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« Ethiopia and Africa » :
Another Perspective in Modern Ethiopian Studies
by Giulia BONACCI¹

It is many years now that scholars of history, anthropology, sociology or political science are pleading for breaching the boundary between Ethiopian studies and African studies (James 1986). In that perspective, the « prospective integration of work on Ethiopia into the mainstream of African historiography » (Crummey 1990:119) has been forseen as a major step in the fruitful development of Ethiopian historiography. This is a perennial concern, which ten years ago was far from achieved (Bahru 2000:17). If progress has been made since then, the overall objective of bridging Ethiopia and Africa remains unfulfilled. Such an objective calls for comparative studies, as well for the conceptualisation of research themes that would encourage scholars to encompass Ethiopian historiography as well as other fields of knowledge. This has become an even more acute need as the field of modern Ethiopian studies (19th and 20th centuries) remains in search of narratives that could reframe the « battlefied » represented by the scholarly discourses on ethnicity and subjectivity, and by the instrumentalisation of memory and history (Triulzi 2002). Therefore, the deepening of alternative themes and perspectives of research could contribute both to a disentanglement of Ethiopia from itself, and to a scholarly dialogue between Ethiopia and Africa.

In his seminal paper on Ethiopian historiography, Bahru Zewde underlines the change of emphasis from political history to economic history, and to a certain extent to social history (Bahru 2000:11, 17). Social history is indeed a well-needed tool to study the fabric of contemporary societies, and represents a disciplinary approach with great achievements in the fields of African studies. Social historians of the 19th and 20th centuries often demonstrate an interdisciplinary concern as they have to work with a variety of sources and diverse documentation. Oral history, cartography, observation and critical analysis of sources are major tools of the social historian, borrowed from sister disciplines like anthropology, sociology and ethnography, and re-assessed within the historical praxis. With a qualitative concern and the use of changing scales in its focus (Revel 1996), social history has a role to play in the

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multidisciplinary construction of Ethiopia in its dialogue with Africa. Of course, a gender-biased approach must be pursued conscientiously, not only in the topics of research but as well in encouraging female staff and students to enter into the academy and get involved in producing history.

Any attempt to define a field named « Ethiopia and Africa » would imply a transnational approach and a keen attention to movements, migrations, mobilities and circulations of people, goods, ideas and popular cultures. As knowledge relating Africa and the African Diaspora has become increasingly fastened in the past twenty years in a variety of disciplines, it would seem logical to reach beyond the continental borders of Africa in such a discussion. Scholarly objectives could be listed as highlighting crucial encounters, unveiling little-known relations, acknowledging key characters and studying both the common and divergent challenges faced by Ethiopia and Africa. From the perspective of Modern Ethiopian Studies, such an endeavour would attempt to give a renewed image of Ethiopia's relationship with Africa and of Ethiopia's place in the world.

Three themes of research are proposed here as working tools towards an emerging field of research within Ethiopian studies. The first theme is about slavery. Research on the transatlantic slavery has reached maturity, probably not yet matched by research on slavery in East Africa and the Indian Ocean, which still suffers from a linguistic divide. What has been most striking in the past ten years is the emergence of studies on slavery in Africa. Yet Ethiopia remains largely outside this field, despite a few engaging works on the topic (Crummey 1990:110). As slavery questions directly the historical construction of contemporary societies and their social fabric, this debate is long overdue in Ethiopia. It is not so much comparative studies between different systems and practices of slavery to would be interesting, but rather the cross-fertilization of problematics, questions and research experiences between different areas that could prove fruitful.

The second theme of research that could contribute to a reflexion on « Ethiopia and Africa » is related to Pan-Africanism. By itself a wide and encompassing field of research, it is primarily the location of Ethiopia within Pan Africanism that should be addressed by Ethiopian studies. This could start with a re-assessment of the « Ethiopianist » ideology, not so much in its political role in Ethiopia's nation-building process, but rather in its outreaching influence and shaping of popular representations, social practices and political thought in Africa and the African Diaspora. The war of Ethiopia with Italy (1935-1941) remains a landmark in the Pan African landscape. Ethiopia became the Pan African cause of early 20th century. We believe that research on the impact of the war among African and black people in the world could complement Ethiopian narratives of resistance. A corollary to the Pan African mobilization for the Ethiopian cause is the temporary and permanent migration of people from the Americas to Ethiopia. This is a potentially comparative issue as since the early 1960s, a number of African countries have welcomed population from the USA and the Caribbean. On a more

continental note, the political relationship of Ethiopia with African countries on their way to independence needs a re-assessment, as well as the financial and military support of Ethiopia to the anti-colonial struggle. Beyond the study of the vicissitudes of the transition from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963) to the African Union (AU, 2002), an analysis of the role of Ethiopia in regional organisations and regional integration as well as in international political negotiation would benefit from renewed scholarly interest.

The third theme of research contributing to the « Ethiopia and Africa » paradigm is about migrations. Research on migrations of Ethiopians towards Europe, the USA, Canada or the Middle-East benefits from the growing body of literature on the contemporary African Diaspora. To complement this, the study of Ethiopian migrants in Africa would represent an exercise in combining historiography and data from a variety of locations. In addition to shedding light on particular migratory trajectories, it would unveil little-known social relationships. For example in Kinshasa (capital city of Democratic Republic of Congo - DRC) two neighbourhoods are named after Ethiopian towns and regions: Gambela and Sayo. Is it due in recognition for Ethiopia's involvement in the 1960 independence struggle? Or to the settlement of Ethiopian veterans in Kinshasa? Now another perspective on migrations is well-needed as well. It would imply shifting from the study of Ethiopians abroad to the study of the impact and challenges of their « return » to Ethiopia. It would provide fresh data on the social and cultural change in the country and would shed another light on Ethiopia's public policies, investment dynamics, institutional and civil developments. This perspective could be usefully extended to wider immigration dynamics into Ethiopia. The historical presence of Indians, Armenians, African Americans and Caribbeans, Yemenites, etc... remains to be fully assessed and precisely complemented with data from African migrants into Ethiopia. Immigration into Ethiopia presents numerous causes (political instability and contexts of war, imaginaries, professional career...), a wide social spectrum (elite, students, refugees...), and complex spatial experiences (transit migrations, urban territorialization, rural investments...). In addition, it requires a reflection on the place and status of the foreigner in Ethiopia – an important aspect of Ethiopia's social history. The complex « migratory landscape » of Ethiopia offers a comparative potential with a number of African countries.

Each of the three themes of research underlined above, slavery, Pan-Africanism, and migrations represent wide areas of research often landmarked by works of reference. However, the objective of this suggestion is to firmly inscribe Ethiopia in it so as to contribute to the rising of a field of research entitled « Ethiopia and Africa ». With the main objective of breaching the boundary between Ethiopia studies and African studies, it would contribute to a thematic renewal within Modern Ethiopian Studies. The study of Ethiopia's relationship with Africa and Ethiopia's place in the world would provide a new breath to a historiography too often entangled with itself and forgetful of wider landscapes.

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Publication experiences from the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* and exploration of possible gaps for ITYOPIS

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ITYOPIS, a welcome addition

ITYOPIS is a welcome addition to the world of publication in research on the Horn of Africa. There are only a few journals all over the world which focus on inter regional themes of research that cut across borders in the Horn of Africa. One example is the *Journal of Northeast African Studies* whose publication has been resuscitated recently after a few years of absence in the market. But few bring up research themes that cut across national political boundaries in the region and it is strongly hoped that ITYOPIS will achieve this, among other things, by publishing materials with regional focus such as language contact, migration, cross border conflict and others.

Moreover, ITYOPIS is also hoped to serve as a publication forum where numerous original research outputs produced in the region in general and Ethiopia in particular. It may create opportunity for young researchers and scholars to publish their research outputs. This is hoped to facilitate for new areas of research and scholarship to make headway in Ethiopian studies as well as themes of a regional character.

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