even which particular amalgams act together as an ethnic group.³⁷

While some groups in Eritrea might have fused the cultural and political dimensions in their self-definition since time 'immemorial', many others have not. Indeed, the crystallisation in cultural/political terms of an otherwise relatively fluid process of group formation would appear to be a relatively recent development.

The above analysis of Eritrea's ethnic groups or nationalities, would therefore seem to confirm the previous chapter's discussion about ethnicity in Africa and it could well be that, as suggested by Anderson, this crystallisation is a characteristic of

³⁶ Cliffe, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 133. For an explanation of the see also Ellingson, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 267, footnote 22 and Tekeste Negash, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³⁷ Cliffe, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

the modern state's administration and of its need to compile the population under its sovereignty.³⁸ Indeed, among the various groups mentioned in the different works consulted, only those that were eventually retained by the censuses appear to have 'survived', the other groups, we must assume, have been subsumed under either one of the remaining categories and perhaps even been assimilated. While the Italian and British presence is most commonly viewed in the ways it might have shaped the Eritrean nation, it could therefore also be argued that their legacy is paradoxical in that it sowed the seeds of potential intra-Eritrean disunity. Indeed, despite the EPLF's claims to the contrary, Eritrea's national unity is not unchallenged.

Two groups in particular may be singled-out as potentially disruptive: the Kunama and the Afar.³⁹ The case of the Afar is particularly thorny given that this group, which straddles the borders of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti, already has a history of opposition to Ethiopian rule.⁴⁰ The fact that the 'Afar Sultanate of Awsa remained virtually autonomous' until the 1974 Ethiopian revolution,⁴¹ and that the Afar territory is located around the strategic port of Assab may complicate matters further for Eritrea's government. As for the Kunama, several factors have contributed to the crystallisation of their identity in ethnic terms. The role of the Franciscan mission, which is greatly responsible for their conversion to Catholicism and for recording their language and history is one. The fact that the Kunama have often been accused of siding with Ethiopia in the earlier stages of the liberation struggle is another potential factor. Also important is the fact that they live in one of the rare

³⁸ Anderson, 1991, *op. cit.*, in particular chapter 10- Census, maps and museums.

³⁹ Gilkes, Patrick, 'Eritrea: historiography and mythology, *African Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 361, October 1991, pp. 623-29; Prunier, Gérard, 'Atouts et failles de l'Erythrée indépendante,' *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 20 avril 1993, p. 20; Pool, 1983, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-193.

⁴⁰ On the Afar, see: Shehim, Kassim, 'Ethiopia, Revolution, and the Question of Nationalities: the Case of the Afar', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1985, pp. 331-48.

⁴¹ Clapham, 1988, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

fertile areas of Eritrea, the Gash-Setit region. It was indeed forecasted that many of the refugees returning from Sudan would be allotted plots of land in this area. Rumour also has it that former EPLF fighters would be encouraged to resettle there. The basis for the politicisation of the Kunama in ethnic terms already exists, any attempt to forcibly stifle it will therefore only further fuel it. Unless the Eritrean government shows greater consideration towards these ethnic communities, it may end up facing a difficult and protracted problem.

4.2 – The legacies of Italian colonisation

Eritrea acquired both its name and territorial configuration in January 1890 when King Umberto proclaimed the existence of the Italian colony of Eritrea.⁴² Italy's presence in the region was made possible because of Britain's need to curtail French expansion in the Red Sea area, as the opening of the Suez canal in 1867 considerably enhanced Eritrea's strategic location. Possible French expansion, from its colony of Obock (now Djibouti), had to be checked without London incurring additional financial burdens. Britain sought to fill the vacuum left by the retreat of the Egyptian troops, defeated by the Mahdiyya, and invited Italy to occupy those areas.⁴³ *Negusa Nagast* Menilek tried to halt Italy's encroachment into the Ethiopian highlands by signing the treaty of Wichale in May 1889.⁴⁴ Conflicting interpretation of article 17 of the Treaty of Wichale, concerning Ethiopia's power over the area, and Italy's subsequent expansion well beyond the treaty's provisions, led to the famous battle of

⁴² The choice of the name Eritrea would derive from the name given to the Red Sea, first by the Ptolemaic Greeks in the third century B.C. (*Sinus Erythraeus*) and later by the Romans (*Mare Erythraeum*). Saleh Sabe, Osman, *The History of Eritrea*, Dar Al-Masirah, Beirut, (no date), p. 28.

⁴³ Prunier, Gérard, 'Italian Colonialism in Eritrea (1882-1941): Policies, Praxis and Impact,' *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 295, 1992, p. 275.

⁴⁴ For a detailed account of the Treaty and of the events that followed, see: Rubenson, Sven, *Wichale XVII: The Attempt to Establish a Protectorate over Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, 1964, and *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, Heinemann, London, 1976.

Adwa of 1896.⁴⁵ Often cited as a landmark in the history of African opposition to colonialism, this battle can also be seen as Ethiopia's surrender of Eritrea.

a) The early stages of colonisation

One of the reasons generally given to account for Italy's motivation to colonise Eritrea is the creation of a colony of settlement.⁴⁶ The Italian government was then faced with high unemployment in southern Italy which created strong centrifugal movements within the newly unified state:

The policy of colonial expansion was according to Gramsci a device for side tracking some internal issues of a political and economic nature. In other words, Crispi wished to resolve the land question in southern Italy without any reform measures by keeping the mirage of colonial lands.⁴⁷

The appropriation of native lands by the Italian colonisers and, more importantly, the introduction of modern agriculture affected traditional land tenure systems in Eritrea. The effect of these on the Eritrean peasantry were significant and triggered revolt, but, according to Negash, these policies remained localised and too short-lived to induce social transformations of the kind necessary for nationalism to emerge.⁴⁸

If education is to be given a preponderant role in nation-formation, then discussion of the existence of a sense of Eritrean nationalism during the Italian occupation must be tempered, but perhaps not, as Tekeste Negash argues, totally dismissed.⁴⁹ Whilst the Italian colonial authorities did little in the way of education, they nevertheless left the task in the hands of the numerous missions of various Christian denominations. Banned when the Fascists took power in the 1920s, these

⁴⁵ Longrigg, 1945, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁴⁶ Pankhurst, Richard, 'Italian Settlement Policy in Eritrea and Its Repercussions, 1889-1896,' in Butler, J., (ed.), *Boston University Papers in African History*, Vol. 1, Boston University Press, Boston, 1964.

⁴⁷ Negash, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ An assessment of the impact of Italian colonialism on the land tenure system and its effect on social differentiation can be found in Negash, 1986, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-94.

missions resumed their operations in the 1940s. They greatly contributed to the education of a portion of Eritrea's population, and this not only during colonisation, but also in later years. Indeed, fieldwork carried in Eritrea in 1994, revealed that many of those occupying higher positions in the University of Asmara, in secondary schools and in government administration, had been educated in Anglican, Swedish or Catholic Missions in the 1940s and 1950s. Some of the missions also pursued their work throughout the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, thus educating part of the younger generations and many of the orphans. While the numbers of those educated through the missions during the Italian colonial period remains difficult to compile, they were sufficiently numerous for it to be possible to talk, albeit in modest terms, of an emerging Western-educated elite.

Furthermore, if one looks at the textbooks used by the Catholic missions in Eritrea, one sees how they may have contributed to the creation of a sense of "Eritrean-ness." These textbooks, where Eritrea is depicted as a cohesive entity and its main features are described, were probably the first written texts to lay down a comprehensive account of Eritrea's history. As the following passage illustrates, it is clear that the objective pursued by these manuals, and more broadly by the Italian colonisers, was to instil a sense of common Eritrean identity.

Leggendo queste pagine gli Indigeni apprezzeranno l'opera nostra, e nascerà nel cuore più vivo e più intenso l'affetto per l'Eritrea, figlia primogenita dell'Italia.⁵⁰

Eritreans educated in the missions thus acquired through their teaching a unitary conception of Eritrea whose particular history distinguished it from other countries in the region. The maps of Eritrea included in these textbooks, also provided the

⁴⁹ Negash, 1987, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-4.

⁵⁰ *La Colonia Eritrea. Manuale d'Instruzione*, 1917, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

necessary visual support, or in Anderson's terms the 'map as logo', which is the basis for an imagined community.⁵¹ In addition to these changes, which could be considered as positive or consolidating factors towards Eritrean nation-formation, are also those that could be termed negative or differentiating elements. Intended as a means of establishing a separation with Ethiopia, policies such as the prohibition of Amharic⁵² may have also had a binding effect on the Eritrean people.

b) Eritrea as a basis for Italy's expansion

If the changes introduced before the 1920s may be considered to have had relatively little impact on the Eritrean population, the transformations that accompanied the second half of Italian colonialism were to have greater bearing on the formation of Eritrean nationalism. Indeed, while the need for a settler colony may originally have motivated Italian policy,⁵³ imperial considerations soon acquired particular importance.

The most important function of the colony remained as a supplier of colonial soldiers for Italian expansion elsewhere. It was however, in Libya that Eritrea compensated Italy for the latter's [sic] perseverance. Up to 4,000 Eritrean soldiers were permanently stationed in Libya between 1912 and 1932. (...) It is not an exaggeration to state that the Libyan occupation was made possible by the continuous supply of fighting forces from the "first-born colony" (la colonia primogenita) at a cost which the Italian tax-payers and the state could easily sustain.⁵⁴

Eritrea's importance as a springboard for further colonial expansion would increase further in the latter stages of Italian occupation when it would provide both bases and soldiers for Mussolini's Italian East African Empire.

⁵¹ The importance of the cartographic expression was also made clear at independence. The first stamp to be issued represented the contours of Eritrea against the backdrop of its flag.

⁵² Getatchew Haile, 'The Unity and Territorial integrity of Ethiopia', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1986, p. 477.

⁵³ Yemane Mesghenna, *Italian Colonialism: A Case Study of Eritrea, 1869-1934. Motive, Praxis and Result*, Lund, Sweden, 1988.

Further expansion of the existing administrative system's bureaucracy and police, and technological innovations in the fields of transport and communication⁵⁵ count among the most noteworthy contributions of this period. Technological innovations are still today viewed as one of the most important legacies of the Italian period. The eighty miles long railroad linking the sea-port of Massawa to the capital of Asmara was completed in 1911, and the Asmara-Keren-Agordat line, connecting the highlands to the western lowlands, was opened in 1922. Although most of the railway lines and roads were destroyed either by the British or by the Ethiopians, there remains an impressive network which connects the various parts of the country. Such extensive and sophisticated communications infrastructure (railways, roads, ports, telegraph and post) not only contributed to Eritrea's economic and political unification but also laid the basis for the nation-building process.

These developments considerably facilitated movement within the territory and were accompanied by a dramatic process of urbanisation. From a small centre of no more than 15,000 inhabitants in 1935, Asmara grew to become a city encompassing as many as 120,000 inhabitants in 1941. Various towns throughout the country grew steadily into organised municipalities which by 1941 included no less than 20% of the total population.⁵⁶ Prior to the Italian occupation, the Eritrean population was predominantly rural: peasant in the highlands, nomads in the lowlands. Under the Italian rule however, and this more particularly so from the 1920s onwards, the Eritrean peasant population was profoundly affected by rapid

⁵⁴ Negash, Tekeste, *Eritrea and Ethiopia. The Federal Experience*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1997, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Longrigg, 1945, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-9; Gebre-Medhin, Jordan, *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea*, The Red Sea Press, Trenton, N. J., 1989, pp. 59-62.

⁵⁶ Killion, Tom, 'The Eritrean Economy in Historical Perspective' *Eritrean Studies Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1996, p.102.

urbanisation, industrialisation, and the commercialisation of agriculture.⁵⁷ By introducing elements of modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation, Italian colonisation thus contributed to the formation of the necessary structural conditions for the emergence of nationalism, i.e.: Gellner's industrialisation and Deutsch's networks of communication.

But perhaps more telling, is the fact that all these changes – including the recruitment of soldiers for Italy's colonial armies – were introduced for the most part in preparation for the future invasion of Ethiopia.

Preparation for the Italian invasion of Ethiopia began in 1929 with the expansion of the port of Massawa, which by 1935 boasted the most extensive harbor facilities between Alexandria and Cape Town. In 1934 the expansion of the road network was begun by thousands of Eritrean workers, and military recruitment was stepped up to mobilize an Eritrean army over 60,000 strong. (...) Thus all the strands of Italian colonial policy in Eritrea wove themselves together to create an emphasis on Eritrea as a spring-board for Italian penetration of Ethiopia.⁵⁸

Here then was a situation of a state preparing for war so propitious, according to Mann and Posen, for the emergence of nationalism. Soldiering employed close to 10% of active male labour before 1934 and over 40% in 1935-40.⁵⁹ Education was used for the purposes of mobilisation and for the formation of Italy's future soldiers.⁶⁰ In 1938-39, there were twenty state-run elementary schools, attended by 4,177 Eritrean students.

All instruction in the government schools was given in Italian; text-books, expensively produced, were written in Italian and glorified the Duce (a reference to Mussolini) on almost every page. In addition, Military service was lauded. Boys were encouraged to become "little soldiers of the Duce", the

⁵⁷ Gebre-Medhin, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 60; and Pool, *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 178.

⁵⁸ Killion, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁵⁹ Negash, 1987, *op. cit.*, 1987, pp. 48-51.

⁶⁰ Teklehaimanot, Berhane, 'Education in Eritrea During the European Colonial Period,' *Eritrean Studies Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 4-8.

Fascist salute was compulsory, and at the morning hoisting of the flag, Italian songs were sung.⁶¹

Triggered in part by the racial laws introduced in the 1920s, the first anti-colonial stirrings amongst Eritreans began to be voiced. Nevertheless, as the preparations for war gathered a pace, Eritrea's economy experienced a period of intensive development 'that transformed Eritrea's society from one that was overwhelmingly rural and traditionally-based to one with a significant urban and industrial component.'⁶² On the 3rd of October 1935, the Italian army with the help of 50,000 Eritrean troops⁶³ crossed the Mareb River and began their invasion of Ethiopia.⁶⁴ On the 5th of May 1936, they captured Addis Ababa. From 1936 to 1941, Italy would rule over its vast East African Empire (Africa Orientale Italiana). The Empire was divided up into six regions: Eritrea, Amhara, Harrar, Somalia, Galla-Sidama, and Addis Ababa. The area which corresponds roughly to today's Ethiopian Tigray region was thus incorporated into the province of Eritrea.⁶⁵ During this period, Eritrea's economy continued to flourish, as Italian investment in various industrial sectors multiplied. Half of Italy's manufactures abroad were located in Eritrea, representing 80,5% of Rome's colonial investments in the manufacturing sector.⁶⁶

While it would no doubt be an exaggeration to speak of a broadly shared sense of 'Eritrean-ness' during the Italian period, it would nevertheless be inaccurate to conclude that Italy's sole legacy was to give the country a name.⁶⁷ If education

⁶¹ Teklehaimanot, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁶² Killion, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁶³ Negash, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶⁴ For a description of Italy's invasion see, Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia. 1855-1974*. James Currey, London, 1991, pp. 150-177. Italy's claims over Ethiopia were initiated in 1934 with the Walwal incident, about which more will be said in the chapter on Somaliland.

⁶⁵ The pursuit of pacification through ethnic partition is explained by one of Italy's former governors to Ethiopia, Corrado Zoli, in his article 'The Organization of Italy's East African Empire', *Foreign Affairs*, XVI, October 1937 to July 1938, p. 84. See also: Negash, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁶⁶ Prunier, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁶⁷ As argued for instance by Negash, 1987, *op. cit.*; and Getatchew Haile, 1986, *op. cit.*, pp. 465-87.

was relatively underdeveloped,⁶⁸ it nevertheless introduced and spread throughout the population the necessary elements – a territorial configuration and a specific history – which would render possible the ‘imagining of the community.’ Indeed, not only are the international boundaries of the Eritrean state those established under the Italian colonisation but also the territorial division of the country into seven administrative regions remained substantially unchanged under the Italian and British administrations and into present times, undergoing only slight modifications throughout. Moreover, the war economy of the later period introduced and established, through industrialisation and urbanisation, the material basis for the emergence of a nation. But while the Italians laid down the necessary structural conditions for an Eritrean nation to exist, more was needed for nationalism to emerge. This factor, or dynamic force – the politicisation of Eritreans around the nationalist project – was triggered during the period of British Military Administration which lasted from 1941 to 1952. By contrast to Gellner, who asserts that nationalism preceded the nation, we are therefore arguing here that some rudimentary elements of nationhood were laid down before nationalism appeared.

4.3 – The British legacy: first stages towards politicisation

Following the defeat of Italy in 1941, the British occupied Eritrea for the following decade. Until 1945, Eritrea served as a military base for Britain and the Allies:

In November 1941, the U.S. War Department developed a secret plan, known as Project-19, to reinforce a British military operation against Rommel in North Africa. The overarching purpose of project-19 was to transform Eritrea into a military communication and distribution center for war material.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ According to Trevaskis, not only were the number schools set up by the Italians low, but so were the standards of education, 1960, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁶⁹ Okbazghi Yohannes, *The United States and the Horn of Africa. An Analytical Study of Pattern and Process*. Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1997, p. 114.

Given Britain's colonial interests in the area, namely in Sudan, the position of the British administration in Eritrea was an ambiguous and delicate one. Mandated to administer Eritrea under the principles of the Hague Convention of 1907, until international decision on the fate of Italy's former colonies was reached, the British Military Administration (BMA) ruled over Eritrea until 1949. It was then replaced by a British civilian administration which ruled until 1952. Although British presence was relatively brief compared to that of the Italians, its legacy in terms of the future politicisation of Eritrea is crucial. Indeed, during this period, the educational system was enhanced and the first political parties were established. Also, and perhaps as important, was the way in which Britain's project to partition Eritrea unified the new political elites in the preservation of their country's territorial integrity.

a) The British Military Administration

As mentioned earlier, the Italian administration did little in the way of providing the Eritreans with a substantial educational system, a lacuna that the British rapidly sought to correct.⁷⁰ Under British Military Administration, the number of primary schools more than doubled from twenty-four to fifty-nine and from 1943 to 1950, Eritrean enrolment in elementary schools grew from 2, 405 to 9,131.⁷¹

At first a few schools were opened with the help of trained teachers recruited from Sudan and from the few Eritreans with higher education; later, other schools were opened as pupil teachers became available, and finally, after a system of teacher training had been introduced in 1943, a steady flow of trained teachers was fed out to the schools. Arabic textbooks were obtained from Egypt and the Sudan, and, later, others in Tigrinya were prepared and printed by the Administration.⁷²

⁷⁰ Teklehaimanot, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-14.

⁷¹ Teklehaimanot, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁷² Trevaskis, 1960, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

Arabic and Tigrinya thus replaced Italian as mediums of instruction. Adoption of Arabic does not at first seem self-evident. Except for some nomadic Rashaida tribes along the coast near Massawa, Arabic had never been much more than a market *lingua franca*. In response to enquiries about the number of Arabic-speaking Eritreans in 1943, Colonel S.F. Nadel, then Chief-Secretary in Asmara, highlighted the difficulty of estimating with any precision their number as ‘the knowledge of Arabic among Eritreans is mostly rather modest and of poor, colloquial standard.’⁷³

It would in fact appear that the adoption of Arabic by the British was done in preparation for Eritrea’s projected dismantling and Western Eritrea’s future incorporation into Sudan. Britain’s plans of annexing these regions were indeed slowly, although secretly, being articulated.⁷⁴ In a letter dated 14 August 1942 to R.C. Mayall, then Sudan Agent in London, Sir Douglas Newbold, Civil Secretary of the British Service in Sudan, wrote:

Nothing much to report about Eritrea, except that I am investigating at leisure the possibilities of Sudan taking over the areas north and west of Asmara after the war, if we are asked to do so. Incidentally, Lea has disposed of the religious problem. Evidence is conclusive that there are no Catholics among the Beni Amer, except in the imagination of the Italian Catholic missionaries.⁷⁵

As will shortly be discussed Britain’s partition plan was to be formally expounded during talks regarding the future of Eritrea. Suffice it to say that despite improvements in the realm of education, few changes were introduced in Eritrea during the early years of British occupation.

⁷³ Memo 77/1. 29 June 1943. *Information Office, Asmara. Radio Licences*. Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara.

⁷⁴ According to Haggai Erlich, British policy towards Eritrean Muslims would go back as far as 1885. See, Erlich, Haggai, *Ethiopia and the Challenge of Independence*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 1986, pp. 47-64.

⁷⁵ Henderson, K.D.D., *The Making of Northern Sudan*, Faber and Faber, Ltd, London, 1953, p. 267. Incidentally, there is some doubt as to how C.E.A. Lea, then Civil Affairs Officer in Keren, ‘disposed’ of the religious problem, for the Kunama, included in this area to be annexed, are for the most part Catholics, thus undermining somewhat the rationale for unifying Muslim territories.

Until 1945, Eritrea had continued to serve as a military base for Britain and its Allies in their Mediterranean campaign. Although the BMA took over the running of the state, Eritrea's economy remained in the hands of Italians. The liberalisation of Eritrea's economy and political life would only occur after the end of the war and more precisely after 1949, when the BMA was replaced by the civilian British Administration. Although political parties were initially banned, a few clandestine organisations began to emerge as early as 1941, the most important of which was the Mahber Fikri Hager Ertra (Association for the Love of the Country of Eritrea).⁷⁶ Then in 1945, with the ending of WWII, the question of Eritrea's future was finally considered by the Council of Foreign Ministers of Britain, France, the USA and the USSR.

The international debates about the fate of Eritrea and the other Italian colonies of Libya and Somalia were initiated in 1945. A council consisting of the foreign ministers of Britain, France, the USA, and the USSR (CFM) held its first meeting in London in September 1945. At this time Ethiopian claims over Eritrea and Somalia were rejected by the CFM.(...) It was only when agreement was found to be impossible, that the CFM decided to send the Four Powers Commission of investigation (FPC) to the colonies to hear the wishes of the inhabitants themselves.⁷⁷

In preparation for the arrival of the Four Powers Commission of investigation, whose task was to ascertain the wishes of the Eritrean population with regards to their country's future, the British Military Administration lifted the ban on political parties in October 1946.

Until then, the only existing political organisations were the clandestine *Mahber Fikri Hager Ertra* (MFHE) and the also clandestine group, later known as the *Ertra*

⁷⁶ For a description of this organisation and its composition (whose leadership was equally representative of both Muslims and Christians) see: Iyob, Ruth, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence. Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 65-69. See also, Ellingson, Lloyd, 'The emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-1950,' *Journal of African History*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, 1977, p. 261.

n'Ertrawian (Eritrea for Eritreans). The MFHE had been set up in May 1941 by a group of Eritreans, consisting of Christians, Muslims, intellectuals and traditional elders.⁷⁸ Its founding members included: Grebremeskel Woldu, Ibrahim Sultan and Woldeab Woldemariam. The MFHE's aim was to ensure that Eritrea did not return under Italian rule, and was thus the first anti-colonial movement in the country. In 1945, Woldeab Woldemariam left the MFHE, which was then beginning to fragment, and established the *Ertra n'Ertrawian*.

Woldeab's group opposed the dominance of the Coptic Church and sought to preserve the liberal pluralism introduced by the BMA. The group proposed a fifteen-year trusteeship before independence, both to prevent partition and to allow ample time for the development of Eritrean social, economic, and political institutions. Woldeab sought the support of those traditional elites who were opposed to Ethiopian rule.⁷⁹

Woldeab Woldemariam, an Orthodox Christian highlander, was educated at a Lutheran mission in Asmara, where he taught for several years. His involvement in Eritrean politics began when he became the editor of the *Eritrean Weekly News* set under BMA sponsorship at the end of 1942. He was to play an important role in the future nationalist movement and is now acknowledged as one of the main 'heroes' of Eritrea's fight for independence.

b) Eritrea's first political parties

When the Four Powers Commission (FPC) visited Eritrea from 23 November to 14 December 1947, it heard a total of 3, 336 representatives from the following five parties:

- (1) 1, 559 from the Union with Ethiopia Party,

⁷⁷ Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 62. For a description of the positions advocated by the different powers present see, Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-7.

⁷⁸ Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

- (2) 1, 033 from the Muslim League,
- (3) 313 from the Liberal Progressive Party,
- (4) 358 from the New Eritrea Pro-Italia Party, and
- (5) 33 from the National Party of Massawa.⁸⁰

Interestingly, and as noted by Ruth Iyob, the Commission failed to meet Woldeab Woldemariam. Reference to his name was nevertheless made in the Commission's Report annex, under the title 'Information from the Administering Authority regarding statement by Mr. Woldemariam of the Independent Eritrea Party'.⁸¹ The history of Eritrea's first political parties is still subject to contentious interpretation, each side arguing that their political adversaries were in fact created by foreign powers and consequently did not represent the interests of the Eritrean population.⁸²

Formed in 1944, the Unionist Party advocated reunification of Eritrea with Ethiopia on the grounds of their common cultural and historical links. Some of its leaders were former members of the MFHE, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that this organisation was the direct ancestor to the Unionist Party. Indeed, as was suggested earlier, the MFHE split into several factions, and while some of its members were later to join the Unionist Party, others, such as Woldeab Woldemariam and Ibrahim Sultan, rejected the idea of unification with Ethiopia. It is frequently argued that the Christian Orthodox Church not only supported financially and verbally the Unionist cause but in fact instigated the movement acting on behalf

⁸⁰ Ellingson, 1977, *op. cit.*, footnote 5, p. 263.

⁸¹ Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, footnote 16, p. 159.

⁸² For an illustration of the polemical nature of this debate, see: Negash, 1997, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-34.

of the Ethiopian government in support of its irredentist aims.⁸³ According to Trevaskis:

If they were not to lose their case by default, the Ethiopians had to arouse some Eritrean support. To this end they first turned to the Coptic Church. (...) By 1942 every priest had become a propagandist in the Ethiopian cause, every village had become a centre of Ethiopian nationalism, and popular feast days (...) had become occasions for open displays of Ethiopian patriotism.⁸⁴

That the Ethiopian government actively supported the Unionist Party should neither be surprising nor shocking; that it actually set up the party is more difficult to substantiate, as are the accusations that the Unionist Party gained support through terror both physical and moral (via the Church). When the Four Powers Commission issued its report, based on survey that had been conducted by the British Military Administration in 1947, it recorded that 48% of Eritreans supported the Unionist Party. Although this may have, as is frequently suggested, indicated strong support for unification with Ethiopia amongst the urban Tigrinya/Christians, it could also be seen, as Killion suggests,

as a manifestation, at least in part, of an anti-colonial “proto-nationalism” that regarded unity with Ethiopia as a means of empowering indigenous Eritreans against European colonizers.⁸⁵

The main opposition to the Unionist Party came from the Muslim League, with 31% of Eritrean support according to the 1947 survey. Set up in 1946 by Ibrahim Sultan, the Muslim League’s initial aim was to ensure the emancipation of Tigre serfs from their mainly Beni Amer masters, who had joined the Unionist Party.⁸⁶ Thus, while the party’s platforms of the Unionist Party and the Muslim League were formulated

⁸³ Ellingson, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 266. According to Ellingson ‘The Unionist Party was handsomely subsidised by the Ethiopian Government although, of course, this was never publicly admitted.’ This opinion is shared by Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, and Obzaghi Yohanes, 1991, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Trevaskis, 1960, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

⁸⁵ Killion, Tom, ‘Eritrean Workers’ Organization and Early Nationalist Mobilization: 1948-1958,’ *Eritrean Studies Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1997, footnote 36, p. 43.

⁸⁶ Ellingson, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

mainly in terms of nationalist or religious aims, underlying status or socio-economic interests were also defended. Initially, the Muslim League's position was not necessarily one of complete independence. Some of its members favoured the maintenance of a British Administration in Eritrea (i.e.: the Tigre and Baria), while others staunchly opposed it (Beni Amer, Jiberti, Kunama, Saho and Afar, all of whom advocated an Italian trusteeship solution). Despite internal disagreement, the Muslim League nevertheless presented the option of a British trusteeship to the Four Powers Commission as an acceptable compromise if total independence was not possible. The Unionist Party saw the favourable position of the League towards a British Trusteeship solution as an indication of British influence in the formation and orientation of the Muslim League. As with the Unionist Party, the legitimacy of the Muslim League has been questioned with the suggestion that it had in fact been instigated and supported by the British administration.⁸⁷ Although this might have been the case up to 1948, the Muslim League later split into several factions. One of these splinter groups, the Western Muslims composed mainly by the Beni Amer, compromised with the Unionists after the 1952 election in opposition to British plans for annexing their territory to Sudan. By contrast to the Unionist Party, the other four other organisations advocated Eritrea's independence, although some variations as to how this was to be achieved distinguished them from one another.

Originally presenting itself as a veteran association, the New Eritrean pro-Italian Party, composed of Eritreans and Italians residing in Eritrea, advocated independence while accepting a transition period under an Italian trusteeship.

⁸⁷ Tekeste Negash seems to imply that the Muslim League was formed in October 1947 under the instigation of Brigadier General Benoy. See Negash, Tekeste, 'The Unionist Party and Its Strategies of Irredentism, 1941-50,' in: Bahru Zewde, Richard Pankhurst and Tadesse Beyene (Eds), *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Volume 1, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa university, 1994, p. 301.

Established only a few weeks before the arrival of the FPC, the political impact of this group was considered to be negligible, despite it having recorded 11% of support according to the Four Powers Commission's report. Also marginal, with 1% of support, was the National Party of Massawa, set up by a dissenting faction of the Muslim League. But perhaps the most important of the four pro-independence parties, despite having recorded only 9% in the Four Powers Commission's report, was the Liberal Progressive Party.

The creation of the Liberal Progressive Party signalled the emergence of a separatist stance among the Eritrean Tigrinyans. Its origins are generally traced to a movement which emerged in 1943 in the administrative division of Akele-Guzai, one of the three highland provinces. Led by Dejazmach Tessema Asmerom, later to be made *Ras* by the British colonial administration, this movement advocated the restoration of the ancient Tigrayan Kingdom making clear thus its irredentist claims on the bordering Ethiopian province of Tigray. The British initially encouraged this movement as it fitted closely with their plans for a Greater Tigray. When the ban on political parties was lifted in 1947, the movement, still under the leadership of Ras Tessema Asmerom, became the Eritrean Liberal Progressive Party and completely modified its political platform. Its most active member, Woldeab Woldemariam, then Chief Editor of the *Eritrean Weekly Newsletter*, opposed unification with Ethiopia and advocated instead the idea of a 15 year UN trusteeship for Eritrea to be followed by independence. Although the Liberal Progressive Party seems to have enjoyed little support at the time, its leaders were to play an important role in the future nationalist uprising. Rather than seeing the highland Eritreans as being coerced into union with Ethiopia, as Trevaskis suggests, or on the contrary favourable to it, as Negash purports, it is more accurate to see them as divided on the issue. The fact that

most of the support for the Liberal Progressive Party came from urban centres (mostly but not exclusively Tigrinya), suggests that existing divisions were not merely, if at all, ethnically defined.

Tekeste Negash's claim that 'there was virtually no nationalist organisation that articulated the desire for Eritrean independence within the boundaries that existed up to 1936 when the issue of Eritrea's status was discussed in 1948,'⁸⁸ is not entirely accurate. The Muslim League, the Pro-Italy Party, the National Party of Massawa and the Liberal Progressive Party all advocated the maintenance of the pre-1936 boundaries. The Muslim League's position at the FPC was that the boundaries of Eritrea should remain as they were in 1935 unless, of course, there was some possibility of adjoining the territories of the remaining Beja tribes of Sudan and of the Afar living within Ethiopia to those of Eritrea.⁸⁹ The fact that some of these parties were to form a coalition, known as the Independence Bloc in 1948, further highlights the existence of a strong opposition to union with Ethiopia.⁹⁰ The Four Power Commission failed to reach an agreement on the future status of Eritrea by 1948, and the matter was referred the UN's General Assembly.⁹¹

c) The Bevin-Sforza proposal

Of the many draft resolutions submitted to the General Assembly in 1949, four proposals were envisaged: (1) Ethiopian annexation of Eritrea, (2) Eritrean independence, (3) the establishment of a UN trusteeship under Italian administration, or another western power, and (4) partition of the territory between Ethiopia, which was to have the mainly Christian inhabited plateaux as well as the sea-ports of

⁸⁸ Negash, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

⁸⁹ FPC, Appendix 20, 3; cited in Ellingson, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

Massawa and Assab, and British-Sudan, who would be given the Eritrean western province. The last of these four proposals, better known as the Bevin-Sforza plan attracted much attention. The plan was the result of an Agreement, reached in early May 1949, between British Foreign Secretary Bevin and Italian Foreign Minister Sforza, regarding all of Italy's former possessions. The Agreement planned:

independence for Libya in ten years. During that period the British would act as trustees for Cyrenaica and the French for the Fezzan. Tripolitania would be administered for two years by the British and then by the Italians for the remaining eight. Italian Somaliland was to be put under Italian trusteeship at once; Eritrea was to be divided between Abyssinia and Sudan, with certain rights reserved for Italy in the towns of Asmara and Massawa. Despite hostile demonstration in Tripolitania and Soviet opposition, this plan was approved by the political Committee of the General Assembly in May, but failed by one vote to secure the necessary two-thirds majority in the Assembly itself.⁹²

As an interested party in this decision-making process, Britain's governing of Eritrea had become more than that of just a 'care-taker'. Financial constraints had forced the British Administration to keep the Italian personnel present in the administration in all but the Western provinces bordering Sudan, as Britain's intention of annexing these regions was gradually crystallising in the minds of senior colonial officials. Brigadier Longrigg, Chief Administrator of Eritrea from 1941 to 1944, wrote that:

Muslim tribal areas adjoining the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan should be included in that country. The Central highland of Eritrea, with the port of Massawa and the Samhar and Saho tribes, should form part of a united Tigray state or province (...) The Danakil should be assigned to the Emperor. Eritrea should cease to exist.⁹³

Longrigg's ambiguous position as to whether Tigray should constitute a state or province is best explained by the disagreement between the British War Office and

⁹⁰ Indeed, as Ellingson notes, the fact that the unionists were unable to attract the majority, is itself significant. Ellingson, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

⁹¹ As established by Article 23 of the Peace Treaty with Italy in October 1946.

⁹² Bullock, Alan, *Ernest Bevin. Foreign Secretary*. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1983, p. 678.

the Foreign Office on the issue of whether Britain should favour a decentralised Ethiopia or restore full powers to Emperor Haile Selassie.⁹⁴ Whatever the precise outcome, it was clear that Eritrea was to be totally dismembered. The annexation to Sudan of Eritrea's western lowlands, coupled with the creation of a 'Greater Tigrayan State' (under British protection) and paralleled by the proposal for a 'Greater Somalia', all formed part of British designs to control the region and would later be used as bargaining positions with Ethiopia.

Recalling the famed politician Woldeab Woldemariam's 1949 declaration at the United Nations, Araya Tseggai relates how the prospect of Eritrea's disintegration united Eritrea's politicians.

When we set out to organize our party, the Liberal Progressive Party, our aim was to preserve the unity of Eritrea under the banner "Eritrean for Eritreans". Six Christians and six Muslims initiated with a vow. (...) We were determined to maintain above everything the unity of our people and our country. Because of this unity, we were able to defeat British schemes for partition of Eritrea. The people of Eritrea were not divided, neither was our country. They were unable to divide us into two peoples or two countries. All this came about because we all agreed on an unpartitioned unified Eritrea.⁹⁵

It could therefore be argued that one of the factors that contributed to the forging of a sense of Eritrean identity was Britain's proposal to partition Eritrea. Nevertheless, the fact that the Unionist Party had managed to muster the support of an important minority suggests that a broad based Eritrean nationalism had yet to crystallise. The following period would prove decisive in this respect.

⁹³ Longrigg, 1945, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-5. Emphasis added. It is noteworthy that alongside Foreign Minister Bevin's better known plan for a 'Greater Somalia', a similar scheme to devise a 'Greater Tigray' had been thought of.

⁹⁴ Erlich, Haggai, 'Tigrean "Nationalism," British Involvement, and Haile Selassie's Absolutism Northern Ethiopia, 1941-1943,' *Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1981, pp. 191-227.

⁹⁵ Tseggai, Araya, 'The History of the Eritrean Struggle' in: Cliffe, Lionel, and Davidson, Basil, (eds) *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace*, Spokesman, Nottingham, 1988, p. 72.

4.4 – War as catalyst of Eritrean identity

Although, as we saw earlier, the General Assembly eventually rejected the Bevin-Sforza plan, Eritrea's future remained unresolved. A five-member Commission on Eritrea was established by General Assembly Resolution 289 A(IV) in November 1949. Composed of representatives from Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan and South Africa, the commission was mandated to ascertain the wishes of the Eritrean people while bearing in mind Ethiopia's interest and security. When the UN Commission arrived in Eritrea in February 1950, the situation was somewhat different than that encountered earlier by the Four Powers Commission. There were no longer five political parties but two opposing camps: the Independence Bloc and the Unionist Party.⁹⁶ The Commission's five delegations reached three different conclusions. Norway proposed Eritrea's 'complete and immediate reunion' to Ethiopia, Burma and South Africa called for a federal solution, and Guatemala and Pakistan argued in favour of independence.⁹⁷

Debate in the UN General Assembly ensued, with the Soviet Bloc, Latin American and Asian countries initially supporting the recommendation that Eritrea be placed under trusteeship before being granted independence, while the US and its allies favouring a federation. The US had come to endorse Ethiopia's claims over Eritrea ever since 1941 when, in alliance with Britain, it began setting up military bases in Eritrea.⁹⁸ Despite the fact that it contravened its initial stance on decolonisation and self-determination, the US maintained its position. As relations

⁹⁶ For a description of the composition of these two blocs, see Iyob, 1995 *op. cit.*, pp. 75-8.

⁹⁷ UN *Report* (1950), 25. Paragraphs 165 and 172. As quoted in Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁹⁸ US military presence in Eritrea was to be formalised in 1953, when it signed an agreement with Ethiopia on Defence Installations, namely that of the Kagnew base. Located near Asmara, the Kagnew base formed part of the US's global communications network. Halliday, Fred, 'US Policy in the Horn of Africa: Aboulia or Proxy Intervention?' *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 10, September-December 1977, pp. 10-11.

between the US and the Soviet Union deteriorated, Eritrea's geostrategic position became all the more significant, as indicated in 1952 by the then Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles.

From the point of view of strict justice, the opinion of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the US and the Red Sea Basin and world peace make it necessary that the country be linked with our ally, Ethiopia.⁹⁹

After lengthy debates, the General Assembly adopted the American-backed draft resolution.¹⁰⁰ On September 15, 1952, under the terms of Resolution 390 A(V), it was declared that Eritrea would become an autonomous region within an Ethiopian Federation. Eritrea was granted its own institutions and symbols of autonomy, a development that was to become an important stepping-stone in the construction of an Eritrean identity. As Woldeab Woldemariam was later to recall:

Yes, relations with the state changed completely. Everybody started to change their minds, to become in favor of Eritrea. (...) During 1945-52 the arena was political. There were only Unionists and Independents, other movements were non-existent. After, 1952 a new idea, a pro-Eritrean idea, began to emerge. As Eritrea was defined by the United Nations, there came new times.¹⁰¹

But the United Nations resolution was not to be respected by Ethiopia.¹⁰² Step by step, Emperor Haile Selassie stripped Eritrea of its various symbols of autonomy. Political parties and labour syndicates were banned, and Eritrea's administrative languages, Tigrinya and Arabic, were replaced by Amharic. In December 1958, the Eritrean flag was abolished, in 1959 the existence of a distinct Eritrean criminal code was abrogated and finally, on 14 November 1962, the Federal Act was dissolved,

⁹⁹ Quoted in Wolde-Yesus Ammar, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 31. For a description of the United States involvement in the Horn of Africa, see also: Halliday, 1977, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-32; and Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁰¹ Interview given by Woldeab Woldemariam, quoted in Killion, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁰² According to Tekeste Negash, Eritrea was not unilaterally annexed by Ethiopia but incorporated into it, according to the wishes of the Unionists. See Negash, *op. cit.*, 1997. Although Negash seeks to

making Eritrea the fourteenth Governorate of the Empire of Ethiopia. Eritrea thus became part of Ethiopia six months before the founding conference of the OAU. The fact that the OAU's headquarters were located in Addis Ababa prevented Eritreans from pleading their case in this forum. Ethiopia's total disregard for Eritrea's previous autonomy signalled the beginning of the nationalist opposition.

a) Civil disobedience

As Eritrea was progressively stripped of its autonomy, discontent, mainly among its urban population, slowly mounted. Eritrean workers were the first to begin agitating. Although their claims were not at first explicitly couched in nationalist terms, they were to play an important 'symbolic' role in future mobilisation.¹⁰³ Just a few months before Eritrea's federation to Ethiopia came into force, the British administration lifted the ban on trade unions. Eritrea's first trade union, the non-sectarian *Hara Zekhlone Semret Kefletat Serahtenyatat Eritrawiyan* (HZSKSE), was established in January 1952, and the first Labour code was adopted in May 1952.¹⁰⁴ Although under article 33 of Eritrea's new Federal constitution, workers' associations were explicitly authorised, no Eritrean labour Code had been adopted. Spurred by growing inflation and increasing unemployment, the HZSKSE began, in early 1953, to call for strike action in Asmara and Massawa. The Eritrean government, conscious of the HZSKSE's widespread support, avoided direct confrontation with the syndicate. It decided instead to try and eliminate its main

correct what he sees as the erroneous interpretation of this period by nationalist propaganda, his account is itself somewhat biased.

¹⁰³ The workers' organisation is frequently quoted in Eritrea's nationalist 'mythology' as one of the first nationalist uprisings. Although this is not exactly the case, it constitutes nevertheless an important moment in the process. See, Killion, *op. cit.*, 1977, for a thorough and balanced account of Eritrea's Workers' organisations.

¹⁰⁴ The HZSKSE was officially translated into English as the 'Syndicate of Free Eritrean Workers.' Killion, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

leader, Woldeab Woldemariam, whose growing popularity and well-known stance against Eritrea's union with Ethiopia threatened the federal government.

In 1954, having survived two assassination attempts, Woldeab Woldemariam decided to flee to Cairo where he began to broadcast a series of pro-independence speeches into Eritrea and Ethiopia.¹⁰⁵ That same year, Ibrahim Sultan, former head of the Muslim League, and leader of the parliamentary opposition group, was sidelined by Eritrea's government. Even the most fervent advocates of the federal option in parliament became increasingly disillusioned as the Unionist camp began to disintegrate.¹⁰⁶

As political opposition was progressively shut out, the economic situation worsened and popular unrest mounted.¹⁰⁷ In March 1958, a general strike was called, only to be violently suppressed by the Eritrean police. Although the scale of police brutality might have been subsequently exaggerated in nationalist accounts, it is clear, as Killion notes:

that the general strike was only suppressed with a great display of coercive force, which underlines both its widespread popular support and its clearly political dimension. Furthermore, the popular memory of brutal repression associated with the strike (which a later generation of nationalists likened to Sharpeville in South Africa) made it a powerful touch-stone for growing anti-Ethiopian and Eritrean nationalist sentiment in the Tigrinya/Christian urban population.¹⁰⁸

The general strike and the government's violent retaliation marked a turning point. The following November, the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM), Eritrea's first non-secular anti-Ethiopian organisation was established in Port Sudan.

¹⁰⁵ Harding, Jeremy, 'A Death in Eritrea,' *London Review of Books*, 6 July 1995, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-5.

¹⁰⁷ 'Between 1947 and 1962, employment in all manufacturing industries declined from 32,400 workers to 10,350.' Killion, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ Killion, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

The founders of the ELM were for the most part Muslim Eritrean exiles and members of the youth branch of the communist Party of Sudan.

As students in the 1950s, they were caught in the rising tide of Sudanese nationalism and the excitement of independence in 1956. During visits to relatives in Eritrea, they witnessed the gradual dismantling of the federation and the growing apprehension of anti-unionist circles as Ethiopia's grip tightened. (...) Their aim was to build an organisation capable of resisting Ethiopian encroachment, and if need be to wrest Eritrea free of Haile Selassie's grip. It was decided to recruit like-minded people inside Eritrea (...) Recruitment initially was carried out among Muslims. (...) Their willing response to the call of the ELM was not surprising. What did surprise the organisers was the depth of political alienation they discovered among Christians, especially workers and students.¹⁰⁹

Despite the ELM's success among the Christian highlanders, it began encountering opposition. Because Mohammed Said Nawd, one of the founding members of the ELM, 'was originally from the aristocratic Beit Asghede tribe in the Sahel,' he was unable to rally some sections of the Muslim population to his cause. His main opponent, Ibrahim Sultan, also from the Sahel, but of serf background, decided instead to found his own movement the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF).¹¹⁰ The ELM was also criticised by the ELF for its initial pacifist stance. In 1962, the ELM did decide to resort to armed struggle. But, in 1965, it was defeated by the ELF in a military confrontation and subsequently dissolved. Although short-lived, the ELM paved the way for Eritrea's future liberation movements. It was the first political organisation to enshrine in its Charter the ideal of a secular pan-Eritrean nationality. It also provided a rallying ground for Eritrea's increasingly politicised students, whose numbers had grown from about 15,000 in 1952 to 38,000 in 1961/62 and of which 1,372 were in academic high schools and vocational institutions. These

¹⁰⁹ Markakis, John, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, Zed Books Ltd, London and New Jersey, 1990, p. 106.

¹¹⁰ Wolde Yesus Ammar, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 51

students provided Eritrea with a sizeable intelligentsia, a group that was to play an important role in Eritrea's future nationalist struggle.¹¹¹

The 1958 general strike had a decisive impact on those students who had begun agitating, albeit in an unstructured fashion, since the mid-1950s. Student unrest originated in Asmara's two major high schools: The Prince Makkonnen Secondary High School (PMSS), one of whose students was Isaias Aferworki, the future founding-leader of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, and the Haile Selassie I Secondary School (HSISS), where, from 1975 to 1995, Ahmed Mohammed Nasser, the chairman of the Eritrean Liberation, was studying.¹¹² In September 1960, three to four hundred students went on strike 'demanding the restoration of the Eritrean flag, seal and arms.'¹¹³ They were imprisoned. From then onwards, student protests intensified. Two of the most important demonstrations took place in May 1962, following rumours of Ethiopia's impending decision to unify Eritrea to Ethiopia, and in March 1965. Both originated and were organised by the students of the PMSS.¹¹⁴ These events are significant not only in that they indicate the presence of an opposition amongst urban Highlanders to the unionist project, but also because they highlight the role played by Eritrea's intelligentsia in the nationalist movement. As the student movement became increasingly organised, it established branches throughout Eritrea. The growing ELM-ELF tension, internal dissension within the ELF ranks (with whom the student unions were closely affiliated) and increased governmental repression forced the student movement

¹¹¹ Wolde-Yesus Ammar, 'The role of Asmara Students in the Eritrean Nationalist Movement, *Eritrean Studies Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1997, p. 60.

¹¹² Wolde-Yesus Ammar, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 65. Eritrea's first student association had been created in Cairo in 1952, where more than 300 Eritrean students were pursuing higher education.

¹¹³ Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹¹⁴ Wolde-Yesus Ammar, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

underground and abroad.¹¹⁵ The failure of the Workers' Union, the student movement and the ELM to induce a change in Ethiopia's policy towards Eritrea, forced Eritrea's opposition movements to abandon the strategy of civil disobedience and rely on armed resistance.

b) The beginning of the armed struggle

In 1959, Idris Mohammed Adam, former chairman of the Eritrean Assembly, Ibrahim Sultan, the former founder of the Muslim League and leader of the Independence Bloc Party, and Woldeab Woldemariam, exiled since 1954, met in Cairo to organise resistance to Ethiopia. But in July 1960, Idris Mohammed Adam broke away from this group and, along with Mohammed Said Nawd, announced the creation of the ELF. Eritrea's first armed opposition movement was originally dominated by Cairo-based Eritrean students; its deputy leader, Idris Osman Galadewos, being a law graduate from the University of Cairo.¹¹⁶ Osman Saleh Sabbe, a former schoolmaster, also joined the ELF soon thereafter. The ELF is frequently accredited with having initiated Eritrea's armed struggle in 1961, yet the first shot was fired by Hamid Idris Awate. Whether or not the famous shifta leader acted for political reasons remains unclear, but whatever his motivations and political affiliation (both the ELM and the ELF were to claim him as one of their own), his defiant gesture posed a threat to Ethiopia's ambitions.

In 1962, the ELF managed to establish a small armed force inside Eritrea. It was mainly composed of former Eritrean soldiers from the Sudanese army who

¹¹⁵ The internal debates that were to eventually undermine the ELF may be seen in conjunction with the student debates on the nationalities questions taking place within the Ethiopian Student Union of North America (ESUNA) during the 1960s and early 70s. For more on this issue, see: Blasvik, Randi Rønning, *Haile Sellasie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977*, Michigan State University, East Lansing, 1985, pp. 281-89.

¹¹⁶ Markakis, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

defected taking along their arms. From then onwards, the ELF's credibility as Eritrea's main opposition movement grew, and it began to receive financial and military support from neighbouring Arab states, and more specifically from Syria and Iraq.¹¹⁷

In 1963, thirty Eritreans, mostly students in Egypt, were sent to Syria for several months' military training. Among them was Ramadan Mohammed Nur, a former student of Sabbe at Arkiko, who was to become the secretary-general of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation front in the 1970s. They returned with arms and were sent into the Barka region of Eritrea. Another group of about seventy trainees went to Syria in 1965, and more were to follow later.¹¹⁸

Renewed armed clashes occurred in 1966 as the ELF expanded towards the highlands and the numbers of student recruits increased. In 1967, Ethiopian troops retaliated and launched a major offensive which drove tens of thousands of Eritrean refugees into camps in Sudan, and during which 'villages and large towns (like Keren) were ruined by fighter-bombers dropping napalm and high explosives.'¹¹⁹ Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ELF launched a number of guerrilla attacks. Several political representatives and senior officers, including the commanding general of Ethiopia's Second Division, were killed in ambushes in Asmara, Keren and Agordat. According to Tekle Mariam Woldemikael:

The Ethiopian government responded by declaring martial law and a state of emergency and committing atrocities reminiscent of My-Lai. The 1969 public hangings in Agordat, the mass killings of 112 people in the village of Bascara on November 27, 1970 and the killings of 625 people in a village near Keren on December 1, 1970 and the shooting of 60 people in a mosque at a village near Elaberid on January 27, 1971 infuriated the Eritrean population, especially

¹¹⁷ Arab support is explained not only by the ELF's predominantly Muslim composition, but also as a reaction to Ethiopia's relationship with Israel.

¹¹⁸ Markakis, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

¹¹⁹ Lobban, Richard, 'The Eritrean War: Issues and Implications,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1976, p. 340. See also, Halliday, Fred, 'The Fighting in Eritrea,' *New Left Review*, lxviii, May-June 1971, p. 62.

the urban and educated ones who had access to reports about the incidents from the international news media.¹²⁰

Ethiopia's military offensives, and the atrocities that often accompanied them, only served to mobilise Eritrea's population against the government of Ethiopia. The ELF's popularity increased and by 1972 it had established itself throughout the country.

As the ELF grew in membership and in geographical scope, internal dissension became more pronounced. The ELF's predominantly Muslim base and earlier Arab patronage, is often invoked to explain the front's failure to achieve broad base support among Eritreans.¹²¹ The Front's decentralised structure, by favouring the emergence of regional leaders, was another important factor in its subsequent fragmentation. Divided into five geographical areas, the ELF's organisational structure was modelled on the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). But this organisational model exacerbated Eritrea's communal divisions and slowly undermined the front's legitimacy as the sole representative of Eritrean society. The ELF's ground tactics - confiscation of peasants' cattle and crops - further 'alienated the traditional highland peasants of Eritrea', fuelling the leadership struggle and personal rivalries that had marred the movement from its inception.¹²² Throughout 1968 and 1969, a number of meetings were held aimed at reforming the ELF's structure and relocating the General Command from Cairo to a base inside

¹²⁰ Tekle Mariam Woldemikael, 'Political Mobilization and Nationalist Movements: The Case of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front,' *Africa Today*, 2nd Quarter, 1991, p. 34. For a description of the atrocities committed by the Ethiopian army between 1969 and 1971, see: Morrison, Godfrey, *Eritrea and Southern Sudan*, Minority Rights Group, Report, No. 5, London, May 1976, p. 6.

¹²¹ Halliday and Molyneux, 1981, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-90; Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, p.108.

¹²² Pateman, Roy, 'The Eritrean War,' *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Fall 1990, p. 85.

Eritrea.¹²³ But these meetings proved unsuccessful, the ELF started to splinter and a new generation of leaders began to emerge.¹²⁴

The main challengers to what would be known as the ELF-Revolutionary Council were Osman Saleh Sabbe's ELF-SG, later renamed the ELF-PLF, and the Tripartite Union (or People's Liberation Front Zones 1 and 2 and the ELF-Ubel). The Tripartite Union was reformed in February 1972 to become the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF).¹²⁵ Led by Isaias Aferworki and Ramadan Nur, both of whom had trained in China, the EPLF, with its military branch the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Army (EPLA), gradually emerged as Eritrea's dominant liberation movement.¹²⁶ From 1972 to 1974, in what is now referred to as Eritrea's first civil war, the ELF fought the newly formed EPLF. The outcome however was inconclusive. Woldeab Woldemariam, who had then joined the EPLF, sought to broker a reconciliation between the two contending fronts. He failed and then decided to return Cairo, remaining in exile until the end of the war.¹²⁷ Throughout the conflict with Ethiopia, Eritrea's contending political movements would clash regularly. Only periodically abated by joint operations, this intra-Eritrean conflict lasted until the early 1980s, when the ELF's forces petered out and its leadership was forced into exile.

Hopes that the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, which led to the demise of Emperor Haile Selassie and its replacement by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (or Derg), would bring a peaceful resolution of the Ethiopian-Eritrean

¹²³ Iyob, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹²⁴ For a description of this and of the history of this period, see: Erlich, Haggai, *The Struggle over Eritrea, 1962-1978*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1982.

¹²⁵ de Waal, Alex, *Evil Days. 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia*, New York, Human Rights Watch, 1991, p. 42.

¹²⁶ Ramadan Nur had joined the ELF in 1963, and Aferworki in 1968-69.

¹²⁷ In 1987, Woldeab made a brief visit to the liberated area, but only returned to Asmara in 1991. Harding, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

conflict were soon shattered. General Aman Adom, despite not being a member of the Derg, was appointed to head the government of Ethiopia. Being himself of Eritrean origin, he expressed the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the Eritrean question, but was killed on 23 November 1974 (“Bloody Saturday”). He was replaced by General Teferi Banti, former Second Division Commander and a hard-liner on the Eritrean question.¹²⁸ As a result, ‘most of the Derg’s few Eritrean members defected to the EPLF, and with the assassination of naval petty officer Michael Asgedom, not a single Eritrean member of the Derg remained.’¹²⁹ Suggestions of a negotiated settlement that would have granted Eritrea a measure of regional autonomy within Ethiopia were rejected both by the ELF and EPLF now both committed to full independence.

On 28 January 1975, the Derg declared that it had lost its ‘patience’ and now intended ‘to eliminate those who fight against the unity of the country.’ A few days later, it was ominously announced that Major Mengistu Haile Mariam ‘had taken personal command of the operations in Eritrea and that he would deal with the “disciplinary problems” among Ethiopian troops’.¹³⁰ A few days after the Derg’s declaration, intense fighting between the combined Eritrean forces and the Ethiopian army broke out. The excesses of the Ethiopian forces were punished by court martial and summary execution of some of their own troops, but this did little to allay the deep-seated fears among Eritreans, not did it calm the hatred that was fanned by the February fighting.¹³¹

Military operations continued throughout the Spring and Summer of 1975 and the Ethiopian Air Force was reported to undertake heavy aerial bombardments on

¹²⁸ Lobban, 1976, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

¹²⁹ Clapham, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

¹³⁰ Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, Vol. XXI, 1975, March 24-30, 1975, p. 27031.

Eritrea' main cities. Although the Ethiopian army succeeded in regaining full control over Asmara, Keren and Massawa, the countryside remained largely in the hands of Eritrea's guerrilla forces. More young Eritreans joined the Eritrean fronts in this period 'as a result of repressive actions by the Army.'¹³² Allegations of atrocities were reported by the Eritrean liberation fronts and by Western relief workers. Visiting London in May 1975 to seek help from the International Red Cross and British Relief Agencies, Dr. Bereket Selassie, a former acting Attorney General under the Emperor Haile Selassie and then chairman of the Eritrean national relief committee said that:

300,000 people had been driven from their homes in Eritrea and were refugees with little food, and that since February 3,000 non-combatants, including women and children had been killed and 47 villages destroyed by Ethiopian troops, whom he also accused of destroying food stores and even poisoning water.¹³³

After having opposed Imperial Ethiopia and its American allies,¹³⁴ the Eritrean liberation movements then faced Mengistu's brutal military regime supported by the US until 1977¹³⁵ and thereafter by the Soviet Union.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Lobban, 1976, *op. cit.*, p. 344; and Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 27032.

¹³² Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 27253.

¹³³ Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 27254.

¹³⁴ 'During the period from 1952 to 1975, U.S. military assistance to Ethiopia amounted to \$275 million. U.S. Military Advisory Group army and air forces were based at Kagnaw, near Asmara, and naval personnel in Massawa.' Pateman, Fall 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 84. For comparable estimates, and a description of US military assistance (hardware and training) see, Lobban, 1976, *op. cit.*, pp. 338-9; Halliday, 1977, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-18; Keesing's Contemporary Archives, *op. cit.*, 1975, p 27253. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, from 1953 to 1978, Ethiopia received some \$400 million in military aid from the United States. See: *Strategic Survey 1977*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, p. 18.

¹³⁵ In February 1977, the new Carter administration decided to suspend all arm supplies to Ethiopia, 'reduce its Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) personnel in the country substantially and close the Kagnaw Communications Station later that year. (...) [Nevertheless], in early 1978, 'Washington fulfilled Mengistu's request for Jeeps and American made fighter plane spare parts (originally part of the May 1977 weapons order) and cluster bombs that were intended for use in a large-scale offensive against the Eritrean liberation movement.' Petras, James and Morley, Morris, H., 'The Ethiopian Military State and Soviet-US Involvement in the Horn of Africa,' *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 30, September 1984, pp. 28-9.

¹³⁶ The superpowers' dramatic shift of alliance between Ethiopia and Somalia is discussed in the following chapter when discussing the Ogaden war of 1977-78. The reader may nevertheless want to consult: Luckham, Robin, and Dawit Bekele, 'Foreign Powers and Militarism in the Horn of Africa:

c) *The EPLF: An insurgent state*

Factionalism and purges within Ethiopia's military, brought some respite to the Eritrean forces. Between 1975 and 1976, following agreement to set aside their differences, the ELF and EPLF joined forces and succeeded in overrunning about 90% of the entire Eritrean territory save Asmara, Massawa and the small town of Barentu in the west.¹³⁷ During this period, major changes in military and political strategy were introduced. Since the beginning of the conflict in 1961, the ELF and EPLF had essentially conducted classic guerrilla warfare.¹³⁸ The capture of several towns, including Keren in July 1977, represented a great military victory for the EPLF and marked the adoption of 'revolutionary warfare'.¹³⁹ But Eritrean hopes for complete victory soon vanished.

Mengistu's call for 'total war' and renewed tensions between Eritrea's rival fronts in the second half of 1977, marked the end of the threat posed by Eritrea's fronts to the Derg. Having won the war against Somalia in the Ogaden, the Ethiopian army was able to re-deploy its troops on the Northern front. Moreover, the resumption of the ELF-EPLF internecine conflict, meant an increase of casualties among their already over-stretched forces. In 1978, the Eritreans were forced to retreat in the face of the Derg's technological superiority and number of troops. Many of the positions acquired during the previous year, save the town of Nacfa, were yielded to Ethiopia's army aided in the field by Soviet and Cuban military

Part I,' *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 30, September 1984, pp. 8-20; Petras, James F., and Morris H. Morley, 1984, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-31; and Okbazghi Yohannes, *op. cit.*, 1997.

¹³⁷ Araya Tseggai, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 78; *de Waal, op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹³⁸ Throughout their struggle Eritreans hardly benefited from outside support, building up most of their military supplies from tanks, arms and ammunitions captured from Ethiopian army. Pateman, Fall 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 82

¹³⁹ Chaliand, Gérard, 'The Guerrilla Struggle' in: Davidson, Basil, Cliffe, Lionel and Bereket Habte Selassie (eds), *Behind the War in Eritrea*, Spokesman, Nottingham, 1980, p. 52.

advisors.¹⁴⁰ From then onwards, 'the Eritrean forces were to wage a mix of conventional trench-warfare around their mountain redoubt and partisan raids behind government lines.'¹⁴¹

In January 1977, the EPLF held its first Congress; it adopted a radical socialist platform and introduced a new military strategy. Criticising the ELF's lack of substantive political programme (except for that of independence), the EPLF put forth a series of socio-political reforms. These were destined to transform Eritrean identity from one defined only by its opposition to Ethiopian oppression to one defined positively from within. Operating in the newly liberated territories, the EPLF set out to educate, politicise and train the population, providing both food and health services.

In large areas of the territory, particularly around Keren, the guerrillas established an efficient administration to govern a mostly sympathetic population: hospitals and factories functioned underground, plantations and farms once owned by the Italian expatriates and later nationalized by the government in Addis Ababa were taken over by guerrilla co-operatives. Rural bus services run by the rebels linked towns in the 'liberated areas'.¹⁴²

The EPLF was, in short, beginning the process of nation-building.

The absence of any external support forced it to further concentrate on mobilising all members of Eritrean society.¹⁴³ From its inception, the EPLF made sure to include representatives of all Eritrea's society: Christians and Muslims participated equally in the decision-making process, peasant and pastoralist concerns

¹⁴⁰ Araya Tseggai, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-81; and Lyons, Roy, 'The USSR, China and the Horn of Africa,' *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 12, May-August 1978, pp. 5-30. Cuban fighter pilots and artillery troops were also involved on the Ethiopian side. American cluster bombs were also used in the attacks on Asmara and Massawa, in which an estimated 1,000 civilians died. See, Petras and Morley, 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 29

¹⁴¹ Connell, Dan, 'Eritrea: Starting from Scratch', *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 22, No. 66, December 1995, p. 589.

¹⁴² *Strategic Survey 1977*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁴³ By contrast to the ELF-RC and the ELF-PLF, who received some financial support from Arab states, the EPLF received only minimal financial assistance and this mainly from the Eritrean diaspora.

were addressed, and women were fully integrated in all levels of the fighting. With the introduction of 'compulsory military service', the war continued to further provide Eritrea with the emotional attachment essential to nation-formation:

Every member (male, female, young and old) goes through one year of military training. In the camps, most of the newly recruited fighters go through a process of transformation the same as in any regular army. (...) A sense of communion among the fighters, based on complete identification with their units, makes the EPLF a very effective organization. The high morale of the fighters can be attributed not only to the fact that most Eritreans identify with an abstract concept called Eritrea, but also to the sense of camaraderie created in the Front.¹⁴⁴

Throughout the war, the front developed an underground primary level education system designed for both its fighters and the local population. During the 1980s, the EPLF was running more than 150 schools with a total of 50,000 students.¹⁴⁵ If education had until then been limited to a small elite, it was now available to a broader portion of the population further spreading the notion of an Eritrean identity, as defined by the EPLF.

When in 1981 the EPLF defeated the ELF,¹⁴⁶ it was able to impose its own definition of 'Eritreanness'. Described as 'egalitarian' and 'progressive', the new values and symbols adopted by the front were for the most part inspired by its Marxist allegiance and provided the substance of Eritrea's national identity.¹⁴⁷ These favourable depictions should not obscure the fact that the EPLF was a highly centralised and 'ruthless' organisation:

Because the EPLF is primarily a military organization, it has been relatively ruthless in dealing with dissidents. Control over members of the organization is

¹⁴⁴ Tekle Mariam Woldemikael, 1991, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-5.

¹⁴⁵ War-Torn Societies Project, *Eritrea Country Note*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Programme for Strategic and International Securities Studies, UNRISD, Geneva, January 1996.

¹⁴⁶ Iyob, 1995, p. 131.

¹⁴⁷ Cliffe, *op. cit.*, 1989, pp. 131-47; Pateman, Roy, 'Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité: Aspects of the Eritrean Revolution,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, September 1990, pp. 457-72; Sorenson, 1991, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-17.

effected through allowing very little time for individual reflection and separate thought. Most fighters eat together, sleep together, attend meetings together and rarely are left alone to reflect about their life and family.¹⁴⁸

Several of the EPLF's leaders, foremost of whom were Isaias Aferworki and Ramadan Nur, had been sent to train in China when they had joined the ELF's ranks in the 1960s. This experience in turn influenced and moulded the nationalist model they established.¹⁴⁹ Another feature of the 'new' Eritrean national identity was its concern for the integration of women into society and, especially, into the liberation army. At the end of the war, it was estimated that 30% of the Eritrean Liberation Army was composed of women.¹⁵⁰

The EPLF's emphasis on self-reliance did not entail total isolation. But by contrast to the ELF, who mainly relied on Eritrea's Arab neighbours, the EPLF cautiously sought to avoid becoming dependent on a single political backer or alienate any potential support. As Mark Duffield and John Prendergast observed:

Although having serious disagreements with Soviet policy, the EPLF refused to brand the Soviet Union an outright enemy. Instead, it mounted a campaign to change the position of other countries within the socialist bloc. This strategy led to the first weakening in Eritrea's isolation. In 1978, for example the EPLF opened an office in Algeria and secured similar recognition in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. In the same year, although having military personnel in Ethiopia, Cuba expressed concern with Ethiopian policy and declined to assist the war in the North.¹⁵¹

The establishment of the Eritrean Relief Agency (ERA) in 1975 constituted another important step in opening Eritrea to the outside world, as well as means of restraining further Eritrean refugee exodus to Sudan. The EPLF actively sought to limit the

¹⁴⁸ Tekle Mariam Woldemikael, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 35. See also, Clapham, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

¹⁴⁹ Marchal, Roland, *Démobilisation et reconstruction en Erythrée*, Centre d'Etudes Africaines, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 1994, p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ War-Torn Societies Project, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁵¹ Duffield, Mark and Prendergast, John, *Without Troops and Tanks. Humanitarian Intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea*, The Red Sea Press, Lawrenceville, New Jersey, 1994, p. 24. On the international reactions to the conflict see, Lefort, René, *Ethiopie: la révolution hérétique*, François Maspero, Paris, 1981, pp. 362-66.

outward flow of refugees, not only to ensure humanitarian aid, but also to secure its own social basis and avoid becoming vulnerable to friendly states.¹⁵² Although created as an independent body, the ERA was closely associated with the EPLF.¹⁵³ Its purpose was to publicise the effects of the war on the Eritrean people and appeal for external assistance. Rather than attempting to persuade foreign governments' officials, the ERA approached international agencies. It focused its energies towards Western countries, and more specifically Western public opinion, whose potential influence on government policy had been demonstrated during the Vietnam War.¹⁵⁴ The exiled Eritrean community was instrumental in this respect.

As the EPLF was seeking international recognition and laying the foundations of Eritrea's nationhood through indoctrination and socio-economic reform, the war against the Derg continued. In 1982, Mengistu launched the infamous Red Star Campaign involving more than 120,000 men, the largest number of troops deployed in Eritrea, using Soviet-supplied hardware, including chemical weapons.¹⁵⁵ Of Ethiopia's 22 divisions, 14 were based in Eritrea and 3 in the province of Tigray.¹⁵⁶ The latter was now controlled by the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) allied to the EPLF.¹⁵⁷ This was the Derg's most destructive offensive to date, and if the Great Famine of 1983-85 acquired such dramatic proportions it was not simply

¹⁵² See also: Marchal, Roland, 'Guerre et Famine: population et guérillas en Erythrée,' Communication au XIIe Congrès International de Sociologie, Madrid, juillet, 1990.

¹⁵³ A dispute arose between the ELF and the EPLF as to the status of the ERA. As a result, the ELF set up its own relief body, the Eritrean Red Cross and Crescent Society (ERCCS)

¹⁵⁴ Duffield and Prendergast, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁵ Araya Tseggai, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 81; and *De Waal*, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 118-123. According to Pateman the Ethiopian army deployed 90,000 men. See, Pateman, Fall 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁶ Pateman, Fall 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁷ The TPLF was established in 1975. For a description and history of the TPLF, see, Young, John, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia. The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, and 'The Tigray People's Liberation Front,' in: Clapham, Christopher, (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, James Currey, Oxford, 1998, pp. 36-52.

because of the drought but mainly because of the war the Ethiopian regime was waging on Eritrea and Tigray.¹⁵⁸

The famine's coverage by the media in October 1984 marked a shift in international response to the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict. International aid, which had hitherto been mostly distributed through the Ethiopian government, started to be channelled through NGOs cross-border operations.¹⁵⁹ The Emergency Relief Desk (ERD), an ecumenical NGO consortium established in 1981 in Sudan, provided the ideal vehicle which enabled donor governments to provide assistance to Eritrea without appearing to infringe directly on Ethiopia's sovereignty. As the famine worsened, the ERD began providing cross-border humanitarian assistance into areas of Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia, co-operating with indigenous relief agencies, namely with the Eritrean Relief Agency (ERA). As Duffield and Prendergast noted:

From the mid-1980s, the ERD provided donor governments with a legitimate, if unorthodox, channel for their resources into Front-held territory. (...) The very fact of this assistance, however, was tantamount to a tacit recognition of the Fronts.¹⁶⁰

In 1984, the European Economic Commission, effectively challenging Ethiopia's sovereignty, 'officially designated the Eritrean Relief Agency (ERA) as a legitimate recipient of aid.'¹⁶¹ That same year, the Reagan administration agreed that USAID

¹⁵⁸ According to Clapham: 'The EPLF strongly disapproved of the TPLF decision to respond to the famine by evacuating the population *en masse* to the Sudan – a decision no less ruthless than the Ethiopian government's resettlement scheme, and dictated by the need to retain control over a population which would otherwise have had to seek food from the Ethiopia authorities.' Clapham, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

¹⁵⁹ Reports that the food aid was being diverted by the Ethiopian government and failed to reach the afflicted areas may partly explain the shift. See, Keller, Edmond J., 'Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1992, pp. 609-624.

¹⁶⁰ Duffield and Prendergast, 1994, *op. cit.*, p 6 and 12.

¹⁶¹ Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 186. That same year, the European Commission urged the Ethiopian government to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict and acknowledge the 1950 UN resolution regarding Eritrea's autonomous status.

join the ERD and provide assistance to the EPLF and TPLF.¹⁶² It is difficult to assess the extent to which the media coverage and the international humanitarian assistance that ensued strengthened the EPLF, in the same way that previous international aid may have sustained Mengistu's regime. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that such cross-border assistance inevitably lightened the burden of the EPLF, allowing it to feed its troops and the Eritrean people, and focus its energies on the war.¹⁶³ Indeed, from 1982 to 1984, there was a virtual stalemate on the battlefield, as the EPLF confined its military tactic to hit and run attacks that allowed it to capture arms and ammunitions. But in early 1984, reverting to conventional warfare and using tanks and artillery, the EPLF proceeded to capture the strategic town of Tessene and areas in the north-east, giving them road access to Sudan, as well as establishing control over a long stretch of the Red Sea, forcing the Ethiopian army back to the position it held before the 1977 offensive.¹⁶⁴ Renewed aerial bombardments and further deployment of Ethiopian troops throughout 1984 and 1985, combined with the famine, only stiffened Eritrean resolve. According to Ales' de Waal, between 1984 and 1987, 'EPLF strength rose from 12,000 to about 30,000, and the number of militia were increased'.¹⁶⁵ According to Roland Marchal, the ELA counted by the mid-1980s about 50,000 fighters, a number that would double in the last two years of the struggle.¹⁶⁶

In 1987, the EPLF held its second Congress and revised its 1977 National Democratic Programme. It united with the ELF-Central Command, abandoned

¹⁶² Duffield and Prendergast, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 12; and Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

¹⁶³ It is also probable that the relief workers operating in the war areas began to pressure their own governments.

¹⁶⁴ Cliffe, Lionel, 'Dramatic Shifts in the Military Balance in the Horn: The 1984 Eritrean Offensive,' *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 30, September 1984, pp. 93-7.

¹⁶⁵ *De Waal*, 1991, *op. cit.*, p 184.

¹⁶⁶ Marchal, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 12. The number of fighters estimated in May 1991 was 95,000. War-torn societies project, 1996, *op. cit.*

previous Marxist rhetoric, called for the introduction of multi-party democracy and a mixed economic system. Isaias Aferworki was elected Secretary General of the EPLF, thus replacing Ramadan Mohammed Nur, who had been the Chairman of the Front since 1977.¹⁶⁷ These changes were to enhance the EPLF's image to the outside world and more specifically to the US. It was for instance suggested that the election of Isaias Aferworki, a Christian highlander, 'deflated the old argument that the EPLF was Muslim fundamentalist in character'¹⁶⁸ which in turn quelled Israel's fears that the Eritrean Red Sea coastline would be controlled by an 'Arab' power.¹⁶⁹

d) The beginning of the end

In late 1987, the EPLF went once more on the offensive, attacking army convoys and disrupting the Ethiopian army's supply lines. Then came Ethiopia's military defeat at Afabet – its regional military headquarters and the base of its infamous Nadew (the 'destroy' troops) – in March 1988. The battle at Afabet is generally referred to as marking a turning point in the war.

The significance to the Ethiopian regime of the loss of Afabet cannot be overstated. In this single battle, Ethiopia lost whole divisions of its best trained and armed troops. Worse still, it left behind a weapons stockpile that it had amassed to carry out what was to have been a 'decisive offensive' against the EPLF. That decisive offensive was being planned by Soviet military advisors. As it was, the EPLF clearly outsmarting the Soviets, turned around the 'planned offensive' to their advantage. The Soviet Union had always denied direct involvement in Eritrea but was caught red-handed by the EPLA at Afabet with the capture of three Soviet military personnel.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ 'Ethiopia: Washington backs a winner,' *Africa Confidential*, May 4 1990, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Tesfatsion Medhanie, *Eritrea and Neighbours in the 'New World Order'. Geopolitics, Democracy and 'Islamic Fundamentalism'*. Bremer Afrika-Studien Bd. 15, LIT, Hamburg, 1994.

¹⁷⁰ Berhane Woldemichael, 'Ethiopian Military in Disarray,' *Review of African Political Economy*, 1989, p. 61.

Although Ethiopia's hold on Eritrea had been waning for some time, it continued to enjoy substantial Soviet military assistance.¹⁷¹ Yet, in July 1988, Gorbachev turned down Mengistu's request for a substantial increase in the supply of military hardware.¹⁷² This was in accordance with Chester Crocker's statement before the World Affairs Council in 1985, where mention was made of an agreement between the US and the USSR of the need for a concerted effort in order to stop the war in Ethiopia and accord Eritrea regional autonomy.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, Soviet military assistance appears to have continued to be provided to Ethiopia after 1988. Indeed, according to Tekle Mariam Woldemikael, in 1989 alone, the Soviets supplied the Ethiopian government with more than \$800 million of Soviet military hardware, including new generation T-62 tanks and b-24 multiple-rocket launchers.¹⁷⁴

In April 1988, Mengistu met with Somalia's President Siad Barre. Both leaders agreed to stop interfering in each other's domestic affairs and to withdraw their troops from the disputed border areas. This would enable Mengistu to re-deploy some of his troops to the North. Even 'youngsters were rounded up and conscripted to the army.'¹⁷⁵ As Ethiopia was preparing another major offensive against the Eritrean and Tigrayan fronts, the EPLF and TPLF launched a series of attacks. The Ethiopian army lost a number of significant positions both in Tigray and Eritrea, of which Mekelle and Ende Selassie represented the most spectacular defeats. The

¹⁷¹ According to figures quoted by Tekle Mariam Woldemikael, the Soviet Union supplied an estimated \$11 billion worth of arms to Ethiopia between 1977 to 1990. Tekle Mariam Woldemikael, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 37, quoting from an article published in the New York Times, February 14, 1990, p. A15.

¹⁷² 'Ethiopia: Dark Days for Mengistu,' *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 17 February 1989.

¹⁷³ Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹⁷⁴ Tekle Mariam Woldemikael, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 37, quoting from an article published in the *New York Times*, February 14, 1990, p. A15.

¹⁷⁵ Berhane Woldemichael, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 61. According to Pateman, every year since 1982, 50,000 young men were drafted into the army. Pateman, Fall 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 95. According to Luckham and Bekelle, 'a new compulsory conscription law was introduced in 1983; but its implementation had the

Ethiopian army suffered massive casualties, reports placing numbers in the tens of thousands.

The ease with which the EPLF and TPLF succeeded to rout Ethiopia's army cannot be solely explained by reference to the loss of Soviet support.¹⁷⁶ The army had indeed offered little resistance in Afabet. Not only was the army's rank and file increasingly defecting, but in May 1989, senior military officers plotted to overthrow Mengistu.¹⁷⁷ Mengistu, alerted by officers loyal to him, had pre-empted the coup by dismissing several senior generals and promoting over forty colonels to the position of Brigadier-General, a tactic he had also used in 1985 to head off military unrest.¹⁷⁸ The attempted coup failed and several officers were arrested and executed. Amongst them were Major General Merid Negussie, the Chief of Staff, and Major-General Amha Desta, the Air Force commander. Following their arrest, Ethiopia's air force refused to bomb Eritrea and Tigray.¹⁷⁹

Although the US had condemned Ethiopia's human rights abuses and policy of repression in Eritrea intermittently throughout the 1980s,¹⁸⁰ it had made no serious attempt to promote a peaceful resolution. In 1989, under the auspices of former American President Jimmy Carter and his Intervention Negotiating Network, two meetings were convened between the EPLF and the Ethiopian government, the first

effect of driving many young men into exile as refugees or into the guerrilla movements. See, Luckham and Bekelle, 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁶ For a discussion of the factors that led to Mengistu's demise, see: Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 344-77.

¹⁷⁷ It would seem that an organisation calling itself the Movement of Free Soldiers of Ethiopia (or Free soldiers Movement) had joined forces with the TPLF in order to overthrow the Derg. See Berhane Woldemichael, 1989, *op. cit.*, 62; and Pateman, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁷⁸ 'Ethiopia: A blow-by-blow account,' *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 30, No. 11, 26 May 1989.

¹⁷⁹ Rimbaud, Albert, 'La négation de l'Éthiopie?' *Hérodote*, No. 65, 1992, p. 193.

¹⁸⁰ Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-2.

in Atlanta, the second in Nairobi.¹⁸¹ Despite a rapprochement between the US and the EPLF,¹⁸² the US State Department nevertheless continued to speak of regional autonomy, refusing to consider any modifications to Ethiopia's territorial integrity. The US position was clearly spelled out by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herbert Cohen, in February 1990:

The United States Government is convinced, based on more than a generation of bloody fighting, that no solution to Ethiopia's internal conflict can be imposed on any side by force of arms. Ethiopia will be able to achieve a durable peace only by means of a negotiated political solution. The outlines of that solution are not hard to see. Ethiopia should remain whole. But its diversity and energy cannot be straitjacketed in a monolithic, centralized state. Loose federation appears the only viable solution.¹⁸³

The US policy with regard to Ethiopia's territorial integrity had remained unchanged since the days when the matter was first discussed in the mid-1940s.

Whether embittered by the US unwillingness to budge from its 'Greater Ethiopia' policy, or emboldened by America's tacit support,¹⁸⁴ the EPLF launched a new offensive and successfully captured the city-port of Massawa in February 1990. The US State Department tried to pressure the EPLF into accepting that Massawa be internationalised so that food aid could be distributed via Soviet military transport planes. The suggestion was met with suspicion and was perceived by the EPLF as an attempt to hinder its attempts at independence.¹⁸⁵ A second round of talks sponsored

¹⁸¹ Keller, Edmond, 'Eritrean Self-Determination Revisited,' *Africa Today*, 2nd Quarter, 1991, p. 10; and Pateman, Fall 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 95. Jimmy Carter, then President of the US, brought American military assistance to Ethiopia to an end in 1977.

¹⁸² In May 1989, Isaias Aferworki travelled to Washington where he met with several high ranking US officials.

¹⁸³ Statement by Herman Cohen, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs before the Subcommittee on Africa and the International Task Force of the Select Committee on Hunger, United States House of Representatives, February 28, 1990. Quoted in Keller, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁸⁴ In late 1989 and early 1990, a number of diplomatic meetings were held between the EPLF and senior American officials, both in Africa and in Washington. Henze, Paul, 'Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Defeat of the Derg and the Establishment of new Governments,' in: Smock, David R., (Ed.), *Making War and Waging Peace. Foreign Intervention in Africa*, United State, Institute of Peace Press, Washington, 1993, pp. 61-3.

¹⁸⁵ Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

by the US State Department was scheduled to be held in London in March 1991 but was abruptly postponed. On 21 May, Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe, and a few days later the Ethiopian army surrendered Asmara to the EPLF forces without offering any resistance. On the 27 and 28 May 1991, the US sponsored London Peace Conference was finally held. Invited to the meeting were the EPLF, the TPLF/EPRDF, and Prime Minister Tesfaye Dinka and his delegation, acting as representatives of the Derg successor government.¹⁸⁶ When on 28 May, the EPRDF forces entered Addis Ababa, Prime Minister Tesfaye Dinka and his delegation left the talks. On 29 May, Isaias Aferworki declared Eritrea's de facto independence, after having agreed to postpone for two years a referendum on independence.¹⁸⁷ In July 1991, a Conference on Peace and Democracy was held in Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front formally recognised the right of Eritrean people to determine their political future by an internationally supervised referendum.¹⁸⁸ Eritrea, it was decreed, had not seceded; it had recovered its independence.¹⁸⁹

4.5 – Independent Eritrea

At independence, the EPLF automatically appointed itself the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE). The PGE's administrative structure was similar to that found as a fighting force. It was mainly composed by former EPLF fighters and was supplemented by Provincial Peoples' Assemblies. The PGE's first task was to

¹⁸⁶ Henze, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁸⁷ According to Henze, the EPLF agreed to this as a 'precondition' to the London Peace Conference. In July 1991, a Conference on Peace and Democracy held in Addis Ababa formally recognised the right of the Eritrean people to determine their political future by an internationally supervised referendum.

¹⁸⁸ For a critique of the lack of debate about this decision see, Rimbaud, 1992, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-98

¹⁸⁹ By thus portraying Eritrea's struggle, the EPRDF was distinguishing it from Ethiopia's other populations.

prepare the country for the referendum.¹⁹⁰ A referendum Commission was set up, headed by Amare Tekle. Contrary to what had been discussed at the London meeting of May 1991, only two options were presented: independence or non-independence, the federal option was dropped.¹⁹¹ The question asked was thus formulated:

Do you want Eritrea to be an independent country, yes or no?

Given the high levels of illiteracy, estimated to be at over 80%, a colour scheme was introduced: blue ballots for yes, red ones for No.¹⁹² The referendum was held between 23 and 25 April 1993 and was monitored by the United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea (UNOVER).¹⁹³ 98.24% of the total number of registered voters participated in the referendum and of these, 99.8% voted in favour of independence.¹⁹⁴ The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Samir Sanbar, declared that 'on the whole, the referendum process in Eritrea can be considered to have been free and fair at every stage.'¹⁹⁵ On May 24th 1993, Eritrea formally declared its independence and became the 182nd member of the United Nations.

The PGE decided in May 1993 to extend the transitional period for another four years, until Eritrea's constitution was drafted and following which elections would be held. The Transitional Government was made up of a National Assembly, a State Council, and an independent Judiciary. During this period, 1993-97, the

¹⁹⁰ In the Autumn 1991, 'six months after liberation, only half the rural population were aware that a referendum was going to be held.' Tronvoll, Kjetil, 'The Eritrean Referendum: Peasant Voices,' *Eritrean Studies Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1996, p. 24.

¹⁹¹ The EPLF Referendum Proposal of 22 November 1980 included the three following options: 1) full independence; 2) federal association with Ethiopia; 3) regional autonomy.

¹⁹² On the potential symbolism behind the choice of colours, see: Tronvoll, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-6.

¹⁹³ As authorised and established by UN General Assembly resolution 47/114 of 16 December 1992.

¹⁹⁴ Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea, A/48/283, 11 August 1993, p. 12

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12. For a more critical point of view, in particular with regards to whom was able to register, see, Styan, David, 'Eritrea. The end of the beginning,' in: *L'Afrique Politique 1994. Vue sur*

Government of Eritrea faced the task of rebuilding Eritrea's war-torn economy, repatriating the refugees from Sudan, whose number were estimated to be around 50,000, and demobilising its 95,000 strong liberation army.¹⁹⁶ While declaring itself committed to 'multi-partism', the government made clear its rejection of any political parties based on religion or ethnicity.¹⁹⁷ It also made clear that priority would be given to the country's economic reconstruction: 'Political democracy cannot be achieved without sustainable and equitable political development.'¹⁹⁸ The journey from Sparta to Athens could be longer than anticipated. Yet, it must be remembered that Eritrea's infrastructure was destroyed by the war, that the country was and still is very much dependent on food aid, and that it is estimated to have one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world. Indeed, although the situation since independence improved, it was nevertheless estimated that in 1994-95, food production covered only 48% of the country's requirements.¹⁹⁹

In February 1994, the EPLF held its third Congress. A National Charter was adopted and the front decided to rename itself the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) after having once again elected Isaias Aferworki as its Chairman.²⁰⁰

la démocratisation à marée basse, Karthala, Paris, 1994, pp. 30-1; and 'Eritrea: Africa's new state,' *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 34, No. 9, 30 April 1993.

¹⁹⁶ A Department for the reintegration for Demobilised Fighters (Mit'iyas) was established by the government. 26,000 fighters were demobilised in June 1993, mainly young fighters that had joined after February 1990. Between 1994 and 1995 another 22,000 longer serving fighters were demobilised, and from 1995 to 1998, another 6,000 were demobilised. Kingma, Kees and Kiflemariam Gebrewold, *Demilitarisation, reintegration and conflict prevention in the Horn of Africa*, Saferworld and the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), July 1998, p. 6.

¹⁹⁷ Government of Eritrea excerpts, 'Eritrea: Birth of A Nation,' *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 57, July 1993, p. 112.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁹⁹ Baker, Jonathan, 'Eritrea's delicate path towards democracy,' *News from Nordiska Afrikainstitutet*, Vol. 1, 1995, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ 'One notable absence was Ramadan Mohamed Nur, a founder and leading member of the EPLF, who refused to stand for election and called for a renewal of the leadership.' Markakis, John, 'Eritrea's National Charter,' *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 22, No. 63, March 1995, p. 127.

The Front's six basic goals and principal guidelines were outlined at the Congress; and national unity was declared as the paramount guideline.

The journey to nation-building is long and complicated. Even though the bases of Eritrean nationalism have been firmly established through our long liberation struggle, it has yet to be concluded. It is known that to build a peaceful and rich country is the hardest, and more complicated than to get success in war.²⁰¹

As the sole political party in Eritrea, the EPLF/PFDJ dominates the National Assembly.²⁰² Several of the measures implemented by the Government were thus very much inspired by the Front's new National Charter and indicated its willingness to ensure the national ideal and state centralisation. One such measure was the introduction of a National Service Programme (NSP) according to which every Eritrean between the ages of 18 to 40, is to undergo six-months military training, followed by a year of additional service in the army, 'in which the participant gives active military and development-related services.'²⁰³ Two factors seem to have motivated the adoption of a national military service. First is the notion that the army is the cauldron of the nation, the objective is thus to ensure that all Eritreans, and especially the younger ones, are steeped in the EPLF's 'fighter spirit' and acquire civic responsibilities. As Ruth Iyob has pointed out: 'The NSP has served to socialise these young men and women from different ethnic communities and of different

²⁰¹ EPLF, *A National Charter for Eritrea, For a Democratic, Just and Prosperous Future*, Nacfa, 1994; as quoted in: Tronvoll, Kjetil, 'The process of nation-building in post-war Eritrea: created from below or directed from above?' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1988, p. 461.

²⁰² In May 1997, following the ratification of the Constitution, 75 members of the central committee of the PFDJ, 60 members of the 527-member Constituent Assembly which had been established in 1997 to discuss and ratify the new constitution, and 15 representatives of Eritreans living abroad were formed into a Transitional National Assembly to serve as the country's legislative body until country-wide elections to a National Assembly are held. When this happens, only 75 members will be elected to the National Assembly—the other 75 will be members of the Central Committee of the PFDJ. Elections we forecast to be held in 1998 when hostilities broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

²⁰³ 'Proclamation on National Service Revised,' *Eritrea Profile*, Vol., 2, No.34, 5 November 1995.

religious faiths into the philosophy of pan-Eritrean nationalism.²⁰⁴ The second motivation is more economic and seeks to avoid idle teenagers from creating trouble in the cities.²⁰⁵

In 1995, a new administrative structure was introduced which involved the redrawing of Eritrea's administrative map. The old administrative division was based on the previous colonial divisions, although some minor changes were made by the British and Ethiopian administrations. According to Eritrea's government, these divisions were said to follow ethnic and/or historical entities and were seen as divisive and a hindrance to the country's unity and development.²⁰⁶ Instead, Eritrea is now divided into six regions or *Zobas*, each with its own Administrator, appointed by the National Assembly. Although the regional restructuring is explained as more efficient in terms of economic development, it is clear that it also seeks to undermine any potential territorial foundation for dissension. Not only is it stated that the regional boundaries are not meant to express any particular ethnic group, but the door is also left open for subsequent modifications, as several of the statements emphasise that the new division should not be 'taken as final and eternal.'²⁰⁷

Perhaps the most controversial policy is the adoption by the Government in August 1994 of a new land legislation that vests ownership of the land in the state, but with individual peasant households having lifetime usufruct rights.²⁰⁸ In a country where 80 percent of the population is rural, the reform's impact is indeed widespread. Some have interpreted the land reform as an attempt to weaken the

²⁰⁴ Iyob, Ruth, 'The Eritrean Experiment: A Cautious Pragmatism?' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, December 1997, p. 669.

²⁰⁵ Marchal, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²⁰⁶ 'Why a new administrative structure?' *Eritrea Profile*, Vol. 2, No. 12, June 3, 1995; and 'National Assembly designates new administrative regions,' *Eritrea Profile*, Vol. 2, No. 34, November 5, 1995.

²⁰⁷ 'Lecture delivered by the vice-minister of local government Ato Habteab Tesfazion,' *Eritrea Profile*, Vol. 2, Issue 49, February 17, 1996.

individual's bonds to land, or the 'blood and soil' connection, since it 'will be no longer necessary to trace descent to a village to acquire land in the highlands, and a stranger (ma'ekelei alet) may again settle amidst the first inhabitants (dekkibat).'²⁰⁹ While this aspect may have motivated the government's decision in part, it should not be exaggerated. The land reform must indeed be considered with reference to three other important issues: the need to resettle refugees, provide land to former fighters and to ensure equal ownership to land to women. Moreover, contrary to what Tronvoll seems to suggest, this reform will affect less the highland peasants than the lowland agricultural communities of the more fertile Gash-Setit area, where most of the returning refugees are expected to resettle.

In July 1996, the draft Constitution which had been proposed by the Constitutional Commission was adopted by the National Assembly. It was ratified in May 1997.²¹⁰ The preamble clearly stresses the importance of national unity, of the liberation struggle and of the 'heroic participation of women'.²¹¹ Thus, while Article 5 specifies that all of the Constitution's articles 'shall apply equally to both genders', Article 6 reiterates the primacy of 'unity in diversity' as the guiding principle. The Constitution outlines the powers of the legislature, executive and judiciary. Eritrea is defined as a unitary government, divided into units for local government (Article 1.5). The National Assembly is 'a supreme representative and legislative body' and is elected by the people. The Executive is composed of the President and the Cabinet (18 Ministries). The President is elected by the National Assembly of which he is a member, by absolute majority. He is, moreover, the Head of Government, Head of

²⁰⁸ Fullerton Joireman, Sandra, 'The minefield of land reform: comments on Eritrean land proclamation, *African Affairs*, No. 95, 1996, pp. 269-85.

²⁰⁹ Tronvoll, 1998, *op. cit.*, pp. 470-7.

²¹⁰ The Constitutional Commission had been set up in April 1994 and was chaired by Dr. Bereket Habte Selassie.

State and Chief of the Armed Forces. The President is elected for five years and shall serve no more than two terms. The Judicial Power is vested in a Supreme Court, headed by the Chief Justice.

The equality of all Eritrean languages is guaranteed by the Constitution. Indeed, although Tigrinya, Arabic and English are generally recognised as the main working languages of administration, Eritrea's government has consciously avoided the adoption of any one official state language, for it sees this too as a divisive legacy from the colonial period.²¹² Although Eritrea's cultural diversity is acknowledged no specific reference to its ethnic composition is made. Similarly, Eritrea is a secular state, although both Muslim and Christian religions are allotted their respective national holidays. As had been established during the war by the EPLF, education in independent Eritrea is provided at the primary level in the language of the student's own nationality and replaced by English at the secondary level.²¹³ The texts published by the Eritrean Ministry of Education in 1993 and distributed to the schools in Asmara for the teaching of English indicate that Eritrean identity remains defined as it had been by the EPLF in the early 1980s.²¹⁴ The handouts distributed to Grade 8 students review and describe Eritrea's nine officially recognised nationalities, their location, customs, language and religion.²¹⁵ The last chapter, entitled 'Eritrean beliefs and tradition', explains that some of the customs of the

²¹¹ Constitutional Commission of Eritrea, *Draft Constitution*, July 1996 Asmara, Eritrea.

²¹² 'A summary of President Isaias's reply to questions from the public,' *Eritrea Profile*, Vol. 2, No. 28, September 23, 1995. President Isaias points here to the fact that 'almost none' of Eritrea's ethnic groups speaks Arabic as a mother tongue, and that it was introduced by the British and maintained by the Ethiopians as part of their attempt to polarise Eritrean society between Muslims and Christians.

²¹³ 'Out of the 512 elementary schools, 354 teach in Tigrinya, 96 in Arabic, 25 in Tigre, 13 in Kunama and 14 in Saho.' Makki, Fouad, 'Nationalism, State formation and the Public Sphere: Eritrea 1991-96,' *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 70, 1996, p. 483.

²¹⁴ This information was gathered during fieldwork in Eritrea in 1994-95.

²¹⁵ Descriptions of the customs of Eritrea's ethnic groups have similarly been published in consecutive issues of the *Eritrea Profile*.

traditional societies described in the preceding chapters – namely marriage and female circumcision – are detrimental to women. It then goes on to describe how

in the field, the EPLF developed a new culture, new traditions, new beliefs whereby marriages are no longer arranged and men and women participate equally in political life.

It is clear that a defining aspect of Eritrea's national identity is the place that is given to women. On those occasions since independence, when Eritrean women's rights have been threatened by private clandestine groups, notably with reference to land ownership, the government has punished those responsible and further guaranteed its policy of equal access to both land and work.²¹⁶

The PFJD is the only political party in Eritrea. At independence several members of the ELF and its factions joined the government, particularly those from the ELF-United Organisation. Among those groups which continue to refuse to support the Eritrean government and accuse it of being non-democratic, are: the ELF-Revolutionary Council (led by Ahmed Nasser), the Eritrean Democratic Liberation Movement (led by Gebreberham Zere), the ELF-Central Leadership (led by Tewolde Gebreselassie) and the ELF of Abdullah Idriss.²¹⁷ None of these groups appears to represent a significant force and thus their challenge remains limited.²¹⁸ More troublesome is the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, a group formed with Sudanese backing in 1989.²¹⁹ The significance of the Islamic Jihad must be seen in conjunction with the refugee issue. As of 1996, more than 200,000 refugees still resided in camps near the border in Sudan and were seen as vulnerable to the Islamic Jihad's

²¹⁶ Perez-Vitoria, Silvia, 'Les femmes d'Erythrée ne désarment pas,' *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Janvier 1997, p. 10; Connell, Dan, 'New Challenges in Postwar Eritrea,' *Eritrean Studies Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1997, pp. 129-59.

²¹⁷ 'Eritrea's new state,' *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 34, No. 9, 30 April 1993.

²¹⁸ Markakis, John, 'Eritrea: Transitional Period,' *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 58, November 1993, 133.

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1 recruitment. This put pressure on the Eritrean Government to accelerate the rate of repatriation. Although the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, 'has so far not been of any fundamental importance within Eritrea, and has itself been plagued by recurrent splits',²²⁰ it has played a significant role in Eritrea's relations with its neighbours and the US. Indeed, the threat of Islamic fundamentalism has now replaced communism as the main focus of American foreign policy in the Horn of Africa and Sudan has been singled out as one of the culprit. Testifying before the Foreign Relations subcommittee on Africa of the US Senate, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, George Moṣse, stated that:

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A central U.S. objective is that Sudan end its sponsorship of insurgent groups which seek to destabilize the neighboring countries of Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.(...) To help these neighboring countries contain Sudanese-sponsored insurgencies, in late 1995, President Clinton authorized the transfer of \$15 million in non-lethal defensive military assistance to these countries.²²¹

Thus, while initially reluctant to support Eritrea's independence, the United States soon recognised the need to establish good diplomatic relations with the country given its geopolitical interests and, to this end, has also encouraged Eritrea's rapprochement with Israel.²²²

²¹⁹ For a description of the genesis and development of the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, see, Tesfatsion Medhanie, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-92.

²²⁰ Makki, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

²²¹ Testimony of George E. Moṣse, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs before the Subcommittee on Africa, *US Counterterrorism policy toward Sudan*, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., May 15, 1997.

²²² Relations with Eritrea's Arab neighbours soured following the Hanish Islands dispute between Eritrea and Yemen in 1995 and Arab diplomats were quoted as referring to Eritrea as "the Israel of Africa". See: Jamal, Nuhad, 'Eritrea's bad press,' *Middle East International*, No. 581, 21 August 1998, p. 20. Given the International Court of Justice Court of Arbitration's decision in favour of Yemen in October 1998, and Eritrea's compliance with the verdict, it may be expected that relations will improve.

Conclusion

Eritrea's national identity has been shaped throughout its history and this is a process that is still ongoing. Three events may be singled out as particularly significant in terms of providing the building blocks for Eritrea's national identity:

- The first, is the creation of Eritrea as a colonial state, an event which not only provided Eritrea with its name and geographical identity, but also with a history distinct from that of Ethiopia. It is also during the colonial period that many important transformations of the type identified as necessary for the emergence of nationalism were introduced: industrialisation, the growth of networks of communication, urbanisation and education.
- The second, was the period of Federation (1952-62), during which Eritrea acquired the institutions and symbols of autonomy. The gradual erosion of Eritrea's autonomous status triggered civilian unrest and launched the armed liberation struggle.
- The third, is the liberation war itself. During this period, the nationalist struggle gradually spread from a small elite to encompass the Eritrean masses. It is also during the war, that Eritrea's identity was cemented and given its present characteristics by the dominant movement, the EPLF.

By giving the country its name and territory, Italian colonisation provided Eritrean nationalism with, to paraphrase Gellner, its navel. Indeed, as was discussed in the first section of this chapter, Eritrea's national identity cannot be traced to any ethnic substratum. Instead, Eritrea's national identity is territorially defined. The importance of this is best illustrated by the fact that more than the flag (a combination of the EPLF and the federal flag), more than the camel (the country's

official symbol since 1991), the new state's favourite emblem is the country's geographical map.²²³ The colonial state therefore, rather than ethnicity, provides the basis for this identity which has been articulated and propounded by the EPLF since the early 1980s. Although the EPLF may now be seen as being predominantly Tigrinya, it would be inaccurate to depict Eritrea's nationalist struggle as having been originally launched by this group. Indeed, as was previously shown, many Tigrinya supported initially Eritrea's unification to Ethiopia. Opposition to Ethiopia's incorporation - the event that sparked Eritrea's nationalism - was instead initiated by urban intellectuals, some of whom were Tigrinya (Woldeab Woldemariam) but not all, students and workers groups (the EDM). Moreover, the first armed liberation movement (ELF), was set up by Muslim expatriate students and not by Tigrinyas.

It was only when the Ethiopian army began to bomb civilians indiscriminately in the lowlands and highlands, that the latter joined more decisively the nationalist movement. While the necessary foundations upon which Eritrean identity could be 'imagined' and crystallised had been implanted by Italian colonisation, fear of dissolution - brought about by the British proposal to dismantle Eritrea and followed by Ethiopia's incorporation of Eritrea - provided the motivational dynamic behind Eritrea's march towards self-determination. The intensity and protractedness of the liberation war further contributed towards achieving greater cohesion among Eritreans. The harder Ethiopia tried to stifle Eritrea, the more it kindled Eritrean feeling of identity. Not only did the war further cement an Eritrean identity, it also provided further definition of this identity. Although a pan-Eritrean secular identity was first propounded by the EDM in the late

²²³ Péninou, Jean-Louis, 'Guerre absurde entre l'Ethiopie et l'Erythrée,' *Le Monde Diplomatique*,

1950s and early 1960s, the EPLF's military defeat of the ELF in the early 1980s, enabled it to impose, unchallenged, its own conception of Eritrean identity. The importance of the liberation war in Eritrea's national identity should come as no surprise. After all, the war lasted thirty years and although no official figures are available, estimates of civilian casualties range between 150, 000 to 250,000; this in a country whose population is of about 3.3 million. There is no section of the Eritrean population that has not been affected by the war and anyone who travels to Eritrea is struck by the presence of war. The road from the capital city of Asmara to the port of Massawa is strewn with defunct carcasses of rusting Soviet tanks. Unexploded ordinance and landmines continue to litter the countryside, maiming young men and women. The 65,000 Eritrean Liberation Army fighters that died during the struggle are now commemorated on June 20th, Martyrs' day. Following Eritrea's new Constitution, the members of the National Assembly, the President and the Judges shall pledge their oath in the name of the Eritrean martyrs. Another indication of the war's central role in Eritrea's national identity is the name given to the country's new currency. The Nacfa, introduced in November 1997, is the name of the mountain redoubt from where Eritrean resistance was organised, one of the few towns the Ethiopian army was unable to recapture after it had been lost to the Eritrean forces in March 1977.

It could be said that the only ideology which guides Eritrea's government is that of nationalism, as indicated by the different policies introduced since independence. Secularism, the rejection of ethnic or religious political parties, the national service, the redrawing of Eritrea's internal administrative borders, the lack of any official language, all these measures indicate the government's willingness to

ensure and consolidate Eritrea's national unity. Whether or not this unity will withstand the test of time is impossible to assess. Although most commentators agree that the great majority of Eritreans are animated by a deep sense of national identity, internal divisions should not be underplayed.

With the outbreak of the war against Ethiopia, in May 1998, the consolidation of Eritrean national identity has moved a stage further. Indeed most Eritreans have rallied behind their government and support among the Eritrean Diaspora community has been reinforced. Moreover, in the propaganda war that rages alongside the border war, a new terminology has arisen. Eritrean newspapers frequently refer to the 'aggressor' not as Ethiopians but as the 'TPLF regime', 'Tigrayans' or as 'Weyane' (in reference to the 1943 Tigrayan uprising). Also noteworthy is the way in which identities are being remoulded and redefined. Following the wave of deportation that has accompanied the recent war, Eritreans are referred to as 'ethnic Eritreans'.²²⁴ Similarly, a scholar of nationalism has described Ethiopia's policy towards its citizens of Eritrean descent as a case of 'mild ethnic cleansing'.²²⁵ Not only are Eritreans now defined as an ethnic category, but the history of Eritrea's Tigrinya speaking population is 're'-written so as to emphasise its distinctiveness from that of Ethiopia's Tigrinya speakers. Indeed, according to Asmarom Legesse:

The Tigrayans and the highland Eritreans are next door neighbors, they speak the same language, and have a common history. However they diverge sharply from each other in culture and character. The divergent developments are not merely a function of the colonial experience of Eritrea: the divergence goes back to the fourteenth century when Eritrea began writing her own customary laws and developing her own grass roots democratic institutions. The deep antipathy that some Tigrayans have now developed toward ethnic Eritreans is,

²²⁴ See for example, Legesse, Asmarom, *The Uprooted Part one. Case material on Ethnic Eritrean Deportees from Ethiopia Concerning Human Rights Violations*, Report written on behalf of Citizens for Peace in Eritrea, Asmara, 26 July 1998. Dehai On Line. <http://www.primenet.com/~ephrem2>

²²⁵ Calhoun, Craig, 'Ethiopia's Ethnic Cleansing', *Dissent*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Winter 1999.

however, a new phenomenon and will probably subside once the hate campaign runs out of steam.²²⁶

Notwithstanding this claim's dubious historical foundations, it is nevertheless quite revealing of the way the ongoing war between Ethiopia and Eritrea appears to have further sharpened the identity of Eritrea's Tigrinyas as distinct from that of Ethiopia's Tigrayans. Although, Eritrea's national identity may emerge reinforced from the current war, the obverse is also possible. Indeed, the brunt of the war is currently born by the civilian populations. Eritrea and Ethiopia's meagre resources are spent in weapons, while its peoples suffer, once more, of starvation. If the war continues much longer, anger and hunger might well signal the collapse of two more states in the Horn of Africa.

²²⁶ Legesse, Asmarom, *The Uprooted. Part Two*. A Scientific Survey of Ethnic Eritrean Deportees from Ethiopia Conducted with regard to Human Rights Violations on behalf of Citizens for Peace in Eritrea Asmara, Eritrea, 22 February 1999. <http://www.primenet.com/~ephrem2>

Chapter 5 – Nation-Formation in Somaliland¹

Somalia has in the 1990s achieved the unenviable status of becoming a paradigmatic case of state collapse. Much of the literature now dedicated to this country focuses either on the causes of its disintegration or on the failures of international humanitarian intervention. Yet, there is another dimension of the Somalia crisis that is of particular interest. In May 1991, as the Republic of Somalia was plunged into the throws of a civil war that accompanied the demise of Siad Barre's regime, Somalia's north-western region seceded from the rest of the country. It would be tempting to interpret Somaliland's secession as the result of the disintegration of a state artificially constructed by colonisation and to seek its roots in the terrain of ethnic politics. Such explanations must nevertheless be quickly dismissed.

Based on the former British Protectorate of Somaliland, the self-proclaimed republic of Somaliland reverted in 1991 to the name and territory it held prior to the 1960 Act of Union that presided over its unification to the UN trusteeship of Somalia (former Italian Somaliland). Like Eritrea, therefore, Somaliland is appealing to its previous colonial existence to justify its claims to independence and in so doing, it could be said that it reinstates rather than challenges the colonial partition. Somaliland's secession moreover, like that of Eritrea, disproves the ethnic interpretation, but this time from an opposite stand point. Whereas in the case of Eritrea, the ethnic explanation was discarded mainly because of the new entity's multi-ethnic composition, Somaliland's secession has taken place from within a state that had hitherto been identified as one of Africa's few homogeneous nation states.

¹ The name Somaliland will be used throughout this chapter without the quotation marks that are frequently used in the literature to denote that it is not yet recognised as sovereign state. This does not necessarily imply that I am taking a particular stance on what ought to be Somaliland's status.

Until its disintegration, Somalia was indeed better known for its nationalist and irredentist aspirations. So compelling was Somalia's nationalist appeal, that its case came to be invoked by those who advocated the redrawing of the map of Africa along ethnic lines. In the preface to the 1978 edition of *A Modern History of Somalia*, I. M. Lewis wrote:

Today with the exception of Somali Democratic Republic, Botswana and Lesotho, sub-Saharan Africa's traditional nations and tribes are not autonomous, but encapsulated in multi-national states formed haphazardly and without regard to ethnic boundaries in the European partition of the continent. (...) It is this prevailing cultural heterogeneity, with the growth of ethnic friction and conflict since independence, which makes African states so fragile and vehemently attached to the territorial frontiers which alone establish their identity. (...) It seems [...] inevitable that if Africa is to overcome its systemic instabilities, concessions may have to be made to its ethnic problems(...).²

Similarly, A.D. Smith argued that Somalia stood out as one of the rare 'true' nationalist movements in a continent where 'still born' colonial nationalisms were the norm.³ Given these descriptions, it is somewhat ironic that Somalia should have split along its former colonial boundaries, challenging by the same token the argument that ethnically homogenous states are more stable than those that are not.⁴

This chapter is divided into five sections. After discussing why ethnic approach fails to convey the complexity of Somali society and throw light on the causes of its disintegration, this chapter seeks to identify the sources of Somaliland's secession by examining its recent history. Given that Somaliland is calling back to its colonial past to justify its independence, the second part of this chapter assesses the ways in which the British administration contributed to the forging of a sense of identity. The third section then examines the history of Somalia, from its unification

² Lewis, I.M., *A Modern History of Somalia. Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*, Westview Press, Boulder & London, 1988, pp. ix, xi-xii.

³ Smith, Anthony D., *National Identity*, Penguin books, 1991, p. 108.

in 1960 to its collapse 1991, assessing the depth of pan-Somali nationalism and discussing the importance of the 1977-78 Ogaden war for Somalia's eventual disintegration. The fourth section of this chapter retraces the chain of events that led to Somaliland's secession and identifies the underlying sources of Somaliland's discontent. Despite the relative dearth of reliable first hand data, the final section attempts to draw a picture of the situation that has prevailed in Somaliland since independence. But before we proceed let us first try to define who the Somali are.

5.1 – *Who are the Somali?*

Much of the literature on Somalia begins by stating how culturally and ethnically homogeneous the Somali State is. Samuel Makinda, for instance, speaks of Somalia as 'the only Sub-Saharan country comprising one ethnic group'.⁵ Similarly, David Laitin and Said Samatar write:

One feature of Somali society that strikes the eye of even the most casual observer is the homogeneity of the Somali culture. In contrast to the vast majority of independent African states whose challenge has been to forge out of a plethora of tribes a common national consciousness within boundaries drawn up by departed colonials, the Somalis essentially constitute a one-nationality state...⁶

These descriptions may surprise the reader more accustomed to seeing Somalia portrayed as a society riven by age-old clan rivalries, which are, according to some, Somalia's version of ethnicity.⁷ So which of these two apparently contradictory

⁴ Indeed, as Christopher Clapham pointedly observed: 'As the Somali tragedy shows, cultural affinity provides no guarantee of stable or even peaceful coexistence.' Clapham, Christopher, 'How Many Ethiopians?' *Africa*, Vol. 63, No. 1, 1993, p. 124.

⁵ Makinda, Samuel, *Seeking Peace from Chaos: Humanitarian Intervention in Somalia*, International Peace Academy Occasional Papers, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colorado, 1993, p. 11.

⁶ Laitin, David D. and Samatar, Said S., *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1987, p. 2.

⁷ Adam, Hussein M., 'Somalia: A Terrible Beauty Being Born?' in: Zartman, William, *Collapsed States. The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colo. and London, 1995, p. 70; Schultz, R.H. Jr, 'State disintegration and ethnic conflict: a framework for analysis, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol, 541,

pictures, both of whom nevertheless still rely on an atavistic understanding of communal identities, more truthfully represents Somalia? As will be discussed in this section, neither seems in fact to be wholly accurate.

a) The Sab and the Samale

The Somali are generally described as divided into two main *clan families*: the Samale and the Sab. These are then subdivided into the six main clans: the Hawiye, Dir, Isaaq, Darod, Digil and Rahanweyn, which are themselves further subdivided into sub-clans, themselves further sub-divided into sub-sub-clans. The Dulbhante, for example, a sub-clan of the Darod clan, is itself divided in 15 further sub-clans and 50 *dīya*, or blood-paying groups.⁸ The first four clans (Hawiye, Dir, Isaaq and Darod), which encompass the majority of the Somali population, belong to the Samale clan-family and are mainly pastoral nomads. The latter two, the Digil and Rahanweyn,⁹ which together are referred to as the Sab, have tended to be marginalised from mainstream politics and suffered more acutely during the 1992 famine. Anthropologists have defined Somali socio-political organisation as a 'segmentary lineage system,' a system that is characterised by its extreme decentralisation. Given the absence of any overarching authority, the decision-making process is often described as radically democratic to the point of being anarchical. Although this would seem to apply to the Samale, it may not be wholly adequate with regard to the Sab.

Located in the southern part of Somalia, in the river areas where they practice agriculture, the Sab are, by contrast to the Samale clans, mostly sedentary. Perhaps

September 1995, pp. 75-88; Horowitz similarly speaks of Somalia's 'ethnic war'. See: Horowitz, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

because of this, the Digil and Rahanweyn clans have developed a more stratified and hierarchical socio-political system than that which prevails among their northern counterparts, and in some instances, 'loyalties based on common residence and common-land-holding are more important politically than those defined by kinship'.⁹ They speak a distinct dialect of Somali which, according to Lewis, differs from that which is spoken by the northern pastoralists in the same way that Portuguese differs from Spanish.¹⁰ Given that Spanish and Portuguese are generally held to be distinct languages and that Spain and Portugal are two nation-states, the comparison is perhaps somewhat unfortunate as it would appear to undermine Lewis's own argument about the existence of a Somali ethnic identity, based primarily, albeit not exclusively, on language commonality.

Moreover, by contrast to what appears to be the practice among the Samale clans, the Digil and Rahanweyn have incorporated peoples belonging to other clans. Although most tend to come from the north, other 'non-Somali' peoples of either Oromo or Bantu extraction and from whom the Sab have borrowed certain cultural practices, are also frequently encountered amongst them. And, as Bernhard Helander points out:

Over time, such adopted groups become, for all practical purposes, members of their new clans. There are a variety of terms for such adopted groups, of which the most polite seems to be the word *dhaqan*, literally meaning 'culture'. However, some of the adopted members continue to be despised for their lowly or unknown origins and in this area are generally referred to as *boon*. (...) While the boon living in the inter-riverine area are treated as a uniform

⁸ Lewis, I.M., *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*, Oxford University Press, London, 1961, p. 132.

⁹ Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 14. This aspect is particularly interesting in light of Gellner's theory of nationalism. Indeed, we see how settled agriculturists may be more prone to develop a territorially based conception of community.

¹⁰ Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

category of people, in reality they comprise a broad variety of different groups, a fact which they consider themselves significant.¹¹

Indeed, while the genealogically defined Somali constitute the vast majority of the population inhabiting the territories identified as Somali lands, there are a number of other groups who, for lack of a better term, could be described as 'non-Somali' minorities.¹² These minorities hold lesser status in the Somali community and do not always benefit from the same protection as that provided through clan solidarity, in spite of the fact that, as mentioned above, some have been 'adopted' and can therefore claim clan affiliation.

b) The 'other' Somalis

The Migdan, Tumaal and Yibir, who perform tasks that are deemed menial by the Somali pastoralists (hunting, leatherwork, iron-mongering and female circumcision) are pejoratively referred to as *sab*.¹³ Although no physical differences, either phenotypic or genetic, distinguish them from the other Somali,¹⁴ these outcasts are nevertheless excluded from Somali genealogy and from the blood-wealth (*diya*) paying groups. Noteworthy is the fact that these three groups have themselves emphasised at times their differences by claiming to have inhabited the area prior to

¹¹ Helander, Bernhard, 'Vulnerable Minorities in Somalia and Somaliland', *Indigenous Affairs*, No. 2, April-June 1995, p 22.

¹² Bernhard Helander, following Virginia Luling's classification, refers to them collectively instead as 'the other Somali'. By so doing these authors emphasise the fact that 'anyone living in Somalia is a Somali.' See, Helander, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 21. Luling, Virginia, 'The Other Somali,' in: Labhan, Thomas (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies*, Vol. IV, Helmut Buske Verlag, Hamburg, 1984.

¹³ Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, 10. It remains unclear from Lewis's account why the term *sab*, which is used to collectively designate the Rahanweyn and Digil clans, is also used here.

¹⁴ Blood group testing revealed no significant difference between these and their host-groups. See, Goldsmith, K.L., and Lewis, I.M., 'A Preliminary Investigation of the Blood Groups of the *Sab* bondsmen of Northern Somaliland,' *Man*, Vol. 58, No. 252, 1958, pp. 188-90.

the Somali conquests. The Yibir, moreover, who live inside the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland, 'occasionally claim to be of original Hebrew descent.'¹⁵

Another minority, whose identity appears to have achieved greater saliency recently, is that which comprises those peoples collectively, albeit somewhat indiscriminately, referred to as Bantu Somali. They include the Somali speaking Bantu and Oromo communities who live in small communities along the rivers or in the Baido region, descendants of slaves that were traded in the neighbouring ports, and the Wa-Gosha or Shambara, also referred to as bushmen. The Benadir of the Mogadishu coastal area, who are believed to be Swahili descendants and who are mostly merchants, traders, sailors or fishermen, are also sometimes included in this group. Although referred to as a community, these so-called Bantu Somali are not organised as such, different groups being differently inserted in the Somali socio-political life. Ironically, and tragically, international intervention¹⁶ has further aggravated their plight, as well as that of non-'Bantu' peoples who had the 'misfortune' of being categorised as such.

Learning that many of their ancestors had spoken Bantu languages the term 'Bantu' was adopted as an ethnic label by the head of UNOSOM's political division, Dr. Leonard Kapungo. In various circumstances UNOSOM treated the 'Bantu' as a social group on a par with the Somali clans. This practice was pursued to the absurd extent that UNOSOM officers in some districts in the Bay and Bakool regions insisted that people were classified as 'Bantu' on the basis of their facial features and consequently have their own representative in the district council, not the representative appointed by the clan to which the suspected 'Bantu' belonged.¹⁷

On the other hand, and paradoxically given UNOSOM's aforementioned practice, the agricultural community which inhabits the Juba and Shabelle river valleys, and

¹⁵ Hellander, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁶ We are referring here more specifically to the two United Nations Operation in Somalia, UNOSOM and UNOSOM II, and the Unified Task Force (UNITAF), set up respectively in April 1992, March 1993 and December 1992, under UN resolutions 751, 814 and 794, in response to the humanitarian crisis provoked by the ongoing civil war.

which had tried to protect itself from the ongoing civil war by organising itself politically and militarily in 1992 under the Somali African Muki Organisation, was not acknowledged as such by UNOSOM. This group was left unrepresented from UNOSOM's plans to establish local government structures in the area because it was not considered as belonging to one of the traditional Somali clans.¹⁸ Little is known or written about these minorities whose existence under the previous regime was downplayed so as not to undermine the notion of an ethnically homogeneous Somalia. While their numbers or relative importance should perhaps not be overstated, it has nevertheless been suggested that, with Somaliland's secession, their presence will become more significant in Southern Somalia.

They [the Samale] might have been a majority in the ex-Somali before the civil war at around 70% but with the North gone, the remaining pastoralist population, (...) would at most make up 50%.¹⁹

As we can see from this account, there are many groups in Somalia that could, if they so wished, claim to be ethnically different and appeal to minority status. If one were to endorse the ethnic explanation for civil conflict, one would therefore have expected these groups to be the main protagonists in the 1990s civil war. But this was not the case. Indeed, most of those actively involved in the conflict belonged to one of the four clans that comprise the Samale clan family. What is more, the conflicts that erupted frequently opposed members of the same clan.²⁰

¹⁷ Hellander, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁸ African Rights, *Somalia. Operation Restore Hope: A Preliminary Assessment*, London, May 1993, p. 32. The Somali African Muki Organization was not represented in Addis Ababa and thus excluded from the Transitional Council established at the conference.

¹⁹ Abdullahi, Mohamed Diriye, 'Minorities of Somali: Victims forgotten amid war and chaos,' <http://www.netnomad.com>

²⁰ The battle over Mogadishu involved four factions from the Hawiye clan fighting each other for the control of the state.

c) *Clanism*

Although Somalia's division into clans is much publicised, it is not necessarily better understood. Several journalists and analysts, commenting on the current civil war, have tended to compare Somalia's clans to ethnic groups. Hussein Adam, for example, writes that clanism 'is the Somali version of the generic problem of ethnicity or tribalism: it represents primordial cleavages and cultural fragmentation within the Somali society'.²¹ Clanism, understood here as the resurgence of age-old clan antagonisms, was held to be responsible for the outbreak of the civil war. This interpretation guided many of UNOSOM's policies between 1992 and 1995, as clanism in Somalia, like ethnicity in Yugoslavia, was seen to be the root cause of the civil war that led to Somalia's disintegration. Yet, contrary to what this primordialist view suggests, the reality on the ground is more complex.

Clan affiliation is important both politically and socially, providing Somalis with both status and identity, as well as determining allegiances for the purposes of security and the paying of blood-wealth (*diya*-paying group). As was explained earlier, most authors agree that Somali society is divided into six main clans, each further sub-divided into clans and sub-clans. Yet even the six principal clans, comprising the traditional social system, 'are generally too large, too widely scattered and too unwieldy to act as effective corporate political units'. And it is only with the introduction of modern political party competition that 'such extended kinship links acquired new vitality and significance'.²² Moreover, a comparison of the genealogical charts provided in the various works reveal significant differences when it comes to describing the hierarchy and relationships of the clans. These

²¹ Adam, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

²² Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

discrepancies may be attributable to two factors: the time at which the information was gathered and the informant's own clan affiliation. This caveat highlights the fact that clan relationships are not as stringent and automatic as assumed by the reference to age-old antagonisms and are instead governed by a 'system of shifting genealogical attachment.'²³ Moreover, as Lewis explains:

Although they have the appearance of genetic origin, Somali genealogies are as arbitrary and man-made as culturally constructed ethnic or national identity [sic]. They are social not natural products. What they offer are natural-seeming, and hence indisputable bases for belonging or communal action, which are so easily manipulated by politicians and used by them for their own purposes to confuse and complicate social interaction by seeming to simplify it.²⁴

Lewis's argument has been further substantiated by other research recently undertaken in Somalia. Trying to identify what actually fuels Somali factionalism, Daniel Compagnon has argued that 'even though this appears to stem from clan rivalry, in almost every instance it has been manipulated by individuals or small cliques in order to further their own interests'.²⁵ Marcel Djama has similarly written that the factionalisation and confrontation of the type frequently invoked to explain Somalia's current state of chaos is not an intrinsic characteristic of the traditional kinship system, a 'social automatism', but a perversion of it, manipulated by an interested few.²⁶ This point is important insofar as it illustrates how a factor, deemed to be an intrinsic feature of a society (like ethnicity or clanism), may be an outcome of the crisis it is meant to have triggered rather than its cause.

²³ Lewis, I.M., 'Problems in the Development of Modern Leadership and Loyalties in the British Somaliland Protectorate and U.N. Trusteeship Territory of Somalia,' *Civilisations*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1960, p. 53.

²⁴ Lewis, I.M., 'Clan Conflict and Ethnicity in Somalia: Humanitarian Intervention in a Stateless Society,' in: Turton, David, (ed.) *War and Ethnicity. Global Connections and Local Violence*, University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY, 1997, p. 199.

²⁵ Compagnon, Daniel, 'Somali Armed Movements. The Interplay of Political Entrepreneurship & Clan-Based Factions,' in Clapham, Christopher (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, James Currey Ltd, Oxford, 1998, p. 83.

²⁶ Djama, Marcel, 'Sur la violence en Somalie: genèse et dynamique des formations armées,' *Politique Africaine*, octobre 1992.

According to Samatar, Somali socio-political life before colonial partition was relatively well organised and cohesive. While stateless, it was nevertheless structured around a complex web of principles that included both kinship associations and Islamic law (the *qanoon*). Together, these bound the society's various strands together. Patrilineally traced blood ties (*tol*) constituted the key element of the Somali segmentary lineage system, but kinship relations and obligations were also dictated by marriage ties (*hidid*) as well as by an unwritten code of practice (*heer*).

Any separatist tendencies that *tol* may have promoted were kept in check by *hidid* and *heer*, which underscored interdependence and inclusiveness. The combination of blood ties and *heer*, embodied predominantly in the person of the elder, was one of the two pillars of indigenous political authority; the other was the *qanoon* (derived primarily from *Al-Quran* and *Al-Hadith*) of Islam, the purveyor of which was the learned and holy, i.e., the *shaikh*.²⁷

This traditional delicate balance was undermined by the introduction of trade and commerce in the nineteenth century and by the imposition of colonial rule. Patrilinearity then assumed the predominant and unbridled role that has now become associated with the centrifugal forces of clanism. Clanism would therefore appear to be a relatively recent phenomenon and, to a certain extent, a deviation from the traditional kinship system.

As will be discussed later, Somaliland has not witnessed the violent fissiparous clanic tendencies that have now come to characterise politics in Southern Somalia. It is possible that Somaliland's particular colonial experience and/or relative peripheral position sheltered it somewhat from some of the pernicious transformations experienced in Southern Somalia. If such is indeed the case, then it would account

²⁷ Samatar, Ahmed I., 'The Curse of Allah: Civic Disembowelment and the Collapse of the State in Somalia,' in Samatar, Ahmed I., (ed.), *The Somali Challenge. From Catastrophe to Renewal?* Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London, 1994, pp. 109-111.

for why Somaliland has been able to rekindle some of the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, albeit in a modernised form.

5.2 – The British Protectorate of Somaliland

The British established themselves in Aden in 1839 and did not initially covet the land that lay across the Gulf. France, for its part, set up a trading counter and naval station in Obock in 1862. Following a treaty with the Issa Somalis in 1885, the French possessions progressively extended eastwards and the protectorate was relocated to Djibouti in 1892.²⁸ With the opening the Suez Canal in 1869, French presence in the area became more ominous to the British, especially when Egypt decided to evacuate Harar in 1884. While reluctant to incur the administrative costs implied by its occupation of the Somali coast, Britain nevertheless needed to check French dominance.

a) Delimitation of the boundaries

Britain pursued a policy of minimal control of the coastal areas. In 1888, after Britain and France had signed a treaty establishing their respective protectorates, the frontier was traced between Djibouti and Zeila. In 1894, a series of treaties were negotiated between Britain and Italy, which by then had occupied the coast of Benadir, south of Mogadishu. These agreements, which granted British control over the Haud and Italian control over the Ogaden, frustrated Ethiopia's imperial ambitions. Following Italy's crushing defeat in Adwa in 1896, Britain could no longer ignore Emperor Menelik's territorial claims.

²⁸ Touval, Saadia, *Somali Nationalism. International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963, pp. 37-40.

On seeing the British boundary (as marked out in 1894) seemingly for the first time, Menelik exclaimed: "But you are advancing right to the gates of Harar." Rodd countered that the British were the reversionaries of Egypt so that really Ethiopia, by taking Harar, advanced on the British sphere. His Majesty then propounded the extraordinary doctrine that the Somalis had been from time immemorial, until the Moslem invasion, the cattle keepers of the Ethiopians who could not themselves live in the low countries.²⁹

The Government of India, which also controlled Aden, then administered British Somaliland. The Protectorate's primary *raison d'être* was to supply Aden with livestock. Since it did not represent a coveted land in itself, which would have justified extra expenditure, Great Britain did not give the Indian Government additional funds or men for its maintenance and defence. Ethiopia's subsequent conquest of Harar - a city that was used as a buffer between Ethiopians and Somalis - was viewed by the Bombay Government as a nuisance but, albeit mistakenly, not as a major threat.³⁰

Given Britain's reluctance to spend more than what was minimally required for the maintenance of the Somali protectorate, the Haud, albeit reluctantly, was eventually ceded to Ethiopia in 1897. The Haud represented for Somali pastoralists a vital grazing area. Indeed, as Ahmed Yusuf Farah has written, it constitutes 'a single economic zone' where 'livestock flow from the north for export through various ports along the Red Sea coast, while commodities and manufactured goods follow the same routes inland'.³¹ The Haud's significance was readily acknowledged by various British representatives when Rodd negotiated a frontier with Ras Makonnen, which was then ratified by Emperor Menilek. Rodd succeeded in so wording the Treaty that while guaranteeing Ethiopia's recognition of the Protectorate, it avoided

²⁹ Silberman, Leo, 'Why the Haud was ceded,' *Cahiers D'Etudes Africaines*, No. 5, fall 1961, p. 56. Silberman is quoting here a passage from one of Rodd's letter to Salisbury. Renell Rodd, First Secretary to the British Agency in Cairo, led a mission to Menelik, under the auspices of the Foreign Office.

³⁰ Silberman, 1961, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

including Britain's recognition of Ethiopia's possessions. This 'omission' would pave the way to Somalia's future disputes with Ethiopia, and could possibly provide an 'opening' to future claims by Somaliland.

b) British Colonisation's impact on Somaliland before WWII

In 1905, the administration of Somaliland passed under the control of the Colonial Office.³² By then, the twenty-year 'war' between the British and the rebellious Mohammed Abdullah Hassan's Dervishes, *aka* the 'Mad Mullah', had been going on for several years.³³ As Lewis notes, 'having spent so much on military operations so completely out of proportion to their interests in Somaliland, the British government was not now disposed to make further funds available for development'.³⁴ Indeed, no exploitable resources justified investment in this colony. Although a geological survey carried out in 1923 indicated the possible presence of petroleum and coal, the Somaliland Petroleum Company, formed by Anglo-Saxon Oil, did not find the prospect's results sufficiently encouraging to warrant further boring.³⁵

Britain's administration of Somaliland was to be very light-handed. Comparing it to that of Britain's administration of Southern Sudan, Gérard Prunier argues that both belonged to the category of 'non-government' or benign neglect.³⁶ It is therefore doubtful that during this period, colonisation had any significant socio-economic impact on the Somali population living in the British Protectorate of the type

³¹ Quoted in: Bryden, Matt, *Report on the Mission to Haud Area, Region 5, 2-15 November 1994*, UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia, 1994, p. 9.

³² Kittermaster, Harold, 'The Development of the Somalis,' *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. 31, 1932, p. 234.

³³ Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-91. Abdullah Hassan's exploits were later incorporated into Somalia's history as the first acts of Somali resistance against Western imperialism.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁵ Kittermaster, 1932, *op. cit.* As will be discussed in the conclusion, Somaliland's potential in the oil area has once more become the object of exploration.

³⁶ Prunier, Gérard, 'Somaliland Goes It Alone,' *Current History*, Vol. 97, No. 619, May 1998, p. 225.

postulated as necessary by some modernist theories for the emergence of nationalism. A few roads were built but urbanisation remained modest, a situation which may also be attributed to the pastoralists' nomadic mode of life. Government policies aimed at encouraging agricultural development yielded few results, although it should nevertheless be noted that during this period a pocket of agriculturists emerged in the north-western part of the territory. In the field of education, little was undertaken. Writing in 1932, the former Governor of Somaliland, Harold Kittermaster, recalls:

The first essential for any development appeared to be a scheme of education, for up to this time the vast majority of the population were altogether illiterate. A school on an ambitious scale was projected, but it broke down on the refusal of the people to pay a stock tax which was to supply the funds. For three years this tax was the cause of considerable internal unrest, and in the end it was abandoned. Though it had the support of all the leading men in the country, at any rate when they were discussing it with the Government, they were unable to carry their people with them (if indeed, they really tried to)....³⁷

By 1934, the protectorate government had opened only one elementary school that catered for 120 Somali students. A small number of students were also sent to Gordon College in Khartoum, but otherwise, education was for the most part confined to the existing Koranic schools.

We may recall how Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner stressed the importance of education and the development of the print vernacular in the emergence of nationalism in the Americas and in Europe. There existed in Somaliland a small educated elite, or to borrow Gellner's terminology, a class of clerks or clerics. As there was no existing transliteration of the Somali language, this educated elite used the Arabic script. In 1920, a revolutionary development occurred in this field when Isman Yusuf Kenadid invented a 'highly sophisticated and

³⁷ Kittermaster, 1932, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

accurate alphabet and script for the Somali language' which came to be known as 'Osmaniya'.³⁸

the creation of a truly indigenous vehicle for the national language naturally appealed to the Somali national consciousness.(...) Later events were to create circumstances in which this ingenious writing was to be championed by the leaders of modern Somali nationalism as a symbol of Somali achievement, associated with perhaps the most prized of all things in the Somali national heritage – the Somali language.³⁹

Despite its potential significance, this development had little impact at the time. The educated elite continued to use Arabic, favoured as it was by the more conservative religious elite, and the great majority of Somalis remained illiterate.

Only a small number of northern Somalis advanced beyond the elementary school level, and in order to pursue their studies they had had to go abroad, either to Aden or Khartoum.

Upon their return, they were employed in lowly clerical posts in the British colony, a status they came to resent because it rendered them subordinate to expatriate Indian personnel, and in 1937 they formed the Somali Officials Union to press claims for promotion to posts reserved for the latter.⁴⁰

Discontent therefore, first emerged among this foreign educated elite. Not only had they been exposed to other ways and systems that highlighted the deficiencies in their own country, but, also, their hopes of socio-economic advancement were frustrated upon their return. Haji Farah 'Omar was one of the first such educated individuals to actively promote an improvement in the livelihood of his countrymen. His activities in the 1920s displeased the Protectorate's authorities and he was sent into exile to Aden where he founded, along with other Somali expatriates, the Somali Islamic Association.⁴¹ As expressions of discontent were being increasingly voiced

³⁸ Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Markakis, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 52, and Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 114-5.

⁴¹ Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 114; and Touval, 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

amongst the emerging, albeit small, educated Somaliland elite, the outbreak of the Second World War ushered in a new period.

After taking over the Benadir Coast, the Italian government expressed its desire to increase its own Somali territory. In order to satisfy Italy, whom it needed as an ally to counter the French, Britain accepted to forgo its Jubbaland and Kismayo concessions in 1924. Italy further pursued its expansion and conquered the Majerteen territory in 1927. Once well established in the region – in Somalia and Eritrea – Italy's colonial ambitions grew further. In the late 1920s, plans for the future invasion of Abyssinia were developed in Rome. As was the case in Eritrea, the Italians prepared their colony of Somalia for the war effort, bringing about important socio-economic changes. During the period preceding Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, Somalia witnessed an unprecedented, albeit brief, period of economic prosperity.⁴²

Although greater than in British Somaliland, the number of primary schools in Italian Somalia remained modest. Nevertheless, 'knowledge of Italian, often of course very rudimentary, was fairly widespread and certainly more extensive than the acquaintance with English in the Somaliland Protectorate.'⁴³ The population of Mogadishu grew twofold between 1930 and 1940, and reached 90,000 inhabitants by the end of the 1940s. The war effort also induced changes in Somali consumption patterns as 'additional purchasing power came from the many thousands who were recruited or employed in the various armies'.⁴⁴ Agricultural investment in the Shebelle-Juba valley grew substantially, transforming this area's subsistence economy to one of intensive farming destined for exports. All these developments indirectly affected the economy of British Somaliland. As Markakis observes:

⁴² Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴⁴ Markakis, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

Military procurement of animals for food and transport considerably expanded the market for pastoralist products for nearly a decade. This in turn boosted the purchasing capacity of this sector, and spurred demand for consumer products – such as rice, dates, tea, sugar and cloth – upon which the herdsmen were becoming dependent. (...) A study of the rise of nationalism in British Somaliland notes that political consciousness first appeared within “an emergent class linked to international demands for livestock and its by-products, and inter-territorial transportation opportunities in the eastern Horn”.⁴⁵

Although to a lesser degree than in Italian Somalia, British Somaliland was therefore also affected by the approaching war.

c) The Italian invasion of Abyssinia and Bevin's plan for a Greater Somalia

In November 1934, a joint Anglo-Abyssinian mission dispatched to demarcate Somaliland's southern border discovered the presence of an Italian fortified post near the Wal-Wal wells in Ethiopia's Ogaden region. The Wal-Wal incident, as it came to be known, provided the *casus belli* that led to Italy's invasion of the Horn and the establishment of its East African Empire. Fusing its existing colonies of Eritrea and Somalia to Ethiopia, Mussolini's East African Empire was divided into six regions: Eritrea, Amhara, Harrar, Somalia, Galla-Sidama, and Addis Ababa. As one of Italy's former Governor to Ethiopia, Corrado Zoli, noted in *Foreign Affairs* in 1937:

In dividing the Empire into regional governments, [or provinces], efforts were made to group together peoples with similar languages, traditions and economic interests. In so far as possible, account was also taken of ethnic and religious factors, *as is necessary in any government of African peoples*. The subdivision of the provinces into commissariati, residence and vice-residence was inspired by the same criteria, in the hope of finding a happy solution to the complex problem of governing diverse and often mutually hostile peoples. This best of all policies - respect for the usages and traditions of the subjects constitutes the basis of the Empire's political organization.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Markakis, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 52. The study to which Markakis is referring is: Gesheker, Charles L., 'Anti-Colonialism and Class Formation: The Eastern Horn of Africa Before 1950,' *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, v. 18, 1985, p. 27.

⁴⁶ Zoli, Corrado, 'The Organization of Italy's East African Empire,' *Foreign Affairs*, XVI, October 1937 to July 1938, p. 84. Italics added. It is worth noting the similarities between Italy's administrative division of Ethiopia and that adopted by the Ethiopian government after 1991.

The new province of Somalia thus encompassed the former colony of Somalia and the Ogaden. Both of these were administered jointly until the 4th August 1940, when Italy declared war upon the Allies and invaded British Somaliland with an army of 25, 000 men.

In order not to deplete its 'scanty' Kenyan forces, who had been ordered to retake Addis Ababa via the south, the British troops based in Somaliland, after briefly opposing Italy's colonial army, were compelled to withdraw being outnumbered by at least ten to one. On 16th August 1940 British personnel, civilian and military, evacuated their Protectorate by boat and abandoned their territory to the incoming Italian troops. But Italian occupation was short-lived; seven months later, in March 1941, the British recaptured Somaliland.⁴⁷ Emperor Haile Selassie recovered his Empire except for the Haud and the Ogaden which, as part of a series of 'reserved areas', were put under temporary British Military Administration so as to counter any threat arising in Djibouti, the still under Vichy rule. Although still considered to be under Ethiopian sovereignty, these territories, along with Italy's colony of Somalia and British Somaliland, were united under British Military Administration.⁴⁸ Thus, with the exception of Djibouti, which remained under French control, all the Somali inhabited territories were brought together under one flag.

During this period, Britain introduced a number of policies in the fields of education, agriculture and administration, designed to help the former Italian colony recover from the war. As was the case in Eritrea, Somali political parties began to appear under British instigation and, in May 1943, the Somali Youth Club, which

⁴⁷ Ministry of Information for the War Office, *The Abyssinian Campaigns. The Official Story of the Conquest of Italian East Africa*, His Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1942.

⁴⁸ On the tensions that arose between Britain and Ethiopia with regards to the formal status of these territories see: Tibebe Eshete, 'The British Administration in the Ogaden and its Legacy: Challenges

would in 1947 become the Somali Youth League, was established in Mogadishu. From its inception the Somali Youth Club 'championed the cause of a greater Somalia'.⁴⁹ Yet, there is some debate as to the exact nature of Britain's role in this process. According to Touval, the British Military Administration's role did not confine itself to being 'merely a benevolent onlooker, but provided during the early 1940's guidance and help to the inexperienced Somali politicians'.⁵⁰ Moreover, according to Alphonso Castagno, Britain originally favoured the Darod and members of the Somali Youth League in its recruitment of civilian and military Somali cadres because it hoped to keep the administration of the whole of Somalia.⁵¹ The fact that Britain's designs for a Greater Somalia were already being voiced as early as March 1943, two months before the formation of the Somali Youth Club, would support such an interpretation. In a letter to Anthony Eden, Robert Howe, British Minister in Ethiopia, expressed his feelings in favour of 'an attempt to create a united Somali, comprising the Ogaden, ex-Italian, British, and French Somalilands and the Danakil territory under an international or joint Anglo-Ethiopian trusteeship'.⁵² Thus, when Britain's Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, presented his proposal for a Greater Somalia in 1946, under which the territories then administered by Britain would

and Responses,' in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, University of Addis Ababa, 1994, pp. 323-338.

⁴⁹ Lewis, I.M., 'Modern Political Movements in Somaliland. I.', *Africa*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, July 1958, p. 257.

⁵⁰ Touval, 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 86 and footnote 2, p. 197.

⁵¹ Castagno, Alphonso, 'A Somali Republic,' in: Coleman, J.S., and C.G. Rosberg, (eds) *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1964, pp. 512-559.

⁵² J-1437, Robert V. Howe to Anthony Eden. 4th March 1943. This position was restated in a memorandum dated March 1944, F.O. 371/41520, Director of Civil Affairs Branch Headquarters of East African Command to War Office, 31/3/44, Public Records Office.

remain under single administration, much had been done in paving the way towards this end in Somalia.⁵³

When the Four Powers Commission of Investigation arrived in Somalia in 1948, in order to ascertain the wishes of the local population, the Somali Youth Club had already re-organised itself into a full-fledged party and adopted its new name, the Somali Youth League.⁵⁴ Whatever the British Military Administration's role may have been in this process, Haji Mohammed Hussein, then President of the Somali Youth League, clearly expressed the party's 'Greater Somalia' aim.⁵⁵ Yet, in spite of the Somali Youth League's efforts, Italy, the United States and the USSR opposed the Bevin plan. In 1948, the Ogaden was returned to Ethiopia and, in November 1949, the General Assembly passed resolution 289, which brought Italy's former colony under UN trusteeship. It was then agreed that Italy would administer the trusteeship for a period of ten years, at the end of which it would be granted independence. Britain continued to administer the remaining territories until 1954, when the Haud and the 'reserved areas' were returned to Ethiopia in respect of the 1897, 1942 and 1944 Anglo-Ethiopian Agreements.

British Somaliland returned to its previous status of Protectorate in 1948, when civilian rule was re-established. The Somali National Society, a party that had been formed just before the outbreak of the war, merged with an association of drivers called the Somali Transport Company, and changed its name to the Somali National

⁵³ Bevin's speech is quoted in: Reisman, Michael W., 'Somali Self-determination in the Horn: Legal Perspectives and Implications for Social and Political Engineering,' in Lewis, I.M., *Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa*, Ithaca Press, London, 1983, p. 153. We will remember that Bevin had announced a similar proposal for a Greater Tigray.

⁵⁴ As was described in the previous chapter, the Four Power Commission of Investigation had been set up to determine the future of Italy's former colonial possessions.

⁵⁵ The Four Powers Commission. Council of Foreign Ministers, *Report on Somaliland*, London, 1948, Section II, Chapter 4, appendix A.

League (SNL).⁵⁶ A branch of the Somali Youth League had also been set up in the Protectorate; but although proposals were made towards an SYL-SNL merger, they never came to fruition.⁵⁷ In the absence of any plan towards independence, little was initially achieved in the way of preparing the territory towards self-government.

Up to 1957 the only central organization for the expression of Somali opinion has been the Protectorate Advisory Council which has, in principle, met annually. (...) In 1953 Local Government Councils were established in two municipalities, Hargeisa and Berbera, and were also set up at Burao and Gebile towards the end of 1957.⁵⁸

Demands for increased representation in the Protectorate were triggered by Britain's retrocession of the Haud to Ethiopia. The National United Front, an organisation that brought together the SNL and SYL, was then formed in 1955 with two aims: recovering the Haud and obtaining independence for the Protectorate. Although the first objective was never achieved, the movement successfully pressured the British administration towards granting the Protectorate greater autonomy. From that moment on, events unfolded rapidly, and a decision was finally reached to grant independence to the Protectorate and prepare for its eventual unification with the trusteeship of Somalia. On 1st July 1960, four days after Britain granted it its independence, Somaliland unified with the former Trusteeship of Somalia, also recently independent, in what Touval has described as a 'precipitate union'.⁵⁹ Somalia's Legislative Assembly elected Aden Abdulla Osman as Provisional President of the Republic and, on July 22nd, the first Government of the Republic was formed, with Dr. Abdirahid Ali Shermarke as Prime Minister, and the government included ministers from the two parts of the Republic.

⁵⁶ Markakis, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁵⁷ For possible reasons for this failure see, Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁵⁸ Lewis, I.M, 'Political Movements in Somaliland.' *Africa*, Vol. 28, No. 4, October 1958, pp. 346-7.

⁵⁹ Touval, 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

5.3 – The Republic of Somalia from unification to disintegration

Although, as will be seen in the following section, the union was far from being harmonious, pan-Somali nationalism rapidly emerged as the dominant legitimising principle of Somali politics. The quest for the unification under a single Somali state of those neighbouring territories predominantly populated by Somalis: Kenya's Northern Frontier District, Ethiopia's Ogaden region and Djibouti, became the avowed thrust of Somali politics. Somalia openly incorporated in the July 1960 Constitution its irredentist policy,⁶⁰ and gave further symbolic expression to its claim by including in its flag a five-pointed star whose arms each represented the territories inhabited by Somalis.⁶¹ Somali politicians argued that Somalia should be given those adjoining territories inhabited by Somalis by appealing to the principle of national self-determination. In so doing, the Republic of Somalia rejected from its inception the applicability to its own particular situation of what would become the OAU's 'first commandment', i.e., the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states.

a) Irredentist claims

From 1960 to 1964, the issue of the Northern Frontier District (NFD) in Kenya dominated Somalia's nationalist agenda. Somali politicians had been led to believe that given Britain's endorsement of the Protectorate's unification to the trusteeship and Bevin's earlier talk of a 'Greater Somalia', it would also support Somalia's territorial claim over the Northern Frontier District. Such was not, however, forthcoming. Weary of not alienating further Ethiopia – which viewed Somali unification as a threat to its security – Britain made it clear that it would not endorse any further Somali claim that might affect the 'territorial integrity of French

Somaliland, Kenya, or Ethiopia'.⁶² Somalia nevertheless continued to pressure Britain to reconsider its position towards the NFD when devising Kenya's future constitution. Their efforts appeared to have born fruit when in 1962 Britain finally decided to send a Commission of Enquiry to ascertain the wishes of the NFD inhabitants. Although the Commission's report found that Somalis in the NFD wished 'almost unanimously' to merge with Somalia, Britain nevertheless announced in March 1963, nine months before Kenya's independence, its decision to place the NFD within Kenya's regional constitution. Relations between Britain and Somalia were broken off as a result, signalling Somalia's move towards the USSR.

While Somali politicians were attempting to induce Britain into modifying its position, they were simultaneously attempting to have their case heard through other diplomatic channels. The first and second All African Peoples Congress, held respectively in 1958 and 1960, appeared to agree with Somalia's interpretation of the principle of self-determination and thus to endorse its irredentist claims.⁶³ But Somali's hopes were soon shattered. At the first OAU meeting, held in Addis Ababa in May 1963, the principle of *uti possidetis* was strongly endorsed and the territorial integrity of African states was enshrined in the Charter. Along with Ghana, Morocco and Togo, Somalia was one of the very few states present at the Charter Conference of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963 to contest the inviolability of colonial borders. Frustrated in its efforts, Somalia provided financial and military assistance to the Somali Kenyan insurgency movement, yet by contrast to the course

⁶⁰ As stipulated by Article 6(4) of the Constitution of the Somali Republic, adopted in July 1960.

⁶¹ It may be surprising that it chose to distinguish thus the two former territories then united.

⁶² Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 185, quoting Prime Minister Macmillan's July 1960 speech to the House of Commons.

⁶³ Adar, Korwa G., *Kenyan Foreign policy Behaviour Towards Somalia, 1963-1983*, University Press of America, Lanham, New York, London, 1994, pp. 89-91.

of action adopted with regard to the Ogaden, it made no direct attempt to seize territory.

Meanwhile, in January 1964, full-war erupted between Ethiopia and Somalia following several years of border clashes. The background to this, as Harry Brind explains, lay in the fact that:

The controversy over the border between Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland was still unresolved at the time of independence. The leaders in British Somaliland refused to endorse the provisions of the Anglo-Ethiopian treaty of 1897, which placed the Haud under Ethiopian suzerainty. The Ethiopian argument was that the frontier agreements concluded with Italy in 1900 and Britain in 1897 remained valid and that Somalis living in the Haud and the Ogaden were Ethiopian citizens. Ethiopia had been hostile to British intentions to merge the British and Italian Somalilands, and had accused Britain of wishing to establish a pro-British greater Somalia.⁶⁴

The OAU seized the matter in February 1964 when the Council of Ministers Meeting in Dar es Salaam adopted a resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire.⁶⁵ In March, negotiations between Ethiopia and Somali were started, but in July that year, at the Cairo Head of States Meeting of the OAU, no settlement was achieved. Instead, the OAU adopted a resolution which reaffirmed 'the principles laid down in Article III, paragraph 3 of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity', and whereby 'all Member States pledge themselves to respect the frontiers existing on their achievement of national'.⁶⁶ Not only did this resolution reassert the territorial integrity of Africa's states, but it also specified that these boundaries, following the norm of *uti possidetis*, were to be those that had been established upon achieving independence.

⁶⁴ Brind, Harry, 'Soviet Policy in the Horn of Africa,' *International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 1, winter 1983/84, p. 79. Although the Ogaden issue is seen to encompass the question of the Haud, the two issues may warrant separate treatment given that the Haud was only 'retroceded' to Ethiopia in 1954.

⁶⁵ Castagno, Alphonso, 'The Somali-Kenyan controversy: Implications for the future,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1964, pp. 165-88.

⁶⁶ Brownlie, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

b) The sources of Pan-Somali nationalism

There has been considerable debate about the roots of pan-Somali nationalism. While some, mirroring the primordial explanations described in chapter one, have explained Somalia's nationalism as emanating from its distinct ethnic identity, others have interpreted it as a relatively modern development. The latter position is grounded in the fact that when the European powers arrived in the Horn at the end of the nineteenth century, the Somali people were stateless. Since no overarching socio-political organisation appeared to unify the Somali, the extent to which they might have constituted a nation, in the sense that they perceived themselves as one socio-political community, could thus be contested.

According to Touval, 'three factors contributed to the development of national consciousness among the Somalis': resentment against their respective colonial governments, religious antagonism, and the 'deliberate encouragement of Somali national feelings by various governments from time to time'.⁶⁷ All three factors, while brewing throughout the 1920s and 1930s, nevertheless only found expression after WWII. In the words of Touval:

In the Horn the principal impetus to the emergence of nationalism as the most important political force in the region was external. Somali nationalism, instead of evolving gradually from internal events, sprang mainly from global war and its aftermath.⁶⁸

In 1940, when Italy declared war upon the Allies, Somalis were recruited in the armies on both sides, and

The war brought the Somali population into extensive contact with the West. Thousands of Somalis served with the armed forces of the warring powers,

⁶⁷ Touval, 1963, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

and, however unpleasant the circumstances may have been, were thus exposed to Western influences.⁶⁹

While Touval insists on the anti-colonial nature of Somali nationalism, Markakis, on the other hand, has emphasised the effects of the socio-economic transformations brought about by colonisation. Thus, more than a mere reaction to external events,

the appearance of nationalism in Somalia and Eritrea reflected an awakening of political consciousness among social strata moulded in the colonial situation and having vested interests in the colonial economy and the state.⁷⁰

The rise in the number of traders was also seen by Markakis as an important factor, as was the extension of their territorial scope of activity brought about by the unification of the Somali territories during the war.

Against these essentially modernist accounts, others have argued that pan-Somali consciousness did exist in pre-colonial times. Ahmed Samatar writes that:

the absence of a state, in addition to segmentation, did not mean a complete lack of public authority or the absence of a sense of political community. On the contrary, like all reciprocal social systems, Somalis of the precolonial age organized and managed their political life through kinship association, conjoined with religious laws. (...) In short, Somalis of precolonial times might not have seen themselves as a nation, in the now familiar sense that nations are invariably associated with the state. However, they did have a moral commonwealth (or umma).⁷¹

Similarly, Lewis argued that despite the numerous cleavages that cut across Somali society, the Somali people nevertheless constitute a nation since they share a common language, a common culture and a common religion.⁷² In particular, he noted that:

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁷⁰ Markakis, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 52

⁷¹ Samatar, Ahmed I., 'The Curse of Allah: Civic Disembowelment and the Collapse of the State in Somalia', in Samatar, Ahmed I., (ed.), *The Somali Challenge. From Catastrophe to Renewal?* Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London, 1993, pp. 109 and 111.

⁷² The first edition of I.M. Lewis's *Modern History of Somalia*, was thus entitled *The Modern History of Somaliland from Nation to State*, 1965.

Above all, Islam adds depth and coherence to those common elements of traditional culture which, over and above their many sectional divisions, unite Somalis and provide the basis for their strong national consciousness. Although the Somali did not traditionally form a unitary state, it is this heritage of cultural nationalism which, strengthened by Islam, lies behind Somali nationalism today.⁷³

With hindsight, given Somalia's disintegration in 1991 and more particularly Somaliland's secession, it would seem that pan-Somali nationalism, whatever its sources may have been, was not after all that deeply rooted. In 1967, Prime Minister Egal initiated a series of talks with Somalia's neighbours and agreed to suspend any irredentist claims over Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia.⁷⁴ Although Egal seems to have been motivated by the desire to curtail Somalia's increased economic isolation by establishing trade agreements with the neighbouring countries,⁷⁵ he was nevertheless accused by members of the political class and the press of selling out the Greater Somalia ideal. The fact that Egal was a northerner may be significant and perhaps Pan-Somalism should be viewed as an essentially Southern Somali ambition.

c) Parliamentary democracy: 1960-69

Throughout the 1960s, Somalia was experimenting with parliamentary democracy. Specifically, from 1960 to 1969, Somalia attempted to devise a system of government based on the Italian Parliamentary model. Elections were held in 1960, 1964 and 1969, with a growing number of political parties participating in the elections. In 1960, five parties competed for the 123 seats in the National Assembly, in 1964, there were 21 parties with 973 candidates and in 1969 the number of parties had reached 62. Despite these increases, the Somali National Youth League was brought back to power in each election.

⁷³ Lewis, 1988s, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ Thuston, Raymond, 'Détente in the Horn,' *Africa Report*, Vol. 12, No. 2, February 1969, pp 6-13.

While western analysts focused on the process of competitive elections as proof that democracy was 'alive and well' in Somalia, in fact, the opposite was true. The multiple parties fractures into sub-clan parties, then extended-family parties, and finally into one-man parties.⁷⁶

The Somali political system entered a major crisis of confidence; politicians were increasingly accused of corruption thus undermining the legitimacy of the National Assembly.

In addition to this, Somalia's dire economic situation was far from improving despite considerable foreign assistance. During the 1964-69 period, Somalia was in fact one of the largest recipients of foreign aid: 'about 85 percent of her total development expenditure up to the end of 1969 [was] externally financed'.⁷⁷ It must be noted that at independence Somalia's economy was far from developed. Except for a few agricultural projects, little investment had been made by either Britain or Italy in their respective colonies. According to the US Department of Commerce:

[T]wo-thirds of its people were still pastoral nomads, engaged in nonmonetized activity. Only two commodities – bananas and livestock – accounted for 90 percent of the country's export earnings, and Somali had to import virtually all necessary manufactured goods. At independence, Somalia's GNP stood at \$56 million, and the annual per capita income was a mere \$28.⁷⁸

Soon after independence, the *First Five-Year Plan, 1963-67* was introduced.

Twenty-nine per cent of total development outlays were earmarked for transport development, with 17.8 per cent allocated to agricultural projects. Industrial development, with an allocation of 15.7 per cent of the total development budget, was assigned an almost equal priority with agriculture. Education (6.5 per cent), health (3.0) per cent), housing, settlement, and water supplies (6.5 per cent) were given relatively low priority. (...) The method of

⁷⁵ Okbazghi Yohannes, *The United States and the Horn of Africa. An Analytical Study of Pattern and Process*, Westview Press, Boulder: Colorado, 1997, p. 228.

⁷⁶ Payton, Gary, 'The Somali Coup of 1969: the Case for Soviet Complicity,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, September 1980, p. 501.

⁷⁷ Mehmet, Ozay, 'Effectiveness of Foreign Aid – the Case of Somalia,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1971, p. 31.

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce. 'Basic Data on the Economy of the Somali Republic.' Bureau of International Commerce, Washington DC. February, 1965. Quoted in Obazghi Yohannes, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

financing the projects envisaged under the First Five-Year Plan was very simple, relying almost entirely on loans and grants from abroad.⁷⁹

Although Somalia received financial assistance from a wide range of sources – through bilateral and multilateral channels – it nevertheless suffered from Britain’s withdrawal of aid following the break of diplomatic relations in 1964. More damaging though, was the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967, which badly affected Somalia’s main source of trade earnings – the export of bananas.⁸⁰

As the country’s economic situation spiralled downwards, presidential elections were held in June 1967, but the new government’s term in office was short-lived. On 15 October 1969, in what appears to have been an accident, a police constable assassinated President ‘Abd ar-Rashid ‘Ali Shirmarke during his tour of a drought-stricken area in Somalia’s Northern Region. Prime Minister Mohammed Haji Ibrahim Egal, who at the time was in the United States on an official visit during which he hoped to secure American financial aid, immediately returned to Mogadishu.⁸¹ The Somali Youth League members of Parliament met to nominate a presidential candidate, but

on 21 October, Major General Muhammed Siad Barre, the Army commander, ordered his troops to seize the capital. It was a swift and bloodless coup; a Revolutionary Council declared itself in control of the nation. Later that same day the National Assembly was dissolved and the Constitution revoked.⁸²

d) The descent into chaos

Following his coming to power, Barre proceeded to discredit Somalia’s democratic experience, declared all political parties illegal and announced the introduction of a

⁷⁹ Mehmet, Ozay, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-4.

⁸⁰ Mehmet, *op. cit.*, p. 35; Obazghi Yohannes, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁸¹ The US turned down Premier Ibrahim Egal’s request. See; Obazghi Yohannes, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-9.

⁸² Payton, p. 502.

'strict' anti-clan policy.⁸³ These measures were allegedly introduced in response to Somalia's previous catastrophic experiment with parliamentary democracy. It must nevertheless be noted that in 1956, after the first Assembly elections in what was then the Trusteeship of Somalia, legislation was passed 'making it illegal for political parties to bear tribal names'.⁸⁴ Denunciations of 'tribalism' in Somali political life therefore predated Barre's regime. Barre pushed this policy to the absurd extreme of forbidding any reference to clan affiliation even in the private sphere.

Clanism was, according to official policy, to be eradicated by the forces of nationalism. A number of policies designed to enhance Somali nationalism were thus introduced. Measures included the adoption, in 1972, of Osmaniya as the national script accompanied by an intensive programme of national alphabetisation. Somali was introduced as the language of administration in 1973, replacing Italian and Arabic, and further hoisting Barre's nationalist credentials. The official history of Somalia was also re-written under the Barre regime. The earlier rebellions of Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Ghazi and Mohamed Abdullah Assan were portrayed as proto-nationalist manifestations of the country's liberation struggles, and statues commemorating the glory of these two men were erected in Mogadishu.⁸⁵

Despite his appeals to Somali nationalism, Barre sought to allay international and regional suspicion by avoiding references to 'Greater Somalia.' Such caution was further reinforced by Soviet threats to withdraw its support were Somalia to

⁸³ Since the history of Barre's rule is well documented, this section will merely recall those aspects that are more directly relevant to the overall argument. For more on this period see, Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, Laitin and Samatar, 1987, *op. cit.*, and Compagnon, 1995, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Such denunciation of 'tribalism' in Somali political life therefore predates Barre's regime. Lewis, I.M., 'Modern Leadership and Loyalties in Somalia and Somaliland,' *Civilisations*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1960, p. 58.

⁸⁵ While the Al-Ghazi's alleged Somali ethnicity remains disputed, Abdullah Assan's status as a national hero was contested by many Northerners, who had sided with the British during the Dervish rebellion and for whom Abdullah Assan was a bloodthirsty despot. On this, see, Compagnon, Daniel,

make any moves towards the Ogaden.⁸⁶ Ever since Barre's adoption of 'scientific socialism' in the early 1970s, which would appear to have been motivated less by ideological than by international political considerations, the USSR had been providing Somalia with important military and economic assistance.⁸⁷ But, in the early months of 1977, the Soviet-Somali relationship was coming under strain:

The fiercely independent Somalis were beginning to have doubts about the extent to which their close ties with the Soviet Union had compromised their sovereignty. Moreover, since joining the Arab League in 1974, Somalia, though not actually an Arab nation, had come increasingly under the influence of Arab States (notably Saudi Arabia) which, seeking to minimize Soviet influence in the Red Sea region, were prepared to offer her inducements to reduce her dependence on the Soviet Union.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the US-Ethiopian relationship was also unravelling. In December 1976, a delegation from the Derg was sent to Moscow and successfully secured from the Soviet Union \$385 million in military aid to Ethiopia. In February 1977, the Carter administration decided to suspend military aid to Ethiopia. The Derg responded, in April that year, by expelling the American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) and closing down other American installations in the country. The twenty-five years long US-Ethiopian alliance had come to an end.

As this dramatic reversal of alliances was occurring, the Mogadishu-backed Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) launched a series of attacks on Ethiopian border positions and by June 1977, it claimed to control 60 per cent of the Ogaden. Whatever circumstances prompted the attack, the Somali army crossed the Ethiopian frontier in July 1977. Condemning Somalia's invasion of Ethiopia, the Soviet Union

⁸⁶ 'Dynamiques de mobilisation. Dissidence armée et rébellion populaire: le cas du mouvement national somali (1981-1990), *Africa*, Vol. 47, No. 4, décembre 1992, p. 513.

⁸⁶ Laitin and Samatar, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁸⁷ According to Robert Patman, the Soviets did not consider Barre to be a reliable ideological ally, but decided nevertheless to support him for geostrategic reasons. Patman, Robert G., *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: The Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 185.

suspended in August its military assistance to Somalia.⁸⁹ The Americans for their part, withdrew the offer, made at the end of August, to provide 'defensive' weapons to Somalia, and, rejecting Ethiopia's requests that it provide it the arms it claimed the US still owed her, decided to maintain an embargo on arms supplies to either side. By September 1977, Somalia had succeeded in occupying most of the Ogaden. Following the declaration made, in October, by the Soviet ambassador to Addis Ababa, in which he confirmed that the Soviet Union was now providing Ethiopia with 'defensive weapons to protect her revolution, unity and territorial integrity', Somalia cancelled her 1974 treaty with Moscow and expelled all Soviet personnel.⁹⁰ Although the US applauded Somalia's decision to break off relations with the Soviet Union and Cuba, it nevertheless refused to supply Barre with arms. Ethiopia, now solidly backed by the USSR and Cuba, launched a massive counter-offensive and recovered most of the lost territory in March 1978, forcing Somalia to retreat.

Somalia's defeat in the Ogaden unleashed a series of events, whose consequences would lead to the state's eventual collapse a decade later. The costs incurred by the war and the loss of Soviet aid plunged the country into an economic crisis, whose effects were further exacerbated by the 1978-80 drought and the massive influx of refugees from the Ogaden.⁹¹ Barre's leadership began to be openly criticised from within. The army, which under Barre had become the pillar of the regime, showed signs of unrest and indiscipline within its officer corps.⁹² In April 1978, a group of officers attempted to overthrow the regime, but their efforts, as well

⁸⁸ *Strategic Survey 1997*, IISS, London, p. 17.

⁸⁹ Despite claims that he was motivated by clan affiliation, Barre appears to have been reluctantly forced into the situation. See, Laitin and Samatar, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹¹ The most conservative estimates put their numbers at 500 000, half of which were re-settled in northern Somalia.

⁹² Makinda, Samuel, 'Politics and Clan Rivalry in Somalia,' *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 26, 1991, p. 117.

as those from more moderate ministers, were brutally crushed. After elections in 1979, organised mainly to satisfy American demands, Barre re-established the Supreme Revolutionary Council and introduced a state of emergency, leading to the constitution's suspension in October 1980.⁹³

The first opposition parties – the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM) – emerged in the aftermath of the Ogaden defeat. High ranking army officers, mainly from the Majerteen (Darod) sub-clan, created the SSDF as early as 1978. The SNM (whose history is detailed in the following section) was formed by Isaaq expatriates in 1981. Although both organisations relied mainly on lineage affiliation, they also included minority sections of other clans. In fact, contrary to what is frequently upheld, it would appear that these armed opposition movements, as well as those that would spring up subsequently, were less an expression of the re-emergence of formerly repressed clan affiliations than the result of Barre's divisive strategies and of elite manipulation.⁹⁴

As Daniel Compagnon makes clear:

The failure of such multi-clan organizations was due in large part to manipulation by Siyaad Barre, who managed to create profound distrust between the clans which opposed him, in order to defuse opposition to his rule. One of his tactics was to militarise the clans by creating clan militias, giving them weapons, and then implicating them in the repression against a targeted clan segment: the Hawiye/Sa'ad against the Majerteen/Uma Mahamuud, the Dulbahante against the Isaaq/Habar Ja'alo, the Gadabuursi against the Isaaq/Sa'ad Muuse, and later, the Harti of Kismayo against the Ogadeen, and the Majerteen against the Isaaq. Quite often, these clan herded their camels together in the bush; they had long histories of feuds, indeed, but also of marriages and alliances.⁹⁵

⁹³ Compagnon, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 506.

⁹⁴ Compagnon, Daniel, 'Somali Armed Movements,' in : Clapham, C. (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, James Currey Ltd, Oxford, 1998, p. 73-90, Compagnon, Daniel, 'The Somali Opposition Fronts: Some Comments and Questions,' *Horn of Africa*, Vol. XIII, nos. 1 and 2, January-June 1990, pp. 29-54; Djama, 1992, *op. cit.*; and Adam, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-89.

⁹⁵ Compagnon, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

Although Barre had publicly denounced clan politics, he relied extensively on kinship networks to exercise his power and control his rivals. Early on, his government came to be disparagingly, albeit secretly, referred to as MOD, each letter standing for one of the three Darod sub-clans (Marehan, Ogaden and Dulbahante) on which his regime rested and from which his advisers tended to be chosen. While Barre's divide and rule strategy was mainly designed to fuel *inter*-clan suspicion and hostilities, it also involved generating *intra*-clan conflict. The SSDF's secession attempt, for instance, was essentially curtailed when Barre managed to play the Majerteen pastoralists against the Majerteen traders by granting the latter substantial economic advantages, thus revealing the fragility of clan bonds.⁹⁶ Despite the fact that his own 'MOD' clan alliance was crumbling and that he could no longer rely on the Army, Barre was nevertheless able to hold on to power and fend off mounting opposition from the North, because of military, technical and financial foreign assistance.⁹⁷

In the 1980s, the IMF and the World Bank recommended the adoption of a number of austerity measures to enable Somalia to recover from the war. These measures, paradoxically, only contributed further to the collapse of the formal economy and of the State as a whole. The restructuring of government expenditure brought about a reduction of civil service wages and a downsizing of the public sector, which generated discontent among employees and pushed the formal economy underground. Foreign aid, released by Somalia's defeat and withdrawal

⁹⁶ Djama, 1992, *op. cit.*, 1995.

⁹⁷ Although most of Somalia's military and economic aid came from the US, Barre's regime also relied on assistance from Italy, China, the UN, the World Bank and the Arab League. See, Hussein Adam, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 75; and Okbazghi Yohannes, 1997, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-57.

from Ethiopia, then contributed to the political economy of warfare.⁹⁸ According to the US General Accounting Office estimates in 1986, only 20 percent of the food destined to aid the refugees of the Ogaden war appeared to reach the refugees.⁹⁹ As government officials continued to enrich themselves, those who did not benefit from the predatory network, and thus found themselves squeezed out of the economy, began to rely increasingly on force. This provided militia leaders with additional incentives for competition over resources legitimising their recourse to violence.

In 1988, the findings of an investigation initiated by the US Congress into the regime's human rights violations and, in particular, its violent response to mounting opposition in north-western Somalia,¹⁰⁰ led to the suspension of American military aid. In 1989, the US government further suspended any economic assistance to Barre's regime, a move that was followed by other states and international organisations. Having lost all external support, and 'increasingly mocked as nothing more than the mayor of Mogadishu' by Somalis themselves,¹⁰¹ Siad Barre fled Somalia in January 1991, leaving the capital city of Mogadishu in the midst of factional chaos where discontented rival factions began to fight each other for control of the state and its meagre spoils.

⁹⁸ On how international economy fuelled the war, see; Clapham, Christopher, 'The Political Economy of Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa,' Bahru Zewde, Pankhurst, Richard, and Tadesse Beyene, (eds), *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. II, Addis Ababa University, 1994, pp. 703-19. Clapham identifies three sources in particular: armaments, food and external remittances. Remittances from abroad did indeed constitute one of the most important sources of income not to be incorporated in official statistics although amounting to 40 percent of Somalia's GNP. See, de Waal, Alex, 'The Shadow Economy. (Somalia's economic difficulties),' *Africa Report*, Vol. 38, No. 2, March-April 1993, pp. 24-9.

⁹⁹ de Waal, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa, *Reported Massacres and Indiscriminate Killings in Somalia*, Washington, DC, Thursday, July 14, 1988.

¹⁰¹ Simons, Anna, 'Somalia and the dissolution of the Nation-State', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 96, No. 4, December 1994, p. 819.

5.4 – The roots of discontent

On 18 May 1991, as the state of Somalia collapsed, north-western Somalia proclaimed its independence and adopted the name of Somaliland. Somaliland invoked as a justification for secession its increased political and economic alienation from Mogadishu. In April 1981, a group of expatriate northerners, mainly from the Isaaq clan which dominates the region but joined also by Dulbahante and Gadabursi representatives who also inhabit the North, met in London to set up the Somali National Movement (SNM). As its president, the SNM elected Ahmed Mohamed Gulayd, a businessman who had played a role in the nationalist movement of the 1950s, and who had been imprisoned by Barre in 1969. Following his release in 1975, he had moved to Djibouti and then to Saudi Arabia. The SNM was at its inception perhaps more representative of Somaliland's exile communities than of its local population.¹⁰² Although their avowed primary aim was to overthrow, 'by any means available' Siad Barre's regime, Somaliland's secession lurked in the background as a possible option. In order to understand what brought the SNM to adopt such a programme, it is necessary to discuss the underlying sources of dissatisfaction in the north-western region. It is also necessary to note that despite the SNM's importance, local mobilisation and unrest played a fundamental role in the process that led to Barre's collapse and Somaliland's secession.

a) Problems of unification

As was mentioned earlier, the 1960 union was carried through hastily and without adequate preparation. Whereas the Italian trusteeship of Somalia had clearly laid out the schedule for independence, such was not the case in British Somaliland. In fact, a

final decision was only taken in May 1960, less than two months before independence was actually granted and this, not because of any internationally agreed plan, but because of the increased pressures for self-government made by the Protectorate's elite. Although the issue was discussed on a number of occasions throughout the 1950s, the decision to unify the two 'Somalias' was only reached in April 1960, during a conference held in Mogadishu between Northern and Southern Somali leaders. The new Somali Republic, it was decreed, would be a 'unitary, democratic and parliamentary state'. According to Ahmed Samatar:

Northerners were much taken in, perhaps dazzled, by the aura of significance of the occasion [decolonization]. The evidence for this is based on three facts: First, despite the declaration of 26 June 1960 as the day of independence in British Somaliland, Northerners waited for a week to merge with the South. Second, Northern leaders came down to Mogadishu to push for unification with no guarantees or conditionalities in terms of Northern interest. Third, there was the a priori Northern willingness to accept Mogadishu as the capital, despite its distance from Hargeisa and the rest of Somaliland.¹⁰³

The Act of Union, which set out the legal framework for the union, was adopted, albeit with retroactive effect, seven months after the deed.¹⁰⁴ The problems entailed by the North's lack of preparation emerged soon thereafter. On 20 June 1961, a referendum to 'sanctify' the union was held. Although the 'yes' vote, in favour of the union, won overwhelmingly in the South, in the North, the 'no' vote (against the union) registered a small majority of 52.3% with more than half of those registered to vote not showing up.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² The SNM's Secretary-General was also a member of Somaliland's exile community.

¹⁰³ Samatar, Ahmed I., 1994, *op. cit.*, footnote 57, p. 143.

¹⁰⁴ Contini, Paolo, *The Somali Republic: An Experiment in Legal Integration*, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., London, 1969, p. 10. Paolo Contini served as Chairman of the Consultative Commission for Integration which was appointed in October 1960 by presidential decree in order to assist the Somali government.

¹⁰⁵ Compagnon, 1995, *op. cit.*, footnote 3, p. 527. See also, Touval, 1963, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-1.

Given their differing colonial legacies, the legal and administrative integration of the two entities proved more difficult than initially envisaged. As Contini observed:

[I]n most respects the Northern and Southern regions were still two separate states. There were two different judicial systems; different currencies; different organization and conditions of service for the army, the police and the civil servants, as well as different training, outlook and working habits between Northern and Southern officials; the governmental institutions, both at the central and local level were differently organized and had different powers; the systems and rates of taxation and customs were different and so were the educational systems.¹⁰⁶

According to Prunier, independent Somalia inherited from the previous period an authoritarian and centralised state bureaucracy which, for lack of personnel, had been set up and was ruled, even during the trusteeship period, by the old fascist cadres of the 1920s and 1930s. This framework, which was originally imposed throughout the country, therefore favoured the Italian-trained southerners.¹⁰⁷

Language soon became a contentious issue. Although Somali was spoken throughout the country, there was then no agreed method of transcription that enabled it to be used as a written language. As a result, official documents and transactions were written in English in the North and in Italian in the South. During the first four years of the Union, the ministry of education was run by northerners and it was consequently decided that English would be designated as the medium of instruction after the fourth grade throughout the Republic. This naturally provoked the indignation of the southern teachers and school officials who had hitherto been trained in Italian and who perceived the ministry's new policy as a threat to their own status.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, the small University Institute, which offered courses in law and

¹⁰⁶ Contini, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 11

¹⁰⁷ Prunier, Gérard, 'Somaliland Goes It Alone,' *Current History*, Vol. 97, No. 619, May 1998, p. 225.

¹⁰⁸ Kapil, Ravil, 'Integrating Disparate Colonial Legacies: the Somali Experience,' *Race*, VIII, No. 1, 1966, p. 83.

economics and which Italy funded, dispensed its teachings in Italian. This created a competing two-tier system which further heightened tensions since the choice of a medium of instruction unavoidably determined the administration's official language.

The introduction of a number of badly implemented measures further raised northern irritation. In December 1961, an abortive coup was instigated by Sandhurst trained Somali lieutenants. Although the coup may have been motivated more by personal than political factors, the event is nevertheless now remembered as an episode in the 'history' of Somaliland's struggle for independence.¹⁰⁹ Hassan Kayd, one of the officers involved in the coup attempt, died in the early 1990s and is now remembered and honoured as one of the first 'heroes' of Somaliland's struggle against unification.¹¹⁰ Another contentious issue was the process by which civil service salaries were harmonised. The law introduced in March 1962 failed to address the fact that wages were higher in the Protectorate. The change, which was not introduced incrementally, generated some discontent.¹¹¹

But perhaps more significant and irksome for Somaliland's population was the introduction in 1963 of a unitary system of tariffs and custom dues which, according to Lewis:

though intended to lower transport costs in the north had quite the opposite effect. Food prices in the northern region immediately soared causing a widespread public indignation that led to a riot in Hargeisa on 1 May.¹¹²

The north's increased feeling of being treated as a periphery was further fuelled by the lack of economic development in the region. Throughout the 1960s, little

¹⁰⁹ It would seem that the Protectorate Lieutenants reacted to the fact that they felt they were being led by less qualified officers coming from the south.

¹¹⁰ Bryden, Matt, 'Somaliland: Fiercely Independent', *Africa Report*, November/December 1994, p. 36.

¹¹¹ Compagnon, 1995, p. 527.

economic investment was made in the North by comparison to the South. A compilation of the regional distribution of projects completed between 1963 and 1969 in Somalia indicates that 68.6 percent of these were undertaken in the Southern region, whereas only 18.4 percent took place in the Northern region.¹¹³

The transfer and concentration of power to Mogadishu meant that from independence on, the people of northern Somalia would have to go to the capital to have their interests represented and voice their grievances. Northerners' pride was injured and was accompanied by the fact that the merger of the two territories' legislatures had brought the overwhelming preponderance of the Somali Youth League in Parliament, a party which was perceived as representing Southern interests.¹¹⁴ In order to curtail the SYL's prevalence, a new party was created in May 1963. The Somali National Congress (SNC) brought together the SNL, then under the leadership of Egal, and the League Jumaleh, whose presidential candidate had been defeated at the previous national elections. In the November 1963 Municipal elections, the Somali Youth League obtained only 28% of the votes in the North, and although it won the 1964 general elections, its candidates once again scored poor results in the North.¹¹⁵ Northern dissatisfaction appeared to subside when the 1967 elections brought Egal, a northern-based Isaaq, to power. It is perhaps therefore not surprising that Siad Barre's coup in 1969, which overthrew Egal's government, was perceived as an insult by the North and an early indication of Barre's alleged anti-Isaaq sentiments.

¹¹² Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

¹¹³ These figures were compiled by Mehmet on the basis of the data provided in the German Planning and Advisory Group's *Report on the Progress of Development Projects in the Somali Democratic Republic*, Mogadishu and Frankfurt, 1969. See: Mehmet, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹¹⁴ The SYL held 85 of the 123 parliamentary seats. Kapil, 1966, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹¹⁵ Kapil, 1966, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

Dissatisfaction in economic matters continued under Barre, as the Isaaq claimed that the situation in the late 1970s in the North was worse than that which had prevailed under British colonisation.¹¹⁶ It could be argued that the economic situation in Somalia overall was catastrophic, this all the more so when, after the Ogaden defeat, the country became the largest recipient of foreign aid per capita in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, as Alex de Waal has argued, official statistics betray the reality. When other indicators are taken into account, Somalia's economy was by many standards booming; but it was a shadow economy which profited particular sectors of the population, mainly those in or affiliated to government, and who handled these transactions in a Mafia-ruled manner.¹¹⁷

While Northern discontent with the union is therefore partially substantiated, the level of discrimination should nevertheless not be over exaggerated and seen as an unbroken trend. After all, Egal was elected in 1967, and even under Barre's rule, a number of Isaaq and other northerners were represented in his administration at least until the early 1980s.¹¹⁸ Northerners themselves may be also partly to blame for the lack of development in their own region as they themselves overwhelmingly invested in Mogadishu and the southern plantations.¹¹⁹ Although the factors mentioned earlier are now in retrospect invoked to justify the North's decision to secede, it is probable that they would not have achieved the importance they have now acquired had it not been for the governmental repression that was unleashed in the 1980s towards the

¹¹⁶ Compagnon, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 531.

¹¹⁷ de Waal, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-9.

¹¹⁸ Africa Confidential obtained a list of the names and clan affiliations of the leading military and police commanders chosen by the Central Committee in September 1986. 'Of the major clans it is noticeable that neither the Isaaq nor the Hawiye are well represented (...) There are in fact only two senior Isaaq commanders (...) [Although, among the police force], the Isaaq provide more regional and local commanders than any other major clan – some 24%.' See: 'Somalia: Military Politics,' *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 27, No. 22, 29 October 1986.

¹¹⁹ Compagnon, Daniel, 'Somaliland, un ordre politique en gestation,' *Politique Africaine*, Vol. 50, juin 1993, p. 11.

North. As is often the case, history will be selectively remembered, and forgotten, to justify present political imperatives.

b) Mobilisation and civil war in the North

Somalia's defeat by Ethiopia triggered a massive refugee movement from the Ogaden, an estimated 500, 000 people, half of whom were put in refugee camps in Northern Somalia. This situation led to increased population pressure in a land where resources are scarce. Despite the fact that they belonged to clans who have been described as traditionally antagonistic, relations between the local population and the refugees appear to have been relatively good in the beginning.¹²⁰ That is until Barre's government, weary of northern discontent, started to fund the Western Somali League militias which terrorised Isaaq pastoralists. The latter, in self-defence, set up their own militias who were in turn brutally dismantled in 1982 by the new military commander in the North Mohammed Hashi Gani (a member of the family of Barre's wife). The government's retaliation was interpreted as a clear indication that the regime favoured the Ogadeni against the Isaaq, although later events would show the repression to be more indiscriminate.

The North began to feel increasingly alienated economically. Among those measures introduced at the behest of the IMF and the World Bank that affected more particularly the North, was the devaluation of the Somali shilling. This, among other effects, led to a dramatic rise in veterinary costs, fundamental for an economy whose main source of income is the export of its livestock.¹²¹ Livestock, essentially reared in and shipped from the North, were for the most part destined to the Gulf and Arab

¹²⁰ Lewis, I.M., 'The Ogaden and Somali Segmentary Nationalism, *African Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 353, October 1989, p. 575.

states. Thus, when Saudi Arabia banned the import of cattle in 1983, invoking fears of rinder-pest, a crippling blow was dealt to traders and cattle-herders in northern Somalia.¹²² That same year, 'the government prohibited the cultivation and sale of the stimulant narcotic plant, qat (*Catha Edulis*), which had become a flourishing cash crop in the north western regions'.¹²³

Finally, the government's decision to suspend the 'franco valuta system' (whereby traders were given the freedom to import goods using their own foreign exchange), also under a World Bank recommendation, dealt a significant blow to the North's trading activities. Although all Somalis benefited from the system, northerners, more than others, appeared to have excelled in the export-import sector and benefited from the fact that an overwhelming proportion of expatriate Somali in the Arab and Gulf states were originally from that region.¹²⁴

In March 1982, 21 Isaaq *uqaal* (elders) of the Hargeisa region, led by Sheikh Ibrahim Sheikh Yussuf, went to Mogadishu to present Barre with a memorandum. The memorandum contained a list of grievances covering matters of commerce (including the question of the abolition of the franco valuta system), agriculture, livestock, public works and industrialisation of the North. Under the first heading, of commerce, the signatories demanded the return of those goods which had been seized by the government from the Port of Berbera as part of its dismantling of the 'franco valuta' system and whose value was estimated at 300 million Somali

¹²¹ Chossudovsky, Michel, *The Globalisation of Poverty, Impacts of the IMF and World Bank Reforms*, Zed Books, London and New York, 1998, pp. 102-3. Somalia's earnings in livestock export were estimated to represent 80 percent of the country's earnings in 1983.

¹²² Saudi fears of rinder-pest were reportedly unfounded.

¹²³ Lewis, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

¹²⁴ Compagnon, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 533.

shillings [\$50 million].¹²⁵ In addition to these economic issues, the memorandum also included a number of complaints regarding the government's harsh treatment of northern civilians and students who had begun agitating in the early 1980s.

In 1981, a group of doctors, engineers, intellectuals and traders, named the 'Hargeisa group' or 'Uffo' (Hurricanes), decided to raise money in order to renovate the Hospital of Hargeisa. They were appalled by the physical deterioration of the region's infrastructure and their action inevitably highlighted the government's neglect and inefficiency. Uffo, moreover, began at that time distributing anti-government leaflets and on June 26 1981, the anniversary of Somaliland's independence from Britain, they gathered secretly for a flag-raising ceremony. 'Their banner was a Somali flag with only one point of the Somali star remaining – Somaliland.'¹²⁶ The government alleged, unfoundedly, that the group was raising money to fund the SNM's clandestine activities; and arrested and imprisoned twenty-nine people in November and December 1981.¹²⁷ The government's heavy-handed response triggered a student revolt in February 1982; the government responded once more with harsh repressive measures, including arrests and torture of students. The Memorandum presented by the twenty-one elders asked for their release, but instead, the government responded by arresting some of the memorandum's signatories.

The SNM, which had then moved its headquarters to Dire Dawa in Ethiopia, launched a number of military operations, the most spectacular of which was the attack in January 1983 on the Mandera Prison, where many of those previously arrested were detained. This episode was decisive in that it formally bound the SNM

¹²⁵ The memorandum is reprinted in the Africa Watch Report, *Somalia: A Government at War with its Own People – Testimonies About the Killings and the Conflict in the North*, London, New York, January 1990.

¹²⁶ Bryden, Matt, 'Somaliland: Fiercely Independent,' *Africa Report*, November-December 1994, p. 36.

and the various grass-root movements that had sprung in the region into a coherent and better-organised opposition. The student protest gathered momentum and set up the Unified Somali Student Organisation (USSO). Two rallies were organised in 1983 and 1984 to commemorate the February 1982 events and demand the release of the remaining prisoners. In June 1984, in total defiance of Barre's regime, USSO staged a demonstration to commemorate Somaliland's independence. The city of Hargeisa followed by shutting down all activity. The government retaliated violently and the police dismantled USSO, on the grounds that it was affiliated to the SNM, although here too such suspicions appear unsubstantiated. As Lewis recalls:

From the early 1980s, the north was administered by increasingly harsh military rule with savage reprisals meted out to the assumedly pro-SNM local population who were subject to severe economic as well as political harassment. The North as I saw when I last visited it in 1985, began to look and feel like a colony under a foreign military tyranny.¹²⁸

By then the government was no longer able to control the wave of discontent; the rebellion was no longer confined to a group of exiles but had reached a great part of the population in north-western Somalia. Until 1988, the mobilisation gathered pace and the SNM launched a number of guerrilla operations but with no significant results.

The situation was to change radically when, in April 1988, Barre and Mengistu signed a peace accord in which both agreed to the cessation of hostilities and the termination of their support to any opposition party to the other. As Prunier recalls:

The SNM fought, alone at first but with the financial backing of the Isaaq clan Diaspora in the Persian Gulf countries. After 1984, President Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia began to aid the guerrilla movement for geopolitical

¹²⁷ Both Bryden and Compagnon concur on this point.

¹²⁸ Lewis, 1989, *op. cit.*, p 576. Mohammed Bali similarly compares the status of Somaliland in the 1980s to that of a military colony. See, 'Somaliland: From Clan Dictatorship to Self-Determination,' *Maroody Jeex: A Somaliland Alternative Press*, No. 1, January/March 1996, p. 4.

reasons; the worsening of the war in Eritrea led him to make peace with Somalia in 1988.¹²⁹

As a result of the Somali-Ethiopian peace accord, the SNM, as well as the SSDF were ousted out of their Ethiopian sanctuary and deprived of the support Mengistu's regime had covertly given them. Taking advantage of the removal of Somali troops in the border area, the SNM decided to launch an attack on the government's Northern based military facilities in May/June 1988 and succeeded in occupying, albeit temporarily, the cities of Hargeisa and Burao. Barre's army retaliated violently and decimated the cities of Burao and Hargeisa through the use of artillery and air bombardments.¹³⁰ An estimated 50, 000 people were killed and hundreds of thousands of refugees fled from northern Somalia to Ethiopia. Although the SNM attack was a military failure, it tolled the death knell of Barre's regime and a point of no return in Somaliland's move towards independence.¹³¹ After the government's violent response, the SNM 'found itself deluged with volunteers.'¹³²

If the SNM leadership was still divided with regard to secession, testimonies gathered by the UNHCR and other NGOs working amongst the refugees highlighted the extent to which the Government raids mobilised the population towards independence from the South:

¹²⁹ Prunier, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹³⁰ The testimony given by Mr Kenneth Brow, then US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, following unrelenting questioning by the Chairman, Mr Howards Wolpe, confirmed reports that the 'Somali military had utilized Hawker Hunter planes, piloted or maintained by ex-Rhodesian technicians for these attacks.' The testimony also confirmed reports that 'an American team' was 'helping to maintain and run the military's communication network in the North' which was destroyed by the May/June attacks. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Reported Massacres and Indiscriminate Killings in Somalia*, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 46. The use of ex-Rhodesian manned Hawker Hunters was also reported in, 'Somalia: Showdown in the North,' *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 29, No. 15, 29 July 1988, p. 2.

¹³¹ Omar, Rakiya, 'One Thorn Bush at a time,' *Current History*, Vol. 93, No. 583, May 1994, p. 233, writes that the SNM rank and file 'had crossed the Rubicon of secession in May 1988.'

¹³² de Waal, Alex, 'Contemporary Warfare in Africa,' unpublished manuscript, p. 19. This paper is an extended draft of the article published in: *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 27, No. 3, July 1996, pp. 6-16.

Aden Tarabi Jamac was one of the 450 guerrilla fighters in the assault in Burao. "Before I was fighting for a free government for all of Somalia," but the shock of joining the battle changed that. "Then we were fighting to have two governments." Boobe, who had become one of the SNM top cadres, noticed a similar shift in the movement's orientation. "The aerial bombings, the bombardment, strafing of refugees as they fled to the border, all helped to solidify our sentiment of separateness. Their looting of the cities, the systematic, indiscriminate shelling... We realized we had nothing in common with these people from the south".¹³³

The following three years would only serve to confirm these views as Barre's divide and rule tactics continued to fuel the Northern feelings of alienation. Various clans and sub-clans, amongst whom some Ogadeni and Hawiye traders, were encouraged 'take over the remains of Isaaqi shops and houses in what [had become] ghost towns.'¹³⁴ But Barre's strategy was of no avail. In January 1991, Mogadishu fell and Siad Barre fled the country. A faction of the United Somali Congress (USC) led by Ali Mahdi Mohammed, renouncing an agreement that was reached in October 1990 between the SNM and the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), declared himself President of Somalia without consulting his allies. The coalition disbanded, chaos ensued and North Western Somalia seceded.

5.5 – Independent Somaliland

As clan and sub-clan factions opposed each other in the South, the SNM adopted the path towards 'national' reconciliation. Although the Isaaq make up the majority of 'Somaliland's' population, they clearly recognised the need to rally to their cause the other northern clans in spite of the fact that some of them had been co-opted by Barre in his attempt to dismantle Isaaq resistance.¹³⁵ 'Prisoners of war from these northern

¹³³ Bryden, 'Somaliland: Fiercely Independent,' 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹³⁴ Lewis, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 577. While Lewis speaks of the Ogadeni, Compagnon mentions the Hawiye, see 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹³⁵ The estimates for Somaliland's population vary from 1 million to 4.2 million. This wide variation may in part be explained by the lack of exact figures before the war and the large movement of

clans were also pardoned and returned to their clan areas.¹³⁶ Two *shirs* (assemblies) were convened, the first in Berbera in February 1991, the second in Burao, in April/May 1991. The shirs were attended by members of the Isaaq, Gadabursi, Dulbahante, Issa and Warsangeli clans and sub-clans, thus reflecting the trans-clanic or national character of these reconciliation processes.¹³⁷

Independence, although considered by the SNM as a potential option, was not initially favoured. In fact, the motion to secede would appear to have been raised publicly for the first time *not* by the Isaaq but by the Gadabursi elders.¹³⁸ The motion was endorsed by all the elders present and at the end of the Burao meeting in May 1991, Somaliland declared the 1960 union to be null and proclaimed its independence within the ex-British Somaliland. As Patrick Gilkes observes, it was 'a move supported by the elders of all northern clans.'¹³⁹ Abdurahman Ahmed Ali Tuur, then President of the SNM, was nominated President and a provisional government was set up for two years. While an attempt was made to include all northern clans in the decision-making process, Samatar nevertheless points to the lack of equity in the new government clan composition as 'eleven of the seventeen ministers and all four vice-ministers were from the Isaaq community.'¹⁴⁰

Somaliland's relative tranquillity and promising march towards normalisation was nevertheless interrupted at the end of 1991, when an intra-SNM armed rebellion

refugees. Depending on these numbers the estimated Isaaq proportion thus varies between 60 and 80 per cent

¹³⁶ Prunier, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹³⁷ Although Prunier lists the five aforementioned clans/sub-clans, Compagnon mentions only the first three. Prunier, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 226; and Compagnon, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹³⁸ Compagnon, 1993, p. 13.

¹³⁹ Gilkes, Patrick, 'Descent into chaos: Somalia, January 1991-December 1992,' in Gurdon, Charles (ed.), *The Horn of Africa*, UCL Press, London, 1994, p. 48.

¹⁴⁰ Samatar, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 123. The author gives the names and clan affiliation of the First interim government in table 5.1, p. 124.

erupted and led to what is referred to as Somaliland's first civil war.¹⁴¹ Some have suggested that the conflict was triggered by the feeling that the newly established government was overwhelmingly skewed in favour of the Habr Garhadjis sub-clan (which comprises both the Habr Yunis and Idegale sub-sub-clans) to which the President belonged as well as sections of the Habr Awal/Sa'ad Muse.¹⁴² Yet the fact that the factions fought for the control for the airfield of Hargeisa and the port Berbera, both of which represent vital routes to trade, might also indicate the presence of economic motivations behind the war. As Matthew Bryden reported:

From late 1991, Hargeysa airport fell increasingly under the control of a group of mainly 'Idegale militia associated with SNM military units of *Kood Buur* and *Sadexaad* ("the 3rd"). The group established itself as an independent authority, demanding landing entry fees from incoming flights, and occasionally shooting at aircraft who transgressed their supple "regulations". Several expatriate members of the UN and NGO community were roughed up, while Somali civilians were subjected to routine harassment. The group resisted any attempts by Tuur's government (which didn't try very hard) to impose any degree of discipline and accountability upon the airport management. Revenue from airport charges was retained almost exclusively by the militia. Only in the weakest sense was the group associated either with their 'clans' or with the administration. (...) Egal's insistence that the matter should be resolved without bloodshed successfully diffused fears – particularly from the Garxajis [other name for the Habr Garhadjis of which the Idegale are a sub-clan] – of a violent confrontation. (...) Physically quarantined and politically orphaned, the renegade militia was almost entirely isolated. The group's only remaining support consisted of a slender link with Abdirahman Tuur and a few associated opposition figures.¹⁴³

This episode is significant in that the war took place not between rival northern clans but among Isaaq sub-clans. The argument that Somaliland's stability and cohesion rests on its predominant Isaaq composition would therefore seem unwarranted.

One of the most important outcomes of the 1988 civil war in Somalia had been the formation, in June that year, of an Isaaq Council of Elders (*Gurti*). Although

¹⁴¹ Bryden, Matthew, *Briefing Paper: Battle for Control of Hargeisa Airport*, 15 October 1994. See also Omar, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 234, Samatar, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 125, Prunier, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 226, Compagnon, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-17.

it draws from traditional resources, the Gurti, according to Compagnon, is a relatively recent institution:

In pre-colonial times, there was no comparable institution that successfully encompassed whole clans; political solidarity instead remained then at level of the diya paying group which limited itself to elementary lineages. The 'local chiefs' Advisory Council created by the British Administration in 1946 would appear to be the sole plausible precursor to the Gurti. This would therefore invalidate readings of current developments in terms of a simple resurgence of "ancestral traditions".¹⁴⁴

Weary of the Elders independent power, Siad Barre had abolished this institution.¹⁴⁵

When Barre launched his military operations against north-western Somalia in the late 1980s, many Isaaq elders used their authority to recruit young men as fighters and helped to finance and legitimise the SNM's military operations. The Elders traditional peacemaking (*nabadoon*) role was also instrumental in the reconciliation process undertaken in early 1991. The conference's success, in turn, reinforced their prestige and authority, and led to the institutionalisation of the Council of Elders. The 1991 Gurti, a direct descendent of the Council formed in 1988, set up a permanent executive committee presided by Sheikh Ibrahim. The Council of elders has now come to acquire a high degree of legitimate authority, its role being compared by some to that of a Senate.¹⁴⁶

When tensions broke out in late 1991, the Gurti's authority was once again sought to resolve the civil war that was engulfing the new country and was jeopardising Somaliland's future. Local clan elders engaged in a number of bilateral peace conferences, which enabled them to stage in January 1993, a 'national'

¹⁴² As related by Bryden, 'Battle for the control of Hargeisa,' 1994, *op. cit.*

¹⁴³ Bryden, 'Battle for the Control of Hargeisa,' 1994, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁴ Compagnon, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 19, *my translation.*

¹⁴⁵ On the role of the Elders, see; Lewis, 1961, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

¹⁴⁶ Compagnon, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

conference (shir) in Borana to which all northern-based clans attended.¹⁴⁷ By contrast to the internationally led meeting held in Addis Ababa at the same time, the 1993 Borana Conference was almost entirely self-financed and foreign contributions remained limited.¹⁴⁸ But while the former failed to achieve reconciliation among southern-based clans, the latter, which lasted almost five months, was successful in drawing up a new 'national' constitution and in electing a new President: Mohammed Haji Ibrahim Egal. Egal, who belongs to the Isse Mussa of the Habr Awal Isaaq sub-clan, had served (it will be remembered) as Somalia's Prime Minister under the Presidency of Abdulrashid Shemarke, from 1967 to 1969, when Barre's coup brought his leadership to an end. Egal was then detained without trial until 1982 when he was freed following US pressure.

The May 1993 Constitution, or National Charter, established a two chamber parliament composed of a Council of Representatives and a Council of Elders, a Council of Ministers and a Judiciary. A new flag was also adopted with the words 'There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet', as Islam was decreed the state religion. The gurti also declared that national elections would be held in two years time. One of the government's foremost tasks was the demobilisation of the militias composed for the most part of young men for whom violence had become a way of life and whose wanton behaviour had greatly contributed to the outbreak of the 'first civil war'. This remains a major challenge. The only way to insure proper demobilisation is to give these young men money, or cattle, so that they may marry

¹⁴⁷ Dulbahante, Warsangeli, Gadabursi, Issa and Isaaq. See Rakiya Omar, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 234; and Press, Robert, 'Elders of North Somalia Meet to Preserve Peace', *Christian Science Monitor*, March 1, 1993.

¹⁴⁸ Helander, Bernhard, 'Somaliland: Example or Exception?' *News from Nai*, Spring 1998, <http://www.uu.se/bh/somaliland.htm>, p. 2.

and integrate the society as adults.¹⁴⁹ The government's lack of funds renders this task difficult. Disarmament of heavy weapons has been carried out with some success and, in 1993, with the assistance of the British company Rimfire, a programme of demining was initiated.¹⁵⁰

But once more, as Somaliland appeared to be on the way to recovery, another civil war broke out. While the hostilities again involved rival Isaaq sub-clans, they were sparked off by exogenous factors, and more specifically by UNOSOM's intervention. In March 1993, the UN was preparing plans for UNOSOM II and considering whether or not to deploy troops in northern Somalia. Yussuf A. Sheikh Madar, then Somaliland's Foreign Minister, had already expressed in February Somaliland's reluctance to accept UN troops on the grounds that any UN deployment might cause 'unnecessary tensions and endanger the peace and stability' of Somaliland.¹⁵¹ The Foreign Minister's apprehension was to be substantiated by subsequent events, as UNOSOM's short-lived presence in the region ended up being more destabilising than beneficial.

The new government, which had been elected in May 1993, nevertheless conceded, and UN personnel was sent to Somaliland. In September 1993, President Egal wrote to Admiral Jonathan Howe, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Somalia, accusing UNOSOM II of trying to split the country by fomenting trouble in the Sool and Sanaag regions and asked him to withdraw.¹⁵² Then, in February 1994, a so-called Harti conference (a common name of the Dulbahante, Majerteen and Warsangeli Darod sub-clans) was held in Las Anod

¹⁴⁹ Prunier, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

¹⁵⁰ Millions of mines are scattered throughout Somaliland. Worthington, Tony, 'Only aid can defeat the gunmen,' *The Independent*, Monday 14 February 1994, p. 16.

¹⁵¹ 'Will the UN deploy in the North?' *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 566, March 13, 1993.

inside Somaliland. This was a follow-up to a previous Harti Conference, held in Garoe, on the border of Somaliland in December 1993. The Las Anod Conference was apparently organised under the orders of General Mohammed Abshir, leader of the SSDF, and of Awad Ahmed Ashra, former chairman of the United Somali Party (USP). It was sponsored by the UN and was attended by UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, James Jonah.

The aim of the conference was to detach the Dulbahante and Warsangeli clans from Somaliland and to re-attach them administratively to the part of north-eastern Somalia controlled by the Merjertein SSDF. This would conform with the plan outlined by UNOSOM 2 representative, Leonard Kapungu, to Somaliland's president, Ibrahim Mohamed Egal, in September 1993.¹⁵³

UNOSOM's involvement in this matter reflects once more its erroneous 'ethnic' assumptions about clan solidarity and explains why the so-called Harti alliance was doomed from the start. Indeed, the northern-based Dulbahante, although belonging to the Darod clan, 'have closer social links (especially via marriages) with the Isaaq people of the Habr Ja'alo and the Habr Yunis clans who live further west in Somaliland, that with the Mejerstein who settled in north-east Somalia.'¹⁵⁴

To add insult to injury, UNOSOM then proceeded in mid-1994 to repatriate Somaliland's former President Abdirahman Tuur from his exile in London to represent the so-called 'federalist' option during one of the many Addis Ababa conference held under UN auspices in 1994.¹⁵⁵ When Abdirahman Tuur, claiming to lead the SNM delegation, met with Mohammed Farah Aydid's Somali National Alliance in the UN sponsored Addis Ababa Conference in April 1994, and agreed to consider a proposal for a Somali federal government, Somaliland's government

¹⁵² 'Somaliland president addresses joint session of parliament and cabinet,' *BBC Summary of World Broadcast*, September 18, 1993.

¹⁵³ 'Somali: Harti alliance sponsored by the UN,' *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, February 26, 1994.

¹⁵⁴ ION, *Ibid*.

reacted furiously.¹⁵⁶ Tuur's attempt to re-enter Somali politics nevertheless backfired, he lost the sympathy of his own Habr Yunis clansmen who viewed with suspicion his association with the unpopular UN and disliked Aydid.¹⁵⁷ Even the Hargeisa group, whom Tuur and his associates supplied with Qat, cash and crude alcohol, rejected the proposal for a Federalist option and expressed their contempt towards Tuur's self-interested political *volte-face*.¹⁵⁸ Now convinced that UNOSOM was determined to derail at all cost the process of national reconciliation that had led to the country's independence, President Egal decided to expell all its representatives from Somaliland.¹⁵⁹ Ironically, UNOSOM's attempts to re-establish Somali unity seem to have had the exact opposite effect of reinforcing Somaliland's identity and belief that independence from the South is the only viable option.¹⁶⁰

Nevertheless, UNOSOM's intervention contributed to a renewal of the tensions between the Habr Garhadjis and Egal's government. Failure to reach any government instigated agreement led once more to the need to revert to a *shir*. This third national conference was held in Hargeisa between October 1996 and March 1997.

At the end of the Hargeisa shir, it was decided that there would now be two elected assemblies, one composed of 'simple' delegates, the second composed of elders chosen not through general election but by clan councils. This second chamber, contrary to the first, may not be dissolved by the president and each clan or sub-clan representative can only be replaced if he dies, is incapacitated or is recalled by another representative of the same clan or sub-clan. These measures were formalised in the newly approved Constitution of February

¹⁵⁵ Bryden, 'The Battle over Hargeisa,' 1994, *op. cit.*; and also 'Somalia: Epistle to Boutros-Ghali,' *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 641, October 8, 1994.

¹⁵⁶ 'Former Somaliland leader renounces secession after Aydid talks,' *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, May 4, 1994.

¹⁵⁷ Flint, Julie, 'Somaliland Expels "Interfering" UN,' *The Guardian*, August 29, 1994, p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ Bryden, *Battle for the Control of Hargeisa*, 1994, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁹ Flint, 1994, *op. cit.*, and Awori, Horace, 'Somali-Politics: UNOSOM Expelled from Somaliland,' *Inter Press Service*, August 30, 1994.

¹⁶⁰ Bryden Matthew, *Somaliland and Peace in the Horn of Africa: A Situation Report and Analysis*, UNDP – Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia, November 1995, p.1.

1997 by two-thirds of the representatives. (...) This patient construction of a western-pastoral hybrid state has led, little by little, to a democratisation process instigated, not in order to please the international community's funding bodies, but to respond to internal functional necessity.¹⁶¹

We can see from the above account that Somaliland's stability has, since its independence, been jeopardised on a number of occasions and partly because of international interference. Nevertheless, the country was able to avert falling into chaos and although its state finances remain precarious, Somaliland's economy appears to be slowly recovering.¹⁶² Fifteen percent of Hargeisa's children go to primary school and nearly sixty percent go to Muslim religious schools. According to Karin Davies, writing in 1997: 'a recent survey by UNICEF found that 57 percent of people in urban areas have safe drinking water and only 9 percent suffer from malnutrition.'¹⁶³ In April 1995, *The Economist* reported that the Port of Berbera had been exporting

some \$100m-worth of livestock to Gulf states in the past 12 months. Trucks take imported goods and locally produced commodities like sugar and soap inland, some as far as Ethiopia and Kenya. On the streets of Hargeisa fresh fruit and vegetables are plentiful.¹⁶⁴

Somaliland's economy, while improving, remains at the mercy of international pressure. In 1998 for instance, Saudi Arabia, at the instigation of Egypt and the Arab League, introduced a ban on Somaliland cattle imports that may compromise the country's fragile stability. Because of the international community's reluctance to recognise its secession, Somaliland has not benefited, like its southern counterpart, from international aid. While this may have forced it to rely on its own resources and

¹⁶¹ Prunier, Gérard, 'Somaliland, le pays qui n'existe pas. Comment survivre sans la "communauté internationale";' *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Octobre 1997, p. 18, my translation.

¹⁶² The annual budget was estimated in 1996 to amount to '30 billion Somaliland shillings, about \$30 million at black market rates, and is split evenly between security forces and spending for social services and reconstruction.' Davies, Karin, 'Seeking to Build on Peace,' *The Record*, April 8, 1996, p. A14.

¹⁶³ Davies Karin, 'Seeking to Build on Peace,' *The Record*, April 8, 1996, p. A14.

to attain what for the moment appears to be a more solidly rooted stability, it has nevertheless hindered the development of its economy and infrastructure. Ibrahim Egal, who was re-elected President in March 1997 for another five-year term, has repeatedly pleaded with the international community for recognition, as this would give it access to much needed international aid, enabling him to demobilise Somaliland's remaining militias and facilitate 'the process of building a nation'.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

It would appear that Somaliland, like Eritrea, is another case where the 'colonial self' rather than ethnicity provided the basis for secession and where war proved to be a catalyst in the process towards nation-formation. Somaliland's secession has taken place within the former colonial boundaries. As, President Egal himself put it in 1988:

Somalilanders have simply turned the clock back thirty years in order to return matters to their natural context, when we declared our independence from Britain in 1960.¹⁶⁶

Although Somaliland's population and the SNM are predominantly Isaaq,¹⁶⁷ this does not appear to have been the primary factor behind its secession and current stability.¹⁶⁸ As discussed in the last section of this chapter, Somaliland's secession

¹⁶⁴ 'Somaliland, they call it.' *The Economist*, April 8th 1995, p. 40.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas, Annie, 'Somaliland leader says a nation is being built,' *Agence France Presse*, 15 juin 1997.

¹⁶⁶ Statement made by Egal and quoted in: 'Somaliland leader offers referendum under UN supervision,' *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, June 12, 1998.

¹⁶⁷ In the same way that there are no figures for Somaliland's population, there are no agreed estimates of what the proportion of the population is Isaaq. Nevertheless, most authors seem to concur in stating that Somaliland's population is predominantly from that clan.

¹⁶⁸ By contrast, north-eastern Somalia, despite its alleged clanic/ethnic homogeneity had not, as of 1999, made any claims towards independence. According to Menkhaus, despite the region's ethnic/clanic homogeneity, '[e]fforts by Mijerteen elders and the Somali Salvation Democratic Front to establish a regional administration have proceeded slowly. Intraclan disagreements over the control and allocation of port customs revenues (the main source of funding for government in the region) have resulted in endless rounds of negotiations and little visible progress in administration.' Although these tensions and disagreements have for the most part been addressed peacefully, and the region has

was decided at the end of a *shir* that involved a number of northern-based clans. Moreover, most of the crises encountered by the new state have been due to intra-Isaaq conflicts and have been fuelled by exogenous factors, but have not degenerated into factional war. Consultation has regularly taken place in Somaliland since 1991 – both among Isaaq clans as well as between Isaaq and non-Isaaq clans – in the form of month-long national conferences and smaller bilateral shirs, Somaliland's equivalent to Renan's daily plebiscite.

The fact that Somaliland has been able to avert factional fighting of the type encountered in southern Somalia, further supports the view that clanism is not a 'social automatism' but a perversion of the traditional lineage system. It may well be that Somaliland's colonial experience and peripheral position has somewhat sheltered it from clanism's nefarious effects, namely that of warlordism. Nevertheless, one should not attribute Somaliland's successes simply to its capacity to re-activate ancestral peace-keeping mechanisms. Indeed, as was indicated earlier, there is no ancient indigenous equivalent to the current Gurti, or Council of Elders, whose roots are more appropriately traced back to the local chiefs Advisory Council, an institution introduced under British colonial administration.

In addition to its particular colonial experience, two factors have contributed to Somaliland's feelings of distinctiveness: the perception and/or reality of Southern discrimination and the experience of repression under Barre in the 1980s; although the former may now only be invoked as a result of the latter. An interview given in 1994 by President Egal illustrates the extent to which the war against Barre's regime is interpreted as a decisive event in the formation of Somaliland's national identity.

been able to avoid the turmoil that continues to prevail in Southern Somalia it nevertheless illustrates the fact that clan/ethnic homogeneity is not in itself a sufficient basis for secession. See, Menkhaus, Ken, 'Somali: Political Order in a Stateless Society,' *Current History*, May 1998, p. 221.

There was no sustained, prolonged war against the oppressive dictatorship of Siad Barre in the southern regions. In Somaliland, our people had fought the dictator for 10 years. *Over this prolonged resistance to a common enemy, our people acquired a common identity, a common aspiration.* And when the dictator was ousted, they were not enemies, they were comrades in arms. They came together in a peaceful conference in May 1991, declared their separation from Somali, and started nation-building.¹⁶⁹

That the war marked a decisive turning point was illustrated by the testimonies given by refugees and quoted earlier. Yet, it remains difficult to ascertain the extent to which the war against Mogadishu has forged a long-lasting sense of national identity. It could be argued that Somaliland's relative stability and unity depends solely on the person of Egal, although critics have accused him of ruling Somaliland in a quasi-dictatorial fashion.¹⁷⁰ To what extent may the 'nation' withstand his departure is subject to question.¹⁷¹

One may also conjecture as to why Somaliland has thus far been unable to achieve international recognition and what the effects of this may be. The reasons behind the international reluctance are varied. Following the visit to Paris in February 1994 by three Somaliland ministers, Catherine Boivineau, the deputy head of Africa Desk at France's Foreign Ministry, 'advised the Somaliland ministers to follow the example of Eritrea by seeking Somalia's acquiescence in Somaliland independence, as Eritrea had obtained theirs from Ethiopia'.¹⁷² Only then could the international community consider recognising Somaliland's independence. Such approval from Somalia was in fact sought when General Farah Aideed was still alive

¹⁶⁹ Timms, Ed, 'Interview with Mohamed Ibrahim Egal,' *The Dallas Morning News*, July 17, 1994, p. 1J. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁰ Zarembo, Alan, 'New kind of turmoil feared; Independent Somaliland faces identity crisis.' *The Houston Chronicle*, June 16, 1996.

¹⁷¹ It may be appropriate to note here Egal's declaration that a law on parties will be added to the new constitution which is to be adopted through referendum in 2001. According to the President, political parties will have to be national parties and 'not be based on religious, tribal or ethnic grounds.' 'Somaliland leader offers referendum under UN supervision,' *op. cit.* It is interesting to note here Egal usage of the words 'tribal' and 'ethnic', which parallel Eritrea's similar declaration on the law for political parties.

and chaired the Somali National Alliance, but was promptly rejected. As, Robert Press noted, 'such a declaration [condoning Somaliland's secession] would be political suicide for any Somali leader outside of Somaliland given the strong anti-secessionist sentiment in Somalia.'¹⁷³ In the absence of any government in Somalia in the foreseeable future, this avenue towards recognition is closed. The expulsion of the UN in 1994, and of the EU representative in 1995,¹⁷⁴ also somewhat damaged Somaliland's cause and it remains to be seen whether or not Egal's calls for a UN monitored referendum to be held in 2001 will be answered.

Powerful regional interests also militate against Somaliland's independence. Egypt fears that Somaliland's recognition will further legitimise secessionist claims in southern Sudan and is therefore against any move that may further complicate its Nile river arrangements. If southern Sudan were to secede, Egypt would be forced to negotiate an agreement with an additional state over the river Nile thus making its situation even more precarious. Egypt has invested much effort in staging a negotiated settlement between Sudan's contending parties in an attempt to keep the country together, this in spite of reassurances from Southern Sudanese leaders that their secession would not jeopardise Egypt's water supply.¹⁷⁵ Somaliland's secession, it has been suggested, is also opposed by Saudi Arabia, which has objected to moves by the SNM to reach agreements with a number of oil companies so that the latter may resume their operations in the region.¹⁷⁶ Oil exploration in

¹⁷² 'Somaliland: A Delegation in Paris, *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 609, February 5, 1994.

¹⁷³ Press, Robert M., 'Somaliland Leader Looks for Foreign Recognition,' *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 6, 1994.

¹⁷⁴ 'Somaliland: Illing says "Get it Right",' *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 675, June 10, 1995.

¹⁷⁵ On Egypt and the Arab League's position: 'Firmness by Arab League,' *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 637, September 10, 1994, and 'East African tensions At Danger Level; Implications For Red Sea States & Israel,' *Arab Press Service Organisation, APS Diplomat News Service*, Vol. 44, No. 4, January 29, 1996.

¹⁷⁶ Northern Somalia was under license to oil companies by the time the 1988 war erupted. Amoco, Chevron, Agip, Conoco and Shell were all granted exploitation licenses by Siad Barre in the area at

Northern Somalia began in 1986, and gathered momentum following the publication of a hydrocarbon study undertaken in 1988 by the World Bank and the UNDP that confirmed the oil and gas potentials of both Somalia and Ethiopia. The presence of oil in the area is a double-edged sword for Somaliland's prospects for recognition could be undermined by the fact that its 'boundary cuts through permits held by Agip and Conoco.'¹⁷⁷ It is impossible for the time being to say whether Western, and more specifically American political opinion will be swayed by these companies conflicting interests and whether or not it will take any decision that risks compromising its relations with the Arab League. Given that oil prices are currently very low, and that the situation in Iraq still requires the US to maintain its regional allies, it is doubtful that any step towards recognising Somaliland will be taken in the foreseeable future if it antagonises Arab allies.

The fact that the SNM has already reached tentative agreements with a number of oil companies is an indication that its effective control and 'sovereignty' over the region, while not formally recognised, is nevertheless acknowledged. This is also borne out by the fact that, in April 1998, Somaliland's government signed an agreement with two international companies hired to rehabilitate and reconstruct the country's power stations destroyed by the war.¹⁷⁸ Establishing contacts and signing contracts with foreign based companies may in the long-term lead to formal recognition if only for practical and financial reasons. Somaliland has moreover

the beginning of 1986. Kielmas, Marie, 'Oil hopes hinge on North Somalia oil exploration,' *Petroleum Economist*, Vol. 58, No. 10, October 1991, p. 19; and Fineman, Mark, 'The oil Factor in Somalia; Four American Petroleum Giants had Agreements with the African Nation Before the Civil War Began. They Could Reap Big Rewards if Peace is restored,' *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1993.

¹⁷⁷ Kielmas, 1991, *op. cit.*, p.19.

¹⁷⁸ 'Somaliland Signs Energy deals with Foreign Firms', *Reuters*, April 11 1998. The companies in question are US-based Collins engineering Co and British-American Energy. According to Reuters: 'The companies will rehabilitate a 25 megawatt power station in the capital Hargeisa at a cost of \$23 million before beginning work on electrification of other areas.'

managed to secure *de facto* recognition from other states, including Djibouti. In 1994, Egal was received in both Kampala and Nairobi with the same ceremony given to a head of state¹⁷⁹ and in 1997, a delegation from the US Congress visited Somaliland.

One could argue that Somaliland's lack of diplomatic recognition has to some extent been a blessing in disguise. Somaliland's attempts to develop its own economic networks without relying on international assistance have sheltered it from the 'perils of aid dependence.'¹⁸⁰ It has also forced Somaliland to find its own route towards political reconciliation and democratisation, making it one of the few cases of somewhat successful post-war reconstruction. To some extent, Somaliland constitutes a mirror image of what Robert Jackson has defined as quasi-states. It has all the attributes of internal sovereignty: a democratically elected government, a police force, a flag, a national anthem, a relatively stable economy, its own currency and its own passports.¹⁸¹ All it lacks is the attribute of juridical sovereignty conferred through international recognition.

¹⁷⁹ Awori, Horace, 'Somalia-Politics: Leader of the New Republic Seeks Recognition,' *Inter Press Service*, January 14, 1994.

¹⁸⁰ Clapham, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 715.

¹⁸¹ 'Holding on in Somaliland,' *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 31 March 1995, and 'New Currency Law,' *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 702, January 20, 1996.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The business of sound theory in relation to practice is not to solve practical problems but to clear them of misunderstandings which make their solution impossible.¹

This thesis has sought to demonstrate why ethnicity is of little heuristic value when it comes to understanding what triggers nationalism and secession. By showing that the ethnic interpretation was not substantiated by the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland, the last two chapters of the thesis have presented its third, and more substantial criticism of the ethnonationalist approach: its lack of empirical foundations. This critique had begun, in chapter two, where some of the internal inconsistencies of the ethnonationalist approach were highlighted. It was pursued further with the analysis of the meaning of ethnicity in Africa in chapter three. The ethnonationalist claim that ethnic identities are *pre-modern* was here questioned by drawing from the findings presented in the anthropological literature on ethnicity in Africa. Before discussing some of the broader implications of our critique of the ethnonationalist model, this concluding chapter will summarise the main arguments that have been put forward in the thesis. It will do so by returning to the three questions raised in the Introduction.

The first section of the chapter will begin by explaining why ethnicity does not provide an appropriate explanation for the secessions of Eritrea and Somaliland. It will then proceed to identify which of those factors identified by modernist theories best account for the emergence of nationalism in these two countries. Turning to the second question, the following section will assess the extent to which the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland challenge the conventional interpretation of the

¹ Collingwood, Robin George, *Essays in Political Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 94.

right of national self-determination. It will also consider whether or not the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland support proposals to redraw Africa's state boundaries so that they more appropriately reflect Africa's national and ethnic identities. Drawing from the discussions presented in the first three chapters and from the evidence that emerged from the cases studied, the third section will then suggest some of the ways International Relations may contribute to the study of the causes of nationalism.

6.1 – Eritrea and Somaliland: Primordial or modern?

a) Ethnicity is not the answer

According to the ethnonationalist interpretation, Eritrea and Somaliland's secessions were ethnically motivated. Yet, despite its predictive ambitions, this model yielded not one, but several different hypothesis as to how 'ethnic ties' or 'national susceptibilities' might express themselves in the context of Eritrea and Somaliland.

Siamak Khatami offered the most straightforward variant of the ethnonationalist model with reference to Eritrea. He wrote that Eritrea's quest for self-determination was explained by the fact that Eritreans constituted an ethnic group which was linguistically and historically distinct from Ethiopia's other ethnic groups.² Connor and Horowitz for their part, stated that Eritrea's nationalist movement was essentially the result of a religious conflict between the Eritrean Muslims and the Christian Ethiopians.³ Smith argued instead that Eritrea's secession was instigated and dominated by Eritrea's Tigrinya-speaking population seeking to distinguish themselves from the Amhara dominated Ethiopians. Interestingly, ethnonationalist arguments have also been invoked to discredit Eritrea's claims to nationhood. The best illustration of this is provided by a radio broadcast which Emperor Haile

² Khatami, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

Selassie gave in April 1950, where he dismissed Eritrea's secessionist demands on the grounds that 'Eritreans had no separate identity but were culturally and linguistically identical to Ethiopians.'⁴ The fact that a single model can provide such an array of possible explanations casts some doubt as to its explanatory value.

Let us then take these four hypotheses in reverse order and explain why they do not provide a satisfactory explanation for the motivations and behaviour of Eritrean 'secessionists'. First, had primordial considerations determined actors' behaviour, one might have expected Eritrea's Tigrinyas to oppose separation from Ethiopia. The historical, religious, linguistic and cultural ties between the Tigrayans (of Eritrea and Ethiopia) and Ethiopia's Amharas have often been noted, as indeed has the fact that Aksum, located in Tigray, was the original centre of the old Ethiopian Empire.⁵ But, despite the 'primordial' bonds that historically united them to Ethiopia's Amharas, Eritrea's Tigrinyas provided instead two of the most prominent figures of Eritrea's nationalist struggle: Woldeab Woldemariam and Isaias Aferworki.

Second, if Eritrea's nationalist struggle was an expression of its Muslim community's desire to establish its own non-Christian state, then one would need to explain why the leading politicians of the Muslim parties did not wholeheartedly endorse Britain's plans for partition in the 1940s and 1950s, and why Eritrea did not split in two along communal lines. One would also need to explain why the Christian Tigrinyas dominated, if not the earlier, at least the latter stages of the nationalist movement and why the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) fought the Eritrean

³ Connor, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Horowitz, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁴ Emperor Haile Selassie's April 1950 radio broadcast, quoted in: Sorenson, John, *Imagining Ethiopia. Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1993, p. 41.

⁵ Bahru Zewde, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 8; Clapham, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

Liberation Movement (ELM) off Eritrea's political scene, despite the fact that both movements were set up by members of Eritrea's Sahel community.

Third, if Eritrea's nationalist struggle had been instigated by the Tigrinya-speaking population to insure, following the nationalist logic, that the boundaries of their new state were congruent with those of the *ethmie* then why was secession within a Greater Tigray not considered? Why were irredentist claims not advanced over Ethiopia's province of Tigray, so that all Tigrinya speakers could be united under a single state?

Finally, as we have shown, and as many ethnonationalists themselves acknowledge, Eritrea is neither ethnically homogenous, nor ethnically distinct from Ethiopia. It is composed of at least nine 'ethnic' groups, whose identities were in many ways shaped by the same processes that led to the formation of Eritrea's national identity. In fact, a fully-fledged ethnic explanation would have predicted not so much Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia, as its fracture along its nine constitutive ethnic groups; an option which, surprisingly, was not considered by those endorsing an ethnonationalist stance. Although a sense of Eritrean nationhood does appear to be deeply rooted, and this more notably among the urban population, the potential for ethnic discontent should not, as was indicated in our earlier discussion of Eritrea's ethnic makeup, be dismissed altogether.⁶ If ethnicity does surface on the stage of Eritrean politics, it will not be because of any atavistic feelings of distinctiveness but because of discontent towards the government's centralised policies.

To summarise, while an ethnic interpretation of secession might have accounted for the aforementioned scenarios, it would not have been able to predict that Eritrea

⁶ Assessing the degree of national or ethnic sentiment is an almost impossible task. The fact that the Eritreans voted overwhelmingly in favour of independence during the referendum can be taken as an indicator of a strong sense of nationhood at that time, but should not be taken as a permanent state.

separate from Ethiopia in the way it chose to do, that is by appealing to its former colonial existence. An ethnic explanation would, moreover, also have found it difficult to foresee the outbreak, in May 1998, of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, whose respective governments are after all dominated by Tigrinya speakers. Kinship ties have therefore not precluded mutual hostilities.

The ethnonationalist interpretation was similarly problematic in the case of Somaliland. There were, to begin with, conceptual problems with the use of ethnicity as an explanatory factor. Whereas until the late 1980s, Somalia was described as having all the attributes of a 'true' ethnic-nation (a common language, religion and myth of common descent), clan affiliation is now depicted as being Somalia's equivalent to ethnicity, and these divisions are invoked to explain the collapse of the Somali state. The fact that ethnicity was thus redefined according to the changing circumstances – to explain Somalia's former irredentist claims and then, its disintegration – illustrates once again the heuristic limits of the concept. In addition to these conceptual shortcomings, the ethnic/cultural interpretation did not seem to be vindicated on empirical grounds

While an ethnonationalist explanation might have accounted for Somalia's irredentist claims over Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, it did not foresee the possibility of it fracturing internally, as it did in the early 1990s. Moreover, if one were to take language and mode of life as distinguishing ethnic markers, then one would have expected internal fracture to take place between the Sab and the Samale. Indeed, as mentioned in our discussion of these two clan-families, they have been described by 'perceptive observers' as speaking different languages, and while the former are mostly sedentary, the latter tend to be semi-nomadic pastoralists. Despite the fact that the Digil-Mirifle clan-family established their own party as far back as the 1950s and

the President of this party in 1958 advocated that Somalia should adopt a federal constitution,⁷ this is not where the fracture occurred.

Finally, if one were to view clanism as Somalia's ethnic equivalent, one would have expected the divisions to take place along the six main clans. Instead, fractures have followed erratic and unpredictable patterns, occurring at times within the same clan (pitching sub-clans, and sub-sub-clans of the same clan against each other as in the case of Mogadishu), and at other times leading to alliances between sub-clans of different clans. The fact that clan allegiances do not always determine patterns of behaviour in Somalia was illustrated by the failure of the UNOSOM instigated attempt to organise a Harti confederation (Mejerteen, Dubhante, Warsangeli) on the grounds that they all belonged to the Darod/Harti sub-clan. The attempt failed because, by adopting the ethnic template, UNOSOM did not consider the fact that the Dulbahante had in fact closer social ties with sub-clans of the Isaaq clan than with the other Harti sub-clans, and were therefore reluctant to join the latter, preferring instead to remain within Somaliland. References to common ancestry were therefore overridden by other factors.

b) Evaluating the modernist approach

Having explained why primordial or ethnic explanations do not account for the secessions of Eritrea and Somaliland, let us now assess the validity of the modernist approach. Indeed, as our initial question suggests, if the nation is not primordial or ethnic, then it must be a modern construct. But which of the factors singled-out by modernist scholars best explain the emergence of nationalism in Eritrea and Somaliland? Throughout our descriptions of Eritrea and Somaliland, we discussed

⁷ Adam, Hussein, 'Formation and Recognition of New States: Somaliland in contrast to Eritrea,'

and assessed the factors that had been identified in the previous two chapters as propitious for the emergence of nationalism.

According to Gellner, nationalism arises out of industrial society's need for a literate and mobile work force. Following from this, one would therefore expect Eritrea and Somaliland to have achieved a certain level of industrial development when nationalist claims began to be voiced. In the case of Eritrea, important socio-economic transformations were indeed introduced during the colonial period. Although the extent to which these changes permeated all strands of the society is debatable, the fact that Eritrea's economy did in 1958 come to a stand-still when the workers trade union called for a general strike would nevertheless indicate that a certain degree of industrialisation was achieved. In the case of Somaliland, British rule was very light-handed and few industrial projects were undertaken during that period. Moreover, the fact that pastoralism remains dominant in Somaliland would appear to restrict, if not invalidate, socio-economic explanations for the rise of nationalism. Should we therefore concur with Brendan O'Leary when he states that 'the primacy [Gellner] gives to industrialisation in explaining the genesis and maintenance of nationalism' is doubtful?⁸

Although socio-economic explanations for the rise of nationalism might not at first appear to be supported by the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland, it is important to note that in both cases, nationalist uprisings in the form of civilian disobedience first emerged in the countries' main cities. And, as our discussion of the anthropological literature on ethnicity in Africa indicated, urbanisation was important in the emergence and crystallisation of ethnic identities. Urbanisation is

Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 21, No. 59, March 1994, p. 23.

seen as an important indicator of modernisation, and although this may be confined to a portion of the country, it is nevertheless significant that nationalism and ethnicity would first emerge in the urban context.

The fact that the anti-governmental demonstrations in Eritrea and Somaliland were mostly staged by students would also support the thesis that the presence of an educated elite and hence education are a necessary pre-condition for the emergence of nationalism. To the extent that education was initially introduced for the purposes of industrialisation, then socio-economic transformations could indeed be said to have contributed to the emergence of nationalism. As far as the establishment and existence of a written language is concerned, evidence is inconclusive. In neither Eritrea nor Somaliland did the presence of a distinct written language play a significant role in the emergence of national consciousness. Moreover, in the case of Somalia, Barre's introduction of Osmaniya in 1972 and intensive programmes towards national education seem to have done little to instil a sense of common pan-Somali nationhood.

The discussion in chapter two of the impact of war on nation-formation suggested that education was instrumental and necessary in the age of mass-army warfare. This was clearly illustrated in the case of Eritrea, first during the 1920s, when industrialisation, networks of communication and education all grew substantially in preparation for Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. Education was also preponderant during the struggle for independence, when the EPLF set out to educate not only its fighters but also the population more broadly. The fact that the nationalist movements in Eritrea and Somaliland were led by educated elites suggests that

⁸ O'Leary, Brendan, 'Ernest Gellner's diagnoses of nationalism: a critical overview, or, what is living and what is dead in Ernest Gellner's philosophy of nationalism?' in: Hall, John (Ed.), *The State of the Nation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 78.

education is an important factor in the emergence of nationalism. What remains to be determined is whether broad-based national education is a product of industrialisation, as Gellner claims, or whether it is the result of the state's need for a mass army, as Posen argues.

Is Gellner's claim that nationalism precedes the nation therefore vindicated? At first sight, this would indeed appear to be the case. As our historical accounts of the emergence of nationalism in Eritrea and Somaliland indicated, it would be inaccurate to say that a broadly shared sense of nationhood existed during the colonial period. Nationalism was initially propounded by minority, a Western educated elite steeped in the ideals of nationalism, and it was only at a later stage that the movement acquired mass appeal. On the other hand, the fact that both Eritrea and Somaliland appealed to their previous colonial existence forces us to reconsider somewhat Gellner's statement. Would Eritrea and Somaliland's secessions have been possible had there not been a basis upon which the nationalist leaders could ground their claim? Insofar as the idea of a distinct 'nation'-state was established through colonisation, one could say, paraphrasing Gellner, that the previous colonial state provided the nation with a navel and that, in this respect, some idea of the 'nation' did precede the nationalist ideology. Nationalism might, as Smith argued not appear *ex nihilo*, although the basis for its emergence is not necessarily ethnic.

The fact that secession occurred within the former colonial boundaries, and that it is this former colonial self which provided Eritrea and Somaliland with a basis for nationhood, indicates the extent to which nationalism is linked with the state. More than any other factor, the establishment of the colonial state appears to have been the main pre-condition for the emergence of nationalism in Eritrea and Somaliland. It is this state which provided the basis upon which national identity

would subsequently define itself, and it is within the boundaries of this state that secession occurred. Indeed, and perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects to emerge not only from our study of the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland but also from our discussion of ethnicity in Africa in general, is the importance of territoriality, or more specifically of bounded territory. This is congruent with Anderson's observations concerning the map and the census. These instruments devised by the colonial powers to order and thus control their dominions, provided in turn the grammar of nationalism. Once established and reproduced, the *map-as-logo* then provided the nation with a seemingly tangible reality, upon which secessionist claims would thereafter be grounded.

But although the colonial state and its bounded geography provided the 'nation' with its visible contours, war was to be the catalyst in the process towards nation-formation. As we saw in the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland, it was only in response to the central governments' violent retaliation that the bulk of the population progressively joined the nationalist movements' ranks. By indiscriminately targeting the masses in Eritrea and Somaliland, the Ethiopian and Somali armies, contributed to the crystallisation and polarisation of identities. During the war, the nationalist ideas initially propounded only by a politicised minority sifted into the masses. The deaths incurred were henceforth interpreted as sacrifices made in the name of the nation and the war thus further contributed to the nation-formation process by providing the nation with its emotional appeal and much needed symbols, martyrs and myths. While the colonial state provided the framework upon which the nation could be imagined, war provided the nation with both its psychological dimension and mythical/historical content. In the words of Max Weber:

The community of political destiny, i.e. above all of common political struggle of life and death, has given rise to groups with joint memories which have often had a deeper impact than the ties of merely cultural, linguistic, or ethnic community. It is this 'community of memories' which constitutes the ultimately decisive element of national consciousness.⁹

6.2 – *Secession reconsidered? Africa's boundaries readjusted?*

Given that the independence of both Eritrea and Somaliland have reinstated the former colonial boundaries established in the late nineteenth century during the "scramble for Africa", it could be said that they do not as such challenge the interpretation of the right to self-determination as decolonisation, as described in chapter one. In both cases, self-determination and *uti possidetis* would seem to go hand in hand. The particularity of their cases stems from the fact that their former colonial existence was overridden before the explicit codification of this right in the OAU charter. Somaliland's incorporation in Somalia in 1960, and Eritrea's federation with Ethiopia in 1962 both took place before the 1963 Addis Ababa conference and the creation of the OAU.

Insofar as Eritrea was already a province of Ethiopia by the time of the founding Addis Ababa summit, and, more importantly, at the time of the 1964 Cairo meeting, its claims for self-determination could then be opposed by reference to international law. Moreover, contrary to what Bereket Habte Selassie implies,¹⁰ arguing in favour of Eritrea's independence on the grounds that it was, from 1962 onwards, *colonised* by Ethiopia and that it thus represented an anti-colonial movement for the purposes of international law, may in fact not have provided its claim for national self-determination with an adequate legal support. Indeed, as we will recall, self-determination as decolonisation was guided by the so-called 'salt-

⁹ Weber, Max, *Economy and Society*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978, p. 903.

water principle,' that is resolution 1541 (XV), according to which colonisation seems to be understood as 'overseas' possessions. The extent to which self-determination as decolonisation could thus be considered under these terms with reference to Eritrea and Ethiopia is doubtful. Also, as we have seen, there was and continues to be considerable debate as to whether the abrogation of Eritrea's autonomous status in 1962 was made under 'duress' or not. Under these circumstances, the United Nations' lack of response at the time, while perhaps deplorable, can nevertheless be understood. Moreover, as we have seen, Eritrea's claim to independence was, until imposed by force of arms, opposed by the international community and especially by the US, given the country's strategic location.

As far as Somaliland is concerned, the legal picture is somewhat more confused. Indeed, according to Jan Klabbers and René Lefeber, although 'the secessionist claims of Somaliland would indeed conform to the *uti possidetis* principle,' it could also be that:

again, under international law, Somaliland would be prevented from invoking the *uti possidetis* principle against Somalia, it being the persistent objector. Ironically, this would mean that the *uti possidetis* principle could be invoked in support of the disintegration of Somalia, whereas Somalia could oppose the application of the principle on the basis of past conduct inspired by its irredentist motives.¹¹

Insofar as Somalia could be said to have persistently objected to the validity of *uti possidetis*, the principle could therefore not be invoked against it by Somaliland. But, until the case of Somaliland is fully resolved, it is impossible to say what principle will be invoked to justify its independence. All that can be said, is that current opposition to its legal recognition, be it by neighbouring states or Western powers,

¹⁰ Bereket Habte Selassie, *Eritrea and the United Nations*, Red Sea Press, Trenton, N.J., 1989.

¹¹ Klabbers, Jan, and Lefeber, René, 'Africa: Lost Between Self-Determination and Uti Possidetis,' in: Brölmann, Catherine, Lefeber, René, and Zieck, Marjoleine, *Peoples and Minorities in International Law*, Martin Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1993, p. 69.

appears to be founded more on *realpolitik* considerations than any lack of legal entitlement.

As we can see, the legal background to the right of self-determination of Eritrea and Somaliland is not as clear-cut as might initially have been expected. Of course, in the case of Eritrea, the question no longer holds since its legal status and recognition as a member state of the United Nations was formally ratified following the April 1993 Referendum. Thus, whereas the right of self-determination as decolonisation could not strictly apply to these two cases, the underlying principle of *uti possidetis* is not in itself substantially challenged.

What is interesting to note, given our discussion of ethnicity, is that neither in the case of Eritrea nor Somaliland has the right of self-determination been invoked on the grounds that they constitute ethnic minorities. This, in turn, brings us back to the question of whether the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland support proposals for the ethno-national adjustment of Africa's boundaries? It will now be clear from the above discussion that the answer to this question is negative. What the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland demonstrate is that the main challenges to Africa's boundaries have come, not from traditional African 'ethno-regional opponents' but from movements whose identities were also defined by colonisation. In fact, they support Clapham's contention that

the great majority of the challenges to the territoriality of existing African states were articulated in the name of a territory demarcated under colonial rule, whether as a separate colony or else as a distinct subdivision within a colony.¹²

The case of Eritrea and Somaliland are indeed no mere exceptions. When one looks at the various nationalist challenges that have arisen since decolonisation, one is

¹² Clapham, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

struck by how many have based their claims on a previously established colonial territory, and how few have appealed to an ethno-cultural self. In addition to Eritrea and Somaliland, one could draw another example from the Horn of Africa, that of Southern Sudan.

With the exception of a lull in fighting between 1972 and 1983, Sudan has been engulfed in a civil war that, since 1963, has opposed the South to the North.¹³ Southern Sudan's demand for national self-determination has oscillated between calls for greater autonomy within a federal Sudan and outright independence. Since it is itself multi-ethnic, such claims have not been made with reference to ethnicity. And, contrary to what is sometimes claimed, the reality is more complex than it being simply a conflict which opposes Muslims to Christians.¹⁴ The history of the Southern Sudan's claim to self-determination can in fact be traced back to the colonial period. The South was not only governed by Britain separately under a distinct colonial army (the Equatoria corps), but movements between North and South were further limited in 1940 with the introduction of a special pass system which restricted northerners' entrance into Southern Sudan.

Until 1946, it was considered necessary to protect the south from northern depredations. Arabic was prohibited, all Arabic names removed, and Christian missionaries, who were excluded from the north, were allowed to proselytise in the south. This move was to have profound implications for the future: as a result of missionary activity, ethnic differences between northern Arabs and Southern Africans were reinforced by a religious difference. Only about 15% of southern Sudanese are Christian, but they include most of the first generation of southern nationalists.¹⁵

¹³ Clapham, 1996, *op. cit.*, p.49. See also, Markakis, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-56; Woodward, Peter, *War – or Peace – in North-East Africa?* The Centre for Security and Conflict Studies, London, 1989.

¹⁴ As explained by Peter Woodward, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Mayall and Simpson, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

From the outset, Southern Sudan has invoked the fact that it was under British colonisation administered differently from the rest of Sudan to support its claim to self-determination.

The rest of Africa offers similar cases where territorial revision is made with reference to a distinct colonial self. The claims made by Camerounian nationalists in the 1940s and 1950s for instance, did not stem from a longing for a precolonial past but were instead aimed at re-establishing the pre-1918 boundaries of the German colonial period.¹⁶ The successive attempts made by Togolese nationalist movements in Ghana to be united with the Togo Republic, often depicted as the expression of Ewe ethnonationalism, were justified not by reference to their common ethnicity but by a desire to return to what was German Togoland before its partition between French and British Togoland in 1918.¹⁷ Similarly, the different cases of Biafra/Nigeria, Katanga/Zaire, Cabinda/Angola and Lozi/Zambia are instances of secessionist movements in Africa that have made reference to distinct colonial experiences to legitimise their claims for self-government.¹⁸ As Neuberger remarks, it would be 'quite misleading to identify all revisionists with a total and principled opposition to any colonial border, treaty or declaration.'¹⁹ And it could be further added that most demands for territorial revision, rather than rejecting the colonial legacy, have only further emphasised its importance.

The fact that in all these cases, claims to independence drew 'on the same principles of territoriality as did most post-colonial independent African states',²⁰ forces us in turn to consider the diagnosis upon which the ethno-national boundary

¹⁶ Neuberger, Benjamin, *National Self-Determination in Postcolonial Africa*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 1986, p. 29.

¹⁷ Clapham, 1996, *op.cit.*, p. 47; Neuberger, 1986, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Neuberger, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

adjustment 'cure' is founded. Does the source of Africa's problems really reside in the 'artificial' nature of its colonially drawn state boundaries? If anything, the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland would suggest that they do not, since they restore the boundaries of former colonial states. Moreover, as our discussion of ethnicity in Africa indicated, it might be erroneous to suggest that claims by ethnic groups are more 'authentic', because traditionally rooted, than those made by territorially defined identities. Both, as we have seen, were the products of colonialism, and both should thus be treated equally. Therefore, if a right to secession were to be considered, it would seem unjust to consider the claims made by groups defined as ethnic as being more legitimate than those made by groups who do not. And while it may be regrettable that current practice only acknowledges secessionist demands made forcibly, there is some wisdom in maintaining the ambiguous notion of 'peoples'. Any proposal in favour of a right of self-determination as secession or, as it has become more fashionable to say, territorial partition, premised on the belief that objective criteria exist and that a 'people' can be easily identified, may in fact not only be jeopardising international order and stability, but also commit an injustice.

6.3 – The international dimensions of nationalism

By showing that nationalism is not rooted in pre-modern ethnicity, this thesis has sought to challenge the notion that nationalism is quintessentially a domestic phenomenon. This in turn opens the way towards examination of the international dimensions of nationalism. Indeed, although the factors identified by modernist theories of nationalism may at first appear to be essentially domestic, it is important

²⁰ Clapham, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

to note that many are themselves the outcome of international processes. The most obvious amongst these are the state itself, imbued with the notion of territorial sovereignty, and the principle of self-determination. Insofar as the state embodies these two principles, its 'piratisation' is the most important international factor in the world-wide diffusion of nationalism. Also significant, is the role played by international organisations, transnational actors and expatriate or diaspora communities. But before we consider how these international actors contribute to the emergence and spread of nationalism, let us first briefly recall how the principle of self-determination acquired international legitimacy and how it influenced the diffusion of nationalism.

International norms and values

When retracing the origins and history of the principle of national self-determination, chapter one indicated how current understanding of nationalism had emerged out of the German reaction to the Napoleonic invasions and the diffusion of the ideals propounded by the French Revolution. It was then that nationalism, originally conceived of as democracy, came to acquire its cultural dimension. National self-determination gained further importance during the First World War, and more specifically as a result of the Russian Revolution. Indeed, as Cobban noted:

One of the first steps of the Russian Provisional Government was to announce, in March 1917, that its aim was the establishment of peace on the basis of 'the right of the nations to decide their own destinies.' With this declaration the ice broke, and the damned-up waters of nationality began a wild rush which was to sweep onward until the end of the war and beyond, in an increasingly powerful and ultimately uncontrollable torrent.²¹

From that moment onwards, the Allied powers no longer refrained from invoking the principle of nationality in response to the Austrian and German use of the national

appeal. As the Central and Allied powers ‘manipulated’ the force of nationality to their own ends, they hastened the dismemberment of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires.

Although Wilson’s proposal that it should be included in the League of Nations Covenant was ultimately rejected, the principle had nevertheless come to achieve universal legitimacy. Self-determination was then advocated, in the second half the twentieth century, by the world’s two superpowers and the United Nations with reference to colonialism. The decolonisation movement, in turn, further strengthened the legitimacy of the principle of self-determination. Indeed, as was suggested in the introduction, the resurgence of nationalism in the 1970s in the West could indeed be interpreted as the result of the renewed impetus self-determination acquired through decolonisation.

It should be noted that the principle of self-determination is only meaningful insofar as it is linked to the notion of sovereignty. Indeed, it could be argued that by propounding that the international system should be premised on the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, the Westphalian settlement insured that self-government would be ‘imagined’ in territorial terms. Not only does international society’s prevailing norms and values – the principle of self-determination, with its dual connotation as cultural distinctiveness and self-government, and sovereignty – favour the expression of nationalism, but so does state behaviour itself.

Inter-state rivalry

By pursuing their national interests, states may act in a way which contributes to the propagation and exacerbation of nationalism. As was argued throughout the thesis,

²¹ Cobban, 1945, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

war is important catalyst in the process of nation-formation. And, although our discussion mainly focussed on the effect of wars for national liberation, the impact of the 1977-78 war between Somalia and Ethiopia, and, perhaps more importantly, the Cold War must also be considered. Cobban's remark, with reference to the First World War, that 'national liberation was to be, as it had been in the time of Napoleon, a by-product of war', could indeed be taken as broader principle.²²

The influence of inter-state rivalry on the rise of nationalism was also described by Morgenthau:

The new nation states competed with each other for power and were at the same time the pawns of the great powers in their struggle for hegemony, the national minorities became to an ever greater extent, as it were, sub-pawns whose aspirations and grievances the contestants used to strengthen themselves and their friends and weaken their enemies.²³

The way in which nationalities or ethnicities are played up by states competing against each other is clearly illustrated in the Horn of Africa where regional states have frequently provided sanctuary and arms to various liberation movements in an effort to destabilise and weaken their neighbours. Whereas Mengistu's Ethiopia sheltered for some time the Somali National Movement as part of its strategy to undermine Barre's Somalia, Eritrea's liberation fronts benefited at one time or another from Sudan's conflictual relations with Ethiopia. This process has continued throughout the 1990s, as Eritrea, for example, is now assisting Sudanese opposition to Khartoum.

It is significant that the principle's appearance on the world stage should result from a combination of power-political and legalistic principles, with the latter, to some extent, justifying rather than opposing the former. This only further

²² Cobban, 1945, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²³ Morgenthau, 1957, *op. cit.*, 486.

illustrates how institutionalist and realist arguments and processes might in fact not be as antagonistic as often portrayed in the IR literature. The institutional and legal frameworks drawn up internationally with regard to the principle of nationalities or ethnicities reflect an attempt to control not only internal fragmentation but also inter-state rivalries.

International organisations

This brings us to the role played by international organisations in the propagation and further legitimisation of the notions of nationalism and ethnicity. Susan Woodward has shown how the international response to the Yugoslav crisis contributed to its politicisation along ethnic lines.²⁴ The first step towards this was the adoption in the early 1980s of IMF's structural adjustment policies. The scarcity of resources increased tensions between the republics and the federal government. Then, in March 1991, the European Parliament adopted a resolution which declared that 'the constituent Republics and autonomous provinces of Yugoslavia', had the right, 'freely to determine their own future in a peaceful and democratic manner and on the basis of recognised international and internal borders.'²⁵ This resolution, for all intents and purposes, acknowledged the international character of the Republics' internal borders and legitimised Slovenia and Croatia's secessions. But as Susan Woodward asks:

If the international community had recognized sovereignty on grounds other than national self-determination, would politicians and intellectuals in the

²⁴ Woodward, Susan, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1995.

²⁵ European Parliament Resolution on Yugoslavia, clause 8, cited in Woodward, Susan, 'Redrawing Borders in a Period of Systemic Transition', in: Esman, Milton J., and Telhami, Shibley (eds), *International Organizations and Ethnic Conflict*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, p. 208.

former Yugoslavia have been able to exploit ethnic differences for political gains?²⁶

As we saw in the case of Somalia, UNOSOM's attempt to rebuild the collapsed state was premised on the assumption that the sources of the conflict resided in Somali society's inherently antagonistic clanic nature. Much energy was thus deployed in organising conferences on the basis of so-called clan affiliations, such as the Harti conferences in 1993 and 1994. Although this particular attempt, as we saw, back-fired, it is nevertheless revealing of the way international organisations may have inadvertently contributed to the future polarisation of Somali society along clan lines.

Transnational actors

Having thus examined how states and inter-governmental organisations may contribute to the politicisation of conflict along national or ethnic lines, one should also consider how transnational actors influence the emergence and spread of nationalism. Chapter three highlighted the role played by the Afro-American community in the rise of nationalism in Africa, and, in particular, that of the Afro-American intellectuals and Church leaders. The role of the Church was further illustrated by the fact that many nationalist leaders had been educated in Western Missions. Missionaries, alongside early anthropologists, explorers and census-takers were also seen as having influenced the crystallisation of identities along ethnic lines. And we may also recall how active international involvement in the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict was initiated in the early 1980s by an ecumenical NGO consortium, the Emergency Relief Desk.

Mention should also be made of the role played by expatriate communities in the origins of nationalism. As the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland showed, exiled

²⁶ Woodward, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

intellectuals were at the forefront of the nationalist movements. Indeed, both the ELF and the SNM were created abroad and the importance of the international context is here apparent. The ELF was set up by students studying in Sudan and exposed to the wave of nationalism that was then embracing the Middle-East and African continent. Most debates about Eritrea's status took place among students studying in North America and Europe and in the pages of the journal they published. Also noted was the financial support provided by exiled or diaspora communities to the national liberation movements in Eritrea and Somaliland, financial support which continues to be important today. These same communities, more or less successfully, have attempted to influence the governments of their respective host countries.²⁷

The fact that nationalism owes as much to international processes as it does to domestic ones should perhaps not be altogether surprising since as Turton aptly noted:

One cannot 'think' locally unless one has already an idea of a global context in which localities can co-exist. One cannot assert a right to local identity and self-determination except by appealing to some general principles. To make such claim, then, is also to assert a global identity.²⁸

That nationalism can only be conceived in an international context only further confirms Mayall's suggestion that nationalism and globalisation are not contradictory but symbiotic trends, 'appearing in the world together and constantly reinforcing one another'.²⁹

²⁷ Members of the Somaliland community in London, for example, are making pressures on the British Foreign Office so that their country's independence may be recognised.

²⁸ Turton, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁹ Mayall, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

6.4 – Implications of our critique of the ethnic interpretation

In his foreword to Patrick Moynihan's *Pandemonium. Ethnicity and International Politics*, Adam Roberts wrote that the fact that concept of ethnicity is nowhere defined in this book was not itself problematic and added that: 'Whether or not it is right to apply the term "ethnic" to all these conflicts is not very important.'³⁰ What was significant, Roberts argued, quoting Kissinger's response to Moynihan, was that Moynihan's 'crystal ball was better' than Kissinger's. In other words, the implication seemed to be, that the ethnic template provided a better predictor than power politics. While it is perhaps true that definitional quibbles about the meaning of ethnicity may be tediously academic, describing today's manifold conflicts as ethnically driven is not without consequences. While not denying the fact that a number of conflicts do indeed display ethnic characteristics, one should be cautious not to confuse attribute and cause. Indeed, many of those who speak of conflicts as ethnic tend to assume that their sources are psycho-historical, not political, economic and international. And, as Susan Woodward has argued with regard to Yugoslavia, failure to adequately identify the sources of such conflicts, blinded by the ethnic label, may in turn compromise our ability to respond to these.³¹

We described earlier how ethnically informed international responses to the crises in Yugoslavia and Somalia might have only contributed to further 'ethnicising' these conflicts. Similar potential dangers arise from proposals for ethnic partition. It has been suggested that when conflicts become polarised along ethnic lines, the only remaining option and solution is territorial partition. Among those authors that have advocated such a solution are John Mersheimer, with reference to Yugoslavia, and

³⁰ Roberts, Adam, 'Foreword', in: Moynihan, Patrick, *Pandemonium. Ethnicity and International Politics*, Oxford, University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. x.

Chaim Kaufman as a more comprehensive blueprint. We will begin by discussing the latter, since his treatment of the question is more comprehensive and the argument more explicitly stated.

According to Kaufman whatever a conflict's origins may be, once identities have become ethnically polarised, ethnic partition is the best remaining option. Kaufman substantiates his prescription by drawing from the data compiled by Ted Robert Gurr on ethnopolitical conflicts between 1944 and 1994,³² and examining twenty-seven ethnic civil wars that have ended. Of these, writes Kaufman:

Twelve were ended by complete victory of one side, five by *de jure* or *de facto* partition, and two have been suppressed by military occupation by a third party. Only eight ethnic civil wars have been ended by an agreement that did not partition the country.³³

The data, Kaufman concludes, 'supports the argument that separation of groups is the key to ending ethnic civil wars.' Notwithstanding the fact that this conclusion rests on only five of twenty-seven cases, there is an additional problem with this statement. Among those five *de jure* or *de facto* partitions upon which Kaufman finds support in favour of ethnic partition are: the Eritreans vs. Ethiopia 'ethnic civil war' of 1961-1991, successfully resolved by Eritrea's independence, and the Somali clans 'ethnic civil war', successfully resolved by *de facto* partition in the North, although war is ongoing in the South.³⁴ As this thesis has argued, neither case can be considered to be 'ethnic' civil wars. Moreover, with the resumption of hostilities

³¹ Woodward, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-234.

³² Kaufman, Chaim, 'Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars', in: Brown, Michael, Coté, Owen R., Lynn-Jones, Sean M., and Steven E. Miller, (eds), *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1997. Kaufman's article was originally published in: *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Spring 1996. The data set Kaufman uses combines two overlapping sets presented by Gurr, Ted Robert, in: *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 1993, pp. 296-97, and in: 'Peoples Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3, September 1994, pp. 347-77.

³³ Kaufman, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

between Ethiopia and Eritrea in May 1998, albeit on an international rather than internal level, partition can hardly be said to have put an end to the war. This leads us to consider Mearsheimer's proposals with regard to Yugoslavia.

In March 1993, John Mearsheimer wrote that in order to stop the ongoing conflict Bosnia should be partitioned along ethnic lines.³⁵ More recently, he advocated Kosovo's division between Serbs and Kosovars.³⁶ It is perhaps ironic that such Wilsonian inspired proposals should have been made by someone like Mearsheimer, notorious for his critique of the idealist/institutionalist approach to IR. Although, according to Kaufman, Mearsheimer sees ethnic partition as justified on humanitarian grounds and should thus be distinguished from those who advocate the implementation of the principle of national self-determination, the underlying assumption is, at the end of the day, the same. National/ethnic self-determination is understood as a means to world/regional peace.

The fact that ethnic partition was not implemented in the case of Bosnia, and does not seem likely to be considered in the Kosovo, should not necessarily be interpreted as a reflection of a commitment to multi-ethnic societies. It could simply be that today's leaders are motivated by the same fears that prevented their predecessors from endorsing an international right of secession, namely, the consequences of the domino effect on their own internal stability. While it might be argued that the situation on the ground in Bosnia and Kosovo is very much one of *de facto* ethnic partition, it is not certain that it vindicates proposals for ethnic partition.

³⁴ Kaufman, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 289, Table 1. Ethnic Civil Wars Resolved 1944-94. The other three cases are: Ukrainians vs. USSR, Lithuanians vs. USSR, and Armenians vs. Azerbaijan.

³⁵ Mearsheimer, John, 'Shrink Bosnia to save it', *New York Times*, March 31, 1993, and Mearsheimer, John J. and Pape, Robert, 'The Answer: A partition Plan for Bosnia,' *The New Republic*, June 14, 1993, pp. 22-28.

³⁶ Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Van Evera, 'Autonomy for Kosovars is No Longer an Option', *International Herald Tribune*, Tuesday, April 20, 1999.

Indeed, if one lesson to be drawn from the history of the Balkans and from our study of Eritrea and Somaliland, it is that once established, boundaries will only be changed at great cost.³⁷ Redrawing once more the boundaries in the Balkans might only trigger conflicts of even greater scale than those so far witnessed and may sow the seeds of conflict for future generations. It is a bit like cutting a new wound in order to heal a previous one.

The ethnic interpretation has also affected some scholars reading of the Cold War, particularly in the context of Africa's current crises. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear in academic conferences the Cold War being nostalgically remembered as a time when order prevailed in Africa, a time when superpowers imposed a semblance of peace on African affairs. Now that this structure has vanished, the argument goes, Africa has reverted into tribal conflict. Such assessment is not only patronising, but it fails to acknowledge that many of today's internal conflicts were only forcibly stifled and hidden from international gaze thanks to the extraordinary military assistance the superpowers, and other powers, gave state representatives. It also ignores that if such conflicts are now so violent and protracted it is only because they were for the last three decades violently repressed. Had the superpowers not enabled and tacitly encouraged some of Africa's governments to respond to internal dissent through violence, perhaps other avenues might then have been considered and today's conflicts been, at least reduced, if not avoided.

Since the end of the Cold War, ethnicity has achieved a quasi-paradigmatic status in attempts to explain the outbreak of violent conflict. This framework has [mis]guided states, international organisations and non-governmental organisations' responses to civil conflicts in Africa and arguably in the former Yugoslavia. By

³⁷ For a similar argument see: Mayall, James, 'Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Self-determination,'

adopting the ethnic template, a number of academics, journalists and members of the 'international community' have prescribed and implemented policies which may have only further exacerbated these conflicts and whose long-term impacts may be more harmful than initially believed. Again, communal differences are not denied, what is questioned is their initial causal power. What this thesis has sought to show is that ethnicity or any other ascriptive identity, cannot by and in itself explain phenomena that might otherwise be better understood with the help of a more 'traditional' realist understanding of politics which takes into account individual interest and greed for both power and wealth.

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