

*Landnahme*, go unnoticed, even though they address directly the systematic place of violence throughout the trajectory of capitalism. Still, such debates will disregard only to their detriment Gerstenberger's momentous contribution.

*Reinhart Kössler*

Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, Freiburg  
 Windausstr. 16, D-79110 Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany and  
 Institute of Reconciliation and Social Justice, The University of the Free State  
 Internal Box 125, PO Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa  
 E-mail: reinhart.koessler@abi.uni-freiburg.de  
 doi:10.1017/S0020859017000499

WELDEMICHAEL, AWET TEWELDE. *Third World Colonialism and Strategies of Liberation. Eritrea and East Timor Compared*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016. xviii, 348 pp. Maps. £82.00; \$129.00. (Paper: £19.99; \$32.99.)

The struggles for liberation in Eritrea and East Timor have never before been the subject of a scholarly comparison. In spite of that the parallels are suggestive. To begin with, the two processes partly overlap in time. Eritrean armed groups took up the struggle against Ethiopian dominance in the 1960s, eventually achieving military victory in 1991. East Timorese resistance to the Indonesian invasion commenced in 1975 and ended with Indonesia's withdrawal in 1999. The two cases also represent a struggle against secondary colonialism, a key concept in Awet Weldemichael's book. The author challenges conventional master narratives of modern history, in which colonialism tends to be defined as the West's rule over the rest. In fact, as he argues, African and Asian powers (apart from the pre-1945 Japanese empire) have also sought to satisfy national (or elite) interests by occupying weaker entities in the region with the silent approval of larger world powers. That Ethiopia and Indonesia had themselves been colonized (briefly, in Ethiopia's case) did not stop them from implementing policies that were every bit as colonial and imperially grandiose as those of Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A postcolonial theoretician such as Edward Said holds that imperialism means the dominance of a metropolitan centre over distant territories, whereas colonialism is almost always a consequence of imperialism. Weldemichael, on the other hand, argues that this calls for qualification. Colonialism may equally well occur in adjacent territories, and secondary colonialism is not necessarily driven by capitalism in the Marxist sense. While secondary colonialism shares many features with classical colonialism, such as the imposition of an administrative structure, language, and ritual, there are also interesting differences. Set in a post-World War II political landscape, it relies on a system of strategic alliances with larger powers – Ethiopia with the Western powers and later the Soviet bloc, Indonesia with the US and its allies. Moreover, Ethiopian and Indonesian colonizers, unlike European ones, sought to erase the identities of the occupied areas by replacing them with their own, eschewing the bifurcated state of “citizens” and “subjects” found in late Western colonial rule. The secondary colonial powers insisted that Eritreans and East Timorese were or had become Ethiopians and East Timorese. This was also anchored by obscure historical references to the ancient Ethiopian monarchy, the allegedly Insulindian-wide Majapahit,

and so on. Weldemichael does not mention that there is substantial ongoing research on the colonization by European states of original peoples in the near area, such as the Sami, which points to the strong similarities in methods and aims of colonialism regardless of whether the metropolitan centre was distant or close.

Over the course of eight chapters, Weldemichael provides a systematic comparison of the various stages of colonization and resistance in Eritrea and East Timor. He follows the emergence of revolutionary movements in the two regions, their early setbacks, and the forging of grand strategies that eventually led to their liberation, under rather different circumstances. Finally, the problems of post-liberation politics are briefly discussed. Given the ambitious scope of the work, there is precious little about their “primary” colonial backgrounds; the obvious historical parallels between the two, being colonized by South European second-rate powers, are not expanded on. More is said about the “Cold War curse”. Superpower rivalry after World War II gave Haile Selassie’s regime a geopolitical significance in north-eastern Africa, which enabled it to acquire the former Italian colony without international protests, also helped by Ethiopia’s standing as a symbol of African freedom. Meanwhile, the anachronistic Portuguese colonization of East Timor was tolerated as long as Portugal was a vital strategic ally of the US. However, when this role was shaken after the 1974 Carnation Revolution and Western interests in East Timor seemed threatened, American and Australian politicians had no qualms about letting the *Orde Baru* (New Order) dictatorship of Suharto off the leash, and permit the latter to round out the vast Indonesian realm with the tiny half-island. The major difference is that Eritrea was gradually absorbed by Ethiopia, culminating in annexation in 1962, whereas East Timor was annexed through the notorious invasion of November 1975.

The following chapters trace the build-up of a homegrown resistance movement in the two territories. Initially, armed resistance took inspiration from successful guerrilla actions in other parts of the world. The first Eritrean movement ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front) drew on the anti-French struggle in Algeria as a model, while the FRETILIN (Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente, or Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) movement of East Timor was inspired by rebellions in the Portuguese colonies in Africa. As Weldemichael points out, both were initially failures – for partly different and partly similar reasons. The ELF had an inadequate understanding of the incoherent political and cultural landscape in Eritrea, and tended to be dominated by Muslims in spite of the strong Christian presence in the territory. Moreover, during the 1960s resistance was fractured among several rival movements, enabling the Ethiopian regime to hold on to the bulk of the territory. The Indonesian invasion of East Timor, meanwhile, was facilitated by the deep division between political factions, and FRETILIN came to lead the resistance. The establishment of *bases de apoio* (support bases), which organized the population of liberated areas in order to support the guerrilla struggle, proved unable to stop the massive might of the Indonesian military.

Instead, a reorganization of resistance took place in the 1970s in the Eritrean case, and in the 1980s in the East Timorese. Both were led by charismatic figures with new organizational ideas. In Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki led the new EPLF (Eritrean People’s Liberation Front) movement to success by tight organization and the centralization of command. This was coupled with an ideology that stressed egalitarianism, women’s rights, an inclusive attitude to ethnic minorities, and land reform. The previous rebel movements were heavily marginalized, and partly defeated by the EPLF in an outright war. By 1984, the EPLF was able to score major military victories over the by now Marxist and Soviet-backed Ethiopian regime. An asset in comparison with tiny East Timor was the relatively sizable

area of Eritrea, which impeded Ethiopian operations. The flickering light of East Timorese resistance was revived with Xanana Gusmão at the helm, albeit in rather different circumstances, as the FRETILIN adopted a more scattered and flexible strategy. The guerrillas could not hope to win strategic battles against the colonizing power, as was the case in Eritrea, but it could persevere in the hope of a political solution – an entirely correct prediction, as it turned out.

In both cases a diplomacy of liberation was launched. As expressed by Weldemichael, referring to Clausewitz, if war is one continuation of human interaction by other means, diplomacy is another. Eritrean groups in Europe and North America kept the issue alive in international circles, and an Eritrean Relief Association based in Lebanon was active in procuring physical support. Meanwhile, the brutality of the Indonesian occupation made for international support groups and a substantial output of literature on the East Timor issue. Moreover, the dramatic global alterations in the late 1980s and early 1990s created new geostrategic preconditions for liberation. The very substantial military equipment provided by the Soviet Union was wound down under Gorbachev, leaving the unpopular regime in Addis Ababa increasingly vulnerable. At the same time, the waning of a perceived communist threat in eastern Asia and the stabilization of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) made an Indonesian-occupied East Timor an embarrassment rather than an asset in Western strategic eyes.

Lastly, Weldemichael argues that the way for the two territories to achieve eventual independence in the 1990s went via Addis Ababa or Jakarta. It was a matter of conquering the conquerors, albeit by different means. The EPLF, joining forces with a number of Ethiopian rebel groups, was instrumental in overthrowing Haile Mengistu's Marxist regime in 1991, in the process securing full independence for Eritrea. In Indonesia, the fall of the Suharto regime after a third of a century, and the immediate launching of democratic reforms, paved the way for the referendum in 1999 which, although soaked with blood, led to Indonesia's withdrawal and a UN transitional administration. By this time, many educated Indonesians had accepted the forlorn nature of the occupation. An illustrative point not mentioned by Weldemichael is that Indonesian-East Timorese official relations (unlike Ethiopian-Eritrean ones) have been generally good in recent years, and that Jakarta has even favoured East Timor's candidacy for ASEAN membership.

The author argues that Ethiopian and Indonesian counterinsurgency was doomed from an early stage, being unable to decisively defeat the guerrillas in spite of their propaganda bluster. The Vietnam War inevitably comes to mind. Strangely, however, the author makes little of the strategic parallels with Vietnam. The book is well-written and illustrates clearly the striking similarities between the two trajectories of liberation, as well as the obvious differences. Although primarily an expert on Eritrean politics, Weldemichael has a good grasp of the literature on East Timor and has made extensive use of archival materials as well as interviews for his two cases. As a theoretically grounded discussion about secondary colonialism and modern liberation movements, this work deserves attention.

*Hans Hägerdal*

School of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University  
 Linnaeus University, 351 95 Växjö, Sweden  
 E-mail: hans.hagerdal@lnu.se  
 doi:10.1017/S0020859017000505