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INTRODUCTION

IDENTIFICATION IN VIOLENT SETTINGS AND SITUATIONS OF RAPID CHANGE

Günther Schlee

The papers collected here all deal with North-East Africa or, politically speaking, with IGAD[1] countries. Within this geographical framework, they address subjects as diverse as new states and justifications for their existence, changes in an administrative order at the regional level, and the violence directed by armed forces against civilians and their response to this. The actors under analysis include, in descending order of magnitude, large-scale collectives like states or emergent states, medium-scale ones like regional liberation movements or new ethnically-based administrative units within a larger state, down to gangs of raiders, both with and without uniforms. These differences in scale and in kind between the collective actors under study are more obvious to the educated reader than to many ordinary people who are exposed to their actions. Some people experience the state only as a group of armed raiders. The difference between state and non-state raiders might seem minimal to them and, historically, are they not right in a way? Have many states not started as gangs of armed men fighting against other men about some form of loot? Such considerations easily lead to debates about legitimacy and political morality. Some of the activities described in these papers are illegal by the standards of one or another set of laws, some are even criminal—at least from an outside perspective like that of universal human rights. The international community is certainly called upon to turn its attention to abuses like the ones described by Knighton in this collection. If human rights are not universal by their nature or by their origins, we should certainly strive to make them universal by enforcing their application universally. But in this introduction I want to address a different issue. What forms of identification occur in such settings? All papers are set against a background of violence and rapid change. How do people draw the boundary between friend and foe, between we-group members and

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[1] IGAD stands for Inter-Governmental Authority on Development. It is an organisation comprising Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and Kenya. Its seat is in Djibouti.

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strangers under such conditions? To answer such questions we shall have to look at forms of reasoning as well as at emotional forces.

Rationality comes in severally as humans aggregate into larger units. One may try to join a group for specific reasons. Such an attempt may be rejected on equally rational grounds. A group may increase its homogeneity and the consistency of its aims and strategies by excluding dissidents. Or, alternatively, it may modify its aims and self-description either in order to accommodate new members, or in the process of doing so. People reason about the group boundaries they draw, they invent or select ancestors, and they classify languages and dialects in order to show that these boundaries make particular sense in just the way they have been drawn. Smaller units thus delineated are part of larger units: so we find systems of categories, taxonomies. The term 'identification' in the title is meant to hint at all these forms of reasoning about identity and difference. Neither the cognitive aspects of identification (the logic of categorical inclusion and exclusion) nor the perspective of rational choice in analysing who identifies with whom or what—and why they do so—have been fully and systematically explored in anthropology. Some of the most inspiring work in this direction is already forty years old (Barth, 1959, 1981) and little systematic advance has been made here since. Much ground remains to be covered. This collection of papers does not attempt a comprehensive theoretical approach either. But perhaps it offers food for thought and inspiration in that direction.

This is not meant to suggest that the analysis of human aggregation can be reduced to a combination of cognitive anthropology and rational choice. There are emotional forces at work, which are covered by neither of these approaches. If we reserve the term 'identification' for the more rational (or 'cognitive') level of categories and classifications, then these may be studied under a label like 'bonding'.

In the call for papers, in response to which some of the following contributions were written,[2] a question was raised about the forces—or, more generally, spheres of power—to which both the shapes and forms of states in contemporary Africa reacted. How were boundaries between them maintained, why and when did they dissolve, and how did all this reflect the struggles between spheres of power? Attention was particularly drawn to the continuing existence of the model of the *nation*-state, and to inter-*national* pressures to adjust local realities to a global political system. However, the alliances between warlords in areas remote from state control were suggested as equally viable focuses. More generally, contributors were invited to examine the criteria used for inclusion and exclusion within processes of political

[2] The papers by Donham, Hultin, and Schlee go back to earlier versions presented at the March 2000 conference in Leipzig of the VAD (Vereinigung von Afrikanisten in Deutschland [German African Studies Association]). The suggestion to include the papers by Knighton and Reid was made by the editor of *Africa* at a later stage and was gratefully accepted by the guest editor.

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identification whether in spheres close to the state or remote from it. As the response to this call for papers demonstrates, analysis cannot be restricted simply to large political units that can be mapped. Rather, our attention has to oscillate between this bird's-eye view and the perspectives of small groups and individual actors on the ground, in order to understand why identification processes take the particular forms they do in contemporary Africa, and what effects such processes have for the lives of people caught up in them.

We can make do with the conventional division between macro-, meso-, and micro-levels to describe these processes. Schlee's contribution ('Redrawing the map of the Horn: the politics of difference') mostly remains at the macro-level. It deals with the entire region and examines the reasons behind its newly drawn national and regional boundaries: the ethnic and religious distinctions, as well as diverse historical identifications—including some with former colonial powers—used to legitimise new states and administrative units in this part of Africa.

Two components of this broad picture, Eritrea and Ethiopia, are singled out by Reid ('Old problems in new conflicts: some observations on Eritrea and its relations with Tigray, from liberation struggle to inter-state war'). He reaches back into the history of the Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998–2000, to a time when Ethiopia still had a different external shape and internal structure, a time when Eritrea had not yet come into its independent existence. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and its Tigrayan equivalent (TPLF) both faced the centralist Ethiopian government as its adversaries. Although they fought largely separate wars against it, both contributed to the downfall of that government in 1991. The TPLF went on to form the nucleus of the post-1991 Ethiopian power structure. Of all Ethiopians, those most similar to Eritreans in linguistic and cultural, as well historical, terms had the upper hand. The two sister states resulting from Eritrean separation from Ethiopia were ruled by very similar elites. Little wonder, then, if to many observers the subsequent war between Eritrea and Ethiopia came as a complete surprise, but Reid shows that it had a previous history in the rivalry between the liberation movements that were precursors of the present states.

The Ethio-Eritrean case confirms the finding (which could as well have been drawn from Bosnia or many other cases) that there is no correlation between the level of cultural difference and the probability or intensity of conflict—at least not a positive one. If anything, slight differences are those often overloaded with meaning and transformed into a social division or even a warfront. This tendency—along with many other factors—might also be part of the explanation for the struggle between the Somali factions. The vast majority of Somali are culturally very similar to one another, and all of them are Muslims. Not without reason has Somalia been called the only true nation-state of Africa. Yet no other state in Africa has disintegrated to quite the same degree of fragmentation.

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Jan Hultin ('Rebounding nationalism: state and ethnicity in Wollega 1968–1976') also looks more closely at a small part of the mosaic broadly described by Schlee. The order of magnitude on which he focuses can be called the meso-level. The population who identify themselves as Wollega speak the Oromo language, and the area in which they live today belongs to the Oromia state within Ethiopia, a country which has been reorganised along ethnic lines. Hultin describes reactive nationalisms, which serve to escalate against one other. It seems ironic that in Wollega, unlike southern Ethiopia, the Semitic–Cushitic divide that pits Amhara and Tigre against Oromo was never characteristic of imperial relations. The empire was present in the form of Oromo rulers and large Oromo landowners; it is only now that a modern, language-and-'culture' based nationalism overlays the older divisions.

In the case described by Knighton ('The state as raider among the Karamojong'), there exists no identification on the part of Karamojong with the state or its administrative units whatsoever. What little 'love' the pastoralists had for the Ugandan government, or 'Museveni' as they put it, was driven out of them by armed state agents, army and police, who raid their cattle, torture their children, gang-rape their wives spreading HIV/AIDS, and burn their settlements. The victims of such atrocities are typically those pastoralists who have surrendered their arms in recent disarmament campaigns. The postulate that the state needs to hold the monopoly of armed force is based on the assumptions that states have the institutional aim of promoting the common good, and that they are capable of controlling their own organs. Where keeping their arms to protect themselves against state agents on the rampage is a matter of survival for civilians, such a postulate needs to be reconsidered.

Knighton places this debate in a post-9.11 context. Since that terrorist attack in the USA, the proponents of statehood and world order have developed a new kind of *horror vacui*. In areas void of state control, and in failed states like Somalia, attempts are being made to re-establish state control. Stateless areas are believed to be potential hideouts and training areas for international terrorists. After the world seemed to have resigned itself to the futility of trying to re-establish statehood in Somalia, suddenly there was again money from anti-terror funds for a renewed peace initiative. I myself had the pleasure and the privilege to attend the Somalia Peace and Reconciliation Conference at Eldoret (Kenya) in 2002–3 as a 'Resource Person'. The positions about disarmament I encountered there ranged between the claims that all advances in the direction of property restitution, re-establishment of justice and of functioning state institutions were conditional on prior disarmament of the civilian population, and sceptical attitudes towards disarmament like those expressed here by Knighton with respect to Uganda. After all, a major step was taken along the path to failure of UNOSOM (the UN/US intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s) when, in February 1993, the intervention forces in the coastal town of Kismayu started to disarm the fighters of 'Jess', an ally of 'Aidiid', and

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then stood by idle while 'Aidiid's' rival 'Morgan' took the town. The problem here, one might argue, was not disarmament as such, but one-sided, unfair, unbalanced, unsynchronised disarmament. But how does one go about fair, balanced, synchronised disarmament? Are there cases where this is known to have succeeded? And how does one distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate holders of arms in a situation where some of the worst perpetrators of arbitrary violence have uniforms and hold military ranks? At precisely what point during the process of dissolution of a state and an army does an army officer become a warlord?

The Jie, a group of pastoralists in Karamoja who have been badly affected by the State as a raider, Knighton informs us, now want to join Kenya. They seem to prefer any functioning state. They want to pay taxes to someone who delivers something in return. Not development projects, I would think, but simply the basic functions of the state: justice and security. What they have now is people who extort their wealth but deliver nothing in return. This demand for regular taxation resonates eastwards through northern Kenya (MOLD, 1992: 143f.) into Somalia. Instead of extortions by state-appointed chiefs or by soldiers waiting for them at the waterholes ('like lions'), the pastoralists would prefer to pay proper taxes in return for government services. By contrast to the mutually reinforcing nationalisms of Ethiopia–Eritrea (Reid) or Amhara–Oromo (Hultin), contrasts filled with specific readings of history and heavily loaded ideologically, Jie identification with a nation state (or rather failure to identify with one) is simply an empty slot. They would like to belong to any functioning nation-state, as long as it was of some use to them, or at least did them little harm.

Donald Donham's concluding comments compare these contributions and put them into perspectives drawn from the recent history of social anthropology. He underlines how far anthropological investigation into the dynamics of the formation of social units has come since the days when social units were often taken for granted as units of study without further ado. He identifies a turning point in Fredrik Barth's seminal introduction to the 1969 collection of essays *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. In the remainder of my Introduction, I shall restrict my own comments to some overlapping themes in the papers with which Donham will not deal.

The papers deal with identification and bonding in situations of rapid change. In the case of the political map of the Horn of Africa, recent change is obvious. Moreover, the regional order within Ethiopia, Hultin's chosen topic, has evolved as recently as 1991, and it is still far from being firmly established or generally accepted. But all these papers have to be read against the historical background of recent and dramatic change. In the 1960s and 1970s Africans grew up with the certainty that education would be rewarded. African states, many of them newly independent, had to recruit a public sector; they subsequently embarked on the first and then the second 'decade of development'. Many jobs were filled with relatively young people, blocking the way for the next batch of school leavers. Development

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should have brought economic growth and more jobs, but in most cases it took place neither in the form nor to the extent anticipated. The options facing the younger generation were no longer to become a farmer or to go to town to get a job. Market relations and land scarcity made the rural option difficult or unattractive, meanwhile urban unemployment had become high. Other options—like informal-sector employment, self-employment, or crime—came into the picture. Failed development and corruption (which was itself one among the many causes of failed development) had discredited the state and given rise to rival armed powers. The kalashnikov had become one more alternative way of life. New types of identification and bonding have to be seen in the light of deprivation relative both to the earlier promises of the development state and, of course, to consumption patterns globalised by new media fuelling new expectations.

Exit is another response to this situation that is not discussed in this set of papers. Somali flock to Canada. Nuer and Anywaa, from the southern Sudan as well as many from western Ethiopia, are resettled to the US from refugee camps in Gambela by a UN programme (Falge, 2001: 26). The Oromo are a global nation. Diaspora communities influence politics back home through flows of money and propaganda. The internet becomes a battleground.

Withholding loyalty from institutions which do not fulfil their promises is another response. Underpaid state agents resort to corruption or extortion. They might remain loyal to individuals in positions of power who protect them, but they become disloyal to their constitutional roles. Others join gangs or militias, which avoid the state or have turned against it. The state must be able to provide positive incentives for loyalty and negative ones for disloyalty and will disintegrate if this capacity is missing. Gellner (1981: 93f.) stresses the importance of education and the promise it holds out for the development of the modern nation state. Give up your local peculiarities and loyalties, adopt the national culture and the language of wider communication, and you will be rewarded by employment or at least the chance of betterment. If, however, this promise is not kept, people revert to other loyalties.

In a recent conference paper, Simons (2000) makes quite explicit the connection between the decline of the state and the official economy, on the one hand, and the rise of other forms of bonding, on the other: '. . . the less the state manages to protect and/or provide for all of its citizens, the more people must turn to those they know they can trust.'

Young males have to be socialised into groups, which are coherent enough to offer their members security and to deserve their loyalty and trust. The most extreme form of such bonding is the one which entails the readiness to sacrifice oneself. Training to be a fighter in a group of fighters should be a choice topic for social scientists interested in the nature of the social, 'but', Simons (*op. cit.*) regrets, 'there are few descriptions of training, perhaps because the presumption is that no training takes place or everyone already understands what training

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involves. Even more is needed than just training; something must be done (or used) to compel fighters to stick together and follow orders.'

There are two recent articles, which allow some insights into the socialisation of fighters. Purnaka L. de Silva asks what makes the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) in Sri Lanka such an effective fighting body. 'The LTTE, which is a very successful organisation by its own grim standards, produces battle hardened cadres who have been trained in carrying out the most desperate of actions, including the phenomenon of suicide bombing' (de Silva, 2002: 226). To explain this intensity of mobilisation, de Silva points to a variety of techniques in the 'cultivation of hatred' (*ibid.*). These include keeping alive the memory of anti-Tamil atrocities committed by the Government, 'torture, rape, murder and the destruction of property' (*op. cit.*: 227). Public statements by public figures on the Sinhalese side are also instrumentalised for this purpose. Revenge and counter-revenge lead to a perpetuation of the conflict.

Mary Kenney (2002) offers a similar analysis of the role of folk history in maintaining the divisions between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. The voluntary associations which socialise young Irish into partisans to this conflict might be compared with secret societies, age-grading organisations and other organisational frameworks for male bonding in Africa.

In the present collection of papers, emotional forms of bonding are addressed in various places. A very emotional ritual scene described by Hultin is taken up by Donham in his Conclusion. Reid elaborates on emotions used to mobilise Eritreans and Ethiopians against each other. He talks about Tigrayan resentment of a perceived Eritrean superiority complex. He speaks of closeness and betrayal. One of his interlocutors said: 'Tigrayans were our brothers; you can never trust a Tigrayan.' Atrocities against Eritrean civilians were more bearable in the earlier liberation struggle, when they were attributed to the distant Amhara. That more recent suffering was at the hands of the Tigrayan 'brothers', makes it worse. Yet, for their part, Tigrayans also complain about 'indignities and insults' and demand 'respect'.

These are the emotional aspects of what I noted earlier about the significance of minimal differences. Who cares whether he or she is respected by people who are far away and do not matter? To be betrayed by someone we never had a reason to trust anyhow is a mild form of betrayal. It is proximity that breeds the strong emotions capable of leading to rapidly escalating levels of violence. There are parallels to this in everyday life. The police know about the dangers of proximity: when a married person is murdered, is not the spouse the first suspect?

Such emotional aspects of identification and difference complement what I write in my own contribution—which emphasises rationalities, logics of identification, and colonial, ethnic, or other criteria for the delineation of boundaries—and also Reid's similar thoughts about the territorial implications of identifying with one or the other historical figure. Tigrayans trace the history of modern Tigray to Emperor Yohannes, a Tigrayan who made incursions into what was to become

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Eritrea. Eritreans perceive this identification as a threat to Eritrean territorial integrity. That Eritrea did not exist in Yohannes' time, and that this entire logic is based on an anachronism, seems not to disturb anyone.

Reading the contributions collected here in the light of each other does not provide a ready-made new theory of identification and bonding (yet). But it might sharpen our analytical interests. Soldiers and irregular fighters, such as militiamen, have been drilling for ages. But few social scientists have looked closely at what happens to them, and at quite what it is—supposing their drill is successful—that produces the extraordinary degree of cohesion among them, in some cases persuading individuals to sacrifice themselves for the group. Looking at familiar things in unfamiliar circumstances sometimes makes us realise the gaps in our knowledge. If in some respects the examples discussed here are extreme, this may make forces at work everywhere more clearly visible. The Jie, Oromo, rural Eritreans, and other groups studied here, live in more precarious settings and struggle with higher risks than most people. In few regions of the earth has the political map undergone such extensive recent changes as in North-East Africa. It has become a commonplace to note in anthropology that all identities are constructs. But that nostrum does not begin to answer the question of what happens when such constructs are re-constructed in a short span of time, transforming co-nationals into enemies, minorities into majorities. Rapid re-identification in situations of political turmoil might open our eyes to processes which elsewhere have a more gradual and less noticeable character.

Much remains to be done before we can claim thoroughly to have explored the different forms of identification and bonding described by our contributors at levels ranging from individual actors to large-scale collectives. And when that has been done—what next? An obvious question concerns the connections between processes understood at the level of particular actors and the behaviour of large aggregates of people, in other words the micro/macro problem. This remains among the most intractable of social science conundra.

Looking towards political science for assistance, we discover model-building that is more diverse and more refined than in current anthropology.[3] However, anthropologists cannot simply apply all these political science models to their data: political scientists deal with a world of states; thus, all the units they discuss share some basic characteristics. Anthropologists, on the other hand, describe a world of complex individual and collective actors, some of which are states but most of which are not. Even if anthropologists may not be able to import political science models wholesale, they can still derive inspiration from them. It is apparent that political scientists face a

[3] I would hasten to add that anthropology has the edge in some other respects: it collects more varied primary data, and treats them with greater scepticism. Not that I wish, either, to preach political science to those readers who happen to be anthropologists.

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similar micro/macro problem to anthropologists. War, whether actual or impending, forces people to make up their minds who are their allies, who their enemies, and why. Therefore, I take my examples from a book about war.

In his summary of theories of conflict, the political scientist Cashman (1993) starts with theories that address the level of individuals (level 1). These examine the personality traits and the psychohistory of leaders.[4] The political beliefs of leaders are studied by the methods of content analysis, and the results are interpreted in the light of psychological theories such as the avoidance of cognitive dissonance. At the next higher level (level 2), governmental decision-making, groups and organisations come in. A 'rational actor model' is discussed, and this is contrasted with a 'bureaucratic politics model' which sees government decisions as resulting from the interplay between the diverse interests and perceptions of sub-organisations. These decisions may be far from optimal for the interests of the whole. Perceptions are also influenced by 'groupthink', the pressure to conform. Interaction between states is introduced at a yet higher level (level 3). Among stimulus-response modellings of escalation, arms races and trust building (Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension Reduction, GRIT), Games Theory and Deterrence Theory come in at this level. Games Theory is about the advantages that can be gained at the expense of other players and about strategies to minimise these advantages and to build trust. Deterrence Theory is about the credibility of threats and their effects on the response of the opponent. Both are rational choice theories, which start from the assumption that the interacting states are rational actors.

There are potential contradictions in all of this of which Cashman also is aware. Having been told at level 1 that political leaders are shaped by their psychohistories, and therefore should not be treated as entirely rational decision makers, at level 2 we learn that how these leaders think might not be very important after all because decisions have been pre-shaped by organisational considerations or influenced by a supra-individual and not wholly rational groupthink. But just as we learn not to expect too much rationality, at level 3, where states interact, we are invited to revert to theories based on rational actor models. There are problems of consistency as we move from one level to the other. Not everything discovered at one level can be incorporated into our understanding of the next higher levels because, by doing so, our theories would become over-complex. Thus, we must constantly cut out valuable insights to reduce complexity.

I sympathise with the political scientists because I face similar problems transferring insights between levels. I would like to know how far the discourses of intellectuals reflect social identities and how far

[4] Like national character studies, psychological interpretations of entire 'nations' seem to be outdated among political scientists as elsewhere.

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they actually shape them. I would like to know how individual experience translates into moral evaluations at the level of collective identities, and to what extent pre-shaped identities influence individual experience. There is much gossip in North-East Africa about the personal relationships between different leaders. Are these relations translated into politics? And, if so, to what extent does this happen? Alternatively, are leaders captives of their roles irrespective of their personal sympathies and antipathies? Again one asks, if so, to what extent? And if collective decisions are not the vector sum of individual decisions, then what are they? All these are loose ends, not just in political science, but also in this attempt by an anthropologist to synthesise some recent findings about North-East Africa. But there is one consolation in this sea of ignorance: there are questions and work enough for all of us.

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