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„Hegemony, African Style“

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Ethiopia – A Hegemon in the Horn of Africa Region

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Introduction – Some Observations on the Role of Regional Powers

It is now commonplace to assert that with the end of the Cold War the bipolar international order had gone. Though there might have been a unipolar moment for the United States, few would disagree that this moment passed as well. Richard N. Haass, president of the American Council on Foreign Relations, argued in the *Foreign Affairs* that we are about to enter an age of nonpolarity.¹ Nonpolarity, however, did not put an end to polarisation and the Horn of Africa gives ample evidence of just how much polarisation still shapes regional relations. Polarisation on the global as well as on the regional level is carried by two characteristics. First, states that polarise their region or the global order are usually stronger or more powerful than other states in their immediate neighbourhood, which is why their actions have a more profound impact on the course of an entire region than the actions of less powerful countries, at least as long as smaller or less powerful states do not resort to drastic or radical action. And second, states that have the ability to polarise try to achieve and/or preserve their position by counterbalancing potential rivals and perpetuating their dominance in their region. These states can therefore be categorised as regional or global hegemon, states that for better or worse dominate the globe.²

It is therefore not surprising that a continent as large as Africa, home of more than a quarter of the world's states, experiences some sort of polarisation itself, polarisation that is certainly precipitating since the end of the Cold War.³ Conventional wisdom has it that there are only four countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that potentially could act as regional hegemon: Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These states comprise the largest populations in Africa and command the largest and with South Africa the most effective armies on the continent.⁴ Jeffrey Herbst, a leading scholar in African studies, who classified these states as potential hegemon, went on to state that the DRC “cannot project power over its own territory, much less into other countries, in a professional and unbiased manner.” And with regard to Ethiopia's position he explained that: “Given its profound poverty and ethnic divisions, Ethiopia also cannot play the disinterested big brother.”⁵ It is

1 Richard N. Haass, The Age of Nonpolarity. What Will Follow U.S. Dominance? In: *Foreign Affairs*. (<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20080501faessay87304/richard-n-haass/the-age-of-nonpolarity.html>)

2 Destradi's useful definition of hegemony will be employed throughout this article: “Hegemony, I argue in this study, is a form of power exercised through strategies which are more subtle than those employed by states behaving as imperial powers. The *means* through which power is exercised – and here the distinction between hegemony and empire becomes evident – can vary from the exertion of pressure to the provision of material incentives, up to the discursive propagation of the hegemon's norms and values. The *end* of hegemonic behavior (...) is always primarily the realization of the hegemon's own goal.” Sandra Destradi, *Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership: Developing a Research Framework for the Study of Regional Powers. GIGA Working Papers. 79/2008*, p. 10.

3 During the Cold War polarisation in Africa was determined by the superpower-rivalry that provided a framework for polarisation and channelled and de-emphasised polarisation.

4 It is interesting to note that Jeffrey Herbst did not define the criteria for potential regional hegemon any further than taking the size of the population and the size of the army into consideration. Jeffrey Herbst, *Western and African Peacekeepers: Motives and Opportunities*. In: John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (Eds.): *Africa in World Politics. The African State System in Flux*. Oxford, Westview, 2000, pp. 308-328, here p. 314.

5 Herbst dismisses the hegemonial role of these states: “Indeed, it is striking that Africa's largest countries, with the

interesting to note that Herbst points to implicit criteria for the characterisation of regional hegemon, underlining that hegemon are by definition large and capable of projecting power beyond their own borders in an unbiased, i.e. disinterested way. However, compared to other countries undoubtedly acting as hegemon these criteria lose their explanatory value. Interventions of France in Africa have seldom been unbiased or disinterested, nor have humanitarian interventions ever been without any accompanying interests, even if these interests were described cautiously as an interest in establishing regional stability, the prevalence of the state system inherited from the colonial past or putting an end to human suffering, as was the case in 1992 when the United States intervened in Somalia.⁶ Nonetheless, what the case of Somalia demonstrates is that interventions by hegemon are at times accompanied by humanitarian considerations, which points to an interesting distinction between classic hegemon and African hegemonic powers: African hegemon rarely acted as benevolent ones, like the United States did in the past.

The very notion of an African style hegemony suggests that there are differences in the way hegemonies work, and that there is something specific about potential African hegemonic powers that would justify to summarise countries as being *African* hegemonies. The first and most obvious observation on large countries in Africa, those classified as potential hegemon, is that, with the notable exception of South Africa, these states are currently not leading the continent or their respective regions, nor did they pull the continent's sub-regions economically.⁷ And they failed to set standards for regional cooperation and integration. As outlined above, a hegemonic power's actions have a more profound impact on regional affairs than those of less powerful nations, unless those less powerful resort to drastic measures or actions. The mere fact that radical action is required to counterbalance the power and influence of a big state underlines the power of the latter while at the same time such radical measures restrict and to a certain extent deny the hegemon's power. Historically, and in a European context, smaller nations usually refrained from such drastic action. I argue that African hegemonies differ from traditional hegemon in at least two different respects: First in that their neighbours are far more likely to resort to such drastic action in order to contain potential hegemon. A strategy that is far more likely to be successful because of the African hegemonies' lack of internal consolidation. Such radical measures include the use of force, as did Eritrea in 1998, when it provoked a war with Ethiopia, or Rwanda in the various Congo-wars and the use of regional integration schemes

exception of South Africa, are more likely to be discussed as destinations for peacekeepers than as benign hegemon leading disinterested interventions." Herbst, *Western and African Peacekeepers*, p. 316.

6 Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, on the other hand, was certainly an intervention by a regional hegemon that was anything but an unbiased intervention. On the interests: William Zartman, *Inter-African Negotiations and State Renewal*. In: John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (Eds.): *Africa in World Politics. The African State System in Flux*. Oxford, Westview, 2000, pp. 139-159, here p. 143.

7 An observation also made by Herbst and Greg Mills: "In theory, big states should dominate their regions, providing markets for goods and, hopefully, stability. In fact, instability has often been the cause for considerable problems for the region." Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills, *Africa's Big Dysfunctional States: An Introductory Overview*. In: Christopher Clapham, Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills (Eds.): *Big African States. Angola, Sudan, DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa*. Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2006, pp. 1-15, here pp. 11-12.

to counter the rise of larger states. Catalysts and constraints determine the rise of hegemons in general; in the African context, however, the constraints have been outweighing the catalysts over a prolonged period of time. They also differ, secondly, in that they are hegemons of a secondary tier. They are by the very nature of being regional hegemons overshadowed by global powers, and their actions are influenced by the interests of these global powers and their desire to add to their own power by forging alliances with global powers in what could also contribute to their regional political leverage. In this paper, I shall focus on the first aspect of regional hegemonic power in particular.

Defining African Style Hegemony

Interestingly, where more traditional hegemons, such as the United Kingdom, India or the United States, differ from current regional hegemons in Sub-Sahara Africa most, is that the rise of hegemons was historically accompanied by a consolidation of their internal political dynamics. Industrialisation, nationalism, the growth of national redistributive policies all went hand in hand with the states capability to project power beyond its borders and the expansion of its hegemonic potential. I argue that large African states, such as Ethiopia, have been able to act as regional hegemons, despite their dysfunctional redistributive state system and the inherent lack of domestic consolidation in both the political and economic realm and in terms of ethnic composition. It is with regard to this domestic consolidation, or rather its lack thereof, that African hegemons differ most strikingly from any other hegemon in contemporary history. Quite on the contrary, with the programmes of the IMF and the World Bank, commonly referred to as the Washington Consensus, many countries even reduced their profile as states over the course of the late 1990s. African states, especially those that are considered hegemons, lack of redistributive policies turns ethnic affiliation into social capital, from where basic services are retrievable, further undermining the consolidation necessary to claim the hegemonic position they aspire to.⁸ Failure to deliver basic services not only manifests itself in the inability of the state to deliver the sort of redistribution the population expects and oftentimes demands, but also in related areas, such as the establishment of the state's monopoly on violence and effective use of the country's resources.⁹ Therefore, African hegemonic powers are strikingly weak.¹⁰ Commentating on state capacity Fukuyama made an interesting and fruitful observation: he differentiates between the *scope*

8 Jean-Paul Azam makes the argument that the state's failure to deliver basic services through redistribution is one of the major factors contributing to civil conflict in Africa. Jean-Paul Azam, *The Redistributive State and Conflicts in Africa*. In: *Journal of Peace Research*, 38, 4/2001, pp. 429-444.

9 Achim Wennmann, *Resourcing the Recurrence of Intrastate Conflict: Parallel Economies and Their Implications for Peacebuilding*. In: *Security Dialogue*, 36, 4/2005, pp. 479-494.

10 Fukuyama blames inefficient demand for institutional reform for the weaknesses of public sectors in development countries. This stance is, in the author's view, misled: basic services of the state are certainly in demand, although one might argue that what is lacking is the articulation of this demand. On the other hand, at least some internal conflicts are an expression of grievances. Francis Fukuyama, *State Building. Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 35.

of the state on the one hand and its *strength* on the other.¹¹ In fact, African hegemonic powers seem to embody this distinction in a rather extreme way: while their strength in the region is undeniable, their scope remains particularly underdeveloped, especially in geographic terms. The states' scope is relatively strong in the capital and its immediate vicinity, but weakens around the capital and gets less discernible, when one moves farther away from the capital. The historical comparison of African hegemon's position to the rise of other hegemonic powers in history also reveals the important role of the prospective hegemon's national economy. As Herbst and Mills illustrated, the continent's economies need a six percent economic growth rate for sustainable development. Yet the large African countries did experience an economic growth well beyond the three percent benchmark that would be equivalent with stagnation.¹² Correspondingly, these states did not pull the economies of their regions, quite on the contrary: as smaller states fared far better in economic terms, they sought to immunise themselves from negative reverberations of the larger economies and potential hegemon's.¹³

The Ethiopian case is particularly revealing, because the country is undoubtedly a candidate for regional hegemony, simply because of its sheer size and its large population.¹⁴ It is historically, however, also an atypical case for hegemony in Sub-Saharan Africa, as its hegemonic aspirations predate colonialism and the state is, in contrast to its African peers like Nigeria, the DRC and South Africa, not simply a product of randomly drawn colonial borders. On the contrary, Ethiopia has been a rather strong, independent, even imperial power well into the twentieth century. The Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941 was only a short interlude and once Ethiopia regained independence, it quickly returned to its regional role as a hegemonic power, when it orchestrated a federation with Eritrea in 1952, which Haile Selassie dissolved in 1962, sparking the first fundamental post-colonial challenge to the state in form of Eritrean resistance. During the 1970s, however, it became clear that the country was facing the very same challenges and problems nearly every other African state had to face: social discontent triggered by modernisation and droughts; coups; civil war on the peripheries and regional conflicts accelerated by the global superpower struggle. Somewhat paradoxically, the post World War II. history of Ethiopia has witnessed two conflictive developments: On the one hand, the country has tried to reassert its traditional hegemonic role in the Horn of Africa region, while on the other the country seems to have lost its historical exceptionalism.

If African hegemonic powers are different from other hegemonic powers around the globe, as suggested in this paper, how could their role and conduct be analysed? In order to understand

11 Fukuyama, *State Building. Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, p. 7.

12 Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills, *Africa in 2020: Three Scenarios for the Future. Brentburn Discussion Papers. 2/2006*, p. 3.

13 As Herbst and Mills demonstrated in a slightly different context: "Without getting into a debate as to whether the big countries of Africa are pivotal states, it is easy to claim that each of these countries has a profound effect on its region. For instance, economic disturbances in Nigeria clearly send reverberations throughout the west African region. Correspondingly, if there was ever a Nigeria that began to develop quickly, the positive effects throughout the neighbourhood would quickly be felt." Herbst and Mills, *Africa's Big Dysfunctional States*, here pp. 7, 11-12.

14 Ethiopia is the most populous landlocked country in the world, which certainly contributes to its hegemonic conduct. For future research it might be fruitful to look into some concepts of the historical sciences with regard to empires. Especially the spatial turn might hold useful concepts for the deeper understanding of African hegemonic powers.

Ethiopia's regional position, it is worth looking at the constraints its foreign policy needs to address and the catalysts that might foster its unique position within Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular. Therefore, this paper sets out to describe the internal and external catalysts and constraints that determine Addis Ababa's hegemonic role.

Ethiopia's Hegemonic Role – Constraints and Catalysts

Assessing the hegemonic capacity of African states is a rather recent exercise and no formula has yet emerged as the leading paradigm in doing so. This paper departs from the basic assumption that African hegemonies are hegemonies of a second tier. They command enough leverage and power to shape their regional environment, but lack the influence to shape the broader global power distribution. Instead, their foreign policy – the means through which their hegemonic conduct is usually exercised – is characterised by the necessity to manoeuvre between the inescapable and oftentimes stark extracontinental and intracontinental¹⁵ influences and the desire to shape their respective regions to their advantage or according to their image. But their actions are also constrained by regional factors: the willingness of neighbouring countries to embrace the hegemon and his role, traditional regional rivalries, the depth of regional integration, to name but a few. In order to gain a deeper understanding of constraints and catalysts, both are going to be outlined separately in this section.

Internal Constraints

Though it certainly is the most powerful country in the Horn of Africa, its ethnic composition and internal political problems have made the conduct of a more assertive foreign policy problematic, virtually since Ethiopia regained independence following the brief Italian rule from 1936 to 1941. Ethiopia's position is in particular shaped by the civil war that erupted in the 1970s, the struggle of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and later the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) on the one hand and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on the other, both initially fighting for secession from Ethiopia.¹⁶ The war that came to a close with the overthrow of the Mengistu-regime and the TPLF turning into the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which took the lead in making major changes in the state structure and also shifted the balance of power between the different ethnic groups. The 1993 secession of Eritrea undoubtedly marked the climax of this rearrangement, while the new government was also introducing a new constitution that reflected the call for more autonomy by other ethnic groups in the country and did not only introduce regional autonomy but ultimately guaranteed the right of self-determination up to secession. The provisional

15 Extracontinental influences may take the form of global alignments and even proxy wars in a particularly polarised setting, intracontinental influences express themselves in conflicts over secession and refugee flows.

16 For a history of the complex relationship of the ELF and EPLF: David Pool, *The Eritrean People's Liberation Front*. In: Christopher Clapham (Ed.): *African Guerrillas*. Oxford, James Currey, 1998, pp. 19-35.

government realised that the countries many subnational groups could lead the multi-ethnic state of Ethiopia to disintegrate if the pressure would not be channeled one way or the other. On the other hand, the leadership of the governing EPRDF had used ethnic affiliations to mobilise the population of Tigray against the Dergue regime and hence knew that the state was vulnerable if the system of centralisation put in place by the Dergue under the leadership of Mengistu would remain unchanged.¹⁷ While these steps were at the first onset successful in creating faith in the provisional government and earned Meles Zenawi, the EPRDF's leader, the reputation of being one of the 'new African leaders' committed to democracy, the government soon reverted to more direct interference with Ethiopian regional affairs. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), for instance, began to distance itself from the EPRDF as early as 1992. With it the most important local ally left the alliance with the EPRDF in the central region of Oromiya. In nearly all regions the first elections brought to power groups that were somehow associated or allied with the EPRDF, the only exception being the volatile Ogaden-region near the Somali border, where the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) formed the first regional government.¹⁸ The de facto revoking of the concessions made shortly after the fall of Mengistu and the increasingly undemocratic attitude of the government over the past years, especially after the elections of 2005, adds to the potential of civil conflict in the country.¹⁹ The resurgence of the ONLF's fight and the ongoing struggle of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)²⁰ indicate that Ethiopia has lost ground on internal consolidation, which disintegration a looming threat.²¹ The various conflicts in Ethiopia have not yet reached the state-threatening quality as in the Sudan, where the state is collapsing on its peripheries. But for most regional groups the question remains whether they will, as Chege put it, take sides for or against the state created by Menelik.²²

Centralisation has always been one of the central features of the Ethiopian state and rendered a settlement of the many conflicts virtually impossible, even when the central government and a rebel movement had overlapping ideological backgrounds, as was the case when Mengistu came to power after his peculiar coup d'état in 1974. Both the EPLF and the TPLF were Marxist oriented and fought a socialist, so called revolutionary government. The concern with the preservation of a centralised state was of special importance in times of the military dictatorship, not only because military regimes in general tend to favour centralised state structures but also because states following a socialist pattern of

17 Abdi Ismail Samatar, Ethnicity and Federalism in Somali Ethiopia: What Autonomy? In: Ahmed A. Sikainga and Ousseina Alidou (Eds.): *Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa*. Asmara, Africa World Press, 2006, pp. 13-51, here pp. 14-17.

18 Samatar, *Ethnicity and Federalism in Somali Ethiopia*, p. 20.

19 Barbara Walter argues: "(...) when the non-linear effects of democracy are assessed, ties between democracy and subsequent conflict do emerge." Barbara F. Walter, Does Conflict Beget Conflict? Explaining Recurring Civil War. In: *Journal of Peace Research*, 41, 3/2004, pp. 371-388, here p. 380.

20 Julia Maxted, Exploitation of Energy Resources in Africa and the Consequences for Minority Rights. In: *Journal of Developing Societies*, 22, 1/2006, pp. 29-37, here p. 32.

21 The ONLF is, like other secessionist movements not directly threatening the EPRDF's hold on power, but it is undermining the legitimacy of the state. Halvard Buhaug and Scott Gates, The Geography of Civil War. In: *Journal of Peace Research*, 39, 4/2002, pp. 417-433, here p. 421.

22 Michael Chege, Conflict in the Horn of Africa. In: Emmanuel Hansen (Ed.): *Africa. Perspectives on Peace and Development*. London and New Jersey, Zed Books, 1987, pp. 87-100, here p. 89.

governance usually govern in a centralised manner.²³ Centralisation of socialist regimes has also fostered the assimilation or disbandment of workers unions, student movements or labour organisations, a move that denied them independent articulation of their interests and claims. Mustapha argues that similar policies were implemented with regard to regions and ethnic groups, fostering civil war, strategies also employed under Mengistu in Ethiopia, unwittingly fostering Ethiopia's potential of disintegration.²⁴

As many other countries in the Horn of Africa region, Ethiopia faces difficult challenges and internal strife. Following the end of the Civil War and the independence of Eritrea in 1993, many observers had hoped the country would embark on a course of ethnically inclusive politics. Fifteen years later, however, ethnic capital has once again become social capital, as Azam aptly put it, and redistribution is now again conducted along the lines of ethnic affiliation and political loyalty instead of egalitarian access to basic services, such as healthcare and education.²⁵ In short, despite a promising start in the early 1990s, the country has not managed to overcome patrimonialism²⁶ – a precondition for the emergence of a strong state –, is haunted by the spectre of ethnic disintegration and has not managed to achieve a sustainable internal consolidation. The state has not developed its statehood in a traditional European sense; as Clapham proposed the state could be best understood as being characterised by a core, from which its power fades in circles.²⁷ Ethiopia's lack of an internal consolidation and its inability to formulate a coherent and comprehensive framework for an ethnically inclusive state is a huge constraint for its hegemonic aspirations. This inability has left the state vulnerable in a regional environment, where it has been common practice for decades to exploit ethnic divisions to counterbalance the power of neighbouring countries.

Regional Constraints

Regional tensions and conflicts have restricted the rise of Ethiopia to a hegemonial power in the Horn of Africa, where most conflicts did not simply spill over but are of transnational nature in the first place.²⁸ The struggle for secession of the Eritrea is a case in point: The Eritrean Liberation Front

23 John Markakis and Michael Waller, *The Hammer, the Sickle and the Gun*. In: John Markakis and Michael Waller (Eds.): *Military Marxist Regimes in Africa*. London, Frank Cass, 1986, pp. 1-13, here p. 4. The bias toward centralised governance is even greater if the government was not only socialist, but also military. Ethiopia's coup d'état of 1974 evaporated the distinction between the military and political sector entirely. Just as the political arena became militarised when the Dergue appointed military personnel to administrative positions, the military was politicised which raised the spectre of military intervention in politics. Bahru Zewde, *The Military and Militarism in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia*. In: Eboe Hutchful and Abdoulaye Bathily (Eds.): *The Military and Militarism in Africa*. Dakar, 1998, pp. 257-289, here p. 263.

24 Abdul Raufu Mustapha, *When Will Independence End? Democratization and Civil Society in Rural Africa*. In: Lars Rudebeck and Olle Töenquist (Eds.): *Democratization in the Third World. Concrete Cases in Comparative and Theoretical Perspective*. Houndsmills, Macmillan, 1998, pp. 221-233, here p. 221.

25 Azam, *The Redistributive State*, pp. 430 and 442.

26 Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works. Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford, James Currey, 1999, p. 4.

27 Christopher Clapham. *The Decay and Attempted Reconstruction of African Territorial Statehood*. *University of Leipzig Papers on Africa*. No. 69, Leipzig 2004.

28 Tatiana Carayannis made a similar argument with respect to the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tatiana Carayannis, *The Complex Wars of the Congo. Towards a New Analytic Approach*. In: *Journal of Asian and African Studies*,

(ELF) was supported by a range of Middle Eastern and Arab actors, from Syria, Iraq to Libya, the latter trying to become a regional hegemonic power itself.²⁹ When the EPLF later took on the fight against the Dergue-regime together with the TPLF the rebel forces finally managed to gain military momentum and ousted Mengistu in 1991. The overthrow of Mengistu opened a window of opportunity to rearrange the borders in the Horn of Africa and the TPLF, looking for a new formula for the Ethiopian state after abandoning plans for secession of Tigray, granted Eritrea the right of self-determination. The secession of Eritrea in a mutually agreed upon fashion could have marked the start of a new era of positive bilateral relationships in the Horn of Africa in what would have paved the way for a leadership role of Addis Ababa. The secession of Eritrea, though peacefully and smoothly at its time, can today be considered as a failed one.³⁰ Ethiopia's desire to take a leading role in shaping the region was dealt a significant blow, when relations with Eritrea turned sour in 1997 after Eritrea introduced its own currency. The border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000 finally ended all hopes for a new era of cooperation between the countries in the region. Instead the relations between Asmara and Addis are still in bad shape, both are again moving closer to war, by violating the Algiers peace agreement and Eritrea's continuing violation of the Temporary Security Zone, which led the United Nations to terminate its peacekeeping mission along the border, despite an apparent stalemate in border demarcation.³¹ Worryingly, in order to counterbalance Ethiopia's role in the region, the Eritrean government has even risked international isolation: its alleged support for the Union of Islamic Courts (ICU) in Somalia, which fought the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) back in 2006 prior to the Ethiopian invasion of Southern Somalia, put the regime in Asmara at odds with the international community, with the United States even considering to list Eritrea a state sponsor of terrorism.³² In 1978 Ethiopia had to face another serious challenge, when Somalia under the leadership of Siad Barre went to war over the Ogaden province. Ethiopia could only defeat the Somali

38, 2-3/2003, pp. 232-255, here p. 236.

29 The ELF was promoting an Arab Eritrea and alienated many Christian Eritreans. The EPLF's promotion of a Marxist ideology proved to be less divisive. Michael Chege, Conflict in the Horn of Africa. In: Emmanuel Hansen (Ed.): *Africa. Perspectives on Peace and Development*. London and New Jersey, Zed Books, 1987, pp. 87-100, here p. 92 and Christopher Clapham, War and State Formation in Ethiopia and Eritrea. *University of Purdue 'Failed States' Conference Paper*, 2001, p. 8.

30 What factors actually influence the prospect of a peaceful long-term coexistence after successful secessions has been the subject of academic debate in recent years, but they have not yet been clearly identified. Jaroslav Tír, Dividing Countries to Promote Peace: Prospects for Long-Term Success of Partitions. In: *Journal of Peace Research*, 42, 5/2005, pp. 545-562, here pp. 545, 555.

31 In a recent piece Healy makes the point that because it was the government of prime minister Meles that sanctioned the independence of Eritrea in the first place, it is now forced to take an aggressive stance as Eritrea is moving to further undermine, in the Ethiopian perception, the territorial integrity of Ethiopia: "But the inability to re-establish a working relationship with Eritrea forces Ethiopia not only to confront its situation as a land-locked country (...) but also to face the fact that it was the this government that agreed to Eritrea's separation. This vulnerability inevitably impacts on Ethiopia's foreign policy, encouraging hegemonic conduct in the region." Sally Healy, *Lost Opportunities in the Horn of Africa. How Conflicts Connect and Peace Agreements Unravel*. London, Chatam House, 2008, p. 17.

32 International Crisis Group, Ethiopia and Eritrea: Stopping the Slide to War. In: *Africa Briefing*, 48, 11/2007, p. 8. Others have called Eritrea a guerilla state for its militarisation of society and lack of cooperation with the international community: Herui T. Bairu, The Security Situation in Eritrea: Its Implications for the Region and its Challenges for Security Sector Reform. In: Len le Roux and Yemane Kidane (Eds.): *Challenges to Security Sector Reform in the Horn of Africa*. Johannesburg, ISS Monograph Series, 2007, pp. 53-67, here p. 58.

forces with massive Cuban and Soviet military assistance. The relationship with Somalia has been problematic ever since. After state authority in Somalia broke down in 1991, Ethiopia supported various camps in the ensuing civil war and maintained healthy relations with Somaliland, which declared independence in 1991, though the Ethiopian government did not recognise its government internationally. When the TFG came under immense military pressure from the Islamic Courts, Ethiopia staged a massive invasion of Southern Somalia in order to support the TFG and foster its return to war-torn Mogadishu. The invasion triggered a resistance by an Islamic insurgency, which gained ground between 2007 and the end of 2008. After two years of a massive military presence, the Ethiopian armed forces will withdraw by the end of the 2008, leaving a deeply divided Transitional Government, whose total collapse seems to be only a matter of time. The important point here is that regional governments are willing to go a long way to stop the rise of a regional hegemon. Whereas in other regions countries would build regional security organisations to incorporate the regional hegemon and constrain its actions in doing so – like in the European Union –, or would build alliances to counterbalance the hegemon by adding the strength of the surrounding smaller countries – like in Southern America –, in the Horn of Africa region, single countries, which are not only smaller, but also militarily weaker, try to counterbalance the hegemon by unilateral action, going as far as trying to undermine the others statehood or bogging it down militarily in proxy wars. This strategy has also prevented Ethiopia from employing a potential catalyst for a leading role in the region, the establishment of an effective regional security organisation.

Regional Catalysts

As pointed out, internal conflicts and their exploitation by neighbouring countries have hampered the development of regional security organisations. Nathan has convincingly argued that domestic stability, i.e. the absence of large-scale violence within the state, is a prerequisite for the establishment of a security community, because of the deep linkages between most intra- and interstate conflict.³³ Cross-border violence even beyond state level carried out by rebels can easily escalate into inter-state tensions and the Horn of Africa presents the best examples of this devastating pattern.³⁴ Although facing serious challenges – an insurgency in the Ogaden, ongoing border disputes with Eritrea and a crippling democracy – it is nonetheless the most powerful and dominant power in the Horn of Africa. It has successfully managed to avoid international condemnation for its failure to comply with the ruling of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Boundary Commission (EEBC) and was capable of maintaining a massive military presence in Somalia over two years, despite heavy casualties inflicted upon its army by Somali factions. While bilateral tensions remain high and have developed into

33 Laurie Nathan, Domestic Instability and Security Communities. In: *European Journal of International Relations*, 12, 2/2006, pp. 275-299, here pp. 275, 280.

34 For a more thorough analysis on these interdependences, see the brilliant pieces published in: Alex de Waal (Ed.): *Islamism and its Enemies in the Horn of Africa*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2004.

impressive obstacles on Ethiopia's way to a more assertive role in the Horn of Africa and Eastern African region as a whole, the country has carefully tried to circumvent these obstacles by a more active role on the regional and international level. Addis Ababa is now seat of the continent's most important body, the African Union and lobbied hard to become the seat of the newly established African Command (AFRICOM) of the United States, though Washington decided to let AFRICOM take its seat in Stuttgart, Germany. And during the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s it also took a leading role in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the regional body for the Horn of Africa. The security organisation, initially started as a purely intergovernmental body to fight drought and desertification, has developed into the most important regional body and took a leading role in formulating the peace processes for Sudan and Somalia. Despite these efforts the organisation remains underdeveloped, understaffed and weak, even in comparison to other African regional organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Regional integration, however, is of particular importance for Ethiopia's position in the Horn of Africa sub-region. Not only because all conflicts in the region that might have had domestic causes at their onset quickly expanded into a regional context, but also because assuming a leadership role in regional integration would have underlined Ethiopia's potential hegemonic position. The consequences of IGAD's comparative weakness have been twofold: On the one hand other important states in the region, such as Uganda and Kenya, seek to circumvent the regional integration scheme that would be dominated by Ethiopia by focusing on the East African Community (EAC). In this context Buzan and Wæver have characterised Kenya as an insulator that separates the Horn of Africa region and its security concerns from the Southern regional frameworks, although they admit that the conflicts from the Horn of Africa blur the lines between the Horn of Africa and the Central African region.³⁵ I would therefore try an alternative hypothesis: Kenya, with its dual membership in the EAC and IGAD is well integrated, though it tries to focus on the more stable Eastern African region, it has also involved itself in fostering a solution for the looming Somali crisis and remains active in the Horn of Africa region as a whole. The real insulator in a broader sense is Ethiopia, which is the first real African state in the Horn of Africa region, surrounded by states like Djibouti, Sudan, Somalia and Egypt that are all characterised by a dual role as African and Arab/Muslim at the same time, expressed in their Arab League membership. Ethiopia therefore insulates, to use Buzan and Wæver's term, the Arab world the African continent and hence finds itself centred in a conflict-ridden region and nonetheless on the periphery of Africa. Strikingly, this also turns into an obstacle, its Christian Orthodox legacy makes it impossible to claim a hegemonic position among its Arab neighbours and its Southern neighbours rather turn to the South or to Central Africa than following Ethiopian leadership. On the other hand, even the existing regional integration

35 Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 230, 243.

framework remains weak, as Ethiopia fails to set a vision for the region. Comparing Ethiopia's role in IGAD with other regional communities might illustrate the point as Adetula did when he observed that „Neither Sudan nor Ethiopia has demonstrated the actual or potential attributes of a 'core state' to assume leadership responsibility within IGAD. (...) None of the member states is rich enough to provide support, in the sense that Nigeria supported ECOMOG operations in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. Hence, the accomplishments of IGAD have remained quite small compared with those of either ECOWAS or even SADC.“³⁶ Moreover, regional integration in the Horn of Africa remains weak because interstate security dynamics are influenced by intrastate security problems: displacement, cross-border incursions of rebel groups all have a profound impact on interstate relations. They have, however, been rather unpredictable and prevented the states in the region from establishing substantial and institutionalised interaction. And finally the fact that bilateral relations are handled on the highest level of government and the foreign policy establishments of these countries are comparatively weak, personal animosities have a larger potential of derailing bilateral relations and preventing states from entering into the sort of relationship that fosters interdependence; the necessary prerequisite to build a regional security organisation. For that reason Nathan goes as far as calling security organisations such as IGAD 'nascent' or 'embryonic' misleading, as member states are unlikely to develop the sort of ties that would allow the organisation to develop a longterm positive impact.³⁷ Nonetheless, IGAD is the most important regional organisation and crucial to Ethiopia's desire to take the lead in regional integration and all problems aside, IGAD reached a preliminary climax in the early 2000s in its efforts to foster regional cooperation and contribute to regional peacebuilding with a successful peace process for Southern Sudan and a peace process for Somalia that led to the formation of a Transitional Government. All peace processes undertaken by IGAD, however, stalled when regional tensions came to play.³⁸ What is important to note is that Ethiopia has not been able to make IGAD work despite the fact that it is the region's most powerful actor. This shortcoming is all the more striking, as Addis Ababa is one of the continent's rare cases of a state with only one membership in a regional organisation and IGAD is a very small regional organisation with only six members.³⁹ In short, IGAD was supposed to function as an important catalyst and Ethiopia had some initial success in using IGAD

36 Victor A. O. Adetula, The Role of Sub-Regional Integration Schemes in Conflict Prevention & Management in Africa. In: Alfred Nhema and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Eds.): *The Resolution of African Conflicts. The Management of Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction*. Oxford, James Currey, 2008, pp. 9-21, here p. 17.

37 Nathan, *Domestic Instability and Security Communities*, p. 293.

38 Dustin Dehéz, Crisis Region Eastern Africa: The Intergovernmental Authority on Development in an Environment of Latent Conflict. In: Belachew Gebrewold (Ed.): *Africa and Fortress Europe. Threats and Opportunities*. Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 21-36. It is, hence, not surprising that peace efforts have been most effective not when regional organisations carried them forward, but when a third party in form of a state took the lead in the peace effort. William Zartman, *Inter-African Negotiations and State Renewal*, p. 140.

39 Members are Ethiopia, the Sudan, Djibouti, Uganda, Somalia, and Kenya. Eritrea suspended its membership in 2007 over the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December 2006, although the future of its membership in IGAD is still open. Ever since IGAD was founded, the organisation lacked a consensus on how much regional integration should be pursued and the states in the Horn of Africa region weren't moving in the direction of closer bilateral relations. Reidulf K. Molvær, Environmentally Induced Conflicts? A discussion based on Studies from the Horn of Africa. In: *Security Dialogue*, 22, 2/1991, pp. 175-188, here p. 186.

to foster regional cooperation. In the long run, however, the regional organisation did not take the lead in regional cooperation and scepticism in the region with regard to the organisation prevailed.

Conclusion – Not so much of a Hegemon

So, if African hegemonies do not, are unable or simply refuse to lead, what exactly is it they are doing? It seems, as if, contrary to hegemonic powers in other regions of the world, African hegemonies invite counterbalancing activities up to the support of internal armed opposition movements apparently by their sheer existence. In this paper, it is being asked what price Ethiopia has to pay for its continuing influence in the entire region and its hegemonic potential. The major thesis proposed here is that the country was able to expand its influence in recent years while successfully managing to uphold the image of a government that is committed to regional security and regional cooperation through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Nonetheless, while certainly the region's largest and most powerful country, Ethiopia has at times found it hard to exert the control over its environment it thinks it should have. The underlining question therefore remains: how is Ethiopia anchored in the wider region? Generally speaking it seems that Ethiopia's neighbours can be divided into two groups: first, countries that do not endorse Ethiopia's position but seem to take a neutral stance, like Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda and countries that actively seek to counter Ethiopia's rise, such as Eritrea, the Sudan and a couple of factions in Somalia. Overall the impression remains that to all its neighbours Ethiopia does not constitute the inevitable core of a wider region, but a country that insulates them from a different region, a perception that makes it even harder for Addis Ababa to claim a hegemonic position among its neighbours. The potential of Ethiopia acting as a regional hegemon is both constrained and catalysed by parameters outside its influence. The global war on terror opened opportunities for Ethiopia to increase its influence in various ways: it provided legitimation for its 2006 Somalia intervention and Ethiopia put itself in the position of a regional bulwark against radical Islamism and in doing so received massive support from the United States. Locally, however, the insurgency presented a massive challenge, embraced by Eritrea. Here, the sophisticated ethnic composition of Ethiopia turned into a special burden, leaving the country open to foreign destabilising influences, thus undermining its regional hegemonic position.⁴⁰ It has been the willingness of regional adversaries, such as Eritrea, to use these vulnerabilities that has hampered Ethiopia's rise to an unchallenged hegemonic position.

This paper could only provide a superficial analysis of Ethiopia's role as a regional hegemon, it highlighted its role in comparison to other African and global hegemons and suggested a framework for the analysis of regional hegemons by focusing on internal and regional constraints and catalysts.

40 Christopher Clapham, Ethiopia. In: Christopher Clapham, Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills (Eds.): *Big African States. Angola, Sudan, DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa*. Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2006, pp. 17-38, here p. 31.

Further research could expand the analysis to incorporate international constraints and catalysts and provide a more thorough theoretical understanding of African hegemons by drawing from recent concepts of historical sciences, such as the spatial turn, mental maps and concepts of imperialism. It would also be fruitful to develop a more comprehensive understanding of African hegemons by comparing them to other regional hegemons and so called secondary powers both within Africa and other regions, such as Latin America. Having said that, it does not seem premature to draw two preliminary conclusions: African hegemons differ from other hegemonic powers first in their lack of internal consolidation. Their imperial or hegemonic outreach does not follow a strong economic performance or internal cohesiveness, on the contrary African hegemonic aspirations do not seem to be tied to a strong internal performance. Secondly, African hegemons also seem to face an environment that is much more willing to use a wide range of actions to contain the rise of the hegemon and usually neighbouring countries revert to actions outside cooperation and are more willing to undermine the statehood of their rival, even if that increases the risks to their own statehood.

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