

# AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO REFUGEE PROBLEMS IN THE HORN\*

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## Background

The Somali in common with other peoples of north-eastern Africa, are an historically conscious nation. The roots of the refugee problem of the late twentieth century are deep. The origins of the Somali nation of today date back thousands of years into the very earliest history of the Horn of Africa. Throughout the Somali lands, this is attested by archaeological and linguistic evidence and cave paintings. Records in Upper Egypt of the famed ancient realm of Punt, with which the Pharaohs traded, references by Greeks and Romans and the interpretation of oral tradition all afford further confirmation. Several ancient cities, including Mogadishu the present capital, have remained thriving administrative and commercial centers to this day.<sup>1</sup> Smaller historic centers also survive as markets for agricultural areas and as caravan staging points. Moreover, there are numerous ruined settlements and foundation outlines, most of which still await detailed survey and exacting study.<sup>2</sup>

No nation lives in complete isolation and contacts there have been aplenty from the Horn of Africa across the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean and to the south, particularly along the Coast. Likewise to the west, trade routes have long extended into the lands where the Oromos, the Afars and other Eritreans now live and even beyond into the highlands of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) above the western escarpment of the Great Rift Valley. The Somali territories, however, have always maintained a geo-

graphical, ethnic and cultural distinctness, particularly from those highlands, on which city states and squabbling feudal principalities rose and fell in profusion over the centuries, for the Somalis have always been a pastoral people and they developed early on, in many ways, unique political frameworks to reflect their social structure, religion and ways of life.<sup>3</sup>

The study of neighboring rich Islamic cultures, such as those of Harar and Aussa, is also of crucial importance to Somali history, folklore and mythology and a key to the comprehension of the attitudes and tensions of today. But their study, like that of adjacent Somali areas, has received little encouragement over the years either from the Imperial Ethiopian Government or its military successors. Likewise study of the history and culture of the Oromo lands is only recently beginning to receive the attention it deserves — the work of certain pioneers notwithstanding.<sup>4</sup> This too is fundamental to the understanding of the refugee problems of today.

For years African studies as a whole was seen as a mere addendum to Oriental Studies and in this context the study of the Horn of Africa, since it (deservedly) received some attention from Semiticists, also suffered from imbalance. The surprising thing is how long this has persisted. The writer has argued elsewhere that the history of the Horn of Africa can no longer be seen merely as a court chroniclers story of Abyssinian emperors, nobles and bishops.<sup>5</sup> Indeed they were scarcely relevant to many of the peoples made subject to the Ethiopian empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Likewise today, murky intrigues within the *derg* — which represent historical continuum rather than revolution — are but part of the political spectrum of the Ethiopian empire-state.

Even before the rise of Islam the effective rule of the kings of Abyssinia was "mainly limited to the highland areas of central Ethiopia . . ." By the second half of the ninth century, the frontiers of Abyssinia began to be pushed "further south and they apparently reached the northern parts of the Shewan plateau."<sup>6</sup> Even Shewa, where today's capital is now located, was itself a Muslim Sultanate,<sup>7</sup> which fell early victim to spasmodic but sustained attempts by the Abyssinian state, throughout history, to ex-



pand at the expense particularly of its southern and eastern neighbors. Christian outposts were "founded as far south as the Ziqwala Mountain and the upper basin of the Awash river in the early part of the thirteenth century."<sup>8</sup> There was, of course, much local resistance and sometimes full scale wars which usually occurred when one or other of the Abyssinian kings was able to effectively assert himself as emperor and in customary imperial fashion, attempt to raid and collect tribute or plunder from neighbors in every direction.

In the east, who were these neighbors? Modern scholarship describes three peoples: "the Somalis", the "ancestors of Saho-Afar speakers in the Danakil depression" and also "the Galla (Oromo) . . . whose presence in the whole region became increasingly dominant only from the sixteenth century onwards . . . It is the Somali who are referred to in the accounts of the early Arab geographers. In fact there was a basic continuity in the use of the term Berber since the first century of the Christian era, to describe the land and people of the Horn . . . there seems to be no doubt now that the Arab geographers had particularly the Somali in mind when they spoke of the 'Black Berbers' of the Horn; and the earlier use of the term by Greek writers may well indicate a more ancient occupancy of the Horn by the same stock of people."<sup>9</sup>

Gone are the days, therefore, when western scholars after disputing the home lands of the Somali and the Oromo, are obliged to talk only in terms of massive *invasions* and *expansions*. The need to re-examine the sources and hitherto accepted theories of Oromo expansion is likewise becoming recognized.<sup>10</sup> The record might well suggest, in fact, that it is *Abyssinian* expansion that has been the main cause of disruption — of which refugees are one manifestation — in the Horn of Africa. This certainly is how the Somali and Oromo people (and the Eritreans) see the issue.

### **The Abyssinian Empire-State and the South-east.**

Every peoples and every nation in the Horn of Africa — as elsewhere — has three thousand years of history — and more — behind it. Some had more sustained contact with highland Abyssinia than

others. The medieval history of the latter can be represented as a series of cyclic expansions and withdrawals from one or other of a series of foci in north-eastern Africa. As this history has normally been portrayed, withdrawals to the "highland core of ancient Abyssinia" have been seen as general reverses for "Ethiopian nationalism" — but this is superficial. The corollary has been ignored that other nationalisms, which it has not been fashionable to study, may be shown to have thrived at such times.

The Abyssinian invaders were usually successfully contained by the Oromo and Somalis — for example in the fourteenth century reign of the Abyssinian Emperor Amde Seyon and the fifteenth century reigns of Emperors Dawit, Zara-Yakob and Baida Mariam. Since by their time, the sultanate of Shewa had been overrun: Ifat another muslim state which was further east in the rift valley, and then Adal, based on Zeila and Harar, were to bear the brunt of further Abyssinian pressures.

One ancient Ethiopic manuscript contains an eyewitness account of the wars of Amde Seyon who ruled from 1314 to 1344 and who "advanced into lands never previously occupied by any Ethiopian emperor."<sup>11</sup> Written by an anonymous Christian monk or priest, it records how in the south-east the ruler of Adal — from the important Walasma dynasty — counselled his people: "We shall not go to the King of Abyssinia, but if he comes to us, we shall not fear but will fight and die for our country." True to his word he did this, and when his two sons were brought before the Abyssinian ruler, even then the latter referred to refugee problems which war in the area created: "Do not such people flee and when they are dispersed hide among the trees or on the mountains and fight as best they can, if they do not submit and pay tribute?" But even then also the youths remained defiant, replying: "Hear O King, Our Country and we ourselves recognize none who rules us but God alone and there is none who can rule us! . . . We are as many as the sand of the sea and the stars of the heaven . . . It is not you only whom we did not fear, but if all the kings of the earth came from one end of the earth to the other we should not fear them but would attack them . . ."

Indeed the crusade/jihad conflicts, not normally associated by western orientated historians with



they arranged that Abdullahi, a son of the last Emir, should succeed.

Meantime Menelik, the Abyssinian ruler of the southernmost province of Shewa, who had been amassing fire-arms with the help of European governments and individual dealers, began an expansionist policy which through conquest, colonization and agreements with other imperialists from Europe, was to more than double the area he ruled and in the process, make him *Negusa Neghast* (king of the kings) of the Ethiopian empire. He coveted not only Harar but Zeila, Hargeisa and great areas belonging to the Somalis, the Afar and the Oromo peoples.

The defeat of the Italian armies by the Abyssinians at the battle of Adowa in 1896 certainly raised Menelik's stature in the imperial capitals of the world, but it inaugurated long years of deprivation and tribulation to the south and east of Abyssinia.

Treaties, agreements and protectorates established by European companies and powers with Somali chieftains and dignitaries on or near the northern and eastern coasts soon began to affect the lives of the people further inland. Indeed, the Somalis and the Oromos soon found themselves encircled. The formula which the treaties followed with only minor variations, clearly set out as paramount the maintenance of the independence of the Somalis. Being in the main, transhumantic and dependent upon herds of cattle and camels, their forefathers had, over the centuries, built up a measure of mastery over the seasonal ecology of the semi-desert lands of the Horn. Thus it was not implied that Britain or anyone else might be empowered to alienate any part of that territory — quite the reverse — or to restrict the vital patterns of transhumance.<sup>22</sup> A typical agreement, dated July 14, 1884, reads: "Whereas the garrisons of His Highness the Khedive are about to be withdrawn from Berbera and Bulhar and the Somali Coast generally, we, the undersigned Elders of the Habr-Awal tribe, are desirous of entering into an agreement with the British Government for the *maintenance of our independence*, the preservation of order etc..." There was always a declaration, quoted here from the agreement signed by "Ahamed Murgan", a "Chief of the Ogaden" on 1st September 1896, "... that I will not, nor shall

my successors or any of my people, *cede or alienate any portion of my territories or dependencies*..." (emphases added).<sup>23</sup> Taken in toto these provisions appear to have affirmed Somali sovereignty over their territory.

Meantime, from the highlands of Abyssinia, King Menelik of Shewa began to put pressure on Harar. The Emir refused to submit, even on receipt of the threat "I will come to Harar and replace the Mosque with a Christian Church."<sup>24</sup> The Emir did however send a Somali, Hersi Ali, to ask — in vain — for support from the British in Aden who had brought his family back to power. Major Hunter, the political agent in Aden reported "the Amir expects to be attacked by Menelek's lieutenant Wal-dagabri, about the 15th February, and he wants to know if the British are inimical to him, for should this be the case he will fly into the interior. A battle took place near the river Burka, on the Shoa side, in October 1886... on that occasion the Amir had 500 men with firearms, besides 3000 other Somalis and Gallas under Bakri Saleh,..."<sup>25</sup>

In due course the Abyssinian forces attacked and captured the city of Harar on January 6, 1887. In February, Menelik advised the British colonial authorities at Aden that he "king of Shoa and of all the Gallas good and bad (had) hoisted his flag in his (the Emir's) capital and my troops occupied his city..." In a clear reference not to the Harari, the Somalis or the Oromo, but to the Christian terminology used by the other imperialists to justify colonization, he added "... This is not a Muslim country as everyone knows."<sup>26</sup> He later wrote to his Italian ally, "my occupation of Harar augurs well for the commercial relations between Italy and Shoa", and anticipating further colonial adventures, added, "... but more important is the question of Zeila, (a centuries old Somali port and trade terminus on the Gulf of Aden) if Your Majesty will see to its cession to me, the port will be open to trade."<sup>27</sup>

In 1891, after further communication with Italy — his major armorer who nevertheless secretly aspired to a protectorate over Ethiopia — Menelik laid detailed claim, in letters to the heads of European states, to the areas he intended to colonize. "I shall endeavour" he wrote, "... to establish the ancient frontiers (*lit.* colonies or tributories) of Ethiopia up



to Khartoum (present capital of the Republic of Sudan) and as far as the Galla Lakes . . ." (there is a possible reference here even to Lake Nyanza or Victoria "and all the Gallas") and alone among the rulers of Africa, he boasted "If powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator."<sup>28</sup> Nor was he.

With Harar as an advance base, Shewan military expeditions began to raid and burn Somali settlements and loot the herds in the Ogaden. There are many reports describing such raids, one of which was addressed by a British Officer in Aden, Lt-Colonel E.V. Stace to Sir Evelyn Baring in Cairo, on 12 April 1892. It concludes as follows:

A large Abyssinian expedition returned from the Ogaden whilst Mr. Harris was in Harar, bringing with them as booty some thousands of camels and cattle and property of all descriptions. I hear from other sources that they have devastated a large part of the Western Ogaden and slaughtered the people. This will probably, I regret to say, seriously affect the trade of Berbera.

Harar itself, and the country near it in the direction of Shoa, are in a most lamentable condition. Many people are dying of starvation, and an epidemic said to be cholera, but which may be "starvation fever", has broken out, and carries off numerous victims daily. It is an actual fact that the hyenas and dogs are feeding off the flesh of the dying in the streets of Harar during the night time. The cries and lamentations throughout the night in this large town are described as most heartrending. This state of affairs is attributed entirely to the conduct of the Abyssinian soldiery, who eat up everything . . .

The cholera, or whatever the disease may be, originated, it is said, amongst the plundering host just returned from the Ogaden. The Europeans and higher officials and all the soldiery have now fled from the town.<sup>29</sup>

Missionaries; travellers; big game hunters — all repeatedly describe countless similar horrors suffered by men, women, children and livestock: and of course the large number of refugees and homeless. Even so, the British, particularly after the

Ethiopian defeat of the Italians, concentrated only on the need to secure fresh meat for their Aden garrison astride the imperial route to India. This, together with their serious difficulties in the Sudan before and after the death of General Gordon, suggested an urgent settlement with Ethiopia, despite the many incidents and problems constantly drawn to their attention by the "protected" Somalis which they had duly noted. Accordingly, and without much regard for "protected" Somalis, whom they also denied arms to protect themselves, they restricted their sphere of influence in the Horn of Africa and negotiated new boundaries with Emperor Menelik, and in particular with the latter's governor in Harar (the Ras Makonnen, father of Haile Sellassie) and with other colonial powers. Mr. Rodd (later Lord Rennell of Rodd) who conducted these negotiations in 1897, mentions in his report to the Marquess of Salisbury that when it was pointed out to Emperor Menelik that the British had established themselves in Somali country "by treaties with the native tribes before the Abyssinians had come to Harar", the Abyssinian ruler "referred to the ancient limits of Ethiopia". "I asked him", reports Rodd, "how the Somalis, who had been established in those regions for so many centuries, could possibly be looked upon as included within the ancient limits of Ethiopia. His majesty then propounded the extraordinary doctrine that the Somalis had been from time immemorial, until the Muslim invasion, the cattle-keepers of the Ethiopians who could not themselves live in the low countries." Then Menelik asked that Britain as "a great power" cede him lands belonging to the Somali Nation as a personal favor!

Rodd's account of the vital partition is as follows:

Finally, we reopened the question of the definition of the frontiers of the Somali Coast Protectorate. I recapitulated the whole situation, the misunderstandings which had arisen owing to our not realizing each other's point of departure, and once more urged on him (Menelik) a line based on tribal divisions, on which, indeed, the line we had drawn in the Anglo-Italian Protocol of May 1891 was based.

His Majesty's attitude was distinctly oriental. England was a great Power; could we not cede



these small parcels of territory, which meant so little to us and so much to him. He had gained Harar by conquest, and looked on all these regions as part and parcel of the Harar province. I assured him that this was not so; we were established in these countries long before the expedition which resulted in his annexation of Harar, and though he had conquered Harar, he had not conquered us. I showed him on the map the pastures frequented by the tribes under our protection, demonstrating that the line I proposed to draw, with Captain Swayne's concurrence, was a reasonable and just division. But His Majesty replied he could not understand maps sufficiently to judge . . .

It was agreed therefore that Rodd and Ras Makonnen should exchange notes on the matter. Significantly Rodd noted:

... from our experience of the treatment which the Abyssinians mete out to their subject tribes, to which I have alluded elsewhere, I do not think anything but the most urgent political necessity could justify handing over tribes to the tender mercies of this marauding race.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the colonial era Somalis to whom the negotiations also "meant so much", were never party to such vital discussions. Mr. Rodd even advised Lord Salisbury that the Abyssinian Governor of Harar had assured him "Anything I had discussed with him would remain between ourselves."<sup>31</sup> Indeed all negotiations were kept secret until they began to affect the day to day life of the people. Later, when an attempt at demarcation was made, popular indignation led to tension, riots and even the death of a commissioner involved. Rodd's account of these negotiations also advised Lord Salisbury that while a limit to "British" territory had been defined, none of the phraseology used recognized any Abyssinian "rights" to Somali land beyond it.<sup>32</sup> Moreover they note of the territory in question, that it was disappointingly "sparsely populated and barren" and if it did include "certain tribes with whom we have protective treaties and who own camels employed in the caravans from our coast ports" this "trifling concession was but a slight loss . . . since it puts to end a long standing

dispute and secures a definite acceptance of the whole line" of policy based on British Imperial interests and also "the friendship of Makonnen" (emphasis added).

The effect of these arrangements which have never been tested in international law, and it should be remembered that the Somalis, although materially affected, *were not party to them* nor, as has been observed, had they delegated to anyone the right to cede territory on their behalf, was that Ethiopia gained control — although in most areas she did not exercise this at least until the 1930's and in some places not at all — over many thousand square miles of Somali country. France, because of her imperial ambitions on the Upper Nile and expanding commercial activity in Abyssinia, and to a lesser extent Italy likewise failed to honor protectorate agreements with the Somalis. These agreements, even though in due course repudiated by the Somali Democratic Republic on the achievement of independence in 1960, did not, in retrospect, put anything "to end." Indeed they lie at the heart of all subsequent conflicts which preceded the war of 1977-78 and the refugee problem of today.

### Muhammad Abdille Hassan and After

Protest against partition soon found expression in Somali literary tradition and in particular in the poetry — composed in Arabic as well as Somali — of another charismatic leader, Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan. A renowned and travelled scholar, he fought the British, the Italians and the Abyssinians for twenty years — and even Somalis if he considered them collaborators. British and Italian archives and books written by soldiers and officials show that they knew well that this "freedom fighter" was very far removed from the "mad mullah" image with which they nevertheless tried to discredit him. He was indeed a visionary as well as one of Africa's greatest poets.

Sayyid Muhammad was born in or about 1864, and was from the Ogaden clan. He had mastered the Koran by the age of seven and soon proved a most adept pupil in horsemanship and the martial arts. In his late teens he studied at Harar and Mogadishu and in the Sudan. After a period in Berbera he left for the Haj. He also visited Nairobi.

There are several contemporary accounts of the



early colonial campaigns, both official and unofficial. They do not hesitate to refer to "Abyssinian Somaliland" as well as "British", "Italian" and "French" Somaliland.<sup>33</sup> An eyewitness wrote of the joint campaigns mounted against Sayyid Muhammad's forces:

They were united in an imperial adventure the like of which had seldom if ever been essayed before, in a campaign against an inscrutable enemy, whose range of movements extended from Cape Guardafui to the equator, from the sea into Abyssinia, who offered no target for attack, no city, no fort, no land, and no possessions save those of others which, if lost, could be replaced as easily as they had been acquired. In short there was no tangible military objective but only an outlaw who would know how to fight when the odds were in his favour and how to scuttle across waterless barren deserts when the odds seemed against him.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, his own position is also on record, for he wrote an open letter to the British people in June 1904, in which he stated:

... I wish to rule my own country and protect my religion. We have both suffered considerably in battle with one another. I have no forts, no houses. I have no cultivated fields, no silver or gold for you to take. If the country was cultivated or contained houses or property, it would be worth your while to fight. The country is all bush and that is no use for you. If you want wood and stone you can get them in plenty. There are also many anthills. The sun is very hot. All you can get from me is war, nothing else.<sup>35</sup>

So effective a guerrilla leader was he, that no Englishman ever saw him once he took to the field. Much of the fighting took place in Somali areas claimed by Ethiopia. The conflict continued on and off until, in 1920, the British Air force bombed the great fortress he had built late in his life at Taleh and sappers following up, mined its walls. The Sayyid had already left, but after a series of military reverses he was soon afterwards obliged to withdraw to the valley of the Webi Shebale with a few indefatigable followers. Sayyid Muhammad was never captured but died at Imi, late in 1921, of natural

causes. The resistance he began has never stopped to date.

### Colonisation of Oromia

The Oromo<sup>36</sup> are referred to as "Galla" by the Amhara, by much of the existing literature and on early maps. They are an assembly of peoples whose subjugation by Menelik II and his lieutenants during the scramble for Africa, though less well known to the outside world than that of the Somalis, is to them, a living memory. It is also well documented.<sup>37</sup> Potentially the most populous nation in all Africa, the Oromo have been estimated to number up to 18 million,<sup>38</sup> although it should be remembered there has never been any kind of census in any part of Ethiopia.

Except to some extent in Wello, most Oromo have maintained their traditional values and rituals, in particular, a system of age and distinctive generation grouping known as "Gada."<sup>39</sup> This, in part at least, is because modern educational opportunities and other services have been rare indeed and economic development in the Oromo provinces has been minimal, even on Ethiopian standards.

What began as cattle- and then slave-raiding, well before the southerly province of Shewa achieved much prominence within the empire state — let alone its present dominance — and before Addis Ababa was founded,<sup>40</sup> rapidly developed during the "scramble" into territorial imperialism. This was due largely to Shewan access to imported firearms.<sup>41</sup> After Wello had been overrun, a great number of separate campaigns were mounted across the Awash River between 1881 and 1886 to conquer Arusi. Resistance was fierce.<sup>42</sup> Then the imperial armies marched on Jimma, Wellegga, Wellamo and Limmu. Sidamo was conquered and occupied between 1894 and 1895: Kaffa and Bale in 1897 and Borana, nominally in 1899. In fact it remained for years in a state of rebellion — much to the disquiet of the British further south who since, on several occasions, have assisted the Ethiopian authorities to maintain their sway. Alliances made by the Oromo amongst each other and with the Mahdists in the Sudan were eventually to no avail, although Jimma was not fully "incorporated" until 1933.<sup>43</sup>

The Shewans represent their expansion as an attempt to forestall European advances, however they



began rather too early, in terms of North-eastern Africa, for that to be very convincing historically. Others have cogently stressed the economic factor; migration from the north, land pressures and particularly the need to control the trade routes and riches of southern and western Ethiopia. Except by way of justification after the event, few have argued that the spread of the Christian religion or a civilizing mission were important factors.

On the other hand the Oromo see the Amhara as colonists and resent the uneasy hegemony their presence has involved, often for little more than one lifetime. Oromos have, until recently, been referred to on public documents as "dependents"; the names of their villages and settlements and even of physical features have been changed; their several uprisings have met with savage retaliation and repression; their shrines and some mosques have been destroyed and even their cultural festivals banned or "Christianized".

Conquest, colonisation, settlement and Amhara administration have followed patterns not far removed from those employed by other nations engaged in the scramble for Africa. Garrisons or *ketemas* were built in defensive locations, often hilltops, land was alienated and settlement initiated. The income of the invaders was derived from the indigenous people, their land and crops. In fact their economic production and even their labor was exploited quite ruthlessly. As further regions were conquered they were subjected to the *naftanya-gabar* system, whereby individuals and their families were designated to support *naftanya* or *settlers*, who were originally members of the Amhara armies of occupation. Perhaps the only significant difference — apart from the obvious ethnic one — is that on the whole colonial expeditions organised by representatives of European powers sought to discourage the slave trade whilst those of the Abyssinian rulers were not so orientated — quite the contrary. In fact, comparisons with Kenya and Rhodesia have been made.<sup>44</sup> A history of Amhara colonization would reveal examples of the maximum utility of limited forces; examples of "divide and rule", etc. A certain harsh paternalism also developed and in due course an indigenous elite was cultivated, though with varying degrees of success.<sup>45</sup>

But the desire for self-determination and freedom

was never far below the surface. A "Western Oromo" federation applied to the League of Nations for recognition in 1936 and during the collapse of Italian East Africa in 1941–2 certain Oromo unsuccessfully petitioned the British for an independent state.<sup>46</sup> "Patriotic" organisations were formed in the 1960's and there was an increase in organised guerrilla activity, especially in Bale at this time. Elsewhere many spontaneous uprisings and "rent revolts" occurred — largely unreported. As a result whole settlements have not infrequently been burned to the ground.<sup>47</sup>

A paragraph of more contemporary history might not be out of place.<sup>48</sup> Haile Sellassie had ruled by the calculated balance of disunity and not the positive promotion of unity practised by the leaders of "the new Africa."<sup>49</sup> Thus it was that when the unrest of the 1960's and early 1970's grew into the creeping revolution of 1974, the whole of south-eastern Ethiopia — not to mention Eritrea and the Ogaden — was anxious and alert for change. Even before land reform was announced by the Provisional Military Government in Addis Ababa, many Oromo had risen against the *naftanya* and many settlers, officials and their families had fled to the capital. But the optimism and "liberation" of the Oromo and other subject peoples was shortlived. True a wide measure of land reform was announced, but so too was renewed settlement of Amhara and Tigray families in the conquered provinces. This policy — "the Green Revolution" — involves the provision of limited medical facilities, schools and churches for these groups and this is somewhat cynically hailed as national development. However, revolution seems to many to mask the perpetuation of colonization. In 1978, the proportion of Amhara officials — mainly *Shewans* — in the government of Ethiopia is higher than it has ever been.<sup>50</sup> A liberation front — the OLF — is already active. There have been savage reprisals, particularly in Bale and Arusi and refugees have flooded into Somalia, Djibouti and the Sudan.

### Colonial Legacy Revisited

In the 1920's and 1930's, there was no permanent Ethiopian settlement or even administration in the Somali areas; only military encampments. Al-



though there is no doubt that, in support of their own political and imperial ambitions, the Italian authorities in Asmara, Mogadishu — and Rome — exaggerated and even encouraged lawlessness within the empire-state,<sup>51</sup> there is abundant evidence that undisciplined Ethiopian raiding parties continued to pillage wantonly.

The advent of the Italo-Ethiopian war in 1935 was heralded by further contention and conflict over the Somali areas and the frontier. In 1901 one traveller had prophesied.

From some oversight on the part of England giving up territory on the south-east borders of Abyssinia in Somaliland, and by the Italian Government not having their Somali Hinterland defined, there is a great chance of difficulties arising on the south and southeastern borders of Abyssinia.<sup>52</sup>

And indeed, to this date, the "Italian" frontier has never been demarcated or even agreed. (An agreement supposed to have been made between Italy and Emperor Menelik has been "lost" by both the Ethiopians and the Italians: the Somalis once again were not party to it.)

In general, the attitudes of the imperial Ethiopian government were typified by Haile Sellassie's mobilization order. It began: "Italy prepares a second time to violate our territory . . . soldiers gather round your chiefs and thrust back the invader. You shall have lands in Eritrea and Somaliland . . ." and concluded that anyone apart from "the blind and lame", found in their villages after the receipt of the proclamation "shall be hanged." Soon after Haile Sellassie's return to Addis Ababa from exile in May 1941, he laid claim, without immediate success, to all of Italy's adjacent colonies.

This and the rest of the story is a matter of colonial and contemporary history, and outside the scope envisaged for this paper. However the European archives covering most of their respective colonial periods are now open. Scholars are working, for example, on the events of 1946, when Ernest Bevin, then British Foreign Secretary, proposed to the Council of Ministers of the post-war Four Power Conference that all the Somalilands, including "Ethiopian Somaliland" be "lumped together as a

trust territory", to enable the people to "lead their frugal existence with the least possible hindrance" so that "there might be a real chance of a decent economic life as understood in that territory." He was not supported and was even criticized as an imperialist. Yet the great powers were neither consistent nor could they agree even on the future of Italy's former colonies, which rapidly became mere pawns in a wider diplomacy.<sup>53</sup>

Eventually in 1949, Italy was granted a ten-year United Nations Trusteeship over her former Somali colony. Haile Sellassie cabled the Secretary General, curiously condemning the General Assembly for "overriding the principles of self-determination of peoples so clearly expressed by the Somalis." Meantime, the Somali Youth League — a social and political movement — sprang up throughout the Somali lands and called for cultural and political freedom. In 1954–5, when the Haud and other areas reserved to the British during and after the Second War were being taken over by Ethiopia, violent demonstrations occurred throughout the Somali lands. The Somali Youth League was proscribed by the Ethiopians and an attempt was made to ban all political activity. Tens of thousands of refugees fled from the Ethiopian military and Britain and Italy both recognized them as political refugees.

Since Italian and British Somalilands achieved independence in 1960 and united, there have been several serious border clashes, as well as, to use a euphemism of the colonial period, "continued unrest." One example — a report from Nairobi in 1963 — will suffice:

hard on the heels of the now famous declaration on African Unity, the Ethiopian division based at Harar got down to business . . . waterholes are being machine gunned from the air — the classic way to control a population of nomad herdsmen is to deny them water. Villages are being burnt and the women and children in them killed. This, local Somalis tell, is to be expected but what has particularly made them feel that the Ethiopians are out to finish them once and for all, is the massive killing of livestock. There are unquestionably plenty of Ethiopian troops there and several thousand refugees in or around Hargeisa, some wounded or mutilated and in hospital."<sup>54</sup>



Then there were refugees from the drought of the early 70's. This pattern culminated in an initially successful uprising in the Ogaden and adjacent areas, supported, in its later stages (1977-78) by the ground forces of the Somali Democratic Republic.

There followed intervention by the Soviet Union and Cuba, on a scale which is unprecedented in Africa, not just in Harerghe (and Eritrea and Tigray) but throughout the conquered provinces of southern and eastern Ethiopia — in Sidamo, Bale, Arusi and elsewhere. As a direct result, decimation so typical of the slave-raiding and looting of the 1890's is once again the norm. A newspaper correspondent, recently returned from the Ogaden has graphically reported:

The Ethiopian soldiers arrive, burn villages, slaughter the camels and drive off the rest of the livestock. The men of the village stay to fight but their primitive weapons are no match for the automatic rifles, rocket-launched grenades and flame-throwers of the Ethiopian troops. The women, children and as many elderly people as can walk flee into the bush. In many cases the flight over the border takes two months... Many of the children have died on the long march, mostly from hunger; others have been killed foraging for food or in Ethiopian ambushes at waterholes.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, the scale of human suffering in North-eastern Africa in the 1970's is also, in all probability, unprecedented. And refugees, both Oromo<sup>56</sup> and Somali, are to be counted in hundreds of thousands.

## NOTES

1. The Arba' Rukun, Fakhr u Din and Jami Mosques, dating from the thirteenth century, are the oldest mosques in Mogadishu but surviving Islamic funerary inscription in the city date back to the eighth century. Another ancient monument is the Sheikh Abdulaziz Mosque, which has stood for many centuries near the old port. There are also many references by Arab travelers to the importance of Mogadishu and other early Somali ports such as Zeila, Brava and Merca. See, for example, the best known discussion of Zeila and Mogadishu reproduced in Said Hamdun and Noel King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (London 1975) p. 12-18; appropriate entries in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and *The Cambridge History of Islam*, (London 1970) Vol. 2A, p. 383.
2. Some preliminary survey has been conducted by Curle

(1940) and more recently by Chittick. In 1978 the writer was introduced to one ancient but abandoned site typical of many on the coastal plain some eight miles south-east of Berbera, an historic and still thriving Somali port. Ruined walls and foundations were located on a hill. To the north they command a view of the eastward approach sea lane used by dhows entering Berbera port and also the southerly route towards the Sheikh Pass (where there are further ruins).

3. I.M. Lewis, *Peoples of the Horn of Africa* (London 1955) and *The Modern History of Somaliland* (London 1965) p. 4-17. (A new revised edition of this latter work will be published later this year, 1979). See also *The Cambridge Modern History of Islam* Vol. 2A (Cambridge 1970) p. 383 and R. Pankhurst 'The First Ethnographic Survey of Somaliland—by the Somali Ibrahim Isma'il', *Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zürich*, II (Bern, etc. 1977), pp. 71-91.

4. See E. Cerulli, *Peoples of South-west Ethiopia and its Borderland* (London 1956); J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London 1965); E. Haberland, *Galla Süd-Athiopiens* (Stuttgart 1963); H. Lewis, *A Galla Monarchy* (Madison 1965); K. Knutsson, *Authority and Change... among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia* (Goteborg 1967); A. Legesse Gada—*Three approaches to the Study of African Society* (New York 1973), etc. for useful Bibliographies.

Relevant articles and papers include A. d'Abbadie 'Les Oromos grande nation africaine', *Annales de la Societe Scientifique de Bruxelles 2me Partie*, (Brussels 1879), pp. 167-192; R. Pankhurst 'The Beginnings of Oromo Studies in Europe' *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto Italo-Africano XXXI*, No 2 (Rome 1976), pp. 171-206; P. Baxter 'Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo', *African Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 308 (London 1978), pp. 283-296, etc.

5. R. Greenfield, 'Eritrean History—Pre-Colonial and Colonial' in B. Davidson Bereket Habte Selassie, et. al, *Symposium on Eritrea*, (1980, forthcoming).

6. Taddessa Tamrat, 'Ethiopia, the Red Sea and the Horn' in R. Oliver (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge 1977), p. 110-1.

7. E. Cerulli, 'Il Sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo XIII secondo un nuovo documento storico', *Rassegna di studi Etiopici* (Rome 1947) I, p. 5-14.

8. R. Oliver, *Cambridge History*, Vol. 3, p. 130.

9. R. Oliver, *Cambridge History*, Vol. 3, p. 135-6 and Harold C. Fleming 'Baiso and Rendille: Somali outliers', *Rassegna di studi Etiopici* (Rome 1964), 20, p. 82-3.

10. General agreement at the Workshop—Society and History in Ethiopia: the Southern Periphery, Cambridge African Studies Centre, 1979.

11. R.K.P. Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (London 1967), p. 20.

12. G.W.B. Huntingford, *Amde Seyon* (London 1965), p. 101-2 and 106.

13. R. Oliver, *Cambridge History*, Vol. 3, p. 150.

14. R. Basset, trans. *Histoire de la Conquete de l'Abyssinie par Chihab Ed-Din Ahmed Ben Abd El Qader* (Paris 1897-1901).

15. J.S. Trimingham 'Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim' in L. Osofsky (Ed.), *The Encyclopaedia Africana Dictionary of African Bibliography*, Vol. 1 (New York 1977), pp. 24 and 46-7.

16. For an outline History of these years see R. Caulk, 'Harar Town and its Neighbours' *Journal of African History* XVIII (3), (London 1977), pp. 369-86. See also P. Paulitschke, *Forschungsreise nach den Someluna Galla-landern Ost Afrikas* (Leipzig 1888) and for a comparative table of Abyssinian rulers



and those of Adal and Harar, see his *Die Geographische Erforschung der Adul-Länder und Harar's in Ost Afrika* (Leipzig 1884), p. 39–42; S.R. Waldron, *Social Organisation and Social Control in the Walled City of Harar*, Ethiopia (Unpublished PhD Thesis 1979). The writer is indebted to Dr. F. Hering (private communication) for a list of ruins near Harar of a culture of which insufficient is known—Egersera; Bio (near Lafto—and mentioned as an 'antica citta' in *Guida Dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* (Milan 1938), p. 455; Bulolo (east of Lake Haremaya and not seen by Paulitschke) Bubassa and Bio Woraba. A brief mention was made of reports of ruins further to the south-west, on the Many plains below Chinina in *Ethiopia Observer* Vol. V, No. 3 (London 1961), p. 210–11.

17. The writer was told this on visits to Al Azhar and the Great Mosque in Damascus, but see also *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 2A (Cambridge 1970), p. 384.

18. See relevant bibliographies for papers by E. Cerulli, R. Caulk, S. Waldron, M. Hassen, etc. which use Arabic documents as primary sources.

19. James Bruce of Kinnaird, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* 5 Vols. (Edinburgh 1790), Vol. 11, p. 126.

20. Sir Richard F. Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa or an Exploration of Harar* (London 1856); J.L. Krapf, *Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours...* (London 1860).

21. E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, 3rd. Edn. (London 1973), p. 75.

22. The British officials were well aware of this: when it appeared that some Somali chiefs may, on March 26, 1885, have ceded territory (in today's Republic of Djibouti) to the French, they recorded 'Our Somali coast treaties contain no stipulation of this nature'. India Office: Political and Secret Dept: Somali Coast 18B 442, 1887.

23. E. Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, 3rd. Edn., 3 vols. (London 1909), p. 387. I am indebted to R. Turton (personal communication) for identification of the Somali leader Ahmad Murgan as belonging to the Muhammad Zubeir branch of the Ogaden clan-group.

24. This reference is not to the old Yami Mosque but a new structure with a soaring minaret built by the Egyptians. In due course it was razed and on its site Medhane Alem (Saviour of the World) Church was built—as much a symbol of the new colonialism as a house of God for Amhara administrators, soldiers and settlers.

25. PRO: F.O. 178/4077, Memorandum 12th January 1887.

26. Although Menelik's interest in Harar made good economic sense, in this letter written in 1887 to the British Resident in Aden, Menelik refers to medieval campaigns against 'Gran' illustrating the depth of historical antagonisms.

27. ASMAI 36/4:40 Menelik to Umberto, (Entotto) May 1887. An interesting comparison with the colonial history of other parts of Africa is that the occupation of Harar preceded the occupation of the site of Salisbury, Zimbabwe, by only three years.

28. ASMAI 36/13:109 Menelik to Umberto, 10th April 1891. See also independent British discussion of this claim: F.O. 403/255 and F.O. 1/32 Rodd to Salisbury, 4 and May 13, 1897.

29. PRO: F.O. 403/177 Inclosure 1 in No. 19, Memorandum 12th April 1892. Further correspondence respecting the Red Sea and Somali Coast.

30. PRO: F.O. 403/255, Inclosure 173 Rodd to Salisbury 13th May 1897.

31. PRO: F.O. 403/255 Inclosure 189 (No. 36 secret) Rodd to Salisbury (Harar) 4th June 1897.

32. PRO: F.O. 403/255 Inclosure 173, Rodd to Salisbury,

(Addis Ababa) 13th May 1897. See also No. 35 of 4th June 1897.

33. See, D. Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (London, 1923), p. 16; other relevant works are Lt. O.E. Wheeler, *Somaliland or the North East Horn of Africa from the Gulf of Tajourah to the Equator* (Simla 1884); Capt. R.E. Swayne, *Seventeen Trips thro Somaliland* (London 1895); M. McNeill, *In pursuit of the 'Mad' Mullah* (London 1902); J.W. Jennings and C. Addison, *With the Abyssinians in Somaliland* (London 1905); A. Hamilton, *Somaliland* (London 1911); H.F.P. Battersby, *Richard Corfield of Somaliland* (London 1914); I.M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somaliland* (London 1965); and R.L. Hess, *Italian Colonialism in Somalia* (Chicago 1966). The official British Military History includes a geographical description of 'Abyssinian Somaliland', under the headings 'The Harar highlands' and 'The Ogaden country', in which it includes the 'Southern portion of the West and Central Haud'. See *The Official History of the operations in Somaliland, 1901–04*, Vol. 1 and 2 (London 1907).

There are serious works in Somali—*The Poetry of Muhammad Abdille Hassan* (Mogadishu 1974) for example. Articles by Muhamad Ahmed Ali, L. Silberman, R. Hess, R. Turton, Abdi Sheikh-Abdi and others on Abdille Hassan, particularly in *The Journal of African History*, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *Samalya* and *History Today* are relevant but too numerous to detail here.

Haile Sellassie persuaded de Gaulle to substitute the name 'Territory of the Afars and the Issas' for the French colony, which eventually in 1977 emerged as the independent Republic of Djibouti.

In response, perhaps, to Somali use of the term *Western Somalia* the Ethiopian Government has recently introduced the term *Eastern Ethiopia* for the disputed areas under their Governorate-General of Harerghe which is made up of ten Awrajas (provinces).

34. D. Jardine *op cit*, p. 47.

35. D. Jardine *op cit*, p. 57.

36. See note 4 for bibliographic information.

37. M. Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (London 1947); H. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II* (Oxford 1975) and R. Darkwah, *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire* all contain information on Shewan expansion, and bibliographies. The accounts of contemporary travellers from W.C. Harris *The Highlands of Ethiopia* (London 1844) on are useful for example J. Gaston Vanderhaym, *Une Expedition avec le Negous Menelik* (Paris 1896) and H. Darley, *Slaves and Ivory* (London 1976). See also E. Simone, *Amhara Military Expeditions against the Shewa Galla (1800–1850)*; A Reappraisal, and A. Triulzi 'The Background to Ras Gobana's Expeditions to Western Wallagga in 1886–1888: A Review of the Evidence' *Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, 1973 (Michigan 1975), pp. 135–142 and 143–157. H. Marcus 'Imperialism and Expansion in Ethiopia from 1865–1900' in L. Gann and P. Duignan (Eds.) *Colonialism in Africa 1870–1960* (Cambridge, Mass. 1969), pp. 420–461 is useful. Marcus has drawn attention to valuable material in travel reports in provincial geographical journals which can supplement government and missionary archival materials. There are a number of useful minor theses and long essays in Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Mogadishu University Libraries, as well as PhD theses in London and Washington. Several unpublished papers by C. McClellan, J. Cohen, etc. are invaluable.

38. For a discussion of this, see Baxter, 'Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem...' *op cit*, p. 287.

39. See Asmarom Legesse *Gada, op cit*.



40. See Greenfield, *Ethiopia . . .*, *op cit*, p. 102. The Afan Oromo name for the Addis Ababa area is Finfine.

41. R. Pankhurst 'Fire Arms in Ethiopian History 1800-1975' *Ethiopian Observer*, Vol. 2 (London 1962), pp. 135-180 and 'The role of Fire Arms in Ethiopian Culture (16th to 20th Centuries)' *Journal des Africanistes*, Vol. 47, 2 (Paris 1977), p. 131-144.

42. Major W. Cornwallis Harris *The Highlands . . .*, *op cit*, Vol. 1, p. 303, remarked in 1844 'The Hawash (River Awash), here upwards of two thousand two hundred feet above the ocean, forms in this direction the nominal boundary of the dominions of the King of Shoa.'

R. Darkwah, *Shewa, Menelek . . .*, *op cit*, p. 105, describes the Arusi campaign as 'the most sustained and the most bloody which Menelik undertook.'

It has become the fashion to write *Arsi* rather than *Arusi*.

43. M. Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes: The Challenge of Islam and the Re-unification of the Christian Empire 1769-1855* (London 1968) provides an interesting background to these events.

Indigenous histories, some in Arabic exist.

44. See discussion of Girmame Neway's unpublished MA thesis 'The impact of the White Settlement Policy in Kenya' (Columbia 1954) in R. Greenfield *Ethiopia . . .*, *op cit*, p. 341-351.

45. Children believed to be those of local leaders who were taken 'hostage' to Addis Ababa for elementary and even secondary education were sometimes found not to be so.

46. R. Greenfield, *Ethiopia . . .*, *op cit*, p. 273.

47. At the very time in 1960 that the late Emperor Haile Selassie was attracting the attention of a shocked world by offering scholarships (never taken up) for the 'orphans of

Sharpville', the spearing of an imperian tax collector near Dilla in Sidamo was followed by such violent retribution that students in the then University College (including Amharas) draw a comparison in their subsequent protest.

This serious incident was almost reminiscent of the 14th century when 'they . . . demolished the mosques, burnt the towns with fire and destroyed the food of the country and they killed man and beast, men and women, old and young, through the power of God', G.W.B. Huntingford, *Amde Seyon* (London 1965), p. 104.

48. See sections on Oromo or Galla nationalism in C. Clapham, *Haile Selassie's Government* (London 1969), pp. 80-82; J. Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (Oxford 1974), pp. 51-70 and passim; P. Gilkes, *The Dying Lion* (London 1975), pp. 204-226; M. & D. Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* (New York 1978), pp. 82-89, 90-94 etc.

49. R. Greenfield, *Ethiopia . . .*, *op cit*, p. 312, 453, 457 and passim.

50. Matchet, *West Africa* (London, 16 July 1979), p. 1257, noted that 'Currently 15 out of 16 members of the Standing Committee and 9 of the remaining 11 members of the dergue's Central Committee are Amharas. So are 31 out of the 37 Ministers and Permanent Secretaries; 6 of the 7 Commissioners; 13 of the 14 Regional Administrators and all 14 of their deputies' and commented 'Emperor Menelik II, architect of the modern empire-state at the time of the "Scramble for Africa", could never have allowed such an obvious concentration of power. Nor could His (late) Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, under whom the empire reached its furthest extent.'

Analysis of other appointments—for example in the diplomatic corps, reveals similar proportions.

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