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## The specious dividends of peace in the Horn of Africa

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Alessio Iocchi, *Living through crisis by Lake Chad. Violence, labor and resources*, London, Routledge, 2022, 224 p., ISBN 9781032155296

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In seven chapters, plus an introduction and a post-script, Iocchi takes us through a one-thousand year journey around Lake Chad, starting with the Bornu-Kanem kingdom in 1076 and ending with the death of Chadian President Déby in April 2021. Drawing on a huge amount of academic literature published in French, English and Italian, various travel accounts from Ibn Kaldun (1377) to Gustav Nachtigal (1879-89), weblogs, documents from Wikileaks, newspapers from Chad and Niger, and more than 10 months of fieldwork in the area, accomplished between 2014 and 2021, Iocchi's work is of huge interest to anyone aiming to understand better how people live and think in this region today. A central concept thus is "*se débrouiller*" - how people are fending for themselves. In fact, when you ask people in this region of Africa "*comment ca va?*" (how are you?/how are you doing?) most people would answer "*Je me débrouille*" (I am fending/ I am trying to manage my life). And Iocchi has written close to 200 pages to make sense of this answer.

The uncertainties and contentions most people in the Lake Chad area live today and has lived for at least the last one thousand years, is often described as "crisis" by outsiders. However, for the people who live this "crisis", it is normality, it is their everyday life. How people manage "in the midst of uncertainty and precariousness" (p. 9) and "how

people co-create their personal circumstances" (p. 8) are central questions in the book. Referring to Giorgio Agamben's concept "la vida nuda" and Achille Mbembe's "necropolis", locchi analyses lifeworlds and everydayness in various locations around the Lake Chad.

Part one, consisting of two chapters, deals with accumulation and dispossession, mostly in the precolonial kingdom of Bornu-Kanem, located at its power peak in parts of today's Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. Slave raiding and trading was at the centre of accumulation, legitimized both ideologically and materialistically. Slave raiding could take place either to establish a tributary relation to a neighbouring Muslim state or to conquer pagan communities to be used as a slave reservoir. A third possibility would include raiding ungoverned mostly Muslim territories to access valuable trade routes. However, in this "meshwork" of landscapes, networks and navigation, we also get an understanding of the uselessness of dichotomies like center and periphery, as "the center and the periphery coexist in the same place" (p. 24), due partly to the informality and fluidity of labour. For example, many different categories of slaves existed and a trusted slave at the court could rise in hierarchy and be much better off than many free commoners (p. 50). While the two first chapters deal mostly with the precolonial period, locchi makes no clear-cut analytical line between the precolonial and colonial periods. In my view, this is valuable. Finding similarities and making connections between the precolonial and the colonial ways of executing power, making hierarchies and boundaries, nurture new thoughts and knowledge about both periods. In fact, the classical making of historical time blocks for analytical purposes - pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period - is not something locchi deals with. In one and the same chapter we can read about Sayfuwa dynasty in Kanem Bornu from 1071 onwards and *shaykh* Uthman dan Fodi and the Sokoto Caliphate's jihad against Kanem Bornu in 1804-1817, but also taxation during the colonial period. locchi argues that "colonization did not affect the principle but modalities of taxation" (p. 61) and concludes the chapter with a reflection on the "the convergence of initiatives between traditional authorities [...] and the colonial authorities" regarding the polder system near the Lake Chad bringing empirical data up the 1950s.

Part two consists of three chapters. Chapter three discusses "bargaining, negotiation, and mediation" among traders and producers, especially fishermen, around Lake Chad. Chapter four, entitled "Le Dérapage", gives us a very detailed accounts of numerous men central in the formal democratisation process (1999-onwards) in the Borno state (Nigeria) and the rise of religious politicized doctrines and preaching. Based on a huge variety of sources, including fieldwork in Northern Nigeria in 2014 with interviews and conversations conducted both in English and Arabic, locchi gives us a comprehensive story of the rise of Boko Haram focusing on the life and thoughts of its first leader, the young and prominent Sufi scholar Muhammad Yusuf (1970-2009). While Boko Haram under his guidance was a rather small, untidy gang with "solid doctrinal credentials"

(p. 101), after Yusuf's death in 2009, Boko Haram converted into an insurgent organisation with strong anti-government rhetoric providing guerrilla fighting training for its sympathisers. The chapter ends with an analysis of a Boko Haram attack on the Chadian side of the Lake Chad in 2015 bringing a natural transition to Chapter 5 where locchi analyses "terrorism hysteria" in a neighbouring village, Bol. Focusing on the humanitarian agents behind high walls and secluded camps, the "peace-keeping economy" ruling the Lake Chad area makes a "reciprocal isolation between the expats and the locals" (p. 112-13; 118). Although international personnel is present with the official goal to increase both life quality and security for the local population, the mentally and physically high walls between the two groups rather create social animosity. The Sultan of Bol claims that the majority of the population are not included in the peace-keeping economy and that development aid is increasing but without any results on the ground (p.119).

The last part of the book, "fear and floating", consists of two chapters, both based on locchi's fieldwork and with a contemporary timeframe. Chapter 6 analyses the moral economy of a frontier post, Nguéli, between Chad and Cameroon. locchi followed transactions and operators at the frontier, interviewed both formal and informal security officers and tax collectors, traders, and smugglers. The porosity of the border and the "straddling between formality and informality" (p. 141) make negotiations and "personalisation of [more or less formal] relationships" (p. 143) the best way to traverse from one country to the other. Using Agamben's "state of exception", locchi claims that "Borderlands such as Nguéli are shaped by the state policy to tolerate - and to some degree promote - informal fiscal or wealth extraction practices among security and military officers [...] in order to provide a minimum income for the demobilized combatants who fought in Chad's insurgencies" (p. 147). The case study of smuggled "tramol" - a much used painkiller in the Sahel - exemplifies and details the above mentioned points. While Marielle Debos published an excellent analysis of the same border-crossing in her book *Le métier des armes au Tchad* (2013, elaborated in the English version *Living by the Gun in Chad: Combatants, Impunity and State Formation*, 2016), locchi's use of Agamben's concept of "the state of exception" offers new perspectives to the "borderland's moral economy" (p. 140).

Chapter 7, the last chapter before the summing up of all chapters in the postscript, offers an interesting analysis of the main research topics in this book: "*on se débrouille*" and the making sense of the everyday life of ordinary people around the Lake Chad. Here the border passings at Nguéli are used to understand the managing of one's daily life in the Sahel. Different transactions, patron-client relationships, the mix of business, politics and personal relationships, the meaninglessness of using Western dichotomies ("private/public" or "formal/informal") are exemplified with detailed accounts from various happenings that occurred during locchi's periods of fieldwork at different locations around the Lake Chad, including in N'Djamena, during parts of 2014 and 2016.

The book's seven chapters cover a huge time span and a variety of empirical examples, all centred on the same main theme: how ordinary people try to manage their everyday lives around the Lake Chad. Though one could be critical towards the variances of timespan covered by each chapter or the difference of details offered in the separate chapters, an advantage for scholars (and students) interested in either the broader Sahel today, the rise of Boko Haram, the ways politics and business (and the personal and formal) intermingle, is that the book's chapters can be read as independent articles offering elaborated and comprehensive closed stories and analyses, each with a separate list of references at the end.

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