Introduction

This book is about the crisis of Africa's postcolonial political order and attempts by revolutionary movements to disrupt, transform and reconstitute it.

For many across the continent, liberation from colonialism dramatically failed to deliver on its promises. During the 1960s and 1970s, independence heroes transmuted into one-party dictators, or fell to military coups, leaving the destructive and extractive structures of the colonial state largely intact. Indeed, life presidents and military juntas often relied on these structures to govern and to crack down on opposition. Regardless of the abuses being meted out to civilians, African postcolonial elites largely closed ranks to maintain their grip on power and the territorial integrity of the states they had inherited. Article III of the Organisation of African Unity's 1963 founding charter committed its state signatories to 'non-interference in the internal affairs' of other signatories rendering it, for many, a 'dictators' club' – a device for leaders to escape domestic accountability.[1] Former colonial powers – together with the US and USSR – also played their part, bankrolling, arming and feting despots for their own geostrategic purposes.

Between January 1986 and July 1994, however, this postcolonial settlement was profoundly challenged – at least in East Africa. For the first time in the region's history, African governments would fall not to military coup or foreign invasion but to domestic, guerrilla insurgency. In the space of eight years, four self-styled liberation movements would seize power from the Red Sea coast to the shores of Lake Kivu.

The first victory, that of Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM), occurred in Uganda in 1986. Five years later, in

[1] Edward Ansah Akuffo, 'Cooperating for Peace and Security or Competing for Legitimacy in Africa? The Case of the African Union in Darfur', *African Security Review*, 19, no. 4 (December 2010), 77.

the Horn of Africa, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – a recent creation of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – overthrew Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam and his socialist Derg regime, paving the way for Eritrean secession in 1993. Finally, in the immediate aftermath of a devastating genocide prosecuted by their opponents, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took power in Kigali in 1994.

These post-liberation regimes were fundamentally distinct from the rest of the region's – and continent's – ruling elites, even if they knew one another intimately (the EPLF and TPLF as wartime allies, the RPF as an offshoot of the NRM).[2] In Tanzania, Kenya and Djibouti, nationalist parties had governed since independence, colonial power structures and institutions having been transferred largely seamlessly from European officials to a postcolonial, civilian aristocracy. In Sudan, Zaïre and Somalia, senior military officers had brokered Cold War politics to establish army rule in the 1960s and transformed themselves into authoritarian presidents-for-life.

The new leaders of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda had few formal links to this postcolonial status quo – indeed, their insurgencies were premised upon overthrowing it. Their movements had emerged from within deeply fractured societies, whose divisions had been exacerbated and instrumentalised by violent, cynical regimes in order to remain in office. The four movements had fought for years, in some cases decades, to 'liberate' their fellow citizens from this form of rule and replace it with a very different dispensation – one which aspired to re-structure sociopolitical relations domestically and, eventually, across the continent.

In some respects, they were successful – today, post-liberation elites dominate the region's politics and have come to define what is regarded, in the words of one senior regional security bureaucrat, as 'the new normal'.[3] Heralded as a 'new generation' of African leaders

[2] The term 'post-liberation' is taken from the work of Sara Rich Dorman ('Post-liberation Politics in Africa: Examining the Political Legacy of Struggle', *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 6 (May 2006), 1085–1101) and is explored in more depth later in this chapter.

[3] Interview 23 (Senior Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) official).

by Western leaders and commentators during the 1990s,[4] the extent to which this group of revolutionaries have, decades later, transformed the regional order according to their *original*, stated agendas is less clear. Like their maligned predecessors, all four post-liberation regimes have come to preside over fundamentally authoritarian and oppressive systems of government. Moreover, far from fostering a regionalism based around cooperation, solidarity and collaboration, the four elites have been key players in some of the most violent and protracted conflicts since the dawn of independence – in several cases mobilising against one another.

The purpose of this book, therefore, is to expose, examine and underline the acute challenges faced by African post-liberation movements seeking to re-structure and transform regional politics. In doing so, the study emphasises the centrality of the four movements previously mentioned to understanding this phenomenon, in East Africa and beyond. Appreciating the distinctive role played by this collective, it is argued, is not only helpful but, indeed, fundamental for understanding the evolving politics of peace and insecurity in one of the most conflict-affected parts of the world. Doing so also sheds critical light on the competing organisational, ideational, sociological and historical pressures post-liberation governments contend with as they balance reform efforts with accommodation of – and, in some cases, accession to – countervailing interests and historical trajectories.

The Book

The study therefore explores how the new, post-liberation governing elites of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda approached and dealt with the challenges of moving from domestic rebellion to regional statecraft. It does so by examining the complex and contradictory relationships and interactions of the post-liberation elites of these four

[4] Madeleine Albright, *Remarks at George Mason University, March 19, 1998* (Washington, DC: US Department of State); James Bennet, 'Throngs Greet Call by Clinton for New Africa', *New York Times*, 24 March 1998; Dan Connell and Frank Smyth, 'Africa's New Bloc', *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 2 (March–April 1998), 80–94; Marina Ottaway, *Africa's New Leaders: Democracy or State Reconstruction?* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

states since 1986, and the manner in which their insurgent origins, and links to one another, influenced their management of regional politics.

The analysis that follows argues for the importance of common ideological, ideational and *aspirational* frameworks around pan-Africanism and liberation across the four elites in their negotiation of a place in the region. Each of these politico-military elites came to power through armed insurrection against a dictatorial, African regime. Each framed their revolution around fundamental political and societal transformation: 'liberation' from domestic and international oppression. Each relied on support from another to defeat the enemy and to establish a post-liberation state. Each cooperated with the other three in a variety of regional security projects during the 1990s and found within the other three a group of natural allies, at least in theory.

Just as they had in the bush, though, once in power these elites rapidly found themselves needing to accommodate a range of competing forces and pressures, reformist ambitions often sitting uncomfortably alongside the practicalities of regional diplomacy and, increasingly, regime maintenance and intra-movement politics. The ideas that had informed their revolutions were also not frozen in time and have continued to develop and be reimagined or romanticised as part of governance debates and internal power struggles. Ultimately, the contradictions at the heart of these processes – and, to some extent, the movements themselves – came to play out violently across, and between, all four polities, as domestic politics and foreign policy became almost inextricably linked. As the book establishes, the lasting impact of what some during the 1990s referred to as the region's 'second liberation' appears to have been less a transformation of relations between states and societies and more a securitisation and militarisation of regional politics and the embedding of a securocratic elite at its heart.

To fully comprehend these developments, it is crucial to understand these post-liberation elites as social, as well as ideological and pragmatic, actors. The liberation struggles of the four elites mattered for what would come later, the book argues, because of the relationships and mindsets that these struggles would come to entrench. Within each movement, struggle and sacrifice came to characterise much of the insurgent experience – leading to the development of intense feelings

of loyalty and friendship, as well as of resentment, mistrust and betrayal. The single-minded pursuit of military victory had also underlined for many the totalising value of violence as a problem-solving mechanism, a lesson which would be transposed onto regional politicking by these elites once in power.

Finally, and what makes this group particularly distinctive and, indeed, fascinating from an International Relations perspective, is that they did not emerge independently of one another – quite the reverse. Future senior NRM and RPF cadres had been classmates in western Ugandan secondary schools and students of the same universities in Dar es Salaam and Kampala. Indeed, the RPF partly emerged from within the NRM and post-1986 Ugandan polity itself. Likewise, the post-1991 rulers of Ethiopia and Eritrea were members of the same study circles and activist groups in universities in Addis Ababa and Asmara and later trained and fought alongside one another in their insurgencies. Intense and contradictory relationships were not, therefore, only built *within* the four movements during struggle but, critically, *between* them – with often decisive implications for the later management of regional affairs, as well as the emergence of fault lines within each movement itself.

The approach of this study is therefore to explore and analyse how personal, ideational, ideological and sociological legacies and linkages of the liberation war era have influenced these four post-liberation elites' approaches to the conduct of regional relations, and how they have interacted and been reconstituted as part of the practical politics of dealing with neighbours, and remaining in power. A study of African international relations, the book consciously locates itself in the interdisciplinary space between International Relations, Comparative Politics and, to some extent, Political Sociology. This is in recognition of the blurred lines that exist between domestic and international politics in African states and the artificiality of delineating clear divisions between the external and the internal. This is particularly so when analysing post-liberation regimes whose leaders, prior to gaining office, fought alongside one another and in some cases served in the other's government. Moreover, it allows for a fuller consideration of how domestic politics drives international relations in Africa, and vice versa, and helps more broadly to demonstrate the intersections between the multiple levels and registers of politics which characterise

the continent.[5] Some of the foundational texts on Africa's international relations – Christopher Clapham's *Africa in the International System* (1996), Jean-Francois Bayart's 'Africa in the World' (2000), Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001) – have retained their influence and significance precisely because they eschew strict, disciplinary boundaries.[6]

Drawing on 130 interviews undertaken across ten countries between 2008 and 2018, the book sheds critical new light on how identity formation, social relationships, liberation ideology and post-conflict state-building imperatives have interacted to drive East African regional politics over the last three decades.[7] In doing so, it makes an important contribution to scholarly understandings of African international relations and how these factors play into domestic processes of state-building and regime consolidation. It also makes a critical contribution to wider debates on political transformation and stagnation in postcolonial polities, and on the character, durability and influence of revolutionary movements-turned-governments.

Acronyms

Before progressing, the reader may find it useful to be reminded of the core acronyms used throughout this chapter, and book, to describe the four movements at its heart:

ERITREA: **EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front)**
Liberation movement founded in 1970 and ruling party of Eritrea since 1991 (de facto) / 1993 (Eritrean independence).
PFDJ (People's Front for Democracy and Justice)
The name the EPLF adopted when it transformed into a political party in 1994.

[5] Carl Death, 'Introduction: Africa's International Relations', *African Affairs*, Virtual Special Issue on Africa's International Relations (August 2015).
[6] Jean-François Bayart, 'Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion', *African Affairs*, 99, no. 395 (April 2000), 217–67; Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2001).
[7] Eighty-eight of these interviews are cited in the text that follows, the remainder have informed the study in various ways but have not been cited.

ETHIOPIA: **EPRDF** (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front)
Four-member liberation movement coalition founded in 1988 (and ruling party of Ethiopia since 1991) and dominated by:
TPLF (Tigrayan People's Liberation Front)
Liberation movement founded in 1975 in Tigray, northern Ethiopia; historically dominant member of the EPRDF.

RWANDA: **RPF** (Rwandan Patriotic Front)
Liberation movement founded in 1987 and ruling party of Rwanda since 1994.

UGANDA: **NRM** (National Resistance Movement)
Liberation movement founded in 1981 and ruling party of Uganda since 1986.

Approach, Argument and Contribution

In November 2015, the author took part in a set of discussions in the region on peace and conflict where regional security elites – including senior figures (current and former) from Eritrea's ruling PFDJ (the rebel EPLF's successor manifestation) and from the dominant coalition partner of the EPRDF (the TPLF) – were gathered.[8] In one particularly heated session, TPLF and PFDJ elders rose to their feet and angrily berated one another – before an audience of regional and international counterparts – for past and present perceived transgressions. Over a decade since the conclusion of a bloody border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and in the midst of 'no war, no peace' between the two former allies, it is perhaps little surprise that feelings still ran high:

Ethiopian Perspectives:
Eritrea itself should not continue still to destabilise the region! The [Eritrean official] blames the UN, the US Government but it would be good if he also blames himself!

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Eritrea's isolation is because it is provoking neighbours, it is fighting neighbours!

Eritrean Perspectives:
The IGAD [East Africa's regional intergovernmental security organisation] chairmanship has been kept hostage by Ethiopia for 8 years!

[8] This event took place in Nairobi and was held under the Chatham House Rule.

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The US Government has refused to recognise the final and binding decision of the [Eritrea-Ethiopia] Boundary Commission [on the legal location of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border] purely to satisfy the Ethiopian government. We [Eritrea] always raise these issues and nobody listens!

That evening, however, the same elders chose to sit around a single table (having been afforded the opportunity to sit among colleagues from any and all other polities in the wider region) and to eat, drink, talk and laugh with one another – reminiscing, in Tigrinya, about their past collaborations, mutual friends and the state of café culture and favourite haunts in Asmara and Addis Ababa.

This is not to suggest that this nostalgic camaraderie represents the 'real' character of contemporary relations between Ethiopian and Eritrean post-liberation era elites – nor that the angry exchanges earlier in the day were simply empty performances. Both are different elements of the same truth concerning a deeply contradictory and complex relationship between intertwined, national politico-military elites.

What this vignette does underline is the deeply contradictory and ambiguous relationships between the four post-liberation elites explored in this study. To fully understand these relationships, it is necessary to explore and analyse how personal, ideational and sociological linkages established between each prior to their coming to power have determined the nature of inter-state and regional relations. It is also important to examine how the conduct of regional politics by the four post-liberation elites has in turn impacted on the place of liberation cadres within their respective polities, and how they have viewed and approached one another.

This study does this by providing a detailed and empirically grounded analysis of the regional security perspectives and approaches of East Africa's four post-liberation regimes and politico-military elites since 1986. In doing so, it charts the ascendancy of the post-liberation ruling elites in each polity between 1986 and 1994, their dominance of security and policy-making apparatuses and fora during the 1990s and the fragmentation and reconstitution of each elite – and relations between the four – since the 2000s. The book marshals an extensive amount of interview and participant observation data to tell the story of these sets of actors through their own words – a story of the emergence and disintegration of an inter-linked community of politico-military liberation cadres whose influence on regional politics

has been profound and enduring, albeit not necessarily in the manner this community originally aspired towards.

The core focus, therefore, is on the narratives and mindsets of the four post-liberation elites themselves. The book analyses other regional polities through this lens and does not seek to provide a comprehensive survey of post-1986 East African regional politics. Consequently, some states appear more frequently in the study than others, or are more prominent in certain time periods than in others. Moreover, the research is concerned with elite-, rather than local-, level political dynamics, perspectives and relationships. Clearly, the contours of regional politics in East Africa, as elsewhere, can only be understood partially through taking an elite-level focus, and it is not this author's intention to downplay the significance of local-level analysis.[9] It remains the case, however, that decisions of a small number of senior figures continue to have a major impact on the security and prosperity of communities across East Africa and the wider continent and, accordingly, that understanding what drives, and has driven, these decisions helps to shed light on the broader picture.

Finally, the study is concerned primarily with regional, rather than international, politics. The two are not easily separated, conceptually or empirically, of course, and how non-African state actors (particularly Western donor states) and their agendas have interacted with the regional activities and relationships of African states must clearly be considered carefully in any exploration of African international relations. The focus of this monograph, however, is on the character, views, actions and perspectives of East Africa's post-liberation movement elite and how these link to, and determine, regional relationships. The role of external actors – focused and extensive analysis of which exists elsewhere, including in some of this author's previous work[10] – will therefore be considered primarily through this lens.

[9] See Julia Gallagher, *Zimbabwe's International Relations: Fantasy, Reality and the Making of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) for an innovative framework for linking local perspectives and high politics in the study of African regional relationships.

[10] Contributions include Will Brown and Sophie Harman (eds.), *African Agency in International Politics* (London: Routledge, 2013); Jonathan Fisher and David M. Anderson, 'Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Africa', *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (January 2015), 131–51; Aleksandra Gadzala (ed.), *Africa and China: How Africans and Their Governments are Shaping Relations with China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015);

In analysing the four movements' evolving interactions with the region and one another, and the wider politics of revolutionary ambition and destabilisation, the book focuses in particular on three forms of politics: aspiration, accommodation and affinity.

The Politics of Aspiration

This study seeks to demonstrate the interrelationships between domestic and regional politics by taking the ideological drivers of policy seriously, and moving beyond purely rational actor framings of this relationship. Each of the four movements examined in this study framed its revolution and subsequent approach to the region in ideological terms – liberation, societal and political transformation and the de/politicisation of ethnic identity – and understanding regimes of this kind, and their regional relationships, requires one to engage sincerely with these aspirational creeds.

The vibrant literature on African statehood rightly emphasises the fundamental crisis of legitimacy inherited by postcolonial polities and the continued reliance of African political elites on external resources and legitimations in the maintenance and expansion of their domestic authority.[11] A problem with this approach, however, is that it can relegate the complex interplay between the internal and the external to a cynical process of instrumentalisation. One influential work on East African regional politics, for example, reduces elite actor approaches to the management of a 'business model'.[12] The influence of other considerations on regional policy-making elites – particularly those linked to ideology, identity, personal relationships, organisational sociology and elite perceptions – are consequently largely under-explored in much Africanist international relations literature,

Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[11] Bayart, 'Africa in the World'; Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford and Indianapolis: James Currey and Indiana University Press, 1999); Clapham, *Africa and the International System*; Jeffery Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*.

[12] Alex de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).