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Review

GÜNTHER SCHLEE with ABDULLAHI A. SHONGOLO, *Islam & Ethnicity
in Northern Kenya & Southern Ethiopia*

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Reviews

But unfortunately her health conditions do not improve and without money she is obliged to ask her children to abandon their studies. In Rawha's story – as Aurora Massa notes – the social and economic inequalities impress their signs on the bodies of the people (Rawha, her husband), by means of disease: historical, political and social events are incorporated and embodied as biological events.

Aurora Massa's contribution depicts a complex panorama where a sick person's search for diagnosis, sense and treatment is unpredictable and never fixed, but always influenced by personal, social, economic conditions, structural factors, infinite contingencies.

In conclusion, the volume edited by Pino Schirripa represents an accurate and useful addition to the body of work on the Ethiopian health system and traditional medical knowledge. Even if some sections might have benefited from a more stringent proofreading (occasional typographical and spelling errors are present) and maybe also from the use of a more academic transliteration system, the book is very informative and raises a number of issues that have been and still are central to medical anthropological debates. Moreover each contribution draws upon well-documented sources and valuable ethnographic data. I sincerely hope that also the investigations carried out by Schirripa and his group in Mäqälä in the last few years – which I came to know during the already mentioned conference in Rome last year – may soon find expression in a new publication.

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GÜNTHER SCHLEE with ABDULLAHI A. SHONGOLO, *Islam & Ethnicity in Northern Kenya & Southern Ethiopia* = Eastern Africa Series, Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey – Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 2012. lx + 186 pp., Hardcover. Price: GB-£ 40.00. ISBN: 978-1-84701-046-9.

A cooperation of scholars from the northern hemisphere with counterparts from Africa is always appreciated in cultural anthropology. Günther Schlee, who can look back on a continuity of research in northern Kenya of 38 years, invited the local Boran scholar Abdullahi A. Shongolo from Moyale to contribute to this book under review. The beginning of the collaboration of the two authors dates back to the early 1990s.

The title of the book highlights Islam and ethnicity as key words for its contents, although numerous other topics such as socio-economic patterns and questions of culture history are debated. The field studies providing the results were not only long-term, but also multi-sited among different ethnic groups of northern Kenya, particularly Rendille, Gabra, Boran (Boorana-Oromo), Sakuye, Garre and Somali. As the territories of some of these groups extend to

the fringes of southern Ethiopia, this country is included in the study. Various facets of ethnicity such as stable and moving identities, cultural differences, changes of political alliances, violence and warfare, voluntary and forced spatial displacements, dynamics of socio-religious change and the phenomenon of interethnic clan relationship, particularly prominent in north-eastern Africa, have been a central concern of Schlee's investigations. He has dealt with them in numerous previous writings, notably a monograph on the Rendille (1979) and a comparative study on clanship and pastoralism in northern Kenya (1989). Thus, apart from some additions and revisions made during the first decade of the new millennium (e.g., pp. 107f.), the contents of "Islam and Ethnicity" are not results of new research, but present a comprehensive overview of the relevant data collected and analysed during the last three and a half decades. The main author Schlee states that the summary of historical and ethnographic facts intends to make the present volume "self-contained" and to round it off by putting the different parts into one coherent framework for those readers who are not familiar with the earlier works. However, the book does not provide a mere sequence of texts already published in previous writings, but it correlates and confronts the ethnographic findings to a noteworthy extent with revised interpretations and methodological considerations. Schlee's scholarly approach combines the sophisticated fieldwork techniques of British Social Anthropology with a deep-rooted interest in culture history of the German tradition (cf. p. 67) and particular linguistic skills.

The book is divided into five parts which respectively focus on different research topics. The title of Chapter 1 "Pax Borana" was elected because of the fact that the Boorana-Oromo had established political dominance in the area of concern for quite a long period. But apart from the fact that their hegemony was threatened by Somali expansion already in the 19th century, the label seems to be somewhat problematic for another reason. Temporary military superiority of the Boran did not necessarily aim at a peace-keeping political control as the foreign colonial powers did with the "Pax Britannica" or "Pax Aethiopica".

Chapter 2 entitled "Non-Proto-Rendille-Somali Elements of Modern Ethnic Groups" (PRS) is based on an ethno-linguistic classification Schlee has elaborated in a wider perspective for the area between southern Somalia and Lake Turkana. He highlights certain cultural elements which, according to his criteria of classification, have originally not been rooted in the layer of PRS. In this context, the "killer complex", widespread particularly in Ethiopia, cultural influences from the Ancient Orient and the Old Testament, which Adolf Jensen had already indicated in the 1960s, systems of time-reckoning, customs associated with *rites de passage* such as circumcision and removal of teeth, are critically analysed. Schlee's explanations on the origin and the ways of diffusion of such cultural traits seem altogether convincing.

Chapter 3 deals with the heterogeneous aspects of culture summarized under the subtitle “Modern Trends”. I have always asked myself why the camel breeders in the Horn of Africa do not ride their camels, and this fact is highly astonishing also to Africans in other countries such as the Sudan. Schlee (p. 76) discussed this question with his informants without receiving a plausible and rationalist explanation. The predominant trend of culture change in the area of concern over the past decades is the conversion from the traditional religions to Islam, whereas Christianity for various reasons is not of similar attraction. With regard to the Rendille and related groups of the region “Islam is the culturally nearer and more viable alternative” (p. 104). The ban on the consumption of blood, a formerly highly important food of pastoralists in northeastern Africa, as impure (*ḥarām*) for Muslims has, however, obviously been accepted only reluctantly and incompletely (pp. 88, 91). Folk Islam with elements of Sufism rooted in the local socio-cultural systems has so far not allowed puristic and ultra-conservative movements such as Salafists (Wahhabi) to gain a notable foothold. The majority of the Muslims of the region are satisfied with their own meagre resources and do not strive for “petrodollars” for the construction of impressive mosques and koranic schools (p. 88), an attitude which can also be observed in most parts of Ethiopia.

In Chapter 4 Schlee discusses various aspects of ecology and politics and their manifold interdependencies. Constraints of natural resources caused by drought and overstocking inevitably result in deficits of food supply and entail bitter struggles of survival among the pastoralists of the region. Inter-ethnic conflicts often culminating in warfare and causing migratory movements from rural areas to towns and refugee camps have indeed characterized the historical fate of the nomadic livestock-keepers over the last decades. Social relationships are illustrated at the micro-level with the help of numerous diagrams, and the nomadic livestock production is also analysed at the macro-level in the context of its integration in the wider economy of northern Kenya, southern Ethiopia and Somalia. As a matter of fact, the data presented here cannot and do not claim to provide a comprehensive picture of these vast and complex fields of research.

Chapter 5 on the impact of war on ethnic and religious identification in southern Ethiopia in the early 1990s is indicated as a shortened version of an article of Schlee and Shongolo published in 1995. New frontlines were opened by this time and the current concepts of being and becoming Oromo were in many respects redefined. A quasi-identification of a religion with an ethnicity was accentuated, for example, in the violent clashes between the Boran sticking to their traditional way of life and politically linked to the *Oromo Liberation Front* (OLF) on the one hand, and the Somali and “Somalid” groups, such as the Gabra and Garre, supporting the

Oromo Abo Liberation Front (OALF, also labelled *Somali Abo Liberation Front* [SALF] in the 1970s and 1980s), on the other hand. These frontlines seem to be clear-cut, but they have been very complex with regard to genealogical, cultural and religious ties and shifting identities as far back as historical sources from the 19th century onwards reveal.

Schlee (pp. 5, 41) complains of recent politically motivated polemics accusing him of anti-Oromo and anti-Somali leaning. They refer, for example, to cultural facts such as the killer complex, which indigenous scholars with deficits in the knowledge of earlier ethnographic works and anthropological terminology are sometimes not familiar with. I am fully aware of this sensitive issue, because I was repeatedly confronted with accusations of the same type.

The book contains numerous diagrams, tables with comparative charts of names in different languages, maps, photos, a bibliography of 159 works (33 of Günther Schlee himself) and an index. Together with another book entitled “Pastoralism & Politics in Northern Kenya & Southern Ethiopia”, also published in the series “Eastern African Studies”, it presents a comprehensive summary of relevant anthropological and historical themes in the borderland of Kenya and Ethiopia.

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GÜNTHER SCHLEE with ABDULLAHI A. SHONGOLO, *Pastoralism & Politics in Northern Kenya & Southern Ethiopia* = Eastern Africa Series, Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey – Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 2012. 191 pp. Price: GB-£ 30.00. ISBN 978-1-84701-036-0.

The relationship between ethnic identity and resource use is crucial when addressing development and governance in many regions in Eastern Africa. This book by Günther Schlee and Abdullahi A. Shongolo on *Pastoralism & Politics in Northern Kenya & Southern Ethiopia* fills the gap in the knowledge on the genesis of recurrent violent episodes that hinder development in these postoralist dominant areas with much needed information. It highlights how historic events shape ethnic perceptions as well as the local politician’s role in a classic ‘divide and rule’ strategy that invokes ethnic pride and territoriality to maintain power bases. The book downplays religious fanaticism as the main driver of conflict in the region and instead directs the conflict discussion to the flexible interethnic relationships that are manipulated according to the targeted result. Analysis of historical interactions in this rich ethnic region thus offers a realistic view of conflict events and offers practical resolutions that can be implemented for peaceful coexistence. It is the best reference book for political scientists, historians and administrators who seek to understand