Conflicts of Four Heterogeneous Cases in the Horn of Africa from Path Dependency Perspective

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Abstract

As a crossroads, the Horn of Africa is characterized by a diversity of ethnic groups, religions, and cultures. Since the wave of Western colonialism, the countries of the Horn of Africa have been embroiled in internal conflicts, and Ethiopia, the Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia have long failed to resolve their communal conflicts. Previous studies have described the outbreak of conflicts or civil wars in terms of competition for resources, ethnic identity, and colonial legacy. The civil conflicts in the four countries in the Horn of Africa are a typical case of heterogeneity. Through the path-dependency approach, this paper takes colonial rule as the starting point and state construction as the node to analyze how the four cases develop step by step leading to the occurrence of internal conflicts. The study shows that all four cases failed to properly solve the problem of state construction and build a system of power balance among ethnic groups, which led to the repeated planning of inter-ethnic conflicts and the formation of conflicts.
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**Keywords:** Horn of Africa, civil conflict, civil war, path dependency, heterogeneous case analysis

### Introduction

After the Cold War, civil wars or conflicts have become dominant compared with transnational wars or conflicts.1 Nils Petter Gleditsch et al., ‘Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset’, *Journal of Peace Research*, xxxix (2002); Therése Pettersson and Peter Wallenstein, ‘Armed Conflicts, 1946–2014’, *Journal of Peace Research*, liii (2015). New civil war starts have dropped appreciably since 1994, all major regions of the world have roughly followed this pattern with a peak in civil war occurrence around 1994.2 Nicholas Sambanis, ‘A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Quantitative Literature on Civil War’, *Defence and Peace Economics*, xiii (2002), 215. The degree of volatility in the Horn of Africa indeed appears higher than at any time in recent years.3 Dan Watson, ‘Red Lines: Upheaval and Containment in the Horn of Africa’, *ACLED*, (2021). Since 2018, the Horn of Africa has experienced several conflicts such as the coup d’état in Sudan in 2019 and 2021, the Tigray War in Ethiopia in 2020, and the civil conflict between Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2023. Otherwise, Somalia has been in armed fragmentation among various factions for many years, and the central government has been unable to enforce effective control over its territory. Djibouti, Eritrea, and Kenya, on the other hand, have remained relatively stable. It seems that the Horn of Africa is entering into a new conflict round.

Since the 2000s, research on civil war has flourished in the social sciences, e.g., the onset of civil war, ethnic relations, inner-state and inter-state factors, negotiations and mediation, peacekeeping mechanism, recurrence of the civil war, etc. From a geographical or spatial side, research on civil war has covered key areas such as the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

The reasons for the onset of conflicts are diverse, depending on the domestic situation in the countries of the Horn. Although Ethiopia is the only African country that escapes the fate of European colonization (except for Italian occupation during World War II), the region was deeply affected by colonialism, so the seed was buried in that time. Sensationally, the conflict in the Horn of Africa cannot be separated from the conflicts between ethnic groups over political power, natural resources, geographic distribution, etc. This paper will review the classical literature on conflict or war study, and then give a framework of path dependency to analyze conflicts in four cases in the Horn of Africa.

### Literature Review

Research on the onset of civil conflict or war has flourished in the social sciences in the recent twenty years. Three explanatory logics in the civil war literature since the 2000s were grievance, greed, and opportunities.1 Lars-Erik Cederman and Manuel Vogt, ‘Dynamics and Logics of Civil War’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, lxi (2017). From the perspective of the actor, the literature consists of individual, organization level, and state or intra-state level.

Grievance is the key psychological factor in civil conflict or war studies. Using grievance to explain the onset of civil war originates from Ted Gurr’s relative deprivation theory. Relative deprivation means some citizens or groups avail themselves facilities, privileges, and advantages, which lead to deprivation of other citizens or groups.2 Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (New York, N.Y., 2016). Relative deprivation will lead to frustration, dissatisfaction, and grievance in excluded groups. The explanatory framework of grievance is mainly based on the individual, some scholars have pointed out that grievance is embedded in a long history and is a factor that has always existed.

Relative deprivation is primarily psychological, whereas horizontal inequalities are largely material.99Halvard Buhaug, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, ‘Square Pegs in Round Holes: Inequalities, Grievances, and Civil War’, *International Studies Quarterly*, lvii (2014). Some scholars have paid attention to horizontal inequalities with civil conflict or war. Focusing only on vertical inequality (that is, income inequality among individuals) is difficult to fully explain the risk of conflict. Therefore, some scholars introduced the concept of horizontal inequality and pointed out that the horizontal inequality between politically relevant ethnic groups and states at large can promote ethnonationalist conflict.1010Gudrun Ølstby, ‘Polari-zation, Horizontal Inequalities and Violent Civil Conflict’, *Journal of Peace Research*, xlv (2008); Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils B. Weidmann, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, ‘Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison’, *American Political Science Review*, cv (2011).

The economic cause is another important factor in the studies. Collier and Hoeffler examined the possible economic causes of civil war by using utility theory and found that the four significant factors affecting the onset and duration of civil war were per capita income, natural resource endowment, population size, and degree of ethno-linguistic differentiation.1111Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, ‘On Economic Causes of Civil War’, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 1 (1998). Furthermore, they suggest that what actually happens is that opportunities for predation (controlling primary commodity exports) cause conflict, and the grievances this generates induce diasporas to finance further conflict.1212Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, ‘Greed and Grievance in Civil War’, *Oxford Economic Papers*, lv (2004).


Based on the framework above, the analysis of civil conflict or war is further expanded. Geography can be a key supplementary factor in civil war studies. Many scholars have focused on the state capacity, like military, financial, and bureaucratic absorption. However, it neglects the divergence between different regions. Thus, through the nighttime light emissions, the mobility of people across regions, and sub-national factors are further elucidated.1616Ore Koren and Anoop K Sarbahi, ‘State Capacity, Insurgency, and Civil War: A Disaggregated Analysis’, *International Studies Quarterly*, liii (2018).

Some scholars include climate change as a variable in conflict studies to explain the relationship between

By using the Georeferenced Event Database (GED) developed by Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Kyle Beardsley and others analyzed movement in conflict zones and found that insurgents who build stronger relationships with civilians and garner local support tend to be better positioned to anchor and gain more ground on the ground. Kyle Beardsley, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Nigel Lo, ‘Roving Bandits? The Geographical Evolution of African Armed Conflicts’, *International Studies Quarterly*, lix (2015).

The impact of colonial legacies has been studied by some scholars. Robert Blanton and others distinguished British and French colonial in Africa and their impact on ethnic conflict. British and French colonies formed unranked system and ranked system, French colonies were more autocratic, and ethnic minorities experienced political and economic subordination by the dominant ethnic group. Ali and others argue that the state capacity of Anglophone countries in Africa was constrained by British colonialism, while Francophone countries had better prospects. Merima Ali et al., ‘Colonial Legacy, State-Building and the Salience of Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *The Economic Journal*, cxix (2019). Chacha and Stojek examined the issue of intervention in civil conflicts or wars, linking pre-colonial ties to economic, political, and social relations, finding that economic relations have a greater impact on pre-colonial relations, while cultural and political connections have no obvious empirical evidence. Mwita Chacha and Szymon Stojek, ‘Colonial Ties and Civil Conflict Intervention: Clarifying the Causal Mechanisms’, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, xxxvi (2019).

Some scholars take a more macro perspective, like environment. Lindsay Reid and others established conflict environment (CE) to explain the conflict onset. CE refers to the spatial and temporal dynamics of violence in a state’s neighborhood that systematically exacerbate the spread of civil war, which is based on the premise that recent and historical violence in the state’s neighborhood and the state’s history of conflict. Lindsay Reid et al., ‘Conflict Environments and Civil War Onset’, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, vi (2021).


Previous studies have focused on multiple causes for the onset of conflict or war, from both psychological and material, quantitative and qualitative, temporal and spatial sides, or mixture methods. Thus, any single
cause to explain the onset of conflict or war seems weak, and the characteristic of certain regions or states should be considered in the analysis framework. As Sambanis concluded, the study on civil war should explore any systematic differences across war types, various measures of ethnic diversity, and polarization, and try to code time-variant measures of ethnic diversity.29Sambanis, ‘A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Quantitative Literature on Civil War’, 230–232.

A comparison of heterogeneous cases in specific regions can complement and refine the perspective of relevant studies. It can provide us with a broader perspective and a deeper understanding of special factors and dynamics of specific states. This comparative research method can provide more in-depth insight and help to form a more comprehensive and accurate theoretical framework. The Horn of Africa is a typical region with heterogeneous cases, colonized and uncolonized, ethnic fragmentation and ethnic integration, etc.

The Horn of Africa countries as heterogeneous cases

This paper aims to investigate the onset of civil conflict by incorporating a variety of factors. Path dependency theory will be introduced and applied to four countries in the Horn of Africa, chosen specifically for their heterogeneity.

Definition of civil conflict

There may be no single cause or set of causes for all civil wars, the concept of civil war needs to be disaggregated into specific types of war.11Jeffrey Dixon, ‘What Causes Civil Wars? Integrating Quantitative Research Findings’, International Studies Review, xi (2009). In general, the Correlates of War (COW) data-sets on war use a relatively high threshold of 1000 battle deaths, and the Uppsala dataset on armed conflict has a lower threshold, 25 annual battle deaths, but has so far been available for only the post-Cold War period.22Gleditsch et al., ‘Armed Conflict 1946-2001’.

Gersovitz and Kriger defined civil war as a politically organized, large-scale, sustained, physically violent conflict. The authors distinguished between civil wars and regional war complexes, noting the interdependence of mass violence in African countries.33Mark Gersovitz and Norma Kriger, ‘What Is a Civil War? A Critical Review of Its Definition and (Econometric) Consequences’, The World Bank Research Observer, xxviii (2013). Gurr pointed out that there are three general forms of political violence: turmoil, conspiracy and internal war.44Gurr, Why Men Rebel. Fearon and Laitin used four criteria to define civil war: (1) fighting between agents; (2) killed at least 1,000 over its course, with a yearly average of at least 100; (3) At least 100 were killed on both sides; and, (4) massacres with no organized or effective opposition.55James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, ‘Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War’, American Political Science Review, xcvi (2003), 76. Somehow, armed rebellion, coup d’état and other violations will be treated as unstable resources of state. From these literature, the definition of civil conflict or war should include following elements: (1) two or more hostile actors; (2) more than 25 deaths in an event; (3) a prolonged period of time; (4) impact on the power or status quo of state. Based on these elements, this paper will focus on the civil conflicts of four cases in the Horn of Africa.

Why four countries in the Horn of Africa

Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia are four countries broadly defined as being located in the Horn of Africa. The Horn is a crossroad of continent, and Middle East and Mediterranean Sea region. Although the four cases are located in the same region, they have different political, economic and cultural environments, which lead to different state building paths. However, four cases share similar historical narratives, which are division of Christian and Muslim population, formulation of cross-border ethnic groups, struggle on colonialism. Nowadays, Ethiopia is in the process of ethno-federation to centralization of power; Sudan and South Sudan is still in tribal division situation; Somalia still does not have an effective central government.
Compared with other regions in the world, the Horn of Africa owns a high ratio of conflict in history. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), four cases have a high number of civil conflicts, in which more than 25 deaths. (Figure 1) It can be found that the conflict fluctuates among the four cases. Somalia keeps a high level of conflict, Ethiopia and Sudan has experienced a growth process. In all, four countries still share a relatively high risk of conflict.

Figure 1 Civil Conflict in the Horn of Africa compared with Kenya since 2018

Second, the four countries have different regime types. After the Derg collapse in 1991, Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power and built the system of ethno-federation. Until Abiy Ali reorganized the EPRDF to Prosperity Party, Ethiopia’s regime can be seen as an authoritarian regime.11Marina Ottaway, ‘The Ethiopian Transition: Democratization or New Authoritarianism?’, *Northeast African Studies*, ii (1995); Jon Abbink, ‘Paradoxes of Electoral Authoritarianism: The 2015 Ethiopian Elections as Hegemonic Performance’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, xxxv (2017); Lovise Aalen and Kjetil Tronvoll, ‘The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections: The Return of Electoral Authoritarianism’, *African Affairs*, cviii (2009). Before the dependency of South Sudan, Sudan suffered from the conflict between Northern Muslim people and Southern Christian people. From Table 1, it is obvious that Sudan has experienced the highest frequency of coup d’état. During al-Bashir’s administration, the Sudanese Army was under his control. However, the relationship between the military and the government is delicate. The clan-based politics has always been a hidden risk. Finally, al-Bashir was overthrown by military power. The fighting between Burhan and Dagalo shows the potential cycle of regime change in Sudan. South Sudan shares a similar status quo with Sudan. Otherwise, Somalia’s central government cannot build an effective domestic order since the 1990s. Various warlords and the unrecognized government of Somaliland would be a prolonged situation in Somalia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Coups Freq</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1969,1974,1977</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Coups Frequency in the Horn of Africa
Third, different ethnic groups in four cases show the complexity. Except for the ethnic homogeneity in Somalia, the size and domination of ethnic groups in the three countries show variety. From Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset (Table 2), Oromo people have become the dominant ethnic group with Tigray people in discrimination, who were the dominant power before Abiy took power. Sudan and South Sudan also have an equilibrium ethnic group relation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>state</th>
<th>group</th>
<th>size</th>
<th>status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>0.3439</td>
<td>SENIOR PARTNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Amhara</td>
<td>0.2695</td>
<td>JUNIOR PARTNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Somali (Ogaden)</td>
<td>0.0622</td>
<td>JUNIOR PARTNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Tigray</td>
<td>0.0608</td>
<td>DISCRIMINATED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Other Arab Groups</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>POWERLESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Other Northern Groups</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>POWERLESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Shaygiyya, Ja’aliyyin and Danagla</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>DOMINANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>Dinka</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>SENIOR PARTNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>Nuer</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>JUNIOR PARTNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>Azande</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>POWERLESS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 The Situation of Ethnic Groups from EPR Dataset

Fourth, besides different sizes of ethnic groups in the domestic level, the Horn of Africa exists a large amount of cross-border ethnic groups. 28% of African ethnic groups identified by Murdock saw their ancestral homelands split across different countries. According to All Minorities at Risk project (AMAR), the main cross-border ethnic groups in the Horn of Africa are Somali, Tigre, Tigrinya, Afar, and Beja/Bedawi. As the central land of the Horn, Ethiopia has 5 out of 18 cross-border ethnic groups in all. Djibouti and Eritrea have deep ethnic ties with Ethiopia, so to Ogaden of Ethiopia with Somalia, and Southern Sudan with South Sudan.

Heterogenous cases can help to understand the differences between regions and groups, and their influence on conflicts, and help explore the causal relationship of conflicts. The heterogeneity of the four cases provides valuable reference significance in the study of civil conflicts in Africa.

Path dependence method

Path dependence refers to the dependence of the present result on the evolutionary path of the previous result. In the field of economic history research, path dependence is widely used in the analysis of technological change and institutional change.

David and Arthur argued that path dependence arises due to the presence of increasing returns. Arthur found that the first technology to emerge in the market is a virtuous cycle of self-reinforcement by virtue of first-mover advantage. Both viewed that technological change is subject to a “positive feedback mechanism”, in which the increasing returns lead to “lock-in”. Liebowitz and Margolis criticized David and Arthur, pointed out that it could be multiple equilibria. North first introduced path dependence into the study of economic history. North’s research found that the same mechanisms of increasing rewards and self-reinforcement existed in institutions. In other words, if an institution follows a path, it will develop in a certain direction under self-reinforcing effects.
North, ‘Institutions and Economic Growth: An Historical Introduction’, World Development, xvii (1989); Douglass C. North, Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance (New York, N.Y., 1990). After that, Sydow showed that path dependence is a continuous process: (1) a critical event leading to a critical juncture; (2) positive, self-reinforcing feedback formed; (3) an organizational lock-in.55 Georg Sydow, Georg Schreyögg, and Jochen Koch, ‘Organizational Path Dependence: Opening the Black Box’, Academy of Management Review, xxxiv (2008). Pierson distinguished between two different kinds of path dependence, narrow path dependence, which refers to the higher switching costs that make subjects abandon the better choice and follow the original track, and broad path dependence, which refers to the existence of a causal relationship between events in sequence.66 Paul Pierson, ‘Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics’, American Political Science Review, xciv (2000). Within conflict studies, Medynskyi used multinomial logistic regression, history model and case studies to prove that broad concept of path dependence emphasizes on initial conditions, and narrow concept describes the factors that “lock in” a particular civil war outcome.77 Ivan Medynskyi, ‘Path Dependence in Intrastate Conflicts: Resources, Regimes, and Interventions’ (Old Dominion University Ph.D. Dissertation, 2015). Cheung and Kwong found that entrepreneurs’ path and location choices were influenced by prior experience, including factors such as personal background, experience, and geographic location.88 Cherry Wun Mei Cheung and Caleb Kwong, ‘Path- and Place-Dependence of Entrepreneurial Ventures at Times of War and Conflict’, International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship, xxxv (2017). Basuchoudhary distinguishes three cultures between state actors and insurgents: war, peace, and bargain, the evolutionary dynamic model suggests that cultural learning can be a hitherto ignored explanation for why conflict is path dependent.99 Atin Basuchoudhary, ‘Why Is Civil Conflict Path Dependent? A Cultural Explanation’, Games, xii (2021).

For Sub-Saharan African countries, the Western colonial intervals make the fragmentation of ethnic groups. Through the process of state building, modern and traditional society are existing parallelly, which led to a contradiction of different groups. As Patrick Tom pointed out, the operation of a modern society alongside a traditional one (that colonialism failed to totally eradicate) became a source of social and political instability in independent Africa.100 Patrick Tom, Liberal Peace and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa (London, 2017), 28. From the intuitive experience, the conflicts within African countries cannot be separated from factors such as resource competition, ethnic identity, political and economic inequality and so on. However, the comparison of heterogeneous cases helps to discover the common ground between different conflicts or civil wars. From the previous literature, path dependency can be applied in the analysis of conflict in the Horn.

In this paper, the starting point for path dependence is colonization and imperialization, which determines the potential type of government and bureaucracy. Colonial experience is the first point of conjunction, which would lead the temporal trajectory of the country’s post-independence development. All four cases are directly or indirectly linked to colonialism, and therefore an analysis of the causes of civil conflict should trace the point in time back to the colonial period. In the four cases, only Ethiopia had almost no colonial experience during 18th to 20th century. However, Ethiopia was affected deeply by the Western colony. In other words, with various situations of pre-colonial period, the Western colonial experience left post-independence legacies. Sudan (and South Sudan) and Somalia did not have a strong central authority that can implement control on all sub-region of territory during the pre-colonial period. Otherwise, Ethiopia can be seen as an authority of empire for thousands of years.

Figure 2 State capacity and civil society (data from Index of State Capacity and V-Dem)
The map of the Horn has gone through two waves: the first was launched by Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia that three countries had annexed the small neighbor abandoned by the receding imperialist tide; the second was the fragmentation of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia with the secession of the three annexed units, which emerged as independent states.11John Markakis, ‘The Crisis of the State in the Horn of Africa’, in John Markakis, Günter Schlee, and John Young (eds.), *The Nation State: A Wrong Model for the Horn of Africa* (Berlin, 2021), 24. From the perspective of nation-state border, the Horn has formed today’s map after two waves of adjustments, which also implied the risk of conflict or war between countries over border disputes.

After the wave of anti-colonialism in Africa, countries in the Horn of Africa have come to independence one after another. The legitimacy of these states was formed in three modes, namely, proto-state, colonial state, and national liberation state, with Ethiopia being regarded as a proto-state and the others as colonial states. After the wave of anti-colonialism in Africa, countries in the Horn of Africa have come to independence one after another. The legitimacy of these states was formed in three modes, namely, proto-state, colonial state, and national liberation state, with Ethiopia being regarded as a proto-state and the others as colonial states.22Redie Bereketeab, *Historical Sociology of State Formation in the Horn of Africa: Genesis, Trajectories, Processes, Routes and Consequences* (Cham, 2023), 157–158. South Sudan can be seen as a national liberation state for its late independence in 2011.

The second conjunction is the establishment of nation-state during the anti-colonialism wave in the third world. The process of state building in all four cases changed significantly after World War II, and the construction of state capacity determined the efficiency of state governance. African leaders confront three sets of issues when building their states: the cost of expanding the domestic power infrastructure; the nature of national boundaries; and the design of state systems.33Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), 3, 12–13. It can be argued that the domestic order in all four cases was based on political elites, which promoted revolution or political control from the top to bottom, but in the end produced very different outcomes.
Ethiopia, as well as Sudan (and South Sudan), have highly heterogeneous ethnic groups, with political elites creating institutions that produce politically significant minority groups. The centralized authority in both adopted a state construct based on the identity of the dominant ethnic group. Somalia, which is a typical case of highly homogenized communities in Africa, the central authority’s control over the various groups in the country ultimately failed, leaving Somalia in a state of “fragmented communities” similar to that of the pre-colonial era.

State building in all four cases suffers from quite serious issues, the main core problem being the contradiction between traditional governance based on ethnicity, clan, and kinship and modern state governance, which leads to a convergence of path dependency to almost the same result in all four cases, where path evolution achieves “lock-in”, i.e., the risk of conflict onset. Among the different path dependencies, there are also several differentiating influences, including the transnational war between Ethiopia and Somalia, and the impact of wave of democratization on the regime change. Thus, we can find a “diamond-shaped” path-dependent evolutionary process in the four cases, with different paths evolving in the intermediate stages from the initial contact with colonialism to the subsequent outbreak of the conflict, leading to conflict onset.

**Horn of Africa: Four Cases**

**Ethiopia**

Ethiopia is the despair of the compulsive classifier, there is hardly any category into which it falls neatly.11Abraham Demoz, ‘The Many Worlds of Ethiopia’, *African Affairs*, lxviii (1969), 49. It is a crossroad in the Horn which links Christians from North and Muslims from Near East. For thousands of years, Ethiopia treated herself as a descendant of the Queen of Sheba, perpetuating Orthodoxy as the religion practiced by its ruling class. As Huntington said, Ethiopia constituted a civilization of its own,22Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, N.Y., 1996), 47. it was highly centralized imperial authorities, were able to resist the onslaught of the West and maintain meaningful independent existence.33Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 51.

From Menelik II, Ethiopia entered modern state building in the 19th century. During the expansion from central plateaus to peripherals, Oromo, Afar and Somali people were involved in the map of the empire. The result is that Ethiopia became a nation with different religious and cross-border ethnic groups.

The seed of conflict was buried during the imperial era. In the face of the colonial threat from Britain and Italy, the rulers of Ethiopia, while using Western weapons for expansion, made the Britain, Italy and other European powers recognize the region under their rule through the victory of the first Italo-Ethiopian War and active diplomacy.

Since the imperial era, dominant national ideologies have had a negative impact on minorities. Pan-Ethiopianism and Pan-ethnic nationalism guided the state, one is the thesis and the other is the anti-thesis throughout the history of the country.44Tefera Assefa Moreda, ‘The Imperial Regimes as a Root of Current Ethnic Based Conflicts in Ethiopia’, *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, ix (2022), 96. The ideology during imperial regimes is highly dominated by the thesis of building a nation-state which is almost similar to the European colonial model.55Moreda, ‘The Imperial Regimes as a Root of Current Ethnic Based Conflicts in Ethiopia’, 105.

The self-identification of imperial regimes with Amhara ethnic identity and the imposition of the Amharan culture (the assumed dominant culture) and religion upon the non-Amhara ethnic group.66Moreda, ‘The Imperial Regimes as a Root of Current Ethnic Based Conflicts in Ethiopia’, 109. Due to the encroachment of Amharic culture on other communities, it can be said that Ethiopia is a colonial state of the Amharas that colonized dozens of ethnic groups as Oromos or Somalis.77Jan Záhořík, ‘Colonial Perspective and Nationalism(s) in Ethiopia in the Context of African Decolonization’, *West Bohemian Historical Review*, 10.
Although Ethiopia did not receive direct Western colonial influence, the Amharic dominance of it has been deeply imprinted in the entire state building.

To a large extent, what has been called ethnic conflict is elite-driven conflict. Hizkias Assefa, ‘Ethnic Conflict in the Horn of Africa: Myth and Reality’, in Kumar Rupesinghe and V. A. Tishkov (eds.), Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World (Tokyo, 1996), 50. In Ethiopia, the Amhara elites have caused the vertical inequalities among other groups. Haile Selassie was the most important politician to push unity based on Amhara culture and identity. Haile Selassie concentrated on the centralization of the empire, and this allowed little scope for any policy of integration of the nationalities beyond the selective incorporation of ethnic elites through Amharization. John Young, Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People’s Liberation Front, 1975-1991 (New York, N.Y., 1997), 47. He remained an absolute monarch with a highly centralized political system. Numbers of violent uprising by different regions and nations resulted at least in part due to over centralization. Kidane Mengisteab, ‘New Approaches to State Building in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia’s Ethnic-Based Federalism’, African Studies Review, xl (1997), 120.

Ethiopia has been mythicized as an independent Empire living in relative isolation, peace, unity and civilization, which were completely broken in 1974. Záhořík, ‘Colonial Perspective and Nationalism(s) in Ethiopia in the Context of African Decolonization’, 152. After the coup, the Derg adopted a radical ideology and undertook a fundamental transformation of Ethiopian society, Soviet style Marxism-Leninism provided the ideological framework the Derg utilized to destroy the old social structure. John Young, ‘Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia’, Review of African Political Economy, xxiii (1996), 534. However, the Derg exacerbated deep ethnic inequality in Ethiopia.

In the 1990s, different elite political groups came to final deal to establish an institution to solve the problem of power distribution. Ethnic federalism with Ethiopia’s characteristics and experiences was built. Federalism had such an impact in three ways: inter-clan conflicts over grazing lands were transformed into clashes between two ethnic groups or killils (regional states); contestations over killil borders led to violent antagonisms; ethnic groups competed on the ownership of regions. Semir Yusuf, ‘Drivers of Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary Ethiopia’, The Institute for Security Studies, (2019), 8.


During the Zenawi period, Ethiopia paid full attention to national development and construction and made various important achievements under Zenawi’s strong leadership. In ethnic policy, the era of Meles Zenawi was an absence of genuine decentralization, the absolute power of the ruling party, and a focus on the developmental state. Jan Záhořík, ‘Ethiopia’s Hegemony in the Horn of Africa: Internal Tensions and External Challenges Before and After Meles Zenawi’, The Journal of the Middle East and Africa, v (2014), 34. The ethnic problem was still a stubborn illness in the state building.

The pre-2018 Ethiopian state had relatively better control over its territories and a monopoly on violence, upon Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s accession to power in 2018, long-suppressed problems in the country resurfaced and have become uncontrolled. Endalächew Bayeh, ‘Post-2018 Ethiopia: State Fragility, Failure, or Collapse?’, Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, ix (2022), 2. Although Abiy is an Oromo, he emphasized his Pan-Ethiopianism and Amhara nationalism identity and took tougher measures against the formerly dominant Tigray. On the other hand, the Oromo also responded strongly to Abiy’s policies.

The Tigray War draws international attention, even OLA initiated conflict with the dominant Prosperity Party. On the other hand, the conflict between ethnic Somalis and Oromos is not only a result of ethnic

The root of Ethiopia’s conflict is ethnicity under the background of state building. The Western colonial power affected the structure of state. With three types of regimes, monarchy, socialist military government, and ethnic federalism, Ethiopia has deepened the contradiction among different groups.

Sudan and South Sudan

Since its independency in 1956, Sudan is constantly in the state of civil conflict, its state building process is also full of hardships. As a crossroad of Arabic Islamic culture and Afro culture, Sudan is divided into two parts, north and south. People in those two areas are in apparent differences in skin color, culture, religious, language and customs. The most fundamental problem of Sudan is the Afro-Arab schism.2020Dunstan M. Wai, ‘Revolution, Rhetoric, and Reality in the Sudan’, The Journal of Modern African Studies, xvii (1979), 72.

The first civil war was started from a mutiny by Southern soldiers. In 1969, General Jaafar Nimeiry came to power through a coup and began to contact the south for peace talks. In 1972, Addis Agreement was signed, which had three points: First, the new revolutionary government expressed determination to reach a lasting solution. Second, recognizing the cultural and historical differences between the North and South. Third, Nimeiry proposed to achieve this goal by extending the amnesty law, developing the South, appointing a minister of Southern Affairs and calling on all Southerners to build a united and democratic Sudan.2121David H. Shinn, ‘Addis Ababa Agreement: Was It Destined to Fail and Are There Lessons for the Current Sudan Peace Process?’, Annales d’Éthiopie, xx (2004), 240.

However, Nimeiry announced the implementation Sharia Law and cancel the regional autonomy of south which caused the second civil war. John Garang merged Southern powers to establish the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA) in 1983. In 1989, after Bashir government came to power, it attached importance to solving the southern problem, but the southern powers insisted on national self-determination in the south and establishing a state with separation of church and state.

After years of war, the government and SPLM enrolled in peace talk, in which IGAD’s role as a mediator. Finally, Machakos Protocol in 2002 was the first of six protocols and the preliminary step towards peace.2222Leslie Anne Schafer, ‘Negotiating the North / South Conflict: Sudan’s Comprehensive Peace Agreement’, Institute for Security Studies Papers, mmvii (2007). In 2005, both sides signed Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). CPA gave the government decentralization, gives the south a certain degree of autonomy, and decides whether to be independent by referendum after a six-year transition period.

After the independence of South Sudan, the north was still in statue of instability. Bashir’s downfall has given domestic parties a chance. Burhan and Dagalo became the first and second powerful people in Sudan, respectively, after the joint removal of former Sudanese President al-Bashir in April 2019, and the outbreak of the 2023 conflict signaled a complete breakdown of the delicate power arrangement that had developed between the two men. The conflict between the two sides is a “zero-sum game” of power struggle, reflecting the instability of Sudan’s domestic order after Bashir’s ouster.

From the history of Sudan, the ethnic problem has always been a stubborn disease. Ethnicity is a product of state building.2323Gunnar M. Sørbo and Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed (eds.), Sudan Divided: Continuing Conflict in a Contested State (New York, N.Y., 2013), 9. The starting point in contemporary history was also the colonialism, Sudan went through the Turku-Egyptian rule, the Mahdi rule and the British-Egyptian condominium. The core issues of Sudan’s state building are Darfur and southern region. In 1902, the British administration divided Sudan into two entities of north and south. Also, the British administration kept the precolonial traditional political and administrative institutions that encouraged people of Darfur to
govern themselves according to their customs and traditions in 1917. Amir H. Idris, *Conflict and Politics of Identity in Sudan* (New York, N.Y., 2005), 86. After independency, the elite chose to create a small “Arab” ruling clique at the expense of the vast majority of the African peoples, and dictated political, economic, and social policies detrimental to the people in the periphery.2526Scopas Sekwat Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War: Africans, Arabs, and Israelis in the Southern Sudan, 1955-1972* (New York, N.Y., 2009), 193. Arabness has become the very center of the dominant criteria for national prestige, decision-making, authority, and even intellectual leadership in the Sudan.2626Idris, *Conflict and Politics of Identity in Sudan*, 95. Precolonial legacies of slavery and the policy of indirect rule during the colonial period have contributed to racialization and fragmentation of cultural societies into conflicting political ones.2727Idris, *Conflict and Politics of Identity in Sudan*, 43.

On the other side, South Sudan is a state that struggle for independency for decades, the result is a late independency in 21st century. For poor infrastructure, limited capacity for governance, weak state institutions, ethnic divisions etc., South Sudan is an artificial state for quite some time.2828Jok Madut Jok, ‘Which Way South Sudan? Cultural Diversity and the Fundamentals of Nation-Building’, *African Arguments*, (2011). The South Sudan experience highlights that state collapse and conflict did not stall social order, it gives rise to alternative, parallel or subsidiary forms of authority that are deemed legitimate by some groups of citizens.2929Sukanya Podder, ‘Mainstreaming the Non-State in Bottom-up State-Building: Linkages Between Rebel Governance and Post-Conflict Legitimacy’, *Conflict, Security & Development*, xiv (2014), 223. After independence, the essence of President Kiir’s policy was to license corruption through state funds to buy loyalty. Kiir also competed with political elites such as Machar, political crisis evolved into ethnic problem that Nuer versus Dinka.3030Alex de Waal, ‘Understanding the Roots of Conflict in South Sudan’, *Council on Foreign Relations*, (2016). The governing system was less regulated and no less brutal than its northern counterpart, combined with the reckless decision to shut down national oil production, meant that by 2013 the South Sudanese government simply could not afford the loyalty payments to keep the system running.3131Alex de Waal, ‘When Kleptocracy Becomes Insolvent: Brute Causes of the Civil War in South Sudan’, *African Affairs*, cxiii (2014), 349.

The conflict in South Sudan is due to the colonization and struggle with the north, as well as the imbalance of power arrangement after independence. The identity rooted in ethnic groups makes it difficult for South Sudan’s political elites to establish a reasonable governance system to improve the state building. Regardless of how internal conflicts develop, limited resources and less investment of administration or public services make South Sudan still a weak state.3232Wolfram Lacher, ‘South Sudan: International State-Building and Its Limits’, *SWP Research Paper*, (2012), 7.

**Somalia**


The origin of Somalia’s conflict could be found in clan structures and politics. Clannism in Somalia is solidly rooted that the political dynamic can channel it towards constructive or destructive ends, the unity of the Somali nation has been maintained by the relative homogeneity of civil society rather than by a centralized state.3535Hussein M. Adam, ‘Somalia: Militarism, Warlordism or Democracy?’, *Review of African Political Economy*, xix (1992), 13–15.

Clan system is a huge lineage web, whereby, through generations, the ties of common ancestry forge the basis
of both alliances and oppositions. Maria Brons, *Society, Security, Sovereignty, and the State in Somalia: From Statelessness to Statelessness?* (Utrecht, 2001), 100. The clanship system and social structure of the Somali people can be described as a confederate system of autonomous clan and sub-clan communities congregated together by common habitat and governed by customary codes of social conduct *xeer* that were reinforced by the authority of clan elders. Omar Abdulle Alasow, *Violations of the Rules Applicable in Non-International Armed Conflicts and Their Possible Causes: The Case of Somalia* (Leiden, 2010), 7. The clan in Somalia is above political parties, religion and any ideology. Abdulahi A. Osman, ‘Cultural Diversity and the Somali Conflict: Myth or Reality?’, *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, vi (2007), 120. And, clan politics was instrumentalized in elite political rivalry with devastating consequences. Redie Bereketeab (ed.), *State Building and National Identity Reconstruction in the Horn of Africa* (Cham, 2017), 228.

After the coup in 1969, Siad Barre announced to end the tribalism, nepotism, corruption, and misrule. Barre suspended the constitution, disbanded the National Assembly and all political parties, and adopted a divide and rule policy to replace loyalty to clans. Ilemobola Peter Olanrewaju, ‘Fractionality in Homogeneity? Value Differences and Cross-Cultural Conflict in Somalia’, in Lucky Asuelle and Suzanne Francis (eds.), *Selected Themes in African Political Studies: Political Conflict and Stability* (Cham, 2014), 15. While rule standardization had significantly increased during Barre’s early reign, numerous “building sites” remained, one was the clan with its long-established institutions and identity systems, and another was the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP), an organization without roots in history, which failed to instil significant participation of the population in the fortunes of the state. Dominik Balthasar, ‘State Making in Somalia Under Siyad Barre: Scrutinizing Historical Amnesia and Normative Bias’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, li (2018), 159.

Barre built a patrimonial regime with increasingly narrow elite of close family members and top political officials. Lidwien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2013), 2. It is a vital point that the disastrous miscalculation which induced Barre to take advantage of the revolutionary upheavals in Ethiopia to enforce by war, brought the failure of state building in Somalia. Alexander Johnston, ‘Ethnic Conflict in Post Cold War Africa: Four Case Studies’, in Kenneth Christie (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict, Tribal Politics: A Global Perspective* (London, 1998). The Ogaden War with Ethiopia made many refugees and chaos of economy. The transnational war did not enforce the state building of Somalia. Conversely, it made Somalia’s administration a dangerous condition. After the failure of the Ogaden War, domestic discontent grew and in 1978 there was an attempted coup d’etat, which Barre characterized as being orchestrated by the Majeerteen clan and began to purge the Majeerteen. In the 1980s, with the rise of the SNM, which was dominated by members of the Issaq clan, Barre began to take increasingly violent and restrictive measures against the various tribal populations, which ultimately led to the fall of the regime.


From 1991 to the present, Somalia has not been able to effectively establish a central government with strong control, even as the northern part of Somaliland has become effectively independent, while the rest of the country has been fragmented by various armed groups, and there has been a high level of armed activity by Al-Shabaab. Even though Somalia enjoys a certain degree of homogenization, the effects of colonialism and subsequent misguided decisions in state-building have pushed Somalia into the path of conflict.
Conclusion

The fault lines of civilization that Huntington proposed still seem to be valid today. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. It is difficult to conceive of a human community where there is no conflict among members or between persons in the community and outsiders. Marc Howard Ross, ‘A Cross-Cultural Theory of Political Conflict and Violence’, *Political Psychology*, vii (1986), 428. As long as the state structure in the Horn of Africa remains this way, the internal conflicts in major countries will continue for a long time.

Through the path dependency in four cases, it can be found that in the pre-colonial era, when ethnic groups were geographically divided or fragmented, the modern state sovereignty brought by the colonizers contributed to the state-building of the regional countries, in which the various ethnic groups were integrated into the framework of a united state, and the resulting tensions gradually evolved into conflicts and civil wars.

It should be emphasis on the state building in the Horn. Emmanuel Hansen attributes the origin of war in the Horn of Africa to three major reasons. Firstly, it is the ruling classes’ attempts to create national states within the international boundaries that were established by the European colonialists. Another reason is the little economic surplus and weak economic base in this region. Lastly is the nationalist ideologies of the regimes and preservation of territorial integrity. Emmanuel Hansen (ed.), *Africa: Perspectives on Peace and Development* (Tokyo, 1987), 88–89. Within four cases, the central government after independency cannot establish an effective control on every group in the country. The wrong building path caused serious problem and the element of ethnicity could be the core issue. As Hizkias Assefa pointed out, ethnic similarity has not assured social harmony nor avoided the outbreak of large-scale conflict in the Horn. Assefa, ‘Ethnic Conflict in the Horn of Africa: Myth and Reality’, 56.

The lessons from the four cases are in three aspects. First, as the existing fact of colonial influence and ethnicity fragmentation, state building should take a more plural way to receive the power balance of both intrastate and regional order. For state building and self-determination have embroiled the Horn, as well as much of the African continent, in decades of bloodshed and destruction. Assefa, ‘Ethnic Conflict in the Horn of Africa: Myth and Reality’, 56. Second, the international society should actively use its good offices and mediate in conflicts in a more neutral capacity, adhere to the principle of “non-interference in internal affairs”, and promote the enhancement of the effectiveness of national governance. For weaknesses in state legitimacy are at the heart of the development failures of many African countries. Pierre Englebert, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa* (Boulder, Colo., 2002), 173.