



Aethiopia 16 (2013)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

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Review

GÜNTHER SCHLEE with ABDULLAHI A. SHONGOLO, *Pastoralism & Politics
in Northern Kenya & Southern Ethiopia*

Aethiopia 16 (2013), 298–300

ISSN: 2194–4024

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

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Reviews

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

the critical issues driving conflict and impede development in any interethnic pastoralist community in East Africa.

The book is the result of a 34-year field research and gives a critical evaluation of the interaction between ethnic groups in Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia and related drivers shaping conflict events in the region. This exemplary work pursues the future of pastoralism among ethnic groups pitted against each other by politics, policies and the environment. It highlights the common ethnicity character in the two countries sharing a border but having different governance histories.

The book centres on the Oromo and associated Proto-Rendille-Somali origin groups found in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. The Kenyan Oromo group is split into the Tana Orma and the larger Boran group while the Ethiopian Oromo is subdivided into several sub-ethnicities. The highly detailed introduction explains the colonial perception of pastoralists and subsequent creation of tribal grazing areas from the beginning of the 20th century that led to formalization of ethnic territoriality (p. 27). These colonial boundaries were enhanced after Kenya's independence as a basis for administrative governance but have been used to fuel periodic tribal clashes in Kenya.

Attention is mainly given to incidences in Northern Kenya and the authors clearly describe the relationship between climatic conditions, pastoralist resources and temporary ethnic alliances in the arid and semiarid (ASAL) region (pp. 55f.). This forms a firm background for a clear analysis of conflict events that result in a detailed chronological account of major massacres in the area i.e. the Wagalla in 1984 (p. 35), Bagalla in 1998 (p. 51) and Turbi in 2005 (p. 116). The authors produce documented manipulation by politicians in the region that include closing transnational borders to curb cattle rustling, influencing civil employment, to involvement of the army in local conflict and registration of refugees during election years to boost voter numbers comprehensively in the book. Finally, the book gives a deep analysis of documented hotspots such as Hurri Hills (p. 122), describes several ethnic alliances and outcomes (pp. 125–129) in the region. The real cause of conflict in this investigation is between elites and pastoralists over land management whereby the elites want to govern ethnic constituencies while pastoralists want resource utilisation arrangements that facilitate peaceful coexistence.

A factor highlighted throughout the book is the lack of support from respective central governments in solving injustices among pastoralists which has created room for revenge missions and blatant impunity making the two regions seem lawless. First, detailed evidence from print media and translated community meeting transcripts reveal instances where politicians have used ethnic territoriality to rally their communities to conflict (pp. 95–100).

Secondly, exploitation of the low literacy level of the masses by politicians who propagate ethnic supremacy towards conflict, for example, spread of the ‘Garriland’ map in 2000 to support claim of land by the Garre community using misrepresented road demarcations (p. 72). Thirdly, the book mentions moments when levels of Islam (dedication levels) or Somali-ness are used to provoke disdain for certain communities (p. 94).

The book also elucidates the position of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) movement active on the Ethiopian side (p. 57) and its position in the region’s violence (pp. 38–45) and places the blame of interethnic conflict squarely on the leaders from ethnic communities (p. 52). On the conspiratorial side, discussion of events preceding the 2006 plane crash in Kenya that killed among many, three dominant Borana, creates a ripe ground for debate (pp. 54f.). Also interesting is that the book includes a chapter by Günther Schlee defending his work against accusations such as a pro-Somali, pro-Oromo or Pro-Amhara by certain publications. He reiterates that he is an unbiased Cushitic culture and language researcher in the region.

However, the book does not discuss in depth the role of intermarriage in shaping ethnic size and relations. Marriage is a strong bond creator in many communities and may contribute to the mutual understanding between ethnic groups in resource utilization or formation of alliances in conflict times. This question remains at the back of the mind especially when reading about the forged relationship ties such as *tiriso* among the Oromo, Boran and Proto-Rendille-Somali origin groups.

In spite of the focus on conflict, the book also mentions specific examples of cultural knowledge that promotes understanding of the ethnic groups to the reader (pp. 37f., 119, 121, 155). Also, it mentions the effect of drought on availability of natural resources for the pastoralists thus creating room for further discussion on climate change and coping mechanisms practised by different ethnic groups that would be important as future resource conflict resolution mechanisms.

The authors offer hope to this situation by forwarding recommendations that guarantee future development in pastoralism. These include transparent implementation of the 2010 Kenyan constitution and the policy framework for pastoralism in Africa by the African Union, promotion of pastoralist relevant technology, integration of traditional resource agreements in conflict resolution and customized education and health schemes for nomadic pastoralists.

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