

part was an excellent one, as it can help us evaluate better the current French “politics of remembrance” in relation to the role that French-ruled Africa and African soldiers played in the liberation of France and the eventual Allied victory.

By completing the picture of WWII in the French empire, Jennings opens the door for a wide array of questions that can teach us not only about the specific subject of the book but also about the French colonial experience in general. More than anything, Jennings reminds us that while it is important to remember the contribution of the empire and its peoples to the war effort, we should not forget that this contribution was usually not voluntary. It was part of a long tradition of colonial repression. The striking similarities in the colonial context between two regimes with opposing ideologies—the Free French and Vichy—should not be blurred by the myths African politicians helped to encourage after the war and which they may not have believed themselves. Current French and African celebrations of the loyal empire and its part in the victory over Nazi Germany should therefore not obscure the fact that even the antifascist regime of the Free French was part of a repressive colonial system based on the same values it supposedly rejected.

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Yebio Woldemariam. *Ethiopia, An Ancient Land: Agriculture, History, and Politics*. Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 2016. xviii + 301 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$39.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-56902-426-3.

Ethiopia has been continually challenged by the historical trio of drought, famine, and wars, and today food security is still a major problem. Indeed, since the 1985 Sahelian drought, Ethiopia has attracted world attention for its devastating famines. Combining consultancy and research experience and focusing on the correlation between the historical and political factors, Yebio Woldemariam provides an excellent account of agricultural production in Ethiopia since medieval times. Starting with a history of famine, the author states that the numbers of “people requiring food aid [have] been increasing exponentially since the 1960s,” and he names Ethiopian feudalism and its “intricate relationship between land tenure system and the producers” as one of the factors. He argues that “the provincial lords continued to extract both commodity and labor surplus at whim,” leading to “the ultra-parasitic relationship” that significantly affects agricultural production (38). Continued warfare, natural catastrophes like locust invasions, and dependence on cereals have also hindered the “emergence of technical inventions” (50) that dramatically improved

agricultural production in other parts of the world. Even the relatively late, limited adoption of the wheel had significant impact on Ethiopian agriculture.

It is interesting that despite the radical land reform of 1975, no major changes occurred in agricultural production. The reform made land available to the peasantry, but it still had significant drawbacks. Although universally welcomed at first, the policy was not effectively executed and failed to produce any major changes in the lives of the producers. A small group of influential members of the regime administered the reforms and refused to recognize the right of citizens to operate commercial farms of any sort. In addition, their policies included the hugely unpopular resettlement programs by which the government moved close to half a million peasants from their ancestral land to make way for the construction of socialist enterprises, cooperatives, and state farms. As a result of the resettlement, by mid-1988 over 12 million people from the north were forced into villagization centers in the southern and western parts of the country. Lack of skilled personnel, weak linkages between agricultural extension and research, and small landholdings have also worked against surplus production.

The country is still unable to feed itself despite improved agricultural policies since the fall of the revolutionary regime. Food security did not improve with the coming to power in 1991 of the current government, and the country is still dependent on food aid. The author states that “Ethiopian agriculture has been as archaic as one can guess.” The plow and the yoke remain the primary tools, and “it is unthinkable to expect well-ventilated granary silos in rural towns or greenhouses producing off-season” items (149). In an attempt to facilitate a rapid response to food shortage, the current government has focused on building warehouses without considering food production as a whole, and the food aid industry is even more active today than during the 1985 famine.

While the book provides some plausible explanations for the lack of a breakthrough in agricultural production, it does not mention all of the relevant factors. Ethiopia has had ongoing relationships with Europe at least since the first half of the nineteenth century, importing many modern weapons but too few modern agricultural tools. Increasing numbers of European explorers, diplomats, and missionaries in Ethiopia as well as Ethiopians studying in Europe did not result in substantial agricultural innovation and production. A more detailed attention to the controversial issue of land grab and more robust conclusions would also have strengthened the book’s argument. Nevertheless, *Ethiopia, An Ancient Land* is a fascinating must-read for policymakers, researchers, and ordinary readers interested in Africa.

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