Book Reviews

The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy
Andargachew Tiruneh

This book is a chronological survey of the Ethiopian revolution, covering the period preceding its outbreak in 1974 up to the proclamation of the new constitution of 1987. It is the first major study of its kind written by an Ethiopian, and furnishes an important synthesis of the processes of political and social change and power struggle in a period of intense upheaval. The work is descriptive, detailed, and based on relevant contemporary documents, newspaper reports and policy statements. It treats all major political developments of the revolutionary period, from middle-class protests to army intervention to totalitarian state construction, and demonstrates that the seeds of the ultimate failure of Derg policy (especially of its chairman) were sown exceptionally early.

In a sense, this book closes (or one hopes that it does) a phase of scholarly political studies of this tragic revolutionary stage in Ethiopian history. In the 1970s and 1980s, several studies, some of them hopeful and supportive of the so-called 'first and real socialist revolution in Africa' appeared (see Markakis and Nega, Ottaway, Holiday and Molyneux, Lefort, Keller, Henze, Harbeson, and Clapham). These well-known works mainly focused on social and economic changes, new political structures and institutions and international relations, but they also assessed factional strife, the emerging dictatorship and ethno-regional conflicts. The development of the revolution, its political and economic impact, and its demise are by now very well-known, and publications about it have become commonplace. For several years now, little new substantive material has been contributed; rather, innumerable articles have content...
themselves by evaluating the data in a somewhat different ideological/theoretical light.

Along these lines, Andargachew's book closes a chapter in Ethiopian political history by providing a valuable summary of existing studies, while adding some interesting inside details and theoretical analysis that is helped by the benefit of hindsight. As such it is a major achievement and a very welcome reference work, despite occasional sloppy details and repetitive passages, which will be overlooked in this brief review.

The book consists of three parts. In Part I, the author seeks to explain the roots of 'King' Haile Sellassie I's failure, which created the political conditions for the take-over of the state by the only powerful institution in the country, the army. He mentions the relevant (commonly cited) internal and external factors undermining the monarch's power position and his legitimacy. Part II is about the crucial period of the revolutionary changes, initially hopeful, and the political power-struggle within the Derg terminating in the well-prepared, violent coup of Mengistu on 3 February 1977. These chapters offer an excellent survey, even for specialists, of the changing alliances and policy changes. Again, good use is made of newspaper sources and policy documents. Interesting is the reassessment of the EDU as a middle-class party (p. 124f.).

Part III is a study of the consolidation of power of the Mengistu-state. First, Andargachew examines the unfolding of the chairman's central power-strategy: the unscrupulous use of force. Such violence demonstrates, yet again, that institutional change was subordinated to the quest for personal power of an absolute dictator convinced of his ideologically correct course. Obviously, there is continuity in the autocratic style of governing and megalomania of the monarch and the dictator, but the amount, nature and use of destructive violence as a political means was perhaps unique to Mengistu. Second, the author gives a point by point overview of the build-up of the WPE/Mengistu state. The great skills of the regime in applying 'organizational operations' is discussed in detail: the pushing through of centrally made 'democratic decisions' through to the lower levels of government and administration (e.g. kebeles), hence allowing the people 'to voice their opinion,' of course with the central authorities retaining the last word (cf. p. 271-72). As an example, the author discusses the process of preparing and adopting the PDRE Constitution. 'Organizational operation' may now be seen as a regular aspect of Ethiopian political culture. The last chapter in the section, concerning the formalization of power, treats the work done by the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities (many results of which have been used with only few amendments by the post-1991 regime), the formation of the National Shengo, the build-up of the political organs of the PDRE, and provides a good picture of the neo-Stalinist political folklore of the Mengistu regime.

In the very long and sometimes repetitive Conclusion (pp. 299-343), Andargachew finally turns away from description to analysis of social causes, contributing factors and human agents in the Ethiopian revolution. He touches upon existing accounts on the post-revolutionary state and on some theories of revolution, e.g. of Skocpol (de-emphasizing the 'will and actions' of agents in the revolutionary process, and not according any decisive role to urban revolt), Trimberger (revolution as transformative action brought about from above, by high military and civilian bureaucrats), and Tilly (revolution as organized collective action with the aim of replacing existing power-holders and gaining of ultimate sovereignty over a population). Despite its length and the fact that the analysis is not sustained, this Conclusion is an interesting chapter about the factors of modernization, social and political change, class structure, and international relations which both materially and ideologically affected Ethiopia before and during the revolution. According to Andargachew, none one of the above-mentioned authors quite explain the specifics of Ethiopia's unfolding revolution, but all highlight crucial factors that assist in interpreting certain developments. Finally, Andargachew asserts, if one expects a revolution to be not just a political or socio-economic transformation, but a 'progressive' change improving the lives of the people (p. 343), then the Ethiopian revolution, as a movement was not a 'real revolution.'

After the manuscript for this book was completed, the historic change of government in Addis Ababa took place resulting in the Mengistu-regime being replaced by a coalition of ethno-regional rebel forces (May 1991). The author took the trouble to add a long Postscript (pp. 344-77) to the book, in which he gives an outline of the demise of the WPE-regime: the disastrous human rights record, economic problems (where he makes the
unacceptable remark that "the sacrifice of human rights might have been excused if the standard of living of the people had improved as a result of the new economic order"), and Mengistu's increasingly autocratic style of governing. He also pays attention to the international setting within which the final stage of the civil war was fought, and to the steady growth of the ethno-regional rebel movements. This book is not meant as an exhaustive theoretical analysis of the Ethiopian revolution as a socio-cultural and regional phenomenon. It is chiefly a study of political developments at the center, not of the regions, not the emergent ethnically based revolts nor the wider socio-cultural impact of the 'revolutionary transformation' of Ethiopian society. Such an analysis would have to delve more deeply into historical, social and cultural factors, the dynamics of ethno-regional conflict and the actual execution of socio-economic policies such as villagization, resettlement, etc. This would help in evaluating the revolutionary period not only as a radical political transformation but also more generally as a tragic episode in the unfolding of 'modernity' in Africa. As a follow-up to the Postscript, it is high time for serious studies on the last five years of the revolutionary period, the years of inexorable decline after the declaration of the 'People's Republic' in 1987 to be written. Such studies should also address the question of why the largest army in Sub-Saharan Africa lost a civil war and why the WPE-regime crumbled. Henceforth, it will not be enough to point to things like the morale, strength, organizational skill, etc. of the victorious opponents. Next to the effects of the self-destructive style of government of Mengistu (terrorizing and alienating everybody, up to the highest level), the successful tactics of infiltration and undermining by the adversary—which found fertile ground among the disillusioned higher echelons of government and army—and of their winning rural support must be scrutinized in detail. A problem might be that the new rulers, having found the archives and documents of the previous regime virtually intact, may removed or destroyed much evidence, in order for a new, probably equally biased, history to be written. In addition, after almost five years of EHADIG rule, a serious study of the achievements of this government and of its core party, the TPLF, has yet to appear. Be that as it may, Andargachew's book provides an essential background study for any further analysis of contemporary Ethiopian politics.

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Surviving Drought and Development: Ariaal Pastoralists of Northern Kenya
Elliot Fratkin

Until recently the study of pastoral societies has been a neglected field. The Sahelian drought of the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, gradually turned the attention of researchers towards pastoralists and the role they could play in national development. Unfortunately, many of these studies and projects were biased against pastoralists and the pastoral way of life. Pastoralism was seen as a backward and anachronistic system of production. The pastoralist was also seen as an avaricious herder, only interested in increasing the size of his herds causing desertification. In the last few years, a few other works have challenged this paternalistic view. Elliot Fratkin's *Surviving Drought and Development* is one such monograph. Since the 1970s, Fratkin has conducted research among the Ariaal, a livestock pastoralist group in northern Kenya. The book is divided into eight chapters. In chapters one to four, Fratkin mainly discusses various aspects of the Ariaal way of life such as their origin/identity, livestock production system, household and settlement pattern and age-set organization. In chapters five to eight he looks at the attempt of the Christian missions (both Catholic and Protestant) as well the UNESCO-IPAL (Integrated Project in Arid Lands) projects to carry out development work and their effect on the pastoralists of northern Kenya especially on the Ariaal and Rendille. Fratkin shows that both the missions as well as the UNESCO-IPAL projects were hastily carried out without taking into account the objective condition of the region and the needs of the pastoralists. Fratkin plausibly argues that although the missions had rendered important services in education, health and infrastructural development their short-sighted goal of "settling" the pastoralists in an area where the rain fall is less than 500 mm per year created the dependence of many pastoralists on relief-food and facilitated...