

Organisational Culture at War: Ethiopian Decision-making and the War with Eritrea (1998-2000)

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Abstract

Although the Eritrean-Ethiopian war (1998-2000) has been analysed by a large number of researchers, the impact of organisational culture on the war has been neglected. This thesis employs the constructivist theories of Elizabeth Kier in order to examine the impact of organisational culture on Ethiopian decision-making before and during the war and uses the findings to produce policy advice for this and other conflicts.

The thesis' main contribution to the study of the specific Eritrean-Ethiopian war is the revelation that organisational culture in a variety of organisations had serious effects on the bilateral relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia, effects that can not be explained by ethnically, economically or geographically defined factors. The thesis' main contribution to the field of peace research is a strong warning: calling for caution when policy makers want to apply some of the more generally prescribed policy guidelines within the field, and controversially suggesting that some of the most common advice, as for example the advice to support the oppositional press in order to promote peace, might, if not planned properly, lead to more conflict rather than promote peace.

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Stig Jarle Hansen,
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Acronyms and Glossary

ANDM (Amhara National Democratic Movement): ANDM, the second most important organisation within the ruling party of Ethiopia, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), originated in a splinter group from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), called Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM). The organisation was established in 1981. It was reorganised along ethnical lines and changed its name to ANDM in 1991. Oromo members then left for the OPDO.

AAPO (All Amhara People's Organisation): Oppositional party organised by Amhara intellectuals after EPRDF's takeover in 1991. The organisation has close links with the newspaper ANDINET. Today AAPO has changed its name to All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) in order to reflect a broader ethnic basis. It is also a member of the largest oppositional umbrella party in Ethiopia, the Coalition for Unity and Development (CUD).

Bado Shewate (The 7th Unit): The security unit of the TPLF, in charge of internal and external security.

Derg: Amharic for 'committee'. It became the popular name for the post-imperial and supposedly Marxist Ethiopian regime which lasted from 1974, when Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed, until 1991.

Dimitse Weyane Bitew (The Voice of Weyane): TPLF's Radio Station

EDU (Ethiopian Democratic Union): Originating from the organisation Teranafit, organised around nobility struggling to re-impose the monarchy after the revolution in 1974. In the 1970's EDU was supported by the United States. Today the organisation is a political party in Ethiopia, within the UEDP-Medhin coalition that in turn is a member of the largest oppositional umbrella party in Ethiopia, the Coalition for Unity and Development (CUD).

EFFORT (Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray): Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF)-controlled NGO promoting development in Tigray

EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front): Formed by an amalgamation of disenchanted members of the older Ethiopian Liberation Front (ELF) in the early 1970's, the EPLF was predominantly led by, and composed of, Tigrinya-speaking highland Christians but it also sought to recruit beyond the highland provinces of Eritrea. Purportedly secular, it adopted Marxist rhetoric (and a number of apparently Marxist policies) in its early years.

EPRDF (The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front): The umbrella organisation currently governing Ethiopia. EPRDF consists of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), which are the two oldest organisations, as well as the newer Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF) and a large number of smaller ethnically based organisations.

EPRP (The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party): EPRP emerged in the mid-1970s as one of the main opposition organisations working against the Derg. It also exists today as a component of the largest oppositional alliance.

ESM (Ethiopian Student Movement): Name used for the student activists politically active in Ethiopian universities during the late 60's, early 70's. These students later led all of the powerful Ethiopian political organisations. Arguably, ESM also influenced the political direction of the Derg. These students are also often called the Generation or the Generation that shook the mountains.

Kebele: The smallest geographically defined administrative unit in Ethiopia

MLLT (Marxist Leninist League of Tigray): Marxist cadre organisation within the TPLF containing more or less all of TPLF's leaders. MLLT has never been officially abandoned.

Nakfa: Eritrean currency from 1998 and onwards

OLF (Oromo Liberation Front): An organisation fighting for the rights of the Oromo ethnic group. OLF fought the Derg from 1973 until the Derg's fall in 1991. From 1991 until 1992 OLF was in alliance with the EPRDF. The organisation clashed with the EPRDF during the 1992 elections, and it is today banned in Ethiopia.

OPDO (Oromo People's Democratic Organisation): Established in 1989 as an organisation for Oromos within the EPRDF. Originally it consisted of many officers from the Derg that had changed sides. However, former Oromo EPRP members joined OPDO from 1991 and onwards. Other OPDO leaders came from the EPDM when this organisation became an Amhara based organisation in 1991.

Palace Group: Nickname for Meles Zenawi's supporters during the showdown between the two factions within the TPLF in Mekele 2001. The nickname indicates the supporters' supposed lack of contact with Tigray.

PFDJ (Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice): The new name of the EPLF, and also, in effect, the only legal party in Eritrea today.

Shemek: Special force units of the Derg specialising in counter insurgency operations (COIN), anti - guerrilla warfare.

SEPDF (Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front): The weakest of the larger EPRDF organisations. It is in itself an umbrella organisation consisting of many smaller ethnically defined organisations representing ethnic minorities in the South Western Ethiopia.

Tigray: The northernmost province of Ethiopia which is inhabited by predominantly Tigrinya (see below) speaking people, and therefore sharing much in the way of culture, language and history with adjacent highland Eritrea.

Tigrinya: The dominant language of highland Eritrea and much of Tigray, and therefore shared by the EPLF and the TPLF. The term can also be used to refer to culture and custom in the same areas.

TNO (Tigrayan National Organisation): Originally named Mahber Gesgesti Bihere Tigray (MAGEBT), it is the predecessor of TPLF.

TPLF (The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front): The organisation emerged in 1974–5 from the TNO. By the late 1970's it was the dominant movement in Tigrayan nationalist politics, having largely cleared the field of both local and pan-Ethiopian rivals. A primarily guerrilla movement, generally eschewing conventional warfare until the late 1980's, it was deeply rooted in the Tigrayan peasantry although its leaders were mostly middle class and educated and, like the EPLF, inspired by Marxism in thought. TPLF is the most important party within the EPRDF.

TUSA (Tigrayan University Student Organisation): Organisation for Tigrayan Students at the Addis Ababa University during the early 1970's; many of the future TPLF leaders were members of the organisation.

UNMEE (United Nations Mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia): The United Nation Peace Keepers stationed at the Eritrean-Ethiopian border to oversee the implementation of the Algiers Peace Agreement

Weyane: Popular Tigrayan rebellion against the Emperor in 1943, crushed by Ethiopian and British forces.

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NOTE:

REGARDING THE SPELLING OF PROPER NAMES: Proper names in Ethiopia and Eritrea tend to be spelled in various ways. In this thesis one version has been chosen for each person/place. However, in direct quotations, the spelling has been kept as in the original.

Introduction

On 6th May 1998 patrols of the Eritrean army clashed with Ethiopian militia. Seemingly surprising both of the belligerents, the initial small-scale clash developed into a full-scale war, involving around half a million soldiers.¹ It was a war fought between two of the poorest countries in the world and diverted money from healthcare and development projects. 140 000 Eritreans and Ethiopians lost their lives before the war ended, and over one million refugees fled their homes.² Moreover, the belligerents involved their local allies in Somalia, leading to conflict in yet another poor country. The war thus had large consequences for a substantial number of people and was a tragedy for the millions living in these areas of the Horn.

Foreign observers were puzzled by the outbreak of the armed conflict. The two belligerents had previously been seen as good friends and their leaders had been regarded as members of a new generation of African leaders, supposedly promoting democratisation, peace and development.³ The war was also puzzling given many of the theories exploring the general causes of war. One could not, as the researcher Samuel Huntington does, speak of a clash of civilisations. Members of the “Muslim civilization” were killing each other, as were members of the “Christian civilization”. Both countries were internally divided by religion, nevertheless they also easily managed to keep a united front outwards.⁴ Similarly, explanations centred on ethnicity and tribalism, which are often viewed as Africa’s great plague, seem to be unable to explain the war. Ethnic groups were divided and fought internal wars, members of ethnic groups in Ethiopia fought their ethnic kinsmen with Eritrean citizenship. Faced with this seemingly unexplainable war, some western observers resorted to the terminology of madness.⁵

This thesis enquires into the causes of this so-called madness, as well as the factors that hindered the various attempts to end the war after it had started. The main objective of the thesis is to reveal new aspects of the process that led to the armed conflict.⁶ It will do this

¹ This estimate includes the Aideed Somali National Army (SNA) fraction in Somalia, the Rahanwein Resistance Army (RRA), The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), and the Ogadeen National Liberation Front (ONLF), guerrilla groups involved in the fighting at various stages. The two belligerents themselves fielded 440 000 soldiers

² Human Rights Watch, "Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 - April 2002)," (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), 3.

³ See for example Marina Ottoway, "Africa's New Leaders: African Solution or African Problem?," *Current History* 97, no. 5 (1998), "Old Comrades Spurn Peace in Horn of Africa.," *The London Times* 9 June 1998.

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

⁵ "Intervju Med Torbjørn Jagland," *Verdens Gang* 1 October 1998.

⁶ Wallensteen and Sollenberg define major armed conflict as a prolonged combat between two or more governments or of one government and at least one organised armed group, with at least 1000 deaths in the duration of conflict. Their definition

in order to create policy guidelines that can be employed to avoid war or to ease tension between the two belligerents. Given the many questions left open even five years since the war ended, and the still tense situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the purpose of the thesis holds a grim actuality.

In order to attain its objective, the thesis draws upon constructivist-based organisational theory, never previously employed to study the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. The thesis examines some of the most important organisations in Ethiopian society: the newspapers and the various member organisations of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), their organisational culture and its impact on the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. Importantly, the thesis explores factors preventing the restoration of peace after the war had broken out as well as factors leading up to the war.

Addressing Problems within Peace Research

The scope of the thesis goes beyond providing new insights with regards to the factors causing the war. The thesis is situated within the field of peace research, and by providing policy guidelines it attempts to deal with some of the problems facing the discipline.

Present-day European peace research was essentially shaped by the East–West conflict. Much of the research conducted during the Cold War focused on the Cold-War frontlines in Europe. Researchers had been studying the rest of the world, but most commonly analyzed it in the light of the Cold War.⁷ When the East-West relationship changed, peace research in many ways lost its foundation. As the peace researcher Christian Scherrer argues, researchers now had to confront cases like Rwanda and Somalia, not the well known bipolar world of the Cold War. Notably, the peace researchers failed to have an impact on these new wars, and often failed to have influence on strategies chosen by decision-makers.⁸ Christian Scherrer gives the causes for the many failures:

They had to do, firstly, with the way in which most peace-research facilities were concentrated in and on Europe and North America (and not on the major

will be used in this thesis. Peter Wallensteen, and Margareta Sollenberg, "Major Armed Conflicts," in *Sipri Yearbook 1997*, ed. Margareta Sollenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 17.

⁷ Christian P Scherrer, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Priorities* (Moers: Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution (IFEK-IRECOR), 2001), 1-10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

areas of conflict), secondly, with the fact that in many countries peace and conflict research was still subsumed under military sociology, and thirdly, with the sad state of empirical research and the almost total lack of on-the-spot knowledge of violent conflict. The latter had and still has probably the most serious impact on the outcomes of established peace and conflict research. The balance between the theoretical and empirical work is missing, hence there is little corrective against speculative research outcomes.⁹

Although there are many exceptions to this trend Christian P. Scherrer rightly argues that there are enormous gaps in peace research.¹⁰ He argues that there are massive lacks in in-depth local knowledge, as well as in knowledge of the practical implementation of ideas and strategies of preventive and constructive conflict resolution. By exploring the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, some shortcomings of the general theories within peace research, hampering the construction of good policy guidelines, are addressed. Additionally, new policy advice, based on local knowledge, is designed. In this way the thesis contributes to the general field of peace research, by re-evaluating some of the standard advice given by peace researchers, as well as by providing new policy advice.

Because of the current tense situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia, such advice might still be needed to address this particular conflict. Policy advice deduced from the Eritrean-Ethiopian case might also be useful in order to address other wars as well.

Utilising Constructivism in Order to Explore New Aspects of the Conflict

The Eritrean-Ethiopian war has been studied in detail by area specialists.¹¹ Most of the researchers studying the war focus on three different factors. The first is a focus on states, the second is a focus on the historical and cultural factors influencing ethnic groups and the third is a focus on individual self-interest. This thesis takes a different approach. Focusing on

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹ Kinfu Abraham, *Ethio-Eritrean History, Liberation Struggle, Statehood and Bilateral Political Economic Social and Diplomatic Relations, and the Ethio-Eritrean War* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development, 2004), Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000), Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "Conflict in the Horn: Why Eritrea and Ethiopia Are at War," *Briefing paper, New Series*, no. 6 (1999), Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming).

organisational culture, it argues that organisational culture and organisational interaction also had a negative impact on Eritrean-Ethiopian relations. Studying a level of decision-making seldom studied in the case of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, it thus opens up new grounds for future research. Similarly, it goes beyond the most common general approaches to the study of war. While statistical and more holistic approaches to war might disclose important facts about conflicts, they often compare states and/or ethnic groups and view them as homogenous entities. The constructivist theorist used in this thesis, Elizabeth Kier, warns explicitly against this focus. Her claim is that sub-groups within a society, such as for example organisations, can have distinct cultures, and that the interaction between these sub-groups will influence the decision making of a state.¹² A Kieran approach will thus put focus on more or less neglected elements of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war, so in this sense the thesis also contributes to the specific study of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war.

The theories of Elizabeth Kier are widely regarded as a part of the wider constructivist research approach. Constructivism focuses on how actors or groups form their understanding of the world through social interaction, an understanding that eventually influences their actions and defines goals and the available means to achieve them. Such an understanding might in turn influence new actions that contribute to armed conflict. Moreover, the constructivist approach has seldom been employed in order to understand war, and this thesis thus focuses on social processes that previously have been almost entirely left out of the study of most other wars.¹³

This thesis has three central research questions. These questions are designed to identify relevant information, and subsequently to use such information to produce policy advice.

The questions are:

- 1) Did the organisational culture of key actors influence Ethiopian decision-making before and during the Eritrean-Ethiopian war in ways that promoted war or prevented peace?

- 2) If so, where did such negative traits of organisational culture originate?

¹² Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹³ Erik Rigmar's study of the Swedish intervention in the thirty years war is perhaps the exception. Erik Rigmar, *Identity, Interest and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

- 3) Given the answers to questions one and two, what kind of policy advice can be given in order to promote peace?

These questions will form the basis of the analysis conducted in this thesis. Importantly, the aim of the thesis is not to falsify other theories, but to contribute to the formation of policy advice. This means that the results can be complementary to several of the previous theories exploring the Ethiopian-Eritrean war, as well as theories exploring other wars.

Chapter Outline

In order to analyse the role of organisational culture in the Eritrean-Ethiopian war and to deduce policy advices based on such an analysis, it is first necessary to establish an appropriate theoretical and methodological framework, then to proceed by using this framework to examine the organisational culture of influential organisations and then subsequently use the findings of such an analysis to explore policy advice. Correspondingly, this thesis is divided into three parts: the first part deals with methodology and theory, the second part with the analysis of the organisations and the third part with the exploration of policy advice.

Chapter one, part one, provides a short introduction to peace research and discusses its normative foundations situating this thesis within an activist/ problem-solving tradition of peace research. Moreover, the chapter presents an introduction to constructivism, and presents Elizabeth Kier's version of constructivism in more detail. It demonstrates how a focus on organisational culture highlights aspects of decision-making procedures seldom studied in relation to the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. Chapter two details the research methods used in this thesis: process tracing, interviews, interview techniques and the study of written sources. Methodology and methods are a way to ensure that the information gathered holds high quality, and subsequently ensures that the policy advice given has a solid foundation.

Part two of the thesis, consisting of chapters three, four, five, six and seven, explores the various organisational cultures with influence on the process leading up to the war. This part also explores how organisational culture influenced the peace process after the war had started. The main argument is that elements of the organisational culture of several

organisations had a negative impact on the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. Chapter three argues that previous approaches have neglected the elements of the organisational culture that influenced the process leading to the war. Moreover, the chapter argues that previous approaches almost entirely neglected sub-group interaction within important organisations, a level of analysis that can be examined by employing Elizabeth Kier's theories. In chapters four, five, six and seven Kier's theories are used to analyse various organisations in Ethiopian society, organisations that play a big role in Ethiopia's public life. The first of these chapters examines the organisational culture of the Ethiopian newspapers. It explores how the rhetoric from the previous regime, the Derg, remained important amongst several newspapers, even after the regime fell, and argues that this was partly because of organisational culture. Subsequently it argues that this influenced the general coverage of the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship, resulting in a newspaper coverage pushing for a more hawkish policy towards Eritrea.

The next chapter moves from the newspapers influencing the public discourses in Ethiopia to the umbrella organisation governing in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (EPRDF). Chapter five argues that the EPRDF's past ideology, Marxism, influenced their decision making even after it had been officially rejected. Based on primary interviews with persons who have not previously spoken about the war, the chapter argues that remaining Marxist elements in the organisational culture hindered peace/ border negotiations when mediators associated with their old ideological enemies tried to facilitate this/were engaged in parallel negotiations. Remaining old ideological assumptions made groups within the EPRDF perceive third parties as linked to Eritrea. Chapter six narrows the focus, focusing on the two most important organisations within the EPRDF, namely the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM). The chapter explores the guerrilla traditions of these organisations, and, drawing upon interviews with key EPRDF party officials never interviewed on these topics before, demonstrates that these traditions produced a habitual tendency to focus on secrecy and security that subsequently created problems for the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. Chapter seven makes a detailed analysis of the most powerful organisation within the EPRDF, the TPLF. It argues that the TPLF's almost obsessive worship of Tigrayan farmers, which was entrenched in their organisational culture, allowed the tension to increase in Tigray, as local authorities failed to deal with locally initiated actions targeting Eritreans.

The third and last part of the thesis deduces policy guidelines. Chapter eight presents the new insights that can be gained from the analysis, thus contributing to the specific study of

the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. The chapter uses these new insights in order to re-examine and change some of the traditional policy advice given by peace researchers as well as to stipulate new policy guidelines. In this way it contributes to the general field of peace research.

The main contribution to the field of peace research is a strong warning, a call for caution when policy makers want to apply some of the more generally prescribed policy guidelines within the field: the thesis controversially suggests that some of the most common advice, such as for example the advice to support the oppositional press in order to promote peace, might, if not planned properly, lead to more conflict rather than promote peace. The main contribution to the study of the specific Eritrean Ethiopian war is the revelation that organisational culture in a variety of organisations had serious effects on the bilateral relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia, effects that can not be explained by ethnically, economically or geographically defined factors.¹⁴ In this sense the thesis contains a second warning, addressed to the analyst studying this war: it warns against examining the belligerents as more homogeneous than they really were and the belief that ethnic or national groups are the only form of groups that can have a distinct culture.

¹⁴ Importantly, this thesis does not argue that the cultural elements identified here are the only ones that influenced the war, but the research conducted indicates that these specific elements of the organisational culture of various EPRDF organisations and newspapers were of vital significance.

Part I: Theory and Methodology

Chapter 1: A Constructivist Approach to Problem-Solving Peace Research

This thesis studies some of the factors that led to the recent Eritrean- Ethiopian war, drawing upon theories within peace research and constructivism. The purpose of this chapter is to situate the thesis theoretically within the field of peace research. In addition, the chapter presents the constructivist theories underlying the analysis and shows how this theoretical approach can lead to new insights on how to contribute to ending armed conflicts. The thesis is thus located within a specific activist peace research tradition that sees the researcher as an activist, an active participant in political processes, offering suggestions for policies to promote peace. While descriptive peace research, satisfied with describing the causes of peace and conflict rather than offering advice, is now quite common, the tradition focusing on giving advice contains notable founding fathers and mothers of peace research such as Johan Galtung, John Burton and Kenneth and Elise Boulding. Moreover, the ideal of giving advice in order to create peace in many ways led to the foundation of peace research itself.¹

This thesis uses constructivism as a tool to produce policy advice. Although constructivists have attempted to explain the outbreak of war or proclaimed the employability of constructivism within peace research, none has so far used constructivism in order to make policy guidelines.² In order to perform such a task, the constructivist theories of Elizabeth Kier are employed.

Section one of the chapter presents the problem-solving peace research tradition this thesis is situated within, and also discusses some of the critiques of this tradition. Section two starts with a general presentation of constructivism and considers some of the theoretical connections between constructivism and peace research. Section three concentrates on explaining the main ideas of Elizabeth Kier, the constructivist theorist employed in the thesis.

¹ Elise Boulding, *New Agendas for Peace Research; Conflict and Security Re-Examined* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), Kenneth Boulding, "The War Trap," in *Towards a Just World Order*, ed. Richard Falk (Boulder: Westview, 1998), John Burton, *Conflict and Communication* (London: Macmillan, 1969), Johan Galtung, "Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peace Building," in *Peace, War and Defence - Essays in Peace Research* (Oslo: Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO), 1975), Johan Galtung, "The Next Twenty Five Years of Peace Research: Tasks and Prospects," *Oxford Projects for Peace Studies* 26, no. 6 (1988), Johan Galtung, "Commentary" (paper presented at the Prion Seminar: Fredsbevegelsen, hvor går den (The Peace movement, where is it heading?), Oslo, 3 September 2002), Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), Johan Galtung, *Peace, War and Defence* (Copenhagen: Christian Ejlertsen, 1976), Johan Galtung, Interview, 28 October 2002.

² For a constructivist attempt to explain war :Erik Rigmar, *Identity, Interest and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a presentation of benefits gained by the use of constructivism for Peace Researchers: Heikki Patomäki, "The Challenge of Critical Theories: Peace Research at the Start of the New Century," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001).

Section four provides the reasons for why her theory employed in this thesis. The chapter concludes that constructivism employed as a tool for peace researchers seeking to actively prevent or transform armed conflicts. Moreover, the chapter opens up for the study of previously neglected factors that are important to understand the processes that lead to war and prevent peace.

Some Principles of Problem- Solving Peace Research

The proper focus of peace research has been widely discussed amongst peace researchers and amongst outsiders commenting upon it. Peace research has traditionally been seen as inquiring into the causes of war; however, this applies to most work within the broad field of international relations. To argue that peace research is the research into the causes of war becomes too simple. As Johan Galtung argues, it is instead an inquiry into the causes of peace, often studying war in order to find these causes.³

Nevertheless, there is more to peace research than an inquiry into the causes of peace. Another central difference between the original agenda of peace research and international relations is expressed in Peter Wallensteen's definition of peace research: "The aim of peace research is to understand the causes of violence and find ways to reduce and remove violence".⁴ According to Wallensteen, peace research not only tries to understand violence, but it also tries to reduce it by actively working to promote peace. Indeed, one of the most notable identifying traits of early peace research was this strong normative component based on the ethical axiom that violence is to be reduced. All of the prominent early researchers in the field, the founders of the discipline itself, including Johan Galtung, Elise Boulding, Kenneth Boulding and John Burton, were activist peace researchers and wanted to end war.⁵ They were not satisfied by just describing the causes of conflict. The aim of peace research is for them strongly normative; certain values are taken for granted, and these values, as the need to put end to all wars and to minimise human suffering, are to be promoted actively. Johan Galtung goes so far as to state "nothing short of the abolition of war as a social

³ Johan Galtung, Interview, 28 October 2002.

⁴ Peter Wallensteen, "The Growing Peace Research Agenda," *Kroc Institute Occasional Paper*, no. 21 (2001).

⁵ Elise Boulding, *New Agendas for Peace Research; Conflict and Security Re-Examined* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), Kenneth Boulding, "The War Trap," in *Towards a Just World Order*, ed. Richard Falk (Boulder: Westview, 1998), John Burton, *Conflict and Communication* (London: Macmillan, 1969), Johan Galtung, "The Next Twenty Five Years of Peace Research: Tasks and Prospects," *Oxford Projects for Peace Studies* 26, no. 6 (1988).

institution should be our goal”.⁶ Early peace research was defined as an applied science and the peace researcher was viewed as a kind of physician, dealing with the problems of fellow beings.⁷ These researchers were not only motivated by the desire to know, they were motivated by a desire to change, and this became a crucial principle for the early peace researchers. It is also one of the underlying principles of this thesis. For Burton and Galtung, peace researchers were to use a multitude of different disciplines such as psychology, economics, international relations, political science and sociology to map conflicts and subsequently try to provide policy guidelines.

Such activist peace researchers, as for example Johan Galtung, always kept close contact with both the peace movement and decision makers. Understanding the disagreements between Galtung and the activists within the peace movement is important in order to understand fully the approach of the activist peace researchers. While appreciating the initiatives and the enthusiasm of the peace movement, Galtung criticised their negativity. Galtung felt that the peace movement should come up with practical alternatives to the policies that they were opposing and the wars they protested against, and should give policy advice and promote principles for policy making.⁸ The task of the researcher was not to describe; it was to create change, and to create change one needed to be aware of what to change, not only know that change was needed.

Not surprisingly, peace researchers soon discovered that this was a hard task. Peace researchers had arguably little impact on the Cold War. Although contested by some peace researchers, historians specialising in the Cold War in general agree that their effect was minimal.⁹ After the Cold War, cases like Rwanda and Somalia showed the irrelevance of much peace research. In a case like Somalia, political scientists like Ken Menkhaus and anthropologists like Ioan Lewis had real influence.¹⁰ Peace researchers in highly regarded institutions, such as the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO), on the other hand, failed to have any influence. The failure of peace research in the cases of Rwanda and Somalia made peace researchers such as Christian Scherrer explore the process of policy advice making

⁶ Johan Galtung, "The Next Twenty Five Years of Peace Research: Tasks and Prospects," *Oxford Projects for Peace Studies* 26, no. 6 (1988): 8.

⁷ Heikki Patomäki, "The Challenge of Critical Theories: Peace Research at the Start of the New Century," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001): 226.

⁸ Johan Galtung, "Commentary" (paper presented at the Prion Seminar: Fredsbevegelsen, hvor går den (The Peace movement, where is it heading?), Oslo, 3 September 2002).

⁹ Geir Lundestad, *The Fall of Great Powers, Peace Stability and Legitimacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Ioan Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), Ken Menkhaus, *Somalia, a Situational Analysis and Trend Assessment* (New York: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)/Writenet, 2003), Boutros Boutros-Gahli, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Somalia, Proposing the Expansion of Unosom and the Creation of Four Operational Zones," (New York: United Nations, 1992). Ioan Lewis also writes his name Ian.

itself.¹¹ At the same time, Johan Galtung also increased his focus on this side of peace research.¹² Both Scherrer and Galtung agreed that the policy guidelines peace researchers suggested had to be practically feasible in order to receive any attention from potential implementers. In addition Scherrer stressed that the researcher had to have local knowledge; in his opinion the lack of such knowledge had made peace researchers suggest solutions that it was impossible to implement.¹³ If policy advice failed to take the attitudes and capacities of the parties and/or implementing agencies into account, the result of policy advice produced by peace researchers would be a form of utopism. Stanley Hoffmann in many ways summed up this point. The problem with utopian visions, he argued, was how to get from here to there. He claimed the main advantage of such theories was that it made the researchers' work easy; the latter only needed to define practical problems away in their theory, but in this way they also remained isolated from the world.¹⁴

The problem was twofold. Firstly, some policy advice might contradict organisational values to the extent that it became impossible to implement them. Other recommendations might suggest measures beyond the available capacity of the potential implementers. Galtung tried to address this point and move peace research away from utopism by developing theories specifically constructed for the different channels of influence available to peace researchers; he also formulated principles for the deduction of policy advice. These principles were made to help the peace researcher form advice according to the background and the capacity of the institutions and organisations for which they were intended.¹⁵

Secondly, local knowledge becomes important in order to understand the complex dynamic of a specific conflict. Scherrer addressed this problem and suggest that local, "on the spot" knowledge is essential if one wants to contribute to the understanding and end of wars.¹⁶

An additional and equally important principle for early peace researchers was an adherence to pacifism. War and violence must be avoided, even when political change was necessary. Alternative non-violent resistance strategies were examined in order to provide

¹¹ Christian P Scherrer, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Priorities* (Moers: Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution (IFEK-IRECOR), 2001).

¹² Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), Christian P Scherrer, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Priorities* (Moers: Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution (IFEK-IRECOR), 2001).

¹³ Christian P Scherrer, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Priorities* (Moers: Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution (IFEK-IRECOR), 2001), 13. The Peace Researcher Håkan Wiberg pushes this point even further, stressing that one ought to know at least one local language before engaging in solving a conflict. Håkan Wiberg, Interview 2004.

¹⁴ Stanley Hoffman, *Duties Beyond Borders* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 194.

¹⁵ Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 27.

¹⁶ Christian P Scherrer, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Priorities* (Moers: Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution (IFEK-IRECOR), 2001), 13.

states exposed to aggression with strategies to counter such aggression.¹⁷ Thus military intervention in order to stop a malignant government was not deemed a viable option; peace had to be achieved through peaceful means.¹⁸ These major axioms of peace research, as articulated by the founders of peace research, are also the normative axioms that underlie this thesis. To the early peace researchers, the peace researcher was supposed to shun violence, even if violence seemed to be a viable tool to achieve positive change.

However, this principle came to be challenged at an early stage of peace research. A new generation of peace researchers started to emerge at the end of the 1960's. Wars such as the Vietnam War contributed to the development of this new group. These researchers were still activists and believed in working to change the world for the better.¹⁹ Their criticism of earlier "advice-driven" peace research was severe, and must be taken seriously. Two major forms of criticism can be identified: first a critique that claims that problem-solving approaches focus too much on local variables, in order to make the envisaged solution easier to implement. The argument is that such approaches overlook the global dimension and indirectly thus legitimise the current global system, a system that is regarded as unfair and in need of change. Second, another critique argues that such problem-solving, focused peace research is too accommodating and does not distinguish between aggressor and victim. The first critique is especially strongly articulated by the Swedish peace researcher Herman Schmid, while the second type of critique is often articulated by his compatriot Lars Dencik, who argues that activists have to take sides in conflicts.²⁰ Both arguments merit careful consideration.

Herman Schmid sees problem-solving theory as a legitimising research that neglects the current international structure and that legitimises international relationships of power.²¹ In 1968 he wrote an article entitled "Peace Research and Politics", in which he argued that peace research aims to achieve a form of social control. He claimed that even though the original peace researchers were supposed to be critical of the global system, their views were based on the belief that all individuals and groups in the world shared a common interest in survival and peace. He was critical of this project, arguing that problem-solving peace

¹⁷ As Adam Roberts, "The Case for Civilian Defense," in *Civil Defense*, ed. Gene Sharp (London: Peace News, 1964).

¹⁸ Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

¹⁹ They were in this aspect far from today's mainstream researchers in institutes such as the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) and the Swedish Institute of Peace Research (SIPRI).

²⁰ Schmid in many ways echoes Robert Cox' critique of problem-solving research. However, as this thesis is situated within Peace Research, the discussion will focus on Schmid. Robert Cox, "Social Forces, States, and World Orders," *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (1981), Robert Cox, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Herman Schmid, "Politics and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 3, no. 5 (1968).

²¹ Herman Schmid, "Politics and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 3, no. 5 (1968): 217-32.

research was escapism from a social reality created by hegemonic interests, and thus indirectly working to hide the latter. Hegemonic interests had created the so-called peace, and this peace had to be sustained so that a hegemonic group could remain in power and continue their exploitation of poorer groups in the social and economic structure. The so-called critical aspect of peace research thus became a mere excuse for naivety. To strive to uphold world peace in a situation where the north was taking advantage of the south, or to uphold a peace where the upper class was taking advantage of the lower class, was seen as immoral. By doing so, the peace researcher contributed to the maintenance of the current situation.²² Peace researchers thus often indirectly had a conservative agenda and helped preserve existing patterns of power. According to Schmid, the peace-researchers often believed they were doing the right thing, without seeing that what was right was defined by an ideology that was conservative in nature because it contributed to preserving existing exploitive power structures.

Problem-solving peace research, with approaches that try to address local conflicts in order to make a quick fix while failing to see that they were created by the global structure, is seen by Schmid as maintaining the interests of those who have power, protecting them against the weak, by failing to address adequately the problems of the power structure. They protect the ideology of the rulers. He argues that the “quick-fix” approach fails to focus on the real differences between interests, making the victims unaware of the hidden exploitation in the world structure. Conflict solving is seen as a form of brainwashing, which makes the parties accept the “quick-fix” solution which maintains the status quo. Peace researchers, according Schmid, should enhance conflicts and sharpen them, break the system down and build new structures. Schmid’s critique thus seems to contain two main elements, the most important being that problem-solving techniques legitimise the existing world structures and enhance the position of a dominant class.

The second element in Schmid’s critique is the accusation of being too particularistic, and thus losing much information in the process. According to Schmid, by focusing on the small details of a conflict the researchers lose the big picture. By examining a war as being between directly involved belligerents, a researcher might fail to explore how international alliances have promoted the war, and how the international capitalist system makes it possible for individuals to benefit economically from war thus giving them incentives to start a war rather than create peace. By being too particularistic, the international structures and historical

²² Ibid.: 226.

sociology are largely overlooked and ignored. Moreover, Schmid also argues that the researcher has a hidden agenda. Perhaps without knowing it, peace researchers work for a class or a party by implementing their ideas of world order, and thus help to maintain their hegemony. By fixing the conflict rather than the world structure, the symptom rather than the cause is addressed. The external actors with a vested interest in war remain and will be ready to promote conflict in other parts of the world. Problematic international structures will also remain. By fixing the symptom, peace researchers contribute to hiding the real cause of the problem. The problem-solving approach could for example be seen to rationalise Russian or American arms sales that make the various wars in the world possible, by studying the directly involved belligerents only. By addressing the local issues in a conflict, how resources and political disagreement create a specific conflict, peace researchers often fail to see the structure of how the supply of weapons and foreign support enabled the belligerents to fight. Focus on internal causes may be viewed as directing the focus away from external factors, and such guidelines may take the focus away from western policies that promote conflict.

Schmid desires major and holistic change. Behind this lies a wish to change development into a positive direction. However, as Heikki Patomäki argues, more historic-specific and/or case specific studies are needed within peace research. A general focus on holistic universalism, focusing on the international structures only, could be regarded as one of the major problems of peace research.²³ During the Cold War, many researchers focused on systemic change and global structure, but the results were meagre. As described previously, after the Cold War peace research, with all its universalistic theories, also had little effect. The more globally focused efforts to create change might be important and can have a long term effect, but measures to deal with present day conflicts also have to be developed, these conflicts can not be neglected. As argued both by Scherrer and Patomäki, an over strong focus on global structures might also leave out a lot of information, as local issues of grievance, local cultural factors, are neglected.²⁴

Importantly, and fortunately, this is not an either/or situation, and both strategies might be followed simultaneously. A problem-solving approach might develop strategies for global change. “Quick-fix” approaches can also be critical of the ruling order and in this case critically expose the organisational culture of the local elite; exposure of local elites might in turn lead to exposure of global elites. Local changes might also give indications of possible

²³Heikki Patomäki, "The Challenge of Critical Theories: Peace Research at the Start of the New Century," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001): 11.

²⁴ Ibid, Christian P Scherrer, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Priorities* (Moers: Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution (IFEK-IRECOR), 2001).

side effects of the global changes that peace researchers strive for and perhaps even suggest slight alterations in their global agenda. System-focused theories and problem-solving theories are not mutually exclusive. Peace research, as shown by Johan Galtung, is about system change as well, and both approaches might provide important information; they can and should co-exist and interact. In this sense Schmid's critique may serve as a reminder of the need to see local conflicts in a global frame, recognising that some conflicts might need to be addressed at both local and global levels.

Peace researchers such as Lars Dencik raise an additional type of critique against mainstream peace research. Dencik argues that peace researchers should "show active solidarity with the people struggling against imperialism and super power supremacy", and they should be prepared to take sides in a conflict.²⁵ Normatively, he maintains that a peace researcher should support violence if it serves a just cause. Dencik also argues that too strong a focus on neutral peace making could reward aggression by giving the aggressors legitimacy in the negotiation process. Such argumentation was used in a major attack on mainstream peace research during the 1960's. Peace researchers like Lars Dencik had watched the neutrality of many peace researchers towards the Vietnam War with contempt. In the late 1960's Dencik accused the majority of peace researchers for hiding the asymmetry of the conflict and the final goals of the parties. One of these belligerents, the USA, was deemed to fight an unjust and aggressive war, while the goals of the second, North Vietnam, was deemed as being just. Dencik characterised the founding fathers of peace research as "Physicists suffering from a bad conscience".²⁶ He implied that this "bad conscience" was because they took no notice of justice, of right and wrong. Dencik argued that peace researchers should support the oppressed, to the extent that certain forms of violence would be legitimate. The need to eradicate unjust situations, situations where one party abused another party in the conflict, was pressing. Such unjust situations were defined as latent conflicts. Addressing an overt conflict situation without addressing the latent conflict does not provide a viable solution; it would be like a sleeping volcano that could erupt in the future. The Vietnam War was again employed as the main example: American support for the Saigon regime was seen as support for an unjust and corrupt regime that exploited its own population. Any negotiations between north and south could perhaps create short-term peace, but the oppressed people of the south would inevitably rise again, they would not accept the unjust situation.

²⁵ Lars Dencik, *Scientific Research and Politics* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1969), 23.

²⁶ Peter Lawler, *A Question of Values: Johan Galtung's Peace Research* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 77.

Dencik argues that the peace researcher has to support the side which is morally right. However, Johan Galtung argues that even an aggressor should have protection: “The judgment of an enemy should distinguish between the status action of an enemy and the status holder”.²⁷ Perhaps international law can be used as an example, distinguishing between Jus in Bello, the legal protection of combatants in war, and Jus ad Bellum, the legality of the war itself. International law thus ensures that the individual has protection even if he fights an aggressive war, in part because the individual in question often thinks he is fighting a just war. Perceptions of right and wrong will exist amongst both parties in a war. The perceptions of the individual belligerents on this issue will often contradict each other.

Importantly, this also involves the peace researcher: the peace researcher’s perception of who is right and who is wrong might in itself be a misperception. This leads to serious problems for Dencik’s argument. If the peace researcher involves herself in violent action and kills, as Dencik actually argues a peace researcher should if necessary, then the effect is irreversible; the individual killed can not be raised from the dead. Subsequently the peace researcher might discover that he/she has killed based on wrong assumptions.

An over strong focus on right and wrong might also prevent reconciliation in the sense that it recycles hate and leads to a search for vengeance for old injustices. As peace researcher and activist Andrew Rigby claims:

Hatred and the search for vengeance can consume people turning them into mirror images of those that they hate. Unless people manage to forsake their determination to get even, there can be no new beginning, no transformation of relationships. Everyone will remain imprisoned in a particular history or mythology recycling old crimes and hatreds.²⁸

Vengeance because of old injustice thus may take the place of a new and better future, by entrenching old conflicts it might lead to even more killing. As Michael Ignatieff claims, peace making must go beyond this

Reconciliation must reach into the shared democracy of death to teach the drastic nullity of all struggles that end in killing, the unending futility of all

²⁷ Ibid., 82.

²⁸ Andrew Rigby, "Forgiving the Past: Paths Towards a Culture of Reconciliation" (paper presented at the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), Tampere, 3 August 2000).

attempts to avenge those who are no more. For it is an elementary certainty that killing will not bring the dead back to life.²⁹

In this sense a too strong will to take sides might recycle old hatred and prolong the conflict itself. Dencik's argument that one should support the oppressed also requires that one clearly can identify who the oppressed are. It should also be kept in mind that in real life both parties in a conflict might at some stage have been oppressive. In Rwanda the Hutu and Tutsi regimes have taken turns as oppressors of their ethnical counterparts.³⁰ Moreover, a weak oppressed group might ally with new oppressors in order to deal with old oppressors. For example Finland allied with Nazi Germany, the latter a clearly oppressive regime, in order to prevent Soviet rule of Finnish Karelia, previously conquered militarily by the equally oppressive Soviet Union.³¹ Subsequently, the separation between the oppressor and the oppressed in a conflict becomes blurred. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that the party that is deemed to be oppressed, or normatively right, might be oppressive in itself. The regime Dencik supported, North Vietnam, for example suppressed its own citizens during the Vietnam War and continues to do so even today, perhaps being harsher towards its own citizens than Dencik's enemy, South Vietnam ever was.³²

A focus on strategies that shun violence seems more viable than focusing purely on a dichotomy between oppressed/oppressor and a too strong emphasis on such a dichotomy might even prevent a solution to the conflict, emphasising old animosity rather than a hope of a better relationship in the future. The consequences of violence may become irreversible, a dead person can not be healed, even though the belief that one side had justice on its side turns out to be wrong. In this way the consequences of violence are often irreversible, and hence a strategy to support violent action. Non-violent strategies trying to address the grievances of both parties as well as addressing recent injustice seem to be the only alternative for an activist peace researcher.

²⁹ Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), 190.

³⁰ Sometimes this was because of the manipulation of a third power, the colonial government of Belgium, that used the Tutsi elite to govern their colony. Jackson Nyamuya Magoto, "The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda," *African Journal On Conflict Resolution* 3, no. 1 (2003).

³¹ John Robert Elting, *Battles for Scandinavia*, ed. Jerry Korn, *World War 2* (Chicago: Time-Life books inc, 1981), 116-19.

³² See for example: Amnesty International, *Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: Renewed Concern for the Montagnard Minority* (Amnesty International, 2004 [cited 1 May 2005]); available from www.amnestyusa.org/countries/vietnam/document.do?id=9D075D101B9E6562802569A600601F67, Amnesty International, *Viet-Nam: Annual Report 1995* (Amnesty International, 1995 [cited 25 October 2003]); available from www.amnestyusa.org/countries/vietnam/document.do?id=9D075D101B9E6562802569A600601F67, Amnesty International, *Viet-Nam: Annual Report* (1999 [cited 1 January 2002]); available from www.amnestyusa.org/countries/vietnam/document.do?id=9D075D101B9E6562802569A600601F67.

Constructivism and Peace Research

Constructivism is a broad school of thought that cannot easily be characterised as one uniform body of literature. Within the field of International Relations, the word constructivism was first used in 1989 in Nicholas Onuf's *World of our Making*.³³ Today many researchers define themselves as constructivists, and the focus of the school has become very varied. However, there have been several attempts to sum up the common focus. Michael Desch characterises constructivists as being united in the belief that "...cultural theories, which look to ideational factors, do a much better job of explaining how the world works."³⁴ Jeff Checkel, a self-proclaimed constructivist, argues that constructivism is:

...not a theory but an approach to social inquiry based on two assumptions: (1) the environment in which agents/states take action is social as well as material; and (2) this setting can provide agents/states with understandings of their interests (it can "constitute" them).³⁵

Thus constructivism often tends to focus on social factors, as for example norms or culture. Moreover, it studies the way social factors constitute the interests and understanding of the agents/states, and how they are constructed through social interaction.

The focus of constructivists has several parallels within peace research. During the late 1980's, the prominence of cultural and discursive analysis grew as researchers such as Hayward Alker became disillusioned with the failures of previous projects launched in order to understand war.³⁶ Today there are many examples of peace researchers that focus on cultural factors, how they are changeable and on the social construction process. The peace researcher Mohammed Abu-Nimer uses the word culture to name the process that creates mental frames, a cognitive process where individuals emphasise the variety of settings that

³³ Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making : Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

³⁴ Michael Desch, "Culture Clash : Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 141.

³⁵ Jeffery Checkel, "The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics," *World Politics* 50, no. 2 (1998): 325-26.

³⁶ Heikki Patomäki, "Hayward Alker: Peace Research to Globalism," in *The Future of International Relations: Masters in the Making?*, ed. Iver B. Neuman and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 1997).

they encounter.³⁷ Johan Galtung states that culture is changeable and thus could be changed into a more positive agenda.³⁸ Raimo Väyrynen explains how rule transformation changes the norms of the parties' interactions, and thus can change a conflict in a positive direction.³⁹ Hayward Alker is interested in the transformation of conflicts through moral discourse and the social reconstruction of relationships.⁴⁰ Such concepts seem close to constructivism; indeed the last researcher is commonly referred to as a constructivist. Thus many peace researchers developed a conceptualisation bearing similarities to present-day constructivism.

Constructivism with its defining concern with the notion of constituted social facts, and a shared interest in the constitutive role of ideational factors, focuses on many interesting elements for a peace researcher, amongst other things how interests are defined and redefined and how a cultural environment can influence behaviour.⁴¹ This thesis makes use of constructivist insights and thus aims to contribute to peace research by generating new insights for understanding and ending conflicts.

Elizabeth Kier's Approach to International Relations

This thesis draws mainly upon the theories of Elizabeth Kier. Elizabeth Kier can clearly be grouped amongst the social constructivists within the field of international relations. Kier starts her analysis with three major claims, the first clearly indicating her constructivist position:

- 1) There are no definitive meanings attached to an objective reality. As important as material factors might be, they can be interpreted in numerous ways. Furthermore, making sense of which incentives structures/organisations provide for individual action often requires an understanding of the meanings that actors attach to their material world. We should not presume that actors from the same socio-economic groups prefer the same policies across national boundaries.

³⁷ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture and Religion: Towards a Training Model of Interreligious Peace Building," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001).

³⁸ Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 56.

³⁹ Raimo Väyrynen, "To Settle or to Transform? Perspectives on the Resolution of National and International Conflicts," in *New Directions in Conflict Theory: Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Raimo Väyrynen (London: SAGE Publications, 1991), 1-25.

⁴⁰ Hayward Alker, *Rediscoveries and Reformulations: Humanistic Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴¹ Thomas Risse, "Let's Argue," *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (2000): 3.

- 2) Domestic balance of power will influence decision-making; military policy should not be regarded exclusively as the strategic interest of a state.
- 3) Culture is not simply a derivative of functional demands or strategic imperatives; it has an independent causal role.⁴²

As the third tenet indicates, culture is central in Kier's analysis. She draws upon Ann Swindler for an explicit definition of culture, defining it as "the set of assumptions so unselfconscious as to seem a natural transparent, undeniable part of the structure of the world."⁴³ However, the use of the term culture within constructivism is severely criticised, even by the constructivists themselves. Prominent constructivists, including Jeffery Checkel, warn about the use of the term culture in international relations. To Checkel, the term culture became a fashion within international relations, an abstract buzzword that few have defined clearly but that many people use.⁴⁴ Kier uses organisational theory in order to address this criticism and narrow the concept of culture. Consequently, the focus in her study is not on culture per se but on a special type of culture, organisational culture, defined as the set of basic assumptions, values, norms, beliefs and formal knowledge that shapes collective understanding within a bounded entity - the organisation.⁴⁵

When it comes to estimating the effects of culture, Kier employs the work of the American sociologist Ann Swindler. To Swindler, culture provides toolkits of behaviour; it provides strategies of action and persistent ways of ordering action over longer periods of time, rather than goals. Moreover, elements of culture are repeatedly used to construct strategies for action.⁴⁶ Certain elements of a culture thus promote certain actions. Such cultural elements make specific strategies seem to be amongst a few restricted viable options, as they are unconsciously defined as correct, and alternatives are not properly discussed or considered. In the most extreme cases, certain strategies and interpretations become habitual. They become almost organisational reflexes.

Culture becomes very important for the organisation itself, as it creates esprit de corps, and also provides specific responses to specific situations, giving help to organisational members that lack information. As claimed by Kier: "Organizational life would be

⁴² Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3-10.

⁴³ Ann Swindler, "Culture in Action, Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273.

⁴⁴ Jeffery Checkel, Interview, 15 May 2002.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 28.

⁴⁶ Ann Swindler, "Culture in Action, Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273.

unmanageable if specific actions did not call for specific responses, if members had no expectations about others' actions, or if they had no understanding of the effects of their own actions on others."⁴⁷ Organisational culture thus provides relevance and standards and determines which external events are to be defined as important and which not. Moreover, it also influences how these events have to be interpreted. Such a culture provides collective assumptions and formal knowledge, the latter referring to knowledge defined as relevant according to organisational standards. It focuses on specific external events and makes some solutions for solving problems more prominent. Organisational culture has a Janus-faced effect on the organisation itself: it creates standards and role expectations that make organisational life easier, but it also inhibits innovation because it hides potential new strategies and makes certain old ones more prominent. Kier argues that a too strong organisational culture leads to a rigid and conservative organisation that fails to respond to external pressure in a proper way.

Kier and Swindler thus stress that culture not only provides goals, it also defines strategies. Cultural assumptions are seen as building a repertoire from which organisations plan their actions, sometimes resulting in a nearly reflexive pattern of behaviour where certain organisational responses become almost automatic. Kier's main finding, namely that organisational decision-making is influenced by culture, is the theoretical starting point of this thesis.

The way Kier employs culture and the factors she stresses as influencing the formation of organisational culture can be studied in her major work, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars*.⁴⁸ This book produced a meticulous analysis of how organisational culture influences the choice of military doctrines, constraining the choices of the decision makers, preventing them from choosing certain strategies while making other strategies more cognitively visible. In *Imagining War*, Kier's main argument is that different organisational cultures within various armed forces created different responses to exogenous impulses. She studies the case of the British and French armed forces in World War Two. The French armed forces felt under constant threat from their own left-wing politicians, which led to a homogenisation and dogmatisation of the organisational culture of the French military. The military felt threatened by conscription, which was seen as a way of getting left-wing agitators into the units. Consequently, this led to a notable antipathy towards

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 34.

⁴⁸ The book won the 1998 Edgar S. Furniss Award for exceptional contribution to the study of national and international security. Ibid.

conscription amongst the military. Military leaders believed the conscripts unable to handle the advanced technical equipment of mechanised forces, thus they chose a static military doctrine. This conclusion was reached despite contradictory information from Germany. The French doctrine was thus a result of organisational culture rather than logical decision-making or organisational self-interest. Conscription had at this stage been accepted for decades; however the pressure for conscription, together with other civilian decisions, created an organisational shock that led to dogmatisation, which in interaction with organisational socialisation caused a specific outcome. Kier also analyses the politics of the armed forces of the United Kingdom, starting with the cavalry. Here she examines an element which was part of the organisational culture. She names this element “An Officer and a Gentleman”, an ideal where officers were supposed to be focused on style and attitude rather than technological competence. In this culture, technical knowledge was looked down upon and war was seen as a sport; this culture inhibited mechanisation, and made the organisation postpone a necessary change of doctrine.

Importantly, she stresses that there were deviant subcultures. For example certain branches of the armed forces adopted mechanisation faster. Because of the segregation of regiments in British services, the British regiments had slightly deviant cultures. She thus acknowledges the existence of subgroups within an organisation, and that such subgroups may have separate competing cultures that lead to differences both in perception and action.

In addition, she addresses the question of how organisational culture was formed. In *Imagining war* she puts emphasis on organisational shocks as well as recruitment patterns as forming organisational culture, but also argues that several other factors influenced or might influence such formation. In order to examine how a specific culture has developed Kier firstly again draws on the theories of Ann Swindler. As Ann Swindler argues, culture consists of many elements of different origins that still influence planning, decisions, organisational structure and partly determine the interpretation of events.⁴⁹ One element with a large influence is previously held ideology. This relationship provides an explanation for how some of the elements of an organisational culture are initially created. To Swindler, ideology, is a type of culture, she defines ideology as:

⁴⁹ Ann Swindler, "Culture in Action, Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273.

“A highly articulated self-conscious belief and ritual system inspiring to offer a unified answer to problems of social action. Ideology might be thought of as a phase in the development of a system of cultural meaning.”⁵⁰

This type of culture is highly influential on action, but it is also very conscious. The individual organisational members know that the ideology and its assumptions can be discussed; their actions are not habitual but based on a choice to adhere to a certain religious or political system.⁵¹ However, ideology transforms into a culture based on institutionalised traditions and a shared definition of common sense. Ideology forms organisational culture even after its assumptions are forgotten, as its rites and habits are institutionalised into the organisation.

In order to explain the transformation from ideology to a more habitual culture, Swindler introduces two concepts: settled and unsettled periods. In a settled period, culture independently influences action by making certain strategies more cognitively prominent. In an unsettled period, culture influence politics directly, but this form of culture, ideology, is both more coherent and more explicit than the culture during the settled period. As Ann Swindler maintains:

In settled lives culture is ultimately integrated with action. It is here that we are most tempted to see values as organising and anchoring patterns of action; and here it is most difficult to disentangle what is uniquely cultural since culture and structural circumstances seem to reinforce each other... Cultural symbols reinforce ethos, making it a plausible world view which in turn justifies ethos.⁵²

The unsettled phase is a culturally offensive stage where culture influences new action instead of preserving old reaction patterns. The organisational members feel strongly about their ideological or religious agenda, fighting for good or world revolution, willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of their ideology. The ideological form of culture in such a stage seems to be more explicit and conscious than the more habitual form of culture in the settled stage. Swindler argues:

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 279.

⁵¹ Ibid.: 278.

⁵² Ibid.

In such periods [unsettled], ideology, explicit, articulated highly organized meaning systems (both political and religious) establish new styles or strategies of action. When people are learning new ways of organizing individual and collective action, practicing unfamiliar habits until they become familiar, then doctrine, symbol and ritual directly shape action.⁵³

A struggling organisation needs ideology. The ideology keeps the organisation together by creating cohesion; ideology reinforces the organisation during struggle, but is also reinforced by the struggle itself. The works of Swindler and Barry Turner, the latter one of the organisational theorists Kier draws upon, make similar statements. All argue that organisational struggle reinforces the ideology during the unsettled phase, in itself a phase filled with struggle. However, even during this phase ideology adjusts to the needs of the organisation; the two will interact and form the future organisational culture.⁵⁴

But ideology transforms. There is a continuum from ideology through tradition to a type of “common sense” as defined by organisational standards. Ideology often transforms into traditions; subsequently traditions become habitual standards and practices and are no longer as explicit as in an ideology. They seem to be inevitable parts of the lives of organisational members. “Common sense” then becomes the common set of assumptions, a natural transparent and undeniable part of the structure of the world for the organisational members that share them.⁵⁵ When the unsettled period changes into a settled period, some of the actions prescribed by ideology become habitual rather than products of conscious decision making. Even though ideology has gone underground, perhaps even been officially rejected, it nevertheless still contributes to a definition of right and wrong actions, of appropriate strategies and habitual ways of interpreting the world and it continues to influence actions. It then becomes harder to trace a causal link between culture and action, because the link between the two is no longer conscious. Nevertheless, organisational assumptions based on old and forgotten ideology remain a way to facilitate collective action, as they create a common frame of reference and are especially important when people need to act in concert. These standards and habits also prescribe action under unfamiliar circumstances. In this sense, they provide safety within organisational life as organisational

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, Barry Turner, "The Organizational and Interorganizational Development of Disasters," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1976).

⁵⁵ Swindler borrows this definition from Clifford Getz. Clifford Geertz, "Common Sense as a Cultural Sense," *Antioch Review* 33, no. 5 (1975).

members form expectations and perceptions based on the previous ideology. Expectations and perceptions based on organisational culture in turn prescribe certain interpretations of external and internal actors, and suggest appropriate strategies to deal with new problems.

In sum, first, the argument is that ideology influences the actions of an organisation long after it officially ceases to be important. An organisational ethos has been created; an ethos that often remains even after the original ideology has been rejected.⁵⁶ Secondly, Kier and Swindler also argue that culture based on such ethos influences action by restricting the possible strategies applicable for problem solving, sometimes narrowing the options down to only a few or even one type of strategy. As Kier stresses, during settled periods it shapes behaviour by establishing what is natural and making other patterns of behaviour inconceivable.⁵⁷ Culture provides a finite set of strategies and, as Kier argues, often only one.⁵⁸ Strategies of action thus last longer than the ideological aim that originally motivated them.

In addition to the works of Swindler, Kier draws upon traditional organisational theory in order to understand how organisational culture forms. To Kier organisations have special traits that influence them, just because they are organisations. They have limited contact with the outside world and a hierarchal order that defines the status of the organisation. New candidates are often selected by applying a standardised procedure and standardised criteria are used to evaluate new candidates. Organisational members have sometimes to go through a rigid training system. They have to learn the standardised operational procedures in order to function within organisational and personal life. In order to fit in, new recruits need to adapt to the organisational culture; this may subsequently lead to active participation in the cultural patterns of the organisation. New members are exposed to a massive socialisation process. The socialisation process tends to produce role beliefs where individuals perceive their position and their role as stable with certain meanings attached to it. They are also exposed to organisational assumptions that define conventional wisdom.⁵⁹ Standards are important to create cohesion. Kier argues that this is especially true in military organisations, also in the type of guerrilla organisations analysed in chapter five of this thesis.

Kier argues that the research conducted on organisational culture in private firms is suitable for her study, and addresses many of the issues discussed by organisational

⁵⁶ Ann Swindler, "Culture in Action, Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986).

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 26.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 144. In the case of ideology Kier keeps the point at a fairly general level and does not go into its connections with the doctrinal processes within the French and British armies

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

theorists.⁶⁰ One of these issues is the role of the charismatic individual in forming organisational culture. Kier cites the organisational theorist Burton Clark, who argues that charismatic leaders might have a strong role in an early phase of organisational development.⁶¹ Individuals are viewed as playing a role in designing organisational culture in its early phases, but their role is drastically limited as the organisation's institutions age and become ritualised.⁶²

Importantly, she explicitly states that the organisation is more than the sum of the values of a few individuals. Individuals may create some of the cultural elements, but the totality of organisational culture is formed by the totality of social interaction within the organisation. As Kier argues: "Organisational cultures are features of organisations, not of individuals. A culture is a property of a collectivity."⁶³

Some parts of organisational culture may stem from organisational needs, in that an organisation might institutionalise standard operational procedures in order to achieve organisational goals. However, these standard operational procedures will always be constrained and influenced by other cultural elements within the organisation.⁶⁴ Such standard operational procedures may continue to be employed long after the needs of the organisation have changed and after the procedures themselves lose their rationale.⁶⁵

Arguments used for propaganda or political purposes also become institutionalised and maintain their importance long after their initial rationale has disappeared. Official programmes, campaigns and day-to-day use of slogans also affect organisational culture. By continuous repetition they persuade external and internal actors of the correctness of certain cultural assumptions. The use of propaganda will also often lead to the organisation adopting certain measures which reinforce the believability of the propaganda; these measures may subsequently influence organisational culture. Kier claims that public commitment and repeated argumentation will have an impact on organisational culture.⁶⁶

Kier admits that conscious efforts to form organisational culture often do not have the intended effect. Such efforts often have "dysfunctional results" in the sense that they fail to fulfil the purpose of the leadership when they interact with other components of

⁶⁰ Ibid., 28.

⁶¹ Burton Clark, *The Distinctive College: Antioch, Reed and Swarthmore* (Luton: Aldine, 1970), Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 152.

⁶² Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 152.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 153.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 154.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 156.

organisational culture.⁶⁷ The new cultural elements that are introduced will always interact with the previous culture. Transforming all sub-groups in the organisation is difficult, because each contains slightly different sub-cultures, and some might actively resist transformation. Attempts at social engineering might also have unintended influence long after they are applied.

Another factor influencing organisational culture is organisational defence mechanisms formed in a period when the organisation faced external dangers.⁶⁸

Organizational theorists argue that hostility in the external environment strengthens the organisational culture. Managers who encounter a hazardous business environment react by pulling the reins in hopes of gaining some control over the situation; midlevel employees become more willing to rely on managers and executives. These responses strengthen the organizational culture at the same time that they reduce the organizational adaptability... In short, the greater the hostility in the organizational environment, the greater the potential for organisational dogmatism.⁶⁹

Arguments promoting the organisation become viewed as a defence of the organisational identity and the identity of the organisational participants. Thus the arguments promoted by the organisation to defend itself might in this way become institutionalised. The organisation becomes more closed, in extreme cases almost like a religious sect. In such extreme cases, only the most ardent believers stay. In addition, arguments justifying the struggle are circulated more rapidly, an obvious consequence of the shrinking size of the organisation: it becomes easier for arguments to circulate rapidly when the group they are circulated within consists of fewer individuals. The argument of self-justification thus becomes a vital part of the self. The belief in victory and in the correctness of organisational goals becomes entrenched into organisational culture as members with doubts about these factors leave the organisation because of the external pressure and only the most fanatical remain. Furthermore, as suggested by Charles Hermann, another organisation theorist that Kier draws upon, the amount of communication within the organisation becomes limited: "The increase

⁶⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁶⁸ Kier here borrows from Charles Hermann and Barry Turner. Charles Hermann, "Some Consequences of Crisis Which Limit Viability of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1963), Barry Turner, "The Organizational and Interorganizational Development of Disasters," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1976).

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 32.

in stress on authority units will reduce the number of channels used for the distribution and collection of information.”⁷⁰ Fewer channels lead to less new information being circulated, limiting the discussions of policies, and even ideological discussions. Old perceptions become cemented, as they become less questioned.

External threats put stress on members of the organisation with several possible results. Those who are not strongly committed leave. Those who are highly motivated, believing in the organisation, will stay. This group, inspired by the organisational ethos and highly influenced by the values of the organisation, will be committed to enduring any hardship. The organisation undergoes a process of self-selection. Elizabeth Kier argues that:

Organizational theory predicts that, when faced with a threatening external environment, organizations respond dysfunctionally by strengthening the organization’s culture; the righteousness of the chosen policy is magnified and the value of the alternative dismissed.⁷¹

This often happens if the organisation encounters an organisational crisis, a relatively unexpected critical event that threatens the high-priority values of the organisation and presents a limited amount of time in which to response.⁷² The argumentation used to sustain the organisation during the crisis often becomes a part of the identity. It becomes a cultural assumption attached to the organisation and is taken for granted, perceived as truth long after the original crisis has passed. Long periods of struggle for survival in a harsh environment may have similar effects on an organisation.⁷³

To sum up, Kier draws upon certain tenets of organisational theory about how organisations behave. For her, charismatic individuals will influence the organisational culture at an early stage of organisational life. However, they will have less and less importance as the organisation develops. Furthermore, repeated slogans and functional needs will have influence, but always in interaction with other elements. However, these repeated slogans will entrench the values of the propaganda in the organisation. While the organisational needs that justify certain operational procedures disappear, the organisational rituals remain. The resulting cultural elements are thus no longer products of functional

⁷⁰Hermann defines authority units as the units that distribute information Charles Hermann, "Some Consequences of Crisis Which Limit Viability of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1963): 75.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 145.

⁷² Charles Hermann, "Some Consequences of Crisis Which Limit Viability of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1963): 64.

⁷³ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 135.

needs. Last, but not least, Kier shares Turner and Hermann's view that organisational crisis will dogmatise its culture.⁷⁴ Cultural assumptions become entrenched in order to justify the organisation's struggle. Ideologies will influence policy even after they are officially abandoned or taken for granted. Slogans and standard operational procedures might also have effects long after their rationale has disappeared. In addition, organisational crises might homogenise an organisation's culture.

All in all Kier claims that organisational culture often creates reflexive thinking, that it prevents decision makers from choosing strategies that do not fit into organisational culture, while it makes certain strategies more viable. Such a culture is created by old ideology that has become habitual, by recruitment patterns, organisational crises, by charismatic individuals in the early phase of the organisation's history, by propaganda that has been continuously repeated, and by old drills and standard operational procedures that have ceased to be functional but nevertheless have been kept as a habit.

To Kier organisational culture has a clear causal effect, changing certain decisions by governing the focus of decision makers towards certain options. Kier argues that organisational culture may be a cause of action, and constructivists might deal with causes and explaining. She claims that if a change in culture inevitably leads to a change in behaviour, then organisational culture has a clear causal effect. Moreover, if differences in culture have led two or more different organisations to adopt different strategies under otherwise very similar conditions, then organisational culture has a clearly causal effect, as after all it determined the outcome. In this way the factors described as influencing the formation of culture within an organisation, also, through organisational culture, indirectly influence decision making.

Applying Kier

Elizabeth Kier's theories offer many advantages when applied to peace research. Firstly, the school of thought she is located in, constructivism, has never been applied to the study of a war in order to deduce policy guidelines. An application of a constructivist approach thus provide a new focus, which in turn might reveal new factors in processes that leads to war.

⁷⁴Charles Hermann, "Some Consequences of Crisis Which Limit Viability of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1963), Barry Turner, "The Organizational and Interorganizational Development of Disasters," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1976).

Secondly, Kier stresses the situational specific: it is not given that organisations, including states, in a similar situation in the world hold the same interests. To understand the difference one has to examine the various organisations, their history and the social interactions taking place within them. According to her it is a mistake to believe a state to be homogeneous. A state will usually contain many groups with different interests, different powers and different cultures. The product of interaction between these groups creates the resulting decisions. In this way Kier avoids taking a unitary national culture, even a unitary organisational culture for granted. Instead she stresses that there will be several competing cultures even within a state or an organisation. Indirectly she warns about simplistic studies without the local knowledge needed to uncover these different cultures. She thus claims that on the spot knowledge is important, making her theories more suitable for peace researchers wishing to take Scherrer's critique of peace research into account. Her focus takes into account the "on the spot knowledge" that Christian Scherrer claims is so important for successful peace research.⁷⁵

Thirdly, the focus of her theories, specifically acknowledging the existence of several cultures within a society, and even sub-cultures within an organisation, allows for the study of interaction between various political and non-political actors and their cultures. A researcher applying the theories of Kier will thus examine how one culture interacts with another culture and how they reform each other, moving beyond ethnic and national stereotypes describing a homogenous culture.

Fourthly, her focus on military organisations offers new insights in societies governed by former military organisations, such as for example Ethiopia.⁷⁶ In addition, the hostile environment facing the military organisations are similar to the environment civil organisations may face when their environment is hostile and they share certain traits. Examples of such civil organisations are for example newspapers in conflict with a repressive government.

Lastly, her theories acknowledge that organisational culture interacts with other factors; her theories are process-oriented and study such interactions, thus acknowledging that organisational culture is influenced by other factors, factors that might be of vital importance if one wants to develop policy alternatives.

⁷⁵ Christian P Scherrer, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Priorities* (Moers: Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution (IFEK-IRECOR), 2001), 13.

⁷⁶ Many of the governing parties around the world, and especially in Africa started out as military organisations. South African is for example ruled by members of the African Nationalist Council (ANC), Zimbabwe is ruled by Robert Mugabe and his former guerrilla organisation Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Importantly, two of the most powerful organisations within the ruling coalition in Ethiopia have a similar past.

All in all, Kier's theories supply very important theoretical tools when studying a setting where former military organisations hold political power, and where organisations experience continuous crises and a hostile environment. As it examines the causes of action, it may examine the causes of actions leading to war as well. Her theories set focus on topics seldom addressed within peace research, namely organisational culture; this might also lead to new insights. Moreover, she puts focus on the interaction within organisations and on how the organisational sub-cultures influence outcomes, again a focus seldom applied to peace research, again with the potential to uncover new insights. Indirectly Kier also takes on some of the points of Scherrer's criticism of peace research, as she takes local details into account. She opens up the possibility for the study of how organisational culture was formed, thus allowing the study of factors that are important for peace researchers trying to transform/accommodate such organisational culture into a more peaceful version, or to accommodate the organisational culture in ways that prevent war. In this way the theories of Elizabeth Kier provides a valuable tool to study war, both the decision-making that leads to it, as well as to study the decisions preventing a reestablishment of peace.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia remains tense even five years after the 1998-2000 Eritrean - Ethiopian war formally ended. Both sides are still engaged in a war of words and the border remains closed. Ethiopian as well as Eritrean politicians, journalists and political scientists retain vested interests when discussing the causes and the handling of the war. The Ethiopian side wants to show that the Eritreans caused the war, while the Eritreans want to show that Ethiopia was to blame. Moreover, the Ethiopian opposition actively criticises the government's handling of the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship and use the Eritrean issue as a strategy in order to gain voters and supporters. The relationship between the Ethiopian government and the Ethiopian press continues to be problematic; there are frequent attempts by the government to harass independent journalists and to manipulate the press. Lies and misinformation are often strategies used to protect the interests of the various parties, as well as to damage political opponents, also when describing the events of the past.

This situation poses a number of challenges for research and the collection of information. It influences the quality of most of the regional sources of information that this thesis has to draw upon, namely interviews, oral and written statements made by involved individuals, as well as Ethiopian newspaper articles. Perhaps more than in other situations, both oral and written sources must be treated with caution and with keen appreciation of their potential bias, or authenticity, as forgery of documents remains a frequent occurrence. It might also imply that some of the original documents from the involved organisations that have been studied are forgeries.

This thesis employs a number of different strategies in order to deal with research under the challenging circumstances of the Eritrean - Ethiopian war, and this chapter outlines these various approaches and methods. No methodology can fully overcome the possibility of misinformation and misrepresentation, however, specific research methods might enhance the analysis conducted through the thesis.

A general introduction to the type of process tracing employed in the thesis is presented in section one and a justification of the chosen narrowly focused case study approach is also provided. Section two presents the interview techniques. Section three presents how written sources were used and how the study of the press was conducted.

Employing Process Tracing in a Case Study

In order to examine how organisational culture was formed, entrenched and in the end had effects on decision making, this thesis employs a form of process tracing. Process tracing is a research strategy that looks closely at the way decisions are made and the factors that influence the participants. It involves reconstructing actors' motivations, as well as their definitions and evaluations of situations. Thick process tracing is close to an historical explanation and traces the sequences of events in detail over a longer period of time.¹ As Alexander George and Andrew Bennet claim, process tracing examines in detail the processes, events, actions and expectations that link a cause to its effect.² Such an approach gives several advantages: the development of organisational culture might be traced over time and the process of how the culture was enhanced, even changed, by external forces, can be studied, as well as its final effects on decision making. The thesis will thus be able to trace specific elements within the organisational culture of the involved organisations, show their origins, how they developed and how they influenced decision-making in the period leading up to the war.

Process tracing is here employed in a case study of Ethiopian decision-making. While statistical approaches comparing different wars commonly applied by peace research might disclose important facts about conflicts, they tend to compare states and use states as units.³ This thesis is based on the constructivist theories employed by Kier, theories that warn explicitly against perceiving a state, or any party to a conflict, as more homogenous than it really is.⁴ She maintains that a state-centric approach often describes a religion and a simplified culture as norms that influence a state's behaviour. To Kier, there is no such thing as a unified state culture; different groups and different organisations operating within a state will always have different cultures. If there are intra-state conflicts, the different rebel fronts will seem more coherent than they really are, whereas they actually consist of smaller groups

¹ Andrew Bennet and Alexander George, "Process Tracing in Case Study Research" (paper presented at the Mac Arthur Foundation Workshop on Case Study Methods, Harvard University, October 17-19 1997), 3.

² Ibid., 2.

³ The classical works of David Singer and Melvin Small for example compare the characteristics of states when exploring inter-state wars. They focus on the GNP of states, their resource situation, and their status in the international system, number of deaths per participant and so on. If additional actors originating in one of the participating states are to be counted, they have to take up arms. Non-violent policy influence is not examined. David Singer, and Melvin Small, *Correlates of War Project: International and Civil War Data, 1816-1992 (Icpsr 9905)* (ICPSR 9905) [Internet] (Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2000 [cited 1 June 2005]); available from <http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/DDI/SAMPLES/09905.xml>.

⁴ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

with different cultures. Moreover, even within the various segments and organisations influencing the decision making in a state, there will be complex interaction between different groups. A case-study approach is one way of avoiding the theoretical superimposition of homogeneity. This kind of study affords possibilities for an in-depth examination of local conditions, local cultures, sub-group interaction and the history and culture of the many groups and institutions inevitably involved in the process leading to war.

However, such a case study is demanding. It is of vital importance to interview people who participated in relevant organisational decision-making. In the Ethiopian case, people that held influential positions are parts of organisations that have a tradition of secrecy, so it inevitably becomes both time- and resource-intensive. Due to the lack of time and resources, the field study phase had to focus on Ethiopia only. While this decreases the information available on Eritrea, it has the advantage of increasing the possibility for an in-depth study of conditions in Ethiopia. This thesis does not look for the cause, the most important cause of the war. It rather examines many of the small causes, causes that nevertheless had crucial impact on decision-making at various stages in the process that led to war. It acknowledges that many of the small causes were probably rooted in Eritrean actions, but also clearly identifies such causes on the Ethiopian side. It is impossible to examine innumerable causes that might lead to a specific war and all peace researchers must limit their focus. The focus on Ethiopia functions as a way to narrow down the focal point. It is important to understand the Ethiopian case. This is not to appropriate blame but to be able to go in depth. Similar studies of organisational culture might be conducted in Eritrea, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The Fieldwork Phase

This thesis is based on ten months of fieldwork in Ethiopia conducted from August 2002 to June 2003, as well as a second short fieldwork phase in December 2004. A vital part of this fieldwork was the conducting of interviews. A total of twenty four persons were interviewed. Twenty of the interviews were recorded. Interviews were conducted in Addis Ababa and Mekele. The largest single group that was interviewed consisted of members or former members of the ruling party in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF). The EPRDF is a complex organisation. It is an umbrella organisation consisting of

four important ethnically defined structures: the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Amhara National Democratic Party (ANDM) and Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Front (SEPDF).⁵ All these organisations have their separate leaders and separate central committees. However, the TPLF is clearly the oldest and most influential of these organisations. It dominates policy making, and is the oldest association within the EPRDF umbrella.⁶ Focus was therefore set on TPLF, its leadership and its central committee, of which five members were interviewed.⁷ The central committee of the EPRDF was also deemed to be important. As the highest ruling body of the party it has a large and direct influence on Ethiopian decision-making. A total of seven central committee members were interviewed. Some of these respondents had double roles: they were also interviewed because of their parallel roles as members in the TPLF central committee, as well as their OPDO and AAPO central committee memberships.⁸ One central committee member in the OPDO and three members in AAPO (of which one at the time had been sacked for corruption) were interviewed.⁹

The second main group consisted of high ranking parliamentarians and civil servants, also originating in the EPRDF structure, but interviewed because of their supposed proximity to the formal decision-making processes.¹⁰ Two of the participants of the Ethio-Eritrean border commission, each from separate sides in the conflict that broke out within the TPLF, were interviewed.¹¹ Six members of the Defence and Security Affairs Standing Committee and the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs (committees in the Parliament) were interviewed.¹² In addition the vice minister of foreign affairs was interviewed.¹³

An interviewer encounters many methodological dilemmas. The respondent might be provoked by the question or be tempted to give answers that suit her/his own purposes.

⁵ANDM used to be known as Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), and was at the start not ethnically defined.

⁶ Sarah Vaughan, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Sida Reports (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 116.

⁷ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Mulugeta Gebre *Chaltu* Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003, Kiddusan Nega, Interview, 17 March 2003, Sebat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003, Netsanet Asefaw Nigus, Interview, 1 January 2002.

⁸ All in all this was the case for three of the TPLF central committee members, two of the ANDM central committee leaders as well as one of OPDO members

⁹ Simon Bereket, Interview, 25 December 2002, Mesmor Fante, Interview, 2 February 2003, Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002, Hassan Shiffa, Interview, 21 December 2003.

¹⁰ As will be elaborated in later chapters, in the case of the Parliament the MPs were not close to the decision-making although theoretically supposed to be so

¹¹ They were not formal members, but these informal participants mixed with the formal members and participated in the debate. Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹² The two committees in the Parliament are now joined together and exist as one committee. Aserat Adaro, Interview, 6 December 2002, Zeray Asgedom, Interview, 3 December 2002, Hailekiros Gesesse, Interview, 1 December 2002, Fentaye Legesse, Interview, 2 December 2002, Tesfaye Tsegaye, interview, 25 October 2002, Techa Uqa, Interview, 16 December 2002.

¹³ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

Interview triangulation, cross checking with other interviews, is employed in order to explore self-interests, using other interviews in order to disclose hidden motives amongst other respondents. Although not perfect, it creates a possibility to detect false information. Political adversaries will usually have a great interest in disclosing the selfish motivations of their opponents, and the thesis employed such adversaries to check the information of the EPRDF respondents. In this thesis, three leaders of oppositional parties, namely Beyene Petros of the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition (SEPDC), Beranu Nega, now vice-leader of the oppositional party Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), and Merara Gudina of the Oromo National Congress (ONC) were interviewed in order to explore the influence of self-interests in the replies of the EPRDF leaders.¹⁴ A representative of the Eritrean side was also interviewed.¹⁵ In addition dissidents from the ruling party itself were interviewed.¹⁶

Self-evidently, the claims of the respondents in opposition to the EPRDF respondents might also be motivated by selfish reasons, and cannot be taken as valid without being checked with other sources of information. However, they can be used as indicators showing that some answers need to be double checked. Comments from these respondents were used as a foundation for further research rather than as an outright dismissal of the EPRDF members' claims.¹⁷

Several members of the press and the civil society were interviewed, as were members of the international diplomatic community.¹⁸ The researcher's day to day interaction with the students and staff of the Addis Ababa University, as well as the press and the diplomatic community in Ababa also provided additional information. All information from interviews was compared and checked with the information from the 49 Ethiopian newspapers studied in connection with the research for this thesis.¹⁹ Previous documents made by and about the respondents, were also employed to study the respondents' background and make comparisons with their more recent statements, to examine changes in opinion over time.²⁰

¹⁴ Merara Gudina, Interview, 1 April 2003, Berhanu Nega, Interview, 1 March 2003, Beyene Petros, Interview, 3 December 2002. ONC and SEPDC has now joined in the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) party

¹⁵ Yonas Manna Bairu, Interview, 1 September 2004.

¹⁶ Alemsegged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Mesmor Fante, Interview, 2 February 2003.

¹⁷ Surprisingly often the various groups actually agreed on relatively controversial issues

¹⁸ Amhare Aregowi, Interview 2002, Muluwork Kidanemariam, Interview, 13 March 2003, Anthony Lake, Interview, 22 March 2005.

¹⁹ They will be dealt with more in-depth later in the chapter

²⁰ Closely following the research methodologies of Checkel; Jeffery Checkel, "Social Construction and Integration," *Journal of European Public Policy (Special Issue)* 6, no. 4 (1999), Jeffery Checkel, "Why Comply? Constructivism, Social Norms and the Study of International Institutions," *Arena working paper*, no. 24 (1999), Jeffery Checkel, "Taking Deliberation Seriously" (paper presented at the workshop on Ideas, Discourse and European Integration, European Union Center, Harvard University, 11-12 May 2001), Jeffery Checkel, "Why Comply? Social Learning and European Identity Change," *International Organization* 55, no. 3 (2001), Jeffery Checkel, Interview, 15 May 2002.

When structuring the interview itself, several other questions had to be dealt with. According to Egil Fivelsdal, politicians have a tendency to have answers prepared in advance, and also to force the interviewer to speak about certain issues. It is easy to lose control over the direction of the interview; some questions become impossible to ask and valuable information is often not obtained.²¹ Ottar Hellevik argues that the use of memory questions often influences the respondents, who tend to believe that their individual preferences are more consistent over time than they are.²² Tove Mordal suggests that researchers also might encounter a *telescope effect* where the respondent tends to include events and developments outside the focus period, and backdate them, believing that they are within the time span they are being asked about.²³

The previously described source triangulation is used as a technique to counter the telescope effect described by Mordal, as important events will be dated in other sources and statements in the interview may be compared to such sources and a telescope effect could be discovered. A cognitive interview technique is employed in order to deal with the challenge of memory questions. In its original form, the cognitive interview format comprised several memory retrieval techniques together with some supplementary techniques for recalling specific details.²⁴ Recent studies have shown that by using these strategies to improve the results, the respondents remember more.²⁵ When conducting interviews with high profile-politicians, such a technique might also have its disadvantages; first and foremost it is time consuming. As many of the respondents were working in positions with relatively heavy working burdens and tight time schedules they had little time for conducting interviews, two-hour sessions were too long, and the interviews usually lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. Thus, in some cases the technique had to be modified to save time, but in general the cognitive interview technique was used.

²¹ Egil Fivelsdal, *Nogle Problemer Ved Interviewing Af Personer I Ledende Stillinger* (København: Samfundlitteratur, 1990).

²² Ottar Hellevik, *Forskningsmetode I Sosiologi Og Statsvitenskap* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1991), 381, Elizabeth F Loftus, "Creating False Memories," *Scientific American* 277, no. 3 (1997).

²³ Tove L. Mordal, *Som Man Spør Får Man Svar* (Spydberg: Tano, 1989.), 155.

²⁴ One of the main cognitive interview techniques is mentally to reconstruct the physical and personal contexts that existed at the time of the event or situation in which the researcher is interested in. This is based upon the assumption that context reinstatement increases the accessibility of stored information. The respondent is also asked to report everything. Respondents also have to report in full without screening out anything they consider being irrelevant or which they only partially remember. Another strategy is to ask the respondent to remember from different perspectives, both from the perspective of another person, but in addition from the perspective of another location. A last, but very important technique is to give the respondent self-confidence. The interviewer has to indicate to the respondent that he/she has little previous knowledge on the subject. The respondent must be allowed to govern the timetable of the interview, thus making him/her feel in control of the situation. Edward R. Geiselman, "On the Use and Efficacy of the Cognitive Interview," *Psychology* 7, no. 11 (1996), Endel Tulving, "Cue-Dependent Forgetting," *American Scientist* 62, no. 3 (1974).

²⁵ Edward R. Geiselman, *On the Use and Efficacy of the Cognitive Interview* (1996 [cited 11 7]).

The way interviews were conducted was structured after an interview guide. An interview guide makes it possible to put systematic focus on important events, cultural themes and expected processes of cognitive evolution without having a structured interview where all questions are prepared in advance.²⁶ The first interviews used as a point of departure an interview guide prepared before the eleven-month long field study in Ethiopia. The interview guide contained a number of events, decisions and themes that were to be researched as well as techniques for conducting the interview itself, and was used as a reminder during interviews to ensure that no themes were forgotten. It is important to stress that this was only a point of departure; responses provided during the interviews were used to add new questions and themes to the interview guide. This process was inspired partly by theories behind the cognitive interview, which is based on the reflection of the respondent; it was also inspired by theories on qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews are an unstructured form of interviewing that resembles a conversation in the sense that the respondent interacts with the researcher, both mutually learning from the process.²⁷ Steinar Kvale argues that a qualitative interview might lead to increased understanding both for respondent and the person conducting the interview.²⁸ By adding themes suggested by the respondents, the researcher will take advantage of both his/her previous knowledge and the increased understanding of interviewer and respondent.

An additional problem that emerged during the interview rounds in Ethiopia was fear. Respondents feared for their positions within their parties, and feared that the disclosure of facts would hurt their party organisation or themselves. This made anonymity essential, and respondents asking for such anonymity were granted it. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed later, in order to make the information available for future research on Ethiopian-Eritrean relations. This made the interviews more formal, but by putting emphasis on creating a good atmosphere, by encouraging the respondent to speak about his/her life experience and interests, this effect was countered as much as possible. In some cases the respondents wanted the tape to be turned off when making certain comments, and in such cases only notes were taken.

Interviews will always have an element of interpretation, and there will always be problems, but the above mentioned techniques are a way to minimise these challenges.

²⁶ The first version of the interview guide is enclosed as an appendix; although later modified this was the basis of all interviews

²⁷ Anna Svabø, Ådel Bergland and Jorun Hæreid, *Sosiologi Og Sosialantropologi* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1993), 220.

²⁸ Steinar Kvale, "Det Kvalitative Interview," in *Valg Af Organisations- Sociologisk Metoder*, ed. Ib Andersen (København: Samfundslitatur, 1990), 227.

Written Sources

The written sources used in this thesis can be divided into four categories: they are literature written by researchers specialising in Ethiopia, ideological documents/ party programmes from the government and various political parties, interviews given to the press and Ethiopian newspaper articles. These sources were used to check the responses given in interviews conducted in conjunction with this thesis, and the interviews were also used to check the written sources in a cross-checking process. The use of such triangulation helps the interviewer improve the interviewing techniques and avoid influencing the respondents' answers.

Books and articles written by researchers are secondary sources as the authors have most commonly not directly witnessed the events they analyse and have to draw upon additional sources. Such books and articles have to be used with caution as it becomes harder to establish the quality of their primary sources. Emphasis is here put on sources directly written by participants in the studied organisations, or on interviews with these various participants, published both in the Ethiopian and the international press.

There are some general traps researchers can fall into when using written sources. Written sources might have other origins than they claim to have. Public claims made by the individual respondents and organisational protocols might be products of efforts to delegitimise actors, due to the tense relationship between the governing party and the opposition in Ethiopia. If the individuals involved are controversial and have fallen from grace with the government, researchers have to examine the source of relevant documents and their context in more depth in order to disclose all potentially problematic aspects of the source. Triangulation will also in this case be a potential method to enhance quality of the research.

The Study of the Press

Peace researchers such as Wilhelm Kempf, Heikki Luostarnen and Rune Ottosen have suggested that newspapers and media coverage are important for the general discussion of war

and peace in society and have the power to promote peace, but also more warlike strategies.²⁹ Similarly, in the Ethiopian case the Ethiopian press influenced the public discussion of the war. Much of it actually took place in their articles, and it thus becomes important to study its role in relations to the war.

It is important to remember that the different newspapers are organisations themselves, and have to be studied as having organisational cultures that influence their writing styles and their conclusions. Newspapers might print articles strongly influenced by their own organisational background.

However, newspapers might also be accurate sources for information about ongoing events, and this is the way newspaper sources will be used in chapters five, six and seven of this thesis. Such use demands the triangulation of the newspaper articles. If the content of an article runs contrary to previous editorial attitudes and against the ideology of the paper, and when statements of the newspaper are corroborated by other sources, this might indicate a weak role of organisational culture. Importantly, erroneous reporting in itself does not necessarily mean that organisational culture have blurred the reporting; papers make mistakes and many individuals have reached wrong conclusions based on good information. The presence of systematic traits and the repetition of certain phrases will be needed to indicate the existence of a specific organisational culture. If such systematic traits seem to be explainable by referring to organisational culture, this indicates that organisational culture has systematically influenced the interpretations of the paper.

Repeated conclusions that systematically contradict the available information on external events might be explained by the organisational history of the papers in question. Nevertheless, this may also be explained by vested interests and the thesis will examine this by analysing which interests papers might have in reporting in a particular way. Interviews with critics of the paper indicate such interests, and triangulation and examination of more neutral sources might be able to confirm such suspicions.

The thesis examined systematically the 49 most important newspapers from 1994 to 1998, looking for common themes and the influence of potential cultural elements.³⁰ It then inquired into the organisational background of the most popular of the Ethiopian papers. As illustrated by the table on page 43 (Table 2.1), the media covered in this thesis can be

²⁹ Wilhelm Kempf, "Gulf War Revisited: A Comparative Study of the Gulf War Coverage in American and European Media" (paper presented at the Projektgruppe Friedensforschung's Conference on Peace Journalism, Konstanz, 13-15 June 1997), Heikki Luostarnen, and Rune Ottosen, "Challenges for Journalism in Restricted Conflicts after the Second World War" (paper presented at the Projektgruppe Friedensforschung's Conference on Peace Journalism, Konstanz, 13-15 June 1997).

³⁰ Most papers are in Amharic (the most important language in Ethiopia).

categorised into eight groups. The first category comprises the major opposition papers directly associated with political organisations, the second category consists of large and well-known opposition papers without a direct connection to political organisations, and the third category includes smaller opposition papers. A fourth group consists of big papers usually viewed as government-friendly, with the fifth category consisting of papers that are directly attached to the government. The sixth is a group of small papers with obscure and unknown attachments. I also chose to include a seventh category for subversive papers, those that pretend to be oppositional but are by some viewed as subversive tools of the government. The eighth and last category is national TV, controlled directly by the government. The different categories are important for methodological reasons, as the control the government held over them varied, as well as the relationship with the government. Thus the more tactical motivations for criticising the government may have varied as well. The articles in the newspapers were analysed while keeping their affiliations in mind.

The study of the newspapers was mainly conducted in Ethiopia in 2002-2003 by the researcher and one Ethiopian project assistant, both participating in the translation of the articles studied in this thesis. In addition the English language Ethiopian Press Digest was studied in Norway 2005, as well as the Ethiopian Herald, the main English newspaper of the Derg. Newspaper issues from 1994 until August 1998 were studied systematically. The Ethiopian Herald was studied from 1974 to 1989. Selected post-1998 issues of the Reporter, the Addis Zemen and the Addis Tribune were studied because they were suggested as sources by respondents.

A study of the organisational culture of the Ethiopian press and its influence on the process that lead to war might raise at least two objections. First, the press might be seen as controlled by the government, a pawn in their media strategy controlled by reprisals and harsh prison sentences given to critical journalists. It might be argued that this has led to the death of several newspapers. From a peak of 128 publications registered in 1994, there are now fewer than several dozen.³¹ As Human Rights Watch argues, “government repression is being used as a means of tightening the state's grip.”³²

³¹ Sarah Vaughan, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Sida Reports (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 72.

³² Human Rights Watch, "The Ethiopian Government Is Trying to Muffle the Independent Press," (London: Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Table 2.1: The studied papers and their circulation (In the year 2000).³³

Cat 1.	Cat 2.	Cat 3.	Cat 3.	Cat 4.	Cat 5.	Cat 6.	Cat 7.	Cat 8.
Andinet	Tobiya (6500)	Genawi	Dannew	Addis Zemen (15.000)	Yereza Etiopia	Madda Welaabu	Adwa?	ETV
Niqa	Mogad (2000)	Dowol	Tarik	Weekly Report	Abiotawi Demokrasi	Roha	Fiametta?	
Tariq	Tomar (2000)	Amiro	Dagmawi	Addis Tribune (2000)	IFIYOTA (Circulated amongst Eprdf Members, numbers unknown).	Tazzabi		
	Amiro	Mudai	Tenager	The Reporter (11.000)		KITAB		
	URJI	WAQT	Mebreq (4000)	The Monitor (1000)		Lubar		
	Gomorra	Zog	Agere	The Ethiopian Herald (7000)		Andebet		
	Beza	Addis lissan	Habasha	Beza		Tequamin		
	Etiop (5500)	Zenai Admas	Wolafen	The Sun (1000)		Anbet		
	Seife – Nebelbal (4000)	Zena Ethiopia				Morech		

³³ The circulation numbers for some newspapers are not available. The first category comprises the major opposition papers associated with political organisations, the second category consists of large and well-known opposition papers without a direct connection to political organisations, the third category includes smaller opposition papers. A fourth group consists of big papers usually viewed as government-friendly, with the fifth category consisting of papers that are directly attached to the government. The sixth is a group of small papers unknown attachments. A seventh category covers subversive papers, papers claiming to be oppositional but are accused by competing newspapers to act as subversive tools of the government. The eighth category is national TV, controlled directly by the government.

Indeed, the Press Law of 1992 had many shortcomings constraining the press.³⁴ This law was based on the Press Proclamation 34/1992, which in turn was partly, not fully, written on the basis of articles stipulated in the Penal Code of 1957 and the Civil Code of 1959.³⁵ Some of these older articles are not fully identical to the new press law, but still have legal force. Journalists and their lawyers also had to pay attention to the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Criminal Procedure Code, and, of course, the International Conventions Ethiopia has signed.³⁶ This confusion has been actively used by the government to prosecute newspapers and their journalists.³⁷ As Mulat says:

Ethiopia's Press Law (Proclamation 34/1992) could be taken as an achievement of great significance in the process of political liberalization. Typical gestures in this direction are the measures taken to free the press from the captivity of pre-print censorship. In practice, however, rather than regulating the activities of the private press, the law imposed prohibitive articles.³⁸

Additionally, the press law contains paragraphs allowing the imprisonment of journalists for example of spreading false accusation against the government, and paragraphs so vague that they are open to interpretation.

The second question becomes how can the Ethiopian press with its low distribution numbers have any influence? After all, only three of them have full coverage of Ethiopia. As the Norwegian press researcher Øyvind Aadland asserts, Ethiopian papers are circulated amongst relatively few individuals, around 20,000 all in all.³⁹ Even a large paper will only have a circulation of 11,000 to 15,000 issues.

With regards to the first issue: the Ethiopian press can clearly not be said to be controlled by the government. On the contrary, most papers are highly critical of the government. Of the four largest papers, the Addis Zemen, the Reporter, the Abitawi

³⁴ A new press law is in the process of being created, this law is still relatively restrictive prohibiting foreign investment in the press and preventing former criminals, including some former journalists convicted under the 1992 law, from owning newspapers.

³⁵ 1949 Ethiopian calendar and 1952 Ethiopian calendar.

³⁶ Kifle Mulat, "Presentation" (paper presented at the Workshop for Journalist associations, Media Policies and Investigative Journalism on HIV/AIDS, Nairobi, Kenya, 5-8 June 2002).

³⁷ There is a problem of incompatibility both in time and outlook (for example the conceptual outlook with regard to the press between these laws) due to the fact that the Press Proclamation is nine years old. The Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure code are both 42 years old. The youngest of the laws pertaining to the press in the Constitution, is only four years old.

³⁸ Kifle Mulat, "Presentation" (paper presented at the Workshop for Journalist associations, Media Policies and Investigative Journalism on HIV/AIDS, Nairobi, Kenya, 5-8 June 2002).

³⁹ Øyvind Aadland, "Contextualization of Communications, the Role of the Media in Bringing Democracy and Protecting Human Rights and in Development" (paper presented at the Freedom of the Press and Social Development Seminar, Imperial Hotel, Addis Ababa, 10-11 October 2003).

Demokrasi and the Tobiya, one, the Tobiya, was highly critical of the government from its conception. The Reporter was initially friendly towards the government but became highly critical in 1997. The Addis Zemen, although owned by the government, contained many critical articles and only one, the Abitawi Demokrasi, an official EPRDF paper, was an uncritical supporter of the government.⁴⁰ Most of the smaller papers had articles that were unfavourable to the government. Moreover, even given the prohibitive articles of the Press Law, the press actually had very strong guarantees compared to previous regimes: the opposition was allowed to found newspapers and had some freedom of operations within the somewhat confusing constraints set by the Press Law and the various reprisals from the government. The reduction in the amount of papers was, as Kjetil Tronvoll and Sarah Vaughan claim, also a result of the limited market for newspapers in Ethiopia, and the over-investment in the media sector following its first opening in 1992.⁴¹

From time to time the oppositional press accuses some of its members of being planted, of being created by the government to publish false rumours so as to discredit the rest of the oppositional papers. Nevertheless, the accusations are directed at few newspapers. During the period studied here such accusations were directed at the newspapers Adwa and Fiametta only.⁴² The critical views of the majority of the papers and the fact that accusations of subversion are so limited make it reasonable to view most of the newspapers in Ethiopia as independent organisations with the ability to write articles with a critical attitude towards the government.

With regards to the second issue, as Øyvind Aadeland, a well known expert on the Ethiopian press, points out, although the circulation numbers of the Ethiopian papers are low and mainly restricted to Addis Ababa and other large cities, they are circulated among a very important elite.⁴³ The papers are circulated amongst the political leadership of all the major ethnic groups, the government, the opposition, the leaders within the army and the financial sector. In addition, the official circulation numbers might be misleading. Ethiopia might be

⁴⁰ A quick look through archived issues of these papers in the institute of Ethiopian Studies library at the University of Addis Ababa will confirm such a view; one might also access the Reporter online at www.Ethiopianreporter.com. For examples see: "The Arrest of Taimarat Layne, Tplf Systematizes Corruption," *Tobiya* 10 April 1997, "Ato Sileshi Woubneh Leaves as a Protest against the Eprdf," *The Reporter* 17 February 1997, "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," *Tenager* 8 September 1994.

⁴¹ Sarah Vaughan, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life, Sida Reports* (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 72.

⁴² "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," *Tenager* 8 September 1994, Issaias Afwerki, "Appendix 3: Letters Exchanged between Afwerki & Zenawi, July-August 1997, Second Letter from President Issaias Afwerki to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Dated 25/08/1997," in *Brothers at War, Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, ed. Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oxford: James Currey, 1997).

⁴³ Øyvind Aadeland, "Contextualization of Communications, the Role of the Media in Bringing Democracy and Protecting Human Rights and in Development" (paper presented at the Freedom of the Press and Social Development Seminar, Imperial Hotel, Addis Ababa, 10-11 October 2003).

similar to neighbouring Somaliland in the sense that one issue is resold after its use, circulating amongst more than one reader.⁴⁴ One copy of a newspaper is often shared by many individuals, and literate family members often tend to read to other, illiterate family members and friends. The circulation is thus larger than official numbers indicated. The newspapers thus were important and most newspapers acted independently of the government.

Methodology, a Summary

All in all, this thesis uses a variety of methodological techniques in order to deal with the problems encountered when doing research on the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. First, it narrows its focus to organisational culture and Ethiopian organisations in order to go more in depth into these factors. All studies of war have to be narrowed down in some way or another and the focus of this thesis allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of a topic seldom researched into.

Second, it uses several techniques to ensure the quality of the information gathered. It compares information gathered in interviews with information from other sources, both written and other interviews. This triangulation allows the researcher to discover more easily answers that are given out of self-interest or answers that are wrong because of the weakness of memory. It also uses the cognitive interview technique in order to deal with these problems. Similarly, triangulation is used to examine information from written sources: they are compared to other sources and the backgrounds of the writers are checked.

No methodology can fully overcome the possibility of misinformation and misrepresentation; however, these specific research methods enhance the foundation for the analysis conducted through the thesis.

⁴⁴ The writer observed this practice in Addis Ababa on several occasions. Newspaper sellers would go to restaurants to pick up leftover papers and sell them again. Berit Linderman and Stig Jarle Hansen,, *Somaliland, Electoral Report* (Oslo: Center for Human Rights, 2003).

Part II: Empirical Analysis

Chapter 3: Explaining the Eritrean-Ethiopian War

On 6 May 1998, a small group of Eritrean soldiers entered a disputed territorial zone on the Badme plains, an area along the western borders of Eritrea and the northernmost part of Ethiopia. The exact details of the clashes that followed are hard to establish. Over a period of six days smaller contingents of Eritreans and Ethiopians became engaged in small scale battles. Eritrea then subsequently launched a major offensive to retake what they claimed to be Eritrean territories controlled by Ethiopia. In response, the Ethiopian government swiftly assembled its lower chamber of Parliament, the Council of People's Representatives. This chamber subsequently issued a resolution condemning the acts of aggression by the Eritreans and demanded immediate and unconditional withdrawal. Suddenly Africa had a full-scale bilateral war, the first in decades.¹ The war lasted for two years and involved half a million soldiers from three countries. Hundreds of thousands had to flee their homes. 140,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians lost their lives.²

Many observers were surprised by the start of the war.³ The alliance between the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) had been perceived as having been one of the more stable alliances during the 1970's and 1980's.⁴ The two organisations were often viewed as recruiting from related ethnic groups, the Tigray and the Tigrinya. Moreover, these groups also shared the Christian Coptic religion. The close ethnic and religious bonds between the groups were seen as central to strengthening their alliance.⁵ The seemingly mutual friendship between the two ruling parties seemed to be so close that the scholar Amare Tekle referred to it as a special relationship in line with the Anglo-American one.⁶ Similarly, in early 1997, the area specialist Roy Pateman optimistically stressed that there would be no military danger as long as the leadership in the two countries remained the same.⁷

Many observers attempted to explain why the war broke out. The explanations ranged from pure conspiracy theory to well-founded theories based on meticulous historical analyses

¹ Walta Information Center, *Chronology of the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict and Basic Documents* (Addis Ababa: Walta Information Center, 2001).

² Human Rights Watch, "Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 - April 2002)," (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), 3.

³ See for example: "Old Comrades Spurn Peace in Horn of Africa.," *The London Times* 9 June 1998.

⁴ Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 12.

⁵ See for example "Old Comrades Spurn Peace in Horn of Africa.," *The London Times* 9 June 1998.

⁶ Amare Tekle, "The Basis of Eritrean-Ethiopian Cooperation," in *Eritrea and Ethiopia from Conflict to Cooperation* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1994), 2.

⁷ Roy Pateman, *Even the Stones Are Burning* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1998), 264.

and in-depth study of source materials, some drawing on general theories of war, some highlighting specific factors. It is important to examine these approaches in order to provide an overview of the literature presenting explanations for the outbreak of the war. In addition, a review of the previous attempts to explain the war is necessary because some of these explanations bring to light factors that interacted with the organisational culture studied in chapters four, five, six and seven of this thesis, and also to show that most of the explanations failed to include organisational cultural factors and inter-organisational interaction when attempting to explain the war, leaving important information unexamined.

Many interacting elements, including the conceptions and strategies of a multitude of actors, drove the developments that led to the war. Many of the previous attempts to explain the Eritrean-Ethiopian war point to different factors that at different stages impelled the process in the direction of war and this chapter highlights their various strengths and weaknesses. The chapter will first show how many of the present day theories of conflict studies fail to explain adequately the causes of the conflict. Subsequently, it will move on to an analysis of more case specific explanations of the war and describe their connections to more general conflict theories when necessary. It will show that both case specific explanations and general explanations leave questions open and almost totally neglect organisational culture.

General Theories on the Causes of War

There are many theories claiming to be valid for most conflicts, and thus also to have the potential to yield new insights when applied to the Eritrean- Ethiopian war.

One set of theories strongly asserts that differences in language, ethnicity or religion can form the basis for psychological distrust or enmity.⁸ Most prominent amongst the proponents for these theories are Samuel Huntington and Donald Horowitz. Huntington, who also touches directly upon the first Eritrean-Ethiopian war in his main book, “The Clash of Civilizations”, claims that different standards, communication problems and lack of familiarity with the assumptions, motivations, social relationships and social practices of other

⁸Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993), Samuel P. Huntington, "If Not Civilizations, What? Paradigms of the Post- Cold War World," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 5 (1993).

people will create large differences between members of the different world religions.⁹ Different world religions are in turn a defining factor of what Huntington calls civilisations: broad cultural entities.¹⁰ Feelings of superiority, fear and distrust of members of other civilisations and difficulties in communication because of different languages and different standards of civic behaviour will all lead to conflicts between such broad cultural entities. Consequently, Huntington claims that war will most often start at the borders between civilisations.¹¹

Horowitz, not commenting upon the Eritrean-Ethiopian war specifically but on war in general, asserts that ethnicity can induce dangerous calculative and passionate behaviour.¹² He claims that humans in general prefer humans that are similar to them, and also have a tendency to form groups. Humans wish to socialise with other humans that are perceived as having many similarities with themselves, like a common ethnic heritage or common language.¹³ Such socialisation will lead to individual group members overemphasising similarities, and make them neglect the differences within a group. Socialisation will also create a desire to belong. Such a desire makes it easier to view other ethnic groups as inferior and justify attacks on them.¹⁴

The Ethiopian-Eritrean war is clearly not a clash of civilisations, nor do the two countries have substantially bilateral problems because of different religions. Indeed some of Huntington's claims become strange when examining this conflict. He claims that conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims are especially violent.¹⁵ A conflict between Muslims and Christians, found both within Ethiopia and Eritrea, exists, but it is small, if not insignificant, compared to the carnage of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. In this war Muslims from Eritrea killed Muslims from Ethiopia and Muslims from Ethiopia killed Eritrean Muslims, members of the Christian civilisation acted likewise. Huntington also claims that Eritrea is a Muslim country while Ethiopia is Christian.¹⁶ This is also clearly wrong, both of the two countries

⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 129.

¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 129.

¹² Donald L. Horowitz, "Structure and Strategy in Ethnic Conflict" (paper presented at the Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics, Washington DC, 20 April 1998), 5.

¹³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 183.

¹⁶ Ibid., 27.

being divided into roughly a 50/50 balance between their Christian and Muslim populations.¹⁷ Huntington's theories seem largely irrelevant for the Eritrean-Ethiopian case.

In the case of Ethiopia-Eritrea, Donald L. Horowitz' claims fare no better. He claims that humans often tend to bond according to similarities into ethnic groups, and that they tend to attack ethnically defined groups perceived as less similar.¹⁸ Two of the most important ethnic groups that stood almost fully united backing the Ethiopian and Eritrean side respectively, the Tigrayans and the Tigrinyas, had a very similar culture and shared the same language. Thus the potential communication problems due to language and traditional cultural differences seem to have been small. The Eritrean-Ethiopian case could be a deviant one, but the above argumentation illustrates that Horowitz' theories have little to offer in explaining this particular war.

Balance of power theories are also commonly used to explain war or the absence of war within the field of International Relations. Scholars such as Stanley Hoffman, commenting on war in general, view changes in the balance of power between countries as vital in order to explain the outbreak of war.¹⁹ It is important to point out that, as indicated by figure 3.1 and 3.2, the balance of power between the two had not been changed by arms import, and no larger arms purchase project had been initiated by any of the two.

In the Eritrean-Ethiopian case the military balance of power between the two states remained virtually unchanged for the five years leading up to the conflict.²⁰ There was no arms race between the two countries.²¹ Admittedly, (as shown in Figure 3.3) there had been a very minor increase in defence spending on the Eritrean side, but this was barely enough to keep track with inflation.

The Soviet Union had earlier exported large amounts of weapons to the previous Ethiopian regime, weapons that were used by both parties in the Eritrean-Ethiopian War.

¹⁷ Thomas P Ofcansky, and Berry LaVerle, *Ethiopia, a Country Study* (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), 1-20.

¹⁸ Donald L. Horowitz, "Structure and Strategy in Ethnic Conflict" (paper presented at the Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics, Washington DC, 20 April 1998), 5-22.

¹⁹ Stanley Hoffman, *Duties Beyond Borders* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981).

²⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997-98* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998), 248-50, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-90* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1990), 131-32, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1995-96* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), 241-42, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1996-97* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1997), 250-51, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1994-95* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1995), 227-28.

²¹ During the autumn of 1997, there was an Eritrean mobilisation of several units that was to participate officially in public construction. These soldiers/workers might have been mobilised because of military purposes. However, this was after tension already had increased, so it did not create the initial tension but might have been a consequence of it.

Figure 3-1: A Comparison Between the Eritrean and Ethiopian Air Forces.²²

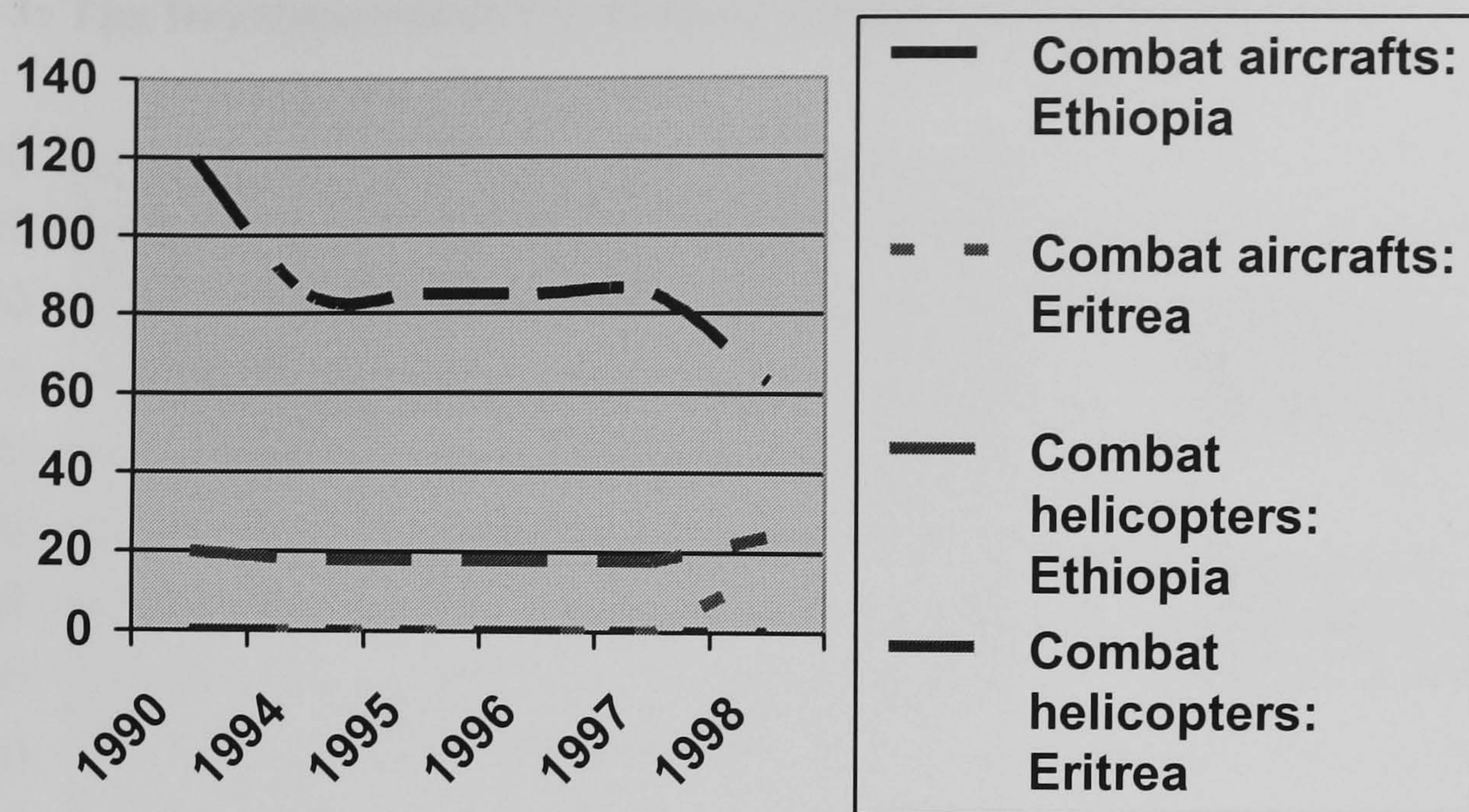
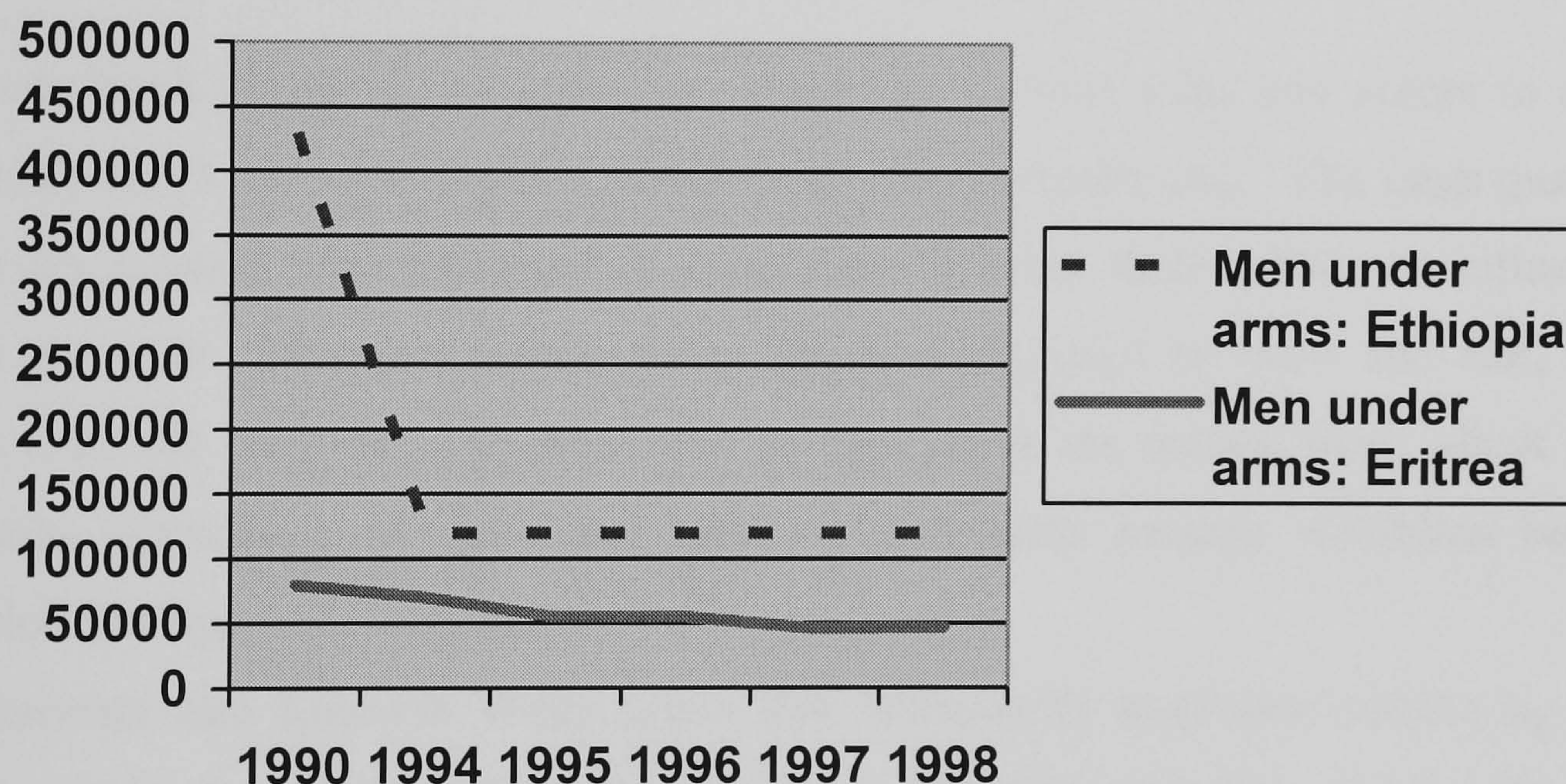


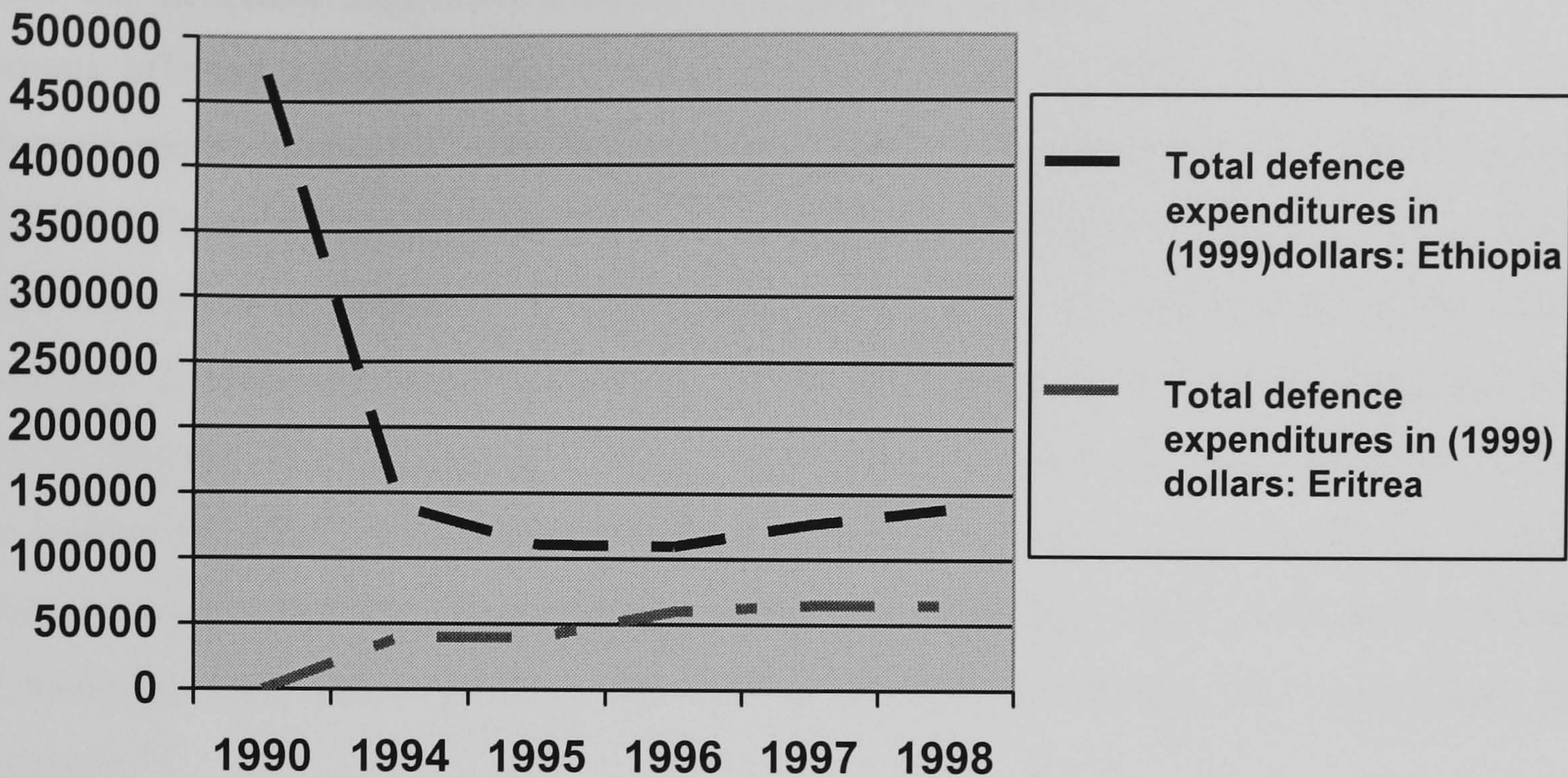
Figure 3-2: A Comparison of the Manpower of the Eritrean and the Ethiopian Army.²³



²² The serviceability of the Ethiopian fighters was very low; the airplanes that remained in service in 1997 were mostly of the Derg vintage. However, the Ethiopian air force had scored some notable successes in increasing the serviceability of their airplanes, this by "cannibalising" parts and by hiring Russian maintenance. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997-98* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998), 248-50, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-90* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1990), 131-32, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1995-96* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), 241-42, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1996-97* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1997), 250-51, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1994-95* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1995), 227-28.

²³ The real Eritrean army was probably significantly smaller than indicated by these numbers; a significant proportion of its manpower is allocated to the running of business enterprises. However, Eritrea mobilised a large number of youths during the autumn of 1997. It was claimed that this was for construction purposes, but it could have been a preparation for war. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997-98* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998), 248-50, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-90* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1990), 131-32, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1995-96* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), 241-42, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1996-97* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1997), 250-51, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1994-95* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1995), 227-28.

Figure 3-3: The Development of the Defence Budgets of the Belligerents²⁴



As Wolbert Smidt points out, whilst this meant that the two sides had access to relatively modern weapons, it does not in itself explain why the war broke out.²⁵ The large quantities of ex-Soviet arms could have remained in storerooms if other factors had not influenced the parties to use them. Moreover, these stores had been depleted by wear and tear, and kept depleting until the time the war broke out. In this sense the parties were, albeit probably involuntarily, disarming, as more and more of their arms became worthless because of deterioration through wear and tear.

Theorists like Kenneth Waltz argue that defensively motivated efforts by states to provide for their own security through armaments, alliances and deterrent threats are often perceived as threatening and so lead to counteractions and conflict spirals that are difficult to reverse.²⁶ The effects of defensively motivated efforts create the security dilemma, the possibility that a state's actions to provide for its security may result in a decrease in the security of all states, including itself.²⁷

²⁴ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997-98* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998), 248-50, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-90* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1990), 131-32, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1995-96* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), 241-42, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1996-97* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1997), 250-51, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1994-95* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1995), 227-28.

²⁵ Wolbert Smidt, "Gibt Es Fur Den Krieg Zwischen Eritrea Und Athiopien Uberhaupt Grunde?," *Streitblatt. Zeitung der Gegenuniversität*, no. 9 (2000): 1.

²⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

²⁷ Jack S. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus Midlarsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 175.

Yet the security dilemma seemed remote from the characteristics of the Ethiopian-Eritrean relationship. The two states seemed to have a deep and warm relationship. At one point the Eritreans suggested creating a federation between the two countries.²⁸ While perhaps offering valuable insights when exploring other conflicts, a focus on the security dilemma seems misplaced when studying the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. The leaders of the two countries, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and Eritrean President Issaias Afworki, were viewed as members of a new and dynamic generation of African leaders able to transcend the previous security dilemmas of the African continent. Martin Plaut and Patrick Gilkes describe their images as: "Hard-working, uncorrupted and determined to break with the continent's sleazy past, both men were promoted as role models for Africa".²⁹ Marina Ottaway mentioned their names together with Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and hailed them as the new generation of leaders that gave hope to the continent.³⁰

Other theoretical approaches apparently touch upon vital characteristics of the parties, but nevertheless seem to leave several questions open. Basing their ideas on Immanuel Kant, peace researchers like Rudolph J. Rummel, Nils Petter Gleditsch and Håvard Hegre claim that democracy in general prevents war.³¹ In a democracy power is claimed to be checked by cross pressures; citizens apply pressure to avoid losing their sons and daughters in war and traders apply pressure to maintain trade; this is claimed to prevent conflict.³² In the Eritrean-Ethiopian case, none of the belligerents were democratic, and the conflict thus fitted with the pattern one would have expected given that Rummel's and Gleditsch's theories work.³³ However, the belligerents had been undemocratic and at peace for several years before the war started. In Ethiopia elections had been held, but observers regarded them as mere shows for donors. The Eritrean ruling party had changed its name, that was all.³⁴ In other words,

²⁸ "Interview with Meles Zenawi," *Die Welt* 26 April 1993.

²⁹ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "Conflict in the Horn: Why Eritrea and Ethiopia Are at War," *Briefing paper, New Series*, no. 6 (1999): 13-14.

³⁰ Marina Ottaway, "Africa's New Leaders: African Solution or African Problem?," *Current History* 97, no. 5 (1998): 4.

³¹ Nils Petter Gleditsch and Håvard Hegre, "Peace and Conflict: Three Levels of Analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 2 (1997), Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace, a Philosophical Essay* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1992), Immanuel Kant, "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, ed. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), Rudolph J. Rummel, *Power Kills: Democracy as a Method of Non-Violence* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

³² Rudolph J. Rummel, *Power Kills: Democracy as a Method of Non-Violence* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 150-60.

³³ Christopher Clapham, "Preface," in *Ethiopia since the Derg: A Decade of Democratic Pretension and Performance*, ed. Kjetil Tronvoll Sigfried Pausewang, Lovise Aalen (London: Zed Books, 2002), xvi, Martin Plaut, "Background to War: From Friends to Foes," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 14.

³⁴ Martin Plaut, "Background to War: From Friends to Foes," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 14.

there had been no changes in the emphasised explanatory variable of Rummel and Gleditsch that could explain why the war broke out just in 1998 and not previously. The approach of Gleditsch and Rummel thus fails to illuminate why the war broke out when it did.

The members of the so-called Toronto group, led by Thomas Homer Dixon, focus their work on scarcities of renewable resources and have defined a special notion, environmental scarcity. They have explicitly concentrated on finding the links between environmental scarcity and conflicts. Thomas Homer Dixon, Daniel M. Schwartz and Tom Deligiannis, commenting upon conflict in general, claim that:

What we should investigate, rather, is the resource's supply *relative to*, first, demand on the resource, and, second, the social distribution of the resource. The relationships between supply and demand and between supply and distribution determine people's actual experience of scarcity, and under any practical hypothesis, it is these relationships that influence the probability of violence.³⁵

The Toronto group claims that environmentally induced conflicts are likely to arise first in the developing world, which for them includes Eritrea and Ethiopia. In these countries, a range of atmospheric, terrestrial and aquatic environmental pressures is claimed to produce, either singly or in combination, four main, causally interrelated social effects: reduced agricultural production, economic decline, population displacement and disruption of regular and legitimised social relations. These social effects, in turn, may cause several specific types of acute conflict, including scarcity disputes between countries, clashes between ethnic groups and civil strife and insurgency, each with potentially serious repercussions for the security interests of the developed world.

Their approach seems to be very relevant for the Eritrean-Ethiopian War. The contested areas between the belligerents in the Eritrean-Ethiopian war had few resources; the area had been plagued by droughts and rain was scarce, and clashes between ethnic groups and civil strife were often induced by the quarrel over resources.³⁶ However, these scarcity problems were also relatively common on the border with Kenya, Djibouti and Sudan, but here the government managed to quell clashes over local resources.³⁷ The approach does not

³⁵ Thomas F Homer-Dixon, and Daniel M. Schwartz, Tom Deligiannis, "The Environment and Violent Conflict: A Response to Gleditsch's Critique and Some Suggestions for Future Research," *Environmental Change & Security Project Report 6*, no. 2 (2000): 79.

³⁶ Kiros Gebre Egziabher, and Solomon Tegegne, "Ethiopian Village Studies: Geblen Subhsaesie Woreda, Tigray," (Oxford: UK Overseas Development Administration, 1996), 4.

³⁷ "Kenya Attacks," *Seife Nebelbal* 9 May 1997.

adequately explain what made the Eritrean-Ethiopian border different from the other borders; why, if this was so, resource scarcity created a larger armed conflict only between Eritrea and Ethiopia, although being equally present in the border areas facing the other neighbours of the belligerents. While it seems to provide relevant information on the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, the environmental scarcity approach nevertheless leaves important questions unanswered.

To sum up: several of the more general theories attempting to explain war are found inadequate when applied to the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. An approach focusing on a supposed clash of civilisation misses out on the dynamics of the conflict as both countries were equally divided when it came to religion: the conflict transcended religion. Furthermore, some of the ethnic groups fighting each other were so close linguistically and culturally that it becomes meaningless to talk about communication problems due to ethnic differences. The armament/disarmament situation strongly contradicts theories emphasising armament as a source of armed conflicts. Other general theoretical approaches leave questions unanswered. An approach focusing on democratisation/ the lack of democratisation and its connection with war, says little about the timing of the outbreak of the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict, as there was simply no change in their democratisation variable. Lastly, an approach focusing on environmental scarcity may explain several small scale conflicts at the Eritrean-Ethiopian border. It does not however explain why the war broke out just on this border and not the other borders of Ethiopia or Eritrea, borders where the locals were facing similar scarcity problems.

Importantly, none of the previously presented researchers have a mono-causal approach to war, acknowledging that other factors also create warfare. However, the factors they emphasise as most important fail to provide the insight needed to understand the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. As Christian Scherrer suggests, the problems of such general theories might be that they fail to take local factors adequately into consideration.³⁸ Several regional analysts examined such local factors in detail. Although sometimes drawing on more general theories, they developed explanations focusing on issues like the confused demarcation of borders, the economic interests of the belligerents, their historical relationship, their identities and the personal interests of their leaders. Regional analysts suggested that it was the interaction between these factors that had led to the war. Again, none of them had a mono-causal approach to the war. Nonetheless, in order to follow more clearly the arguments they

³⁸ Christian P Scherrer, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Priorities* (Moers: Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution (IFEK-IRECOR), 2001), 3.

used to support their claims and the varied emphasis various researchers put on the different factors, it becomes necessary to analyse these factors in separate sections.

A Confusing Border

Both parties in the conflict and many academics stress the confusing border disagreement between the belligerents as one of the major causes of the war.³⁹ Such explanations come in many different versions. One of the researchers supporting Eritrea, Tekie Fessehazion, invokes a narrative of how Ethiopia aggressively handled border demarcation long before the war started and thus created a pattern of hostility.⁴⁰ The occupation of Adi Murug on 16 August 1997, one year before the war started, was often claimed to be an example of such hostility.

There are various versions of this 1997 event. Gabriele Ciampi, for example, writes that Adi Murug was peacefully returned to Eritrea after what was an Ethiopian operation to destroy Afar rebels from the Ougugume rebel group.⁴¹ Ciampi's view is not shared by Ethiopian decision makers, who would seem to have incentives to support her as her version puts more blame on the Eritreans. The Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Yemane Kidane admits that Ethiopia entered into the area with the intention of re-establishing Ethiopian sovereignty there.⁴² Other researchers are also critical of Ciampi's claims, Jean-Louis Péninou explicitly stating that the village was occupied by Ethiopians. Elias Habte Selassie even claims that the Ethiopians dismantled an existing Eritrean administration in the area and replaced it with their own, a claim that Ethiopian authorities also contested.⁴³ Nevertheless, all of the above researchers argue that this incident led to a downward spiral that ended in the Eritrean-Ethiopian war.

³⁹ See for example: Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000), Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000).

⁴⁰ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

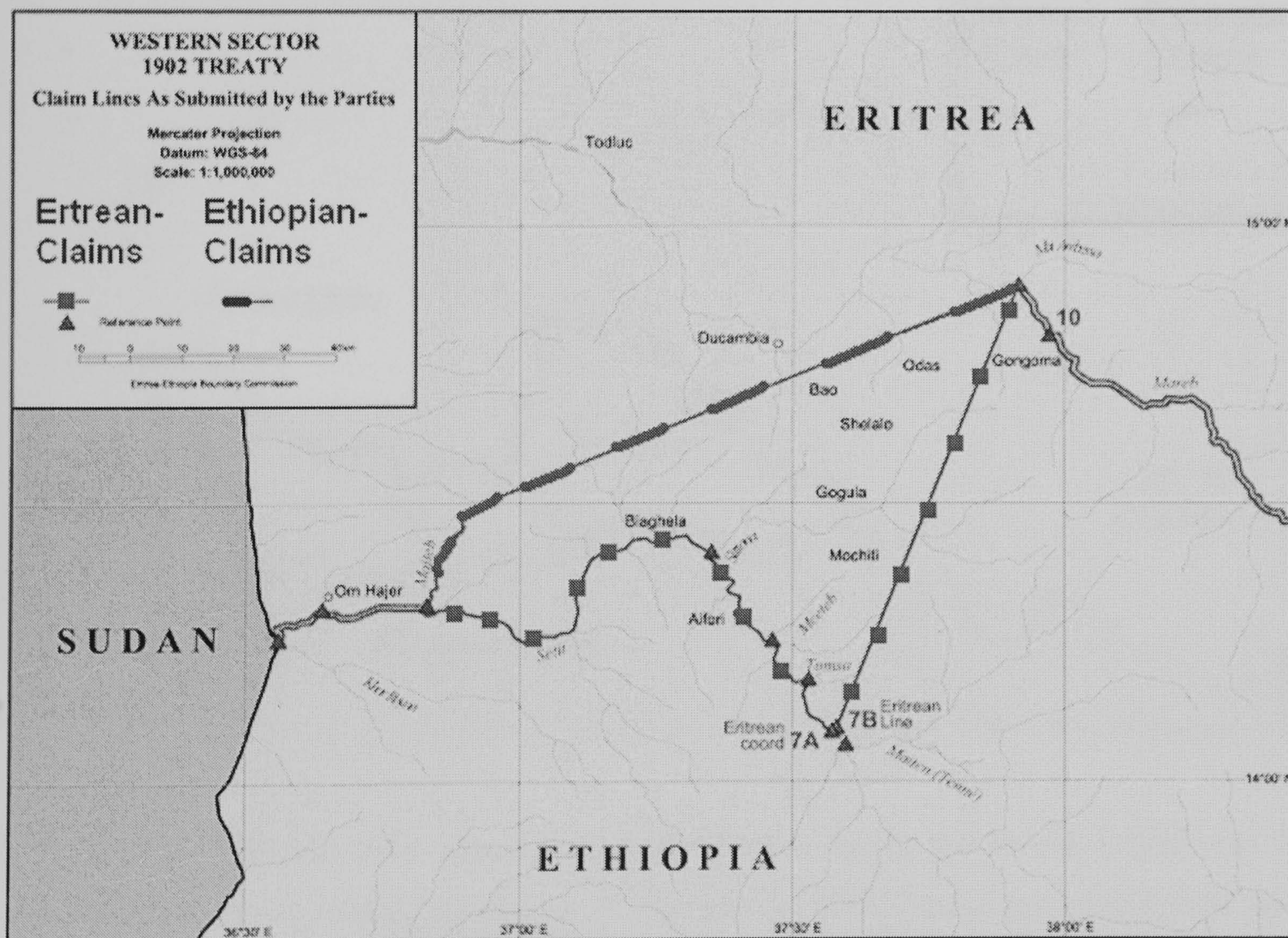
⁴¹ Gabrielle Ciampi does not point to any sources for this information. Gabriele Ciampi, "Componenti Cartografiche Della Controversia Di Confine Eritreo-Etiopica," *Bolletino della Societa Geografica Italiana* 12, no. 3 (1998).

⁴² Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

⁴³ Gabriele Ciampi, "Componenti Cartografiche Della Controversia Di Confine Eritreo-Etiopica," *Bolletino della Societa Geografica Italiana* 12, no. 3 (1998): 508, Jean Louis Péninou, "Guerre Absurde Entre L'Ethiopie Et L'Erythrée," *Review of African Political Economy* 25, no. 77 (1998): 508. Elias H. Selassie, *The Ethio-Eritrean Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences* (CISP, 2001 [cited 20 November 2001]); available from <http://www.cispngo.org/CorsoConflitti/Conflitto%20Etiopia-Eritrea/ConflictSelassie.htm#7>.

They also stress the importance of the clashes between Eritrean and Ethiopian forces in the vicinity of the small village of Badme, some ten months after the Adi Murug incident. Badme was contested by both Ethiopia and Eritrea. An agreement made between Italy and Ethiopia, signed on 10 July 1900, seemed to support Eritrea's claim to the area. This agreement states that the area called Badme, and also the Sittona and Meetebe tributaries of the Setit River, were Italian and fell within what was then the Italian colony of Eritrea (Map 3.1). The Italian geographers Federica Guazzini and Gabriele Ciampi contest this view.⁴⁴ According to them, the map that the Eritrean government claims to be the product of the 1900 treaty is a map produced by Italian cartographers in 1906.

Map 3.1: Ethiopian and Eritrean Claims: Western Sector (Including the Badme area)



⁴⁴ Gabriele Ciampi, "Componenti Cartografiche Della Controversia Di Confine Eritreo-Etiopica," *Bolletino della Societa Geografica Italiana* 12, no. 3 (1998): 530, Federica Guazzini, *La Regione Di Un Confine Coloniale: Eritrea, 1898-1908* (Torino: L'Hattman Italia, 1999), Bereket H. Selassie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1980).

Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll agree and claim that: “Italy resorted to what geographers describe as the persuasive functions of maps” and that they: “chose to manipulate the colonial map so as to incorporate the larger part of the Badme plains”.⁴⁵ Ethiopia protested to this alteration many times during the early part of the 20th century. However, the Ethiopian protests were in general weak, and the issue was not felt to be important, mainly because the Italians lacked practical control over the borders.

Tekie Fessehazion argues that disagreements concerning another contested area, the area around Irob, east of Badme (Map 3.2), created conflict as well. Moreover, he claims that the area was Eritrean, and most maps clearly agree.⁴⁶

Map 3.2: Ethiopian and Eritrean Claims: Central Sector



Nevertheless, Irob had been administered by Ethiopia during the period Eritrea was ruled from Italy. After the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1936, Tigray was united with Eritrea, thus sidelining the border issue until the Eritreans started their struggle for independence. During the early part of the conflict Ethiopian writers such as for example Getahun Gebre Amlak stressed that the contested areas in Tigray (Map 3.1 and Map 3.2 as far east as Irob) as

⁴⁵ Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 24.

⁴⁶ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

well as outside Tigray (Map 3.3), had been under de-facto Ethiopian control for many decades.⁴⁷ As an oddity it could be mentioned that the Ethiopians until 1997 used maps that accorded with the Eritrean version of the story on their birr notes. It became necessary for the Ethiopian government to explain their predecessors' use of these maps. Running parallel with these arguments, another line of argumentation developed. Many Ethiopians claim that the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 nullified all treaties between Eritrea and Ethiopia prior to that date, as can be seen in an article by an anonymous contributor to the well-known book "Dispatches from the Electronic Front" containing Internet articles written by Ethiopians defending the Ethiopian views. Argumentation like this had the advantage of presenting Ethiopia as a champion against former colonial injustice, suggesting parallels between the Eritrean government and the government of Benito Mussolini.⁴⁸

Professor John Abbink claims that the wishes of the local population should have been the most important factor in deciding between the claims to the Badme triangle.⁴⁹ Moreover, he claims that the neglect of the wishes of the locals and the disrespect of the principle of *uti possedetis facto* (lands actually held being the basis for continued possession), enabled the Eritreans to go to war and thus this neglect in itself became a factor leading to conflict. To him, the locals clearly wanted to remain Ethiopian. However, in order to establish who lives in an area, one has to establish the location of the area itself, and in the Eritrean-Ethiopian case even this was problematic. As for the town Badme itself, its location was confused by the varied usage of the term Badme. Abbink argues that:

On most maps there is a place called *Yirga*, which seems to coincide with the location of Badme. Yirga's geographic location is 14° 37' 60N latitude - 37° 55' 0E longitude. In a news dispatch of 12 July 1999, an AFP reporter noted that local people spoke of 'Badme' when they meant the village formally named 'Yirga'. In official Ethiopian documents, however, Badme is the name of a place in the

⁴⁷ Getahun Gebre Almak, "We Do Know Where Badme Is and to Whom It Belongs," in *Dispatches from the Electronic Front*, ed. Walta Information Center (Addis Ababa: Walta Information Center, 2000), 209-10. This conclusion is supported by the OAU high level delegation examining the issue, which claims: "With regard to the authority which was administering Badme before 12 May 1998 and on the basis of the information at our disposal, we have reached the conclusion that Badme Town and its environs were administered by the Ethiopian authorities before 12 May, 1998. This conclusion does not obviously prejudice the final status of that area which will be determined at the end of the delimitation and demarcation process and, if necessary, through arbitration"; 4th Ordinary Session of the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, "Report on the Efforts Made by the Oau High Level Delegation on the Dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea," (Ouagadougou: Organisation of African Unity, 1998).

⁴⁸ Anonymous, "Issayas' Deeds Are Similar to Those of Mussolini in Many Ways, but Ten Reasons Stand out the Most," in *Dispatches from the Electronic Front*, ed. Walta Information Center (Addis Ababa: Walta Information Center, 1999), 52-53.

⁴⁹ Jon Abbink, "Badme and the Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict: Back to Square One?," *Perihelion Working Papers*, no. 2 (2003): 4.

woreda (or district) of Tahtay-Adiabo. In the Ethiopian census report of 1994 there is no mention of a town called Yirga, which confirms the idea that Badme and Yirga are one and the same.⁵⁰

Abbink situates Yirga well inside the Ethiopian border. On the other hand, the writer Margarethe Fielding claims she visited a village called Badme 5 km to the west - for example on the Eritrean side - of the "internationally recognized border", by which she means the straight line of the 1902 treaty.⁵¹ The journalist Dan Connell, admittedly a well-known friend of Eritrea, claims that:

I was in Badme in early 1985 with guerrillas of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, who then administered the area. Badme had just been obliterated by Ethiopian jet fighters, and most people had fled. A week later, I was on the other side of the border in Ethiopia's Tigray People's Liberation Front. When I mentioned where I had been, one TPLF fighter commented, 'you were not in Eritrea - Badme is Tigray.'⁵²

The demographic composition of the area makes the situation bewildering. The triangle is inhabited by the Kunama, a group that lives mostly inside Eritrea but was against Eritrean independence in 1993. The Kunamas in the area were hostile towards the EPLF, and the regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam frequently used them to fight both the EPLF and the TPLF.⁵³ The problems are made even more confusing by the fact that Eritreans from Hamasien and Tigrayans from central Tigray resettled in the area.⁵⁴ The area had an Ethiopian administration, some of the population had voted in Ethiopian elections and the Ethiopian birr was the currency in use.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the area clearly also had many Eritrean farmers.⁵⁶ Thus few clear conclusions can be drawn, and this indicates that the border issue

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Margarethe Fielding, *Bad Times in Badme* (Durham: International Boundaries Research Unit, University of Durham, 1999), 3.

⁵² Dan Connell, "Against More Odds, the Second Siege of Eritrea," *Eritrean studies review* 3, no. 2 (1999): 97.

⁵³ Patrick Gilkes, "Conference Proceedings" (paper presented at the Eritrea- Ethiopia conference, Institute of African Alternatives, London, 1 July 1998), 1.

⁵⁴ Jon Abbink, "Badme and the Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict: Back to Square One?" *Perihelion Working Papers*, no. 2 (2003): 2.

⁵⁵ International Crisis Group, "Ethiopia and Eritrea: War or Peace," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003), 7.

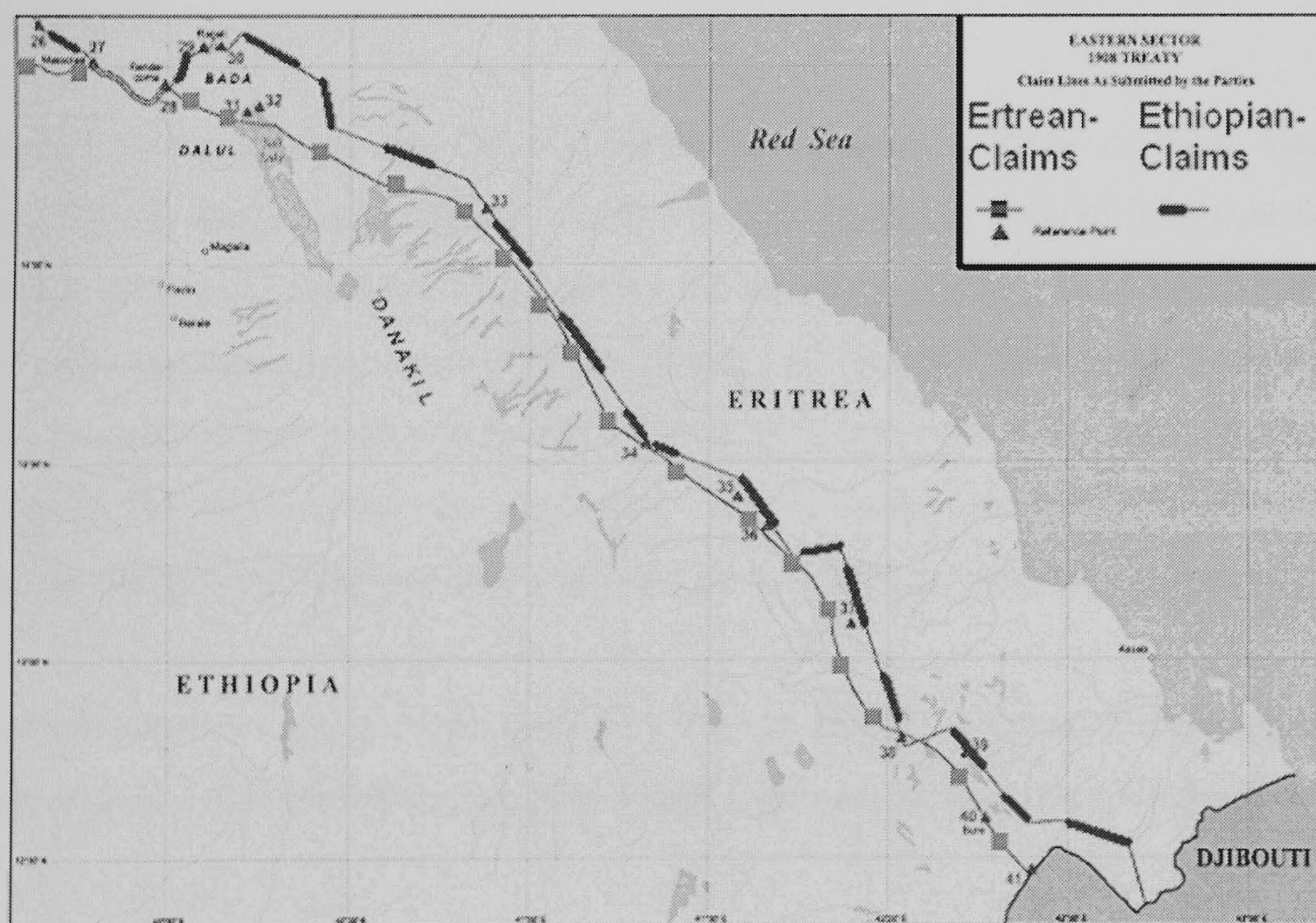
⁵⁶ Alexander Last, "A Very Personal War: Eritrea Ethiopia, 1998-2000," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 60.

indeed had the potential to create hostilities between the two belligerents, each of them choosing a version of the history of the areas that fitted their own interests.

If an ambiguous border was the main cause of the 1998 - 2000 war, the border issue would have been likely to figure prominently in the previous talks between the TPLF and the EPLF. Indeed, Richard Reid claims that this was one of the issues that sparked the conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the rivals of the present day rulers of Eritrea, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), during the 1970's. This was one of the reasons that the TPLF came to prefer the EPLF as an alliance partner, as they were more lenient on this issue.⁵⁷

During the 1980's the ambiguous border created tense relations even between TPLF and EPLF parties. According to one of the founding fathers of the TPLF, Gidey Zeratsion, the question surfaced in November 1984. The EPLF raised the issue and wanted to demarcate the Badme (on map 3.1), Tsorena-Zalambessa (on map 3.2) and Bada (on map 3.3) areas.⁵⁸

Map 3.3: Ethiopian and Eritrean Claims: Bada and the Afar regions



⁵⁷ Richard Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and Its Relations with Tigray, from Liberation Struggle to Inter-State War," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 73, no. 3 (2003): 387. The conflict was mainly about the Sheraro area. He claims that the argument tied the TPLF to the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), as the former saw the latter as more reasonable with regards to the border questions.

⁵⁸ Richard Reid claims that the issue was raised at the Khartoum meeting in 1983, *Ibid.*: 386.

They wanted to ensure that they could recruit in these regions and sought to stop Eritrean deserters fleeing to Badme. The TPLF used very harsh language when they commented upon the EPLF's request. They thus threatened the EPLF with war even before they won the war against Mengistu. At an MLLT (Marxist Leninist League of Tigray)/ TPLF leadership meeting in September 1985 they declared:

If EPLF trespasses the present borders, even if we are not sure it belongs to Tigray, we will consider the EPLF as an aggressor and we will go to war. If the documents for demarcating the border areas, which now are under the Tigrian administration prove the contrary we will consider them as Tigrayan territory because they have been under effective administration of Tigray. The identity of a people is determined by the unity and common history created under the same administration. This type of areas, which are under Tigrean administration (areas in Belesa-Muna and in Erob, which in the maps are shown within the borders of Eritrea), will be under common administration of TPLF and EPLF. If the EPLF rejects this and tries to administer it alone, we will consider the EPLF as an aggressor.⁵⁹

As Zeratsion claims, this shows that the border was important from an early stage. It is significant to note that he also argues that it was not important enough to create war. The TPLF at the time again adopted a 'wait and see' policy. They did not have enough knowledge, and they could not sign an agreement for the whole of Ethiopia.⁶⁰ It is vital to underline that the TPLF did not threaten with war to protect its final hold of the provinces, only its interim rights to them. The TPLF at the time wanted to wait. The issue was postponed by both parties in mutual agreement and was not one of the issues that later created the rupture between the two.⁶¹

After Eritrean de-facto independence in 1991, the borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia had to be drawn, and the border question again gained prominence. Many local border

⁵⁹ Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999), 4-5.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4. Negash and Tronvoll claim that the issue was raised in January 1984, basing this on an interview with Zeratsion. Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 25.

⁶¹ This rupture will be described later in this chapter.

disputes now emerged.⁶² According to Kjetil Tronvoll and Tekeste Negash, the local Ethiopian authorities in Adi Abo, the area adjoining Badme, now began to claim that Eritrean farmers illegally crossed into the Badme triangle.⁶³ Eritrean researchers such as Tekie Fessehazion claim that these farmers had been long established in the region.⁶⁴ Moreover, they argue that the farmers were unfairly penalised when the Ethiopian authorities confiscated their property to punish them for illegal entry.⁶⁵

These early cases created some local tension. The local Eritrean administration felt somewhat offended by the fact that the Ethiopians only sent junior regional officials to deal with the problems.⁶⁶ The Adi Murug incident in 1997 was one of the larger incidents. Eritrean President Issaias Afworki then subsequently wrote to Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on 25 August, proposing that a Joint Border Commission be set up at governmental level. Prime Minister Zenawi replied in a cordial manner, saying that:

We did not imagine that what happened in Bada could create problems. Because the areas our comrades are controlling were not controversial before and [we] believed that prior consultation was only needed for the disputed areas.⁶⁷

A Joint Border Commission was consequently established, and the first meeting of the commission took place in Asmara on 13 November 1997. This achieved little, and there was no further meeting until 8 May 1998, on the eve of the war itself. Meetings between the parties involved much socialisation, but little negotiation. A lot of the time of the last meeting was for example spent in the bar of the Addis Ababa golf club.⁶⁸ It seems safe to claim that the commission did not function properly.

Nevertheless, the problem had been there since 1984 and did not create war before 1997. When it had previously created hot discussions and even threats of war, like in 1984, the two sides managed to cool things down and to postpone a settlement. Nor was the issue

⁶² Formally, Eritrea seceded in 1993 after a popular referendum, but in practice Eritrea functioned as an independent entity from 1991 and onwards. Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "War in the Horn, the Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia," *Royal Institute for International Affairs Discussion Paper*, no. 82 (1999): 10.

⁶³ Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 40.

⁶⁴ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* ([cited]).

⁶⁶ Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 40.

⁶⁷ Meles Zenawi, "Appendix 3: Letters Exchanged between Afwerki & Zenawi, July-August 1997: Response of Prime Minister Meles to the Letter of President Issaias Afwerki of 16th August 1997," in *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, ed. Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oxford: James Curry, 1997), 116.

⁶⁸ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

regarded as the most important issue remaining to be settled between the two organisations. Not one of the previous serious crises between the two organisations had been caused by the border issue. While important, it seems as if other issues must have been involved, issues that could have made the border a more serious question in 1998 than before. As Aregawi Berhe, the former military leader of the TPLF, claims - echoing most of the scholars commenting upon the conflict - "It is worth observing that the border issue was just one ordinary element and by no means the only driving cause of the conflict".⁶⁹

Economic Interaction Between the Belligerents

The history of Eritrean - Ethiopian relations gives rich empirical support to scholars focusing on the importance of economic factors. The Ethiopian market was very important for Eritrea and vice versa, but Ethiopia's and Eritrea's economic perspectives were different. As Jean-Louis Péninou points out, the governments of the two countries had different "dreams".⁷⁰ Eritrean leaders dreamed of Singapore with its financial liberalism, production for export and distrust of uncontrolled aid. Ethiopian leaders dreamed of South Korea with its control over trade, extensive investments and maximum foreign aid. Relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia were formalised in the Asmara Pact of 1993. It was decided to harmonise exchange rate policies and interest rates. The two governments also decided to work out common economic tools to deal with inflation and to harmonise their economic policies in general. One of the reasons for the strong Eritrean will to achieve cooperation could have been that Eritrean leaders wanted a free trade area to benefit the Eritrean investors in Ethiopia, of which there were many. Another reason could be the Eritrean focus on autonomy from the west.⁷¹

Kjetil Tronvoll and Tekeste Negash correctly claim that the agreement created a huge Eritrean trade surplus. This surplus became the main theme in the trade negotiations between the two countries after 1993 and was to cause the Ethiopians irritation.⁷² Ethiopia also tried to combat the surplus unilaterally by applying stricter and stricter rules regulating investment.

⁶⁹ Aregawi Berhe, "The Ethio-Eritrean Crisis: Why?" (Paper presented at the International conference on the Ethio-Eritrean conflict, Amsterdam, 11 July 1998), 4.

⁷⁰ Jean Louis Péninou, "Guerre Absurde Entre L'ethiopie Et L'erythree," *Review of African Political Economy* 25, no. 77 (1998): 505.

⁷¹ Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 32.

⁷² Ibid.

The Ethiopian trade policies subsequently became less and less friendly to the dream of Singapore.

Eritrea and Ethiopia had also been in a practical currency union since 1991. This was not the long-term solution the Eritreans wanted, primarily because it allowed extensive Ethiopian control over monetary policy as the Ethiopian national bank controlled the production of currency. Moreover the fact that Eritreans had to use notes with the old Derg slogan Ethiopia Tikdem (Ethiopia First) was seen as an insult. In 1997 they announced that they planned to introduce their own national currency, the Nakfa, which was expected to be in circulation before the end of 1997. They asked Ethiopia for a 1:1 exchange rate and to let both currencies circulate on either side of the border.⁷³ Ethiopia refused to accept this, thus creating obstacles for the trans-border trade. Furthermore, Ethiopia unilaterally decided that border trade should be conducted via hard currency and letters of credit.⁷⁴ This meant that the border itself became more important, as it now needed to be patrolled more frequently to catch smugglers taking advantage of the new regulations, and new border posts had to be erected.⁷⁵

The demand for the use of letters of credit provoked Eritrean accusations of discriminatory politics; according to them such policies were not imposed on the trade with Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is essential to underline that this is the most common standard of trade relations between sovereign states.

Patrick Gilkes and Martin Plaut stress the importance of the economic negotiations, as well as the timing of the negotiations. The decision to demand letters of credit in cross-border trade was announced by the Ethiopians in late October 1997. This was just before the first meeting of the Joint Border Commission thus making the issue of borders more important for both Ethiopian and Eritreans.⁷⁷ The relationship between the belligerents also became damaged by the new birr note made by the Ethiopian Government to prevent an influx of the birr changed into Nakfa in Eritrea, a note showing an expansive map of Ethiopia containing the contested areas.

Other economic factors may have soured the climate even more. Gebru Asrat, the previous Ethiopian governor in Tigray, claimed that Eritrea provoked the war because of the threat to its hegemonic economic position in Ethiopia, especially due to the rapidly worsening

⁷³ The details were disclosed in July 1997; Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000): 14.

⁷⁴ The only exception was for petty cross-border trade with goods valued less than 2000 birr (285 US 1999 dollars). A licensing system and especially designated border posts were opened to handle this type of trade. Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Stepped up Border Vigilance," *Beza* 21 October 1997.

⁷⁶ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 37.

⁷⁷ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000): 14.

terms of bilateral trade.⁷⁸ Tigray received more investments after 1993 and thus, seen from this view, had the potential to increase its share of Ethiopian trade. Negash and Tronvoll argue that this could have made Tigrayan leaders believe that they could replace Eritrea's place in the Ethiopian economy. War might have made bilateral trade impossible, and in practice this could have been viewed as a type of protection for industry in Tigray. Alternatively, as Gebru Asrat promulgates, war could be seen as an Eritrean strategy to force Ethiopia to relax their trade barriers.⁷⁹

However, as Negash and Tronvoll claim, such arguments are close to conspiracy theories. A rupture in relations between the two was perceived as potentially extremely expensive, offsetting any gains that both nations could have hoped for through such policies. Both countries were extremely dependent on each other and a conflict had the potential to decrease their income. Nonetheless, given its prominence in the media and amongst political commentators, such a conspiracy theory may have influenced the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments and subsequently the process leading to conflict. Explanations of this sort also became ideal propaganda tools in the hands of the belligerents, making them able to label their opponents as greedy.

A moderate focus on economic factors, as held by Gilkes, Plaut, Tronvoll and Negash, probably highlights important elements in the process that led to war but also raises some very important questions. During the 1980's there had been fierce economic competition between the EPLF and the TPLF. The competition was about securing humanitarian aid. The rivalry between the two organisations over western humanitarian aid was vicious; indeed it had to be since such aid was crucial for the continued existence of the organisations. The limited amount of money available to the organisations must have made such aid money exceptionally vital for their operations and indeed 80% of the TPLF's non-armament budget came from humanitarian aid. Regardless of such economic competition, the two organisations managed to remain at peace with each other. At the time, the competing economic interests of the organisations must have been of equal importance with the contradicting interests that rose to prominence in 1997 and 1998.⁸⁰ After all, during the guerrilla years of the two organisations, they needed all the money they could get in order to insure their own survival.

⁷⁸ Gebru Asrat, "War," *The Reporter: Magazine* 1998.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999), 6.

Nevertheless, the situation never developed into war. This could be one reason why observers such as Chester Crocker choose to focus on an additional element, namely ethnic conflict.⁸¹

Ancient Hatred and Ethnic Expansionism

Many observers including Kidane Mengisteab and Chester Crocker stress the animosity between one ethnic group, the dominant Tigray group in Ethiopia, and Eritrea as the main factor causing the war.⁸² This approach has similarities with the more general approach of Donald Horowitz presented earlier, but focuses on one ethnic group only, the Tigrayans. The opponents, the Eritreans, are seen as united despite the existence of various ethnic groups in Eritrea.

Statements from the Eritrean government argue that Tigrayan irredentism was a reason for the war. According to their claims, the Tigrayans wanted to include the contested areas in Tigray. A map, published early in 1997 at Mekele in Tigray, is central to their argumentation. The map was not used in any legal discussions about the border but was intended to be distributed to primary schools and was funded by the German government aid agency, Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). Several contested areas were incorporated into Tigray. For the Eritreans this was positive proof of the hostile intentions of the Tigrayans. The Eritrean scholar Kidane Mengisteab interprets the map as the realisation of the long-held TPLF dream of a Greater Tigray, a Tigray supposed to include parts of Eritrea as well as other regions in Ethiopia, expanded in order to include all Tigrayan speakers.⁸³ Such argumentation is enforced by the fact that similar views had been outlined previously in the famous TPLF manifesto of 1976 outlining the policy of the then young movement.⁸⁴ It is said to contain claims to 50% of the Eritrean land mass and thus to have started a trend and culture of Tigray expansionism. The TPLF manifesto was repudiated in the next TPLF congress but it was not publicly disowned until some time later.⁸⁵ Kidane Mengisteab sees

⁸¹ Chester Crocker, *From Comrades to Adversaries* (British Broadcasting Cooperation World: Africa, Monday, June 8, 12:27 GMT 1998 [cited 30 January 2002]); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/107332.stm>.

⁸² Ibid.([cited), Kidane Mengisteab, "Some Latent Factors in the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict," *Eritrean Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (1999).

⁸³ Kidane Mengisteab, "Some Latent Factors in the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict," *Eritrean Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (1999): 91.

⁸⁴ Jean Louis Péninou, "Guerre Absurde Entre L'Ethiopie Et L'Erythrée," *Review of African Political Economy* 25, no. 77 (1998): 507. Indeed some books written on the TPLF contained quite "aggressive" maps even during the seventies and early eighties. One example is James Firebrace, *The Hidden Revolution : An Analysis of Social Change in Tigray (Northern Ethiopia) Based on Eyewitness Accounts* (London: War on Want, 1982).

⁸⁵ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 99.

the war as a product of greater Tigrayan expansionism developed by a militant wing of the TPLF that gained power during the years before the war.⁸⁶

There is also a primordial version of this argumentation. In his article "Eritrea (Mereb-Melash) and Yohannes IV of Abyssinia," Jordan Gebre-Medhin takes a historical approach when identifying the source of the Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute: the revival of Tigrayan hegemonic ambition. Gebre-Medhin sees a direct link between Emperor Yohannes IV's repeated invasions of Eritrea (then known as Mereb-Melash) during the last century and the TPLF's intermittent forays into Eritrea since May 1998.⁸⁷ He describes how expansionist attitudes towards the Eritreans on behalf of Tigrayans evolved under the Tigrayan Emperor Yohannes and survived until the present day.

Not only Eritreans stress ethnic rivalry as a possible factor. The US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, focuses directly on the rivalries between Tigray and the Eritreans. Crocker points to the historic rivalry between the Tigrayan Ethiopians and the Eritreans, claiming that: "The people who are fighting each other should not be viewed as all of Ethiopia against all of Eritrea. It's really Tigrayans and Eritreans going at each other".⁸⁸

However, when evaluating such argumentation its flaws easily become visible. The TPLF was always nationalist, yet nevertheless it managed to cooperate with the Eritreans from 1991 until 1998. The TPLF allowed Eritrea to gain independence before they had gained the areas they wanted, hardly the act of an expansionist regime. Moreover, the events taking place at the end of the war totally discredit proponents of a theory focusing on Tigrayan expansion. When the Eritrean military was almost destroyed during the final battles of the war in 2000, the Ethiopians abstained from advancing claims beyond the contested areas. Thirdly, the military armaments situation between the two countries contradicts the existence of systematic expansionist plans; as shown previously the two countries simply did not arm for war. Larger quantities of additional armaments were only bought after the relationship had soured.

The ethnic expansionist factor seems more important as a narrative in the Eritrean press, than as a factor leading to the outbreak of war. The Eritrean press might in turn have influenced many observers into believing in such factors.

⁸⁶ Kidane Mengisteab, "Some Latent Factors in the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict," *Eritrean Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (1999): 92.

⁸⁷ Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "Eritrea (Mereb-Melash) and Yohannes IV of Abyssinia," *Eritrean studies review*, 3, no. 2 (1999): 101.

⁸⁸ Chester Crocker, *From Comrades to Adversaries* (British Broadcasting Cooperation World: Africa, Monday, June 8, 12:27 GMT 1998 [cited 30 January 2002]); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/107332.stm>.

Superiority and Inferiority Complexes

The areas making up the nucleus of the Abyssinian state have a long history of warfare. Several scholars, including Patrick Gilkes, Gidey Zeratsion, Tekie Fessehazion and Wolbert Smidt, indicate that this may have had some influence on the Eritrean-Ethiopian war.⁸⁹ In order to understand their argument one has to go back in Ethiopian history.

Emperor Menelik (1844-1913) is by many viewed as the founding father of modern Ethiopia.⁹⁰ Thanks to Italian support Menelik was able to conquer forcibly the rich regions of present day Ethiopia. On 2 May 1889, Menelik and Italy signed a treaty at the Ethiopian village of Wuchale. The treaty was craftily written in both Amharic and Italian. The Italian version implied that Italy had sovereignty over all Ethiopia. This was unacceptable to Menelik and he sent an envoy to Rome to reissue the treaty in its original form. Italy did so but on 11 October 1889 reasserted to the other European powers its claim to a protectorate over Ethiopia. Italy subsequently occupied the town of Adowa in January 1890 and informed Menelik that they would not withdraw until he recognised the Italian version of the Wuchale treaty. The Abyssinian Empire rejected the Italian ultimatum. The Italians lost the subsequent battle, known as the battle of Adowa. On 26 October 1896, the Italians capitulated and agreed to the Peace Treaty of Addis Ababa. This treaty nullified the Wuchale Agreement and recognized the complete independence of Ethiopia.

Italy had 17,000 troops fighting in the battle, one third of which were Eritrean conscripts. Many Eritreans had been eager to join the ranks of the Italian forces, and this was noted amongst the Ethiopians. Eritreans were still seen as Ethiopians (Abyssinians), from the old Abyssinian region of Hamasien.⁹¹ This meant that Eritreans joining the Italians were seen as traitors. While the Italian prisoners-of-war avoided punishment, the Eritreans were punished severely. Chris Prouty writes:

⁸⁹ Tekie Fessehazion, "Explaining the Unexplainable: The Eritrea-Ethiopia Border War," *The Eritrean Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (1999), Patrick Gilkes, "Conference Proceedings" (paper presented at the Eritrea- Ethiopia conference, Institute of African Alternatives, London, 1 July 1998), Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "War in the Horn, the Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia," *Royal Institute for international Affairs Discussion Paper*, no. 82 (1999), Wolbert Smidt, "Gibt Es Fur Den Krieg Zwischen Eritrea Und Athiopien Uberhaupt Grunde?," *Streitblatt. Zeitung der Gegenuniversität*, no. 9 (2000), Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999).

⁹⁰ Haggai Erlich, *Ras Alula and the Scramble for Africa, a Political Biography: Ethiopia and Eritrea 1875-1897* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1996), 11.

⁹¹ Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming), 138.

When the captured Askaris [Eritrean soldiers] were paraded before Emperor Menelik, he, as usual, did not make the decision but looked up at Abune Matewos [The Bishop], while all the soldiers were shouting “slice them up”. The Bishop ruled that since they had been treacherous their left hand and right foot should be cut off.⁹²

Despite the Italian failure, Eritrea remained an Italian colony, received investments from the latter and developed a monetised economy. Tigray, in spite of its proud warrior traditions, grew poorer and poorer. Many Tigrayans had to go to Eritrea to get work; they were regarded by many Eritreans as backward and uncivilised. During these years, the term Agame became used by Eritreans to denote the backward Tigrayans. Agame was initially a village in Tigray, which was regarded by the Eritreans as dirty and undeveloped and became a derogatory term. As one of the founding fathers of the TPLF, Gidey Zeratsion, put it:

Since there are better cosmopolitan areas in Eritrea than in Tigray, many Tigreans and especially from Agame, usually travel to work in Eritrea. Most of them take the type of job despised and considered inferior by the Eritreans. The Tigreans are hence seen as inferior in Eritrea. The Eritreans use the derogatory "Agame" to describe many things that are socially or physically ugly.⁹³

The Eritrean role in the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 was to create even more animosity. As Kjetil Tronvoll puts it: “The fact that Italy used about 50,000 Eritrean colonial troops to help pacify the Ethiopian resistance was viewed as treachery by Ethiopians”.⁹⁴ Moreover, after the Italians won, they in a way institutionalised Agame. The Italians started to distinguish between the two groups, with Eritreans being defined as more civilised.⁹⁵

The Eritreans had to pay a price for this; to a certain extent they became associated with Fascism, treason and Italy, although Eritreans participated heavily in the resistance against the Italians.⁹⁶ The price the Tigrayans had to pay was that the term Agame became entrenched in everyday use in Eritrea. Poor Tigrayans became to a certain extent despised.

⁹² Chriss Prouty, *Empress Taytu and Menelik 2. Ethiopia 1883 -1910* (London: Ravens, 1986), 158.

⁹³ Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999), 6.

⁹⁴ Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming), 377.

⁹⁵ Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia, the Federal Experience* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrika institutet, 1997), 16.

⁹⁶ Two Eritreans were behind the most famous terrorist attack on Italian officials, in 1937 they tried to kill Governor Rudolfo Graziani.

This development reflected itself in various Tigrinya (one of the most common languages in Eritrea) proverbs such as “shih entekone hyaway, ayt'meno ntgraway”, which means: “never trust even the most innocent and harmless Tigrayan”. An inferiority/ superiority complex seems to have developed, enhanced by a rather militaristic culture and a myth treating the Eritreans as traitors.

Several researchers claim that the Agame complex was an important factor influencing the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. Gidey Zeratsion claims that the use of the derogatory word Agame created tensions between the TPLF and the EPLF during the 1980's, but he allocates little space to the subject in his writings on the history of the former organisation.⁹⁷ The Eritrean scholar Tekie Fessehazion also puts some emphasis on the Agame complex, claiming that he heard Tigrayan generals visiting Eritrea talking about rectifying Tigrayan inferiority and claiming that their inferiority complex influenced the outbreak of war.⁹⁸ Richard Reid describes how such perceptions were entrenched long before the war broke out, and how he encountered EPLF veterans in 1991 who warned against trusting Tigrayans and Ethiopians.⁹⁹

References to the connections between Eritrea and Fascist Italy became common after the war broke out, referring to the treason of the Eritreans when they allied themselves with Italy in 1896 and in 1935 to go to war against Ethiopia. A line in a popular poem in Tigray stated that: “Do you Issaias Afworki [Eritrea's president] like to be called Hitler or Mussolini? Whom do you want to be named after you small Graziani?”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Eritrean soldiers stuck notices on Ethiopian corpses, with texts like: “who would like to live with an Agame?” Moreover, these habits produced severe reprisals from the Tigrayan soldiers, and indeed also from soldiers of the other Ethiopian nationalities.

The research of Kjetil Tronvoll clearly indicates that such popular myths had some importance, but he conducted this research only after the war had started.¹⁰¹ Importantly, as Alessandro Triulzi argues when criticising the focus on old cleavages between the two belligerents, the ancient conflicts between Eritrea and Ethiopia were actively promoted by the two belligerents and the press after the war broke out, selectively highlighting some events,

⁹⁷ Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999), 7.

⁹⁸ Tekie Fessehazion, "Explaining the Unexplainable: The Eritrea-Ethiopia Border War," *The Eritrean Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (1999): 77.

⁹⁹ Richard Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and Its Relations with Tigray, from Liberation Struggle to Inter-State War," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 73, no. 3 (2003): 377.

¹⁰⁰ This poem became popular in Mekele during the summer 1998., Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming), 185.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

while forgetting others.¹⁰² It is true as Tronvoll claims: “contemporary conflicts draw heavily on heroic myths, national and ethno-national symbols, and enemy images in order to inspire the Tigrayan population to sacrifice their lives in yet another war to protect their homelands”.¹⁰³ Inferiority/superiority argumentation could thus have been employed by the belligerents to inspire their soldiers after the war had started, thus making it more important than it was before the war, making it harder to say something about their pre-war strength without referring to pre-war fieldwork.

Surprisingly, the research of Alemseged Abbay indicates that the animosity between Ethiopians was much larger than the Tigrayan animosity towards Eritreans.¹⁰⁴ These animosities did not lead to large scale war. Tronvoll also suggests that different conceptions of the relationship existed side by side, some stipulating brotherhood between the two people, some stipulating conflict.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, it seems fair to claim that while animosities between the population of Tigray and the Eritreans existed, equally important animosities existed between Tigrayans and other Ethiopians, yet these animosities did not cause war.

As the works of Patrick Gilkes and Wolbert Smidt suggest, an inferiority/ superiority complex played a role.¹⁰⁶ However, the role of the inferiority complex increased after the war had started and this theme was pushed in the propaganda of the parties. This does not explain why the conflict erupted when it erupted, nor does it explain the many years of peaceful cooperation between the two countries, and previously between the two organisations. Indeed neither Patrick Gilkes, Gidey Zeratsion, Tekie Fessehazion nor Wolbert Smidt suggests such mono-causality; to them an inferiority/superiority complex becomes one factor amongst many.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰²Alessandro Triulzi, *Colonial Violence and the Transfer of Memories in the Eritrean-Ethiopian War 1998-2000* (Forthcoming).

¹⁰³ Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming), 121.

¹⁰⁴ Alemseged Abbay, *Identity Jilted or Re-Imagined Identity? The Divergent Path of the Eritrean and Tigrayan Nationalistic Struggle* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea press, 1998), 204.

¹⁰⁵ Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁶ Patrick Gilkes, "Conference Proceedings" (paper presented at the Eritrea- Ethiopia conference, Institute of African Alternatives, London, 1 July 1998), Wolbert Smidt, "Gibt Es Fur Den Krieg Zwischen Eritrea Und Athiopien Uberhaupt Grunde?," *Streitblatt. Zeitung der Gegenuniversität*, no. 9 (2000).

¹⁰⁷Patrick Gilkes, "Conference Proceedings" (paper presented at the Eritrea- Ethiopia conference, Institute of African Alternatives, London, 1 July 1998), Wolbert Smidt, "Gibt Es Fur Den Krieg Zwischen Eritrea Und Athiopien Uberhaupt Grunde?," *Streitblatt. Zeitung der Gegenuniversität*, no. 9 (2000). Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html, Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999).

Identity as a Process

Approaches focusing on ancient hatred, ethnic expansionism and inferiority/superiority complexes in general view the identities of the belligerents as relatively homogeneous and stable. The war is seen as being between two or more well defined ethnic groups or two countries. However, ethnic and national identity might be under construction or in need of definition, and some approaches to the conflict stress that this process in itself was a cause of the conflict.

The claim that identities are in a continuous construction process is indeed a well-known claim within international relations theory. International relations theorists such as Iver B. Neuman claim that collective identity should be treated as “always in a state of formation, as ever-lasting negotiations about who is who, how that who comes about, how individuals become a party to it and how it is reproduced over time.”¹⁰⁸ Ruth Iyob, Patrick Gilkes and Martin Plaut indirectly adopt such an understanding of identity when they examine the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. They argue that active policies designed to influence the identity formation processes, as well as uncontrolled aspects of this identity formation process, were important factors influencing the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship in a negative way.¹⁰⁹

One might identify three different case specific approaches that stress attempts at identity construction or unconscious identity construction as a cause of the war. A first approach stresses the incommensurability between the Eritrean notion of civic identity and the Ethiopian notion of ethnic identity. A second approach focuses on the changing identities of the parties and stresses the strains that the transformation from rebel organisations to ruling parties created in the relationship between the TPLF, the EPRDF and the EPLF. A third approach emphasises the need for Eritreans to create a coherent national identity by finding enemies.

To understand the first approach, an approach that focuses on the incommensurability between the Eritrean notion of civic identity and the Ethiopian notion of ethnic identity, a short exploration of the history of the organisations that formed the foundations of the two governments is in order. The Eritrean state apparatus had its origin in the Eritrean People's Revolution Force (EPLF), an organisation that included many different ethnic and religious

¹⁰⁸ Iver B. Neuman, "Identity and the Outbreak of War," *The International Journal of Peace Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998): 1.

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "War in the Horn, the Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia," *Royal Institute for international Affairs Discussion Paper*, no. 82 (1999), Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000), Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "Conflict in the Horn: Why Eritrea and Ethiopia Are at War," *Briefing paper, New Series*, no. 6 (1999), Ruth Iyob, "Re-Configuring Identities: A Clash of Vision(S) in the Horn of Africa, 1991-2000" (paper presented at the Early warning in practice: the case of Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA), London, 5 March 1999).

groups. This group's identity and ideology were in turn formed by its struggle with the first large Eritrean opposition group, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF).¹¹⁰ Some of the ELF's field commanders, most notably Eritrea's present President Issaias Afworki, had formed the Tripartite Union. They did this to reform the ELF in order to alter what they perceived to be the prevailing influence of regionalism and the ethnic dominance of the Beni Amer.¹¹¹ However, the old leaders of the ELF started to hunt down actively the Tripartite Union's leaders.¹¹² This development created widespread dissatisfaction within the ranks of the ELF. The organisation splintered. Two of the splinter groups, the Ala group and Popular Liberation Forces (PLF), were to become the foundation of the EPLF. These two groups subsequently laid the foundations for the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) as an alternative to what they perceived as an ethnocentric ELF. In February 1972 the EPLF was formally established as a rival of the ELF.¹¹³

Thus the EPLF was initially formed as a reaction against regionalism and a reaction against ethnocentrism. From its foundation, the EPLF stressed unity between religions and between ethnic groups. Moreover, EPLF promoted a single Eritrean identity that transcended the ethnic and religious identities; unity was an important goal for the movement. A clear pan-ethnic identity had been formed by the struggle against the ELF, a view stressing Eritreanness as superior to the ethnic focus of the ELF. Such a pan-Eritrean view resulted in draconic measures against all tendencies towards ethnicist ideology and/or federalised organisational structures.¹¹⁴ As Haggai Erlich observes, the EPLF became an extremely hierarchical organisation with a focus on unity, and this focus increased during the organisation's history.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Alex De Waal, *Evil Days, 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (Washington: Africa Watch- Human Rights Watch, 1991), 47. NOTE: ELF consisted mostly of Muslims. These Muslims were often from the Beni Amer ethnic group. Indeed the ELF often killed Christians that wanted to be members during its first years.}

¹¹¹The members of the Tripartite Union were mostly from Northern Sahil the Massawa coast, the Danakili Desert and Asmara, Region III, IV and V of the ELF.; Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle over Eritrea, 1962 -1978* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1983), 22-23, Bereket H. Selassie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1980), 64.

¹¹² Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle over Eritrea, 1962 -1978* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1983), 27.

¹¹³The PLF was established on a meeting from 2 to 24 June 1970; The strongly pro Arab Uthman Sabi were quite prominent at the meeting and it is claimed that the organisation sent fighters to fight with PLO against the Jordanese during September 1970.; Ibid., 28, David Pool, "The Eritrean People's Liberation Front," in *African Guerrillas*, ed. Christopher Clapham (Oxford: James Curry, 1998), 24.

¹¹⁴Both Seliassie and Erlich describe the organisation as consisting of Christian fighters and a diplomatic mission that was Muslim and Arab Nationalist.Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle over Eritrea, 1962 -1978* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1983), 22, Elias H. Selassie, *The Ethio-Eritrean Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences* (CISP, 2001 [cited 20 November 2001]); available from <http://www.cisp-ngo.org/CorsoConflitti/Conflitto%20Etiopia-Eritrea/ConflictSelassie.htm#7>.

¹¹⁵He suggests that this was demonstrated indirectly when they changed their name from Eritrean People's Liberation Forces to Eritrean People's Liberation Front. While there could be many forces there could be only one front.Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle over Eritrea, 1962 -1978* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1983), 70.

The EPLF's emphasis on unity within the organisation and indeed within the future Eritrean state also showed itself in the criticism of the Tigray People's Liberation Front's (TPLF) call for liberation of the nationalities.¹¹⁶ The TPLF had a different perception of ideology and of the nationality issue, nationality to them being an ethnically defined concept. The TPLF, which later supplied Ethiopia with its present prime minister, was officially formed on 18 February 1975 in Dedebit. It had roots in the student-based Tigray National Organisation (TNO). The students later tried to harness support from their native regions and successfully managed to mobilise many peasants.¹¹⁷ One way of mobilising peasants was to promote Tigrayan nationalism. Indeed, important elements within the TPLF promulgated full independence from Ethiopia based on ethnic lines.¹¹⁸ The principle of the right to independence for ethnically defined groups was a key principle for the movement, thus contradicting the EPLF's view focusing on unity between ethnic groups in Eritrea.¹¹⁹ The two groups were at odds from the start with regards to their suggested strategies for solving the ethnic questions facing the two countries and had a different ideology with regards to the nationality question. The TPLF wanted independence on ethnic grounds, while the EPLF had a unitary territorial definition of Eritrea. The EPLF definition included all the nine large groups in Eritrea, all of them represented in central posts, but still with a strong emphasis on unity in the decision making process.¹²⁰ Argumentation for ethnic self-determination was not accepted and the nominal rights of the ethnic groups were limited. The two organisations again had different dreams for the future. The EPLF dreamed about *Ius soli*, citizenship based on a common geographic background; they dreamed of an identity forged by the common experiences during the colonial period and during the struggle against Ethiopia. The TPLF dreamed a dream about *Ius sanguinis*, citizenship based on common bloodlines and thus based on the bonds of ethnicity.

The differences kept resurfacing. In June 1985, at the height of the Ethiopian famine, the EPLF closed the Barka route, the TPLF's supply lines between Tigray and Sudan. This move effectively isolated Tigray from its chief source of food. According to a TPLF officer interviewed by Negash and Tronvoll, the "EPLF did this to kneel them down, since it did not

¹¹⁶ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 19.

¹¹⁷ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 99.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹²⁰ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "Conflict in the Horn: Why Eritrea and Ethiopia Are at War," *Briefing paper, New Series*, no. 6 (1999): 4.

accept TPLF's analysis of the nationalities contradiction in Ethiopia".¹²¹ The exchange of comments following this move also highlighted the importance of the definition of national identity. The TPLF claimed that "a truly democratic" Eritrea would have to respect "the right of its own nationalities up to and including secession".¹²² There are thus some indicators showing the importance of different conceptions of identity as a factor creating conflict even during the war against the Derg.

The differences between the two organisations were to become larger. Their relationship was officially normalised after the Khartoum meeting held in April 1988. A joint statement was issued, indicating that their differences had been overcome.¹²³ The TPLF now joined with various other organisations to form the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). All these organisations were dominated if not created by the TPLF.¹²⁴ The year of 1991 was one of the most successful years for both the EPLF and the EPRDF as it saw the final demise of Mengistu Haile Mariam and his regime. Eritrea was promised independence and the EPRDF immediately started to prepare a new Constitution for Ethiopia.¹²⁵ It was finished in 1995. The Ethiopian Constitution guaranteed extensive rights of ethnic self-determination. Article 8, 1 of the Constitution put the sovereignty with the Ethiopian nations, defined as a people with common culture, common language and belief in a shared identity within a specific geographic area. Each nation was to have their own representatives in the Council of the Federation. Furthermore, the Constitution's Article 39 guaranteed education in the mother tongue of the different minorities. Article 38 of the Constitution contained an even larger gesture towards the ethnic minorities in Ethiopia, as each of the Ethiopian nationalities received the right to declare independence. A constitution of this kind was in itself a contradiction to the Eritrean idea of nationhood.

The differences between constitutional events in Ethiopia and similar processes in Eritrea were striking. A resolution passed by the third congress of the EPLF in 1994 rejected the old Awraja systems of administration, a system where the country was divided into nine

¹²¹ Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 19.

¹²² Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), "The Differences between Eplf and Tplf," *People's Voice* 1986.

¹²³ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "Conflict in the Horn: Why Eritrea and Ethiopia Are at War," *Briefing paper, New Series*, no. 6 (1999): 7.

¹²⁴ The most important of them was Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), an organisation largely based on Oromo captives from the army of Mengistu Haile Mariam. The Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), a splinter group from an earlier rival of TPLF that had lost the military struggle with the latter, also participated and became more important after some years. John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 166.

¹²⁵ The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 8 December 1994* (The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1994 [cited 1 May 2005]); available from http://www.civicwebs.com/cwvlib/constitutions/ethiopia/constitution_1994.htm.

Awrajas or districts.¹²⁶ Awrajas were designed by the Italians during the colonial period, and loosely drawn along ethnic lines.¹²⁷ The new territorial units, six Zobas, were deliberately created to criss-cross ethnicity and kinship. President Issaias Afworki's speech at the announcement of the reform underlined this point:

There was a time when people thought in terms of we and they, using religion and regional boundaries as bases. However, such notions have been put aside during the 30-years long struggle, and it is because the fighters struggled as one person by uniting their hearts that we were able to achieve our goal of liberation.¹²⁸

He also threatened those that wanted to create tension by playing on ethnicity:

The government will not restrain itself from taking appropriate measures regarding those who misinterpret and misconstrue any administrative or developmental policies in order to create religious and regional conflicts.¹²⁹

As Patrick Gilkes, Martin Plaut, Kjetil Tronvoll, and Tekeste Negash argue, there were huge theoretical contradictions between the Eritrean and the Ethiopian way of dealing with ethnic questions.¹³⁰ These writers all claim that different perceptions with regards to national identity created tension and became a factor that influenced the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship in a malign way. Patrick Gilkes and Martin Plaut explore the contradicting definitions of identity and also describe the tension before the war. One factor influencing the outbreak of the war was for them the need for a preventive battle to protect an Eritrean concept of nationality.¹³¹ To them, the Ethiopian version of nationhood, granting rights to all the ethnic groups within Ethiopia, might have been felt by Eritreans to have the effect of making Eritrean ethnic minorities fight for the same rights, thus destabilising Eritrea. It becomes a form of ideological war, a struggle between two world-views.

¹²⁶ At this congress EPLF also changed their name into the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).

¹²⁷ Kjetil Tronvoll, "The Process of Nation Building in Eritrea, Created from Below or Directed from Above?," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998): 463.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "War in the Horn, the Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia," *Royal Institute for International Affairs Discussion Paper*, no. 82 (1999), Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000), Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "Conflict in the Horn: Why Eritrea and Ethiopia Are at War," *Briefing paper, New Series*, no. 6 (1999), Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000).

¹³¹ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000): 1.

However, this type of argument also has its weaknesses. The scholar Allehone Mulugeta, for example, emphasises some of the statements of Berket Habte Selassie, who headed Eritrea's Constitutional Commission, in order to criticise Tronvoll and Negash's focus on such issues. Habte Selassie stresses the positive contribution of the new Ethiopian Constitution to Africa as a whole. Mulugeta continues his citation of Berket Habte Selassie: "...but the vitality of Eritrean nationalisms make such arrangements unnecessary for Eritrea".¹³² Implicit in this statement lays the claim that Eritreans already have a strong and centralised identity, which is so strong that it can withstand the existence of an Ethiopian multiethnic identity.¹³³

An argument focusing on the differences in policies on ethnicity/ ethnic groups becomes further weakened by the many accusations directed at the Ethiopian government for ignoring their own constitution. Siegfried Pausewang, who monitored several Ethiopian elections, stated that the constitution was bypassed by governmental oppression.¹³⁴ Moreover, an argument focusing on the differences in policies on ethnicity is weakened by the fact that the constitution in itself also had limitations to the power of the nationalities. The representatives of the nations are for example appointed by another decision level, the regional state, where the nation in question may be a minority. Both facts could not have escaped the Eritreans, even as early as in 1997, and one might question if a defunct constitution together with a pretty much non-functioning agenda could have created much hostility.

Nevertheless, there are indications that a clash of the concept of nationhood could have some importance. The Ethiopian Constitution still creates debates in Africa and could have significant symbolic value.¹³⁵ The first statements from the Eritrean Government after the war had started explained that: "... the recurrent border incursions that continue to be perpetuated by Ethiopians forces basically emanate from the narrow perspectives of the administrative zones (Ethnic regions)."¹³⁶ This statement at least shows that the clash of the concept of nationhood figured in Eritrean explanations of the outbreak of war. Importantly,

¹³² Allehone Mulugeta, *Review of Brothers at War* Walta Information Center (Walta Information Center, 2001 [cited 3 November 2002]); available from <http://www.waltainfo.com/Conflict/Articles/2001/June/article1.html>.

¹³³ Ibid.([cited), Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000).

¹³⁴ Siegfried Pausewang, Interview, 10 January 1998.

¹³⁵ The main points of this discussion are best summed up by Ugo Mattei .Ugo Mattei, "The New Ethiopian Constitution: First Thoughts on Ethnical Federalism and the Reception of Western Institutions," in *Transplants, Innovation, and Legal Tradition in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Elisabetta Grande (Torino: L'Harmattan Italia, 1995).

¹³⁶ The Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea, "Appendix 5, Statement of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea on the Dispute with Ethiopia, 14 May 1998," in *Brothers at War, Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, ed. Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oxford: James Curry, 2000).

however this does not demonstrate that Ethiopian and Eritrean decision making was influenced by such issues, as such statements might have been a propaganda effort in order to show that Ethiopia was the guilty party. Indeed, explanations focusing on difference in the conception of nation became more important as the war progressed, with the belligerents using them actively as propaganda, making them prominent in public discussions.

A second approach to the Eritrean-Ethiopian war that also focuses on the process of identity formation is found in the works of Ruth Iyob. Rather than focusing on different conceptions of nationhood and of the role of ethnic groups, Iyob sees identity as extensions of the way governments and People's view their collective national missions (destinies).¹³⁷ Iyob claims: "At the heart of the conflict remains the dynamics of the contradictory roles that the two states – Eritrea and Ethiopia – came to play vis-à-vis each other".¹³⁸ Ethiopian leaders have historically regarded their country as the dominant power in the eastern Horn of Africa: it was the hegemonic leader of the area with interests within the other states, conducting various military operations and colonising missions. Eritreans, on the other hand, have defied this vision and struggled for the right to have a vision and a scope of action that differs from that of the region's traditional hegemonic power. When the interaction between the two former allied organisations became more and more formalised they also internalised the values of the different states. The TPLF became Ethiopia in the sense that it internalised its traditional hegemonic values and aspirations. The EPLF became Eritrea, a nation defined by its survival struggle, the pogroms conducted against it and thus also the acceptance of extreme tactics to protect it. Iyob names the former category of states Hegemonic states and the latter Diaspora states. The formerly cordial, pragmatic and informal relationships were replaced by a formal state-centric and rigid relationship as the TPLF and EPLF grew from mere rebel organisations into Ethiopia and Eritrea. The latter type of relationship contributed to this internalisation of values leading to conflict. Her arguments seem to reveal important information with regards to the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, but it does not illustrate how such values were internalised. It is not clear if Iyob claims that this was a geopolitical development, where the rulers of these two entities were bound by Eritrea and Ethiopia's geographical position, or if the two organisations were exposed to the pressure of other Ethiopian/Eritrean groups pushing them in such directions.¹³⁹

¹³⁷Ruth Iyob, "Re-Configuring Identities: A Clash of Vision(S) in the Horn of Africa,1991-2000" (paper presented at the Early warning in practice: the case of Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA), London, 5 March 1999), 7.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ The first explanation has similarities with classical geopolitical approaches to the study of conflict, stressing that the specific geographic traits of a country defines its national interests and the conflicts it is most likely to engage in. See Karl

The need to have an enemy in order to build a common identity is the central element in a third approach. This approach sets out to explain the Ethiopian-Eritrean war as a result of nation building, of the need for an enemy in order to define and consolidate a vulnerable Eritrean identity, a factor most often stressed by Kjetil Tronvoll.¹⁴⁰ Italia colonised Eritrea in 1885. Before this some ethnic groups were part of the Ethiopian empire, others gravitated culturally towards the middle-east.¹⁴¹ This leaves a period of 116 years to build retrospective myths and to forge an identity, a relatively short time span. The construction of national identity is seen as coinciding with the definition of and distinction from the other, which was all too often defined as the enemy.

When Eritrea became, for all practical purposes, independent in 1991, the country kept its good connection with its former allies. However, the Eritreans also lost something: they lost the eternal enemy, the Derg/Imperial Ethiopia. This, according to Tronvoll: "left a void for contrasting the territorial Eritrean identity". They needed somebody to demarcate the ethnic and religious groups within Eritrea from their cousins in the neighbouring countries; they needed an enemy.¹⁴² Tronvoll continues: "the Eritrean government seems to deem it necessary to create significant others by means of violence."¹⁴³

Indeed Eritrea appeared extremely warlike after its independence, and one cannot rule out the possibility that this has something to do with the process of nation building. It has had confrontations involving troops with all of its neighbours and regular, albeit small scale, wars with Sudan and Yemen. Sometimes these confrontations seemed quite out of proportion to the potential dangers of the situations they created. In 1996 Eritrea deployed troops against Djibouti, a country that has strong ties to France and has a strong garrison of French foreign legionaries.

However, it is important to stress that the causes of many of these conflicts were complicated and that all of them were resolved. Moreover, Eritrea often accepted defeats in the mediation process without resorting to violence. For example, Eritrea occupied the Hanish islands, a contested island group between Yemen and Eritrea, in 1996. On the other hand, this was after Yemen had started to build a large hotel on one of the islands, a project that the

Haushofer, *Grenzen: In Ihrer Geographischen Und Politischen Bedeutung* (Berlin: Kurt Vowincklen Verlag, 1927). This thesis suggest that the latter explanation is more correct. See chapter four.

¹⁴⁰ Kjetil Tronvoll, "The Process of Nation Building in Eritrea, Created from Below or Directed from Above?," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998), Kjetil Tronvoll, "Borders of Violence - Boundaries of Identity: Demarcating the Eritrean Nation-State," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 6 (1999).

¹⁴¹ Kjetil Tronvoll, "The Process of Nation Building in Eritrea, Created from Below or Directed from Above?," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998).

¹⁴² Kjetil Tronvoll, "Borders of Violence - Boundaries of Identity: Demarcating the Eritrean Nation-State," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 6 (1999): 105.

¹⁴³ He plays down this line of argumentation in his later works.

Eritreans felt should have been postponed until the final status of the islands had been cleared.¹⁴⁴ Yemen and Eritrea agreed to put the matter to the International Court of Justice. Yemen won; they were granted all the larger islands. Although Eritrea at the time had a military advantage, they withdrew and made a large effort to repair their relationship with Yemen.¹⁴⁵

It must also be underlined that Eritrea has many other strategies to strengthen its national identity, such as schools and compulsory military service with members being drawn from all the ethnic groups. Eritrea has a strong notion of civic identity. The strength of the Eritrean identity was demonstrated in the landslide victory (99.805 % for independence with a 98.24 % participation rate) in the referendum on independence, held on 23-25 April 1993. The UN, the OAU and the Arab League monitored the referendum. It was subsequently approved by all of them, so the results seem quite valid.¹⁴⁶ It is also a paradox how the Eritreans during the early years of the last decade pushed strongly for a closer relationship with their Ethiopian counterpart, the enemy they were supposed to be employing to create a national identity.

In sum, Eritrea seemed to have a very strong national identity, so strong that its need for enemies must have been little. The conflicts it had with its neighbouring countries indicate that the need for an enemy was less important. Eritrea usually backed off before the conflicts escalated into war, often stressed the traditional friendship it shared with these states and accepted international mediation.¹⁴⁷ The arguments raised by Ruth Iyob seem more plausible, however she leaves unanswered questions about how the values connected with Eritrea and Ethiopia became internalised.

Greed and the Lust for Power

Patrick Gilkes makes the case that an additional factor contributed to war in the case of Eritrea-Ethiopia, namely the self interests of the leadership in the two countries.¹⁴⁸ Mirroring

¹⁴⁴ In December 1995, Yemen granted a German company, Konzeptbau, permission to build a hotel. Martin Plaut, "Yemen and Eritrea: Friends Once More?," *Review of African Political Economy* 25, no. 7 (1998): 660.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.: 660-63.

¹⁴⁶ Ruth Iyob, "Re-Configuring Identities: A Clash of Vision(S) in the Horn of Africa, 1991-2000" (paper presented at the Early warning in practice: the case of Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA), London, 5 March 1999). For an alternative interpretation of the referendum, see Kjetil Tronvoll, "Mai Weini, a Village in Highland Eritrea : A Study of the People, Their Livelihood, and Land Tenure During Times of Turbulence" (Master (Hovedfagsoppgave), University of Oslo, 1996).

¹⁴⁷ The notable exception to this was Sudan, but this conflict never escalated into full war.

¹⁴⁸ Patrick Gilkes, "Conference Proceedings" (paper presented at the Eritrea- Ethiopia conference, Institute of African Alternatives, London, 1 July 1998).

the so-called “rally round the flag” or “diversionary theory of war”- theory of conflict and peace research, a theory claiming that war may be a tool by leaders to create unity and gain support in their own state, Gilkes argues that the war could have been a tool to tap into national feeling in order to gain support.¹⁴⁹

Indeed, both Issaias Afworki and Meles Zenawi had other pressing internal issues and mounting internal opposition.¹⁵⁰ The Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, is for example half Eritrean Tigrinya, half from Tigray. His government was often viewed as Tigray-dominated. Many critics accused him of being pro-Eritrean and of being pro-Tigray, the Ethiopian oppositional papers in general trying to describe him and his staff as puppets of the EPLF. In a way he could have been trapped by their criticism, and had a strong motivation to try to counter it. According to Patrick Gilkes, Meles Zenawi was under heavy pressure “to prove his Ethiopian credentials”.¹⁵¹ One way to counter this sort of criticism was to be harsh and hawkish in the negotiations with Eritrea. Gilkes states that the present conflict gave Meles Zenawi the possibility of proving his “Ethiopianness”. By being strict towards Eritrean demands, he was able to refute the critics that blamed him for pro-Eritrean attitudes because of his ethnic background.

Another researcher, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) veteran Leenco Lata, emphasises the internal pressure Zenawi must have been under, making it in his own interest to be less lenient towards Eritrea to keep his position and keep his party united. Lata claims that an important group criticising Meles Zenawi for being too lenient on Eritrea had been in existence from 1995 and onwards.¹⁵² This group, consisting of several of the most powerful individuals within the TPLF, was so strong that Meles Zenawi had to take them into account in order to survive. In 2001 the division within the TPLF became so large that this group walked out of a meeting in Mekele, the split became public and the group members themselves admit that they wanted a more hawkish policy towards the Eritreans, in a way confirming Lata’s claim.¹⁵³

A third version of the self-interest argumentation is identifiable in relevant literature, namely that the Eritrean leadership wanted war to postpone elections. In 1991, the EPLF

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, Jack S. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus Midlarsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973). For a Marxist version see: Vladimir Illyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International, 1916).

¹⁵⁰ The names of the President of Eritrea and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

¹⁵¹ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000): 79.

¹⁵² Leenco Lata, "Ethiopia: The Path to War, and the Consequences of Peace," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 43-51.

¹⁵³ Gebru Asrat, "Letter to the People and Council of Tigray," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

formed a provisional government. This provisional government dealt very well with the difficult transition period between practical independence (1991) and formal independence (1993). Violence was in general avoided, and Eritrea seemed to move in a democratic direction. Eritrea declared its formal independence on 24th May 1993. The provisional regime declared that they wanted to establish a four-year transitional government pending the drafting of a constitution. The proto-democratic institutions and rules of interaction were in place by the end of 1997.¹⁵⁴ The war made it possible to postpone the forthcoming election, and to this day no election has been held. Democratisation has been successfully postponed, and Issaias Afworki is still in power.

Tekeste Negash also focused on the self-interest line of argumentation in an earlier article from 1998. Focusing on the economic failures of the Eritrean government, he argued “that the EPLF government's economic policy had failed and therefore the EPLF chose to divert the attention of the Eritrean people from economic and political issues”.¹⁵⁵

The war did serve as a justification for Issaias Afworki to stop some of the democratic processes in his country. However, it did not prevent differences with regards to policy from surfacing within the governments of both states. Furthermore, the EPLF government had managed such problems before, without conflicts escalating into war. The two leaders seemingly had few economic advantages of the war, the European Union and the United States actually threatened to block their personal assets, but nevertheless the respective leaders continued to fight. Nor were there any large corruption cases or scandals before the war.¹⁵⁶ Kjetil Tronvoll argues that the war actually split Ethiopia.¹⁵⁷ Again, this does not directly contradict scholars arguing that personal interests are important. The respective leaders might have been unaware of this effect and believed that unity would follow when war was declared, or their decisions could have been attempts to please oppositional groups within their own organisation. As will be explored in later chapters, some of the Ethiopian leaders felt intimidated by popular pressure and by pressure from their rivals. Personal interests indeed seem to have been an important factor, amongst the many leading up to the war. The

¹⁵⁴ Ruth Iyob, "The Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict: Diasporic Vs. Hegemonic States in the Horn of Africa, 1991-2000," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 4 (2000): 670.

¹⁵⁵ His attack on the Eritrean leadership becomes even stronger and he claims: "The president of Eritrea is a mentally unbalanced person". He subsequently claims that the president's mental state is one of four causes of conflict, all the others stated earlier in this text. The last statement is in many ways extreme, and he does not, to my knowledge, repeat it in his later work. Such a statement seems vague and unsupported by material observations. Tekeste Negash, "How Ethiopia Could Win over the Crisis without Going to War" (paper presented at the Seminar on Ethiopia-Eritrea, Dutch department of foreign affairs (Holland), 1998), 6.

¹⁵⁶ The last large scandal was the arrest of Ethiopian deputy Prime Minister (former Prime Minister) Tamirat Layne in 1996

¹⁵⁷ Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming).

fact that groups within the TPLF put pressure on the Ethiopian leadership in order to make them less lenient towards Eritrea also seem solidly established, with both members of the current leadership of Ethiopia, as well as members of this group confirming this publicly.¹⁵⁸

Unanswered Questions, Unexplored Areas

Some previous attempts at explaining the war, as well as some of the more general attempts to explain wars, seem to be misleading. The war was not a result of any Tigrayan or Eritrean master plan to expand. The fact that the Ethiopian (Tigrayan) leadership refused to mobilise their army until after the war had started, and that both belligerents failed to substantially increase their defence purchases contradict such claims. The war was no clash of civilisation and Muslims were allied with Christians and vice versa. Nor was the war a product of an arms race, such an arms race simply did not exist. Superficially, Eritrea's need for an enemy in order to consolidate national identity might seem to yield much insight, and the importance of this factor is seemingly validated by Eritrea's aggressive behaviour after its independence, instigating conflict with all of its neighbours. Yet Eritrea also accepted the international verdict in the conflict between themselves and Yemen, showing that Eritrea's need for an enemy was so weak that it was possible to seek new friendship with that enemy even though conflicting interests still existed. The armament purchases made by Eritrea do not indicate aggressiveness, at least not until the autumn of 1997. The ancient hate between the two belligerents, as well as the inferiority/superiority complex, was supposed to have existed for a long time, yet war only broke out in 1998. Moreover, research indicated that there was close affection between some of the groups that were supposed to hate each other, as well as traditional hate between groups that became allies in the Eritrean-Ethiopian war.¹⁵⁹

Some approaches are very hard to evaluate. For example, the traditional relationship between Tigrayans and Eritreans might have had influence, but this relationship became propagandised by the belligerents themselves and might appear stronger in hindsight than it really was. Similarly, the general theoretical approaches stressing the lack of democracy as a cause of conflict seem to yield little information when trying to explain the Eritrean-Ethiopian

¹⁵⁸ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003, Gebru Asrat, "Letter to the People and Council of Tigray," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

¹⁵⁹ Alemseged Abbay, *Identity Jilted or Re-Imagined Identity? The Divergent Path of the Eritrean and Tigrayan Nationalistic Struggle* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea press, 1998), 204, Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming).

war. Both countries were undemocratic and had serious economic problems, yet these traits remained constant and the two countries were on friendly terms for most of the 1990's.

However, several previous analyses of the war have provided a number of valuable insights. The border between Tigray and Eritrea was ambiguous; it left room for interpretation on behalf of both parties. Moreover, the border became more important as the economic relationship between the two countries broke down and it had to be patrolled in order to stop smuggling. It also seems safe to claim that the economic issues of difference between the two countries poisoned the atmosphere between them and that resource scarcity might have initiated local conflicts in Tigray. Ruth Iyob's focus on how the EPLF and the TPLF internalised new values after they came into power also is very interesting.¹⁶⁰

The personal interests of the leadership in the two countries appear to have been important. Eritrea's President Issaias Afworki managed to shelve the question of election. As suggested by Leenco Lata, there seem to have been internal conflicts within the TPLF, the EPRDF and the PFDJ (EPLF), with important sub-groups pressuring for a more hawkish policy. Moreover, on the Ethiopian side there seems to have been a considerable pressure from the public press in order to promote a more hawkish policy towards Eritrea, a pressure that could have made it seem in the leaders' self-interest to adopt a more hawkish stand, or could have contributed to the internalisation of the values described by Iyob.

Nevertheless, all these approaches leave questions unanswered. Eritrea had ambiguous borders with other countries as well, but they did not cause war; the two governing organisations had previously competed over economic resources, but it had not caused war at that stage. Moreover, while resource scarcity created local conflicts in Tigray, it also created local conflicts in the border areas facing the neighbours of the two belligerents, but none of these conflicts developed into war. Iyob's approach does not explore how the internalisation of Eritrean and Ethiopian values happened, how the TPLF became influenced by the rest of Ethiopian population.

Notably, several areas of research have also been neglected. Culture has been examined by researchers attempting to explain the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, but only culture defined by ethnicity, the culture of ethnic groups or culture defined by a common membership in a state, a homogenised Ethiopian or Eritrean culture. The constructivist theories of Elizabeth Kier suggest that there might be additional types of culture influencing decision-

¹⁶⁰ Ruth Iyob, "The Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict: Diasporic Vs. Hegemonic States in the Horn of Africa, 1991-2000," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 4 (2000), Ruth Iyob, "Re-Configuring Identities: A Clash of Vision(S) in the Horn of Africa, 1991-2000" (paper presented at the Early warning in practice: the case of Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA), London, 5 March 1999).

making and human interaction, namely the cultures of various organisations, organisations that through social interaction, through standardisation and through common historical experiences, end up sharing traditions and customs influencing decision-making strategies. In this sense this thesis will examine an almost totally neglected aspect of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war.

Moreover, with the notable exception of the work of Leenco Lata, it has been taken for granted that the EPRDF and the PFDJ acted unitarily, with few inner discussions. The inter-group dynamics within these organisations have not been studied in detail before.¹⁶¹ Even Lata lacks an in-depth examination on why and how these groups emerged. A focus on organisations and their culture will enable an in-depth study of the larger organisations influencing Ethiopian decision making. The employment of the theories of Elizabeth Kier, theories explicitly acknowledging the existence of sub-groups even within organisational hierarchies, and also acknowledging that sub-group interaction is important for national decision-making, might provide insights into how much influence the sub groups explored by Lata had, and why the groups were formed.

In addition, the role of the press in the developments leading up to the war has never been studied before. The private Ethiopian newspapers were also organisations that can be studied employing Kier's constructivism that has been inspired by organisational theory. Such a study can be of vital importance: it might discover if the press contributed to the pressure on Meles Zenawi described by Gilkes and Plaut, the pressure to prove his "Ethiopian Credentials", and if so, why this came about.¹⁶²

The following chapters will focus on these unexplored areas, as well as attempting to answer some of the questions left open by previous attempts at explanation. The role of the press in defining the public debate in Ethiopia will be explored, as well as the pressure the press placed on EPRDF politicians. Why and how the sub-groups within the EPRDF that put pressure on the Ethiopian leadership were formed and how they influenced Ethiopian policy-making will be explored. The question of why scarcity or economically driven local conflicts in Tigray were allowed to develop, when similar conflicts in other border areas were controlled, will be answered. How economic factors were allowed to have influence on the bilateral Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship will also be examined.

¹⁶¹ Leenco Lata, "Ethiopia: The Path to War, and the Consequences of Peace," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005).

¹⁶² Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000): 79.

Chapter 4: The Press, Organisational Culture and the War

If the observers most surprised by the outbreak of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war had conducted a systematic study of the Ethiopian press in the years between the Press Law of 1992 and the outbreak of the war in May 1998, their surprise would perhaps have been reduced.¹ The tone that the private Ethiopian press used when commenting upon Eritrea before the war was hostile and aggressive, branding the Eritreans by using terms such as “brother murderers” or “Haemorrhoids”.² Strong language is quite common in many newspapers in numerous countries around the world. However, the Ethiopian press was special in many ways. A certain theme portraying the ruling party of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Front (EPRDF), as controlled by Eritrea or other foreign powers, dominated press coverage and certain axioms based on this theme came to dominate the public debate. The Ethiopian leadership was strongly criticised for being puppets of foreign actors, and this puppet theme dominated most of the coverage of Ethiopian bilateral relations. Regardless of the specific topic examined in the articles of the newspapers, the press tended to suggest reflexively that the Ethiopian government was controlled by outsiders, mostly of Eritrean origins.³ The puppet theme contributed to a homogenisation of the Ethiopian public debate. As suggested by experts such as Patrick Gilkes, Martin Plaut, Medhane Tadesse and John Young, the Ethiopian leaders seem to have been pressured into a more nationalistic direction by the massive critique from the public debate.⁴ As John Young and Medhane Tadesse argue: “Constantly accused of lacking a patriotic commitment to Ethiopia, the TPLF leadership sometimes found it necessary to take extreme actions to prove the contrary.”⁵

This chapter examines the role of the Ethiopian press in the developments that led to war. It shows how the puppet theme dominated large segments of the oppositional press. The chapter demonstrates how the theme became an axiom that was used to interpret various events and provided ready-made explanations that could be used to describe the Ethiopian-Eritrean relationship. Subsequently it explores how this influenced Ethiopian decision-making with serious implications for the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. The newspapers created a

¹ The Press Law of 1992 opened up for the establishment of private newspapers.

² “Economics,” *The Addis Tribune* 13 May 1994, “Wolde `Ab` and the Press,” *Niqa* 23 May 1995.

³ See for example. “Bickering and Punches or Dialogue?” *Tobiya* 3 August 1995.

⁴ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, “War in the Horn, the Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia,” *Royal Institute for international Affairs Discussion Paper*, no. 82 (1999), Medhane Tadesse, and John Young., “Tplf: Reform or Decline,” *Review of African Political Economy* 97, no. 3 (2003).

⁵ Medhane Tadesse, and John Young., “Tplf: Reform or Decline,” *Review of African Political Economy* 97, no. 3 (2003): 398.

public debate in Ethiopia that became hostile towards Eritreans, and Ethiopian attempts to negotiate with them almost inevitably tended to be interpreted as showing that the government was controlled by Eritrea. This chapter argues that this can not be explained by referring to the economic interests of the newspapers, as the papers often suffered economic loss when they adhered to their theme. Papers like the large *Tobiya* were forcefully closed down by the government because they stressed the theme, and accordingly, economic motives cannot account for the repeated insistence on the government's supposed puppet behaviour.

The main argument of the chapter is that organisational culture entrenched the puppet theme, a theme that deterred politicians from giving concessions towards Eritreans, scared Eritreans and prevented the dissemination of information. It thus indirectly created problems between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Moreover, it will argue that such an organisational culture in turn was created by the recruitment patterns of the various newspapers' organisations and the newspapers' history of interaction with the government.

The Puppet Theme

On 4 January 1995 a strong verbal attack on Eritrea was launched in the *Wolafen*, a small opposition paper.⁶ The article, written by Ato Mersha Wodajo, claimed that the new Constitution, implemented later in 1995, was an attempt by the USA to split and weaken Ethiopia. The USA was claimed to support the general Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) /Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) programme that aimed to use Ethiopian resources to build Eritrea.⁷ This alliance subsequently planned to increase Tigray by taking land from Gondar and Wollo. A last stage in this plan was supposed to be to include Tigray in Eritrea. There are no indications that such a plan ever existed. Indeed, the story is strongly contradicted by the events of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, in which the TPLF - dominated government fought fiercely to prevent even minor parts (such as Badme) of Tigray from being included in Eritrea. However, the article illustrates a general trend within the articles of the Ethiopian opposition papers, focusing on foreign manipulators manipulating the Ethiopian government in order to destroy Ethiopia. This theme had many variations. Sometimes the newspapers accused the United States, sometimes even Germany, of being out to destroy

⁶ Mersha Wodajo, "Complaint against America," *Wolafen* 4 January 1994.

⁷ Ato Mersha Wodajo was also chairman of the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (CODEF), an oppositional group

Ethiopia.⁸ Both had through manipulation also contributed to the fall of the Derg and thus to the present misery:

..they had been involved in fragmenting a once sovereign and united Ethiopia through the instrumentality of the hidden agenda of the opposition groups which they had organised and fully supported. In doing so they had exposed Ethiopia to misery of hereto unprecedented magnitudes.⁹

Nevertheless, the Eritreans were most commonly named as the original source of the overt control of Ethiopian authorities. There were many examples of articles carrying such themes. Newspapers like Mogad, Wonchif, Tomar, URJI, Beza, Etiop, Kittab, Habasha, the Ethiopian Register and Niqa all described the rulers of Ethiopia as more or less controlled by Eritrea, or other external forces.¹⁰ Most of them agreed with the Habasha's claim of 5 September 1995 that the "TPLF is dominated by EPLF so much that it is impossible to speak of them as two".¹¹ They also seemed to agree with the Ethiopian Register's claim that the TPLF was on an "EPLF assigned mission of dismantling Ethiopia."¹²

The most important newspaper that adhered to the theme was the large Addis Ababa - based newspaper, the Tobiya, and it was to be central to the diffusion of the theme into other newspapers. The Tobiya had (and has) a solid financial basis with a registered capital of birr 90,000 (c 13,000 dollar), and is according to the Ethiopian independent scholar Shimelis Bonsa the richest paper in Ethiopia.¹³ The Tobiya was thus able to start publishing more issues than other newspapers; it had (and has) one of the largest circulation numbers in Ethiopia. Moreover, the number of pages in each of the Tobiya's issues, a regular copy having 16-20 pages, was so high that it had an increased resale value. Increased resale subsequently meant that it became more popular amongst the poor, as it could be resold for a higher price. Lastly, the Tobiya's articles had a high technical quality, and their journalists were usually good writers. The Tobiya was thus a very popular and influential paper in Ethiopia.

Because of the Tobiya's influence, it is highly significant to examine its articles. The Tobiya's coverage of the new Ethiopian Constitution, formalised and put into practice in

⁸ "America Failed to Act," *WALWAL* 27 December 1994. "Olf," *Tobiya* 22 May 1997.

⁹ "We Seek a Dictatorship Rather Than Democratic Governance," *Andinet* 19 September 1996.

¹⁰ For examples see: "The Consequences of Ethnic Politics and Secession," *Tobiya* 10 August 1995, "The Root of All Sprouted from This Land," *Tobiya* 14 November 1997, Mersha Wodajo, "Complaint against America," *Wolafen* 4 January 1994.

¹¹ "Fighting for an American Cause?" *Habasha* 5 September 1995.

¹² "Lessons for the Ethiopian Diaspora," *Ethiopian Register* 1 April 1997.

¹³ Shimelis Bonsa, *Survey of the Private Press in Ethiopia 1991-1999* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2000), 26.

1995, shows the importance of the puppet theme. On 20 January 1994 the *Tobiya* concluded that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) wanted to weaken Ethiopia.¹⁴ For the *Tobiya* this was easy to see because the newspaper meant there was an intentional lack of a definition of a common Ethiopian flag in the new Constitution and no common definition of territory. The lack of the definition of the flag was intentional, because, as the newspaper put it, there was "a need to divide the country". The territories were not defined because of the need to "decrease the Ethiopian ability to declare and fight a war". The combination of the two strategies would lead to "weakening the national spirit". Moreover, the negative effects of the Constitution were said to be products of an active policy to make the country vulnerable if attacked by another nation, and also a part of a foreign plot to weaken Ethiopia.

The paper did not indicate what type of information and sources it had accessed that indicated foreign influence on the Constitution. Importantly, the Constitution was at this stage not finished, and the exact wording was under discussion. Indeed, the Ethiopian Constitution, Article 3, now reads: "1).The Ethiopian flag consists of three horizontal bands of equal size, the uppermost green, the middle yellow and the nethermost red". So the flag became clearly defined, albeit at a later stage of the process. There was no discussion of the possibility that the lack of a common definition of territory was a result of the increased power of the ethnic groups, namely because Article 38 stipulated their right to secession. To the *Tobiya* it seemed clear that the whole Constitution was a result of foreign manipulation, even at a stage when it was still under construction.

Notably, the *Tobiya* in general failed to see the contradictions between this Constitution and the Constitution of the supposed manipulators, Eritrea, which allowed few concessions to its ethnic groups. The TPLF and the EPLF actually had massive differences with regards to their views on ethnic groups. The TPLF defined national identity according to the *Ius sanguinis* principle, citizenship based on common bloodlines and thus based on the bonds of ethnicity. On the other hand, the EPLF defined citizenship according to the *Ius soli* principle: citizenship based on a common geographic background disregarding ethnic background.¹⁵ The EPLF felt that few concessions should be given to the various ethnic groups within Eritrea, as the common Eritrean identity was seen as transcending the older ethnic identities. The TPLF on the contrary wanted to give the full sovereignty to ethnic

¹⁴ "A New Constitution," *Tobiya* 20 January 1994.

¹⁵ Bertil Egerø, "The Roots of the Recent Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia- an Interpretation" (paper presented at the Conference on Culture and Conflict at the Horn of Africa, Lund University, 5 August 2004).

groups that should even be allowed to secede from Ethiopia if they wanted to. Taken to the extreme the new Ethiopian Constitution thus could be seen as opening up for territorial demands on Eritrea. Some of the Eritrean highlanders were so close to Tigrayans that, if one accepted the principle of ethnically defined states within the Ethiopian federation, they should be a part of Tigray. Indeed, the EPLF had previously been very frightened by the TPLF's use of this principle, especially its possibilities to be employed as a justification for Ethiopian/Tigrayan expansion, and it had contributed to most of the serious rifts between the two organisations.¹⁶ Moreover, an Ethiopian adaptation of the *Ius sanguinis* principle could be used as propaganda by ethnic groups within Eritrea that wanted to secede. After all, secession was according to the new Ethiopian Constitution legal for ethnic groups within Ethiopia, and Eritrean population groups could point to this as a justification for their own actions. The EPLF had been negative towards the TPLF's views on ethnicity from the day the two organisations first established contact, and there was little reason for Eritrea to become more positive with regards to this principle when it became enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution. Martin Plaut and Patrick Gilkes even stress that the contradiction between Eritrea and Ethiopia with regards to the treatment of ethnic groups, including the contradictions enshrined in the new Constitution, could be a cause of the war itself.¹⁷

Importantly, information indicating the previous conflicts between the EPLF and the TPLF over the ethnicity question was available to the Addis Ababa newspapers. John Young had commented upon this information in his book *Peasant Revolutions in Ethiopia*, published in 1997.¹⁸ Previous members of the TPLF, members who had seen the conflicts between the EPLF and the TPLF over this principle, were available for interviews. The important TPLF leader Gidey Zeratsion had for example left the country, but was still active in the Diaspora and could easily have been interviewed by Ethiopian newspapers. Nevertheless, the newspapers failed even to discuss how the Ethiopian Constitution violated important Eritrean principles of nationhood. It becomes almost ironic that the Ethiopian Constitution that the Tobiya claimed was a product of Eritrean control perhaps was the document that most clearly demonstrated some of the most important of the conflicting issues between the Eritrean and Ethiopian ruling organisations. The Ethiopian Constitution was, self-contradictingly, rather described as a product of Eritrean manipulations.

¹⁶ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000): 1, Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, "Publications of the Eplf: The Tplf and the Development of Its Relations with the Eplf," in *Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara* (Asmara: 1984), 4.

¹⁷ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000): 1.

¹⁸ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

The new Constitution also meant that government structures had to be rearranged. Transitional governmental organs created after the victory over the Derg in 1991 had to be changed into more permanent institutions. The new permanent institutions had to include more non-Tigrayan members in order to be theoretically more representative. Some of the Tigray/ TPLF members of the cabinet had to leave in order to make positions available for non-Tigrayans.¹⁹ The speculations that arose when the powerful Minister of Defence Siye Abraha Hagos, also a veteran central committee member of the TPLF, vacated his office were a major issue in some of the opposition papers. The articles commenting on his removal again demonstrated how the theme of a foreign power controlling the Ethiopian government became an axiom, and how this theme was almost as a reflex invoked to interpret new events. On 30 November 1995, just after Siye Abraha Hagos vacated his office, the *Tobiya* wrote "Some circles ascribe Siye Abraha's removal to probable differences with Meles on Eritrean influence over Ethiopia". Siye was said to have protested against the Eritrean control of the government.²⁰ The first reflex of the *Tobiya* was to interpret this event, as many other events, as a result of the Eritrean influence over Ethiopia.

Superficially, it might seem as though the reflex reaction could have been justified in this particular case. Seven years later Siye Abraha was removed from the TPLF central committee because of differences with Meles over Eritrea. However, this does not validate their story from 1995. Siye Abraha remained powerful after he moved from Addis Ababa to Tigray and until 2001 remained in the TPLF central committee, an organ that, given the TPLF's relative power in the EPRDF, was in many ways more important than the cabinet. Sebhat Nega, a former leader of the TPLF, today one of the senior leaders within the movement, actually stresses that Siye Abraha supported a lenient policy towards Eritrea at least until January 1998 and voted against military mobilisation before the war.²¹ Importantly, this claim is supported by Alemseged Gebre Almak, former head of propaganda within the TPLF. Almak was, together with eleven other central committee members, including Siye Abraha, ousted from the TPLF in 2001. Members of this group, of which Almak is one of the leaders, have a strategic interest in saying that Siye Abraha was ousted from the cabinet in 1995 because of the Eritrean issue, as Ethiopian public opinion is today largely against the

¹⁹ In practice TPLF continued to dominate. The TPLF still had control over the new National Security Authority, and Kinfe Gebre Medhine, a TPLF veteran, got this position. Several international observers as Kjetil Tronevoll and Sigfried Pausewand also commented upon informal channels of overt control, which enabled the TPLF to exercise control over the government. Siegfried Pausewang, and Lovise Aalen, "Local Elections in Ethiopia, February/March 2001," *Nordem Report: WORKING PAPER* 01, no. 07 (2001).

²⁰ "Power: In Whose Hands?" *Tobiya* 30 November 1995.

²¹ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

Eritreans. Such claims could thus have confirmed their credentials for the general public, the group itself claiming that resistance towards lenient policy towards Eritrea is one of their main policies.²² Nevertheless, Amlak, in contradiction of his own interests, claims that Siye was very important in the TPLF even after 1995, and that he actually supported a very lenient policy towards Eritrea until 1998, even voting against military mobilisation in 1997.²³ The stories of Sebhat Nega and Alemseged Gebre Almak are corroborated by other sources. Mesmor Fante, a former leading member of Amhara National Democratic movement (ANDM), the TPLF's sister party within EPRDF, supports their statements.²⁴ This makes the Tobiya's argument extremely weak. Moreover, much of the information available to them should have indicated this. The Tobiya, like most Ethiopians at the time, must have been aware of the relative dominance of the TPLF in the EPRDF, and of the importance of the TPLF central committee, in which Siye still sat. They pointed to the importance of the TPLF structures in many of their articles.²⁵ Nevertheless, they did not analyse why Siye kept his position in the central committee. The possibility that Siye Abraha relinquished his power because of the constitutional rearrangements, and that he kept much informal influence, was not discussed by the Tobiya. Instead of using the sources available to them, the Tobiya reflexively interpreted the event as a product of Eritrean manipulation.

The story of the ousting of Tamirat Layne, Prime Minister of Ethiopia from 1991 to 1995, from 1995 to 1996 Deputy Prime Minister and Siye's replacement as Minister of Defence, also illustrates the way the puppet theme functioned as a reflexive axiom underlying the interpretation of a new event. At the time when Siye Abraha moved to Tigray, the Tobiya claimed that Tamirat Layne was crucial in removing Siye, being indirectly "an opponent of Siye's attempt to prevent Eritrean influence".²⁶ Nevertheless, when Tamirat Layne was arrested for corruption one year later, the first reaction of the Tobiya was to claim that Tamirat had been removed because of his hostile attitude towards Eritrea. The paper also used this opportunity to underline once more the control they felt Eritrea had over the EPRDF. To them the ANDM, Tamirat's party within the EPRDF umbrella, never really was intended to be a representative Amharic organisation. The ANDM was intended to be TPLF's spearhead in Amharaland, and the TPLF was subsequently intended to be EPLF's spearhead in Ethiopia.

²² See for example Gebru Asrat, "Letter to the People and Council of Tigray," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

²³ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

²⁴ Mesmor Fante, Interview, 2 February 2003.

²⁵ See for example "A New Constitution," *Tobiya* 20 January 1994.

²⁶ "Power: In Whose Hands?" *Tobiya* 30 November 1995.

We vividly recall how Ato Abraha Yayhe had once referred to the EPDM [later renamed ANDM] as the Amhara wing of the Weeyins [TPLF]. Shabia (EPLF) had used the Weeyins to penetrate into the country. In like manner the Weeyins had used the EPDM as a vehicle and a bridge for penetration of the central highlands.²⁷

Tamirat was seen to have an important position in the Eritrean-Ethiopian trade negotiations. He was a member of the ministerial commission, but he became too sceptical of what the Tobiya claimed to be “the Eritrean control of the Ethiopian political life”, so he had to be removed.²⁸ Admittedly, the newspaper later changed its view, and claimed that the corruption accusations against Tamirat were solid and probably the sole cause for his removal.²⁹ Nevertheless, the initial reaction of the Tobiya again showed a tendency to interpret new events according to a puppet axiom.

The Tobiya also claimed that the TPLF tried to Eritreanise the Ethiopian society:

Many citizens have become increasingly convinced over the past four years that Ethiopia no longer belongs to Ethiopians. Ethiopians dismissed from work on various levels are replaced by Eritreans. Eritreans also hold key positions in the government. These are causes for widespread complaint and discontent amongst Ethiopians today.³⁰

Other papers followed the lead of the Tobiya. On 5 September 1995 the Beza claimed that “Ethiopia has become an Eritrean colony”.³¹ In December the same year the Tequami claimed that the “EPRDF’s role as an agent directly in charge of EPLF interests in Ethiopia has been repeatedly confirmed by a number of popular voices on various occasions”.³² The Tobiya followed suit claiming: “Should Ethiopians remain unemployed while Eritreans control every thing from petty kiosks to high positions in the government? Have you considered this?”³³ They also warned about officials with Eritrean relatives: “Can government officials with Eritrean blood possibly work for the interest of the Ethiopian

²⁷ "Who Is Tamirat," *Tobiya* 31 October 1996.

²⁸ "What Is the Mystery Behind Tamirats Dismissal And.... Questions Remain Open," *Tobiya* 31 October 1996.

²⁹ "Uproot the Rotten System!," *Tobiya* 7 November 1996.

³⁰ "Editorial: The Freedom of Information in Contemporary Ethiopia," *Tobiya* 10 August 1995.

³¹ "Editorial," *Beza* 5 September 1995.

³² "Eritrea Demands Ethiopians to Pay Custom Duties in Us Dollars," *Tequami* 19 December 1995.

³³ "Questions Addressed to Cpr and Genuine Tigreans," *Tobiya* 13 June 1996.

people?"³⁴ Interestingly, the same paper later in the same article, albeit when discussing Oromos, contradicted itself, claiming that mixed blood is so common in Ethiopia that no one should be judged because of his/her ancestors.

Admittedly, Ethiopia's citizenship laws at the time were awkward and complex and might have contributed to some hostility targeting the Eritreans. The EPRDF chose to be lenient with regard to the possibility for citizenship not only vis-à-vis Eritrea, but also with regards to nomads straddling the borders. Focusing on the rights of Eritreans only, many newspapers saw this as the clearest example of how the TPLF was controlled by the Eritreans, how they were forced to allow Eritreans to enter Ethiopia.³⁵ However, the inter-marriage between Eritreans and various population groups in Ethiopia, not only Tigrayans, but also Amharas, Afars and to a less extent Oromos and Gurages, would have made other options extremely impractical. As Human Rights Watch says when commenting upon the later expulsions of Ethiopians with Eritrean origins:

For the forty years preceding Eritrean independence in 1991 both countries were part of the same internationally recognized state. Strong cultural, religious, and linguistic affinities existed between the two people, and intermarriages were common. The Ethiopian Constitution, in its Article 6, grants citizenship by birth to any person with one or both Ethiopian parents.³⁶

In fact, the discussion of the citizenship of Eritreans was equally influenced by the puppet theme, and influencing it in return. The issue of citizenship became tied to the background of the citizen in question rather than the principle itself. For several opposition papers the naturalisation, even dual citizenship, of foreigners was unproblematic as long as the person in question, or his mother/father, had not originated in Eritrea. Thus when discussing the background of the largest entrepreneur in Ethiopia, the half Saudi Arabian Al-Amoudi, the newspaper *Moresh* for example remarked that:

No Ethiopian would have reservations if Al-Amoudi becomes a naturalized Ethiopian citizen. But giving dual citizenship to Al-Amoudi would violate the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "Haven't We Had Enough," *Beza* 1 January 1998, "The Nationality of Thousand Eritreans Is Put to Question," *Tobiya* 29 August 1996, "Questions of Eritrean Nationals in Ethiopia Should Be Resolved," *Tobiya* 27 November 1997.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 - April 2002)," (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003). (Eritrea formally gained independence in 1993, but had it de-facto from 1991 and onwards)

provision in the Ethiopian Constitution which prohibits dual citizenship. If that provision on dual citizenship is amended, a great number of Eritreans who have registered as foreign nationals and are denied dual citizenships would have the opportunity to make use of two citizenships.³⁷

Reflexively, the interpretation was that when Eritreans gained citizenship, it would be negative, but non-Eritrean foreigners gaining citizenship would be positive.

Indeed, the dominance of the puppet theme led almost reflexively to the interpretation of most new events in the light of the supposed puppet relationship between the EPLF and the TPLF. So when Ethiopia sold its navy, the newspaper *Genanaw* almost as a reflex action suggested that the money went to the Eritreans.³⁸ This tendency continued, not only in the *Tobiya*, but also in many other papers. On 17 July 1997, the *Wonchif* claimed that the Weyane (TPLF) and Shabia (EPLF) alliance was the root of all problems in Ethiopia.³⁹ The *Wonchif* made the claim that Zalambessa, one of the Ethiopian cities that saw the fiercest battles during the 1998-2000 war, was to be handed back to the Eritreans and claimed that this was partly because of Eritrean domination of the TPLF. Needless to say, this never happened. According to the paper, Sebhat Nega, a powerful TPLF central committee member, and General Tsadekan “were partly of Eritrean origins”, and also influenced the negotiations.⁴⁰ In fact, Tsadekan was at the time strongly negative towards the Eritreans, and advised military defensive mobilisation against them just months after.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this story was repeated in other newspapers, also during the tense period between the Eritrean-Ethiopian governments during August 1997. The tension between the governments had at this stage even become clear to many of the Addis Ababa newspapers.⁴² However, on 5 August 1997 the newspaper *Zegabbi* reported that Zalambessa was given to Eritrea.⁴³

The *Tobiya* also continued to interpret events reflexively in accordance with a puppet theme. On 22 May 1997, a peace attempt trying to create a dialogue between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) guerrilla organisation and Ethiopia was said to be a German-Eritrean (EPLF) plot to weaken Ethiopia.⁴⁴ On the 26 of May it also suggested that the OLF, as well as

³⁷ "Al-Amoudi, 'Yes', Eritrean Nationals, 'No'," *Moreshe* 15 March 1998.

³⁸ "Naval Ships Sold," *Genanaw* 19 September 1996.

³⁹ "Ethiopia-Eritrea Territorial Settlement," *Wonchif* 17 June 1997.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

⁴² See for example: "Stepped up Border Vigilance," *Beza* 21 October 1997.

⁴³ "Ethiopia/Eritrea Border Adjustment," *Zegabbi* 5 August 1997.

⁴⁴ "Olf," *Tobiya* 22 May 1997.

its enemy EPRDF, was Eritrean controlled.⁴⁵ And other smaller papers followed suit. Beza even carried an article suggesting that “the two groups, Tigrayans and Eritreans, are so similar that they should be kept apart from the rest of Ethiopia.”⁴⁶

The events of 1997, the Eritrean introduction of the Nakfa and the problems in the border areas increased the manifestations of the puppet theme. Each new event was interpreted according to the theme, and complex issues were reduced to a question of Eritrean influence only. In late 1997- early 1998 the *Tobiya* for example heavily attacked Eritrea and its “puppets in the Ethiopian government” under headlines such as “Enough is enough”.⁴⁷ Commenting on the on-going trade negotiations, they claimed that “The hullabaloo on the birr and Nakfa has raised the eyebrows of the Ethiopian people. Ethiopia should not continue to bleed in order to satisfy the interests and the needs of Eritrea.” Meles Zenawi’s adviser Fasil Nahom, an Eritrean Jew, was described as a traitor. The former EPLF member Yemane Jamaica Kidane, the Secretary of the Foreign Minister, was used as an example of how far the infiltration had gone. The coverage of the trade negotiations became one-sided as newspapers reported that the Eritreans dominated both the Ethiopian delegation and the Eritrean delegation. The *Beza* in detail explored how the Ethiopian delegation was controlled by Eritreans.

Ato Aw-Alom Woldu is an Eritrean and yet has been appointed Ethiopian ambassador to Eritrea to [so called] look after Ethiopia’s interests. During negotiations that were held in Assab between Ethiopia and Eritrea Ato Aw-Alom was negotiator on the Ethiopian side. Ato Fasil Nahom, who is an Eritrean Jew, is Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s advisor. Yemane Kidane, nicknamed Jamaica, is the secretary of the Ethiopian foreign minister.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the supposedly Eritrean controlled negotiation team was ardently resisting Eritrean attempts to facilitate a continuation of the trade pact which they saw as disadvantageous to Ethiopia. Again the EPRDF proved their ability to hold their ground against the supposed puppet masters, and again the puppet theme was depicting a situation

⁴⁵ "And Who Are the Next Targets? Further Dismemberment in Store for Ethiopia?" *Tobiya* 29 May 1997.

⁴⁶ "Interview with Professor Tilahun," *Beza* 22 April 1997.

⁴⁷ "Enough Is Enough," *Tobiya* 1 January 1998.

⁴⁸ "Haven't We Had Enough," *Beza* 1 January 1998.

erroneously. The Beza had seemingly reflexively interpreted the situation according to their puppet theme and avoided examining what was going on in the negotiations.

Given the information available to the papers, arguments of Eritreans' ruling Ethiopia through high ranked Eritrean civil servants within the Ethiopian government appear odd. It would have been an understandable conclusion for ordinary citizens because of the close connection between Tigrayans (TPLF) and Eritreans, and considering the number of Tigrayan leaders with Eritrean relatives. However, the attitudes of some of these supposed Eritreans, such as for instance Gebru Asrath, the then powerful president of Tigray, were highly critical towards Eritrea.⁴⁹ Information about the attitudes of several critical TPLF officials circulated relatively widely in TPLF circles and leaked. Members of the opposition were indeed aware of this, so the information should have been available to the oppositional papers who frequently interviewed oppositional politicians.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the Tobiya even threatened the government directly, attempting to push them towards a more hawkish stand in the negotiations: "If the situation is allowed to continue, the present ruling party which has been criticised for being an instrument of Eritrea could further lose credibility."⁵¹ In this way the Tobiya attempted to push the Ethiopian leaders into being stricter towards Eritrea, by claiming that the leaders would be seen as Eritrean instruments if failing to do so.

Moreover, the frequency of such coverage increased. Although first starting amongst oppositional papers, allegations of Eritrean control of the Ethiopian government spread beyond them. Business papers like the Addis Tribune moderately started to claim that Eritreans in the Ethiopian government had a negative impact on the trade negotiations.⁵² The theme thus spread to new segments of the press during the crucial economic negotiations of 1997-1998. Interestingly, during this period the Ethiopian government clearly showed that they were no puppets, refusing the Eritrean suggestion that they should allow the Eritrean Nakfa to circulate at a one-to-one exchange rate with the Ethiopian currency, the birr.

The tone developed, it became harsher and the newspapers now started to condemn even the critics of their puppet axiom. The newspaper Beza for example suggested that female critics of the interpretation that the EPRDF was a puppet of Eritrea had been the sex partners of the TPLF leaders.⁵³

⁴⁹ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

⁵⁰ Beyene Petros, Interview, 3 December 2002.

⁵¹ "Strict Control Measures: A Timely Necessity," *Tobiya* 17 December 1997.

⁵² "Prime Minister Says No Change in Free Trade Agreement with Eritrea (but Reaffirms Necessity of Dollar-Based Letter of Credit): A Commentary," *Addis Tribune* 16 January 1998.

⁵³ "Haven't We Had Enough," *Beza* 1 January 1998.

Newspapers also started to identify Eritreans that supposedly manipulated the Ethiopian financial sector. This was perhaps a less surprising adaptation of the puppet theme than its adaptation to the Ethiopian delegations sent to renegotiate bilateral agreements. Eritreans had a prominent position in the Ethiopian economy, including black-marketing and illegal enterprises taking advantage of Ethiopia's somewhat cumbersome laws.⁵⁴ However, the theme again led to reflexive interpretations of events and to the discovery of non-existing Eritrean back men controlling the Ethiopian economy. The newspaper the Ethiopian Register for example claimed that Dashen Bank, the second largest bank in Ethiopia, was fully controlled by Eritreans, the owner being supposed to be an Eritrean.⁵⁵ This was erroneous: all 11 owners of the bank were Ethiopians. Moreover, this information was open to the press. All the same, rather than do research, the Ethiopian Register reflexively applied the puppet theme when an article was to be produced.⁵⁶

Another issue that became linked to the puppet theme was the issue of Assab. The city of Assab is located in the south of Eritrea, where Eritrea narrows and the Ethiopian border is closest to the sea. The region is populated by the Afar, an ethnic group that also occupies the north eastern part of Ethiopia and Djibouti, and that previously fought for independence from all these countries. Assab had been integrated into the Ethiopian economy and was second only to Port Djibouti when it came to the amount of cargo going back and forth from Ethiopia during the Derg era.⁵⁷ The Ethiopian presence was large, also after the end of the Derg. According to the United Nations' Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs 70% of Assab's population were actually Ethiopian on the eve of Eritrean independence in 1993.⁵⁸

However, while there were few celebrations in Assab during the independence frenzy in 1993, the percentage of pro-independence votes was as high here as in the rest of the country. International observers, including the researcher Terrence Lyons, concluded that the city wanted to be a part of Eritrea.⁵⁹ Moreover, it had always been a part of the Italian colony, and thus had to be Eritrean according to the OAU charter that defined the former colonial borders as a foundation for the borders in Africa.

⁵⁴ See for example: "Counterfeiter under Police Custody," *Eritrea Profile* 2 May 1998.

⁵⁵ "The Perils of Ethnic Banking," *Ethiopian Register* 1 August 1997.

⁵⁶ Dashen Bank, "Press Release: Dashen Bank," *Press Digest* 18 September 1997. Moreover, the article had additional negative effects, as Dashen bank in a press statement stated that never had any Eritrean owners. By going out and denying it publicly in one of the larger Ethiopian newspapers, they underlined that it was problematic to have Eritreans, in this way even the bank contributed to a general anti-Eritrean discourse.

⁵⁷ Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia, the Federal Experience* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrika insitutet, 1997).

⁵⁸ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)/ UN office for coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Eritrea-Ethiopia: Irin Focus on Assab* (Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)/ UN office for coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2000 [cited 25/04 2002]); available from www.irin.org.

⁵⁹ Paul Henze, *Eritrea's War* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2001).

As claimed by the United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs and by Fissehatsion Menghistu, Assab was extremely important in Ethiopian public discussions.⁶⁰ Segments of the Ethiopian press claimed that the secession of Assab in 1991 was a result of the supposed Eritrean control over the EPRDF and the TPLF. The decision to let Assab go and the humiliation that many Ethiopians felt because of this inevitably fed the puppet theme, as well as being interpreted in the light of it. The Ethiopian ambassador and chief negotiator during the Assab negotiations, Ato Aw-Alom Woldu, was, according to both members of the present day TPLF leadership, the opposition and the more anti-Eritrean TPLF group that left the party in 2001, one of the hawks of the TPLF, pushing for full defensive mobilisation against Eritrea as early as in December 1997.⁶¹ The Tobiya had ample opportunity to speak with the politicians of the opposition, nonetheless, the Tobiya claimed that Woldu was influenced by his Eritrean origins.⁶²

The application of the puppet theme had several negative implications for the bilateral Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. Firstly, it framed the situation for the Ethiopian decision makers: they were afraid of appearing as the puppets they were accused of being. It intimidated several of the EPRDF leaders. For example Yemane Jamaica Kidane, who in 1976 had been a member of the EPLF but had switched to the TPLF, felt strongly pressured by the comments with regards to his Eritrean background.⁶³ Lovise Aalen's respondents also observed how TPLF central committee member Tewodros Hagos became pressured because of his half Eritrean origins.⁶⁴ Indeed several other researchers such as Patrick Gilkes, Martin Plaut, John Young, Medhane Tadesse and Kjetil Tronvoll point to the effect of the agitation of the press and the public debate it defined.⁶⁵ As suggested by John Young and Medhane Tadesse: "Constantly accused of lacking a patriotic commitment to Ethiopia, the TPLF leadership sometimes found it necessary to take extreme actions to prove the contrary."⁶⁶ On several occasions this was seemingly even the conscious strategy of the newspapers

⁶⁰ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)/ UN office for coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Eritrea-Ethiopia: Irin Focus on Assab* (Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)/ UN office for coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2000 [cited 25/04 2002]); available from www.irin.org, Fissehatsion Menghistu, *Let Us Have Assab and Outlet to the Sea and Let Eritreans Go to Hell, Attitudes of Some Extremist Ethiopians, Part 15* (Hadish-Tesfa, 2002 [cited 20/08 2004]); available from <http://www.hadish-tesfa.org>.

⁶¹ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

⁶² "Enough Is Enough," *Tobiya* 1 January 1998.

⁶³ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

⁶⁴ Lovise Aalen, "Expressions of Control, Fear and Devotion," in *The Ethiopian 2000 Elections*, ed. Siegfried Pausewang and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 2000), 85.

⁶⁵ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000), Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 44.

⁶⁶ Medhane Tadesse, and John Young., "Tplf: Reform or Decline," *Review of African Political Economy* 97, no. 3 (2003): 398.

themselves, with newspapers such as the *Tobiya* asserting that the TPLF now had to demonstrate their Ethiopianness by being strict towards Eritrea, and thus avoid being branded as Eritrea's puppets.⁶⁷ Interesting, the critique of the government's Eritrean connections also had influence on the opposition. Oppositional leaders with connections with Eritrea were removed, a paradox in a country with so many citizens of mixed origins. In 1995, the vice chairman of the Medhin party, Dr. Fisseha-Tsion, was for example removed from his position because of his Eritrean family roots.⁶⁸

Secondly, the press failed to raise questions about strategies for peace and in this sense be critical to the government. The harsh critique of alternative voices, voices claiming that the relationship between the EPRDF and the Eritreans actually was tense, might have contributed to the silencing of such voices, voices that could have given an early warning of the conflict and that often also arguing for moderation. As Dominique Jacquin-Berdal puts it: "The legitimacy of the war was never openly questioned, even by those who subsequently voiced their opposition to the government in power."⁶⁹ No pressure for peace emerged in the Ethiopian press, instead pressure for war dominated. Given the findings of Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll, namely that the private press had a substantial influence on small town intelligentsia, it seems fair to claim that its relatively homogenous coverage of Eritrean-Ethiopian relations must have had influence too.⁷⁰ This might in turn have contributed to the fact that no peace movement emerged in Ethiopia during the war. The public debate became dichotomised with only two different choices: to support the government and the war, or to support the even more hawkish opposition.

Thirdly, the press also failed its important role as an informer vis-à-vis the Ethiopian opposition. Oppositional politicians were in general much more reflected than the tabloidised quotations that were published in the Ethiopian press.⁷¹ The Ethiopian government failed to provide them with information, and thus one of the few ways they could remain up-dated on issues concerning Ethiopia was by reading the private press. Organisations like the All Amhara People's Organisation (AAPO) had to trust the speculative members of the Ethiopian

⁶⁷ "Strict Control Measures: A Timely Necessity," *Tobiya* 17 December 1997, "Time for the Tplf to Take Stock of Itself," *Tobiya* 11 December 1997.

⁶⁸ International Freedom of Expression Exchange, *Ifex Alerts 3 January 1996, 13, and 12 December 1995* (International Freedom of expression exchange, 1996 [cited 14/03 2005]); available from <http://www.ifex.org/es/content/view/full/3337/>.

⁶⁹ Dominique Jacquin-Berdal, "Introduction," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: 2005), xii.

⁷⁰ Sarah Vaughan, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life, Sida Reports* (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 73.

⁷¹ Personal impression after interviews with: Merara Gudina, Interview, 1 April 2003, Berahnu Negga, Interview, 1 December 2002, Beyene Petros, Interview, 3 December 2002.

private press. The effects of this is hard to estimate, but it might have substantially weakened the quality of information that the opposition based its decisions on.

Fourthly, the negative attitude towards Eritreans must have created fear amongst the latter. An Ethiopian, Fisseha-Tsion Menghistu, concluded that “Such articles may be temporally appealing to the emotions of many Ethiopians, but they also have a great potential of creating fear amongst sensible Eritreans.”⁷² The Eritrean Foreign Ministry also remarked how intimidated they felt by the press coverage claiming that “the Ethiopian media is waging an inflammatory campaign of inciting hate and confrontation.”⁷³ In many ways the situation was ironic: the Eritrean government had their propaganda tools made ready for them by Ethiopian papers: the negativity of the Ethiopian press was used to illustrate the hostility of Ethiopians in general. In this sense papers like the *Tobiya* indirectly acted like the puppets they accused others of being, helping the propaganda effort of the Eritreans.

In sum, between 1991 and the outbreak of war in 1998 a puppet theme was adopted by a majority of the private Ethiopian newspapers. This puppet theme was reflexively applied to interpret the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. The puppet theme put pressure on Ethiopian politicians to show that they were not Eritrean puppets, giving them less room for leniency towards Eritrea, it scared Eritreans, damaged the quality of information provided by the newspapers and contributed to a development where the press failed to question the war and rather pressed for an escalation.

Former Cooperation and Commercial Interests

It could be argued that the puppet theme was adopted because of the previous cooperation between the EPRDF, more specifically the most powerful movement within the umbrella organisation the TPLF, and the EPLF and its successor, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). Admittedly, the TPLF had received initial training from the EPLF. Tigrayans (TPLF) and Tigrinyas (EPLF) were closely related ethnically. However, although never entering into open conflict with each other before 1998, the relationship between the two organisations had been filled with conflict, and the organisations often ended up supporting each others’ enemies.

⁷² Fisseha-Tsion Menghistu, *Let Us Have Assab and Outlet to the Sea and Let Eritreans Go to Hell, Attitudes of Some Extremist Ethiopians, Part 15* (Hadish-Tesfa, 2002 [cited 20/08 2004]); available from <http://www.hadish-tesfa.org>.

⁷³ "Are We Reaping What We Have Sown?," *Press Digest* 21 May 1998.

As early as in 1975 the TPLF defined Tigrayans as anyone speaking the language Tigrinya, thus including large population groups within Eritrea in Tigray. The EPLF was frightened by this, since it in practice was a claim to what they regarded as Eritrean territory.⁷⁴ In 1977-1978 the TPLF actively cooperated with the EPLF's enemy, the ELF. In this case the TPLF indirectly aided an organisation that aimed to destroy the EPLF, hardly the act of a puppet. While their support for the ELF ended in 1978, the disagreements between the EPLF and the TPLF continued. According to Gidey Zeratsion, former military leader of the TPLF and a frequent critic of the present day organisational leadership, the TPLF gave an ultimatum to the EPLF with regards to the border areas in 1984. The TPLF stated that if the EPLF failed to accept TPLF interim control over contested areas, the TPLF would go to war against the former.⁷⁵ Such harsh language is again hardly the act of a puppet. The closing of the Barka route, described in the previous chapter, was another incident that showed how the TPLF was able to resist the EPLF. From 1986 to 1988 the relationship between the two organisations was like a cold war. The TPLF even vocally supported the rights of the Afar population in the south of Eritrea to secede, creating even more animosity within the EPLF.⁷⁶ The examples continue after the war against the Derg ended. Until 1994 the TPLF militarily supported the ELF CC and Shagim, two organisations that wanted to remove the EPLF by force, again hardly the act of a puppet.⁷⁷ They continued to support the Eritrean Afars. The TPLF sent forces to Adi Murug to eject the Eritreans in 1997, forcing the Eritreans out.⁷⁸ The TPLF also rejected the Eritrean wish for parity between the birr and the Nakfa. The events of 1998 again showed that the TPLF was far from a puppet.

Importantly, most of this information was readily available to the newspapers. Exiled politicians like Getachew Garredew, as well as several TPLF and EPLF leaders in exile, willingly described the previous conflicts between the two organisations and warned of the animosities between them, even about the possibility of war, but they were, with the exception of one Ethiopian newspaper, the *Itop*, ignored.⁷⁹ Some of the information about these animosities was relatively openly available even in Ethiopia: any Tigrayan farmer would be able to tell about the closing of the Barka route in 1986, which created much suffering

⁷⁴ Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, "Publications of the Eplf: The Tplf and the Development of Its Relations with the Eplf," in *Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara* (Asmara: 1984), 4.

⁷⁵ Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999).

⁷⁶ Richard Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and Its Relations with Tigray, from Liberation Struggle to Inter-State War," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 73, no. 3 (2003).

⁷⁷ Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000).

⁷⁸ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

⁷⁹ "Interview with Getachew Garredew," *Itop* 31 April 1997.

amongst ordinary Tigrayans. Interestingly, several of the Ethiopian newspapers even printed information with regards to the disagreements between the EPRDF and the Eritreans. The Beza for example clearly knew that the Ethiopian government supported the Afar opposition within Eritrea, writing articles on how the Ethiopian government had to send high level delegations to Asmara because of Eritrean complaints about this.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the Beza still adhered to the puppet theme. Again it seems as if certain sources of information were overlooked, the axiom of the foreign puppet master coming to dominate the oppositional press. As Richard Reid says, information about the conflicts between the TPLF and the EPLF should:

..have been well known to the leadership circles as well as to informed observers of the two movements over the past twenty years. A closer examination of the problems themselves demonstrates the degree to which the war in 1998 should have been anticipated.⁸¹

Newspapers fully involved with analysing Ethiopian politics, with access to oppositional politicians, with the possibility of accessing ex-TPLF officers residing abroad and of accessing the work of scholars like John Young, should have had the possibility to abandon their own puppet theme. Indeed, some newspapers, such as for example the Itop and the Reporter, managed to discard the theme. However most of the private press failed to discard it.

On the other hand, it could be argued that this failure could have been because of commercial interests. There are many examples from many different countries of newspapers that deliberately ignore information in order to sell as much as possible. This seems unlikely in this case, partly because the papers adhering to the puppet theme were often punished by the government simply because of this adherence. The Tobiya's second Editor-in-Chief, Taye Belachew, was in 1997 for instance detained for five days, then released on a bail of birr 5,000. Less than one month later, he was detained at the Criminal Investigation Department and released on a bail of birr 10,000. All of this was because of two articles entitled "The Strategy for Re-unification of Mereb-Melash (Eritrea) with Ethiopia" and "The Root of All

⁸⁰ "High Level Ethiopian Team Goes to Eritrea," *Beza* 27 December 1997.

⁸¹ Richard Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and Its Relations with Tigray, from Liberation Struggle to Inter-State War," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 73, no. 3 (2003).

Sprouted from This Land", articles describing the Eritreans as the rulers of the TPLF.⁸² While the Tobiya managed to survive, even to be profitable, the costs it had to pay were massive and the amount of human suffering it had to endure was immense. Other smaller papers experienced the same consequences when they adhered to the theme.

The Siye Abraha story, where the Tobiya described how he was removed from office because of his anti-Eritreanness, shows how the puppet theme rather became invoked almost as an organisational reflex. The theme was implemented immediately when a new event broke and thus served as a replacement for information. The Tobiya and other papers did not wait for information but published weakly researched articles with the theme instead. This was not the result of a wish to earn more money, for the journalists that published such stories often suffered jail for them and their newspapers had to pay high fines. Thus the puppet theme can not be understood as a strategy employed by the newspapers in order to sell more newspapers, in fact the newspapers lost economically when they pushed the theme as the government closed them down. It cannot be explained by the previous cooperation between the two ruling organisations in Eritrea and Ethiopia, as the relationship between them was as much filled with conflict as with cooperation, and information about these conflicts were available to the Ethiopian Press.

The theories of Elizabeth Kier focus on organisational culture and decision making, and offer a possibility to examine an alternative explanation of the appliance of the puppet theme. To Kier, elements of organisational culture influence decision making and have the potential to lead to decisions that contradict both the available information, and the organisational self interest. Organisational culture creates organisational reflexes, reflexes that for newspapers also can include a particular habitual way of writing.

Inheritance, Lack of Information and Repeated Crises

The entire Adiabo Plains (Kunama) region between Mereb and Takazie including the eastern parts of Badema and Sheraro woredas which are in Shire Awraja, Assaye and Egela in Adwa Awraja, and Zalambassa area in Agame Awraja. This secret Agreement completes TPLF's previous commitments, as the preceding

⁸² "The Root of All Sprouted from This Land," *Tobiya* 14 November 1997, "The Strategy for Re-Unification of Mereb Melash (Eritrea) with Ethiopia," *Tobiya* 5 November 1997.

paragraph makes clear, to a prospective Eritrean state by carving out the Tigray districts to be within its internal territorial boundaries at independence.⁸³

The above quote could have been from any of the private newspapers that were established after 1992. Several of them had stressed how the TPLF had been forced by their puppet masters to give away Zalambessa, Badme and several other areas in Tigray to the Eritreans.⁸⁴ This never happened, according to both TPLF and EPLF sources, both dissidents and insiders. These areas had actually been heavily contested by the parties in 1983, with none of the sides being willing to yield.⁸⁵ Importantly, the quote is not taken from any of the post 1992 Ethiopian newspapers, but is taken from a newspaper published in a previous era of Ethiopian history, the era of the Derg (1974-1991), the regime that preceded the EPRDF's takeover. The article thus illustrates an important continuity between the press coverage during the Derg regime and the private press during EPRDF rule, namely the frequent use of the puppet theme. Newspapers controlled by the Derg had also often labelled their opponents as puppets controlled by external forces. On 8 October 1978, the Ethiopian Herald for example wrote:

Shattering of the conspiracy of reactionary Arab regimes is not an easy task either. On the local scene, there has [been] strain to rebuff envoys of the discredited EPRP, the trio self proclaimed ELP, EPLF, Awhad secessionist bandits in Eritrea.⁸⁶

Here the Arabs were the puppet masters, but the United States, Germany, China, Albania, and the EPLF also received the label.⁸⁷ The examples of the pre-1991 employment of the puppet theme are many, and some will be explored in detail later, the puppet theme thus had emerged during the Derg but remained in use during the EPRDF's regime.⁸⁸

⁸³ "The Tplf Mission," *Addis Zemen* 11 November 1990. An Awarja roughly equalled a municipality, a Woreda is a lower administrative unit

⁸⁴ See for example: "Ethiopia/Eritrea Border Adjustment," *Zegabbi* 5 August 1997, "Ethiopia-Eritrea Territorial Settlement," *Wonchif* 17 June 1997.

⁸⁵ Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999), Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, "Publications of the Eplf: The Tplf and the Development of Its Relations with the Eplf," in *Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara* (Asmara: 1984).

⁸⁶ Yashenifal Chikun, "Victory through Struggle," *The Ethiopian Herald* 8 October 1978.

⁸⁷ Haile Mengistu Mariam, "The National Revolutionary War in the North," (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information and National Guidance, 1978), Haile Mengistu Mariam, "Eprdf Is the Tools of Shabya," in *News* (Addis Ababa: 1991), "Eritrea Then and Now," *The Ethiopian Herald* 23,24,27 and 28 November 1976, Haile Mengistu Mariam, "1 May Speech," *Ethiopian Herald* 1977, "People's Revolution, a New Chapter, for Unity of Nationalities," *The Ethiopian Herald* 6 September 1984, "The Tplf Mission," *Addis Zemen* 11 November 1990.

⁸⁸ See for example: "People's Revolution, a New Chapter, for Unity of Nationalities," *The Ethiopian Herald* 6 September 1984, Abiot Zeke, "Proletarian Internationalism or Nationalism," *The Ethiopian Herald* 14 October 1978.

When taking the theories of Elizabeth Kier into account, it becomes easier to explain why the puppet theme was kept by many of the newspapers even after the fall of the Derg. Many the private newspapers emerging in Ethiopia after 1992 were formed by former journalists from the newspapers of the Derg. As Shimelis Bonga pointed out when commenting upon what he calls the first wave of Ethiopian newspapers, the first newspapers founded after the Press Law:

The papers were in most cases founded by people who had worked as journalists during the previous regime but who had left their jobs under the current government, these people injected their experience into the periodicals which were consequently demonstrative of the comparatively better professional standings of their procedures.⁸⁹

A substantial number of journalists working in some of the major new papers had received their journalistic experience from older Derg-controlled newspapers like the Addis Zemen and the Ethiopian Herald, or other parts of the Derg-controlled Ethiopian media. Teferra Asmare, an editor of one of the new papers, the Etiopis, might serve as an example: he had twelve years previous experience from the Ethiopian Television (ETV).⁹⁰ Many of the former Derg journalists were crucial in the establishment of new newspapers as they were knowledgeable with regards to the practicalities of a newspaper. Because of their experience they were also looked up to by many of the new journalists, and functioned as what Elizabeth Kier refers to as charismatic persons, individuals that have influence on organisational culture in an early phase of organisational history.⁹¹ In this way there seems to have been a transfer of the puppet theme from the Derg newspapers to many of the newspapers emerging after 1992.

In order to understand the initial adoption of the puppet theme and how it became a part of organisational culture of several of the post-1992 newspapers, it is essential to understand the relationship between the previous Ethiopian regime, the Derg, and its newspapers. The history of this relationship started in 1974, when there was a major watershed in Ethiopian history. Ethiopia's traditional administrative elite had been weakened through earlier coup attempts and was divided over the implementation of modernisation schemes. Student demonstrations, in addition to the imperial administration's inefficient

⁸⁹ Shimelis Bonga, *Survey of the Private Press in Ethiopia 1991-1999* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2000).

⁹⁰ "Teferra Will Soon Be Free," *Niqa* 16 May 1995.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 152.

handling of severe droughts, further prepared the grounds for a revolution. The Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie, was brought down by his own junior officers in a creeping coup. A Coordinating Committee consisting of these junior officers, most of them Marxist, was organised, eventually totalling about 120 members, none above the rank of major. They came to be known as the Derg, a word that means committee or council in Amharic.⁹²

After a short confusing period, the government took direct control over all the newspapers in Ethiopia. During their period in power, the Derg controlled the papers and often employed deliberate misinformation, including the puppet theme, in order to strengthen its cause. This is very different from the common sense of the subsequent period that makes newspapers fall back on a particular interpretation inspired by the puppet theme. However, the similarities between the adoption of the puppet theme during the first phase and during the second phase indicate that the Derg installed habits and entrenched the puppet theme amongst its journalists. As suggested by present day editor-in-chief of the Addis Tribune, Yohannes Ruphael, the puppet theme became repeated continuously amongst the state controlled papers, and any journalist that wished to write in a Derg newspaper had to know it, and it became a common strategy to put the blame on an external manipulator.⁹³

It is important to note that the Derg's first use of the theme was probably not due to a direct wish to misinform; rather it was a result of disappointment and wishful thinking. There was some bewilderment amongst the new rulers as to what to do with the EPLF. In 1975 the TPLF came into being and caused more of the same bewilderment.⁹⁴ Both of these organisations in theory shared much of the Derg's ideology, Marxism. One view, originating early under the Derg and in the circles around Tefferi Bante, the second leader of the Derg, saw the EPLF movement as progressive. The TPLF was at this early stage not yet created and thus not commented upon. Bante's conclusion was that the EPLF had its origins in class resistance towards the ancien régime of Haile Selassie.⁹⁵ Bante and the Derg officers around him also held that the EPLF was confused: they started out as progressive but became controlled and manipulated by external forces, namely the Arabs and the Western countries. This became an explanation for the confusing fact that what they saw as a progressive Marxist organisation had chosen to fight their fellow Marxists in the Derg.

⁹² Sometimes, written Dergue

⁹³ Yohannes Ruphael, "A Monumental Folly," *Addis Tribune* 6 May 2004.

⁹⁴ The EPLF was at this early stage named PLF

⁹⁵ Geir O Pedersen, "The Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict: Presentation of Arguments Used by the Actors in the Conflict, 1945 and 1975 -80" (Master (Hovedfagsoppgave), University of Trondheim, 1987), 107-36.

During the later phase of the 1970's, strategic interests also motivated the Derg into employing the puppet theme in their newspapers, and during this period there was a large growth in articles carrying such theme. The Derg was at the time attempting to get the support of other communist countries around the world. If the Derg managed to convince the Soviet Union that the EPLF was controlled by external forces, the troublesome pressure from the Soviet Union and the DDR to push the Derg to negotiate with their Marxist rivals might end.⁹⁶ The Soviet Union's initial stand was that it would have liked to have peace between the Marxist EPLF, the Marxist TPLF and the Marxist Derg. They regarded all of them as ideological allies that could be employed in order to prevent American influence. The Derg understood that if the EPLF was shown to be controlled by USA, the Soviet Union's attitude might change. In the end the Derg were successful in getting Soviet support and benefited greatly from its friendship with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union participated heavily in defending Massawa against the EPLF as early as in 1977-1978, and all in all the Derg received \$12 billion worth of Soviet arms.⁹⁷

The puppet line of argumentation now became repeatedly printed in various publications from the Derg's information service, the Ethiopian Resource and Information Centre (ERIC). Rebel organisations opposing the Derg were seen as part of an international plot to sabotage Ethiopia's progress. In the words of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam:

Every time the broad masses of Ethiopia move a step forward, confirmed internal and reactionary forces, coordinated and abetted by imperialists have been hatching plots and openly confronted them in an attempt to block their path and force them to retreat two steps backwards.⁹⁸

This line of argumentation also became a part of the Ethiopian press. The Derg's Ministry of Information and National Guidance published two daily newspapers: the English-language Ethiopian Herald, with a circulation of 6,000, and the Amharic-language Addis Zemen, with a circulation of 37,000. The Ministry also printed the Hibret, a Tigrinya-language newspaper published in Asmera that had a daily circulation of 4,000.⁹⁹ The Ministry closely controlled

⁹⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁷ Paul Henze, *Eritrea's War* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2001).

⁹⁸ Haile Mengistu Mariam, "The National Revolutionary War in the North," (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information and National Guidance, 1978), 7.

⁹⁹ The Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) published the Serto Ader, an Amharic-language newsletter with a weekly circulation of about 100,000. Two other periodicals were the magazine Yekatit Quarterly and the ideological journal Meskerem, also in Amharic. In addition to this the Arabic Al Alem, the Berissa in Oromiffa, the Le Progres Socialiste in French (published on an irregular basis) and a last Amharic paper, Ye Zareyitu Ethiopia existed.

the contents of these publications, and the speeches of Mengistu and the views of the Derg were always adhered to. One example was a series of articles entitled “Eritrea then and now”, running in the Ethiopian Herald in November 1976. The stated purpose of the series was to show how “progressivism” in Eritrea had become a tool in the hands of reactionary forces outside Eritrea, showing how the west and the Arabs controlled the rebels.¹⁰⁰ According to the Herald, the rebels “had become prisoners of those who finance their activities.”¹⁰¹ The more hawkish amongst the Derg officers maintained that they had always been controlled by external forces that “from the very beginning were behind the scenes controlled and directed by the imperialist and reactionary Arab rulers”, as Mengistu Haile Mariam concluded in his 1 May speech, printed in the Ethiopian Herald in 1977.¹⁰²

Certain facts gave impetus to the puppet theme. Firstly, some of the organisations fighting the Derg had foreign support. It was common knowledge that the Ethiopian Democratic Union (the EDU), a rebel organisation fighting the Derg as well as both the TPLF and the EPLF, was backed by the United States.¹⁰³ The EPLF’s predecessor, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), had strong connections with the Arabs. The more Arab-supported ELF and the more independent EPLF managed to maintain an alliance for a short period around 1975, though usually they were enemies. Under the influence of strongly pro-Arab EPLF leader Uthman Sabi, there was an early period with some contacts between elements of the EPLF and the PLO. Later the PLO actually supported the Derg, but its previous support for the EPLF might nevertheless have created rumours.¹⁰⁴ Such facts might have influenced the Derg journalists, perhaps influencing them to overestimate the connections between the EPLF, even the TPLF and foreign powers.

Certain events also made it more likely that the TPLF in particular should be seen as an organisation controlled by foreign powers or other organisations. The early TPLF lacked both members and equipment. Almost immediately after its establishment it made contact with the EPLF in order to gain support and some initial training. Two fighters, Yemane Jamaica Kidane and Mehari Tekle Mussie came from the EPLF to the TPLF and remained within the organisation. More importantly, they rose in rank and became relatively famous.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ “Eritrea Then and Now,” *The Ethiopian Herald* 23,24,27 and 28 November 1976.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Mengistu Haile Mariam, “1 May Speech,” *Ethiopian Herald* 1977.

¹⁰³ Thomas P Ofcansky, and Berry LaVerle, *Ethiopia, a Country Study* (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991).

¹⁰⁴ Seifudein Hussein Adam, “Systemic Factors and the Conflicts in the Horn of Africa: 1961-1991,” in *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective, Volum 2*, ed. Eisei Kurimoto Katsuyoshi Fukui, and Masayoshi Shigeta (1998), David Pool, “The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front,” in *African Guerrillas*, ed. Christopher Clapham (Oxford: James Curry, 1998), 24.

¹⁰⁵ Both of them had Tigrayan fathers, in this sense they were half Eritrean, half Tigrayan. Mussie was born in Tigray.

Mehari Tekle Mussie also became a link between the two organisations.¹⁰⁶ Many of the original members had some connections with Asmara or other Eritrean cities because of the close trade and ethnic connections between the two regions.

A specific event in July 1975 was a defining moment for press attitudes towards the TPLF: the Derg managed to capture one of the leaders of the former, Mehari Tekle Mussie, who had an Eritrean mother and had initially been an EPLF member.¹⁰⁷ The captors became aware of Mussie's Eritrean background and this was repeated in the press, also when other prisoners were taken.¹⁰⁸ Describing the TPLF as Eritrean bandits became a way of marginalising the organisation. By using the puppet line of argumentation, indicating that it was Eritrean not Tigrayan, the inference was that it lacked support from the locals and thus that it was small. As such the argument might have had a strategic value for the Derg, but it can not be ruled out that the coverage of the event was influenced by the lack of available information on the TPLF, as the Derg newspapers might have believed that the capture of Mussie really indicated that the TPLF was an Eritrean creation. Lack of information also probably continued to sustain the theme. The Derg press lacked information about the various conflicts between the EPLF and TPLF, how the EPLF supported the EPRP in the 1970's when the latter tried to destroy the TPLF. Also they lacked information on how the TPLF supported and cooperated with various enemies of the EPLF, such as the ELF and later Shagim, and the ruptures between the two organisations.¹⁰⁹

However, as the Derg's problems grew, the frequency of their deliberate employment of the puppet theme grew. In order to explain how bandits managed to beat the Ethiopian army, in order to explain hunger during the reign of the Derg, one needed excuses. As a fearful eyewitness to this development, Yohannes Ruphael, present day editor of the Addis Tribune, writes:

It was not until the emergence of the military regime in 1974 that Ethiopians were witnessing the esoteric art of political lying in its most sophisticated state. [so called] Reactionary elements and [so called] agents of imperialism were castigated for all the troubles that the military regime was facing – these being the most fearsome bogeymen bent on destabilizing the regime.

¹⁰⁶ Aregawi Berhe, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 586.

¹⁰⁷ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Mussie was eventually freed from captivity by a TPLF commando raid.

¹⁰⁹ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000).

He explains why:

Since the new regime had chosen to tread the virtually impossible path of revolutionary socialism, however, it had to resort to shameless lies to legitimize its authority. That is precisely why it was being haunted by the specter of [so called] reactionaries and agents of the CIA who were disturbing its waking and sleeping hours.¹¹⁰

The employment of the puppet theme was thus a conscious strategy of the Derg in order to remove focus from their own mistakes, as well as a product of the lack of information on the various rebel organisation, and also, albeit at an early stage only, of the Derg's own need to explain why it had become enemies with the EPLF and the TPLF in spite of a common ideology. All these factors made the puppet theme a common one, repeated almost on a day-to-day basis in Ethiopian papers. On 14 October 1978, the Ethiopian Herald for example claimed that:

Chinese complicity with conspiracies and plots by these die hard elements became an open secret. China has stocked the assassin EPRP group seeking to thwart the progress of mass movement, which is striving to rebuild the nation in line with scientific socialism.¹¹¹

And this line of argumentation continued. In an article published on 6 September 1984 the newspaper claimed that:

Ethiopia's genuine desire to solve the problem of nationalities, however, had faced and still faces many problems. Most significantly, there is the problem created in the administrative region of Eritrea by the united front of separatists and imperialism. Eritrea itself is a home of many of Ethiopia's nationalities; in addition, the region has always been the core of historical Ethiopia. But since the region occupies a strategic place along the Red-Sea coast, the enemies of Ethiopia

¹¹⁰ Yohannes Ruphael, "A Monumental Folly," *Addis Tribune* 6 May 2004.

¹¹¹ Abiot Zeke, "Proletarian Internationalism or Nationalism," *The Ethiopian Herald* 14 October 1978.

have waged struggles for centuries to bring this area under their hegemonism [sic].¹¹²

The Eritrean movements were still seen as puppets controlled by external actors. The puppet theme also expressed itself in other types of media. Mengistu Haile Mariam spoke on Radio Addis of the “EPRDF as the tools of Shabiya”.¹¹³ As previously described, in 1990, while the Derg was on the verge of collapse the government-owned Addis Zemen even desperately attempted to convince its readers that the EPRDF had planned to give away large parts of Tigray.¹¹⁴ The puppet line of argumentation had continued influence even during the last stages of the Ethiopian civil war. In 1991, the writer Jenny Hammond was for example asked: “Why do you bring Arabs?”, because the state radio had pressed the message that the TPLF was a puppet in Arab service.¹¹⁵

When the Derg fell, the regime’s newspapers were either taken over by the EPRDF or were closed down. Journalists from the Derg newspapers were recycled when the Press Law of 1992 led to a surge of new papers, their experience being much in demand. However, the way the puppet theme became employed after 1991 was drastically different from its use before 1991. It now ceased to be used by the Derg as a propaganda tool, and indeed the Derg did not exist anymore. However, the theme was employed by former Derg journalists, as well as their new subordinates in new papers, the latter eager to learn from their more experienced Derg educated counterparts. Subsequently, it became adopted by newer newspapers that did not have any journalists from the Derg but were eager to draw on the older newspapers experience, and lacked alternative sources of information.

Nevertheless, the puppet theme was thus not only a product of the inheritance from the Derg. Some of the developments after the takeover of power by the EPRDF also contributed to the entrenchment of the theme, namely the conflict between the government and the press and the failure of the new government to distribute information to the private press. As will be explored in depth, there was a malign spiralling process between the government and the oppositional press, driving each party to more extreme positions. One might again use the Tobiya as an example of such a process. The Tobiya was a part of what Bonsa called “those with an attitude of head-on collision with the government and, are, consequently, remote from

¹¹² "People's Revolution, a New Chapter, for Unity of Nationalities," *The Ethiopian Herald* 6 September 1984.

¹¹³ Mengistu Haile Mariam, "Eprdf as the Tools of Shabya," in *News* (Addis Ababa: 1991).

¹¹⁴ "The Tplf Mission," *Addis Zemen* 11 November 1990.

¹¹⁵ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999).

its sources of information".¹¹⁶ Significantly, the government did nothing to improve their relationship with the paper, shunned dialogue and prevented its access to important information. The former editor of the *Tobiya*, Kiflu Mulat claims that

The editorial office of the *Tobiya* newspaper which is one of the free press publications had over the past few years repeatedly requested more than thirty government officials over the telephone and by mail to provide them with information. Only three officials favourably responded to their requests.¹¹⁷

This interaction process seemed to have two important consequences. Firstly, as little information was forthcoming from the government, organisational culture, mainly inherited from the Derg papers, gave a large proportion of the available clues about to how to perceive a situation. This created habits that were invoked even when information was available, as for example in the earlier described case of the ousting of Tamirat Layne. Lacking information and influenced by the assumptions of the previously state-controlled Derg press, the first generation papers printed stories based on rumours, so imaginative that some oppositional newspapers even claimed that the EPRDF was indirectly writing the articles behind the scenes just in order to discredit the press.¹¹⁸ Oppositional newspapers suggested that the Derg was launching major offensives as late as in 1994, and that several larger EPRDF units were annihilated in major campaigns in 1997.¹¹⁹ Many of them suggested that Ethiopia received substantial military support, including 50 tanks, which no other source ever confirmed.¹²⁰ The newspapers printed stories with little connection with reality, which in turn made the government (over)react to curtail the newspapers, using out-of-proportion prison sentences, and in some cases even arson, contributing to a renewal of the malign process.¹²¹

Secondly, as described in chapter one, Kier and organisational theory claim that an organisation fighting for its survival will entrench its values. She claims that the culture of such organisations would be grafted into the members, that the values of the organisation and the individual would become more similar, as the lines between the organisation's members

¹¹⁶ Shimelis Bonsa, *Survey of the Private Press in Ethiopia 1991-1999* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2000), 35.

¹¹⁷ Kiflu Mulat, "Presentation" (paper presented at the Workshop for Journalist associations, Media Policies and Investigative Journalism on HIV/AIDS, Nairobi, Kenya, 5-8 June 2002).

¹¹⁸ "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," *Tenager* 8 September 1994.

¹¹⁹ "General Haile Meles Encircles Debre Tabor," *Tobiya* 29 December 1994.; "Government Troops Surrounded," *URJI* 28 January 1997.

¹²⁰ "General Haile Meles Encircles Debre Tabor," *Tobiya* 29 December 1994.; "Us Support to Zenawi," *Siefe-Nebelbal* 9 May 1997.

¹²¹ Ravi Nessman, "War with Eritrea Gives Respite to Ethiopia's Independent Press," *The Associated Press* April 26 1999.

and the enemy become sharper.¹²² She argues that “In short, the greater the hostility in the organisational environment, the greater the potential for organisational dogmatism.”¹²³ Many of the first generation newspapers were constantly in a hostile environment, constantly fighting for survival.¹²⁴ To depict the stories of conflicts between these papers and the government would take up almost an entire thesis in itself and goes beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the Tobiya’s organisational history might serve as an example; it was a history of suffering and of legal battles. To give some examples: fourteen charges were filed against the first Editor-in-Chief, Mulugeta Lule, during his first period in the position only.¹²⁵ He was first fined birr 10,000 and released on a one-year suspended sentence. When Mulugeta Lule subsequently went into exile he was replaced by another Editor-in-Chief, Ato Goshu Moges. Goshu Moges did not fare any better than his predecessor; he was sentenced to six months in jail.¹²⁶ The replacement for the second Editor-in-Chief, Taye Belachew, was first detained for five days and then released on a bail of birr 5,000. Less than one month later, he was detained at the Criminal Investigation Department and released on a bail of birr 10,000. The following legal battle was to entrench the puppet element even more. The Tobiya was fighting for its life, and the validity of the narrative of justification was emotionally important, being a justification for the fight itself. And the narrative was based on the puppet theme. Articles claiming that the EPRDF was controlled by Eritrea, such as the previously described "The Strategy for Re-unification of Mereb Melash (Eritrea) with Ethiopia" and "The Root of All Sprouted from this Land", were the cause of many of the trials the paper had to go through.¹²⁷ The paper had to protect the validity of the theme in order to sustain its self confidence. The theme had to be correct in order to convince the journalists of the paper that their fight was just, and that they needed to continue the fight. Some kind of justification was needed in order to motivate the journalists to endure.

And their endurance was pushed to the limit. Taye Belachew spent seventy-seven days in the Central Investigation Department Prison.¹²⁸ Later, he was made to give a statement at the Criminal Investigation Department and was then released on a bail of birr 10,000. After a

¹²² Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ "The Status of the Ethiopian Press," *Fiametta* 20 October 1997.

¹²⁵ He had made statements to the police and was thrown to prison. Subsequently he was released after producing birr 10,000 bail for each of the charges (totalling birr 140,000).

¹²⁶ He was imprisoned for two month and released on appeal. Moges was on another occasion kept in prison for two months and twelve days under the pretext of undergoing investigation. Additionally, he was later kept in jail for 6½ months at the Addis Ababa Prison without any charges filed against him.

¹²⁷ Published in Tobiya, Volume 4 (No's 11 and 12, respectively).

¹²⁸ The International Press Institute, "Letter from the International Press Institute to H.E Meles Zenawi," *The International Press Institute* 2000, 1.

few months, he was again jailed at Addis Ababa Prison for seven months and, finally, released.¹²⁹ When the third Editor-in-Chief was in prison, he was replaced by the second, Goshu Moges. He was then detained for 30 days at the Criminal Investigation Department.¹³⁰ The government and the Tobiya continued their legal struggle and the government became harsher and harsher towards the paper. The Tobiya did not experience an organisational crisis: it actually went through multiple organisational crises almost on a regular basis, it was in a hostile environment with many similarities to the environment facing the organisations analysed by Kier. The history sketched here is only a brief outline. The Tobiya was exposed to arson and had to change editors eight times before 1998.¹³¹

As could be expected when taking into account the theories of Elizabeth Kier, this gave the editing staff of the Tobiya a highly closed social structure sharing strong beliefs, and often employing what Fred Halliday calls corkscrew journalism, self-referential journalism instead of active researching.¹³² The locus of such self-referential stories became the puppet master, the Eritrean exploiter. The relationship between the Tobiya and the government was close to war, but the paper nevertheless managed to publish its issues regularly and to circulate them in relatively large numbers. The Tobiya's financial strength gave it the possibility to publish many issues and thus to circulate amongst a larger public. Moreover, the number of pages in each of the Tobiya's issues was so high that it had an increased resale value; this subsequently meant that it became more popular amongst the poor, as it could be resold for a higher price. The Tobiya was thus important: it was read by many, also by other journalists who subsequently quoted stories from them. Colleagues working in the papers of the first generation shared the same experiences and thus often held similar views. As late as in 1997, three out of the ten major adherents to the puppet theme, the Tomar, the Urji and the Tobiya, all had journalists in prison, indicating that the government had ongoing conflicts with a large segment of Ethiopian newspapers, that were exposed to similar organisational crises as the Tobiya was.¹³³

¹²⁹ He was fined birr 12,000 after having been found guilty of a previous charge

¹³⁰ He was then released when Tobiya presented 10.000 birr as bail.

¹³¹ Goshu Moges was in 1995 again sentenced to a six-month prison term. The Tobiya then hired another editor. However, the new fifth editor-in-chief, Anthene Merid, was detained for fifty five days and was released on birr 5,000 bail. The Tobiya was also put under surveillance and exposed to illegal actions. The sixth Editor-in-Chief, Taye Belatchew, was on July 5 1995 detained without charge by civilian agents of the Central Criminal Investigation Department. The seventh Editor-in-chief, again Goshu Moges, who took up the post for a third time, was charged with committing two offences and was released on birr 1,000 bail and birr 2,000 bail respectively. A charge then was filed against the eighth Editor-in-Chief, Arega Wolde Qirqos.

¹³² Fred Halliday, *Two Hours That Shook the World, September 11: Causes and Consequences* (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

¹³³ "The Status of the Ethiopian Press," *Fiametta* 20 October 1997.

Illustration 4-1: The Prime Minister of Ethiopia attacking the press¹³⁴

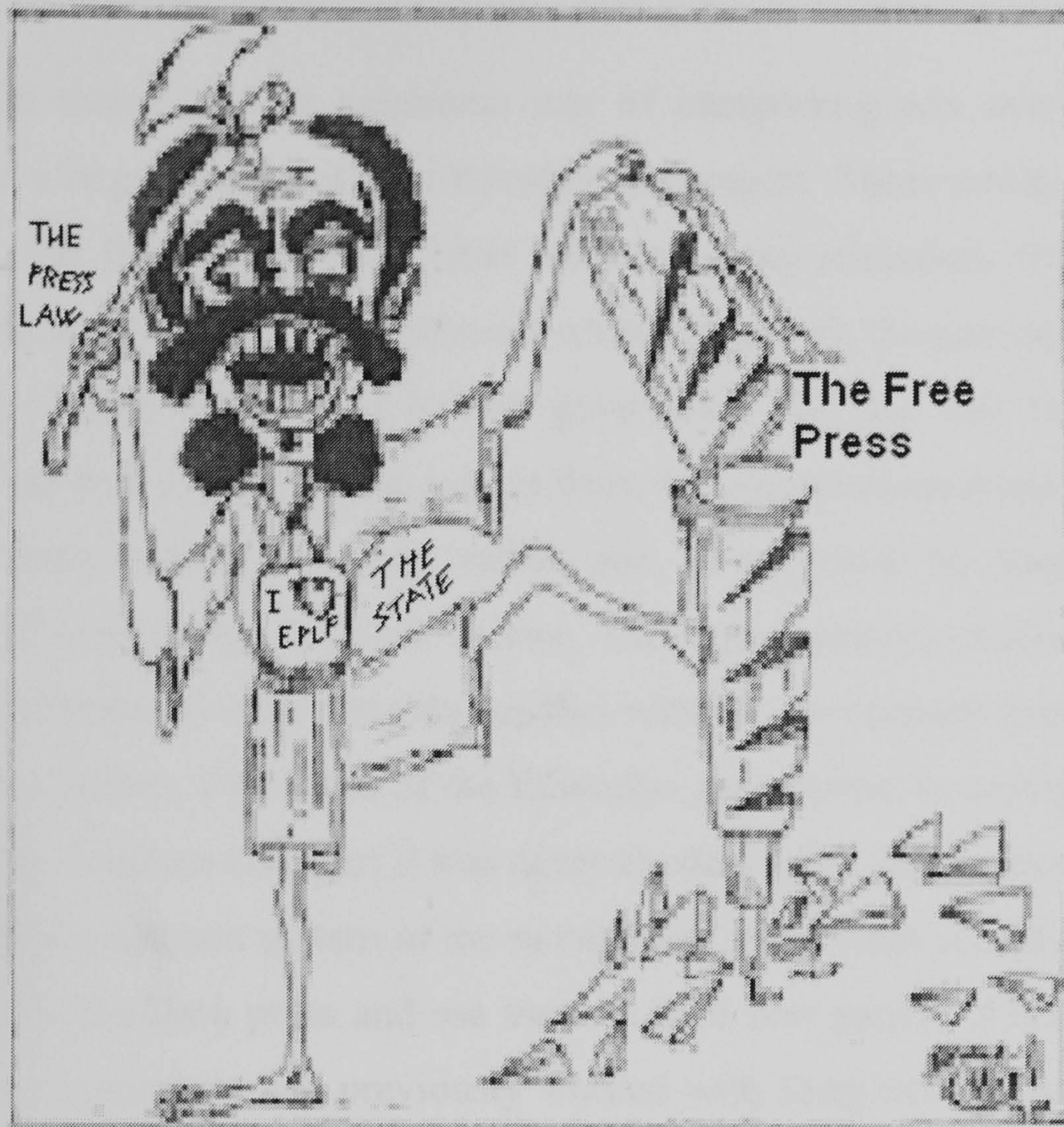


Illustration 4-1, taken from the Ethiopian Register newspaper excellently illustrates their perception. Meles Zenawi is here seen attacking the press with an axe, he is wearing a t-shirt with the text “I Love EPLF”, indicating his affiliation with the Eritreans. As shown through the quotes earlier, all of the above-mentioned newspapers came up with relatively similar explanations of new events, often based on the axiom of a malign puppet master controlling the governing party in Ethiopia in order to hurt the country. They also interpret their own suffering in a similar way, as a fight against the Eritrean dominated Ethiopian government.

The recruiting patterns of the first generation of newspapers, the role previous Derg journalists had in their establishment, their lack of information, and their conflicts with the government entrenched the puppet theme as an element in their organisational culture.

¹³⁴ "Caricature," *Ethiopian Register* 1 March 1997.

Organisational Culture and Its Influence

The puppet theme, and an axiomatic way of interpreting new events based on this theme, dominated a large number of the Ethiopian newspapers. These newspapers had three things in common. The first was that they had recruited many journalists from old Derg papers; the second was that they had a troublesome relationship with the government. Thirdly, they were repeatedly denied information by the government. In this way they were exposed to an influence on their organisational culture from the organisations many of their journalists were recruited from, namely the Derg media, and, as suggested by Kier's theories, recruitment patterns influenced organisational culture. This organisational culture was also influenced by all the organisational crises that the conflict with the government created, entrenching it even further. In addition, the failure of the Ethiopian government to provide information made the organisational culture stronger: it was never challenged by information from the government.

The recruitment pattern of the newspapers made them accept arguments that had been prominent in the Derg press and use them in their new papers. After all, many of their most experienced journalists had previously worked with Derg newspapers. The conflict with the government made them adhere to the axiom that the government was controlled by foreign elements, and this in a way justified the struggle of the various newspapers. The struggle against the government in many ways came to equal the struggle for justice and for Ethiopia. These factors entrenched the puppet theme and it became an element in the organisational culture of several newspapers. While there were differences between the newspapers, these factors contributed to the entrenchment of similar elements of organisational culture.

The puppet element had a negative impact on the Ethiopian-Eritrean relationship as it put pressure on Ethiopian politicians negotiating with Eritreans and scared the Eritreans and thus ironically gave arguments to the more hawkish elements on the Eritrean side, which could point to intimidating articles in the Ethiopian press. Moreover it created doubt with regards to the various agreements that resulted from Ethiopian-Eritrean negotiations, as many Ethiopian newspapers argued that Eritrea de-facto had been negotiating with their own puppets. The Ethiopian press also failed to question the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, but rather indirectly pressured for an escalation.

The puppet theme did not cause the war. However it did contribute to the negative process leading up to the war. In this way the chapter provides clues to why the pressure on the Ethiopian leaders to “show their Ethiopianness”, as expressed by Gilkes, grew so immense, with the private press arguing daily that these leaders were controlled by Eritreans.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ For the Ethiopianness quote see Patrick Gilkes, "Conference Proceedings" (paper presented at the Eritrea- Ethiopia conference, Institute of African Alternatives, London, 1 July 1998), 3.

Chapter 5: EPRDF, Haunted by Old Ideology

This chapter focuses on what Ann Swindler defines as a special form of organisational culture, namely ideology.¹ It explores how the old ideological assumptions from the Marxist era of the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (EPRDF) were kept even after Marxist ideology had officially been rejected. The main argument of the chapter is that such ideological assumptions created a tendency to link the issues raised in negotiations with the former ideological enemies of the EPRDF with the issues raised in the negotiations with Eritrea, subsequently hampering negotiations with the latter and thus contributing to an increase in tension.

Two key incidents will be identified. Firstly, in 1998 concessions to Eritrea were linked with concessions to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), both being perceived as bourgeois by several EPRDF members.² As a consequence, concessions to the IMF prevented concessions to Eritrea. This chapter will show how this happened, and how the rhetoric used when discussing the IMF Agreement/the border issue with Eritrea, two seemingly unrelated issues, was strongly reminiscent of earlier ideological discussions from the Marxist period of the EPRDF.

A peace plan designed by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1998, serves as a second example. The Ethiopian authorities hesitated about accepting the technical framework of the plan. Arguments not only circled around the practicalities of the plan, they also focused on a third party country that supported the plan, namely the United States. The rhetoric employed in the discussion around the Technical Agreement again echoed the rhetoric employed in the EPRDF's ideological discussions more than ten years earlier, again illustrating a linkage between old ideology and the Eritrean-Ethiopian negotiation process.

Ideology, IMF and the Ethiopian-Eritrean Negotiations 1997-1998

The period from the summer of 1997 to May 1998 was critical for the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. The new Eritrean currency, the Nakfa, was at that time a hot topic in the

¹ Ann Swindler, "Culture in Action, Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 279.

² Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

Eritrean-Ethiopian negotiations. In the spring of 1997, the Eritreans asked to have both the Nakfa and the birr circulate in Ethiopia as well as Eritrea, and to have a one-to-one exchange rate between the two, but the Ethiopians refused.³ As a consequence of the disagreement, the old free trade pact between the two countries, the Asmara pact, collapsed.⁴ A new letter of credit arrangement was implemented by the Ethiopians, and trade between the two countries now had to be settled in hard currency (dollars).⁵ Petty trade, allowed to circumvent the letter of credit pre-requisite, was allowed, but had to be under a certain threshold amount of birr 2,000.⁶

The Nakfa negotiations seemed to focus on Ethiopian-Eritrean relations only, they do not seem to be connected to the old ideology of the EPRDF. However, this chapter will argue that old ideology facilitated the creation of an issue linkage between the Nakfa process and an additional parallel negotiation process, the IMF/ Ethiopian negotiations. The chapter will show that this linkage was so strong that concessions to the IMF prevented concessions to Eritrea. Ethiopia's strict capital control, heavy restrictions on foreign investment and limited rights for farmers to own their properties were far from the ideals of the IMF, and the IMF-Ethiopian negotiations were troublesome.⁷ As Joseph Stiglitz, at the time Chief Economist at the World Bank, observed:

Meles [The Ethiopian Prime Minister] was having problems with the IMF. What was at stake was not just \$127 million of IMF money provided through its so-called Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) program (a lending program at highly subsidized rates to help very poor countries); but World Bank money as well.⁸

The IMF suspended the whole ESAF program on the 11 October 1997.⁹ There were hard internal discussions within the EPRDF, concerning both the IMF Agreement and the economic relationship with Eritrea. Alemseged Gebre Almak was at the time an active TPLF central committee member and heavily involved both in the discussions with Eritrea and with

³ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 35.

⁴ Kinfu Abraham, *Ethio-Eritrean History, Liberation Struggle, Statehood and Bilateral Political Economic Social and Diplomatic Relations, and the Ethio-Eritrean War* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development, 2004), 99-117.

⁵ "Effects of the Decision to Conduct Trade between Ethiopia and Eritrea in Us Dollars," *Addis Tribune* 2 January 1998.

⁶ Patrick Gilkes, and Martin Plaut, "The War between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Foreign Policy, INFOCUS* 5, no. 25 (2000): 14.

⁷ Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (London: The Penguin books, 2002), 25-32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹ "Latest Talks between Ethiopia and the Imf Fail to Lift Esaf Suspension," *The Reporter* 13 March 1998.

the IMF. Amlak had a negative attitude towards the Eritreans, as he felt that previous agreements between the two countries had been to Eritrea's advantage. Nonetheless, he also felt that the discussions were influenced by other, more subjective, factors. He claimed that several of the high ranking EPRDF members discussing the two issues saw the IMF and Eritrea negotiations as connected, and that a concession to the Eritreans was indirectly seen as "a concession to the IMF, the global forces of capitalism and imperialism."¹⁰ Alemseged Gebre Amlak's claim is supported by Sebhat Nega, former leader of the TPLF and today an important member of the TPLF central committee. Nega remembers the same linkages: "The struggle against the IMF was perceived to be connected with the struggle against Eritrea, and its bourgeoisie."¹¹ The results were according to both Alemseged Gebre Almak and Sebhat Nega that the IMF's successes in pressuring Ethiopia made top-ranking EPRDF officials demand a harsher line towards Eritrea, constraining negotiation attempts, even when discussing the border.¹²

Admittedly, there were certain factors that could have made observers believe that the relationship between Eritrea and the IMF was very friendly and that a linkage between the two negotiations could be justified. Both the IMF and Eritrea promoted the economic system of Singapore as an ideal; they wanted an open economy in which foreign investment supposedly was to create growth. However, Eritrea was highly antagonistic towards the IMF. It saw the latter's programmes as a form of neo-imperialism and rejected any major deals with them.¹³ Eritrea was eligible for large-scale balance of payments support from IMF but did not apply for it. Eritrea's loans in the IMF sister organisation, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), also known as the World Bank, were small, Eritrea preferring Arabic banks. One of the reasons for the Eritrean politics was the wish to avoid donor conditionality, which was regarded as a form of interference and in addition as a sovereignty problem. Eritrea for example borrowed \$ 125.4 million from the World Bank before 1999. In comparison Ethiopia had borrowed \$ 3036.3 million. In many ways it was Ethiopia that was the IMF's most important local partner, even before the discussions in 1997.¹⁴

A counter argument could be that if Eritrea and Ethiopia had remained in an economic pact and the free trade agreements between the two countries had remained valid, the open economy of Eritrea would have forced Ethiopia to adapt to the capitalist system. However,

¹⁰ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

¹¹ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹² Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹³ "Interview with Isayas Afeworki," *LA Times* 9 March 1998.

¹⁴ Gøte Hansson, "Building New States, Lessons from Eritrea," *World Institute for Economic Research discussion paper* (2001).

according to Sebhat Nega and Alemseged Gebre Amlak, the link between the IMF issue and the Eritrean issue continued even after the Asmara pact had collapsed and the former goal of a comprehensive free trade pact had been abolished.¹⁵ Moreover, the link was even invoked when discussing pure border issues.¹⁶

Both Sebhat Nega and Alemseged Gebre Amlak were aware of the strange linkages between the two seemingly unrelated issues; they both stressed the old ideology, kept as an organisational reflex rather than a conscious element, as a possible explanation of the linkage.¹⁷ As will be explored in depth later in this chapter, EPRDF internal ideological discussions had previously deemed Eritreans as a part of the global capitalist alliance. The TPLF, and some of its older sister organisations such as the ANDM/ EPDM had seen themselves as participating in a global struggle against capitalism, of which the Eritrean bourgeoisie had been considered a part.¹⁸ The words used by the two respondents when describing the discussions are also interesting, resembling the old ideological phrases used by the two oldest EPRDF organisations, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) during their period as Maoist Marxist organisations. As will be illustrated later, words such as bourgeoisie and world capitalism had been used to describe the ideological struggle of the TPLF and its nearest ally, Albania, against the rest of the world.¹⁹ Old ideological ghosts seemingly haunted the negotiation processes.

The Technical Agreement and Old Ideology

The linkage between the economic negotiations with the IMF and the negotiations with Eritrea could have been an isolated episode. However, a pattern is indicated by occurrences of similar linkages in the later peace negotiations, more specifically during the discussions surrounding the second major attempt to solve the war after it had broken out, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) plan. Again traces of old ideology influenced the discussion.

¹⁵ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹⁶ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹⁷ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹⁸ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 16.

¹⁹ Wondmu Yigzaw, "The Search for Ideology, Legesse Zenawi's Dilemma," *The Reporter* 18 July 2001.

An exploration of the influence of old ideology vindicates a short exploration of the various negotiation attempts implemented by third party governments and organisations. In order to explain why the other peace attempts before the Technical Agreement failed to be influenced by old ideology, and why/how the Technical Agreement became influenced, the causes for the rejection of the previous attempts have to be established.

The first peace plan, the so-called US-Rwandese Peace Plan of 3 June 1998, failed because Eritrea rejected it.²⁰ Eritrea claimed that temporary administration in the belligerent areas stipulated as Ethiopian in the peace proposal, needed to be handled with “flexibility”. In addition, Eritrea also claimed that more details had to be worked out with regards to the composition of the suggested technical team that according to the proposal was to demarcate the border.²¹ An Ethiopian air attack against Asmara airport, Eritrean distrust towards the United States and reactions to harsh Ethiopian statements also influenced their decision.²² Ethiopia, however, accepted the plan just one day after it was made public, allowing little time for an in-depth discussion within the EPRDF. The central organs of the organisation were involved only to a limited degree, allowing few possibilities for organisational culture of sub-groups within the EPRDF to have influence, because the main discussions of the Agreement took place amongst the leadership.²³

The Eritrean rejection stopped the peace process, and it also stopped further deliberations over it within the EPRDF. The stage was then set for a new initiative, at the 68th ordinary session of the OAU in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. From 1 to 10 June 1998 the organisation decided to send a high level delegation. The high level delegation contained the heads of state from Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Zimbabwe and Rwanda. The OAU’s leader Salim Salim also participated. On 8 November 1998 the OAU came up with a clear peace framework. Both parties were supposed to withdraw from the contested areas, and the United Nations cartographic unit, together with experts appointed by the two parties, was to demarcate the borders.²⁴

Nevertheless, the legal consequences of the third party demarcation and its exact conditions were not dealt with, nor were the events in Adi Murug included in the suggested examination of the events leading up to the war.²⁵ Eritrea first asked for elaboration.²⁶ After

²⁰ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 57.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

²⁴ High Level Delegation The Organisation of African Unity, "Proposals for a Framework Agreement for a Peaceful Settlement of the Dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia," (The Organisation of African Unity, 7-8 November 1998).

²⁵ See appendix 1

the elaboration was received, the Eritreans hesitated. The Eritreans rejected the re-establishment of an Ethiopian administration in the contested areas. They wanted to drop the question altogether and put focus, as the Eritrean President put it, “on an expedient demarcation of the border, which will automatically solve the question of administration.”²⁷ Ethiopia endorsed the plan on the 9th, while also asking for and receiving some clarifications with regard to the meaning of the text.²⁸ Ethiopia again accepted a peace plan just one day after it was made public, allowing little time for its discussion within the EPRDF party organisation.²⁹ Again, the involvement of the central organs of the organisation was limited, allowing few possibilities for the organisational culture of the rank and file officials of the organisation, including their former ideological tenets, to have influence.³⁰

Since Eritrean acceptance of the plan failed to emerge, the Ethiopians now started to plan a major military campaign against Eritrea. On 23 February 1999, the Ethiopians launched operation “Sunset”. 40,000 troops were deployed in the Badme area and participated in the attack. Eritrea was forcefully evicted from Badme. One of the most important Ethiopian demands had indirectly been fulfilled: Ethiopia controlled the area and could now re-create administrative institutions regardless of the Eritreans. The Eritrean negotiation position now became drastically weakened and the Eritreans now backed down. A letter from Issaias Afworki, dated 27 February 1999 and addressed to the president of the Security Council, was hailed by the United Nations as an informal acceptance of the framework agreement.³¹ A vague modality agreement, based on the previous framework, was at this time designed by the OAU. On 14 July 1999 the Eritreans accepted this agreement, adding only a small point about economic compensation to Eritreans deported by Ethiopia.³² The Ethiopians accused the Eritreans of trying to change the initial framework agreement, hesitated, but on 21 July they also accepted the one page modalities agreement.³³ On 7 and 8

²⁶ Issaias Afworki, "Document 14, Annex VIII: Letter from Eritrean President Issaias Afeworki to H.E Blaise Compaore, President of Burkina Faso, Sent December 15, 1998," in *Chronology of the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict and Basic Documents*, ed. Walta Information Center (Walta Information Center, 1998).

²⁷ Issaias Afworki, "Speech to the OAU Central Organ Meeting, Ougadougou," (Embassy of Eritrea to Sweden, 17 December 1998).

²⁸ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 62.

²⁹ Walta Information Center, *Chronology of the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict and Basic Documents* (Addis Ababa: Walta Information Center, 2001).

³⁰ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 58-59.

³¹ Walta Information Center, *Chronology of the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict and Basic Documents* (Addis Ababa: Walta Information Center, 2001).

³² Issaias Afworki, "Document 26: President Issaias Afwerki's Remarks Regarding the Oau Modalities of 14 July 1999," in *Chronology of the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict and Basic Documents*, ed. Walta Information Center (Addis Ababa: Walta Information center, 2001).

³³ Walta Information Center, *Chronology of the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict and Basic Documents* (Addis Ababa: Walta Information Center, 2001).

August a technical arrangements' proposal, made in order to implement the modalities' agreement, was submitted by the OAU. It seemed that the war was getting closer to a peaceful solution. External actors such as the USA and the European Union now put heavy pressure on both parties to sign. The USA even sent a delegation, led by their special envoy Anthony Lake, to convince the belligerents.³⁴

The Eritreans accepted, while the Ethiopian authorities again hesitated. This time, and for the first time ever, the peace proposal was discussed in-depth by the party organisation, including all the five major central committees.³⁵ In this way the discussion of the peace negotiations with Eritrea reached the depths of the EPRDF, it was exposed to all the central organs of the organisation, not only the core leadership; and, as will be shown, it became exposed to the organisational culture of various sub-groups within the EPRDF. The proposal was first debated by members of the EPRDF politburo, then by the Central Committee of each of the EPRDF member parties and finally by the council of the EPRDF. It led to splits in all the institutions, as anonymous former central committee members claim:

The prime minister tried to turn every stone to convince the politburo of EPRDF and the central committee of TPLF into accepting the Technical Arrangement when his argument for the benefit of the arrangement was met by serious challenges. Then he advanced a rebuttal argument that not accepting the arrangement would annoy America and tough measures would be taken against us.³⁶

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's argumentation would have made perfect sense if it had not been for the remaining tenets of old ideology within the EPRDF; he failed to grasp the mode of his own argumentation. The argument he used in the debate was centred on the pressure that the USA could put on Ethiopia if Ethiopia refused to follow the OAU plan. The Ethiopian Prime Minister's strategy seriously backfired.³⁷ The USA came up repeatedly in the discussions. The then president of Tigray, Gebru Asrat, stated that the USA's

³⁴ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 80.

³⁵ Walta Information Center, *Chronology of the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict and Basic Documents* (Addis Ababa: Walta Information Center, 2001).

³⁶ Suspended central committee members, "The Sovereignty Agenda Is Not yet Closed," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

³⁷ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

recommendations of decreasing the defence budgets before the war had forced Ethiopia to become vulnerable.³⁸ Anonymous central committee members claimed that:

It was not surprising America argued that we were fighting for a rugged plateau because our sovereignty was less important to them according to their global strategy.³⁹

Rather than focusing on Eritrea, the debate became focused on the USA and its status in the global system. Negasso Gidada, at the time president of Ethiopia and also a central committee member of the EPRDF, claimed that the rejection of the Peace Plan “was a vote against USA, against world imperialism.”⁴⁰ Prominent EPRDF members like Dr Abdulmejid Hussein, the Ethiopian representative to the UN, even officially had to stress the prominent role of the OAU, and that the USA was not very involved after all.⁴¹ United States and the struggle against global capitalism became the prevalent topic in a debate on a pure border issue.

Importantly, the Peace Agreement was largely irrelevant for any plans on behalf of the United States to increase its power. Firstly, the OAU Technical Agreement contained no references to economic issues and could have been implemented with few implications for Ethiopian trade policies. If central committee members wanted to prevent the economic influence of United States they could have done so regardless of this Agreement. Secondly, it did not contain any paragraph that mentioned the USA by name, so in this sense it did not empower the United States.⁴² The peace effort of the United States could have been motivated by the wish to encircle Sudan with regional allies of United States, both Eritrea and Ethiopia being viewed as such allies.⁴³ Nevertheless, the Technical Agreement contained no reference to the relationship with Sudan. If the American wish to encircle Sudan was the worry of the various EPRDF central committee members, it could also have been thwarted regardless of the status of the Technical Agreement. Moreover, the United States actually supported Ethiopia

³⁸ Gebru Asrat, "Letter to the People and Council of Tigray," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

³⁹ Suspended central committee members, "The Sovereignty Agenda Is Not yet Closed," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

⁴⁰ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

⁴¹ Abdulmejid Hussein, "The Current Political Situation May Be a Blessing in Disguise," *The Reporter* 4 April 2001.

⁴² See High Level Delegation The Organisation of African Unity, "Proposals for a Framework Agreement for a Peaceful Settlement of the Dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia," (The Organisation of African Unity, 7-8 November 1998).

⁴³ Susan Rice, "Appendix 12, Testimony of 25 May 1999 by Assistant Secretary of State, Ms Susan Rice, on the Conflict in the Horn of Africa, in a Congressional Hearing," in *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War*, ed. Tekeste Negash and Kjetill Tronvoll (Oxford: James Curry, 2000).

militarily during the conflict, according to Martin Plaut: the Ethiopians for instance had access to vital information from American spy satellites.⁴⁴

Nevertheless many EPRDF members saw the plan as a plot by the United States.⁴⁵ The Technical Agreement of the peace proposal was rejected by most of the organisations under the EPRDF umbrella. The central committee of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) voted completely against the proposal. The central committee of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) voted 100% against the OAU proposal. The Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF) central committee also overwhelmingly voted against the agreement, while the TPLF was split, with seventeen voting against, and fourteen for.⁴⁶ The rejection meant that the war had to continue until an interim cease fire agreement was signed on 18 June 2000.

The linkage between the United States and the implementation of the Peace Plan seemed to make little sense. However if one examined the EPRDF's pre-1991 history, when the United States was viewed as the EPRDF's ideological enemy, the linkage becomes explainable. The discussion emphasising words like bourgeoisie and imperialism actually summoned echoes of the EPRDF's organisational past. Older TPLF publications for instance tended to label the USA bourgeois.⁴⁷ On several occasions this label was used for Eritrean traders and even the EPLF, creating an indirect linkage between Eritrea and the United States.⁴⁸ The perceived division between Ethiopia and the capitalists, including the United States, remained important for many EPRDF members. As claimed by ex-president Gidada: "Western powers can never be real friends, we cooperate as long as it's to our advantage, but their capitalist systems prevent friendship."⁴⁹ For many of the strongest opponents to the involvement of the United States, such as Negasso Gidada, Marxist-Leninism was still important, and they admitted that ideology played a role in their scepticism towards the United States, as well as the Technical Agreement.⁵⁰ Interestingly, many of the members who rejected the peace agreement, such as e.g. former Defence Minister Siye Abraha and Alemseged Gebre Amlak, later left the EPRDF en masse. One of the reasons given for leaving the organisation was its failure to guard its ideological heritage and that it was

⁴⁴ Martin Plaut, "The Conflict and Its Aftermath," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 102.

⁴⁵ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

⁴⁶ Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life, Sida Reports* (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 122.

⁴⁷ Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), "The Differences between Eplf and Tplf," *People's Voice* 1986.

⁴⁸ Medhane Tadesse, and John Young., "Tplf: Reform or Decline," *Review of African Political Economy* 97, no. 3 (2003): 392, Meles Zenawi, *Revolutionary Democracy* (Addis Ababa: Unofficial translation, 1999).

⁴⁹ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

“becoming capitalist”. Although they rejected Marxism, some of its tenets still were important to them.⁵¹

Marxism had been rejected as an official ideology as early as in 1991. Nonetheless, the factors described above indicate that the ideology from the EPRDF’s organisational past merits a closer attention if one wants to explain important elements influencing the interaction between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

An Unsettled Period of Organisational History

This chapter argues that, although rejected, previously held ideology influenced the negotiations between Eritrea and Ethiopia. As described in chapter two, Ann Swindler argues that ideological influence might continue even after the original ideology has been abolished. Ideology might become transformed into a culture based on institutionalised traditions and a shared definition of common sense. When the ideology is changed from a clearly articulated agenda into institutionalised rites and subconscious assumptions, the organisation goes from an unsettled to a settled phase. While the ideologically unsettled phase becomes a culturally offensive stage where culture influences new action instead of preserving old reaction patterns, the settled phase is reactionary and ideology is transformed into a culture based on institutionalised traditions and a shared definition of common sense. Such a shared definition of common sense, of enemies and of appropriate linkages becomes important in order to understand the results of the previously explored negotiations.

Given the extreme importance of ideology in the early history of the EPRDF organisations, the importance of old ideology even after its official rejection is unsurprising. Marxism, more specifically the EPRDF’s Maoist/Hoxaist version of it, had been a part of the TPLF, the oldest and the most prominent of the EPRDF organisations, even before that organisation had been created. The students who had formed the TPLF were educated in colleges and universities during the high tide of the international student movement, during the years from 1967 to 1974. Inspired by outside events such as for example the Paris and Berkeley student rebellions, the mass of students in Ethiopian universities became politically active; they were to change Ethiopia for ever. In Ethiopia politically active was synonymous

⁵¹ Ibid.

with Marxist. As Kiflu Tadesse, a member of the Ethiopian student movement in the 1960's, writes in his book called *The Generation*:

In the years to come the militant group acquired a distinctly radical ideological orientation, which many of them felt and understood in Marxist terms. The activists had immersed themselves in the study of Marxist theory, driven by an intense desire to understand their own society as a prelude to changing it.⁵²

Moreover, impulses from abroad were important:

Students returning from abroad, where the student movement was in an upsurge, brought additional reading materials and ideas, all from the radical left of the politico- ideological spectrum.⁵³

Randi Rønning Balsvik's research indicates the strength of the Marxist student movement; by 1970 all the candidates for student elections were Marxist.⁵⁴ The men and women who later became the leaders of the EPRDF were a part of this movement. They participated actively in student politics, engaging in frequent theoretical discussions. Even Tigrayan secondary schools became arenas for politicised debate. The Agassey Comprehensive High School in Mekele was perhaps most important and became a fertile recruiting area for the TPLF.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it was the Haile Selassie University in Addis Ababa, today named the Addis Ababa University, which was to be the political cradle of the future leaders of the TPLF, and, as will be shown later, also for a majority of the leaders of the TPLF's sister organisations within the EPRDF.

There are several indications of continuity of the ideological assumptions carried by these students and the later assumptions held within the TPLF. The similarities between the discussions amongst the students that later became the leaders of the TPLF and the discussions taking place with regards to the Eritrean-Ethiopian negotiations taking place twenty to thirty years later is surprising. One such similarity was for example a focus on the

⁵² Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation* (New Jersey: Red sea press, 1993), 45.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Randi Rønning Balsvik, "An Important Root of the Ethiopian Revolution: The Student Movement," in *Ethiopia in Change*, ed. Siegfried Pausewang (London: British Academic Press, 1994), 85.

⁵⁵ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 78.

negative role of the United States. The student movement in Addis Ababa had grown increasingly sceptical towards the United States. At the Haile Selassie University, the Americans ran the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Business and Administration; this was deeply felt by the students. As Kiflu Tadesse puts it:

The American presence was now becoming dominant in teaching and administration, including the post of dean and vice president of the university. The Americanisation of the curriculum had done little to enhance the indigenous content of the subject matter, and little, if anything, of relevance to Ethiopia was taught. By then, an incipient hostility towards the American dominance began to surface.⁵⁶

The American support for the Emperor and his conservative regime in Ethiopia was another reason for the hostility against them. The students saw the American support as hindering the modernisation of Ethiopia.⁵⁷ Moreover, the USA's war in Vietnam was a hot topic on the campus.⁵⁸

In the spring of 1968, a fashion show organised by a female Peace Corps volunteer, trying to show new western fashion design, led to the so-called miniskirt riot. Kiflu Tadesse claimed that:

A hostile campaign orchestrated by the radicals drew a connection between a seemingly innocent affair like the fashion show and the underlying themes of cultural alienation and moral degradation, evils they attributed to western imperialism.⁵⁹

The American vice president, the United States Information Service and the American Library became the targets of the rioters, and the two buildings were stoned. Moreover, Ethiopian students who had taken secondary education in the United States were named Jolly Jacks, and the politically active students claimed that they had been indoctrinated and could not be trusted.⁶⁰ The American flag was burned during riots.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation* (New Jersey: Red sea press, 1993), 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

The support given to the Haile Selassie regime by the USA all reconfirmed the negative image the United States had on campus. The perceived negative role of the United States and the frequent use of terms like “world bourgeoisie” were to resurface thirty years after the incidents at Haile Selassie University. The words of Negasso Gidada in 1999, a claim for the need to vote “against USA, against world imperialism”, would have been an entirely regular comment in the student elections of the late 1960’s or early 1970’s.⁶² Similarly, the need for Dr Abdulmejid Hussein to stress publicly the unimportance of the United States in the peace process, resembles the need for any believable student candidate in the early sixties to stress that he/she detested the United States and had no connection with them, that they were no Jolly Jacks.⁶³

Many of the future leaders of the TPLF experienced the politicised atmosphere of the Haile Selassie University during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Tigrayan students formed the Tigrayan University Students Association (TUSA), an organisation which was to supply the TPLF with its early organisational mythology. Future TPLF cadres got their first Ethiopian idols when the government, sometimes supported by the United States, tried to constrain the TUSA. Individuals like Tillahun Gizzaw, killed in 1969, and more importantly Meles Teckle, who was executed by the Derg in 1974, became important icons for the future leaders of the TPLF. Meles Teckle was elevated to legendary status amongst the students and later became regarded as a martyr by the TPLF. Ethiopia’s present Prime Minister, who was originally called Legesse Zenawi, even took the name “Meles” in honour of the student leader.⁶⁴ During these years, the first organisational values were grafted into the TPLF structure which was a child of the student movements and was to share many values with them.

The lives of the students were to change drastically. In 1974, a creeping coup ended the reign of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie. A Coordinating Committee consisting of junior officers, the initiators of the coup, was organised, eventually totalling about 120 members, none above the rank of major, electing Major Mengistu Haile Mariam chairman and Major Atnafu Abate vice chairman. They came to be known as the Derg, meaning committee or council in Amharic. Initially, the teachers and students, by now experienced in protesting against the previous regime, expected the end of the government’s reprisals and freedom of speech and organisation to follow. However, the result was quite the opposite; they were not

⁶² Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

⁶³ Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation* (New Jersey: Red sea press, 1993), Abdulmejid Hussein, "The Current Political Situation May Be a Blessing in Disguise," *The Reporter* 4 April 2001.

⁶⁴ It started out as a "nom de guerre" but became generally used.

allowed to demonstrate anymore. Moreover, student activists did not gain any influence over the Derg's decisions, although the Derg claimed to have the same ideology as them.

The Derg implemented the Zemacha, a government scheme to promote primary school attendance, in which university students were sent back to their regions as teachers. Many students also left the university because of their general disappointment with the new regime. While taking up work as teachers, these former university students often tried to engage local pupils in political activities promoting the values of the university student movement. Such Tigrayan student-teachers became the nucleus of the future TPLF, and many of their local pupils became their first soldiers.⁶⁵

The first stage on the path to rebellion was the creation of the Tigray National Organisation (TNO), which consisted of a combination of high school pupils and university students.⁶⁶ The TNO was created to function as a link between university students building up a military organisation and their supporters in the city. The military organisation in question was the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and was formed on 18 February 1975 in Dedebit. The early TPLF cadres had strong ideals influenced by their background from the student movement. As present day Prime Minister Meles Zenawi claims: "Their ideas were influenced by Maoism, and the idea that individuals like Che Guevara could transform society, that they could change everything through intensive political work as in China."⁶⁷ The strong theoretical focus of the TPLF was actually watched in amusement by the local Tigrayan farmers. Meles Asgede, then Tigrayan farmer, later TPLF soldier, told Jenny Hammond: "They had big sacks of books"; "they would spend twenty four hours reading, discussing and debating what the political differences between us and the junta were."⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, the TPLF became organised according to its ideological foundation. The organisational structure of the TPLF was partly established during the fighter congress on its first anniversary on 18 February 1976, attended by all its 170 members. Aregawi Berhe was elected chairman of the organisation. The TPLF's organisation was then, as it still is today, structured fully according to a Marxist/Maoist model. The early recruiting pattern of the TPLF, mostly amongst students with Marxist leanings, its early organisational structure and the ideological motivation of its members meant that Marxism became the main ideology of

⁶⁵ Young estimates that 50% of Tigrayan teachers joined the TPLF between 1975 and 1978. John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 80.

⁶⁶ Ironically Young claims that the TNO became especially active in the summer months when the university was closed. Ibid., 82.

⁶⁷ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 382.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 57.

the organisation. Moreover, this ideology was very strong, defining global capitalism, and the United States, as its enemy.

Marxism was to become even more entrenched in the organisation through the years of armed struggle against the Derg and its various other rivals. During the TPLF's early years, the life and death struggle with the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) and its predecessor Teranafit formed the culture of the organisation. These organisations were royalist rebel movements supported by the USA. This conflict was seen as a showdown between two different ways of viewing the world, and subsequently entrenched the TPLF's early form of Maoist/ Hoxaist Marxism. The TPLF's 100 fighters were unable to fight efficiently the estimated 10,000 men from Teranafit, so according to Young the only battle the TPLF could wage initially was an ideological one. Through emphasising the EDU/ Teranafit's conservative origins and its own Marxist identity TPLF justified the struggle, Marxism indirectly becoming the truth that justified the existence of the organisation, the reason for its existence and the reason not to defect.⁶⁹ The United States, the patron of the EDU, became viewed with even more hostility. In this way the arguments of the 1999-2000 discussions of the Technical Agreement would also have been very familiar to the rank and file TPLF soldier of 1978. The United States, supporting the EDU, was to them an easily identifiable and deadly foe. The EDU was seen as a part of the global imperialist strategy of the United States. As shown previously, to many TPLF members the United States remained an ideological enemy as late as during the Technical Agreement negotiations in 1999.⁷⁰ In the 1970's the United States supported the TPLF's enemies; in 1998-1999 they provided the TPLF with valuable intelligence, they had by then also provided them both with financial as well as, albeit limited, military support.⁷¹

The tense phase of the late 1970's strengthened the ideological assumptions of the TPLF. Given the staggering military odds the TPLF faced in the struggle against these organisations, ideological motivation became important to keep the struggling TPLF together. Ideology became the motivator for individuals facing immense hardships. As Tesfay Atsbeha and Kahsay Berhe put it:

⁶⁹ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷⁰ Gebru Asrat, "Letter to the People and Council of Tigray," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

⁷¹ Martin Plaut, "Background to War: From Friends to Foes," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 102, "Fighting for an American Cause?," *Habasha* 5 September 1995.

The actual and feared losses caused mass desertions in the TPLF. Since the overwhelming majority of the TPLF fighters were either peasants or students with only rudimentary training and no experience of fighting, it was not surprising that they ran for their life, when many of their comrades fell in combat. Some TPLF Militiamen went over to the EDU and many fighters went to areas held by the Dergue.⁷²

Soldiers with doubts had the tempting possibility of deserting the struggle and thus avoid these hardships. The TPLF fighters that stayed in the organisation were highly motivated and believed strongly in its ideology. Furthermore, when other differences arose, Marxism, or more specific the TPLF's Maoist-Hoxaist version of it, became the reference point for cohesion, becoming the principle that was referred to in order to decide right or wrong. Even in the serious hinfishfish [meaning chaos in Tigrinya] crisis in 1977-1979, the conflicting parties cited the works of Karl Marx as the standard of truth, the standard of justification.⁷³ Other internal conflicts of the TPLF also became defined by its ideological origins.

One of the themes in the conflict between the TPLF's first leader Sebhat Nega and the military leader Gidey Zeratsion, a conflict that led to the ousting of the latter, was the status of the Tigrayan trading class. The question was: were they allies or were they enemies? Their discussion closely mirrored the discussion between Kamenev and Lenin in 1918 and was to have great significance for the events that led to the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. The result was that the comprador bourgeoisie were defined as enemies, as were the feudalists, though neither of the classes was clearly defined.⁷⁴ Interestingly, the discussion was indirectly tied to discussions of the Eritrean issues, and Zeratsion also argued for support for the EPLF. Zeratsion's opponents contradicted his views by defining many Eritreans as members of the comprador bourgeoisie.⁷⁵ The Eritreans, including the EPLF, were also branded bourgeoisie because of the military strategies they employed against the Derg.⁷⁶ Because of the EPLF tendency to operate with larger units instead of employing purely Maoist guerrilla tactics, the TPLF accused the EPLF of fighting a conventional, 'bourgeois' military campaign, divorced

⁷²Tesfay Atsbeha, and Kahsay Berhe, *Two Groups of the Tplf and Two Issues of Ethiopia Power Struggle and the Mllt from 1979 to 1985* (2001 [cited 1 November 2002]); available from <http://www.geocities.com/haweltina/kahsay-u-tesfay.htm>.

⁷³ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

⁷⁴John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 115.

⁷⁵Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999).

⁷⁶ Richard Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and Its Relations with Tigray, from Liberation Struggle to Interstate War," *Africa* 73, no. 3 (2003): 382.

from 'the people' in its struggle. The TPLF members contesting the claim that the EPLF was bourgeoisie, including Zeratsion, lost the struggle and had to flee in order to survive, and the EPLF ended up defined as comprador bourgeoisie. The issue of the Eritreans as bourgeois was to surface again fourteen years later in relations to the parallel negotiations between Eritrea and Ethiopia and Ethiopia and the IMF. According to the witnesses Sebhat Nega and Alemseged Gebre Amlak, the two issues became linked through rhetoric claiming that Eritreans, like the IMF, were bourgeois, and thus had common interests.⁷⁷ The capitalist nature of Eritreans as such was seen as making them pawns for the international capitalist forces.⁷⁸ Again the rhetoric of the pre-1991 Marxist TPLF was surprisingly similar to the supposedly non-Marxist TPLF of the late 1990's.

The ideology of the TPLF of the mid-eighties was to be reinforced by the day-to-day discussions at the front. In her book *Fire from the Ashes*, Jenny Hammond writes about one of these discussions: "Outside, sitting on a rock, two women fighters and three male fighters are in a heated discussion about the problem of petty bourgeois elements in fighters themselves". Jenny Hammond's TPLF guide commented "by wanting private things, by selfishness, and by working for personal advantages you show petty bourgeois element."⁷⁹ In addition, during the early period of the TPLF's struggle, the organisation actively tried to control trade and merchandising, set prices and apply taxes. However, this developed into commodity shortages and such measures were reduced to a tax on luxuries and exports to Eritrea.⁸⁰ This trade involved taxing and controlling the Eritrean petty bourgeoisie in Tigray.

The TPLF's own propaganda also entrenched specific views with regards to Eritrea and international politics. Together with other rival factions, as well as foreign powers, the EPLF was placed in the bourgeois category. The rival rebel organisation the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was described as Feudo-Bourgeois. Moreover, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) was again described as liberal bourgeois and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) as chauvinist and anti-revolutionary.⁸¹ In this way the discussions of Eritreans within TPLF propaganda resembled the arguments described by Amlak when he participated in the negotiations with the IMF in 1997-1998. In both instances the bourgeois nature of the Eritreans were emphasised, again indicating a connection between previous ideological discussions and pre war decision-making.

⁷⁷ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Berhanu Nega, Interview, 1 March 2003.

⁷⁸ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

⁷⁹ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 130.

⁸⁰ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 191.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1-90.

The TPLF's propaganda also entrenched the Marxist ideology by connecting it with its own identity as the only correct Marxist alternative. The TPLF's anti-government propaganda stressed that the Derg was not really Marxist, but only opportunist. To them, the real alternative became the TPLF's Maoist/Hoxaist version. The founding of Malalite, or the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), showed the importance of Marxism as a reference point used to define the truth. The MLLT was an inner circle of the TPLF. It originated in "the Organisation of the Vanguard" from 1983, but was first initiated on 25 July 1985.⁸² The MLLT was less nationalistic than the rest of the organisation, putting more stress on Maoist/Hoxaist Marxism. As John Young points out, and in contrast to the TPLF's own charters, nationalism was not mentioned amongst its stated objectives.⁸³ This inner circle was created to spread Marxism-Leninism through the world and "to engage in the bitter struggle against all brands of revisionism (Krutchevism, Titoism, Trotskyism, Euro-Communism, Maoism...)", engaging the TPLF in a global struggle, also with the United States.⁸⁴

Ideology also became a powerful tool for internal rivalries between the TPLF leaders, a tool to exclude unwanted individuals. When a member of the TPLF was ousted, as for example in the case of Zeratsion, the justification was that he/she failed to adhere to Marxist principles.⁸⁵ While showing that opportunism could be important in the TPLF, such struggles also show the importance of ideology. Ideology remained the standard of justice; it was used as justification for inflicting punishment on members, it was so important that it had to be centrally controlled.⁸⁶

All in all, until 1991 the TPLF was what Swindler refers to as an unsettled organisation. Its animosity against the USA was founded on ideology as well as the members' own experiences from their student days, and the organisation was fully aware of its ideological tenets. It was also an organisation that defined its enemies as bourgeois and that used the term to label segments of Eritrean society.

⁸² Gidey Zeratsion claims that the planning started already in 1982. Gidey Zeratsion, "The Ideological and Political Causes of the Ethio-Eritrean War" (paper presented at the International Conference on the Ethio-Eritrean Crises, Amsterdam, 24 July 1999), 3.

⁸³ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 139.

⁸⁴ Rich farmers were however regarded as allies; *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁵ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

⁸⁶ Tesfay Atsbeha and Kahsay Berhe, *Two Groups of the Tplf and Two Issues of Ethiopia Power Struggle and the Mllt from 1979 to 1985* (2001 [cited 1 November 2002]); available from <http://www.geocities.com/haweltina/kahsay-u-tesfay.htm>.

Ideology and the Organisational Allies of TPLF

While the TPLF clearly is the most important organisation within the EPRDF, the EPRDF also consists of several other organisations. TPLF's major allies within the EPRDF, the Amhara National Democratic movement (ANDM), The Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and the Southern Ethiopian Democratic Front (SEPDF) supplied prominent personalities such as Negasso Gidada, the former President of Ethiopia, the now imprisoned former Prime Minister, Tamirat Layne, and the present Minister of Information, Bereket Simon. It is therefore important to examine the influence of former ideology on these organisations. Arguably, all of them had real importance and influenced decision-making in the EPRDF, although in different ways.⁸⁷

There were similarities between the background of the TPLF's leaders and the leaders of the OPDO and the ANDM when it came to ideology. The leaders of the OPDO and the ANDM had also been members of the so-called Generation, a term used about the Ethiopian student movement of the late 1960's/ early 1970's. Several of the leaders in both organisations had earlier been members of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP).⁸⁸ The EPRP was officially founded in 1975, but was based on the older Ethiopian People's Liberation Organisation (EPLO).⁸⁹ This organisation in turn had its roots back to anti-monarchy Marxist cells organised in the sixties. There were many similarities between the EPRP and the TPLF, partly since both originated in the student movement. Future leaders of the EPRP participated heavily in the campus discussions that the future leaders of the TPLF had taken part in, they participated in the discussion surrounding the previously explored fashion show incident, voicing their opinion against American influence. They participated in the criticism against the Peace Corps, which was viewed as a pawn of American influence, and they rhetorically attacked students that had studied in the United States for being Jolly Jacks.⁹⁰ The words of president Negasso Gidada in 1999, commenting upon the Technical Agreement, his claim for the need to vote "against USA, against world imperialism", would indeed have been familiar rhetoric to the future EPRP members engaged in the campus discussions in the late 1960's, early 1970's.⁹¹ The United States was at that time viewed with

⁸⁷ Mesmor Fante, Interview, 2 February 2003.

⁸⁸ Ethiopia Hizbawi Abyotawi Party in Amharic

⁸⁹ Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation* (New Jersey: Red sea press, 1993), 201-39.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹¹ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

hostility.⁹² The need to stress that the United States was not supporting a political project would have been similarly important for an EPLO cadre that wanted to be elected in 1973 as it was for Dr Abdulmejid Hussein during the peace process in 1999.⁹³ As indicated earlier, there was a rhetorical continuity between the campus debates and Ethiopia's bilateral decision-making.

Like the other organisations based on student recruits, the organisation chose Marxist-Leninism as their ideology of choice in its unsettled period. Their charter stated that:

“The EPRP is the party of the working class. It is guided by the working class ideology of Marxist-Leninism. Its aim is to strengthen the unity and alliance of the workers and the Peasants so as to ultimately establish Proletarian Dictatorship in the era of Socialism.”⁹⁴

From 1975 and onwards the EPRP entered into its most dramatic period when the organisation fell out with the Derg. In September 1976 the party had to take up arms after the Ethiopian military in practice declared war against it.⁹⁵ The EPRP now had to engage in a life and death struggle with the Derg and the TPLF. Like the TPLF, the EPRP needed to indoctrinate its members, to convince them about the merits of the EPRP's version of Marxism.

However, the EPRP failed to recruit local farmers and slowly lost ground to the TPLF. The TPLF's major ally in the EPRDF, the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), previously known as the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), originated in a splinter group from the EPRP. In 1981 this group rebelled against the EPRP leadership initiating a period that later became known as “The Bitana”.⁹⁶ The EPDM took up many of the original rites of the TPLF, later even changing its name and becoming a purely Amharic party after the model of the TPLF, which was a purely Tigrayan party.⁹⁷ The EPRP background ensured that EPDM leaders had many similarities with TPLF leaders: they were

⁹² Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation* (New Jersey: Red sea press, 1993), 46.

⁹³ Ibid, Abdulmejid Hussein, "The Current Political Situation May Be a Blessing in Disguise," *The Reporter* 4 April 2001.

⁹⁴ Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), "Party Program," (Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP): Addis Ababa, 1975).

⁹⁵ This contributed to the start of the so called "red terror" Michael Chege, "The Revolution Betrayed, Ethiopia 1974-79," *Journal of Modern Africa Studies* 17, no. 3 (1979): 372.

⁹⁶ Elisabeth Verdier, *Who Is Who, Ethiopias 100 Most Important Persons* (Paris: Eastern Indian Ocean Newsletter, 2002), 3-20.

⁹⁷ The EPDM never had the local democratic structure of the TPLF described later in chapter five, indeed for the nine first years of its existence it was impossible. The EPDM did not control Amharic lands and their operations in the Amahara region were very limited, furthermore , their negative ideological view on nationalism prevented this.

educated, former students, often graduates from the Haile Selassie University in Addis Ababa. This, in combination with organisational Marxist propaganda employed to ensure the loyalty of the EPDM's soldiers in the harsh civil war, meant that Marxism also became entrenched in the EPDM organisational culture.⁹⁸

The EPRP and its organisational values also influenced the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), a second large organisation under the EPRDF umbrella. This organisation is commonly said to have been based upon turncoats, prisoners of war, pointing to people like Defence Minister Abadula Gameda and Kuma Demekesa who chose to join the rebellion against the Derg in exchange for their freedom.⁹⁹ However, through the Forum 84 organisation, which consisted of former members of the EPRP choosing to support the government, former Oromo EPRP members joined the OPDO from 1991 and onwards. Important leaders such as Ali Abdo, the former president of Addis Ababa city council, had a background from the EPRP.¹⁰⁰ Other OPDO leaders came from the EPDM. When this was turned into an Amhara organisation in 1991, the Oromo EPDM members had to leave the organisation and entered the OPDO instead.

Organisational connections between the EPRP, the ANDM/ EPDM and the OPDO were thus strong. The three organisations had leaders that shared organisational backgrounds. Many of them shared common organisational experience through their EPRP background. Common organisational shocks, such as the government's prosecutions during the Red Terror in the seventies when the opposition was heavily prosecuted by the Derg, had a lasting impact on them. Nevertheless, their interpretations of the world were, with the notable exception of the nationalities' question treated in a later chapter, convergent with those of the TPLF. In short, this was a world view where traders were viewed with hostility and the United States viewed with suspicion. Arguments focusing on the fight against the bourgeoisie, against the world capitalism of the United States, against Imperialism, surfaced during the early years of these organisations, as well as the later stages of their organisational life, most crucially during the period 1997-1999. However, by then, all the EPRDF organisations had officially rejected Marxist ideology.

⁹⁸ For an exploration of the EPDM's relationship with Marxism, see Messay Kebede, "Marxism- Leninism as the Two Stages of Ethiopian Elitism-Part 2," *Addis Tribune* 19 October 2001.

⁹⁹ Elisabeth Verdier, *Who Is Who, Ethiopias 100 Most Important Persons* (Paris: Eastern Indian Ocean Newsletter, 2002), 1-30.

¹⁰⁰ A last organisation that in the end provided members for the OPDO was Meison, a Marxist party that had supported the Derg until 1977, when the party organisation was crushed in the Red Terror. Shiferaw Jarso, the minister of water resources, was a former member of this organisation.

The EPRDF Becomes a Settled Organisation

In 1990, the EPRDF rejected Marxism. This ideological transformation was far from a linear process. As late as in 1989 Meles Zenawi expressed admiration for Albania, but when he visited Washington in May 1990 he had renounced Marxism.¹⁰¹ As late as January 1991, Ethiopian Workers Parties were established within the OPDO, the EPDM and the SEPDF. These were similar to the MLLT of the TPLF. The fact that these organisations seem to have been abandoned just a couple of months after their initiation illustrates the ideological confusion.¹⁰² Nonetheless, during 1990 year the word Marxism was removed from the EPRDF party programme.¹⁰³ Observers like Sarah Vaughan noticed how the rhetoric changed, the new buzzword becoming “democracy”.¹⁰⁴

It is possible to see the rejection of the EPRDF’s Maoist/Hoxaist Marxism as a purely tactical one. The researcher Paulos Milkias claims that Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, had:

taken a bold step of appearing to follow two lines at the same time - one capitalist, the other Marxist-Leninist. The first one is for the West which is important for its pecuniary values, whereas the second one is for his Stalinist hard core cadres, still loyal to MALELIT [Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, (MLLT)] that are crucial in keeping his base in Tigray.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, within some sub-groups, as amongst the upper echelons of the OPDO, and within sub-groups of the TPLF, the move was seen as purely tactical. Former President Negasso Gidada never saw Marxism as a past phase of the EPRDF, viewing the capitalist phase as a transitional one that was bound to end in communism. In a comment to “Revolutionary Democracy”, he characterised the EPRDF mix between capitalism and Marxism as:

¹⁰¹ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 167.

¹⁰² The MLLT was never formally abandoned

¹⁰³ Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming), 229.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Vaughan, "The Addis Ababa Transitional Conference of July 1991: Its Origin, History and Significance," *Edinburgh University/ Center for African Studies Occasional Papers* (1994).

¹⁰⁵ Paulos Milkias, "Ethiopia, the Tplf and Roots of the 2001 Political Tremor" (paper presented at the International Conference on contemporary development issues in Ethiopia, Center for African Development Policy Research, West Michigan University, 2001), 3.

..a revolutionary democratic system may last a while or be short-lived, but it is not the same thing as bringing about a socialistic order. It is just preparing the conditions for a socialist system.¹⁰⁶

However, within other parts of the organisation, such as the top leadership of the EPDM/ ANDM, the move was seen as a genuine one. To EPRDF members like the present day Minister of Information, Bereket Simon, or the now ousted (from EPRDF) Mesmor Fante, the latter clearly with no present interest in pleasing donors, the failure of Eastern Europe was seen as proof that Marxism had failed.¹⁰⁷ Bereket Simon claims: "Some were motivated by a perception that a third way, between capitalism and Socialism, based on Scandinavian models, was possible."¹⁰⁸

The drastic economic changes implemented in Ethiopia, pushing it in the direction of a free market, indicate that the last group was powerful. According to the United Nations Development Program the political system in Ethiopia took a drastic turn and "moved towards market-oriented economy."¹⁰⁹ The private sector was accepted, and the regime also tried to mend fences with former enemies abroad, also drastic changes given their previous ideological stance. The EPRDF developed their highly complicated new ideology, revolutionary democracy, based on amongst others John Maynard Keynes. This ideology, as mentioned above, had parts clearly aligned with Marxist views, but was in part clearly also new, allowing more circulation of capital. The ideology of revolutionary democracy could have been developed to please all the sub-groups within the EPRDF, but it was not developed to please donors. In fact the main book describing the new ideology, "Revolutionary Democracy", was never translated into English, so many donors lack in-depth information about the book until this day.¹¹⁰

The EPRDF seemed to consist of several sub-groups after the 1990 ideological change: a clear Marxist group, as well as a reformer group. Indeed later events confirmed the existence of at least two sub-groups with contradictory views on ideology. This manifested

¹⁰⁶ Negasso Gidada, "Interview with Negasso Gidada"

¹⁰⁷ Bereket Simon, Interview, 25 December 2002, Mesmor Fante, Interview, 2 February 2003.

¹⁰⁸ Bereket Simon, Interview, 25 December 2002.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), "Human Development Report 1998 Ethiopia," (Addis Ababa: United Nations Development Program (UNDP),, 1998), 17.

¹¹⁰ Meles Zenawi, *Revolutionary Democracy* (Addis Ababa: Unofficial translation, 1999).

itself in 2001, when several TPLF members left the organisation, partly because they felt the ideological heritage of the TPLF had been rejected.¹¹¹

However, the rhetoric of the negotiations of 1997-98 and 1999 shows that Marxist assumptions were important outside the circles of pure Marxists surrounding Negasso Gidada. Criticism of the supposedly American plot against Ethiopia was launched by TPLF members who according to several respondents had abandoned Marxism, as for example the then president of Tigray, Gebru Asrat.¹¹² Many of the old ideological assumptions actually remained in the EPRDF, even within the sub-groups that rejected Marxism. In “Revolutionary Democracy”, published first in 1999, typical Marxist argumentation remains in use with the present day Prime Minister Meles Zenawi talking about the indoctrination of cadres and of cadre schools and using many other terms taken from dialectic materialism.¹¹³ “Revolutionary Democracy” and the TPLF’s earlier Marxist-Leninism had other similarities. As in the early Soviet system, the elite, the bolsheviks, was to rule Ethiopia. Therefore the good leaders should be taken care of and the elite had to be in charge. The next generation elite, the cadres, were to be indoctrinated in Marxist/ Revolutionary Democratic ideology.¹¹⁴ Similarly, other Marxist assumptions were kept within the organisation, one of them being scepticism to property rights. In 2001, when the disagreement within the TPLF and the EPRDF broke out, and twelve top ranking members left the TPLF central committee meeting in protest, the resulting discussion also showed the importance of old Marxist rhetoric and assumptions when Prime Minister Meles Zenawi used the term “Bonapartism” borrowed from Marx to label his opponents.¹¹⁵ As Messay Kebede remarks, his choice of words, when he only wanted to denounce corruption and autocracy, becomes strange if not seen in the light of the TPLF’s old ideology.¹¹⁶

There were thus massive signs that old ideological assumptions still had influence even beyond the EPRDF groups still adhering to Marxism, and that even reformists such as Meles Zenawi and Gebru Asrat were influenced. Parts of the organisation were settled in the sense that it kept the old ideological phrases and assumptions unconsciously, parts of the organisation even kept them consciously. Given this, it was hardly surprising that old

¹¹¹ Elisabeth Verdier, *Who Is Who, Ethiopias 100 Most Important Persons* (Paris: Eastern Indian Ocean Newsletter, 2002), 1-30.

¹¹² Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹¹³ Meles Zenawi, *Revolutionary Democracy* (Addis Ababa: Unofficial translation, 1999), 100-20.

¹¹⁴ This elitism, was to a certain extent countered the gimgemma effect and the democratic tendencies in Tigray. It is important to stress that "Revolutionary Democracy" is a very interesting contribution to political theory in its own right

¹¹⁵ Genenew Assefa, *Thinking out Loud No Xi, Commentary on the Split in the Tplf* (Walta Information Center, 2001 [cited 13 April 2004]); available from www.walta-info.com.

¹¹⁶ Messay Kebede, "Marxism- Leninism as the Two Stages of Ethiopian Elitism-Part 2," *Addis Tribune* 19 October 2001.

ideological assumptions had influence on decision making, even when it came to bilateral relations such as the relationship with Eritrea. The in-depth discussion of the Technical Agreement in 1999 opened up possibilities for the influence of several sub-groups within the EPRDF, sub-groups that still adhered to the old Marxist Maoist ideological tenets that the organisation officially had rejected, both settled sub-groups, as the group around Gebru Asrat, and unsettled groups, as the group around president Gidada.

Moreover, sub-groups, both unsettled and settled, kept scepticism towards the western democracies, which were defined as the Enemy. They could be temporary partners when it was deemed necessary, but to many members of the TPLF they were eternal enemies because of their ideological system.¹¹⁷ A large group of EPRDF mid-level cadres viewed the United States as an enemy even after the latter in theory became Ethiopia's main ally and partner.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, some classes still had to be controlled or quelled. One such class was the bourgeoisie, of which the Eritreans were to become a symbol. The Eritreans as a trading class were highly visible in Tigray. This was partly a result of the Italian investment in Eritrea, as Kjetil Tronvoll states: "The (Eritrean) economy was monetised; a small working class was established; law and order was established; and there was a marked distinction in material well-being between the Tigrinya in Eritrea and the Tigrinya in Ethiopia."¹¹⁹ Eritrean traders functioned as exporters for Ethiopian goods, a fact that created many conflicts and disagreements with accusations of misbehaviour as early as in 1992. The terms comprador bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie were central in the discussions on the subject. TPLF officers were framed by their own organisational background: the two categories were seen as enemies of the system and the Eritrean traders were defined as members of these classes.¹²⁰ In 1997-1998, the IMF agreement was viewed as giving in to the capitalists and the Eritrea-Ethiopian negotiations became defined by a wish to avoid another ideological defeat, namely giving in to the Eritrean petty bourgeoisie, suffering an additional defeat against capitalism.¹²¹ The hostility towards Eritrea was thus not necessarily directed against Eritreans, it was also a product of the existence of an important Eritrean petty bourgeoisie that the old organisational assumptions defined as the enemy. This created the issue linkages described by Amlak and Nega: one had to avoid an additional defeat by the global bourgeoisie.¹²² The IMF and Eritrea

¹¹⁷ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 8.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹²² Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

were linked, although the latter was actually highly sceptical to the former. Geographical concessions to Eritrea were linked to the concessions to the IMF, and the concessions to the IMF were seen as too large to allow additional sacrifices to a global bourgeoisie, of which the Eritrean petty bourgeoisie was a part.

Correspondingly, although the United States was officially an ally of Ethiopia, it was perceived as a hostile state.¹²³ Even though the USA had little practical influence on the details of the OAU plan itself, a plan that focused on the border issue and avoided ideological or economical issues, major segments within the EPRDF reflexively viewed the USA's attempt negatively. American efforts to facilitate peace became counterproductive, hindering peace instead. The continuity between the arguments used by later EPRDF members in their ideological discussion in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's and the discussions around the Technical Agreement indicate that former ideological assumptions still played a role.

A Ghost from the Past influenced Decision-making

In the late 1960's and early 1970's the campus of Haile Selassie University as well as the secondary schools of Tigray vibrated with political activity, and the future leaders of the most important political organisations got their baptism of fire in student politics. Themes like the United States' negative role in Ethiopian Politics as well as the status of the bourgeois were important in the student discussion. As in the European universities, Marxism and Marxist themes formed the discussions. However, surprisingly these themes surfaced again during the IMF negotiations as well as during the discussion surrounding the Technical Agreement. The rhetoric was employed regardless of the role change of United States from an enemy supporting the old regime to an ally supporting the EPRDF regime.

Similarly, the discussions taking place within TPLF during the eighties carried the same themes. The big political showdown within the TPLF, the struggle between Sebhat Nega and Gidhey Zeratsion, had many similarities with the discussion surrounding the IMF negotiations in 1997-1998. The latter became linked with the Eritrean issue because of Eritrea's supposedly bourgeoisie status; in the former discussion, the issue of the EPLF's status as bourgeoisie was also an issue. The participants maintaining that Eritreans were comprador bourgeoisie won the day in this discussion, creating a linkage to the discussions in

¹²³ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

1997-1998, in which the IMF and Eritrea were seen as allies because of their presumed bourgeois status.¹²⁴

Marxist assumptions were clearly a part of the discussions amongst the Ethiopian students of the late 1960's and the early 1970's. They were also clearly a part of the discussions within TPLF of the 1980's. These Marxist assumptions were officially rejected in 1990. However, as indicated by Swindler's concepts of settled and unsettled periods, ideology might influence decision-making even after it has been rejected: it could become organisational culture. Marxist rhetoric remained important, so important that it influenced the Eritrean-Ethiopian negotiations. The Eritreans were seen as bourgeois and indirectly allied to the IMF, even though the former viewed the latter with large scepticism. Concessions to the IMF made it harder to give concessions to Eritrea, even when such concessions were related to the demarcation of the border rather than financial issues. Likewise, the old ideological foe of many of the EPRDF members, the United States, was still regarded as a foe, although it now supplied Ethiopia with intelligence and, albeit to a less extent, arms. Their initiative to push the Technical Agreement thus proved counterproductive, leading to a re-emergence of the old pre-1991 rhetoric and strong hostile attitudes towards the Agreement.

Organisational culture, in the form of the remains of an old ideology, had a dramatic impact on the negotiation processes, leading to two failed negotiation rounds, rounds that, if they had been successful, could have saved tens of thousands of lives. Again a focus on organisational culture highlights vital processes leading to the war, and even prolonging it. The EPRDF was haunted by a ghost from its past, a ghost from its unsettled phase.

¹²⁴ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 115.

Chapter 6: ANDM and TPLF, from Guerrilla Movements to Political Parties

Two of the organisations within the EPRDF, namely the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), were originally guerrilla movements fighting in a civil war. As within other guerrilla organisations, the extreme conditions of a civil war meant that certain standard operational procedures focusing on secrecy and security had to be developed for self-protection. However, this chapter will argue that such procedures influenced EPRDF decision-making long after the EPDM and the TPLF had transformed themselves from guerrilla organisations into political parties.

As will be shown later in this chapter, the EPRDF manifested a behavioural pattern of secrecy and a pattern of acting reflexively in a heavy-handed way towards perceived threats. Firstly, an old tradition of secrecy seemed to have been transferred from the guerrilla organisations to the political parties. This tradition manifested itself in a systematic failure to provide information, both to its own members and to the Ethiopian public. Subsequently, the EPRDF's traditions of secrecy allowed rumours damaging to Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship to circulate. Secondly, the tradition of putting emphasis on security was kept, even after the organisations turned from military fractions into political parties, manifesting itself in a marked tendency to act swiftly in order to maintain security. In doing this, the government had an inclination to impose sentences seemingly out of proportion with the offences committed.¹ The chapter argues that this also influenced Eritrean-Ethiopian negotiations; when the EPRDF discussed Eritrean-Ethiopian affairs, it tended to focus on security measures rather than mediation strategies.

¹ In 1996, Garoma Bekele, the publisher of the newspaper Urji, for example, had to pay birr 10,000 (US\$ 1,600), a substantial amount in a country where a good monthly wage is around birr 800, after being accused of disseminating false information. The story that he was prosecuted for seemed to be trivial, describing new taxation imposed on peasants in Oromiya Regional State. International Freedom of Expression Exchange, *Ifex Alerts 3 January 1996, 13, and 12 December 1995* (International Freedom of expression exchange, 1996 [cited 14/03 2005]); available from <http://www.ifex.org/es/content/view/full/3337/>.

The Cult of Secrecy

The government has nonetheless preferred to remain silent; this silence has led many to suspect that government officials holding key positions have a hidden agenda which they do not want to be made public. Many believe the issue must be a leading public agenda.²

This quotation, taken from an article in the newspaper the *Tobiya*, excellently illustrates one of the main points of this chapter, namely how the Ethiopian government in several instances chose to remain silent, even when such a silence hurt their own interests, and subsequently how this silence created rumours, also rumours with the potential to spark conflict with Eritrea.

The EPRDF showed a marked tendency to fail to disperse information and to keep even trivial information secret, often leading to speculations about hidden agendas. As explored in chapter four, oppositional papers like the *Tobiya* had problems getting information from the government.³ However, even more moderate papers experienced these problems. The Reporter, one of Ethiopia's largest papers, should have had excellent channels to the inner circles of the TPLF. Its editor-in-chief, Amare Aregawi, had previously been a high-ranking TPLF official, responsible for the TPLF propaganda bureau.⁴ After the fall of the Derg, Amare Aregawi became an Ethiopian TV general manager. Amare was then made a head of the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) in 1994. He became regarded as a top EPRDF official among the diplomatic circles in Addis Ababa, but also as an enemy of the new oppositional papers. After a demotion Aregawi subsequently resigned and then started to work in the private press.⁵ Aregawi still kept his connections from the ENA and from his guerrilla days in Tigray, and this gave him access to the inner circles of the EPRDF. Moreover, even though the paper later became oppositional, during the period of 1995 to 1997 the paper remained an ardent supporter of the government and retained the sympathy of the EPRDF. Even the Reporter experienced problems when it wanted information. The Reporter was worried about this, fearing the impact of rumours created by the lack of information, also with regards to the Eritrean-Ethiopian relations.⁶ When Ethiopian Prime

² "The Nationality of Thousand Eritreans Is Put to Question", *Tobiya* 29 August 1996.

³ See for example "Editorial: The Freedom of Information in Contemporary Ethiopia," *Tobiya* 10 August 1995.

⁴ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 24.

⁵ "Veteran Quits Ena," *The Indian Ocean Newsletter* 17 December 1994.

⁶ Amare Aregawi, Interview 2002.

Minister Zenawi visited Asmara, the Reporter for instance claimed that: "It would however be much better if the outcomes of the Prime Minister's visits were announced openly instead of leaving the public to keep on assuming and speculating in the dark."⁷ When rumours about the conflicts between Ethiopia and Eritrea with regards to trade started to emerge, the Reporter complained that:

Only recently, his [Meles Zenawi] explanations of the post currency-change Ethio-Eritrean relations were not clear either. All he said was that there are differences which would be solved through discussion as usual. And so it seems we are left at the mercy of rumours and hearsay to learn about an issue that concerns us deeply.⁸

The Reporter clearly felt that the government had a tendency for secrecy, creating rumours that could generate conflicts.⁹ Other moderate papers, as for example the Addis Tribune, were equally worried. The Addis Tribune was usually on very friendly terms with the government.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Tribune had great problems getting information, even when they wanted to explore relatively trivial issues:

The GDP is kept secret, arable land not occupied by peasants is kept secret, [the number of] farmers with only one ox is kept secret, government subsidies for fertilizer and other commodities, population characteristics, actual current and capital expenditures by purpose, including national defence, government budget deficit, external debt and arrears by creditor, money supply, inflation, foreign reserves and their composition by currency, IMF and world-bank loans, bilateral loans and grants, franco valuta imports, details on foreign exchange auctions, the amount of birr issued in Eritrea, exports to and imports from Eritrea, actual government expenditure by region, bank credit by borrower and type of activity, etc... They are all kept secret.¹¹

⁷ "No Need for Secrecy," *The Reporter* 13 November 1995.

⁸ "A Trend of Non-Transparency," *The Reporter* 14 January 1997.

⁹ Amare Aregawi, Interview 2002.

¹⁰ The Addis Tribune had a clash with the EPRDF. On 24 January 1994 the Tribune's founding father and first editor Tamrat Bekele, was detained for questioning. However, this remained an isolated incident. The government was usually on excellent terms with the Tribune. When Tamrat Bekele died in 2000, the Ministry of Information for example wrote a very positive obituary for him. When the Tribune celebrated its ten years anniversary in 2002 they got flattering comments from the government. "Celebrating Addis Tribune's Tenth Anniversary," *Addis Tribune* 30 August 2002, "Tamrat Bekele (Chairman Ceo of Tambek International Ltd) April 24/1944 - June 02/2000," *Addis Tribune* 2 June 2000.

¹¹ "The Stranglehold on the Flow of Information in Ethiopia," *Addis Tribune* 2 July 1995.

It seems fair to say that the number of farmers with one ox has little relevance to national security, so the focus on secrecy went far beyond what was demanded by national interest, inviting ironic comments from the press. In fact, the Tribune found the situation tragic-comic; they clearly saw that the culture of silence manifested itself even within the government, and that it damaged the EPRDF itself. The paper claimed that "Information exchange does not function, the Ministry of Finance must wait for days in order to get information from the Ethiopian Privatization Agency."¹² As expressed by another weekly, The Ethiopian Press Digest:

The first thing a government employee does when asked for some information these days is to check as best he could on the ethnic origin of the enquirer, the second thing he would try to find out is whether the guy looks like somebody who may have connections with any political group whatsoever. If the employee begins to have some rather anxious hunches about these attributes, the snap reply would be: we have no such information. If he somehow feels that the enquirer is somebody that could be brought into his confidence, then the reply might be: We do have information, but it is confidential. So you've got to get me a green light from my boss who's next door. Invariably the boss's answer is: It's absolutely confidential.¹³

The claims from these four different papers, with different backgrounds and political stands, The Reporter, The Tribune and The Press Digest even on relatively friendly terms with the government, clearly indicates the existence of a cult of secrecy in the EPRDF and within the state structures controlled by them.¹⁴ The EPRDF kept even trivial information secret.

It can be argued that this cult of secrecy was intended as a strategy to decrease public respect for the press, as the press became less and less accurate because of the lack of information. However, as suggested by the above newspapers, the cult hurt the EPRDF itself, as it hindered an effective dissemination of information within the organisation. Moreover,

¹² "Information Generation and Exchange at Low Ebb in Ethiopia," *Addis Tribune* 17 April 1998.

¹³ Gøte Hansson, *The Ethiopian Economy 1974-94: Ethiopia Tikdem and After* (London: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁴ For more examples of the private press and their encounter with the cult of secrecy see for example: "Secrecy Must Make Way for Transparency," *Zeggabi* 8 April 1998.

the negative effects of the cult was even felt and feared by many of the EPRDF members themselves, indicating that it was far more than just a strategy in order to deal with the press.¹⁵ Ethiopian actions to support Eritrea defensively against Yemen serve as an excellent example of the effects of the cult of secrecy even within the EPRDF organisation. In 1995, Eritrea and Yemen clashed over a group of islands in the Red Sea. Yemen approved the construction of a hotel on the contested islands. When the construction started Eritrea deployed troops and a minor clash followed.¹⁶ This conflict was solved peacefully, with Eritrea accepting an international verdict that granted most of the Islands to Yemen. At the time Ethiopia sent an anti-aircraft brigade in support of Eritrea.¹⁷ It is worth noting that information about the Ethiopian move was not dispersed within the ruling party of Ethiopia; large segments of the EPRDF leadership were not informed about it. Negasso Gidada, who after all was President of Ethiopia at the time, was not informed.¹⁸ The EPRDF also failed to inform Zeray Asgedom, the EPRDF leader of the foreign relations committee in the Shengo, the Ethiopian Parliament.¹⁹ It can be argued that Negasso Gidada and Zeray Asgedom were left out of the information chain because they lacked access to the inner circles of the TPLF, the most politically important of the EPRDF's various organisations.²⁰ Both Negasso Gidada and Zeray Asgedom were non-Tigrayans, and thus not members of the TPLF, and this could also have prevented them from getting information. However, even members of the inner circles of the TPLF were left in the dark. Sebhat Nega, the former leader of the TPLF, and an important central committee member, clearly a member of the core group of the EPRDF, was not informed.²¹ The ambassador to Eritrea, and relatively powerful central committee member of the TPLF, Aw-Alom Woldu was even kept in the dark when Ethiopia decided to lend Eritrea birr 1.2 million.²² Thus the cult of secrecy manifested itself even within the top echelons of the TPLF. Low-level party officials got even less information and had to trust the oppositional press or locally circulated rumours if they wanted information about relatively important events.

The lack of information had serious implications for the Eritrean-Ethiopian Relations.

¹⁵ Mesmor Fante, Interview, 2 February 2003, Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003.

¹⁶ Martin Plaut, "Yemen and Eritrea: Friends Once More?," *Review of African Political Economy* 25, no. 7 (1998).

¹⁷ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

¹⁸ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

¹⁹ Zeray Asgedom, Interview, 3 December 2002.

²⁰ Leenco Lata, "Ethiopia: The Path to War, and the Consequences of Peace," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 38.

²¹ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

²² "Tplf, Eplf and Why Peace Eludes Them," *The Reporter* 16 April 2005.

Firstly, low level civil servants failed to give adequate information to the civilian population, sometimes sparking negative rumours about Eritrea, rumours again leading to tension between Eritrea and Ethiopia. There were many incidents demonstrating this, amongst them the Adigrat incident of 1997, in which 700 prostitutes and beggars were forcefully removed from Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, as well as from Assab, one of the largest Eritrean ports.²³ Some of them were moved to Adigrat, one of the larger cities in Tigray. According to Muluwork Kidanemariam, then college lecturer in Tigray and consultant for the TPLF, residents of Adigrat were informed about the event by the prostitutes and beggars themselves, giving the locals a rather skewed picture of the situation. The local Kebele (municipality leaders) of the TPLF became furious over the presumed Eritrean deportation of what they believed to be Tigrayan waitresses and cleaning maids. The TPLF centrally failed to provide information and counter arguments. The issue was raised in various meetings between the lower TPLF leaders and the President of Tigray, Gebru Asrat, and led to harsh criticism of him and a demand for a straighter line of policy towards Eritrea.²⁴ Moreover, several popular actions against Eritrean merchants took place just after the incident; all of them were reported to the Eritrean President, souring the already tense relations between the two countries.²⁵ The EPRDF's failure to provide information thus directly contributed to the bilateral tension between Eritrea and Ethiopia.²⁶ Important information was kept secret, and although the secrecy clearly hurt the TPLF, a cult of secrecy manifested itself.

Secondly, it was also to have an indirect effect on the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship through its effect on Ethiopian newspapers. As suggested by all of the above-mentioned Ethiopian newspapers, the EPRDF tradition for silence allowed rumours to circulate amongst the Ethiopian elite.²⁷ This could have paved the ways for the influence of the organisational culture of the newspapers described in chapter four. Newspapers like the *Tobiya* became more important when they became the only source of information, commenting upon events that the cult of secrecy prevented the government from informing about. As suggested by the *Reporter's* editor, Amare Aregawi, this actually empowered the oppositional newspapers, as

²³ Muluwork Kidanemariam, Interview, 13 March 2003, "Abduction of Ethiopians at Assab," *Tomar* 5 November 1997.

²⁴ Muluwork Kidanemariam, Interview, 13 March 2003.

²⁵ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

²⁶ Several EPRDF leaders dealing with border questions such as Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, a powerful central committee member, and Yemane Jamaica Kidane, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, claim that popular pressure for tough measures against Eritreans put a heavy pressure on Gebru Asrat, the regional president of Tigray, and the other top TPLF leaders stationed in Tigray. See the next chapter

²⁷ "Editorial: The Freedom of Information in Contemporary Ethiopia," *Tobiya* 10 August 1995, "No Need for Secrecy," *The Reporter* 13 November 1995.

the only way to get any information about critical events was to buy oppositional papers.²⁸ In this way the cult of secrecy contributed to a form of monopoly of information services on behalf of the relatively speculative press. Again the EPRDF's cult of secrecy worked to their own disadvantage, aiding the enemies it had in the private press by indirectly providing the newspapers with readers. In many cases the government's silence created a fertile ground for rumours and speculations with anti-Eritrean content, arguing that Eritrea for example intended to incorporate the northern Ethiopian city of Zalambessa into their territory with the help of the TPLF.²⁹ This in turn was noticed by the Eritreans and, according to Eritrean observers as well as Ethiopian observers, created fear in Eritrea.³⁰

Thirdly, it had a direct impact on the Eritrean-Ethiopian negotiations, creating increased tension. Kifle Abraham, a well-known Ethiopian scholar but also a special advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and thus directly informed on the details of the negotiations, for instance claims that "The lack of transparency in the dialogue between the two parties had also resulted in false rumours that were to poison their relationship."³¹ The cult of secrecy apparently also had influence after the war broke out. In several instances Ethiopia failed to inform both Eritrea and third party international mediators about their demands thus creating trouble for the Ethiopians themselves. Eritrea for example officially requested information about Ethiopian territorial claims for many months after the start of the conflict, without receiving any.³² A border incident of 15 March 2001 illustrates how the cult of secrecy was directly involved in creating such tension even after the war had ended. Ethiopia failed to provide the necessary information to the United Nations. On 15 March 2001, the UNMEE discovered three companies of Ethiopian soldiers in the Irob area six kilometres north of the Southern boundary of the proposed Zone. The UNMEE protested. Ethiopia maintained that it had administered the area before 6 May 1998 but had failed to

²⁸ Amare Aregawi, Interview 2002.

²⁹ See for example "Fighting for an American Cause?," *Habasha* 5 September 1995, "An Interview with Ato Mersha Wodajo," *Wolafen* 5 Januar 1995, "The Strategy for Re-Unification of Mereb Melash (Eritrea) with Ethiopia," *Tobiya* 5 November 1997.

³⁰ Fisseha-Tsion Menghistu, *Let Us Have Assab and Outlet to the Sea and Let Eritreans Go to Hell, Attitudes of Some Extremist Ethiopians, Part 15* (Hadish-Tesfa, 2002 [cited 20/08 2004]); available from <http://www.hadish-tesfa.org>, Yonas Manna Bairu, Interview, 1 September 2004.

³¹ Kifle Abraham, *Ethio-Eritrean History, Liberation Struggle, Statehood and Bilateral Political Economic Social and Diplomatic Relations, and the Ethio-Eritrean War* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development, 2004), 77.

³² Eritrea, "Appendix 8: Points of Clarification Raised by Eritrea on the Oau Framework Agreement, (Handed over to the Secretary General of Oau During the Meeting with the President of Eritrea in Asmara on 12 December 1998 as a Follow-up to the Ouagadougou Meeting, 6-7 November 1998)," in *Brothers at War, Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, ed. Tekeste Negash and Kjetill Tronvoll (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 126, The Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea, "Appendix 5, Statement of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea on the Dispute with Ethiopia, 14 May 1998," in *Brothers at War, Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, ed. Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 118-19.

inform the UNMEE about it, it rather chose, in a typical EPRDF manner, to keep the information secret. The UNMEE examined the claim and verified it. As Ian Martin argues:

But by twice failing to make clear to UNMEE the full extent of the areas it claimed to have been administering, yet compelling UNMEE to adjust its map of the Zone, it had undermined UNMEE's ability to adjust its map of the Zone, it had undermined UNMEE's ability to convince Eritrea of its objectivity, even though in fine-tuning the southern boundary UNMEE attempted as far as possible to restore Eritrean villages to its administration.³³

Again the inability of the EPRDF to disperse information hampered relations with Eritrea. The incident created a tense stand-off between Eritrea, Ethiopia and the UNMEE. A tense situation was made even tenser.³⁴

While the various examples explored above indicate the existence of a cult of secrecy within the EPRDF and show its effect on the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship, it does not explain where this cult originated. Kjetil Tronvoll and Sarah Vaughan argue for the existence of a culture of power within the Ethiopian culture, more specifically the Amharic culture within Ethiopia, which prevents the general dispersion of information.³⁵ The EPRDF is seen as formed by this, hampering the dissemination of information, creating something similar to a cult of secrecy:

The government and opposition do not enter into public dialogue on issues and ideology, but tend each to be entrenched in their own inwardly-informed political positions, from which they communicate against each other rather than with each other.³⁶

The existence of an Ethiopian culture of power might have influenced the EPRDF, as it might have enhanced the cult of silence. However, it is important to avoid making an Ethiopian/Amharic culture more important than it really was. Firstly, the EPRDF was dominated by non-Amharas, Tigrayans, originating outside the pure Amharic culture,

³³ Ian Martin, "Keeping the Peace: The Un Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 140.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 140-41.

³⁵ Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Sida Reports (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

although influenced by the latter. Secondly, the EPRDF also had traits that failed to conform to Ethiopian culture as described by Tronvoll and Vaughan. De Waal for example sees the TPLF as having a socio-contractual relationship with the Tigrayan population, far from the top-down hierarchic culture of the traditional Ethiopian state.³⁷ The EPRDF principle of *Gingemma*, where civil servants and party members are submitted to an oral review by their peers, or even individuals lower than them in the organisational hierarchy, also indicates willingness for evaluation that diverges from the traditional patterns of the Ethiopian state as described by Tronvoll and Vaughan. It thus seems like EPRDF in many ways diverged from the Ethiopian traditional cultural pattern.

Thirdly, it is important to pay attention to opinions within the EPRDF; after all, they have a high level of knowledge about their own organisation. According to Techa Uqa, an EPRDF member of the foreign relations committee in the parliament, there was a hate-love relationship within the EPRDF, between the newer SEPDF and OPDO and the two former guerrilla organisations, the TPLF and the EPDM (ANDM). The SEPDF and OPDO members acknowledged that the TPLF and the EPDM had far more experience and know-how, however they criticised TPLF and the EPDM overemphasis on secrecy, claiming that this was a relic from their guerrilla days.³⁸ Nevertheless, the OPDO and SEPDF members looked up to the freedom fighters of the TPLF and EPDM, leading to a dispersion of organisational culture, including the cult of secrecy, from the TPLF and the EPDM to the OPDO and the SEPDF.³⁹ To Uqa, the cult of secrecy was not a product of an Ethiopian culture; it was rather a product of organisational culture originating in the experiences of the guerrilla period.

Even the TPLF itself was aware of the cult of secrecy, they saw it as a problem and tried to address it through *Gingemma*, a criticism routine where peers in theory are able to criticise each other in order to improve the organisation, and they introduced active programmes to change their organisational culture.⁴⁰ The TPLF member Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, a powerful central committee member, even identified its origin, claiming that the culture of secrecy as originated in the experiences of TPLF when it functioned as a guerrilla organisation. Moreover, Hywat claimed that the change from guerrilla organisation to political party had failed to change parts of the organisational culture: “It was like having a football team, a really good football team, suddenly transform into a basketball team, it did

³⁷ Alex De Waal, *Famine Crimes* (Oxford: James Curry, 1998). This will be described more in depth in chapter 7

³⁸ Techa Uqa, Interview, 16 December 2002.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003.

not go smoothly.”⁴¹ Foreign observers concurred with these statements. The BBC journalist Martin Plaut for example concluded that organisational culture could have been a factor because: “Secrecy, always a necessity for a guerrilla movement, was almost turned into a cult during the long years of fighting against the Ethiopian government.”⁴² The origins of the cult of secrecy must be sought in the guerrilla days some of the EPRDF organisations.

A Cult of Security

The EPRDF also manifested other behavioural tendencies. It acted swiftly and reflexively in order to deal with what it regarded as enemies, and it overemphasised security. There were several incidents that demonstrated such overemphasis. Many newspapers were punished heavily for relatively small offences. The Tobiya for example once published a secret United Nations’ memorandum recommending security precautions to its staff in its Addis Ababa headquarters.⁴³ Although this clearly was illegal according to Ethiopian law, it must have been of little practical importance to the Ethiopian authorities, and the memorandum did not concern Ethiopian civil servants and was therefore largely irrelevant to the security of the Ethiopian government. Although it could have hurt the prestige of EPRDF, the response against the Tobiya, swift, harsh and seemingly out of proportions with the Tobiya’s offence, hurt this prestige even more. The government arrested the editor-in-chief and three of its former editors. At the same time the newspaper’s offices were burned to the ground, its equipment, archive and database totally destroyed.⁴⁴ The incident was a manifestation of a frequently repeated pattern of actions, illustrating a tendency to overreact and focus on the use of violent sanctions against even relatively trivial threats, and illustrating the existence of a cult of security. Another incident two years earlier can be used to give an additional example of this tendency. Garoma Bekele, publisher of the newspaper Urji, had been detained because the Urji published an article containing false information with regards to new taxation of peasants in Oromiya Regional State. The publisher was released on bail of birr 10,000, around

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴² Martin Plaut, "Background to War: From Friends to Foes," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 18.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia, Human Rights Developments* (Human Rights Watch, 1999 [cited 15 March 2005]); available from <http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/africa/ethiopia.html>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.([cited]).

a year's wage for an Ethiopian upper middle class worker.⁴⁵ Again, the same pattern of behaviour manifested itself: reflexive actions in order to protect the EPRDF's security, seemingly out of proportion with the offences committed. There are many examples of such incidents, too many to be listed in this thesis; however all of them point to the existence of a cult of security.⁴⁶

This cult of security also manifested itself in the Ethiopian-Eritrean relations, for example under the Adi Murug incident. Adi Murug is a small place in eastern Tigray, long occupied by Ougugume rebels. The Ougugumes sided with the Derg during its war against both the EPLF and the TPLF. However, the Ougugumes continued to fight both the TPLF and the EPLF after the end of the war against the Derg, thus creating confusion with regards to who actually controlled the area. In addition, the local river had changed its course and this made old maps harder to interpret. In July 1997 Eritrean forces moved into what they probably believed to be Eritrean territory.⁴⁷ The Ethiopians reacted severely and threatened with the use of force if the Eritreans did not withdraw.⁴⁸ After one week Ethiopian officials noted a victory.⁴⁹ Again, the Ethiopian resorted to a response focusing on security, using the threat of violent sanctions.

The losers, Eritrea and Issaias Afworki's regime, wanted to avoid similar incidents in the future so Afworki pressed for a border commission; the nucleus of a previously formed joint commission was to deal with the practical sides.⁵⁰ There was a notable difference in the perception of the two involved parties. The Eritreans pushed for the commission, but the Ethiopians regarded the incident as unimportant and agreed to the commission just because of the wish of the Eritreans.⁵¹ The Ethiopian side of the commission consisted of four persons: Tewolde Wolde Mariam, Hassan Shiffa, Gebru Asrat and Kinfu Gebre Medhin. Others attended the meetings of the commission on an ad hoc basis.⁵² The Eritrean delegation was

⁴⁵ International Freedom of Expression Exchange, *Ifex Alerts 3 January 1996, 13 and 12 December 1995* (International Freedom of expression exchange, 1996 [cited 14/03 2005]); available from <http://www.ifex.org/es/content/view/full/3337/>.

⁴⁶ For more examples, see: Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia, Human Rights Developments* (Human Rights Watch, 1999 [cited 15 March 2005]); available from <http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/africa/ethiopia.html>, Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Human Rights Developments 1991* (Human Rights Watch, 1992 [cited 1 March 2005]); available from http://www.hrw.org/reports/1992/WR92/AFW-02.htm#P111_34316, Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia* (Human Right Watch, 1999 [cited 1 December 2004]); available from <http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/africa/ethiopia.html>, Human Rights Watch, "Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 - April 2002)," (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), Human Rights Watch, "The Ethiopian Government Is Trying to Muffle the Independent Press," (London: Human Rights Watch, 2004).

⁴⁷ Alexander Last, "A Very Personal War: Eritrea Ethiopia, 1998-2000," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, the various EPRDF central committees were not even informed of the incident, again showing the poor dissemination of information and propensity to secrecy within the organisation

⁵¹ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003, Sebat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

⁵² Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

headed by Defence Minister Sebhat Ephrem, Head of Political Affairs, Yemane Gebreab; and National Security Adviser, Abraha Kassa.⁵³ A majority on both sides had a background from security and/or defence related parts of the administrative apparatus of their respective states. Instead of professional diplomats, the parties, both Eritrea and Ethiopia, chose to elect former and present security officers to the committee. The Ethiopian focus on security personnel again serves to illustrate a more general focus on security, the cult of security.⁵⁴

Another and more important incident more clearly illustrates the importance of this cult, in this instance with direct implications for the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. During the autumn of 1997 economic issues influenced Eritrean-Ethiopian relations negatively, making the border more important as the end of free trade between the two countries meant that the militia had to control the borders in order to stop smugglers.⁵⁵ The issue of preparations for a forthcoming war was then raised for the first time in the TPLF politburo. In one way the TPLF's inclination was towards peace: they did not discuss whether Ethiopia should attack Eritrea, as this was out of the question for all members of the politburo.⁵⁶ The question was instead whether Eritrea would attack or not, and how to prepare for such a situation. The option of partial or full mobilisation was put on the table. Alemseged Gebre Amlak, former Marxist philosopher of the TPLF, Gebru Asrat, President of the Federal state of Tigray, and Tewolde Wolde Mariam, former second secretary of the TPLF and special advisor for Zenawi, voted for mobilisation.⁵⁷ Meles Zenawi and Siye Abraha, head of the governmental development agency EFFORT, were against.⁵⁸ The Ethiopian ambassador to Eritrea, Aw-Alom Woldu, was present and argued for mobilisation, as did the Chief of Staff Tsadkan Gebre Tensay. However the two did not have voting power in the Central Committee, they only had the right to voice their opinions. The discussions focused on the issue of mobilisation, namely whether the standing forces of Ethiopia could deter the Eritreans, or if additional units needed to be mobilised.⁵⁹

⁵³ Issaias Afworki, "Appendix 3: Letters Exchanged between Afwerki & Zenawi, July-August 1997, Second Letter from President Issaias Afworki to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Dated 25/08/1997," in *Brothers at War, Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, ed. Tekeste Negash, and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oxford: James Currey, 1997).

⁵⁴ In addition to this commission, a joint party commission, a joint (local) committee for border incidents and a joint ministerial commission for economic problems existed; the two first institutions also discussed border related issues. The third, the joint ministerial commission, focused on economic issues, issues that nevertheless also had an impact on border regulations, as customs rules had to be enforced by patrolling borders.

⁵⁵ "Stepped up Border Vigilance," *Beza* 21 October 1997.

⁵⁶ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

⁵⁷ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ The discussion actually centred on the question of whether Eritrean President Afworki was a rational actor. If he could understand that Ethiopia was stronger than Eritrea, or if one needed to show this through mobilisation. Ibid.

There were several other options, such as for example to increase the activities of the commissions dealing with the problems between Ethiopia and Eritrea, but this did not happen, and was not really discussed. In fact, according to Yemane Gebreab (Eritrean member of the border commission), the Eritreans asked for more frequent meetings, but the Ethiopians postponed all the suggested dates.⁶⁰ Indeed, the pre-war frequency of the border commission meetings, twice in six months, is embarrassing given the amount of suffering the war was to cause. The focus of the EPRDF was rather, as it had been with regards to its relation to the oppositional press, on security measures. The EPRDF seemed focused on security and self-protection: they focused on strategies of self-protection rather than strategies of negotiations and dialogue.

Although the above examples indicate the existence of the cult of security and its implication for the Eritrean-Ethiopian bilateral relationship, the factors creating the cult are left unexplained. As they did with regards to the EPRDF emphasis on secrecy, Kjetil Tronvoll and Sarah Vaughan argue that the focus on security related measures could have been an effect of the culture of power within the Ethiopian culture, more specifically the Amharic culture within Ethiopia.⁶¹ The culture is seen as leading to a “Let us talk with the barrel of a gun” mentality in Ethiopian society.⁶² While this sort of mentality might have influenced the cult of security within the EPRDF, several factors indicate that other elements must have intervened as well. As described previously, the EPRDF had many traits that deviated from the traits one should have expected if it was a pure derivative of Ethiopian/Amharic culture, as it was also dominated by non-Amharic Tigrayans.⁶³

As with the cult of secrecy, EPRDF members were aware of the cult of security. They blamed it on previous organisational experience from the guerrilla years. Again TPLF members such as Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat saw the problem as an organisational cultural problem, a problem of mental frames inherited from the civil war phase of the history of the TPLF and the EPDM.⁶⁴ Techa Uqa of the EPRDF claims that this mentality became transferred to the OPDO and the SEPDF.⁶⁵ To Uqa, the cult of security was not a product of an Ethiopian culture, rather a product of organisational culture originating in the

⁶⁰ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 28.

⁶¹ Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life, Sida Reports* (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Alex De Waal, *Famine Crimes* (Oxford: James Curry, 1998). This will be described more in depth in chapter 7

⁶⁴ Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003.

⁶⁵ Techa Uqa, Interview, 16 December 2002.

experiences of the guerrilla period. The origins of both the cult of secrecy and the cult of security must be sought during the guerrilla days of some of the EPRDF organisations.

Institutionalisation

As illustrated previously the EPRDF had a tendency to keep even the most trivial information secret, even when it hurt the organisation. Moreover it had a tendency to act out of proportion when it felt that its security was threatened. To a political party, too much focus on secrecy and security becomes damaging; it leads to overreaction, to confrontations with potential allies and to the creation of unnecessary conflict. However, a strong focus on secrecy and security is important if you are a guerrilla organisation, fighting for survival in a harsh environment, as it aids your survival.

The TPLF started out as a guerrilla organisation. Their early doctrines put emphasis on secrecy and security. Their battles were guided by the military doctrines of Mao, with some leanings towards the teachings of Che Guevara.⁶⁶ Mao's perhaps most important principle was that of self-preservation and the structure of the TPLF had to be protected by all means. Losses had to be minimised in order to achieve revolution.⁶⁷ One way to do this was to withdraw units after combat occurred and to reject holding land. This was a basic part of early TPLF strategy, institutionalised into its formal drills. Early TPLF publications highlighted Mao's teachings and their strategy closely followed his principles of self-protection, of which a focus on secrecy and security was an integral part.⁶⁸

Mao formulated three stages of guerrilla war, namely strategic defensive, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive.⁶⁹ The TPLF largely chose to remain on the strategic defensive. During its first ten years the organisation was always weaker than the Derg. With some notable exceptions it evacuated its personnel when the Derg took an offensive, leaving their supporters under enemy rule, tentatively evacuating them.⁷⁰ This practice in turn meant

⁶⁶ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 389.

⁶⁷ Bruno Shaw, "Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung," in *Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare*, ed. James Sarkesian (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1975).

⁶⁸ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 33.

⁶⁹ Bruno Shaw, "Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung," in *Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare*, ed. James Sarkesian (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1975), 205.

⁷⁰ When the Derg opened its Red Star offensive in 1982, 3,000 TPLF fighters spent nine months in the Sahel Region where they defended EPLF, contributing almost 50% of EPLF's non-militia force, in a bloody trench war, probably saving the latter from defeat. However, this was an exception, and until 1987 the general TPLF strategy was to hit and run. John Young,

that secrecy had to be maintained to protect supporters in Derg controlled territories. It also meant that security and secrecy had to be given priority, as a breach of security in enemy controlled territory would mean annihilation and a leak of information would have similar consequences. Institutionalisation of guerrilla strategy also meant institutionalisation of secrecy and security.

Moreover, a focus on security and secrecy became institutionalised by the TPLF's standard tactical operational procedures for tactical attack and defence operations. A guerrilla warrior attacks when the enemy is unprepared or weak, under cover of darkness and taking advantage of the enemy's lack of readiness. Stealth and secrecy is actively employed in this strategy. Young illustrates such priorities when describing the TPLF campaign against the royalist Ethiopian Democratic Front (EDU):

As their military skills and numbers increased the TPLF typically sent out squads of 60-100 fighters who travelled at night and slept during the day while in search of the EDU. Upon finding an enemy encampment, a reconnaissance team would observe them and decide where to attack. Ambushes were usually at night and the TPLF attempted to surround the enemy, enter into their midst, and, in the fashion of their forefathers, concentrated on attacking the core of the enemy camp where the leaders were most likely located.⁷¹

The initiatives that are taken in a guerrilla campaign are usually just relatively small scale hit-and-run attacks. Tactical security and stealth become of immense importance, swift action can ensure success, a wait-and-see policy exposes the attacker to danger as the enemy becomes able to draw in reinforcements or to detect the enemy and implement preparations. Security again becomes of vital importance.

In 1987 the TPLF reorganised into fronts, the units became bigger and the TPLF became an army, but even as late as 1989 mobility was the key word. If the pressure became too high the TPLF would withdraw. The TPLF main base was in the Sheraro area of western Tigray, but according to Young, even this base was evacuated on three or four occasions.⁷² Even at this late stage of the TPLF's struggle secrecy and security were of vital importance. Secrecy had to be maintained in order to safeguard the safety of those left behind during the

Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 124.

evacuation and it had to be maintained in order to protect the mobile force. Leaks of information, internal conflicts and traitors: all these could have serious implications, and thus still had to be dealt with at an early stage.

The institutionalisation of a cult of secrecy and security was also reinforced by the dramatic day-to-day experiences of the front, constantly exposed to a hostile environment, constantly exposed to organisational shocks, entrenching organisational values. Fears of the potentially dire consequences of leaks frightened the organisation into using harsh punishments. One of the stories told to Jenny Hammond by former TPLF fighter Iassu Berhe Ruba Lemin illustrates this point. A new recruit had been suspected of spying:

Ahferom and Sebhat challenged him and he started to admit he was a spy, but he also accused Marta [a female TPLF fighter] of being a spy... 'I came with a mission and now I am against you' he said. This started a real suspicion because she came from Asmara too. Two days later; another comrade was accused [by the boy first accused of being a spy]. Finally he accused Father Shifare of being against us and to prove it, he alleged that he had poison in his house. At night his house was checked. The spy found the medicine and the old man was taken to prison. We had no experience at interrogating people. Physical pressure was absolutely forbidden, only democratic methods, but in fact we beat them and Martha and the peasant. They all denied it saying 'We are not afraid, we support you. You know there is something not right in our organisation, if you realize this, it is a victory'. Then the strong words of prisoners like Marta gave us doubts. Especially impressive was father Shifare. 'We are being tortured', he said, 'but we accept it, because it is rectifying our organisation. Even the old man was beaten. He told the truth about the spy coming for just one night. In the end, we turned on the spy and he was the one who broke and the others did not, in front of all of them, he was killed. The biggest lesson was the strength of those fighters. TPLF was very near to dissolution, without morale, without strength. From then on, the organisation began to be alert against spies. From then on we began to appreciate the nature of a fighter.'⁷³

⁷³ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 261.

This was the harsh reality of the TPLF's struggle, fighting against the Shemek, the counter-guerrillas of the Derg, exposed to infiltration attempts and always suspicious of each other. Secrecy, and security, became values that you needed to hold in order to survive, and these values thus became a part of the TPLF culture from an early stage of its organisational history. Such values also became formally institutionalised as the organisation evolved. The hunt for traitors, spies and even soldiers who failed to keep secrets became institutionalised. A central organisational tool was the Bado Shewate (a Tigrinya expression meaning: the seventh unit), the security unit of the TPLF.⁷⁴ The Bado Shewate struck quickly against suspected 'traitors', but also against internal groups that were perceived to be potential defectors. They thus emphasised military action and deterrence rather than in-depth investigation of accusations. Organisational experience and institutions based on these experiences meant that a highly necessary culture of silence was developed, as well as a culture of security.

The events in the early 80's and the events taking place before the Eritrean-Ethiopian war show organisational continuity. The actions of Ahferom and Sebhat (leaders in the TPLF) in the Iassu Berhe Ruba Lemin story from the civil war years and the actions of EPRDF before the war broke out in 1997-1998 are strikingly analogous. In both instances the TPLF leaders focused on the use of violent sanctions and deterrence. However, while the TPLF during the guerrilla years in many ways had to focus on such strategies in order to survive, Ethiopia had a larger army in 1997-1998 and could have afforded to be lenient and to focus on more peaceful ways to stop perceived threats from emerging. They did not. As suggested by Mulugeta Gebre Hywat and Techa Uqa, the mentality of the guerrilla organisation had stayed on, even though the TPLF had attempted to change it.⁷⁵

Given the threats that the TPLF members were exposed to, an institutionalisation of such mentality is understandable. Even the top leadership was exposed to danger. In 1978 Meles Zenawi, today Prime Minister of Ethiopia, and Abay Tsehay, after the war a central member in the TPLF politburo and Minister of Federal Affairs, contracted malaria near the Mereb River.⁷⁶ Meles Zenawi's paternal grandfather lived nearby and alerted his son, Meles' father, who gave them medicine and then hid them for a month.⁷⁷ Any form of treason, or failure to keep secrets, could have killed both Abay Tsehay and Meles Zenawi during this incident. Secrecy also had to be maintained in order to protect relatives living within the reach

⁷⁴ Sarah Vaughan, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Sida Reports (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 103.

⁷⁵ Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003, Techa Uqa, Interview, 16 December 2002.

⁷⁶ Elisabeth Verdier, *Who Is Who, Ethiopias 100 Most Important Persons* (Paris: Eastern Indian Ocean Newsletter, 2002), b99.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, b100.

of the Derg, as the latter actively used reprisals against family members. Prominent TPLF members such as Sebhat Nega lost relatives because of indiscretion: in the case of Sebhat, his brother was killed.⁷⁸ Organisational theory claims that organisational shocks, dramatic events, entrench organisational culture and the members of the TPLF were exposed to such shocks on a day-to-day basis exposed as they were to danger and losing relatives because of Derg reprisals, all of which contributing to the entrenchment of the secrecy and security cult. The tension amongst the guerrilla fighters was high, and the value of security and secrecy had to be learned in order to keep alive. Indeed, the reaction pattern of the TPLF during the guerrilla years was strikingly similar to its reaction pattern ten years later, indicating organisational continuity. EPRDF choose to focus on military precautions, discussing mobilisation rather than an increase in the frequency of peace negotiations in 1997-1998, just as they had focused on military precautions during their attacks against the EDU in 1979.

It is not surprising that the EPDM, TPLF's sister organisation within the EPRDF, shared these values. The EPDM had a very similar background. It started its history as a wing of the older Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which in turn was based on the Ethiopian People's Liberation Organisation.⁷⁹ The founding conference of the EPRP, held in August 1975, had been highly secretive because of fear of Derg reprisals:

In the official statement, the date the conference was held was put three months back, a piece of disinformation designed to protect the delegates to the conference whose absence from their work place might have been noticed. The party branches throughout the country were alerted to prepare for the task of distribution. The intention was to publicise the event throughout the country on the same day. It had to be done in the uttermost secrecy to prevent any interference from the regime. For the sake of absolute secrecy, the central committee and the Addis Ababa inter-zone committee shouldered the major burden, including conveying bundles of printed material from place to place.⁸⁰

The EPRP's fear of the Derg thus meant that the cult of secrecy was there the moment the organisation was born. Even in the first meeting ever in the organisations history high emphasis was put on secrecy.

⁷⁸ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 263.

⁷⁹ Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation* (New Jersey: Red sea press, 1993), 201-39.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

In September 1976, the Derg acted against the EPRP, trying to kill or capture all its members.⁸¹ The EPRP's organisational history then became as dramatic as that of the TPLF, fighting a life and death struggle against the TPLF as well as the Derg. The perils of a guerrilla organisation now faced the EPRP: it was weaker than the Derg and had to withdraw if facing superior forces. It also had to focus on the security of the organisation and secrecy in order to protect members living in cities controlled by the Derg.⁸² As with the TPLF, the EPRP was exposed to organisational shocks on a day-to-day basis, exposed to heavy attacks from the Derg and the TPLF and experiencing practically an annihilation of its military wing at the end of the seventies. Values such as secrecy and security were the values needed to survive. Moreover, some of its members paid a heavy price when security was neglected. The present day Minister of Information in Ethiopia, Bereket Simon, for instance, lost his brother in action against the TPLF.⁸³

The EPDM was a product of a conspiracy within the EPRP. In 1981 tactical commanders and commissars of the EPRP met and decided to form a new and independent organisation, partly as a reaction to purges and inflexibility within the EPRP organisation.⁸⁴ The defection might also partly have been motivated by the wish to survive, as the EPRP was in the process of losing out militarily at the time. Secrecy must have been essential when planning their action, with the defectors operating within an organisation that had harsh penalties for such defection.⁸⁵ Although the new organisation found itself an efficient ally in the TPLF, it nevertheless became exposed to the same dangers as the latter, and used the same guerrilla strategies, guerrilla strategies which emphasised secrecy and security.

Similarly, the new organisation experienced several organisational shocks inflicted on it by its enemies. Ato Addisu Legesse, General Secretary of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the successor of the EPDM, describes the early years:

as the gigantic Derg army was bent on destroying the various liberation struggles, most of these movements either opted to safeguard their existence by retreating until the tempest passed or were obliged to strengthen their struggle by drawing up suitable guerrilla strategies. On the whole this was without doubt a period of unprecedented suffering and despair in our country. This was a period when any

⁸¹ Michael Chege, "The Revolution Betrayed, Ethiopia 1974-79," *Journal of Modern Africa Studies* 17, no. 3 (1979): 372.

⁸² The EPRP was a more urban base organisation than the TPLF

⁸³ Elisabeth Verdier, *Who Is Who, Ethiopias 100 Most Important Persons* (Paris: Eastern Indian Ocean Newsletter, 2002), 60.

⁸⁴ Simon Bereket, Interview, 25 December 2002.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

form of popular struggle was extremely difficult, much more so for nascent organizations that had not acquired any experience yet.⁸⁶

The Derg had used spies and informants in order to purge the EPRP and also its splinter group the EPDM, and it learned to keep secrets quite early in its organisational history. The need for secrecy and the need for security became equally, if not more, enshrined in the EPDM than in the TPLF.

Perhaps it was not a coincidence that the head of the Ethiopian Ministry of Information, the institution behind the EPRDF extreme strategy for punishing the offences of press, was Bereket Simon, one of the EPDM leaders who had lost most relatives during the civil war, but also one of the EPDM leaders that just through the increase of security and secrecy measures managed to turn the EPDM into a very successful guerrilla movement. The actions by the Ethiopian Ministry of Information towards the press in the 90's become more comprehensible when viewing them in the light of what the leaders of the Ministry had experienced during the EPDM's guerrilla days.

Although the fight of the TPLF and EPDM organisations was crowned with victory in 1991, with the Derg crushed and only small fragments of the EPRP and the EDU remaining, still the guerrilla mentality remained. While there had been some differences between the EPDM and the TPLF, such as for example views on the nationality question, their experiences with regards to the fight against the Derg had been very similar.⁸⁷ An emphasis on secrecy and on security had contributed to the survival of the two organisations. After 1992-1994 the security situation stabilised and the need for drastic measures in order to protect security decreased and the need to keep secrets became less pressing. Nevertheless, the EPRDF still chose to keep secret "the amount of farmers with one ox".⁸⁸ As Vaughan and Tronvoll remarked: the view that "if you are not with us, you are against us," remained an important assumption for the EPRDF in general.⁸⁹ Secrecy and security became important elements in the organisational culture of the EPRDF. The secret names of the TPLF leaders, created in order to confuse the Derg intelligence with regards to the identity of the TPLF's leaders, remained in use. Central committee member Aw-Alom Woldu for example remained Aw-

⁸⁶ Addisu Legesse, *Statement by Ato Addisu Legesse, General Secretary of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (Andm) on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Founding of the Movement November 21, 2000* (Walta Information Center, 20 November 2000 [cited 15 March 2005]); available from <http://www.waltainfo.com/conflict/basicfacts/2000/november/fact2.htm>.

⁸⁷ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 398.

⁸⁸ "The Stranglehold on the Flow of Information in Ethiopia," *Addis Tribune* 2 July 1995.

⁸⁹ Sarah Vaughn, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life, Sida Reports* (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003).

Aw-Alom, even though his original name had been Tiku Woldu, and Abay Tsehay, later Minister of Federal Affairs, remained Abay, even though his original name had been Ahma Tsehay. The present day foreign minister, Seyoum Mesfin, choose to keep Seyoum instead of the original Ambay.⁹⁰ The emotional attachment to the guerrilla era was still strong.

In 1997-98 Ethiopia had the time and resources to avoid the emphasis on security and secrecy, as it had a large army, more resources than its rival Eritrea and far more than its internal opposition.⁹¹ The EPRDF was no longer guerrilla movement that needed its previous focus on secrecy and security, it nevertheless kept it. As claimed by many of the TPLF leaders themselves, the mentality stayed on.⁹²

Organisational History, Secrecy and Security,

A guerrilla organisation is exposed to perils and threats that make an emphasis on security and extensive secrecy necessary. For the TPLF and the EPDM such values were required in order to stay alive as guerrilla organisations. Organisational theory argues that such values will be carried on long after the functional needs of the organisation are gone. Respondents within the EPRDF suggest that this happened in the case of their own organisation.⁹³ Moreover, they suggest that such values spread from the original two organisations to other members of the EPRDF umbrella.

Indeed, viewed in the light of the old guerrilla history of the EPDM and the TPLF the actions of the EPRDF before the war become more understandable. Heavy handed sanctions against perceived enemies (newspapers) leading to hostility, the tendency to keep even trivial information secret, leading to rumours hurting the EPRDF itself, the tendency to focus on maximising security through military means rather than through negotiations, would all have made sense for organisations engaged in a life and death guerrilla struggle with ruthless and superior opponents. The EPDM and the TPLF had been such guerrilla organisation just seven years before the Eritrean-Ethiopian war broke out.

Such actions had implications for the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship: it allowed anti-Eritrean rumours to circulate freely, it left both Eritrea and the international community in the

⁹⁰ Aregawi Bereh, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 579.

⁹¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997-98* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998).

⁹² Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003, Techa Uqa, Interview, 16 December 2002.

⁹³ Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003, Techa Uqa, Interview, 16 December 2002.

dark with regards to Ethiopian claims and intentions and it prevented the employment of more peaceful negotiation strategies before the conflict broke out. Again organisational culture, this time in the form of a cultural inheritance from the organisations' guerrilla period, influenced the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship.

Chapter 7: The TPLF, Tigray and the War

The ruling party of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), consists of several smaller parties, but the influence and power of these smaller parties vary.¹ The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the oldest of these organisations, had an extremely important role in the decision-making process before the war, supplying all Ethiopia's members of the border commission as well as most of the important inner circle of advisers around Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Given the relative significance of the TPLF, its organisational culture becomes of vital importance, and the focus of this chapter will be on this organisation.

As will be shown later in the chapter, the organisational culture of the TPLF was different from the other EPRDF organisations. The TPLF's propaganda as well as internal discussions put positive emphasis on the culture of the peasants of Tigray (Map 7.1), the home province of the organisation. A broad organisational acceptance of popular initiatives by such peasants, at least when the peasants raised their voices to influence local issues, also developed. Such acceptance allowed informal forms of local political participation to develop, as well as permitting locals to act without consulting the central authorities. Eritrean and Ethiopian sources confirm several episodes in which local peasants, customs officials and local Tigrayan militia put pressure on local officials, failed to uphold centrally given regulations and/or acted in an offensive way against Eritreans.² Similar incidents were heavily punished in other parts of Ethiopia, but in Tigray they were more or less accepted.

The main argument of this chapter is that actions targeting Eritreans, initiated by ordinary Tigrayans, were allowed to influence the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship because of special traits in the TPLF's organisational culture. In addition, the chapter argues that popular pressure from Tigray, again allowed influence because of the TPLF's organisational culture, contributed to the consolidation of a group of hardliners within the TPLF, a group that later actively blocked most peace attempts.

Firstly, the chapter establishes that local peasants and low level TPLF on their own initiative acted against the Eritreans. Subsequently, the chapter examines how such incidents contributed to the formation of a hard line group within the TPLF. The chapter then proceeds

¹ Sarah Vaughan, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Sida Reports (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 116.

² Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html, Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

A Series of Small but Important Incidents

There are many examples of incidents where local Tigrayan Peasants on their own initiative, neglecting Ethiopian law, acted against Eritreans without suffering any form of punishment from the central Ethiopian government.

The different incidents can be divided into two categories; the first was conflicts over resources, the second concerned trade. Several of the pre-war resource conflicts in the border zone between Tigray and Eritrea actually originated before World War II. After the 1991 EPRDF/EPLF takeover of power in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the local authorities on both sides of the border managed to negotiate settlements, even to these older conflicts. However, the implementation of such agreements repeatedly failed because of a lack of will by the Ethiopian side to punish locals breaking the agreement. Numerous examples can be given. In for instance Aromo (Eritrea), where the problem was illegal Aromo (Eritrean) taxation of Ethiopian Erob after the latter had cut down eucalyptus trees, an agreement between the parties had been reached.³ According to Professor Tekie Fezzehasion, the Tigray regional authority failed to uphold this agreement and the locals continued to break it.⁴ Some border incidents were of larger proportions. In Upper Indali (close to Erob), Eritreans reported the large scale incursion by Tigrayan militia soldiers as early as in 1992, probably because of a quarrel about resources.⁵ The Eritreans acknowledged that they believed that the action had been initiated by the local TPLF commander and had no linkage with central TPLF policy.⁶ A joint (local) border committee, ad hoc in its composition, held a meeting on 10 August 1992 in order to solve this tense situation. It was then agreed that the local authority of Erob, Ethiopia, should pay compensation. Only 1/13 of the agreed compensation was ever paid. Again the local authorities neglected the implementation of an agreement.⁷ These incidents, as well as many others, indicate a pattern where locals or local authorities were allowed to break regionally or centrally negotiated treaties, without any repercussions from either the regional government or Addis Ababa. Interestingly, the Eritrean side was usually, albeit not always, very satisfied with the decision reached during local negotiations, but not with the

³ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

⁴ Ibid.([cited]).

⁵ Alemseged Tesfai, *The Cause of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Conflict Part 3 (Final Part)* (The Eritrea-Ethiopia Conflict Page, 1998 [cited 15 January 2005]); available from <http://www.dehai.org/conflict/home.htm?analysis.htm>.

⁶ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

⁷ Ibid.([cited]).

implementation by the local authorities.⁸ Local violations were seldom punished, indicating a lack of will to curtail the actions of ordinary Tigrayan peasants and the local TPLF organisation that often consisted of such peasants.

There are many similar cases illustrating this point. Alemseged Tesfai claims that there were eighteen in the rainy and cultivation season of 1996 alone.⁹ The frequency of such incidents is corroborated by Ethiopian sources. They were even described by newspapers as far away as in remote Addis Ababa.¹⁰ Even when issues were being negotiated higher up in the system, the local Tigrayan administration failed to curtail actions by their own militia and by ordinary citizens, actions that provoked the Eritrean side.¹¹ The Eritreans were also dissatisfied with several parallel actions by the local Tigrayan militia, who acted with what they claimed to be unnecessary brutality.¹²

Moreover, the lower level TPLF officials in Tigray often became empowered by the central TPLF leadership, awarded responsibility beyond their local area of responsibility. The Eritreans complained that several TPLF high level delegations themselves delegated responsibility down the command chain within the TPLF. One of the first high-level meetings, on 20-21 July 1994, led by Secretary Alamin Mohammed Said from the Eritrean side and politburo member and vice-chairman of the TPLF, Tewolde Woldemariam from the Tigrayans/Ethiopians, resulted in another meeting where the Tigrayan/Ethiopian side sent low level officials only.¹³ This indicated a will to delegate responsibility that was rare for the EPRDF, demonstrating an unusual will to empower local Tigrayan actors.

Ethiopian newspapers also reported several similar incidents belonging to the second category of incidents, all trade related.¹⁴ According to Professor Tekie Fessehazion, local Tigrayan police repeatedly harassed Eritrean traders, often under the pretext that the latter had made derogatory remarks about Tigrayans, or that they had been members of the EPLF's

⁸ Ibid.([cited]).

⁹ Alemseged Tesfai, *The Cause of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Conflict Part 3 (Final Part)* (The Eritrea-Ethiopia Conflict Page, 1998 [cited 15 January 2005]); available from <http://www.dehai.org/conflict/home.htm?analysis.htm>.

¹⁰ "Anti Shabiya Activities on the Rise," *Tomar* 7 November 1996.

¹¹ Tekie Fessehazion, *First Things First: Demarcate before Dialogue: (Part 2)* (Shaebia, People's Front for Democracy and Justice, 2003 [cited 10 March 2005]); available from www.Shaebia.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi?archive=6&num=2061, Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

¹² Tekie Fessehazion, *First Things First: Demarcate before Dialogue: (Part 2)* (Shaebia, People's Front for Democracy and Justice, 2003 [cited 10 March 2005]); available from www.Shaebia.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi?archive=6&num=2061.

¹³ Alemseged Tesfai, *The Cause of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Conflict Part 3 (Final Part)* (The Eritrea-Ethiopia Conflict Page, 1998 [cited 15 January 2005]); available from <http://www.dehai.org/conflict/home.htm?analysis.htm>.

¹⁴ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html, "Sugar Destined for Eritrea Held in Tigray," *Tobiya* 14 March 1996.

rival, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF).¹⁵ Again, the Eritreans felt that their complaints were neglected and that the Tigrayan central authorities failed to deal with the problem.¹⁶

The frequency of border incidents increased in 1997. As Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi claims: “Bad feelings between the two of us were building up, as I said earlier, following the currency changes in particular. Misunderstandings along the border also started assuming greater visibility after that.”¹⁷ The border now had to be intensively patrolled in order to keep the new customs regulations, and the customs control had to be expanded, often by recruiting new personnel with little, if any, previous experience with such tasks. New and complex tasks were assigned to the Tigrayan militia. Militia patrols were intensified in order to deal with breaches of the new trade regime.¹⁸ With new rules, new and/or untrained personnel, it was hardly surprising that the implementation of the new arrangements became disorganised. In the words of TPLF central committee member Mulugeta Gebre Hywat, also known as “Chaltu”, his code name from the civil war:

Our bus was passing through the border post, I travelled incognito and few of the customs officials knew who I was. The bus was stopped, and a female customs official entered, she claimed that the 2000 birr limit [for individuals] for petty trade was for the whole coach and started to confiscate from all the passengers. This might have happened in other areas as well.¹⁹

Other EPRDF leaders also claim that local Tigrayan officials/ civilians took the law into their own hands, in the words of Yemane “Jamaica” Kidane, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs: “Yes, they stopped trucks, the population themselves stopped trucks going to Eritrea, they stopped them at the border.”²⁰ Their statements clearly underline that the locals in Tigray acted against Eritrean traders. Moreover, none of them mentioned any steps beyond pure communication taken to stop such actions, indicating a similarity with the Ethiopian government’s response to the previous actions targeting Eritreans initiated by the Tigrayan border population.

¹⁵ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

¹⁶ Tekie Fessehazion, *First Things First: Demarcate before Dialogue: (Part 2)* (Shaebia, People's Front for Democracy and Justice, 2003 [cited 10 March 2005]); available from www.Shaebia.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi?archive=6&num=2061.

¹⁷ Meles Zenawi, "Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's May 21 Press Conference, 29 May 1998" (Addis Ababa, 1998).

¹⁸ "Stepped up Border Vigilance," *Beza* 21 October 1997.

¹⁹ Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003.

²⁰ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

Outside Tigray, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (EPRDF) had a different record when facing angry peasants acting illegally, both when it came to resource conflicts and trade related conflicts. Although more lenient than all of its predecessors, the Ethiopian government did not hesitate to use strong methods to strike down on peasants that they believed to be acting outside Ethiopian law.²¹ The Ethiopian newspapers contained story after story about how the government harshly curtailed demonstrations and riots by both Amhara and Oromo peasants.²² Compared with incidents taking place under somewhat similar circumstances on the borders with Kenya, the contrasts with EPRDF actions become striking. On 9 May, the Addis based newspaper *Seife Nebelbal* for example reported on how Ethiopian and Kenyan authorities had used their armies jointly in order to stop border incidents.²³

Admittedly, there was some action to address the problems. From 20 to 22 April 1997 representatives of Barka region and Western Tigray met in Shire, Tigray, in order to deal with the Eritrean complaints about the activities of Tigray militia in the border areas.²⁴ This meeting was followed up by the so-called Shambuko meeting, 8 May 1997. The previously ad-hoc joint (local) border committee was now formalised in order to review complaints.²⁵ A special committee of three Tigrayans and four Eritreans was formed to study the disputed areas in Gasha Barka and Western Tigray. Regional committees at city and municipality level were to be formed in order to deal with the complaints locally. Nevertheless, the situation again escalated and a third meeting, this time in Mekele, the capital of Tigray, had to be held. The meeting was scheduled for 23 July 1997.²⁶ It was then agreed that the problems should be examined at a higher level in the TPLF/ PFDJ organisation. Moreover, it was agreed that the contested areas should remain under the temporary administrations that had been determined in an agreement made between the parties in 1987. In addition, it was decided that an eight-man committee was to meet again in Mekele, Tigray (Ethiopia) on 30 July.²⁷

²¹ See for example Kjell Solberg, "Political Apathy and Class/Caste Conflict: The Election in Sidama, Southern Ethiopia (Snnpr)," in *The Ethiopian 2000 Elections*, ed. Kjetil Tronvoll and Siegfried Pausewang (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human rights, 2000). Siegfried Pausewang, "A Population Resisting Local Control and Intimidation? The Elections in Gedo Southern Ethiopia (Snnpr)," in *The Ethiopian 2000 Elections*, ed. Siegfried Pausewang and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human rights, 2000).

²² See for example "Mass Arrest of Peasants," *Tomar* 24 September 1997, "North Gondar: Hot Bed of Tension," *Wonchif* 19 August 1997, "North Shoa, Land of Misery," *Tobiya* 18 September 1997, "Peasants Attack Ndfs," *Wonchif* 26 August 1997.

²³ "Kenya Attacks," *Seife Nebelbal* 9 May 1997.

²⁴ The meeting was chaired by Ato Tsegay Berhe, Vice-Chairman of the Tigray administrative region and the Deputy Administrator of the Gash-Barka Region of Eritrea, Ato Tesfamichael G. Medhim. It lasted for two days, 20-21 April 1997, and included all the major officials of the of the corresponding border districts.

²⁵ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

²⁶ The participants from the Tigrayan side were Haleka Tsegay Berhe, the Vice Chairman of the Tigray administrative region; Kiros Bitew, the Chair for Western Tigray, and Beyene Mukuru, Assistant chief of Propaganda, TPLF

²⁷ Tekie Fessehazion, *First Things First: Demarcate before Dialogue: (Part 2)* (Shaebia, People's Front for Democracy and Justice, 2003 [cited 10 March 2005]); available from www.Shaebia.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi?archive=6&num=2061.

At the same time, according to Eritrean sources, arms were distributed to Tigrayans living close to Geza Sherif and the Tigrayan militia actively rounded up Eritreans close to the border, creating irritation on the Eritrean side.²⁸ Both Ethiopian Vice-Minister Yemane Kidane and Sebhat Nega, former leader of the TPLF and at the time an important central committee member, claim that Gebru Asrat tried to moderate similar local actions and that he scored many successes.²⁹ They also claim that Gebru Asrat felt pressured by such actions, and their claim is supported by one of Gebru Asrat's political allies, Alemseged Gebre Amlak.³⁰ Their claims are puzzling for, as previously illustrated, the EPRDF failed to be pressured by local action outside Tigray, preferring to use force to curtail it. However in Tigray the TPLF politicians nevertheless paid attention to informal pressure from peasants and traders living in the border areas.³¹

It could be argued that the regional authorities could have tried to use popular pressure and local actions against Eritreans in order to justify their own policy. Nevertheless, the Eritrean President at the time clearly believed that the various actions had local origins.³² This view is shared by some of the most prominent members of the TPLF central committee.³³ It is also stressed by Tigrayans observing the events close to the border.³⁴ It is also unlikely that the central leadership of the TPLF and the EPRDF had a policy of actively provoking Eritrea in order to start a war. The Ethiopian reluctance to mobilise even after Eritrea called in reserves and their downscaling of the Ethiopian army, thus putting themselves at risk by making themselves more vulnerable to attacks, contradict such a view, indicating that Ethiopia failed to prepare for war.³⁵ Rather than being a result of a central strategy of Ethiopia to intimidate Eritrea, the actions must have been a result of local initiatives.

This nevertheless leaves an important question open: in Tigray locals were allowed to take initiatives with bilateral implication whereas outside Tigray locals were heavily punished for such attempts. The difference between the policies towards the actions of non- Tigrayan

²⁸ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html.

²⁹ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

³⁰ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

³¹ For examples of how popular pressure outside Tigray was curtailed, see "Mass Arrest of Peasants," *Tomar* 24 September 1997, "North Gondar: Hot Bed of Tension," *Wonchif* 19 August 1997, "North Shoa, Land of Misery," *Tobiya* 18 September 1997, "Peasants Attack Ndfs," *Wonchif* 26 August 1997.

³² "Interview with Isaias Afwerki," *Eritrea Profile* 1 May 1998.

³³ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003, Hassan Shiffa, Interview, 21 December 2003. Kidusan Nega did not want to talk about the subject.

³⁴ Muluwork Kidanemariam, Interview, 13 March 2003.

³⁵ For the trends in Ethiopian military expenditure see: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997-98* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998), Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

peasants and the actions of Tigrayan peasants is not explained. This question became more and more important during 1997 to 1998, when even the more central authorities in Tigray now took initiatives apparently going beyond their mandate without being reprimanded by the central TPLF leaders in Addis Ababa. On 30 July 1997 the eight-man local negotiation committee met. The Tigrayans now wanted to make the interim border permanent and argued that this had to be a pre-condition for further negotiations. Such a demand had potential implications for all Ethiopian-Eritrean border negotiations, and was never a pre-requisite for the Ethiopians negotiating at state level. Although led by Haleka Tsegay Berhe, then Vice President of Tigray, the committee lacked the mandate to make such statement, a statement with bilateral implications that according to the Ethiopian Constitution should have been decided by the Ethiopian Cabinet and Parliament.³⁶ It seems as though the Tigrayan officials went far beyond their mandate when making the claim. Local negotiations then stalled, with much animosity being created between the regional administrations. Moreover, the anger of the local Eritrean commander, General Gerzgiher Tesfamariam, over the actions of the local Tigrayan militia was cited as one of the causes of the aggressive Eritrean actions in May 1998, by several well situated international observers such as for example the journalists of *Le Monde diplomatique*.³⁷ Eritrea now requested the formation of the joint border commission. While this commission formally was created after the Adi Murug incidents, the Eritreans emphasised that it was the sum of all the incidents that worried them.³⁸ Thus the small border incidents and the TPLF's failure to curtail local initiatives clearly created tension between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

In sum, the various border incidents from 1993 to the outbreak of the war formed a pattern: local negotiations were successful, but collapsed during the implementation phase, often because of the actions or inactions of the Tigrayan militia/local party officials. Local TPLF cadres and customs officials often took initiatives against Eritrean traders and the Eritreans in the border area, and Tigrayan officials made decisions that seemingly went beyond their mandate. All in all low-level TPLF cadres and ordinary Tigrayans were allowed to make decisions influencing the bilateral relationship with Eritrea. To many Addis Ababa newspapers this was puzzling, partly because of the contrasts with the harsh reprisals

³⁶ The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 8 December 1994* (The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1994 [cited 1 May 2005]); available from http://www.civicwebs.com/cwvlib/constitutions/ethiopia/constitution_1994.htm.

³⁷ "Escalation of Violence in the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia-Eritrea, an Absurd War," *Le Monde diplomatique*, 1 June 1998.

³⁸ "Interview with Isaias Afwerki," *Eritrea Profile* 1 May 1998.

implemented on informal attempts from locals to protest against even Eritreans.³⁹ As expressed by the newspaper *Wonchif* in 1997: “Over the past six years, Tigray Region has more or less transformed into a state within a state. Tigray National Region does not seem to be totally under the control of the central government.”⁴⁰ Indeed, given the harsh reprisals peasants in other parts of Ethiopia received when attempting similar actions, it was puzzling. The popular pressure from Tigray was even to have significant consequences for the top leadership of the TPLF.

A Hard Line Fraction within the TPLF

The TPLF’s surprising leniency towards the actions of local TPLF officials and Tigrayan peasants was to have implications even within the higher decision making levels of the organisation. As will be shown, it contributed to the consolidation of a group of hardliners within the organisation.

A quest to understand the influence of popular pressure and why this pressure came about also directs attention to an event taking place after the end of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. The hard line group within the TPLF became well known only after its showdown with the rest of the TPLF in a central committee meeting in Mekele, March 2001. At this meeting twelve out of twenty-eight central committee members of the TPLF walked out in protest at what they regarded as erroneous procedures and violations of the TPLF charter. However, both witnesses and investigative journalists indicate that the group consolidated much earlier and had effects on the Eritrean-Ethiopian Relationship even from an early stage.⁴¹ According to *Africa Confidential*:

the Central Committee did set up a war council headed by Siye [Abraha], Seyoum [Mesfin] and Gebru [Asrat], which distance Meles from the military decision-making process. Meles held support among more ideological Committee members, including head of Organisation Tewelde Woldemariam,

³⁹ See for example "Mass Arrest of Peasants," *Tomar* 24 September 1997, "North Gondar: Hot Bed of Tension," *Wonchif* 19 August 1997, "North Shoa, Land of Misery," *Tobiya* 18 September 1997, "Peasants Attack Ndfs," *Wonchif* 26 August 1997.

⁴⁰ "Secret Undertaking," *Wonchif* 9 July 1997.

⁴¹ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, "Ethiopia: Eritrea-Brothers at War," *Africa Confidential* 11 September 1998.

Alemseged Gebre Amlak of the Ideological Department and senior Politburo member Sebhat Nega, but the former MLLT Chairman, Abay Tsehay, swung the undecided by robust responses and swift agreement to act against Eritrea. At the price of accepting the expulsion of Eritreans and a continuing military build-up, Meles kept control, if only just.⁴²

At the time, in 1998, the fronts were not clearly defined, Siye Abraha had just (in February) voted no to Ethiopian mobilisation, but he regretted it and so now ended up supporting Gebru Asrat.⁴³ Alemseged Gebre Amlak still supported Zenawi on many issues.⁴⁴ However, when Siye Abraha fell in line with Gebru Asrat and Abay Tsehay (who later turned on the group), there arose a consolidated sub-group within the TPLF, a sub-group that from the early stage also controlled the war council.⁴⁵ The dissenter group, together with Abay Tsehay, who remained a part the group until 2001, held a majority in the TPLF politburo, and must have been a major influence on Ethiopian decision-making. The main point is that this hardliner group both was consolidated before the war and that it had influence over the bilateral relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The connections between the process leading to the consolidation of this group and the previously analyses of the actions of peasants and low level TPLF officials in Tigray become clearer if the geographical and cultural affiliations of the members of the hardliner group are examined. Most of the hardliners had closer connections to Tigrayan peasants than was common within the TPLF central committee. Moreover, the hardliners lacking such a connection were often engaged in cultural work emphasising the importance of the culture of the Tigrayan Peasant. An examination of the background of the members of the hardliner group confirms this. The informal leaders of the opposition were Tewolde Wolde Mariam, then Vice Chairman of the TPLF, flanked by Siye Abraha, at the time head of EFFORT (Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray), Gebru Asrat, the president of Tigray, and Alemseged Gebre Amlak, former head of the propaganda section of the party.⁴⁶ Of the four,

⁴² "Ethiopia: Eritrea-Brothers at War," *Africa Confidential* 11 September 1998.

⁴³ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

⁴⁴ "Ethiopia: Eritrea-Brothers at War," *Africa Confidential* 11 September 1998.

⁴⁵ Researchers like Leenco Lata claim that this group had been consolidated earlier, as early as in 1995. He is supported by notable figures in the Ethiopian opposition, such as Beyene Petros. However, none of the TPLF insiders interviewed for this thesis, some 25% of the central committee all in all, including members of the opposition group, support their claim. See for example Leenco Lata, "Ethiopia: The Path to War, and the Consequences of Peace," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003, Beyene Petros, Interview, 3 December 2002.

⁴⁶ Kinfu Abraham, *Ethio-Eritrean History, Liberation Struggle, Statehood and Bilateral Political Economic Social and Diplomatic Relations, and the Ethio-Eritrean War* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and

two resided in Tigray. In addition, Aregash Adane, former regional secretary of Tigray and Deputy for Gebru Asrat (at the time Head of Social Affairs with the Office of the Prime Minister), played a prominent role. Gebremeskel Hailu, leader of the Dimitse Weyane Bitew (the Voice of Weyane), the TPLF radio station, and a leader of the TPLF's propaganda committee was also important. Both Aregash Adane and Gebremeskel Hailu were close to the events taking place in Tigray.

The other core members were Abraha Kahsay, long-time veteran of the TPLF central committee, Bitew Belay, then Head of Regional Affairs with the PM's office, Aw-Alom Woldu, then ambassador to Eritrea, and Solomon Tesfaye "Timmo" Gebreigzi, Head of Propaganda, but also the founder of the Cultural Association of Tigray. Abraha Kahsay resided in Tigray, while the three others lived outside of the province.

Abay Tsehay, advisor to Prime Minister Zenawi and secretary general of the TPLF, as well as head of the Commission for Sustainable Agriculture and Environmental Rehabilitation of Tigray (SAERT), and resident in Tigray since 1995, supported the group, but later changed his opinion. Hassan Shiffa, himself a veteran TPLF central committee member, also changed his mind later.⁴⁷ A majority of the members of the group of twelve were based in Tigray and/or had been resident there within the five last years before the Mekele meeting. Moreover, several of the members were actively engaged in voluntary work to maintain and strengthen Tigrayan popular culture, a culture that was based on the dances and songs of Tigrayan Peasants. Together with low-level officials from farming families, such peasants were the main implementers of the previously described events taking place in Tigray.

An examination of the sixteen TPLF members opposing the group of twelve, the supporters of the line of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, is also illuminating, illustrating how this group indeed had weaker connections with Tigray and Tigrayan peasants. Two members, Kidusan Nega and her husband Haleka Tsegay Berhe nearly voted with the group of twelve, changing sides very late in the process. The couple resided in Tigray at the time and Haleka Tsegay Berhe had in his role as Vice President of Tigray participated in several of the meetings trying to solve local border issues. The two Meles Zenawi supporters with the closest connection to Tigray were thus also the most hesitant Meles Zenawi supporters.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi himself, his Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin and the former leader of the TPLF Sebhat Nega were the dominating personalities amongst the

Development, 2004), 370. The group is sometimes given the name the Tewolde-Siye group after two of its leaders. The followers of the group also used the name "Guardian twelve" in the early phase of the conflict.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

sixteen. Importantly, none of the three leaders of the group resided in Tigray. Other members included Berhane Gebre-Christos, then ambassador to United States, and Addisalem Balema, ambassador to China, again, none of whom resided in Tigray. Two other members, Mulugeta Alemseged, the Head of the PM's Office, and Getachew Assefa, then head of the Federal Police, also resided in Addis Ababa, as did a third member, Arkebe Oqubay Mitiku. Abadi Zemo, the powerful head of several state owned business companies, and also a member of the coalition supporting Meles Zenawi, resided mostly in Addis. Zemo's colleague Tewodros Hagos had a house in Tigray but lived in Addis Ababa.

Only three core members of Meles' alliance resided in Tigray, namely veteran TPLF central committee member Tirfou Kidanemariam, Gobezay Woldearegay, the Head of Southern Zone of Tigray, and Abay Woldu, then chairman of the Central Zone of Tigray.⁴⁸ The list shows that only five out of the sixteen members of the coalition supporting the Prime Minister resided in Tigray; two of whom actually supported the dissidents at the start of the processes. Not a single leader of the group resided in Tigray.

Indeed, the dissidents claimed to be closer to Tigray and Tigrayan culture and maintained that the group supporting the Prime Minister had betrayed "the people of Tigray".⁴⁹ Meles Zenawi and his allies were seen as the "Lounge Lizards" or "Palace Group", travelling to "high places", talking with "important people" and drinking fine "French wines" having abandoned both the culture of Tigray and the TPLF.⁵⁰ Researchers such as John Young and Medhane Tadesse also argue that the hardliner group became remote from the original values of the TPLF, including the values of the simple lifestyle in Tigray:

The move of many TPLF leaders, who had lived with the peasants and shared their deprivations in the Tigrayan countryside, to Addis Ababa, exposed them to an alien material world divorced from the realities of peasant existence. Inevitably, some cadres were corrupted, yet many remained dedicated to the cause. In order to take effective control of the state apparatus, the front had to appoint many of its cadres to positions of power and responsibility for which they were ill prepared. Power attracted careerists to join the ruling party. Attitudes to

⁴⁸ Kinfe Gebre Medhin and Mulogeta Gebre "Chaltu" Hywat were not present, they were busy with other tasks and could not attend the meeting in Mekele, but joined the group later.

⁴⁹ Kinfe Abraham, *Ethio-Eritrean History, Liberation Struggle, Statehood and Bilateral Political Economic Social and Diplomatic Relations, and the Ethio-Eritrean War* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development, 2004), 381.

⁵⁰ EthiopiaFirst, *Interview with Ambassador Abdulmejid Hussein* (Walta, 2001 [cited 1 March 2005]); available from <http://www.waltainfo.com/>, Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

women, comradeship, communal living, religion and the value of a simple lifestyle were increasingly challenged.⁵¹

In opposition to the “Palace Group”, the group of dissenters saw themselves as still paying attention to the traditional networks, talking with ordinary peasants, travelling in Tigray and according to themselves keeping the traditions of old Tigray.⁵² The group stresses its connection with Tigray, and for example mentions “the people of Tigray” twenty times in Gebru Asrat’s main statement on the conflict, “Letter to the People and Council of Tigray”, alone.⁵³ Indeed, the title of this document indicates the emphasis put on the connection with ordinary Tigrayans. Several of the members, like Gebremeskel Hailu and Solomon Tesfaye “Timmo” Gebreigzi, also worked actively to promote Tigrayan culture in their day-to-day work, emphasising, and thus giving value to, the deeds and songs of the Tigrayan peasants. Tigrayan peasants, or low level governmental/ TPLF officials, often the sons of such peasants, were behind the actions targeting Eritreans in Tigray.

Admittedly, not all dissenters were from Tigray, but the dissenters from Tigray acted as a group towards the remaining members of the group.⁵⁴ It is also notable that two out of five Tigray-based Meles supporters only supported him at the end of the showdown. Additionally, many officials who became members of the dissenters, such as for example Gebru Asrat and Aregash Adane, were just the leaders who failed to curtail popular activities like riots against Eritrean traders and violations against negotiated agreements in Tigray. Indeed, they must have been influenced by such activities, as well as by popular pressure from the groups behind them. Muluwork Kidanemariam, then resident in Mekele, was a close observer of the events taking place in Tigray: “Popular pressure had immense effect, on several Kebele and TPLF meetings the leadership of TPLF in Tigray was pressured, there were popular discontents, and the leaders were influenced.”⁵⁵ Gebru Asrat refers to such popular pressure in order to explain his own views.⁵⁶ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, another prominent member of the dissenters, agrees with Asrat’s claims.⁵⁷ Sebhat Nega, long-time TPLF central committee member and ally to Prime Minister Zenawi, admits that several dissenter leaders had been put under pressure by pressure from locals and their actions

⁵¹ Medhane Tadesse and John Young., “Tplf: Reform or Decline,” *Review of African Political Economy* 97, no. 3 (2003): 401.

⁵² Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

⁵³ Gebru Asrat, “Letter to the People and Council of Tigray,” *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

⁵⁴ “Ethiopia: Eritrea-Brothers at War,” *Africa Confidential* 11 September 1998.

⁵⁵ Muluwork Kidanemariam, Interview, 13 March 2003.

⁵⁶ Gebru Asrat, “Letter to the People and Council of Tigray,” *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

⁵⁷ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

targeting Eritreans.⁵⁸ Sebhat Nega says this even though it could be advantageous for him to deny it, for such statements could increase the public perception that the dissenters were closer to the common Tigrayans than the EPRDF of today. The actions of the local peasants of Tigray, as well as a fascination with and closeness to the Tigrayan culture, influenced the processes that lead to the consolidation of the hardliner group. Even the Addis Ababa newspapers observed the effect of such pressure, as the *Beza* wrote in their 8 January 1998 issue:

The people of Tigray have exerted great pressure on the government to formulate and pursue a clear cut policy regarding Ethio-Eritrean relations. In consequence, political leaders have been forced to change their course of action, the pressure has taken deep roots so much so that differences of opinion have emerged from within the TPLF leadership. This indicates that the trend could open the way for a new political direction.⁵⁹

Given the frequency of actions targeting Eritreans and popular pressure, and the number of witnesses claiming it had effect, it seems quite certain that the TPLF's Tigrayan leadership was influenced by the local initiatives of peasants and low-level officials in Tigray, as well as a large respect of the culture of these peasants.

The formation of the hardliner group had far reaching consequences for the Eritrean-Ethiopian Relationship. The group was consistently negative to all of the peace agreements, regardless of variations in contents.⁶⁰ Siye Abraha, Tewolde Wolde Mariam, Gebru Asrat and Alemseged Gebre Amlak, the leaders of the dissenters, for example all voted against the Technical Agreement, as did most of the other members.⁶¹ Moreover, the group even resisted and continues to resist the current peace agreement. Gebru Asrat, now widely regarded as the leader of the group for example claims:

And who stopped him [Meles Zenawi] when he in contravention of international laws confiscated our properties in Massawa and Assab? What I'm saying is not that we should flout each and every international law but that these issues are very

⁵⁸ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

⁵⁹ "Is the Journey Uphill Well and Safe?," *Beza* 8 January 1998.

⁶⁰ Elisabeth Verdier, *Who Is Who, Ethiopias 100 Most Important Persons* (Paris: Eastern Indian Ocean Newsletter, 2002).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1-90.

much at the core of the conflict and they need to be redressed. And this redress would have started with scrapping the Algiers Agreement.⁶²

Ironically, the fissure within the TPLF at one stage probably also had a positive impact on peacemaking. Gebru Asrat argues that one of the reasons for the Ethiopian acceptance of the Algiers Peace Agreement was that the TPLF was concerned with its internal divisions.⁶³ Nevertheless, the group itself stressed its dissatisfaction with what they perceived as lenient policies towards Eritrea and wanted a less submissive line.⁶⁴ The existence of a group consistently negative to the international peace attempts must in general have hindered peace making.

The analysis of the formation of the hardliner group within the TPLF also gives clues with regards to why local peasants were allowed to act so freely in Tigray compared to the rest of Ethiopia. Amongst the hardliners, Gebremeskel Hailu and Solomon Tesfaye “Timmo” Gebreigzi, worked actively to promote Tigrayan culture. Moreover, the reference to the Tigrayan culture was common in the publications of the group stressing the virtues of the Tigrayan peasant lives, and their closeness to the original Tigrayan values. In many ways, as will be shown in the next section, these arguments strongly reminded of previous TPLF propaganda that had paid heed, if not outright worshipped the values of Tigrayan peasants and their culture.⁶⁵ The explanation of the previously explored incidents might be the special relationship that had traditionally existed between the people of Tigray and the TPLF, and the extreme respect TPLF had for the peasants’ culture.

The TPLF as Wedibna of the Tigrayans

The TPLF and the Tigrayan Peasants often viewed themselves as one single organic unit, an observation that has been made by several external observers. Lovise Aalen for example observed how people in Tigray made statements claiming that there was no distinction between the people of Tigray and the TPLF, “claiming that the Tigrayan People have watered

⁶²International Freedom of Expression Exchange, *Ifex Alerts 3 January 1996, 13, and 12 December 1995* (International Freedom of expression exchange, 1996 [cited 14/03 2005]); available from <http://www.ifex.org/es/content/view/full/3337/>.

⁶³ Ibid.([cited]).

⁶⁴ Gebru Asrat, "Letter to the People and Council of Tigray," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

⁶⁵ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 222.

the TPLF as a Plant”.⁶⁶ She also recorded how a Tigrayan academic claimed that “The TPLF is flowing as blood in their [people’s] veins”.⁶⁷ The peasants of Tigray had a tradition of close affiliation with the TPLF, and many spoke of the TPLF as “Wedibna”, meaning “our organisation” in Tigrinya.⁶⁸ The close relationship between the organisation, the peasants in Tigray and Tigrayan culture was rooted in the origins of the organisation. Merara Gudina, formerly a member of the Ethiopian student movement during the early seventies, explains:

There are two major issues we have to consider when we analyse the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) holistically: these are the questions of class and the question of national equality. Even at that time, at least towards what we take to be the end of the ESM, the political forces which used to say class struggle first and those saying national struggle first were clearly marked out. The first of them were then defeated - the EPRP, MEISON and so on. Forces which said national struggle first, like the TPLF, won the political battle.⁶⁹

Nationalist sentiments were important amongst the Generation during the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie. Nationalism was to gain special importance amongst the TPLF cadres.⁷⁰

The perception that the regime was “a prison house of nations” was strong amongst most Ethiopian students of the time.⁷¹ As early as in 1967, there was a riot at the Faculty of Education that pitted Tigrinya speakers against Amhara students. On this occasion the riots went on for several days.⁷² The activities of future Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, might again serve as an illuminating example of the more nationalistic stands held in the student movement. As a student, Zenawi got into problems with his university when he wrote a paper on the legendary battle of Adwa in 1896. This was a battle of great significance within Ethiopian, if not African, nationalist discourse. Ethiopia won over Italy, and was the first non-western power to win a war over a western power for many centuries. Zenawi argued that most of the Ethiopian/Abyssinian soldiers participating in the battle were from

⁶⁶ Lovise Aalen, "Expressions of Control, Fear and Devotion," in *The Ethiopian 2000 Elections*, ed. Siegfried Pausewang and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 2000), 90.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life, Sida Reports* (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 122.

⁶⁹ Merara Gudina, "There Is a Serious Tension between the Original Agenda (of the Tplf/Eprdf) and the Project of Liberal Democracy," *The Reporter* 21 May 2003.

⁷⁰ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 83.

⁷¹ Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation* (New Jersey: Red sea press, 1993), 52.

⁷² John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82.

Tigray and he thus indirectly claimed that Tigrayans both suffered most losses and contributed most to the victory.⁷³ Aregawi Berhe, one of the founders of the TPLF claims:

The university at Addis Ababa became the venue where politically minded teachers and students from all districts of Tigray converged and discussed issues concerning the whole of Tigray. Land degradation, recurring famines, massive unemployment, political marginalization, cultural domination and different aspects of social problems were some of the issues that arose, and their solutions were debated by students. They compared the level of the problems with those in other regions of Ethiopia, believing that conditions in Tigray were by far the worst. This assessment was often expressed sentimentally, in relation to the past glory of Tigray and its standing in the history of the Ethiopian nation.⁷⁴

The case of Meles Zenawi's hero, Meles Teckle, illustrates how popular nationalist rhetoric could be. In 1972 Meles Teckle won over the then ardent Marxist and present day Speaker of the lower house of Parliament, Dawit Yohannis, in a nomination contest for the position of representative of the Law Faculty. Dawit Yohannis was successfully challenged on the question of whether he put the class struggle before the right of Ethiopia's oppressed nations, and Teckle won a clear victory over him.⁷⁵ Meles Teckle, together with notables such as Abay Tsehay, later a member of the dissenter group before turning on his former allies in order to support Meles Zenawi, became prominent members in the Tigrayan University Student Organisation (TUSA), in which the situation in Tigray was discussed.⁷⁶

There were many problems in Tigray that fed Tigrayan nationalism amongst the students. The province had endured several droughts. The Tigrayan language had been banned, this in a province with perhaps as little as 12.7 % Amharic speakers.⁷⁷ Moreover, as Otto Klineberg and Marisa Zavalloni suggest, Tigrayans had a separate and powerful national tradition, from Emperor Yohannes IV, an Ethiopian emperor of Tigrayan origins, to the Weyane Rebellion in 1943.⁷⁸ As Randi Rønning Balsvik points out, many Tigrayan students

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Aregawi Berhe, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004).

⁷⁵ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 86.

⁷⁶ Aregawi Berhe, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 577.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ The Weyane rebellion was relatively brief, lasting from May 22 to October 14, 1943. After the fall of Mekele, capital of Tigray, on October 14, 1943, practically all organised resistance collapsed. The government exiled or imprisoned the leaders of the revolt. The Emperor implemented harsh reprisals against peasants suspected of supporting the Weyane.

were aware of the power struggle between Amhara and Tigrayan dynasties in the 20th century and that this created distrust between Amharas and Tigrayans.⁷⁹ A connection between the students and the older elite of Tigray existed, as many of the Tigrayan students were of noble families, and senior Tigrayan parliamentarians and leaders actively supported organisations like the TUSA.⁸⁰

Within the TUSA, a politically conscious group by the name of Mahber Gesgesti Bihere Tigray (MAGEBT), combining Marxism and nationalist ideology, evolved in 1974. Literally translated, the name means the Association of Progressives from the Tigray Nation, but for convenience it was called the Tigrayan National Organisation (TNO).⁸¹ The organisation symbolised the fusion between Marxism and nationalism that was to become the basis for the TPLF. This fusion in many ways meant something new in Tigray, as Donald Donham claims: “Before, Tigrayan peasants’ sense of difference had related primarily to their identification with Tigrayan elites who had competed with other lords in Ethiopia for the office of ‘King of Kings’.”⁸² The emphasis on class justice meant that the ordinary peasant became elevated, with the TPLF’s teaching claiming that they should be treated better, allowed influence and that old injustice towards peasants should be corrected. The principles outlined in the rhetoric of the TNO could in many ways serve as a blueprint for the TPLF strategies directed towards the Tigrayan peasants targeting Eritreans in 1997-1998. In 1997-1998, the peasants were allowed to continue to violate treaties without any sanctions, they were allowed to have influence on central TPLF politics, TNO suggesting that peasants must be able to influence central politics, as well as inciting peasants to act outside the law against oppressors. Moreover, the emphasis put on the peasant culture of Tigray also had its parallel in the developments from 1992 to 1998, the emphasis on their culture in a way elevated the peasants status. In 1992 to 1998, the Tigrayan peasants were, rather than being punished as non-Tigrayan peasants would have been, elevated to a higher status when they were allowed to influence central Tigrayan policies. Importantly, this elevation contradicted the traditional very hierarchal traditions of Tigray, as Tigrayan culture had traditionally suppressed, not elevated peasants.⁸³ It did however follow the rhetoric of the Tigrayan student movement, stressing the value of Tigrayan peasants and their right to influence. The parallels between the

⁷⁹ Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectuals and Social Background to a Revolution* (East Lansing: ASC/Michigan state University, 1985).

⁸⁰ Aregawi Berhe, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 577.

⁸¹ The TNO was established at a meeting held on 14 September 1974, in a Meeting in Piazza in the centre of Addis Ababa.

⁸² Wendy James, Donald Donham, Eisei Kurimoto, and Alessandro Triulzi, *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

rhetoric and actions of the Tigrayan students in the TNO and the leaders of the TPLF in Tigray from 1992 to 1998 indicate an organisational continuity.

TNO was to become even more attached to the peasants of Tigray. The TNO became active in Tigray:

Students used to write, demonstrate, organize in study groups and sing songs of a revolutionary nature that were more straightforward and programmatic. University students took the lead in these revolutionary activities, confining their Marxist rhetoric to the company of their peers and expounding the national self-determination of Tigray within the conservative peasant society. The ethno-nationalist cry was stretched so far as to invoke the martyred patriots of the 1943 Weyane while hailing their own movement as the second Weyane.⁸⁴

Nationalism became a tool to mobilise Tigrayan masses. The contents of nationalism were much simpler in form than the TPLF's Marxism and thus easier to understand for the potential local recruits. They invoked the 1943 Weyane rising, in which Tigrayans had risen against the regime of Haile Selassie, indirectly celebrating the many Tigrayans, mostly peasants, who had participated in this rising. The TPLF claimed that their rebellion was the second Weyane. Sebat Nega's sister Kidusan Nega, a very prominent TPLF leader in her own right, for instance remarked that "the first Weyane in 1943 becomes the first revolution".⁸⁵ One of the larger newspapers of the movement was even named the Weyane and the TPLF later also institutionalised a celebration of the 1943 Weyane.

The TPLF symbolically married nationalism through the participation of the Tigrayan icon Gesessew Ayele Sihule.⁸⁶ Sihule's father was a grazmach (Ethiopian nobleman) and a living legend due to his resistance towards the Italians during the 1930's. Sihule had held important positions in the imperial regime. He was also famous in Tigray for his fight against Ras Mengesha's Gum Arabic cooperation (a state development company) when the latter established a factory in Tigray but nevertheless refused to hire workers locally.

In the words of TPLF founding father Aregawi Berhe:

⁸⁴ Aregawi Berhe, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 584.

⁸⁵ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 87.

⁸⁶ Sihule is a nickname. Gesessew Ayele acquired his nickname 'Sihule' at the beginning of the armed struggle in February 1975, in reference to the eighteenth-century Tigrayan warrior and kingmaker Ras Mikael Sihule, whose power was felt as far as Gondar and Wollo. Ras Mikael Sihule was known for his decisive action in getting rid of emperors he thought illegitimate and replacing them with those of his own choice. He overthrew King Ioas in 1769 and was responsible for placing the next two Emperors on the throne.

He [Sihule] had the respect of the people living in the villages adjacent to this terrain. Otherwise, the people in these villages would definitely have been hostile to the unknown students whose activities had previously been only in the towns. When representatives of the people in Shimelba, Tselimoye and Adi-Mohamedai, three villages surrounding Dedebeit, were approached by the TPLF to render their support, they did not hesitate. This compliance was granted not because they understood the objectives of the emerging front, nor because of the young revolutionary students, but simply because Sihule, whom they knew very well, was involved. Thus, it was not surprising that, for some months, the TPLF was referred to not by its proper name, but as a group that belonged to Gesessew Ayele.⁸⁷

His popular status was immense and he drew many supporters to the TPLF, he gained a function similar to the charismatic personalities that Elizabeth Kier describes in her works. Sihule was in himself a fusion between the old Tigray and the new movement, embodying centuries of traditions, both in his actions, and by his nickname. Gesessew Ayele "Sihule" was killed in June 1976, in some ways giving the TPLF more symbolic strength as they now had a martyr, an additional icon, connected to Tigray.

In 1976 the TPLF created the famous "Manifesto of the TPLF" which argued that "the first task of this national struggle will be the establishment of an independent democratic republic of Tigray."⁸⁸ Again this was a compromise between Marxism and traditional nationalism; secession was, just like in Stalinism, seen as a step and only a step to "socialism and communism rather than being demands or ends in the struggle."⁸⁹ Even given this comment, the claims of the manifesto were too strong for a Marxist organisation and the manifesto was soon after renounced by the organisation.⁹⁰ It nevertheless showed that amongst many top leaders of the TPLF the issue of Tigray was important and aroused emotions.

⁸⁷ Aregawi Berhe, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 590.

⁸⁸ Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), "Manifesto of the Tplf," (Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), 1976), 24.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁰ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 99.

The close connection with the peasants also provided tactical advantages for the TPLF. The present day Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yemane Kidane, explains:

We used to say: We had to work with the masses, and organise them for war. So we saw our army as a spear and the stick was the people. The stick was important, all had to participate. If somebody is wounded, somebody will pick him up. Women will bring food. Men will give ammunition. When we fight an enemy of 5,000, we had an army of 1,000 and 10,000 civilians support us. If an enemy has a wounded, the soldiers will have to carry him, if he needs ammunition he needs to fetch it. We have others to do that for us. In the end of the day the odds are evened out!⁹¹

This strategy was as old as the TPLF itself: even the TNO tried to send students back to their native Awrajas and build up a basis for support, and the TPLF was to take great care to avoid committing crimes against the locals and to help them as much as possible. The TPLF actively started to recruit amongst peasants, and nationalism and references to the old history of Tigray were fertile strategies in order to recruit amongst them. Young rightly claims that: “In its battles with Teranafit/the EDU the TPLF concluded that nationalist appeals were not enough and that if the Front was to win the support of the peasants it had to address their social problems and needs.”⁹² As remarked by Meles Zenawi, the urban Marxists had to convince the locals to join them in the fight and to adopt some of the tenets of Marxism: “If you try to instil a new theory, you don’t proceed far. You must start and widen and deepen what they already have and in the process the two things get fused and changed at the same time.”⁹³

At the same time their respect for ordinary Tigrayans increased, as they became dependent on advice on how to gather food provided by ordinary peasants. As Meles Asgede, TPLF fighter and former peasant put it: “In the forest it was the peasant who had the wisdom of life and experience.” Moreover Asgede claims “that wisdom is perhaps more important than some far-fetched theory you might have had.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

⁹² John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 114.

⁹³ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 389.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

The TPLF showed much care for locals during their struggle. The TPLF soldiers discovered treating locals in an impolite manner were heavily punished, even for voluntary sexual relationships with locals. In the struggle to defeat the EDU the TPLF popularised itself, focusing on land reform, honesty, moderation and local democracy in order to convince potential recruits that their organisation was superior. Respect for the Tigrayan peasant became grafted into the new recruits; the peasant had the values the recruit was supposed to strive to defend. As more and more Tigrayan peasants were recruited, the more important this factor became. A part of this strategy was to involve the Tigrayan peasants. Mebratu Adhanom told Jenny Hammond how the TPLF first came to their village, Sobeya: "The whole village was in church. Afterwards, they gathered us around the church and told us their aims and what they wanted to do. Then they asked everybody what were their immediate and burning problems."⁹⁵ The problems were often banditry and lack of land, and the TPLF took strong measures to deal with both of them.⁹⁶ The Front's position on land issue, wanting to give all Tigrayans equal access to land and taking immediate steps in order to implement it as soon as they had gained control over an area, made them more popular amongst the peasants. However, by making land communal property, and subsequently by allowing the peasants themselves to distribute the land, they built up a system of grass-root participation.⁹⁷ Again the TPLF empowered the Tigrayan peasant.

According to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, from the 1980s this also led to a formalised policy, in which responsibility was delegated down to hamlet level, so as to involve the peasant in every area of the struggle.⁹⁸ Peasants and local officials were used actively to try to discuss local issues with the low level cadres that also to a certain degree were open to their arguments.⁹⁹ The TPLF had through their organisational culture become used to allowing peasants influence at a neighbourhood level.¹⁰⁰ The pattern of allowing peasants informal political influence and giving them influence in local matters was thus developed long before the events taking place at the Eritrean-Tigrayan border from 1992 to 1998. In the eighties the peasants were allowed to influence the local policies of the front, and in the nineties they continued to influence such policy, this time using their influence to

⁹⁵ Ibid., 267.

⁹⁶ Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming), 142.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 143.

⁹⁸ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 391.

⁹⁹ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 205.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

thwart the local settlements with Eritrea. Indeed, it must have been hard for a central or a more local level TPLF official to challenge such an old organisational tradition.

This must have been made even harder by the tendency TPLF had to worship the life and culture of the peasant. The actions and habits of the Tigrayan peasants were upheld as the standard the TPLF soldier was to strive for. The TPLF was engaged in a Tigray cult, cultural troupes entertained troops with traditional plays and songs in Tigray and with more modern plays that nevertheless frequently referred to ancient Tigrayan history and local culture. Jenny Hammond describes how such events took place:

We arrived in the evening as hundreds of young fighters, organised in their units and singing songs, were making their way through the trees and across open ground to take their places on hillside, which soared like an immense amphitheatre above the performance area. At our last meeting, Iassu had confided his idea of a musical drama. It will be like an opera, he said. It will be based on the ancient songs of the people. It will move the heart. For the last few years, the cultural troupe had been researching and collecting traditional songs from the remote countryside. They were really sung poems, which had been passed on orally from one generation to another and ranged from odes of praise to powerful feudals to bitter laments at the injustice and poverty of peasant life.

Moreover, she emphasises the value such events put on the day-to-day activities of the peasant family:

The simple story of a mother at her grindstone, the father at the plough, and the son (who eventually becomes a fighter) wielding his sling against the birds who threaten the crop, certainly moved the heart. There must have been several thousand fighters on that hillside, but there was not a rustle to be heard and when I turned to scrutinise the ones sitting beside and behind me I saw their faces filled with tears.¹⁰¹

The ideal was the simple peasant and the values they held. The result of this cult of Tigray and the TPLF's quest for recruits was a form of contract, in which peasants gained

¹⁰¹ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 222.

influence. Indeed the TPLF was, as Alex De Waal suggests, basing its relationship with the Tigrayans on a form of social contract.¹⁰² Such politics had positive effects on the TPLF's military efforts. The results of the TPLF politics were a rapid mobilisation of peasants in 1980-82 and the gain of support from the whole of Tigray. Furthermore, as Young claims, the TPLF's care for Tigrayan peasants kept them in Tigray during the droughts. The TPLF's aid organisation, Relief for Tigray (REST), managed to provide them with food, and thus managed to uphold the TPLF's militia system.¹⁰³

Contact between the TPLF and the local population was always given high priority. Political meetings were arranged to indoctrinate the local population. These meetings developed and became more of a two-way channel than an arena of pure indoctrination, as the worries of the locals were aired. Indeed, this was the way it had to be, for if the TPLF lost the loyalty of the people, they might lose the battle itself. Even when it came to religion, the TPLF went to great lengths to accommodate ordinary Tigrayans, who were very religious. TPLF cadres read the Bible to try to link their causes with religion and to persuade the lower clergy and ordinary Tigrayans to join their struggle.¹⁰⁴ Jenny Hammond described how "The fighters stayed with us for the whole day carrying stones to the new church."¹⁰⁵

The image of the TPLF fighter was also central in the peasants' perception of the organisation. The TPLF fighter was seen as shunning luxuries, as sacrificing himself for the peasants. In this way the connections between people and leadership within Tigray became very close during the struggle, and individuals living in small hamlets would often know surprisingly much about the TPLF's dealings.¹⁰⁶ Indeed the foot soldiers of the TPLF were recruited from these hamlets. By the end of the war, an almost mythical bond between the TPLF and Tigray had been created. The martyrs of Tigray, 30,000 sons and daughters of Tigrayan peasant families, were worshipped and a gigantic monument was raised in Mekele, Tigray, to celebrate their sacrifices. An Ethiopian holiday, the Martyrs' Day, was reintroduced on 22 June, commemorating a Derg attack on the small village of Hauzen in Tigray in 1988.¹⁰⁷ The expression "in the name of the martyrs" became almost a magic spell and was invoked in the major conferences of the TPLF.¹⁰⁸ Tigrayans also repaid the post-war

¹⁰² Alex De Waal, *Famine Crimes* (Oxford: James Curry, 1998).

¹⁰³ John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 131.

¹⁰⁴ Because of the Dergs' religious prosecution, the TPLF and the church also had common enemies. Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1999), 267.

¹⁰⁶ Kjetil Tronvoll, Personal communication, 12 March 2002.

¹⁰⁷ Kjetil Tronvoll, *Identities in Conflict, an Ethnography of War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia 1998-2000* (forthcoming), 254.

¹⁰⁸ As in the Mekele meeting in 2001.

courtship from the TPLF, by referring to the organisation as “Wedibna”, which means our organisation in Tigrinya.¹⁰⁹ It became “the plant that they watered”.¹¹⁰

The TPLF’s sister organisations were different. Organisations like the EPDM and the OPDO achieved military supremacy over their home areas relatively late in the conflict with the Derg, if not after the latter’s collapse. It was almost impossible for them to build up a relation with peasants they lacked contact with. The TPLF’s sister organisations were also recruited from a variety of backgrounds, many from what could be deemed to be the remains of other organisations lacking the TPLF’s link with their respective population. In the case of former EPRP members in the ANDM and the OPDO, they came from an organisation that focused more on class than on nationality.¹¹¹ In this sense, the EPRDF was a schizophrenic organisation. In Tigray popularly instigated actions targeting Eritreans were allowed and even had influence on the TPLF, outside Tigray the punishment for popular small scale action would be severe. This enabled the effects described by Muluwork Kidanemariam, where angry Tigrayan Peasants dared to face high ranking TPLF officials and even influence their decisions.¹¹² It also explains Lovise Aalen’s description of how TPLF officials were shouted at in some popular meetings.¹¹³ Moreover, the respect and emphasis on the Tigrayan peasants and their culture remained an important element of the TPLF even after its war against the Derg had ended. It remained important even when no more soldiers were needed from the hamlets in Tigray. It was regularly invoked in propaganda, in speeches; it had become an unconscious element in the TPLF’s organisational life: it was a part of organisational culture.

It is symptomatic to read some of the TPLF publications. Its newspaper the Weyyin often focused on the peasants, their culture and the need for students and intellectuals to make sacrifices in order to help them. In 1996, they for instance wanted the students to go into the Tigrayan countryside to teach peasants:

“As such one way the people can use their time, energy and knowledge during the coming long vacation is to go into the countryside, serve the people and learn

¹⁰⁹ Sarah Vaughan, and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Sida Reports (Stockholm: SIDA, 2003), 122.

¹¹⁰ Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), *Tplf Begins 6th Congress* (Walta, 2001 [cited 1 April 2005]); available from www.waltainfo.com.

¹¹¹ Merara Gudina, "There Is a Serious Tension between the Original Agenda (of the Tplf/Eprdf) and the Project of Liberal Democracy," *The Reporter* 21 May 2003.

¹¹² Muluwork Kidanemariam, Interview, 13 March 2003.

¹¹³ Aalen also claims that fear played a part in the relationship between Tigrayans and the TPLF but fails to give any examples of intimidation. She does however give several examples of statements confirming the devotion between the TPLF and Tigray, of how Eritrean issues created loud and severe criticism against TPLF. Lovise Aalen, "Expressions of Control, Fear and Devotion," in *The Ethiopian 2000 Elections*, ed. Siegfried Pausewang and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 2000), 81-96.

from the people and in so doing contribute significantly to the development process currently underway.”¹¹⁴

The sacrifices of the peasants in arms, the common soldiers of the TPLF, were stressed in both TPLF and EPRDF newspapers.¹¹⁵

This was the organisational culture that surrounded the TPLF officials in Tigray who were supposed to curtail illegal local behaviour. This was the organisational culture that influenced Gebru Asrat when he faced such behaviour in Tigray. It was also the organisational culture surrounding Meles Zenawi. However, he was far away from the pressure from the peasants, he did not meet them in his day to day work, and the reaction of his Palace Group indeed became different.

Interaction with other factors

Elements of TPLF organisational culture unconsciously defined respect for peasants and their opinion as correct. Importantly, there was much anti-Eritrean animosity amongst peasants in Tigray. The Eritrean deportation of Ethiopians in 1991-1992 was remembered. According to Human Rights watch, most of the deported were members of the Derg's army, intelligence and the Derg's Ethiopian Workers Party.¹¹⁶ However, rapid implementation meant that decisions were taken in a rush and many mistakes were committed. In October 1991 the EPLF for example deported 424 non-Eritrean orphans, residents of church- and government-run orphanages in Asmara.¹¹⁷ The TPLF also estimated that many Ethiopians left in panic when they observed the Eritrean will to use force against the deported.¹¹⁸ The deported Ethiopians had few means to take care of themselves and became a burden for the place they were deported to, namely Tigray. As Meles Zenawi claims: “In Tigray, there was not enough food even for the resident let alone for 100,000 more. There was not enough shelter.”¹¹⁹ When

¹¹⁴ "What We Expect from Our Students," *Weyyin* 6 June 1996.

¹¹⁵ See for example : "Lest Our Martyrs Should Have Died in Vain," *Abyotawi Demokrasi* 27 June 1996, "What We Expect from Our Students," *Weyyin* 6 June 1996.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Human Rights Developments 1991* (Human Rights Watch, 1992 [cited 1 March 2005]); available from http://www.hrw.org/reports/1992/WR92/AFW-02.htm#P111_34316.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* ([cited]).

¹¹⁸ "Interview [Transcribed] with Meles Zenawi from ETV," *Addis Zemen* 22 August 1991. It is important to underline that a large number of Ethiopians, 70,000 in Assab alone, choose to remain in Eritrea.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

dealing with the incident, the TPLF maintained their tradition of secrecy, failing to inform about the event, so rumours were allowed to circulate locally.¹²⁰

Conflicts concerning land distribution and the rights to use natural resources were common, and also created animosity inciting farmers against Eritreans, symptomatically the frequency of conflict increased in the ploughing season.¹²¹ Indeed according to the Eritrean researcher Tekie Fezzehasion most of the incidents where Tigrayan peasants violated existing bilateral agreements directly involved conflicts over resources.¹²²

Moreover, the trade laws created animosity. The laws regulating trade were confusing and hard to understand even for Ethiopians.¹²³ Loopholes within Eritrean and Ethiopian trade laws made it tempting for Eritrean traders to take advantage of them. Ethiopia refused to use currency that was earned through exports for imports, creating incentives for hiding exports to avoid reporting the earned currency. In 1994 approximately 40% of all exports were illegal, and many of these illegal export activities were conducted by Eritreans, since the more developed Eritrean economy provided more capital for investments.¹²⁴ In addition, Eritreans were banned from importing Ethiopia's exportable goods, and they were not allowed to re-export to Ethiopia goods from a third country; the same did not apply to Ethiopians in Eritrea.¹²⁵ Additionally, the lower birr: dollar exchange rate in Asmara meant that foreigners got products cheaper there than if they bought them from the source in Ethiopia, creating incentives for the Eritreans to cheat.¹²⁶ Finally, an illegal scheme that involved many Eritreans was the production of fake birr notes. According to Ethiopian sources, the trade related episodes of actions targeting Eritrean were most common, being according to Eritrean sources only second to the resource related incidents.¹²⁷

The new trade regulations that were implemented in 1997, after the Eritrean introduction of their currency, the Nakfa, made things even worse. Firstly, these new regulations, allowing border trade only if the total amount was less than birr 2,000,

¹²⁰ Several similar incidents occurred later, following the same patterns. Eritrea dumped unwanted people, some of Sudanese origins, in Tigray. The TPLF still often failed to inform about the causes for the deportation, so strong sentiments against Eritrea, rumours and actions targeting Eritreans followed. Muluwork Kidanemariam, Interview, 13 March 2003.

¹²¹ Martin Plaut, "Background to War: From Friends to Foes," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005), 15.

¹²² Tekie Fessehazion, "Explaining the Unexplainable: The Eritrea-Ethiopia Border War," *The Eritrean Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (1999).

¹²³ "For Clarity of Directives," *The Reporter* 12 August 1996.

¹²⁴ Göte Hansson, *The Ethiopian Economy 1974-94: Ethiopia Tikdem and After* (London: Routledge, 1995), 110.

¹²⁵ Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War Making Sense of the Eritrean Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), 33.

¹²⁶ Flora Goudappel and Masrtien Oosweterhagen, "Ethnicity, Federalism and Development, Constitutional Solution for Ethiopia" (paper presented at the 3 day conference on the Ethiopian Situation, Amsterdam, 28-30 June 1996).

¹²⁷ Tekie Fessehazion, *Genesis of the Border War* (Denden, 1998 [cited 17 March 2005]); available from www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-062898.html, Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

approximately 285 dollars, gave many new incentives for smuggling. Almost all of the trade between Ethiopia and Eritrea became illegal overnight. Secondly, the new trade arrangements were implemented in a confusing way.

However, the above explored factors do not explain why the TPLF, a very successful military organisation with very efficient strategies to deal with its enemies and unwanted internal elements, failed to discipline its own cadres. Local party officials, customs officers and militia were allowed to operate the laws in a confused and non-transparent way since they had local support. The TPLF centrally failed to punish or constrain the local initiatives of militia leaders or seemed afraid when facing hot tempers in Kebele (municipality) meetings.¹²⁸ The President of Tigray, Gebru Asrat, a tough veteran guerrilla fighter, used to acting harshly in order to purge potential traitors from his organisation, had a hard time controlling the sentiments and had to face popular opinion in the meetings with Tigrayans.¹²⁹ Lovise Aalen describes how Tewodros Hagos, top level TPLF central committee member, was severely criticised in many popular and even municipal meetings, partly because of his position on Eritrea.¹³⁰ As earlier indicated, similar actions committed by peasants in other Ethiopian provinces were at best neglected by the EPRDF, at worst curtailed with power.¹³¹ The emphasis on the value of the Tigrayan peasant, the organisational tradition for allowing them influence in local matters, allowed the factors that angered Tigrayan peasants to have influenced the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. The TPLF was simply not willing to use force to curtail the peasants that its organisational culture had elevated into icons and idols. This means that organisational culture had a clear effect: without an organisational culture that prevented the TPLF from punishing peasants for their actions, even trying to stop them, these peasants would have had little influence on the bilateral Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. Instead they would have been imprisoned or curtailed, as their colleagues were in other border zones.

¹²⁸ Muluwork Kidanemariam, Interview, 13 March 2003.

¹²⁹ Sebhat Nega, Interview, 21 January 2003.

¹³⁰ Lovise Aalen, "Expressions of Control, Fear and Devotion," in *The Ethiopian 2000 Elections*, ed. Siegfried Pausewang and Kjetil Tronvoll (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 2000), 85.

¹³¹ See for example "Mass Arrest of Peasants," *Tomar* 24 September 1997, "North Gondar: Hot Bed of Tension," *Wonchif* 19 August 1997, "North Shoa, Land of Misery," *Tobiya* 18 September 1997, "Peasants Attack Ndfs," *Wonchif* 26 August 1997.

The Effect of Organisational Culture

The case of the TPLF and its traditional relationship with Tigray and Tigrayan peasants illustrates how a founding ideology, namely nationalism, combined with a selective recruitment pattern (peasants) and recruitment strategies created a strong element in organisational culture. It also illuminates the fruitfulness of analytically accepting the differences within the EPRDF: it was only the TPLF amongst the EPRDF organisations that had the traits in question. Moreover, as indicated by organisational theory, the physical location of sub-groups even within that organisation influenced the strength of these traits. The closer the TPLF members were to Tigray and the more local actions targeting Eritreans they saw, the more they became influenced by them.

This chapter again clearly illustrates the fruitfulness of applying Kier's theories in addition to other approaches. Organisational culture explains why resource scarcity as well as peasant protests contributed to developments leading to war only in Tigray, and not in other border zones. The close relationship between the TPLF and the peasants and low level civil servants of Tigray, entrenched in TPLF organisational culture, enabled the latter groups to act outside the control of the government and outside both Ethiopian-Eritrean treaties as well as the Ethiopian law, angering Eritreans and creating more tension in the border areas.

The pressure from locals and the respect TPLF gave them also led to a formation of a hardliner group within the TPLF. This group was led by individuals both geographically and culturally closer to the Tigrayan peasants, and is a group that was negative towards all the peace plans that were launched to end the war, and that remains negative to the current Peace Agreement.

Organisational culture played a crucial role. Without the culturally entrenched respect for the Tigrayan peasants, less hostility towards Eritreans would have ensued and peace would have been easier to maintain.

Part III: Policy Guidelines

Chapter 8: From Analytic to Problem-Solving Peace Research

In this chapter implications for the study of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, as well as theoretical implications, are presented. The findings of the previous chapters are then used in order to explore strategies to address the Eritrean-Ethiopian war and potentially in other wars. Firstly, the chapter argues that a focus on organisational culture reveals new information because it avoids treating ethnic groups as more homogeneous than they really are and broadens the focus of examination of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war to include organisational interaction, as well as the culture of important sub-groups within these organisations. Secondly, basing itself on the first argument, the chapter argues that the application of several standard peace research policy guidelines in order to prevent or stop war, such as press support, increasing multilateral trade and employing a powerful third party broker, could, if not implemented in a way that corresponds with local organisational cultural factors, contribute to increased tension in the Eritrean Ethiopian case. General principles are subsequently deduced to address some similar problems and to promote peace.

This last undertaking is grimly topical. Although the Algiers Agreement was supposed to solve the border issue, the verdict of the Border Commission created as a consequence of the Agreement has failed to be respected.¹ On 28 March 2003, the Commission clarified that the area known as the Badme Plains was largely Ethiopian. However, the commission also stated that the village of Badme, the area where the first clash of the war took place and an area that had a prominent role in the war propaganda of both of the belligerents, was inside Eritrea.² Ethiopia raised serious questions about the process and failed to accept the status of Badme, claiming that this issue needed to be readdressed during the demarcation on the ground phase, de-facto rejecting the verdict of the commission. Although the border is patrolled by United Nations soldiers, the situation remains tense.

¹ Eritrea and Ethiopia, *Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia* (US Institute of Peace, 2000 [cited 20 April 2003]); available from www.usip.org/library/index.html.

² International Crisis Group, "Ethiopia and Eritrea: War or Peace," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003), 6.

Implications for the Study of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war

As illustrated in chapter three, most researchers studying the Eritrean-Ethiopian war either treat the two states as homogenous entities, treat the various ethnic groups in the countries as culturally homogeneous or focus on the interest of individuals.³ The war is seen as a product of a problematic border between two states, contradicting interests of two countries or ethnic groups and cultural and historical animosity between ethnic groups, or self interest. This thesis challenges this focus. The war was not only about the relationship between Ethiopians and Eritreans, nor was it only about the relationship between Eritreans and Tigrayans or about the personal interests of the leaders. The Ethiopian society consists of a multitude of organisations with a multitude of often overlapping sub-group cultures. The process that leads to war is an interaction process between all these groups, as well as their Eritrean counterparts, interacting with both the culture of ethnic groups, with the effects of economic factors and with the interests of individuals. However, so far the analysis of such sub-groups and their culture have been neglected, and an important aspect of the development that led to the 1998-2000 war has been lost.

The chapter thus shows how a more traditional approach focusing on ethnic culture fails to explain events easily explained when organisational culture is considered in the analysis. Importantly, it was organisational culture, neither the ethnic culture of Tigrayans nor a more general Ethiopian culture, which enabled the empowerment of the Tigrayan peasants explored in chapter seven. Contradicting TPLF organisational culture, Tigrayan culture traditionally held local peasants in low esteem and mass action had previously been mercilessly put down.⁴ The focus of the study of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war has to be expanded in order to include organisational cultural factors.

Secondly, the findings of the thesis indicate that the dynamics of EPRDF subgroup interaction is an equally important, but equally neglected factor directly influencing the Eritrean-Ethiopian bilateral relationship. A small number of researchers have already emphasised the interaction between the various sub-groups within the TPLF and the effect this had on the outbreak of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, the most notable being Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) veteran, Leenco Lata.⁵ As Lata suggests, sub-group interaction had

³ See chapter three

⁴ Wendy James, Donald Donham, Eisei Kurimoto, and Alessandro Triulzi, *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 4.

⁵ Leenco Lata, "Ethiopia: The Path to War, and the Consequences of Peace," in *Unfinished Business, Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, ed. Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 2005).

an impact on the duration of the war and the various peace negotiations.⁶ However, the theories employed in this thesis also explain how some of the most important sub-groups came into existence. As suggested by the organisational theories presented in chapter one, location within an organisation matters, because geographical location may limit social interaction. This thesis claims, as do many of the members in the dissenter group, that the formation was a consequence of their closeness to Tigray and the popular actions taking place there.⁷ Importantly, the analyses of EPRDF subgroups in this thesis show that explorations of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war have to acknowledge the existence of even sub-groups within organisations, sub-groups with different cultures.

Thirdly, the findings of the thesis indicate that organisations have to be studied over time in order to understand fully their decision making, and that the EPRDF's history similarly has to be explored in order to understand decision making. As explored in chapters five, six and seven, old cultural elements, such as rejected ideology, cultural remains from a guerrilla period and a focus on Tigrayan peasant culture, influenced decision making. The consequence becomes that the organisational history of the most important organisations within a belligerent party has to be understood in order to understand why this belligerent made decisions that prevented peace and damaged the relationship with other belligerents.

In addition, the thesis suggests that other organisations than the organisations in power in Eritrea and Ethiopia have to be studied in order to adequately understand the factors that created the war, namely the press that put pressure on Ethiopian politicians, not for peace, but to act more hawkishly towards their Eritrean counterparts. The organisational theories employed by Elizabeth Kier suggest that the initial recruitment pattern of organisations will influence the culture of organisations. Moreover, it is suggested that a hostile environment will entrench the parts of the organisational culture providing justification for the struggle. This happened in the case of the first generation newspapers in Ethiopia, creating a prevailing pressure for more hawkish actions towards Eritrea and Eritreans.⁸ The theoretical approach employed in this thesis thus reveals new insights: insights, controversially exploring the negative effects of an oppositional press, and insights also explaining why this came about.⁹ Elements of organisational culture within several important organisations had a crucial impact on the developments that led to the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. Moreover, organisational theory

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003, Gebru Asrat, "Letter to the People and Council of Tigray," *The Reporter* 25 April 2001.

⁸ See chapter four

⁹ See chapter four

illuminates aspects of the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict that never have been explored before. The organisational history is seen as a whole, and decision-making is seen as connected with the organisational past.

The main contribution of this thesis to the research into the causes of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war is its demonstration of the importance of organisational culture and also of a broadened research focus, a focus that includes such organisational culture, organisational history and also an examination of seemingly minor actors as the Ethiopian press. In this sense the thesis contains a warning, addressed to the analyst studying this war as well as researchers studying other wars: it warns against examining belligerents as more homogeneous than they really are and against a belief that ethnic or national groups are the only form of groups that can have a distinct culture.

Theoretical Implications

There are several additional theoretical insights offered by this analysis. Firstly, one insight concerns Kier and Swindler's analytic division in settled and unsettled periods of organisational life, the former an organisation that keeps ideological assumptions as unconscious assumptions, the latter keeping it as a conscious belief. It seems as though an organisation can be both settled and unsettled: parts of the EPRDF were still consciously Marxist, while parts kept Marxism as unconscious assumptions. The EPRDF did not totally reject Marxism, nor did it keep it as a hidden agenda. The situation was much more complex. The EPRDF was far from homogenous, while there was a circle within ANDM, around its leader Bereket Simon, pushing for market reform, as well as a circle around Meles Zenawi holding similar opinions. A group around President Gidada saw revolutionary democracy only as a stepping stone in order to achieve more wealth, before communism could be implemented, a New Economic Policy (NEP) of Ethiopia.¹⁰ Importantly, members of Zenawi's group tended to pay lip service to Marxism at party meetings in order to keep the loyalty of the latter group. In this way the findings in the thesis indicates that one has to take the possibilities for several sub-groups into account when employing Kier and Swindler's terms. The EPRDF was both settled and unsettled at the same time, some parts of the

¹⁰ Bereket Simon, Interview, 25 December 2002, Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

organisation unconsciously keeping the former ideological assumptions, some parts still adhering to Marxist ideology and some adhering to it for tactical reasons, attempting to maintain the unity of the organisation.

Nevertheless, the concept of settled and unsettled organisations is still fertile. The respondents dealing with the IMF Agreement and the border negotiation in 1997-1998 acknowledged that the connection between two was subconscious. The discussions of the Technical Agreement went on within the whole organisation, involving members both within and outside the Marxists surrounding President Gidada. Both incidents show that Marxist assumptions were still carried by sub-groups outside President Gidada's group within the EPRDF. Parts of the organisation acted as an unsettled organisation, parts of it acted as a settled organisation. Thus the concept of an organisation going from the status of being settled to being unsettled illustrates vital processes within important sub-groups of the EPRDF.

Secondly, the analysis suggests that categories of organisations may share many historical experiences and thus also share traits of organisational culture. One such category of organisations is the first generation of Ethiopian newspapers, the papers starting up within two years after the new Press Law. These newspapers shared their recruitment patterns and experiences with the government. As explored in chapter four, many of the first generation newspapers recruited from the old Derg papers; the expertise of these old journalists was invaluable to the new newspapers, providing them with journalistic competence. As explored in chapter six, the Ethiopian government tended to overreact towards what it perceived as threats, and to fail to disperse information.¹¹ The latter did not concern only the Tobiya; some very moderate papers were affected, the legendary editor in chief of the moderate Addis Tribune, Tamrat Bekele was for example arrested by the government in 1994, but released shortly afterwards.¹² Even the newspapers of category four, all with relatively good relationships with the government, had such problems. More surprisingly, even newspapers from category five, owned by the state or the party, had problems in getting information.¹³ Three different factors were thus influencing the organisational culture of most of the early first generation papers. The first factor was a common recruitment pattern; the second factor was lack of information and the third factor a continuous hostile relationship with the government, which it is important to point out did not influence the papers from the segments

¹¹ "A Trend of Non-Transparency," *The Reporter* 14 January 1997.

¹² "Tamrat Bekele (Chairman Ceo of Tambek International Ltd) April 24/1944 - June 02/2000," *Addis Tribune* 2 June 2000.

¹³ Sekutire Getachew, Interview, 5 February 2003.

of the press on more friendly terms with the government or the government papers themselves (category four and five),.

These similarities between different organisational cultures indicate that similar external settings and recruitment patterns might homogenise culture across organisational boundaries. On the other hand, such findings do not contradict the need for in-depth research on the various organisations. Moreover, it does not indicate an existence of a homogeneous press culture, or that the papers had been marked by a homogeneous Ethiopian culture. The newspapers of the first wave became different from other Ethiopian newspapers that did not share their experiences. Other newspapers, as the Reporter, with good sources within the government, a less tense relationship with the government, a different recruiting pattern and an editor who was a former TPLF member developed very different organisational culture. The Reporter did not accuse the government of being controlled by Eritrea. Similarly, the Addis Tribune, although amongst the private papers started up in the period 1992 to 1994, showed a very different recruiting pattern, recruiting from the private business sector as well as amongst the old journalists, and also having a businessman as its first editor-in-chief. The Addis Tribune focused on business related stories and invoked the theme of Eritrean control over the EPRDF in a different way from for example the Tobiya.¹⁴ All papers did not have a similar organisational culture, only a segment of them shared similar experiences and recruitment traits. However, this segment was very important, commenting upon events that other papers failed to comment upon.

A Foundation for Policy Guidelines

In sum: this thesis initially asked if organisational culture had an influence on Ethiopian decision-making before and during the war in ways that prevented peace. It also asked how such organisational culture originated. The four previous chapters show how such organisational culture influenced, and how culture had originated in previous ideology, recruitment patterns, organisational propaganda, standard organisational procedures and organisational crises. The examination of various Ethiopian organisations influencing the bilateral relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia provides several new insights never before

¹⁴ "Celebrating Addis Tribune's Tenth Anniversary," *Addis Tribune* 30 August 2002.

revealed in studies of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. Firstly, the organisational culture of independent Ethiopian newspapers prevented them from having a positive role in promoting peace. Elements of organisational culture rather made these newspapers attempt to push the Ethiopian government into being more aggressive. Secondly, former ideology entrenched in the organisational culture of the Ethiopian ruling party had a negative effect on peace negotiations, mainly because the mediator, the United States, a former ideological enemy that had become an ally, was regarded with suspicion. Thirdly, the thesis reveals that values entrenched in organisational culture during the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front's (EPRDF) guerrilla years, namely an emphasis on security and secrecy, had a malign influence on the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship. Lastly, the thesis discloses that the prominent role of the Tigrayan peasants within the organisational culture of the strongest organisation within the EPRDF, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), allowed local border incidents to escalate in the Tigrayan region of Ethiopia. Certain strategies employed to deal with specific elements of organisational culture could have slowed or even stopped the process that led to war or enhanced negotiation attempts. The deduction of such strategies is the task of the following sections.

It is important to point out that the analysis conducted in the previous chapters does not disclose the single most important cause of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war; however, this was never intended. The analysis rather reveals factors that intervened on different stages of the process leading to the conflict, and factors that prevented peace after the war had started. Nevertheless, these elements created tension and contributed to the carnage of the war. Such a process-centred rather than event-centred approach, offers several possibilities for the deduction of policy guidelines. Rather than focusing on one or two major factors that should be changed, it focuses on many small factors, factors that can perhaps be changed without the loss of prestige needed to change the more prominent factors like for example the border. The identification of such factors creates a foundation for the deduction of policy guidelines in the next part of the thesis. The war was not only about the relationship between Ethiopians and Eritreans, nor was it only about the relationship between Eritreans and Tigrayans, nor about the personal interests of the leaders. The war was rather about the interaction between a multitude of organisations with a multitude of often overlapping sub-group cultures, interacting with both the culture of ethnic groups and with the interests of individuals. Several of these sub-groups within the Ethiopian society, such as the media, the Tigrayan locals and the sub-groups within the EPRDF need to be addressed when designing policy advice. In order to prevent the potential negative influence of these groups, their members

either need to be accommodated in ways that prevent their negative influence on decision - making, or the subculture of these groups has to be changed, sometimes in ways that seemingly contradict traditional policy advice dealing with conflict.

Media and the Prevention of Conflict

This thesis has analysed the elements of organisational culture that influenced the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship negatively so as to push the countries towards war, and also so as to prevent a successful negotiation outcome after the war had started. Chapter four focused on the role organisational culture had in the Ethiopian oppositional press. The main conclusion was that inheritance from the Derg made several newspapers adopt a puppet theme, describing the EPRDF as puppets of the Eritreans. EPRDF leaders had to adopt a more and more hawkish stand against Eritrea in order to show how invalid the puppet theme was.

It is a common view within liberal and democratic thought that a free press is important to prevent conflict. Political philosophers from John Stuart Mill to Amartya Sen argue for the importance of the press.¹⁵ Mill for example argues that a public press and the resulting free debate together create an arena where arguments can be met with counterarguments and new views in order to prevent individual and societal self-deception.¹⁶ Such philosophical arguments are reflected in the various agendas for good governance, ways to improve the governance in third world countries, bringing them up to the supposedly higher standards of western countries. The General Secretary of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, for instance claimed that a free press was an essential part of good governance, which in turn would lead to peace.¹⁷ Moreover, in policy defining reports, Kofi Annan actively encouraged and encourages support for the free press in third world countries.¹⁸

This belief has to a certain extent been challenged by media researchers. Ross Howard for example claims that:

¹⁵ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 3 (1999): 7.

¹⁶ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 19-56.

¹⁷ Kofi Annan, "Report of the Secretary-General on Prevention of Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization," (New York: United Nations, 1999), 10-14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-27.

The news media is also capable of causing considerable damage when no-one is intentionally wielding it at all. Under ideal conditions the news media is supposed to have a mind of its own and operate according to professional codes of conduct. But its culture of professional and financial instincts can drive the media to practices which obsess with violence and influence opinion in socially destabilizing ways. Under less than ideal conditions, media bias, inaccuracy and sensationalism can generate xenophobia and violent conflict.¹⁹

Howard argues that there are two factors that under some circumstances can lead to a negative impact even from a free press, namely sensationalism and partisanship. The findings of this thesis show the existence of a third one, namely organisational culture. A majority of the Ethiopian oppositional papers failed utterly in the task given to them by Mill: they did not open up a public debate, their opinions were static and few counterarguments were included in their articles. Importantly, this does not mean that the lack of a free press would fully have prevented the war, nor is it to say that a free press can never contribute to peace. However, in the Ethiopian case, the free press pressed their agenda of hostility towards Eritrea, contributing to a generally negative public discourse about Eritrea, and put pressure on several politicians.²⁰

Contrary to some of the advice within the good governance agenda, press support actually seems to have had the potential to make a situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia tenser. Moreover, it seems as though financial support for independent newspapers, like the *Tobiya* during the years 1994 to 1998, could have led to an increase in the distribution of articles depicting Eritreans as evil, and the number of articles depicting the government as their puppets. As argued in chapter four, the frequency of such articles scared Eritreans, intimidating politicians of Eritrean origins as well as possibly pushing the government in a hawkish direction.²¹ Such developments made the relationship between the two belligerents even more hostile.

Based on these findings, this thesis thus suggests that general advice to support a free press in order to prevent war has to be treated with caution, and that each separate case merits

¹⁹ Ross Howard, "The Media's Role in War and Peace Building" (paper presented at the Conference on the Role of Media in Public Scrutiny and Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector, Budapest, 6-9 February 2003), 1.

²⁰ Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003.

²¹ Medhane Tadesse, and John Young., "Tplf: Reform or Decline," *Review of African Political Economy* 97, no. 3 (2003), Yemane Kidane, Interview, 28 January 2003, International Freedom of Expression Exchange, *Ifex Alerts* 3 January 1996, 13, and 12 December 1995 (International Freedom of expression exchange, 1996 [cited 14/03 2005]); available from <http://www.ifex.org/es/content/view/full/3337/>.

detailed examination. Painstaking attention has to be paid to the details of press support programmes in order to promote reflection rather than habitual thinking and hawkish newspapers. In this way it follows Ross Howard, when he argues for a more holistic approach to press support schemes, but also going beyond him when arguing for also taking the organisational culture of the newspapers into account when constructing press support schemes and aid programmes.²² Simplistic press support can make a situation tenser, as large papers with cultural traits inherited from previous regimes are supported.

Nonetheless, thoroughly planned press support might have a positive effect. Importantly, not all newspapers shared the organisational culture that facilitated the spread of the puppet theme. Several of the first generation newspapers had journalists that had worked for the Derg, while newer papers, what Shimelis Bonsa called “the second generation of Ethiopian newspapers”, had a different recruitment pattern.²³ However, the second generation newspapers were weak, with few educated journalists and little organisational experience.²⁴ The newcomers’ lack of access to information and little experience in investigative journalism made it easier to adopt the editorial stance of larger and more experienced papers. Support for the second generation papers and providing them with financial resources, information and training, might have created an alternative to the first generation papers.

Importantly, the large first generation papers, such as the Tobiya, cannot be blamed for the negative development. There is little doubt that they displayed appalling journalism, but the government also exposed them to violence that in turn made their journalism even worse, becoming more confrontational and also less based on external sources. In addition, the government had an extreme tendency for secrecy, which to a certain extent opened up for the circulation of rumours. Pressure should have been put on both parties in this conflict; this could have been done by both third party governments as well as by international organisations. The government should have been pressured to abide by its own laws and to provide information to the press. Some of the large first generation private papers could have been pressured to ensure the quality of their sources, or tentatively ensure that they actually had sources. Donors could have supported smaller and newer newspapers, more open to new impulses, and they could have trained journalists in critical journalism. By doing this, they could have contributed to ending the dispersion of elements of organisational culture with negative effects, through enforcing rigorous quality standards.

²² Ross Howard, "The Media's Role in War and Peace Building" (paper presented at the Conference on the Role of Media in Public Scrutiny and Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector, Budapest, 6-9 February 2003), 12.

²³ Shimelis Bonsa, *Survey of the Private Press in Ethiopia 1991-1999* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2000), 57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Moreover, donors could have created arenas where Ethiopian journalists could meet Eritrean journalists and/or journalists from the entire Horn of Africa (including Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya), thus making the organisational culture of both parties open to scrutiny. Such gatherings could create opportunities for fruitful discussions that could introduce alternative perspectives in a much cheaper way than flying in journalists and editors from Europe and USA. It could give the smaller Ethiopian newspapers new role models, replacing some of the larger newspapers adhering to the puppet theme. Indeed, many of the Somali and Kenyan papers, such as the *Hatuf*, the *Jamhurya* and the *East African Standard* are of high quality.²⁵ Targeted donor support actively using regional actors might prevent malign elements of organisational culture from spreading, thereby also facilitating a true discussion between papers holding different views. Some existing programmes like the cooperation project between the Centre for Human Rights in Oslo, Gimlekollen Journalist College in Norway and several Ethiopian newspapers can be expanded in such a direction emphasising a regional rather than a solely Ethiopian profile.

The international peace movement could play a part in improving Ethiopian journalism. Parts of the peace movement arranged various courses promoting press ethics and peace journalism.²⁶ These courses have themes like “War Journalism - the dominant narratives of conflict reporting and how to recognise them”, or “Getting beyond the sport and court paradigm of winner takes it all.” Indeed, some of the workshops of the peace movement encourage journalists to answer questions like: “What is this article not telling us?” They contain exercises that encourage journalists to “identify the important facts of A and how they are perceived by B and vice versa”.²⁷ These courses could indeed have been good tools to create an awareness of organisational culture amongst Ethiopian journalists. Academics also have a large potential to contribute to peace. Firstly, they might counter the lack of information facing the Ethiopian papers, by establishing media-academic links, and academics might provide the media with alternative sources of information. This can be achieved by creating joint seminars initiated by Somali, Kenyan and Djiboutian academicians, rather than by Europeans. There have been some achievements on this front already. One

²⁵ Somali papers are in general vibrant, innovative and good despite the conditions in the country, however their circulation numbers are small. *Hatuf* will e.g. publish around 1,400 issues a day.

²⁶ Transcend Peace University, *Peace Journalism* (Transcend Peace University, 5 October 2004 [cited 5 October 2004]); available from www.transcend.org/tpu/j1_course.htm.

²⁷ *Ibid.* ([cited]).

example was the Horn of Africa Conference III: Transforming the Horn of Africa – Culture of War Vs War Culture” arranged by the Somali International Rehabilitation Centre.²⁸

The conflict between the oppositional newspapers and the government also hurt oppositional political organisations, which got little, if any, information from the government, and often misinformation from the private papers, information confirming negative images of Eritrea. One way to counter a potential lack of information is to institutionalise questioning, creating arenas where the government and the opposition can meet regularly for public discussions. First, institutionalised questioning will allow both the opposition and the government to get direct information about each others’ views. Secondly, the two parties will become used to discussing with each other, and will get to know each other directly instead of through articles in papers heavily influenced by their own organisational culture. Thirdly, the press might become used to such interactive discussions instead of one side presenting their arguments and this might influence editorial style. Again, this is a development that has already started. The Inter Africa Group initiated high level public meetings between the opposition and the government in 2003, and similar discussions were also held before the 2005 elections. Such arrangements could be expanded and their frequency increased.

The conclusion must be that all press support is not necessary good press support, and that a free press does not always promote peace. As the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Aid, Hilde Frafjord-Johnson, claims, “badly trained journalists are like badly trained poodles: more good as simple amusements than real watchdogs against the government.”²⁹ The same can be said about journalists influenced by a too strong organisational culture. Press support is not necessarily a good thing; a private press does not necessarily have a positive role in a society but it can be of immense value if supported in a proper way. The issue of press support is a very important issue in Ethiopia today. The opposition and the private press in Ethiopia remain hostile towards the peace with Eritrea and the Algiers Agreement.³⁰ There are several international support schemes envisaged to support just the newspapers arguing against the Peace Agreement. Paradoxically such support could lead to increased agitation for war, and malign consequences of foreign press support schemes have to be addressed.

²⁸ Somali International Rehabilitation Centre, "Programme Workshops" (paper presented at the Horn of Africa Conference III: Transforming Horn of Africa- Culture of War Vs War Culture, Lund, 28 August 2004).

²⁹ Hilde Frafjord-Johnson, "Utdanning Av Journalister" (paper presented at the Jubilee for the cooperation agreement between the Journalism college of Gimlekollen and Addis Ababa University, Gimlekollen, 17 February 2004), 2.

³⁰ See for example articles as: "Robust Democracy: Sentinel of Peace!," *The Reporter* 15 January 2005.

Trade and Neutrality

Theorists such as Richard Cobden and Norman Angell argue for trade liberalisation as a measure to stop war.³¹ When trade is liberated several mechanisms arise which are supposed to create peace. Trade can enhance peace between former belligerents by capturing the impact of trade on the states' welfare with respect to consumers, producers, exporters and importers.³² The gain trading partners get from trade, in theory creating cheaper commodities for all parties, is seen as deterring the parties from engaging in warfare. Moreover, investment and trade might serve as media for communicating interests, preferences and needs on a broad range of matters among trading partners. Trade is seen as getting people involved with individuals from other countries thus creating social bonds that prevent hostile feelings and animosity.³³

As John O'Neal, Bruce Russett and Michael Berbaum claim, these theoretical arguments are today supported by many peace researchers and policy makers alike.³⁴ The promotion of peace through free-trade is indeed one of the explicit targets of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.³⁵ However, the findings in this thesis indicate that such policy advice might have counterproductive effects, especially when it is a result of foreign pressure and not properly adjusted to local factors as for example organisational culture. During the period just before the war, from 1997 until 1998, the IMF engaged Ethiopia in a structural adjustment programme. It is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss the advantages and failures of structural adjustment programmes.³⁶ Nevertheless, concessions towards the IMF were linked with concessions towards Eritrea, allowing fewer concessions to be made towards the latter. The implementation of the structural adjustment programme enabled an issue linkage between the negotiations on the structural adjustment programme

³¹ Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1933), Richard Cobden, *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903).

³² Ruth and Seev Hirsch Arad, "Peacemaking and Vested Interests: International Economic Transactions," *International Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1981).

³³ Solomon W. Polachek, "Why Do Democracies Cooperate More and Fight Less: The Relationship between International Trade and Cooperation," *Review of International Economics* 5, no. 3 (1997), Solomon W. Polachek, "Conflict and Trade: An Economics Approach to Political International Interactions," in *Economics of Arms Reduction and the Peace Process*, ed. Walter Isard and Charles H. Anderton (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1992).

³⁴ John Oneal, Bruce Russett and Michael Berbaum, "Causes of Peace: Democracy, Interdependence and International Organizations, 1885-1992" (paper presented at the Annual meeting of American Political Science Society, California, 31 August 2001).

³⁵ Horst Köhler, "Welcome Address: Peace Pole Dedication with the Goi Peace Foundation," (Washington: 2002), 1.

³⁶ For analyses of the Ethiopian-IMF relationship see: Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (London: The Penguin books, 2002), The International Monetary Fund, *The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Imf* (The International Monetary Fund, 2005 [cited 1 July 2005]); available from www.imf.org/external/country/ETH/.

and the negotiations with Eritrea to have influence. The linkage happened because members of the TPLF felt that the IMF and Eritrea were allies, both representing the global bourgeoisie. Although officially rejected, old Marxist ideological assumptions about the global bourgeoisie still had influence, even as much as seven years after they were officially abandoned. The result was that concessions to the IMF were seen as equalling concessions to Eritrea. Through subjective issue linkage the IMF was seen as Eritrea's ally. The IMF was actually a participant in the conflict without knowing it. Such beliefs worsened the relations with Eritrea, which was quite ironic since the Eritreans actually held similar beliefs about the IMF.³⁷

The findings in this thesis suggest that international organisations promoting certain agendas of good governance must examine properly the previous ideology of the most important organisations in the countries with whom they are cooperating. If international partners fail to conduct such an examination, the result could be increased tension. In the Eritrean-Ethiopian case the IMF's agenda to promote free trade indirectly contributed to conflict, probably without the IMF understanding it themselves.

It might be argued that the Eritrean-Ethiopian case actually supports the advice that free trade creates peace, as the end of the free trade area between the two countries led to conflicts as the borders were closed down. This is a complex issue, beyond the scope of this thesis. The point here is that pressure for free trade can, if applied without knowing the local setting, be counterproductive if the aim is to create peace.

Organisational Culture and Mediation

The role of organisational culture in the negotiation process also merits closer attention, as does the interaction between organisational culture and the mediators trying to create peace.

Peace and conflict researchers like Marieke Kleiboer and Ronald Fisher have previously discussed how the characteristics of a mediator affect the process in terms of mediator impartiality, leverage and the like.³⁸ Ronald Fisher claims that:

³⁷ Gøte Hansson, "Building New States, Lessons from Eritrea," *World Institute for Economic Research discussion paper* (2001): 92.

³⁸ Ronald J. Fisher, *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2001), Marieke Kleiboer, "Understanding Success and Failure in International Mediation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40, no. 2 (1996).

The received view on third-party bias is that the third-party should be impartial, without favouring one party over the other, neutral, and not determining outcomes one way or the other. Impartiality is seen as one of the main requirements of acceptability by the parties, and as a prerequisite to establishing a relationship of trust. It serves as the basis for effectively carrying out the role of intervener.³⁹

Impartiality is thus stressed as important.⁴⁰

The Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict also shows that the perceived position of the mediator in the international system is not neutral for the results of the negotiation process; the point in this case was ideological. The USA was seen as the defender of capitalist ideology, and this was seen as having a direct implication on their mediation, they were seen as biased towards Eritrea. The intervention of the United States during the vote over the Technical Agreements failed. The issue linkage between the war and a perceived global struggle against the USA influenced the USA's efficiency as an arbitrator between the parties. Parts of the EPRDF did not see the USA as neutral because of the EPRDF's organisational culture.⁴¹

As the South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested: "Many mediators make serious mistakes. However, they believe that their authority and mandate derive from their personal stature, or the body which appointed them, rather than from the disputant parties."⁴² The authority and legitimacy thus derives from the belligerents. In this way the perception of the belligerents also becomes important for the legitimacy of the mediator, a perception that might be formed by organisational culture.

Conflict researchers Kevin Avruch and Peter Black have proposed that the first step in a successful intervention should be to carry out a cultural analysis of the conflict. They suggest an in-depth analysis, going beyond one's own cultural identity, seeking instead to ascertain the particular cultural dimensions of the conflict and to assess their relevance to its expression and potential resolution.⁴³ The findings of this thesis indicate that organisational culture, including former ideological assumptions and their strength within the implicated

³⁹ Ronald J. Fisher, *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2001), 19-20.

⁴⁰ For an alternative view see: Saadia and William Zartman Touval, "Mediation in International Conflicts," in *Mediation Research: The Process and Effectiveness of Third-Party Intervention*, ed. D. Pruitt and Associates K. Kressel (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989).

⁴¹ Negasso Gidada, Interview, 31 December 2002.

⁴² Laurie Nathan, "A South African Policy Framework on Peace Initiatives in Africa" (paper presented at the Second Workshop with Civil Society: Draft paper on Peace Support, Pretoria, 1997), 5.

⁴³ Kevin Avruch, and Peter Black, "Conflict Resolution in Intercultural Settings: Problems and Prospects," in *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and Application*, ed. D. Sandole and H. van der Merwe Dennis J. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

organisation, has to be a part of such cultural analysis. Moreover, it indicates that such cultural analysis might be necessary if one wants to identify which mediators are perceived as biased by important sub-segments of the various involved belligerents. An ideal facilitator/mediator should not be a country or organisation that is perceived as hostile by parts of the elite of an involved country.

Although power might be important on occasion, as one might need military or economic power in order to enforce settlements, it is also important that the mediator is seen as neutral. Parts of the EPRDF did not see the USA as neutral, and this created problems regardless of Meles Zenawi's threat that the United States would use its relatively large power if Ethiopia did not comply, in fact this threat proved counterproductive to a settlement.

If a mediator with a controversial ideological background is chosen, perhaps because of its power in the international system, the rhetoric of the mediator has to be adapted to the situation. It was very unfortunate that the United States, the old enemy of the TPLF, was seen as the main instigator of the pressure applied on Ethiopia to implement the Technical Agreement. If other actors, such as for example the European Union or China, had taken the lead or even acted as equal partners to the United States, perhaps less hostility would have followed, as they had been less prominent in the TPLF's pre-1991 discourse.⁴⁴

The global peace movement has an advantage when dealing with the belligerents if they are willing to use it, as it is generally viewed as being critical to western interventions in the third world, and it includes many former Marxists. These two factors make it more likely that their advice would be listened to, as organisational culture within the EPRDF enhanced these values. It will also be less likely to perceive them as agents of foreign powers; after all, the peace movement is usually critical towards their own governments. This gives the movement an additional advantage and a momentum if they want to engage themselves actively. Certain views about conflict can be promoted and alternative strategies can be envisaged more freely.⁴⁵ The Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict could perhaps also be more efficiently dealt with by a country sharing the same ideological foundations: a former Marxist regime in transition or a country run by former Marxists, such as for example South Africa, or Algeria, who later actually successfully took a more active part in the negotiations. In this way a form of subsidiarity could have been applied.

⁴⁴ The EU successfully took the lead in the troublesome negotiations between the EPRDF and the opposition after the elections in 2005, thus indicating that they could engage themselves successfully as mediators.

⁴⁵ However, this demands a will on behalf of the peace movement to engage themselves in other conflicts than Afghanistan, Iraq and the Palestine-Israeli conflict.

The European Union defines subsidiarity as “deciding an issue at a decision level as close as possible to the persons it concerns.”⁴⁶ Perhaps a form of ideational subsidiarity, to have a mediator that is as close as possible to both of the parties with regards to ideology and ideological past, would be an advantageous way to deal with the Eritrean-Ethiopian case. Perhaps such a principle of ideational subsidiarity could be advantageous, if adapted to local conditions, in other cases.

The Events in Tigray

Local initiatives by the border population in Tigray, actions that influenced the TPLF’s politicians, also seem to provide valuable insights for some of the more general approaches to policy guidelines, especially approaches focusing on democratisation as a way to achieve peace. This tradition can be traced back to the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who claimed that: “If the consent of the citizenry is required in order to determine whether or not there will be a war, it is natural that they consider all its calamities before committing themselves to so risky a game.”⁴⁷ Kant’s discussion is complicated, and he has strong reservations with regards to the positive effects of popular influence. Nevertheless, the argument that this mechanism prevents wars has been presented by notable peace researchers as Rudolph J. Rummel. For Rummel, the population has to sacrifice its sons and daughters in a war, so this will lead to them to use their influence to prevent it from happening. If such popular influence is allowed, if their influence is efficient, if there is a democratic society, the likelihood for war will decrease.⁴⁸ This line of argumentation also became a part of the good governance rhetoric of institutions actively involved in peacemaking, now also including informal process of political participation as tools to promote peace. Former General Secretary of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali for example claimed that “Promoting formal and informal processes of political participation” was a form of peace building, preventing war.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The European Union, *Glossary: Subsidiarity* (The European Union, 2005 [cited 19 April 2005]); available from www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cig/q400s.html.

⁴⁷ Immanuel Kant, "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, ed. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 113.

⁴⁸ Rudolph J. Rummel, "Political Systems, Violence and War" (paper presented at the United States Institute of Peace Conference, Arlie House, Arlie Virginia, 1 June 1988).

⁴⁹ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping, Report of the Secretary General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on the 31 January 1992," (New York: The United Nations, 1992), 55.

However, far from constraining the Ethiopian government, through locally instigated actions in Tigray, informal political participation ended up pressurising the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship in a negative direction. The way locals were allowed to instigate such actions was a serious problem in the Eritrean-Ethiopian case, creating distrust on the Eritrean side. Importantly, the events in Tigray were driven by locally instigated actions: they were not a part of a plot by the central Ethiopian leadership to provoke war. If that was the case, then Ethiopia would not have refused to mobilise, nor have downsized their army.⁵⁰

Several peace researchers warn that popular participation can have damaging effects. Although arguing for popular influence, even Rummel warns that the population “superheated” with hate and revenge can “drive democratic nations to war” under the “irresistible” influence of “ambitious politicians”.⁵¹ Researchers such as for example Håvard Hegre warn that democratisation actually increases the likelihood of armed conflict, until the process has gone beyond a certain threshold, only then it will promote peace.⁵² The findings of this thesis indicate that critics of policy advice based on a belief that democratisation and popular participation inevitably lead to peace, have a point. It supports the conclusions of conflict researcher Alexander Kozhemiakin that popular influence does not necessarily neutralise a negative [in the sense that it promotes conflict] cultural legacy but may make government leaders more susceptible to popular hawkish appeals and nationalist pressures working against international cooperation.⁵³

Incidents in Tigray remain a serious problem today: As present day General Secretary of the United Nations Kofi Annan writes in his 2003 progress report to the Security Council: “Since my last report, the number of Ethiopian herdsmen and livestock entering the [the demilitarized] Zone on a daily basis in some areas in Sector Centre has increased even more.”⁵⁴ As late as on 21 June 2005, the United Nations warned that such “small-scale events, if left unchecked, had the potential to spiral out of control and evolve into a larger crisis”, warning of a rise in the number of incidents.⁵⁵ The greatest concern of senior Ethiopian officials is

⁵⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997-98* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998), Alemseged Gebre Amlak, Interview, 26 March 2003.

⁵¹ Rudolph J. Rummel, *Power Kills: Democracy as a Method of Non-Violence* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 105.

⁵² Håvard Hegre, “The Limits of the Liberal Peace” (PhD Thesis, University of Oslo, 2004), 131.

⁵³ Alexander V. Kozhemiakin, *Expanding the Zone of Peace? Democratization and International Security* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Kofi Annan, “Progress Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea,” (New York: The United Nations, 2003), 1.

⁵⁵ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)/ UN office for coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Unmee Warns of Continuing Border Incidents* (Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)/ UN office for coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2005 [cited 27 July 2005]); available from http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=48222&SelectRegion=Horn_of_Africa&SelectCountry=ETHIOPIA-ERITREA.

often that “The Tigrayans would instigate skirmishes, and this could erupt into full scale war.”⁵⁶ The warnings from Tigrayans are ominous: leaders of the Tigray Regional Administration have stated unambiguously that people along the border cannot accept the ruling. There are several signs that popular pressure is being applied to the TPLF. The TPLF, previously immensely popular in Tigray, almost lost out to a more hawkish candidate in the border province Irob during the 2005 elections, probably because of distrust of the TPLF’s supposed leniency towards Eritrea. TPLF officials increasingly need to please their constituency. The split within the TPLF now means that the Ethiopian leaders have rivals contesting over the support of Tigrayans, and the emphasis on the Tigrayan culture remains important within the organisation. Tsegay Berhe, President of the Administration, warns that accepting the decision to concede traditionally Ethiopian-administered areas would weaken the TPLF, the leading party within the ruling EPRDF, in the eyes of the Tigrayan people.⁵⁷ The interaction between various factors described in chapter eight still remains, the natural resources in the area are scarce and new clashes, like the ones before 1997, might happen again. Several organisations active in Tigray with a vested interest in the conflict, such as for example the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, add more tension to the current situation.

It becomes important that mediators and peace makers recognise the existence of the pressure from the Tigrayan constituency of the TPLF. The element of the organisational culture of the TPLF which enables local informal channels of influence is one of the core elements in the culture of the organisation and will be almost impossible to change. This places responsibility on the already overburdened United Nations Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE). Through civil affairs programmes tension can be eased and information can be gathered, making it possible for the UNMEE to prevent local clashes in the demilitarised zone. As the International Crisis Group claims, it is important to: “Create a rapid response verification capability to troubleshoot border difficulties and deter those who may want to manufacture a problem, including to embarrass a national government intent on fulfilling its obligations.”⁵⁸

The resource situation in the border area remains a source of local conflict, resources are scarce and poor Ethiopian and Eritrean locals have many incentives to fight over them. That is why the international society needs to address several of the root economic problems in Tigray. Generous foreign aid might prevent resource conflicts from emerging during a future

⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, "Ethiopia and Eritrea: War or Peace," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003), 8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, ii.

demarcation, while local development projects might make resources less scarce. This thesis can only concur with the advice promoted by the International Crisis Group and its advice to the governments of the United States, the African Union and the European Union to provide: “Generous compensation and development aid to affected local populations, including support for relocation, reconstruction of infrastructure, and restoration of livelihoods.”⁵⁹ In the longer term, arranging contact between villages on both sides of the border might be a good strategy, creating an arena for discussing problems and dissolving tension. However, given the closed border, this is not yet feasible.

How to Deal With Secrecy

Although the EPRDF won the war, the analysis in chapter five demonstrates that the EPRDF failed to engage successfully in dialogue elements within their own organisation. Previous analysis demonstrated that the slow flow of information created large problems and that the organisation often acted sluggishly and clumsily. It could be in the interests of the EPRDF to improve their information dissemination abilities; indeed this is recognised by members of the party.⁶⁰

There are several ways to approach this problem. Third party mediators, both governments and organisations, may create institutions where individuals with a relatively independent background, and/or with a different ideological background, can screen the government. A good alternative is to involve traditional elders or technocrats, groups that might be less threatening to the government. Many such arenas ought to be created. The EPRDF has partly institutionalised somewhat similar procedures through their earlier mentioned principle of Gimgemma, where civil servants and party members are submitted to an oral review by their peers. However, the aim of Gimgemma is to discuss the performance of civil services and does not examine in depth the hidden cultural assumptions underlying decisions. Furthermore, the Gimgemma is not performed by outsiders or technocrats, but by party officials, with a similar background to that of the person questioned, sharing the same organisational culture. Shared organisational culture could hinder an exploration of this same organisational culture. In addition, the Gimgemma is not an interaction; often it functions

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003, Techa Uqa, Interview, 16 December 2002.

rather like an interrogation. An opening of the Gimemma, allowing trusted externals to participate and making the process into an interaction rather than a one-sided questioning process, is advised. This might sound naïve: the EPRDF may be seen as a closed organisation that would refuse to implement such policies, partly because of their own organisational culture. However, members of the EPRDF have themselves acknowledged how many problems their cult of secrecy has created for them.⁶¹ For third parties to the conflict, it could be fruitful to ask the EPRDF if it could be possible to implement such routines; for the EPRDF it could be useful to implement such routines itself.

Another way to address the problem is to consider legislation. As explored in chapter four, the Ethiopian Press Law was, although revolutionary in the Ethiopian setting because it, for the first time in Ethiopia allowed independent newspapers, confusing and allowed the government many opportunities for punishing newspapers and keeping information secret. In 2003 the Ethiopian government issued a draft of a new Press Law. While this Press Law acknowledged the right of the press to have information (Article 3.1.), it included restrictions on who could lead and start newspapers (Article 5.), various paragraphs dealing with how to stop legally the information flow (Articles 14 to 20) and a relatively vague right to appeal (Article 31).⁶² Moreover, the draft uses several relatively vague terms to define newspapers that can be censured, such as for example “immoral”. As the international press institute claims: “The term carries with it certain religious connotations and is so wide and subjective that it might once again be abused by the Ethiopian government.”⁶³ A way to challenge the cult of secrecy could be to challenge some of the legislative problems in the Act. Clearly the vague right to appeal and the many articles dealing with how to prevent the disclosure of information give civil servants and EPRDF officials excuses to follow their old organisational culture and chose secrecy rather than openness.

Too much secrecy creates rumours, as it clearly did in the Ethiopian case. Refraining from giving information will lead to, and indeed did lead to, serious rumours. Rumours might influence popular opinion and for this reason even decrease the options available to a government.

⁶¹ Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu Hywat, Interview, 5 March 2003, Techa Uqa, Interview, 16 December 2002.

⁶² The Ethiopian Ministry of Information, *A Proclamation to Provide for the Freedom of the Press* (The Reporter, 2003 [cited 1 April 2005]); available from www.ethiopianreporter.com/drpress.php.

⁶³ International Press Institute, *Comments on the Ethiopian Press Law* (International Press Institute, 2003 [cited 1 April 2005]); available from www.freemedia.at/R_EthiopiaLaw17.12.03.htm.

General Principles

This chapter concludes that an independent press might in some cases damage the possibilities for peace, and that trade agreements could damage the prospects for peace through issue linkages.

Moreover, it suggests that popular informal participation might promote rather than prevent conflict and that the ideological background of a belligerent can make mediation by third parties much harder, that is if the third party have previously been defined as an ideological enemy. Lastly, it suggests that information is important in order to avoid rumours damaging both parties in the negotiation process. These findings will form the foundation of a set of general principles.

The above analysis is based on information from the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict only. It may be argued that this limits the value of the deduced principles. However, as Robert K Yin claims, one might generalise analytically, suggesting that policy generalisations may be important for cases with large similarities. Nevertheless, deduced principles have to be examined specifically in relation to case specific information from these other cases.⁶⁴

The deduced general principles below, based on the previous analysis, might give clues for dealing with factors that can ruin peace processes and make a tense situation even tenser. Such principles can be used by governments, organisations and academics alike, as long as they are interested in addressing violent conflicts, or conflicts believed to be on the way to becoming violent. All in all, seven principles are deduced:

- A principle of *examining elements of organisational culture and remains of old ideology before implementing policies directed against belligerents*. It seems to be negative to create tension in an already tense phase by imposing policy that is controversial because of issue linkages created by organisational culture. In this case, an agenda that was supposed to create growth but also, according to the IMF, supposed to create peace, free trade, was linked to other issues and thus created tension.
- *A principle of ideational subsidiarity*. The principle of subsidiarity is usually defined as deciding an issue at a decision level as close as possible to the persons it concerns.

⁶⁴ Robert K. Yin, "Case Study Research: Design and Methods," (Thousand oaks: Sage, 2003).

The principle of ideational subsidiarity is to have a mediator that is as close as possible to both of the parties with regards to ideology and ideological past.

- A principle of *examining elements of organisational culture before designing programmes of press support, and to acknowledge that a free press is not necessarily good free press*. Supporting the private press in an erroneous way might facilitate aggression. Sometimes the support has to be planned in order to hinder malign elements of organisational culture from spreading.
- *The principle of open journalistic and academic channels*. Discussion will expose journalists and researchers to assumptions beyond their own organisational and national culture. Regional academics and journalists should handle such tasks if possible.
- *The principle of creating arenas of contact between the opposition and the government*. The principle is most important in a phase just before conflict and just after. It will make the organisational culture of larger newspapers less important.
- *The principle of minimising secrecy*. As admitted by EPRDF officials, this should be in the interests of the Ethiopian government, as it gives them more freedom of choice in the long run.
- *The principle of institutionalised questioning by externals*. Individuals lacking the organisational culture of most of the organisational members might see culturally based assumptions more clearly.

Conclusions

The thesis contains many warnings to future peace makers. It asks them to remember that small elements like the action of local herdsmen, vanished ideologies or old standard operational procedures might have influence. Such factors are harder to discover and to understand as they do not figure in the argumentation of the belligerents, indeed the belligerents are often not aware of them. These factors are not the large factors discussed in

the newspapers, they are not big economic issues or contesting views on the demarcation of a border. Nevertheless, they might create uncertainty and might have a crucial impact on both the process leading to war and the negotiations attempting to end it.

It warns against taking a homogenous state or ethnic-wide culture for granted, as sub-groups often have different and non-ethnically defined cultures. The Tigrayan culture did for example not explain why peasants were empowered by the TPLF, organisational culture did.

Secondly, it warns potential peace makers about applying existing policy guidelines for peace, especially the ones stipulated in the good governance agenda, for example support for the private press, liberalisation of trade, popular participation, in a simplistic manner. It suggests that if such strategies had been applied in the Ethiopian case without taking the special circumstances of this case into account, they would actually have had the potential to make things worse.

The thesis contains a third warning. The Eritrean-Ethiopian war is not cold yet and the international community cannot afford to look away and hope for the best. Accordingly, both academics, journalists, international organisations, states and peace activists still need to focus on solving the current situation.

However, the findings also suggest that there are ways of dealing with the problems. This chapter suggest that regional organisations and journalistic and academic networks might have a potentially large role in creating arenas that can make organisations aware of their own organisational culture and the constraints it creates and it suggests principles guiding how to achieve this. These findings suggest that there is hope. Elements of organisational culture may have negative effects that might be changed or accommodated - the most important thing is that one is aware of them.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide¹

(The contents of the two pages were combined into one page and used when interviewing)

Page 1: Main Subjects:

- 1) Respondent's background, story of his/her life. (This is a good way of getting a respondent to relax; besides it may contain important information).
- 2) Respondent's organisational background, organisational heroes and rituals.
- 3) How his organisational background has formed him/her, in the respondent's own words.
- 4) Organisational rites, taboos, managerial styles, heroes.
- 5) Critical events for his/her organisation, his/ her perceived estimate of the psychological effects. (Cognitive interview standards applied)
- 6) Spirit of the organisation.
- 7) How he/ she felt if they changed organisation. (Cognitive interview standards applied).
- 8) Which groups of society he/ she admires.
- 9) When he/she changed his opinion on different events. (Cognitive interview standards applied)
- 10) When he/she changed his/her opinion on Eritrea. (Cognitive interview standards applied)
- 11) What he/ she felt when speaking in the decision making group. (Cognitive interview standards applied)
- 12) When he/ she felt that the mode changed in the group. (Cognitive interview standards applied)
- 13) If he/ she felt that the group was isolated.
- 14) Respondent's comments to the interview, additional information that the respondent wants to add.

¹ The interview guide is based on suggestions and a tentative structure made by Ib Andersen in his: "Valg af organisations-sociologisk metoder" (How to Choose organization-sociological research methodology). Samfundsliteratur, København.

Page 2: Key words

Events	Agreements	Ideas	Non-state organisations and ethnic groups.	Governmental Organisations	Themes
The occupation of Adi Murug	The Asmara pact of 1993.	Eritrean leaders dream of Singapore as an economic ideal	Tigray and Tigrinya	EPRDF	Zobas system
Italian Occupation of Ethiopia in 1936	The agreement made between Italy and Ethiopia, signed on 10th July 1900	Eritrean vs Ethiopian idea of nationhood	The Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF).	The Joint Border Commission	Disputed territorial zone on the Badme plains
The Refusal of Nafka, November 1997	The Khartoum meeting, held in April 1988 (connected to the closing of the Berka rout)	The organisational ideas	The Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF)	The House of the Federation	The public and organisational discussion might have hardened the attitudes
Mediations preceding the war		Eritrea	The Kunama	Committee for States' Affairs	The GTZ Tigray map
The Badme incident		Ethiopia	The political parties with important positions in the decision-making process. ²	The House of Peoples' Representatives	Eritrean vs Ethiopian idea of nationhood

² This could be: Amhara Nation Democratic Movement, Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Front, Tigray People Libration Front, Afar National Democratic Party, Benshangul Gumuz Peoples' Democratic United Party, Gambela Peoples' Democratic Front, Council of Alternative Forces for peace and democracy in Ethiopia, Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Coalition, Hadiya National Democratic Organization, Oromo Liberation United front. Ethiopian Democratic Party, All Amhara People Organization, Oromo National Congress, Sidama Hadicho People's Democratic Organization, Siltie People's Democratic United Party, Hareri National Legue. But the question has to be explored during studies in Ethiopia.

Appendix 2: Interviews

Adaro, Aserat, 6 December 2002, Addis Ababa
Amlak, Alemseged Gebre, 26 March 2003, Addis Ababa
Aregawi, Amare 2002, Addis Ababa
Askedom, Zeray, 3 December 2002, Addis Ababa
Bairu, Yonas Manna, 1 September 2004, Lund, Sweden
Checkel, Jeffery, 15 May 2002, Oslo
Fante, Mesmor, 2 February 2003, Addis Ababa
Galtung, Johan, 28 October 2002, Oslo
Gesesse, Hailekiros, 1 December 2002, Addis Ababa
Getachew, Sekutire, 5 February 2003, Addis Ababa
Gidada, Negasso, 31 December 2002, Addis Ababa
Gudina, Merara, 1 April 2003, Addis Ababa
Hywat, Mulugeta Gebre Chaltu, 5 March 2003, Addis Ababa
Kidane, Yemane, 28 January 2003, Addis Ababa
Kidanemariam, Muluwork, 13 March 2003, Mekele
Lake, Anthony, 22 March 2005, Telephone interview
Legesse, Fentaye, 2 December 2002, Addis Ababa
Nega, Berhanu, 1 March 2003, Addis Ababa
Nega, Kidusan, 17 March 2003, Mekele
Nega, Sebhat, 21 January 2003, Addis Ababa
Nega, Berahnu, 1 December 2002, Addis Ababa
Nigus, Netsanet Asefaw, 1 January 2002, Addis Ababa
Pausewang, Siegfried, 10 January 1998, Oslo
Petros, Beyene, 3 December 2002, Addis Ababa
Shiffa, Hassan, 21 December 2003, Addis Ababa
Simon, Bereket, 25 December 2002, Addis Ababa
Tronvoll, Kjetil, 12 March 2002, Oslo
Tsegaye, Tesfaye, 25 October 2002, Addis Ababa
Uqa, Techa, 16 December 2002, Addis Ababa
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