

New Visiting African Research Fellow at LSE

*Dr Asnake Kefale is the 2013/2014 Visiting African Research Fellow based in the **LSE IDEAS**. He is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Relations at **Addis Ababa University**. I met with him on his arrival at the School to talk about his research.*

What are your research interests?

My interests lie very much in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. My background is in political science and international relations. I primarily focus on conflict management. The region has been affected by conflicts over the past century and this is a situation which we still face today. I look at the issues behind these conflicts and how institutions are involved in conflict exacerbation and resolution as well as the role of international actors.



When and why did you develop an interest in this subject?

I started studying politics at a young age in Ethiopia back in the late 80s and early 90s around the end of Cold War. The study of the Cold War was about ideological and geopolitical conflict. Although there were many regional conflicts in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia was one of the countries seriously affected by the conflicts involving the two superpowers. There were insurgency movements and civil wars. This situation motivated many students of politics to look at the reasons behind conflicts whether ideological, historical, resources, economic. This kick-started my interest in the study of conflicts in our region.

What conclusions have you come to as a result of your research?

There is no one straightforward answer. First of all, it is really important to understand what causes conflicts. Resolving conflicts requires several steps including – development of institutions, ideas, norms and a culture of compromise and learning from people at the grassroots level. At that level, people live effortlessly with religious and other differences. However, when it comes to state politics, it is very difficult to live with differences. I think we need to look at our historical roots and



appreciate some of the strengths in our African culture and develop institutions and principles to find solutions to the conflicts raging in the continent.

For example, the Nuer and the Dinka in what is today South Sudan historically lived together peacefully. However, divisions within the leadership of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) during the independence struggle on the basis of ethnicity brought conflict between the two tribal groups in what is now known the “doctors’ war”.

While at LSE, what will you work on?

I have always wanted to examine the role of regional institutions in the management of conflicts. Therefore, I will look at the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which was particularly successful during the 1970s and 80s in maintaining peace within its region. I seek to understand how it operates and compare it with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) which brings together eight countries in the Horn of Africa and is working to develop a system to manage conflicts effectively. IGAD is a young institution in comparison to ASEAN. I will look at how these institutions manage conflicts and how IGAD can learn from the experience of ASEAN. This South-East Asian body had a very strong stance of non-intervention in the affairs of fellow member countries. However, countries in the Horn of Africa practice mutual interference, that is, every country interferes in the politics of the neighbouring countries.

Why did you choose ASEAN?

Although ASEAN and the region now face many challenges, it helped earlier to ensure stability and the regional body was noted for the development of principles such as the “ASEAN Way”. While refraining from denouncing fellow leaders publicly, the organisation worked informally to resolve conflicts. For the most part, ASEAN nations also did not support insurgent movements operating in fellow member nations. Even if there is now more criticism about how ASEAN developed a “security community”, it was successful in maintaining regional peace and stability in comparison to other regional bodies.

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