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## Review

ELLENI CENTIME ZELEKE, *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and Knowledge  
Production, 1964–2016*

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they do not necessarily correspond to the text. It would have been useful with as precise identification as possible of the many place names since many of them are not well known and may be difficult to locate in the future. It is also a problem that some place names are found in many parts of Yəfat. This is aggravated by some variation in spelling, which made me uncertain of whether it was the same place or two different ones. The bibliography is comprehensive, but consists of so many parts that it takes time to locate a source cited in a footnote. These shortcomings may be irritating for the critical reader who has to cross-check everything—to understand details and the resulting validity of the historical reconstruction. Others can just ignore them and enjoy this original account of the culture and history of Yəfat by a highly accomplished scholar.

Svein Ege, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskaplige universitet (Emeritus)

ELLENI CENTIME ZELEKE, *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and Knowledge Production, 1964–2016*, Historical materialism book series, 1570–1522, 201 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2019). 281 pp. Price: €135.00. ISBN: 978-9-004-41475-4.

The book under review reconsiders the history of the Revolution of 1974 and the student movement of Ethiopia. It is not a book of the history of the Ethiopian student movement or the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974. It is a book that argues in favour of a Marxist reading of history to analyse the student movement, while contextualizing and defining terms that were common to the movement then, and to Ethiopian politics today. Based on a selected group of secondary sources, Elleni strives to understand how Marxist and mainstream social science studies persist as tools of the educated in political struggles in Ethiopia all the while engaging with international and global movements. The social sciences are broadly those fields that study societies and relationships among individuals in those societies. The book explores the persistence of using social sciences from the times of the intellectuals of the 1960s to Ethiopian politics today.

Elleni's notable contribution with this book is in showing the lasting legacy of the student movement. This legacy Elleni presents as the act of using social sciences as a means to present solutions in Ethiopia, and the dominating belief that they should do this instead of being spaces to understand, criticize, question, and probe ideas central to Ethiopian experiences. According to Elleni, the social sciences have become tools used 'to produce a direct benefit for society rather than being understood as a space that opens up a critical and philosophical dialogue on social reality' (p. 10). Based on this, Elleni skilfully demonstrates how various social science theories and methods that were discussed and debated by

the students prior to the revolution have shaped the revolution, and the governments since then. She writes, ‘in 1974, and again in 1991, its ideas and some of its persons reshaped the Ethiopian state, setting up new social groups, new class dynamics, new land policies, and new and unique ways of dealing with ethnic and linguistic differences’ (p. 190).

The book engages with the time frame 1964–2016 and is structured in two parts. The first part deals particularly with the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 by drawing on selected journal writings of the student movement, in particular the journal *Challenge* which began publication in 1965. It investigates the English literature by authors who were influential prior to and after the revolution. This is particularly important as it reveals how student revolutionaries understood their roles in Ethiopia by gauging the internationally dominant political and economic theories around them in reference to their own realities as well as their engagement with modernization and what the consequences could be for Ethiopia (pp. 112–113). This part also includes a brief look into the May 2005 elections to show the endurance of this approach, namely, the need to bring about top-down national development by means of implementing the social sciences. This is an interesting addition as Elleni extends her argument that the elite of Ethiopia are constantly in dialogue with the global realities of the day. This is seen in her discussion of how members of the student movement of the 1960s were visibly adapting to the global political economic realities of the world by 2005, namely, discussing and accepting civil societies, and neoliberal ideas.

In the second part of the book, Elleni embarks on a discussion of literature dealing with Marxist critical theory in an attempt, she writes, to rescue critical theory from Eurocentrism and from a stagiest analysis of history without abandoning ‘a notion of social progress’ (p. 243). The strength of this section is that it lays out the reasons why Marxian critical theory could be a tool to successfully study the past without falling into the trap into which the social sciences have fallen. This, in part, refers to the first part of her book which shows how, in the case of Ethiopia, this trap is the belief that these theories must be used for ‘positivist’ social change. And according to the website of the book ([ethiopiaintheory.org](http://ethiopiaintheory.org)), this theoretical section is in line with the author’s intellectual engagement as a professor of African Studies at Columbia University with interests that span ‘vernacular politics in the Horn of Africa, Critical Theory, the Frankfurt School and the problem of constituting Africa as an object of study’.

Finally, something could be said as to the medium of language used in the journals and writings that were selected for discussion in the book. Readers are left wondering to what extent the social sciences as written and studied in English add to some of the issues raised by Elleni herself, namely, Eurocentric critical theory or a stagiest analysis of history. Is there more to say about studying a society in a language that it does not use? The book does not consider a single

work in Amharic or any other Ethiopian language for its analysis or discussion on these topics. It also does not consider Ethiopian philosophy writings on Ethiopian conceptions of time and history for its research. It seems worthwhile to consider writings in Ethiopian languages prior to and post-revolution for contextualizing the revolutionaries and their writings. This might even help us understand why the social sciences were predominantly dominated with research for purposes of positivist outcomes and what the relationship was between those engaging in the social sciences in this way and the rest of Ethiopian society. Let us hope for a succeeding book on this.

A book that developed out of a PhD research, it is written for individuals with knowledge of Ethiopian history and of modern Ethiopian historical developments, as well as for students of critical theory in the Horn of Africa. It is remarkable in demonstrating how to engage in the social sciences and guides readers to reflect on the indigenization of Marxist social science ideas in Ethiopia. Elleni's book highlights some of the consequences a positivist approach to the social sciences has had and continues to have in shaping Ethiopian politics, for example, in selecting which local issues, individuals, and ideas become dominant topics of discussion (p. 11). It seems Elleni hopes that those who study Ethiopia investigate (Ethiopian) history without presupposing that investigations and knowledge productions should lead to certain practical outcomes.

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SERAWIT BEKELE DEBELE, *Locating Politics in Ethiopia's Irreecha Ritual*, Studies of Religion in Africa, 49 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2019). xii, 209 pp. Price: €149.00. ISBN: 978-9-004-41006-0 (HB), 978-9-004-41014-5 (e-book).

The Irreecha festival is annually held in Bishoftu. It is a paradigmatic expression of the rise of the Oromo national identity. Since the 1970s the Oromo question has been a crucial factor in Ethiopian politics, being central to the land issue and the influence it had on the socialist revolution, the overthrowing of the military junta by ethnonational insurgency, the introduction of the multi-national constitution—with the full participation of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and other Oromo organizations—and the recent renewal of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the ruling coalition.

The traditional ritual annually held on the shore of Hooraa Arsid (Lake Aradi) by the Tuulama section of the Oromo is the central element of the Irreecha festival. From 1991 it grew from being a ritual of local relevance to an event capable of attracting millions of Oromo annually, from all areas and social clas-