

Jutta Bakonyi (2011), *Land ohne Staat: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Krieg am Beispiel Somalias*, Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, ISBN 978-3-593-39528-9, 396 pp.

In academia and the media alike, Somalia is usually portrayed as a place of civil war, anarchy, hunger, Islamic terrorism and piracy. The fact that these terms have no analytical value, however, is often overlooked. They are buzzwords that serve political or journalistic interests. They hinder a clear understanding of the political and economic conditions in the country. At worst, they facilitate short-sighted and possibly destructive interventions in the name of international humanitarianism or the war against terrorism.

The book *Land ohne Staat* by Jutta Bakonyi is the fruit of long-term research on Somali issues. Regarding its scientific rigor, relevance and originality, it distinguishes itself from all other publications in German on Somalia. In fact, were it written in English, one could make a similar comment vis-à-vis the much broader English field of Somali studies. The author combines theoretical approaches from sociology, political science, development studies and social anthropology in a most creative way. Marx, Weber, Elias and Bourdieu are used to clarify and develop the central terms of the book: commodification, power, sociation and habitus. Bakonyi draws on Mauss, Polanyi and Sahlins to understand the economic relationships and dependencies between actors and groups in Somalia before and during the civil war. Her reading of Tilly, Hobsbawm, Scott and Duffield, but also Popitz and von Trotha, clearly influenced her comprehension of the dynamics of violence and war. The central questions of the book are: How do society and politics function in the absence of regulation by the state and during war-time? And how does economic reproduction take place under such circumstances? Like her previous work, Bakonyi's newest book follows the "Hamburg approach" to conflict research (theoretically advanced by Jung, Schlichte and others in the 1990s). The aim of this approach is to put local conflict dynamics into a world-societal/global context.

Methodologically, Bakonyi applies a "double" strategy: General structures and historical developments in Somalia and the region are presented on the basis of the author's extensive study of secondary sources (including academic and "grey" literature as well as news reports, including *Africa Confidential*). Case studies and local dynamics are based on primary data (interviews and observations). These data were gathered during the author's ethnographic field research and extended stays as a development worker between 2001 and 2007. The geographical focus of the book is on southern Somalia. However, Bakonyi also occasionally refers to the situation in northern Somalia, particularly in Somaliland in the northwest. In line with

Weber's "interpretive sociology", Bakonyi attempts to show the reader how the actors themselves interpret reality in order to explicate "how people are motivated to become violent, what is expressed by violence and what allows violence to continue or end" (17; translation Markus Höhne).

The short and clear introduction is followed by eight chapters that aim to answer the key questions on economy and society during wartime in Somalia. Chapter 1 contains the theoretical framework. It is no easy read but worth the considerable effort on the part of the reader, as it develops the key terms used throughout the book and defines their relationship to one another, thereby providing a real theoretical approach that is not just helpful but also necessary for the reader in order to understand what follows. Theory is not just an ornamental addition for Bakonyi but both basis and aim. The other seven chapters provide a historical background, including the world-societal/global context relevant for the case of Somalia, the prehistory and dynamics of violence in the south in the 1980s and 1990s, with a brief excursion to the particular developments in Somaliland, the humanitarian intervention by the UN and the US and its unintended consequences, different types of violence, power and rule coming from authorities other than the state, and the political economy of the warlord figurations. The conclusion in Chapter 8 sums up the findings.

Each chapter provides insights that are original and partly new, even to seasoned regional experts. For instance, in Chapter 3 Bakonyi compares the various Somali guerrilla movements in the 1980s. Her analysis shows how the approach of the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), based on the personalized power of its leader, is quite different from the "democratic" approach of the Somali National Movement (SNM). These different approaches influence how each movement operates. They also, by extension, explain the distinct political developments in Somaliland (which was founded by the SNM) and Puntland in the northeast (which traces back to SSDF control of the region). The personalized approach was also dominant in later (southern) Somali guerrilla movements. It is this heritage of the early years of civil war in the south that continues to influence Somali power politics as it also complicates the stabilization of the country and makes focusing on a "common good" so difficult.

Despite the (local) depth of the text and the original analyses of Somali political dynamics, Bakonyi accomplishes something more: Her analysis goes beyond overlooked or not properly considered details. Starting from the Somali context, she wants to advance general theories in the research on violence and war. And she succeeds in adding to a number of interesting general debates: Chapter 5 on humanitarian aid, Chapter 6 on violence, power and rule by authorities other than the state, and Chapter 7 on the

economy of the warlord figurations all speak to – and, in several regards, advance – discussions in sociology, political science, social anthropology and development studies on legitimacy, local ownership, and the dilemmas of development and humanitarian aid in crisis states.

The most important finding of the book is that Somalia is not an exceptional case of civil war and state collapse, though it is often presented as such. The political and economic dynamics outlined in *Land ohne Staat* rather point to general processes of societal and economic integration during wartime. Bakonyi looks far beyond the façade that was erected in academia and the media with the help of the aforementioned buzzwords. She shows that one can understand Somalia and Somali actors and that the dynamics of violence, which have brought about specific forms of social and economic change in the collapsed state, are part of global trends that are also visible elsewhere. Therefore, Somalia is not the “anarchic other” that is often presented (for reasons of simplicity but also sensationalism) by other authors. With this book, Somalia found an appropriate and even “honourable” place in the theoretically oriented literature on conflict research. One can only hope that *Land ohne Staat* inspires similar and possibly even comparative works on related matters.

- Markus V. Höhne