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**Review**

DENA FREEMAN and ALULA PANKHURST (eds.), *Peripheral People: The Ex-  
cluded Minorities of Ethiopia*

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held inside that Islamic *ṭarīqa* is confirmed by several facts<sup>13</sup>. This by no means causes a postponing of the vague chronology of *shaykh* Nūr Ḥusayn's life to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Aḥmadiyya first spread to Somalia, as it is only the link between the *ṭarīqa* and the saint of Bale that was established at that time. The Aḥmadiyya which is here concerned is the Aḥmadiyya Idrīsiyya, the brotherhood created by some of the disciples of Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Fāsī (died 1837); and it has absolutely nothing to do with the homonymous Pakistani group of the Aḥmadiyya founded by Mīrzā Gulām Aḥmad (died 1908) which in Humphrey Fisher's book mentioned by Braukämper (p. 133 notes 19 and 148), *Aḥmadiyya A Study in Contemporary Islam on the West African Coast* is actually referred to.

Concluding these few remarks on Braukämper's collection of essays, sincere admiration and deep gratitude should be expressed to the author for his scholarly activity and, particularly, for this book which makes now easily available to all the Ethiopianists and Islamologues some of the results of his hard work.

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DENA FREEMAN and ALULA PANKHURST (eds.), *Peripheral People: The Excluded Minorities of Ethiopia*. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2003. xxvi + 394 pp. Price: £ 50.00. ISBN 1-85065-657-6 (casebound). £ 18.95. 1-85065-656-8 (paperback).

This path-breaking book contains a collection of original, field-based studies of the occupational minority groups in Southern Ethiopia. These craft worker peoples (smiths, tanners, weavers, woodworkers, basket workers, potters, hunters, folk healers, ritual specialists) tend to have peripheral status and low social prestige, but historically fulfil vital economic and technical functions in the wider society. At the same time, as we know from other parts of Africa, they are usually seen as having ambiguous status, feared but loathed, shunned but indispensable. They are often seen by the 'host' peoples, mostly agrarian cultivator groups amongst whom they are settled, as having supernatural powers and/or as being a source of ritual 'pollution'. The questions of why and how these groups were excluded in the course of history, and how this exclusion as to food, marriage, commensality, burial, ritual and other social relations functions in day-to-day

<sup>13</sup> ENRICO CERULLI, *Studi Etiopici II La lingua e la storia dei Sidamo*, Roma, 1938, pp. 19-26; see also ALESSANDRO GORI, *Studi sulla letteratura agiografica islamica somala in lingua araba*, Firenze 2003, pp. 246-248.

life has long fascinated researchers. They are discussed here in full detail. From the case studies in this book it again becomes clear that the inequality between these mutually complementary populations of 'hosts' and craftsmen groups (more than 30 are identified) has a very complex history and is deep-seated, despite many efforts to reduce it – e.g. in the time of the Socialist *Derg* regime in Ethiopia, from 1974 to 1991. There are nowadays many examples of individuals who are leaving their group and make careers elsewhere, and with trends of economic change, decline of traditional worldviews and influences from globalisation, the position and status of these groups often considered as caste-like (the editors don't approve of the use of this word, generated in the South Asian context) will continue to change. But still, perceptions and practices of exclusion, e.g., based on ideas of low descent from a craft worker group, persist.

Both for ethnographic and theoretical reasons this is an interesting and important book which has much to offer. The editors are to be commended on having succeeded in engaging a promising group of Ethiopian anthropologists (most of whom products of Addis Ababa University's Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology) in this collaborative project funded by a number of institutions and NGOs in Ethiopia. Interestingly, the researchers carried out fieldwork simultaneously, and followed a pre-set, shared research agenda so as to get roughly comparable data from the various groups.

As an edited volume this book is remarkably well-structured, with a comprehensive thematic introduction, well-written empirical chapters, and two evaluative concluding chapters at the end, reviewing the empirical cases in the light of general theory. The book also has a good bibliography, a map, and illustrations. The case chapters are on occupational minority groups in southern Ethiopia among the Gurage, Yem, Kambata, Kafa, Shekacho, Dawro, Malo, Oyda, Gamo, Wolaita, Sidama and Konso peoples. Two chapters discuss the role of artisans and craft groups who migrated to the mixed southern towns of Woliso and Shashemenne, where social opportunity and religious conversion allow people to change their life and to some extent escape their background. These chapters, introduced per region, contain a lot of new information on the minorities. As the editors note, for future research (p. xi), an extension of the study of marginalised minorities in the north, west and east of Ethiopia (where they are less in number) would be promising. Dena Freeman makes some comparison with northern groups in her concluding chapter.

In the introductory chapter by Alula Pankhurst a good outline of the issues and the theories is presented, centering on the nature of and the reasons for the production of marginality of these craft workers. This margin-

ality is seen to exist along five dimensions: spatial, political, economic, social and cultural (p. 2), discussed in turn. The author also reviews existing theories or 'paradigms' on the origins and reasons of marginalisation of the craft worker groups: the 'ethnic', the symbolic, the class, the caste and the culture area approach. He dismisses all of them because of various objections and concludes that no unitary theory can explain the emergence and existence of all of these groups.

To begin with, theories offered so far did not include a proper assessment of the views of the craft workers themselves. Doing this shows that the minorities are often not universally despised or inferior, but also valued and powerful in some contexts. In addition, Pankhurst emphasizes the necessity of a *comparative view* on the craft worker group, and of taking into account the factor of *change*, e.g. in the social relations that (re)produce marginalisation. These three points are, however, methodological, and they do not necessarily yield a full alternative theory to explain the continued marginalisation of craft workers replacing the theoretical approaches mentioned above. Indeed there can probably be no unified theory that encompasses all of the minority groups. The author rightly underlines that in some empirical cases some of the above theories may indeed be applicable, e.g., the ethnic one (when groups are the result of migration of conquest) in the case of the Manja or the Fuga, or the class approach (based on the argument of internal differentiation due to the development of ranked occupational specialisation). In this sense, his introduction is very productive in charting virtually all possible elements to be considered when we want to account for the emergence and persistence of the marginalised minorities. Freeman's theoretical conclusion deals with the dynamics of social exclusion underlying the position of craft worker groups, based on an interactive view of the categories craft workers – peasant cultivators or majority society. Her categorisation of minorities looks at stereotyping based on notions of (non-)pollution and fertility, at historical processes of conquest, migration, and at developments in political complexity. She in fact makes a strong case for historical, not symbolic-cultural, processes having led to the formation of the marginalised craft worker minorities.

The editors' joint last chapter addresses the challenges of change and development in historical perspective and in particular addresses the question of interventions by outside parties to assist the minorities in improving their life and overcoming marginalisation. Special emphasis is put on social, and not only economic factors.

Also in his Introduction Pankhurst noted that one aim of the book was to suggest ways in which the situation of these disadvantaged groups can be alleviated. This is an important point. There is a need (see p. 25) to reassess

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craft traditions in the current context of Ethiopia's rural development. Strategies of rural development are usually marked by prejudices toward craft workers and the favouring of the cultivators. But status inequalities and perceptions of social distance and of different personhood between mainstream people and minorities will take a long time to be transformed. They are socially and culturally internalised by members of both groups and durable socio-economic conditions in the countryside perpetuate them.

And when differences become eroded, one might even expect to see tensions between (the descendants of) both groups increase because of the phenomenon that Sigmund Freud called the 'narcissism of small differences': if people of various backgrounds become 'too equal', problems may resurface. If the opportunity structures of rural life do not change, the problem of inequality and the lingering marginality of craft workers will continue to be around. This book will help us understand why. In all, it is an excellent contribution to the comparative study of marginalized craft worker groups in Ethiopia.

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HAGGAI ERLICH, *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Nile* (Boulder, Denver – London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002) x + 249 pages and a map; hardcover. Price: \$49,95. ISBN 1-55587-970-5.

"In the coming decades, gradually and perhaps inescapably, the Nile River will become an issue of life and death." (p. 1). With these pregnant words the author opens his book, not because he claims to be a prophet, but because his study, which is based on history and current international relations, shows precisely that very danger. The book under consideration is a unique survey of an historical aspect of the Nile and the Red Sea region which has apparently been hitherto neglected in Ethiopian studies; at least the subject was hardly treated from that perspective. In recent times, the problem of the Nile sharply increased in importance, as one can notice from the series of international conferences and consultations related to it; the recurrences of droughts and famine in the upper basin of the river, which prompted this study, and the increase in number of various Nile basin countries interested in using the waters of the river and its tributaries underlined the urgency of the problem. By the end of the twentieth century, the number of the Nile countries increased from three to ten; seven riparian claimants – Burundi, Congo, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda – have expressed their wish to use their respective waters to alleviate their poverty. Egypt is of course very sen-