The International Community's Role in Eritrea's Postliberation Phase of Exception

GEORGIA COLE

Abstract

When Eritrea emerged from its decades long struggle with Ethiopia to attain de jure independence in 1991, there was widespread optimism about the country's future. Eritrea was applauded as "the one ray of hope in the Horn of Africa" (McSpadden 1999, 73). The international community—including states, international organizations, the media, and academics—for the most part celebrated the government's unorthodox approaches to the country's economic, political, and social development. By the late 1990s, however, the mood towards Eritrea had changed and previously excited onlookers made their disappointment clear. Numerous reasons have been proposed for why Eritrea failed to effectively develop during this period, not least the role of Ethiopia and the shortcomings of domestic governance. This chapter, however, seeks to expand existing literature on this theme by asking: in what ways did the international community's engagement with President Isaias's regime in the period between Eritrea's liberation and its descent in to war with Ethiopia influence the country's trajectory? Using examples related to the multilateral attempt to repatriate Eritrean refugees in the first half of the 1990s, this paper explores the ways in which the international community, most notably in this case the United Nations, the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees, and its donor states, behaved in ways that potentially isolated and hardened the new regime in Eritrea. It draws on three "unremarkable" features of these negotiations to highlight that identifying and understanding the more quotidian diplomatic experiences of newly independent states like Eritrea is critical if we are to understand how their governing psyches have evolved and become consolidated.

On May 24, 1991, within a week of the start of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front's final offensive against Ethiopian troops, Eritrean tanks rolled in to claim back their capital, Asmara. Thirty years of resistance and fighting, first against Ethiopia's imperial regime and then against the Derg, ended in a celebratory fervor that was shared by many across the globe. The victory of a grass-roots, leftist, revolutionary front over a repressive, well-funded colonial force resonated with a host of Western states and interested bystanders. They felt vindicated in their enthusiasm for a new generation of "Renaissance" African states (Woldemikeal 2013). Unlike their predecessors and other heads of state across the continent, leaders of states such as Eritrea, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Uganda were branded as paragons of a new style of less unequal, less corrupt, and less violent politics, even before some of their tenures as postliberation regimes had effectively commenced.

As this chapter will show, coverage of this period from the international community—including states, international organizations, the media, and academics—was widely supportive of the contention that Eritrea was "the one ray of hope in the Horn of Africa" (McSpadden 1999, 73). Discussions with academics and employees of international organizations who worked in the country at this time are, even today, still redolent of the optimism that informed their stances towards the new regime. Their enthusiasm is nonetheless tinged by the almost ubiquitous disappointment that these individuals came to feel towards Eritrea. This set in most notably when the country descended back into war with Ethiopia in 1998 and emerged on the other side to see

the PFDJ instigate a torrent of political arrests against opposition figures in September 2001. To use words taken from Dan Connell's denunciatory speech of 2003, within a decade of the country's Liberation there came to be a sense within many that "the Revolution was in jeopardy, that silence in the face of this was complicity, and that open criticism was the only option." The view thus prevailed amongst these once ardent supporters that despite the huge amount of international support that the new regime had garnered, the immense legitimacy it commanded as a result of its thirty-year popular struggle in the trenches, and the country's immense promise in the immediate postliberation era, the PFDJ's state-building project had almost irreversibly failed.

This chapter does not set out to challenge this view on the underperformance of the Eritrean government. The priorities and ideals promoted by the EPLF during the liberation struggle, from democratic accountability to civil rights, and from tertiary education to women's empowerment, have for the most part either been lost or distorted beyond recognition by President Isaias's regime. Multiple factors and actors are held responsible for this, largely depending on what opinions the person pointing the finger holds of the country. These explanations include, but are certainly not limited to: the leadership's relative inexperience with international diplomacy (McSpadden 1999; Mengisteab 2009); the legacy of the Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party in postliberation politics (Connell, 2001); the deepening militarization of society following the border conflict with Ethiopia, and its continuing lack of resolution; the autocratic style of governance that those in the highest echelons of the ruling party have tended to exhibit; and the economic impacts of sanctions against the country for its supposed support for Al Shabaab.

This piece also does not aim to discredit these analyses, or to suggest that it was anything but a complicated mix of all of these contributory forces that resulted in the government emerging as increasingly mistrusting, isolated, and vituperative. What this chapter will instead seek to challenge is whether the international

community's disappointment that this decline happened *despite* their support, and the promising foundations laid by the preliberation Front, fails to explore an important part of the story. This constitutes the possibility that the approaches adopted by the international community towards the EPLF/PFDJ in the pre-border war period served to legitimize a phase of exceptional behavior, which contributed to the consolidation of the ruling apparatus as we see it today. I have chosen to focus on the period between 1991 and 1998 intentionally, to side-step three areas of international engagement with Eritrea that have received far greater coverage in academic debates. First, the United Nations' failure to act when Ethiopia annexed Eritrea in 1962. Second, the degree of support provided by the international community to the EPLF during the Liberation war. And third, the role of the international community in the aftermath of the border conflict with Ethiopia (Bereketeab 2009). The Eritrean Government has long used the failure of the United Nations to enforce the findings of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission to justify the continuing degree of militarization and political control within the country, which continues to drive so many Eritreans across the border (Zondi et al. 2006). The border conflict is also often cited by commentators as *the* pivotal moment in Eritrea's political trajectory, serving to potentially obscure the changes afoot in the country long before its descent back into war.

I instead intend to draw attention to the possible role that the international community, from loyal journalists to international organizations, played in the consolidation of the newly independent state in the pre-1998 period. With reference to Eritrea, Mengisteab (2009, 47) stated that "a country is fully responsible for its foreign *policy*, but its foreign *relations*, good or bad, are also outcomes of the policies and actions of the other parties involved." This piece will argue, however, that policy of any kind must also be situated within the past experiences of states, their global and regional contexts, relationships that they have held with those "other parties," and the ideological convictions of those in power. Rather than start from

the premise that the PFDJ frustrated the efforts and expectations of its external patrons and observers, I therefore flip the equation to pose a new question: in what ways did international engagement with President Isaias's regime in the inter-war period influence the country's state-building endeavors?

The first section of this chapter explores the international optimism that surrounded Eritrea's prospects as a postliberation state, before detailing dominant explanations for why the country failed to convincingly fulfill these—and its own—expectations. Using examples related to the multilateral attempts to repatriate Eritrean refugees in the first half of the 1990s, the second section then explores the ways in which the international community, most notably in this case the United Nations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its donor states, behaved in ways that potentially isolated and hardened the new regime in Eritrea. I develop this example not to explain what happened to the Eritrean refugees in Sudan or during their repatriation to Eritrea, which is beyond the scope of this paper and has been discussed at length elsewhere (Kibreab 1996a, 1996b, 2000; Farwell 2001; Habte-Selassie 1992; Bascom 1994, 2005; McSpadden 1999; Bariagaber 1999). I instead use one component of these negotiations[1] to highlight a formative experience in the relationship between the international community and the Eritrean government. I suggest that this period requires greater discussion for two main reasons. First, because it illustrates the consolidation of many points of disagreement that continue to plague this relationship and second, because these "sticking points" themselves should be understood as having contributed to the trajectory of political developments within Eritrea.

Emphasis is placed on three areas of the international community's behavior, all relating to their expectations around the relief and development response of the Eritrean state. The first was the disjuncture between professed international support for the impoverished nation, and the financial and political assistance that materialized. Relatedly, the second was the contradiction inherent

in donors' respect for the strategies used by the liberating forces in sustaining Eritreans throughout the war, and yet their desire upon independence to impose models of development upon this regime that were at clear odds with the EPLF's foundational principles (Smith-Simonsen 2003). And the third was that donors failed to take account of the reasons why some Eritrean refugees showed a hesitation to return for reasons beyond material deprivation. Thus, they missed the opportunity to caution the Eritrean government on its human rights record accordingly. As the international community was prepared to intervene in other areas of the state's behavior, the defense of wishing not to appear as neo-imperialist holds limited justificatory clout. The chapter concludes by a brief discussion of what these observations might mean for historiographical analysis of the postliberation Eritrean State.

Euphoria Over Eritrea's Postindependence Period

Though many retrospective accounts of Eritrea's internal politics contend that the state was in terminal decline from independence onwards, this ignores the immense optimism that surrounded the country's future during the years directly following liberation (Hansson 2001). Commenting on this period, and expressing the general sense of awe that surrounded the country then, Mengisteab (2009, 48) states that,

> The regime's progressive rhetoric, along with the cooperation that the EPLF had cultivated with the population during the armed struggle, gave it a remarkably high level of popular support, arguably unprecedented in African politics. It also received praise from many outside observers.

The international community placed a set of huge expectations on the newly independent state, from rebuilding devastated rural infrastructures to securing peace in the wider Horn of Africa. As Ruth Iyob, writing just before the outbreak of hostilities with Ethiopia, stated, "Eritrea is beginning to emerge as the epitome of peace, stability, and the locus for challenges to the status quo in the Horn of Africa. . . touted by many outsiders as a driving force for the region's political and economic transformation" (1997, 656). The professed commitment of President Isaias and his team to peaceful relations with neighboring states left commentators sanguine about the contribution that the country might make, both to the re-establishment of amicable ties between Ethiopia and Sudan and to the revitalization of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development. This sense persisted even despite the country's confused and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to court states and international alliances that held clearly incompatible goals, not least Israel and Sudan (Mengisteab 2009).

Drawing on a narrative that painted the country's future as on the ascendance, the PFDJ's behavior, and restrictive interpretation of many "liberal democratic" concepts, was repeatedly given the benefit of the doubt by onlookers. The PFDJ's charter, produced after the EPLF's third congress in February 1994, was celebrated by observers as providing an alternative, inclusive, and democratic model of governance. It called for extensive public participation in the Constitution drafting process, human and political freedom for all citizens, and strong checks on excesses of power through the eventual establishment of three branches of the state (Doornbos et al. 1999). The Eritrean government was praised for aiming to provide a more inclusive forum for national reconstruction, and for promoting certain key tenets of governance: national harmony, economic and social development, social justice, cultural revival, and widespread political democracy (Ministry of Information 2009). Articles in the *Eritrea Profile* discussed the timeframe over which the Constitution should be produced, and expounded that the time

might be ripe for the replacement of customary law with a democratic constitution (1995c, 1995d).

It appeared to matter little to those expounding the virtues of these policies that the PFDJ's interpretation of these qualities was markedly different to conventional Western wisdoms. Democratic accountability was conceived of as broad public participation, not the existence of multiple political parties or electoral processes. The PFDJ also felt that this participation should be strictly controlled, to avoid it "degenerat[ing]. . . into endless public meetings, seminars, group meetings, workshops, when the same points are belabored over and over again" (Doornbos et al. 1999, 280). The authors of this view, including the renowned freedom fighter and author, Alemseged Tesfai, defended this stance by arguing that "the likelihood that multi-party politics would divide the country into regional and religious factions is a real possibility and danger. For what purposes would a nation sacrifice the unity and peace it enjoys to party politics it is not yet ready for and whose eventuality holds dubious benefits for its future?" (*ibid.*, 322). The party publicly debated the extent to which democracy was a prerequisite for economic growth, or whether greater power invested in President Isaias would yield more profitable results (*Eritrea Profile* 1995e).

Restrictions on oppositional politics were widely accepted by international onlookers as a necessary, and perhaps even an innovative and praiseworthy, route to ensuring that national unity was not jeopardized by opportunistic sections of society. A briefing produced in 1997 to shape US policy towards Eritrea, for example, advised that the Eritrean government would build its "system in stages, rooted within its own history and culture," and that "The U.S. should," as such, "back off from pressuring Eritrea to impose a pluralistic model drawn up in Washington" (Connell 1997, FPIF). The political system was thus praised not simply in spite of its unorthodox approaches to conventional development challenges, but also as a direct result of them. Iyob (1997, 671) commends this stance at the time, arguing that "international readiness to accept political and economic stability in Eritrea as a precursor to

democracy (however defined) has provided an 'oasis of civility' with which to dazzle foreign observers and analysts." Commentators at the time therefore overwhelmingly accepted this line of reasoning due to their general belief in the PFDJ's sincere commitment to the development of the country (*The Independent* 1996). Summarizing their views, McSpadden (1999, 73) stated that,

> The Government of Eritrea. . . has proven itself, according to UN personnel, Western government and NGO sources, to be honest and 'clean' in their governing. Confidence in the integrity of the leadership is widespread. This confidence is strengthened by the fact that since liberation, thousands of former fighters have, until recently, been working in the government without salary, including at the highest level. Most importantly, the country is at peace.

Early Counter-Narratives to Eritrea's "Success Story"

The concerns being raised by more critical voices appeared to neither hugely dampen the international community's expectant excitement nor to incentivize them to promote changes that were more than technocratic. Counter-narratives reasoned that changes within the country were occurring at the expense of personal freedoms, to an extent that was unjustifiable and potentially threatening to the country's long-term prospects for democratization (The Fund for Peace 1994). Though testament to the media's comparative openness in this period, a report by James C. McKinley Jr, republished in the *Eritrea Profile* in 1996, discussed the human flipside of the Eritrean government's revolutionary fervor: the round-ups of impoverished people from the streets; the shooting of disabled former fighters during a protest over the government's treatment of them since independence; and the disgruntlement of those populations being told to work for several years without any remuneration (*The New York Times* 1996). The

PFDJ did little at the time to conceal its heavy-handed response to dissent or nonconformity, convinced as it was by its alternative formulation of democracy. In 1994, the PFDJ openly and unashamedly declared its attitude towards the "unconstitutional obduracy" of Jehovah's Witnesses. This group's refusal both to fight during the liberation struggle and to vote during the referendum was interpreted as a betrayal of Eritrea, and illustrative of this community's relinquishment of their rights to citizenship. A Standing Directive issued by the PFDJ on the 25th October 1994 therefore stripped them of their citizenship, without any apology for the damage that this would do to their job security prospects and social security (*Eritrea Profile* 1995a). With this in the background, newspaper coverage nonetheless continued to promote headlines such as "Eritrea: African Success Story Being Written" (*The New York Times* 1996).

The facts, however, suggested that it was far from a "success story" that was being cultivated during this period. The country had managed to fall out with all of its neighbors over the course of the decade, including with Yemen in a dispute over the Hanish Islands. As mentioned above, blame for the Eritrean state's failure to mature as both it and the international community anticipated that it would has been retrospectively aimed in multiple directions. Looking more historically, increasing interest is now turning to how the regime's current behavior can be explained through analyzing the EPLF's structure and performance from the liberation struggle onwards. Reid (2009, 2) suggests that the current militarization of the Eritrean state and society can be seen as "informed by" the government's intrinsically militaristic attitude, which was fostered during their time fighting the Derg. The "stability, discipline and pragmatism" (Iyob 1997, 667) so celebrated by observers when that efficiency was directed at supposedly admirable causes, and so bemoaned when it has underpinned the stubborn pursuit of ill-advised policies, has thus been attributed to the characteristics necessitated by guerrilla warfare, and that have subsequently proven extremely difficult to shake off.

A critical component of this psychology has been the government's unwavering commitment to the principle of self-reliance. This has appeared to have come at the cost of development assistance that might have significantly improved the country's social and economic prospects (Smith-Simonsen 2003). Engagement with international non-governmental organizations has long been intermittent due to the unpredictable constraints that the Government has placed on their behavior. Even when organizations were permitted to operate during the 1990s, those loyal to the PFDJ have confessed that "whenever international policies and actors have found themselves contravening national policies, the government has not hesitated to cancel them or renegotiate their entire content and form" (Tesfai 1999, 353). In 1992, for example, the PGE reduced UNHCR's office in Eritrea to administrative staff because they felt that the organization was working at cross-purposes to their own goals.

Even though some of those loyal to the regime acknowledged that this strategy risked alienating international actors in ways that undermined the country's long-term interests, the PFDJ has fairly consistently promoted this approach (*ibid.*). During the process of expelling international organizations from Eritrea in 1998, for example, the president prophetically stated that, "We reject assistance. We are in no need of humanitarian or charity aid. . . And this is based on crucial questions and matters of destiny" (*Eritrea Profile* 1998). As Smith-Simonsen (2003, 340) suggests, however, this came to constitute "an eviction the Government soon came to regret." When the PFDJ sought to invite these organizations back to assist with the reconstruction efforts following the waves of displacement in 1999 and 2000, they hesitated. After their unceremonious dismissal from the country, they nurtured disappointment and distrust towards the PFDJ (*ibid.*). As Reid (2009, 7) suggests, Eritrea's "robust, aggressive style of diplomacy has won it few friends." Failures to significantly adapt this style of governance in the postliberation era are thus widely held responsible for the state's isolation.

There were certainly many opportunities for domestic reform that the PFDJ avoided in the 1990s, and that the international community—whether intentionally or not—appeared to overlook. Much like during the liberation struggle, economic activity continued to be dominated by companies owned by those close to the ruling elites. With the country's most profitable sectors almost exclusively controlled by this population, private enterprise and its associated dividends were stifled. The concentration of power and wealth within the president's narrow cadre resulted in the failure of autonomous and accountable institutions to develop, and a policy portfolio based on the ideas of just a few (Mengisteab 2009). The absence of alternative political parties and the right to promote alternative political views sent a clear message about the desired absence of democratic constraints on the government's decision-making. Without a sounding board for major policy decisions, however, the Eritrean government made several naive, albeit potentially unpredictable, decisions that had far-reaching consequences. The overarching belief that the contentious points of their relationship with Ethiopia could be addressed down the line, or would be unimportant given the rapport between the two countries' guerrilla movements at liberation, provides a clear example. Issues concerning trade, currencies and the shared border were left unaddressed, only to flare up as key points of irreconcilable difference once the two governments exhausted their "benefit of the doubt" towards each other (*ibid.*). Despite episodes of conflict with all of its neighbors, it was the descent into war with Ethiopia and its aftermath that have been held most responsible for the failure of Eritrea's political, economic, and societal strategies for building the nation.

It is in relation to this incident that the international community's reputation, from the perspective of the PFDJ and many un-aligned third parties, has come out most scathed. The episode following the Algiers Agreement and the findings of the Boundary Commission, when the United Nations failed to act decisively and arguably impartially on the outcomes of the latter's ruling, codified Eritrea's

distrust of multilateral institutions (Bereketeab 2009). As discussed above, this incident was nonetheless only one of several key moments in the Eritrean leadership's history when they have felt unfairly treated by the international community. Criticism of the United Nations has sprung hyperbolically from the Eritrean government and its supporters, predominantly around annexation, border demarcation, and the current sanctions regime. Whether or not this community has been justified in their sense of victimhood is not, however, the focus of this chapter. It instead highlights how less sensational discussions around the role that international actors may have played in shaping the Eritrean state in its formative years have, perhaps as a result of this focus on major events, been largely ignored. It responds to the contention that understanding the consolidation of the Eritrean state must involve recognizing the impacts of both remarkable and unremarkable encounters with the international community. The remainder of this chapter thus briefly explores one more subtle manifestation of contradictory, confusing, and potentially damaging behavior that was exhibited by international actors in the 1990s. Using the negotiations over the return of Eritrean refugees in the early-1990s, it outlines some of the ways in which one series of poorly handled negotiations fed into the often obstructive narratives that the Eritrean government has continually drawn upon in its international engagements.

Refugee Repatriation as an Example of Misaligned Expectations

Even before the country's liberation from Mengistu's Marxist-Leninist rule, the EPLF and then the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) established the repatriation of Eritrean refugees from Sudan as a clear priority (Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs 1991).[2] In the context of these events, and the "climate of brutal

repression that had triggered their exodus" coming to an end, the PGE stated that "these people can no longer contemplate life in exile. . . or sustain the deprivation of their basic rights to live in their homeland," "craving to return home but unable to do so for want of basic assistance" (PGE EPLF 1993). Refugees were thus assured by the PGE that they could and should return to Eritrea, without fearing any adverse measures upon return (ERREC/UNHCR 2000). The Eritrean Government stressed from the very start of this process that its success would be wholly contingent on the promotion of a "holistic" model of return, and that refugees could expect reintegration to occur hand in hand with repatriation. Herein lay the source of one tension, however, that would continue to undermine the relationship between the Eritrean government and other stakeholders in these negotiations throughout subsequent years.

After a series of over-ambitious first attempts had failed to attain material or political support for these proposals, the Eritrean government unveiled its redesigned flagship program for the successful repatriation of its refugees in June 1993. This was entitled the Program for Refugee Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Resettlement Areas in Eritrea, hereafter named PROFERI. It represented a scaled down version of a plan presented by the government only a few months earlier, which had aimed to support the repatriation and reintegration of all 500,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan. PROFERI instead proposed the adoption of a graduated approach for repatriating the 340,000 refugees who they claimed actively wished to return from Sudan, and who the Eritrean government felt were becoming increasingly vulnerable to physical violence and economic exploitation in the camps (CERA 1995, 12; PGE/UN 1993). The extent of unassisted return in the early 1990s, of approximately 150,000 individuals, corroborated what several Eritrean commentators at the time suggested was Eritrean refugees' overwhelming desire to return home (Kifleyesus 2010).

PROFERI was intended to last just three and a half years, commencing immediately after a pledging conference convened by

the Eritrean authorities in Geneva on the 6th of July, 1993. The program was designed as a key pillar of the Eritrean government's broader strategy for recovery and rehabilitation, which included the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants within a comprehensive development plan, the restructuring and streamlining of the civil services, and discussions over the constitution-making process (Doornbos et al. 1999). Investment in these strategies, which were supported on paper by a broad consortium of donors, was seen as time-critical. A "Joint Appeal by the Eritrean Government and United Nations Organisations" (1993, 29) stated that "if the framework and resources required to reintegrate these returnees, and to rehabilitate the areas to which they will return are not provided, this opportunity will be lost. This in turn could make the returnees a burden instead of an asset, with the added danger that they could even become a divisive factor for the new nation at a time when national unity and healing are essential."

The Mutual Failure to Procure Funds

The failure of the pledging conference to adequately support PROFERI has been widely documented (Bascom 2005; McSpadden 1999; Ericson et al. 2009). Explanations from parties sympathetic to Eritrea at the time focus on it being the result of the country's political marginalization, and the incompatible expectations of the UN organizations and the Eritrean government vis-à-vis repatriation since the country attained de facto independence.[3] As Sutton (1994) commented in Eritrea's national newspaper, the *Eritrea Profile*, though the Eritrean Government felt that PROFERI was a "blueprint for success. . . global politics intervened. Donors, preoccupied with demands from the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Russia, baulked at the $262 million price tag. They pledged just $22 million—and even this has yet to appear in the coffers" (*Eritrea Profile* 1994b). The divergence between multiple stakeholders'

widespread approval of the program and the contributions raised in the pledging conference was seen by one member of the Eritrean government, over a decade on, as an inexplicable "tragedy." Though the same representative's view that they "didn't get peanuts of support for their program and how they suffered"[4] ignores that pledging attempts almost never reach the desired amount, and that some funding, albeit minor, was provided for the program, these sentiments nonetheless reflected the PFDJ's obvious disappointment.

To them, the question of how a project could have been so widely supported and yet fail to catalyze the requisite financial support was never answered. In the absence of any explanation, and being not well acclimated to the realpolitik of these processes, individuals from the Government of Eritrea were quick to conflate the international community's apathy with "sabotage attempts" and a "big conspiracy against Eritrea not to stand on its feet."[5] As Teclemichael Wolde-Giorgis (1999, 95) stated when reflecting on these failures in the late 1990s,

> The external economic assistance that would have enabled implementation of the three-year PROFERI programme did not materialise. The lesson seems clear, the needs that arise from devastation caused by war are not sufficient to qualify for outside assistance. Aid is not given based on demonstrated necessity, or even the capacity of using it properly. It is usually guided by donor priorities, whatever they may be.

Beyond the disappointment was also most likely the sense of embarrassment that accompanies the wounding of national pride. Given international debates on repatriation, and the broad support enjoyed by the Eritrean government at the time, the country's provisional government had felt excessively confident that the international community would embrace the comprehensive program that they had designed. It had, after all, in their eyes been completed in partnership with committed and supportive UN

agencies. Further conviction was fed by the fact that the pledging conference in Geneva immediately followed the opening of the 1993 UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This forum had included deliberations on "Coordination and Humanitarian Assistance–Emergency Assistance and the Continuum to Rehabilitation and Development," which the Eritrean government felt was perfectly encapsulated in PROFERI's aims. Buoyed by their new-found confidence, the pledging conference was thus envisaged as an opportunity for Eritrea to make its first, high profile presentation to the international community after the country's independence (PGE-UN 1993). The paucity of pledges was therefore a bitter reminder that the words of external actors, however complimentary and encouraging they might be, were not necessarily to be trusted.

Though it was clear to the United Nations institutions involved in these interactions that they were dealing with a government new to the world of international diplomacy, they appeared to make limited attempts to guide the PFDJ's transition. Confusion and disappointment on the part of the Eritrean authorities over the failure of PROFERI was compounded by contradictory messaging. UNHCR was undertaking a precarious balancing act in its attempts to both placate the PFDJ and to adhere to its own mandate. The organization thus ended up simultaneously promoting multiple "lines" on whether or not to support more comprehensive return, rehabilitation, and reintegration projects within Eritrea. Speaking on behalf of UNHCR in July 1995, a senior protection officer was, for example, clear in stating that "I would like to stress. . . the point that when refugees return home, they cease to be protected by UNHCR" (*Eritrea Profile* 1995b). Other colleagues within UNHCR nonetheless issued statements that entirely contradicted this. The Head of UNHCR in Eritrea at the time did little to assuage the PFDJ's suspicions that the country's lack of funding was related less to mandates than it was to politics. In response to a question concerning whether or not he felt that the UNHCR office in Asmara

had "done enough" to support the repatriation and resettlement of Eritrean refugees, the Head of Office was reported as stating that,

> I say concerning this question that the UNHCR has not been able to do what we liked to do. Because we don't have enough funds from donor governments. Actually the scope of our activity is limited by the awareness and good will of donor governments. Fortunately for Eritrea, there is peace and stability now, but this has shown to be counterproductive when it comes to awareness and understanding of the needs of Eritrea. CNN today goes to Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Somalia and focus is no longer on Eritrea even though Eritrea deserves attention, because of its important role in creating regional peace and prosperity (*Eritrea Profile* 1995b).

The Promotion of External Models of Development

The second element that appeared to confuse the Eritrean Government, as alluded to above, was therefore the disjuncture between the donors' celebration of their founding ideologies, not least self-reliance and independent agenda-setting, and their respect for these strategies in practice. To the Eritrean government, refugees were not special citizens. They felt that those who had never left the country required and deserved the same treatment as those who had. It furthermore made no sense to the PFDJ, from either a diplomatic or a human rights perspective, to have refugees return and face greater hardships than in Sudan. Eritrea's economy was devastated, even if foreign governments felt optimistic about its recovery. Plunging areas of return into even greater difficulties—if repatriants exacerbated the existing strain on services and infrastructures—was not an option for the PFDJ. Their stance towards repatriation and reintegration was therefore unfaltering: return and reintegration should be driven by principles of equal opportunity for both returnees and stayees. They "could not see

any point in creating refugee enclaves within its borders, albeit of its own citizens, that would be a great problem to administer and sustain. . . the government's logic seems to be that if UNHCR (or any other) assistance is to be relevant and effective, it should be geared towards solving the problem, not transferring or compounding it" (Tesfai 1999, 334).

This was considered especially important to the Eritrean government because of the immense tasks that confronted them upon seizing power. Large proportions of the population were suffering from a food deficit, and had little or no access to services and employment opportunities. The British Military Administration had stripped away much of the infrastructure built by the Italians, and Ethiopian occupation and the 30-year War of Independence that followed caused both further destruction and retarded the economic and technological development of the country. Degradation of agricultural land combined with poor rainfall meant that eighty percent of crops failed in Eritrea in 1993, and 400,000 individuals were estimated to be suffering from food shortages (*Eritrea Profile* 1994a). The Government responded to these shortcomings by issuing Proclamation No. 11. This mandated that 100,000 EPLF fighters work voluntarily in national reconstruction programs, and that all Eritreans between the ages of 18 and 40 undertake a national service obligation (Selassie 1996). The initiative was informed by the PGE's general attitude in the postliberation period that "the period of sacrifice, the time when the national interest subordinates every other individual or group need, is not yet over" (Tesfai 1999, 283). While the government therefore argued that they did not want refugees back outside of controlled repatriation operations, to ensure that support mechanisms were not over-run, they simultaneously demanded that individuals return if they could contribute towards the project of national reconstruction.

Several observers supported this attitude. They argued that the Eritrean authorities should resist the temptations of a rushed repatriation exercise. The incentives to be resisted included the

Eritrean Government's own, to ensure that refugees were back in time to vote in the referendum in 1993 for example, and those of donor governments, who were reported to be looking for an excuse to scale down their activities in Sudan because of the country's worsening political situation and extractive tendencies (Selassie 1996). Others agreed with this approach, arguing that the conditions in Eritrea were unsuitable for return, and that the Government of Eritrea should feel entitled to defend a position whereby refugees were not unconditionally welcomed back. Kibreab stated that, in conditions whereby return would be a death sentence because of lack of resources, "a legal right to return may be rendered meaningless without concerted international humanitarian assistance" (1996b, 54). This hesitation sat uneasily with the approach being promoted by UNHCR at the time. This made clear that homecoming was not always "likely to be under ideal conditions. In many it will be dogged by political insecurity and economic uncertainty" (UN General Assembly 1995, 33). Domestic constraints, and the Eritrean government's attempt to exercise autonomy in determining patterns of repatriation, were thus dismissed by UNHCR as they continued to promote return without funding the complementary programs for rehabilitation and reintegration.

To the PFDJ, the continual rebuffing of their plans for repatriation—which continued with multiple, largely unsuccessful iterations throughout the decade—confirmed their belief that the international community had the resources, but not the will, to assist them. This fed into an ongoing psyche of inherent mistrust of outsiders, and "the powerful concept of 'historical betrayal' [that] permeates the nation's image of itself" (Reid 2005, 483). The perceived inconsistency in these organizations' rhetoric and behavior, whether real or not, left Eritrea with a sense of its political and strategy irrelevance to the major donor countries. As one UNHCR employee later stated, this was quite likely accurate given geopolitics at the time and America's apathy towards funding programs in the region.[6] Writing in 1997, Connell stated that US

policy towards the country was indeed sending "mixed signals." Funding to the new state was conditional from the start, and based on Eritrea's ascription to a series of Washington Consensus reforms that stood at fundamental odds with the political model that the EPLF had employed, with generally considered success, throughout its time in the trenches. The US was also accused of rhetorically supporting the Eritrean government while failing to provide corresponding levels of funding (Connell 1997). As such, Connell recommended that "the U.S. should support Eritrea's bottom-up economic and political development strategy without trying to control it" (*ibid.*). Policy makers appeared to have disregarded this recommendation when it came to respecting the PFDJ's attempt to carve an autonomous path to refugee return and national rehabilitation, while embracing it when it came to tacitly supporting the PFDJ's non-participatory consolidation of power.

The International Community's Failure to Recognize Why Some Refugees Hesitated to Return

Finally, return was being encouraged by UNHCR and donors with limited regard for the reasons as to why some Eritreans were reticent to do so; even the Eritrean government was not making a secret of the fact that areas of return had very limited capacity to receive refugees (Kibreab 2000). The absence of guaranteed livelihoods certainly constituted the primary reason underpinning refugees' reluctance to return.[7] There was nonetheless also a contingent of Eritrean refugees in Sudan who held political sympathies that were antithetical to the PFDJ's. A document released by WRITENET in 1996 summarized that "Although the regime [Eritrean refugees] fled is no longer in power in Ethiopia and Eritrea has been independent since April 1991, the present government does not belong to the same political shade of the independentist spectrum as the majority of the refugees. As a result, most of the refugees have not gone back" (WRITENET 1996). Though

this paper ignores that the majority of Eritreans did in fact return upon the country's independence, albeit through informal channels beyond the governments' and UNHCR's control, there was continuing uncertainty amongst some in Sudan as to how welcoming Eritrea would be to individuals upon return. The government authority coordinating refugee affairs stated that they welcomed all Eritreans regardless of their political "stand" (CERA 1992, 5), but statements by President Isaias suggested a less forgiving attitude towards individuals who had a previous affiliation with the competing guerrilla army, the Eritrean Liberation Front:

> The government's policy is based on the principle of forgiveness and the covering of past sins. A lot of people joined ELF in person or helped the Front from afar, and many others became members for a minimal contribution. The problem is that someone who joined the front in 1965 comes now, after twenty years of uncertain whereabouts, and asks for pay rise [sic] and other amenities. We know who is who, but we prefer to let sleeping dogs lie, otherwise it would be very easy for us to open the books and settle matters one by one (*Eritrea Profile* 1995f).

It was thus no secret that the PFDJ continued to harbor resentment towards individuals who had sided with other fronts during the conflict. The fact that reintegration would require a concerted effort on both societal and economic fronts was, however, notably absent from official documentation on this process. In much the same way as the international community wilfully sacrificed democratic ideals in the hope of furthering political and economic goals first, they also seemed willing to marginalize questions on the country's dubious human rights record until they had diminished the caseloads under their charge in eastern Sudan. The same behavior was repeated almost ten years later, when UNHCR promoted repatriation from Sudan despite being aware that the protection of returnees could not be guaranteed in the post G-15 climate.[8] This does not mean that the organization is

responsible for the PFDJ's discriminatory behavior or incendiary language. The fact that UNHCR turned a blind eye towards early manifestations of intolerance and exclusion, however, likely did little to encourage more inclusive models of state-building in the long run.

Though a significant number of Eritrean refugees did return through their own means in the 1990s, PROFERI and its subsequent incarnations never proved hugely successful. Alongside the reasons stated above, the relationship between the Eritrean government and both UNHCR and the Sudanese government deteriorated, and the behavior of the Commissioner for Refugees in Sudan continued to undermine the success of repatriation operations.[9] Berhane Woldegabriel (1996, 88) commented at the time that "the scheme is scarcely in operation, while overtly the three parties are conducting a face saving diplomatic manoeuvre so that the voluntary repatriation program could appear to be progressing." Alongside being immensely disappointing for those parties that had wished to alleviate refugees' long-term exile in deteriorating camps in Sudan, this string of failures and incompatible expectations—amidst ostensibly widespread support—disturbed the PFDJ. Though much blame can be directed at the PFDJ for their behavior during this period, the Eritrean government nonetheless felt angry at the disconnect between the UN's mandate for support, the organization's support for some reintegration programs but not theirs, and UNHCR's dismissal of their own intentions for community-wide rehabilitation projects. It has been stated elsewhere that disappointing introductions to multilateral diplomacy, such as that outlined above, have continued to undermine the PFDJ's relationship with the UN system more generally (Kifleyesus 2010).

Conclusion

In the majority of discussions exploring the many shortcomings of the Eritrean state after independence, the onus of responsibility has been primarily levelled in three main directions: from the Eritrean state and pro-PFDJ contingents towards Ethiopia and certain cases of inimical international action, from anti-PFDJ contingents and many within the international community towards the Eritrean government itself, and from both sides, towards the lasting effects of waves of colonial projects dating from the Italians, through the annexation of the country under the United Nation's watchful eye, to the thirty years of Ethiopian occupation. The purpose of this chapter is not to deny the critical importance of these factors in contributing to the current state of Eritrean governance, but to inject this discussion with a further, comparatively underexplored component. Rather than merely deploring the "downfall" of the Eritrean state, it suggests that the ways in which the behavior of the international community affected the country's trajectory in the inter-war period deserves greater attention. This includes casting a more critical eye on the implications of the types of support that Eritrea received in the first few years of its independence.

Detailing the negotiations between the Eritrean government and various UN institutions over the repatriation of Eritrean refugees from Sudan is intended to illustrate a few examples of the ways in which these multilateral relationships played a part in the hardening of the Eritrean state. First, some unorthodox initiatives peddled by the Eritrean state were supported by the international community. Their overarching rationales for how refugee return and community rehabilitation should be pursued were nonetheless rejected in international fora, both conceptually and financially. Beyond the embarrassment that this caused to those in power within Eritrea, poor explanations for this inconsistent international engagement confirmed long-held narratives of international betrayal, disrespect,

and apathy that for a brief moment after liberation had appeared slightly less unimpeachable.

Second, return movements were encouraged at a time when the willingness of the PFDJ to integrate dissenting voices was hardly guaranteed. Evidence available at the time concerning human rights abuses and "disquieting signs" (Connell 2003) within the country, such as the gunning down of disabled war veterans, went largely unchallenged. Support for the return of vast swathes of the population from exile—despite illustrations of repressive modes of social control—suggested that such behavior was tolerable if progress on other fronts could be discerned. Similar to accounts of how donors had behaved during the liberation struggle, there was a sense in the postindependence period that donors "were more inclined to turn a blind eye as long as the Eritrean case was regarded as being a just one, or of special interest" (Smith-Simonsen 2003, 345). The result, however, was that a transitional "phase of exception" was tacitly supported by the international donors, organizations, and commentators as government projects were interpreted within a grand narrative of teleological progress.

Third, and with reference to both the above points, many international actors were enthusiastic to celebrate Eritrea's independence as illustrative of the new African Renaissance. This led, however, to the creation of a set of expectations of the country's trajectory and behavior by external authorities that were almost certainly unattainable. Part of this was due to the fact that they relied on the construction of an era in Eritrea's history that many argue never happened. As Smith-Simonsen writes, "one cannot question the absence of something that never was. The liberation army was never truly self-reliant and Eritrea as an independent nation had little prospect of ever getting self-sustainable" (2003, 347). For each time the PFDJ peddled its "culture of self-reliance" (Tesfai 1999, 317) and stated that it was "in no need of humanitarian or charity aid," (*Eritrea Profile* 1998), there was a contradictory moment when the regime berated the international community for its failure to provide the funds they felt entitled to, such as in the

case of PROFERI. The contradictions inherent in the government's behavior have nonetheless seldom appeared to prevent President Isaias's regime from publicizing characteristics that it has shown little proof of possessing. More pertinent for this discussion, however, was that, in the early years of independence, these lofty aspirations appeared to have been legitimized by an international community that had temporarily bypassed its usual sceptical stance. The result was even greater confusion and animosity between the international community and the Eritrean government, as the former's encouragement of particular state behaviors was not met with corresponding financial and political commitments and was likely unattainable regardless.

Though less blatant than the strict imposition of external models through projects such as structural adjustment, the expectations placed on newly independent states come with their own colonial ideologies and implications. We increasingly hold international donors to account for how their funding has served to prop up, shape, and legitimate states with dubious governance records, such as Rwanda and Ethiopia (Uvin 2001; McDoom 2013; Human Rights Watch 2010). The more subtle ways that multilateral interactions and relationships have engendered similar processes in newly independent states like Eritrea potentially requires greater exploration too. The unique "socio-psychological make-up of the EPLF' is a phenomenon that has rightly deserved academic attention (Reid 2005, 470). Due to a history of disappointment with the international community's assistance, dating back to their supposed failure to provide support to the EPLF in the trenches, the PFDJ has cultivated a national psyche whereby "Sacrifice, struggle, hardship, are the key concepts of the government's ideological armoury" (*ibid.*, 480). As stated in the introduction, however, this "psyche," which informs both domestic policy and international relations, must be understood within the historical, geographical, political, and economic contexts that have influenced it. Such an endeavor does not mean to exculpate the PFDJ of responsibility for the current state of affairs in Eritrea, nor to pass judgement on

whether such disappointment is justified or not. It instead seeks to suggest that furthering our understanding of the Eritrean state will involve greater recognition of the more unremarkable international experiences through which its practices and performances have been, and continue to be, shaped.

References

Bariagaber, A. 1999. States, international organisations and the refugee: reflections on the complexity of managing the refugee crisis in the Horn of Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37(4): 597–619.

Bascom, J. 1994. The dynamics of refugee repatriation: The case of Eritreans in eastern Sudan. in *Population Migration and the Changing World Order*, edited by Gould, W. and Findlay, 225–248. John Wiley & Sons: London.

———. 2005. The long, "last step"? Reintegration of repatriates in Eritrea. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 18(2): 165–180.

Bereketeab, R. 2009. The Eritrea-Ethiopia Conflict and the Algiers Agreement: Eritrea's road to isolation. in *Eritrea's External Relations: Understandings its regional role and foreign policy*, edited by Reid, R, 98–131. Chatham House: London.

Commission For Eritrean Refugee Affairs 1991. Information on CERA's Programme of Returning Eritrean Refugees. Produced by the Provisional Government of Eritrea. Archival document. Available at the Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara, Eritrea.

———. (1992) Repatriation of Eritrean Refugees and the Challenges Ahead. Paper presented at the EIAC General Assembly, 9th-11th November 1992. Archival document. Available at the Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara, Eritrea.

———. (1995) Phase One of the Operational Plan for PROFERI. Archival

document. Available at the Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara, Eritrea.

Connell, D. 1994. The Greening of Eritrea: Famine Unlikely Again. The Christian Science Monitor, 30th November, Available at: http://csmonitor.com/1994/1130/30111.html

———. 1997. Eritrea. Foreign Policy in Focus, 1st September, Available at: http://fpif.org/eritrea/.

———. 2001. Inside the EPLF: The Origins of the "People's Party" & its Role in the Liberation of Eritrea. *Review of African Political Economy* 28(89):345–365.

———. 2003. Eritrea: Enough! A Critique of Eritrea's Post-Liberation Politics. Available at: http://allafrica.com/stories/200311060876.html.

Doornbos, M. and Tesfai, A. 1999. *Post-conflict Eritrea: prospects for reconstruction and development*. Red Sea Press Inc.: USA.

Ericson, R. and Zeager, L. 2009. *Eritrea, Donors, and the Return of 500,000 Refugees: Was there no Equilibrium Path to an Agreement?* Department of Economics, East Carolina University. Available at: http://www.ecu.edu/cs-educ/econ/upload/ecu0911.pdf.

Eritrea Profile. 1994a. Interview. 19th March, Volume 1, Number 1. *Eritrea Profile*.

———. 1994b. Being There. Volume 1, Edition 8, p5. *Eritrea Profile*.

———. 1995a. Statement on Jehovah's Witnesses. 4th March, p3. *Eritrea Profile*.

———. 1995b. Refugees: Projects, Prospects. 8th July, p2. *Eritrea Profile*.

———. 1995c. Viable, long-lasting document. 12th August, p3. *Eritrea Profile*.

———. 1995d. Ripe Time. 26th August, p3. *Eritrea Profile*.

———. 1995e. Constitution-making: A people's project. 11th November, p3. *Eritrea Profile*.

———. 1995f. A Summary of President Isaias's reply in questions from the public. 16th December, p2. *Eritrea Profile*.

———. 1998. No Coexistence with the NIF Regime: President Isaias. 11th April, p2. *Eritrea Profile*.

ERREC/UNHCR. 2000. Remarks Concerning Legal Assurances for Refugees. Draft 3 of Strategic Country Operations Plan: Eritrea' Voluntary Repatriation of Eritrean Refugees from the Sudan and Yemen and their reintegration in Eritrea, 14th March. Archival Document from the Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara, Eritrea.

Farwell, N. 2001. "Onward through strength": Coping and psychological support among refugee youth returning to Eritrea from Sudan. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 14(1):43–69.

Habte-Selassie, E. 1992. Eritrean refugees in the Sudan: a preliminary analysis of voluntary repatriation. in Beyond Conflict in *The Horn: Prospects for Peace, Recovery and Development in Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan*, edited by Doornbos, M., Cliffe, L., Ahmed, A. And Markakis, J. 23–3. James Currey: London.

Hansson, G. 2001. Building New States: Lessons from Eritrea. United Nation University World Institute for Development Economics Research, Discussion Paper No. 2001/66, Available at: http://www.wider.unu.edu/stc/repec/pdfs/dp2001/dp2001-66.pdf.

Human Rights Watch. 2010. Development without freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia. 19th October, Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/10/19/development-without-freedom/how-aid-underwrites-repression-ethiopia.

Iyob, R. 1997. The Eritrean Experiment: a Cautious Pragmatism? *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 35(4):647–673.

Kibreab, G. 1996a. *Ready and willing... but still waiting: Eritrean refuges in Sudan and the dilemmas of return.* Uppsala: Life and Peace Institute.

———. 1996b Left in Limbo: Prospects for Repatriation of Eritrean Refugees from Sudan & Responses of the International Donor Community. in *In Search of Cool Ground: War, Flight & Homecoming in Northeast Africa*, edited by Allen, T., 53–66. James Currey: London.

———. 2000. Resistance, displacement and identity: the case of

Eritrean refugees in Sudan. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/ La Revue canadienne des études africaines* 34(2):249–296.

Kifleyesus, A. 2010. Recollections of Return, Resettlement, and Reintegration from Gash Barka in Eritrea. Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Mcdoom, O. 201. To aid or not to aid? The case of Rwanda. United Nations University, 29th April, Available at: http://unu.edu/publications/articles/to-aid-or-not-to-aid-the-case-of-rwanda.html.

Mcspadden, L. 1999. Contradictions and control in repatriation: Negotiations for the return of 500,000 Eritrean refugees. in *The end of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, edited by Black, R. and Koser, K, 69–84. Berghahn Books: London.

Mengisteab, K. 2009. What has gone wrong with Eritrea's foreign relations? in *Eritrea's External Relations: Understandings its regional role and foreign policy*, edited by Reid, R, 45–71. Chatham House: London.

Ministry Of Information 2009. Eritrea at a Glance III. 30th October, Shabait, Available at: http://www.shabait.com/about-eritrea/eritrea-at-a-glance/342-eritrea-at-a-glance-part-iii.

PGE-EPLF. 1993. Appeal to Donor Governments. 22nd March. Produced by the Provisional Government of Eritrea. Archival Document from the Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara, Eritrea.

PGE-UN. 1993. Joint Government of Eritrea and United Nations Appeal for Eritrea. Volume 1, June. Archival document. Available at the Research and Documentation Centre, Asmara, Eritrea.

Reid, R. 2005. Caught in the headlights of history: Eritrea, the EPLF and the post-war nation-state. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 43(3):467–488.

———. 2009. Introduction. in *Eritrea's External Relations: Understandings its regional role and foreign policy*, edited by Reid, R, 1–10. Chatham House: London.

Selassie, E. H. 1996. Homecoming in Eritrea: Challenges and Constraints. in *In Search of Cool Ground: War, Flight &*

Homecoming in Northeast Africa, edited by Allen, T, 44–53. James Currey: London.

Smith-Simonsen, C. 2003. The pros and cons of self-reliance: Eritrea's relations with aid agencies and NGOs. *Forum for Development Studies* 30(2):335–348.

Street, J. 1996. ERITREA-POPULATION: Refugees Caught in Political Deadlock. Inter Press Service, 18th July, Available at: http://www.ipsnews.net/1996/07/eritrea-population-refugees-caught-in-political-deadlock/.

Teclemichael Wolde-Giorgis 1999. The Challenge of Reintegrating Returnees and Ex-Combatants. in *Post-conflict Eritrea: prospects for reconstruction and development*, edited by Doornbos, M. and Tesfai, A, 55–100. Red Sea Press Inc.: USA.

Tesfai, A. 1999 The Challenges of Post-war Development: A review of WSP Research findings. in *Post-conflict Eritrea: prospects for reconstruction and development*, edited by Doornbos, M. and Tesfai, A, 325–357. Red Sea Press Inc.: USA.

The Fund For Peace. 1994. Consensus and Dissent in the Horn of Africa – Balancing Consent and Dissent: The Prospects for Human Rights and Democracy in the Horn of Africa. University of Pennsylvania, African Studies Center, Available at: http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Bricker.html.

The Independent. 1996. Better to give than to receive, as a small African state discovers. 22nd December, Available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/better-to-give-than-to-receive-as-a-small-african-state-discovers-1315676.html *The Independent*.

The New York Times. 1996. Eritrea: African Success Story Being Written. 30th April, Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/30/world/eritrea-african-success-story-being-written.html?pagewanted=all *The New York Times*.

United Nations General Assembly. 1995. Opening Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at the Forty-Sixth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner' Programme. Annex of the Report of the Forty-

sixth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Geneva, 16-20th October, Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/3ae68d91c.html.

Uvin, P. 2001. Difficult choices in the new post-conflict agenda: the international community in Rwanda after the genocide. *Third World Quarterly* 22(2):177–189.

Woldegabriel, B. 1996. Eritrean refugees in Sudan. *Review of African Political Economy* 23(67):87–92.

Woldemikeal, T. 2013. Introduction to Special Issue: Postliberation Eritrea. *Africa Today*, 60(2):v–xix.

WRITENET. 1996. Sudan – Eritrea: Early Warning Note. 1st April. Available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a6b68.html.

Zondi, S. and Rejouis, E. 2006. The Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Conflict and the Role of the International Community. *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 6(2):69–83.

Notes

1. Another factor influencing these negotiations, for example, was the relationship between the Eritrean and Sudanese governments. In late 1994, and coinciding with when the PFDJ surrendered the Sudanese Embassy in Asmara to Sudanese opposition forces, diplomatic ties between the two countries were severed. The lack of dialogue between the two countries, as well as instability at their shared border and continual attempts to undermine each other's regimes, impeded repatriation operations throughout the 1990s.
2. The EPLF and PGE had both approached UNHCR for support in these early operations, but had been denied this assistance because of UNHCR's inability to work directly with what were at that point—pending the country's de jure Independence—still non-state actors. Upon achieving independence, the Eritrean government did not forget these early rebukes (McSpadden 1999).
3. The Eritrean authorities' main partner during the formulation of PROFERI was the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs following their dismissal of UNHCR's international staff the year before. UNHCR remained in the background throughout these initial discussions, until a full working relationship was re-established in 1994.
4. Interview with former member of the Commission for Eritrean Refugee

Affairs, Asmara, Eritrea. May, 2014.

5. Interview with former member of the Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs, Asmara, Eritrea. May, 2014.
6. Interview with a staff member at UNHCR, Geneva. September, 2014.
7. Refugees with ethnic ties across the border in Sudan, such as the Beni Amer, also did not cross back to Eritrea en masse in any organized repatriation operations.
8. Interview with a staff member at UNHCR, Geneva. November, 2014.
9. UNHCR's Chief of Mission for Eritrea in 1996 was quoted as saying that "We (UNHCR) created a monster in Sudan. . . we still support 2,000 jobs in the refugee business there, and there are vested interests in keeping the Eritrean refugees. If they repatriate, their refugee empire will collapse. We have to take a lot of responsibility for creating the situation in Sudan" (Street 1996). The Sudanese government therefore sought to discourage the repatriation of Eritreans to ensure that operations in the east of the country were not scaled down.