
“The existence of the marginalized minority groups in Ethiopia has puzzled scholars for decades” (p. 9), is one of the first sentences from the foreword of the book. The authors of the volume, aware of this fact, have successfully attempted to present the problem from different angles. Their aim was to offer not only new material on different groups, but also to confront research with findings and theories from previous publications on the subject. The terms “marginalization” / “marginalized groups” in themselves are discussed thoroughly in the volume, and other terms (e.g. “occupational groups” / “hereditary status groups” and “status groups” as applied in the title of the book) are offered with the view to better describe the various phenomena. Also the history of research is critically discussed (as in the „Introduction” by Susanne Epple, esp. p. 13-17, or by Hermann Amborn, p. 131-133).

“The state of status groups in Ethiopia...” is an example of a vision of Ethiopia’s history and cultures presented from the perspective of the periphery; however, the influence of the state on the discussed groups throughout as well as the groups’ relationships with the state, are strongly addressed. The main interest of the authors lies in the areas that have remained on the edges of scholarly interest, e.g. Bayso and Haro people living on one of the islands on Abbaya lake in southern Ethiopia; Mao and Komo from western Ethiopia; or Kumpal-Agaw in the northwest of the country. Among the theoretical questions, the issue of sometimes blurred differences between ethnic and social groups has also arisen in the book. Another subject is the manifestations of marginalization, which are being discussed throughout the volume. Eating and drinking taboos resulting in separation within these spheres are among the most obvious, while breaking this separation is an obvious sign of overcoming marginalization. Another taboo is intermarriage between the members of groups of low and high status. One of the biggest values of the volume lies in the authors’ ability to present a picture of the contemporary situation of occupational and hereditary status groups within the context of the longue durée processes.
The volume begins with a foreword by Dena Freeman, whose work, co-authored with Alula Pankhurst, titled “Peripheral people: Excluded minorities of Ethiopia” (Addis Ababa 2003) is quoted throughout the book as one of the milestones in the scholarly interest in minorities and marginalization in Ethiopia. The volume continues with Editor Susanne Epple’s introduction in which she discusses the state of research in this field. She also highlights the problems attached to the question of minorities. This chapter itself provides a valuable source of information on the history of the research, the main themes connected to the subject and an overview of the most important discussions. The general introduction leads a reader to case studies divided into two parts. The first part discusses “Transformation and manipulation of social differences”, while another part concentrates on “Resistance of marginalization”. Susanne Epple continues her thoughts from the introduction in the first chapter, where she presents the contemporary situation in Ethiopia in terms of how and if the roles of status groups within the spheres of social life have changed at a local and national level (“The transformation of status groups in Ethiopia. Recent observations”, p. 33-48).

The internal and external factors involved in minimizing marginalization have been interestingly described in the volume. Conversion to Christianity is perceived as one of the most important factors which stimulate change. Conversions — to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church or to Evangelical churches — are often perceived by the members of the marginalized groups as a way to escape marginalization. A number of authors of the volume (including Samuel Tibebe in “The chances and limitations of integration through conversion to Evangelical Christianity”, p. 49-63) discuss to which extent and under which circumstances the method is effective. A different way of overcoming marginalization is presented by Susanne Epple and Fabienne Braukmann using the example of Haro people (“Overcoming layers of marginalization. Adaptive strategies of the Bayso and the Haro people of Laka Abbaya, southern Ethiopia”, p. 79-100). Both the motivations arising from the Bayso-Haro environment, and external triggers for change influenced the development of their mutual relations. In the case of internal processes, apart from adaptation through religion, some features of the Haro’s culture (i.e. the
Haro being respected for their magical and medical abilities as well as divination practices) influenced every-day life in which friendship and intermarriage practices started to be accepted. As for the external influences, migrating off of the island and modern education brought some change.

Within the volume, the authors also seek to describe social boundaries between the groups discussed, and at the center of interest is the flexibility of social categories which are closely related to how the boundaries are understood. Another important question asks how these boundaries change and to what extent they remain solid. Consequently, the methods of influencing situations are discussed, particularly which changes are caused by the developing social and political situation, and which are created by the members of the groups under discussion. It seems however, that even in a constantly changing environment the social order often remains to a large extent, static. This provokes further questions about the factors (among them social, historical, political) responsible for keeping the old order, or — in some cases — for returning to the established system. Another discussed problem are the processes that begin as social differentiation and later turn into discrimination. This problem is reflected in a chapter by Sayuri Yoshida (“From social differentiation to discrimination. Changes in the relationship between the Kafa and the Manjo of southwestern Ethiopia”, p. 193-217).

A subject which provokes many questions is on the status of the descendants of enslaved people. It might seem that, as a consequence of the many decades since slavery was officially abandoned in Ethiopia, the descendants of the slaves have managed to find their place within Ethiopian society without being stigmatized by the status of their ancestors. The situation proves to be otherwise, however. This subject is discussed by Bosha Bombe (“Heritages of slavery and status transformation. Evidence from Ganta, Gamo highlands of southern Ethiopia”, p. 65-78). Kiya Gezahegne’s contribution (“Living on the margins in the Rayya Qobbo highlands. Slave descendants in contemporary Wollo, Amhara region”, p. 157-171) also discusses the question of social memory regarding being a slave (or the descendant of a slave), but in an area geographically distant to the one researched by Bosha Bombe.
The authors show the contemporary situation not only from an anthropological, but also from a linguistic point of view. Graziano Savà and Kirsi Leikola present the problem from a linguistic perspective. Graziano Savà (“Code-switching from Bayso and Haro to Amharic as a status-change strategy”, p. 101-119) concentrates on using Amharic phrases in the Bayso and Haro languages while Kirsi Leikola (“Talking Manjo. Manipulating a social boundary through new linguistic resources”, p. 219-240) researches on Manjo. Both authors seek for an answer to how changes occurring in languages are related to social processes.

Among the most interesting perspectives is the one by Hermann Amborn (“Continuity and change in the relationship between artisans and farmers in southern Ethiopia”, p. 121-136). Amborn discusses the “marginalization” term itself and he further goes into presenting arguments showing that traditional relationships between artisans and farmers in the south of the country aimed for integration to a greater extent than marginalization. He also claims that marginalization was induced by the colonization of the south by the northern peoples representing the Ethiopian Empire.

Desalegn Amsalu opens the second part of the volume devoted to the persistence of marginalization with a chapter on the Kumpal-Agaw group living in northwest Ethiopia who believe that they are themselves responsible for their status as a cursed group (Desalegn Amsalu, “The social reproduction of marginalization among the Kumpa-Agaw of Northwest Ethiopia”, p. 140-156). The influence of the construction of Ethiopia as a contemporary nation state on the lives of minorities has been analyzed by Alexander Meckelburg using the example of the Mao and the Komo from western Ethiopia (“Minority integration and citizenship expansion. Observations from the Mao and Komo groups in western Ethiopia”, p. 174-192).

Of special interest is a translation of the text by late Eike Haberland which had first been published in German in the “Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde” magazine (number 8, 1962). This chapter not only presents the state of art and the problem of status groups as it was perceived over half a century ago, but it also proves the contemporary value of Haberlands’s findings at the time.
Annexes to the book include a glossary of terms in Ethiopian languages (p. 269-274), a list of contributors with information on their scholarly interests and achievements (p. 275-278) and an index of persons mentioned in the chapters of the book (p. 279-283).

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