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Review article

Ethnicity and Democracy in the Horn of Africa

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- THEODORE M. VESTAL: *Ethiopia. A Post-Cold War African State*. Westport and London: Praeger, 1999, 211 + 18 pp. Price £ 45.50. ISBN 0-275-96610-0.
- LEENCO LATA: *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads. Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration?* Lawrenceville and Asmara: Red Sea Press, 1999, 252 + 18 pp. Price US\$ 79.95. ISBN 1-56902-120-1 (*hb*). Price US\$ 21.95. ISBN 1-56902-121-X (*pb*).
- TEKESTE NEGASH and KJETIL TRONVOLL: *Brothers at War. Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*. Oxford and Athens: James Currey and Ohio University Press, 2000, 101 + 77 pp. Price US\$ 42.95. ISBN 1-8214-1371-6 (Ohio Univ.Pr./*cloth*). Price US\$ 18.95. 0-8214-1372-4 (*paper*). Price £ 12.94. ISBN 0-85255-854-6 (*James Currey/paper*). Price £ 35.00. 0-85255-849-X (*cloth*).
- PATRICK CHABAL and JEAN-PASCAL DALOZ: *Africa Works. Disorder as Political Instrument*, Oxford and Bloomington: The International African Institute and James Currey, 1999. 192 pp. Price £ 9,95. ISBN 0-85255-814-7.
- JAMES C.N. PAUL: "Ethnicity and the New Constitutional Orders of Ethiopia and Eritrea", in: YASH GHAI (ed.), *Autonomy and Ethnicity. Negotiating Competing Claims in Multi-Ethnic States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. pp. 173-196. US\$ 22,95. ISBN 0-52178-642-8.
- STEFANIE CHRISTMANN: "Der Verlierer steht als Sieger da", in: *der überblick*, Hamburg, 1/2001, pp. 76-80.

Is ethnicity a straight road to anarchy and chaos, violence and civil war? Or does it offer people a solid identity? Is democracy in Africa to be built on ethnic self-consciousness — or does politicized ethnicity open the doors for human rights violations and genocide? Ethnicity is one of the most controversial concepts in political discourse in Africa. For some, ethnicity is a recipe for “divide and rule” politics, a tool to disintegrate and destroy a state. For others it is the foundation for democracy. Others again claim that democracy will fail if it does not incorporate the different cultural traditions and ethic codes of the African ethnies. To be understandable for Africans, they believe, democracy has to build on their culturally determined practice of decision making by open debate and consensus.

It happens not often that several new books are published at the same time on the same countries, which reach different conclusions from the same material. Three recent books on politics in Ethiopia and Eritrea do just that: all three see Ethiopia at a crossroad which can lead to chaos or to a democratic future. They conclude so for very different reasons. Two articles and one book on Africa add to the context. None of them offer pleasant reading for the rulers. Together they may console both governments that there is no pressing need for change as long as their critics can not agree neither on the reasons nor on recommendations.

THEODORE VESTAL presents Ethiopia today as a post- (or rather neo-) communist state trying to survive beyond the end of the Cold War. Leaders adapt the rhetoric of Western democracy but use it as a cover beneath which they continue their communist agenda with a abysmal record of suppression and human rights violations. They have engaged the currently “correct” political and legal vocabulary in formulating a constitution which overtly promises to respect and protect all individual freedoms and human rights, but leaves room in practice for an all-embracing control by the ruling party. VESTAL discerns behind the façade of democratic elections and procedures a hidden agenda of total control of the economic resources and an orchestrated manipulation of the political expressions of the population.

VESTAL maintained a meticulous collection of facts, from the early years of the Transition after 1991 to the atrocities committed in the war against Eritrea, and even more so in the continuing silent war against critics in all parts of the own population. He describes how the victorious TPLF invited all other opposition groups into a cooperation in the Transitional Government. They knew that they could not succeed in keeping the wide and diverse empire together without the support, at least temporarily, from other ethnicities and

their resistance groups. But from the beginning, they demonstrated in their actions that they did not intend to keep the promises made for an open and democratic state. One after the other, those political movements that did not accept total domination by TPLF, were pressed out of the coalition and replaced by the loyal puppet parties in EPRDF. Their members were subjected to harassment and suspicion of being enemies, to arrests, torture and even extrajudicial killings.

The facts are well known, and will hardly be disputed. Yet the supporters of the regime will discredit VESTAL's book not because they can refute the facts he presents. They will stamp him as partisan, by identifying him with one of the two major strains of opposition against the TPLF/EPRDF regime. They will doubtlessly discard his book as built on exaggeration of individual cases and events out of the larger context. They will accuse him of dwelling on a few negative events but being silent about the merits and improvements of this regime.

VESTAL makes no secret of his closeness to the nationalist Greater-Ethiopia diaspora especially in the USA, a group that is politically on the extreme right, defending Ethiopian unity — including Eritrea — as if the Mengistu regime and its 17-year war against Eritrea never had happened. VESTAL's most cited source is "The Ethiopian Register", one of the flagbearers of a chauvinist political conservatism that offers prime minister Meles Zenawi a convenient adversary against whom to direct his propaganda and justify his politics. Serious scholars tend to shun this and similar organs of extreme positions in Ethiopian politics. VESTAL not only quotes it extensively, he is an active author himself in the "Ethiopian Register" and one of its editorial advisers. This makes him a convenient target for criticism.

This is a pity. VESTAL's book would deserve a better reception. It tells a fascinating story about how a new start was made full of hope and good intentions of cooperation across ethnic and other dividing lines, and how this process was step by step frustrated and diverted, to consolidate the uncompromising power of just one ethnic and political group. The book is full of important details and facts, which are seen from one main perspective: VESTAL's political gospel is the protection of the neo-liberal "free world" against the sinister plots of communism. In this view, ethnicity is artificially revived by the TPLF in order to keep the non-Tigrean population split and divided. He records atrocities against members of such other ethnic groups, including their militant liberation fronts, as human rights infringements of the regime, but not as witness to alternative political concepts or ambitions for

independent identities of other ethnic groups. The critical stance of his book is summarized in one and a half sentences: “Could ‘crypto-communists’ or ‘nuevo conversos’ to the gospel of Adam Smith hoodwink the donor nations and especially the United States into keeping the Front financially propped up and blessed at a time when the monied regimes were disparaging other African governments for their democratic deficits and failures as guarantors of human rights? Apparently so.” (page 115). And one is tempted to add, for clarity’s sake: in spite of Ethiopia’s recent record being considerably worse than that of most of the disparaged regimes.

Why, then, did the United States allow themselves to be hoodwinked? For VESTAL this is a story of sly deceit or smart balancing between a democratic façade and a repressive practice out in the bush. The US government even helped the EPRDF to maintain a democratic façade sufficiently to allow continuing support, because they saw no credible alternative to the EPRDF in Ethiopia, and placed stability and order in the Horn of Africa higher than the concern for human rights abuses which were played down as isolated incidents. They kept talking about a democratization process needing many steps forward, well realizing that the steps became gradually smaller or even turned backwards, while the road kept getting longer.

VESTAL is preoccupied with the unity of “greater Ethiopia”. He writes that Eritrean independence “was not popular to a majority of Ethiopians”. Indeed, it was unpopular in the urban population, but that is a mere 10 to 15 % of the Ethiopian people. In the rural areas outside Tigray and possibly Amhara areas, people were more occupied with their own issues, and could not care less. Many of them had their own doubts whether they should opt for independence for their own ethnic group, rather than remaining in an Ethiopian state which they and their ancestors had experienced only as aggressor and a colonising power. Yet, of course, the majority of emigrants in America come from the privileged and educated urban groups, for whom, after they had adapted to Amharic as predominant culture and language, Greater Ethiopia had become the source of national pride. It is them VESTAL meets as “a majority of Ethiopians”.

In this way his analysis becomes essentially unhistoric, and “americentric”. VESTAL shows little concern for the different views and interests of the many diverse ethnic groups in the wide country — officially, there are about 70 to 80 language groups — who are, for good or bad, grappling with the problem of how to secure a minimum space for practicing their culture, for some degree of self-determination, for some pride. Or, if this proves impossi-

ble, how to get out of Ethiopia altogether. VESTAL does not consider Ethiopia's history as a multi-ethnic conglomerate which was brought and kept together by sheer force, at the same time as other African peoples were colonised by European powers. These Ethiopian peoples have been subjugated to economic exploitation and living conditions which often bordered to slavery. As late as in the sixties, they were not allowed to use their own language in public context, and their leaders were persecuted for trying to revive their cultures. Even Mengistu's regime gave these people only one choice: to adapt to Amhara culture and identity or to remain second class citizens. Until today, Ethiopia consists of a multiplicity of cultures, torn apart by violent traumas of experience of the last 100 years, in which they participated, the ones as masters, the others as underdogs, in an oppressive empire, which was every bit as much acting as a colonial power as England or Belgium, except its rulers were Africans. (In fact, around 1860, Emperor Theodoros proposed to Queen Victoria to marry him, for the sake of creating a true world power.)

How, then, is the ethnic problem experienced by rural people whose reference is not Greater Ethiopia, but their cattle, their farm land, their family and their village? For them the major issue is to keep at least some minimum control over the distribution of land and natural resources of their region. In practice, this means to keep the state authorities at distance as much as possible. They have experienced the state only as interfering in their management of resources, and appropriating a good portion of their produce. Their interest is to maintain as much influence as possible for their kin. Cultural traditions, the maintenance of age-old institutions of administering collective resources — such as grazing land, forests, water or wildlife — and of local decision making may well be essential rallying points in defending their autonomy against the incursions of other ethnicities and of the state. Defending their everyday access to productive resources, they reinforced their ethnic solidarity and identity.

A fascinating book that offers — among others — an entirely different view on Ethnicity was recently published by PATRICK CHAVAL and JEAN-PASCAL DALOZ: "Africa Works. Disorder as Political Instrument". Africa works, these authors contend, but it works different, not following our yardsticks and not understandable with our paradigms. The authors challenge us to follow a different logic when looking at political Africa. What appears to us as disorder, may make perfectly sense to an African mind, thinking in terms of near and close relations, the family, the village, the tribe — and hence in terms of ethnic solidarity but not state development. Occupied with personal

relations, a clientelistic structure and a vertical line of solidarity makes much more sense: a strong patron can indeed protect “his” people from much of the adverse practice of the state.

But how can African states develop without the loyalty of their people? Or should we rather ask: How can African people develop without states? CHABAL and DALOZ offer no solution, but a new way to see why much of what we feel is essential and self-evident, just does not make sense to Africans. They may accept structural adjustment programmes, to get access to donor resources. But Africa’s clocks work different, yet they work; and what we conceive as disorder, may for them just be a political instrument to achieve a different objective.

Ethnicity is one aspect of what we from our European viewpoint conceive as part of disorder. For many Africans, it is a primary category of identity and orientation. For us, ethnicity appears as a centrifugal force threatening to blow up the structures of the state, to destabilize society and undermine development. To an African, the state may be a moloch that disturbs peaceful life and threatens productive adaptations to the ecological and social environment.

Yet, Africa adopted the “OAU-doctrine” protecting the borders of the colonial states, though the colonial state never had a base in ethnic or cultural identities or in African societies. In the hands of the colonial masters it was a tool to control resources and defend their power. As Basil Davidson has argued convincingly, the colonial state was handed over to elites which were dissociated from their societies, whose orientation was the European model of a nation state. Consequently the state became a tool for these elites to keep in power and maintain control over the resources. “Nation building” was a project essentially to adapt African societies to the needs of the state, not vice versa. So it was also in Greater Ethiopia, where the Abyssinian state ruled over its conquests, in size larger than the core empire, annexed at the same time as European powers colonised the rest of Africa. Social life continued outside the state, which was largely experienced by the rural majorities as a factor of life which one rather should keep at distance. “Politics and electricity hurt — if you don’t keep your fingers off” says an Ethiopian proverb. Thus ethnicity grew into an alternative identity, in an agricultural society, where ninety per cent of the population experienced the State only as a power collecting taxes and interfering in their work.

The OAU doctrine accepts the state on an overt level. Underneath, however, Africa works differently. Informalised relationships, personalised power

are more convenient to use for the average African, and clientelistic relations replace formal relations to the state and the law. The clan and the ethnic group take the place of the state in people's everyday life orientation. Under the surface, African leaders find a way to work for their own people. As long as everyone has someone to turn to, it pays better to work with your superior from your own tribe than for your "mate" in a distant and impersonal relationship. And the truly destitute is he who has no patron to relate to, as CHABAL and DALOZ observe.

Ethiopia is seen by many as the big exception: Ethiopia had an indigenous state, not inherited from a colonial power. Yet, a majority of its subjects experienced the Ethiopian state every bit as predatory and interfering. To keep the state at distance was probably even more essential for peasants' survival. Certainly the Ethiopian state tried to suppress ethnic identities earlier and more zealously, though with no more success than most colonial states.

It is revealing to note that CHABAL and DALOZ quote Ethiopia's ethnic federalism after 1991 as a possible alternative model of dealing with ethnicity in Africa. Contrary to VESTAL who accuses Ethiopia of instrumentalising ethnic differences to divide the Ethiopian people, they see the federal constitution as a signal of hope. They argue that ethnicity could become "the cornerstone of more accountable political systems". A free unfolding of ethnic and cultural feelings can allow people to develop a personal self-consciousness without inferiority complexes. Only as self-conscious ethnic groups can Africans build larger forms of cooperation between equal but different clans and tribes and peoples. CHABAL and DALOZ seem to see the seeds of a true "rainbow nation" in the federal constitution of Ethiopia.

As a vision, this may also be true for LEENCO LATA. Yet he sees present day Ethiopia at the crossroads, which may well lead to disintegration instead. The starting point of LEENCO's political analysis, diametrically opposed to VESTAL's, is the trauma of his people, the Oromo, after more than one hundred years of political suppression, economic exploitation and cultural degradation. Having been himself an active participant in the political struggles of the transitional period, LEENCO knows from the inside the potential of the political alliance of 1991. There was indeed a hope in July 1991 when all ethnic groups and political movements were invited to form a transitional government. Cooperation should have allowed all ethnic groups to develop a unity in diversity, a strong, relaxed self-confidence and cultural identity.

The Oromo Liberation Front had originally a political agenda for a separate state for the Oromo, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. So had, prior to

1989, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front. OLF waged a new attempt at starting together in 1991. It cooperated with TPLF in the Conferences in London and in Addis Ababa, and OLF experts were among the chief architects of the Transitional Period Charter guiding the process of integration. The key was the liberation of all oppressed groups, and a vision of a voluntary cooperation of different, but equal cultures and peoples in one state of free Ethiopian peoples.

But LEENCO describes how TPLF betrayed this hope. In his view, TPLF never had a genuine intention to share power. In 1991, they needed OLF and other ethnic movements to win confidence in the South. But already from autumn 1991, they systematically built up their puppet OPDO to replace OLF, and in the run-up to the 1992 elections they forced OLF out of the cooperation. The chance of 1991 was squandered, the prospect of ethnic freedom lost.

The rest is a record of renewed suppression of all other ethnicities by the Tigray, with the Eritrean war as a final result. The Ethiopian polity is going towards increasing conflict. The lines become clearer: Tigray stands against the South, with the Amhara in between. But people do not tolerate suppression in the long run. Sooner or later they will revolt — all the more as the Tigreans have less historical legitimacy than Haile Selassie had, and less revolutionary enthusiasm, after Mengistu had discredited it thoroughly.

LEENCO concludes that a solution can only be found in a regional context. The Oromo have to realize that the world has changed. Mengistu failed because the Cold War ended, and with it the possibility of getting support from the East. TPLF is still maintaining the support of the USA because of their interest in stability in the Horn. But TPLF is forced to increase repression as the peoples in the South demand the promises of 1991 fulfilled. Either this spiral is carried to the end, which is disintegration, or TPLF has to yield to pressure to open up for a new dialogue.

To the address of his own people, LEENCO warns that the Oromo have to realize that armed struggle is no more a political avenue. Even an independent Oromia would have little choice but to enter into larger regional cooperation, also with other groups and states — with parts of Tigray, Eritrea, Sudan, Djibouti. If they get a fair level of freedom, cultural autonomy and political self-determination, it may be advantageous for the Oromo to remain within an Ethiopian state which is free and democratic. The first step in the right direction is to overcome the old but revitalised trauma of being suppressed and culturally emasculated, in short, to experience freedom. The second step is to

re-organize Ethiopia to become a multi-ethnic society. For the Oromo, if the road towards the second is blocked by TPLF, the only alternative may be to go the first step alone. That would mean disintegration for Ethiopia.

Ethiopia, thus, is rapidly approaching a crossroads. Either TPLF is pressed to accept setting the agenda anew, starting from where the Transitional Charter of 1991 aborted the process, and bring Ethiopia together in a unity in diversity. This could bring the process of de-colonization and democratization to its logical end, a coexistence of nationalities, imbedded in a regional context. Modern times demand larger, not smaller units, not division but integration and cooperation. A vision of many ethnicities in one society demands democracy practiced on all levels, based on the people, their sovereignty, and their cultural mechanisms for conflict management and consensus creation. For Ethiopia, LEENCO concludes, the choice is now to embark on the road to democratization. Or else, Ethiopia will end in disintegration, when the suppressed ethnic groups decide to go the road to the future alone.

LEENCO's book is more than a political analysis, it is, no doubt, every bit a political programme. More than that, it is a pedagogical exercise to the address of his own people and his own political movement. It is, not least, for the scholar and the interested reader an excellent document to allow a deeper understanding of the political predicament of those societies in the South of Ethiopia that were conquered by Emperor Menilek and forcefully integrated into the Empire during the 19th century. Without taking their needs and feelings and their political visions into account, one could never understand the role of ethnicity in Ethiopia.

How complicated and contradictory ethnicity can affect political progress and development, is demonstrated in the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. TEKESTE and TRONVOLL try to make sense of it in their book "Brothers at War". One of the major lines of argument is that the two liberation movements that were victorious in 1991 and took over the government in respectively Eritrea and Ethiopia, had diametrically opposed policies on ethnicity. TPLF in Ethiopia insisted on ethnic federalism, embraced "self-determination up to and including secession" for all ethnic groups, and promised a democratic federal state built on a voluntary cooperation of self-administered regional states.

TEKESTE and TRONVOLL demonstrate that this policy was from the outset in collision with the Eritrean state formation. EPLF — later re-named PFDJ — insisted that the common experience of 30 years of struggle had melted all Eritreans into one nation, regardless of language, religious, ethnic or regional

differences. People who were divided between Eritrea and Ethiopia, such as the Afar and the Kunama, found their ethnic identities and rights suppressed in Eritrea, while their relatives across the border were offered a self-administered state or zone. The two concepts just could not exist side by side without conflict.

From early in the war, moreover, both parties exploited the situation and played the ethnic card to destabilize the other. Eritrea hoped for an uprising in Southern Ethiopia once the war broke out, and gave active support among others to the Oromo Liberation Front, in their futile attempt to revive the armed struggle from bases in Somalia. But Southern Ethiopia saw no general uprising. To the contrary, Ethiopia managed to mobilise considerable patriotic feeling in the South — albeit it lasted only for a short period.

Ethiopia retaliated by supporting ethnic movements in Eritrea which tried to revive their languages and cultures and the ethnic identities of minorities. The Kunama were offered a radio station in Mekelle to disseminate programmes in their own language — forbidden in Eritrea. The Afar had such radio programmes any way in their regional state on the Ethiopian side. Ethiopia also created a strain on Eritrean resources by deporting a considerable part of the Eritreans living in Ethiopia. Contrary to official propaganda, the confiscation of a large part of their individual property boosted the war economy in Ethiopia, while their return without money or jobs created a heavy strain on Eritrean war-torn economy — not to forget the human tragedies it caused. (The economic consequences of expelling the Eritreans are only mentioned by TEKESTE and TRONVOLL. A recent article by STEFANIE CHRISTMANN suggests that the money confiscated was used to buy weapons against Eritrea.)

Differences in economic policy added to the conflict, and were aggravated by the war. The introduction of a new currency in Eritrea in 1997 revealed a long lasting split in economic interests, which led to a competition between new industries built up in Eritrea and in Tigray. While the authors do not believe that this competition in itself caused the war, they do accept it as one major factor for why a border crisis could develop into a war.

As another issue behind the conflict, the authors describe a growing feeling of difference between the Tigrigna-speaking people in Tigray and Eritrea. People in Tigray suspected the Eritrean highlanders for being unprincipled and for having opportunistically supported Italy against Ethiopia both in 1896 and during 1936 to 41 and later. They felt embarrassed and insulted by Tigrean-Eritreans referring to their brethren from Tigray as rude and uncivi-

lized peasants. Referring to each other as “Shabia” and “Woyane” respectively, the warring parties indicate their readiness to exploit memories of earlier and less flattering periods in their history to degrade and demoralize each other. Caused or exacerbated by the frustration of collective ambitions and violated identities, such conflict is potentially explosive, and does not easily allow peaceful cooperation nor democratic development.

And the lack of democratic development, both in Ethiopia and in Eritrea, is in the final analysis the cause for the war, as TEKESTE and TRONVOLL see it. Eritrea is described as one of the most autocratic states in the world, a one-party state with a democratically ratified constitution which has not been put in force, and a president whose control reaches out into every village and every organization. Ethiopia has a constitution which in theory guarantees all individual and human rights, a free press and a transparent and democratic society. But practice follows a solid administrative tradition of a hierarchical and closed system, and political leadership on all levels is giving priority to control and the maintenance of power and positions, at the expense of accountability or individual rights or security of the law.

The authors refrain from allocating guilt or causes. Rather, they follow the conflict between the two brothers back into their common history of armed resistance against the military regime in Ethiopia from 1975 to 1991, into differences which were only temporarily plastered over, and into contradictions of policy and ideology after 1991. Already in 1985, differences in ideology, policies and military strategies caused a breach in relations between the two fronts. TEKESTE and TRONVOLL do not identify any single issue so grave as to necessitate a war. They see two “real issues behind the war”: the nature of economic competition between Tigrinya people in Eritrea and Tigray, and their competition about political influence and hegemony in the Horn of Africa. Both issues have not been solved by the war. The title of the “postscript” to the book may thus prove realistic when it asks whether the two countries are on the way towards a state of “No war — no peace”. Both people have gained nothing from the war, but have been thrown further back in their aspirations towards democracy.

STEFANIE CHRISTMANN has thus a point when she argues, in a recent article, that both Eritrea and Ethiopia (and their people) lost this war, but that both leaders, Essayas Afewerki and Meles Zenawi, won it. Before the war started, she observes, the demands for democracy were increasing in Eritrea (but also in Ethiopia). The Eritrean constitution had been approved by the

Constitutional Assembly, but not put in force by the President. When the date for the election was to be announced, CHRISTMANN claims, Essayas started the war by ordering his troops to occupy Badme. And he succeeded in herding the Eritrean people back into acquainted wartime patterns of standing together whatever comes — behind the President.

While the war came as a surprise for Ethiopia, Meles used it skilfully to rally the Ethiopian opposition, particularly the nationalist urban population, behind his policy of defending the “sovereignty of Ethiopia”. In face of a growing internal conflict in TPLF, this was no minor achievement. It may have played a significant role in allowing Meles recently to confront his rightwing opposition within TPLF.

From a more distanced and principled viewpoint, JAMES C.N. PAUL, in a recent contribution to an anthology, offers us some clarifying glimpses into the legal, historical and social significance of ethnicity in the constitutions of Ethiopia and Eritrea. JIM PAUL, with his experience in Ethiopia from the time he was Dean of the law faculty when it still was part of Haile Selassie I University, contrasts the different views on Ethnicity. His well argued and brilliantly formulated article gives a short analysis of ethnicity in both constitutions, embedding it in a condensed but comprehensive glance through the history of ethnic differences and identities. He identifies three distinct “genres” of Ethiopian history. One is the narrative of three thousand years of proud history of a Christian Abyssinian Empire in Northern Ethiopia, symbolized in the Solomonic Dynasty of Emperors. The second is the history of the forceful incorporation of other peoples to the South, West and East of the core empire. The third is the story of the causes, consequences and implications of the implosion of the Ethiopian Empire. “All are controversial, and a synthesis of all three even more so.”

He continues to show that the Ethiopian Constitution can be seen as a “treaty between the nations and the peoples of Ethiopia, who are portrayed as its authors”. Or, “alternatively, it might also be seen as part of an ingenious ‘divide-and-rule’ political strategy which enabled the TPLF ... to legitimate its power.” As for Eritrea, JIM PAUL deplors that the provisional government has postponed elections indefinitely, simply by failing to act. The legal status of the constitution remains problematic. Eritreans have been urged to abstain from politics, and the Eritrean peasants do not have any influence on the broad lines of their development.

For both countries, JIM PAUL concludes saying: “The case study sketched here has a broader relevance. It reflects a history of state failure similar to the

recent histories of other African states. It suggests the limitations — and risks — of efforts to alleviate grievances, generated by state failure, by recourse to problematic, officially imposed theories of ethnicity, self-determination and ethnic federalism, *or* by recourse to dogmatic, official doctrines prescribing national unity and centralized governance. It suggests the need to convert juridical states into organic social formations — and the need to rethink the fundamental tasks of states in the African context.”

There is hardly much to add for a summary, except, maybe, that the four books and two articles together show that *ethnicity matters* in politics in Africa. Ethnic identity is understood as meaningful where the state is experienced only as predator, not as provider of resources nor as facilitator of development, nor even as liberator. What counts is people’s feelings about their experience of being suppressed, exploited, and despised. Peace will not be won before each one of the different peoples and each individual within them have experienced the proud consciousness of being free from undue repression and having an influence on matters of common concern. This consciousness may be called *democracy*, or *gada*, *xeer*, or *seera*, or whatever. It may be organized in states or regions or villages or in the United Horn of Africa. In any case, the Horn can not achieve peace without winning peace with its ethnic differences.

VESTAL’s book may be especially important as a collection of the record of the Ethiopian government after 1991 in terms of violation of human rights. Particularly important as a source for researchers may appear his collection of companies in the economic empire built up by TPLF and affiliated individuals. Unfortunately, this list is not up to date: new companies have been added to the TPLF empire since this list was published in *Ethiopian Review* in 1996.

It is a shame that VESTAL allowed someone who has no idea about Ethiopian names to re-arrange his “selected bibliography”, putting Ethiopians into the alphabetical list under their second — that is, their fathers’ — name. To find, for example, Alemayehu Gebre Mariam under “Mariam” is, to say the least, annoying. No-one will ever be able to find Alemayehu in this alphabet, since “Gebre Mariam”, not Mariam, is the first name of Alemayehu’s father. The malaise is not made better by the fact that both LEENCO LATA’s book and TEKESTE and TRONVOLL’s suffered the same fate. Also in their bibliographies, the publishers have inverted Ethiopian names. They were more lucky, however, in that theirs do not include authors whose fathers happen to

have names consisting of two words. At least, someone who is used to the malpractice can find an author by looking for his father.

CHABAL and DALOZ have a wider public and have already received a more comprehensive reception in other context. Their book offers no solution — but it is an important contribution to re-think the political dimensions of development in Africa. In the final analysis, they point in the direction of re-assessing political identities in an African context. With it goes a more thorough debate on the role of the state in Africa. A debate for which it is high time.

The book by LEENCO LATA should in particular offer food for thought to the Oromo refugees in Europe and America. Many of them have been and some continue to act as a political lobby to preserve a fighter-mentality and a feeling of victimisation, a readiness for armed struggle. Their conservative influence may prevent a reorientation in the political attitudes of the Oromo living in Ethiopia. Both could gain from a new attitude which looks at democracy as an exit from the present predicament towards liberation of all peoples and a fruitful cooperation for development in the Horn of Africa, on all sides of cultural and political borders.

TEKESTE and TRONVOLL have endeavored a difficult analysis of the events and reasons behind the war. They have brought forward a considerable material. Their “appendix” collects all the more important documents on the war and the negotiations, and is a valuable resource for further research. In addition, the book contains original material such as interviews with leading political figures from both sides in the war, which shed new light on some of the more obscure aspects of political thinking in the two fronts. Their book is a valuable addition to literature on Eritrea and Ethiopia, and an important source for further research.