



Éloi Ficquet, Ahmed Hassen Omer and Thomas Osmond (dir.)

**Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement. Volume 1**  
Proceedings of the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies

Centre français des études éthiopiennes

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## Ethiopia's Elusive Quest for an Outlet to the Sea: The Case of the Haud-Zeila Exchange from the 1920s to the 1950s

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Publisher: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, Tsehai Publishers, Addis Ababa University

Place of publication: Addis Ababa, Los Angeles

Year of publication: 2016

Published on OpenEdition Books: 22 June 2023

Series: Corne de l'Afrique contemporaine / Contemporary Horn of Africa

Electronic EAN: 9782111723139



<http://books.openedition.org>

### Electronic reference

SAMUEL NEGASH. *Ethiopia's Elusive Quest for an Outlet to the Sea: The Case of the Haud-Zeila Exchange from the 1920s to the 1950s* In: *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement. Volume 1: Proceedings of the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* [online]. Addis Ababa, Los Angeles: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2016 (generated 23 juin 2023). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/cfee/1177>>. ISBN: 9782111723139.

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*Ethiopia's Elusive Quest for an Outlet to the Sea: The Case  
of the Haud-Zeila Exchange from the 1920s to the 1950s*

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Samuel Negash\*

For more than a decade, the dramatic deterioration of the relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea has fostered passionate debates around the controversial re-conquest of Assab, to provide Ethiopia with a direct access to the Red Sea. Though the ports of Djibouti and Berbera are today often considered as the only credible alternatives to cope with the land isolation of the country, their access raises several economic and political challenges. However, from the Ottoman views on Zeila since the 1650s, to the construction of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the issue of the Ethiopian access to the sea has crystallized several regional and international stakes for a long time.

Mainly based on the diplomatic archives of the British Foreign Office and several unpublished documents, this article aims to present the failed attempt of the Ethiopian authorities to abandon their control over the eastern Haud territory, in exchange for a privileged access to the port of Zeila. Through the involvement of different regional and European actors, these Haud-Zeila negotiations reveal the plural historical legacies of the Ethiopian access to the banks of the Red Sea and the trade networks of Bab el-Manded.

### **The significance of the Haud and Zeila**

The Ottoman Turks seized Massawa and the Red Sea coast in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century making Ethiopia a landlocked country. After Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868) began the process of unification of Ethiopia, however, successive rulers attempted to acquire an outlet to the sea. Of course, the quest for an outlet proved elusive until Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952. One area of interest was the Haud-Zeila exchange. A serious attempt to gain access to the sea via Zeila was initiated in the late 1920s by Ras Teferi, later Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974).

#### *Zeila*

Zeila is a port city on the Gulf of Aden coast, situated in the north-western Awdal region of Somalia. Located near the Djibouti border, the town sits on a sandy spit surrounded

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by the sea. Berbera is 270 km to southeast, while the Ethiopian city of Harar is 320 km to the west. Zeila is a very old city and, according to Richard Pankhurst, the city first appears under its own name at least as early as 891. Dependent on trade with southern Abyssinia, Zeila flourished in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It sold incense, myrrh, slaves, gold, silver, camels, and much more. It grew into a huge multicultural metropolis with Arab, Somali, Afar, Oromo and even Persian inhabitants. It was part of the Ifat, and later, Adal, Sultanate (PANKHURST 1968; ABIR 1980).

In 1548, Zeila was annexed by the Ottoman Empire. In 1875 the Egyptians obtained a *firman* from their Ottoman overlords by which Zeila and Harar became Egyptian. In the 1880s, Zeila and Berbera came to be part of British Somaliland. Zeila was one of the main ports of access to landlocked Ethiopia in mediaeval times. The trade items from Jimma, Kaffa and Gurageland found their way to Zeila and Tajura via Alyu Amba and Ankober in Shewa. By the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, Zeila was a mere shadow of its former self, “a large village surrounded by a low mud wall, with a population that varied according to the season from 1,000 to 3,000 people” (ABIR 1968). Although Zeila was frequented by Arab sailing crafts, the lack of proper port facilities prevented them from anchoring too close to the shore (RUBENSON 1976; CAULK 2002; HARRIS 1844).

There were a number of factors for the decline of Zeila as a major port. Zeila is known for its coral reef. The unfavourable nature of Zeila as a port was described by Burton in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: “No craft larger than a canoe can ride near Zayla ...There is no harbour: a vessel of 250 tons cannot approach within a mile of the landing-place” (BURTON 1856: 10-15). As more convenient ports including Tajura, Obock and Berbera emerged, Zeila declined further (CAULK 2000). The most important weakness of the city-port was water, “drawn from the wells of Takosha, about three miles distant...”<sup>1</sup> Landward, the terrain is unbroken desert for some 80 km. The British gave greater attention to the port of Berbera than Zeila. It was, however, the construction of a railway from Djibouti to Addis Ababa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that hastened the decline of Zeila (RUBENSON 1976; HARRIS 1844; SHIFERAW BEKELE 1982).

Menelik made, like his predecessors, vigorous efforts but failed to obtain an outlet to the sea. The railway concession which was meant to facilitate external trade was agreed during the reign of Emperor Menelik (1889-1913). The French were granted by Menelik in 1894 a concession to construct a railway from the Red Sea coast to Addis Ababa, the official capital, and to Harar, the commercial capital. A company called “Le Compagnie Imperiale des Chemins de Fer Ethiopienne” began the construction from Djibouti. The British voiced opposition fearing that the railway would destroy the trade of Zeila. They exerted efforts to purchase the existing Company and transfer the terminus from Djibouti to Zeila, or else build a competing line from the latter port to Harar. When the Railway Company encountered financial difficulties, English capitalists bought a significant share and proposed to build a branch line from Zeila to join the Djibouti line. The scheme was thwarted due to strong French opposition (FO/41/1902; PANKHURST 1968).

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.1911encyclopedia.org](http://www.1911encyclopedia.org), consulted in August 2013.

*Haud*

Haud was a huge grazing land that stretched along the border between Ethiopia and the Protectorate. Taken in its broader extent, “the Haud” according to Laitin, “extends from Hargeisa in the northwest to Galkayo in the northeast; from the Ogaden Dollo plains in the west to the Nugaal valley in the east and; form the bulk of Somalia pasturelands.” A high undulating plateau, the Haud had two rainy seasons i.e. the main rain called ‘*dayr*’, which came in October and November and a generalized rain called ‘*gu*’ in March and April. The dry seasons were ‘*bagaa*’ from May to July and ‘*jilal*’ from December to February. During the wet season the Haud would turn green with plentiful vegetation that included thorn bush and aloes (MERSIE HAZEN WOLDE-QIRQOS 2003; LAITIN and SAMATAR 1987).

Providing the largest grazing area in the region, the Haud attracted various Somali clans including sections of the Ishaq and the Dolbahante from the Protectorate, sections of the Marehan and Mijertein from Italian Somaliland and sections of the Ogaden clan from the south-west. In all, more than 700,000 pastoralists visited the area to share the pasture. The Haud, however, was called “waterless Haud” because it was devoid of any permanent source of water. As long as the pasture was plenty, grazing animals needed no water. As soon as the pasture turned dry, however, livestock such as cattle, sheep and goats, and camels had to leave the Haud and return to the dry season water sources (BARNES 2000; JENNINGS 1905; LAITIN and SAMATAR 1987; MARKAKIS 1989).

Following Egyptian evacuation, Menelik conquered Harar in 1887 and *Dejazmatch* (later *Ras*) Mekonnen was appointed the first Governor. Mekonnen’s army extended its control to the Haud and the Ogaden. The Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1897 delimited the boundary between Ethiopia and British Somaliland. The British agreed that the largest proportion of the Haud, about 40,000 square km grazing land, lay within Ethiopia’s jurisdiction (KELLER 1995; BROWN 1961). Nevertheless, the following provision was incorporated in the Treaty: “The tribes occupying either side of the line shall have the right to use the grazing grounds on the other side...Free access to the nearest wells is equally reserved to the tribes occupying either side of the line” (see Treaty Series n°27 1908, in HERTSLET 1967).

Thus, almost half of the Protectorate’s population used for centuries to migrate seasonally to the Haud in the Ogaden with an estimated two million flocks and herds and stayed there for about six months. Before the Italian Occupation (1936-1941), the Ethiopians never really administered the Ogaden, except sending once a year a body of troops to collect tribute. Owing to British protection, since the 1940s, some of these migratory clans began to stay for nine months or more in the Haud. Some lineages of the Dolbahante and the Warsenglie clans permanently occupied southern Haud of Warder *Awraja* (District). Still others, particularly the Ishaq (spearheaded by the Habr Awel) and the Gadabursi clans started to engage in cultivation staying in the Haud throughout the year. The Ishaq clans who were the most dependent on the Haud pastureland for their livelihood came to regard the Haud as their own territory (WATERFIELD 1958; MARKAKIS 1989).

The tendency to stay long in the Haud affected the ecological balance as a result of overgrazing. The main victims of such phenomena were the Ogaden clans. Lineages of the Ogaden clan depended on the Haud for grazing throughout the year concentrating mainly around (and having possession over nearly all) the water wells of Aware, Danot and Warder. These lineages were, therefore, partially displaced from the rich pastureland as well as from the string of wells along the border. On their part, the Ogaden clansmen considered the Haud as belonging to them since time immemorial (RODD 1948; JAENEN 1974; DEMISSIE TEFERRA 1977; FO/371/113528, 1955).

In the meantime, between 1931 and 1934 a Boundary Commission successfully demarcated the border between Ethiopia and British Somaliland. Because they shared the prized pasture of the Haud, there was an age-long traditional conflict between the Ishaq and the Ogaden. Scarcity of water was also another source for Ishaq-Ogaden rivalry. During the British Military Administration (B.M.A.) lineages of the Ogaden appealed to the Ethiopian authorities that the Ishaq were trespassing into Ogaden territory and were depriving them of their pastureland and water wells (MARCUS 1983; PANKHURST 1951)<sup>2</sup>.

### **Negotiations for the Haud-Zeila exchange: Ethiopia's generous offer and British procrastination**

Discussions potentially favourable to Ethiopia's quest for an outlet to the sea appeared as early as the 1920s. The Italians had offered Abyssinia a port at Assab on the Eritrean coast, but they wanted too much in return. Since the Italians sought an electric railway from the port to Addis Ababa, the Ethiopians refused to concede. In 1926, H. Kittermaster advised his government's cession of Zeila to Ethiopia and recognition of the latter's sovereignty over the Gadabursi permanently resident in Abyssinia. Although some sections of the Gadabursi and the Habr Awel of Ishaq came under Ethiopian jurisdiction by the 1897 Treaty, most lineages only crossed the border as seasonal migrants. Consul Plowman even suggested, "...the transfer to Abyssinia of a piece of Esa country which we could afford to sacrifice, in return for a piece of Isahq country which we should value." Such considerations might have prompted the initiative for exchange that soon came from Ethiopia (PANKHURST 1968; FO/371/13110, 1927; 13111, 1928).

During a conversation with British officials in 1927 in Addis Ababa, Ras Kassa, enquired as to the possibility of some arrangement being made for cession or lease of Zeila to Abyssina. Kassa specifically expressed Ethiopia's desire to come to some arrangement about Zeila port. The British at that time were trying to negotiate a water storage facility on Lake Tana and some officials saw no harm in granting lease on certain conditions in exchange for Tana agreement. (FO/371/13110, 1927) Due to constant squabbles over the status of the Gadabursi along the border, an Anglo-Ethiopian Boundary Commission demarcated from 1931 to 1934 the boundary between Ethiopia and British Somaliland. (MERSIE HAZEN WOLDE-QIRQOS 2003) In 1931, the Emperor

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<sup>2</sup> See also Harar Archives: ቁ.357/አ54/ከ5, 20.12.52/26.8.60; MOD [Ministry of Defense] Archives: አሰ/3400, 4.11.65/117.73; FO/371/115354/1957

once again raised the issue of the lease or establishment of an Ethiopian free port at Zeila with a corridor in exchange for the concession of the Tana scheme. The British, however, coolly reacted when Sir S. Barton stated that the question was being ‘explored but it is unlikely that any reply can be given for some months’ (FO/371/16099, 1932).

In 1936 Italy invaded Ethiopia and, during WWII, dislodged in 1940 the British from the Somaliland Protectorate. It then merged the Ogaden and the Protectorate with Somalia to create the Province of Somalia giving rise to the vague term of ‘Somalia Grande’. Within months, however, the British ousted the Italians from the Horn including Ethiopia in 1941 and, adding the NFD (the Northern Frontier District of Kenya), continued to administer the Province of Somalia as a unit giving definite shape to the concept of “Greater Somalia.” In 1942, Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement was concluded in which the British agreed to hand over administration of Ethiopia to Emperor Haile Selassie except for the Ogaden and a strip of land 40 km wide encircling French Somaliland known as the “Reserved Area” (TIBEBE ESHETE 1988; RAHJI ABDELLA 1964; BEREKET HABTE SELASSIE 1980; FO/371/31598, 1942; FO/371/35623, 1942).

Concerning outlet to the sea the Emperor’s eyes mainly focused on Eritrea. He had laid claim to Eritrea on the ground that this territory was filched from Ethiopia by the Italians between 1869 and 1889. The British had also in mind the possibility of affecting a general rectification of Anglo-Ethiopian frontiers and to give Ethiopia a seaboard as part of a general settlement. On his return from the San Francisco Conference in 1945, Bitwaded Makonnen Indalkachew, the Prime Minister, expressed optimism on Ethiopia having its own ports on the seaside. But no decision was possible until the end of the war and the Peace Conference (FO /371/35631, 1942; FO/371/46092, 1945).

While Ethiopia demanded the return of the Ogaden and the Reserved Areas in the negotiations of 1944, the British nourished a secret agenda of creating “Greater Somalia.” In December 1944, a new Agreement provided for continuation of the B.M.A. in the Ogaden and the Reserved Area (which was, however, limited to areas adjacent to British Somaliland including Jigjiga and the Haud). The British were, however, taking actions that were inimical to Ethiopia’s sovereignty. With the intention of obtaining the Reserved Area and the Haud the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, in 1946 proposed the infamous “Bevin Plan.” He argued the enormous benefit the Somalis would gain if the British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland and the adjacent part of Ethiopia (Ogaden), were brought together under British Trusteeship. Thanks to the rivalry of the Four Big Powers and Ethiopia’s strong protest, the idea was quickly neutralized (AMANUEL ABRAHAM 1992; FO/371/69291, 1949; FO/371/41448, 1944; MOI [Ministry of Information] 1961; CASTAGNO 1970).

With the failure of the ‘Bevin Plan’ the British concentrated their energy on securing the Haud permanently for their Protectorate clansmen. The Reserved Area proper was largely occupied by a section of the sedentary Gadabursi lineages that had adopted mixed farming. The Issa lineages of Ethiopia also shared the territory. The main interest of the British, however, lay in the Haud where almost half the population of the Protectorate used to migrate seasonally. Ethiopia, on the other hand, was ready to go to great lengths

to get an outlet to the sea. Ethiopia's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Aklilu Habte-Wolde, met Bevin in London in 1946 and presented the following generous offer. Ethiopia would cede the greater part of the Ogaden to Great Britain, if in return Great Britain would cede to Ethiopia the corridor to Zeila. Aklilu outlined the land to be ceded on the map as follows. The eastern border of the Zeila corridor would run in more or less a straight line from the coast to join the then Ethiopian frontier outside the Ogaden near Segeg in the far west. British Somaliland would have all the territory to the east of that line and to the north of the Webbi Shebelle and to the west of ex-Italian Somaliland (WATERFIELD 1958; FO/371/53467, 1946; FO/371/53467, 1946).

The radical nature of the offer could probably be explained by the fact that the Ethiopians felt uncertain about the future of the Italian colonies. The offer astounded the British authorities and Bevin even said, "it would be exaggerated for us to take so much of the Ogaden" (FO/371/53467, 19.6.46). He also suggested putting off the suggested exchange until the settlement of the future of the ex-Italian colonies, since it might prejudice Ethiopia's prospects of receiving Eritrea. But other factors also prompted the British to procrastinate. They regarded the proposed corridor much wider than was necessary to Ethiopia for the purpose of access to the sea at Zeila. It was also inhabited by the Issa, the Gadabursi and the Ishaq (Habr Awel) clans. They were prepared to withdraw protection to the small section of the Issa in the Protectorate. They thought it difficult, however, to justify the transfer of the Gadabursi and the Habr Awel who were among the most important of the British Somali clans. Therefore, the British preferred to cede a narrow corridor limited to the road to Zeila and the territory of the Issa clan (FO/371/53467, 1946).

For the British it would be sufficient to only take the Haud and the Reserved Area, as the proposed area of the Ogaden was an arid land inhabited by a number of Somali clans with whom the British had no previous connection. The British would accept the wider Ogaden proposal only in the unlikely event of Italian Somaliland coming under British Administration. They thought it unwise, however, to refuse altogether the Ethiopian offer. They handed to the Emperor a Memorandum appreciating Ethiopia's offer, but expressing willingness to cede only a narrower strip of territory as a corridor (FO/371/53467, 1946; CASTAGNO 1970; FO/371/73688, 1949).

In the meantime, Emperor Haile Selassie demanded in September 1947 immediate restoration of the Ogaden and the Reserved Area in a draft proposal for an Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of Friendship. The British, however, insisted that they should keep the territory until the United Nations (U.N.) passed a resolution on the future of ex-Italian Somaliland. Finally a compromise agreement was reached when Ethiopia presented the Anglo-Ethiopian Protocol on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1948. Ethiopia agreed that the Grazing Area and the Haud should continue for some time under the B.M.A. pending a final agreement on the Zeila-Haud exchange. The rest of the Ogaden was restored to Ethiopia (JAENEN 1974; FO/371/69296, 1948; COLLINS 1960; FO/371/69296/1948; FO/371/69292, 1948).

## The prospect of Eritrea's restoration to Ethiopia

### *Ethiopia's reduced interest on the exchange*

Ethiopia's interest on Eritrea went as far back as 1942. During the Paris Peace Settlement in 1946 Ethiopia's claim over Eritrea was accorded favourable reception. Bevin indicated that the right course of action was to support Ethiopia's demand for the restoration of Eritrea. The British were interested to reach agreement with Ethiopia in a number of issues including Tana Project, Baro Salient, Kenya-Moyale, and Haud-Zeila exchange. Cognizant of Ethiopia's anxiety of acquiring an outlet to the sea, the British emphasized that their support to Ethiopia's claim over Eritrea would depend on Ethiopia's reply to the aforementioned issues. In 1946, the French and Russians proposed that Italy should have trusteeship of all her former colonies in the Council of Foreign Ministers (C.F.M.). With a desire of attaching western lowlands of Eritrea to the Sudan, the British wanted Ethiopia to acquire Eritrea and the Italians to return to Somalia. They thought that Ethiopia would not oppose such an arrangement as long as it got the eastern portion with Asmara and the ports (FO/371/53467, 1946).

Although Ethiopia could abrogate the 1944 Agreement on three months' notice after 1946, it did not insist on British withdrawal. The reason for Ethiopia's reservation was that it desperately needed Britain's diplomatic muscle to regain Eritrea. Beginning from early 1947, however, the British began to suspect that the Ethiopians were dragging their feet concerning the frontier rectifications. Farquhar, the British Consul in Ethiopia, reminded the Emperor that it was nearly a year since this matter had been raised and hinted that the British might perhaps be a little disappointed at the slow progress made. The Emperor said he should await the return of Aklilu and his Private Secretary, Taffese-Worq, before making reply to the British Memorandum. But Aklilu avoided seeing the Consul for five weeks after his return. Due to Ethiopia's discernable procrastination, the British contemplated to make a threat including withdrawal of their support for Eritrea's claim and to revive a United Somalia policy that should include a portion of the Ogaden. When Aklilu finally met the Consul he said that he was working hard on the matter and promised to produce something concrete in a fortnight (FO/371/102642, 1953; FO/371/69296, 1948; FO/371/102642, 1952; FO/371/63134, 1947; FO/371/63133, 1947).

The British found the delay for more than six months a little discouraging. They even thought that the Ethiopian Government no longer wished, for some reason, to proceed with their idea of a territorial exchange. At long last Ethiopia's counter-proposal on Zeila-Ogaden exchange came on July 20, 1947. The Ethiopian Government accepted the proposed narrow Zeila corridor and gave the whole grazing ground of Gadabursi clan. But for the British it was less satisfactory regarding the territory of the Habr Awel clan to the east of the Reserved Area. The withdrawal of a large extent of the Ogaden from Ethiopia's previous offer confirmed what the British had been suspecting for some time, i.e. Sinclair's prospect of discovering oil. It was thought that the smell of oil had permeated the negotiations and was responsible for the Ethiopian's continued prevarication (FO/371/63134, 1947; FO/371/63136, 1947).



The British were, however, anxious not to reject the proposal outright. They informed the Ethiopians that the counter-proposal was not satisfactory regarding the grazing lands of the Habr Awel. They stated, however, that the territorial exchange would be without prejudice to the rights of Ethiopia or Britain over oil in the respective areas they agreed to cede. If oil was discovered the British believed that Ethiopia would be more interested in Zeila and Berbera as they were the only two ports from which oil could economically be shipped. If no oil was discovered the Ethiopians might well lose all interest in the proposed exchange. In this event the British should seek a new Ethiopian agreement for grazing rights of the British Somaliland clans and some form of jurisdiction over these clans while in the grazing areas (FO/371/63136, 1947).

Ethiopia's diminishing interest in the exchange was also vaguely manifested when Aklilu handed in September 1947 the British Consul draft of a "Treaty of Friendship and Commerce". That priority was given to the Treaty, not the exchange, became clear when he stated that the Reserved Area and Ogaden should be considered as having been "blocked" or put into a suspense context. They would again become "negotiable" only if no oil were found. Nonetheless, Ato Aklilu soothed the British by indicating that frontier rectifications and the new Treaty should be concluded concurrently. In November the Vice-Minister presented Ethiopia's case regarding Eritrea in detail and that of Italian Somaliland briefly to the Deputies for Italian colonies. On the whole he was satisfied with the manner in which the Ethiopian case had been received (FO/371/63216, 1947).

*The desperate efforts of the British*

The British preferred to dispose of various outstanding questions such as division of Baro Salient, Lake Tana, and modification of British Somaliland- Ethiopian frontier before attempting to negotiate a treaty. The British were anxious to press ahead with these negotiations while the Eritrean card was still in their hand. They knew that once the future of Eritrea had been decided, their position for securing satisfactory settlements would be much weaker. But the British were compelled to delay particularly the Haud-Zeila exchange due to French opposition. For almost a year they were unable to put forward their counter-draft due to French objection (FO/371/63158, 1947; FO/371/73688, 1948).

In the Ethiopians' mind there was a very definite connection between the Zeila-Haud exchange and the disposal of Eritrea, though the British idea was quite the opposite. For the British it would be awkward to have the Zeila exchange suspended until the fate of Eritrea was settled. The problem in the final analysis boiled down to the supposed Ethiopian policy of stalling negotiations until the question of Eritrea was decided one way or another. The British thought that even minor pretexts were employed to stall negotiations for both the Treaty and the Haud-Zeila exchange. Discussions were, for instance, delayed till January 1949 because Ato Aklilu had fallen sick. The British resolved to take the initiative as the Ethiopians prevaricated to reopen the discussion on the Haud-Zeila after the return of Aklilu from treatment abroad. It was becoming quite obvious in 1949 that with the prospect of Eritrea's federation and the acquisition of Assab as an ideal outlet, Ethiopia was reversing its commitment and

losing interest in the exchange (FO/371/69290B, 1948; FO/371/69291, 1948; FO/371/73688, 1949).

*The French and the Issa challenges*

Meanwhile, French opposition to the Haud-Zeila exchange compromised the bargaining power of the British. This opposition forced the British to delay negotiation and miss opportunities favourable to conclude satisfactory agreements. When the Haud-Zeila exchange with a corridor was initiated in November 1946, it was feared to arouse the susceptibilities of the French and lead to difficulties with Issa clan. The proposed corridor lay on the eastern frontier of French Somaliland. Moreover, the whole object of Ethiopia's proposal was to obtain direct access to the sea, thereby bypassing the French port of Djibouti and the French controlled railway. The Ethiopians and the British agreed to refrain from informing the French until the point of reaching final agreement on the exchange (FO/371/53467, 1946).

The exchange came to be entangled with other international problems including the discussions on the disposal of Libya, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. As discussions about the disposal of Italian colonies started, the British could no longer keep the exchange secret. They felt that to flout French views would make it even more difficult to get agreement with them on the really important question of Tripolitania and Eritrea. The British needed the French support in thwarting the return of Italy to both Libya and Ethiopia (FO/371/69290B, 1948; FO/371/73688, 1948).

The issue between the British and the French was a legal one, i.e. validity of certain provisions of the Tripartite Treaty of 1906 between France, Italy and Britain. The British held that all the provisions except Article 10 of the railway servitude had lapsed when Great Britain and France recognized the annexation of Ethiopia by Italy. This Article prohibited the British from constructing a railway without French consent from British Somaliland to Ethiopia because it would compete directly with the Franco-Ethiopian Railway. The French argued, on the other hand, that Article 4 was also still valid. This Article indicated that "in any case" the three powers concert together the interests of France as regards the hinterland of French Somaliland (FO371/69290B, 1948; FO371/69291, 1948).

When the British disclosed to the French the negotiation for exchange in 1948, the French wrote an unsatisfactory Note. It declared that the French Government could not consider British proposals until after decision regarding the disposal of Eritrea had been taken. Fearing the establishment of a competitive railway line, the French opposed the exchange. The French also expressed fear of encirclement in light of Ethiopia's possible acquisition of Eritrea with Assab port in the proxy. It took more than a year for the British to persuade the French change their position. When the French finally abandoned their opposition in 1949, they attached unfavourable conditions. These conditions included the railway servitude of 1906. The majority of the Issa clansmen lived in Ethiopia and Djibouti. Only a small section of this clan inhabited the northern tip of the Somaliland on the Zeila corridor. Although the Issa had concluded a protectorate treaty with the British, the latter intended to hand over the corridor after

withdrawal of their protection. The Ethiopians were apprehensive of the 1906 Tripartite Treaty and wanted freedom of action in the corridor (FO/371/69290B, 1948; FO/371/73688, 1948; FO/371/63133, 1948).

Negotiation on Haud-Zeila exchange was suspended in July 1949 and was only resumed in January 1950 as Ethiopia's claim to Eritrea was disputed by Italy. Still, however, the tendency of the Ethiopian Government was to spin matters out until the Eritrean question had been disposed of once and for all. As Ethiopia felt pretty certain that she would get Assab or Massawa, the value of Zeila Port had further diminished. Moreover, the servitude attached to the Zeila Corridor detracted greatly from its value. In the event of failure of the Haud-Zeila exchange the British envisaged the following course of actions: (a) a lease of the Haud – considered comparatively feasible, (b) a new grazing agreement – rated less feasible, (c) outright purchase – regarded highly impracticable (FO/371/73688, 1949).

The Four Powers failed to reach agreement over Eritrea in 1949 and the case was transferred to the United Nations, while Somalia became an Italian trusteeship. In 1951, the U.N. passed a resolution and Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952. After more than 500 year Ethiopia's elusive quest for an outlet to the sea was solved. The resolution delivered a heavy blow to the Haud-Zeila exchange. In 1953 Ethiopia re-raised the return of the Haud and the Reserved Area through a formal proposal for a Treaty of Friendship. Talks were initiated in March 1953 and experts from both sides examined the issues (FO/371/73688, 1950).

The tactic of the British was to begin negotiation by a proposal to keep the status quo and, failing this, to suggest an exchange of the Haud with a corridor to Zeila, plus an additional sum of money, ranging from £ 250,000 to a maximum of £500,000. On the insistence of Ethiopia, however, negotiations focused on a new grazing agreement. Here, the main difference boiled down to the question of who would control the Protectorate clans during their stay in the Haud. Aklilou suggested establishing liaison office and social (medical) services to accompany the clans that migrated seasonally, but for these services to be administered by Ethiopia (FO/371/102642, 1953; FO/371/108209, 1954; FO/371/108208, 1954).

The British refused to subordinate the accompanying British officers to Ethiopian administration. As a last resort, the British, in the face of Ethiopia's strong position to dictate terms, began to negotiate the status of the 'accompanying officers'. Accordingly, the British delegates met Aklilu formally on September 14, 1954, in Addis Ababa. In return for recognition of Ethiopia's sovereignty in the Haud, they demanded administration of protectorate clans in the area under Somaliland laws and customs by British Somali courts. Due to outstanding differences the high level negotiation was abruptly adjourned. Due to the grand European tour of the Emperor in October 1954, however, the delegates agreed to continue the negotiations in London (FO/371/108209, 1954; FO/371/108210, 1954; FO/371/108213, 1954).

At long last, the arduous negotiations that began in Addis Ababa finally led to the agreement over the Reserved and the Ogaden – generally known as the Haud Agreement – that Aklilu and Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, signed in

London the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1954. The Agreement recognized Ethiopia's full sovereignty over the two "territories" and stipulated that transfer of power be completed by the end of February 1955. The right of clans from both countries to cross the frontier for the purpose of grazing was reaffirmed. Cases involving only the "tribes" would be tried in the Protectorate, and cases involving Ethiopian and Protectorate clans would be tried in Ethiopian courts. A British Liaison Officer would reside in the Grazing Areas (later at Jijiga), practically administering "the tribes". The Agreement was to remain in force for a period of fifteen years and replaced the 1944 and 1948 Agreements (FO/371/108213, 1954; FO/371/108215, 1954; BROWNLIE 1979).

The British continued with their desperate moves and tried to appease their Somali subjects by supporting 'Greater Somalia' or 'United Somalia' with the hope that independent Somalia would be member of the Common Wealth. Deputy Foreign Minister, Dodds-Parker, visited the Protectorate in 1955 and pledged that Britain would support the unity of the Somalis. He also came to Ethiopia and blatantly asked for the Haud and the Reserved Area to be detached from Ethiopia and be merged with the Protectorate. Lenox-Boyed, Minister of the Colonies, visited Hargeisa in 1959 and proposed the unification of the two Somali territories that would include the Ogaden, the Haud and the Reserved Areas. The fate of Haud-Zeila exchange was sealed forever when Somalia became independent in 1960 and began to work towards annexing the whole of the Ogaden (AMANUEL ABRAHAM 1992).

## **Conclusion**

Since the independence of Eritrea in 1992, Ethiopia has once again become a landlocked country. Beyond nationalist nostalgia and the current tensions around the border between the two countries, the Ethiopian concerns regarding the secession of Eritrea are also largely related to the loss of Assab, preventing Ethiopia from this strategic port, as well as any direct access to the Red Sea. Nowadays, several intellectuals and politicians assume that the Ethiopian State has the legitimate right to re-conquer Assab, to break with the territorial isolation of the country. As many Ethiopians, these national elites seem to have forgotten the long-drawn out negotiations around the Haud-Zeila exchange. Had this exchange succeeded, an international treaty would have provided Ethiopia with a legal access to the Red Sea. In the past as in the present, the sea access issue in Ethiopia remains embedded in complex regional and international stakes.

It is sometimes argued that the success of the Haud-Zeila negotiation would have created a great deal of resentment among the Ogaden clansmen and fostered conflicts with the Somali territories in general. However, nine decades after the failure of these tough negotiations, the historical trajectories of the international and regional interests in the Horn of Africa tend to moderate this interpretation. There is no doubt that the implementation of the Haud-Zeila exchange would have strongly impacted the then French colony of Djibouti on the African bank of the Red Sea. Encircled by Zeila and Assab, this port and the railway linking Djibouti to the Ethiopian capital city would have faced important economic difficulties. Under such circumstances, the leaders of the Djiboutian independence might have opted for a federal arrangement with Ethiopia in

1977. Moreover, by accepting to give up their authority on Haud, the Ethiopian authorities might have elicited sympathy from the Ogaden clansmen and strengthened their position to negotiate a sustainable access to the sea – as they now are attempting to achieve, through the discussions around the port of Berbera with the present government of Somaliland.

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