

## Reviews

**The Poor Are Not Us: poverty and pastoralism in eastern Africa** edited by DAVID M. ANDERSON and VIGDIS BROCH-DUE  
Oxford, Nairobi and Athens, OH: James Currey, East African Educational Publishing and Ohio University Press, 1999. Pp. 276. £14.95 (pbk).  
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What constitutes poverty? How do notions of poverty and, conversely, of wealth become constructed and change through time? And who decides who is poor, and is in the position to suggest remedies? Building on a relatively long tradition of in-depth anthropological and historical work amongst livestock-herding peoples in eastern Africa, this edited volume interrogates these questions for a contemporary context in which pastoralists are viewed by outsiders through a lens of poverty and degradation – as representing ‘problems’ that require intervention and cure. The book repeatedly returns to the theme of working with the perceptions and realities of ‘the Other’ fieldwork, concepts, terms and categories, that are frequently taken as given and easily transferable across contexts, are revealed as minutely relational and constructed.

Following an introductory chapter by the editors, the volume moves through four intertwined sections, organised around different themes. The first two sections are concerned with definitions and perceptions of poverty. Section I, ‘Poverty Past and Present’, takes a perhaps more realist perception of changes in material poverty through time both between and within pastoralist societies, focusing on Maasai (Waller, chapter 2) and Turkana (Broch-Due, chapter 3). Section II, ‘Metaphors and Meaning’, explores the ‘cultural conceptualisations of wealth’ (p. 9) pertaining to eastern Africa’s herders. What emerges from the two sections is a multi-sourced explosion of the category of ‘poverty’ itself. The book’s title – *The Poor Are Not Us* – provides an indication that poverty indeed may be ‘in the eye of the beholder’ rather than resonating with those labelled as poor. Further, and given the diversity of pastoralist peoples inhabiting various areas of eastern Africa, perceptions of who is poor and what constitutes poverty vary both between and within ‘groups’, while historical analyses indicate the ways in which individuals, families and even genders exist in different relationships to ‘poverty’ – material and social – through time. Talle in chapter 5, for example, illustrates the ways that ‘markers’ of poverty may differ according to socio-economic and cultural position. In this case, the smell of sheep fat associated with Maasai signifies their coarseness and roughness to the perfumed urban inhabitants of the Kenya–Tanzania border town of Namanga, whilst this is understood as an indication of indigeneity and therefore of authenticity amongst pastoralists themselves.

While adding an appropriate disclaimer regarding problems associated with the ‘thinness’ of analysis based on quantifiable measures, the book’s third section – ‘Coins and Calories’ – comprises three data-rich chapters to explore assumptions regarding material indicators of poverty. The data presented highlight ways in

**Ethiopia since the Derg: a decade of democratic pretension and performance** edited by SIEGFRIED PAUSEWANG, KJETIL TRONVOLL and LOVISE AALEN

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This accessible and well-informed book is an important contribution to contemporary Ethiopian studies. Its title largely encapsulates its content: an inquiry on the democratic record of the governing Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The editors, Norwegian researchers affiliated to the University of Oslo and the Chr. Michelsen Institute, display great familiarity with Ethiopian politics before and after the fall of Mengistu's Derg. The empirical material emanates from the authors' observations of the 2000 and 2001 elections which they diligently embed into 'the continuity of Ethiopian political development since 1991' (p. 25).

Each chapter represents a vivid testimony of electoral competition rooted in local and national power struggles. Seven contributions cover the May 2000 elections to the regional councils and the House of People's Representatives. Elections in Addis Ababa are reviewed from a gender perspective (Marta Camilla Wright) and in the context of recent land distribution in Amhara region (James C. McCann). Lovise Aalen documents the combination of fear and loyalty expressed by Tigrayan citizens towards the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Charles Schaefer sheds light on ethno-political tensions composing the background to campaigns and voting in Oromiya region.

Elections in Ethiopia's Southern Region, inhabited by a multiplicity of diverse ethnic groups and home to some of the stiffest resistance to EPRDF hegemony, figure prominently in this volume. Three chapters describe fierce political confrontations, systematic abuses of administrative power and violent incidents during elections held in Gedeo (Siegfried Pausewang), Sidama (Kjell Solberg) and Hadiya (Kjetil Tronvoll). Finally, two accounts of the February and March 2001 local elections held in the capital and the Southern Region, authored by Aalen and Pausewang, complete the anthology of election observations.

Although formal procedures are at times respected on Election Day, infringement of sound democratic practice is reported to be systematic and deliberate, ranging from subtle forms of voter manipulation to crude intimidation and arrest of opposition candidates. These violations are viewed as symptomatic for a ruling party not willing to relinquish power, and of state structures, from the local *kebele* to the National Electoral Board, cementing the political status quo. The government controls and represses the rural masses, which heavily depend on public services for their daily survival. The TPLF thus reigns over 'an obedient and quiescent electorate' (p. 160) after having 'established an administration and a power structure that perpetuate its rule' (p. 242). Opposition parties lack an independent material base to effectively challenge the regime. In the rare cases when they endanger the EPRDF's dominant position, they usually suffer harsh subjugation.

This thoroughly researched volume amounts to a powerful critique of Ethiopia's ruling circles. Yet the book spares the reader overly accusatory statements and

simplistic explanations in favour of a differentiated analysis. Except the somewhat disappointing contribution by Wright, all chapters represent first-rate reading. The authors creatively blend participant observation and in-depth interviews with their own expertise into an innovative and persuasive methodology. The fairness and outspokenness exhibited by the editors are to their credit and deserve appreciation. Consequently, *Ethiopia since the Derg* ought to become mandatory reading for everyone seriously concerned with present-day Ethiopian politics and post-cold-war democratisation in Africa in general.

TOBIAS HAGMANN  
*University of Lausanne*