

The Ethiopian – Somaliland Boundary

Cedric Barnes, School of Oriental and African Studies.

Introduction

The dominant discourse on borders, including the Ethiopia-Somali borderlands, has portrayed Africans – and in our case Somalis – as victims of arbitrary state boundaries, who rejected such artificial constructs. Historical records on the Ethiopian-Somali border demonstrate that Somalis, far from rejecting borders actively used state boundaries to their advantage against rival Somali groups. Though in common with other African state boundaries the Ethiopia-Somalia border has come with its fair share of problems, the border is also an asset. Moreover Somalis – generally expert at making something out of nothing - made use of this indistinct political and economic asset in myriad ways. Somalis not only used and abused the boundary in time-honoured ways e.g. smuggling, banditry, but they also actively engaged with the jurisdictional boundaries to claim individual or group advantage. We should again emphasise note (in agreement with Dereje’s analysis of the western Ethiopian periphery [ref?]) how *active* rather than passive, the Somali borderland communities have been in the relationship with state boundaries. As a general rule, borders have offered a great deal of affordances and opportunities as much as they have restricted and restrained.

The background

The borderland area dividing the Somali inhabited territory of northeast Africa has a complex administrative history. Large parts of the north-western regions of Somali inhabited areas were claimed as part British Somaliland Protectorate. But following Ethiopian victory at Adwa in 1896 and Ethiopia’s effective occupation of large tracts of Somali inhabited areas at her eastern periphery, forced the British to relinquish her original territorial claims.¹ The British colonial administration in Somaliland, along with many of its Somali subjects, bitterly regretted this cession. In fact, shortly after the British government reduced its territorial claims, the administration of what

¹ See Harold G. Marcus, ‘The Rodd Mission of 1897’, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (1965).

became the British Somaliland Protectorate desperately sought a solution that would reintegrate the lost areas back into the Protectorate territory.² It was not until the Second World War reached the region in the nineteen-forties that momentary solution arose.

During the nineteen-thirties the whole of north-east Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, British and Italian Somaliland) was militarily annexed by Italy. Following Italy's declaration of war in 1940, by 1941 British and Commonwealth forces, in alliance with Ethiopian patriots, had attacked and defeated the Italian East African Empire. The defeat of Italy brought the whole of the Somali-speaking lands in northeast Africa under British Military Administration, including much of the Ethiopian (claimed) Somali-lands. Therefore, at the defeat of the Italian East African Empire under the arrangements of the British Military Administration (BMA), the Protectorate government temporarily achieved the recovery of its lost areas by default, though Ethiopian sovereignty of the area was never denied. Once in possession of the lost areas, the Protectorate administration was loathed to relinquish the territory once more.

It had been a constantly regretted fact that the 1897 cession of some of the British Protectorate's claims 'lost' some prime grazing lands to Ethiopian control. This had made securing grazing rights for their subjects a priority for the British Somaliland administration. By the nineteen fifties - fuelled by fifty years of changes to the economy of the region - the situation had become acute. Though the differing impacts of imperial Ethiopian rule on the Somaliland protectorate and the British rule of the Somaliland Protectorate on the adjacent Ethiopian administered Somali territory have not been fully investigated,³ nevertheless, archival records do note the extent of change that the Protectorate government and economy had on the Ethiopian Somali borderlands.⁴

² For boundary issues between Ethiopia and British Somaliland see especially Leo Silberman, 'Why the Haud was Ceded', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (1961), and generally John Drysdale, *The Somali Dispute* (London, 1964).

³ This may be partly due to the archival division that reflected the territorial administrations. British Somaliland colonial archives reflect the British Somaliland's administrations' priorities, whereas the Foreign Office archives give a much more sympathetic view of the Ethiopian side of the border.

⁴ Documents attributed to Foreign Office officials observing the Ethiopian side of the border expose the traditional rivalry between the 'pro-Somaliland' Colonial Office and the 'pro-Ethiopian' Foreign Office.

One such record is a Foreign Office reply to memorandum by the Governor of the Somaliland Protectorate pressing for the retention of lost Protectorate territory under British administration. The Foreign Office representative took the opportunity for a long and detailed rejoinder to the Protectorate's claims:

“The kernel of this thesis [the retention of Ethiopian ‘Haud’ borderland territory under British Administration] is the statement that the pasturage of the British Somaliland Protectorate is deteriorating and thus rendering the Protectorate unable to support its population. [...] But it is pertinent to ask what the deterioration is due to [...] The truth seems to be that because the country is being over grazed by an ever increasing population; and that the increase in population is due chiefly to the fact that the British administration has reduced infant mortality, animal mortality and the mortality due to tribal warfare, it appears, in fact, that the *pax Britannica* is in the process of creating, or at least helping to create a situation in which the choice lies between territorial expansion and starvation. [...]”

The document continues in ever more critical tones:

“The idea is prevalent that we have some sort of moral right to demand the cession by Ethiopia of the Haud because such a cession by Ethiopia provides the only means of ‘preserving the tribal *status quo*’. When analysed this convenient form of words is seen to mean that in the past we treated a certain area of Ethiopia as our own for all practical purposes, the Ethiopians being unable to prevent it, and that we wish, now that they are able to prevent it, to regularise the position by advancing our frontier to cover the area in question.”

Finally the Foreign Office tears down a dearly held myth at the heart of the British Somaliland administrative history:

[...] We cannot even contend with any plausibility that the original frontier was incorrectly drawn in the light of the tribal distribution: the Haud is not a vacuum into which British tribes pour at seasonal intervals, but a region inhabited for the greater part by tribes which do not belong to us. [...] The fact

of the matter is that by preserving the *status quo* we really mean preserving a situation which is constantly evolving to the detriment of the Ethiopian element in the shared area.’⁵

This withering reply certainly underlines the fact that by the late nineteen forties - if not before - the British Somaliland Protectorate had outgrown itself, though the British Somaliland Protectorate could not very well admit this fact.

The 1954 Border Agreement

By the nineteen fifties, with a weakened Britain in the first stages of imperial retreat in Africa, the Protectorate was forced to finally return parts of borderland territory it had retained back to Ethiopia. However, for a time there was an attempt preserve a kind a dual British-Ethiopian authority in the borderland area in a 1954 agreement that recognised the ‘rights’ of British subjects in Ethiopian territory. The 1954 agreement attempted to regularise relationship between the cross-cutting interests of Ethiopian and British Somaliland administration of their common borderlands and trans-national subjects. Yet rather than simplifying matters, the agreement gave full-vent to myriad affordances that the borderland had enjoyed and endured over the previous half century.

The 1954 agreement foundered on the conflicting interpretations, not to say divergent *governmentalities* of the British colonial and Ethiopian imperial states. The divergence of governmental practice is revealed in the minutes⁶ of a series of meetings between the two governments held in Harar between the years of 1955-56, held to iron out problems arising from the 1954 agreement. The minutes of the Harar conference reveal that each territorial administration would not admit that their policies would have an impact across the frontier, despite the constant (and contradictory) complaints of the depredations of the others’ policies on their respective administrations.

⁵ ‘Observations concerning the problem of the Hawd’, Lascelles to Bevin, British Legation, Addis Ababa, 16 October 1948, PRO: FO 371/69294/J6841.

⁶ John R. Stebbing, ‘Harar Conference 12th December 1955 – 21st January 1956’, Mss. Afr.s.2109.

There was a great deal of mutual suspicion between the two governments. A letter from the Chief Secretary to the Government of British Somaliland, J. R. Stebbing, listed what he saw as Ethiopia's 'real' agenda:

- “ i) to reduce grazing rights by cultivation and to encourage settlement by Ethiopian tribes, or persons they claim as Ethiopians, wherever rainfall and soil conditions are suitable.
- ii) to claim as sedentary peoples, and therefore outside the 1954 agreement, any nomadic people who cultivate land, even in the rudimentary and temporary fashion.
- iii) to claim as Ethiopian subjects any fully nomadic peoples who spend the greater part of the year in the territories
- iv) to appoint Ethiopian tribal leaders (*akils* and elders) over any tribes or tribal sections to which they can [...] lay claim, or over which they can fabricate a claim for Ethiopian jurisdiction [...]
- viii) to split the potential alliances of Somali peoples against them, by fostering the traditional antipathy between Isaq and Darod groups of tribes and the fear of the Darod over Isaq expansion into their country.

Without a hint of irony given the Protectorates' own historical designs on Ethiopian sovereign territory, he added for the record:

“The Somaliland Protectorate members of the delegation were also agreed that Ethiopian policy towards Somaliland is undoubtedly expansive and imperialistic⁷ [and ...] that at some later date the Ethiopian government will claim right under the 1954 agreement of reciprocal facilities, so that they may set up their own liaison organisations within the Protectorate, and so, very greatly expand their influence”.

Certainly the Chief Secretary's assessment was not without merit. Nevertheless while the local Somalis are portrayed as the victims of Ethiopian manipulation, the colonial

⁷ An aside notes here that 'Mr Killick and Colonel Pink of the FO 'while not ruling out the possibility, did not agree that the Ethiopian attitude to the Agreement [...] were necessarily sure indications of a policy of Ethiopian expansionism'.

‘voice’ does not allow for Somali’s acute awareness of the affordances of state boundaries, in their individual, local and group interests.

Indeed, of the many hundreds of specific cases that find their way into the historical record, the common theme, is *which* jurisdiction Somali individuals or sections of clans chose to claim. More often than not they claimed both. Moreover, as Drysdale (a participant in the conference) noted about the period of dual administration in the borderlands:

“But, as a clan aligned itself with one government, and then with the other, shifting according to the expediency of the moment, each government would be provoked into action to preserve its dignity, and would intensify the competitive struggle for the nationality of the clan in question.”⁸

Moreover, it is also striking - given the benefit of historical hindsight - how many of the cases recorded in the 1955-1956 Harar conference showed continuities of local strategies towards the boundary since the outset of Ethiopian and British rule over the region.

Careful reading of British Foreign Office records dealing with the eastern Ethiopian periphery, reveal various repertoires employed by the trans-border Somali communities in the half-century before the 1954 agreement. Moreover, though much of the discourse on the Somali-Ethiopian borderlands has concentrated on the ‘pastoral’ (herding) Somali sections, agro-pastoralists are also a significant presence in the borderlands. Agricultural Somalis seem as astute in making use of the affordances of the borderlands as were their pastoral cousins.

A Gadabuursi case study

The history of the agricultural or agro-pastoral transformation of the north-western Somali-lands is an important but little studied process, and the trans-border dimension to this is understood even less well. Though two acknowledged experts on the region, Abdi Samatar and Ioan Lewis, have both written on the rural transformation of the

⁸ Drysdale, *The Somali Dispute* p.82.

British Somaliland Protectorate,⁹ neither author has taken into account the impact of the agricultural transition across the Ethiopian border, and specifically the fact that the transition to agriculture, added further dimensions to the question of border 'dividing' Somali populations.

The increase in sedentary agriculture certainly began in the late nineteenth century in the north-western Somali lands, though some Somali clans, especially those inhabiting the Harar highlands were already well-established farmers by then. Agriculture really began to increase on both side of the border, from the nineteen-twenties onwards. Work on the Somaliland Protectorate has shown that the transition to agriculture in the Protectorate and accompanying the registration and enclosure of lands, put pressure on the wells and grazing of the Protectorate clans in the higher and well-watered areas of the Protectorate.¹⁰

During this period the Protectorate government followed a policy of minimising social change after the experience of disastrously expensive and social disruptive rebellion led by Mahammad Abdille Hasan. Though the Protectorate government was attracted by the increased revenues that farming Somalis generated, it nevertheless found agriculture an added headache. In the Protectorate the agricultural transition was above all an 'administrative' issue to be dealt with carefully for overall good of the all sections of the population. On the other side of the border however, the Ethiopian government positively welcomed and pushed the transformation of pastoralists to tax-paying ox-plough farmers. Grain-growing farmers were vital for Ethiopia's agrarian-based taxation system. Therefore while the British attempted to closely regulate and circumscribe the agricultural activities within what it perceived as the 'customary institutions of their Somalis', the Ethiopians energetically encouraged farming by local Somali clans, and introduced highland settler-farmers for good measure.

⁹ See Abdi Ismail Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia 1884-1986* (Madison, 1989) and I. M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*, (Oxford, 1961).

¹⁰ Patrick Kakwenzire, 'Colonial rule in the British Somaliland Protectorate, 1905-39', (Unpub. PhD, London, 1976), pp. 337-8; 398.

Indeed, thirty years after the transition to farming began in earnest, as the documentation of the Harar Conference show, one of the main problems identified by the British was the fact that the guarantee of trans-border grazing rights in the original border treaties for pastoralists was adversely affected the increase in cultivation on the Ethiopian side.¹¹ But it was also the case that the increase in pressure on trans-border grazing rights – that is British clans grazing rights in Ethiopia - was undoubtedly increased by the Protectorate's own enclosure of grazing land for agriculture at the heart of its territory. The complaints made in Governor Stebbing's list against Ethiopian policy on settling Somalis to agricultural, was doubly disingenuous since cultivation on the Ethiopian side had vastly expanded under the British Military Administration of the reserved areas in the 1940s in response to a boom in grain prices.¹²

In the nineteen twenties as part of the consolidation of rule in the Somali periphery, the local Ethiopian government based in the eastern garrison town of Jigjiga¹³ had attempted to reform and regularise collection of revenues. The Ethiopian administration took advantage of the expansion of farming already undertaken by some sections of Somali clans since the late 19th century. In 1917 the then (sub-) Governor of Jigjiga, and one of Ethiopia's early 'modernizers', Takla-Hawaryat, began to formalise the previously erratic collection of agricultural revenue (grain) from the increasing numbers of farming Somalis. The more regular demands for tax either in cash or in kind, inevitably, brought resistance from some quarters, not least the Gadabuursi clan, who had begun profitable sorghum gardens on the well-watered hills that made up the northern section of the border between Ethiopia and the Protectorate.

In a sub-province still dominated by camel herders, cultivating clans like the Gadabuursi were especially valuable tax-payers – tax which was primarily paid in

¹¹ 'Minutes of the Harar Conference between Representatives of the Somaliland Protectorate Government and the Imperial Ethiopian Government, Dec. 1955 – Jan 1956', in John R. Stebbing, 'Harar Conference 12th December 1955 – 21st January 1956', Mss. Afr.s.2109, Rhodes House Library, University of Oxford.

¹² For an account of this period see Cedric Barnes, 'The Political Economy of Somali Nationalism in Eastern Ethiopia circa 1941-48' in Abdi Kusow ed., *Putting the Cart before the Horse: Inverted Nationalism and the Crisis of Identity in Somalia* (Trenton, 2004).

¹³ Then part of the Harar province under the reforming governor and 'regent' of Ethiopia, Ras Tafari Makonnen, later crowned Emperor Haile Sellasie.

grain. Ethiopian officials pointed out that like any civilised power, their provincial administration needed regular revenues to ensure good administration.¹⁴ In 1920 Takla-Hawaryat was replaced as Governor of Jigjiga by *Qagnazmach* Gadla-Giyorgis. The colonial officials in Somaliland saw him as ‘unscrupulous, determined and tyrannical, but clear headed and remarkably plausible’. For the nascent modernising regime in Ethiopia, Gadla-Giyorgis was an ideal governor, extracting the ‘last ounce of tribute’ from the district and remitting valuable revenues to Addis Ababa ‘without misappropriating much for his own use’.¹⁵ Like Takla-Hawaryat, Gadla-Giyorgis paid particular attention to cultivating Gadabuursi on the border with the Protectorate.

The context of the Ethiopian tax demands should also be seen against the recent British administrative withdrawal (*circa* 1909 – 1913) to a mere coastal presence as Mahammad ‘Abdille Hasan’s rebellion raged in the centre of the Protectorate. During the period of British withdrawal, the Gadabuursi clan had received ‘protection’ and wages from the Ethiopian government. When the British returned they did not tax their subjects directly for fear of prompting another revolt. The Protectorate’s tax-breaks were directly corrosive of attempts at good ‘provincial’ governance by the Ethiopian administration. Instead the British encouraged trade with the coast and gained indirect taxes there from import and export tariffs,¹⁶ and established a customs post close to the Ethiopian border around which the district of Borama evolved. Many Gadabuursi clans welcomed the British presence which would counteract the advance of Ethiopian administration and their incessant demands for taxation along the yet to be demarcated border.¹⁷

During the nineteen-twenties harvests got better, and markets stayed healthy and Gadabuursi enjoyed good revenues from their grain harvests which they sold in the Protectorate where tax was light and indirect. Indeed after the British re-established themselves in the Gadabuursi areas of the Protectorate there was an abrupt decline in

¹⁴ Enclosure No. 1, Archer to Long, Sheikh, [BSP], 6 November 1918, in Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 22 January 1919, PRO: FO 371/3497/12877; and see Summers to Russell, Sheikh [BSP], 10 October 1923, PRO: FO 371/9986/E3447/363/1.

¹⁵ Report on Harar Province, C. H. F. Plowman’, Harar, 13 August 1927, PRO: FO 371/12353/J2925/1.

¹⁶ D. C. Walsh, ‘History of Borama station in Zeila District of British Somaliland Protectorate’ – (written from memory in 1942 after the original records were lost during the evacuation of BSP in 1940), Mss. Afr.s.605, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

¹⁷ Walsh, ‘History of Borama’.

trade between the Ethiopian centre of Somali trade in Jigjiga and the Protectorate. Customs receipts at one of the Protectorate customs posts at Gabileh fell from 27,000 *Rupees* in 1920 to 12,000 *Rupees* in 1922, with official imports of grain falling from 1,625 tons to 832 tons. The decline in revenues was partly due to increased cultivation in the Protectorate itself, but the figures hid the increasing instances of grain being smuggled from Ethiopia across the border to markets in the Protectorate avoiding Ethiopian taxes at Jigjiga.¹⁸

In spite of the Ethiopian efforts to collect taxes and establish effective administration on the Ethiopian side of the border, the British rather churlishly accused Gadla-Giyorgis of ‘maladministration’ and reporting that he had reduced Jigjiga, the once prosperous town ‘to a half-deserted weed-grown ruin’.¹⁹ The British appeared blind to the effects that their timid indirect taxation was having in the Jigjiga region. Nevertheless the Ethiopian government continued to bolster its claim to the Gadabuursi through the recognition of individual ambitions to the ‘chieftaincy’ (known as the *Ugaas*) of the Gadabuursi.

Early on in the Protectorate’s history, the government recognised a certain *Ugaas* Robleh as hereditary chief of the Gadabuursi before their temporary withdrawal from the Protectorate in 1909. On their reoccupation, the Protectorate government discovered that Robleh had taken money from the Ethiopian administration in their absence (not unreasonably, it would seem, given the abandonment of the interior by the protecting government). The Protectorate replaced Robleh with another man who did not gain clan-wide recognition among the Gadabuursi, so the British appointed *Ugaas* Robleh’s son, Daudi, supported by other important Gadabuursi personalities. These adjuncts to Daudi were revealingly called ‘trade agents’ by the British, and their appointed task it was to attract Gadabuursi goods and grain away from Ethiopian jurisdiction into the British Protectorate.

¹⁸ ‘Monthly Intelligence Report for March’, Addis Ababa, April 1923, PRO: FO 371/8408/A2436/2276/1.

¹⁹ ‘Monthly Intelligence Report, Addis Ababa for October’, November 1924, PRO:FO 371/9994/E11310/173/1.

Meanwhile, Daudi's father, *Ugaas* Robleh continued to work for the Ethiopian government who maintained their claim to the Gadabuursi as an 'Ethiopian' clan. However, under the more stringent conditions of Gadla-Giyorgis's rule, and the evident economic and agricultural success among the Gadabuursi of the Protectorate, *Ugaas* Robleh became disgruntled and returned to British territory. However, in the meantime his son Daudi went over to the Ethiopians and Governor Gadla-Giyorgis, helping to collect tax and registering sections of Gadabuursi as 'Ethiopians'. Daudi eventually earned himself the Ethiopian title of *Grazmach*.²⁰

The struggle to claim Gadabuursi became intense. In November 1923 a British Gadabuursi was killed by an Abyssinian party trying to collect taxes from a village at the frontier.²¹ In another instance the Ethiopian government arrested a trading caravan for smuggling grain to the Protectorate, but local (presumably Gadabursi) Somalis killed the Ethiopian police and the caravan escaped to the Protectorate.²² When Gadla-Giyorgis proceeded to levy a tax per camel on all caravans of grain going out of Jigjiga district many Somalis were roused, and by 1925 five Ethiopian tax collectors had been murdered.²³

In an attempt to stop the leakage of grain and revenue from trade from Jigjiga to the Protectorate Gadla-Giyorgis resorted to more forceful measures. He appointed Daudi Robleh over armed bodies of irregular Somali police whose role it was to collect customs dues at the border, grain taxes, and to register sections of the Gadabuursi as Ethiopian. The methods the Somali irregulars used were often violent, and levies of customs dues quickly escalated into the plunder of entire caravans, with some of these gains sent back to Gadla-Giyorgis and some being kept for themselves.²⁴

The Ethiopian border administration under Gadla-Giyorgis was exposed to continued British criticism throughout the nineteen-twenties. Many of the incidents came about

²⁰ Kittermaster to Bentinck, Sheikh [BSP], 20 February 1926, PRO: FO 371/11559/J805/8/1, and Plowman to Bentinck, Harar, 30 December 1926, PRO: FO 371/12344/J229/54/1; also see D. C. Walsh, 'History of Borama station'.

²¹ Kittermaster to Amery, Sheikh [BSP], 15 August 1925.

²² Plowman to Assistant Secretary, Berbera [BSP], Harar, 15 March 1925, PRO: FO 371/10874/J3565/681/1.

²³ 'Summary of Intelligence Reports for 1925', Addis Ababa, 10 October 1925, PRO: FO 371/10878/J3349/2480/1.

²⁴ Kittermaster to Bentinck, Sheikh [BSP], 18 February 1926, PRO: FO 371/11559/J827/8/1.

through Gadla-Giyorgis' vigilance towards the collection of revenue which the British saw as 'maladministration'. Finally in June 1927 the British were given real cause for complaint when the zealous Gadla-Giyorgis attacked a Somali caravan for 'taxes'. Gadla-Giyorgis did not realise however that the caravan had been carrying the property of the ex-Governor of Somaliland, Archer, who was accompanying the 'Maharajah of Kutch' on a shooting expedition in southern Ethiopia.²⁵ On account of this unfortunate incident, the Ethiopian government was obliged to remove Gadla-Giyorgis much to the satisfaction of the British.²⁶

Nevertheless the Gadabuursi continued to play on their ambiguous status and the affordances of boundary administration, a situation that had suited the British up to a point. However by 1930 the situation had changed. The then Governor of the Protectorate, Harold Kittermaster, wrote,

The question of the border tribes is becoming increasingly urgent. His Imperial Majesty Haile Sellasie is apparently making genuine attempts to improve the administration of the border districts and naturally the indefinite procedure of the past must be improved. Cases are being constantly filed in the Buramo [Borama] court against Gadabuursi who have always been regarded as British but who are now living in Abyssinia and if application is made to the Abyssinian authorities for the execution of the judgements they challenge the validity of the British courts to try the case at all. [...] In view of the closer administration of the district by the Abyssinians I now withdraw the opinion I expressed two years ago that the demarcation of the border should be postponed as long as possible. I think it should be undertaken at once.²⁷

Later that year there was an ugly incident during a dispute over the Ethiopian right to tax certain sections of the Gadabuursi clan. During a meeting at the border between the new Governor of Jigjiga, *Fitawrari* Taffassa and his British counterpart in

²⁵ Plowman to Bentinck, Harar, 23 July 1927, PRO: FO 371/12351/J2284/1446/1.

²⁶ Archer to Plowman, Jigjiga, 21 July 1927, PRO, FO 371/12351/J2286/1446/1.

²⁷ Kittermaster to Passfield, Sheikh [BSP], 16 May 1930, PRO: FO 371/14593/J2099.

Borama, District Officer Walsh, to resolve taxation rights and dues, tensions escalated and shots were fired. A number of Ethiopians were killed.²⁸

Problems continued to bedevil Gadabuursi country near the border with the British Protectorate's Borama district since Ethiopian soldiers regularly prevented grain and other produce from going across the border for sale.²⁹ Later in 1934 when the Ethiopian government introduced poll tax to their side of the border it immediately provoked the old problem of the dual nationality of Gadabuursi when, as in the past, the local officials at Jigjiga taxed all the Gadabuursi present in Ethiopia regardless of their 'nationality'.³⁰

The intervention of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and British Somaliland, the Italian defeat and the subsequent administration of the eastern Ethiopian periphery by British Military Administration 'solved' the borderland problems for a time. However in the post-war period the division of the Gadabuursi clan on either side of the border was of the most perennial of 'borderland' problems, and many Gadabursi cases are included in the deliberations of the Harar conference in the 1950s.

Conclusion

Though it is not always explicit in the written records, it is evident that Gadabuursi 'agricultural' clans were actively engaged in using the affordances of the border to full effect. For some the less stringent fiscal demands of the early British colonial regime made an Ethiopian nationality attractive. However, it is also evident that some elements preferred being 'Ethiopian' for various reasons, for example to evade court cases in the Protectorate. The divide in the Gadabuursi ruling family hints at a wider Gadabuursi agency in the exploitation of borderland affordances. The choice between territorial administration was a complex calculation of short term 'household' interests – rational economic decisions - but wider questions of the relative strengths of other Somali clans, past experience and future ambitions.

²⁸ Walsh, 'History of Borama station.'

²⁹ 'Addis Ababa Intelligence Report', Barton to Henderson, Addis Ababa, 3 February 1931, PRO: FO 371/15389/J571.

³⁰ 'Somaliland Protectorate Intelligence Report' Major C. V. Bennet, Burao [BSP], 31 December 1934, PRO: FO 371/19104/J758.