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Review

SUSANNE EPPLE, ed., *The state of status groups in Ethiopia: Minorities between marginalization and integration*

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Reviews

The Foreword, written by the second author, states that the book consists of ‘two essentially independent parts’, because the second part deals mainly with the Orthodox Churches in Russia, the Balkans, Greece, and Cyprus. I wonder to what extent the last two countries were under the influence of Communism. The same writer confirms that the common factors between the two parts are in fact the theme of the work, namely the Church and the socialist State, the latter being dominant during the period of Communism. Prior to communist rule relations between Church and State were, at least in Ethiopia, relatively peaceful and, in fact, its dignitaries were highly respected by the monarchs.

During the relatively short period of socialist rule in Ethiopia, monasticism was mostly silent, thereby avoiding possible conflict with Communism. The most conspicuous attack on the churches and monasteries was that, by nationalizing their land, the socialist government deprived them of their main source of income. But direct conflict was avoided through the tactful silence of the religious institution, an act which the author sees as characteristic of the Church.

The book has a few shortcomings which could have been avoided. Spelling and punctuation errors are recurrent. At the very least an index and one or two maps of the monasteries would have facilitated better access to this large book. Some pictures of persons and things are presented at the end of the book, but the reason for including monkeys on p. 543 is incomprehensible.

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SUSANNE EPPLE, ed., *The state of status groups in Ethiopia: Minorities between marginalization and integration*, Studien zur Kulturkunde, 132 (Berlin: Reimer, 2018). 284 pp. Price: €49.00. ISBN: 978-3-496-01587-1.

This anthology on the socio-economic and cultural state of status groups deals with a problem of basic relevance in present-day Ethiopia. The special position of a minority of occupational groups, craftsmen and hunters, vis-à-vis the mainstream society of farming majorities is a pan-Ethiopian phenomenon which has existed in most parts of the country since time immemorial and continues to be a very conservative characteristic of the present living conditions of the country. It has increasingly attracted the interest of cultural anthropologists and has long been an important topic of research in the pioneering studies of, for example, Eike Haberland, Christopher R. Hall-

pike, David M. Todd, Hermann Amborn, and Dena Freeman and Alula Pankhurst.¹

The second major theme of this anthology is the ongoing discrimination of slave descendants: in spite of being still a widespread phenomenon in Africa, this is much less prominent in Ethiopia than, for example, in Mauritania where practices of slavery are still widespread at present.

Following a brief Foreword by Dena Freeman and an introductory chapter by the editor, Susanne Epple, the book contains thirteen contributions, six written by female and seven by male authors. Scholars from Ethiopia contributed four of the studies, and it is to be hoped that their proportion gradually increases in anthologies of this kind. The regional focus is the multi-ethnic south-western parts of the country, the hitherto favourite area of anthropological studies, whereas only two were carried out in the north, while two others take a more general and comparative approach. Most of the contributions to this volume were presented at a panel of the 19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Warsaw, Poland in August 2015.

Special attitudes and norms of behaviour with respect to craftsmen is a widespread phenomenon and has attracted much attention since Louis Dumont's pioneering study *Homo Hierarchicus* about the caste system with a particular focus on the Indian subcontinent.² The dichotomy, perhaps best expressed with the Greek terms 'ergon', decent and honourable manual work, as against 'douleia', disgraceful labour associated with a status of bondage, has been omnipresent in world history. A broad spectrum of its peculiarities and characteristics as found in Ethiopia is presented in this volume. Unfortunately, not all contributions can be given equal attention in a review of this kind.

¹ E. Haberland, 'Zum Problem der Jäger und besonderen Kasten in Nordost- und Ost-Afrika', *Paideuma*, 8/2 (1962), 136–155; C. R. Hallpike, 'The Status of Craftsmen among the Konso of South-West Ethiopia', *Africa*, 38/3 (1968), 258–269; D. M. Todd, 'The Origins of Outcastes in Ethiopia: Reflections on an Evolutionary Theory', *Abbay*, 9 (1978), 148–158; H. Amborn, *Differenzierung und Integration: Vergleichende Untersuchungen zu Spezialisten und Handwerkern in südäthiopischen Agrargesellschaften*, Ethnologische Studien, 1 (München: Trickster, 1990); D. Freeman and A. Pankhurst, eds, *Living on the Edge: Marginalised Minorities of Craftworkers and Hunters in Southern Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Department of Sociology and Social Administration, Addis Ababa University, 2001).

² L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago, IL–London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), originally appeared in French in 1966 with the title *Homo hierarchicus: Le système des castes et ses implications*.

The discrimination of slave descendants differs in some important respects from the segregation of occupational groups. It is historically effected by acts of subjection and enslavement, for instance following military conquest, and is not rooted in complex processes of socio-religious differentiation which, to a large extent, still remain obscure. This basic difference could have provided a broad classification of the contributions of this book. However, the editor preferred to focus on two major aspects of research: 'I. Transformation and manipulation of social difference' and 'II. Persistence of marginalization'. In her comparative overview, Epple presents useful historical data going back to the nineteenth century as well as internal triggers of change which are still at work.

The special position of occupational groups seems to be an astonishingly conservative element in Ethiopian societies, although some changes by the expansion of Protestant missions and the impact of the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 cannot be ignored. Getting access to the world of the 'outcasts', the *fuga*, *wata*, *manġo*, and so on, has always proved to be a difficult task; however, it has never been particularly esoteric and hypotheses concerning 'secret' languages could not be verified. For example, when Siegfried Seyfarth, a researcher of the Frobenius-Institut, focused on the *fuga* in Hadiyaland in the 1970s, he was met with suspicion by mainstream society. A study by another researcher of the institute, Helmut Straube, on the *baadiiččo* among the Sidaama during the 1950s remains unpublished. It should be emphasized that work in the field of occupational minorities in Ethiopia (and elsewhere) largely belongs in the category of 'urgent anthropological research'. This is particularly true for groups specializing in hunting, because their means of livelihood has become obsolete as a result of ecological and political conditions.

Among the papers included in the book under review, Samuel Tibebe contributes a study on the *manġo* in Dawro who have increasingly started to escape their socio-economic marginalization by converting to evangelical Christianity. From the 1990s onwards the *manġo* in neighbouring Käfa, originally living as hunters and peripatetics, became the subject of investigation by two scholars, the Japanese Sayuri Yoshida and the Finn Kirsi Leikola. In her contribution to this volume, Yoshida sketches various efforts of the *manġo* to gain a higher degree of socio-political emancipation; however, these efforts were still far from reaching a decisive breakthrough at the beginning of the new millennium. In her paper, Leikola, basing her study on fifty speeches collected in different communities of the area, deals with questions of language ideology and with a particular argot. The Bayso and Harro people on the islands of lake Abbayya had to abandon hunting hippopotami in lake Abbayya as early as 1960, but they continued fishing—an

important means of livelihood—and expanded their activities in gardening and farming. Two researchers, Susanne Epple and Fabienne Braukmann, investigate the necessities of culture change imposed on these two groups. A basically linguistic contribution by Graziano Savà investigates the phenomenon of code-switching among the Bayso and Harro to Amharic, the language of administration and commerce, as a particular status-change strategy. Although not explicitly investigated, such a strategy can also be assumed for other case studies of this anthology. This phenomenon is obviously a factor contributing to the death of minority languages.

In his contribution, the Ethiopian scholar Boshā Bombe investigates recent phenomena of status transformation in the Gamo highlands. With regard to the emancipation of ex-slaves, the political campaign (*zāmāča*) of the military government in 1975 was obviously a decisive breakthrough.

The legacy of slave raids and the institution of slavery are the focus of Alexander Meckelburg's research among the Mao and Komo in the borderlands of Ethiopia and Sudan. Exploitation akin to slavery was quite common in these areas until the 1950s, and the process of a fair division of resources is obviously less advanced than in most other parts of Ethiopia. Interrelated dimensions in the spatial, economic, political, and social spheres, causing a continuum of subjection and migration, have continuously strained the living conditions of the indigenous populations along Ethiopia's western peripheries. The ethnographic overview, the historical background, and the theoretical reflections of this paper are excellent, and scholars of Ethiopian cultural anthropology will eagerly look forward to a comprehensive monograph of Meckelburg's research.

As already indicated, only two of the contributions of this book deal with analyses of occupational groups and slave descendants in the northern part of the country. Desalegn Amsalu's paper concerns the Kumpal-Agāw, an originally Cushitic-speaking minority in Amhara *kəlləl*. This group believes that a curse was laid on them by their ancestors which allegedly caused their socio-economic inferiority vis-à-vis the majority Amhara population. Desalegn's research reveals that, despite the political changes since the last decades of the twentieth century, the living conditions of the Kumpal-Agāw have not decisively improved. Kiya Gezahegne carried out field research on slave descendants in Rayya Qobbo of northern Wällo between 2013 and 2015. They still face real discrimination and, for example, are often rejected as marriage partners by 'freeborn' people and as equal members in the churches. The argument that possession cults (*zar*) were introduced to the highland areas by former slaves as a kind of cultural niche appears to be plausible. A synonymy of the terms '*balabbat*' and '*näftännä*' (p. 162) can, however, be excluded for the area under consideration.

Two contributions in this anthology, those of Hermann Amborn and Eike Haberland, are specific in their decidedly comparative approach. This reveals a particular tradition of ethnological research in Germany which, to some extent, has remained outside the mainstream of world anthropology. Amborn, just as in his brilliant opus *Differenzierung und Integration* (1990), highlights the striking dichotomy of the spiritual, the socio-economic, and the technological spheres in the world of craftsmen: their particular capacity as *homines sacri* on the one hand, versus the status of underprivileged pariahs on the other. Comparative data are not restricted to southern Ethiopia, but are also analysed from materials in West Africa and Sudan. Haberland's contribution to this volume, translated by Jeremy Gaines, dates back to a German article of 1962. Stimulated by the results of his fieldwork in Ethiopia, it deals with a broad spectrum of materials from the whole of north-eastern Africa. It thus represents a typical example of an approach to culture history which dominated research in the Frobenius Institute at that time. Although his emphasis on a particular symbiosis between occupational groups and the ruling elites was not an entirely new approach, it had not previously attracted any obvious attention. For Haberland this socio-political phenomenon remained a focus of his research until his posthumously published book on hierarchy and caste among the Dizi (1993).³

This anthology deals mostly with minority groups in different parts of Ethiopia with which not all researchers of the country are necessarily familiar. However, only in a few articles are maps provided, and a general map presenting the geographical position of all case studies would be helpful. In order to standardize transcription, the system of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (2003–2014)⁴ could be recommended for contributions in the field of cultural anthropology. In conclusion, it is to be hoped that studies on hitherto outcast professional groups and slave descendants will gain more attention and help these groups to overcome their marginalization, paving the way for their further emancipation in Ethiopia.

Ulrich Braukämper †

³ E. Haberland, *Hierarchie und Kaste: Zur Geschichte und politischen Struktur der Dizi in Südwest-Äthiopien* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993).

⁴ S. Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; in cooperation with A. Bausi, ed., IV: O–X; A. Bausi in cooperation with S. Uhlig, ed., V: Y–Z. *Supplementa. Addenda et Corrigenda. Maps. Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).