

Pubblicazione quadrimestrale
numero 2 / 2021

afriche e orienti

www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/africheorienti

rivista di studi ai confini tra africa mediterraneo e medio oriente

anno XXIV numero 2 / 2021

The specious dividends of peace in the Horn of Africa

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AIEP EDITORE



Davide Chinigò, *Everyday Practices of State Building in Ethiopia. Power, Scale, Performativity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, 272 pp., ISBN: 9780192869654

Davide Chinigò's first book is a study of State-building during EPRDF's Ethiopia (1991-2018) from the perspective of both the political elite and the citizens. It is the result of five qualitative fieldworks undertaken in Ethiopia between 2006 and 2018 and countless theoretical and methodological works. The case studies analyze State policies – resettlement, land registration and decentralization, agriculture commercialization, small business development and industrialization – in the country's four most populous regions – Oromia, SNNPR, Amhara and Tigray – and in Kolfe Keranyo, a peri-urban sub-city of the capital Addis Ababa.

Although the main theoretical framework of the book is a political one – namely how a State policy "enacts the subject as a political subject in the everyday" (p.33) – it is inherently trans-disciplinary because "beneficiaries and local State officials employed a wide variety of strategies and political repertoires to [...] minimize risk and consequences threatening their social, economic, and political reproduction" (p.33). The overall goal of the book is an analysis of "the relationship between State formation and social change" (p.1). Chinigò unpacks this notion into two classical sub phenomena, a political one and a sociological one: the utility of using the Nation-State as a meaningful category to analyze African political and social changes and

"how to conceptualize elusive State-society relations" (p.1). This dichotomic approach is followed by Chinigò throughout the book: "the lens of the everyday interrogates State formation as both a project of the political elite and from the perspective of how subjects navigate the representational and material forces of State power in society" (p. 216). The everyday perspective casts shadows and lights on different topics: State-society relations, the State's representational and material forces and, the intended and actual beneficiaries of State policies. At the same time, Chinigò raises serious doubts about well-established analytical categories employed to analyze Ethiopia – such as center periphery relations and the predominance of the Abyssinian political culture – and disputes Ethiopia as an example of 'Africa rising'.

The book aims to analyze the relationship between State and society through a qualitative fieldwork methodology which reconstructs through interviews, group interviews and focus groups, the dynamics of a micro reality without losing the grip on the "*longue durée*". The goal is to avoid depicting a reified society where culture shapes power relations while escaping "depictions that conflate experiences of State formation across space and time" (p.1); this is done through "the lens of the everyday". According to Chinigò this analytical lens allows us "to conceptualize State formation as epiphenomenal to social change" (p.2) and highlights new possibilities produced, unintendedly, by State's action.

184

The book is a pioneering work about EPRDF's Ethiopia and some of the main areas in which the State has intervened, nonetheless the focus on the everyday risks to become an idiographic argument which underestimate the national arena in privileging local and international phenomena while also presenting EPRDF's Ethiopia as a unique historical experience. Chinigò relies mostly on his fieldwork combined with an astonishing knowledge of secondary literature; archival records are not included, by a specific choice of the author. Even if this is deliberate, it still raises the doubt: can the insights from these micro realities be generalized?

The five chapters can be considered as separate essays, but they allow the reader to investigate everyday EPRDF's Ethiopia in a unique way. The author is in a constant struggle to connect local dynamics to national and international ones and this inductive-deductive method is probably the main key feature distinguishing the book. The first chapter analyses the resettlement program in Sekota *woreda* located in Waag Himra, a special zone of the Amhara *kilil* in the heart of the Ethiopian plateau. The resettlement program was an EPRDF's national policy from 2002 to 2007 to assure food security in rural deprived areas. One of the flagship programs of EPRDF, resettlement has an infamous history in Ethiopia and the Party embarked on it only when Meles' leadership was uncontested, together with the shift in economic thinking towards *lemat* (development). The chapter follows a deductive framework: it structures the continental, national and regional historical political economic context in which Waag Himra's development-induced displacement and resettlement took place. Waag

Himra is an area where population pressure over land and rain-fed agriculture made over 50% of the population dependent on food aid, which became an integral part of local economy "providing little incentive [...] to grow and diversify and making the fortune of ruthless middlemen" (p.59). Resettlement was the Party's answer to the food dependency trap but turned out to be a complete failure: after two years 80% of the population was returning home. The program was embraced by beneficiaries in the beginning, but the "climatic, agricultural, and cultural conditions" (p.63) in the new areas, as well as the "mismatch between expectations and the actual conditions" in the resettlement site proved too much for them.

The second chapter is set in Siraro *woreda*, located in the West Arsi zone, which is part of the Oromiya *kilil*, and analyses the rural land registration program embarked upon by EPRDF since 1998 with a differentiated approach for each region. The chapter's structure is deductive-inductive, going from local to general and the other way around. In Oromiya, and SNNPR, the program started in 2004 "to strengthen the productivity of smallholder agriculture, to increase capitalization and long-term investments on land, and to incentivize the marketization of agricultural products" (p. 73) In practice it turned out as "a tool for the State to make resource and people legible, capturing the profit of smallholder agriculture while intensifying the monitoring and political control of rural areas" (p.74). At the same time farmers renegotiated their symbolic and socio-economic attachment to land in opposition to this policy and the politicization of the Oromo identity as opposed to a "top-down, centralizing State policy" (p. 114).

The third chapter is set in several *kebellles* of Wollaita, located in the SNNP region in the South-West of Ethiopia where two foreign investors backed by the government set up a project of agricultural commercialization focused on biofuel crop production through contract farming from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s. Wolaita is densely populated and agricultural commercialization was intended to shift production processes from traditional to biofuel crops to diversify the economy. According to Chinigò the result was a spectacular failure, but this allows the author to analyze the EPRDF's sectoral opening to neoliberal policies, challenging the notion that "the developmental State is an effective model to counter the effect of neoliberal policies" (p.117). The EPRDF's failure was spectacular: economic development did not happen and Wolaita farmers, as well as local officials, "constituted the micro-political terrain within which broader national anti-government protests unfolded" (p.118).

The fourth chapter is set in Kolfe Keranyo, a peri-urban sub-city of Addis Ababa where the policy of job creation through micro and small enterprises (MSEs) and micro-finance schemes promoted by EPRDF in the 2010s took place. MSEs were an economic failure, beneficiaries felt they were imposed by the Party and indeed the EPRDF pre-established the sectors in which the enterprises had to work. Chinigò maintains that "a narrow focus on financial and economic viability obscures the social and political significance of the entrepreneurship strategy in Kolfe" (p. 171). Indeed, beneficiaries had access to

credit and were pushed to engage in informal business activities because "participation in government initiatives [...] was often the only possibility many peri-urban dwellers had [...] to make a living" (p. 172); or, as stated by a street vendor interviewed by the author "MSEs are a good entry point to the system" (p. 173). MSEs constituted, in the government's intentions, the way to regularize informal business as well as providing financial services through group collateral: if the first one had the opposite effect, group dynamics such as the one-to-five network "played an essential role in terms of surveillance of the peri-urban areas" (p. 165). They can be considered a tool with which the State penetrated even further the peri-urban areas even if its unintended effect was to destabilize the same area they wanted to control.

Chapter five is set in Mekelle, Tigray's *killil* capital where a set of policies promoting industrialization in the textile industry were implemented in the 2010s. EPRDF envisioned a central role for Ethiopia in global value chains thanks to its comparative advantage in the cost of labor: together with donors, Ethiopia set up different industrial parks which attracted multinational companies thanks to several incentives. This other flagship policy was at the forefront in promoting the structural change envisioned to make Ethiopia a middle-income country by 2025 by moving the country from agrarian capitalism towards an industrial one while creating domestic capacity thanks to spill-over effects. Chinigò's unit of analysis is household reproduction, this allows him to make sense of the various processes of absenteeism, turnover and tardiness in a context of wages well below economic reproduction. Mostly young female workers were involved in the textile industry and the practices they employed were instrumental "to navigate material and representational challenges associated with the project of socio-economic transformation under the developmental State" (p. 214). According to Chinigò the Ethiopian industrial effort was based on the extraction of a rural surplus. Industrial female workers relied on their kin in the countryside to survive with wages below reproduction level and at the same time the cash they earned was instrumental in supporting rural efforts to buy agricultural inputs.

By taking together the five case studies Chinigò concludes that EPRDF's State building was a "fiercely contested one, highlighting both continuities and discontinuities with previous regimes" (p. 216). Its developmental State project generated economic development but also inequalities and gave new meanings to subjects identity, enacting a politicization process which led to the political turmoil of the mid-2010s. Chinigò contends also that the case studies "demonstrate that studying State formation requires interrogating a wide set of scalar dynamics beyond a geographically differentiated scope of State policies under *strict centre-periphery categorizations* (my italics)" (p.218) and that after looking closely at the flagship policies of EPRDF, Ethiopia is a murky example of 'Africa rising'. The developmental State achieved some economic growth, but it was not shared equally and made "masses of unemployed and disenfranchised youth remain highly unstable politically" (p. 229), an issue still unresolved by Abiy Ahmed's nowadays.

Even though some scholars could disagree with Chinigò's point of view, the book provides several thorough and well-structured points that will surely foster meaningful discussions. This innovative angle to look at EPRDF's Ethiopia is a relevant addition to current literature for both critics and supporters.

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ISBN 978-886086-229-7



9 788860 862297

ISSN 1592-6753

€ 18,00

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