

Book Reviews

Christopher Clapham*, Tim Kelsall†, Pádraig Carmody‡ and Jonathan Fisher§

This publication includes reviews of the following books:

The Horn of Africa by Kidane Mengisteab. Cambridge: Polity, 2014. £15.99 (pbk.). Pp. 240+index. ISBN: 9780745651217. Review by Christopher Clapham.

Ethiopia: the last two frontiers by John Markakis. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2011. Pp. 399. \$34.95 (pbk.). ISBN: 9781847010742. Review by Christopher Clapham.

Regime change and succession politics in Africa: five decades of misrule, edited by Maurice Nyamanga Amutabi and Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. Pp. 237+bibliography+index, £80.00 (hbk). ISBN13: 9780415534086. Review by Tim Kelsall.

China's resource diplomacy in Africa: powering development? by Marcus Power, Giles Mohan and May-Tan Mullins. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. Pp. 329 + xix, £63 (hbk.). ISBN: 9780230229129. Review by Pádraig Carmody.

Dealing with government in South Sudan: histories of chiefship, community and state by Cherry Leonardi. Suffolk: James Currey (Eastern African Series), 2013. Pp. 224 + notes + bibliography + index. £45.00 (hbk). ISBN: 9781847010674. Review by Jonathan Fisher.

Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa

Christopher Clapham

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The Horn of Africa – essentially comprising the north eastern part of sub-Saharan Africa, with Ethiopia at its core – is an extremely distinctive part of the continent, and one that has become almost synonymous with war (both internal and inter-state), famine, dictatorship, state failure, external intervention, and environmental decay. Since none of these issues pay much attention to the imposed frontiers between states, there is much to be said for a regional approach, and one written from the perspective of the inhabitants of the region would be particularly welcome.

Kidane Mengisteab's *The Horn of Africa*, however, is sadly very poor indeed, and entirely fails to meet the legitimate expectations of any reader of a book on the subject. For a start, it gives us little idea of why this region should behave in a way so different from the rest of Africa. Why, for example, should it provide Africa's only two successful

secessionist movements, in Eritrea and South Sudan (or three, if unrecognised Somaliland is included)? Why do interstate frontiers, which despite their artificiality have been generally accepted elsewhere, continue to arouse bitter conflict? Why have the continent-wide issues of post-colonial state and nation-building here proved so particularly intractable? Such explanations as are given fall into a critique of poor leadership and inadequate institutions that are common to the rest of Africa, without considering the environmental, social and historical base on which such institutions have to be constructed, and within which leaders (however appalling many of these have been) must operate.

Nor does this book provide us, at the most basic level, with a straightforward empirical description that would enable readers to follow the tangled politics of the Horn. It is quite astonishing, for example, that there should simply be no discussion of Eritrea's long and heroic struggle for independence from Ethiopia, or the mark that this has left not only on Eritrea, but on the region as a whole. Nor is there so much as a mention of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution – the only classic revolution to have taken place anywhere in Africa, and one that has sent shockwaves throughout the region. A whole chapter on 'Failures of governance and nation-building' castigates leaders for their inadequate 'management of diversity', but does not even note the creation in Ethiopia after 1991 of a federal system in which every 'nation, nationality and people' is accorded its own regional or sub-regional state, each of which is constitutionally accorded a right of self-determination, up to and including secession – a provision unique in the constitutions

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of the world. Though this system is deeply contested, and the level of autonomy actually granted falls a very long way short of that which is formally promised, as an approach to diversity management it is certainly worthy of extended discussion, not least within a comparison with other states in the region that have approached the same problem in very different ways.

Even what might (and should) have been the book's great strength – the author (though long resident in the United States) originates from the region and could have provided an internal perspective to contrast with that of scholars from outside – fails to materialise. There is no sense here of how the people of the Horn *think* – a subject that is central to the conflicts in the region. Instead, its conceptual approach derives from the institutionalist politics of the United States, rather from any sense of what it is like to belong to any of the communities within the region, or to experience the horrors that have scarred so many of its inhabitants. This is a book to forget.

It is a pleasure then to turn to *Ethiopia: the last two frontiers*, the culminating work of a scholar with a lifetime's commitment to the region. This places Ethiopia in the context of the state-building and putatively nation-building enterprise explored notably by Tilly,¹ the inescapable role of violence in this process, the attempts of Ethiopian rulers to build first a state and then a nation, and the resistance that this engendered, principally (though by no means entirely) from the pastoralist periphery conquered only in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Altitude is given its proper place in defining the character of the region, and the opening chapters provide a superb overview of the central issues of Ethiopian state and nationhood, with implications extending to the Horn as a whole. The analysis is divided broadly between the imperial model before 1974, the socialist model instituted by the 1974 revolution, and the federal model introduced by the present EPRDF regime after 1991, showing how each has struggled – and in large measure, failed – to manage the problems created by the intractable geography of the Horn and the legacies of Abyssinian conquest.

Unusually, indeed uniquely, Markakis places his greatest emphasis on what he terms the 'lowland periphery', that arc surrounding the highland core from the Afar in the east through the Somali and Boran to Gambela and Beni Shangul Gumuz on the Sudanese border, characterised by extreme climatic conditions and pastoralism as a way of life. As an original approach to the issues involved in Ethiopian statehood, and the bringing together of a vast range of material on the least known peoples in the country, this is invaluable, even if the treatment is at times too detailed for any but the specialist reader. The price that has to be paid for this is a relative neglect of the 'highland periphery', constituted by the Oromo and the numerous peoples of what is now clumsily entitled the 'Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State', here sensibly abbreviated to 'Dubub'. It is here, rather than in the pastoralist lowlands, that the future of Ethiopia will be decided, and I would have welcomed an attempt by a scholar with Markakis' depth of knowledge and sharpness of analytical vision to get to

grips with it. Still, there is so much here to be thankful for that it would be churlish to complain at what is inevitably missing.

The title, it has to be said, looks like an afterthought: there is no reference in the text to the 'two frontiers', which are identified only on the back cover as the need to put an end to the monopoly of power inherited from the empire-builders and since guarded by a ruling class of Abyssinian origin, and the need to integrate the lowland peripheries. More important, the title conveys a teleological sense that there are just two more rivers to cross before Ethiopia emerges as the 'mature nation state' (to quote the back cover again) that has constituted the central goal of Ethiopian governance under the three markedly different regimes to which the country has been subjected in modern times. In fact, as the text makes very clear, there is nothing remotely inevitable (or even, perhaps, probable) about this process at all. Creating 'Ethiopia' is not just a work in progress, but a struggle the outcome of which remains deeply uncertain, most of all in the pastoralist lowlands where successive governments' attempts at 'integration' have proved not just unavailing but often deeply counter-productive. As a guide to the issues involved, however, this book makes essential reading.

Africa and regime change

Tim Kelsall

Regime change and succession politics in Africa: five decades of misrule, edited by Maurice Nyamanga Amutabi and Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. Pp. 237+ bibliography+index, £80.00 (hbk). ISBN13: 9780415534086.

In 2011, formerly impregnable dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya succumbed to popular or military uprisings, Morocco experienced a significant political opening, while following disputed elections in Côte d'Ivoire, President Laurent Gbagbo was dragged from his hotel in his pyjamas, to later face trial in the Hague. Meanwhile, other authoritarian leaders such as Angola's Jose Eduardo dos Santos, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, clung on. The time seems right, then, for a volume of this nature, which examines the phenomenon of regime change and political succession in Africa over the past five decades.

According to the editors, political transition in Africa is, 'full of intrigues, secrecy and all manner of internal and external dynamics' (p. 1), which they aim to explore through seven single-country chapters and six more general ones. While some regime transitions in recent years have been democratic and peaceful (Ghana, Zambia, Senegal), the majority 'have not been handled well' (p. 3), being characterised either by violence, or by an absence of transition: 'It is because of these differences in handling succession and regime change that this book proposes to examine factors that make it hard for these countries to deal with these phenomena successfully' (p. 3). Africa, the editors aver, 'needs an inventory on regime change, succession politics, and transfer of power' (p. 5).

Unfortunately, the book falls short of providing such an inventory, much less a typological theory that might

explain why some states manage successful transitions when others fail. Part of the reason for this might be the geographical focus of the chapters. The collection contains single country case studies of DR Congo, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Nigeria, Uganda, Ethiopia and Botswana. Only the last of those countries, however, has managed to stage regular, peaceful successions, and these have taken place in the absence of regime change. Neither the 'success stories' of Ghana, Zambia, and Senegal, nor the recent transitions in North Africa, are given their own chapters. There are also six chapters with a more regional focus. While some, such as Frederick Wanyama's chapter comparing political leadership and development in East Africa, are scientifically grounded and interesting in their own right, they do not directly address the issue of regime change and succession. This is even more true of Caroline Tushabe's chapter on feminist struggles in Uganda, and Olivier J. Tchouaffe's literary analysis of three films about Africa.

The problem also stems from the fact that the editors and authors appear not to have engaged with some crucial pieces of literature, for example the studies by Guillermo O'Donnell et al on transitions from authoritarian rule, or recent work on modern authoritarianism by authors such as Steven Levitsky, Lucan Way, and Jason Brownlee. The country case studies, generally speaking, provide rich and relatively up-to-date accounts of those countries' political histories, making them useful reference material. But when it comes to making recommendations that might help them navigate succession difficulties, most can only offer exhortations to moral or institutional change. 'Current rulers should stay clear of the natural inner motives that would lead some to want to cling to power or even attempt to change the constitution for such a purpose', avers Claver Lumana Pashi in his chapter on Congo. 'State actors should have the political will to ensure that state institutions responsible for providing checks and balances, hence safeguarding democracy, are relatively autonomous' (p. 109), concludes Oscar Gakua Mwangi in his Lesotho chapter.

Both of these statements may be true, but a more useful analysis would look at why and how actors in some states develop the will to do such things. This could provide insight into means of encouraging political will in countries where it is currently lacking. Timely and informative though many of these chapters are, then, the absence of a systematic comparative approach limits the volume's ability to advance politically realistic solutions.

China's resource diplomacy in Africa

Pádraig Carmody

China's resource diplomacy in Africa: powering development? by Marcus Power, Giles Mohan and May-Tan Mullins. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. Pp. 329 + xix, £63 (hbk). ISBN: 9780230229129.

There is now a substantial literature on China-Africa relations. Typing 'China in Africa' into an Internet search engine yields almost a billion results and according to some reports there have been millions of academic papers written on the subject, although this may be exaggerated.

China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa is a rare book. The authors are some of the world's foremost authorities in this field and the breadth of their knowledge, theoretical insight and familiarity with on-the-ground reality is conveyed in this book. The book has been published as a monograph in hardback, but to this reviewer's mind it might have been more appropriately published as a textbook in paperback. This is the single most definitive work in the field to-date.

When I initially saw the (sub)title of the book I assumed it was about the oil industry. This assumption was misplaced. The book covers the gamut of Chinese policies in Africa, to geopolitics, environment, aid and development. Consequently it is the single most comprehensive available treatment of the subject to my knowledge. For those who are familiar with the literature many of the facts cited will already be known to them, however what distinguishes the book is both the extent of its coverage and the theoretical insight that is brought to bear. In contrast to many other accounts the authors insist on the importance of African agency in shaping 'China-Africa' relations. They also seek to problematise these ontological categories by unpacking and illustrating the range of different actors involved, demolishing the idea that there is unitary actor – 'China' – in the process. The authors draw on actor-network, post-colonial and post-Marxist theories, amongst others, to illustrate the complexity of the multi-faceted and rapidly evolving relations that characterise 'China in Africa'. The extent of the coverage of the literature is also impressive. The bibliography itself will be an important resource for those who are interested in delving deeper into the subject as it extends to over forty pages. The book is also illustrated with posters, photos and other graphics that provide greater context for the subjects under discussion.

The book also brings the authors' substantial primary fieldwork experience from Angola and Ghana to bear. These are two interesting case studies given the contrasting nature of their state-society formations. The authors also have in-depth experience of and undertake an in-depth, insightful and illuminating review of Chinese political economy and how this impacts on Sino-Africa relations. This is another distinctive contribution of the book. For example in relation to China they argue succinctly and insightfully that 'in short, the market was initially introduced as a survival strategy for the state faced with increasing competition between nations, globalization and the 'inevitability' of market reorientation, the state needed to find new space for accumulation, and thus legitimized itself through shifting its priority from 'class struggle' to 'promoting economic growth' (p. 99). While the book is packed with fascinating facts the authors' ability to penetrate official rhetoric and reveal the reality of motivations, political economy and impacts is particularly noteworthy.

As intimated previously readers new to this area could usefully start with this book and not read much of the previous literature on the subject. It accomplishes both a synthesis of the previous work and through the combination of this with empirical data and the use of social

theory achieves new insights and clarity around the operation of the 'Sino-Africa' assemblage(s). If there is a criticism of the book it is perhaps that some could also see its strength as a weakness. The extensive, if not quite exhaustive coverage in the book might make reading it a little difficult for some less committed readers. This would be a mistake given its unique contribution to the literature.

Government in South Sudan

Jonathan Fisher

Dealing with government in South Sudan: histories of chiefship, community and state by Cherry Leonardi. Suffolk: James Currey (Eastern African Series), 2013. Pp. 224 + notes + bibliography + index. £45.00 (hbk). ISBN: 9781847010674

The tragic disintegration of the nascent South Sudanese state since December 2013 raises critical questions about the nature of statehood and the establishing of legitimate rule in this part of Africa. Cherry Leonardi's masterful book, part of James Currey's innovative *Eastern African Series*, skilfully addresses many of these questions. Focusing on the history of chiefs in the entity now known as South Sudan, Leonardi argues for the mutual constitution of both the state and chiefship itself since the 'coming of the *hakuma* (government or state)' to the region in the nineteenth century.

Situating her enquiry at the 'frontiers' of major urban centres (mainly Juba, Rumbek and Yei), Leonardi paints a complex picture of the myriad opportunities and dangers existing for actors engaging with the *hakuma* there and contends that it was at this interface (often physically demarcated by the building of roads) that chiefship as a formal political institution came into being – crucially, through its interaction with the *hakuma* itself.

Drawing on extensive archival research and interviews undertaken between 2002-2008, Leonardi emphasises the fact that chiefship's roots in South Sudan are less ancient than many often assume (and than many contemporary chiefs themselves suggest). In delineating the composite and overlapping relationships between lineage, skill-based authority (such as 'rain chiefs') and state recognition in the historical constitution of chiefship, the book presents one of the most nuanced analyses of this phenomenon to date – and avoids some of the traps fallen into earlier by scholars exploring the 'invention of tradition' in Africa and elsewhere.

The book traces the evolution of chiefship through three historical phases (c.1840-1920; 1920s-1950s; c.1956-2010) roughly punctuated by important shifts in the structure of southern Sudan's political economy and the relationship between the *hakuma* and chiefs. Each section then analyses different dimensions of chief-state-society engagement, particularly relating to the dispensation of justice, creation of territorial units and 'local' communities and calibration of relations with the *hakuma's* military apparatus.

Throughout this analysis, a central issue explored is the survival of the chiefs and of chiefship itself. For in spite

of the institution's compromised origins and its instrumentalisation by the *hakuma* in the collection of taxes and maintenance of order, chiefship remains central in South Sudan today, even a 'definer and signifier of community' itself (p.182). Leonardi's comprehensive explanation of this state of affairs can be found in her nuanced delineation of the dual-nature of chiefship for most living in this region in the last two centuries. For while chiefs represented a threat to some as Mahmood Mamdani's despotic agents of the state they also represented a source of protection from the arbitrary force and power of the same. Chiefs frustrated and angered their communities by extracting important and valued resources from them, but also gave them opportunities for accessing other resources and opportunities through their relationships with the *hakuma* itself.

Indeed, the many ways in which space for agency has been opened-up and curtailed for both chiefs and their communities is a powerful central theme of the book. Possessing the knowledge, skills and nous to 'deal with' officials and institutions of the *hakuma* has often allowed individuals to assume chiefly authority and recognition but these same individuals have also often been blamed – and punished – by the state for local insurrections or failure to collect sufficient revenue. Chiefs have also, as Leonardi makes very clear, never been the sole link between the 'local' and the state in the frontier; their enduring relevance has derived from their ability to adapt to changing political and economic circumstances, to *remain* relevant – to the *hakuma* (as mediators and proxies) and to their communities (as providers of justice, security and access to resources).

A striking feature of the book, however, is its simultaneous focus on continuities over time – something which the chronological structure of the piece lends itself to. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is Leonardi's description of the early 'coming of the state' in the form of the militarised stations of the Egyptian government (*zariba*). The 'clearly demarcated and exclusionary' nature of these outposts (p. 32) coupled with the local political economy which grew up around them bear more than a little resemblance to the 'fortified aid compounds' Mark Duffield and others have written on of the UN in contemporary South Sudan. The ambiguous and incomplete creation and incorporation of 'chiefs' into the *hakuma* following this, because of their knowledge of local issues and ability to 'speak the language' of those in the *hakuma*, also has parallels with the establishment of a burgeoning class of 'local staff' in UN and other agencies in Juba today.

There is nevertheless a certain strangeness to the South Sudan portrayed in the book. The focus on the urban frontier and the perspectives of chiefs and their communities renders forces traditionally central to recent histories of this region – notably the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) – peripheral and little different to the other amorphous forms of *hakuma* that predeceased them. In some respects this is a weakness of the

book; the forces of the state are argued to be integral to the constitution of chiefship but are rarely contextualised sufficiently and often come and go as if from nowhere. This is also, however, how they have appeared to many in South Sudan in the last two centuries. Indeed, the current crisis in the state is arguably the product of enduring

dissatisfaction among South Sudanese with a state that remains distant, predatory and craven.

Notes

- ¹ Tilly, Charles 1990 *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1990*. Oxford: Blackwell

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