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Contents

Ideologies of Governance in the Horn of Africa

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Abstract

The underlying conflicts in the Horn of Africa, within states as well as between them, are driven not least by differences in the ways in which their governments and peoples *think* about themselves. Different conceptions of the 'nation' derive from different cultural origins and formative histories, and define nations in different and competing ways, while the inadequacies of *all* of the region's nationalisms have driven a search for alternative ideologies of governance, most prominent among which has been Marxism-Leninism. Religion, by contrast, has played a surprisingly small role at least in official ideologies of governance in the region.

Introduction

While the distinctive political features of the Horn of Africa are most basically the result of the region's peculiar environmental construction and historical legacies, these features can also be illuminated by examining the ideologies of governance through which the states of the region have been created and maintained, and through which these states have justified their specific projects, and the control of some people by others. In this, as in so many other respects, the Horn differs sharply from the post-colonial African norm, and at the same time exhibits an exceptional level of variety within the region itself. Drawing on the two principal original states of the region – Ethiopia and Somalia – and on their two secessionist offshoots – Eritrea and Somaliland – this paper seeks to explore the underlying ideologies of governance in the region, and the ways in which they have been used to impose and justify the very different forms of government that have ruled in the Horn since the independence of Somalia in 1960.

The starting point for this enquiry is that states both come into existence, and justify their existence, in very different ways. States are all too often taken for granted, and it is just assumed that the world is composed of states, these are all basically the same kind of organisation, and that's all there is to it. This is simply not the case. Beneath the superficial uniformity imposed by the doctrines of state sovereignty enshrined in international law, and their representation on a nominally equal basis within organisations like the United Nations or the African Union, states actually exist for very different reasons, and moreover *think* of themselves in very different ways. Conflicts, moreover, are especially liable to arise when there are contiguous clusters of different states whose rulers and often peoples see them as existing for different reasons, which in turn create contradictions with neighbouring states with different conceptions of themselves. States characteristically justify their existence, and seek to create solidarities between the hierarchical structure of the state and the allegiance of their people, by constructing ideologies of *nationalism*; but there is not one nationalism, but rather many different kinds of nationalism, depending on the kind of state that the doctrine is designed to support, and the states of the Horn have come to embody alternative conceptions of the 'nation' in ways that have a major impact on the politics of the region.

In Europe, where doctrines of nationalism largely originated, states have come to be seen, at least since the era of German and Italian 'unification' in the mid-nineteenth century, as existing in order to express the identities of the different 'nations' of which Europe is conceived as being basically composed. At moments of crisis, therefore, like the collapse of the Austrian empire after 1918, or of the Soviet empire after 1989, Europeans have looked to nations as the basic building blocks for reconstruction, and have redesigned the map of the continent to reflect the major ethnic or national groups of which it is taken to be composed. So after 1989, Czechoslovakia was divided between Czechs and Slovaks, because these peoples saw themselves as belonging to different nations, whereas the two German states were united (or reunited), because east and west Germans saw themselves as basically the same. The problems in Europe have arisen in states such as Yugoslavia, or indeed Belgium and Northern Ireland, which cannot be made to fit neatly into the model that Europeans have chosen to use.

In most of Africa, by contrast, states exist for a very different reason, because these are the units that were defined and demarcated by European colonialism, and which served in turn as the basis for the various 'nationalist' movements that emerged in opposition to colonial rule. These colonially created territories were then essentially taken for granted as constituting Kenya, Senegal, Zambia,

and the great majority of other African states. No one would dream of trying to create European states like that, and were anyone to try, the resulting political units would rapidly fall apart, but this mode of state formation has served Africa, despite problems, well enough since independence over half a century ago.

Nationalisms in the Horn

The 'problem' of nationalism in the Horn of Africa, to take the first of the ideologies of governance with which this discussion is concerned, is that it does not work in the standard African way, or indeed the standard European way, but instead defines its states in ways that are inherently hostile to one another. To start with Ethiopia, as the core state of the Horn whose presence decisively shapes the region as a whole, the central problem of Ethiopian nationalism is *not* that it is a multi-ethnic state – a trait that it shares with virtually all other African states – but that it is an *imperial* state, whose leaders have historically seen it as deriving from ancient origins rooted in the plough agriculture cultures of the northern highland region of the present Ethiopian (and indeed Eritrean) state, and in the Orthodox Christian religion long associated with imperial rule. This in turn has promoted its rulers to claim a 'manifest destiny' to rule over any of the surrounding territories over which they were able to exercise control. This in turn has meant that ethnicity has worked very differently in Ethiopia from the way it has worked in most other parts of Africa, and has therefore been potentially much more dangerous. It is a myth that 'historic' processes of African state formation have worked more effectively than the 'artificial' structures 'imposed' on Africa by colonial rulers. On the contrary, within a colonial system, all of the subject peoples are broadly equal to one another, with the result that the state or 'nation' do not *belong* implicitly to any particular one among them. All Nigerians *are* Nigerian, and all Zambians *are* Zambian, in a way that all Ethiopians have not necessarily been Ethiopian: they have had to *become* Ethiopian, and have on occasion resisted the pressure to do so. Becoming Ethiopian has meant *thinking* of yourself in a certain way, that associated you with a particular history, speaking a specific language – very often different from that of the community into which you were born and raised – and even dressing in a particular way, and eating particular kinds of food. Most problematic of all, it has also been associated with being Christian (and specifically Orthodox), rather than Moslem. I am certainly among those who believe that a sense of being Ethiopian now extends significantly, beyond the original core, and that the country has a strong sense of its own identity – vividly indicated, for example, by widespread outrage at the Eritrean seizure of Badme in 1998 – but the underlying problems in what Ethiopian 'nationalism' still in some degree remain, and must be acknowledged.

For a vivid contrast with Ethiopian nationalism, one has only to look at Somali nationalism, which in its original formulation at the time of Somalia's independence in 1960 most basically expressed the idea that all Somalis had a right to live together in a single Somali state. Had Somalis lived in Europe, this would have been so basic and obvious that it would have been taken for granted. Somalis are a very distinctive people, defined by language, culture, religion and common identity, and in European terms would therefore be entitled to a state of their own. In African terms, however, they had no such right, because of the way in which the territories in which Somalis lived cut across the frontiers established by colonialism. Ethiopian nationalism could be fitted, however incongruously, within the African parameters, because Ethiopia was a territorial state, whose boundaries had been defined at the time of the colonial conquest, and by reference to the colonies by which it was surrounded. Somali nationalism could not, and Somalia became as a result the 'problem child of Africa', as the Ethiopian geographer Mesfin Wolde-Mariam described it.[1] The attempt to realise the Somali nationalist project in 1977/78 not only failed, but led to the collapse of the Somali state itself.

For a third and equally problematic nationalism, we can take the case of Eritrea, which actually fitted precisely into the format embodied by the vast majority of post-colonial African states. Eritrea, in this sense, was simply the successor state to Italian colonialism, and like any other colonial territory in Africa was entitled to separate independence within its colonial frontiers. The 'problem' in this case was not about Eritrea itself, but rather that this 'normal' definition of Eritrean nationhood clashed with the Ethiopian sense of 'manifest destiny', which implied an Ethiopian right to rule over peripheral peoples, reinforced though this was by the historicist claim that much of Eritrea had fallen within the Ethiopian empire before 1890, the support of some of the territory's population at the time of federation in 1950-52, and the demand to control what had been, notably in 1895 and 1935, the principal invasion route for the attempted colonial conquest of Ethiopia. It was at this point that the Ethiopian concept of nationalism clashed with what was to become the normal African one. But a further and vital constituent of Eritrean nationalism was the legitimacy of the 'struggle' – the long, bitter and extremely costly war through which the Eritrean People's Liberation Front eventually won independence for Eritrea in 1991, and the sense of entitlement that this aroused. The conviction that Eritrean nationhood was sanctified by the blood of the martyrs who died in that struggle, though analogous in some degree to the experience of other territories whose independence was eventually attained as the result of liberation war, such as Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, achieved an intensity in Eritrea that singled it out from the rest of Africa. A vivid (and

1 Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, *Somalia: the problem child of Africa*, Addis Ababa University, 1977.

diplomatically disastrous) expression of this feeling was the first speech at an OAU summit in 1993 by the president of the newly independent country, Isayas Afewerki, in which he described the organisation as 'a complete waste of time for thirty years'. This embittered comment derived from the way in which the Ethiopian government had over that period secured the support of other African states for its rule over Eritrea, by defining the conflict over Eritrean independence as maintaining the 'territorial integrity' of Ethiopia against an illegitimate demand for 'secession', rather than (as the Eritrean independence movement saw it) as the expression of the legitimate right of a former colony to 'self-determination'. It was for this reason that, paradoxically, the 'imperial' state of Ethiopia was better able to fit into the African consensus than the 'standard' post-colonial state of Eritrea. A precisely similar issue, though not at the same level of intensity, has arisen over the claim by the former British Somaliland since 1991 to independence as a state separate from the Somali Republic.

A further critical element of nationalism is that of territoriality – the way in which the definition of the 'nation' is tied to a specific area of land – and the nationalisms of the region are likewise shaped by the different and clashing ideas of territoriality that they embody. The dominant political classes of both Ethiopia and Eritrea derive from the Orthodox Christian plough agriculture societies of the northern highlands, to which land, and therefore frontiers, are critically important. 'A good neighbour', in the words of the Amhara proverb, 'is one who does not move the boundary markers' – with the implicit corollary that there are *no* good neighbours.[2] It is difficult, without recognising these in-built cultural values, to account for the vicious and extremely costly war that took place between these two states in 1998-2000, over small and economically valueless areas in dispute between them. To Somalis, on the other hand, frontiers are a hindrance, or at best an irrelevance: the corresponding Somali saying, 'wherever the camel goes, that is Somalia', perfectly expresses the pastoralist disdain for any mere line on the ground that may stand in the way of the movement of animals. With different attitudes to territory, in turn, go different attitudes to states: to highlanders, they are essential, and it is difficult to conceive of any stable and legitimate political order without them; to lowlanders, they are at best an obstruction, and at worst a major source of suffering. The breakaway Republic of Somaliland finds itself caught between these alternative conceptions. Its claims to separate independence critical depend on its ability to establish itself as the legitimate successor state to the former British Somaliland Protectorate, and hence to the boundaries delimited under colonial rule. On the other hand, much of its sense of a separate identity turns on the association between Somaliland and the Isaaq clan grouping, which occupies the central part of the territory and accounts for a substantial majority of its people, but also spills over into the Haud region of Ethiopia to the south. Both the Gadabursi clan of the Dir grouping to the west, and the Gadabursi and

2 Cited from Donald N. Levine, *Wax & Gold*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Dulbahante clans of the Darood to the east, fall within the territorial boundaries of Somaliland but outside its preponderant clan grouping – a problem especially acute in the east, where the quasi-state of Puntland defines itself in terms of the Harti group of the Darood to which both Gadabursi and Dulbahante belong, in the process privileging clan identity over territory.

The final and critical problem in defining a nationalist ideology of governance in the Horn is that *all* nationalisms in the region are extremely partial and limited. Not only do they clash with one another: they also disguise, or at best may help to bridge over, massive faultlines within the highly artificial states within which they are imposed, and in the process, privilege some people within those states over others. This is most obvious in Ethiopia, where as already noted the idea of nationalism can never entirely evade its association with the historical and cultural underpinnings of the Ethiopian state, and the deep inequalities that these carry with them: the 'project' of Ethiopian nationalism has essentially been concerned with finding some way to come to terms with this legacy, and the accession to the prime ministership in 2012 of a Welayta, Hailemariam Desalegn shows one way in which this difficult task is being attempted. Hailemariam is not the first non-northerner to rule Ethiopia: Mengistu Hailemariam is commonly believed to have been a Kullo Konta from the far southwest, while even emperor Haile-Selassie was genealogically in large part Oromo (both of his grandfathers were Oromo); but he is the first *publicly identified* non-northerner, and this in itself makes his tenure extremely significant.

But Somali nationalism, despite its ability to draw on a high level of cultural unity among Somalis, was likewise concerned to disguise or rectify divisions both between clan groups, and also between the legacies of the different colonial traditions – Italy, Britain, Ethiopia, France – under which different Somali peoples had been governed. In practice, too, the idea of Somali nationalism tended to favour Mogadishu over Hargeisa, and Darood and in some degree Hawiye clams over Isaaq, Dir and (most disadvantaged of all) the Rahanwein clans. Nor should the hegemonic imposition of an official conception of Eritrean nationalism, built on the EPLF and the memory of the struggle, blind us to the fact that Eritrea is divided between Christians and Moslems, each with different histories and social structures. Eritrea, like Belgium in Europe, forms a meeting point between different peoples who historically have close associations with groups across the formal frontiers in the state: the Tigrinya-speaking Orthodox Christians of the highlands share both cultural traits and historical legacies with their fellow Tigrinya-speakers to the south; the Moslems of the western lowlands look similarly to the Sudan; and their fellow-Moslems of the coastal plains have connections

reaching back to the era of the Prophet across the Red Sea to Arabia. In Eritrea – as in Ethiopia and Somalia, and indeed in Djibouti – the narrative of nationalism tends to privilege one group, in this case Christian highlanders associated with the EPLF. The moment other narratives express themselves, notably that of Islam, but also that of 'unionism' with Ethiopia, the existence of the state – and the legacy of the martyrs – is deeply threatened.

Marxism-Leninism

All narratives of 'nationalism' in the Horn have thus been significantly flawed, and it has therefore proved necessary to deploy alternative ideologies of governance, in an attempt to displace or supplement the nationalist project. That Marxism-Leninist should – a quarter of a century after the breaching of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union – still figure prominently among these may well seem bizarre, not least to those unfamiliar with the region. Marxism-Leninism, or communism, is now regarded with little more than derision, as an obviously failed ideology, throughout the more developed worlds, while even in those Asian states, notably the People's Republic of China, in which nominally Marxist-Leninist regimes still hold power, the doctrine has had to be drastically modified in order to promote the capitalist forms of economic management that have had a spectacular impact on development and living standards. In other parts of Africa it has had only very limited influence, especially as an ideology of liberation war in southern Africa, followed at times by disastrous attempts (as in Mozambique) to use it as a strategy for economic development. That it should gain its greatest traction in one of the least developed parts of the continent, in which the stages of development outlined by Marx have scarcely even started, and the culminating stage of socialist revolution must on any reckoning be immeasurably far in the future, is especially surprising.

There are nonetheless a number of reasons for the hold that this mode of thinking has gained especially over governing elites in the Horn, the first and still in many ways the most important of which is its prominence in the Ethiopian student movement of the later 1960s and early 1970s.[3] For the generation of university students who first challenged and then played a major role in overthrowing the imperial regime, Marxism-Leninism enjoyed a canonical status both as a means of explaining Ethiopia's past, and still more importantly as a blueprint for shaping its future. The past, readily dismissed as the era of 'feudalism', bore a strik-

3 For the definitive history of the Ethiopian student movement, see Bahru Zewde, The Quest for Socialist Utopia: the Ethiopian student movement, c.1960-1974, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2014.

ing resemblance to that of pre-revolutionary Russia, with its Orthodox Church, its decaying monarchy, its peasant problem, its national question, and its urgent need to 'catch up' with the evidently more developed countries with which its intellectuals compared it. Equally evidently, the way ahead was through revolution and the violent destruction of the feudal ruling class and its means of production, and their displacement by a new ruling class structure based on the peasantry. Given that the Soviet Union in the later 1970s was at the apogee of its global influence, with the Communist victory in Vietnam, and the spread of revolutionary socialism elsewhere, it is not surprising that the USSR provided the perfect role model for the Derg to follow, in its quest for a powerful, united, and rapidly developing Ethiopia. In addition, of course, adoption of a specifically Soviet model served to align the Derg with its most powerful source of military and diplomatic support.

'Land to the tiller' was accordingly the great rallying cry of the revolution: the dispossession of landlords, and the transfer of control over land to the people who actually farmed it – a transfer that was actually achieved, with characteristically Leninist sleight of hand, by *nationalisation*, through which land was vested in the state, and organised through peasants associations, which were always subject to ultimate state control. Especially in southern Ethiopia, where a system of exaction by landlords was far more brutally imposed than in the northern highlands, this was initially very popular and successful, even though the PAs were rapidly incorporated into hierarchical political structures. The key idea behind this was that the critical divisions within Ethiopia were not, ultimately, ones of ethnicity, but rather ones of *class*, and that once class domination by landlords was ended, the ethnic divisions in terms of which this class conflict was expressed would disappear, laying the basis for a revived and popular Ethiopian nationalism anchored in equality. But one could equally argue that the revolutionary land reform was in essence – as in the USSR – a means to capture the peasantry, and subject it to the control of a highly centralised regime, whether for military purposes or for those of state-directed industrialisation, and that the alienation of the countryside was built into the structure of the regime. This alienation was in turn critical to the eventual overthrow of the Derg in 1991.

Marxism-Leninism also had a peculiar resonance in the cultures of highland Ethiopia, as indeed in that of Russia, that is most vividly illuminated by its resemblance to Orthodox Christianity. Both were modes of governance and social control imposed from the top, through a priesthood – whether of church or party – who were believed to embody an unchallengeable wisdom that the governed were expected to accept and obey. Both, too, rested on an arcane body of

knowledge, which its acolytes were expected to acquire, but which in turn was subject to vicious doctrinal disputes, virtually incomprehensible to those outside the magic circle of the initiated, which were taken intensely seriously. These distinguished alternative visions of the 'correct' ideological line, which had a major bearing on key policy decisions such as the organisation of agriculture or the recognition to be given to different 'nationalities' within the multi-ethnic state, and were literally matters of life or death to the different groups or factions between which the student movement was fractured. Divisions such as those between the rival parties, and notably the All Ethiopia Student Movement (*Me'ison*) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) are incomprehensible without acknowledging the depth of ideological passion that underlay them.

With the establishment of the Derg regime in 1977, and still more with the launching of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984 and the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) in 1987, Marxism-Leninism became, albeit briefly, Ethiopia's *official* ideology of governance. Despite the dedication that this attracted from at least a number of WPE cadres, this is probably best regarded as an attempt by the regime to combine an appeal to the residual fervour of the revolutionary generation with the essential support of the Soviet Union in its battles against well-organised insurgencies in Eritrea and Tigray. It was at any rate a rather more genuine effort than only other explicitly Marxist-Leninist regime in the region – the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party organised by Siyad Barre in Somalia during the period before the Ethio-Somali war of 1977-78. Siyad used this after his coup in 1969, not only to consolidate the Soviet alliance but also to suppress the language of clan allegiance, while at the same time putting together his own clan coalition, but Somalis simply lacked the social and economic infrastructure within which Marxist ideas could be made to mean anything: you couldn't organise a vanguard party in such a society, let alone nationalise a camel. While Marxists can readily fit peasants into a class structure and its accompanying stages of development, they have enormous problems in understanding pastoralists. This ideological mode might plausibly have been expected to succumb to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, and of the PDRE itself two years later, and that it continues to enjoy a resonance in the politics of the Horn – and notably in Ethiopia – derives from its appeal to the Derg's opponents.

In Eritrea, Marxism-Leninism had two limited but nonetheless very important roles. First, it had an unmatched status as an ideology of revolutionary insurgent warfare, derived essentially from Mao Zedong, at which the EPLF proved to be extraordinarily effective. It was indeed one of the greatest guerrilla armies in the

history of the world, with organisational technologies of dual politico-military control on the Chinese model, derived in all probability from its leader Isayas' Afewerki's training in China. Second, it served to help overcome the ethnic-religious division between Moslem and Christian communities in Eritrea, and notably to defeat the EPLF's internal rival, the ELF, with its bases in Moslem areas and Arab alliances. In the process, it enabled the EPLF to create a genuinely Eritrean nationalism, independent both from regional alliances and from internal ethno-religious identities, in which the military organisation would eventually form the vanguard party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). Whether Marxism-Leninism in Eritrea has much traction beyond these two instrumental goals, apart from the third one of central control, is to my mind very uncertain.

The same could certainly not be said of Ethiopia, where Marxism-Leninism has been absolutely integral not only to the TPLF's eventually victorious liberation struggle, but to its organisation of the new political structures of Ethiopia after 1991. And while its use of Marxism as an ideology of liberation had much in common with Eritrea, its use as an ideology of governance was sharply different. At one level, the EPRDF retains a thoroughly Leninist conception of the role of the 'vanguard', and situates its claim to democracy in its ability to identify and mobilise leading elements in the wider society around its programme of transformation. This has been especially evident in the revival and restructuring of the party since the electoral disaster of 2005, as expressed for example in the role of 'model farmers' in modernising agriculture.[4] The identification of democracy as 'government *for* the people' rather than 'government *by* the people' sets Ethiopia apart from the great majority of African states, as well as from Western donors, which at least in principle conceive it as embodied in a liberal model encompassing notably multi-party electoral competition. This is further promoted by the idea of the 'democratic developmental state', which essentially amounts to a claim to the 'performance legitimacy' indicated by rapid rates of economic growth, and the improvements in human welfare that these bring with them.

The second key respect in which Marxism-Leninism continues to provide the underlying ideology of Ethiopian governance is through the commitment to a federation of 'nations, nationalities and peoples', each with a constitutional right to 'self-determination, up to and including secession', that constitutes the major

4 See René Lefort, 'Free market economy, "developmental state" and party-state hegemony in Ethiopia: the case of the "model farmers"', Journal of Modern African Studies Vol.50, No.4, 2012, pp.681-706.

respect in which the EPRDF regime has differed from *all* of its predecessors, monarchical as well as Marxist. This programme had, of course, a substantial element of tactical calculation. The core of the new regime lay in the TPLF, which as a movement based in a small, economically undeveloped and historically distinctive part of the country, needed to broaden its political base by making common cause with other areas and peoples alienated from the harshly repressive and centralising rule of the Derg. Given that the Derg had tested to destruction the idea of powerful top-down central government, an alliance of the peripheries against the centre had an obvious appeal, all the more so since it could exploit the weaknesses in the historic formation of the Ethiopian state already referred to. It is however essential to recognise that Meles Zenawi and his companions were heirs to precisely the same student Marxism-Leninism as their predecessors, and in turn sought to build on, rather than destroy, the ideological legacies of the Derg, most vividly expressed in their adamant refusal to reverse state ownership of land. The system of ethnic federalism that they established was accordingly directly and very consciously based on Stalin's writings on the 'national question', which shared the Derg's view that the 'national question' of problem of ethnicity in Ethiopia was essentially an expression of class conflict, but extended this beyond land ownership into issues of culture and local governance. They believed that once the structures of 'Abyssinian' dominance were removed, and the different peoples of the former empire-state were guaranteed autonomy with the ultimate safeguard of separation, a new Ethiopia built on a premise of equality would come into being. In the process, any ideology of governance derived from concepts of ethnicity would wither away once its economic roots were destroyed.

Whether this will indeed prove to be the case – and Stalin's theory of nationalities has been derided as fiercely as it has been espoused – is one of the most critical issues of governance continuing to face Ethiopia. The ultimate test rests in the ways in which the federal construction of the present Ethiopian state interacts with the 'developmental statehood' through which governance is increasingly being implemented. The extremely ambitious development agenda of that state can necessarily be realised only through an approach that is nation-wide rather than based in the country's diverse regions. The communications network and notably the road-building programme that provide the most visible aspect of developmentalism is inherently integrating in its effects. The processes of industrialisation that provide the next phase of this grand project must involve the large-scale population movements that invariably accompany such transformations, not only from the countryside into the towns, but also from areas with 'surplus' labour (whether skilled or unskilled) to the regions where such labour is needed. The complex external ramifications of export-led growth, in relations both with neighbouring states (as in extending regional trading blocs or exporting electricity from Ethiopia's massive hydro-projects) and globally (in attracting

foreign direct investment or seeking global markets) can only be managed by central government. Development, too, is in its early stages almost necessarily unbalanced, since it has to draw on those sectors and regions in which a country enjoys the greatest comparative economic advantage. In principle, following the Marxist logic, the pulling power of attachments to individual 'nationalities' should diminish as the benefits of country-wide development are extended and shared. In practice, integrating these two processes is likely to require complex political management.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to one potential ideology of governance that has *failed* to figure prominently in at least the official politics of the region, that of religion. Though the government of the Horn's northern highland zone historically owes much to Orthodox Christianity, and its Moslem pastoralist regions have equally been subject to periodic upheavals and revivalist movements – from Ahmed 'Gragn' through Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hasan to al-Shabaab – these appear to have played on a very minor role in the development of modern governmentalities. In both Ethiopia and Eritrea, the conscious downgrading of religious legitimacy is clearly linked to the dangers that it would arouse in states in which governments drawn predominantly from Christian regions of each country seek to maintain control over its largely Moslem peripheries. In predominantly Moslem states, and notably Somalia, Islam would appear to provide at least a potential source of solidarity overriding the intense factionalism characteristic of pastoralist societies, and this in principle has been the mission of al-Shabaab. In practice, nonetheless, in Somalia as elsewhere in the Moslem world, Islam has proved much more effective as an ideology of *opposition*, to the corruption and ineffectiveness of the states by which Moslems have been governed, than as an ideology of governance. This can perhaps most plausibly be ascribed to the difficulty of articulating a common conception of Islam capable of gaining the necessary traction among diverse Moslem populations, to the striking lack of fit between Islam and the territorial entities around which governance projects have been organised, and possibly to more basic problems of reconciling Islam to the essentially modernist vision of statehood.

Conclusion

To a far greater extent than is commonly recognised, differences in politics stem from differences in the ways in which people *think*. And while 'ideology' in the sense of some grand and explicit overall plan through which to shape the future has been thoroughly discredited by the collapse of Marxism-Leninism in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere, ideology in the broader sense of how

people's minds are organised continues to shape alternative conceptions of governance and the proper construction of political communities. These conceptions themselves, of course, spring from the physical and mental environments within which human beings have to exist, and a major part of the reason for the salience of ideology in the politics of the Horn derives from the vast differences in the landforms, climates and consequently of societies within the region, as well as the dramatic and frequently violent historical experiences to which its people have been subjected. From an academic viewpoint, this makes northeast Africa a peculiarly fascinating area within which to explore the varieties of ideology, and their interactions with one another. From the viewpoint of the lived experience of the region's peoples, it imposes itself as a source of many of their traumas.

One question that is raised by ascribing the distinctive problems of the Horn to causes deeply entrenched in the mentalities of its peoples is then that of whether these problems are themselves the inevitable outcome of essentially unchanging features of the region's make-up, with the result that they are effectively beyond human management, and that the region is therefore doomed to a path-dependent future in which its frequently dismal past must, in one form or another, be constantly replicated. Mercifully, in my view at least, this is not the case. The region's history reveals not only all-too-frequent conflicts, but also patterns of stable governance, and forms of accommodation both among and between peoples that have served to manage and mitigate the actual incidence of violence. Even if the building blocks represented by the diverse societies of the Horn, and the social attitudes and values salient within each of them, are likely to change only slowly if at all, the ways in which they are combined and managed can vary, and in the process create markedly different – and hopefully beneficial outcomes. The structure of the FDRE, whatever the criticisms that may be (and have been) directed against it, represents a highly explicit attempt to recognise and reconcile the differences within the region's largest and most diverse state. At the very least, however, an understanding of the ways in which the peoples of the Horn differ, in terms of their mentalities every bit as much as of their more tangible attributes, must be central to any successful achievement of this task.