

Caught in the Legacy of Post-Colonialism: The Eritrean-Ethiopian War



Ethiopian troops check for land mines near the town of Badme on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border.

Introduction

The Eritrean-Ethiopian War, from 1998 to 2000, is known for its escalation from a simple border dispute into a full-scale conventional war. While this may be the general discourse of the conflict, it is evident there were more prevalent factors at play than a one-dimensional border dispute. For instance, as a consequence of Italian colonization, Ethiopia and Eritrea have different understandings of their borders and different ethnic and racial groups that contend with one another over power. Another factor to consider is that Eritrea and Ethiopia's respective political parties have non-aligning agendas. Ultimately, in an attempt to understand the core causes of the conflict, it is imperative to look at the main interpretations of the war. Three different contexts of origin must be

analyzed: the relationship between the liberation parties in Ethiopia and Eritrea respectively, as a consequence of economic relations, and a border dispute. Although border alignment and economic relations played a significant role in the rationale behind the war, the relationship between the political interests and beliefs of the liberation parties holds more weight in explaining the build up to war.

“Although many know Ethiopia as one of the few African states never colonized, the war with Eritrea was rooted in the consequences of colonization.”

Historical Context

The historical link between Ethiopia and Eritrea provides imperative insight into why the Ethiopian-Eritrean War took place. Although many know Ethiopia as one of the few African states never colonized, the war with Eritrea was nevertheless rooted in the consequences of colonization. In 1882, Italy occupied Assab, a port city in the south part of the Red Sea. By 1890, Italy had laid claims to three pieces of territory along the African Red Sea coast, which it then combined to construct the state of Eritrea.¹ Eritrea's construction is important in understanding the origins of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War because the Italians played a major role in defining the borders that would eventually be a catalyst in the 1998-2000 conflict. Following the creation of Eritrea in 1980, the Italians oversaw Eritrea as colonizers for the next 40 years. From their proximate position in Eritrea, Italy attempted to confront and engage Ethiopia in their colonial enterprise. Ethiopia was able to defend its state in the Battle of Adwa in 1896 from falling into the hands of Italian colonizers. Although Ethiopia resisted formal colonization, this sovereignty came at a price in 1889: Treaty of Wuchale. The treaty allowed for Italians to have complete control over Eritrea and a protectorate role over Ethiopia. Perhaps the most important outcome of this treaty would be the border agreements that followed, delineating a 1000 kilometer border between the two states.²

Italy's main objective during this colonial period was to use Eritrea as a trade and communications hub. Thus, a bi-product of the Italian occupation was a newfound infrastructure in Eritrea that included education, agriculture, and commerce. Certain scholars have argued that Eritrea has had a long-standing superiority complex, which developed around this time with regards to Ethiopia.³ Ethiopia was composed of two closely related ethnic groups, the Tigreans-Tigrinya and the Amhara. Due to Italian occupation, the Tigrinya became a part of Eritrea and were separated from their once close neighbors, the Tigrean people and their Amhara cousins in Ethiopia. The importance of this separation was not the loss of proximity between two groups of people, but the beginning and overall formulation of a new identity for the Tigrinyas. The Tigrinya under Italian occupation developed a new identity that distanced them



A detailed map of the Disputed Area between the countries in the area known as Badme

from their now-estranged relatives in Ethiopia. This happened over time as the Tigrinya were exposed to Italian propaganda that argued Ethiopian socio-economic inferiority, and the group would actually fight under Italian rule against Ethiopia.⁴

After the World Wars, Italy was incapable of maintaining its empire, and the British, who were tasked with administering Eritrea, left. This removal led to the United Nations' decision in 1952 to make Eritrea a federal component of Ethiopia. This agreement failed to understand that Eritrea had developed its own identity. The country sought sovereignty and by no means to merge with the Ethiopian state. Conversely, Ethiopia benefitted greatly from this particular UN decision due to an increase in territory that included profitable Eritrean

“... the Tigrinya were exposed to Italian propaganda that argued Ethiopian socio-economic inferiority, and the group would actually fight under Italian rule against Ethiopia.”

industry that had been built up during Italian colonization. As one scholar notes, “it was argued that more than thirty-four percent of Ethiopia’s industries were located in Eritrea by the mid-1970s.”⁵ In 1962, Ethiopia proposed full integration of Eritrea into their state. In this tense context, border disputes were beginning to flourish in light of poor delineations.

“The TPLF and EPLF alliance brought victory to both sides in terms of fulfilling their agendas. The EPLF would achieve independence for Eritrea, which was officially recognized in 1993, and the TPLF formed multiple federated states in Ethiopia.”

As Eritreans became increasingly dissatisfied with Ethiopian terms and exploitation, they began armed struggles against the Ethiopian government in the form of the Eritrean Liberation Front, which eventually became the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF). The main objective of the EPLF was to achieve Eritrean independence. The Tigrinya-speaking population that lived on the border of Ethiopia and Eritrea also began to form its own liberation movement, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). The idea that the Tigrinya-speaking population now saw as two distinct groups because their separation during colonialism was challenged by their still apparent common sense of identity. The main objective of this party was to liberate the Tigray people. The TPLF found support from the EPLF via assistance in training and weaponry, while the latter received military support from the former defending Eritrea from Ethiopia. The TPLF and EPLF alliance brought victory to both sides in terms of fulfilling their agendas. The EPLF would achieve independence for Eritrea, which was officially recognized in 1993, and the TPLF formed multiple federated states in Ethiopia. Today, Ethiopia is a country divided by ethnic distinctions amongst its people but it is united as a singular state.⁶ The EPLF and TPLF distanced themselves from one another after independence in 1993. This eventually culminated into another war, and effectively ended their once fruitful partnership. In its place were now two ideologically opposed sides.⁷

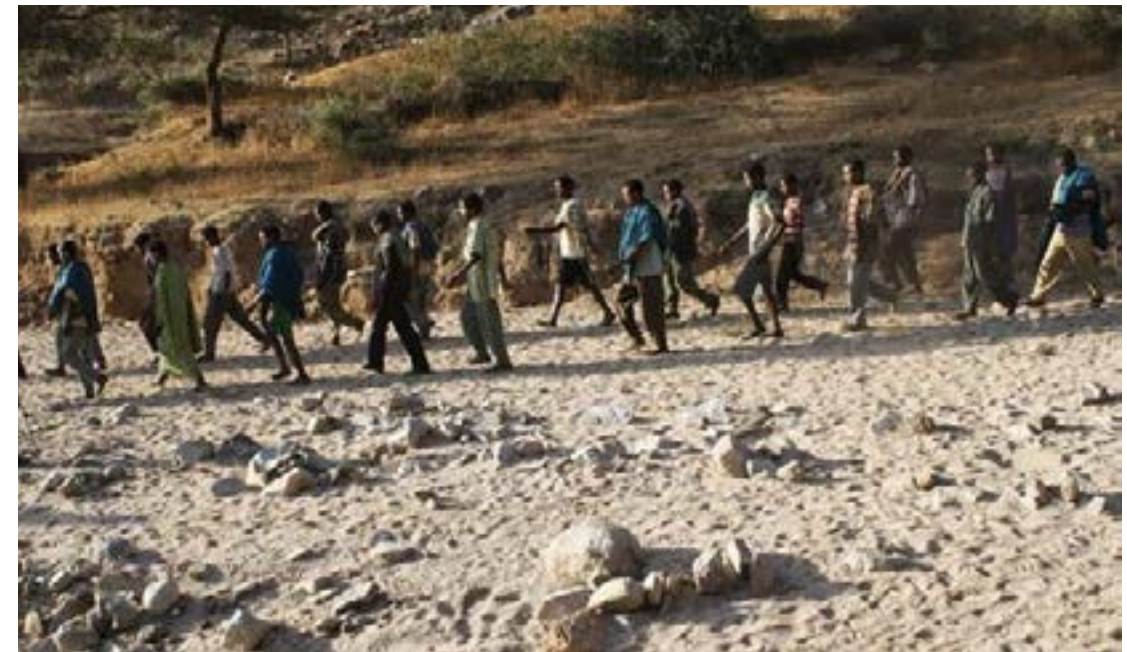
Relationship Between the EPLF and TPLF Post-Independence

The first interpretation of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War points to the complex relationship that arose at this time between the two liberation parties. The EPLF, which would eventually become the governing body in Eritrea, viewed the TPLF as inferior due to their leading role in training and arming its troops. Moreover, the EPLF was more confident in its defensive capabilities due to a trench warfare background. This mindset eventually became a cause of the war that erupted between the two countries in 1998. The EPLF did not see the TPLF as an actual threat, and considered its military strategies as superior to their counterpart.⁸ Thus, the eventual TPLF occupation of Badme, a border town which Eritrea and Ethiopia both opposing liberation fronts lay claims to, was received with great surprise and hostility. The EPLF found itself unprepared and unable to contain the TPLF forces, with its usual trench tactics falling short in the face of the TPLF occupation.

Though the TPLF in Ethiopia and the EPLF in Eritrea both rose to power in 1991, the resulting administrative systems and ideologies promulgated by the two were very different. The Eritrean government was only interested in a unified country and looked down upon Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism. Meanwhile for Ethiopia, the dismantling of the state best suited the interests of the new Tigrayan rulers.⁹ Fundamentally, the Eritreans felt the Ethiopian ethnic emphasis was a threat to their unified state, heightening hostilities. As many of the ethnic groups present in Ethiopia were also represented in Eritrea, the Eritrean government felt that Ethiopian ethnic federalism posed a direct threat to its nation-building process. This sense of insecurity inevitably fueled the possibility of war. Eritrea did not want Ethiopian administrative practices to gain popularity, as the country sought one, sovereign state rather than an ethnically divided one. Further fueling the discord between the two states, Eritrea’s one nation vision threatened to delegitimize the goal of liberating the Tigray people because it was argued they should be under Ethiopian rule.

Ethiopia and Eritrea are often referred to as brothers due to their intertwining history, people, and culture. The war that occurred between the two from 1998 to 2000 was a culmination of their

“Eritrea smuggled enough coffee from Ethiopia that it became a major exporter while producing none of the coffee it was trading.”



Ethiopian refugees crossing into Eritrea

differences. Eritrea’s desire to be a sovereign state with a uniform Eritrean identity, and Ethiopia’s multi-ethnic regions and Tigray influenced state ran into direct conflict. Eritrea saw itself more powerful than it was, disregarding any threat the TPLF and Ethiopia put forth. Ethiopia, led by the TPLF, found itself battling Eritrean political thought in hopes of establishing its independence.

Economic Causes for War

The second interpretation of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War directly correlates with the economic degradation of both states. Following Eritrean independence in 1993, both Eritrea and Ethiopia vowed to work as economic and political partners. Therefore, both set out to make sure free trade, investment, and open borders were present in and across both states. The pre-war period between 1993 and 1997, however, was filled with major setbacks.¹⁰

As previously mentioned, Ethiopia and Eritrea shared a tense relationship due to their opposing ideologies and practices. Consequently, when Eritrea introduced its own currency, the Nafka, Ethiopia was unsettled, as both countries had always relied on the Ethiopian Birr. Simultaneously, Ethiopia’s introduction of a new trade policy that taxed Eritrean exports to Ethiopia, while preventing Eritrea from importing Ethiopian products, led to unprecedented tensions between the neighboring countries.¹¹ Rather than viewing the new Ethiopian tax policy as a protective measure, Eritrea interpreted this gesture as a sign of Ethiopian weakness and an attempt to undermine Eritrea.¹² Eritrea smuggled enough coffee from Ethiopia that it became a major exporter while producing none of the coffee it was trading.¹³

Ultimately, this interpretation of the war posits that Ethiopia was pushed into war in order

to maintain political favor as a result of economic circumstances. The economic superiority of Eritrea and introduction of the Eritrean currency put the TPLF into a difficult position. In order to maintain its political control in Ethiopia, it had to settle the qualms that Eritrea was becoming more powerful

and threatening Ethiopian livelihood. In the Ethiopian context, the war was a response to Eritrean economic superiority.¹⁴ Although some assert that the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict was entirely economically-based, it is evident that Eritrea's economic growth was simply the tipping point in the tense relationship between the neighboring countries.¹⁵ Eritrea viewed war as a means of settling its long-standing dispute with Ethiopia. Ethiopia saw the war as a way to respond to their critics externally and internally, in an effort to quell doubts surrounding the TPLF's hold on the country.¹⁶ The TPLF, with their economic stance already precarious, was determined to prevent Eritrea from seizing any of the country's land. Ultimately, when a confrontation arose between the two states at Badme, Ethiopia was left with no choice but to engage in combat, hoping to salvage its tarnished reputation.¹⁷

“Eritrea viewed war as a means of settling their long-standing dispute with Ethiopia.”

A Border Dispute

A third interpretation of the Eritrea-Ethiopian war is through the traditional lens of a border dispute. This interpretation claims that ultimately the border was tied to an Eritrean superiority complex and a responsive Ethiopian nationalism.¹⁸ Territorial disputes are not new to the Horn of Africa. After extensive colonization, Ethiopia, Britain, France, and Italy partitioned the region with little regard for the arbitrary divisions they were creating and the long-standing consequences these would inflict upon the people of the region. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that the Ethiopian-Eritrean dispute was already Ethiopia's second border-related conflict, having faced Somalia in a short war in 1982. Similarly, Eritrea was involved in maritime and border disputes with

Sudan, Yemen, and Djibouti, alongside Ethiopia.¹⁹ The border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia escalated to war due to its relationship with each state's sense of identity. The border was not simply a legal line of separation between two countries, but it was a representation of political identities.²⁰

Eritrea, according to Dr. Christopher Clapham, former professor of African Studies at Cambridge University, is a “borderland,” meaning it has a fluctuating territorial history due to external influences. That is, the dilemma Eritrea faces when it comes to the construction of its borders has shaped the country's violent, reactionary policies towards neighboring nations.²¹ The Eritrean government has stated, “We have accepted the war, the military path to assert ourselves as a people and a nation

“The border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia escalated to war due to its relationship with each state's sense of identity. The border was not simply a legal line of separation between two countries, but it was a representation of political identities.”



Above: Eritrean prisoners of war
Lower: Eritrean artillery fires over the border, May 1998.

“Ethiopia saw the border conflict as a chance to restore national pride and legitimacy above all else.”

because all other avenues were remain closed to us.”²² Evidently, Eritrea has been largely shaped by geopolitical factors. Ethiopia viewed the border as a source of redemption. Ethiopia due to its economic shortcomings, was by no means the regional hegemon that it had once aspired to become. In an attempt to regain its political esteem and power, it made the “recovery of the national territory its principal *raison d'être*.”²³ Ethiopia saw the border conflict as a chance to restore national pride and legitimacy above all else.²⁴

Conclusion

To simplify the Ethiopian-Eritrean War to a

mere border conflict would be an egregious oversight of both the economic and political landscape of the region at the end of the 20th century. In reality, the war was a case of different liberation fronts having opposing agendas and practices, economic divisions creating a motivation for war, and the unique significance each side afforded to the border territory. Ultimately, this analysis has concluded that the strongest correlation and regression to the cause of the war is the relationship between the TPLF and the EPLF. More precisely, it is the relationship of their opposing political interests and beliefs that would commence the war. The Eritrean-Ethiopian War was a conflict between two liberation front's interests combined with their shifting identities.

Ronald Claude is an International Studies major, Class of 2016

The Role of Japanese Aid in Vietnam's Economic Development

By Stefany Pham

1. JICA, *Signing of Japanese ODA Loan Agreement with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*. 2013, 5
2. Ibid.
3. Pan, *Japanese ODA to Asian Countries* "An Empirical Study of Myanmar Compared with Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam". 23
4. JICA, 2013, 4.
5. JICA, 2013.
6. Pan, *Japanese ODA to Asian Countries*, 23.
7. Shiraishi, *Japanese Relations with Vietnam 1951-1987*, 84.
8. Ibid.
9. Shiraishi, *Japanese Relations with Vietnam*, 19
10. Ibid.,17
11. DHD
12. Shiraishi, *Japanese Relations with Vietnam*, 19
13. Ibid.,21
14. Ibid.,16
15. Ibid.,17
16. Large, *Shōwa Japan: 1952-1973*, 17
17. Ibid., 170
18. Ibid., 171
19. Muratana, 2008, 18
20. Pan, *Japanese ODA to Asian Countries* 15
21. JICA, 2013, 8
22. Muratana, *The Nature of Japan's Official Development Assistance: Japan's Bilateral ODA and its National Interests*, 1981--2001, 32.
23. GRIPS, *Japan's Development Cooperation in Vietnam*, 2002, 16
24. Hatakeyama, *Japan's Aid to Vietnam: Becoming an Intellectual Leader?*, 2008, 352
25. JICA, 2013, 6
26. Ibid
27. Mitsui, *Impact Assessment of Large Scale Transport Infrastructure in Northern Vietnam*. International Development Center of Japan, 2004, 9
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. JICA, 2013, 6
33. JICA, 2015
34. GRIPS, 2
35. Ibid.
36. JICA, 2013, 13
37. Ibid.
38. Tran, *Amendments to Vietnam's Commercial Law and Civil Code*, 2005
39. JICA, 2013, 13
40. Ibid.
41. JFTC, *The JFTC holds Training Course for the Vietnam Competition Authority on the Antimonopoly Act and Competition Policy*, 2015
42. JICA, 2013, 13

Image 1: Various documents of the Foreign Ministry and MITI. Cited from Yamakage 1985, 139.

Image 2: www.mofa.go.jp

Caught in the Legacy of Post-Colonialism: The Eritrean-Ethiopian War

By Ronald Claude

1. Negash, Tekeste, and Kjetil Tronvoll. "Brothers at war: making sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war." (2000), 5.
2. Mulugeta, Kidist. "2 The Ethiopian-Eritrean War of 1998–2000." *Regional Security in the post-Cold War Horn of Africa* (2011), 32.
3. Ibid., 32-33.
4. Negash, Tekeste, and Kjetil Tronvoll. "Brothers at war: making sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war." (2000), 5-11.
5. Ibid., 43.
6. Young, John. "The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: A history of tensions and pragmatism." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34.01 (1996), 106-209.
7. Negash, Tekeste, and Kjetil Tronvoll. "Brothers at war: making sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war." (2000), 21.
8. Ibid., 19.
9. Clapham, Christopher. "War and state formation in Ethiopia and Eritrea." *colloquium: La guerre entre le local et le global, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, Paris*. 2000, 10.
10. Abbink, Jon. "Briefing: the Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute." *African Affairs*(1998), 558-559.
11. Negash, Tekeste, and Kjetil Tronvoll. "Brothers at war: making sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war." (2000), 32-33.
12. Mulugeta, Kidist. "2 The Ethiopian-Eritrean War of 1998–2000." *Regional Security in the post-Cold War Horn of Africa* (2011), 38.
13. Ibid.
14. Mengisteab, Kidane. "What has gone wrong with Eritrea's foreign relations." *Eritrea's external relations: understanding its regional role and foreign policy* (2009), 58.
15. Negash, Tekeste, and Kjetil Tronvoll. "Brothers at war: making sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war." (2000), 95.
16. Abbink, Jon. "Briefing: the Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute." *African Affairs*(1998), 385.
17. Mulugeta, Kidist. "2 The Ethiopian-Eritrean War of 1998–2000." *Regional Security in the post-Cold War Horn of Africa* (2011), 37-39.
18. Clapham, Christopher. "War and state formation in Ethiopia and Eritrea." *colloquium: La guerre entre le local et le global, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, Paris*. 2000, 11.
19. Dias, Alexandra Magnólia. "The conduct of an Inter-state War and multiple dimensions of territory: 1998-2000 Eritrea-Ethiopia war." *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* 22 (2011), 22-23.
20. Tronvoll, Kjetil. "Borders of violence-boundaries of identity: demarcating the Eritrean nation-state." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22.6 (1999), 1041.
21. Clapham, Christopher. *Africa and the international system: the politics of state survival*. Vol. 50. Cambridge University Press, 1996, 241-242.
22. Tronvoll, Kjetil. "Borders of violence-boundaries of identity: demarcating the Eritrean nation-state." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22.6 (1999), 1044
23. Clapham, Christopher. "War and state formation in Ethiopia and Eritrea." *colloquium: La guerre entre le local et le global, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, Paris*. 2000, 11.
24. Ibid., 10-12.

Image 1: <<http://diplomat.so/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ethiopian-troops-check-for-mines-near-the-town-of-Badme-on-the-Ethiopian-Eritrean-border.jpg>>

Image 2: <<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2012/03/27/opinion/borderlines-africa/borderlines-africa-blog427.jpg>>

Image 3: <<http://diplomat.so/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/1299.jpg>>

Image 4: <http://nazret.com/blog/media/blogs/pict/_763154_prisoners300.jpg>

Image 5: <<https://teachwar.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/eritreafiring.jpeg>>