ICWA
LETTERS

Institute of Current World Affairs
The Crane-Rogers Foundation
Four West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 U.S.A.

MM-18
SUBSAHARAN AFRICA

Marc Michaelson is a Fellow of the Institute studying the challenges of nation-building in the Horn of Africa.

Afar-Issa Conflict Managment[1]

"In war a youth is killed, not born."
Somali proverb

ASWASH, Ethiopia January 2000

By Marc Michaelson

It's just after 5 p.m. The scorching sun plunges into free-fall and a warm dusty breeze brushes the flatlands. Returning from an aborted visit to Afa'assey, our Toyota Landcruiser pulls into Gadamaytu, a disputed town on the border between Ethiopia's Afar and Somali Regions.[2] We park in front of a square mud hut, pass an armed guard at the entrance, and find a dozen Issa elders sitting in the backyard, chewing *khat*[3] and plotting strategy for the following day's all-Issa peace consolidation meeting.

The hut is packed with large bundles of contraband — used clothes smuggled by camel from neighboring Djibouti. Unfazed, a high-ranking Somali official presides over the *khat*-chewing and discussion. The scene reeks of parody — elsewhere in the world, a politician sharing drugs with constituents in a room brimming with illegal goods would be the subject of high drama. Among Somalis it is business as usual.

The irony is lost on all but myself, and is quickly overshadowed by the seriousness of the deliberations. The EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) government, and especially the Afar and Somali Regional administrations, have worked hard to restore stability and peace to the northeastern lowlands — the traditional home and battleground of the Afar and Issa people. The next day's meeting of all 12 Issa family trees endeavors to unify and solidify the Issa in preparation for a joint Afar-Issa peace meeting in Awash town a few days later.

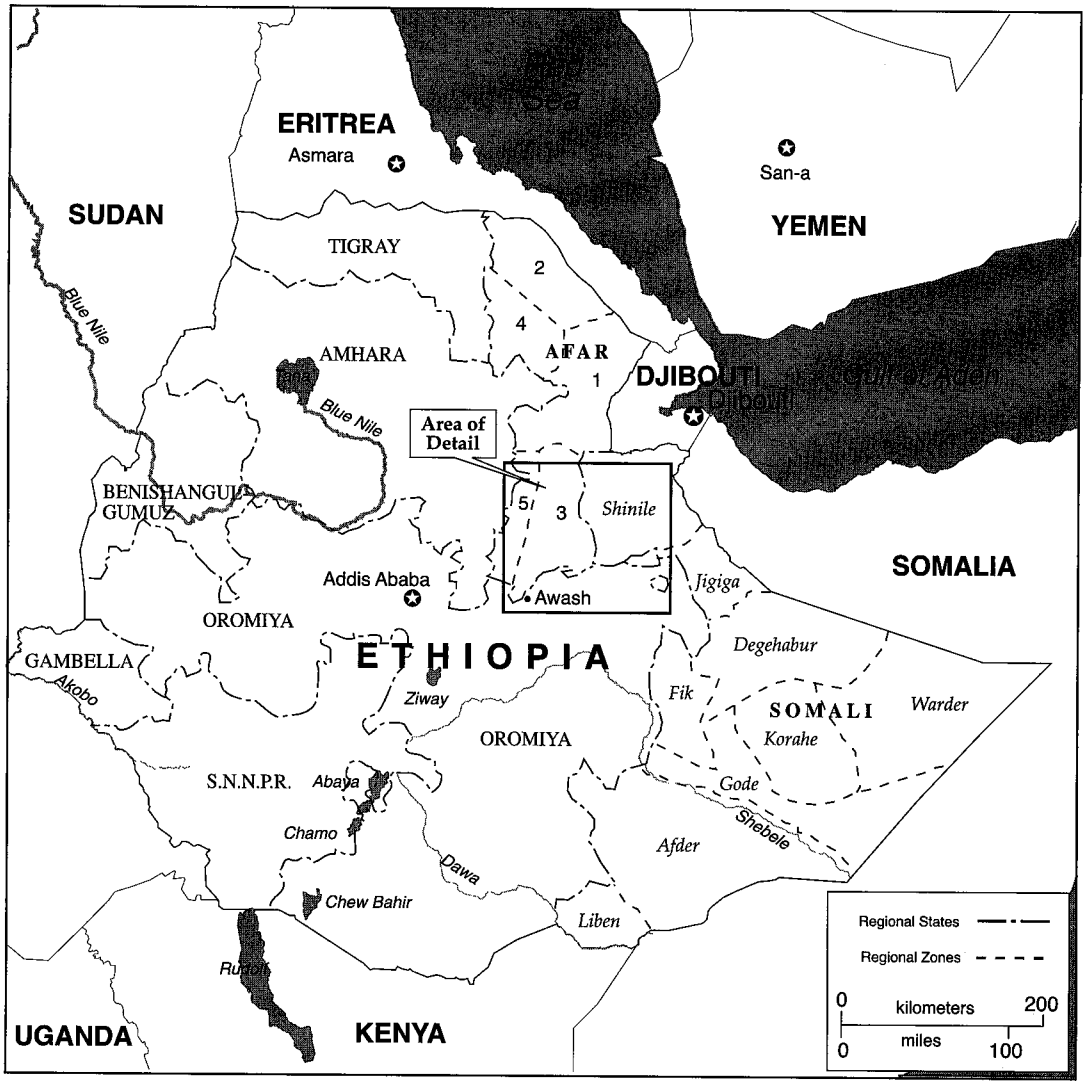
THE AFAR-ISSA CONFLICT

Hassan Galab is introduced with labels of respect and awe — a great commander, strong man and brave fighter. That he has now metamorphosed into a

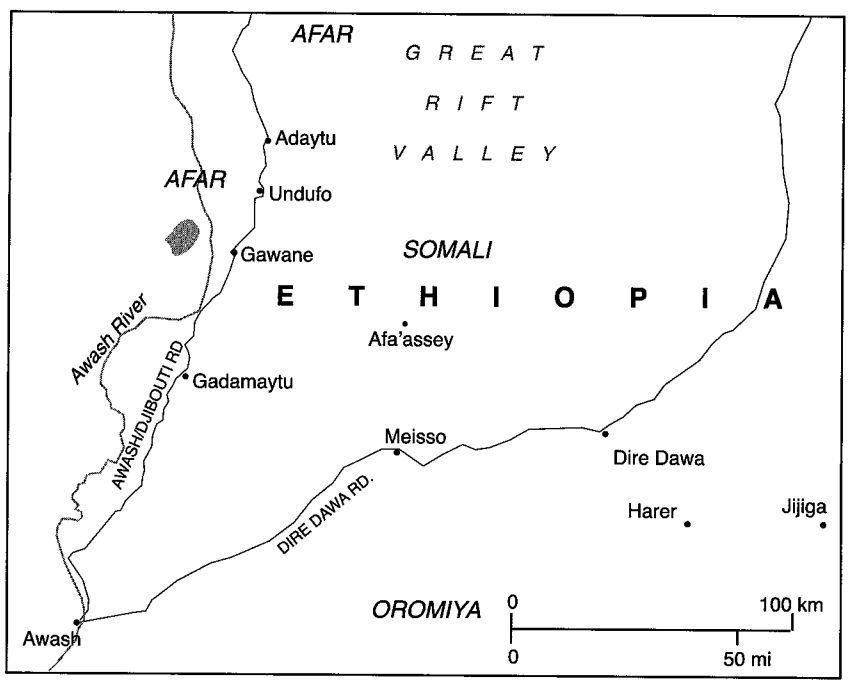
[1] The Afar and Somalis are two distinct ethnic nationalities living in Ethiopia. The Issa are one clan of Somalis. Both Issa Somalis and Afars are Muslim, pastoralist people who inhabit parts of eastern Ethiopia and Djibouti.

[2] The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is divided into nine regional states and two autonomous administrative zones. The Afar National Regional State (ANRS) and Somali National Regional State (SNRS), the foci of this article, are two of the nine. These two states share a common border, sections of which are disputed. The Somali National Regional State should not be confused with the Republic of Somalia, which borders Ethiopia to the east.

[3] *khat* (pronounced "chat") is a narcotic leaf chewed by Afars, Somalis and some other peoples in the Horn of Africa and Arabian peninsula. It is a social drug, most often chewed in groups, during long hot afternoons. As the chewing progresses, the conversation flows and senses become more acute. Euphoric contemplation is also common; one Somali expression says that *khat*-chewers "build castles in the sky."



All boundaries are approximate and unofficial.



Camels carrying contraband from Djibouti to Gadamaytu, Ethiopia

peace-maker is understated and seemingly less worthy of reverence than his vast achievements as a warrior.

In both Somali and Afar societies, power is revered. Bold, accomplished fighters are heroes, highly decorated and adorned with amulets and beautiful wives.[4] They are celebrated wherever they go and livestock are slaughtered to honor their visits. Some of these cultural rewards are slowly being phased out. As the two societies seek peace, macho personas endure, but some warrior icons are being disposed of.

Hassan is a compact, solid man in his early 60s. He exudes an air of inner strength, a quiet, unassuming power and confidence. Perched on his haunches under a shade tree, Hassan calmly tells a life-story riddled with personal tragedy and tit-for-tat brutality.

"I was in my mother's womb when my father was killed in the Saha Battle, east of here in a mountainous area near the Djibouti border. Our people [Issas] had launched the attack on the Oga Ali [Afar clan] but were badly defeated. The vultures feasted on our dead. To take revenge for my father, I had to train to fight and engage in battle myself."

He pauses for a pensive moment and then continues his narration: "Once [about 40 years ago] I went on a journey and left my livestock with my wife and two small children. When I returned everything was gone — my family were all dead and my livestock looted. I immediately gathered some of my people [Issas] and launched an attack. We destroyed an entire Afar settlement. We killed the people and took all the livestock. I used that livestock to get married again and have more children."

Hassan speaks matter-of-factly, as if these horrors happened to someone else in a faraway place. He is weathered, mellowed now. His tone indicates emotional distance, and this may be what enables him to confront the ghosts and reconcile with his enemies.

I ask Hassan how many livestock were stolen from him, and how many Afars he killed in the revenge attack.

"They stole about one hundred camels, four-to-five hundred head of cattle and over two thousand sheep. As for those killed, there were many, but we Issas don't talk about how many we killed. It is a shame to do so."

Afar elders tell similar tales of brutality. In Gawane, an Afar village 100 kilometers north of Gadamaytu, Hamadu Ali Hubi recounts his own wartime experiences: "It was 1976, Ethiopian Calendar [1984]. We were herding our cattle in Ba'ada between Mount Ayalew and

[4] Sitting next to Hassan Galab during our interview was Kamil Delaty, a gray-bearded, thin-featured Issa elder. Kamil has a large looping hole in each of his ears, signifying a traditional rank akin to general—it is said to decorate a man who has killed 1,000 men.

Issa warriors turned peace-makers — Hassan Galab (left) and Kamil Delaty

Abida. The Issa attacked us, killing sixteen Afars. We killed ten of them. They wanted to steal our cattle and take our land. We retreated. That place is now part of Afar Region — in the rainy season we use it, and in the dry season the Issa graze there."

Humud Lalita, another Afar elder, adds his own piece: "I also fought many times. Sometimes the Issa attacked us, sometimes we attacked them. There were two reasons — stealing cattle and land."

Nearly all Issa and Afar living in the boundary area have felt the pain and devastation wrought by the fighting. All have lost fathers, brothers or sons. At some point they all have had to defend their land and property from attack, or have had to fight for water, the liquid life that sustains pastoralists and their livestock.

The Afar-Issa feud is centuries old. According to elders on both sides, past governments fomented the conflict by distributing arms and encouraging fighting. The Christian, highlander-dominated regimes of Emperor Haile Selassie and Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam inflamed lowland feuds. Conflict served as a deliberate instrument of social control, keeping marginalized peoples divided and disempowered.

The EPRDF government, these elders claim, is different. "This is a period of democracy and self-rule. We are empowered to solve our own problems, and the central government, for the first time ever, is giving us the support to do so." While many elders sounded curiously like government cadres, there is no small hint of truth to their claims. The federal system has enabled regional governments to proactively confront their problems. And this case is an excellent example — the Afar and Somali Regional States recognized the self-destructive conflict between their peoples. In the past few years they have successfully stopped the archaic tribal violence and instituted a modern system of legal-based order.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: HARMONIZING MODERN AND TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

Inclusive Peace Conferences: Awash and Dire Dawa

The self-destructive cycle of Afar-Issa raids and revenge came to a rapid halt in 1997. At that time, two processes — one traditional, one modern — merged in a massive peace conference in Awash.

Awash represented the culmination of several dialogues. Issa elders say they sent a group of women peace envoys to the Afar in 1995 to express their desire for peace and request a forum to discuss the conflict.[5] One Issa el-

[5] In Afar and Somali societies, women are perceived as non-threatening and have thus been traditionally charged with the crucial responsibility of initiating peace contacts. A group of women is sent to the enemy bearing a message of peace. If they are received and treated well — given clothes, good food and gifts — this is seen as an indication of seriousness and dedication to launching a peace process. If they are not treated very well, it is a sign that the hosts are unwilling to engage in peace deliberations.

der explained: "fatigue and exhaustion had invaded us. We realized we were destroying ourselves." Afar and Issa elders met at Kallala bridge, Gawane and in several other venues. They talked about the history of their conflict and the need to resolve disputes more peacefully.

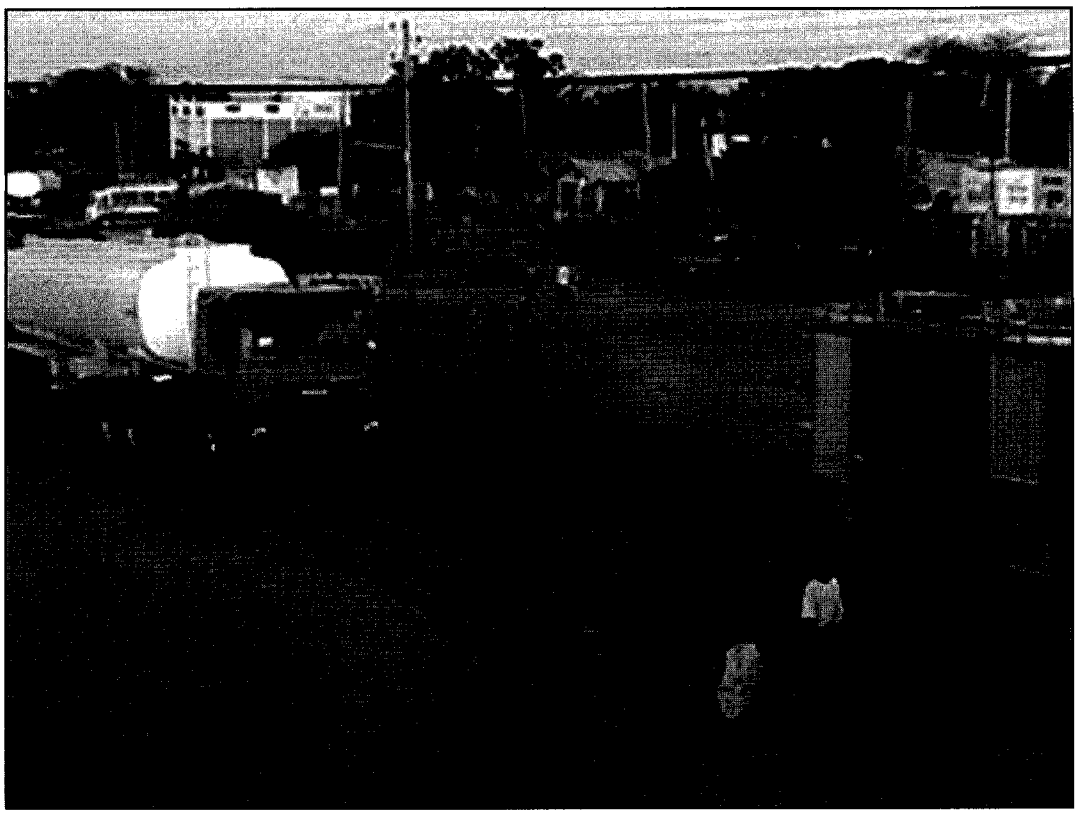
Simultaneously, regional officials from the five administrative units of eastern Ethiopia (Afar, Somali, Oromo, Harar and Dire Dawa) met to discuss common issues of security, social affairs and trade. Sector heads met quarterly and regional presidents convened bi-annually. In 1996, the Regional Presidents gathered in Duftir (Afar Region) and exhaustively discussed the Afar-Issa conflict as well as lingering Somali-Oromo disputes. They decided to convene a large peace conference in Awash to thresh out the problems and formulate solutions.

The Awash meeting brought officials from Afar Zones 1, 3, 5, and Shinile, the northernmost of Somali Region's nine Zones, together, along with regional authorities, local elders and a national government representative. The deliberations focused on root causes and resolved to establish joint Afar-Issa Peace Committees on several administrative levels (regional, district, zonal).[6]

The Awash Meeting symbolized a turning point in Afar-Issa relations. Awash represented a fusion of the modern and traditional, a new partnership between local elders and government authorities.

In December 1998, the broad commitments of Awash were consolidated and translated into concrete institutions. Six hundred elders and government officials participated in the Dire Dawa Peace Conference, and reached important agreements on practical matters of peace implementation.

First, the elders decided that the Awash Meeting, as the symbolic turning point, would also function as the cutoff date for accountability. All killings, lootings and other violations that occurred *before* Awash would be forgiven under a general amnesty; all criminal acts *since* Awash would be investigated and punished. This decision represented a critical step. If the temporal scope of the conflict had not been strictly delimited, claims and counter-claims dating back hundreds of years might have emerged. Ancient grievances would be impossible to prove and might spark new anger, tension and hos-



Street scene in Awash, the town that hosted the 1997 Afar-Issa Peace Meeting

[6] The Regional Afar-Somali Peace Committee is based in Awash and is staffed by three people — Hamud Fille (Somali Security Head), Mohamed Akli (Afar Security Head), and Captain Berhane (Military Representative). This Committee coordinates and oversees all the activities of the lower level committees.

tility. The explicit time limit made instituting lawfulness a more manageable and realistic project.

Second, the elders decided on punishments and legal processes. In both Afar and Issa traditions, killings are punished by the payment of blood prices.[7] The elders agreed to adopt a variation on this tradition, calling for the payment of 52 cattle for each killing since Awash. Fifty cattle would be paid by the killer's family to the relatives of the victim. The remaining two cattle would be slaughtered for the Afar and Issa elders who managed and supervised the process, serving as a ceremonial connector between the two communities.

As Table 1 shows, during the last year a total of 2,704 cattle have been paid, and only one remaining blood price is outstanding. In the past, when an Afar killed an Issa or vice versa, the murderer received an honorary title, respect and gifts. Now, when someone kills, he receives a prison sentence and a taxing blood-price penalty. As a result, incidences of violence between Afars and Issas have effectively come to a halt.

The Dire Dawa Conference determined other punishments as well. Henceforth, stolen animals would be returned and the offenders given prison sentences exceeding five months. Hiding a stray animal would incur up to a five-month prison term. Selling a stolen animal would require the repayment of two cattle for every one sold. Table 2 shows the status of looted animals and guns.

Enforcing Peace: Special Courts and Police

To administer justice, Dire Dawa established special courts and police. Each Region reassigned 15 officers to the new border police force with one basic precondition — none of the appointees could be of Somali or Afar nationality. Most are Amharic speakers who have long served in Afar and Somali Regions. They are known by the locals and are perceived as neutral, immune to the emotional tribal battles of the area. The police are equally distributed in three disputed towns along the Afar-Somali border — Gadamaytu, Undufo and Adaytu.

Ato Melaku Worku, the police commander in Gadamaytu, was born in Gojjam, Amhara Region. He has served as a policeman for 24 years, the last eight posted in Jijiga, the Somali Regional capital.

Melaku sees considerable change in the relations be-

Table 1: Blood Prices (15 Dec. 1998 - 11 Oct. 1999)[8]

	Somali Region Shinile Zone		Afar Region Zone 1		Afar Region Zone 3		Afar Region Zone 5	
	Paid	Unpaid	Paid	Unpaid	Paid	Unpaid	Paid	Unpaid
#BloodPrices (52 Cattle each)	31	-	5	1	12	-	4	-
Total Cattle	1612	-	260	52	624	-	208	-

Table 2: Looted Items (15 Dec. 1998 - 11 Oct. 1999)[9]

	Somali Region Shinile Zone		Afar Region Zone 1		Afar Region Zone 3		Afar Region Zone 5	
	Returned	Outstanding	Returned	Outstanding	Returned	Outstanding	Returned	Outstanding
Cattle	1291	88	130	4	305	9	42	13
Camels	272	12	184	7	99	12	112	11
Sheep/Goats	211	15	588	9	103	1	144	-
Calves	22	6	-	-	13	-	-	-
Donkeys	3	-	11	-	32	-	6	5
Guns	38	-	4	1	3	-	3	-

[7] According to Afar elders, the traditional blood price for killing a man was 65 head of cattle; for killing a woman (a taboo in Afar societies), the blood price was 80 cattle. According to one Issa official, the traditional Issa blood prices were 77 camels for a man and 55 camels for a woman.

[8] Source: Afar-Somali Joint Peace Committee, Awash, Ethiopia.

[9] Source: Afar-Somali Joint Peace Committee, Awash, Ethiopia.

tween Afars and Issa in the area. "Previously, whenever they came into contact, violence would erupt. Now they don't quarrel, and you can see them eating together and watering their animals together. Killings have stopped. There are still occasional cases of banditry along the road, and looting of animals, but even these cases have diminished."

I ask Melaku what are the biggest challenges his force faces. "We don't have any vehicles or radio communication, so when a crime is reported all we can do is write a report."

These deficiencies notwithstanding, the police have solved several cases with crucial assistance from locals. "In January, a sick military officer was assassinated while returning from hospital on the Addis Ababa-Djibouti road. We took some Issa elders with us to the spot where the incident occurred. They followed the footprints and tracked down the three assailants, one of whom was carrying the victim's pistol."

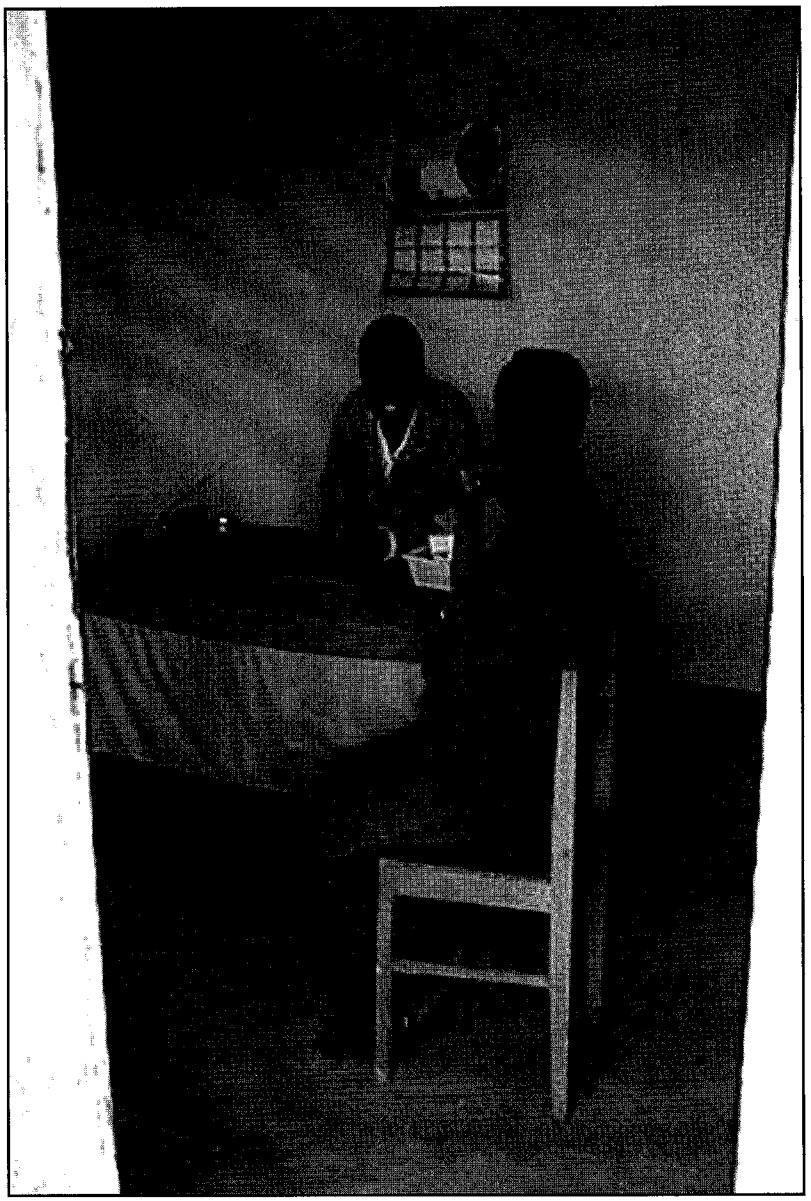
Alleged criminals are held at the police station until their trial in special courts. District courts sit in Gadamaytu and Adaytu, and a high court decides appeals in Adaytu. The Supreme Courts of Afar and Somali Regions are jointly mandated to serve as the final court of appeals, although resolution at lower levels is encouraged. Like the police force, the courts are staffed by non-Somalis and non-Afars appointed by the two regions.

Hussein Said serves as magistrate in the Gadamaytu District Court. Born in Dese, Welo (Amhara Region), Hussein has worked for six years in Afar Region. The Prosecutor is Taddesse Regassa, a half-Amhara half-Oromo from Western Shewa (also in Amhara Region). He has worked for 23 years in different parts of Somali Region, and now considers Jijiga (the Somali Regional capital) his home. Neither Hussein nor Taddesse speak Afar or Somali. The official language of the court is Amharic. Translators are provided so that defendants and plaintiffs can follow proceedings and testify in their native languages.

Prosecutor Taddesse says his job is easy. "When someone commits a crime here they don't deny it or hide it. They usually just tell the truth, unlike most other criminals I've had to deal with." I ask him why he thinks they are so forthcoming. "They are uneducated pastoralists; they believe a confession results in lighter punishment."

Does the community provide any support to the court? Prosecutor Taddesse laughs, "We don't have any tough cases. The elders do most of the work for us. Often it is a father or brother who turns in the accused." In the past, family loyalty always superseded legal considerations. "Parents used to hide their law-breaking sons; now they turn them in."

The court convenes whenever cases arise or new evidence is discovered. Most of the cases involve either truck robberies or livestock thefts. Taddesse and I spoke in the late afternoon of 9 November 1999. Earlier that day, the court heard new evidence in a months-old case of four Issa-owned cattle allegedly stolen by an Afar. The



Magistrate Hussein Said in his tiny Gadamaytu courtroom

Table 3: Criminal Status by Offense (15 Dec. 1998 - 11 Oct. 1999)[9]

	Somali Region Shinile Zone		Afar Region Zone 1		Afar Region Zone 3		Afar Region Zone 5	
	Imprisoned	At Large	Imprisoned	At Large	Imprisoned	At Large	Imprisoned	At Large
Truck Bandits	10	7	10	-	33	2	-	-
Cattle Bandits	17	19	12	-	47	-	4	8
Killers	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	-

next day two deliberations were scheduled — one regarding theft of road-construction materials from the local warehouse of a South Korean road-repair project and the second concerning another livestock theft (two Afar-owned cattle allegedly stolen by an Issa).

As Table 3 shows, 136 criminals have been imprisoned since the new legal infrastructure became operational. Thirty-six criminals remain at-large, most of whom have fled the area to escape the newly established hand of justice.

All-Issa Peace Consolidation Meeting

Afa'assey, the venue for the all-Issa Peace Consolidation meeting, is 42 kilometers east of the tarmac Addis Ababa-Djibouti "highway." We leave early in the morning, our Landcruiser filled with local Somali officials.

The terrain is flat and mostly barren. A few mountains jut strangely out of the horizon. Abdi Shakur, a well-spoken, insightful administrator from Meisso, ruminates on the remote, otherworldliness of the landscape: "We hear the Americans have been to the moon..." he guffaws heartily "...look around, you get a tour of the moon here, and you didn't have to travel nearly as far!!"

Several vehicles pass us en route, and the Somali passengers grow impatient, egging our driver Negussie to pick up the pace. The ride takes nearly two hours, due in part to the pock-marked dirt track and in part to Negussie's molasses-like driving.

Afa'assey is a simple cluster of mud huts perched on a plateau. A river flows through the adjacent valley only

A harsh, dry flatlands outside Afa'assey

Elders at the All-Issa Peace Consolidation Meeting in Afa'assey

after heavy rains, but water can be harvested from small wells year-round. As a result of this reliable water supply, Afa'assey has emerged as the closest thing to a permanent settlement in this nomadic region.

We park under large shade trees, march down into the dry riverbed and cross to the other side. Fifty meters farther, under a clump of shade trees, a hundred men sit, squat and stand — all facing a row of VIPs seated in chairs. The elders brandish sticks, canes, traditional knives (in waist-sheaths) and old shotguns. My guide/translator Mohamoud Abdi-Ali Bayr and I hover in the background, observing the proceedings. Our attempt at inconspicuousness immediately fails and we are ceremoniously ushered to the front. Two elders are unseated to make room for us amongst the VIPs.

Due to our late arrival, we miss the Islamic prayer that opened the proceedings. Somali Region Vice President Adam Abdillahi, himself an Issa, addresses the gathering first. He speaks in a firm, confident voice and Bayr whispers a translation in my ear.

VP Adam begins with a history lesson. He recounts the harsh, violent treatment Somalis received at the hands of Emperor Haile Selassie and Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, and then moves on to the current period of democratic rule: "Now we are in a period of democracy, where we have freedom of the individual — we can talk, learn and speak out in our own language." He goes on to explain the federal system: "There are nine regional states, and we are one of them. Each can rule itself, use its own language, administer its own people."

Part II of the lecture entails a plea for local peace, much of which plays upon Ethiopia's border war with Eritrea. He cites Issa customary law, which commands that "if a territory is attacked, it must defend itself" — a thinly veiled justification for the war in the north.

Next, VP Adam reveals Eritrea's dubious plot to exploit Ethiopia's diversity by hammering rifts between nationalities: "Eritrea believes 62 million Ethiopians can't fight alongside each other. They say Afars and Issas can't fight in the same trenches and cooperate together. [In Badime] we've shown them wrong."

Continuing to play on the emotions of the elders, he recalls Eritrea's rude rebuff to Djibouti's former President Hassan Gouled Aptidon: "The OAU sent President Hassan to [Eritrean President] Isaias as a mediator. Isaias rejected him and said he was helping Ethiopia." The significance? Djibouti's ex-President is a Somali from the Issa clan, just like all of them.

Following the VP's political soliloquy, Hamud Fille, the Somali representative on the Afar-Issa Peace Committee, begins to address the crowd. He pauses just two minutes into his speech, turns to me and says this would be a good time to interview a few of the prominent elders. I'd prefer to observe the proceedings and conduct the interviews later, but this is an order, not a request. So as the meeting continues I retreat some 25 meters away

with a group of five elders, and chat with them for 45 minutes.

At the end of the interview, the elders smile broadly and encourage me to head back to Gadamaytu. With feigned concern, they nudge me to depart: "You *must* be hungry and thirsty; you should hurry back in time for lunch."

After such a long trek to Afa'assey, I'm in no rush to leave. I send Bayr to ask Hamud if we can stay and watch a bit more of the meeting. He returns with a negative response. "They are discussing *very* sensitive issues. Hamud says it would be better if we left." Fair enough. An armed escort is appointed to accompany us and off we go.

Later that day, we ask a few elders what was discussed. They explain that many rifts exist amongst the Issas themselves. Many of the people aren't actively supporting the peace — they don't respect the laws and they defend guilty relatives rather than bring them to justice. Surely there must be more to the intra-Issa problems than that. Unfortunately, I'm forbidden to scratch below the surface.

While relations between the Issa and Afar have greatly improved, several thorny issues and challenges remain. This is to be expected, and I had hoped to draw a more complete, balanced picture, showing both the achievements and the prickly, problem areas that still need work. My Issa hosts (elders and government officials) seemed more interested in showing a miraculous peace between two historical enemies. They insisted on painting an all-is-hunky-dory, smily face on a more complex, mixed reality.

A FRAGILE PEACE

On the return journey to Gadamaytu, it doesn't take long for the fragility of the peace to reveal itself. We pass several pastoralists trying to hitch lifts and politely decline until we come across an animated group of five young men. Four wave us down frantically while the fifth stands aside, holding up an injured left arm and grimacing in pain. We stop, pick them up and continue toward Gadamaytu.

The injured young man sits bravely as blood continuously trickles down his arm. We ask what happened. "I was joking, playing around with my cousin. We got in a fight. He had his knife, but I didn't. He slashed my arm." The other boys are confident the offender will be caught, since he's a relative and has nowhere to run.

The previous day, along the same road, we had encountered several Issa camel herders transporting large bundles of contraband to Gadamaytu. I asked our guide Boqole if we could stop to take their pictures. He agreed, we stopped, he exchanged a few words with them and I snapped away with my digital and 35 mm cameras. I showed the herders their pictures on the mini-screen of

A fragile peace — Issa camel herders who threatened to rob us if we passed by at night

Pastoralists and sheep at a well in the riverbed near Afa'assey

the digital camera, we shared a few laughs, they had a few more words and we headed back to the vehicle.

Before continuing our journey, Boqole recommended we turn back — it was late in the afternoon and by the time we arrived in Afa'assey, we'd have to return in the dark. Disappointed, we reluctantly agreed to postpone our trip to the next morning. Simple enough, right?

Back in Gadamaytu, Bayr (my translator) explained what had really happened. The camel herders told Boqole that the white man should pay them for the photos. Boqole refused and tried to defuse the request by lying and saying I was supporting Issa development projects. As we were leaving, one of the boys (who happened to be armed with an ugly looking automatic rifle of some sort) said: "That's all right — they'll have to pass through here on their way back tonight. We'll become bandits and get them then."

Unnerving, to say the least. Boqole was a respected authority (and security officer), but he was from a different sub-clan and had no control over these young men. He decided to take the safe route and have us turn back.

The significance of these two not-so-subtle anecdotes is obvious. This pastoralist area continues to be a frontier where the law isn't nearly as relevant as the blade of a knife or barrel of a gun. If a few camel herders can credibly threaten the peace and cousins are still knifing each other, stability remains paper thin. Likewise, the centuries of Afar-Somali violence that recently came to a sudden halt must rest on fairly shaky ground.

* * *

Perhaps the greatest threat to the new Afar-Issa peace is the placement of major substantive issues on the back burner. Land, be it for grazing or watering livestock, lies at the center of the Afar-Issa dispute. In our discussions, Issas repeatedly downplayed the importance of land conflicts, focusing instead on looting and revenge-killing. The Afars acknowledge that land is a key component of the conflict and say they've agreed to temporarily set territorial issues aside. After a final investigation and negotiation, they believe the matter will be resolved. In the interim, both peoples have agreed to share disputed territories up to 100 kilometers on either side of the road (the current official boundary).

The touchiness of the land issue emerges most clearly during my interview with Mohamed Akli, the Afar rep-

resentative on the Afar-Issa Peace Committee. I ask him for a map of the border area to illustrate who is where and which lands belong to which groups. He replies sternly that he can't provide any such map of the border and anyone who does, either Afar or Somali, does so falsely.

"But," he continues, tone softening, "you are welcome to go to any of these areas — ask elders or independent outsiders who have lived here for decades [working for previous governments]. They can tell you who owns what land." His confidence seems to imply that the disputed territories are in fact Afar lands. Mohamed's position corroborated the comment of one Somali who quietly admitted: "The Issa have been pushing westward for decades. They've pushed the Afar out of their traditional lands to the other side of the Awash River."

Further complicating the land question is the nomadic nature of both Issas and Afars. As pastoralists, both groups move seasonally to better grazing and watering points. To survive drought years they venture into less marginal areas. This harsh and transient life style often brings Issas into Afar lands and vice versa — driving them into direct competition for scarce resources. Likewise, these continuous population movements make the placement of solid, stationary boundaries problematic and perhaps inappropriate.

My conversation with Mohamed Akli takes place on 12 November 1999 during the joint Afar-Issa meeting in Awash. In a hall just 20 meters from his office, *woreda* (district) level officials and traditional elders are evaluating their past two months of activities. After talking with a few elders, I send a messenger to ask Mohamed for permission to attend the meeting. I am refused.

Another opportunity to observe the processes of peace-making first hand is lost. Perhaps my presence would hinder open expression or the comfort-level of participants. Perhaps they would start to posture and pose for the outsider, rather than hunker down and tackle the tough nitty-gritty details facing them. Perhaps all is not as rosy as they encouraged me to believe. There may have been very good reasons not to have me there. Whatever the case, I wasn't welcome.

CONCLUSIONS

With some of the contentious issues placed on the back burner, long-term peace prospects remain tenuous. Still, the short-term achievements of the Afar-Issa peace process are impressive. Violent attacks have diminished dramatically and almost come to a complete halt. Looting still occurs, but much more rarely, drastically reducing tension between the two communities. Issas and Afars still do not live together in the same settlements or intermarry, but they do conduct business and meet in social arenas. Just a few years ago, such basic interactions were unheard of.

The two concerned regional governments (with assistance from the federal government) have prioritized and supported this peace process from the outset. Significant resources (time and money) are still being spent on the reconciliation process. The government has sponsored large meetings and established modern institutions — court and police — to enforce the peace.

One lesson from this still-unfolding process is the importance of harmonizing traditional and modern strategies in local-level peace-making. Traditional elders have conducted discussions and negotiations in tandem with local government leaders. The inclusiveness of the process has lent it legitimacy within the communities. A top-down approach, engineered from Addis Ababa, would not have been welcomed by suspicious local leaders. The federal government's support and constructive participation evidences a new, positive engagement and should help improve relations between the center and furthest peripheries of the Ethiopian state.

Problems remain and the progress will unlikely be linear. Some violence may return to the area — at some point the fragile peace may break down. For example, if the land question is not handled carefully and resolved to everyone's liking, aggrieved parties may try to undermine it. Also, if the intense processes — continuous peace meetings, special joint committees and law enforcement infrastructures — do not maintain pace, violence may return.

In the past, Hassan Galab says, the Afar and Issa used to make peace, but it would unravel after a year or so. The current détente is just a few years old. But as the Afar and Issa continue to interact and share social spaces, the return of historically destructive behavior patterns will become increasingly less likely. As they graze animals together, educate their children in the same schools, meet in mosques and trade with each other in the market, their connections will deepen and strengthen. These new connections may just pull them through, when future disputes over scarce land and water arise and threaten their fragile peace. ❑

INDEX

Entries refer to ICWA Letters (MM-1, etc.) and page, with Letter number given before each page entry.

Entries refer to ICWA Letters (MM-1, etc.) and page, with Letter number given before each page entry.

Entries refer to ICWA Letters (MM-1, etc.) and page, with Letter number given before each page entry.

Author:	Michaelson, Marc
Title:	ICWA Letters - Sub-Saharan Africa
ISSN:	1083-429X
Imprint:	Institute of Current World Affairs, Hanover, NH
Material Type:	Serial
Language:	English
Frequency:	Monthly
Other Regions:	East Asia; South Asia; Mideast/North Africa; Europe/Russia; The Americas

ICWA Letters **(ISSN 1083-429X)** are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4 West Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers by subscription.

Phone: (603) 643-5548 E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net
Fax: (603) 643-9599 Web Site: www.icwa.org

Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.

Institute of Current World Affairs
THE CRANE-ROGERS FOUNDATION
Four West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 USA