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Review

ALFREDO GONZÁLEZ-RUIBAL, *An Archaeology of Resistance: Materiality
and Time in an African Borderland*

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ALFREDO GONZÁLEZ-RUIBAL, *An Archaeology of Resistance: Materiality and Time in an African Borderland*, Archaeology in Society (Lanham–Boulder–New York–Toronto–Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). 381 pp., multiple illustrations and maps. Price: €61.94. ISBN: 978-1-4422-3090-3.

Building on a decade of archeological research in western Ethiopia conducted by a Spanish research team led by Victor Fernández,¹ this book, written by one of the mission's members, Alfredo González-Ruibal, invites its readers to unearth the local 'cultures of resistance'. The protagonists of this book are some of the least studied ethnic groups of the generally understudied border region of Beni Šangul-Gumuz: the Gumuz, the Berta, the Mao, and the Komo. Resistance, as defined in the book, is the 'strategies and circumstances, that have allowed egalitarian societies to survive in one of the earliest areas of state formation in Africa' (p. xiii).

Squeezed for centuries between the hammer and anvil of the emerging Sudanese and Ethiopian state systems, as well as those of various local polities, these border peoples share a common history: the struggle for cultural survival in the face of state encroachment and control over territory and people. This struggle might soon be lost: the current ethno-federal policies of the Ethiopian government are pushing the state apparatus into the last corners of its territory, making retreat for the people more and more strenuous. The Epilogue (pp. 325–333), which the author refers to as an epitaph, calls for attention to be paid to the forceful integration of the border peoples through villagization and settlement. The book may have been published just in time, shedding light on the mechanisms of resilience, and excavating the archaeological remnants of the centuries-old battles for local autonomy.

Time and materiality are the two pillars on which the book rests, and they are 'fundamental for understanding the tactics of resistance deployed by the peoples of the Sudanese–Ethiopian borderlands', the author argues (pp. 330–331). The theoretically rich Chapter 1 introduces the author's fascinating approach to the borderlands: as an archaeologist he focuses his attention on 'things from the past' (p. 6) and how they live on. This enables him to take a radically different approach to understanding indigenous historicity. The archaeologist looks at continuity rather than change. His ap-

¹ V. M. Fernández, 'Four thousand years in the Blue Nile: Paths to inequality and ways of resistance. Cuatro mil años en el Nilo Azul: Caminos a la desigualdad y vías de resistencia', *Complutum*, 14 (2003), 409–425.

proach, pugnacious but conciliatory, is to bring the ‘archaic’ back into the debate of non-Western historicity. Time, and hence the archaic, become important parts of the identity and pride of the people under study: ‘in different ways, they want to live in the past’ (p. 331). By ‘reclaiming the archaic’ (p. 29), both material and immaterial objects of the past are not just maintained as a form of cultural heritage, but as tools ‘for producing equality’ (p. 331). Materiality builds the bridge between past and present: pottery, bows and arrows (kept secretly or in actual use), houses and granaries connect past and present; adornments, clothes, and body modification (the ‘artifacts of the self’) highlight the struggles for identity of the groups González-Ruibal has been working with.

Chapter 2 puts the landscapes and the people in a historical-ecological perspective. The author brings two concepts to life: the ‘shatter zone’ and the ‘deep rurals’. The latter, positively applied to describe the resilience of the border peoples, is a concept used by Charles Jędrej in his works on West African history, and applied to the western Ethiopian borderlands.² Deep rurals, or ‘cultures of resistance’ are those groups that sought to avoid ‘subordination by, and cultural assimilation into, the neighbouring, more pervasive culture’.³ The book juxtaposes the ‘deep rural tradition’ (p. 69) of the peoples of the lowlands, depicted as egalitarian societies that avoided the state, with the history of the peasants (p. 79) who were the direct subjects of the state. Chapter 2 acquaints us immediately with the background to state formation, as well as with that of other political structures (cf. ‘complex chiefdoms’, pp. 57–59) to which the deep rurals have been exposed over the centuries. The narrative is placed in the ‘shatter zone’,⁴ meaning the frontiers of empires and states, that have, over time, created spaces of refuge, and ‘regions of bewildering ethnic and linguistic complexities’ (p. 45).

Chapters 3 to 5 are the main empirical part of the study: the analysis of the Gumuz, Berta, Mao, and Komos’ material culture and temporality. Richly illustrated, the archaeological findings are framed by a remarkable body of primary and secondary sources on the subject peoples (cf. the rich

² W. James, ‘Charles Jędrej and the “Deep Rurals”: A West African model moves to the Sudan, Ethiopia, and beyond’, *Critical African Studies*, 8/1 (2016), 32–46.

³ M. C. Jędrej, *Ingessana: The Religious Institutions of a People of the Sudan–Ethiopia Borderland*, *Studies of Religion in Africa*, 13 (Leiden–New York–Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995), 3.

⁴ J. C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, *Yale Agrarian Studies Series* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2009).

bibliography on pp. 335–361), and supported by oral testimonies, interviews, and a breadth of ethnographic observations.

The strategies of resistance and resilience of the groups are markedly different. This is explained by the differing relations the groups had with the state systems and with their cultural neighbours. The Gumuz, in this regard, were the first small-scale society in direct contact with the Ethiopian state. They suffered ‘centuries of violence’ (pp. 92–98), slave raids and state predation. In a stunning, at times encyclopaedic manner, the chapter details the Gumuz’s material culture (Chapter 3.3, ‘Making a community of equals’) and body art (Chapter 3.4, ‘Bodies of resistance’).

The Berta are historically both rulers and ruled. Their history in Beni Šangul-Gumuz is framed by the influence of Sudanese Arab immigrants who settled in the area and integrated into the existing Berta society, forming a nobility that ruled the local Berta. The author finds this duality both in present-day Berta society and in the local material and non-material culture. The society consists of three clans, namely the Mayyu, of mixed Arab descent (p. 190); the Fa-Kuŋkuŋ, the ‘pure’ (p. 192); and the Fadasi, the ‘in between’ (p. 195). Much of Berta culture exemplifies the mix of traditions: the fusing of orthodox Islamic elements with the traditional religion and the case of female and male pottery are only two examples on which the book elaborates in order to illustrate the Berta’s fractured present, and the patterns of resilience to state culture.

‘Mao’ is a generic term under which several linguistic groups can be found. One particular collective mechanism of resistance illustrated in the book is ‘mimicry’, which is the ability of the Mao to adopt characteristics of their neighbours (mostly of the Oromo) in order to protect their original cultural traits. This separates them from the Komo (both a homonym and a social label). Under the term ‘Komo’ we thus find those groups who chose to escape the influence of the majority culture (mostly ethnic Gwama and Ganza) as well as the ‘actual’ ethnic Komo, meaning the speakers of a Nilo-Saharan language, *taa komo*. A fascinating part of the study addresses the *swal kwama* (the traditional, sacred houses, cf. ‘Houses of Resistance’, p. 295). Here, González-Ruibal documents the use and structure of these houses both among the Koman Mao and the Hozo (Omotic Mao) groups, and his analysis points to a ‘pan-Mao phenomenon’ (p. 296). These houses are windows into a deep Mao culture; they are still found, and are in use as spiritual centres, or the margins of mainstream settlements.

The book combines fascinating ethnographic detail with first-hand comparative data of the ethnic groups in present day Beni Šangul-Gumuz. However its focus on the deep history leaves other equally demanding questions on cultural and language change and shift unanswered, although

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the book straddles many such themes: the modern history of more immediate patterns of state encroachment, clan divisions, the influence of the civil wars (both in Ethiopia and in the Sudans) as well as the actualities of current ethno-federal policies, the processes of creating elites and citizens, and their direct influence on the people under study.

The book offers a much needed background to questions concerning the developmental paradigm of the state and its modernist ideologies: how can people, deprived of their past and culture, be positively integrated into a multi-national state? They cannot, is the answer of the book. 'In different ways, they want to live in the past' (p. 338): the border people take pride in the past and have chosen not to be part of the state systems or to be citizens—however difficult 'modernization' may make it for them. The book portrays peoples' pride, a quality often overlooked by paternalistic and exploitative neighbours.

González-Ruibal's book sheds new light on a forgotten and understudied area. With its insights both into the *deep past* and the *complex cultural present* of western Ethiopia, the book is a much needed contribution to the ethnography of this area.

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LUKIAN PRIJAC, ed., *Les relations entre l'Éthiopie et les nations étrangères. Histoire humaine et diplomatique (des origines à nos jours). Foreign relations with Ethiopia. Human and diplomatic history (from its origins to present)*, Geschichte, 120 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015). 384 pp. Price: €44.90. ISBN: 978-3-643-12658-0.

Die Geschichte und Gegenwart äthiopischer Außenbeziehungen gilt als gut erforscht. Einen neuen und erweiterten Blick ('une autre façon de lire l'histoire d'Éthiopie') verspricht Lukian Prijac. Der von ihm 2015 herausgegebene, fünfzehn englisch- und französischsprachige Beiträge umfassende Sammelband markiert in der Tat Neuland. Auf über 380 Seiten werden die Äthiopienpolitiken europäischer, asiatischer, russischer und US-amerikanischer Akteure einer rückblickenden Analyse unterzogen. Dabei steht die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von kulturell geprägten Wahrnehmungen und ökonomisch oder politisch beförderten Macht- und Einflussinteressen im Vordergrund. Überkommene Mythen und liebgezwungene Stereotype werden kritisch hinterfragt. Der Sammelband vermag durch detaillierte, gut dokumentierte und empirisch fundierte Hintergrundinformationen zu überzeugen.

Die AutorInnen suchen Antworten auf komplexe, in der überkommenen