18. WARS WITHIN WARS: THE WESTERN AND SOUTHWESTERN LOWLANDS

Ethiopian provinces spread out from the central highlands like spokes of a wheel. Most provinces consist of a highland area, usually inhabited by Amhara or Oromo, and a lowland hinterland, inhabited by marginalized people who are often semi-nomadic pastoralists. This is particularly the case for the west and the southwest.

West and southwest Ethiopia is the most economically productive and ethnically complex part of the country. Gojjam province is one of the Amhara heartlands, but contains a large peripheral area to the west, inhabited mainly by Agau and Gumuz people. Ethiopia's main export, coffee, is indigenous to the southwest,[1] which is mostly fertile and well-watered. In the nineteenth century, the Oromo states of the Gibe region (straddling modern day Keffa, Wollega, western Shewa and eastern Illubabor) were the most prosperous part of the country, and were the center of the regional trade in coffee, slaves, gold and ivory. Apart from coffee, these commodities originated in the surrounding lowlands, which are inhabited by a variety of people, including Gumuz, Berta, Koma, Mao, Ganza, Anuak, Nuer, Nyangatom, Chai, Dassenatch, Kwegu, Mursi, Ari, Hamar, and others. Many of these ethnic terms overlap, or are used in different ways by different groups, and many ethnic groups have two or more names. In the west of Wollega and Gojjam, these peoples are referred to as "Shankilla" by the highlanders, a derogatory term that they themselves reject. These groups are incorporated into the state to varying degrees -- some may be considered to be subjugated, others are marginal but have maintained a high degree of independence.

The existence of the international frontiers with Sudan and Kenya is a central fact of this area. Many ethnic groups straddle the border. The civil war in southern Sudan and the repression in northern Kenya have often meant that life on the Ethiopian side of the border, where the government has at times shown flexibility in local administrative arrangements, has been preferable to life in the neighboring country.

This chapter will outline the wars and famines that have affected the lowlands of the west and southwest, province by province, from north to south.

Western Gojjam: The EPRP Revisited

The western region of Gojjam is one of the Amhara heartlands, with a traditional independence from Shewa (see chapter 3). The western lowlands of the province, however, are

[1] The word "coffee" is even said to derive from the name of Keffa province, where the trees grow wild.

inhabited mainly by peoples who have more in common with their neighbors in lowland Wollega than the highland Amhara. These people include Gumuz, Agau, Shinasha and others. The Gumuz (also known as Begga), who numbered about 53,000 in 1970 will figure most prominently in this account.

Western Gojjam has long been incorporated into the extended domains of the highland states, which have raided for slaves in the area. In the 19th century, Ras Kassa of Quara became a renowned shifta leader in the area, rising to become the Emperor Teodros.

Following its first defeat in Addis Ababa during the Red Terror, and its second defeat in Tigray at the hands of the TPLF in 1978, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) set up a base for guerrilla operations in western Gonder. In 1983, it expanded its operations into northwest Gojjam. The leaders of the EPRP forces were mostly educated Amhara, but the rank and file were drawn from the local people of the area. Growth was slow but steady. In 1984, the EPRP held its second congress in Quara.

From 1985 onwards, the EPRP became more active, particularly in northwest Gojjam. This was partly in response to the resettlement program, which created deep resentment among the local people.

The establishment of the large Metekel settlement complex in late 1984 led to the displacement of the local Gumuz. The Gumuz of this area rely on shifting cultivation and gathering wild foods from the forest. The government declared that any arable land currently uncultivated and forests were "unused," and designated them resettlement areas. According to Dessalegn Rahmato, the established land use system was thereby disrupted: new land could not be cleared for shifting cultivation, and as "the main difference between hunger and a full stomach may depend on forest resources," local famine followed.[2] Some Gumuz turned to armed resistance; in 1985 and 1986 there were incidents in which settlers were fired on, and some joined the EPRP.

According to the testimonies of resettlers who escaped from Metekel and returned to Tigray, the EPRP harassed the settlements and stole food and other commodities, but gave food assistance to escapees and helped them return home.

As elsewhere, the government recruited a militia force from among the resettlers and used it not only to police the resettlement camps, but the local people as well.

In December 1985, the government launched its sixth attack on EPRP positions in western Gojjam and south-west Gonder, deploying about 4,500 troops. By mid-January, the attack had been repulsed, but retreating soldiers burned several villages, including Birawe

[2] Dessalegn Rahmato, "Settlement and Resettlement in Mettekel, Western Ethiopia," Africa (Roma), 43, (1988) pp. 14-34.

(December 21) and Arema (January 8, 1986), and summarily executed at least 20 civilians. Two further attacks were launched in each of the following two dry seasons. In 1988-9, activity intensified.

On June 21, 1989, the EPRP attacked a construction project within the Metekel area and kidnapped three Italian workers. Several vehicles and a water point were destroyed in the attack, and (according to escapees) food from a store was taken. The kidnapping incident gained much international publicity and government reprisals were quick to follow.

There is a credible account that on December 20, 1989, government troops entered Ambela market, Ankesha Banja sub-district, and opened fire, killing 14 and wounding 20 marketgoers. In August 1990, the EPRP made military gains, leading to another round of reprisals. These included:

* August 28: two villages in Ankasha sub-district were shelled, and three civilians killed.

* October 1 and 2: villages near Dangila were shelled and ten civilians were killed.

* December: soldiers killed a number of peasants in Laye Zigem, and reportedly then cut the genitals off the male corpses and displayed the mutilated bodies as a deterrent to support for the insurgents.

Conflict between EPRP and EPRDF

During 1990, the military advance of the EPRDF brought it into contact with the EPRP. The wounds from the battles of 1978 had not been healed -- if anything, they had intensified due to the fact that the EPDM, a constituent of EPRDF, was originally a breakaway group from EPRP. There were a number of mutual accusations of aggression. When the EPRDF occupied highland Gojjam in February-March 1991, these intensified. The EPRP accused the EPRDF of "declaring war" against it, of detaining EPRP supporters in the towns it occupied, of shooting unarmed demonstrators, and of taking away infrastructure from the resettlement sites. The EPRDF on its side accused the EPRP of aggression, of ambushes and of mining roads. On April 18, 1991, there was a battle between EPRP and EPRDF following the latter's occupation of Dangila.

Following the fall of the Mengistu government in May, fighting between the EPRP and EPRDF continued in western Gojjam. The Sudan government, which had hitherto given support to the EPRP, withdrew that assistance and closed the border. Four EPRP leaders in Sudan were arrested and handed over to the EPRDF. Intense fighting continued into July, with the EPRP admitting serious losses.

The conflict with the EPRP presented the EPRDF with its first challenge concerning its

conduct of warfare in a situation in which it possessed overwhelming superiority in manpower and materiel. At the time of writing it is too early to tell how the EPRDF forces have acquitted themselves in terms of treatment of the civilian population believed to be sympathetic to EPRP, and treatment of EPRP combatants taken prisoner. There have, however, been no reports of such abuses.

Highland Wollega: Lutherans and Oromo Nationalists

In the 1880s, the western Oromo states and Keffa were incorporated into the Shewan empire of the Emperor Menelik. Some were conquered by Menelik's armies, under the command of an Oromo general, Ras Gobana Dacche, and were subjected to the alienation of land and the imposition of neftegna Amhara settlers. Others, notably Leka-Nekempte (eastern Wollega) submitted voluntarily, and retained a degree of internal autonomy. The peripheral areas, most of them already subject to Oromo domination, were conquered in the 1890s.

The ethnic heterogeneity of the area and the variety of manners in which the peoples submitted to Abyssinian rule meant that local administration was uniquely intricate and frequently anomalous. As elsewhere in the empire, many conquered people did not submit readily to their new overlords. There were frequent if localized rebellions. The Gibe states had themselves subjugated neighboring peoples, and there were occasional violent clashes between the Oromo and the peripheral groups.

During the Italian occupation, the Oromo leaders of Wollega and Illubabor initiated a movement for independence from Ethiopia, based on the premise that they had voluntarily joined in the 1880s and had not thereby forfeited any sovereign rights, and in 1936 petitioned the British government to secede and become a British protectorate. The attempt was unsuccessful, but Oromo nationalism remained at least as potent in this area as in eastern Ethiopia. Many Oromo from Wollega were active in the Mecha-Tulema Association of the 1960s.

An important element in the growth of Oromo dissidence in the southwest was the Evangelical Church of Ethiopia, known as the Mekane Yesus. This was founded by Lutheran missionaries from Sweden, who were also active in Eritrea. The Imperial government forbade the missionaries to operate in the Amhara highlands, but permitted them to evangelize among the Moslems and followers of traditional religions in the south. Wollega province was where the Mekane Yesus concentrated, and by the 1970s it had a large number of followers and, equally importantly, had provided educational facilities on a scale that outstripped all other provinces save Shewa and Eritrea.

An indigenous protestant church, the Bethel Evangelical Church, was also influential in

the growth of Oromo political consciousness. This gained a strong following in the Dembi Dolo area.

Repression and Insurrection 1975-85

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was slow to begin military operations in western Ethiopia; it only began small-scale activities in 1981. The conditions were right, however, for resistance to grow. The government had already instigated a series of crackdowns in the area, mainly aimed at the influence of the educated elite associated with the protestant churches.

The military commander of Wollega from 1976 onwards was Sergeant Negussie Fanta, who soon acquired a reputation for ruthlessness. In early 1977, 15 Oromo students were executed for campaigning for the right to an education in Oromo (ironically, the government-sponsored literacy campaign was soon to cede them that right). The period of the Red Terror saw a crackdown on educated Oromo, especially members of the Mekane Yesus. A prominent pastor in the Mekane Yesus, Gudina Tumsa, was imprisoned in June 1979, and later "disappeared." His wife, Tsehai Tolessa, was imprisoned with over 400 other Oromo women in February 1980, and later released. Between May and December 1981, 300 Mekane Yesus churches were closed, and 600 pastors and other church workers arrested and church property confiscated.

In an apparent attempt to enforce a cultural change and a break from the church, people were forced at gunpoint to attend literacy classes and public meetings.[3] The government sent students to Wollega with instructions "to make 80 farmers literate;" instruction in the ideals of the revolution was also given.

Lowland Wollega: Multiple Marginalization

The OLF had its natural constituency in the Oromo-inhabited highlands of Wollega. However, when it started military operations, it did so from a base in Sudan, and therefore operated in the lowlands. Most of the lowland people are not Oromo, but Berta, Komo, Gumuz, and others. These peoples were already suffering at the hands of government military and resettlement policies, following a history of destruction at the hands of raiders and conquerors from all directions.

Life on the border consisted of shrewd calculations as to where short-term security could best be had. For example, a substantial part of the Komo crossed the border several times.

[3] Somali, Tigray and Oromo Resistance Monitor (STORM), 1.4, October 1981.

They originated on the Ethiopian side of the border, but crossed into Sudan earlier this century to escape Oromo raids, when Sudan became safe from Arab slavers.[4] In the 1960s, many Komo crossed back into Ethiopia in order to escape the forced labor demands of Sudanese military outposts. In 1966, a Sudanese army unit, annoyed at the departure of its servile labor force, crossed the border, burned several of the villages newly built by the Komo, killed animals and took several hundred people back to Sudan. The villages were also raided by Nuer groups associated with the Anyanya insurrection in southern Sudan. The Komo who remained protested to the Ethiopian authorities, who gave them arms and set up a police post, together with flag poles and flags so that they could advertise whose protection they came under.

The Ethiopian government also brought in highland settlers to secure the border. Started under Haile Selassie, this was intensified under the Dergue.

In 1979, resettlement camps were created at Asosa, close to the Sudan border, with about 25,000 resettlers. These involved alienation of land from local residents, and many of the settlers were armed. Locals were also forced to work without pay on the resettlement projects. This was also one of the few areas in which agricultural collectivization was enforced. Forcible conscription to the army was implemented on a large scale. In early 1981, nearly 10,000 refugees, mainly Oromo, fled to Sudan to escape these abuses. This coincided with famine in western Wollega. Despite good climatic conditions, government policies had induced a severe localized food shortage, affecting an estimated 30,000-40,000 people in western Wollega. The OLF estimates that one thousand died.

In the late 1970s, the Beni Shangul Liberation Front was active in the lowlands, engaging in guerrilla activity on a small scale. During the 1980s it had no effective presence in the field.[5]

Early OLF Activity and Army Reprisals

The first OLF cadres arrived in Wollega in 1981 from eastern Ethiopia, and began to recruit.

Military activity by the Ethiopian army on the "western front" began with an offensive in January-February 1982. Counter-insurgency activities quickly intensified, and a year later a

[4] This section is derived from: Wendy James, "From Aboriginal to Frontier Society in Western Ethiopia," in D. Donham and W. James (eds.) "Working Papers on Society and History in Imperial Ethiopia: The Southern Periphery from the 1880s to 1974," Cambridge, African Studies Centre, 1980, pp. 49-50.

[5] In 1989 the EPRDF trained some Beni Shangul Liberation Front fighters, who re-entered the area in early 1991. They clashed with the OLF and were defeated near Shirkele, northwest Wollega, in early March, whereafter they came to an agreement with the OLF.

major military camp was constructed in the Didessa valley. Both routine patrols and larger campaigns were conducted with the indiscriminate violence against civilians that is so familiar from elsewhere in the country. During 1983-5, the OLF benefited from the offensive stance towards Ethiopia taken by the Sudan government.

In August 1984, according to credible reports, army reprisals in Begi area killed over 200 civilians and destroyed numerous homes.[6] Another army campaign in western Wollega during November-December 1984 led to the burning of villages and the killing of civilians. The largest offensive took place in June 1985 and was centered on Asosa. This followed an intensification of OLF activity, and a joint statement by the OLF and TPLF that they planned to coordinate their attacks and ultimately open a joint military front. Reports indicate that the army used scorched earth policies. The OLF accused it of burning villages and other revenge atrocities.[7] This offensive coincided with the planting season and contributed to local famine conditions.

In the period 1985-8, the counter-insurgency operations in Wollega were closely related to the implementation of the resettlement and villagization programs, to which attention must now turn.

Impact of Resettlement

The first major resettlement program in the west was implemented in Asosa, starting in the late 1970s. The settlers were brought from Wollo and Gojjam; many were given military training. The local people were compelled to give land to the settlers, and to supply free labor for the construction of the resettlement sites. The settler militia were reportedly used to exact taxes from the locals and obtain conscripts for the army.

The much larger resettlement program of 1984-8 had comparable consequences for the local population, on a larger scale. In "integrated settlements," the settlers were mixed in with local people, who were obliged to share their land and other resources with the newcomers. The larger "conventional" settlements involved the displacement of indigenous people and the disruption of existing systems for land use, reducing many to a state of hunger and destitution.

Investigations by Cultural Survival indicate that the impact of the resettlement program of 1984-6 on the indigenous population of western Wollega was disastrous.[8] According to the

[6] Africa Contemporary Record, 1984-5, p. B244.

[7] Africa Contemporary Record, 1985-6, p. B296.

[8] Cultural Survival, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine 1984-1985, Cambridge, Mass., 1985; Sandra Steingraber, "Resettlement in 1986-1987", in J. W. Clay, S. Steingraber and P. Niggli, The Spoils of Famine: Ethiopian Famine Policy and Peasant Agriculture, Cambridge, Mass., 1988.

testimony of refugees in Sudan, local people lost land to the settlers, and were forced to undertake large amounts of unpaid and coerced work constructing the resettlement sites and accompanying infrastructure. The loss of forests and forest resources to the settlements was also disliked. These reports have to be set against more positive descriptions from central and southern Wollega, which report much less tension between settlers and locals.[9]

Based upon the existence of the settlement militia and other considerations, the OLF declared that "the settlement program is a legitimate military target."[10] It attacked settlements on several occasions, for example the settlement of Jarso on April 28, 1988, when two Irish relief workers were captured.[11]

Villagization

Villagization began in Wollega in late 1985, and was implemented in the adjoining provinces starting the following year. The program was linked to the construction of roads, and relocation near army garrisons. The program in western Wollega was implemented with thoroughness and coercion, though the level of violence did not match that of Harerghe.[12] All the villagers' possessions were registered, and many were confiscated, including plow oxen. People were detained, tortured, raped and executed; houses and grain stores were burned.

Western Wollega was unusual in that villagization was also accompanied by enforced collectivization; on the collective farms the produce was entirely taken by government officials, and the villagers were instead given a ration.

Outside the insurgent zones of western Wollega and Illubabor (see below), the villagization campaign in southwest Ethiopia was more akin to that in Arsi -- implemented with an implicit threat of violence, but with little actual force used.

The Role of the SPLA

The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was set up in 1983 following a mutiny by southern Sudanese soldiers in the town of Bor. From the beginning it was led by Colonel John

[9] Alula Pankhurst, "Settling for a New World: People and the State in an Ethiopian Resettlement Village," PhD thesis, Manchester, 1990.

[10] OLF, "Statement to Agencies Working in Oromo Land," May 4, 1988.

[11] The two were released unharmed in Sudan a month later.

[12] Sandra Steingraber, "Villagization in a War Zone: Refugee Reports from Western Wollega," in Clay et al., 1988, pp. 200-213.

Garang. Political marginalization and economic exploitation of the south and increasing human rights abuses by the Sudan government were all factors contributing to the mutiny and the subsequent rapid spread of the revolt throughout much of southern Sudan. The SPLA turned to the Ethiopian government as a natural ally in its struggle, and Col. Mengistu for his part saw Col. Garang's movement as a useful counterweight to Khartoum's continuing support for the EPLF, TPLF, OLF and other smaller fronts.[13] Close links were quickly established between the SPLA and the Ethiopian government at the highest level. The Ethiopian government provided the SPLA with military equipment, bases and a radio station.

Until the fall of the Mengistu government in May 1991, there was close military and security coordination between the SPLA and the Ethiopian army. The Ethiopian army assisted the SPLA in attacks on Kurmuk in Blue Nile Province (across the border from Asosa) in November 1987 and November 1989, and in Eastern Equatoria Province in early 1988. The Ethiopian army also allowed the SPLA freedom to operate in several areas of western Wollega and Illubabor. From 1986-90, the SPLA had a military base at Duul, just inside Ethiopia opposite the Sudanese army garrison at Kurmuk. Local administrators and senior civilian politicians reportedly objected to the SPLA presence, but were overruled by the military command. For its part, the SPLA fought against the OLF. This occurred right up until May 1991, when SPLA contingents fought alongside the Ethiopian army at Dembi Dolo, near Gambela.[14]

The SPLA presence in Wollega Ethiopia led to a number of abuses. The enslavement of escaping resettlers has been discussed in chapter 12. Cattle raiding in Keffa and Gamu Gofa will be discussed below.[15] It attacked Oromo refugees and displaced people in August 1987 and November 1988, killing several civilians on each occasion.[16]

On November 9, 1989, the SPLA attacked a refugee camp at Yabus in Blue Nile Province, Sudan, and burned it to the ground. Fortunately, the 10,000 refugees had evacuated the camp when they learned of the likelihood of the attack, but were forced to spend many days in the wild without supplies. Yabus camp lay in an area contested between the SPLA and the

[13] In the late 1970s and early 1980s, mutineers in southern Sudan had sought and obtained refuge and sometimes support from the Ethiopian government.

[14] There are two examples of the Sudanese army giving comparable military assistance to rebels in Ethiopia. One was support for the Ethiopian Democratic Union offensive in Gonder in 1977, and the other was the OLF offensive in 1990, described below.

[15] Such raiding was also undertaken by local pastoral groups armed by the Sudan government to fight against the SPLA.

[16] Unconfirmed claims by the OLF are that 37 were killed in the first attack and 19 in the second.

Sudanese army, and relief items had been regularly brought to the camp with OLF and Sudanese army military escorts. It is therefore understandable that the SPLA might have suspected that it also performed a military or intelligence function.

Perhaps the most common abuse was the requisitioning of supplies and stealing of cattle from the local populations, with accompanying violence against civilians. Simon Mollison, a visitor to Berta areas of western Wollega, controlled by the OLF, in March 1990, described some of the damage caused by SPLA units:

> The damage caused by the SPLA was greatest near the Sudanese border and here the ruins of many villages are the only signs of the area having been inhabited. Some of these are now being rebuilt but others are only shown to have existed by the often-singed groups of mango trees in the bush. In villages destroyed more recently, ruined houses still have the charred remnants of human habitation - broken pots, lamps, etc.
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> Deeper inside [Ethiopia] (50-60km) villages were not destroyed but had been regularly looted by the SPLA. In one village people told how over 1,000 SPLA troops had regularly set up a camp in the village. They would demand food and money from the villagers and strike them. Twelve people had been shot. Even the clothes they were wearing would be taken. Eventually this treatment had impoverished them to the extent that many of them fled to the bush, where they were mainly living on wild foods.... In another village I was told how the SPLA had stolen many of their animals and had burned their grain stores. They had been scared to cultivate in the immediate vicinity of the village.

The OLF offensives of 1990 and 1991 effectively drove the SPLA from the northern and southern parts of western Wollega respectively.

Groups armed by the Sudan Government

The Sudan government employed a very different strategy to its Ethiopian counterpart when faced with insurrection. Instead of using a large and well-equipped conventional army, the Sudan government chose to give arms, support and training to locally-based militia groups, which would then attack the forces of the SPLA with a greater or lesser degree of coordination with the army. This policy started in 1983 and persists up to the present. Some of these militias, such as the Murahaliin of southern Darfur and Kordofan regions, have been responsible for some of the grossest abuses of human rights witnessed in modern Africa, including large-scale massacres of civilians, slavery, destruction of villages, and deliberate starvation.[17]

Close to the border with Ethiopia, the Sudan government armed several "friendly" groups. These included the Anyanya 2 paramilitary force, mainly drawn from members of the

[17] See: Africa Watch report, Denying "The Honor of Living:" Sudan: A Human Rights Disaster, March 1990.

Nuer ethnic group, and Toposa and Murle militias. These groups raided into Ethiopia as well as attacking the SPLA and its sympathisers. One cattle-herding people, the Chai, who live close to the Sudan border, lost almost all their cattle by 1988. Many people were killed, and the remnants of the group was forced to retreat from their existing grazing land to the Maji mountains.

Military Activity in Wollega 1989-91

In November 1989, an SPLA attack across the border from Ethiopia succeeded in capturing the town of Kurmuk. This was the second time that Kurmuk had been taken, and as on the previous occasion two years before, the Sudan government launched a major campaign to recapture it. In the face of superior forces, the SPLA withdrew. There then followed a period of close military cooperation between the Sudanese army and the OLF. In the first days of the new year, the OLF launched a major offensive in western Wollega, with assistance from the EPLF and possibly the Sudanese army, which certainly launched a simultaneous attack on SPLA positions inside Sudan. Within a few weeks, the Ethiopian army and the SPLA had been driven out of their major positions in northwest Wollega, including the strategic town of Asosa. Though a fierce counter-attack followed, and Asosa was recaptured, the OLF gained the ascendancy in the area.

The OLF Capture of Asosa

The OLF capture of Asosa on January 5-10 witnessed a number of abuses against civilians. The first incidents were against the refugees in Tsore camp.

Tsore camp contained about 42,000 Sudanese refugees. The majority had been displaced by fighting in the area in 1987-8, though some were very recent arrivals. About 60 per cent were speakers of the Uduk language.

According to reports, a warning was delivered to the SPLA (by either the OLF of EPLF) that an attack was imminent and that the refugees should be removed from the area for their safety. However, the SPLA failed to effectively pass such a warning on to the residents of Tsore, who learned of the impending attack only when the gunfire came within earshot. Most then collected their possessions, abandoned the camp, and headed southwest towards Yabus Kubri, just across the border in Sudan. According to testimonies later obtained from the refugees, they passed safely among people they identified as "Eritreans," but while travelling through a mountain ravine they were shot at by the Duwalla people, who were armed and instructed by the OLF. An old man and several young girls, some of them carrying babies on

their backs, were killed by being shot and falling into a ravine.

About 120 refugees who did not evacuate the camp were killed in the OLF attack, some of them deliberately.

At Yabus Kubri, the displaced refugees and a contingent of SPLA fighters were bombed by the Sudanese air force. They fled to nearby hill villages. There was then a ground attack on Yabus Kubri by the Sudanese army, which used artillery to shell the hill villages where people were hiding. The people were forced to run southwards again, leaving sick people behind on the road. The refugees moved through a succession of places. On the way, they suffered hunger and further aerial bombardment, and heard of threats of more ground attacks by the Sudanese army. Finally the refugees were directed by the SPLA to cross back into Ethiopia, at Pagak, where they arrived in batches between March and June. A representative from UNHCR visited the refugees in their makeshift camp in Pagak and provided some food rations. The camp at Pagak (which is inside Ethiopia) was then bombed, presumably by the Sudan air force. For reasons of cost, UNHCR decided against a new camp at Pagak and instead transferred the refugees to Itang camp between April and July.

The OLF denied that the attack on Tsore camp took place. It did not attempt to justify the attack on the grounds that the camp was also used as a military base, though there is strong evidence that the SPLA utilized all the refugee camps in Ethiopia for military purposes, and the camp occupies a strategic location close to the Kurmuk-Asosa road, where the OLF could not have safely allowed the SPLA to remain. There is also a striking similarity between the attack on Tsore and the destruction of Yabus camp by the SPLA just two months earlier, so a motive of simple reprisal cannot be ruled out.

The OLF also attacked trucks bringing supplies to refugee camps on at least one occasion.

The OLF overran Asosa town and the resettlement camps in the area. Both of these may be counted as military targets -- the town had an army garrison and the resettlement camps (collectively known as Gojjam Sefer) contained about 6,000 militiamen who had been used to secure the area and extract taxes, forced labor and conscripts. Both also included substantial civilian and non-combatant populations. In the attacks, there were civilian casualties, and there was at least one incident in which Amharic-speaking civilians were deliberately killed; according to different versions, shot or burned to death.

The Ethiopian government made great propaganda out of the atrocity. Supposed eye-witnesses to the incident were interviewed, who claimed that non-Oromo people were rounded up and instructed to go for a meeting in a school, where they were machine-gunned. One man claiming to be an eyewitness said that the attackers spoke Tigrinya (the main language of Eritrea

and Tigray). Full details of the incidents have never fully come to light.[18]

While evacuating, the Ethiopian army burned and looted at least three villages: Shigogoo, near Asosa; Shanto, near Bambesi; and Kongiloo, near Kobar.

[18] In one respect at least, this propaganda backfired: the OLF reported a new influx of recruits from government-controlled areas, who volunteered in order to "kill Amharas."

The Army and Air Force Counter-Attack

The army responded with a bombing campaign. According to OLF claims, mostly substantiated by independent sources, the following air raids occurred:

* January 7 and 8: Asosa: nine killed, 15 wounded, including women and children.

* January 10: Asosa: ten killed, five wounded.

* January 15: Bambasi, east of Asosa. (For this and the following raids, no casualty figures are available).

* January 23: Mandi, east of Asosa.

* January 23: Dalatti, east of Asosa.

* January 26: Bambasi.

* January 27: Hopha, north of Asosa.

* February 7: Hurungu: many houses burned.

* February 8: Arge: many cattle killed.

* February 8: Buldugilin, north of Asosa: many houses burned.

This was followed by a ground assault, which took the form of a military action to recover the (now-deserted) town of Asosa, and a series of punitive expeditions in the rural areas. Simon Mollison, visiting western Wollega in March 1990 reported some of the actions of the army and their effects:

> Closer to Mandi ... some raids on Berta villages had been carried out by government forces. Such raids appear to have been a recent phenomenon. They have commonly taken the form of government troops entering a village and stealing animals, food, money and possessions from the houses of the people, who had fled at the first sight of the armed force. Those late to leave had been shot at and some had been killed. This happened at the village of Ferdos, for example, a little more than a month ago [mid-February]... They say that at least one man was killed. Houses were broken into and looted but no burning took place.
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> The village of Sirba, inhabited by the Sese people, was attacked by a government force in January. At least two of the local people were killed and their bodies were tied to trees, but others had time to escape because the attackers were seen while still some distance off. The village was looted and much of it was destroyed. The people have not returned to rebuild the village as they feel it would remain a target. Sirba was the centre of some missionary project and had an airstrip. It can thus be seen as having been quite

an important centre for the area. Because of the burning and the method of dealing with the corpses, this raid seems to have been motivated by a desire to punish the villagers.

Harangama is a small village in the hills by the Blue Nile about six hours' walk from Oda. It is a Gumuz village and was attacked by government forces in September 1989. Six people, who were slow escaping, are said to have been killed. The village was burned and most people lost most of their possessions.

I talked with some Oromo people in the lowland bamboo forest about two hours from Ferdos. They told me something of the reason that they had fled their homes to this previously unsettled area.

Government forces had regularly and systematically "raided" their villages. They would take the villagers' money and cattle and also their children (who would be taken to fight in the army). One old man I talked with told me his story. He had arrived to settle in this lowland area two months before [i.e. in January] having finally decided to leave the collective farm, Baamichee, where he had lived for the last eight years. Previously he had lived in a village called Gumbi where he had been "a rich man". He had owned many cattle and a lot of coffee bushes, he said. His farm in Gumbi was "given to others" (possibly Tigrayans [i.e. resettlers]). Life had got worse and worse in Baamichee. At first it had not been bad but now the government had taken nearly all he produced (maize, luba, peppers, tef). They had taken some of his children and some of his cattle. In the end he was so anxious to escape get away that he left 20 cows behind, taking only two and a little money. He escaped with nine other families and he was the only one who managed to get away with anything. He is now living in this lowland area (they seem to call it Buche) where people would never have dreamed of living once. It is okay in the dry season but not in the rains. The malaria will be terrible and the soil is a heavy black clay.

Other Oromos I talked to in Buche had similar stories to tell. Oromo refugees from Asosa town who I had talked to in Bikorri in Sudan also told stories of terrible taxation, straight theft and always of their children being stolen and sent to the war. The number of Oromos who have "voluntarily displaced" themselves to the Buche area where they live in great poverty and in an area that will obviously be a swamp in the wet season is further testimony to the conditions they decided to leave.

In the first three months of 1991, about 4,000 refugees from this area crossed the border into Sudan. They included a disproportionate number of young men and teenage boys, fearing conscription.

Burning Villages

Throughout 1990 and into early 1991, the army was active in destroying villages, spreading southwards and eastwards out of the border area as the OLF gradually gained ground. The testimony of an army deserter obtained by Dr Trevor Trueman, a physician working with a humanitarian agency, and circumstantial evidence suggests that the army utilized special "burning squads". Members of the squads would enter a village after warning shots had scared the inhabitants away, collect farm tools and other implements and place them inside the houses, and then systematically burn all the houses. Crops were also burned.

The following incidents have been confirmed:

* September 1990: Al Amir area, several villages: 600 houses burned.

* September: Bela Bangaa village, Tuulu district, burned and attacked from the air, about 700 houses burned.

* October: Gibao, near Kobar: about 300 houses burned and looted by soldiers.

* November 8: Shirkale village, near Asosa, burned in an attack by helicopter gunships, killing one civilian and wounding five others.

* November 21: Fongo, near Kobar: over 90 houses burned by soldiers.

* November 26: Ego Kurmuk village attacked by helicopter gunships.

* November 28: Ego Gomono village attacked by helicopter gunships.

The Creation of Famine

It will be clear from the details given above that the government military activity from 1989 onwards was causing great impoverishment. Certainly, visitors to the area report that local people said that they had become much poorer. Dr Trueman estimated that in Al Amir the average area farmed by one family had fallen from 1-2 hectares before the military actions to about half a hectare afterwards. The culmulative effect of enforced villagization, collectivization, destruction of houses and farms by the army, and forcible displacement were added to by the prevention of trade. Donkey trade almost came to a halt in the late 1980s on account of the brutality and demands for money of army patrols and checkpoints. It only restarted after the OLF occupation, but the retreating government forces took with them all cars

and trucks, severely disrupting bulk trading. Food prices were climbing fast in early 1991.

There can be no doubt that if the government's counter-insurgency policies had continued for another year or so, and spread to a larger area, famine would have ensued in western Wollega, despite the fact that it is an exceptionally fertile and well-watered area.

Conclusion

Most of the population of the lowlands of Wollega has gone through, in an accelerated form, a version of the destruction, impoverishment and displacement that occurred in Tigray and Eritrea over a longer period. There were certain added complications such as resettlement, and the manner in which the Sudanese civil war directly spilled over into Ethiopia. While the OLF is in control of the great majority of the area at the time of writing, certain lowland areas adjacent to the Sudan border remain beyond any form of civil authority. Whether peace and stability are established in these parts depends crucially on developments in the Sudanese civil war. Re-establishing civil administration and the rule of law, and resolving the many local ethnic disputes that are certain to arise in this area, will demand considerable skill and patience from the incoming administration.

The Anuak of Illubabor

One group of peripheral people who suffered particularly from the government's policies were the Anuak, who are a Nilotic people who inhabit an area straddling the Sudan border. Many Anuak bore the brunt of violently-enforced resettlement and villagization, and then were overwhelmed by an inflow of Sudanese refugees, accompanied by the SPLA. However, as in the case of most peripheral people, the government followed a strategy of "divide and rule." Certain groups of Anuak certainly benefited from government patronage and policies. The government armed an Anuak militia, which however had uncertain loyalties. The Anuak in Sudan also suffered from the neglect of their area by successive Sudanese governments, and the outbreak of the Sudanese civil war in 1983, and thus were more sympathetic to the Ethiopian government.

The Ethiopian Anuak numbered an estimated 56,000 in 1970. Historically and culturally they have greater ties with their neighbors in Sudan than they do with the Ethiopian highlands. Their well-watered area has, however, been coveted by successive Ethiopian governments. In 1979, many Anuak were evicted en masse when the government set up irrigation schemes on the Baro river. Amhara settlers were brought from the north to farm the

schemes. This coincided with an intense conscription campaign for the army.[19] Several hundred Anuak were killed by the army, and in response the Gambela Liberation Front (GLF)[20] was set up in 1980. It had links with the OLF and operated through Sudan. There were clashes between the army and the GLF in 1982, with government reprisals against the civilian population.

In 1979, 4,000 Anuak and Nuer fled to Sudan, claiming their land had been confiscated by the government. Shortly afterwards, 3,000 of their southern neighbors, the Begol, also fled to Sudan. Without any investigation of conditions on the Ethiopian side of the border, the UNHCR floated a proposal to repatriate these refugees in 1983.[21]

The resettlement program in Gambela in 1984-6 involved another round of land confiscation. It also meant that the Anuak population was matched by 70,000 new settlers.

In June 1986, villagization began among the Anuak population of Illubabor. The program was implemented in a particularly severe manner. The Anuak population was compelled to relocate in villages integrated with the recently-set up resettlement sites. The new villages have been described as more akin to forced labor camps.[22]

In April-May 1987, the re-named GLF staged several attacks on the resettlement sites that were now "integrated" with the new Anuak villages. A clinic in Abol settlement was attacked, apparently with the intention of killing government cadres. Government reprisals included the killing of a number of Anuak, and the enforcement of a strict curfew and related restrictions in Gambela town and nearby areas, by a militia drawn from among the resettlers.

The Anuak were also victims of attacks by the SPLA, with numerous credible but unconfirmed reports of killings of civilians. After 1988 the SPLA gained full control of the Sudan border, and GLF military activity ceased.

In May-June 1991, when the OLF and EPRDF occupied Gambela, the GLF was given a large role in the administration of the area. The Anuak militia was partially disarmed. The GLF is reported to have engaged in attacks on resettlement sites, looting villages and killing tens of civilians.

The SPLA and Sudanese Refugees

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[19] Survival International, 1991, pp. 3-4.

[20] Renamed the Gambela People's Liberation Movement in 1985.

[21] Ahmad Karadawi, "Refugee Policy in the Sudan, 1967-84," DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1988, pp. 112, 332.

[22] Sandra Steingraber, "Integrated Settlement in Gambella: Armed Uprisings and Government Reprisals," in Clay et al, 1988, pp. 236-7.

Starting in 1983, Sudanese refugees began to flee the war in southern Sudan. Many headed for Ethiopia, where the SPLA and Ethiopian government gave them protection, and international agencies provided assistance.

Two camps were set up in western Illubabor and one in the adjoining area of Keffa. By 1990, Itang camp had 270,000 registered refugees, though in reality it probably held about 150,000, due to some having double-registered and others having left the camp but remained on the register. Fugnido had 85,000 registered, though actually probably 50,000-60,000. Dima, in Keffa, had 35,000. The population of these camps was about 75% young men and boys. This reached an extreme at Dima camp in 1988, where the population was 97.8%, 86% of them aged between 15 and 45.[23] Part of the explanation for this is that the women and young children had fled the war and famine in a different direction (to northern Sudan), and part is that the refugee camps also operated as military bases for the SPLA.

Security was always tight at the refugee camps. Foreign visitors were given only guided tours, and usually not allowed to stay overnight. The SPLA presence was strong, and uniformed SPLA members were often present. According to a former Commissioner for Relief and Rehabilitation, internationally-donated food aid was diverted to the soldiers of the SPLA.[24] In 1991, it was commonly estimated that 20 per cent of the food destined for the camps was diverted to the SPLA, but visitors to the neighboring areas of Sudan report that much of this "diverted" food was in fact being eaten by civilian relatives of the refugees inside Sudan. However, the diversion of ten per cent of the food would have been sufficient to feed half of the combatant members of the SPLA.

According to an arrangement reached with the Ethiopian government, the SPLA was given a free hand in much of Illubabor province, in return for keeping the GLF in check.

In the lowlands of Keffa province, cattle raiding by SPLA units was common. SPLA soldiers would demand cattle from the local population.

The Refugees Return to Sudan, May 1991

In a few days in May and June 1991, almost the entire population of Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia returned to Sudan, precipitating a humanitarian crisis and a major relief operation led by the UN. Allegations were made -- some by the SPLA -- that the refugees had been

[23] UNHCR Technical Support Service, "Ethiopia: Health and Nutrition Assessment of Southern Sudanese Refugee Camps in Kefa, Illubabor and Wolega Awrajas, 8-22 March 1988," Geneva, 1988, Annexe F.

[24] Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia, Trenton, NJ, 1989, p. 158.

forcibly driven out by the EPRDF and/or OLF, or that a Sudanese army attack on the camps was planned. None of these claims were true. The SPLA later said that they had led the refugees out, fearing for the safety of the refugees during a breakdown of law and order.

In late March 1991, EPRDF forces crossed from Gojjam into Wollega. In the first ten days of April they captured the provincial capital, Nekempte, and other key garrisons. Defeated government soldiers looted several parts of Nekempte town, including stealing property and vehicles belonging to the UN relief operation for Sudanese refugees.

In occupying Wollega, the EPRDF cut the route between Addis Ababa and the Sudanese refugee camps. On April 5, an EPRDF representative assured the UNHCR in Geneva that the Front was willing to cooperate with continued relief programs to the camps, allowing free passage of relief commodities. The UNHCR never took up the offer, presumably because the negotiations necessary to obtain an agreement from both sides would have taken too long, the situation was too unstable, the position of the OLF was unclear, and the UN was fearful for its staff following the looting incidents in Nekempte and the OLF attack on Tsore in 1990. This meant that there were no more food deliveries to the camps. However, grain remained in store, and some distributions occurred.

More generally, the EPRDF said it was willing to see the refugees remain in Ethiopia, but it would not accept the armed presence of the SPLA. In April and May, four separate attempts were made by mediators to bring representatives of the SPLA and EPRDF together to discuss the plight of the refugees. On each occasion the suggestion to meet was rejected by the SPLA -- "why should we talk to them?" was the SPLA attitude.[25]

Meanwhile there was a series of meetings between the EPRDF and the OLF, and the two organizations agreed to coordinate their military strategy in the southwest. This led to a coordinated advance southwards towards Illubabor.

When President Mengistu fled the country on May 22, the imminent collapse of the government was clearly evident. The refugees in the camps were tense, apprehensive of a repeat of the Asosa incident. The relief agencies feared for the safety of their staff, and began to withdraw from Itang, the most northerly camp, on May 24-25. UNHCR evacuated its staff at the same time, taking the keys of the food stores and other vital equipment. The hospital at Itang was left without doctors or administrators. The last staff members left on the morning of May 26.

On the evening of May 26, OLF forces approached the Ethiopian army garrison north of Itang, and EPRDF forces approached Gambela town. The advancing forces shelled both garrisons, and the garrisons replied. However, the government soldiers quickly left, setting fire

[25] "Sudan and Ethiopia; No Rebel Unity," Middle East International, June 14, 1991.

to their houses and an ammunition dump, which caused a series of explosions. Several bridges across the Baro river were destroyed, almost certainly by government soldiers. Shells fired by the advancing forces landed close to the camps. The shelling and explosions alarmed the refugees -- especially those who had previously fled from Tsore.

Earlier in the year, the SPLA had laid contingency plans for an evacuation of the refugee population.[26] The refugees had been warned beforehand that they might have to leave, river transport was arranged for community leaders and administrators, and the migration to Sudan was conducted in a remarkably orderly manner.

Throughout the day of May 26 and the following night, the camp of Itang was evacuated. Most people headed for Nasir; smaller numbers went to Akobo and to the other refugee camps, from where they returned to Sudan. Some people went back to Itang the following day to collect possessions, but members of the government Anuak militia were present, engaging in looting, and this deterred them. There is some evidence that this looting had been planned in advance, for example Anuak militiamen had prevented the camp administrators opening the food stores the day before. The Anuak militia and unaffiliated bandits also preyed on small groups of refugees as they trekked towards Sudan. A Gaajak Nuer militia (also armed by the Ethiopian government) crossed into Sudanese territory (partly because of a conflict with the Anuak militia) and preyed upon the refugees there. Dead bodies of those killed by these militias and bandits floated down the Sobat River the following week.

The camps at Fugnido and Dima were evacuated over the following weeks. The refugees from these camps neither saw nor heard any sign of the OLF or EPRDF forces. In Fugnido they were reportedly warned to leave by armed local people, and migrated to Pochala in Sudan in accordance with SPLA instructions. In Dima, the SPLA closed the camp, looting and destroying vehicles and other property, and ordered the refugees to leave to Pakok in Sudan. The SPLA forces then made a stand inside Ethiopia against the EPRDF forces until they were forced to leave in early July.

The Sudan government was aware in advance of the likely return of the refugees, and closely monitored the return movements, by listening in to radio traffic and sending airplanes to overfly the area. The Sudanese air force bombed Nasir on May 14 (killing 49 people and wounding 50, and forcing the evacuation of the town) and on May 22, killing one. Columns of returning refugees were also bombed, at Jokau (on the way to Nasir) on May 30 and Akobo on May 31. The bombing was carried out from a great height and was highly inaccurate and caused at most one fatality.

[26] Proposals had been circulating for some time for a gradual return of the refugees to their homes. Western donors had disagreed over whether it would be better for the refugees to remain or return. Some refugees had also made independent plans to return after the harvest of late 1991.

A UN-led relief program, including an airdrop of food to Nasir, was implemented almost immediately. Like other such programs in southern Sudan, it has been subject to delays and restrictions by the Sudan government. To date, while a large relief-dependent population exists in Nasir, Pochalla, Akobo, Pakok and in the surrounding areas, the previous good nutritional state of the refugees, the local resources of the area, and the relief program has prevented the extremes of famine.

Conclusion

The continued support of the SPLA for the Mengistu government until its final days was a debacle for the organization, and particularly for its leader Col. John Garang who was personally identified with the policy. The SPLA lost military supplies and bases, its radio station, and a haven for its civilian sympathisers. These factors contributed to an attempted coup by the SPLA military commanders in Upper Nile province in August 1991. The outcome of the split in the SPLA remains uncertain at the time of writing. Relations between the EPRDF, OLF and the two wings of the SPLA will be an important determinant of the peace and stability of the border region in the forseeable future.

Lowland Gamu Gofa: Carriers of New Guns

The lowlands of Gamu Gofa, adjacent to the frontiers of Sudan and Kenya, is the remotest periphery of Ethiopia. The peoples of this area have never been fully controlled by the highland states -- they are peripheral but not subjugated. They are mostly cattle-herders, and have a history of inter-communal violence. However, in the 1980s, this violence changed markedly, with the supply of modern automatic weapons to some groups. This weaponry upset the previously existing state of approximate balance between different groups, and led to unprecedented numbers of civilian deaths. The increased level of violence was also caused by, and in turn caused, direct military intervention by the Kenyan army, and may yet provoke a similar response from the Ethiopian government.

Conflicts up to the 1980s

The river Omo drains into Lake Turkana in Kenya. In its lower reaches, it passes through territory inhabited by pastoral groups, such as the Dassenatch (also known as Marele), Nyangatom (also known as Dongiro and Bume),[27] Mursi, and Hamar. Their immediate neighbors in Sudan are the Toposa and in Kenya are the Turkana.

These peoples have traditionally conducted armed conflict between themselves. Some of this conflict consisted of cattle raiding, and some of disputes over territory. Social anthropologists have observed the rules followed in this local warfare, which include attempting to maintain reciprocity in attacks, and formalizing relations and boundaries after periods of hostility. Dr David Turton, who has been studying the Mursi for over two decades, describes a typical raid carried out by the Hamar, which occurred on December 25, 1969, in the Elma Valley:

> In the early hours of the morning a rifle shot was heard by people living nearby but it was assumed that the stock of this [cattle] camp were being worried by hyenas. Later it was discovered that the camp had been raided and three people killed -- the herd owner, who had been shot, and his two sons, aged about seven and thirteen, who were lying where they had been sleeping with their throats cut. All the cattle had been taken and their tracks led in the direction of the Mago Valley. The tracks of the raiders indicated that there were no more than four of them.[28]

It can be seen that the fighting involved "civilian" loss of life. The hostilities also contributed to recurrent food shortages, not just because loss of cattle or farmland meant loss of food, but because fear of raids led herders to take measures such as keeping their animals in large, well-protected groups, thus not utilizing grazing resources fully, and caused farmers not to cultivate outlying fields.

David Turton also describes a series of wars between the Mursi and their immediate neighbors in the highlands, the Bodi, over territory. Wars occurred in the early 1950s and between 1971 and 1975, and consisted in occasional raids and ambushes, with long quiet periods in between, until a formal peace agreement concluded the conflict and re-drew the territorial boundary.

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[27] "Before the introduction of firearms, this particular group called themselves Nyam-Etom ('Elephant-Eaters'), which stressed their hunting abilities, but after the acquisition of guns, they rephrased this slightly to Nyang-Atom ([carriers of] 'new guns') which stresses their bellicose qualities instead." Jan-Ake Alvarsson, Starvation and Peace or Food and War: Aspects of Armed Conflict in the Lower Omo Valley, Ethiopia, Uppsala, 1989, p.87 (quoting Serge Tornay).

[28] David Turton, "Warfare, Vulnerability and Survival: a Case from Southwestern Ethiopia," Cambridge Anthropology, 13.2, (1988-9) p. 71.

These conflicts and the measures taken to preserve security directly contributed to famine in the area in 1971-3, when they coincided with drought. The drought and famine itself led to increased pressure on natural resources and led to more conflict with the Bodi. Disease, hunger and homicide all accounted for high levels of mortality during those years.[29]

Between 1968 and 1971, a war was also fought between the Bodi and their eastern neighbors, the Dime. The Bodi enjoyed the advantage of superior access to firearms, and were able to undertake raids with relative impunity. About 700 Dime men, women and children were killed and a further 1,000 forced to leave the area, a considerable loss to a population totalling no more than 11,000. The war was brought to an end by Mursi attacks on the Bodi and a government punitive expedition which confiscated cattle and firearms.[30]

Another local war was fought between the Dassenatch and the Nyangatom.[31] In the late 1960s, the Dassenatch, under pressure from the rising waters of Lake Turkana, which was flooding their farmland, began to press on Nyangatom territory. The Kenyan police enforced a peace in 1966 between Dassenatch, Nyangatom and Toposa, which involved burning several villages and trying to make the Ilemi Triangle a "no-man's land."[32] This peace began to break down in 1968-71, with killings by all groups, including three Kenyan policemen killed by Dassenatch in July 1970.

In 1972, this developed into a serious Dassenatch-Nyangatom conflict, with each side raiding the other and killing between six and ten people in four separate incidents between March and early June, followed by a major Dassenatch attack on three settlements south of Kibish on June 20, in which at least 204 Nyangatom men, women and children were killed as they slept or awoke. The Nyangatom were driven from their fields before they could harvest, and lost many cattle; famine resulted.

In January 1973, a joint Hamar-Kara war party attacked the Nyangatom, killing between 80 and 100. After the Ethiopian police failed to respond to Nyangatom appeals to intervene, the Nyangatom retaliated and killed 104 Kara at the village of Kurdam the following month. On June 21, the Hamar-Kara alliance attacked the Nyangatom at Aepa on the Omo River, killing

[29] David Turton, "Response to Drought: The Mursi of Ethiopia," in J. P. Garlick and R. W. J. Keays (eds.) Human Ecology in the Tropics, London, 1977, p. 180.

[30] Dave Todd, "War and Peace between the Bodi and Dime of Southwestern Ethiopia," in Katsuyoshi Fukui and David Turton (eds.) Warfare among East African Herders, Osaka, 1979.

[31] The following is based upon a detailed account of this conflict, in: Serge Tornay, "Armed Conflicts in the Lower Omo Valley, 1970-1976: An Analysis from within Nyangatom Society," in Fukui and Turton (eds.), 1979.

[32] The Ilemi triangle is an area of Sudanese territory, adjacent to Ethiopia, that has been administered by Kenya, under agreement, since colonial days. The international frontiers in this area have been drawn without reference to the boundaries and migration patterns local ethnic groups.

about 60. The Nyangatom did not retaliate, as they were preparing (jointly with the Toposa) a raid against the Dassenatch. The raid was only a partial success: the intended victims managed to escape and only five were killed, 3,000 animals were taken, but 20 of the raiders died of thirst on the way home. The Dassenatch counter-attack in December at Kibish left 20 dead.

Further clashes continued into 1974, with at least 41 fatalities. The Nyangatom were in the ascendant: thereafter the Kara were obliged to become the lesser partners in an alliance with their erstwhile opponents.

During this period there were sporadic attempts by the Ethiopian and Kenyan governments to control the local warfare. This included paying compensation for cross-border raids, negotiating settlements, undertaking punitive patrols (four against the Dassenatch), and on one occasion, aerial bombardment of villages (the Ethiopian government against the Hamar).

Between the mid-1970s and 1986, the level of violence was much lower, with only 28 confirmed inter-tribal homicides.[33]

These conflicts remained under the control of the leaders of the respective ethnic groups. While involving regular violence and homicide, the problems remained within well-defined limits, and the level of military technology was low. In the 1980s, with the intervention of regular armed groups, notably the SPLA and the Kenyan army, and supplies of modern weaponry from these sources and from the Sudan government, conditions began to change, and bloodshed on a larger scale began to occur.

The Nyangatom Massacre of the Mursi

In the mid-1980s, both the SPLA and the Sudan government began to distribute automatic weapons to a number of cattle-herding people close to the Sudan-Ethiopia border. These groups then participated in cattle raiding inside Ethiopia. One group that was heavily armed was the Toposa, who were supported by the Khartoum government as an anti-SPLA militia. The Toposa in turn distributed arms to local allies inside Ethiopia, prominent among whom were the Nyangatom.

The Nyangatom were one group which benefited from the Sudanese supply of weapons. The Chai, as noted above, lost out heavily. The Mursi were next in line. Mursi-Nyangatom conflict has been longstanding, interspersed with periods of friendly relations and indeed interdependence with mutual trade. A typical incident of homicide occurred in April 1985, when two Mursi boys were shot dead by Nyangatom. Cases such as this were not considered exceptional; a cause for retribution but not for upsetting a fundamentally equable relationship.

[33] Alvarsson, 1989, p. 77.

In 1987, however, events occurred out of all proportion to what had gone before.

In January or early February 1987, six Nyangatom who were visiting a Mursi village to buy grain were killed by their hosts, using guns and bush-knives. This was considered an outrageous violation of local norms of hospitality. In retaliation, the Nyangatom launched a massive raid on February 21. Equipped with automatic weapons, the destruction was unprecedented. A man who lost three family members in the attack recounted what happened.

> The Nyangatom crossed the Omo at the Kara village of Dus, south of the Omo-Mago junction and, guided by Kara, moved northwards up the east bank of the Omo, crossed the Mago and attacked the southern Mursi, who were now sitting targets, from the east. Thus, when the attack began at first light, the Mursi assumed that their attackers were Hamar.[34] It was only when they heard the sound of automatic rifles that they realised they were Nyangatom.
>
> The slaughter was indiscriminate, most of those killed being women and children. This was, firstly, because a good proportion of the men were with the cattle, north of the Dara range and, secondly, because it was easier for men and boys, unencumbered with young children, to scatter and hide in the bush. The majority of people were killed with spears, having been wounded in the rifle fire. One particularly respected elder, who was well-known to the Nyangatom, was deliberately sought out and speared to death. The hands of women and girls were chopped off with bush knives so that their metal bracelets could be more easily removed ...[35]

Another visitor to the area met a girl who survived despite having both wrists severed with almost surgical neatness. Another Mursi described the aftermath of the massacre:

> The vultures could not eat all the corpses. Crocodiles pulled the bodies into the water. The grass down there died because of all the fat from the bodies.[36]

Between 600 and 800 were killed -- over ten per cent of the entire Mursi population. Almost the entire southernmost section of the Mursi was annihilated.

The anthropologist Jan-Ake Alvarsson spoke with Nyangatom who had participated in the massacre and recounted how it had come about.

> The attack in question had been well planned in advance. The force was supposed to charge at dawn, the vanguard consisting of four people, armed with one heavy and three light machine guns. They were also to carry four hand grenades. The second line was supposed to give the first one cover. They were equipped with sixteen carbines. The third line carried the ordinary (Austrian) rifles,[37] and the rest were intended to follow

[34] The significance of this is that the Hamar were not in conflict with the Mursi, so that the worst that could be expected was a small-scale cattle raid.

[35] Paraphrase based on an eyewitness account, in: Turton, 1988-89, p. 83.

[36] In: "The Land is Bad," a film by Leslie Woodhead, shown on Independent Television, UK, July 17, 1991.

[37] These weapons were widely available during and after the second world war, most brought by the Italians.

suit, equipped with spears or bush knives and to finish off those shot down by the front lines.

> In reality, things turned out differently.... It is unclear whether the target [i.e. which Mursi section] or the day of the battle were the ones planned. Furthermore, the army crossed the Omo around 8 a.m., much later than planned, and the attack was not as surprising as intended as people were awake. The military order was soon transformed into an unordered and undisciplined row. At least eight Nyangatom warriors were killed from behind by their own forces during the phase of wild shooting.[38]

The Mursi reprisal was taken against the Kara, the weaker part of the attacking alliance. On March 28, six Kara (including two children) were killed by Mursi, who retaliated by killing seven Mursi. In November, two Nyangatom were killed while working on a dug-out canoe. These were however only short term responses. The Mursi were emphatic that a counter-raid on a comparable scale was needed before an equitable peace could be concluded with the Nyangatom.

Mursi plans for counter-attack verged on the suicidal -- they were heavily outnumbered and possessed no automatic weapons. A much greater danger was further Nyangatom raids, which if carried out on a comparable scale, could have meant the end of the Mursi as a group.

The Kenyan Massacre of the Nyangatom

These plans and fears were overtaken by events. The Nyangatom were also engaged in raiding some of their other neighbors, such as the Dassenatch. In July 1988, in alliance with the Toposa, they carried out one such raid in the Ilemi Triangle. About 60 people were killed in the attack. Earlier in the year the Kenyan government had decided to annex the Triangle, and was fast developing a military presence in the area. The Sudan government was able to lodge only diplomatic protests, as all the surrounding countryside was controlled by the SPLA, which enjoys close relations with Kenya.

The Kenyan government has a long-standing hostility to the pastoralists who live on its borders, who cross the international frontiers as if they did not exist, and who engage in livestock raiding. The administration of these nomads has long consisted of punitive expeditions interspersed with attempts to persuade them to live a settled life, wear clothes and send their children to school.

On July 28, the Kenyan police clashed with a group of Toposa or Nyangatom raiders who had previously attacked the Dassenatch, and came off worst. Fifteen policemen were killed, and some taken hostage. The Kenyan government responded the following day with an

[38] Alvarsson, 1989, p. 68.

attack using helicopter gunships and paramilitary forces on the Nyangatom area of Kibish, which straddles Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan. About 200 Nyangatom raiders and a minimum of 500 civilians were killed by the Kenyan forces over the following 18 days. In the attack, at least five villages inside Ethiopia were partly destroyed, and the Swedish Philadelphia Mission at Kibish was burned. The Kenyan army also undertook a retaliatory massacre against the Toposa in Sudan.[39]

Recent reports indicate that another round of killings may have started, with a reliable account that Mursi raiders killed tens of Ari in May 1991 in retaliation for the killing of one Mursi.

Conclusion

Successive Ethiopian governments centered in the highlands have shared a similar attitude to pastoral nomads to that of the Kenyan government. The power base of the EPRDF is, like its predecessors, located in the highlands. The EPRDF avows an ideology which gives equality to all and the right of self-determination to peripheral people. However, the First National Congress of the EPRDF, held in February 1991, adopted a political program that included an item resolving "to settle nomads in settled agriculture."[40] This implies that if nomadic pastoralists do not agree to settle, the state is entitled to settle them by force. The history of such attempts indicates that the nomads will resist. Democratic rights and the enforced settlement of nomads are incompatible.

The Lower Omo valley presents a more general challenge to the government of Ethiopia (and indeed those of Kenya and Sudan). It is an area where their writ scarcely runs, and where central control can only be enforced by extraordinarily high levels of violence. Government-mediated settlements of local conflicts, the so-called "stranger's peace", can be successful only when both sides to the conflict share an interest in a settlement, and the terms of the settlement can be enforced. At least one such negotiated "stranger's peace" broke down in the 1970s for these reasons. A lasting peace and respect for human rights in this troubled area can only be achieved through long and patient interaction with the indigenous people, undertaken by all the governments concerned.

[39] See: Africa Watch report, Kenya: Taking Liberties, July 1991, pp. 334-6.

[40] Revolutionary Democratic Program of the EPRDF adopted at the First National Congress, Political Program, Article 8(d).