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representation of chiefs in the District Assemblies and the sub-district structure' by Joseph Ayee (University of Ghana); but there is also a non-academic review of 'The role of the chief in democratic governance' by the Chief Justice, George Acquah.

Apart from such general reflections, the book offers specific case studies on 'The role of music of the court' by Simeon Asiama, 'Liquor consumption' by Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'The evocative power of the poet at the court' by Esi Sutherland-Addy and a discussion of the procedures of succession for chiefs in the Upper East Region of Ghana by the co-editor, Albert Awedoba. Of contemporary interest are 'Chieftaincy and ethnic conflicts in northern Ghana, 1980–2002' by N. J. K. Brukum and the 'Decline of traditional authority: the case of the Ga Mashie State of Accra' by S. S. Quarcoopone. The conflict in the North has cost the Government of Ghana millions of dollars in security and peacekeeping. In the case of the decline of authority in Accra, the repercussions are felt in urban development. The relationship between chieftaincy and land has affected land acquisition for private estate development and public infrastructure, as can be seen in cases where chiefs have sold the same land twice, leading to litigation in the courts that can take years to resolve because of disputes over successions to titles.

The importance of this collection of essays lies in the fact that many of the contributors are native Ghanaians with direct links to their areas of research who, therefore, approach their topics with uncommon understanding. The other reason for regarding this as an important collection is the wide range of the case study material. Since the emergence of the Asante Kingdom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the historiography of what is today Ghana has been dominated by Asante's culture and political system (mainly reflected in the exploits and progress in statecraft of the Asantehenes and in their symbol of office, the Golden Stool). Early British writers such as T. Edward Bowdich (in his 1819 *Mission from Cape Coast to Asantee*) and their successors such as R. S. Rattray, the famous Oxford anthropologist, did a great deal to further understanding of nineteenth-century Asante. But as Kumasi and Asante continue to be the strongest point of reference for studies of chieftaincy in Ghana, it is through such publications as this one that the broader field is addressed.

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**Unfinished Business: Ethiopia and Eritrea at war**, edited by Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut. Lawrenceville, NJ and Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 2005. xxi + 294 pp. US\$ 29.95 (paperback). ISBN: 1-56902-217-8 (paperback).

This interesting collection of studies on the 1998–2000 conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and its aftermath will retain its value as a reference work on the background of the war. The chapters are largely descriptive, going into great detail and looking for explanations for why the war happened. Nothing much has changed since the publication of this book: the stalemate continues, marked by frequent verbal warfare between the leaders of the two countries and frequent warnings by UN spokespersons about the threat of impending war. Eritrea has consistently said that the 2002 border decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) should be implemented to the letter, and has steadily limited the monitoring possibilities of the UN peacekeeping force in the border zone. Ethiopia initially refused to fully accept the "final and binding" PCA decision, but since November 2004 has

acquiesced to it on condition that changes to the border can be made to reflect human realities on the ground. As of 2006, the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) force is slowly being scaled down in the absence of any prospect of the two parties moving closer to a solution. It is all highly ironic: after 1991 the two new leaders started out on good terms, having been allies in the war against the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia. Unpublicized, non-transparent agreements in 1991–2 and false assumptions about each other's economic and social policies, however, have led to misunderstandings. In May 1998 a border skirmish quickly escalated and a massive war was the result. It was an unexpected, incomprehensible conflict between two "brothers" – or at least close partners. But this often-heard view ignores the history of conflictual relations between the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1985–8, when the EPLF cut off supply routes to the starving population of Tigray and refused to have any dealings with the TPLF except on the battlefield. Much ink has been spilt on the absence of motives and on the faulty decisions of the leaders in the 1998–2000 war; however, the ambivalent relationship between the two authoritarian regimes and the lack of transition from military thinking to civilian thinking within the TPLF and EPLF after 1991 played a vital role.

This book, edited by the BBC World Service Africa editor Martin Plaut and the late LSE academic Dominique Jacquin-Berdal (who died aged 39 on 24 January 2006), has a number of insightful and sometimes quite personal analyses of the backgrounds of the conflict. After Jacquin-Berdal's very perceptive introduction, there are twelve chapters by specialists: academic researchers, journalists, and former policy makers. The authors are from a range of disciplines. The issue of the war and its aftermath is as controversial as ever, and opinions differ on the rights and wrongs of the parties and the possible ways forward. Some authors (Reid, Gilkes, Lata) explore the role of conceptions of ideology, nationhood, and ethnicity in the conflict, in addition to possible economic factors and aspects (Styan, Plaut). Others (Last, White and one anonymous author) pay more attention to aspects of regional power and prestige struggles. The economic, political, and human impacts of the war on the local populations and the wider region are also treated in detail (Plaut, Cliffe). In various contributions (Martin, Prendergast, Roessler), the limits of international diplomatic intervention become clear: the two governments did not heed their requests and advice.

No author succeeds in decisively pinning down the motives for the war, which is indeed very hard if not impossible. Economic policy and currency, different historical trajectories, and divergent conceptions about nationalism and state identity are all relevant, but they did not lead inevitably to war. Probably small details, cultural-psychological factors, and the democratic deficit of both political elites (making policy outside the scrutiny of a participatory democracy) led to the uncontrolled escalation of irritations and ultimately to military action. This conclusion emerges particularly clearly in Martin Plaut's interesting chapter on the background to the war, although he omits a few relevant details. For example, though he acknowledges that there were currency problems (p. 17), the point was that Ethiopia did not want to accept the 1:1 equivalence of the Eritrean *naqfa* with the Ethiopian *birr*, which would have seriously disadvantaged Ethiopia's economy. Inevitably some of the facts in the book remain contested; for example, it is suggested (p. 118) that after the war had started 21,000 Ethiopians left Eritrea 'voluntarily', but that sounds rather bizarre when we know of their treatment in Eritrea. On the whole, however, this book gives a wealth of information and is absorbing reading.

A number of useful appendices, with the texts of various proposed settlements since 1998 including the December 2000 Agreement between the two countries, conclude the book. It is likely – and the chapters in this book underscore it – that the dispute is unsolvable in current conditions and with the present leadership in both countries in place. Giving in is seen as defeat and loss of “national honour”. War is not feasible for either side – it would mean another huge loss of manpower and resources, and huge pressure on the regimes. Despite the economic and human costs involved, it seems that the will to end the dispute is also receding. In Eritrea the border dispute is one of the few remaining unifying elements among a population disappointed with the record of its leadership, while in Ethiopia many people are dissatisfied with the inconclusive end of the armed conflict and the “sell-out” after December 2000. Perhaps one has to accept that some conflicts simply have no solution except through time, when current elites will have left the stage and another generation can look at things afresh. This book is a valuable contribution towards understanding the relevant background to this intractable border conflict.

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**Oromia and Ethiopia: State formation and ethnonational conflict 1868–2004** by Asafa Jalata. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press and The Red Sea Press, 2005. 320 pp. \$29.95 (paperback). ISBN: 1-56902-246-1 (paperback).

This is a revised version of a volume which first appeared in 1993 with the same title; the earlier version, however, covered a slightly shorter timescale (1868–1992). The new edition has two major changes: Chapter 1 has been considerably revised and expanded, and Chapter 9 has been added: this new chapter depicts the current plight of the Oromo, who are facing ‘the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government and global tyranny’ (Preface). Readers of Asafa Jalata’s earlier works will not find much that is new in this powerful indictment of the internal domination of the Oromo people by successive Ethiopian governments. Nor will they be overly surprised to hear that conditions in the country have, if anything, worsened since 1993. The global fight against terrorism has provided the Ethiopian government with new strategic arguments (and international support) for crushing the Oromo nationalist movement – not just the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) – which is increasingly portrayed as “Muslim” and “fundamentalist” (p. 234), in spite of the fact that it is largely secular and heterogeneous in composition and motives.

Everybody in touch with Ethiopian events knows the complexity of the Oromo question in Ethiopia: the largest ethnic group in the country, amounting to some 30 million people, has not fared well in terms of power sharing and cultural-political inclusion in the life of the country. The book describes the process of marginalization of the Oromo, the expropriation of their land and wealth, and the debasing of their cultural values by the Ethiopian ruling elite, from centralizing monarchs through to recent socialist reformers and military autocrats (chapters 1–3). Asafa Jalata uses the political history of Ethiopia – from the tragic and mind-ravaging “revolutionary” changes brought by Mengistu and his policies of “encadrement” (1974–1991) to the “cosmetic” ones introduced by the new federal government – to illustrate the continuity of mainstream political and cultural attitudes towards the Oromo and their repeated exclusion from the Ethiopian political system (chapters 4–8). As a political pamphlet it is an impressive volume and no reader will read about the