stand the world more through near and distant encounters. Globalism, in this context, designates an evolving mirror where we can view the changing world, ourselves in it, without necessarily having the power to intervene in the occasion.

Through his many works that precede this book, Harrow has achieved the less-acknowledged breakthrough of representing African intellectual efforts globally, where current debates have demonstrated great concern with Global North and Global South intellectual relations. Coming from the Global North, but being a true Global South scholar, Harrow has demolished the wall of global intellectual prejudice, which the world's top scholars are silent about regarding the continent's intellectual projects or in which they adopt a purely 'outsider' position that demeans Africa as a geographical, cultural, and intellectual space. He has also pinpointed global issues such as migration and retrogressive cultures and made reasoned critiques of such cultures in the context of Africa's contemporariness. In modern times, such matters trigger massive responses from decolonization rhetoric; it is thus not a trivial matter that Harrow thrusts these to the forefront of this novel temporal-based theory of African cinema. I highly recommend this book. It offers an unmatched blend of theory and method, history and culture, past and present, Africa and the world, peoples and infrastructures, places and movements—all parameters that are useful in current global scholarship across diverse disciplines.

Notes

[1] Some of his other notable books in the field of African cinema include Trash: *African Cinema from Below* (Indiana University Press, 2013), *Rethinking African Cultural Production* (Indiana University Press, 2015), *A Companion to African Cinema* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), *Space and Time in African Cinema and Cine-scapes* (Routledge, 2022), and now *African Cinema in a Global Age* (Michigan State University Press, 2024).

[2] His film *Bamako* (2002) embraces a pro-revolutionary aesthetic against globalist colonial institutions, specifically the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

**Tom Gardner, *The Abiy Project: God, Power and War in the New Ethiopia* (Hurst & Company, 2024), 423 pp.**

Reviewed by
Ulf Engel, Leipzig

The *Abiy Project* is a journalistic account of Ethiopia's turbulent development between 2017 and 2023. After the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in August 2012, the country began to disintegrate. His successor, Hailemariam Desalegn, was unable to contain the protests and unrest, particularly in the Oromia region around the capital of Addis Ababa. After several states of emergency failed to achieve their goal, Hailemariam resigned in February 2018. Following weeks of negotiations between the four partners in the ruling coalition government, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a little-known Oromo party leader was appointed prime minister in April 2018: Abiy Ahmed. He immediately introduced impressive reforms, including the release of political prisoners, the appointment of opposition politicians to important posts, the

invitation of the diaspora to a national dialog, and the introduction of the principle of gender parity in the cabinet. In part, this process was driven by Abiy's philosophy of *medemer* (synergy). In addition, in June 2018, the ERPDF decided to fully implement the 2000 Algiers Agreement, which ended the 1998–2000 war between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the 2002 ruling of the United Nations on the border with Eritrea (which also meant giving up the claim to the city of Badme). The border was reopened, air traffic between the two capitals resumed, and the embassies were reopened. Abiy was praised as a visionary peacemaker. The international community was thrilled, and the prime minister was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2019.

In hindsight, the reforms during what has been dubbed the "Abiymania" period were the prelude to a systematic rollback of the influence of the EPRDF coalition's dominant partner, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). In November 2019, Abiy founded a new, nationwide party: the Prosperity Party. The general elections scheduled for August 2020 were postponed, allegedly due to the coronavirus pandemic. Freedom of the press was curtailed again, and human rights violations increased once more. The privatization of state-owned enterprises mainly affected the political economy of the TPLF. It then organized elections in the small region of Tigray. Developments escalated to the point that the two sides started a war in November 2020, which ended two years later with the defeat of the TPLF and the partial occupation of the region by forces from Eritrea and the Amhara region. While this conflict ended with a cessation of hostilities agreement, conflict between the government and separatists and insurgencies—mainly, but not exclusively, in the Amhara and Oromia regions—escalated and are still ongoing. At this point, Abiy had become what Tom Gardner has elsewhere described as the "disruptor-in-chief" (*The Guardian*, June 20, 2024).

Against this backdrop, Gardner presents a captivating, lucidly written biography of Abiy that can also be read as a contemporary historical analysis of Ethiopia. The British author (https://www.tomgardner-journalism.com) moved to Addis Ababa in September 2016 as *The Economist*'s correspondent, first for Ethiopia and later also for the Horn of Africa (2016–2022). On May 13, 2022, his press accreditation was withdrawn. He was PNG-ed as so many journalists in that country—that is to say, declared a persona non grata—and expelled within 48 hours. Since March 2024, he has been working from Nairobi, Kenya, as the *The Economist*'s Africa correspondent. He holds a Master of Science in African Studies from Oxford University (2014).

The book is mainly based on hundreds of interviews Gardner conducted during his years in Ethiopia. It is organized in 4 sections with 19 chapters. In part one, "Revolution," the rise of Abiy is recapped, including longer references to Abiy's involvement with Pentecostalism (he is a devoted member of the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church), his years in the national signals and intelligence agency Information Network Security Administration (INSA), and the emergence of Oromo nationalism. In part two, "Reform," the Abiymania and the rapprochement with Eritrea is narrated, together with the continued disintegration of the country into more and more regions. Part three, "Crisis," has two major themes:

the rise of Amhara and Oromo nationalism, and the parallel evolvement of the Prosperity Party and the beginning rollback of the reforms. And part four, "War," obviously reconstructs the "road to war with Tigray," the role of Eritrea in the fight against the TPLF, mass human rights violations committed by all sides (including ethnic cleansing), and international diplomatic efforts to end the war.

Most of my Ethiopian friends do not read Gardner because they think he is biased and does not do enough justice to the difficult challenges facing any prime minister in Ethiopia. The strengths of Gardner's account of Abiy and the country are doubtless in the emphasis on the religious roots of politics and the multiperspectivity the author develops on many issues. Gardner manages to provide detailed insights into the country's political dynamics of the last six/seven years that also go beyond some of the academic debates. Yet, despite this praise, a few critical remarks: Gardner has certainly benefited from the fact that political events in Ethiopia have become much easier to read by outsiders in recent years than they were 20 or 15 years ago thanks to the greater freedom of the press. But as he does not speak Amharic and much of the information available is only accessible in the national language, especially on social media, his information base remains rather limited. In addition, for my taste, Gardner too easily joins the prevailing discourse on "ethnic federalism," or "territorializing ethnicity," which finds its expression in the country's 1995 constitution and the central role of "nations, nationalities and peoples." The socially constructed role of ethnicity is particularly successful in Ethiopia—but it is still socially constructed and not primordial. In the end, Abiy remains an enigma; Gardner was never given a chance to talk to the prime minister. Writing history by analogy, Gardner describes Abiy as "a Pentecostal Putin, he is part-preacher, part-spy" (p. 3). And finally, the political economy of the conflict is omitted: a deeper understanding of past and current lines of conflict is only possible by analyzing how the various political factions and armed groups finance themselves. Admittedly, this is a big black box. All in all, this monograph offers great insights into the recent history of a person and a nation and polity undergoing dramatic transformation, but it also has its methodological limits.