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Review

WOLDE-SELASSIE ABBUTE, *Gumuz and Highland Resettlers. Differing Strategies of Livelihood and Ethnic Reaction in Metekel, Northwestern Ethiopia*

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Finally, lack of consistency in transliteration of Ethiopian names and terms may be confusing, particularly for the general public not accustomed to the language, onomastics and geography of the country.

Notwithstanding all the remarks and comments above, it is emphasized, that the work was read by the reviewer with deep interest and pleasure. There is little doubt, that this book enriches our knowledge not only of the fascinating story of the Mission Dakar–Djibouti collection, but also of Ethiopian art over the last three hundred years.

Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, Uppsala University

WOLDE-SELASSIE ABBUTE, *Gumuz and Highland Resettlers. Differing Strategies of Livelihood and Ethnic Reaction in Metekel, Northwestern Ethiopia* = Göttinger Studien zur Ethnologie 12. Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2002. pp. 320 text and bibliography, 321–45 appendices. Price: € 35,90. ISBN: 3–8258–7819–8.

Resettlement for Abyssinian rulers has always been an important means of their population policy. By resettling colonists from the central regions to the frontiers around the uncontrolled “periphery” and neighbouring territories the realm of highland culture(s) was constantly expanded. While resettlement relieved the central regions of surplus population and land conflicts, the resettlers served to safeguard the country. In the modern era, resettlement became a way of providing a new base of livelihood to victims of famine and drought. During the reign of the Provisional Military Council (“Därg”) the resettlement or migration of masses of “highlanders” of different ethnic origins into remote lowland regions was organized. The study of the persevering anthropological field researcher, Wolde-Selassie Abbute, focuses on the fate of state-sponsored resettlement in the Beles Valley in the northwestern lowlands of Ethiopia, which was started in the 1980s.

The book deals with the clash of two civilizations, and with the encounter of two nearly incompatible attitudes towards the natural environment. Wolde-Selassie Abbute describes this encounter on the basis of a deep analysis of the livelihood strategies and modes of encroachment on the natural resources of the two population segments in the Metekel zone in northwestern Ethiopia – with the indigenous Gumuz, on the one side, and the “highland resettlers” (Agaw, Amhara from Wällo, Shoa and Gojjam, Hadiyya, Kambaata, Oromo, Tigraway), on the other. Furthermore, the author characterizes the interethnic relations between all groups involved. In short, the study ex-

amines the difficult interplay between the three “parties”: the indigenous “host” society, the “resettlers” and the “environment” or “ecology”.

After the introductory chapters, including a theoretical discussion, Wolde-Selassie Abbute provides an ethnography of the Gumuz focussing on their social institutions, livelihood strategies and ecological knowledge systems of natural resource management. He describes the way nature has her place in the traditional belief system and discusses the impact the Gumuz livelihood strategies have on their environment. Then the author turns to the ethnography of the “highland resettlers”. Here, focus is placed on the history of the state-sponsored resettlement of the 1980s and the difficult adaptation of the newcomers to the new human and natural environment. The integrating role of social institutions, especially that of self-help organizations, is discussed. In a next step, the interethnic relations between the Gumuz and the “highland resettlers”, ranging from conflicts to the development of conflict resolution mechanisms and coexistence, are examined. The text is completed with a synoptic discussion providing analyses, synthesis and conclusion. The quantitative findings of the research are presented in a great number of tables in the text as well as in the appendix.

The resettlement brought difficult times to the resettlers, to the Gumuz and to the natural environment. The picture drawn by Wolde-Selassie Abbute of the first phase of resettlement gets under your skin. Attracted by false promises by the government and/or pushed by the precarious economic situation in their home country, the highland plough-cultivators migrated into an environment, which was completely alien to them. They lost property in their homelands, thus leaving them insecure, disintegrated, impoverished and exposed to lowland diseases and an unfavourable climate. The responsible institutions broadly neglected the autochthonous Gumuz. The land resources of these shifting cultivators, hunters and gatherers were taken away from them and treated as if it were unpopulated territory. They lost “resources, space and autonomy, without having had any say in the matter” (p. 169). The impact of the resettlement and the increase of population density on the ecological system was, and still is, dramatic. The forest cover was basically destroyed, resulting in soil erosion and the disappearance of the original flora and fauna. While the Gumuz as well as the natural environment could not recover from the changes brought on by the resettlement, the highland resettlers gradually adapted to the new circumstances. Despite the discouraging interference of the local administration, they developed new livelihood strategies such as market exchange, handicraft and other private business activities. Based on institutions of mutual help, like *iqqub* and *iddir*, and on the solidarity among the members of the religious congregations, social identities were rebuilt and relative social safety was re-established.

Despite my general satisfaction, some critical points, influenced by my own interests, may be mentioned:

- In my opinion, a work based on anthropological fieldwork should provide, at least in the appendix, some examples of the (translated) original speech of the people visited. Such an element is not completely missing in the book. The documentation of longer oral texts, however, would illustrate what the author is discussing and make his empirical base more transparent. It would also give the reader the chance to directly learn something about the way thought and knowledge is expressed and organized among the people concerned. Since “[indigenous] knowledge” is one of the theoretical key concepts discussed in the book, it would be helpful if the reader could develop some understanding of the specific character of the indigenous ecological knowledge and the traditional belief system of the Gumuz based on their own explanations.
- The earth and the land resources are considered “sacred” by the Gumuz because they are guarded by the supreme being *yamba*. Different natural phenomena, like trees, rivers or sorghum and pumpkin even have their own spirits, the *missa*. The author mentions different ritual regulations in which the relation of the people with the nature/spiritual world is expressed. For example, in order to maintain good relations with the *missa* of the trees, it is prohibited to cut bigger trees when clearing a field. The description of such mechanisms of resource management based on the traditional belief system gives the impression that there is much more to discover in the details. A minor question remains: Why does the author call the *missa* “poly-spirits” and not just “spirits”? The term “poly-spirit” is used in spiritism, while it is only rarely found in religious studies.
- The close reader encounters some unnecessary repetitions (for example, in the description of the cropping cycle, p. 77) and tautological sentences, like, for example, the definition of indigenous ecological knowledge on page 30 (“Indigenous ecological knowledge is considered as a subset of indigenous knowledge and limited, more explicitly, to ecological knowledge”).

Wolde-Selassie Abbute’s doctoral dissertation is a holistic study in the best sense of the word. This is supported by an intelligently tuned methodological mix that not only includes major instruments of social anthropology, but also considers rural sociology, agriculture studies and political analysis. His book is to be highly recommended to those interested in the ethnography of north-western Ethiopia, interethnic relations, contemporary history of Ethiopia, development issues and, last but not least, environmental studies. With its multi-perspective view and its environmental

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and social consciousness, the book should be part of the required reading of the technocrat elite of present Ethiopia.

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BIRGIT MATTAUSCH, *Die Kunst der Ambiguität – Indirekte Kommunikation im historischen Äthiopien und den Gäbrä-Hanna-Anekdoten* = Aethiopistische Forschungen 67. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006. ix, 187 S. Preis: 68,-. ISBN: 3-447-05386-0.

Obwohl das Amharische über eine sehr umfangreiche Literatur verfügt, sind literaturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten äußerst rar, wenn man dabei die amharisch verfassten und nur schwer zugänglichen B.A.- und M.A.-Arbeiten der Addis Abeba Universität unberücksichtigt lässt. Gerade deshalb ist man auf die vorliegende Arbeit gespannt, die sich des Genres der Anekdoten/Schrullen/Geschichten von *aläka* GÄBRÄ-HANNA annimmt, welche sich in Äthiopien großer Beliebtheit erfreuen. Obwohl der *aläka*, eine historische Person, die auch am kaiserlichen Hofe in Addis Abeba tätig war, bereits Ende des 19. Jh. verstorben ist, stammen die Sammlungen seiner Geschichten aus den letzten fünfzig Jahren. Zu diesen gehören die Sammlungen von ABBÄBÄ (mit langem *b*!) AYYƏČČEH (zu diesem Autor s. die kurze Notiz bei J. Mantel-Niećko: "Ethiopian literature in Amharic", *Literatures in African Languages – theoretical issues and sample surveys*, Cambridge – Warschau: 1985, S. 301–336, S. 327f.) und ARRÄFÄ (mit langem *r*!) AYNE HAGOS. Letzterer hat (zusammen mit EFREM ʼNDALÄ) eine weitere, im Literaturverzeichnis nicht erwähnte Sammlung von Witzgeschichten vorgelegt (*Käldočč* [Witze], Addis Abäba: gənbət 1980 a.-mə. [= 1988 A.D.]; 96 S.). Es wird zu prüfen sein, inwieweit diese Geschichten Elemente der hier behandelten enthalten.

Aus den Sammlungen von Anekdoten, die GÄBRÄ-HANNA zugewiesen werden, hat die VERF. 72 Geschichten ausgewählt, leider ohne die jeweilige Quelle zu nennen. Es wird dabei nicht klar, wieviel Geschichten nach der vorliegenden Literatur überhaupt GÄBRÄ-HANNA zugeschrieben werden. Gibt es Hinweise darauf, dass Geschichten anderen Ursprungs in diese Sammlungen aufgenommen wurden? Lassen sich diese voneinander abgrenzen? Alle Anekdoten werden in der Arbeit sachkundig übersetzt, wobei auch auf den schwierigen Prozess der Übersetzung von Texten einer ganz anders strukturierten Sprache eingegangen wird. Hier verdient natürlich die typisch amharische indirekte Konstruktion mit dem Verb für 'sagen' erwähnt zu werden. Die Konstruktion *ənčät-u "al-därk" alä* 'das Holz sagte: Ich werde nicht trocknen!' (S. 159) lässt sich sehr schön im Deutschen mit 'das Holz *will* nicht