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Movement in Ethiopia / Ethiopia in Movement
A Country in Change as Reflected by an Academic Event

Eloi Ficquet, Ahmed Hassen Omer, Thomas Osmond

Editors of the Proceedings of the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian studies

By producing a rhetorical mirror effect in which the various facets of the past and present of Ethiopia are reflected, the word of ‘movement’ has defined the central theme of the Eighteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (ICES 18 in abbreviation). This major academic event took place from Monday 29 October to Friday 2 November 2012 in the Chartered City of Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. It gathered 286 registered participants on the basis of the 335 papers selected by the organizing committee. The presentations were dispatched in 41 thematic panels (see the full list in the annex of the second volume). Any international conference of this kind and size has to do in practice with the notion of ‘movement’, for it involves the displacement of all participants from their homes or working places to the meeting place, but this edition represented a particular move in the flow of an established tradition.

After the first ICES that was held in Rome in 1959, the Conference has been organized five times in Addis Ababa. The third, eighth, eleventh, and fourteenth were held in the central campus of Addis Ababa University in Siddist Kilo. The seventeenth, in 2009, was displaced to the Akaki campus on the outskirts of the city, on the road leading to the southern and eastern regions of the country, thus opening new horizons for the next venue. In this line, the ICES 18 presented two particularities and innovations. On the one hand, it was moved outside the capital city, to be convened in a regional city, Dire Dawa, a major town of past and present Ethiopia. On the other hand, it was organized in Ethiopia by a foreign country, France, through the involvement of the French Center of Ethiopian Studies (CFEE) based in Addis Ababa, with the financial support of the cooperation service of the French Embassy in Ethiopia. The requirements of this project, from its scientific foundations to its logistical implementation were fulfilled through the close partnership with two Ethiopian academic institutions: the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Dire Dawa University.

This evolution in the principles of organization of the conference towards a more decentralized and multipartite approach was approved by the International Organizing Committee and was recognized by all participants as an encouraging step forward, as it introduced the possibility for future conferences to take place in Ethiopian regional universities. Since 2002 more than 30 universities have been established, most of them

directly out of the ground, in all regional states and in many of the administrative zones of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. By rethinking the scope of its institutionalized tradition, the worldwide community of scholars specialized in Ethiopian studies has acknowledged the considerable transformation of the country's academic landscape as well as the improvement of transport infrastructures, urban services and accommodation capacities.

Beyond these formal and organizational changes, the main purpose of the Conference was to take stock of the recent trends of investigation in the various fields of study of the Ethiopian past and present. Instead of the conventional division into disciplines, the topics proposed by the panel organizers introduced new transversal perspectives, interdisciplinary debates as well as theoretical and methodological issues, corresponding more or less closely to the programmatic idea of 'movement'. Thereby, in the perspective of departing from static views of societies, notions like 'transition', 'dynamics', or 'change' were applied by paper presenters to a wide range of questions whether on prehistorical and ancient times, contacts between languages and cultural groups, local and international processes of modern political history, or on the factors and consequences of contemporary economic and social transformations. Some significant turns were also taken by initiating scholarly discussion on topics that were sparsely discussed in previous conferences like cartography; food; history of slavery; internal and outward migrations; representations of rivers; relations to the Ottoman world; the study of the textual traditions of the Ethiopian Muslims. There was also a noticeable amount of papers which considered gender issues and womanhood in various contexts of questioning.

From the 409 papers submitted after the call for papers, 335 were selected by the Ethio-French organizing committee, after having consulted the panel organizers, and 286 participants could eventually confirm their attendance. The full list of panels and selected papers is given in the annex of the second volume of these proceedings, as a testimony of the extent and the diversity of the 'food for thought' gathered and shared in Dire Dawa. Due to limitation of financial and human resources, however it was not possible to collect all papers into a comprehensive set of proceedings. Therefore, after having secured the funds for publication, found an agreement with the publishers and defined with them the technical specifications and maximum size of the printed output, a call for completed papers was launched. As a consequence of these limitations a number of topics are not represented in the present two volumes, for the organizers of some panels have been allowed the papers for publication as special issue in specialized journals.¹ A collection of 71 articles was selected and edited carefully by the editorial

¹ **Panel 2.01:** A selection of papers on manuscript studies from this panel will be published as a special section in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Aethiopia* (18, 2015) edited by Alessandro Bausi and Denis Nossitsin.

Panel 3.01: A selection of papers from this panel has been published as a special issue of the journal *PentecoStudies* (12/2, 2012) edited by Jörg Haustein and Emanuel Fantini under the title "The Ethiopian Pentecostal Movement: History Identity and Current Socio-Political Dynamics".

team with the cooperation of all contributors. The transcription could not be homogenized and it was left to each author to make it consistent with the system he/she had opted for. The distribution of papers into the two volumes has been completely reorganized in comparison with the original thematic structure of the conference. We have not attempted at redefining thematic or disciplinary sections by putting together papers that were initially presented and discussed in different panel sessions.

Despite these constraints and limitations, this collection of essays reflects the wide and creative diversity of the research undertaken internationally on the past and the present of Ethiopian societies in all fields of social sciences and humanities. This strong multidisciplinary blend has characterized the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies as a major academic event, unique among the traditions of knowledge on African nations. By avoiding peremptory judgements on the national destiny through keen descriptions of local situations, the research outcomes exposed in these volumes will encourage the renewal of the already rich tradition of Ethiopian studies, with the perspective of establishing knowledge as one of the bases for a peaceful and sustainable development of the country.

The first volume of the proceedings consists mostly of historical or ethno-historical studies based on different textual sources (manuscripts, archives, newspapers), or other kinds of material like oral traditions, music, heritage items, maps, coins, photographs, and so on. This volume is opened by the contributions of two of the keynote speakers of the conference. Prof. Bahru Zewde, the author of major works on the economic and intellectual actors and factors of the Ethiopian contemporary history, reviews the long evolution of the Ethiopian polity through the question of political succession from the medieval period to the present time. The Conference was held in the wake of the period of national mourning and political transition after the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in August 2012. In such a particular context, where the present meets history, the academic observers of Ethiopia's past, present and future had to adapt their grids of analysis to an unprecedented situation of political transition. The other keynote address of the conference also questions, through the cultural scene, the link between variable institutional provisions and the resilience of the social and cultural assets of the Ethiopian population. Mr Francis Falceto, the curator of the celebrated *Ethiopiquest* disc

Panel 4.05: Some of the papers of this panel will be included in a volume edited by Dirk Bustorf, Sophia Dege and Alexander Meckelburg, entitled "Oral Traditions in Ethiopia", which will be the number 4 of the collection "Supplement to *Aethiopica*" published by Harrassowitz in 2016.

Panel 4.07: Selected papers from the panel 4.07 have been published as a special issue of the journal *African Diaspora* (8/1, 2015) edited by Giulia Bonacci under the title: "In and Out of Ethiopia: Migrations, Diasporas and Contemporary Ethiopia".

Panels 6.01, 6.03 and 6.04: these three panels on linguistics were merged into one volume: *Explorations in Ethiopian Linguistics: Complex Predicates, Finiteness and Interrogativity*, edited by Ronny Meyer, Yvonne Treis and Azeb Amha (Harrassowitz, 2014).

We wish we could have gathered the bibliographical references for all papers presented at Dire Dawa and published in other publications than these proceedings, but it has not been possible to keep track systematically of all authors. The list of papers selected for the Conference, published in the annex of the second volume might provide helpful indications to find references through online search engines.

series and indefatigable finder of historical records of Ethiopian music, deplors the lingering misconceptions on popular culture and considers that the preservation of the plural traditions and modern expressions of Ethiopian music as a cultural heritage, as precious and valuable as any other heritage, would contribute to a better recognition of the ordinary voices.

In the same perspective of deviating from a top-down approach to privilege observations made on the local levels, the second volume gathers studies on contemporary issues in the context of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia through various information gathered from situations observed at the local level in the eleven regional states. The fast and significant changes all over the country that have emerged from the implementation of proactive state-led development policies deserve thorough academic investigation in all fields of activity to trace and analyse the deployment of these processes and measure their impact.

We believe that the wide range of studies gathered in these proceedings will address the curiosity and the needs of a large public of readers, ranging from Ethiopian or foreign students and scholars, to journalists, NGO workers, governmental cadres or international organizations.

Our first acknowledgements go to the population of Dire Dawa and the local authorities for their hospitality and support. By their situation at the crossroads of regional and international trade and migration routes, the inhabitants of this city have been the promoters of modernity and change and the heirs of traditions of tolerance between religions and cultures. Born out of the French-Ethiopian railway in the beginning of the 20th century, Dire Dawa was the place of the first industrial development in Ethiopia, which attracted a cosmopolitan blend of communities of traders, entrepreneurs and workers. In the 21st century, Dire Dawa, as other Ethiopian regions, has undergone fast economic and social transformations. An international event like the ICES 18 could not be convened in this city if it had not been equipped with the appropriate infrastructure and facilities, in particular hotels of international standard. However the necessary transformation of the urban landscape involved by economic growth is often undertaken at the expense of the local architectural and immaterial heritage. By their different styles of houses, their lively streets under the shade of majestic trees, and the living traditions of local knowledge found behind the doors of each house, the historical areas of Kazira and Magaala and Ganda Core charm the visitors by their unique and attracting atmosphere that, we hope, will be preserved.

The involvement of a number of local stakeholders was essential to meet the challenge of hosting a great number of international participants. The Municipality and the University of Dire Dawa kindly offered conference rooms transportation means, logistic support and permanent attention to insure the success of the Conference. From the very beginning of the project, Dr. Wagayehu Bekele, the President of Dire Dawa University, and his team brought an enthusiastic and efficient support to provide the venue of the conference in the growing fast-transforming campus of Dire Dawa University. All participants unanimously appreciated the tasty lunch buffets prepared under the supervision of *Weyzero* Mima, the owner of Paradiso Restaurant. The

managers of the hotels of Dire Dawa kindly offered discount fares and their staff did their utmost to make every guest comfortable. The opening dinner at the Ras Hotel offered by the Municipality will long be remembered as an outstanding moment. The evening cultural events took place in the spacious and welcoming courtyard of the Ethio-French Alliance of Dire Dawa, thanks to the remarkable involvement of the Director, Mr. Joseph Petros, the Deputy Director, Mr Vincent Frontczyk, Mr Soufiane Nouh and all other staff members. Among the local partners, we have also to remember the efficient and (almost!) punctual transportation services provided by the *Bajaj* drivers, and the medical assistance provided by the Dilchora Public Hospital and the Railway Hospital.

We also express our gratitude to all members of the Organizing Committee for their commitment in reviewing panels, abstracts and papers and their support at each stage, from the first call for panels to the editorial work on these proceedings. Throughout each phase of implementation of the project the teams of the French Centre for Ethiopian Studies and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies have developed an excellent and exemplary collaboration. We owe a lot to Prof. Gebru Tareke, who, as the former Director of the IES, brought his immense knowledge and experience to the conception of the intellectual outlook of the Conference in its early phase. The key task of the secretariat was carried out by Mrs Marie Coutant, Dr Céline Lesourd, Mr Jean-Gabriel Leturcq, and Mrs Tamirua Fantahun. They paid attention to all requests and even made miracles to solve some last minute issues.

Finally, we are particularly grateful to our partners and sponsors. Within the framework of cooperation programs for the development of post-graduate education and research, the French Embassy in Ethiopia allocated a grant that was both substantial and essential to set the basis of the organization and confirm the Conference could take place in the best conditions. The German Embassy in Ethiopia contributed to the concert performed by Munit & Jörg. Thanks to Ethiopian Airlines a special flight could be chartered. Selam Bus provided also an excellent service to the participants who travelled by road. Jonathan Le Péchon was very helpful for the design and printing of the communication materials (see pictures 2 and 3 in the annex of volume 2). The leather bags were designed and produced by Chic Segá in Addis Ababa. For the publication of the proceedings, the editors benefited from the managerial assistance of Dr Jean-François Breton and Dr David Ambrosetti, successively directors of the French Center for Ethiopian Studies. Dr Kofi Ababio, a former faculty member of the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department, Addis Ababa University, collaborated to the copy-editing of papers. Finally this book could not have come to existence without the care, patience and inspirational thoughts of Elias Wondimu and the staff of Tsehay Publishers.

The logo and other visual materials of the conference were designed on the basis of the picture of an anonymous man walking in a street of Dire Dawa. This stylized silhouette was aimed at referring to the most basic signification of ‘movement’, understood as a step-by-step process. The initial impulsion by which a human being stands up and proceeds to somewhere, wherever this movement leads to, is fundamental

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in the approach of any kind of activity. The work of researchers in the humanities and social science is to describe the contexts in which human activities take place, and their motivations at different levels, from the individual to the social. Even the most far-reaching ambitions rely on pedestrian perspectives and slow movements. For the design of these two volumes of proceedings the picture of the single man has been completed with the silhouette of a child holding the man's hand. The Conference 'gave birth' to a new set of knowledge on Ethiopia and Ethiopians, and by holding this book, the reader is invited to take part in this chain of knowledge.

Dire Dawa – Addis Ababa – Paris, 2013-2015

The Editors