BOOK REVIEWS


Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism is under stress more than any time since its introduction in 1995. Waves of protest movements in Oromia and Amhara Regional states, in particular, have not given ethnic federalism an easy ride since 2015. Hence, Semahagn Gashu Abebe’s *The Last Post-Cold War Socialist Federation* is a significant contribution in understanding the sociology of Ethiopian federalism, the political context within which it came into being and is operating, and sheds light on why some ethnic groups are protesting. Abebe’s underlying objective is to explain how the configuration of a Socialist federation in the restructuring of the Ethiopian state makes the transition to and consolidation of democratization and respect for human rights difficult.

Organizing the book in eight chapters, Abebe makes a compelling case on the disjuncture between constitutional design and practice in the operation of federalism in Ethiopia. His main hypothesis is that the ideological and political tenets of the TPLF/EPRDF, the ruling coalition since 1991, are more important than the formal constitutional rules in the operation of the federal system. Precisely because of this, he contends that there are two parallel constitutional systems in Ethiopia. In order to test this hypothesis, Abebe explores and examines in detail the scholarship on federal theory and comparative federalism in the first and second chapters. After examining the origin, essential components, basic features, and operation of democratic multicultural federations, Abebe could not find comparative relevance for the Ethiopian federal experiment in these systems. As a result, he turns his inquiry to former Socialist federations (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia) to get aid in understanding and explaining the Ethiopian federalism.

Abebe eloquently argues that, as the case with former Socialist federations, the original logic and the fundamentals of federalism in Ethiopia are linked to the ideological and political underpinnings of the TPLF/EPRDF. After giving a brief historical background to the Ethiopian state and its constitutional development in chapter three, Abebe discusses how the ideological and political convictions of the TPLF/EPRDF, in particular, the right to self-determination, revolutionary democracy, developmental state ideology, by party rules on *gingemme* (party evaluation), democratic centralism, and neo-patrimonial mobilization, give impetus to the origin of ethnic federalism and permeate its experiment and operation. From chapter four to seven, not only does Abebe demonstrate how these political convictions perform constitutionalist functions by pushing the formal constitutional rules into the periphery, he also identifies the socio-political factors within which each of these political underpinnings arise and operate in the context of the party, TPLF/EPRDF, and the state. In the final chapter, he holds that the ideological framework of the ruling party not only challenges the consolidation of democratic institutions and creates a hostile atmosphere for the operation of civil society.
... involvement in their marriage, a "long-standing affective circuits [of indebtedness] between and among ... their kin" was created (p. 63). Taken together, this chapter underscores the crucial role of familial ties in the lives of Cameroonian migrant mothers in Berlin. Chapter Four opens with the musings of Ariane—who doubles as a young mother and an international student. To Ariane, belonging is largely familial, and the task of navigating its many layers in "an unfamiliar social and bureaucratic environment" is daunting. Mothers like Ariane consider childrearing to be a "socially reproductive labor" that enables the development of affective circuits (p. 92). The social networks that memorializes childrearing is seen as an avenue to "work to ensure their children have legal rights" in Germany, and create ties with "wider circles of kin" in Cameroon (p. 92).

The fifth chapter examines civic engagement. It explores how Cameroonian migrant mothers in Berlin engender civic engagement through associational life. Feldman-Savelsberg notes that through "formal membership in association, [participation] in monthly meetings," and the use of "association resources in times of need," Cameroonian migrant mothers create and reproduce belonging (p. 130). They consider these associations to be particularly important because they serve as platforms for their children to get connected to their roots and to cherish things as simple as hearing someone speak their own dialects. In the final chapter, Feldman-Savelsberg foregrounds the interaction between migrant mothers and the law. The chapter casts a broader light on the idea of legal consciousness in Chapter One. Here, she notes that the multiplicity of legal rules and the burdens of foreignness strongly "affect[s] the connections that Cameroonian migrant mothers maintain with their relatives in Cameroon" (p. 164).

Overall, this is a beautiful contribution to scholarship on migration and belonging, although some points in the book seem repetitive. The argument that migrants’ "reproductive practices" are paths to citizenship and logical steps to strengthening affinal ties is also compelling. And the evident trust and camaraderie between Feldman-Savelsberg and her respondents is remarkable. However, the "Europe" in the book title is somehow unnecessary, since the book focuses solely on stories from migrant lives in Berlin. Besides, what works in Germany might not work in, say, Turkey or Israel.

Olagbenro (Ola) Oladipo, University of Wisconsin-Madison


*Njinga of Angola: Africa’s Warrior Queen*, the first comprehensive biography of Queen Njinga of Ndongo and Matamba published in the English-speaking world, is essential reading for scholars of Central and Lusophone Africa. In her lifetime, Njinga drove the narrative of seventeenth century Angola. Born to a royal Mbundu family in 1582, Njinga oversaw her kingdom’s transition from continuous war with the Portuguese to a peaceful, autonomous, Christian state at the time of her death in 1663. The book covers the entirety of Njinga’s incredible life as the leader of two kingdoms, describing her expert skills as a military and political leader, her initiation as an Imbangala warrior, conversion to Christianity, and transformation into an icon of resistance to colonialism by the leaders of Angola’s independence movement in the twentieth century.
The narrative begins in the decades before Njinga’s birth, providing a brief history of the neighboring Kingdom of Kongo, the founding of the Kingdom of Ndongo, and a description of Njinga’s royal lineage, providing context to the world into which Njinga was born. Further chapters chronicle the rise to power of her father, Mbanda a Ngola, her brother, Ngola Mbande, and Njinga’s own ascension as queen and the perpetual oscillation between warfare and negotiation with the Portuguese. In 1626, the Portuguese colonial government selected her distant relative, Ngola Hari, as their preferred ruler of Ndongo. While Ngola Hari persisted as a rival to the queen throughout her reign, he was forced to pay humiliating tribute to the Portuguese and was never accepted as the legitimate king by the majority of Ndongo. His life as a shadow king serves as a symbol of what Njinga’s royal position would have been reduced to, had she acquiesced to vassalage. Resistance and defiance are the root of her enduring hero status in Angola. In her later years, Njinga’s political life turned from warfare to religious diplomacy as she leveraged her renewed interest in Christianity to broker a peace treaty with the Portuguese, while weighing the extent to which she and her court would continue to practice the Mbundu rituals expected of her by the people.

The author, historian Linda Heywood, spent years researching the letters and diaries of Njinga’s contemporaries in archives across Angola, Italy, and Portugal. These primary sources bring to life a charismatic woman who dominated every room into which she set foot. She was as adept at using ritual and pageantry to make political impressions as she was at wielding a battle ax in war.

Heywood is committed to lifting Njinga’s historical status to that of other famous women in history, and for this reason the focus on her subject is justifiably unwavering. It would have been natural to fill pages with descriptions of the various Portuguese governors who passed through Luanda in Njinga’s lifetime. Instead, their numerous names and short terms serve to highlight the duration and constancy of the queen’s royal authority across time. From the moment the narrative shifts from Ngola Mbande’s demise to Njinga’s rule, few words are devoted to anyone else. Action and actors outside of Angola are not described in great detail. In this regard, Heywood is a demanding author; she expects the reader to come to the table prepared with a basic understanding of the seventeenth century world. It is mentioned that the 1641 Dutch invasion of Portuguese Luanda was a piece of the Thirty Years War, but the events are told entirely from Njinga’s perspective, elaborating the potential benefit she saw in making an alliance with the enemies of her enemy, rather than the motivations of the Dutch.

In a similar vein, little explanation is provided regarding the fate that awaited the thousands of slaves traded with the Portuguese under Njinga’s watch. These are details that can be found in other publications. In many ways, *Njinga of Angola* serves as a complement to Heywood’s past research on the Atlantic World, providing a view of the slave trade from the perspective of African leadership.

In a 2011 interview with *Bostonia* magazine, Heywood stated that, through her research, she aimed to “sort myth from fact.” The most illustrative myth about Njinga, that she used an attendant as a chair in order to assert her power, rather than sit on the floor before a Portuguese governor in 1622, turns out to be true. Instead, perhaps the most important myth unwound by this book could very well be of the image of Njinga as an unquestioned hero of resistance to oppression. The narrative does not shy away from Njinga’s involvement in the slave trade and
there is no evidence presented that she questioned the morality of the trading of humans, only that she insisted on her right, as queen, to control it. The most cynical interpretation of her life is that her famed resistance was only to the assault on her absolute authority over her own people. Heywood makes no such interpretations, presenting her subject’s well-documented complexity in full view, without hagiography or judgement.

Heather Jordan, Independent Researcher


For nearly a millennium, Borno and its eastern extension called Kanem was the economic and political center of an empire built on the control of the trans-Saharan commercial networks that linked the Sahel to the Mediterranean. Conquered in the 19th century, Borno has since then become a remote periphery, most famously known for hosting one of the bloodiest insurgencies of the world. A History of Borno draws out this paradox to trace the evolution of this pre-colonial state, from the Fulani jihad in 1804 until the year 2010.

The chapter that covers the 19th century is by far the most stimulating of the book but also the most problematic. The author challenges Jeffrey Herbst’s thesis according to which African pre-colonial states adopted a non-territorial model of power because the cost of expanding power from the capital combined with military weakness and the absence of a decentralized political apparatus made the control over territory impossible. For the author of A History of Borno, by contrast, the case of Borno shows that some pre-colonial states exercised territorial control over their hinterland and maintained well-defined boundaries, in a similar way to Westphalian states. “Borno was a bounded territory with a codified relationship with its vassal states,” the author argues (p. 14).

Hiribarren provides a number of historical arguments that makes this thesis difficult to defend, recognizing himself that “we still do not know what extent [19th century Borno leader] El-Kanemi actually dominated the whole territory of Borno after the Fulani jihad” (p. 24). Far from mastering its borders, Borno maintained ill-defined peripheries where the empire could episodically raid slaves if the population was pagan, as in many other peripheral regions in Western Africa, such as the Bandiagara Cliff and Hombori Mountains in today’s Mali. Far from ensuring territorial control over its hinterland, Borno also relied on a person-based system to control its population, a property that Muhammad El-Kanemi did not call into question when he supplanted the Sufaywa dynasty that had ruled over Borno since 1380. Similar strategies were developed by pre-colonial states in other parts of Western Africa, where so small a population was scattered over so vast an area. Finally, unlike the European nation-states Borno did not define itself as an ethnic nation but as a Muslim community, which caused many embarrassments to the Jihadist Fulani of Sokoto when they attacked Borno at the beginning of the 19th century. This can be said of many political entities for which the European-inspired concept of nation was not relevant until the 20th century. In sum, Borno may be understudied but no different from many pre-colonial states that, from the Senegal River valley to Kanem, have flourished in the Sahel-Sahara.