Secessionism in Africa

By

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"The potential for splintering is highest in Africa and here the official diplomatic doctrine is most firmly set against secession."[1]
"In heterogeneous states, irredentism is bound to be a divisive ethnic issue."[2]

Introduction

Africa is a continent of almost a billion people, and consists of more than 54 ethnically and linguistically diverse nation-states, some of them deeply divided (e.g. Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Democratic Republic of the Congo). Yet, the most remarkable thing secessionist movements in Africa is the fact that there have been so few. Where there have been incidents of separatism such movements have rarely succeeded.[3]

One of the main reasons that altering state boundaries in post-colonial Africa by any means is so rare is that at the time of the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, the signatories of its founding charter proclaimed the sanctity of the territorial boundaries of member states while they were securing their independence.[4] The territorial integrity of member states is enshrined in Article III, paragraph 3 of the OAU Charter (Amate 1986). This principle was affirmed in a resolution of the OAU heads of state at the 1964 summit in Cairo, Egypt. The principle of *uti possidetis juris* was invoked, indicating that the inherited colonial boundaries were inviolable. This move was seen by most African leaders as a hedge against claims of self-determination, particularly secessionism. This no doubt goes a long ways towards explaining why movements to break up independent African states have been rare. At the same time, however, this has not in fact prevented secessionist sentiments, secessionist talk, or even outright secessionist mobilization among certain groups.

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1. Crawford Young. *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and Independence.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), p 82.
2. Donald Horowitz. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict.* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.)
3. Baker in a 2001 counted some twelve contemporary (since the independence era) separatist movements in Africa.These included both secessionist and irredentist movements.
4. The OAU has been transformed into the African Union (AU).

The purpose of this essay is to critically assess the origins of separatist sentiments in Africa; how and when such sentiments have evolved into actual movements; and the factors which determined the success or failure for such movements. Secession involves assertion of a claim to self-determination by an ethnolingusitic group or an ethnically heterogeneous region. Rothchild[5] and Trzciński[6] have described the secession of territory as the most radical form of separation. Secessionist movements aim to dismember an independent state by either forcible or non-forcible means into two or more independent countries with legal personalities that are acknowledged in the international community. Importantly, secession is a much more far- reaching act of separation than a demand for self determination that does not alter the boundaries of a particular state, such as a call for power sharing between a federal government and sub regional political entities (e.g. federalism, decentralization, regional autonomy).

In the following section I consider different theoretical and empirical claims that are made in the literature about secession and secessionist movements, followed by an analytical framework for the empirical assessment of these issues, and finally I use this framework to analyze three incidents of what I call here, "Great Secessionist Movements in Africa": Southern Sudan, Biafra, and Eritrea. Great secessionist movements are those that have moved beyond being merely a sentiment, or beyond rhetoric, and actually resulted in secessionist mobilization of some duration.[7] While only one of these great secessionist movements succeeded, they were all protracted and their effects were profound. The Biafran war was the shortest of the three, lasting just over two years. In the case of the civil war in Southern Sudan, the struggle occurred in two phases and lasted a total of thirty-nine years; the war in Eritrea lasted almost thirty years.

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5. Donald Rothchild. "Secession," in Seymour Martin Lipset (ed). The Encyclopedia of Democracy. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1995), pp 1114-1116.

6. Krzysztof Trzciński. "The Significance of Geographic Location for the Success of Territorial Secession: African Example," *Miscellanea Geographica Warsawa*, Vol 11 (2004), pp 207-216.

7. Although the Katanga Secession in the former Belgian Congo lasted for almost four years, I do not include it in this category.First, it was not a bottom-up movement, but a contrived attempt at secession on the part of the former Belgian colonizers, and South African and Southern Rhodesian mining interests.It was claimed that the groups indigenous to the Katanga region should have the right to self-determination and independence.Second, the matter was complicated by the fact that the United Nations took military action to end the secession.Even though there existed structural elements in the Katanga region that would have allowed us to consider it a case of, according to Collier and Hoeffler (2002b), a "resource grab" oraccording to Horowitz (1985, 255), a case of secessionist mobilization of the part of a backward group in an advanced region, it was more than both of these.See also, Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja. *From Mobutu to Kabila,* New York: Zed Press, 2003.

Why Secessionist Talk and Why Secessionist Mobilization? Theory and Practice.

The scholarly literature on secession ranges from normative theories about the right to self-determination juxtaposed against the need to retain the territorial integrity of nation states, to cultural justifications for secession, to political and economic reasons. The fundamental questions addressed by the normative theoretical literature are: what explains the emergence of secessionism? What does the right to self-determination entail in this day and age?

Lehning groups arguments for and against secessionism under the rubrics of liberal political theory and communitarianism.[8] He goes on to distinguish between two branches of the liberal perspective: one is opposed to secession while the other argues that groups have a restricted right to secede, particularly when they are inspired by a belief in the need to preserve the culture of a particular group. Although in both branches the preference would be to maintain existing states, the more permissive branch of liberal theory is comfortable with the notion that there are situations where there is a justification for secession.[9] For instance, this branch believes that when wrongs have been meted upon particular groups they have a right to secede. Yet a group's secession should not negatively affect other groups. The most extreme of this liberal perspective holds that, based on the universal moral right of freedom of association, groups have the right to unilateral secession.[10] However, some scholars question the moral as well as the practical and theoretical grounds on which the argument rests.[11]

While they are good entry points into any effort to understand separatist movements, normative debates can take analysis of this kind only so far. For example, to be useful, any theory of secession must go beyond the level of ideas and fully engage real political situations on the ground. Analysts must take into account relevant structural factors as well as the context of given societies in their efforts to understand when and why secessionist sentiments exist. Only in this way can they provide a practical roadmap for understanding and even resolving intrastate conflicts that revolve around demands by certain groups to separate. In this analysis, I hope to do just that.

In an era in which imagined communities are being frequently constructed, some theorists argue that a precondition for a right to secession is the existence

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8. Percy B.Lehning, "Theories of Secession: An Introduction," in Lehning, Percy B., (ed). Theories of Secession. (London: Routledge, 1998.) p 2.

9. Anthony H.Birch, "Another Liberal Theory of Secession," *Political Studies*, Vol. 32 (1984), pp 596-602; Buchanan, Allen. *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec.* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991.)

10. Harry Beran, "A democratic theory of political self-determination for a new world order," in Percy B. Lehning (ed). Theories of Secession. (London: Routledge, 1998), pp 32-59.

11. Linda Bishai, "Altered States: secession and the problems of liberal theory," in Percy B. Lehning (ed). Theories of Secession. (London: Routledge, 1998), pp 92-110.

of real as opposed to imagined communities.[12] Gilbert,[13] a communitarian, argues that a people must derive their communal character wholly from shared political institutions, and possess other elements common to statehood. Again, however, normative theories do not always take into account real situations on the ground. One only has to consider the case of the Republic of Somaliland, which has for more than a decade been severed from the failed state of Somalia and has reconstituted itself as a self-proclaimed independent state. It looks like a state and acts like a state, but is it a state? The problem is that for the most part the Republic of Somaliland does not have international recognition.[14] Furthermore, it is unlikely that this will change in the near future since the international community continues to hold dear the territorial integrity of existing states, and it seems not to have given up on reunifying Somalia. On its part, the transitional government in the rest of what was Somalia has not made a military move against Somaliland to force it to defend its independence. The transitional government's main priority at this time appears to be to firmly consolidate its own rule, and to defend itself against the military advances of the Union of Islamic Courts, which wants to create a state on the strict principles of Islam.

Conflicts sometime grow out of situations where ethnic identities have become ideologized, and where one or more groups perceive that their own culture is not respected, or they have been suppressed by some other group(s) or the state itself. In such situations a demand for separation and self-determination may come in the form of a call for decentralization, regional autonomy or even secession. Here it is extremely important to consider structural relationships in a polity (political and social) and the context, historical as well as contemporary, in which groups interact. Ethnic conflicts are often based on a perception that the citizenship rights within a given society are not equally accorded across groups, that some groups suffer disproportionately from inequalities and discrimination, or that particular groups feel insecure and threatened by some other group(s) or the state itself.[15] However, it is important to note that this does not always lead to conflict that rises to the level of a revolution or a secessionist movement. A great deal is dependent upon the

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12. Benedict Anderson.*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* (London: Verso, 1983.)

13. Paul Gilbert, "Communities reaal and imagined: good and bad cases for national secession," in Percy B. Lehning (ed). Theories of Secession. (London: Routledge, 1998), pp 208-226.

14. Edmond Keller, "Understanding Conflicts in the Horn of Africa," in Chandra Lekha Sriram and Zoe Nielsen (eds). Exploring Subregional Conflict: Opportunities for Conflict Prevention. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, 2004), p 42; Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.); Ian S.Spears, "Reflections on Somaliland and Africa's Territorial Order," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 95 (2003), pp 89-98.

15. David Lake and Donald Rothchild (eds). *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion and Escalation.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.); Horowitz 1985; Crawford Young,*The Politics of Cultural Pluralism.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976.)

political will of the particular regime to implement policies intended to assuage fears and distrust among aggrieved groups and to reduce conditions that give rise to culturally based grievances.

As mentioned earlier, groups demanding secession often claim that this is justified because they feel their culture is under threat. However, Collier and several of his colleagues and Collier and Hoeffler,[16] argue that such claims are most often disingenuous, as their sense of group identity is usually a recent contrivance designed to support the perceived economic advantages of seceding. Moreover, they argue that secessionist movements are more likely in countries where abundant natural resources are concentrated in certain regions. If secessionists in regions of a country that are well endowed with natural resources in the form of primary export commodities are able to organize themselves into a military force capable of challenging that of the state, they are more likely, according to Collier *et.al.* and Collier and Hoeffler,[17] as well as according to contributors to an edited volume by Berdal and Malone,[18] to attempt a "resource grab."[19] At times this might involve a region simply seceding from a particular state, but in other cases it would involve rebels actually attempting to capture the state itself.

If this thesis is correct, it highlights the relative importance of the coercive capacity of the state *vis á vis* the secessionist movement as well as the geographic location and contiguity of the contested region. Trzciński[20] correctly notes that political and economic factors always play the main role in a group's desire to succeed, but various aspects of geographic location, along with the performance of the secessionist movement in the field, can also facilitate or hinder secession. Secessionists, if they are to succeed, must be able to take and hold territory and they must be able to exploit the natural resources of the region. This certainly seems to be the case with the sustained separatist movements in Senegal's Cassamance region, in Angola's Caprivi Strip, and in the Republic of Somaliland. Also, what seems to determine whether a secessionist movement actually develops is not necessarily a common cultural identity among the people of a region, but rather, the resources in the region and the belief among its leaders that the movement can exploit those resources and form the contested region into an independent state.

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16. Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis. *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.), 53-78; Collier and Hoeffler, "The Political Economy of Secession", (typed manuscript) Development Research Group, World Bank, (December 23, 2002), 2.

17. Ibid..

18. Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, eds. *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars.* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, 2000.)

19. It should be noted that this strategy is not a manifestation of simple greed, but a way to enhance the capacity of rebel forces to pursue their political ends against the state.

20. Trzciński 2004, p 207.

Collier and Hoeffler[21] acknowledge that natural resources and the structure of political opportunity[22] are not the only factors that might explain the emergence of secessionist movements, but these factors are particularly potent. Other factors that can be important are the structure and functioning of political and social institutions, in combination with the context in which social groups relate to one another. For example, the weight of history could very well be based upon myths and memories that serve as justification when particular secessionist movements emerge.

The importance of the interaction of culture, structural relationships among groups, and the structure of political opportunity in laying the foundations for ethnic conflict, including revolution and secessionism, is highlighted in the work of Donald Horowitz. Horowitz[23] asks the question, "What kinds of groups attempt to secede and under what circumstances?" He argues that in attempting to answer this question it is useful to divide groups into advanced and backward categories, and the regions of a country similarly into advanced and backward regions. An advanced group is one that has benefited from educational and non-agricultural employment opportunities. Such groups generally regard themselves and are regarded by others as "highly motivated, diligent, intelligent and dynamic." Backward groups tend not to have benefited much from educational and non-agricultural employment opportunities, and they are stereotyped as, "indolent, ignorant, and not disposed to achievement."

Horowitz classifies regions as advanced based on their relative economic position in terms of internally generated regional income levels per capita. Advanced regions tend to be highly endowed in terms of minerals and other forms of economic resources. The argument is that the interplay between relative group position and regional position determines if a secessionist movement is likely to occur.[24] Admittedly this is a simplistic model, but it is extremely illustrative and allows one to consider some very complex processes in an analytical manner. In order to do this some important factors about the real world are not addressed. For instance, 1) not all groups concentrated in certain regions end up being inclined to secessionism; 2) countries may, and often do, contain more than two important regions; and 3) the measurement of the economic position of regions---per capita income---is extremely simplistic. The real world is more complicated than that. However, for discussion purposes, let us accept Horowitz's parsimonious model (See Table I).

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21. Collier and Hoeffler 2002, p 5.

22. Herbert Kitschelt, "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies."*British Journal of Political Science.* 16 (1986), pp 57-85.

23. Horowitz 1985, pp 229-265.

24. Ibid, 235.

TABLE 1: THE DISPOSITION TO SECEDE

Group and Region	Political Claims	Precipitants	Calculations	Timing, Relative Frequency
Backward Group in Backward Region	Proportionality in civil service, occasionally also in revenues	Denial of proportionality in civil service; symbolic issues like language and religion; influx of advanced civil servants	Secede despite economic costs	Early, Frequent
Advanced Group in Backward Region	Nondiscrimination; no revenue issue	Severe discrimination; repeated violence; migration back to home region	Secede only if economic costs are low	Late, Somewhat Frequent
Advanced Group in Advanced Region	Nondiscrimination; spend revenues where generated	Severe discrimination; violence and migration back to home region if population exporter	Secede only if economic costs are low	Late, Rare
Backward Group in Advanced Region	Proportionality in civil service; spend revenue where generated	Denial of proportionality; political claims made by immigrant strangers in the region	Secede regardless of economic benefits or cost	Early, Rare

SOURCE: Horowitz, Donald L. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985, p 258.

Horowitz[25] presents empirical evidence that suggests that by far the largest number of secessionist movements have emerged among backward groups in backward regions. Such movements mostly emerged immediately after independence and were prompted by the fact that members of the group or region felt that they would not benefit as a group or a region from the planned post-independence political and economic arrangements. Relative to the position of advanced groups and advanced regions, backward groups in backward regions perceived themselves to be at a severe disadvantage and that their best chance for being able to pursue a secure and decent quality of life would be to secede. Examples in this category include secessionist movements in Southern Sudan (1956-72) and Northern Chad (1964-78). In those cases where there have been attempts at secession by backward groups in backward regions the rebels were undeterred by the possible costs of such a move.

Because they tend to be underdeveloped and severely lacking in educated and skilled people, backward regions in some cases offer meaningful opportunities for advanced groups with the needed attributes to migrate or be assigned by a central authority to their region. On the other hand, backward regions that offer few opportunities for their educated and skilled people for personal advancement end up being population exporters.[26] In the process family members who remain in the backward region come to benefit from remittances from kin who have gone elsewhere to seek gainful employment. Rather than favor secession for their region, advanced groups in backward regions who take advantage of opportunities throughout a country tend to favor the continued unity of the country (e.g. the Ibo of Nigeria prior to the Biafra War).

Backward groups in advanced regions are not as prone to secession as backward groups in backward regions. While advanced groups from backward or advanced regions may migrate to a region that is economically advanced or has the potential to become advanced to take advantage of economic opportunities, backward groups tend to be trapped in their impoverished and undereducated conditions, causing a sense of insecurity and grievance. They tend to be disposed to separation and to violence against immigrants from other regions, particularly in times of crisis or when they appear to be losing ground to the outsiders. They are generally not in a good position to fill from their own ranks the roles that were filled by skilled and educated immigrants. Yet, they come to demand better representation in the government bureaucracy as well as the private sector. On their part, the immigrants, when they realize their vulnerabilities *vis á vis* the local population, seek guarantees against discrimination and a relaxing of standards in making hiring decisions. At the same time, out of desperation regional elites may risk all and call for secession. The potential economic advantages of seceding are most often powerful motivating factors for would-be secessionists. This was the kind of situation that existed in mineral rich Congo-Kinshasa's Katanga province in the late

25. Ibid, 236-43.
26. Ibid, 245-6.

1950's and early 1960s. Baluba immigrants from Kasai province who flocked to Katanga for employment came to far outnumber indigenous groups who might compete with them in the marketplace. Frustration among the locals became so high that some of their leaders were willing to pursue a secessionist option and to compensate for their lack of educated and skilled people by relying on foreigners. However, even though the actually fighting was carried out by local backward groups with the aid of mercenaries and aid from foreign governments and private interests, they were instigated to do this, and eventually bought into the idea of secession.

By far the least likely to opt for secession are advanced groups in advanced regions. As mentioned earlier, these groups and regions tend to have ample educational and economic opportunities, so much so that they can provide a source of export labor as well as capital for the rest of the country. However, when such advanced groups feel squeezed by efforts on the part of a central government to institute reforms that would redistribute resources and possibly deprive their region of its competitive advantages in relation to other regions, there might be a rise in secessionist talk, if not secessionist action, among advanced groups in advanced regions. For example, this occurs from time to time among the Yoruba of Nigeria. Similarly, in Uganda in the mid-1960s, the Baganda kingdom appeared to be ready to secede from the rest of the country, but was brutally thwarted.

As mentioned earlier, Horowitz's typology is only meant to be suggestive, as it leaves out factors that might be important in certain contexts and result in different outcomes in different situations. Historically those secessionist movements that have been able to sustain their struggles over a protracted period of time have been able to take advantage of their ability to control contiguous areas of a country with substantial natural resources that they could sell in the international marketplace, and thereby finance their struggle (e.g. Sudan People's Liberation Army in southern Sudan). In other cases, secessionist struggles have been stretched out over time because rebels were able to secure financial and military support from international sources. Also, groups that have been able to rely upon financial and other forms of support from diasporas and to control territory in border zones have sometimes been in a position to sustain a struggle over some period of time (e.g. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front).

Any effort to discuss secession and secessionist movements must be mindful of the fact that secessionists do not always remain committed to total separation. It is common for them to periodically shift from demands for independence to demands for regional autonomy, federalism or power-sharing in another form, or they might even shift from a demand to separate to the pursuit of revolution and the capturing of state power. Much depends on the perceptions and vision of rebel leaders, especially those leaders' perceptions at certain moments in time of the structure of political opportunity. .

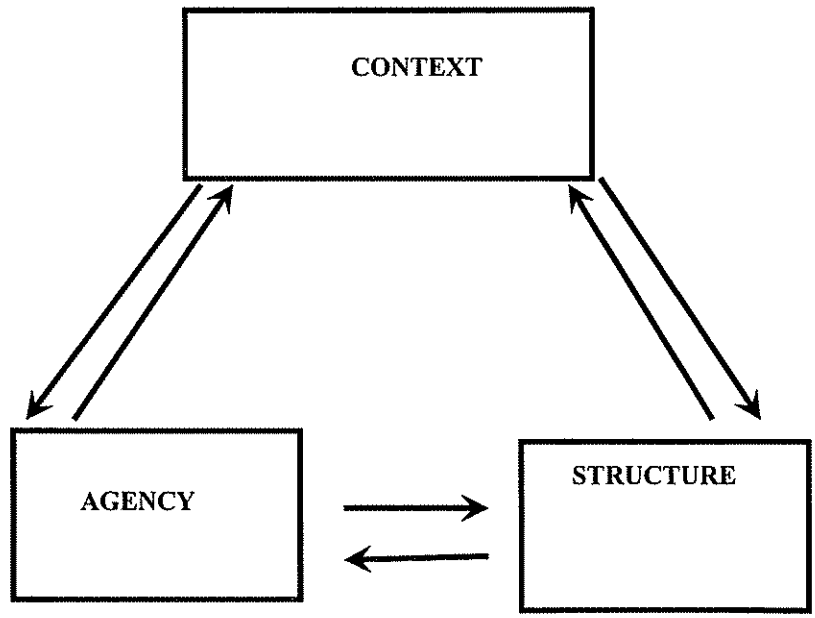
There are no hard and fast rules as to when secessions will occur, let alone when they will succeed. However, one absolutely necessary condition for success is for a secession to be internationally recognized as being bone fide and

legitimate. Related to this, in order to survive, secessionist states must be able to defend the independence they fought for. This being said, it would be useful to consider the three African cases identified above as "Great Secessions", the civil war in Southern Sudan, the Biafra War, and the Eritrean war of national liberation. I call these great secessions not because they all succeeded, but because they were able to challenge the state over an extended period of time. Indeed, only the Eritreans actually succeeded. What I would like to do in the remainder of this essay is to tease out the elements that contributed to the protracted nature of these struggles, and the factors that seem to have contributed to failure or success. However, before I do that, I will briefly sketch a framework for analysis in order to organize my discussion of the cases.

Towards an Analytic Framework

What I propose here is not a causal model. Instead this framework for analysis is descriptive and attempts to identify certain common and divergent features in these four cases. The basic elements we consider are: context, structures, and human agency.

Figure 1: A Framework for Analysis



For each case, I consider the historical and contemporary contexts. For example, at what stage in political and economic development was the particular country when the secession or attempted secession occurred? In some cases we expect to find that economic factors go further in helping us understand why and when a particular rebellion occurred, but in others political motivations would seem most important. Culture is always an intervening factor, but it may not be determinative. Geography is almost always important: Was the secessionist region contiguous or not? Were the rebels able to take and hold territory outside the power domain of the state, or was the state able to effectively project its coercive assets and power into the contested region?

In some cases, political and economic factors appear to be fused together, as when a regime militarily responds to a threatened secession so as to preserve the political as well as the economic status quo. Was the region in question economically advanced or backward? Was the secessionist movement ethnically homogeneous or heterogeneous?

Related to the context of the secession is the issue of politically relevant structures. Particularly important in efforts to explain any form of political change is the structure of political opportunity. This factor is important in explaining the timing of secessionist movements that have any chance of success. What were the group dynamics both nationally and locally at the time? Among politically relevant groups, what appear to have been the power relations among regions and groups? What was the character of state-society relationships in the region in question? Was the state strong and cohesive, or was it weak and failing? States rarely willingly accommodate demands for self-determination by agreeing to secession. The most common response to such claims is to either ruthlessly suppress them, or to attempt to find ways of satisfying claims for self-determination without altering the boundaries of the state (e.g. regional autonomy, decentralization, federalism, power-sharing). This is why secessionist movements tend to be costly and violent.

Another factor to consider in each of our cases is the relative importance of international forces either directly involved in the secession, or indirectly involved (e.g. foreign governments, diasporas). At times secessionist movements must rely on outsiders to bankroll their movements, or to support them politically in their efforts to secure international recognition for their claim.

However, even though context and institutions matter, equally important are factors of human agency. In order to be successful, any secessionist movement would be well served by visionary leadership that is able to engender cooperation among elites who may or may not be from the same ethnonationality group, and also to inspire followers to adopt the vision of the leadership. It is rare that secessionist regions are ethnically homogeneous.[27] Thus, minorities within a secessionist region must be made to feel that their interests will be pursued and protected by the movement. Securing the hearts and minds of those who end up being the followers and foot soldiers of the

27. Ibid, 267.

movement is critically important, because the state will also be vying for their loyalties. The question will always be who---the state or the movement---can provide people of the region with the most security and the most viable promise of future well-being?

Sub-Saharan Africa's Great Secessionist Movements: Southern Sudan, Biafra, and Eritrea

There have been at least twelve notable secessionist movements in Sub-Saharan Africa since the nationalist period, but there has been an abundance of secessionist sentiment and secessionist talk all over the continent in the same time period. However, I would classify only three cases as "Great Secessionist Movements." One (Southern Sudan) occurred almost simultaneously with the end of the nationalist period and the initial years of independence. The timing of the other two (Biafra, and Eritrea) was a bit delayed, but they illustrated the lack of an independence compact upon which different regional and/or ethnic groups could agree. I now turn my attention to analyses of each of these cases.

Southern Sudan.

The civil war in southern Sudan occurred in two stages: 1955-1972 and 1983-2005. Modern-day Sudan can trace its history back almost 200 years, but the period of most significance for this analysis spans roughly the last one hundred years. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed in the late 1880s, the British government moved into Egypt and in the process also came to control the Suez Canal and the sea route from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. Once ensconced in Egypt, Britain utilized Egyptian administrators to govern what is present-day Sudan by a system that came to be known as "condominium rule." When Egypt gained its independence in 1922, Britain, wanting to firm up its control of the strategically important Nile River Valley, became more involved in Sudan.

Sudan has a population of around 36 million people, comprised of more than 140 different ethno-linguistic groups, though some estimates suggest that at least 400 different languages are spoken in Sudan. Black Africans make up more than 52 percent of the country's population and include the Azande, the Dinka, the Nuer, and the Shiluk peoples, located in the southern one-fifth of the country. Arabized Sudanese account for almost 40 percent of the total population, and the majority of that population (70-75 percent) adheres to some form of Islam. Most of the southern Sudanese adhere to either traditional beliefs (25 percent) or some form of Christianity (5 percent). Arabic is the official language and is spoken by about 51 percent of the population as a first language, but is used as a second language by many more than that. English is also widely spoken. The Sudanese population is extremely diverse not only in their ethnic characteristics but also their religions and ways of life. Historically, the social

elite were those who could claim some connection to the great families of Arabia, with presumed ties to the Prophet Mohammed.

While the British allowed these northern Islamic forces to flourish, after 1922 they sought to keep Islam from spreading south. They envisioned the development of local administration in the south under the control of southern bureaucrats. In 1930, they introduced what they termed the Southern Policy, aimed at erecting and enforcing barriers to the penetration of northerners into the south not only through religion but also through commerce. In place for 20 years, the policy did little to move the south towards development and self-rule and in retrospect set the stage for a system of inequality and separate development that was to have a devastating effect on the incorporation of the south into an independent Sudan. Subsequently, when nationalist politics began to pick up steam in the 1950s, in the south there was no attempt to develop among the people a sense of Sudanese national identity.

After the unification of the north and the south in 1947 the movement towards independence in 1956 advanced rapidly. The nationalist movement was rather disorganized; with most groups agreeing only that the British should go, but nationalist leaders lacked a clear vision about what the future of Sudan should be.

The main beneficiaries of the British exit strategy for Sudan were the northern sectarian leaders who sought to protect their own class and group interests. The Mahdists and the Khatimiyya sects had built vast business and agricultural empires for themselves during the colonial period. There were some secular nationalists in the north, but they did not seriously challenge the religious sects. They generally saw the move to independence only in terms of what came to be known as *Sudanization*. Sudanization was the process of replacing colonial administrators with nationals.[28] As independence approached in Sudan, gross inequalities between the north and the south remained, and politics was moving too fast for southerners to organize and become effectively involved. Northern Islamic Arabs had a vision of Sudan that was driven by their religious convictions more than anything else, and did not attend to the need to allay the fears and insecurity of many southerners. Relative to the northerners, they were poorly educated, and their region was, while abundant in agricultural potential and natural resources (e.g. timber, petroleum), severely under developed.

Many southerners came to feel that a benevolent, if neglectful, British colonial rule had been replaced by a tyrannical Arab and Muslim postcolonial government, bent on Islamicizing the entire country. Consequently, they felt they had to find an exit strategy for their group, or to engage in pre-emptive attacks against the northerners. While Muslim politicians publicly claimed to respect the equality of all Sudanese citizens, for many southerners this commitment was not credible. Some explained their mistrust of the northerners by recalling their memory of the slave trade. Such mistrust led to the eruption of

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28. Peter Woodward. *Sudan 1898-1989: The Unstable State.*(Boulder: Reinner, 1990), 78-79.

a mutiny of southern Sudan soldiers at the Torit Barracks in the southern province of Equatoria in August 1955; widespread killing of northerners in the south followed. The new interim government of the National Unionist Party retaliated in the south, but Sudan nonetheless achieved independence on 1 January 1956, even as southerners were mobilizing for a civil war which continued until 2005, with an eleven year respite between 1972 and 1983. Over the forty years of its independence, Sudan has seen a vacillation between civilian and military rule. In 1969 the civilian government of Muhammad Ahmed Mahjoub was ousted by a military coup headed by Ga'afar al Numeiri, with the support of the Sudan Communist Party. This was an historical moment, because it set the stage for Numeiri to seek a settlement of the civil war in the south.

In this first phase of the civil war, the southern rebels consisted of several factions that came to be known as the Anya-Nya (guerrilla forces). The core of this group was made up of former mutineers from Torit; other defectors from the Sudan army joined from time to time, as did young males from the south. Three things are important to note: 1) throughout most of the period---until the early 1970's---Anya-Nya had no clear leadership; 2) Anya-Nya was not an ethnically homogeneous or cohesive movement. Various clusters of ethnically-based guerrilla units operated in Upper Nile, Eastern and Western Equatoria, and Bahr-al-Ghazal provinces. But as the fighting continued and spread there began to be some signs that a regional movement with some sense of solidarity among those waging the struggle was emerging; and 3) the driving force behind this phase of the secessionist movement was what Young has identified as "a common fear of cultural annihilation."[29]

Throughout the struggle, the intensity of the fighting waxed and waned, as the central government stepped up either the military or political initiative to bring the conflict to an end. By 1970 it was clear that the two sides had reached a fork in the road, a mutually hurtful stalemate that demanded a political and not a military solution. However, a way out did not appear until the following year.

In 1971, there was a failed coup against Numeiri that was thought to be a communist plot.

Subsequently the coup plotters were executed and Numeiri moved away from his then-superpower patron, the Soviets, and towards the US. Numeiri also moved quickly to find a political solution with southern rebels, which was reached with the signing in 1972 of the Addis Ababa Agreement.[30] The agreement called for the granting of regional autonomy for the South. Over the next eleven years, relative peace in the south made it possible to begin to push the pace of economic development in the region. In addition to the pre-independence Zende cotton scheme, the region was now open to oil exploration. Significantly, rich deposits of oil were found, but rather than developing the capacity of the south to extract and process this petroleum, the central

29. Young 1965, p. 497.

30. Donald Rothchild and Caroline Hartzell, "The Peace Process in the Sudan, 1971-72, in Roy Licklider (ed). *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End.* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), pp 62-93.

government decided to build oil pipelines to the northern seaport, Port Sudan. However, the political implications for the south were not immediately apparent.

From his efforts to implement the terms of the Addis Ababa Agreement, it seemed that Numeiri had initially attempted to build trust among the southerners, granting them a measure of regional autonomy. However, hard-line Islamists began in 1977 to demand a revision of the Addis Ababa Agreement and the implementation of *Sharia* (Islamic Law).[31] By the early 1980s, Numeiri began to capitulate to the demands of the fundamentalists, distancing him from the south. All of this must be viewed in the context of politics and economics. On 5 June 1983 he issued "Republican Order Number One," abrogating the Addis Agreement and returning regional powers to the central government; he later declared Sudan an Islamic state. These acts triggered Sudan's second civil war and the mobilization of southerners by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In contrast to the south's first resistance movement, the SPLA did not prioritize regional autonomy, calling instead for transforming Sudan into a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-ethnic democratic state (Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement 1983). There were other movements operating in the south and from time to time they clashed with the SPLA, and the SPLA also had conflicts within its ranks from time to time, but in the end, the SPLA, under the leadership of John Garang, was able to unify rebel forces and to take both military and political command.[32]

From the very beginning, the SPLA was more cohesive than the Anya-Nya had ever been. Many of its top commanders were well trained defectors from the Sudan Army. Also, it was able to take and hold significant parts of the south over a long period of time, and in the process, putting the SPLA in a position to disrupt oil drilling operations. It was also able to exploit non-petroleum primary products in the region, and to use the proceeds from their sale to sustain the movement and its army. By 2002 again, a mutually hurtful stalemate was reached in the second civil war.[33] Perhaps most importantly, the SPLA was able to gain considerable international support for its cause.

No doubt the position of the Sudanese government on the possibility of a political settlement of the civil war was in part influenced by its desire to not be "tarred" as a terrorist state following the international terrorists' strikes in the US on 11 September 2001. The government agreed to negotiations aimed at leading to accommodation with the southern rebels. The talks, taking place in Kenya, were sanctioned by the African Union (formerly the OAU) which delegated the function of third party mediator to a sub regional organization, Intergovernmental Agency for Development (IGAD).

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31. Ann Mosley Lesch. *The Sudan: Contested National Identities*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997.)

32. Jok Madut Jok and Sharon Elaine Hutchinson, "Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2, (September 1999), pp 125-45.

33. Robert O.Collins, "Africans, Arabs, and Islamists: From Conference Tables to the Battlefield in Sudan," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2, (September 1999), pp 105-123.

On 10 January 2005 an agreement ending Sudan's second major civil war was signed in Nairobi, Kenya. The settlement, known as the Nairobi Accords, calls for: a six year period in which the 10 states of southern Sudan will be allowed to govern themselves in a federal arrangement with the central government. At the end of this period, there will be a referendum at which time the southern states could vote to remain a part of Greater Sudan or to declare the independence of the region. Related to this is a power sharing arrangement at the national level. In addition, the armies of the two sides will be merged. The northern part of the country will continue to adhere to *Sharia law,* but the southern states will be governed by secular law and there will be religious freedom. The latest civil war in the south erupted partly in response to the central government's intention to apply strict Islamic law throughout the entire country. In the South the population generally adheres to either Christianity or some traditional religion. Finally, a UN peacekeeping force of at about 10,000 troops was deployed to the border zone between the north and south in the summer of 2005.

Importantly, the movement for self-determination for southern Sudan over the years shifted from being a secessionist movement to becoming a movement for regional autonomy and power sharing at the center. In large measure this was dictated by the context, the situation on the ground, the structure of political opportunity, and by statecraft on the part of the leaders of the SPLA/M. Cultural, political and economic factors all had a role to play in determining the character of the war. Although the central government remained fairly strong and cohesive throughout, it was matched by the growing strength and cohesiveness of the SPLA and its political wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.

Biafra.

Nigeria is the most populous country on the African continent, with more than 100 million people. It is also an extremely diverse country, with between 350 and 400 distinct ethnic groups. The largest ethnic groups are the Hausa of the northwest (around 28 percent), the Yoruba of the southwest (around 18 percent), and the Ibo of the southeast (around 14 percent). The remainder of the ethnic groups number from a few thousand to several million. In addition to its ethnic diversity, Nigeria is also diverse in terms of religion. About half the population practices some form of Islam, Christians make up about 40 percent, and the remainder of the population practice various traditional religions. It is important to note, that only about 35 to 40 percent of the Muslims are concentrated in the northwest of the country. Fifty-five to 60 percent of Nigeria's Muslims are clustered in enclaves throughout the rest of the country.

Nigeria was a British colony until its independence in 1960. At the time it was granted its independence, the country brought together three regions that had been governed under the colonialists as relatively separate states. Moreover, in each of these regions one of the three major ethnic groups predominated: the Yoruba in the southwest, the Ibo in the southeast and the

Hausa-Fulani in the north. The form of government chosen for the new nation was federalism.[34] However, within less than a decade this arrangement proved unworkable, and the society was thrown into intense and protracted ethnic conflict. This conflict in large measure grew initially out of interethnic cultural issues as well as out of intraethinic political disputes within regions.

Under colonialism, governance in the north was characterized by a form of indirect rule. The British had allowed traditional religio-political authorities to manage their own affairs. This allowed northerners to remain true to their traditions and to a large extent hold back the penetration of modernization and its accompanying secular formal education and urbanization. On the other hand, the southwest had maintained and greatly expanded its contacts with western countries and became the commercial center of the territory. This development was not lost on the residents of the southeast, and they like the Yoruba to the west, embraced secular formal education and commerce, particularly after the Second World War. At that time, Ibo leaders who had seen the value of western education as early as the 1930s, had come to believe that their group was so far behind that extraordinary measures had to be taken in order for the Ibo to "catch up" with the Yoruba.[35]

It is important to note that Iboland was, throughout the colonial period, what Horowitz would term an economically backward region. Also, it was very populous; even when the region began to vigorously pursue the development of its human capital after the war, there were not enough economic opportunities for its residents at home and the region had to become a labor- exporting enclave. Educated and skilled Ibos migrated to urban areas throughout the country, and as they did, they set up Ibo cultural self-help associations to provide a sense of support and security to Ibo migrants from the southeast. The Ibos had never been a coherent ethnic group that organized itself into large political units such as states, empires or sultanates, yet the pressures of competitive communalism during the process of modernization led to the development an expanded sense of Ibo identity.[36]

As Nigeria moved toward independence, and as it began to rapidly urbanize and develop economically, Ibos came to see themselves in terms of their regional identity, in competition with the Yoruba who had long taken advantage of employment and business opportunities throughout the entire country. This kind of thinking and behavior carried over into the political arena during the nationalist period. Whereas in the past, Ibos had viewed their extended families, their towns or parochial regions as being their terminal political communities, many now came to view Iboland in general as their terminal political community. In the process their pan-Ibo identities were socially constructed.

The first real signs of the serious inter-ethnic conflict that was to characterize Nigeria after independence can be traced to a 1945 incident in the

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34. Rotimi T Suberu. *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria.* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001.)

35. Audrey Smock. *Ibo Politics: The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 16; Young 1976, 461.

36. Ibid.

northern city of Jos.[37] At that time, a deadly riot targeting Ibo migrants erupted, resulting in the loss of a number of lives. In 1953, an even more deadly ethnic riot occurred in the northern city of Kano, and again Ibo migrants were targeted by Northerners. As the nationalist period unfolded, ethnically based parties emerged, but for a time, given the federal character that independent Nigeria would assume, there was a tendency to form cross-ethnic political alliances. All parties had to compete for votes in all regions, and this led to efforts of parties to join in what they perceived would be minimum winning coalitions. In this environment, federal elections in 1959 leading up to independence contributed to high expectations, at the same time that the intensity of inter- and intra-ethnic political competition created an aura of fear and anxiety, particularly among the Ibo. This condition was also prevalent at the time of the 1964 federal elections.

In the wake of independence, the Ibo continued to attempt to take advantage of economic opportunities as well as opportunities in the civil service throughout the country. The North was lacking in educated, skilled people in both the public and private sectors. The buzzword was *Africanization*. But Northern leaders translated that to mean *Northernization*. Not only was there a fear of being swamped and marginalized by Ibo migrants to the North, but the Yoruba in the west also feared the penetration of Ibo migrants into their homeland. For instance, in federal universities, there was intense competition between the Ibo and the Yoruba. While the paramount Ibo political leader, Nnamdi Azikiwe, preached national unity based upon a sense of a common Nigerian identity, many in the North as well in the Southeast came to see a hidden Ibo agenda aimed at dominating all aspects of Nigerian life.

By the time of federal elections in 1964, it was clear that Nigeria's federal political system was on the brink of collapse. The catalyst that served as a direct precipitating cause of the coup of 1966 was represented in rigged elections in late 1965 in Western Region. This set the stage for ethnic tensions within the region, and ultimately these tensions gave way to the January 1966 coup. The coup was led by J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi, an Ibo. Moreover, most of the coup makers were Ibo officers of roughly the same age and educational background. In other words, they were friends who trusted one another. Initially, the coup was greeted throughout the country with jubilation, but it soon came to be seen as an ethnically based coup, heightening fears that the Ibo were putting themselves in a position to finally and completely take over the country. In the days that followed, mostly non-Ibo military officers and leading politicians were assassinated.[38]

Less than five months after taking power, Ironsi issued a decree calling for the abolition of the regions and transformation of Nigeria into a unitary state. On 27 May 1966, three days after the decree, ethnic riots targeting the Ibo again broke out in northern cities. Hundreds of people died. Out of fear and insecurity Ibos began to flee the North, returning to their homeland. Simultaneously, a

37. Young 1976, p 466.
38. Ibid, pp 468-70.

secessionist sentiment emerged in the North. Also, at the federal level, discussions were underway about the possibility of partitioning Nigeria.

Even though the southeast had always been Nigeria's poorest region, by the mid-1960s it was evident that Iboland and its environs had the potential to be an economically advanced region. Oil had been discovered, and this prompted some elites to believe that the region could go it alone and did not have to rely on economic opportunities and remittances from other parts of the country.

Amidst tensions and growing insecurities throughout Nigeria, a second coup was staged on 29 July 1966. This time the coup was headed mostly by northern officers, who proceeded to kill Ironsi and his closest supporters. They initially chose a Yoruba Brigadier General to head the new government, but he declined, and the group finally settled on Yakubu Gowan, a northern Christian from a minority group, to assume executive leadership.

Along with former Ibo migrants returning home, Ibo military personnel also returned home. Among Ibo intellectuals, this made the idea of secession all the more a viable option. The final decision to secede the southeast from the rest of Nigeria came on 30 May 1967. At the time Lt. Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu made the announcement that the Eastern region would now be known as the independent Republic of Biafra. He stated:

> ...that territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria together with her continental shelf and territorial water shall henceforward be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of 'The Republic of Biafra'...[39]

The motivations for secession among intellectuals were clearly economic, but they were also in part based upon cultural and political consideration. The latter was particularly true among average Ibo. It is important to note, however, that the Ibo were not monolithic. Within Iboland there were intra-regional differences of opinion about the need to secede. Also, the Eastern Region possesses a number of significant minority groups such as the Efik, Ibibio and Ijaw. The Ibo tend to be concentrated inland, and these minorities are largely found along the coast, where the petroleum wealth of the East is also found. Young has convincingly argued that Ojukwu made a gross miscalculation when he assumed that he would have the backing of every group in the region.[40] For example, the Ibos of the Midwest Region were initially ambivalent about supporting the secession. They had declared their neutrality, in hopes that both the federal government and the Biafra regime would leave them out of the fight. However, they could not remain above the fray. This became readily apparent when the Midwest was invaded by the Biafra army, which occupied that region for a month.[41]

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39. Quoted in Young 1976, p 461.

40. In 1963 the Mid-west Region had been created, separating that south central area from the East.Large segments of the Ibo people live there.

41. Young 1976, pp 472-3.

Remarkably, at one point during the war, the Biafra army penetrated deep into the Western Region. But eventually the tide turned and the federal army began to push the Biafra army back into its own territory. By early 1969 it was clear that the secession would fail, but the fighting continued mostly because there was widespread fear among the Ibo that if they lost, they would become the victims of genocide. The war came to an abrupt end on January 6, 1970 when Ojukwu fled to Côte d'Ivoire, and resistance ceased almost immediately.

Apart from the problems facing the secession discussed earlier, it is important to note that even though it declared its independence, Biafra was not able to secure significant international recognition. African governments called for adherence to the OAU charter, and generally frowned upon the idea of breaking up any African state. Among African states only Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon, and Côte d'Ivoire recognized Biafra's right to independence.[42] Moreover, Nigeria had substantial international support.

During the attempted secession it is estimated that somewhere between 1 and 3 million people in the East died as a result of the hostilities, disease and starvation.[43] There were also more than 3 million refugees and internally displaced persons. Rather than engaging in government-sponsored genocide, the Federal Military Government led a massive relief and rehabilitation campaign in the Eastern region. It also put in place mechanisms to reintegrate Biafra fighters into Nigerian society.

Eritrea.

Eritrea is the only country in Sub-Saharan Africa to have secured its independence through secession.[44] In comparison with the other cases considered here, Eritrea is a very small state, with less ethnic diversity than the other states., With a population of 3.5 million, Eritrea has nine significant ethnic groups. The largest among these are the Tigrinya- and Tigre-speakers, who make up about 80 percent of the population. The remainder of the population consists of the Afar, Bilein, Hedareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, and Saho, all of whom have their own languages. The two predominant religions are Islam and Coptic Christianity, each including around 45 percent of religious adherents. Despite its diversity, through an almost 30 year struggle for its independence, a

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42. It also had the approval of the apartheid regime in South Africa, the rogue state ofSouthern Rhodesia, and Portugal, the colonial overlord at the time of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique.

43. See GlobalSecurity.org, "Biafra War" (April 2005), http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/biafra.htm (accessed 3 August 2006).

44. Strictly speaking, some Eritreans see their struggle for self-determination as an effort to be allowed have a referendum on whether or not to be a part of Ethiopia.They base this claim on the fact that when European colonizers left other parts of Africa, the colonial state was allowed to become a sovereign state with the same geographic boundaries of the colonial state.It is claimed that Ethiopia simply replaced the Italian colonialists with their own late colonization of Eritrea.This is the subject of some debate, but it will not concern us here.

sense of multi-ethnic Eritrean national identity took root. There is no claim that the common identity of Eritreans can be traced back through antiquity.

What is now Eritrea had been contested terrain throughout history (Keller 1988). For hundreds of years it had a tributary relationship with states in the Ethiopian highlands, but there was never a consolidated state of Eritrea. The Ottoman Empire occupied the lowland areas of the country for a time just prior to the European partition of present-day Africa. Following the ouster of the Ottomans from the region, Italy came to occupy the territory they had previously claimed. It is important to note that the Italians were not content with occupying the lowlands of this territory; they coveted the idea of conquering imperial Ethiopia as well. They occupied the highlands of the territory, and legalized their claim to it after a resounding military defeat at the hands of the Ethiopians in 1896. Following this, a treaty was signed between the two sides drawing the boundaries of the territory claimed by the Italians.

Italy established a colony in Eritrea in 1896 and remained until it was pushed out of the whole of northeast Africa in 1941. From 1941 to 1952, Eritrea was a trusteeship of the UN, and was governed by the British. In 1948, the UN set up a commission, composed of representatives from Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan and South Africa, to recommend a plan for the trusteeship. In 1949, the commission submitted its findings. The majority (Burma, Norway and South Africa) supported a union between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Guatemalan and Pakistan favored the complete independence of Eritrea. The UN chose federation.

Eritrean political organizations supporting either unification or independence had emerged during 1941-46. The Unionist Party, claiming that Eritrea had been stolen by the Italians from Ethiopia, favored unconditional unification with Ethiopia. The Muslim League and several smaller parties favored independence; they were joined in 1947 by the Liberal Progressive Party, a predominately Christian group. The parties favoring independence united to form the Independence Bloc. In the years leading up to the actual consummation of the federation with Ethiopia, Eritrean parties intensely competed with one another over political power. In the background, Ethiopia's emperor, Haile Selassie I, attempted to structure politics so that the unionists came out on top. Eritrea was officially federated with Ethiopia in 1952, and almost from the beginning, the Emperor worked to gradually undermine Eritrea's regional autonomy.

The systematic destruction of the federal relationship was subtle and calculated. Haile Selassie smashed autonomous institutions and instituted policies that pulled Eritrea further and further into Ethiopia's orbit. Among the first moves in this direction was to force some Eritrean industries to either close down or move their operations to Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. During their presence in Eritrea, the Italians had built Eritrea into a viable economic entity which could serve the interests of the Italian metropolis. Italian settlers constructed an impressive agricultural industry as well as urban industries, mostly of the import substitution variety. Also, the colonial administration

established schools and built roads, ports, bridges and other forms of infrastructure.

An important thing to note about Eritrea in relation to Ethiopia is that it is located astride the strategic Red Sea. By unifying Eritrea with Ethiopia, the Emperor was able to compensate for the fact that Ethiopia is landlocked. This in large measure explains why Ethiopia wanted to make good on its claim to Eritrea.

The year 1952 was a watershed year not only because it marked the beginning of the federation, but also because it was the year in which the Eritrean constitution was suspended. A year later, all trade unions there were banned, and the Eritrean Legislative Assembly "temporarily" suspended. At the same time, the imperial regime replaced Arabic and Tigrinya, the languages of instruction in schools, with Amharic. In 1958, the "Ethiopianization" of Eritrea went one step further, when a blatantly unrepresentative assembly voted to eliminate the requirement that both Eritrean and Ethiopian flags fly in public places, requiring only the latter. The next year, the Eritrean code of laws was voted out of existence and replaced by the Ethiopian code. The final act in the de facto dissolution of the federation occurred in 1960, when the assembly voted to rename the Eritrean Government the Eritrean Administration.[45] After this series of events, the formal annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962 was anticlimactic. In that same year, the Eritrean war for national liberation began in earnest.

The armed insurrection continued until mid-1991. The most serious challenges facing the liberation movement from the very beginning were the need to develop a base of popular support and the need to form a cohesive military force. Initially, the most prominent rebel organization was the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which had close ties to several Arab countries. The ELF divided Eritrea into five military regions and gave regional commanders a great deal of latitude over military activities in their respective zones. By 1967, Haile Selassie had recognized that his regime was pitted against an increasingly sophisticated guerrilla army. Consequently, with the help of US and Israeli assistance, Ethiopia launched a massive military offensive, not only decimating Eritrean guerrilla units, but also uprooting civilians, who fled as refugees into Sudan. Over the next several years, internal ELF disputes over strategy and tactics led to its fragmentation and the founding of another movement for secession, the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF), in 1970.

By 1971, the cumulative effect of various Eritrean groups waging separate guerrilla campaigns against Ethiopian forces had amounted to such a serious threat that the emperor declared martial law in the region. In addition, he was forced to deploy half of his army to contain the uprising. In January 1974, Haile

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45. Edmond Keller. *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988.)There is some question as to whether the assembly was coerced into accepting the dissolution of the federation.What is clear is that Haile Selassie used a combination of political acumen and coercion to both establish in the international community his claim to Eritrea and to bring about the incorporation of Eritrea as a mere province of Ethiopia.

Selassie's forces suffered a crushing defeat by the EPLF, and this severely affected army morale and exposed the ever-weakening position of the Imperial state in Eritrea. This was one of the factors that contributed to emperor's demise in September of that year.

The military regime that followed the imperial regime immediately turned its attention to the Eritrea problem, and continued Ethiopia's efforts to solve it militarily. It even created its own peasant militia army to enable human wave attacks on Eritrean positions, but these efforts proved to be disastrous. The EPLF in particular had developed into a well-oiled fighting machine, and peasant militias were no match for them in the field.

These developments must be considered against the backdrop of: 1) Ethiopia's military regime's attempt at reconstructing the state according to the principles of Marxism-Leninism; 2) the regime's loss of US military and political support, and its subsequent turn instead to the Soviet Union and its allies for such assistance; and 3) the regime's efforts to suppress various civil uprisings throughout the territory it controlled. All of these factors made it clear that Ethiopia as a state was on the verge of collapsing.

Between 1977 and mid-1978, the military regime lost most of Eritrea, retaining control only of the Eritrean capital, Asmara, the port cities of Assab and Massawa and some small towns in the region. Despite being nominally controlled by the Ethiopians, these urban areas were merely enclaves under siege by Eritrean forces. While preparing for a major counter offensive the Ethiopian regime simultaneously attempted to negotiate with the EPLF, but these talks failed. In May of 1978, this counter offensive was launched when government forces, with support from the Soviets, East Germany, and South Yemen, pushed their way out of their Asmara garrison. Over the next year, more than 120,000 regular and militia troops pressed the offensive, gradually claiming 95 percent of the land that had been taken by the EPLF or the preceding ELF forces. For the next decade, the Eritrean nationalists had to make do with hit and run guerrilla campaigns.[46]

The setbacks of the late 1970s and 1980s did not lead to the demoralization and collapse of the Eritrean movement for independence. On the contrary, the intensification of the struggle seemed to broaden and deepen the Eritrean resolve, enabling the nationalists to develop an army that was strong enough to win on the battlefield, if necessary. This became clear in March of 1988 when the EPLF launched a massive military offensive against Ethiopian troops stationed in the region. The scale and power of the attack caught the Ethiopian regime completely off guard. More than 18,000 Ethiopian soldiers were either killed or captured in several weeks of intense fighting. Over the next three years, successive defeats at the hands of the EPLF and the newly created umbrella organization, the Ethiopia Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front, fighting inside Ethiopia, caused the Ethiopian military to become severely

46. Roy Pateman. *Eritrea: Even the Stones are Burning.* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1998.)

demoralized. This gave rise to an attempted but abortive coup in May 1989, followed by mass defections from the Ethiopian army.

By this time, international attention had turned to the growing crisis in the entire Horn region. Various third parties including the US and the Italians attempted to broker peace deals between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and between Ethiopia and various ethnic movements operating inside the country. On top of this, the economy was in a shambles, and drought and famine were constant threats. The worsening conditions inside Ethiopia and the prospect of completely losing Eritrea forced the Ethiopian regime to agree to peace talks in 1990, but before these talks could bear fruit, Ethiopia's Marxist regime collapsed. The Ethiopian forces were pushed out of Eritrea or fled on their own, and the EPLF forces moved into the capital, Asmara.

The EPLF had benefited during the struggle from its ability to escape the power domain of the Ethiopian forces, to take and hold territory in the rugged western part of Eritrea along the border with Sudan, and to create a viable governance structure in the liberated zone.[47] They built underground schools and hospitals, and set up industries (e.g. pharmaceutical, clothing, military equipment and arms). Rather than relying heavily on military aid from outside sources, the EPLF became adept at capturing military arms and equipment from the Ethiopian forces. When necessary, they made their own ammunition and repaired damaged military equipment in shops in the liberated zone and in Sudan. They also used Ethiopia's poor relations with Sudan to ferry supplies of all kinds from donors through Sudan and into the liberated zone.

In addition, after 1988, the EPLF launched an international campaign to explain why they were fighting for secession. The Secretary General of the EPLF and other top leaders of the organization made frequent trips to foreign countries, trying to drum up support for the cause. As a complement to this, the EPLF utilized Eritrean national assemblies in foreign locations to represent it on a day-to-day basis. These were assemblies of Eritreans in the diaspora. They not only represented the EPLF position to foreigners, but they also raised funds for the movement, and even taxed themselves for it.

On 29 May 1991, Issaias Afwerki announced the formation of the Provisional Government of Eritrea, culminating the long, bitter struggle for Eritrean self-determination. The primary objective of the new government was to lay the foundation for a referendum to decide the future of Eritrea. The prospect of an independent state of Eritrea challenged the international community to rethink its assumptions about the sanctity and inviolability of the boundaries of multi-ethnic nation-states in much the same way that the breakup of the Soviet Union challenged such assumptions. The international community had long viewed Eritrea as nothing more than a province of Ethiopia. The world was now faced with a situation wherein a secessionist movement had succeeded and the rump state from which it had seceded was agreeable to its conducting a referendum to decide their future relationship. The United States, which had been attempting to bring about a negotiated end to the Eritrean war, was the first

47. Ibid.

to recognize the transitional government and to establish a diplomatic mission there. Other countries, including African countries, immediately followed suit. In 1993, the Eritrean electorate in a national referendum voted almost unanimously to become an independent nation-state.[48]

Conclusion

Africa is a huge continent consisting of more than fifty mostly multi-ethnic states. These states were generally created artificially during the so-called European Scramble for Africa in the 19th Century. In the 1960s when most African colonies began to gain their independence, outsiders generally thought that once independent these countries would integrate themselves and that both imagined and real loyalties to ethnic groups would give way to a multi-national identity defined by their existence in their respective independent states. However, this was not to be. Ethnically based competition over scarce resources in the independent states occurred immediately almost everywhere. In some places aggrieved groups sought to have the state partitioned in order to secure self-determination. However, partition was almost never seriously considered. Nor were irredentist claims where they occurred granted legitimacy. At the time of the formation of the OAU, the signatories to the founding charter of the organization had declared their commitment to maintaining the territorial integrity of states as they existed at the time of independence. The secessionist option has for various reasons rarely been chosen. Two important reasons for this are the material as well as human costs of such a move.

What has been more common in Sub-Saharan Africa is widespread but episodic secessionist sentiment and secessionist talk. In fact, there have been less than a score of actual secessionist movements in Sub-Saharan Africa, and there are only three, based on their scale and duration, that I would classify as "Great Secessionist Movements." Only one such movement succeeded: Eritrea. The other two great secessionist movements, in Southern Sudan and Biafra, resulted respectively in a power-sharing arrangement and a federal framework.

There is no one theory that explains all secessionist movements, but we can identify three integral factors that in various combinations, at various times, can help us at least analytically understand when secessionist movements might emerge or when they might not: structure, human agency, and context. These factors constantly interact with one another instead of being organized in a predictable cause-effect relationship. Here we constructed an analytical framework which allowed us to critically examine the factors at work in each of

48. Sigfried Pausewang and Astri Suhrke, eds. The Referendum on Independence for Eritrea: Report of the Norwegian Observer Group in UNOVER. (Bergen: International Peace Research Institute, 1993.)

our three case studies of great secessionist movements. In our analysis we were always mindful of the weight of history and path dependency in each case. We were also aware of geographical and environmental factors.

Among the three cases, only Eritrea succeeded. Although that struggle lasted for almost thirty years, in the late 1980s the structure of political opportunity as well as the context in which the struggle was taking place became increasingly favorable to the secessionists. Militarily they were strong enough not only to hold the military forces of the Ethiopian government at bay, but they were also able to totally route that army. Internationally, the liberation movement benefited from political and material support from its diaspora. Also, the EPLF succeeded in internationally legitimizing its claim to Eritrea's self-determination. The statecraft of the leadership of the movement was the key that introduced positive human agency into the equation, and the result was the successful secession of Eritrea.

Southern Sudan was at war for about as long as Eritrea, but over time its goals shifted from secession to regional autonomy with the possibility of voting for independence in the future. In large measure this was due to the fact that rather than either side in the struggle being able to vanquish the other, a mutually hurtful stalemate developed. This made it more practical for the warring parties to agree to the contingent compromise. Importantly, the negotiations and their aftermath were facilitated by the third party mediation of the UN and IGAD, the guarantors of the peace pact.

In the case of Biafra, the secessionists were never able to secure international support; nor were they able to rely upon the oil revenues they expected. In fact, the rebels never secured the extent of support they had expected to from all segments of the Ibo people, nor from minorities in the Eastern Region. All of this, coupled with the fact that the secessionists in the end were not militarily a match for the Nigerian army, led to the total defeat of the secessionist effort. The Nigerian government was determined not to allow the Eastern Region to break away and it used all means deemed necessary to prevent this.