

History education in Ethiopia post-1991: rethinking the nation's history in the context of 'decolonization' debates

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Introduction

Ethiopia's historical identity as a nation and a polity (a political community) is under scrutiny, notably since the EPRDF ethno-federalist regime (1991-2018), which actively discouraged an encompassing national narrative in favour of an ethnicized one. This has had its reflections not only in public debate and policy, but also in the academic teaching of history in high schools and in higher education. On the basis of a discussion of some recent products of this process of rethinking Ethiopian history teaching (mainly the Module *Hist 102*, 'History of Ethiopia and the Horn', of January 2020), I in this paper discuss some of the main positions in the current debate, and relate it to the 'decolonization' discussion. The question is posed whether a 'common', minimally shared history of Ethiopia - as a nation and a political entity (polity) - is now seen as illusory by most interlocutors, or still a shared aim - and if so, how it might be scientifically defended and taught as part of the curriculum. The discussion can be related to the theme of the 'Africa Knows' conference regarding manifold calls for 'decolonizing knowledge'. As in the debates in Western academia and elsewhere, the alternative versions of history (writing) from the standpoint of indigenous or minority groups in Ethiopia have to be encouraged when they aim towards equality and inclusiveness of representation, but may be problematic when they 'subjectivize' knowledge or become parochial and skewed - which would lead to reductionist, partial histories that make any national history outline remote and ignore its lines of connection.

'Decolonization' discourse in academia

African post-colonial countries struggled for decades with 'national identity'. After political decolonization, the (re) invention of new social and political symbolism for states often without precolonial political or cultural cohesion was problematic. A 'colonization of the

mind' had its effects and transformed local traditions and aspirations, so as to never to go back to a 'before' state. Mutual influencing but also local appropriation shaped a new cultural context and reservoir for 'nation-building' efforts.

While Ethiopia was politically not colonized¹, its modernization since the early 20th century was greatly influenced by ideas, models, techniques and educational programs from the rest of the world (notably the West and Japan). The 1960s-70s Ethiopian student movement and its ideas are one (bad) example of this (cf. Marzagora 2017: 434; Messay 2008), copying radical Marxist ideas unsuited for application in Ethiopia. Whether, and how far, the 'solution' to such extraneous socio-political influence is a campaign of 'decolonizing' the cultural fabric (including education systems) in its current sense stands to be seen.

In recent years, 'decolonizing' everything² has indeed become the talk of the town in social science and creates challenges. It is not about the aftermath of *political* decolonization (since 1960), but about the supposed and real 'epistemological' and knowledge biases in academic research, staffing and curricula, resulting from observed historically grown inequalities and dominance structures. Even a so-called 'coloniality of knowledge' in general has been asserted. African Studies is not exempt from this, and is in fact a major frontline (e.g., Adams 2014; Allen & Jobson 2016; Malik 2017; Jansen 2019; Kessi, Marks & Ramugundo 2020; Cloete & Auriacombe 2109). As Jansen (2020) recently noted on the South African case, the term was being used as a (radical) political slogan from the start.

A lot is to be said for this critical moment, notably if it aims to correct personal and cultural biases, re-evaluates scientific findings, and enhances equality of access to scholarly fora and open scientific debate focused on content. Much of this movement of correction has already come from the critical process in several mainstream disciplinary sciences across the globe (cf. Wig 2018). In African studies, anthropologists were historically in the forefront contesting views of superiority and hegemony as found in government circles, mainstream media and the general public (cf. Nader 2011). They also have questioned the cultural limits and conditioning of certain findings, e.g. in psychology or sociology. Notably has been the serious bias in psychological research, reproducing 'Western epistemological assumptions

¹ But occupied briefly by Italy from late 1935 to 1941.

² See for instance this web page, with its array of fields to 'decolonize':

https://www.google.com/search?q=ECAS+8+decolonizing&client=firefox-b-d&sxsrf=ALeKk03rVGMs2FzavIyQsFwVu_yL58VxSA:1604684384229&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=ovKk_ugxeE-XcM%252C5bpzoSh1msAlrM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_kTmPchAKehZu1d2IqO4-Ti7d2v03g&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjo48qVu-7sAhUL-qQKHSmeDjYQ9QF6BAgKEA4#imgrc=ovKk_ugxeE-XcM.

and methods, thus distorting findings. The same goes for cultural ecologists, calling attention to local environmental knowledge systems that reassess context and embeddedness, and that can be appraised on their efficiency and value via universalist criteria (cf. Frainer et al. 2020).

So if ‘decolonization’ means (and there are many shades of meaning and also much unclarity on the term) to rid existing university curricula of racist, biased and prejudiced aspects so as to enlarge access to academia and to broaden scientific discussion to un(der)represented parties and suppressed voices, then no one can object to it. This has been ongoing and will always be, in line with the promises of the Enlightenment (yes, still work in progress) as a project working towards a global conversation to interpret and explain the world, based on critical reason, argument and equality of access unencumbered by the dogmas of religion and state (or ideology) (cf. Malik 2017). Neither is the ‘decolonisation’ of knowledge wrong if it is part of a critique on the unquestioned hegemonic assumptions found in development discourse, e.g., in Western or Chinese or any ‘donor country’ policies, in World Bank projects, or in the authoritarian-developmental policies of African governments imposing their cultural models at the expense of local culture (for the Ethiopian case, see Ellison 2012; Yirga 2017), or in marginalising instead of testing of local bodies of ‘embedded’ knowledge (cf. Asebe et al. 2017; Demssie et al. 2020; Frainer, et al. 2020).

But, as usual when a new intellectual fad is emerging, the proponents of today’s ‘decolonization’ paradigm are overdoing it. They often use reductionist arguments, ‘provincialize’ knowledge, and deny the transcendent aspects of knowledge formation processes. This especially applies to many in African studies centers in the ‘global North’, where different preoccupations seem to prevail than in Africa itself, perhaps South Africa excluded. In this light, some critics of the ‘decolonisers’ have spoken of the danger of a ‘recolonisation’ (Long 2016; Williams 2017; Clapham 2020: 148). In African studies, the main focus of ‘decolonising’ efforts will profitably be on reforming the academic field and setting new agendas *in Africa itself*, at African universities and among researchers doing work on African societies (cf. Clapham 2020: 141, 148), and not predominantly in the North.

The tendency seen in much recent writing by ‘decolonialists’ is also to suggest, without much analysis, that today’s African universities and their curricula are too much shaped by ‘the colonial condition’. But as Damtew Teferra recently noted (2020), such an argument “..ignores the transformational growth and diversity the continent [Africa] has registered”. This holds especially for Africa-based higher education in the last 15 to 20 years, when it saw its own growth and renewal after the financial and institutional crises of the 1980-90s.

A way forward in the ‘decolonise’ debates is to wind down on ideology, not apply it as a blanket term for *all* criticism, not see ‘identity’ and ‘minority position’ as an automatic source of new (scientific) authority³, and tackle concrete issues that enhance representation, access, and the full spectrum of knowledge acquisition, judged on canons of rational debate (as a regulative idea).

Historiography as locus of contestation

One core field in which the ‘decolonizing’ moment finds a target is *history writing*.⁴ It has of course long been argued, also in Western historiography, that history – as the public record of defining events and people’s deeds - is written by the ‘winners’, the politically hegemonic, and that the ‘history of ordinary people’ and the lower classes or minorities was often forgotten. This may hold for much of pre-mid-20th century history, with a focus on dynastic history, history of state-formation, elites and ‘great men’ (few women), and on histories of wars and battles. It was certainly a dominant streak especially since Roman times almost two millennia ago. However, the pioneers of history writing, Herodotos, did not start out as such, and neither did Chinese historians like Sima Qian (1st cent. BC) and Ban Zhao (1st-2nd cent.), or Ibn Khaldoun, the great medieval social historian: they described also wider social and cultural developments and searched for explanations beyond mere elite behaviour. Since the middle and late 20th century, historiography and the social sciences have significantly changed course in developing much attention to the societal and cultural developments, ideological social movements, demography, ethnic and social diversity, and processes of conflict and social change that were correlated to or underlying military and political events.

History writing and education in many countries also submit to influence from the state for the general outlines of a shared corpus of knowledge (in some cases a ‘canon’) of minimally accepted historical narratives and facts, apart from the certification, quality control and institutional support that they need. Here the line between a dominant, ‘hegemonic’ narrative and free and dissenting views on historic process and identity is tenuous, notably in the case of new (e.g., post-colonial), Communist, Islamic, and pluralist countries. The

³ Which would be dubious and counter-productive; cf. Wingfield 2017, Butcher 2018, Wig 2018, and Stokes 2019.

⁴ See e.g. <https://www.historyextra.com/period/modern/decolonise-history-curriculum-education-how-meghan-markle-black-study/> (With even Megan Markle feeling the need to give (uninformed) comments).

‘provincialization’ of historical knowledge written from an explicitly limited perspective (religious, ethnic, regional, or class-oriented) is frequent and understandable but rarely useful for ‘nation-building’ and shared civic identity in a country.

History in/on Ethiopia

Exactly such challenges have characterized Ethiopian historiography, especially since the early 1970s. However, interesting in this case is that the debates in historiography in Ethiopia have proceeded largely on the basis of a *local* Ethiopian framework: first of all, Ethiopia was not colonized (except for years of Italian occupation, 1936-1941) and had less need to resist imposed foreign authority structures or conceptual schemes/ideologies, and second, it has shown strong independence and continuity in historical reflection, as history writing and story-telling, already found well-entrenched in the country, like in religious hagiographies, (royal) chronicles, oral ethno-history traditions, and travelogues and autobiographies of leading persons (cf. De Lorenzi 2015). History pioneers in early 20th century Ethiopia were largely self-educated and connected to a ‘vernacular’ historiographical tradition, although inspired by Western and missionary education; they adapted or assimilated Western themes and interests into a local (Ethiopian-Eritrean) perspective (*ibid.*: 138).

A more broad academic discipline of history emerged after 1950, when the first university (Haile Sellassie I University) in Addis Ababa was founded, and here the formative influence of foreign/Western academics was indeed notable in many fields, including history. Still, the contents and choice of themes of curriculum and research as well as the perspectives on Ethiopian society and history were strongly determined by Ethiopian historians.

One core issue always has been ‘national identity’ and its historical roots. African postcolonial national identities in general have of course long been under (re)construction, facing continued problems of regional disparity, religious and ethnic tensions, and socio-economic inequalities. In Ethiopia these were already an issue since the era of Emperor Menilik II (r. 1889-1913), when the country had expanded significantly after conquest and incorporation of new areas around the Ethiopian highlands, the location of the historical Ethiopian (‘Abyssinian’) state. Identifying its ‘national identity’ in any era is difficult, as the country’s borders were always in flux and because even in modern times, i.e. after the country acquired ‘internationally recognized’ borders since ca. 1896 (the victory at Adwa against the Italians), the line of those borders belie a constant insecurity and fuzziness about what they enclose; they did not produce any clear or unified political cohesion but consolidated a certain hierarchical power structure.

The history-writing and teaching of the imperial era (up to the 1974 revolution) was no doubt characterized by the dominant narrative framework of a ‘unitary’ imperial state, dominated by a highland literate core – the ‘state makers’ and the power holders since at least the 13th century (cf. Toggia 2008). This ‘hegemonic model, centered on the Christian highlands where the historic kingdom going back to the Axum empire was located, is indicated by Marzagora (2017) as the ‘Great Tradition’ (cf. also Clapham 2002). No leaders in Ethiopia ever used this term; it is a Eurocentric concept, of course derived from F.R. Leavis’s idea of the dominant, ‘superior’ or normative great literary tradition in Britain since the early 19th century. However, the aristocratic highland elites imbued by Orthodox Christianity indeed saw themselves as bringers of a civilized tradition in the wider realm and had an underlying idea of the ‘destiny’ of imperial rule and guidance for Ethiopia (cf. Marzagora 2017: 443). And the hierarchical model of ‘lesser’ and ‘more civilized’ (state-forming, literate, Christian) groups was dominant. An important point made by Marzagora (2017: 427, 437) is that this dominant ‘Great Tradition’ in historical discourse and attempted national identity was *always* accompanied by dissenting voices and localized counter-narratives, not only in the past 30-40 years but from the start of the ‘Ethiopian polity’ (I would add, likely already in 4th century Aksum, which also was a multi-ethnic, multi-language realm). But as Clapham’s analysis (2002) suggests, these counter-histories - of regions, peoples, minorities or religious groups - are yet to be effectively woven into a new integral historical picture of Ethiopia.

Due to historical processes and specific features of the expansion of the imperial state, the elite strata mentioned above were dominated by Amharic-speaking people - although in certain periods also by Tigreans, like in the late 18th-early 19th century *Zememe Mesafint* period (= the ‘era of princes’, see Abir 1968) and during the rule of emperor Yohannis IV (1872-1889), and also in the mid-18th - early 19th century by Oromo, then dominant at the court and the ‘king makers’ (cf. Pankhurst 1998: 124-125; Bahru 1998: 106-107; Tekeste 1990: 56, 59). These identities then were not so much ‘ethnic’ in the modern sense than linguistic or, roughly ‘territory of origin’, and hybrid by nature. The provincial rulers and the emperor primarily saw themselves as (Orthodox) Christian custodians of the land, and for a long stretch of its history, they indeed were. In addition, the simple historical fact is that many territories now part of the state of Ethiopia were not politically included in it before the 19th century, although trade and tribute relations as well as cultural influences existed for ages *before* the annexation in the late 19th century: with Afar, Wolaitta, the Gibe states, or Käfa,

and denying this latter fact will not be helpful in forging a minimally ‘shareable’ conception of the (federal) state that exists today.

The above-mentioned image of Ethiopia as the never-colonized, ancient, unified African country with a strong degree of boundary and permanence began to crumble after the empire’s demise in 1974. Still today, the country is host to critical if not acrimonious debates on what the shared ‘history of Ethiopia in the post-imperial period is, or can be. There is a recognition of a wider Ethiopian historical domain or ‘culture area’, but also a lack of unity and agreement across different sections of the political spectrum and intellectual (ethno-)elites on what *is* ‘the nation’s history’ in any unifying sense. The political contours of a polity called Ethiopia since at least the 13th century are a fact (and some would effortlessly trace it back to the Aksumite empire of 2 millennia ago), but these are deemed insufficient to provide for a sense of continuity today. I need not dwell on the alternative stories and histories of ‘subaltern’ or ‘marginalized’ or ethnic groups that now produce self-appointed leaders and local ‘intellectuals’ reinterpreting their (part-)histories and ‘deconstructing’ the pan-Ethiopian narrative in a political sense: from Oromo to Silt’é to Kafa to Gurage to Tigray to Wolaitta, ethno-regions each claiming their own specific history,⁵ often purposely detached from Ethiopia and the former empire, and not seldomly mirrored a teleology similar to the dominant narrative (cf. Clapham 2002: 42). Many today go along with this view, but for equally many ordinary Ethiopians it is bizarre to witness this ‘centrifugalist’ debate, driven by a modern preoccupation *par excellence*: ethno-linguistic or ethnic-based ‘identity politics’ - the politics of the group or the collectivity, instead of a focus on interconnecting processes, individuals, structures of political economic power, class, and competition. Ethiopian activists and ‘ethnic’ historians here connect to the global debates that in the form of identity-centered ‘decolonization’ discourse have been wrecking much of academic life in several other African countries (notably South Africa), and perhaps even more so American academia (Mac Donald 2018) and some European countries, like the UK (cf. Malik 2017; Black 2019). As we noted, however, Ethiopia is a ‘special case’, where decolonization ideology takes another form and does not resemble the South African and US forms. Although the oldest independent African country and having an heritage of state identity and ‘unity in diversity’ since many ages, Ethiopia *internally* has tied into these debates, despite its fundamental differences with Africa’s postcolonial states. Up to 1991 the ‘centralist’ model of Ethiopian political unity

⁵ Many of such local ethnic histories have been produced, e.g. Nocho 1994, Wanna 2001, Bekele 2010, Ayyza 2015, Asgu 2016.

prevailed, first in the empire under emperor Haile Selassie (d. 1974) and later under the Marxist-Socialist *Derg* regime, and this was clearly reflected in history writing and education.

Most historiography until ca. 1975 accordingly focused on the power holders (the imperial dynasty, provincial leaders, religious communities/relations, economic development and modernization, foreign relations, and on efforts to resist external invaders and colonial efforts (cf. Egyptian incursions in the 1870s, the Sudanese Mahdist attack in the 1880s, the 1896 battle of Adwa with the Italians). A nationalist flavour, imbued with Ethiopia being defined primarily as a largely Orthodox-Christian, independent country, was prominent. We might conclude, with Toggia 2008, that history-writing (and teaching) was then to a certain extent ‘ideological’, building or reinforcing political legitimacy claims of the imperial elite. But this also applies to the successor regimes after 1974 (and indeed to most state ruling classes anywhere). We have to distinguish between the projected narrative of the state elite in power vs. the narratives as presented in educational institutions via its textbooks and research work. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the two, although the first kept check of the broad outlines of the second. While a detailed analysis of the historical narratives in the textbooks for the last two grades (11 and 12) of high school and in university introductory history courses, written by local Ethiopian academics, could tell us more on this, in practice the distinction between state ideology and educational narrative is indeed precarious, because final Ministry of Education approval was always needed on the educational texts. Especially in the *Derg* time (1974-1991) and the EPRDF period (1991-2018) this was strong (cf. Toggia 2008). History education always served as an ideological instrument.

The *Derg* regime’s political self-image turned away radically from an imperial model of highlander-dominant Christian rulers, church leaders nobles and emperors towards a political model of class-based ‘popular’ leaders that led a socialist regime and were ruling in the name of the ‘farmers and workers’. Ethiopian historiography reluctantly followed, to pay more attention to the ‘history of the broad masses’ and of ‘class relations’, ‘structures of oppression’, etc., including attention to historical processes of conquest and violent contestation of the imperial, ‘feudal’ order (cf. Tekeste 1990: 55f.). But not to the extent that all Ethiopian historians, although progressive, bought into the ideologies of Socialism (and later Marxism-Leninism), far from it. They continued to negotiate space for independent historical research and teaching - although means were dwindling and university budgets stagnant (cf. Bahru 2000: 17). Highschool textbooks, however, underwent a more rapid turn towards the new non-imperial, non-religious and class-oriented perspective on Ethiopia and its peoples. This went parallel with a new ‘nationalities’ policy - on a kind of Stalinist base –,

i.e., an identification of all the ethno-linguistic groups (= ‘nationalities’) to be translated into an effort to draw them into a new socialist egalitarian society on the basis of class position and material economic development.⁶

After 1991 with the victory of the insurgent movement EPRDF⁷ – originally also strongly Socialist in orientation, with a Marxist-Leninist background - the above model was abandoned in favour of an ‘ethno-federalist’ political model of government (1991-2018), whereby the emphasis was laid – both administratively and educationally – on the recognition of all ca. 75 ‘ethno-linguistic’ groups that could nominally be distinguished in the country. Toggia (2008: 323) contended that the then government “...it revised the history lessons in all public schools and Addis Ababa University’s curricula to reflect the heterogeneity of ethnonational groups”. The extent to which this happened is unclear, because many professional historians resisted the pressure. E.g., in the teaching material used since the early 1980s - the *Introduction to the History of Ethiopia*, Hist 102 (cf. Merid 1998: x) - a fairly traditional state and power-center perspective was used, though with more attention to the (‘peripheral’) regions, peoples, classes and ethnic groups in the country. This also applied to the follow-up manual compiled by Bahru Zewde (1998), which was used for at least two years for university-wide history teaching.⁸ After ca. 2000 however, there seems to have been no obligatory introductory history course for freshman students the higher education curriculum (Commentary 2020).

But this process of rethinking as well as governmental pressure seem to have massively stimulated a general questioning of the country’s historical identity. It was a feature already emerging in previous decades and in the *Derg* years (cf. Bahru 2000: 15-16). EPDRF ideologues like the late PM Meles Zenawi (r. 1991-2012) actively devalued the idea of Ethiopian national identity and fomented ethnic identity thinking and radical political restructuring as a substitute. (In)famous is his 1992 statement on the alleged unity of Ethiopia: “The Tigreans had Axum, but what could that mean to the Gurague? The Agew had Lalibela, but what could that mean to the Oromo? The Gonderes had castles, but what could that mean to the Wolaita?”⁹ By reducing the multilayered symbolic value of those places (religious,

⁶ An analysis of high school textbooks under the *Derg* was provided by Tekeste 1990: 55-70.

⁷ Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front’, led by the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front and its cadres. The EPRDF was reorganized and renamed ‘Prosperity Party’ in November 2019, and the TPLF leadership, having retreated to Tigray in 2018-2020, was dismantled during the recent war in November-December 2020.

⁸ Based on material produced by staff of Addis Ababa’s History Department. See also Merid’s Preface (1998).

⁹ Cited in: *Ethiopian Review* 2, no. 9 (1992).

cultural, and historical) to ethnicity only, this statement was highly contested at the time, even by many belonging to these peoples.

Since the 1991 political changes, a concomitant new discourse on ‘ethnic self-determination’ has emerged in the country. It partly contravened the parallel government discourse on the ‘developmental state’, which was premised on overall *national* development. These discursive moments of ethnicity as primary and driven by grievances are also reflected in history education and curricula. In the past decades, history education in secondary schools and introductory university courses in Ethiopia have shown important changes, as is normal. But specifically, the EPRDF regime’s political ideology and administrative practices based on ethno-regional diversity and ethnic identity put a premium on emphasizing diversity and ‘ethnic citizenship’ above all. This was despite the regime reverting to core elements of the so-called ‘Ethiopianist’-hegemonic discourse when needed (as in the Eritrea war in 1998-2000). As Marzagora (2017: 442) noted: “[the] state-sponsored nationalism in today’s Ethiopia thus draws both from the Great Tradition and from the counter-historiographies. It attempts to accommodate both, and selectively emphasises one or the other”.

In any case, the tilting towards particularist ethnic identities – with an underlying ‘divide-and rule’ model - led to a certain measure of fragmentation and to ‘identity politics’, the fruits of which are frequent violent campaigns of minority targeting and ‘ethnic cleansing’, still ongoing.¹⁰ Bahru Zewde noted the effects on the historical discipline at the time (2000: 5): “... the deification of ethnicity has presented a constant nuisance to the day-to-day activity of teaching and research”.

Certainly under EPRDF, the dominant notions of Ethiopian national identity were further questioned and the idea of the nature of any ‘Ethiopian nation’ was put on hold. Endless ideological debates followed on what (still) could constitute Ethiopia and how its history should be taught. These discussions in their own fashion tuned in to global debates on ‘decolonizing’ models of knowledge, but in unexpected ways and without solutions.

¹⁰ Among the most recent ones are the mass expulsions and executions of Amhara-speaking people in the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia Regions: see ‘Killings of civilians in West Wollega, Guliso woreda and government reactions’, *Addis Standard*, 2-11-2020 (<https://addisstandard.com/killing-of-civilians-in-west-wollega-guliso-wereda-govt-reactions>, accessed 2 Nov. 2020); ‘Civilians continue to suffer from repeated violence in Metekel’, *Addis Standard*, 26 Oct. 2020 (<https://addisstandard.com/analysis-civilians-continue-to-suffer-from-repeated-violence-in-metekel-what-we-know-so-far/> (accessed 28 Oct. 2020), and the recent massacre of hundreds of Amhara people living in in Mai Kadra, Tigray, in the context of the TPLF Tigray Region rulers’ armed conflict with federal Ethiopian troops (see: <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/news-54875296>). In November and December 2020 and January 2021 other massacres of civilians in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state have followed.

Interestingly, in Ethiopia these debates – i.e. in their specific form of ‘decolonization’ talk - have not really caught on in academia but only in sectarian ethnic and political circles.

History curriculum reform in Ethiopia

The latest reform of the History Curriculum for university students was proposed in 2019 (see Surafel et al. 2020), and was in the making during 2018 and 2019. Again it may have been partly in line with the instructions from the Ministry of Education and strongly reflected in the new ethno-political realities of the EPRDF era. But it is not sure whether the influence and the instructions of the new reformist government since April 2018 (under PM Abiy Ahmed) were in any way relevant.

In commenting on this text here the idea is not to explore and weigh the ‘veracity’ or the most suitable and commonly acceptable history of Ethiopia from a factual perspective, but only to see how historiographic issues and points of hot debate and controversy were represented in this textbook. I do not deny, however, that in a comprehensive study of Ethiopian history the two aspects have to be combined, because not all diverging histories can have equal value or be ‘true’ at the same time. I will come back to this below when discussing some specific examples.

While a case could be made that Ethiopia - or certain parts of the country, have suffered from (internal) colonialism, the ‘decolonisation’ debate has not been popular in Ethiopia. The nature of colonialism (as conquest and forced socio-cultural change by external powers) was obviously different from European colonialism elsewhere in Africa. Not that criticism on imperial (pre-1974) history-writing and on privileging one national/ethnic group above others has not been given; on the contrary. Accusations and critiques by representatives from various subjected, under-represented or minority peoples and groups in the country since the extension its political boundaries in the wake of emperor Menilik II’s late-19th century conquests, have been numerous. But apart from the absence of debate on *political* decolonization (because there *was* no colonization of Ethiopia apart from five years of Italian interlude, 1936-1941¹¹), discussions on ‘epistemological’/cultural decolonization as we saw e.g. in South Africa are not prominent, and usually seen as irrelevant to the Ethiopian context. Few dispute the value of general scientific insights, methods and epistemological canons as followed in mainstream science, be they ‘Western-based’ or not. Even Messay Kebede, a leading Ethiopian-American philosopher and a critic of the adoption of Western models and

¹¹ Exception was Eritrea, detached from Ethiopia and made an Italian colony from 1890 to 1941.

ideologies into the Ethiopian (political) context (Messay 2008), is a global thinker, bringing together Western and African traditions, and does not reject the canons of rational debate and argument or ‘Western’ epistemology in general (Unlike many ideological proponents of decolonisation today, like De Sousa, Mignolo, Quijano, etc.). Messay’s 2004 book was a nuanced argument for proper ‘decolonization’ and for bridging narratives. In 2017 there was a mini-debate among some Ethiopian academics on ‘decolonization’: Hewan Semon (2017) tried to call for ‘decolonizing Ethiopian studies’, but it was not taken up but even strongly questioned by several Ethiopian critics (Abinet 2017; Berihun 2017).

Below we briefly review the contents and approach of the new Module on Ethiopian history in its latest version of January 2020: a key text in the academic cultivation of Ethiopian historical identity. This is preceded by a note on high school textbooks.

History high school textbooks: a note

As a preface I note that Ethiopian history is also dealt with at Ethiopian high schools with specific textbooks¹² in grades 9-10 and 11-12, but limitations of space prevent their full discussion here. Suffice it to say that the broad outlines of the textbooks across the various regimes of the past 50 years have differentially reflected the political spirit of the times.¹³ Tekeste has noted that the textbooks of the *imperial* times reflected, apart from many factual errors and unclear use of language, relatively little attention to specific Ethiopian history compared to ‘world history’ (Tekeste 1990: 67). This what he calls ‘colonial’ character was also upheld by a preponderance of foreign teachers in grades 11 and 12 of the high schools and in the AAU History Department (*ibid.*: 69), which was founded in 1963. In the *Derg* period since 1974, the foreign influence on the history curriculum was evident in the heavy mark of Marxist-Leninist ideas, ‘class analysis’ and developmental fixations, whereby “...the educational programme (curriculum and media of instruction) reflect[ed] very little the history and culture of the country” (*ibid.*: 69). As noted above, the *EPRDF* era (1991-2018) saw the emergence of more diversity, with a focus of ethnicities (‘nationalities’) and ethno-regional histories being explored, written and discussed,¹⁴ but with a certain measure of confusion on how ‘national’ or state Ethiopian history and ‘national identity’ would be impacted. The most recent textbooks in use (Eshetu 2015a, 2015b, Girma 2015) show a combination of world

¹² E.g., Eshetu 2015a; Eshetu 2015b, Girma 2015.

¹³ Obviously a full appraisal of the tenets and ideological contexts of Ethiopian history teaching would need an additional analysis of such high school history textbooks.

¹⁴ See works mentioned in footnote 4.

history, African history and Ethiopian history, with the latter more prominent at the center of the narrative. In the 2015 Grade 9-10 textbook, attention is paid to the preconquest southern states (Wolaitta, Kafa, the Gibe states) and to the both violent and peaceful expansion of emperor Menelik II to the southern areas and their “harsh feudal exploitation” (Eshetu 2015a: 149). The narrative is still strongly focused on *political* events: kings, emperors, wars, local states, revolts, socio-political movements, and foreign relations (e.g., the interference of colonial powers since the mid-19th century). In the Grade 11-12 textbook (Eshetu 2015b) a similar but more in-depth mix of global and Ethiopian history is presented, with again Ethiopia as the central core of the story with eight of the twenty units (chapters) dealing directly with Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Here the great diversity of the region but also the longstanding connections between its peoples are emphasized; no privileged place is accorded to any one people (cf. p. 98. From the start, however, in the first section on Ethiopia (‘Peoples and states in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa up to 1270’) some ideological-interpretive statements are given on the modern state that seem out of place: “... the nations and nationalities ..lived side by side... had many common experiences including the class oppression they have suffered. But very recently conditions have begun to change and the national oppression has started to fade away” (*ibid.*, p. 99). These politically correct statements seem unnecessary, or at least premature. Striking in both textbooks is the rather conventional *periodization* of Ethiopian history in dynastic eras and familiar power elites¹⁵ that were known - and much criticized – in previous history books (including those from the imperial era). But serious attention is again given to the pre-conquest kingdoms in the South, such as Wolaitta, Yem, Enarya, Sheka, Kafa and the Oromo monarchies. They get an entire chapter (pp. 278-289).¹⁶

Critical appraisal of proposed changes in the university curriculum: the 2020 Module History of Ethiopia and the Horn (Hist 102)

The *Module* (Surafel et al. 2020) is an important new history curriculum text that elaborates on the discourse of diversity and ethnicity in vogue since the 1990s. It will be influential in

¹⁵ The Aksum empire, the Zagwe era, the ‘restoration’ of the Solomonic dynasty, the Muslim sultanates, wars between Muslim Adal and the Christian highland emperors, the Oromo population movements/conquests, the ‘Era of Princes’, the Menilik II expansion, emperor Haile Selassie’s ‘absolutist’ rule, *Derg* rule, and the (post-1991) EPRDF state, founded as ‘a nation of nations’ based on ‘equality, democracy and economic prosperity’ (Eshetu 2015b: 455).

¹⁶ Neither of these textbooks (incl. Girma 2015) devoted any attention to the period of EPRDF rule (post-1991), although the books were published 24 year after the EPRDF took power.

the coming years in shaping students' thinking nationwide and in fueling public debate. It was written to fill a void: Ethiopia for 25 years had no introductory history course for its freshman university students (only courses in the History Departments). It was written by a more or less representative selection of four historians from Addis Ababa, Jimma, Debre Tabor and Wollega Universities, with seven text reviewers, from Hawassa, Bahir Dar, Haramaya, Jimma, Arba Minč, Meqele and Gondar Universities.

The following points are noteworthy:

1. The Module's scope is on Ethiopia and not so much on the Horn; the time period is from prehistory to 1995 (the start of EPRDF rule under the new Constitution), and it counts a modest 196 pages. It contains a list of questions for study at the end of the units. It is written in English, the language of senior high school and higher education in Ethiopia.
2. There are seven Units (chapters, of ca. 28 p. each), treating in chronological order: an (excellent) introduction on aims, methods and sources; prehistory and languages/peoples; the evolution of states until the early 13th century; politics, economy and socio-cultural processes until the early 16th century; politics, economy and socio-cultural processes from the early 16th to the early 18th century; internal interactions and external relations 1800-1941, and finally internal interactions and external relations from 1941 to 1994.
3. The general objective is *not* to produce one history or one master narrative, but to "... introduce the students to the diverse histories of Ethiopia and the Horn" (p. 5). The authors thereby also mention the aim to look at "...the extent to which *interaction between peoples* (my emphasis, J.A.) throughout the region ... have shaped the history of the region" (*ibid.*) – an important point. It is also emphasized on p. 21 as having produced long-term linkages.¹⁷ This point is sometimes over-emphasized, as on p. 79 in the discussion of the period just after the 16th-century Muslim-Christian war.
4. The chronological and thematic outline of Ethiopian history is still fairly conventional, with an emphasis on power holders, states, trade & economic processes, and international relations, although the choice of topics and the regions and peoples discussed is wider. Also the depiction of religions and their origins or introduction into Ethiopia (mainly Christianity and Islam) is conventional and not much integrated in the wider narrative.

¹⁷ Also on p. 74, and on p. 79.

5. While based on academic historical literature,¹⁸ it seeks to project a politically correct, ‘acceptable’ or ‘useable’ history for all Ethiopians, with violent episodes and facts under-emphasized or omitted, and declaring a ‘equality’ of constituent peoples. Indeed, in the Commentators’ comments it says: “...it tried to uncover what has been silenced and tried to serve as the voice of all. Above all, it tried to give recognition for the victims by addressing some issues in a modest way”.¹⁹ This seems to be a political, not educational aim. This has led in some places to an approach aimed to address or meet perceived ‘grievances’ of people previously less well-described in the older history courses, such as the Oromo. But it also led to the cavalier use of evidence, notably oral evidence, for which no clear methods are indicated on how to establish their reliability. It also has a number of factual errors, commented upon by others (e.g. Getachew 2020, discussing the 1886 battle of Azule issue, mentioned in the Module on p. 124 but without detail).²⁰
6. Remarkably, in view of the academic critiques on Ethiopian historiography and its ‘ideological’ use (cf. Triulzi 2002, Toggia 2008, Marzagora 2017; Smidt 2020), the paradigm of history presented in the Module is *not* radically different from that in previous textbooks and modules. Interpretive explanation is limited. An effort at rewriting or re-presenting history from an alternative baseline and with a different periodization, as for instance suggested by Clapham (2002), or making use of the many anthropological and ethno-historical studies produced in the last 20-30 years, was not tried, except for brief, non-historical ethnographic profiles (e.g., on pp. 93-103). Some concessions were, however, made to the well-known criticisms of ‘ethnonationalists’ in *decentering* the historical account and not ‘privileging’ any ethno-national group or elite. In the chapters on the Middle Ages all the political formations of the Ethiopian realm, including those of the South, are listed.
7. The Module text aims for consensus and ‘inclusivity’. This has led to the avoidance of major historical controversies and difficult facts. This becomes somewhat problematic in the presentation of major events like the 16th century Muslim-Christian war and the Oromo ‘population movements’ (a euphemism), as well as the past 150 years of

¹⁸ Although apparently hardly on the authoritative 5-volume *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (2003-2014).

¹⁹ See: *Commentary by Module reviewers*.

²⁰ In the draft edition of the Module (Nov. 2019), the issue of the ‘Anole amputations’ was mentioned, but after critical debate this was taken out in the last version (p. 124), as the source for this is deemed unreliable. The text now literally says: “The battle of Azule was followed by the Anole incident that inflicted heavy damage to the Arsi Oromo in 1887”. But this is very unclear and has no context.

Ethiopia's history. Neither is there any word on the past two impactful decades of EPDRF rule.

8. Half of the literature used for the Module consists of 'standard works' written by foreign scholars, and the rest is by Ethiopian scholars (also older works). There is no evidence of developing a 'local epistemology' used for a specific 'Ethiopian' perspective, and no connection to the work of first generation of independent Ethiopian-Eritrean historians, discussed by De Lorenzi (2015).
9. It therefore cannot be said how the Module will contribute to forging a new Ethiopian national identity or to a new form of 'nation-building', one of the expressed aims. But despite its descriptive lacunae and factual errors, it has at least resisted a 'recolonisation' of Ethiopian history by other politically-driven agendas.
10. The Module at least meets the desire expressed by many (e.g. Smidt 2020: 33; Clapham 2002: 40-41) that a history should not be exclusively oriented towards the power holders and the state(s) it 'fragments' the story and calls attention to other themes, like the integrative role of trade and exchange relations, the cultural and agrarian-technological exchanges across regions and groups, even in times of tension, and the trans-group role of religion, notably Christianity and Islam.
11. There was a round of comments by reviewers, which led to improvements and corrections but not to a fundamental change of perspective. A *validation workshop* on the final text held in February 2020 did not bring unanimous approval (mentioned in Smidt 2020: 26). The major topics of controversy were – entirely in line with those of the previous 30 years of debate - the 'colonization' thesis (regarding the 19th-century imperial conquest of the South), the status of 'oral tradition evidence' (strongly interfered with by post-tradition political influences), the impossibility of agreeing on an idea of a 'unified', all-Ethiopian history, and the status of the various 'ethnic groups' or peoples making up Ethiopia (or by some seen as *not* belonging to Ethiopia).²¹ However, the Commentators said that the criticisms "... waged against the Ministry [of Education] concerning the validated introductory history curriculum are unfounded and do not hold water", and that instead it "... should have been unabashedly appreciated for taking such a commendable step in trying to salvage the

²¹ Smidt (*ibid.*) noted that the meeting cycle ended in disagreement and was canceled after ten days. It was even suggested that PM Abiy Ahmed should look into the matter and give a decision..

generation by introducing arguably a balanced historical document.” (Commentary 2020).

12. In this respect it questions, if not ‘decolonizes’, the past dominant story of Ethiopia with its tacit assumptions of normative hierarchy, formative power politics, socio-cultural prestige ranking, and recurrent foreign perceptions of it as an ‘underdeveloped’ country.

Obviously, the above-mentioned debate of history teachers in February 2020 showed that new Module was a necessary but *not* sufficient new document on Ethiopian history teaching and for forming civic Ethiopian identity.

Thus, the debate on what an Ethiopian nation state and national unity or cohesiveness can ultimately look like, or is at all possible after decades of sectarian debate and conflict, is ongoing and will likely never end. In fact, it has been repetitive for the past 30 years and the current Module will contribute to this. It may be noted that the debate is mostly conducted by ‘intellectuals’, media commentators and self-appointed ethnic group leaders/activists and of course vocal members of Ethiopian ‘diaspora’ (in cyber space), and hardly by the ordinary people that try to make do and to accommodate with others in daily life.

The ascent to power of PM Abiy Ahmed as new PM in April 2018 has rekindled the debates, this time with an unusual measure of political openness and a deluge of articles and comments in the printed and digital media, but often with no common end goal in mind and rehearsing parochial group views. The same duality was already present in the 1970s-1980s in the student critiques on the hegemonic national narratives re-emerge in these ‘debates’: ‘ethno-nationalists’ - those who want far-reaching autonomy if not ‘independence’ for an ethnic region or ethnic group, contesting Ethiopia as ‘empire’²² - and ‘unitarists’ - those striving toward a unitary state structure that de-emphasizes ethnicity as an organizing principle of politics and often seeking for a ‘former glory’ of the nation as a whole. The two labels (often fueled by ‘diaspora’ radicalism) are, however, based on biased readings of history, and less and less helpful to further the debate, clouding the broader range of positions across the spectrum, and rarely appreciating the wishes and dilemmas of ordinary people in Ethiopia.

²² See Semir Yusuf’s book review of a work in this line, in *African Affairs* 109(434), 2010, pp. 171–172.

Concluding remarks

The new *History 102 Module* was written in post-EPRDF days and in the early period of the new PM Abiy Ahmed's tenure. It is unclear in how far the Ministry of Education has shaped or influenced the Module's composition, beyond general guidelines of inclusiveness. It was presented against the background of ongoing debates and controversies Ethiopian political and national identity. Recent narratives on Ethiopian history and historiographical works on the country by both indigenous and academic historians are quite diverse, to the point of being mutually exclusivist, but a rethinking and literally a battling of the Ethiopian federation is going on as well.²³ Some authors, in a sustained critique of the old 'imperial', or Great Tradition approach (see above), discern biases of representation that some have termed 'native colonialism' (Yirga 2017). This term has wider application than the referring only to the disadvantaged political position of certain peoples and minorities: there is a historical 'state bias' towards culturally different minorities, notably in the pastoralist and southern fringes of the country, that has led to the insensitive imposition of policy and of development schemes (for one example, Ellison 2012; also Amborn 2016). The grand task in national history education is to first recognize this, identify the biases and then confront the empirical realities with them. That the "... continued veneration of the nation-state", as Bahru (2003-04: 49) called it, is not fruitful is by now clear, and the wider social and cultural effects of the failed effort to impose it are to be addressed. The question is, can 'diversity in unity' be realized, and how?²⁴

The *Module* of 2020 and the high school textbooks in Ethiopia of today devote attention to diversity and to disparate ethno-regional histories as never before. The Module authors have tried to come to a 'non-colonial' view of Ethiopian history, trying to steer away from conventional unitary histories by both Ethiopians and foreign scholars *as well as* from views by parochial historians that see Ethiopian history predominantly in a perspective of a 'local colonialism', injustice, inequality, fragmented ethno-groups, etc. The authors also made an effort to open up lines toward a historical image of Ethiopia that is not imprisoned by the past – a path often taken by 'ethno-nationalist' historians and activists, seeking the future of Ethiopia in its past.

²³ As evident in the Tigray armed conflict since 3 November 2019.

²⁴ Interestingly, the new PM Abiy Ahmed's 2020 book *Meddemer* ('Synergy') pleads for this and contends that Ethiopia's peoples, despite significant diversity and problematic historical experiences, are connected and should work together in a new federal union. The construction of a 'Unity Park' (2019) in the Addis Ababa government compound, with all Ethiopian regions and their ethno-cultural diversity represented in separate pavilions, supports the idea of embracing unity in diversity.

But the texts surely reflect that despite some underlying common themes and lines of knowledge, there is still no national consensus yet on the broad outlines of a national history or ‘identity’, or *even on the interpretive model of how to arrive at one*. So it seems unlikely that there soon will be one in the substantial sense. There is sometimes ideology-fed disagreement even on elementary facts.²⁵ This situation of dialogic disagreement as to ‘reality’ is manageable if the diversity and the controversies are inculcated as facts *in themselves* and when continued debate is the purpose of history education in a ‘constructive-critical’ sense. But in the sense of a minimum shared national narrative that can engage all Ethiopian citizens of varying background it may not suffice. An appeal to the ‘specificity’ and ‘uniqueness’ of all ethno-linguistic groups and their ‘knowledge traditions’, on the other hand, in line with a ‘decolonial’ practice declaring them all of more or less equal weight or value, is not a solution either and will fragment the picture even further. The diversity of Ethiopian peoples’ historical experience and of approaches to it necessitates in itself a shared epistemological and knowledge framework facilitating the debates on how societal relations and the mutual influencing of peoples, political power centers, ethnic groups and religious communities in the Ethiopian domain emerged and developed.

History debates and curriculum (re)writing in Ethiopia are therefore ongoing, both in professional circles and publicly in the (social) media. That contestation is a permanent feature of this is not surprising; it is only the fact that some refuse to allow common ground and a priori reject bridging narratives. There are the entrenched positions, notably in the ‘diaspora communities’, and based on dominant victimhood perspectives²⁶ and identity-politics positions, seemingly fed by a politics of resentment and by competition (and job aspirations). Against such positions it is difficult to marshal evidence and facts, because these are rejected or doubted from the start. Needless to say, Ethiopia is not unique in this; it is also widespread in the West, e.g. in the excesses of ‘diversity discourse’ (cf. Mac Donald’s trenchant critique 2018; Butcher 2018) and in conspiracy-thinking in the USA (e.g., SWC 2020; Van der Linden et al. 2020). Interestingly, the approach chosen by ethnic intellectuals or spokespersons of the various peoples that were allegedly marginalized in the ‘grand imperial narrative’ up to 1974 shows a ‘reverse essentialism’: to show that they had a right to

²⁵ One of the most glaring disagreements is that around the historical background facts giving rise to the controversial and architecturally very ugly ‘Anole monument’ (cf. Ayele 2016: 16-17), built under the EPRDF in 2014 in the Oromia Region. It was one of the breaking points during the February 2020 discussion at AAU.

²⁶ An attitude with serious dangers, cf. Jordan Peterson’s 2017 lecture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeYRK16PIIA>.

exist and were historically important, the historiographers of such ethnic groups/ peoples often constructed dubious historical identities and ancient timelines not supported by the facts as appraised in an academically responsible manner. Like the imperial narrative, they “...appealed to antiquity, authenticity and unity” (cf. Marzagora 2017: 444), thus reproducing the error.

To come back to the ‘decolonizing’ narrative: it seems like a metaphor gone wrong that cannot have unquestioned applicability everywhere. Taken from political history - the phenomenon of political decolonization in Africa since 1960 - it was seamlessly transposed to the domain of culture and of intellectual/scientific discussion. But that is not working. Science, including social science and humanities, is a transcultural, transnational enterprise that historically emerged in a certain area: among the ancient Greeks, among Arab(ic) geographers, mathematicians and philosophers in the early Middle Ages, and among Enlightenment-inspired thinkers resisting the dogmas and orders of the religious establishment and repressive regimes. Basically there is no pure culture-specific or country-specific knowledge *only* applying in one location (cf. Jansen 2019). It may be that certain insights and bodies of knowledge emerged in, or are particularly geared to, the local physical-geographical, botanical or social context of a place. But this does not mean that they are in a knowledge-class of their own. The only valid reason for ‘decolonising’ calls is that we develop more understanding of context, local cultural entanglements and inequalities in sharing the discursive critical knowledge conversation, *not* in abolishing or provincializing it. If ‘decolonizing’ talk is used as the intellectual buzzword for all criticism and assumes itself to always be justified, then social science & African studies are on the wrong track, as the word becomes meaningless. In a sense, as Mary Douglas noted “...our colonization of each other’s minds is the price we pay for *thought*” (Douglas: xx; my emphasis), and we should deal with it critically.

The story of history education in Ethiopia has shown this: narratives not going beyond the (repetitive) argument of conquest, conflict, and internal ‘colonisation’ do not give the full range of historical events and neglect the complex patterns of interaction that have emerged over hundreds of years in Ethiopia – albeit with shifting borders of territory, power, ‘values’, inclusion and membership.

The historiography of Ethiopia will be served best by its ongoing dissociation from ‘politics’ in the broader sense and regain academic autonomy. An academic perspective on Ethiopian history would profitably focus on the multiple and complex interactions - both peaceful and marred by conflict – between the various constituent parts of the state domain in

its various forms across the ages. Without subscribing to the ‘Greater Ethiopia’ thesis (Levine 2000²) it can be said that there is a field of interaction of ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’ that stretches over centuries and, with a few exceptions, has shaped the participating territories, ethnic/religious groups and elites, *more* than interactions with neighbouring countries like Sudan, Kenya or the Somalias. It is thereby to be recognized that according to regional or religious tradition, the perception of ‘Ethiopia’ will continue to differ and cannot be prescribed: no one can prevent the majority of the Orthodox-Christians from identifying their motherland with the idea of ‘covenant’: the historic bond forged between the people and the land of Ethiopia and its age-old religious heritage (including the belief of having inherited the biblical Ark of the Covenant, replicated in every Orthodox church). Indeed, ‘covenant thinking’, as Girma (2018: 7) has argued, is a familiar Ethiopian *topos*, that has its counterpart among Ethiopian Muslims cherishing that Ethiopia is the first country/regime (in the 7th century) to have extended a warm welcome to Muslim fugitives from Arabia, thus allowing Islam to survive. The demand to develop a more inclusive Ethiopian historiography cannot proscribe such ideas that give meaning to the ‘Ethiopian’ identity of a large part of its citizens. Neither can the lingering effects of feelings of past discrimination and marginalization of minorities and non-Amharic/Tigrinya speaking groups be neglected, although they equally relate to the Ethiopian state.

‘Ethiopia’ - a term used in local sources across the area since at least the 13th century - has been an ‘idea’, a concept of varying territorial, religious and cultural contents, and this variety has to be recognized to give it a political-institutional content relevant for all citizens today. Regardless of its origins in a Byzantine-imperial and Christian heritage, the idea of Ethiopia has appeared as a durable (negative or positive) reference point for dozens of ‘peoples’ or ‘ethnic groups’ and their elites, and thus seems to provide a basis for constant though conflictuous engagement. Ethiopia is not a metaphysical entity with a manifest destiny, but a shared *arena*, the open boundaries of which have shaped the quest for an encompassing historiographic narrative, and continue to do so. To reiterate, any relevant historiography of Ethiopia has in that sense to be ‘decolonized’ - i.e. not *a priori* privileging any group-based conception of it – and describe/represent the country as *a relational complex* with deep historical roots but with threads of cultural (incl. religious) difference that both unify and divide. Although it is not clear that we have much advanced beyond the problems set out by, for instance, Triulzi (2002), this effort towards a decolonial historiography is in full swing, led by Ethiopian historians doing tremendously interesting and path-breaking empirical work. But the venture does not logically imply the ‘subjectivization’ or

parochialization of knowledge. In academic terms, the effort towards this new historiography will benefit from detaching it from instrumentalized, political agendas (cf. Clapham 2002: 45), as the latter would perpetuate the controversies and fragment the quest for Ethiopian identity (or identities) to no good purpose.

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