Balewa; and there was the question of resurgent Easterners bent on secession after the massacres in the North. Unquestionably, these problems could not have been dealt with in a heavy-handed manner as a lot of tact and diplomacy were required to hold the combustible fragility of the nation in place. In this respect, perhaps Gowon's supposed dithering and indecision were useful in that they averted igniting an already highly inflammable scenario.

The war created a behemoth out of the Nigerian army, which spiralled from 10,000 soldiers at its beginning to 200,000 at its height. In both civilian and military mindsets, it led to the erroneous impression that the military had answers to sociopolitical problems and that force was always a useful approach to pursue. Of course, this culminated in more coups, more bloodshed and more deaths, the cost of which cannot be easily computed. In other words, the war resulted in the militarisation of society and also, in a way, partial societal amnesia. Ultimately, what ought to be remembered about the conflict is that:

> It proved to be a strange war in some respects. There were no major set battles, as was the case in World War II. It was a war of minor skirmishes, short, sharp confrontations and localised incursions with ever changing boundaries, both sides being in the ascendant and descendent in almost equal measure throughout the campaign. In spite of there being some 300,000 troops eventually involved in the war for both sides, total casualties could have been as few as 30,000 (p. 3).

Gould's account of the Biafran war possesses strengths that many Nigerian studies lack. First of all, he is not hampered by the prejudice of ethnicity that tends to compel many authors to write from highly ethnicised perspectives. Indeed, undue ethnicisation and politicisation are challenges that mar most Nigerian accounts of the civil war. Secondly, he was able to conduct interviews with many principal personalities of the conflict, notably, Gowon, Ojukwu, Adekunle, Achuzia, Adeyinka Adebayo, Cummings-Bruce, and Danjuma. This alone is commendable. In sum, here is an analysis of a war that continues to open fresh wounds when mentioned, told by an outsider who apparently has nothing to gain but the truth, told for once without the impediment of seeking to score cheap political points, or having needlessly to pacify bruised and over-ambitious egos that would rather not be assuaged.

The Promise of Liberation and the Reality of Oppression

Kidane Mengisteab

The Africa Garrison State: Human Rights and Political Development in Eritrea

By Kjetil Tronvoll and Daniel R. Mekonnen

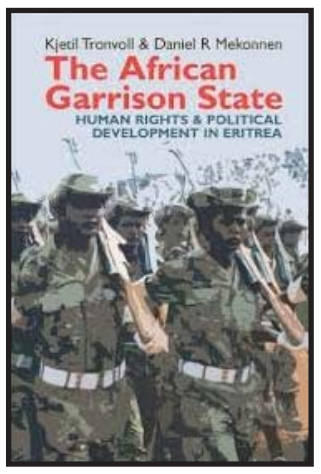
James Currey, 2014, pp. 212, ISBN-13: 978-1847010698

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which successfully brought about the country's independence, was expected by the overwhelming majority of the country's citizens to build a democratic state that liberates and transforms society. As the authors of this book note, many observers also saw the country during the early years of its independence as a promising "model of African renaissance".Roughly two decades later, however, Eritrea is widely regarded as one of the most repressive authoritarian states in the world.

The EPLF, as a liberation front, was a highly centralized military organization that did not tolerate any dissent. With the country's independence the Front changed its name to the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ),with the aim of signaling its transition from an armed liberation front to a governing political party that would bring about development with democracy and justice. Unfortunately, the Front failed to shed its highly centralized structures, which was perhaps, essential for its success during the war. Failing to transform its structures of centralization, the PFDJ continued to suppress dissent and to bar other organizations from participation in the country's political affairs. As it erected a monopoly of the country's political life it slid into a cruel betrayal of the liberation goals of the 30-year armed struggle for which thousands of patriots sacrificed their lives. In less than a decade after independence, the once very popular EPLF metamorphosed into a highly repressive organization completely inept in establishing inclusive governance and unwilling to build the structures of a democracy-fostering state.

The authors of this book grapple with this dramatic shift in Eritrea's political developments and their impacts on society. The book revolves around two interrelated principal objectives. One is to describe the type of state structures the ruling party has imposed on the Eritrean population and the magnitude of repression and human rights violations perpetrated by the Eritrean state upon its citizens. The second objective is to explain how a once hugely popular liberation front came to establish a "garrison" state characterized by (1) a totalizing political ideology that does not allow any political organization other than the ruling PFDJ party and (2) a repressive personal rule devoid of the rudimentary principles of the rule of law and relies on violence to crush any dissent against its decrees and policies.

The book is organized into eleven chapters. The first chapter introduces the objectives and organization of the book and defines the concept of garrison state, which serves as the theoretical anchor for the analysis. Chapters two through ten build up empirical and analytical support for the claim that the Eritrean state equates to a garrison state. More specifically, chapters two and three examine the workings of the country's judiciary and the state of rule of law. Chapters four through six examine the structures of totalitarian rule that the EPLF has erected and its obliteration of the country's civil society. Chapters seven, eight, and nine discuss the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Kunama, the Jeberti, and the Jehovah's Witnesses and social groups, including journalists, human rights defenders, and dissenters of the PFDJ. Chapter ten revisits the book's conceptual framework to ascertain that Eritrea matches the criteria of a garrison state. The concluding chapter makes a modest attempt to suggest some policy recommendations to change the country's current predicament.



The modern state is composed of a set of interlocking organizations that include the government with its executive, legislative, and judiciary branches, the constitutional court, the security forces, the bureaucracy, the central bank, the electoral commission, the auditor general and others, depending on the political system. A democracy-fostering state establishes structures that allow its different constituent organizations to enjoy a measure of independence from each other (and especially from the executive branch) in performing the tasks within their spheres of authority and ensure horizontal accountability by acting as checks and balances on each other. In an authoritarian political system, by contrast,the roles of all the different organizations of the state would be concentrated in a single organization, the executive, or an individual leader. In such a situation there would be little distinction between the state and the government, or even between the state, the government, and the individual leader.

As the authors of this book ably show, the EPLF has created a highly centralized authoritarian state dominated by the individual leader, who is accountable to no one. Since the country has no functioning national assembly and the government has not implemented the 1997 ratified constitution, the president functions as "the premier de facto law-making body …." He serves as the party chairman, head of state and government, and commander in chief of the armed forces. He also controls the judiciary since he appoints and dismisses chief justices. The Special Court that he has created with hand-picked judges with little legal training also operates outside the judicial system undermining the integrity of the regular courts. The country has not had any presidential elections since its de facto independence in 1991 and,as noted already, political parties and independent civil society organizations are not allowed. Under such concentration of power, there is little to restrain the president's power. For all practical purposes he is the government and the state. In the absence of any structures of accountability, there is also little to protect citizens, especially those who express dissent, from excesses of the government and from violation of their human and civil rights. Dissenters are imprisoned for decades without formal charges let alone trials. Various human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human rights Watch and the UN Human Rights Commission have documented various forms of torture. The number of political prisoners is unknown but many observers view the country as an 'open-air-prison'. The authors meticulously document such violations by the regime. Perhaps the single largest group whose human rights are grossly violated is the country's youth, who are locked in an open-ended national service with minimal pay and often forced to provide free labor in the firms controlled by the PFDJ or firms associated with it. Some are said to have been kept in the service of over a decade wasting their productive age unable to develop skills and careers or to support their families. Since the conscripts are given little education beyond High School or skill training, the country is also losing the opportunity to build up human capital that would be essential for its development. It is also losing labor power as the youth are fleeing the county in large numbers. There is little doubt that the disruption in human capital development is certain to retard the country's development for years to come.

In general the authors provide a very strong documentation of the regime's human rights violations. In a few cases, however, the book either fails to provide a historical perspective or reliable empirical evidence on the allegations of abuse targeted at certain ethnic identities. The claim that the government targets the Kunama is a good example. There is little doubt that the regime suppresses any

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