

that workers grew increasingly cynical towards socialist ideology and began to leave the party ranks en masse by the second half of the 1980s.

In the GDR, however, the sources do not reveal the same tendencies clearly. The number of workers joining the party ranks in Carl Zeiss was growing throughout the two decades. The descriptions of working-class neighbourhoods in Jena indicate that communal life styles remained in place with no social atomization similar to the Hungarian scenario. Bartha recognizes these discrepancies, but chooses to downplay their importance by pointing to the unreliable nature of sources written under an oppressive regime. She points out the frustration with the scarcity of consumer goods among the workforce and suggests that behind the sterile party information reports workers were just as disconnected from the official rhetoric as was the case in Hungary. This seems plausible. Still, it does not present the reader with a clear idea about the framing of dissatisfaction on the shopfloor in Jena and its compatibility with the capitalist values.

The widespread practice of watching West German television and the spread of the Intershop chain with its luxury goods are not convincingly presented by Bartha as an equivalent to Hungarian-style consumption on the market. Consumption-oriented policy, aimed to raise the standard of living in a planned economy, does not necessarily equal market-stimulated consumerism. In the GDR more consumption was connected with centrally distributed social provisions, more investment into light industry, and better planning, not the spread of the private sector. At one point Bartha even introduces different names for the two contrasting models of welfare dictatorships (“reformist” in Hungary and “collectivist” in the GDR) but never manages to follow up this theoretical insight in her case studies. More focus on dissimilarities between the two “welfare dictatorships” and careful theoretical handling of consumerism in state socialism might have contributed to a better understanding of the break between the East German workers and their respective party.

These inconsistencies should not be used as a pretext for ignoring ambitious questions and the usage of overarching models when writing the labour history of eastern Europe. Eszter Bartha’s meticulous research sets the standards high and serves as a must-read for all scholars willing to go down the same road and challenge the dominant accounts of state socialism in the region still clinging to simplistic depictions of totalitarian regimes and the relentless heroic defiance of nations caught underneath them.

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BAHRU, ZEWDE. *The Quest for Socialist Utopia. The Ethiopian Student Movement c.1960–1974.* [Eastern African Series.] James Curry, Woodbridge [etc.] 2014. xvi, 299 pp. Ill. £50.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000583

To readers of Ethiopian history, Professor Bahru Zewde needs no lengthy introduction. His lucid and masterly *History of Modern Ethiopia*¹ has been a standard volume of

1. Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991*, rev. edn (Oxford, 2001).

instruction for academic courses in Ethiopian history and politics for decades, and will probably remain so for many more to come. After having chronicled the lives and works of early generations of Ethiopian intellectuals preoccupied with reformist modernization in *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*² he has recently turned his attention to what he identifies as their successors: the generation of radical Ethiopian students that emerged in the 1960s and that through incessant dissident work prepared the ground for the downfall of the imperial regime in 1974.

In 2005, Bahru took the initiative of bringing together former student activists for a 4-day workshop in Adama, 100 kilometres south of Addis Ababa. The retreat was a commendable initiative that resulted in a fascinating discussion, aptly captured in Bahru's edited volume *Documenting the Ethiopian Student Movement*.³ With the publication of this captivating work of oral history, anticipation was high for the upcoming "full history" of the student movement that was announced in its preface. It is this "full history" that is under review here. Unfortunately, however, the high expectations warranted by the initial publication are only partly met.

The emergence of the Ethiopian Student Movement, as it became known, can be traced to the enthusiasm with which the students of the University College of Addis Ababa welcomed the unsuccessful coup attempt against the imperial regime in December 1960. Throughout the 1960s, agitation and radicalism increased, and by the second half of the decade the Ethiopian Student Movement had adopted a consistently Marxist outlook. In 1969, agitation and student unrest led to a wave of repression that culminated in the assassination of student leader Tilahun Gizaw and the killing of several students, as soldiers stormed the Addis Ababa campus in the aftermath. In response to such open repression, the movement transformed. Many radicals moved abroad, and became more determined than ever to end imperial rule. A number of hijackings were undertaken by former student activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and once abroad the student radicals proceeded to set up political organizations that could spearhead the struggle. Inside the country student unrest continued unabated, and militancy spread from university to high-school students. The organizations formed abroad established structures among the urban youth while new Marxist-Leninist groups emerged from within. By 1974, when a popular uprising in urban centres led to the toppling of the imperial regime by a military committee, the student movement had divided around two poles that were to declare themselves the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (known by its Amharic acronym, MEISON) respectively. The divide would not be crossed. The former fought the military government in subsequent years while the latter established some level of cooperation with it. Both were eventually destroyed in the repression that followed.

The history of the Ethiopian Student Movement as outlined in broad strokes above has been told elsewhere. The most cited study to date is Balsvik's *Haile Selassie's Students*.⁴ Balsvik's narrative is carefully assembled and, while rich in description, it supports the

2. *Idem*, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens, OH, 2002).

3. *Idem* (ed.), *Documenting the Ethiopian Student Movement: An Exercise in Oral History* (Addis Ababa, 2010).

4. Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to the Revolution, 1952-1977* (East Lansing, MI, 1985).

conclusions drawn, however limited – that the radicalization of the movement was conditioned by the inability of the imperial regime to accommodate initially more moderate demands. Bahru finds Balsvik's volume improvable on two points: in terms of its neglect of the movement abroad, but more importantly in terms of its descriptive methodology and non-analytical treatment of the movement (pp. 4–8). Such objections may certainly be justified, but they also serve to raise the bar for the volume that carries them.

Bahru's narration of the evolving student movement in *The Quest for Socialist Utopia* is more comprehensive and adds some level of detail to Balsvik's account, particularly with regard to its attention to documents and publications generated by the student movement, and to events that unfolded in the years after 1969. In itself, this would be a highly welcome contribution to the historiography of the Ethiopian Student Movement, for the review of documentary sources is extensive and the discussion that these sources generate is informative. As the justification for this volume, however, is in the generation of novel analytical insights, it is on this point that the book must be evaluated; and indeed the major problem is that the narrative does not fully support the verdicts superimposed on it.

The country's political culture, the reader is told, produced a dogmatic movement (pp. 279–280). The adoption of a doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist outlook "was to all intents and purposes a transmutation of religious orthodoxy of the classical tradition [...] into a Marxist orthodoxy, or continuation of dogma by other means" (p. 138). But, as Bahru argues elsewhere, the Ethiopian Student Movement cannot be understood in isolation from the worldwide movement of students and youth that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Marxist-Leninist groups and movements emerged from this global movement in the most diverse places – the Red Guards of China, the Naxalites of India, the plethora of ML-groups of Europe and the Americas, the Sarbedaran of Iran, the Sholayes of Afghanistan, and the TKP/ML of Turkey are only a few examples. Considering the sectarian diversity of the societies involved here, it seems difficult to explain the attraction of Marxism-Leninism to Ethiopian students in terms of a specific religious orthodox tradition.

Bahru further argues that the two major legacies – both deemed entirely negative – of the student movement can be found in the establishment of an intolerant and acrimonious political culture and in the lingering power of the discourse of the national question (pp. 273–278). However, such a listing of the movement's legacies is selective. What remains unconsidered in this discussion, for instance, is the role of students in the popularization of the demand for agrarian reform and thus their contribution to the advent of the land reform of 1975 that established the contemporary land tenure system. Other major legacies may include the agency the students had in popularizing the demands for the ending of religious discrimination, for the secularization of the state, and for political democratization.

Despite the fact that Bahru is explicitly aware of the dangers of judgmentalism (pp. 264–265) other verdicts with no real basis in the text appear throughout the volume, particularly regarding a later period of time which is not covered by the narrative – that of the revolution. These include the claims that the EPRP's opposition to the military government "was justified", while its attitude towards other leftist groups apparently was not (p. 278); that the strategy of MEISON was "singularly naive" (p. 278); that the division within the civilian left is to blame for the "death of thousands of young Ethiopians" and "the ascendancy of the ethno-nationalist opposition" (p. 277); and that an

article written under the pen-name Tilahun Takele – probably by future EPRP General Secretary Berhanemeskel Redda – was responsible for initiating a process of “verbal violence” leading to physical violence that eventually “killed a generation” (p. 206). This is not to say that there are no bases for the statements above. There may very well be, but they are not presented in the text, so the reader is left having to take the author’s word for it.

In other places the text succumbs to a journalistic style of speculation. When discussing the fracturing of the movement it is argued that the membership, while utterly unaware of the real reasons for the division, responded to the machinations of the leadership with “a fanaticism that must have [left the] leaders as amused as they were gratified” (p. 249). This is a serious but unsubstantiated allegation. Most senior leaders on both sides of the divide paid for their principled political choices with their lives. There is no reason to think that any aspect of the situation occurred to them as anything but serious.

Part of the problem outlined above may originate in an attitude that is openly declared at the outset. *The Quest for Socialist Utopia* begins with a statement that reveals a deeply patronizing attitude – if not condescension – towards the objects of the study and sets the tone for the narrative that follows: the youth of Ethiopia is described as having assumed a burden “incommensurate with their intellectual resources”. Throughout, the radical students are characterized as benevolent but clueless. The fact that the author himself was once involved in the student movement does not alter the fact that patronization is an unfortunate starting point for any enquiry.

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