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Thomas Zitelmann

Introduction to the special issue 'Horn of Africa'

The 'Horn of Africa' has a long-standing history of virulent and violent conflict. Therefore, it is of little surprise that most contributions to this issue deal with conflicts, but they also analyse how conflictive behaviour becomes channelled into institutions and collective representations. Maybe those among our readers, who long for good news from Africa, will be disappointed. On the other hand, others may be dissatisfied exactly because not all conflicts are treated. This issue does not include any in-depth report on and analysis of the current stage of war in Southern Somalia, for example. Nor does it consider Islamist terrorists and stratagems in the Horn! The articles in this volume introduce micro-perspectives on conflict, institutions, and collective representations. Micro-perspectives on certain aspects may contribute to a better understanding of wider issues.

Macro- and micro-perspective on conflict

A characteristic feature of the macro-conflict system in the Horn of Africa is 'playing the ball off the edge' or, in other words, a policy of alliance that follows the motto 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. The political classes of Eritrea and Ethiopia are experts of this policy, but it is also well known at the grass roots of kinship groups, clans and localities. In this volume Yasin Mohammed outlines an Afar perspective on this pattern. International allies may provide arms and aid, as in the strategic partnership between Ethiopia and the United States, while at the same time, in early October 2007, opponents of the Ethiopian government were able to successfully lobby for the 'Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act', a motion in favour of democratic freedoms in Ethiopia, in the US House of Representatives (Lyons 2008: 160). The lobbying 'Alliance for Democracy' (AFD) includes contradictory Ethiopian exile factions, linking parts of the centralist Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the self-proclaimed winner of Ethiopia's 2005 elections, with micro-nationalist organisations, like a wing of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ethiopian Somali based Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Eritrea served as an external midwife for the AFD, offering a base area for political and military activity closer to home. At the same time Eritrea sanctions the Islamic shari'a courts of Southern Somalia, against

which the US supported Ethiopian invasion of this region was directed in December 2006. By allying themselves with the CUD, the OLF, and the ONLF they escaped the constant threat of being internationally outlawed as 'terrorist', a goal the Ethiopian government tried to reach for more than a decade. 'Networks of conflicts' contribute to a regional conflict system, but where this 'convergence of crises' (Lyons ibid.) eventually leads to is unclear. So far we can observe an increase of violence and human suffering in some segments. Whether the AFD is more than yet another 'opportunistic floating' of factions and individuals towards an 'alliance of convenience', not unlike internal Somali alliances (Menkhaus 2007: 360), remains to be seen.

The contributions to this volume switch perspective from the whole of the conflict system to some of its parts. From several micro-perspectives the articles deal with the background of institutions and collective political agency or representation involved in governance and conflict in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and in the Republic of Somaliland, the de facto independent state on the territory of former Northern Somalia. Tobias Hagmann and Allemmaya Mulugeta describe and analyse post-1991 impacts of ethnic federalism on conflict, conflict motives, and institutional responses from a state-building perspective among pastoral populations in south and south-east Ethiopia. Yasin Mohammed's contribution on the history of political developments among the Afar in Ethiopia and Eritrea gives a strong subjective voice to a related issue: the representation and institutionalisation of collective political agency among the Afar vis-à-vis the surrounding system of states.

For the Republic of Somaliland, Marcus Höhne describes features of the freedom of press linking it to the particular experience of leading journalists as guerrilla fighters. Luca Ciabarri looks at the impact the refugee experience has on those Somaliland institutions that deal with external transfers (humanitarian aid), like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, and the Ministry of Planning. In contrast to Somaliland's free press, the ministries linked to external transfers are rooted in the refugee experience of those Somalilanders who during the early 1990s were opposed to independence and fled to the neighbouring Ethiopia. These different experiences continue to live on in various social memories and are solidified into institutional set-ups.

The articles contain good news in disguise. All articles are based on most recent field research, either from a perspective of micro-politics or of anthropology. The very possibility of such fieldwork indicates a condition of basic openness and security. Whatever one may think about the trials and tribulations of ethnic federalism in contemporary Ethiopia, which is one topic of this issue; nowadays facts and the critical analysis of developments are derived from well informed first-hand knowledge. Since 1991, this is a continuous trend, which has produced a body of literature that has covered

different stages in the recent Ethiopian 'politics of space' (Clapham 2002).[1] This volume adds some critical notes and angles. Those who remember the conditions for social and anthropological research in socialist Ethiopia under the *Derg* (1974-1991), know and appreciate the difference between now and then.

State, conflict, representation

With regard to Ethiopia, the empirical field is overshadowed by its legacy of empire and the myth of 'the state' being in existence for more than 2,000 years. Hagmann/Mulugeta argue that the gradual incorporation of pastoral groups into the Ethiopian state contributes to a transformation of conflict motives. They also argue forcefully against primordial (what here stands for classical anthropological 'structural-functionalism') and environmentalist ('neo-Malthusian') positions that relate current conflict or violence among (agro-)pastoralists either to an unchanging social structure (clan, segmentary system) or shrinking natural resources and populations growth. Instead they concentrate on the interaction between state and local pastoral communities, under the conditions of ethnic federalism and decentralisation. Both aspects appear as state-sponsored vices that contribute to the politicisation of kinship structures, and by that to an endless 'politics of difference' (Schlee 2002).

On the basis of politicised difference, new boundaries are drawn, creating territories that inhibit the necessary pastoralist mobility. Competition for natural resources is transformed into rivalry for state resources. Also collective violence is modernised. It still contains cognitive patterns of ritual and customary references linked to culture and social structure, but it is more a nostalgic allusion towards the pastoralist past.[2] Yet the real conflict is about urban estates, electoral campaigns, and public budgets. Eventually this also allows 'the state' to interfere with local settings of the very institutions that should contribute to decentralisation. Mediation of 'ethnic conflicts' that develops between the newly divided territorial units becomes a prominent means of state interference into local affairs. The authors' argument is based on a well-chosen sample of literature and on their own research. The empirical data of this contribution is drawn from recent studies in Ethiopia's Somali region (see also Hagmann 2005) and among Karrayu (-Oromo) herders in the

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[1] See Cohen 1994, Abebe/Pausewang 1994, Emminghaus 1997, Serra-Horguelin 1999, Aalen 2002, Pausewang/Tronvoll/Aalen 2002, Keller 2002, Asnake 2004, Merera 2004, James et al. 2002, Schlee 2003, Turton 2006, Hamer 2007, Chanie 2007, Lefort 2007, Smith 2007.

[2] See my own perspective on social myth and stages of the symbolic revival of the Oromo age- and generation-grading Gada system among Oromo nationalists before and after 1991 (Zitelmann 1991, 1996, 2005).

Awash valley (Mulugeta). While I basically agree with the dynamics Hagmann/Mulugeta outline, I shall add below some words on the relation between ethnic federalism and decentralisation, about the fine differences between 'nations'/'nationalities' and 'peoples' in the Ethiopian political discourse, and about the analytical potential of structural-functionalist and cognitive positions.

Yasin Mohammed describes in his article the more recent history of political representations among the Afar, whereby lineage, clan, generation, and territorial units mark division lines that eventually reappear under the manifold acronyms of fronts and parties. The account is subjective in particular with regard to the historical narrative employed. The Afar are one of the major ethno-linguistic groups within Ethiopia that have received their own 'regional state' (*kilil*). They are Muslim and they are pastoralists. But Afar are also a divided population that lives partly in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and in Djibouti. The dimension of political Islam is briefly touched with reference to 'strategic minorities forgotten by the regional and international community (who) might turn to al-Qaeda' if their grievances are further disregarded.

The Afar are an example of how contemporary ethnic federalism is rooted in pre-1991 political structures. The Afar were the only ethnic group that was granted self-administration under the *Derg*, in return for co-operation with the central government. Yasin Mohammed describes this development. The current armed Afar opposition against the Ethiopian government, known as '*Ugugumo*' (a neologism for 'revolution') has its roots in a revolutionary militia that fought under the *Derg* against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Fissions and fusions mark the processes towards political representations among the Afar. It is difficult to disregard the logic of a segmentary system as source of such a process.

Yasin Mohammed mentions one conflictive field that Hagmann/Mulugeta have not considered. Institutionalised or informal transfers between generations are of central interest in these societies. There exists a high historical awareness of generation and succession. It concerns the interplay between external agencies and internal conflicts about succession. The divided Afar have several neighbouring 'external agencies' they can turn to in case of need (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Yemen, and at one stage also Somalia). This multiplies the possibilities for acronymic representations, based on politicised kinship, territory, and generation.

The political desires forwarded by Yasin Mohammed, 'true decentralisation' for Ethiopia and accommodation with multiculturalism in centralist Eritrea, indicate that a constructive critique of current ethno-federal practices in Ethiopia needs some utopian spirit.

Institutions, experience, memory

In the Somaliland case, 'the state' does not have the mythological depths that its Ethiopian counterpart has. For the Republic of Somaliland, the different legacies, sources, roots, and interests that contribute to 'the state' are traceable in the immediate environment.

Somaliland seceded from the Republic of Somalia in 1991. Internationally the Republic of Somaliland is not recognised, but the country is de facto independent. The internal affairs of Somaliland are fairly efficiently handled. The country has a working democratic system, based on power sharing between the administration, elected institutions, and clan-based councils. Advocates of 'good governance' give much credit to Somaliland's achievements. Not all the clans that settled on the territory of the Republic of Somaliland were in favour of independence. Ciabarri traces the legacy of the Somaliland ministries that deal with 'extraversion' – in the sense outlined by Bayart (1989) – of the refugee experience of those Somalilanders, mainly belonging to the Gadabursi clan, who fled in 1991 to Ethiopia, because they did not agree with the new system. The border camp of Darwanaje became an experimental ground to learn of all the virtues and vices dealing with international emergency aid that were also characteristic for the refugee camps in 1980s Somalia. 'Humanitarian entrepreneurs' brought the camp experience with the aid-system to the home areas, following the UNHCR sponsored repatriation of the refugees in 1997. Ciabbari speaks of a 'social memory' that links different 'generations of camps' and influences institutional attitudes. He makes an interesting point, which deserves more research, looking into a social genealogy of institutions.

Höhne follows a similar track. For him, the free press in Somaliland carries the legacy of the guerrilla fighters who fought for independence with the Somali National Movement (SNM), mainly based on the Ishaq clan. The free press is an uncompromising supporter of Somaliland's independence, even falling back on mere propaganda if independence seems to be endangered. The cases Höhne presents deal with the press reaction on the Somaliland-Puntland (the semi-independent eastern part of remaining Somalia) border conflict in 2003/2004, which the author experienced at the frontline. This enabled him to compare local facts to journalistic fictions. Another example provided by Höhne is the dealing of the press with attempts of northern elders to take part in reconciliation processes in the South. Each attempt is regarded as a potential threat against the principle of Somaliland's independence from the South. The initial stability of Somaliland during the early 1990s was based on negotiations between an armed movement (SNM), pro-independence elders of the Ishaq, and anti-independence or neutral elders of other clans. These different environments with various stakeholders did not vanish. They nourish the public institutions of Somaliland. Tiny shifts in the

once negotiated compromise can easily contribute to more basic political revisions. However, that this can be documented, as Ciabarri and Höhne do, indicates the relative stability of such institutions.

The Republic of Somaliland is longing for de jure recognition, even though it could lose external aid. Since Somaliland is internationally not recognised, the country receives aid under an international humanitarian aid regime. A de jure recognition would change this into a linkage with the actors of the international development aid regime. The Ethiopian experience shows that those internal actors who could not cope with such a change in 1991 failed in the longer run.[3]

Ciabbari makes creative use of the older literature on the socio-economic and cultural settings of refugee camps in the Horn of Africa. He sees these camps as places of political and social production that contribute to the social history of the region. One aspect that was overlooked during the 1980s are the remittances from the diasporas. In her short research note to this volume Cindy Horst describes remittance practices and social expectations attached to them (short-term survival vs. long-term investment in education) for Kenya's Dadaab camp, which link the camp economy and refugee livelihoods to the wider Somali diasporas. Indeed, if, as Ciabarri argues, the 1980s were a decade were 'the state' by its rather strong refugee administration, learned to handle (use, misuse) international public emergency transfers, current global trends seem to contribute to a privatised attitude 'alongside the state'. However, social memory linked to generations of camps may include tricky illusions and twists. During the 1980s, the informal remittance techniques, also known as hawala, were, as far as my memory goes, used by the NGOs and the agency staff to overcome the difficulties of changing the US-$ into the Somali Shilling. 'Actors beside the state'? Yes – but who's experience, memory, and legacy?

Ethnic federalism, nation or nationalities vs. peoples, conflict management

Hagmann/Mulugeta, who deal with the influence of the Ethiopian state on pastoralist populations in the Somali and Oromo lowlands are uneasy about the deliberate or collateral impacts of the entanglements between state and social units linked in their traditional environment to extended kinship structures (lineage, clan) or age- and generation-grading. They indicate that this entanglement has a history dating back to imperial times, but they concentrate on the recent past, after 'ethnic federalism' has entered the scene in 1991. There is

[3] For an insiders complaint about this development see (Leenco Lata 1999: 119-141).

a tendency to blur 'ethnic federalism' with 'decentralisation'. Likewise, political concepts for human aggregates like 'nations or nationalities' and 'peoples' are used as if they mean the same. From my perspective they can not be used synonymously. In the Ethiopian political discourse the terms transport crucial differences. Taking Ciabarri's idea about the genealogy of institutions in Somaliland as an argumentative frame, I think it is worth to trace the history and contents of current administrative practices and concepts. Ethnic federalism is a political project that grew out of the need to hold a heterogeneous empire together. Decentralisation describes a bundle of tools for governance offered by the international regime (practices, discourses) of development and 'good governance'. How such aid bundles are locally unpacked, how they are adapted to the political project of ethnic federalism, are usually negotiated or contested issues. The population-related concepts used within the project of ethnic federalism mirror longstanding differences between shades of Marxism, of macro-, and micro-nationalism, which have their roots in the history of the liberation fronts that came to power in 1991. Since reference to such roots became increasingly outdated, a selective 'tools approach' towards ideas offered in the global market for decentralisation, 'good governance', and 'conflict regulation' began to replace the earlier discourse and institutional practices of control. Institutions of low intensity democracy oscillate with low intensity violence and warfare.

The experiment with ethnic federalism started in summer 1991, after the fall of the socialist and centralist military government. In July 1991 a makeshift national conference took place, called in by the new rulers and an uneasy coalition of numerous 'national liberation fronts'. The conference agreed on a National Charter, a Transitory Parliament, and a schedule for regional and national elections. Excluded from the conference were pan-Ethiopian forces in opposition to TPLF. Participating groups that claimed 'ethnic' representation had often no strong social basis. Makeshift independent 'National Liberation Fronts' and 'People's Democratic Organisations' (PDOs), linked to EPRDF, mushroomed. The National Charter stressed the validity of the UN Convention on human rights, including individual and collective rights of nations, nationalities, and peoples. The Charter was not an agreed on law. It was a memorandum of good intentions. The National Charter provided TPLF/EPRDF with some legitimacy, with ad hoc local allies for a power monopoly, and an agreement on a federal state based on ethnolinguistic units. With the consolidation of its powers, allies and regional forces started to challenge the hegemony of TPLF/EPRDF and their PDOs. In 1991-1992 the newly created Oromiya Regional State was streamlined due to pressure and violence. In 1994-1995 the Somali regions (now Somali Regional State) were streamlined, but to a lesser degree than among the Oromo. The first elections in 1992 as well as all the following elections were neither free nor fair.

Ethiopia has more than 80 ethno-linguistic groups. Only a few received newly created regional states (Tigray, Amhara, Oromo, Afar, Somali), in other cases (Southern Regional State, Gambela, Beni Shangul & Gumuz), several groups were joined together, each with their own ethno-national sub-regions or districts. On nearly all levels among farming and pastoralist populations the new boundaries were locally contested. In some cases, enterprising individuals started to redefine local varieties of cultural practices or speech into fundamental differences, to make claims for self-administrated ethno-national space. Sometimes such processes developed from the grass roots; sometimes they were sponsored by the ruling party or by opposition forces. In many cases regional states or sub-regions developed internal frontier policies to guard against their neighbours, using internal resettlement strategies not unlike earlier governments did from the perspective of the central state (Schröder 2004).

The constitutional and legal process, which had started with the July conference and the National Charter, culminated in 1995 in a constitution that defined '... the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples of Ethiopia' (Preamble of the Constitution) as the components of the sovereign of Ethiopia. The much-contested Article 39 of the constitution allows for the secession of these components: 'Every Nation, Nationality, and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession …'. But there is no agreed on definition of nation, nationality, and people. EPRDF/TPLF made their position very clear: Nation and nationality stand for units that include 'class' and class-divided interests. 'People' stands for the working 'masses'. EPRDF/TPLF and their allied People's Democratic Organisations were to defend the rights of the masses, who, according to a revolutionary logic, do not have an interest in class-based secession politics. This type of revolutionary logic defined the central state's and core party EPRDF/TPLF's interventionist strategies towards regional and local affairs during the 1990s, reaching its low-point in several purges. Locally, the purges encountered generation conflicts, in which for each post of a dismissed bureaucrat or party official, a young, educated, and eager cadre queued up. See e.g. the fate of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), its founding generation, and its newcomers. During the later part of the 1990s, ERRDF/TPLF tried to capture the development discourse as part of its revolutionary differentiation between 'them' (narrow nationalists, class-based interests, anti-people) and 'us' (with the people, development-minded).[4]

As Yasin Mohammed shows in this volume for the Afar, the foundation of an allied PDO was not always an easy process for EPRDF/TPLF. Often

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4 This logic was outlined in early 1997 in EPRDF's party paper *Hizibawi Adera* ('People's Appeal'), Vol. 4 (7), December-January 1996-1997 (Zitelmann 2005: 143).

people of low status were attracted, which shows how issues of class and also gender (women who had fled to TPLF to escape from forced marriage) were part of the spectrum leading to ethno-political representation within EPRDF/TPLF. In the case of the Afar, EPRDF/TPLF never captured and streamlined the political processes that developed out of the segmentary, generation-based, and territorial order of the Afar pastoralists. The same was true for the Somali region, with its clan-based legacy. Even when EPRDF/TPLF was able to create administrative allies, they were not able to control the processes inside the parties permanently. Eventually it was the pastoralist lowland areas (Afar, Somali, Gambela) and the borderlands towards the Sudan (Bela Shangul & Gumuz) were the centralist techniques of control by EPRDF/TPLF did not work.

Global decentralisation strategies, mediated by the international development regime, helped EPRDF/TPLF to overcome an impasse in the control of the lowlands. This involved, as Hagmann/Mulugeta show, from 2001 onwards the newly established Ministry of Capacity Building. In the year 2003 the regional states of Afar, Somali, Gambela, and Bela-Shangul & Gumuz were declared to be 'peripheral regions' that came under the remote control of a newly established Ministry for Federal Affairs. 'Peripheral regions' became defined by 'underdevelopment' (predominance of pastoral production) and a high degree of inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic factionalism, i.e. clan structures (Vaughan/Tronvoll 2003: 49 f.). The ruling PDOs in the 'peripheral regions' were excluded from the core institutions of the EPRDF, while those of Tigray, Amhara, Oromya, and the Southern State remained attached to it (ibid.: 123 f.).

One institution that sidelines the Ministry of Capacity Building is the Ethiopian Civil Service College, which started in the service of the ruling party. Ironically, as Yasin Mohammed shows, education-and-generation led to a new acronymic party among the Afar, formed by students of the Ethiopian Civil Service College, which was not well received by the EPRDF and was forced to join the recognised PDO.

Conflict transformation, regulation, and prevention became a highly valued currency in the official representation of Ethiopian politics.[5] Hagmann/Mulugeta mention, how elders of the region of the Karrayu-Oromo pastoralists, with mediating capacities under the age- and generation-grading gada system, are brought into government and NGO-sponsored workshops being paid per diems, to learn about 'commercialised peace-

5 A recent document for the official perspective on the 'peripheral regions' , the definition of conflicts, and conflict transformation, is Government of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia/UNDP Ethiopia (2007): Strengthening National Mechanisms and Capacities for Conflict Transformation. For the Period from May 2007 to April 2008. Addis Ababa (>http://www.et.undp.org/dmdocuments/Prododc-57610.pdf<).

making'. By and large Hagmann/Mulugeta develop a critical perspective on the avoidance of statutory law and justice, while cases regulated according to customary practices seem to mushroom. They include this into the catalogue of vices of state-sponsored ethnic policy in the pastoral lowlands. This is a difficult issue. Hagmann (2007) has his own experience with the integration of elders into local, state-framed politics of Ethiopia's Somali Region. On the other hand, mediation strategies by elders, linked to issues that can disturb local peace, can also develop from the ground, as Andrea Nicolas (2007) has shown in her recent dissertation, based on three years of intensive fieldwork in a mixed Oromo-Amhara peasant neighbourhood south of Addis Ababa. Elders deal with cases of insult, theft, homicide, abduction of young girls (for marriage), adultery, collective violence, and land issues turning to procedures and solutions based on customs. But custom is at the same time recaptured or reinvented. Under previous regimes other agencies than the elders were vested with local mediation powers (nobility and land owners under the imperial regime; institutions of the peasant associations under the socialist regime). If the mediation is successful, state agencies may seal the agreement (for instance in cases of homicide), but the state does not interfere with the mediation procedure, neither do political parties. We need more knowledge, based on in-depth fieldwork, on how mediation based on customary law and procedures works, where it fails (in cases of asymmetric conflict partners, land issues, public goods), and where it interacts with the state and other agencies that contribute to legal pluralism.

It is open to question whether non-statutory local legal practices or mediation procedures in Ethiopia could be per se related to ethnic federalism. I rather see a relationship between EPRDF/TPLF's outdated 'democratic centralism' of the earlier years, and the new globalised policy think-tank terminology and toolbox practices under the heading 'governance as conflict management'. 'Commercialised peace-making' or, using a trope coined by Richard Rottenburg, globally 'travelling models of conflict management', contribute to the entanglement between the central state and the localities. The channelling of conflicts through institutional set-ups makes them more predictable and less violent (Elwert 2004). This normative wisdom from anthropological conflict research includes also a second message. What is needed to make such channels efficient are institutional pluralism and an openness to name the issues of real or assumed disagreements about interests and intentions.

Wherewith is conflict and conflict behaviour – violent or less violent – related to in the ethno-federal setting of Ethiopia? Hagmann/Mulugeta concentrate on the current relation between conflicts, public goods, and economic assets defined as 'new resources'. They dismiss the environmentalist concentration on conflict motives, which is highly prominent in the official Ethiopian discourse. They disregard the autonomous character of kinship organisation (or segmentary structure) as a basis for conflict behaviour, but

stress the current interrelation between state institutions and kinship organisation. They likewise dismiss autonomous cognitive patterns for conflict and violence. Recent anthropological findings from the patchwork of ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia, edited by Ivo Strecker and Jeanne Lydall (2006), confirm that 'the state', its institutions, and human agency belong to the landscape (not just now, but since the troops of Menelik II occupied the area). A continuous element in the state-locality relationship, deeply enshrined in cognitive patterns and social memory of the ruled and the rulers, is the tension between asymmetric and symmetric power relations among occupants and locals, i.e. practices, symbols, and feelings of superiority and inferiority, which the population of the Ethiopian South experienced since the late 19th century. These findings show also, that the contradictions within segmentary structures (based on age, gender, status) renew the negotiation practices between 'the state' and local groups for each generation.

Conflict patterns in classical segmentary societies do not follow a confrontational automatism determined by 'structure'. Conflicts can be mediated or processed by crosscutting social relations (Gluckman 1956) and by rhetoric (cognitive) strategies that invoke more peaceful or more violent tactics. Here, as Strecker (1999) has shown for the Hamar, the employment of the cognitive register is linked to age, generation, and succession, i.e. to the chances of young men to become an 'elder'.

Post-imperial politics and its Islamic other in the Horn of Africa

If one maps the 'peripheral regions' vis-à-vis the other federal states of Ethiopia, one can observe a remarkable similarity between the shape of the Ethiopian empire under emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) during the early 1890s vis-à-vis the yet marginal or still un-occupied territories in the lowlands. Does the current self-representation of the central government as an arbitrator of ethnic conflict, suggest a continuity of an empire in disguise? Ethiopia, if not an empire, is post-imperial in the sense that past structures of a centralist state (imperial, socialist) have an impact on social memory and agency. Social memories are manifold. Ethiopians and other populations, but also political institutions in the Horn of Africa are 'battling with the past' (Triulzi 2002) and its different legacies and interpretations. The post-imperial politics of Ethiopia finds an Islamic other in Somalia's shari'a courts.

The examples used by Hagmann/Mulugeta have a bearing on aspects of the wider network of conflicts. In the pastoral lowland areas of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian central state interferes as the supreme arbitrator in cases of conflict and as mediator of development and the flow of aid. This policy includes an asymmetric and paternalistic attitude towards the pastoralist populations. In mere economic terms, pastoralist systems in the region can

well flourish without 'the state', as Peter Little (2003) has shown for the Somalia-Kenya borderlands. But economy and material wealth represent only one aspect of the issue. Law represents another one. The Somali revival of customary clan law during the 1990s, concomitant with the vanishing of the Somali state, had its limits in dealing with contested public goods (overland roads, airfields, ports). Security was the scarcest public good. The Islamic shari'a courts have one root in the need to find legal solutions in dealing with public goods in absence of a state supported security.[6] Added to this were the rhetoric and practice of Pan-Somalism and Jihadism, which contributed its own radical 'politics of difference' to the current situation in Southern Somalia. From this perspective, the Ethiopian state and Islamic shari'a courts in Southern Somalia compete on a related functional level. On the other hand, the Somaliland examples show that pastoral societies are very well able to construct public institutions in their own right.

For Ethiopia, ethnic federalism opened new venues for negotiations between 'the state' and local groups. Within these units, groupings based on kinship, age, gender, generation, religious affiliation, or friendship – each with its own cognitive particularities – may find different reasons and pathways to link up with external agencies. Even if we agree on the 'new resources' as a central conflict motive under the current conditions, we cannot be sure either about the bundled tensions and motives behind or about the segmented employment of cognitive conflict strategies. Even crosscutting social relations that mediate conflict may change from generation to generation. Conflict management, sponsored by the international aid regime in ethno-federal Ethiopia, is a version of 'seeing like a state' (Scott 1998). Fields of ignorance are surveyed and ordered in a schematic and reductive mode, and created are illusive perspectives on predictable channels for local tensions and conflicts.

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6 See Zitelmann 2003; Marchal 2004; Le Sage 2005; Barnes/Hassan 2007.

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