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Review of

MESSAY KEBEDE, *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia,
1960–1974*

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MESSAY KEBEDE, *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960–1974*, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2008. pp. vii–235. Price: £ 40,–. ISBN-10: 158046291X; ISBN-13: 978–1580462914.

The late 1960s and 1970s were marked by student protests throughout the world. Sub-Saharan Africa was no exception: disruption of teaching, discussing the state of affairs within the universities and, last but not least, open confrontation with governments took place in many of the newly-independent States. While in the United States and Western European countries the political activities of university students have produced a number of interesting studies in recent years, Western public opinions have seldom been acquainted with student unrest and the struggles carried on in Africa, due among other reasons to the general neglect of the mass media.

The political activism of African students dates back to anti-colonial struggles, at home and abroad; it was the response of the educated élite to its marginalization within the colonial system and contributed much to the decolonization process. In the African context, historiography focused more on the role of students as an emerging élite and on their becoming effective agents of political change, a topic that has been the subject of a number of noteworthy contributions including Randi Rønning Balsvik's recent attempt to identify students as "a major driving force in the second liberation of the continent, that of democratization". Rarely, however, was African student activism able to challenge the State's legitimacy in the mid-60's and 70's, when universities were often closed due to student unrest. Ethiopia is a notable exception. The Addis Ababa University went through a prolonged crisis that gave rise to a strong student movement and students soon became a revolutionary vanguard. In few, if any, other African countries, did a student movement become so prominent in the domestic political realm as in Ethiopia.

In *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960–1974*, Messay Kebede examines students as the chief protagonists of the chain of events that led to the toppling of the government of Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase I. This study confronts political turbulence and tensions from a reconstituted methodological and epistemological framework in an attempt to provide further understanding of the phenomenon of radicalism and of the process that ended empire in Ethiopia.

Messay Kebede of the North American University of Dayton's Department of Philosophy, has carried out research into the *vexata quaestio* of the lack of prosperity and stability in both imperial and post-imperial Ethiopia, and published extensively on this topic. Here he turns his attention to contestations of power, ideological contexts, and the constraints of the political environment, providing space for an epistemological reassessment of the ways in

which dominant discourses on modernity have critically informed scholars' studies over the past few decades.

A wide range of sources have contributed to making Messay Kebede's work a thorough, in-depth study as well as a very readable book. Manuscript sources, archival documents, newspaper reports have been carefully scrutinized; selective personal interviews carried out in Ethiopia and abroad with famed activists of the period under study are supplemented by abundant information from secondary materials, including the fact that the author was an eye-witness to the revolutionary process, being himself part of that Ethiopian educated élite that participated in the student movement. Making use of these sources, the author contends that cultural dislocation is a mainstream matter in the study of contemporary Ethiopian political history.

Since the focus is on the élite which had gone through the Ethiopian school system, it is tempting to read this book in succession to Bahru Zewde's *Pioneers of change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the early Twentieth Century*, as the latter focuses on those who were exposed to Western education and who took a reformist stance in the process of Ethiopia's modernization, starting from the late 19th century.

Messay Kebede's study is coherently organized in nine chapters. In driving home some of the key points; the author sometimes tends to repetition. For instance, digging into philosophical and epistemological underpinnings, he often expresses an unlimited trust in the virtues of democracy and in its capacity to reshape dogmatic radical forces and steer them towards moderation, contrasting with what happened in Ethiopia: "Ethiopian students, too, would have hailed liberalism if they had not lived in a period of world history dominated by the Marxist-Leninist ideology" (p. 79). For the reviewer who is a historian, the prevailing feeling while reading passages like this, is that describing possible alternative scenarios is not the most appropriate methodological tool for assessing the past. Messay Kebede underlines the fact that the Ethiopian students' "imitative tendency precluded any attempt to integrate Marxism with Ethiopian traditional culture" (p. 89); therefore, their efforts were condemned either by their failure to indigenize Marxism as well as by elitism, which was a byproduct of the modern educational system and which induced the students to speak on behalf of the masses, thus turning themselves into revolutionary intellectuals.

Two minor criticisms can be made. The book overlooks the influence played by Ethiopian students abroad and misses the opportunity to integrate a gender dimension into the study. Minor references on the role of women are provided; the author limited himself to underlining radicals' complaints about the "low level of political consciousness of female students" in 1968 (p. 29), stressing how they were *en masse* pro-moderates.

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However, the book is a re-interpretation of Ethiopia's recent past that has direct resonance with the present political landscape: Meles Zenawi himself was a member of the radical Ethiopian student movement that initially supported the military, Marxist dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam – “remnants of the Ethiopian student movement of the 1960s and early 1970s”, as labeled by the author (p. vi). This motive comes out quite clearly on the cover of the book which pictures a lonely Ethiopian man, lying down beside a tree, resting on the shores of Lake Awasa, against a rather desolate background. The man seems to be reflecting on past events, alluding to the anguished course of the idealistic young intellectuals of his generation. This has also been recently put filmed by the Ethiopian director Haile Gerima in his latest film “Teza”.

Thus, the key value of this book for scholars and advanced students, who will be its main market, is that it expands on existing studies of the dynamics of change leading to the downfall of the imperial regime, providing valuable additional insights into the political evolution of the country that still echoes in the present.

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ALULA PANKHURST – FRANÇOIS PIGUET (eds.), *Moving People in Ethiopia. Development, Displacement and the State* = Eastern Africa Series. Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2009. XLII + 301 pp. Price: £ 45,-. ISBN: 978-1-84701-613-3.

There is hardly any part of Africa where population dynamics since the 19th century have been as intensive as in Ethiopia. Processes of “moving people” can either occur voluntarily or forcibly, yet in most cases the state is involved. Editors Alula Pankhurst and François Piguet have collected a broad spectrum of contributions on this topic which focuses on different types of development, drought-induced displacement as well as conflict and its socio-economic results. The articles presented in this volume stem from papers discussed at a conference held in January 2003 that was organized by the *Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists* in cooperation with the *United Nations Emergency Unit for Ethiopia*. A considerable amount of new findings and materials have been updated by most of the authors since then.

This book is composed of contributions from 16 authors and as such is divided into six major parts including the introduction and the conclusion. Part II deals with *Theoretical and International Perspectives*, Part III with *Devel-*