Elders' Mediation and Formality in Central Ethiopia

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DESCRIPTION:
This anthropological study describes a specific form of mediation, as it is practiced in Ethiopia (Northeast Africa) by members of the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups. It introduces elders as male household-heads in their advanced ages, who settle conflicts and arrange marriages for the members of the junior generations. There are not only 'easy' cases dealt with, which one might assume to be too 'unimportant' for state courts or other juridical institutions but also aggravated cases that may affect the wider group or that have inter-ethnic dimensions. The study uses specific case studies of marriage, bride abduction, physical injury and homicide for illustration. Within the book, reference is made to speech-act-theory and the 'new ethnographic' approach related to it. Both rhetoric strategies and non-verbal means of communication are discussed, such as postures, gestures, spatial arrangements, numerical symbolisms, or the deliberate use of certain kinds of dress and of material objects. Special attention is paid to the use of ritual in mediation procedures. The book brings to light significant regularities that are inherent to the different types of elders' proceedings. Peculiar elements and phases can be distinguished that re-occur in all types of processes analysed in the study. This cannot exclusively be explained by reference to 'process', as a general idea of people negotiating law. It moreover hints to the existence of a formal 'procedure', which follows its own rules. Accordingly, a change of perspective 'from process to procedure' is suggested in the book's programmatic title.