

⁴Examples include, David Albright, Communism in Africa (Bloomington, 1980); Thomas Henriksen, Communist Powers and Sub-Saharan Africa (Stanford, 1981); Mohamed El-Khawas and Luis B. Serapiao, Mozambique in the Twentieth Century (Wash., D.C., 1979).

⁵Though his analysis is unique, there has been an attempt to compare Amílcar Cabral's political thought with Gramsci. [Timothy W. Luke, "Cabral's Marxism: An African Strategy for Socialist Development," Studies in Comparative Communism 14/4 (1981)]. Since Cabral's theoretical foundations applies to all the national liberation movements in the former Portuguese colonies, it could be said that Luke's analysis can apply to the Mozambican struggle.

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René Lefort. Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution? Translated by A.M. Berret (London: Zed Press, 1983). pp. xii, 301, 2 maps. Price: \$10.50 paper covers.

René Lefort is a well known French journalist with solid credentials as a progressive analyst. Readers of Ufahamu who do not know his work in French may be familiar with his earlier sympathetic discussion of Mozambique that appeared in translation in Monthly Review, 28/7 (December 1976), pp. 25-39. In this book which was received very favorably by French reviewers when it was first published in Paris in 1981, Lefort sets himself the following task:

We have sought to include within a single book the Ethiopian revolution as it was in the north and the south, in the towns and in the countryside, for the 'bourgeois' citydweller and for the serf, for the Amharas and the Oromos. We have tried to do this by starting from the contradictions that Ethiopia's traditional society had failed to overcome, from the cracks opened in this frozen edifice by the emerging of a zone of modernity. We thus locate how the revolution percolated into these cracks and, by successive small advances, followed the fault line. Finally, we stop at the end of 1978, when the infernal rhythm of events slowed down with the appearance of a new political line and a new political order, incarnated less by an institution or a social group than by one man - Mengistu Haile Mariam. (p. 4)

He goes on to admit that while his approach is essentially external and necessarily reductionist, and that few of the facts are firmly established, he hopes that his basic conviction will be shared that "whatever may be the dénouement, whatever may be the judgment that it arouses, a revolution has traversed Ethiopia from one end to the other, and deserves more than scorn or ignorance." (pp. 4-5)

Lefort's success in attaining his goals is mixed. He certainly conveys his basic contention successfully, but I am not convinced that there are many who seriously doubt this assessment. Even so severe a critic of the Ethiopian military regime as John Markakis does not deny that a revolution has shaken Ethiopian society or scorn that transformation. The real bone of contention among both scholars and Ethiopians themselves is the character of that revolution and the course it has taken and will take in the future. Thus, it seems to me that while Lefort's principal conclusion may have been news to the French in 1981, it is really not very controversial today.

What is more arresting about Lefort's interpretation is his conviction that Mengistu Haile Mariam was throughout the course of events possessed of a clear vision of the direction that had to be taken by the revolution. Whatever one's ultimate position on the Ethiopian revolution, Lefort argues, it is not possible to dismiss Mengistu simply as an opportunist or as a military dictator. In particular, his identification with the southern peasants and the urban masses gave him a legitimacy and a popular base during the critical turning points of the revolutionary process that facilitated the triumph of his "line." This is a provocative and important thesis if it can be substantiated, but the evidence on which it is based is far too fragile to carry much confidence beyond the power of Lefort's argumentation. It seems to me, therefore, that Lefort's real contribution in this book is to have made this argument, even if he cannot demonstrate his conclusions convincingly.

Given the difficulty of establishing the "facts" of the Ethiopian revolution, the need to weigh the available evidence meticulously imposes special obligations on those who write about it. Part of my inability to endorse Lefort's interpretation of this momentous social upheaval is the opaqueness or absolute obscurity of some of his principal sources. With the exception of a few obvious examples (e.g., pp. 85-88), it is impossible, for example, to identify those observations and interpretations that derive from Lefort's personal experience of the events about which he is writing. Furthermore, there is the question of Lefort's dedication of his book to the pseudonymous J. Steiner, whose "personal notes form the backbone of this book." While I can appreciate Lefort's concern to

protect the identity of Mr. Steiner, without providing his readers with a single clue as to his friends identity (Ethiopian or foreigner? occupation? experience? politics?) and without ever indicating when he is calling upon these personal notes in his own detailed reconstruction, Lefort leaves us with no choice but to suspend judgment altogether or to be extremely wary about accepting any of his undocumented evidence. I hope that I am not being narrowly academic in making this criticism. Indeed, it is because I share Lefort's concern for arriving at a sympathetic and historically accurate appreciation of the Ethiopian revolution that I believe we must insist upon the most rigorous possible source assessment and verification. On this score, Lefort does not serve his readers well.

Finally, I think that this book could have profited from a stronger editorial hand. The translation reads as though it is perhaps too close to the original French and consequently does not make easy reading in English. The text is also extremely dense at some points and is not always chronologically clear. A map of Addis Ababa would have been helpful, too, especially for those who do not know where the principal landmarks of the city are located (see, e.g., p. 95). When all is said, however, Lefort's Ethiopia still stands as an important addition to the growing literature on the Ethiopian revolution, particularly for the interpretation that he seeks to establish regarding the visionary role of Mengistu Haile Mariam.

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