

## 1972 – 1989: The Ugugumo rebellion and civil wars in Ethiopia

### Case no. 3

#### The Afar rebellion: geopolitical motivations and control over land and resources

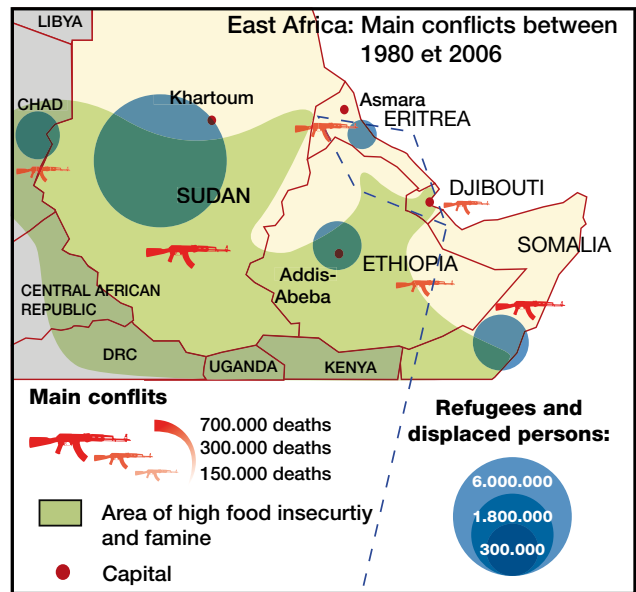
The Afar pastoralist communities are dispersed over the desertic high plateau of the Awash valley, in the heart of the Horn of Africa, an area also referred to “Afar triangle”.

Successive drought periods – notably 1972, 1973, 1974 and 1976 – reduced pasturelands and pushed the Afar further into the fertile lands of the valley.

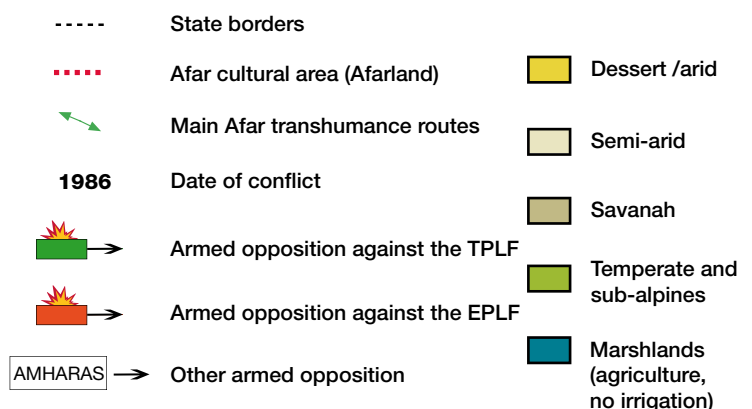
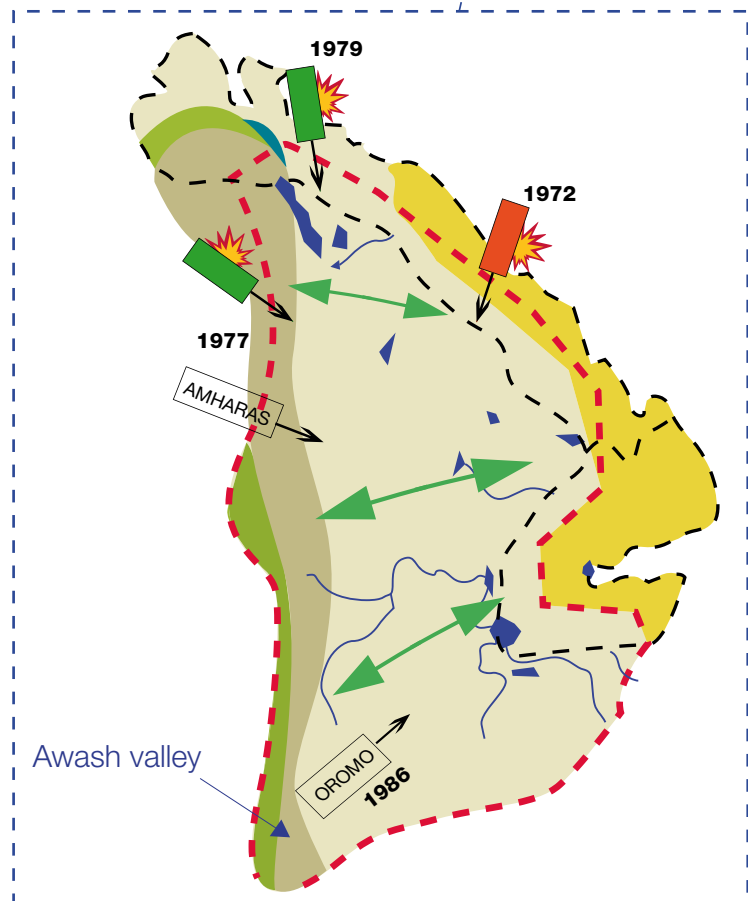
**This increased pressure on resources created tensions between all neighbouring communities** (Oromo from Wello, Tigrayan, Argobba, Somali, etc.) and the Afar. The uprising – “l’Ugugumo” in Afar – progressively became a military movement feared by the regime of Haile Selassie and later by the armed autonomy and loyalist movements of the Mengistu regime.

In 1972, of the Eritrean independence war between Ethiopia and the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) began. L’Ugugumo fought the EPLF secessionists and demanded the unification of the Afar nation.

Defending the Afar identity and territory was also a main driver in the armed conflict against the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) from 1977 to 1989 and then against the Issa from Djibouti from 1991 to 1996. From 1993 the Eritrean and Ethiopian army joined forces to fight the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF) which continues to move its radius of activity southward.



Source: UNHCR 2007





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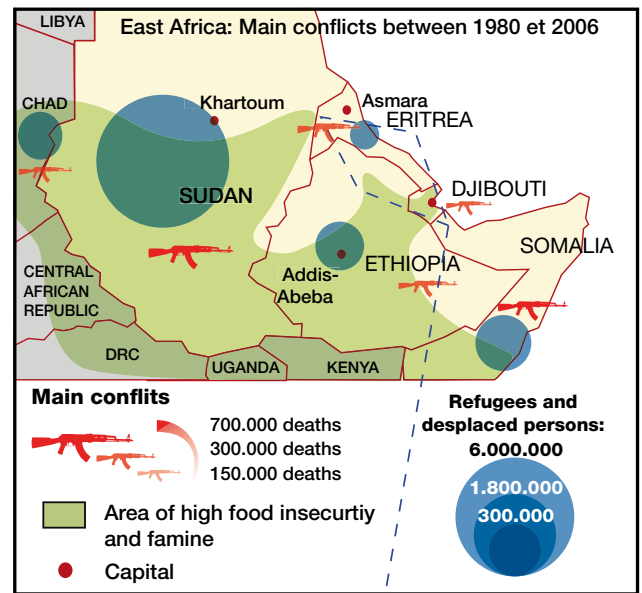
The coming to power of the Ethiopian Peoples's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)\* in July 1991 provoked a massive arrival of Tigrayan farmers on the lands of the Awash valley and on Afar pasturelands. The installations of large-scale horticulture and sugar cane farms were accompanied by expropriation of Afar herders. These large scale agricultural investments coincided with three years of large reductions in rainfall (1990, 1993 and 1996).

The reduction of pasturelands, overgrazing on available land and the construction of dams upstream significantly reduced drinking/watering possibilities for livestock. The further weakening of herds caused by diseases led to significant losses of livestock. Affected by famine, the Afar were forced to move further southwest where they compete with Issa herders over the more humid and fertile areas of the Awash.

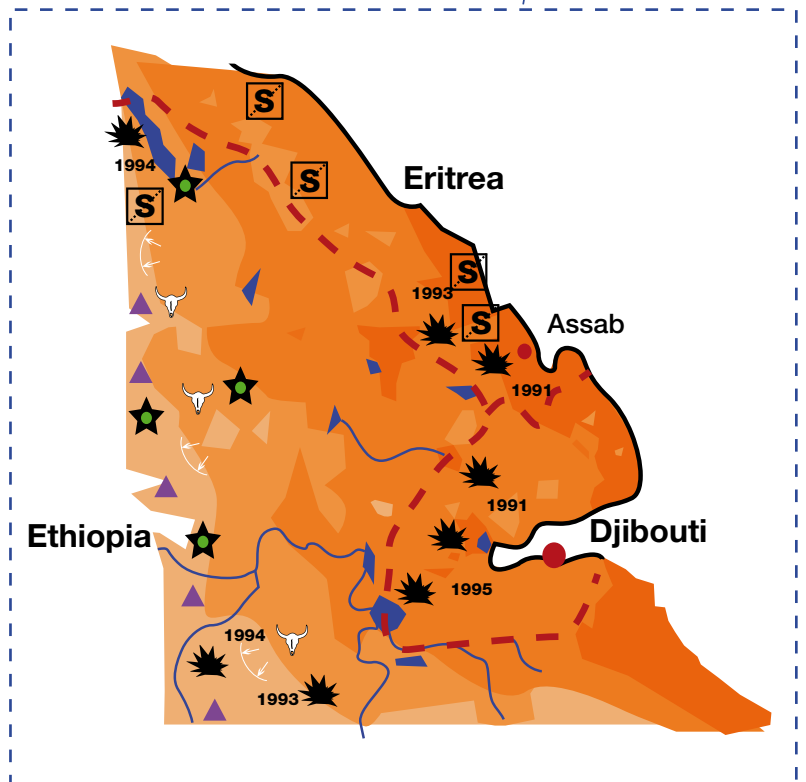
The suppression of saltmining concessions is further hurting the Afar community who lived for centuries from this activity. Leading to loss of revenues (taxes) and employment. The pressure of other communities on a traditional Afar economic monopoly worsened inter-ethnic tensions, in particular in Djibouti. In 1995, despite signing of a ceasefire several hundred Afar fled.

\* Political coalition formed in 1990 between the Tigrayan Peoples's Liberation Front, the Eritrean Peoples's Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Front. In May 1991 the EPRDF advanced on Addis Ababa leading to the ousting of the pro-soviet Mengistu and the taking over of power.

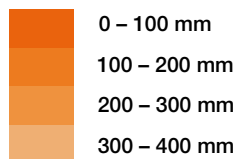
### 1990 – 1996: Armed insurrection: partly motivated by growing pressure on resources



Source: UNHCR 2007



#### Rainfall (mm/year)



- Main cities
- Intensive agriculture
- Land confiscations

- Significant loss of livestock
- Growing scarcity of pastureland
- Suppression of salt mining concessions
- Areas of high insecurity
- Date of main armed opposition



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