



15th of September 2011

**The Causes of Return to Conflict and
The Geopolitical Dynamics in The Horn of Africa:
The Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Conflict**

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MA African Studies

Politics Major Dissertation

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Home Department: Culture and Language

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Word Count: 9300

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Stephen Chan, for all the advices given throughout the research and for giving motivation and guidelines at the beginning of the research.

I would also like to sincerely thank the Eritrean official who accepted to be interviewed which was remarkably helpful to share his knowledge and opinion on the situation of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

I am also grateful towards family and friends who helped me and motivated me during this summer 2011.

Abstract

Explaining why conflicts occur or re-emerge has been a difficult task for policy makers and academics. It remains an area where theories and strategies are in a dynamic of changes and challenges over time and space and driven by different grievances from economic gains, self-determination, territorial integrity, nationalism and power gaining. The case of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border conflict is, thus, matter of interest, which has been neglected on the international board. The return to conflict needs to be debated and analysed on its causes and consequences for these neighbour countries but also in the region as a whole. Hence, the Horn of Africa has always been a tool to invasions, colonisations and bases for super powers due to its geo-strategic position on the coastline. All these aspects are important to consider in understanding the reasons why the diplomatic relations between the newly independent Eritrea and its neighbour Ethiopia have broken out in the late 1990s, consequently, created, until today, a situation of 'no war no peace'.

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1. Introduction

The Horn of Africa is a region well known in African politics of being a volatile, hostile and poor place due to numerous conflicts, wars, and colonisations. Understanding the eruption of conflict between neighbouring states in the era of globalisation where, conflicts are often perceived as being internal, the Eritrea-Ethiopia border conflict challenged this aspect of wars with a return to conventional war of inter-states conflict. The cause of this return to conflict has been difficult to explain by the wider international community as they were perceived as brothers' countries since the independence of Eritrea in 1991 and the new government of Ethiopia in place since then. However, the Horn of Africa was once more the victim of its fourth conflict between states, which makes it "a regional record for Africa" (Markakis 2003:359). Thus, the sudden shift from cooperation to a state of complete diplomatic fallout until today needs to be further examine on its deep-rooted reasons and to, look at the role of conflict resolution and prevention in practice and how it is challenged by the reality of conflicts. Thus, the research paper aims in looking at the last fifteen years of relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia in order to analyse the degradation of diplomatic situation and the escalation of war.

The research will give an understanding of the causes leading to war and how it was influenced by the dynamics of geopolitical change, which are part of the politics towards the Horn of Africa since the Cold War. The dissertation would argue that the return to conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998 is part of a 'blame-game' relations influence by the international arena and there is no one side to be taken from the other, but the influence of power and geopolitical resources are important factors influencing the relations between the neighbour countries and how international agreement and laws are only tools by some against others.

Thus, this is an interesting start of research, which would bring understanding on what factors push neighbouring states to go to war after years of cooperation? What are the multiple causes and implications? What can influence them? These interesting points would be further assessed. However, it is important to firstly, look at the literature available on the question of causes of conflicts, contested lands and conflict prevention and the geopolitics around boundary disputes. Secondly, the research would give information to the reader on how the analytical research was conducted in the methodological part to then assess the different points and arguments in the case study of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border conflict in four main sub-sections combined with response from the interview of an Eritrean representative, which details can be found in the appendix.

2. Literature Review

The research aims in understanding the causes of return to conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, therefore, it is primordial to look at the literature available on this subject which will give an understanding of the situation that both countries are encountering. Hence, prior the analysis of the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict; it is important to, firstly, look at the literature available on causes of conflicts, to then look at what leading scholars affirm in terms of boundary disputes, followed by the solution and different mechanisms implemented to resolve situations of contested lands and finally, the literature on geopolitics.

2.1. Causes of Conflicts

Firstly, the literature available regarding the causes of conflict often showed how leading scholars influence the perception and, subsequently, shape policies. They attempt to explain factors leading to conflicts, such as Kaplan¹ (1994), who perceived the African continent as wild and backward. Huntington (1993) explained conflicts due to the interaction of different cultures leading to clashes, radicalisation and fundamentalism². Moreover, Chabal and Daloz (1999) can be under the same umbrella by viewing Africa of the Post-Cold War as the ‘way it works’. These explanations of conflicts tend to generalise and stereotype conflicts as irrational. Henceforth, it is important to enhance the research by looking at the question of rationality. Thus, Collier and Hoeffler (1998) explained this notion, which will be useful in the analytical explanation of the return to conflict. In other words, they see the rationale driven by economic grievances creating

¹ Kaplan (1994) focused on the situation in West Africa and where “criminal anarchy emerges as a real “strategic” danger, disease, overpopulation unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migration, increasing erosion of nation-states and international borders and empowerment of private armies, security firms and international drug cartels”.

² Huntington’s (1993) Clash of Civilisation, perceived the world in the global era as a response to the shrinking of culture, revival of religion, increasing economic regionalism and that clashes would inevitably occur between groups and between states, merely between the West and the Rest.

new types of war, as argued by Mary Kaldor's 'new wars' (2006)³. Although, this notion is broader than former scholars mentioned, it remains a narrow explanation of the causes of violence and conflict only from an economic perspective neglecting other factors i.e. political power, self-determination and external actors' implications. Additionally, conflicts due to geographical situation are increasingly significant in literature; indeed, Clare (2001) explained this phenomenon to be influenced by vital interests and contested resources zones. Territories and boundaries, especially in Africa, is matter of debate and thus, the literature on this subject is important to assess.

2.2. Boundaries and Contested Lands

*Frontiers are indeed the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war and peace*⁴

This quote is an interesting one and important in understanding borders in creating conflicts or cooperation. Conflicts in post-Cold War era are, generally, explained as being internal. Nonetheless, according to the case study, the importance of inter-state boundaries disputes will be primordial to focus on through a political perspective in understanding the tensions over boundaries. Prescott⁵ (1987), Donnan and Wilson (2001), Cohen (2009), Flint (2006) and Gavrilis (2008) are some of the leading scholars in explaining what lead to territorial disputes. Flint (2006) and Prescott (1987) shared similar explanations of border as the region proximate to the boundary while borderland defines both sides of the boundary and frontier is

³ To strengthen this statement, land grabbing, economic benefits of being in war as more fructuous than peace are the main explanations. While these created fractions implying multiple actors i.e. warlords, militias influence by greed.

⁴ Curzon 1907:7 cited in Prescott 1987:5

⁵ His book *Political Frontiers and Boundaries* was interesting and as the basis to the understanding of the importance of borders in today's world politics and the history of boundaries and how it shaped diplomatic practices.

mostly used in media or as generalised terms (Prescott 1987:13-14). However, the literature is matter of interpretation as authors such as Anderson (1996a) refers to frontier as synonym to borders and as both institutional and a process showing the limit of a state's sovereignty, simultaneously, being an instrument of its policy and also "markers of identity" (cited in Donnan & Wilson 2001:5). Gravois's book⁶, mainly his chapters in explaining the four typologies of "border control strategies"⁷ will be an important source of literature in explaining the policies of both Eritrea and Ethiopia. Hence, he highlights the differences in interstate boundaries by including both macro- and micro- level actors and the presence and interests of institutions at local level and their perceptions of borderlands (Gravilis 2008: 9). While he acknowledges the importance of borders as "sites of coercion, extraction, and demarcation of territory", others such as Rosecrance (1996) or Adler and Barnett (1998) recognise boundaries as increasingly irrelevant (Gravilis 2008:6-8). Thus, the literature and the different points of view will be enhanced in the analysis combined with authors on the specific cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia such as Bereketeab (2009), Mengisteab (2009), Tekle (1994) or Woodward (2006).

Contested lands are delicate situations, which can escalate or be resolved. They are important to consider and many organisms, internationally and regionally, carefully examine the body of work on this matter. Bose (2007) explained well this concept as being due to the "fixation with the control of territory" although we live in an interconnected world, which is a contradiction especially concerning inter-state conflict over contested lands (Bose 2007:290). Scholars such as Cohen (2009) will be often used in understanding the causes of contestation,

⁶ Gravilis (2008) wrote a book titled: *The Dynamics of Interstate Boundaries*, which will be often taken as source to the understanding of the relevance of boundaries and the security challenges face by states on their borders and at "successful and failed boundary regimes in new states" (Gravilis 2008:9).

⁷ The four typologies of border security strategies concerns: (1) Boundary Regime; (2) Unilateral policing; (3) Unilateral, Conflictual Policing and (4) Ad Hoc Policing (Gravilis 2008:table 2.1. 16), which will be further enhanced when looking at the case study of Eritrea-Ethiopia border conflict.

concerning the African continent; he explained it as being the result of never clearly demarcated territories (2009:405). He stressed that border conflicts are due to dynamics of multiple disputes such as “control of natural resources, access to the sea and reunification of peoples” (Cohen 2009:406). Many mechanisms in solving boundaries disputes are mainstreams of international community and its organisations, which will be further examine in the next section.

2.3. Resolving Boundary Disputes

The literature on boundary disputes, contested lands and sovereignty as explained earlier, are important mechanisms to prevent such disputes and how to bring an end to such conflict are mainstreams of policy makers. Therefore, the use of sources from the United Nations (UN), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), will be enhanced on their effectiveness on border conflicts and how warring parties respond to third party implication in mediation and peace agreements. Thus, the amount of resources on the approaches to conflict, violence and the solution in preventing it were highlighted and often generalised or universalised norms being applied in different areas in terms of historical facts, causes and impacts⁸. Scholars such as Blay (1994), Gen (2003), Goulding (1999), Lotze (2008), Prescott (1987)⁹ often repeat notions of peace building, peacemaking and conflict resolution, which become one of the main focuses of the UN and the wider international community. The latter, since the end of the Cold War, uses regional powers or organisations such as the AU to respect these principles. There are different solutions argued in literature on how to deal with conflict and prevent further diplomatic fallout.

⁸ In fact, the literature that prevention and the use of international body such as the UN peacekeepers seem to be agreed as tools to contain conflicts and to deal with conflicting parties (Gen 2003:21-36; Bose 2007)

⁹ The three solutions Prescott (1987) are firstly, the drawing of a provisional line while searching for final boundary, secondly, the warring states will put an end to the dispute through the creation of a “neutral zone” and, thirdly, warring parties will “recourse to arbitration” (Prescott 1987:61-62).

Plus, preventive diplomacy that Gen¹⁰, regarding ex-Yugoslavia, made interesting points on how short and long term processes are important in the prevention of conflict¹¹. In fact, this practice is in use by the international community and the UN Charter also refers to it as the main policy. Solving boundary disputes is, according to Lotze (2008), a question of coordination and even the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)¹² acknowledges its importance in peace building (Lotze 2008:1). Nonetheless, the literature is focusing more on the legal aspect and seems to be a mechanical method to prevent conflict and often fails to admit the importance of looking at case-by-case causes to find solutions in lasting peace. Moreover, most sources do not particularly focus on the case of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border conflict but on the African continent such as Goulding (1999) and his article *The United Nations and Conflict in Africa since the Cold War* or to more famously recognised conflicts such as the study by Bose¹³ (2007). Certainly, resolving territorial disputes require the acknowledgment of external or interests-driven and spill over effect in the region prone to dispute.

2.4 Geopolitics in Boundaries Issues

Boundaries are product and process of geopolitical agency¹⁴.

Understanding why some parts of the world see borders, as markers of identities, have to be examined as Anderson 1996a highlighted (cited in Donnan & Wilson 2001:5). Violence and conflicts are not sudden event but a slow process, hiding many tactical strategies from both

¹⁰ His work, 'Preventive Ethnic Conflicts: A Reconsideration of the Self-Determination Principle' was published in the edition of Hideo, S. (2003). *Containing Conflict: Cases in Preventive Diplomacy*. Japan Centre for International Exchange. New York.

¹¹ "Easier and less costly to tackle disputes early before reach point of armed conflict - armed conflicts can be prevent through short-term light-preventive diplomacy and long-term deep-preventive diplomacy." (Gen 2003:21-22).

¹² Please see: Lotze, W. et al. (2008). *Peacebuilding Coordination in African Countries: Transitioning from Conflict – Case Studies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and South Sudan*. ACCORD 2008. 3 (1).

¹³ Bose (2007) and his work titled: *Contested Lands: Israel-Palestine, Kashmir, Bosnia, Cyprus, and Sri Lanka*. Harvard University Press, London.

¹⁴ Flint 2006

domestic and international politics. Geopolitical concepts need to be enhanced especially concerning the strategic region of the Horn of Africa. Hence, finding solution to border conflicts through the mechanisms available by only looking at the two states in conflict neglect other aspects of its occurrence. Henceforth, geopolitically driven boundary issues will be important to research, accordingly, some authors look at the question of power and the impact of regional and international implications in such conflicts. For instance, Donnan and Wilson (2001) argued that borders are “sites and symbols of power” (2001:1). The remaining significance of territorial sovereignty is common mainly in newly independent or less developed states. To understand the international implication in the Horn of Africa, the literature and geopolitics approach will be primordial tool for the research with key authors such as Agnew (1998), Ó Thuathail (1996), Flint (2006) and Dalby (1998).

Boundary changes will be indications of a shift in the balance of forces caused either by an increase in driving force on one side of the frontier [boundary] or by a decrease in resistance on the other¹⁵.

Another important concept is critical geopolitics that Ó Thuathail explained and which, relates to power relations and the multiple practices to gain it. Indeed, the notion of geopolitics will also be combined with the principle of power and realism. Accordingly, Myers (1999) would be used as a reference on questions of national interests, the geopolitics is interlinked with, and he calls, the ‘political realism’. Donnan and Wilson (2001) will also be looked at in terms of the dynamic structures in power relations between states (2001:45). These aspects in the literature will be important background for the research of the specific case of the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which cover all aspects from cause of conflict to geopolitics in boundaries issues

¹⁵ Spykman & Rollins 1939:392 cited in Prescott 1987:10

introduced in this part of the paper. Prior the analytical part, the next section will explain the types of methods of research chosen in order to guide the reader.

3. Methodology

3.1 Source of data

The research on the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia was a challenge and conducted by combining different sources and methods. Indeed, the methodology was a combination of primary and secondary sources due to the lack of varied sources, and focusing mainly on the history of both countries, the thirty years of war and the actual situation. However, regarding the border conflict; the resources were limited. Thus the study of the causes of the border conflict and its geopolitical implication was not a mainstream in political science or African politics. As a result, the epistemologies will be a combination of interpretivism and constructivism to guide the qualitative method of research (Dessler 1999:123-125).

Gathering data through primary sources will come from official documents but also the literature on the approaches and understanding of the conflict with also look at the view from the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments, the press in both countries and also international organisations e.g. the United Nations and the African Union. Secondary sources will be from an interview of a representative of the Eritrean government to have a broader explanation on the cause of the conflict from the view of stakeholder. By combining the answers of the interview and the literature available, it gave the opportunity to construct a reality and, simultaneously, creating an interpretation of the situation. Therefore, as it concerns a political subject of study-gathering data, through this qualitative method, will be more useful than only looking at statistics and figures. The interview helps in understanding and challenges the theories on contested lands, geopolitics, and diplomatic relations and peace resolution.

3.2 Ethical and Practical Issues

By using a triangular method of research by using books, publications and at the same time interviews gave more support and understanding of the case study. However, the question of ethic was the main obstacle. Indeed, being from an Eritrean descent, while looking for interviews with representatives of Ethiopia was challenging. In fact, the reluctance was felt as no positive answers were given. Although, the numerous attempts to find an Ethiopian to interview, it only resulted to negative responses. This is one practical issue faced, however, the numerous publications and press release from the Ethiopian government were useful in finding the view of Ethiopia.

The other important ethical issue concerns the importance of being as objective as possible and the cultural codes of hospitality was also important to keep in mind. Nonetheless, aspects of cultural understanding were not a problem due to the knowledge and sharing the same origin. It was also important to be aware of possible disappointment in conducting interview, due to numerous reasons such as the answers not being useful or the interviewed could not feel comfortable to speak freely.

Regarding the practical issues, finding sources in English or French was a challenge as many sources on Eritrean or Ethiopian governments were whether in Tigrinya or Amharic. However, having Tigrinya as mother tongue the problem was quickly resolved. Moreover, the translation of documents but also of the interview from Tigrinya to English was a major task in time management.

4. The Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Conflict

The section below aims in understanding the situation of Eritrea and its neighbour country Ethiopia since early 1990s with the independence of Eritrea and the fall of the Derg¹⁶ in Ethiopia. Indeed, prior any attempts to analyse the causes of return to conflict, it is important to look at the chronological degradation of relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia since early 1990s.

4.1. From Peace to an Unexpected War?

To begin with, the history of Eritrea and Ethiopia is increasingly known, however, it is important to highlight key moments of their histories in order to understand the current situation and the causes leading to war in 1998 between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Indeed, they fought a war which lasted thirty years between the Eritrean secessionist guerrilla of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and then, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) against the Ethiopian regime of Haile Selassie to then, overthrown by Colonel Mengistu, from the 1970s until early 1990s. The independence of Eritrea was proclaimed with the end of the war in May 1991 and officially recognised in 1993 by the international community while, the Ethiopian rebel group, the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) took control of its government under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Both countries and the international community perceived the situation as optimistic, through the increasing economic cooperation between both states and recognised as leading role in the region and "open new chapters in their respective histories" (Tekle 1994:1). Thus, a new era of collaboration started between Ethiopia and newly independent Eritrea. And, in July 1993, both countries signed an accord on

¹⁶ The Derg was the name given to the military regime of Colonel Mengistu in Ethiopia since 1974 when he came into power by coup d'état against Haile Selassie (Henze 1993:57).

cooperation in Addis Ababa, including twenty-five aspects then confirmed in Asmara in September of the same year, under the Friendship and Cooperation Agreement (FCA), including:

The preservation of the free flow of goods and services, capital and people; Ethiopia's continued free access to Eritrea's sea ports, paying for port services in its currency (the birr); cooperation in monetary policy and continued use of the birr by both countries until Eritrea issued its own currency; harmonisation of customs policies; and cooperation and consultation in foreign policy¹⁷.

The quote above showed how both countries aimed in reconstructing their war-torn situations by focusing on economic development. As a result, this cooperation was perceived as the most viable solution for their populations but also the region of the Horn. In fact, their economic situations were interlinked i.e. "Eritrea's manufacturing products and salt had a great impact on the Ethiopian market. And Ethiopia was the main trade partner for Eritrea" (Licht 2002:3). As a matter of fact, "Ethiopia was thus the destination of about 60% of Eritrea's exports between 1993 and 1996" (World Bank 1994 cited in Mengisteab 2009:58). Accordingly, this policy driven by economic development put aside the question of demarcating the borders between both states and, both leaders, Isaias Afwerki and Meles Zenawi, thought that the demarcation would be held when the time will come (Mengisteab 2009:57). Nevertheless, in November 1997, the situation between the neighbour countries started to change. Hence, Eritrea adopted its own national currency, Nakfa and, from this point, the economic situation worsens with Ethiopia's refusal to trade with a different currency led to the hard exchange rates and taxes on the use of the seaports of Assab and Massawa. It then "became clear that political union was out of the question, and the

¹⁷ Mengisteab & Yohannes 2005:229-30 cited in Bereketab 2009:104 and Tseggai 1994:63.

FCA signed in 1993 was broken off” (Bereketeab 2009:106). Henceforth, the positive diplomatic relations shifted with; first, Eritrea’s willingness for complete independence reflected through the implementation of its own currency as “one big symbol for real independence” (Licht 2002:3).

... That it was only a matter of times before the supposedly ‘amicable’ relationship would reach a critical junction (Bereketeab 2009:206).

The situation soon escalated with the armed clash erupting in the town of Badme¹⁸ on the borderland, which soon intensifies into a state of war from May 1998 until 2000. The optimistic approach made by Fessehatzion in 1994 that “permanent peace and a smooth transition from economic crisis to sustainable growth for the entire region” was deferred from then on (1994:52). The border conflict became, then, apparent diplomatic breakout between Eritrea and Ethiopia and many scholars and politicians attempted to explain the causes and impacts this conflict has. The boundary dispute, on itself, is part of broader and deep-rooted reasons, which the interviews conducted during the research combined with the literature available and the resources from international organisms, e.g. the UN, the OAU, gave a broader understanding and will be assessed more in details below.

4.2. Understanding the Causes of the Conflict

The one development that nobody had expected was that the new friends of the US, Ethiopia and Eritrea, would engage in a war of their own¹⁹.

¹⁸ Please see maps in appendix 7.1. pages 39-40

¹⁹ Lata 2003 cited in Woodward 2006:85.

The statement above shows how the border conflict was perceived as a shock and disappointment after years of collaboration. Indeed, during the liberation struggle the TPLF and EPLF were perceived as allies in their struggle against Mengistu's regime. Hence, the interviewee explained:

At the independence of Eritrea, both countries we had good relation and even the free flow of goods and also people was put in place. It was a prosperous situation for the region of the Horn.

However, the situation in 1998 became bitter and the boundaries and territorial integrity were perceived as the cause of the conflict eruption. The town of Badme was the victim of the fight between Eritrea and Ethiopia and as the chairman of the OAU said: "what happened in Badme between 6 and 12 May constitutes a fundamental element of the crisis" (Petros 2000:78). At this specific period, in the areas surrounding Badme, tensions were rising between the peasants living in Tigray and those living in Eritrea as "people-to-people dispute" (ICG 2003:3). Thus, the situation exploded with the killing of Eritrean officials from the district of Badme (Connell 2004: 818-819). Soon it escalate when the Ethiopian Parliament made an ultimatum and declared war with the bombing of Asmara, Eritrea and the counter attack by Eritrea on Mekele in Tigray, Ethiopia (Mengisteab 2009:60).

Most of the world was therefore surprised when what appeared to be a minor border dispute suddenly exploded into one of the bloodiest international conflicts in Africa since the end of colonialism²⁰.

The causes of this diplomatic breakout are explained differently within the different sources available and also reflected during the interview. According to Woodward, the border conflict

²⁰ Woodward 2006:85-86.

between Eritrea and Ethiopia was different than other conflicts on its “cause and scope” (2006:86). However, an important point made by Woodward (2006) concerns the problem of demarcation as the main cause. In other words, the demarcation became an issue that was neglected and both Eritrea and Ethiopia thought they could negotiate peacefully, and by failing to settle an accord to define the border, the question of boundary delimitation soon became matter of conflict (Woodward 2006:86; ICG 2003:3). Mengisteab (2009) and Bereketeab (2009) explained that the Tigrayan militia illegally evicted farmers from Eritrea in the region of Badme and also attacked Eritrean patrol on the 6th of May 1998. Plus, some scholars such as Girma V. Senbet (2003) argued that the aggression was made by Eritrean while other sources explained that Eritrea responded to attack by Ethiopia by using military forces (Bereketeab 2009:107). Hence, Eritrea was accusing Ethiopia of administering territory surrounding the region of the town Badme “that maps showed as Eritrea, and it advanced its army into the disputed region, whereupon Ethiopia responded with force” (Woodward 2006:86).

Because international borders have served as both locuses and symbols of a state’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and power, and have done so since states have existed, they have now become places and symbols, which mark the important transformations, which states are undergoing²¹.

The importance of this boundary dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia has to be understood as a question of territorial integrity i.e. the sovereignty of a state that the quote above explain well as a symbol in state-building. Thus, understanding the causes of this return to a state of war after

²¹ Donnan & Wilson 2001:156

years of cooperation needs to look at four main reasons. Firstly, the economic situation and the implementation of the Eritrean currency meant the end of the monetary union with Ethiopia. As a result, the Ethiopian government insisted in trading in hard currency and with US dollars. Throughout the interview with Eritrean national, he supported the idea that it was the main cause of this conflict eruption. A second important factor was the supposedly implementation of the new constitution of Eritrea, which meant that the Ethiopian constitution would be no longer in use in Eritrea. The latter as a second source of tensions as Eritrea showed once more its willingness to be completely independent from its former federation, Ethiopia.

Nonetheless, the diplomatic fallout intensified concerning the sovereignty through the importance of territorial integrity. As shown earlier, the question of demarcation along the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia in reference to the treaties of colonial boundaries of 1900, 1902 and 1908 signed by Menelik to the Italian colony were not delimited on the ground as the interview also pointed out. The main reason as being the willingness at the time of independence and newly settled Ethiopian government to focus on reconstructing their respective countries through economic development. However, time did not help in demarcating their frontiers, in contrary, it led to the situation we are facing in the Twenty-First Century, i.e. a ‘no war no peace’ state of affairs, which has an impact on the political and economic situation of both states and the region as a whole (Healy 2009:157). Having the border never truly demarcated on the ground has to be kept in mind in understanding the conflict and as Bereketeab said: “that it was only a matter of time before the supposedly ‘amicable’ relationship would reach a critical junction” (2009:106). To strengthen this statement, although, as Tekle mentioned that it is unnecessary to look back to the past and instead focusing on cooperation by working together; on the ground, there was a

mistake by both states at the end of the war in 1991 that it should have been done and perhaps the situation of broken diplomatic relations between Isaias Afwerki and Meles Zenawi would not exist (1994:2-3). Hence, this is an assumption of how the future could have been.

Certainly, the conflict around the town of Badme, which then spread throughout other regions on the border, became a conflict with higher deep-rooted significance for both states accusing each other. In fact, the interviewee explained that the border conflict on itself is not the issue, it is more complicated and it is a question of sovereignty. The question of territorial boundaries remains an important step of newly independent country and shows the limit of sovereignty of a state (Prescott 1987:80).

Furthermore, it is clear that both countries' leaders show strong patriotic ties. In other words, the historical background and the way, Eritrea reached its independence and how the TPLF overthrow Mengistu's regime in Ethiopia are key factors in today's conflict. Henceforth, on the one side, the Eritrean government perceived it as an occupation by Ethiopia and a threat to their independence or also a refusal by Ethiopia of being landlocked while, Ethiopia, accused Eritrea of act of aggression. As a former representative of Ethiopia, Ambassador Duri Mohammed, stated that "the Eritrean regime committed an act of aggression against Ethiopia and occupied Ethiopia's territory by force" (1999 cited in Petros 2000:58).

The dispute quickly became a war in its conventional way of 'army against army', which is one of the rare case of such conflicts in the era of globalisation where new wars are usually internal and with multiple groups as Mary Kaldor (1999) would argue. Plus, another cause is, combined with the first factor of the end of monetary union; the access to the seaports as it had an impact on prices and increasing prices of importing and exporting through the seaports. This can explain the reason why the border conflict around the town of Badme spread throughout the

southern part of the border, near the port of Assab. Accordingly, during the interview, the Eritrean official explained that Ethiopia did not respect the cease-fire and repeatedly tried to attack the port of Assab with the only willingness of occupying it. “Ethiopia, is a rich country with its own resources, however it does not accept to be landlocked” as he said. In fact, although Eritrea recognised the importance of the access to the seaport of Assab to Ethiopia and even under the article 3 of the FCA, the latter was no longer acceptable to Eritrea’s government since 1998 (Teshete 1994:39).

The consequences of this war were tremendous to both countries in terms of human losses but also economically impacted due to the high amount of spending in defence forces. Furthermore, there was a high number of Eritreans deported from Ethiopia perceived as a threat to the Ethiopian regime. In other words, “expelled individuals who were organised, trained and involved in subversive activities for security and safety reasons” as the Ethiopian government justified (Petros 2000:vi). However, this statement was matter of interpretation, which the international community showed deep concerns with records that, for instance, properties were left behind, imprisonment for up to five weeks without charges (UNDP 1998:4). Simultaneously, the Eritrean government also expelled Ethiopian nationals as a response to the mass deportation of Eritreans living in Ethiopia. As a matter of fact, the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC) registered, that about 67,000 people of Eritrean origin living in Ethiopia were deported out of Ethiopia during the period from 1998 to 1999 (2000:3).

Undoubtedly, another important factor concerns Eritrea, a newly independent state and Ethiopia, under Meles’s Tigrayan ethnic majority in government, are strongly nationalists i.e. “a burst of aggressive nationalism on both sides” (Woodward 2006:86-87). This aspect in causing conflict strengthens the breakout of any diplomatic relationship between both states, which is

significant to examine further. Accordingly both states leaders and also reflected throughout the interview; use a language of diplomatic ‘battle’ between both sides, which do not help in improving the situation. In other words, the press release but also speeches by officials show how there is a language of hostilities and both warring parties do not seem willing to improve the situation. In fact, Meles Zenawi sent to African political leaders before the OAU Central Organ’s Summit Meeting in Ouagadougou on December 1998, several points regarding Eritrea and its aggression towards Ethiopia (Petros 2000:64-66). For instance, the sentence “Eritrea’s Lack of Civility and Rudeness” is a good example of the kind of diplomatic relations created at the breakout of peace (Petros 2000:65). There is, therefore, a language of victimisation by the Ethiopian government with for instance: “Ethiopia has been a victim of a vast propaganda misinterpretation deliberately instigated in other countries, and academic forums to damage their reputation with its official policy guideline ‘to highlight the crimes and isolate Ethiopia at the O.A.U.’” (Petros 2000: iii). The rising tensions leading to the war showed as well as the importance of national interests and the realist approach in justifying war. Indeed, the Ethiopian government proclaimed that the war was “a just and necessary war” (Petros 2000:vii). On the other side, the Eritrean government but also during the interview of the Eritrean representative, the cause of this return to conflict is merely due to:

Violation by Ethiopia of the colonial borders of Eritrea and the occupation of some parts of its territory by force [...] it is a border dispute which can be settled by technical and legal means (demarcation and, in case of controversy, arbitration)²².

Moreover, Connell (2004) and his collected Articles on *Renewed War 1998-2000* explained that the deep causes of the conflict was a response to numerous attacks which Eritrean officials were

²² OAU Summit 1998 cited in Petro’s 2000:7

killed, as the Eritrean interviewee also explained, and afterward, Ethiopia declared war to Eritrea (Connell 2004:818). In other words, the diplomatic failure regarding the boundary dispute very quickly escalate unto a war between both states keeping their sides, as Lata (2003) said that the determination of Eritrea to have the colonial boundaries respected while Ethiopia claimed that its long term administration of the region on the borderland was sufficient to represent possession (2003:380). Plus, in terms of diplomatic ‘battle’, Isaias Afwerki sent several statements affirming to the OAU; “fairness demands that appeals by the Summit be directed only to the culpable party” (1998:38). Additionally, the interviewee also argued “Eritrea is seen as the bad one. Why does Eritrea have to be the victim of it”? According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea, the conflict “did not start in May 1998 but that it goes back to July 1997 and its call for an investigation into these events is significant since it has a bearing on the framework for a peaceful solution” (1998:36). Thus, two important points argued by the Eritrean President also followed the different points made by Meles Zenawi to the OAU member states. In other words, he, first, claimed that his neighbour country committed an act of aggression by producing a new map in October 1997 in which it illegally incorporated large areas of Eritrean territory. The second point concerned the military actions to bring evidences in order to add these areas claimed on its false map by occupying Adi Murug and the incursions into the area around Badme in July 1997 (OAU 1998:37). The different arguments by both states and their representatives show how there are tensions and a ‘blame-game’ situation remains.

As a result, when looking at different sources and information on this conflict, it is difficult to find one to blame on as each source stand on different sides. Conversely, there are proofs of certain violation of territorial integrity that the international community tried to solve through peace agreements. Thus, this broken diplomatic relationship until today is reflected

through the different peace talks and agreements that the international community tried to find a peaceful solutions. Accordingly, the section below will look at the causes of the failure in improving the situation and, then the wider geopolitical dynamics in this conflict and its impact in the Horn of Africa.

4.3. Failure of International Mediation

Conflict resolutions are important tasks of the international community through the different organisms within the UN but also regional organisations such as the OAU/AU. In fact, there are different mechanisms of preventing conflict and how to solve boundary disputes put in place through allocation, delimitation and demarcation are three steps that Prescott (1987) explained. In reality, resolving boundary disputes can be more complicated and deep rooted into history and influence by geopolitical means. Hence, concerning Eritrea and Ethiopia, the international community did not wait long before intervening in the conflict. Indeed, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Susan Rice, went twice to the region in the hope to stop the conflict with the complicity of Rwanda in finding peaceful solution to the crisis (Woodward 2006:87). The aims were, firstly, to find a solution through diplomatic and peaceful methods, the withdrawal of the Eritrean troops from Badme, delimiting the border and demilitarisation of both warring parties (Woodward 2006:87). The solutions found were agreed upon by Ethiopia especially as it called for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops. Eritrea, on the other hand, refused and perceived that the intervention in peace talks by the US and Rwanda were blaming on Eritrea solely (Negash & Tronvoll 2000 cited in Woodward 2006:87). The peace plan was not taken seriously and, as a result, in October of the same year, a new US delegation led by Mr Lake visited the region regarding the possible access to the seaport of Assab for Ethiopia. However,

this commission did not find any peaceful solution and in contrary in early 1999, the war became an inter-states war with offensives and counter offensives on both sides bombing cities and villages (Woodward 2006:88).

Later, the international community quickly called for the settlement of a commission held by the OAU/AU. In fact, already in December 1998, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, with the president of Burkina Faso, representatives from Zimbabwe and Djibouti and the chair of the OAU was held. The talk was put in place to find solutions between the neighbour countries seen as “the two sisterly countries” (Petros 2000:72). The international community perceived the war as a disappointment of the (at that time) allies of the US and, the quick escalation into a state of war shows how preventive diplomacy that Gen (2003) explained did not have the time to be implemented. As a matter of fact, the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia had to be quickly resolved in the eyes of the international community. In fact, in December 1998 the first peace talk was hold and the decision taken was of controversies especially for Eritreans. Indeed, the summit was again putting the blame only on Eritrea as invading Ethiopian territory while Eritreans perceived as an illegal occupation. Thus, the war continued for two more years until the Algiers Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed by both states in December 2000. With the primary aims of cessation of hostilities and to settle a Boundary Commission called the Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission (EEBC) at The Hague in April 2002, which decided to allocate Badme to Eritrea and the delimitation on the map to be implemented in October 2003 (ICG 2003:1).

Yet, since the EEBC decisions, on the ground, the situation remains the same, as the demarcation has not been implemented and the ongoing ‘Temporary Security Zones’ (TSZ)

settled by the UN Security Council along the border (UNSC 2003:1). As the Eritrean interviewee said that the law was not respected by Ethiopia as it still occupies Eritrean territories and until then, the situation would not change. Although there are no longer direct hostilities between the warring parties, the situation remains ad hoc with both armies standing along the border. The reason why there is a clear failure of the international community in implementing the law in practice although both countries signed the peace accord and the EEBC is due to the still ongoing diplomatic ‘battle’ that both countries are playing.

As a matter of fact, one question was asked to the interviewee concerning the reason why Ethiopia accepted the agreement to then refusing to implement it? The answer was an interesting one, thus, from his viewpoint, *the international community is mandated by the US. And it is not doing its work as an international commission. First, America has the veto power, if America says no it's no. It is because of the Americans.* This is an interesting point made and it can be argued that the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia comes from the outside and using the alliance with Meles Zenawi in putting pressure for dialogue. In fact, Ethiopia refused to implement the EEBC accord and instead called for dialogue prior any demarcation to be made. Ethiopia argued that dialogue is important in order not to separate families and villages, which the Eritrean interview perceived it as “a kid’s answer”. Thus, here is the point of tension with Eritrea that prevails. The latter refusing any dialogue prior the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in the Badme region and saying that is it only a way of finding a way to have an access to the sea (Hanson 2008 cited in Mengisteab 2009:65). Another point made to the OAU by Eritrea concerns that the OAU only focus on the administration of Badme, however, it neglected other areas such as Adi Murug contested lands prior July 1997 that nobody tend to highlight (OAU

1998: 11-12). Simultaneously, Ethiopia refuses any dialogue under this condition. Thus, it seems that there is no possible diplomatic talk between the stakeholders and this is where, the international community uses its power to mediate the tensions, which has failed. The town of Badme of 5,000 inhabitants remain the centre of this diplomatic fallout. The reason why both sides are unwilling to compromise further relies on deep-rooted factors. In other words, “many Ethiopians are determined no to cede any territory to Eritrea after having allowed its independence” and on the Eritrean side; by abandoning Badme, it could lead to “the threat of encroachment by Ethiopia on their hard-won sovereignty [...] That Ethiopia may one day try to regain access to the sea” (ICG 2003:2). The failure of the EEBC although, the peace agreement was respected show that without the proper demarcation of the border, the situation cannot be resolved completely and, as the International Crisis Group (ICG) Special Advisor on Africa, John Prendergast, affirmed: “it could set in motion a rapid deterioration of the atmosphere, and a small incident could easily escalate out of control” (ICG 2003:1).

The international community shows its failure and how it is dominated by other factors and its limitation in dealing with conflict in terms of contested lands as being not only a question of boundary disputes but deep-rooted into the history and often influenced by nationalism, external power and geopolitical interference. Thus, from the view of diplomacy, this is an example of the failure of international organisms in solving disputes with the failure of the United States to mediate the conflict and the wider international diplomacy, which has tremendous impact in the stability of the Horn of Africa (Licht 2002:7).

Until today both armies stand on the frontier and the free flow of people and capital, which existed, prior the conflict does not seem to be in their future agenda. Since the end of the war and the accords settled by the international community, it remains unresolved and into a ‘no

war no peace' situation since 2002. Thus, why the international community, by intervening in finding an accord, failed in implementing the agreement? Are there any questions of geostrategic alliance? Those questions cannot be neglected and the last section below will assess them.

4.4. The Geopolitical Implication in the Conflict

The border conflict, which started in Badme and quickly spread unto a full-scale war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, was difficult to understand for the international community who perceived them as 'brothers' countries. However, one has to bear in mind that although Meles Zenawi and Isaias Afwerki fought against the military regime of Mengistu side by side, there were some conflicting ideas. In other terms, Meles Zenawi and his TPLF aimed in an independent Tigray while Eritrea's EPLF was against this idea and thus, explained that the TPLF that it was impossible for them to survive as a country but instead should promote unity among Ethiopians rather than dividing the country on ethnic lines. Therefore, it is perhaps one aspect of the past that could bring answers to the actual situation we are facing. Indeed, the Ethiopian government is in majority comprised of officials from the Tigray ethnic group although it is a minority group in the country. This is one aspect that the government tries to hide its internal issues as discussed during the interview. However, another aspect is the question of occupation that Eritrea accuses its neighbour country of doing so. By looking at the accord signed and the final decision of the EEBC, it is clear that there is a violation of the law but the reason why nothing has been done yet, is matter of interpretation.

Concerning the dynamic of geopolitics, the conflict has a wider cause and impact. To strengthen this statement, the region of the Horn of Africa, has always been prone to invasions, colonisations but also interests by Great Powers. Accordingly, during the Cold War, the Horn

was one of the centrepieces of interests by both the Soviet Union and the US, both battling to keep their hands on the region as “source of concern for decades” (Woodward 2006:1). In addition, it is important to keep in mind how, during the Cold War; the Horn of Africa was the base for military defence force of both Great Powers. To give an example, the Kagnaw military base close to Asmara, Eritrea given by Ethiopia to the United States plus the Dahlak islands, were valuable in order to counter possible communist threat (Woodward 2006:9). Moreover, the European Parliament concerning the Horn of Africa stated in April 1984 that “noting the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa for both Western countries and the Eastern bloc, being adjacent to the Arabian peninsular” (Firebrace & Holland 1984:177).

The geographical situation of the Horn of Africa and precisely the cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia could help in understanding the current political debate regarding the tensions between these two countries and how the international community plays a role. Since the declaration of war and the, then end of hostilities; it did not mean a return to peace, with the presence of TSZ along the border and the non-implementation of the decision of the EEBC. One important question regards the diplomatic relations between both states and also with the international community. In other words, the Horn of Africa, through the tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia, is facing a situation where, there are alliance on one side and isolation on the other. As a matter of fact, the conflict, which started in Badme was important to be quickly solved for the international community but, why? The importance of having a stable region was the main *raison* as conflicts, which often are internal can quickly spread throughout a whole region especially on the African continent (Goulding 1999:157). In fact, the conflict eruption came at the time of the emergence of Islamist fundamentalist terrorist movements. Consequently, due to its geo-strategic

situation of Ethiopia and Eritrea and both countries being secular governments surrounded by the Sudan and Somalia/Somaliland and the Red Sea Coast Line, this part needed to be on the side of anti-terrorism of the Western world. Therefore, the question of morality that the international arena endorses since the Post-Cold War needs to be understood in terms of power politics (Myers 1999:12-13). Thus this morality around the concept of spreading peace as a Kantian approach was reflected in the settlement of the boundary dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Accordingly, the international community as a third party mediator was solely focusing on ending hostilities and finding an agreement as quick as possible. "States are not prior to the inter-state system but are perpetually constituted by their performances in relation to an outside against which they define themselves" (Ó Thuathail & Dalby 1998:4). One interesting point made by Flint (2006) concerns the fact that the importance of territory in politics as being in continuous competition to control, and can be perceived in the relation between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the wider international sphere (2006: 1-5).

Furthermore, the binding of the border demarcation decided by the EEBC has yet to be implemented and the reason why the international community has failed to put in place the decision can be interpreted from a strategic dynamic. In other terms, the alliance versus isolation that prevail in the region of the Horn is significant and has tremendous impact on the diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and the international arena and the diplomatic relations between Eritrea and the international community. In view of that, and also the points were discussed during the interview; most of writings on Eritrea since early 2000s are not in favour of it. In fact, the question was asked during the interview about the fact that Eritrea is accused of supporting proxy war in Somalia by supporting al-shabab terrorist group and also to isolate itself from the

international community i.e. suspending its membership at the African Union. He explained that by creating new issues are methods to deviate from the real problem of the demarcation of the border. However, the counterarguments can be that first, the African Union is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia which makes it clear for Eritrea that it is not welcome. Plus, the Ethiopia on the other hand, is a strong ally of the United States in its 'war on terror' and even sent its troops to Somalia (Markakis 2003:361). Currently, the situation shows complete reluctance for dialogue between Eritrea and the international community reflected through the imposed sanctions on the country since 2010 while strong alliance remains between Ethiopia and the international community. The use of diplomacy has helped one country while containing the other. The border conflict, however, remains into the same situation since 2000 which will have dramatic impact on the long run if the 'no war no peace' state of affair prevails.

5. Conclusion

Eritrea and Ethiopia, these neighbour countries situated in a volatile region but also a rich one, the Horn of Africa, are important in understanding African politics and the mechanisms in preventing conflict and the role of the international. The case study of the border conflict which erupted in the region of Badme in 1998, showed deep concerns in the future diplomatic relations and their impact in the region as a whole. Understanding the fundamental cause of this return to conflict that nobody could see coming was an interesting one and throughout the source but also the interview with the Eritrean official reflected the divisions from both sides. The main reasons of the conflict eruption could be perceived from four main factors which are all interlinked from the end of the monetary union, increasing in prices for import-export through the use of the Eritrean seaports, the demarcation never truly implemented on the ground and the strong nationalist political system of both states. It is clear that Badme, a small town on the borderland was a tool for confrontation, which escalates from peasants' conflict to an inter-state war. The border on itself does not seem to be the real issue behind but the wider question of regional power and legitimacy on the eyes of the international.

The willingness to show complete independence and self-reliance of the Eritrean government inherited from decades of armed struggle clashes with the strategic importance of one of the biggest country in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia and the willingness of having an access to the sea. In other terms, the U.S. in its war on terror has used Ethiopia, mainly concerning the intervention in Somalia and also the strong interest in accessing the sea is an important factor. Thus, using the anarchical situation in Somalia, leads to the access of the port in Berbera. The diplomatic fallout between Eritrea and Ethiopia showed during the research how it is a question of deep-rooted grievances and the influence of the map of geopolitical strategy.

The interview with an Eritrean official was interesting as it reflected how the government reacts towards Ethiopia and the Western World by proclaiming that once the international community would leave the region to deal with its own issues, from then we can try to re-create cooperation among us. Nevertheless, the situation remains pessimistic in terms of regional stability due to as he said: “Power abuse”. The discussion on the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia could go beyond in looking at how the law is used when it benefits one group from the other. The role of international diplomacy and agreement showed once again its limitation and influence by political factors rather than convention and laws on territorial integrity and the importance of boundary’s allocation, delimitation and demarcation. These three steps will still be a major cause of tensions in the Horn of Africa and also the wider African continent.

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7. Appendix

7.1. Map of Contested Boundary

The map below shows the border of 1993 at the official declaration of independence of Eritrea and the situation in 2000. Also the TSZ where the UN troops are settled. The map can be found

on: Anonymous (2000). *The Border War*. Available from:

<http://jayandcassandra.com/Policy/Eritrea/cir919.gif>[Accessed 15/08/2011]



The map below shows the contested areas after decision of the EEBC. The source is from the International Boundaries Research Unit and can be found at: BBC (2007). [Online]. No Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Deal. *BBC News* Dec 2007. Available from: http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/40005000/gif/_40005693_ethiopia_eritrea2_map416.gif

[Accessed 15/08/2011]



7.2. Interview transcription

An Eritrean representative answered some questions during an interview conducted in about an hour and a half. The interview was translated and transcript from Tigrinya to English by the researcher. Below the questions and answers can be found:

- Good afternoon, first I would like to thank you for accepting to be part of my research on the causes of the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia and its geopolitical implication it has in the region.

Good afternoon, it is a pleasure and I hope that I can be helpful for your research.

- Thank you, could you just briefly tell me your situation, your age?

Yes, no problem. Well I am an Eritrean national working for the Eritrean Embassy and I am fifty-five years old.

- Thank you, let's start the interview and please feel free to ask if a question is unclear or you would like more explanation or if you wouldn't like to answer a specific question.

Ok, I am ready we can start.

- First of all, could you please explain to me the relation between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1991 politically and economically?

Interesting question... Well, in 1991, at the time of the independence of Eritrea and the regime change in Ethiopia that the Eritreans helped them to take their capital Addis Ababa and overthrew Mengistu.

The two countries started to cooperate, firstly to help each other and we helped Ethiopia to overthrow the Derg. Secondly, between the people of Eritrea and Ethiopia, culturally and so on, it was a relation of cooperation. People and capital could move freely, a mutual understanding between both government existed and the situation was peaceful and optimistic for the region. And Ethiopia could use the ports freely for economic purposes. They were using both ports, Assay for the Southern part of Ethiopia and for Northern Ethiopia, Tigray by Massawa. Until 1997, they could use them freely.

Before that, I have to mention that in 1993, there was a referendum to let the people choose for independence under the coordination of the UN and other organisations, which was massively a yes by the Eritrean people. Even Ethiopia, during the referendum helped the Eritreans living in Ethiopia to be able to vote and also in the wider diaspora. The Ethiopian government accepted the referendum, and then, we started to draft our own constitution as we were using the Ethiopian one until then. The proposal and everything concerning the constitution were told to the people and also those in the Diaspora. Everybody was involved and was learning about the constitution and each community had a meeting and even within the Diaspora, with for instance, if I am not wrong, seven representatives from Europe, same in the US and also the Middle East.

After that, in 1995, there were a meeting on the implementation of the draft of the Constitution. And after in May 1997, it was about to be implemented but only the last stage of the plan was the start the shift from a transitional government to a constitutional one. So it was about putting it in practice.

- And what happened after that?

Incidentally, we can say, the border conflict started in 1998. Well it is not really an incident. The reason is coincidentally, we implemented our own currency in late 1997. From then on, the Ethiopian regime was unhappy of these changes and it started to create problems regarding Badme. The situation in Badme started to have issues between the people living on the borderlands. So clashes were created around the borders and Ethiopia started accusing Eritrea of pushing them but in reality, the Ethiopian government pushed the peasants.

- Between the people? How come?

Yes, people were coming from Tigray, attacking the people and taking their cattle for instance because the government of Ethiopia was pushing the peasants to put the fire on. Eritrea was telling the Ethiopian government that if there was a question of border issues, we should sit down and find solutions. But, Ethiopia refused dialogue and three mediators from Eritrea in the borderland just been killed after meeting the other parts and from then, the situation intensified. They just killed them! So when this happened, the conflict took important consequences.

Therefore, the Eritrean government decided there was a need to look at the delimitation and find solutions through peaceful means. And nothing should violate the boundary in May 1998. And that if it was about the boundary dispute, there is a need to look at the respect of the colonial boundary.

But the Ethiopian Parliament declared war in May 1998 and they occupied our territories and we never step on their territories. And you know, Badme was always an Eritrean town. But it is important to understand what was the aim of Ethiopia's regime. This aim was to have Eritrea

under Ethiopia and to get rid of the EPLF and to have Eritrea under its authority. However, it was the EPLF who put them in power.

At the beginning we have good relations but then it just went down. I have to highlight this point, that at the time of the war prior 1991, the TPLF wanted to be a republic of Tigray and EPLF was telling them that they have to be as one Ethiopia than a republic.

- In 1998, the war erupted again between the neighbour countries, from your viewpoint, could you tell me what were the factors leading to the conflict?

From my point of view, first the region of Badme, is a rich resource zone and Ethiopia wanted to control it. And Secondly, to take Assab as their seaport, to have access to the sea. Many countries are landlocked but Ethiopia wanted to own it although it had its own potential within the country. Ethiopia is a rich country with its own resources, however it does not accept of not having an access to the sea and to control Eritrea. So they declared as well that All Eritrean women should leave Eritrea and come to Ethiopia.

- Why?

To get rid of the Eritrean race and also to kill the youth generation. That was the hidden policy of Ethiopia and within one week, to be able to capture Eritrea. This is the agenda of the Weyane. So by taking the women and all the youth above eight years old to be killed was a way to get rid of the Eritrean race.

And the Western world, especially the US was on their side but when they saw that Eritrea was too strong for them, they decided to put a ceasefire. There were three offensives, which they

could not battle. At the 2nd offensive they went until Barents in Eritrea but then again, the Eritrea responded and again, in the 3rd offensive they came back with more power in 2000.

- So there were three offensives?

Yes, so after the three offensives Ethiopia could not get anywhere and afterwards they accepted the ceasefire and the peace talks.

They did not care about the human losses, there were sending their soldiers massively and were saying that those who die, die and other will come after. This is the way Ethiopia's regime worked.

During the ceasefire in 2000 when it was the time of the Algiers agreement they violated the ceasefire and attack Assay over night. At the time, because we accepted the ceasefire, which was about 65 km by air that Eritrean soldiers had to retreat, which we respected. So Ethiopia took this opportunity to attack and Ethiopian troops were very close to Assay, as it is easy to get there because it is just a desert landscape. However, the Eritrean soldiers responded and after their defeat, Mesfin and Meles rushed to Algiers. So, you can see that there were many ceasefires implemented but violated by Ethiopia.

- What was decided in Algiers?

There were the UN, the US, the African Union, Algeria and other was present. First, it was about the ceasefire implementation and the final and binding of The Algiers agreement was signed by both of us. Then, it was about the question of demarcation that needed to be done through the law.

-So Ethiopia signed the agreement?

Yes it did. Then, we went to The Hague in 2002, both countries prepared their own demarcation documents etc but the Ethiopian came without documents just accusing Eritrea. While Eritrea prepared all the documents showing the colonial boundary that inherited Eritrea. And the commission decided in April 2002 that Badme remains in Eritrea. So the commission and the pillars should have been put in place on the frontier and subsequently, the UNMEE and their troops were there as observers to avoid further aggression in 25km at the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

But, once all the agreements at the EEBC were signed, Ethiopia refused and accused the UN of mistaken the decision and Ethiopia was then happy to say that Badme is Ethiopian. And Eritrea could not accept that, it was a lie and that the decision by the court at The Hague was made and had to be respected.

The American asked why dialogue could not work? If the dialogue would have happen before the aggression but now, and until they do not respect the decision of the EEBC there would not be any dialogue. The refusal of Ethiopia to respect should have followed by 'sanction' by the international community but it was not. They should not go in favour of Ethiopia but in favour of the law. The international community did not follow the law and the decision that was signed.

Before any dialogue, Ethiopia should stop the occupation of Eritrean territories, if not, there is no way for dialogue with us.

Again in 2007, mutual agreement of the demarcation on map by the border commission is done and the presence of UNMEE was therefore not anymore in need. Especially because the UNMEE was making money, trafficking and so on. They were making businesses and also abusing women and so on. They were completely useless. This is why, the UNMEE had to leave and the UN accepted the decision.

Our people, who were deported, started to be in decent situation however as Badme is still under Ethiopia so the people from Badme were displaced into camps in Eritrea and until now they live there. It is not fair for the people and that they still occupy our territory; it is an occupation! Our government is still telling about this but everything we here, are accusations on Eritrea of this or that.

- Are they still living outside their native place?

Yes, they still live in camps and under the government's umbrella.

- Do you think there were some warnings it will happen?

No, there were no warnings; it was all of a sudden. It was not the issue of Badme, it is more than that.

- But what major impacts this conflict had on both states? And the populations? The economic and political situations?

The people are the first victims of both countries. But in Eritrea in the last 10 years continue to improve its infrastructure and food security, health and education access. The improvement of

agriculture and, so on. Eritrea is not a poor nation; it is rich and has the natural resources. But Ethiopia is the obstacle.

- And I'm going to take a question that an author also asked, Bereketeab (2009), about why the international community, and especially the guarantors of the Algiers Agreement, failed to ensure the implementation of the final and binding verdict of the EEBC?

The international community is mandated by the US. And it is not doing its work as an international commission. First, America has the veto power, if America says no it's no. It is because of the Americans. Strategically, economically, they want Eritrea to be under Ethiopia but why? We are a sovereign state. Before the colonial border we were under the Italians, the Egyptians and so on, it was logic to be sovereign state.

- In some readings, many authors asked why did Ethiopia accept colonial conventions for the delineation of the border, and, further, why did Ethiopia agree to accept the EEBC verdict as the basis for a final and binding agreement?

Because Manlike signed in early 1900s the boundary delimitation with Eritrea. So they had to because it is true. So everything is proven in maps. Why they accepted, because it was the right decision.

- Why does Eritrea refuse dialogue from the US and the UN?

The government did not refuse but about the final binding and that the demarcation of 2007 had to be put in place. Why do they not put pressure on Ethiopia to respect the decision of the law? The mandate of the international community was to respect the law. They take position in the

conflict by favouring Ethiopia as being the ally of America. Eritrea is seen as the bad one. Why does Eritrea have to be the victim of it, more than 20,000 young lost their lives? Where is the law? It is not about what you want to do. Why they do not respect the territorial integrity of Eritrea? Ethiopia would tell you that what do we do of our farmers, who now use the lands there, that are a kid answer.

- What will be the best solution to end this situation of broken diplomatic relations?

The international community is colonised by America who decides everything. When Ethiopia will respect the decision of the EEBC. The situation that we have before the war, that we could move from one country to other freely, would not be settle again until this border issue is not resolved.

- What is your opinion to what the press says for both Eritrea and Ethiopia? The sanctions on Eritrea? The Ethiopian famine and the Impact of aid, what is going on in the Ogaden region? And about Somalia?

Well, concerning the famine is due to the regimes in place because the Horn of Africa is a rich region and it should not have famine on their lands. The people should not face hunger or starvation, why with all the resources, food security could not be provided to all? They do not use their resources for the people as a whole due to the regime but instead they keep for themselves. The amount of corruption is too high.

- So what would be the best solution?

The regimes have to work for the people, to provide basic needs and so on. In Ethiopia, it is only Addis Ababa that is developed but they have ethnic tensions among the Oromo, Ogaden, Amhara and so on. Ethiopia is selling their people's territories to China, India and so on. Why? The government is corrupted and it is all about remaining in power. It is the people's land but there is no respect by the Ethiopian government.

In Somalia, they used to be a rich country that was self-reliant but in 1991 the situation started to change and as we can see now, the country is in chaos and facing famine, as they could not put in place a food security system.

- Well, another question that many authors or in the press tends to say and I would like to have your opinion on that: Eritrea and Ethiopia used Somalia situation as their proxy war or as well that Eritrea helps opposition groups in Ethiopia and vice versa. What do you think of this statement?

These so-called opposition parties in Ogaden, Oromo, Amharic against the Tigrayans are only response to the construction of ethnic hatred within Ethiopia. Tigray as one ethnic group should have united the whole country into one instead of favouring the Tigrayans over others. The way they treat even their own veterans was not right for them. They do not give the people who fought their war, a decent situation when they are back. So of course, it will create opposition. But it is their own problem it is their internal situation not ours.

Regarding Somalia, Eritrea only see Somalia as it should be a one united state and the situation should be only between the people without the implication of external states, powers such as

Ethiopia, why did it go there and attack? Us Eritrea, we do not stand on any parts the shabab or any others. The international community has to stop to put pressure in Somalia. It has to come from their own population. For instance, why did Ethiopia intervene militarily there?

- So how do you perceive the future situation in the Horn might be?

Military intervention should end in the region and let them solve their issues by themselves.

- And between Eritrea and Ethiopia?

Between the people of both states there is no issue, the problem is the regime, to respect the law. In my opinion, it has to get out of Eritrea's territories and from then we start diplomatic talk but before that no. Because we are neighbours and we have to be able to live in peace and once they would get out the situation can improve.

For instance, with Uganda, the situation and the truth about Eritrea started to be acknowledged. Because us, we focus on self-reliance and we don't wait for aid and we want to use our resources for our own people.

- How do you see the future? Will it be possible for both states to create cooperation in the future?

Until they don't go out of our territory there is no way to have peace. We are blaming the international commission for not reacting on this matter. The diplomatic relation remains broken.

- Are you pessimistic or optimistic? With the sanctions imposed on Eritrea?

Cannot be optimistic as there are lies that Eritrea supports al-shabab in Somalia and we are against any terrorist movements. At the end, we are the first in fighting it as for instance in 1994 when al-Qaida tried to come into Eritrea and were captured and killed. We were working in cooperation with the US. And the sanctions now on Eritrea are just complete lies to forget the real issue of the border by creating new issues.

There cannot be a return to conflict, even if Ethiopia wanted they do not have the possibility. We want to go by the law and we are putting pressure on the UN. But not by the use of force.

We want to have peace in the region.

Power abuse!

- Well, I thank you very much for this interview, which was very helpful and interesting.

You are welcome, it was a pleasure and I hope that what I explained to you will be useful and that you understood the situation of my country.