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## Review

AMBAYE OGATO ANATA, *Synergy of Descent, History and Tradition:  
Sidama Ethnic Identification*

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AMBAYE OGATO ANATA, *Synergy of Descent, History and Tradition: Sidama Ethnic Identification*, Topics in Interdisciplinary African Studies, 49 (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2019). xvii, 209 pp. Price: €34.80. ISBN: 978-3-896-45918-3.

Focusing on three overlapping aspects of what constitutes Sidaama identity, namely descent, history, and tradition, the book under review investigates how the Sidaama people of Ethiopia articulate their identities and how they make sense of changes and continuities. These three criteria of identification are the means by which they identify themselves in relation to other ethnic groups in the country. Irrespective of the changes that occurred as a result of the incorporation of the Sidaama to the Šäwa kingdom, the author argues that the Sidaama have maintained a distinctive identity that survived the pressure modern education and Christianity imposed upon it. Identity saw revival and became a strong political force following the change of regime in Ethiopia in 1991 that introduced ethnic federalism as the governing ideology. The book is composed of seven chapters including its Introduction and a short Conclusion.

After offering a brief background to the study, the Introduction provides extensive discussion of the methodological trajectories in which the author explains the processes of generating the material for the book. Here the drawbacks as well as advantages of being an insider, particularly in relation to the political atmosphere in the country, are also explained. It becomes clear that the author has visited multiple sites, which have enriched the ethnographic materials. This is followed by a section situating the study within the theoretical debates on ethnicity.

Chapter 2 deals with the ever-changing forms of identification and thereby asserts that ethnic identity is always shifting both at individual and group levels. In so doing the author challenges the notion of essence and the danger of ascribing one. The author also takes into account how territoriality shapes processes of identity formation. Chapter 3 takes up the *luwa* system to debunk the assumption that *luwa* is a mere symbolic ritual practice. Drawing on some major constituting elements of the *luwa*, such as *songo*, Fičee, gender relations, rituals, and so on, the author demonstrates the relevance of *luwa* to the socio-political and cultural life of the Sidaama. The author also asserts that *luwa* is beyond anything static but is actually a dynamic system that plays a major role in fostering solidarity, maintaining territorial integrity, ensuring peace and security, as well as conflict resolution, enhancing inter- and intra-ethnic relations, to mention but a few examples.

Chapter 4 focuses on change and continuity in the history of the Sidaama people. Its point of departure is the imperial expansion of the nineteenth century, a process that resulted in the formation of modern Ethiopia. Here, the author

assesses the changes Sidaama identity underwent, the effects of those changes and how they are perceived by the people. Three factors shape the changes: the introduction of the state (the Šāwa kingdom), Christianity, and modern education, resulting in the marginalization of the Sidaama identification. However, regardless of the pressure, the Sidaama still maintained a distinct identity that is central to their sense of self. Chapter 5 reports on the recent developments in Ethiopia and the introduction of ethnic federalism. Whereas, in Chapter 4, the author used the metaphor of a broken pillar to describe the historical encounter with empire, re-erecting the pillar is central to the analysis of Chapter 5. The revival of previously marginalized sense of Sidamaness is manifest in the resurfacing of nationalist sentiments, and the way in which they are mobilized to articulate political demands. Annual ritual celebrations like Fičee (New Year), as sites of performing collective Sidaama identity, are given significant coverage in this chapter. The revival of ethnic identities coupled with nationalism and the articulation of political demands, as this chapter demonstrates, have helped the Sidaama forgo a distinct identity vis-à-vis other groups within the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS). This is linked to the struggle for self-administration through the declaration of the Sidaama as an autonomous regional state. Chapter 6 takes up the issue of regional autonomy featuring a detailed discussion of the role and place of Awasa in the process of consolidating Sidamaness. The chapter begins with a detailed description of the increasing significance of Awasa over time. The author depicts the mounting of the political salience of and contestations around the city, which is also the capital city of SNNPRS. The city plays a major role in substantiating the claim Sidaama make for their standing as an autonomous regional state. If Chapter 4 focuses on the temporal dimension of Sidaama life, this chapter is mainly preoccupied with the spatial dimension of identifications and its political purchases. Finally, the concluding chapter encapsulates the major points raised in the book.

This is a very timely and invaluable addition to the ongoing debates on ethnic identity and how it operates in Ethiopia and the rest of the continent. It is extremely relevant now because the Sidaama question for self-administration has put ethnic federalism and constitutional provisions to the test as has been witnessed over the last few years. That said, some concerns have to be raised. For instance, instead of translating *buda* to 'tradition', a notion loaded with value judgment, it would have been more productive to stay with *buda* and the description offered. There is no point in translating the indigenous notion to something as problematic as 'tradition'. When it comes to the literature on ethnicity in Ethiopia, one would expect a critical engagement with previous works to ground the current work in the debates. This would have helped readers see why this book is compelling in terms of the gap it bridges or the new perspectives it introduces. It would have helped accentuate the work's broader significance and

contribution to the literature not only on Ethiopia but on Africa more generally. Needless to say, Sidaama culture is massively shaping pop culture in Ethiopia, as can be seen through the music and clothing as well as dance. This is one area that could have been explored to show the connections and resonances beyond the region under discussion. In the discussion on change and continuity, the author privileges major ‘events’ that led to huge transformation and also focused purely on empire as the sole actor. However, it would have enriched the work even further if the author had paid attention to other forces and actors such as the Oromo. In particular, one would expect reference to the mutual influence of *luwa* and *gadaa*, Fičee, and Irreecha as there seem to be some obvious overlaps well worth exploring.

While the author might take these issues into account for future work, as it stands now, the book contributes greatly to scholarship on Ethiopian studies. It introduces one major voice that, historically, has been marginalized by hegemonic voices of empire. This immensely shapes knowledge production processes and, hopefully, inspires more in-depth discussion.

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JAROSLAV NIKOLAEVIČ GUTGARC [YAROSLAV GUTGARTS], *Russko-tigrajskij tigrin'ja–rususkij razgovornik i slovar' (Ēritreja, Ēfiopija). መምህራ ዝርርብ ትግርኛ–ሩስያኛ ሩስያኛ–ትግርኛ ምስ መዝገበ ቻላት* (‘Russian–Təgrəñña Təgrəñña–Russian phrase book and dictionary (Eritrea, Ethiopia)’) (Moskva: Nauka–Vostočnaja Literatura, 2017). 455 pp. Price: unknown. ISBN: 978-5-02-039804-7.

There is a growing body of phrase books, dictionaries, and other learning aids for people eager to gain some practical knowledge of Təgrəñña. Among them, this tastefully published middle-size book is a pearl: well thought-out and reliable from both the linguistic and cultural point of view. Like no other contemporary source on the language, it incorporates both varieties of Təgrəñña: that which is spoken in Eritrea, and that which is spoken in Təgray in northern Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> The few criticisms to be made below are all of a minor and technical nature.

The book is divided into two major sections of more or less equal size: a phrase book and a dictionary. It opens with preliminaries in Russian encompassing a Preface, an introduction to the Təgrəñña language and its speakers, a succinct outline of

<sup>1</sup> A small improvement would have been to mark, when two options are given, which community uses which word.