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**Review**

PAULOS MILKIAS and GETACHEW METAFERIA (edited by), *The Battle of Adwa. Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism*  
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Schlusskapitel ("Imperial land policy: The root of socio-economic contradictions and mass poverty", S. 105) widmet sich dann den rechtlichen Voraussetzungen und sozialökonomischen Folgen einer Landzuteilungs- und Abgabenpolitik, die ("näftäñña-System, absentee landlords") die Rechte und Einkommen lokaler Produzenten geschichtsträchtig minderte.

Tesema Ta'a's Untersuchung ist vor allem deshalb lesenswert, weil sie sich systematisch um Problemsichten müht, die die herkömmliche Äthiopistik lange vernachlässigte. Zahlreiche Zitate belegen, dass der äthiopische Südwesten auch renommierten Historikern und Landes Kennern als kulturloser und geschichtsfreier Raum galt. Zugleich kann dieser eindrucksvoll belegte Befund aber nicht darüber hinwegtäuschen, dass auch Tesema Ta'a, einem marxistisch grundierten politökonomischen Erklärungsansatz verpflichtet, der Gefahr problematischer Vereinfachung nicht immer entgeht. Der Autor weiß um dieses Defizit, wenn er schreibt: "It is important to point out, however, that the study is part of continuing research. Much remains to be done in this field either by way of area coverage in collecting oral sources and traditions or in presenting a definite and exhaustive interpretation, both of which are bound to take more time and further research efforts" (S. 121).

Stefan Brüne, InterGovernmental Authority on Development, Dschibuti

PAULOS MILKIAS and GETACHEW METAFERIA (edited by), *The Battle of Adwa. Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism*, New York: Algora Publishing, 2005. xi + 320 pp. Price: US-\$ 26,95. ISBN: 0-87586-413-9 (paperback). Price: US-\$ 35,-. ISBN: 0-87586-414-7 (hardcover)

The Battle of Adwa was central to the history of Ethiopia, as the country was the only African polity able to counteract and defeat European colonial imperialism, and there is little need to reiterate for readers of this journal the importance of this event, which has produced a body of literature reaching a peak after the one-hundred-year anniversary. Official celebrations of the event in Ethiopia included an international conference aimed at exploring the event and its implications and significance for Ethiopia's 20<sup>th</sup> century-history. The conference was held at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Abäba from February 25<sup>th</sup> to March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1996 and the proceedings were published two years later under the title *Adwa Victory Centenary Conference*. These celebrations marked a turning point in mainstream Ethiopian historiography, by attributing both the beginning of the modern nation-building process and the power centred on the Amhara core-power to the great victory. The Tigrayan-led government, in power

since 1991, fostered a revisionist interpretation, focusing on all-Ethiopian-peoples' contributions to 'Adwa and stressing its pan-African importance.

*The Battle of Adwa* is edited by two noted researchers, such as Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia, and is composed of nine chapters written by distinguished North America-based scholars of the Horn of Africa. The editorial introduction (pp. 5–14) fulfils its aim of presenting the whole, while providing a summary of each individual chapter; it states that the volume is addressed to "casual readers", and that it is meant to provide a comprehensive history of the battle and its repercussions to a wider audience than an exclusively scholarly reading public. To popularize 'Adwa is not the only aim of this collection. The thesis running through all the chapters links a re-examination of the forces that shaped modern Ethiopia in the past with the present and engages in a critique of the Ethiopian government's responses to the current domestic and regional political situation in the Horn of Africa.

The collection begins with Theodore M. Vestal's chapter on '*Reflections of the Battle of Adwa and Significance for Today*'. The author focuses briefly on the battle and concludes that the "Lessons from the Battle" to be learnt are the Italians were misled by cartography at 'Adwa, as the Eritreans were during the Ethio–Eritrean war in 1998. Vestal blames the Ethiopian government for having recovered the value of March 1<sup>st</sup> 1896 late (pp. 33–34). This tardy re-appropriation of 'Adwa as a symbol of Ethiopia's resistance to foreign aggression is also censured by Maimire Mennasemay (p. 260) in his sobering contribution.

Chapter 2, '*The Battle of Adwa: The Historic Victory of Ethiopia over European Colonialism*', by Paulos Milkias, continues to explore the links between the past and the present. Like other contributors of the volume, Milkias highlights the "Lessons of Adwa": the Ethiopian magnanimity towards the defeated enemy, the importance of rallying together – in spite of ethnicity, class and nationality – in a demonstration of 'Ethiopianness' that overcame the dangers of division, also including Eritrean highlanders (pp. 79–80). According to Paulos Milkias, the poisoned outcome of 'Adwa was the 30-year war leading to Eritrea's national independence, which had its historical roots in the unwillingness of Emperor Mənilək to drive the Italians from the Red Sea coast. The author devotes pages 69 to 76 to painstaking explanations of the reasons and speculations that prevented the Ethiopians from continuing the war. This is a theme to which the former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Həylä Šəllase's government, Zewde Gebre-Selassie, returns in the final pages (129–30) of chapter 3 – '*Continuity and Discontinuity in Menelik's Foreign Policy*'.

In chapter 5, *'Ethiopia: A Bulwark against European Colonialism and its Role in the Pan-African Movement'*, by Getachew Metaferia (pp. 181–216), the author narrates the connection between Ethiopia and the Pan-African Movement from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present-day. He is the only contributor to this reviewed book to openly read the legacy of °Adwa as a stimulus for visionary leaderships to strengthen the African Union.

Two chapters constitute a contribution to the literature. Richard Pankhurst's *'British Reactions to the Battle of Adwa: as Illustrated by The Times of London for 1896'* (pp. 217–227) is a careful and smart summary of British attitudes towards both Italy and Ethiopia. The late lamented Harold Marcus' revised version of an article first published in 1979, and then reproduced in the *Proceedings of the Adwa Victory Centenary Conference*, is republished here under the title *'Racist Discourse about Ethiopia and Ethiopians Before and after the Battle of Adwa'* (pp. 229–237). With inimitable flair and fine writing, the author exposes how ethnocentric and ignorant the European discourse about Africa and Ethiopia was. Concerning the latter, what Marcus shows in a thought-provoking manner is how nuanced and inconsistent discourse and terminology were.

One issue that recurrently appears in the book is the *"humanity and civility at Adwa and thereafter"* (pp. 164–174), as Negussay Ayele writes in chapter 4, eloquently entitled *'Adwa 1896: Who was Civilized and Who Was Savage?'* Here, he turns the usual colonial stereotypes on their heads and makes the point that the Christian values, principles and standards of behaviour which characterised the conduct of Ethiopian rulers had been disregarded by Italian colonialists. The author's list of lessons of °Adwa (pp. 174 et seq.) ranges from the symbolism of victory against colonial aggression, political subjugation and racist oppression, to a call for a historical reassessment of Mənilək's rule. Indeed, all the contributors of this volume stress the ability of Mənilək to profit from international diplomacy and his political skill, in plain contrast to the current historiographic revisionism that portrays the Emperor as the leader of the so-called 'Abyssinian colonialism'. Despite Ethiopia escaped from European imperialism, it suffered greatly – Negussay concludes – attributing to the divide and rule legacies of colonialism both the 1990s loss of Eritrea and present-day ethnic regionalism. In this vein, Getachew Metaferia takes up the same theme when he writes that the Ethiopian government *'seems to downplay Ethiopia's past history'* (p. 214) and argues strongly that this is a *'negation of the Pan-African movement'* and of the spirit of °Adwa. Indeed, one of the most cogent passages of the reviewed book is the criticism of the beliefs that the roots of the present political problems – in Africa as in Ethiopia – lie in the nature of former colonial government. The authors suggest that these problems did originate in colonizing and being colonized and in the long-lasting

imprint left on the subject, such as when Fascist Italy attempted to consolidate its occupation of Ethiopia by re-shaping the country along ethnic and regional lines between 1936 and 1941.

Chapter 8 '*Contemporary Ethiopia in the Context of the Battle of Adwa, 1896*', by Mesfin Araya (pp. 239–252) develops the theme and takes it even further by stating that "*Adwa represents a bold critique on the current ethnic politics in Ethiopia ... Adwa has its own contradictions which still plague Ethiopia*" (p. 240). The critique of both Ethiopian and Eritrean ruling classes is open and unequivocal, and it is linked to criticism revisionist historiographical narratives of the EPLF and TPLF (pp. 244–252).

Maimire Mennasemay is essentially concerned with the same topic when he invokes a "*historical awakening*" in support of an emancipatory understanding, which he defines as "*The Absence of an 'Intellectual Adwa'*", arguing that "Adwa is a battle not yet finished. Chapter 9 '*Ethiopian History and Critical Theory: The Case of Adwa*' is thus an attempt to push the question beyond the simple '*external aspect*' of that historical watershed. The author explores the cultural constructions and conceptualizations of the '*internal*' dimension of the Battle; he doesn't elaborate these questions with conventional historical scrutiny but rather by an analysis of the links between collective memory and emancipation. There is a useful section in this chapter that discusses the historical works written by those who interpret the Ethiopian past as colonial history (pp. 270–276). The reader is left to make his own conclusions with the aid of this final chapter. As only limited space is available here, it is not possible to deal with many of the issues addressed by the contributors. Overall, they present a vision of contemporary Ethiopia that is neither hopeful nor unduly pessimistic. Their disapprobation of the existing government revolves around their concern that the institutionalization of the rights of ethno-cultural groups can be expected to do little more than solidify ethno-regional-based patterns of national politics. The Ethiopian society of today appears to them at a crossroads. The answer they offer is democratization (see for instance Mesfin Araya at p. 252 and Maimire Mennasemay at pp. 294–300).

The volume includes a map, a glossary of Ethiopian titles and an appendix with the Amharic version of the Wəçale Treaty (pp. 303–08). There are a number of textual errors regarding the spelling of Italian names suggestive of probably hasty word processor editing; the use of cross-referencing would have helped and reduced some repetition within and between chapters. Regarding scholarly literature, the limited bibliography may disappoint Horn of Africa specialists. Not only are the proceedings of the *Adwa Victory Centenary Conference* omitted but reference to the insightful overviews of new directions in Ethiopian historiography produced by a number of scholars, are also neglected. Similar considerations can be made for the

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literature regarding the Italian side, the side of those vanquished at ʿAdwa. Throughout contemporary Africa the writing of history has been assigned a major role in establishing the basis of citizenship and is part of the nation-building process. From an Africanist historical perspective, the interest of this collection lies in a reading that plunges into ideological interpretations and represents one of the multiple political narratives within the Ethiopian cultural landscape.

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DAVID TURTON (ed.), *Ethnic Federalism. The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective* = Eastern African Studies. Oxford: James Currey – Athens, OH: Ohio University Press – Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2006. 320 S. Preis: US-\$ 49,95. ISBN: 0-8214-1696-0

Es gibt etliche westliche Staaten, in denen Minderheiten leben, die sich als eigene "Nation" begreifen. Deren Forderungen nach mehr Selbstbestimmung wurden von den Regierungen in der Vergangenheit nicht selten gewaltsam unterdrückt. Mittlerweile hat sich die Situation jedoch komplett verändert. Selbst das in einer zentralistischen Staatstradition stehende Großbritannien hat kürzlich den Walisern und Schotten gewisse Autonomierechte zugestanden. Der Trend hin zu mehr Föderalismus ist im Westen also unverkennbar und mittlerweile ist er auch nach Afrika gelangt. Dort begegnet man föderalistischen Modellen allerdings mit großer Skepsis, was nicht nur für die politischen Eliten, sondern für weite Kreise der Bevölkerung gilt. Auch das jüngste afrikanische föderalistische "Experiment", der nach ethnischen Kriterien organisierte Föderalismus in Äthiopien, der Thema des zu besprechenden Sammelbandes ist, wird im Lande selbst äußerst kritisch bewertet.

Alle Autoren sind sich darin einig, dass das "äthiopische Experiment" einen Fortschritt gegenüber den in der Vergangenheit praktizierten zentralistischen Systemen unter der Ägide eines dominanten Staatsvolks darstellt. Die Autoren sind sich aber auch darin einig, dass der gegenwärtige äthiopische Föderalismus in konzeptioneller wie auch praktischer Hinsicht erhebliche Demokratiedefizite und innere Widersprüche aufweist.

Die Diskussion über den äthiopischen Föderalismus, so David Turton in der Einleitung, weise zwei Mängel auf, denen dieser Sammelband begegnen wollte: Dieser werde häufig isoliert betrachtet, d.h. es fehle eine Einbettung in einen größeren historischen und komparativen Kontext, was ein tieferes Verständnis des äthiopischen Modells verhindere. Andererseits sei das äthiopische Beispiel noch nicht für die allgemeine Debatte über Föderalismus als