

PART ONE AND PART TWO

BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

Messay Kebede,* RADICALISM AND CULTURAL DISLOCATION IN ETHIOPIA, 1960 – 1974, Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2008. [PP 235] [US \$75]

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"Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Æthiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world, by which they were forgotten."

Edward Gibbon**

PART ONE

I. Introduction

It is quite puzzling that a rigidly autocratic and legendary "Dynasty" of great antiquity that draws its legitimacy from over three thousand years of mythical origin in an ancient traditional society could be toppled in a blink of an eye and be replaced by a militant radical Marxist-Leninist generation/group the World had ever known next to Cambodia's genocidal Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge. How could a traditional people, mostly Orthodox Christians, up to seventy percent of the population, turn their back on their own accepted "Divine" order of imperial dynastic system for a "Godless" Military Regime run by individuals literally scraps of society? How did such calamity happen to the "People" of Ethiopia some thirty five years ago?

Messay Kebede in his new book, the subject of this review, is providing us valuable answers to such questions I have asked above. There is no doubt in my mind that Messay Kebede is one of the few Ethiopians whose dedication to their profession and whose contribution to the great reservoir of human knowledge is monumental. I suggest that one should consider it a singular mission to read Messay's recent book if one wants to understand and acquire a depth of knowledge about the evolution or development (processes) of Ethiopia's puzzling revolution and the overthrow of its *Ancien Régime*. I feel privileged in writing this review and commentary on Messay's latest master work, his book Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960 – 1974. I am wholly captured by the beauty of Messay's writing (language), and fascinated with his original theories offered as foundations to explain even some of

the most bizarre activities of Ethiopian elites during the fourteen years of turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s—the timeframe of Messay’s book.

I am used to writing more than I need to, often enough expressing myself in more ways than necessary. By contrast Messay writes with equanimity, but with elegance. I am even tempted to say that he is Spartan or laconic at times. To wit, consider the following succinct sentence illustrative of both elegance and pointed expression: “The students who revolted were not the remedy for Haile Selassie’s bankruptcy; they were rather its exasperated expression.” [Messay, 69] In such a short sentence, he expressed a point of view better than others attempting to express similar views in a couple of pages.

Messay’s book is deceptively short, a mere two hundred pages of text and thirty five pages of valuable and extensive endnotes, bibliography, and index. It is packed and packed some more with serious scholarly writing. The book is extremely well written, and at times pure poetry and a pleasure to read just for its sheer eloquence. In terms of content, it is not a book for the faint hearted; it is demanding of full attention and extensive prior reading of a wide range of subject matter and Ethiopian history. I have not been so immersed and rewarded with a book in a long time as I was/am with Messay’s book. This review is not simple accolade to encourage a fellow Ethiopian in his work; in Part Two of this review, I have pointed out what I consider to be serious flaws and oversights in Messay’s book. Nevertheless, I am extremely proud of Messay Kebede for his exemplary scholarship, insights, courage, and originality.

It may indeed be foolhardy on my part to attempt in a book review to capture all of the complexity of Messay Kebede. In Messay what we have is a person who is very hard working, brilliant and profound—a person who thinks and writes in layers and not in linear manner. The book I am reviewing is not an isolated event, but a work that clearly shows cognitive continuity, extension, and refinement on Ethiopia’s social conditions, from Messay’s earlier books and articles, for example, from his remarkable book Survival and Modernization—Ethiopia’s Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse, (Lawrenceville NJ: Red Sea Press, 1999). He brought into his writing a three dimensional perspective to little understood Ethiopian students revolutionary zeal with such monumental effects on our lives. Thus, my review of Messay’s book would only be considered as a starting point, for one has to read the book itself to benefit oneself to a great depth.

Bear with me, and I must ask your indulgence and tolerance reading this review and comment, for I have inserted my own life story and private thoughts intermingled with my review of Messay’s book. Although I may sound self absorbed and narcissistic in doing that, there is a purpose in making such extensive references to my own life and experiences in reviewing Messay. It is true that Messay in his book covers a time period that I lived through with most of the characters and through most of the events that are the subject matter of his book. I hope you will let me off the hook if I beat up myself first for focusing on some incidents in my life in this review. Thus, I share with you a quotation on narcissism of the highest order—a comment about President

Theodore Roosevelt by a relative: "When Theodore attends a wedding he wants to be the bride and when he attends a funeral he wants to be the corpse." After all, Messay's wonderful book is our biography.

I strongly suggest, even insist, that Ethiopians, friends of Ethiopia, government officials, and others make time to read this great book, in order to understand Ethiopia and Ethiopians. For the Ethiopian student anywhere in the World, I recommend that he or she take extensive notes at the time of reading the book with a dictionary and an encyclopedia nearby.

II. Timeline and Relevance

The first question I ask when reading a book is how much I would be able to learn from such a book, especially when a book is a serious work dealing with subject matters dear to me. The question of scholarship and relevance is understood in my query. Some books are overwhelming in their scope and depth that I keep as a referential text, while others are read and promptly tossed aside to collect dust. I cannot emphasize enough how relevant and timely this book by Messay is to us Ethiopians and to those who are genuinely interested in our future.

Messay's book is about a crucial time in the lives of thousands of Ethiopians [quite a few departed souls, and a few more now fast aging] who were either in college in Ethiopia or elsewhere in the World and/or young graduates starting out in their professional careers during the tumultuous period of 1960 to 1974. To some extent it is a biography of a generation of Ethiopians who shared in the process of Haile Selassie's "modernization" of an ancient and highly self indulgent society that finally was caught and swept along like many other young nations by Marxist-Leninist ideology—the deluge of the 1974 military takeover. I suppose the book is no less a journey of discovery and reflections for Messay as well. This is one of the few books written by Ethiopians addressing the Ethiopian Students Movement as a generic subject. It is invaluable and a jewel of great worth.

I have read two seminal works by two individuals who participated in the 1970s Ethiopian revolution from opposing camps: Kiflu Tadesse's The Generation, Part I (1993) and The Generation, Part II (1998), and Tesfaye Mekonnen's Yederese Lebaletariku (1992). These are books essentially recording the process of change resulting in the overthrow of the Ethiopian Aristocracy and the infighting that took place by different political organizations and the Ethiopian military forces for power that resulted in the most horrible atrocities in the thousands of years of the history of Ethiopia. There is no doubt that both books were partisan efforts to highlight their respective organization in the best possible role during the struggle for progressive and fundamental changes in Ethiopia. In a way both writers (books) are apologists attempting to minimize the destructive role played during the period of the skirmish for political power in the wake of the overthrow of the ageing Emperor.

By a fair estimate of international observers, such as the Human Rights Watch, (Alex de Waal, Evil days : thirty years of war and famine in Ethiopia, New York: Human

Rights Watch, 1991) close to half a million Ethiopians lost their lives from the time the program of annihilation that culminated in the orgies of murders of the Red Terror was implemented starting in early September of 1976 to the end of 1978 to the end of Mengistu's regime in 1991. In the heat of the Red Terror alone over a hundred thousand Ethiopians were murdered in a span of a fortnight. In the two books mentioned above, we read, for example, Kiflu Tadesse pushing the date of the beginning of the Red Terror to early 1976 implicating Meison Members as co-planners and executors with the Derg during the Red Terror, whereas Tesfaye Mekonnen tries to exonerate Meison by claiming that the Red Terror took place much later than is claimed by Kiflu Tadesse, sometimes in November of 1977, a time that is calibrated to show that Meison had already parted company with the bloodthirsty Mengistu and his Military butchers. I do not want to revisit such criminal behavior of well known political figures; some still actively seeking power as members of this or that political organization including the EPLF, EPRP, MEISON, OLF TPLF, et cetera.

The two books I mentioned above narrate the existential aspect of our suffering, often as innocent bystanders and/or as ignorant pawns, while undergoing an upheaval of social change with the worst form of violence and of biblical proportions. Messay's book is providing us with acutely missing literature on important aspects of the period prior to the deluge, the build-up to the revolution in question—mainly giving us both theoretical content and hermeneutics enriching our understanding of our traumatic period where millions of us truly suffered and still continue to suffer.

Messay's reference to a number of authorities to augment his ideas is very impressive, indeed, which attests to his first rate scholarship. However, I find such references more of an obstruction, like potholes on a paved street, rather than being helpful—they tend to interrupt what otherwise is a smooth ride. Even if I accept the references to Ethiopian authors, especially Aleqa Asres Yenesew and Addis Hiwet as relevant and on point, nevertheless, I am not enthusiastic about Messay's extensive references to non-Ethiopian authorities. First and foremost, Messay does not need validation for his views from such cited authorities because he is the "authority." There is no need in this case to cite far less knowledgeable individuals to strengthen one's arguments. If it is not for characteristic Ethiopian humility, Messay does not need to cite anybody to support his views. He has presented his views in great depth and profundity, shaped by his first rate schooling and years of experience as educator and researcher. His views are presented to us, to say the least, elegantly and clearly, well reasoned, and grounded in Ethiopia's reality.

III. Critical theories and hermeneutics

Messay seems obsessively inclined in providing theoretical foundation on the chaotic activities of the Ethiopian elite, and in particular those engaged in social engineering in the 1960s and 70s. I have a distinct feeling that Messay in another life would have been an architect, for it seems in his intellectual makeup to see structures or rational interrelationships in between groups, episodes far remote, and even unlikely events as a matter of course. Whether it is the limited radical but highly volatile behavior or activities of students at Haile Selassie I University or the more sedate no less

transformative massive European and American social dissonance during and after the Vietnam war, for Messay both are worthy of looking closely and giving theoretical basis. It is in this sense of finding motives, patterns, rational, even in the most chaotic of situations that distinguishes Messay from most thinkers and writers on the baffling history of the people of Ethiopia of our time.

There seems to be some similarities between Messay and some famous socio-political theorists, such as Samuel Huntington and Theda Skocpol (both of Harvard) in considering and grounding social phenomenon in what they call “historical institutionalism” in its expanded form to explain the dynamism in the informal, the revolutionary, or the unruly. Messay devoted his attention precisely to understanding such realities of “Modern” life in Ethiopia through his first hand experience, as I critic him also from a first hand experience having undergone a similar route. This current trend in political science of studying all threads of activities in a society in socio-economic and political processes is distinctly different from the traditional approach of focusing on the “state” and its functionaries “personalities” to understand socio-political developments. It is in this sense that I suggested the proximity of Messay’s approach in discussing and writing about the social dynamics of changes to that of the school of “historical institutionalism.” As a matter of fact, I see this trend of the “historical institutionalism” approach closely related to the approach adopted by philosophers of the “Modernists” as well, such as Jurgen Habermas. Hermeneutics is the handmaid of such thinkers although there had been challenges to such association as part of the midwifery of “critical theory.” I shall devote considerable time with Messay’s philosophical approach and lying of foundation in Part Two, section VII. Cause and Effect: Messay’s philosophical underpinning.

It is possible to summarize Messay’s primary often provocative points into several distinct premises using mostly my own phrasing and words, but along the way horribly simplifying Messay’s very complex ideas as follows:

- 1) Ethiopian University Students imposed themselves on Ethiopia as leaders for revolutionary political and economic changes in Ethiopia elbowing out both farmers and workers of Ethiopia. [Messay, 19-23]
- 2) Ethiopian “educated” elites rejected traditional Ethiopia’s Culture to the detriment of Ethiopia’s modernization. [Messay, 72-75, 99-102]
- 3) The Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church had been sidestepped by Ethiopian University Students revolutionary leaders and by the majority of the students. [Messay, 59-60, 70-83]
- 4) Ethiopian Students movement was essentially Leninist as opposed to being Marxist. [Messay, 23-25, 95-97]
- 5) Ethiopian Students did not have meaningful connection with the people and communities of Ethiopia. Ethiopian students have arrogantly pushed aside traditionally trained Ethiopian scholars. [Messay, 59-60]
- 6) The revolutionary political philosophy pursued by Ethiopian students was not a consequence of economic hardship, but because of social alienation due to the education bubble created by Haile Selassie’s education policy. [Messay, 48-49, 95-97]

- 7) The radicalization of Ethiopian students was not due to rational or dialectical process but psychological of deeply felt feeling of guilt for rebelling against inapt “fathers.” [Messay, 143-154, 165-186]
- 8) Ethnicity as pursued currently by Ethiopian “educated” elites is reactionary to a failed revolutionary Marxism-Leninism attempted social changes. [Messay, 154-163]
- 9) Haile Selassie’s education system failed Ethiopia and is the cause of the radical revolution that destroyed his aristocratic Government and his Dynasty, and seriously harmed the economic and political development of Ethiopia. [Messay, 86-95]
- 10) The future of Ethiopia is dependent on how far we can reverse the present trend of elitism, and reintroduce our tradition and culture appropriately correcting what need to be changed in an effort to modernize Ethiopia with an “upgraded nationalism.” [Messay, 193-196]

What is interesting and often times original and profound is how Messay reasoned to reach such conclusions I summarized and simplified above. However, such summaries of Messay’s ideas will not do justice to the subtlety of his reasoning. Often, I have come across surprisingly original and unambiguously constructed sentences that totally throw a different light to processes in the student movement of the period that I was also caught up in the sweep of the time as a student at Haile Selassie I University from 1964 to 1971. Messay’s main thesis is developed on the basis of a particular form of psychologism of Freud’s concepts of psychoanalysis—claims of suppressed and delayed responses due to feelings of guilt that Messay has identified in various forms, and the most obvious being the famous Oedipus Complex. “Western education was doing nothing less than reviving the Oedipal conflict.” [Messay, 143] Messay saw such behavior of radicalism as characteristics of all individuals who had rebelled against their parents’ failure to challenge the power structure, and thereafter developing shame and guilt for beating up on weak and inadequate parents. Such students overcompensated their paralyzing feeling of guilt by developing or sublimating into the most radical form of “self sacrifice” to be found in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, an atonement of sort to serve the exploited and the poor masses of Ethiopia.

“The concept of political patricide best describes the phenomenon in that it points to the disturbance of generational succession by a desire seeking an improper dethronement, since what used to be an outcome of evolutionary transfer is thought of as a takeover. This positioning for social leadership through the impeachment of the older generation cannot fail to stir up guilt feelings... This culpatory stand aggravates the guilt feeling with the consequence that the accusers welcome lofty ideals as a way of silencing their conscience.” [Messay, 143]

By undertaking such a challenging journey, Messay is traveling down a more dangerous and risky academic route rather than traveling down the well-trodden wide avenue of dialectical materialism and using every fool’s crutch “behaviorism” along the way. It is always problematic when one seeks and reads the motives of human

beings from their manifest actions. “What else could explain the appeal to self-sacrifice but the need to appease the deeply felt guilt over the desire to dislodge the older generation?” [Messay, 152] Finding the psychological disposition of human beings introduces a dualist approach to understanding human history and society, which has been challenged since the time of Socrates and Plato. Ultimately, the reason I am skeptical of reading motives in understanding social changes, including revolutionary ones, is the fear of reaching such logical paradox of the type of “the ghost in the machine.” In contradistinction to the Freudian approach of “Oedipus complex” adopted by Messay, I tend to think that rebellious activities are often driven by personal ambition for power and dominance, or at the very least the desire for self-actualization and fulfilling one’s potentialities.

Sometimes Messay’s analysis hits home too close for comfort. Although I knew very well some of the student leaders, I was never part of the insider-group. I participated in every demonstration and boycott organized by those same leaders, and I was arrested a few times by the Police. I even have old scares from beatings as a memento from the Police that is nothing to compare with those inflicted on students during Mengistu’s or Meles’s administrations. Nevertheless, such proximity to student leaders and events at that time gave me also unique insights into the student leaders’ humanity warts and all. For example, I went to the same elementary school with Berhane Meskel who was three grades my senior but whom I knew very well from such early age all the way throughout my years in college; Walleign was my classmate at W/o Seheen High School in Dessie in Tenth Grade before he went to the University Lab-School; Tilahun Gizaw was my roommate in my second or third year at the Law School. And from the more shady and subversive characters, I knew well, for example, Tekalegn (whose last name I never learned) the “Crocodile” who introduced me to the Soviet Union Government’s answer to the American Library—a cavernous badly lit library full of socialist literature along with Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky!

Even though I was the “artist in residence” around campus at HSIU, with a studio (a large room with a private restroom and a shower—a rarity on that score alone) that the University provided generously for my use, none of the student leaders asked me to do something for them like cartoons or use my studio to copy subversive material. I was asked only once as the Editor of a student literary magazine called “Something” if I could put some of the radical students’ articles in that magazine. The student leaders fully respected the literary aspect of our magazine, and some of the leaders were, in fact, very fond of the short stories and poems (decidedly bourgeois) that appeared in “Something” that really had very minimal political content except to reflect life as lived by simple folks. I kept that magazine independent from radical political entanglement for three years during the height of the students’ radicalism from 1966 through 1969. I want to believe that the student leaders left me alone because they appreciated my creativity and art works—my studio was always open to everyone, and some of the students used to come in and just look at my paintings even when I am not around or chat with me now and then. It was also obvious that I did not care that much for the aristocracy as a system of government even though there were particular

individuals in the Royal Family that I liked—I never painted Haile Selassie’s portrait, although I had opportunities to get a “Royal” commission to do so.

Let us consider Messay’s most poignant and probably his most controversial categorical assertion that the Ethiopian student movement was not a result of economic deprivation and social class antagonism extant in Ethiopia, but a consequence of the alienation of Ethiopian students from their own culture, tradition, and religion. He asserted in several of the Chapters of his book that Ethiopian students were isolated in a bubble of their schools, and were uprooted and alienated from society. In other words, Messay seems to believe that Ethiopian schools (from grade school to university colleges) functioned as insulations against the very society students were supposed to learn from progressively both technical and social skills that would have helped their integration and absorption as useful members of the community. I wanted to test Messay’s explanation and theory on the student movement with some concrete applications. Thus, I asked myself, how true is such assumption as it applies to my situation and friends whom I know well enough during the 1960 to 1974 period to test Messay’s thesis.

One may have to be very careful with generalized statements; for example, if I test my life-experience against Messay’s explanation about Ethiopia’s radical revolution staged by students, as a deeply seated reaction to the feeling of guilt felt by such students for rebelling against the inaptitude of their parents, such theory does not seem to apply to me and a few others. I grew up in a relatively economically adequate and prominent family in terms of pedigree. I was in constant battle with school-yard bullies defending neighborhood kids. Nevertheless, I grew up being highly insecure and extremely sensitive due to the tyrannical behavior of people close to me and also the brutality of most of my teachers at school. My short and slight frame did not help either. My family relationships speak to the fact of a typical dysfunctional family where the needs and well being of children and women are drastically subordinated to the needs and well being of the male members of the family, typical of all Ethiopian families at some level.

What was the most painful experience for me growing up was that I was not able to defend my very young siblings whose cries for help being mercilessly disciplined sunk right into my heart; I was unable to interfere, and no one explained to me that some form of discipline was necessary for the good of children to prepare them to do well in life as adults. Such explanation would have saved me from my hate and resentment of people close to me and my feeling of contempt against some of my teachers. This was not a case of the “Oedipus complex” that Messay cited at work, it was rather an issue of self-awareness, and a question of coming of age, and empowerment. The experience of those formative years were etched in my memory firmly that often while sitting in classes attending lectures at the Law School [HSIU] much later, I used to hear the cries for help of my siblings in my head rather than the lectures. On the outside, I looked fine with a bent for the bohemian sporting the first dreadlock and wearing sunglasses (in the dark!)—a “*Jolly-Jack*” proximo.

Moreover, I lived by a chivalrous code of conduct borrowed no doubt from my early readings of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, Treasure Island, The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor, The Iliad (Helen of Troy) (Hector not Achilles was my hero) and several more of the classic books, all wonderfully illustrated books at a brand new modern elementary school, Memhir Akale Wolde Elementary School, with an extensive collection of books and periodicals that delighted me and set the tone of my moral content. The school had a set time for reading classes where students in each class go to the library and read books or leaf through magazines and periodicals. That was one class everyone loved.

At home, I learned much about Ethiopian history both oral and textual from an old family history book that reinforced such generalized sense of the heroic, as I grew up in a sort of polarized life. However, the reality around me of limited resources of many of the families in the neighborhood, the abject poverty of the families of some of my friends, the moral deprivation in down town Dessie with its rows of houses of ill-repute, the everyday meanness of simple folks, the brutality of teachers, et cetera somehow was countered with a sense of national pride. My interaction with our large family members, with relatives visiting our home literally from all over Ethiopia expanded my cocoon of school environment and gave me an awareness of my identity as an Ethiopian of great history and worth at that tender age. I grew up admiring and imaging many Ethiopian heroes including those who fought bravely the Italians in a war that just ended seven years earlier before I was born leaving still open wounds in the families of most Ethiopians including mine. My maternal Grandfather was executed by an Italian Firing Squad in 1937.

Growing up into my teens did not sit well with me. For my first rebellion was against the very core of our family values, against Ethiopia's sacred culture, and a blatant defiance of society. In Tenth Grade, one day coming back home from school, I declared to my Mother that there was no God, that it was all fiction and made-up stories. To this day, I cannot understand how I reached such decision considering the fact at that time God was not some abstraction to me, but a real presence whom I felt all the time to a point that I could not even tell a white lie, as other kids do; and as a sign of my devotion, I used to draw and paint endlessly the Trinity. That was the end of my innocence at the age of fifteen. And it has nothing to do being in the education "bubble" of modern education, I would have been as heretical in a traditional school as I was in a modern school. To this day, I have not changed my mind about a spiritual journey cut short. However, I have refined my reasons for supporting the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church, and also have found an important role for religious institutions in general for Ethiopia,

My respect of the Ethiopian Church has become exceedingly deep over the years. And yet over the years, it has become very clear to me that my respect of religion is no where a substitute for profound faith and belief in the "divine." It is too late for me to undo that harm of my heresy at such young age—for I have eaten of the "forbidden fruit." I know now that the Genesis (Bible) "forbidden fruit" allegory was meant for Adam's own good, and not a Promethean interpretation that saw God trying to keep

humankind ignorant and worshipful. The fact is that we, human beings, are no where ready to handle our naked reality. Thus, I concluded, rather painfully, that a person who is not afraid of God cannot be afraid or respectful of human institutions or human beings either. It is absolutely necessary for the good of society that those who lead ought to be individuals with some reasonable belief in the “Divine,” a God or Gods (and Goddesses) and not fanatics or atheists.

I have delved into the details of my own private life just to show that the molding of the personality of an Ethiopian is a very complex process and very difficult to pin down to a couple of factors, such as the experiences Ethiopian children would go through in schools of whatever kind as one such molding process in shaping them/us into raving lunatics or revolutionaries. [Not much difference between the two!] I can give as examples many of my childhood friends who are conservative as they come to illustrate further the complexity and diversity of our Ethiopian personality. “*Yenat hod jigurgur.*” For example, my good friend Zewge Fanta, with a charming habit of defending his friends (even me *l’enfant terrible*) in the Diaspora whenever his friends are attacked by third parties, who is well known through his occasional writings, is from similar family background as mine and we share some of the student leaders as friends, and yet you could not find a more conservative individual than Zewge this side of the Atlantic Ocean—Zewge genuinely respects Ethiopia’s tradition and cultural values. Another close childhood friend is the distinguished art historian Essaye Gebremedhin, whose sophistication and dedication to Ethiopia seems a mismatch; an individual educated at the Sorbonne and who has traveled the world over, lived and worked most of his adult life in the United States and yet is conservative and highly critical of the student movement that he considered to be childish. I could name a number of other individuals who were in the “bubble” with me and all other students, but did not show any of the rebellion characteristics whether radical or mild of the student movement of the 1960s and 70s.

Of course, I have committed a fallacy of composition trying to prove a general statement by giving a couple of examples. I suggest we keep aside strict logical validation of our arguments and allow a degree of intuition in this complex discourse. I might as well add some more generalizations not yet substantiated by empirical data, however, very attractive alternate theory to Messay’s psychoanalysis. I suggest that one may think of being in school for Ethiopian children as a welcome relief of sort away from family squabbles and humiliating discipline, a distinctly existentialist approach. In a way, Ethiopian children learn to control their rage “*elikh*” while still quite young. Withholding of food along with sever beatings is used to enforce such destructive discipline in order to beat out the “individuality” from such children—an effective Pavlovian (conditioned reflexes) approach of behavior modification as further developed by Skinner. And as such our later rebellion in college may be just the venting off of years of accumulated rage and not something profound.

For most college students being in college is emancipatory due to the fact that it may be the first experience for such students to be treated with some respect as adults who are responsible for their own lives and not answerable to any parental authority. I may say

that my approach in explaining or understanding the Ethiopian Students' movement is close to or is slanted toward the "humanistic movement" or the "third force" of [Abraham Maslow](#), which is a motivational process reflective of the human effort or aspiration to satisfy certain needs of "self-actualization" of the individual's inner potentialities and capacities. "Inner" in this reference does not point toward some structure like the "soul" as in religious claims, or the "id" and the "super ego" of Freud. It is understandable that Messay chose to reduce to a manageable size our monumental Ethiopian experience in terms of creating categories for easy labeling. Is his approach helpful to our understanding of our perennial problems of civil strife, poverty, famine, epidemics, ignorance, and fossilized social relationships?

PART TWO

IV. Ethnicism in Messay's World perception

The discussion of "ethnicity" or "ethnicism" is a crucial subject far more so for Ethiopian elites as opposed to Ethiopians in general. Ethiopians in general do not seem to have drum-tight feeling about such ideas. Messay as an intellectual has shared in the vacillation of Ethiopia's elites on the subject of ethnicity or ethnicism, and in that he is no exception. However, there is a marked evolution and a distinct shift on the issue of ethnicity in his book than views he held as late as 2001. In fact, in May of 2001 Messay wrote in a rather long article wherein he seems to be ambivalent about ethnicism. He seems to suggest that ethnicism has a significant even desirable role to play in shaping Ethiopia's political and economic future. He stated then:

"Does this mean that ethnic politics should be ruled out altogether? Not in the least, *since the ethnic banner is here necessary to define and enforce the universal rights of individuals*. The recognition of pluralism is essential to concretely define and protect these rights. But then, the generation of socioeconomic conditions in which universal rights protect particular rights is the way to go. If so, unlike the ethnic paradigm, particular rights do not limit universal rights for the simple reason that they are but applications, crystallizations of universal rights. The advantage of this system is that the guarantee of the rights of a given group is not its exclusiveness, but the recognition of universal rights whose consequence is that individuals always retain the control of their situation. This control is also how these individuals extend similar rights to other groups, for any denial places them in a situation in which their lack of reciprocity backfires on them by turning the chains they put on other peoples into their own prison. *Ethnicity must steer toward unity and reciprocity to be consistent and empowering.*" [emphasis, mine]

[Messay Kebede, "Ethnic Politics and the Cracks in the Dry Ground of the TPLF," May, 2001. http://www.ethiopians.com/Views/messaykebede_on_ethnicpolitics.htm. It is a snapshot of the page as it appeared on Nov 16, 2008.]

The obvious problem with that paragraph, other than the fact of using ethnicity as an enforcement mechanism for human rights, seems to be the hierarchical sequencing of "Universal" rights with "ethnic paradigm" or "rights of a given group" down to individual rights that Messay seemed to favor. Let me start by asserting that there are no ethnic rights or "rights of a given group" for belonging in such ethnic group distinct from individual rights derived from universal principles. The one exception I can think of are

“indigenous people” who are very few in number and on the brink of extinction that the world tried to preserve giving them special consideration for just that reason of endangerment by extinction where they are “given” specific rights by an international document as an indigenous people [I emphasize the word ‘given’ here as distinct to the phrase ‘human rights’ that is simply acknowledged being inherent or God given]. [See United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 61/295 on 13 September 2007.]

One important source that would illuminate my point and clear the confusion is the legislative history of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. [Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights document was structured and the process that was undertaken by the drafters of that Declaration (the Commission on Human Rights), at the United Nations was as close to the aspirations of the philosophers, historians, jurists et cetera representatives of all civilizations and cultures, whose views was sought and collected by the Commission as its store house of knowledge. Taking into account the lengthy debate of the drafting commission of the Declaration, I am convinced that the Declaration was distilled from such collection and relevant records of the long struggle of human beings through out human social developments around the world from all ages. It is essentially Kantian in its approach. Article 2 of the Declaration states,

“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, **without distinction of any kind**, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.”

I realize that I am making a grand synthetic claim. Moreover, there is no doubt in my mind, having brooded over the question of human rights for most of my adult life, that any allusion to “ethnic” rights is based on misunderstanding and bad politics. This means that Messay’s earlier attempt, for example, in his article of 2001, to use ethnic based defense or safeguard of individual rights would do the opposite. To base any defense of human rights based on ethnicity, instead of promoting or safeguarding such rights, it would simply distort and deform the very rights that are being safeguarded or protected. It seems that realizing such pitfall, Messay has changed his approach clearly stating his disapproval of ethnicism as a political tool on any ground for any purpose. It is proper to note here that Islamic nations meeting in Cairo in 1990 issued an alternative declaration called “The Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam” and that “Declaration” in Article 24 states that “All the rights and freedoms stipulated in this Declaration are subject to the Islamic Shari'ah,” thereby effectively negating or rendering the Islamic “Declaration” in its entirety ineffective or subordinate.

As I stated above, Messay seems to have changed his mind in the sense of crystallizing his thoughts on ethnicism. And I take his latest statement in his book to be his conclusion and final stand on issues dealing with individual rights versus ethnicity. In

his recent book, Messay stated in one of his most eloquent statements that ethnicity maybe considered as a passing phenomenon that wrecked havoc in the struggle for self-realization and individual freedoms by “educated elite” Ethiopians, and the future of Ethiopia is dependent on internalization of “universal” principles and not mincing in a highly relativistic and parochial manner, in the name of ethnicity, what should be a commonly (universally) shared freedoms and rights. Better still, let us read him in his own monumental words.

“Whereas traditional intellectuals (*debteras*) subdued their ethnic and regional attachments to what permanently defined Ethiopia, modern-educated Ethiopians fell back on ethnic and regional ties owing to the loss of their national mission. After the illusory and temporary unity around Marxism-Leninism, which was itself an expression of alienation, nothing was left but to adopt the even more divisive ideology of ethnicization. The great tragedy of modern Ethiopia is, therefore, its failure to produce domestic, homegrown intellectuals who would have conceived of modernization as an upgrading of traditional culture... Is it surprising, then, that Ethiopian intellectuals worked actively toward the dismissal of traditional culture rather than its renewal through purification and reinterpretation? And in so doing, were they not curtailing their ability to achieve consensus, that is, to become a national intelligentsia through the transcending of particularism? Once national norms were put aside, little remained but the promotion of ethnicity. The present infatuation of Ethiopia’s educated elite with ethnicity does no more than continue the polarizing tendency inherited from the Marxist-Leninist notion of class struggle.” [Messay, 193-4]

More importantly, Messay’s treatment of the subject of “ethnicism” or “ethnicity” in his book was scholarly and objective and not parochial. To begin with, as a good scholar he took himself out of the equation completely i.e., he neither promoted nor defended his own ethnic origin. When I mentioned to a friend that I was buying Messay’s book, my friend told me that Messay is rumored to “hate” Tigrians and that he was an Oromo narrow ethnicist. I challenged my friend on those allegations, for I had read most of Messay’s writings and did not see anything overtly or secretly hateful or narrow reflection of ethnicism. Having read this book, I can say without any hesitation that neither allegation is true.

In his book, Messay did spend time discussing Tigrean and Eritrean overt ethnic identification and also being the most radicalized students during the student movement from 1960 to 1974, as a matter of political and social reality to be analyzed and understood. His writing is not an advocacy of ethnicism or bashing of Tigreans or Eritreans. In his discussion of ethnicism in connection with the more advanced claim of colonialism of nations and nationalities as expressed rather coarsely by Walleign Mekonnen, whom Messay identified as an “Amhara.” [Messay, 153, 175] He gave us a theoretical base why Ethiopia’s radicalized students adopted such self-destructive notion that Ethiopia is an oppressive state made up of oppressed “nations and nationalities” and the remedy being self determination and liberation of such oppressed peoples. I read Walleign’s piece when it came out in 1969, and the article became for sometime a subject of heated discussions among my friends. Even at that time when

student-politics was one-sided, there was dissension among many students about the “self-determination” issue. I re-read Walleign’s piece a couple of years ago, and what struck me most re-reading that article was how shallow and pretentious it was. [Speaking of ethnic identity, Walleign might have been from the Amhara Saeint area, but it is more likely that he may have been an Amharized Oromo from Borona (Wello), where his ancestors might have settled the area in the wake of Gragn Mohammed’s ravaging of the region in the 16th Century.]

Messay connected such contradictory position of the radicalized students to the internationalism of progressive ideologies. However, Messay did not challenge the reason why “Amhara” students readily accepted the divisive claims by Eritrean and Oromo students labeling their struggle as a liberation struggle from “Amhara” “colonialism” except to link the process with international socialism. Of course, he identified very important characteristics why individuals from such ethnic background, along with Tigreans, were the most radicalized student leaders. As a matter of fact, this sub-section titled “Ethnicity and Radicalization” is Messay’s most intense and penetrating look at the myriad world of the Ethiopian students’ radicalization and distorted view of their ethnic identities and their place in the scheme of social and political processes. [Messay, 174-178]

Messay did give one original additional explanation why the university students did not oppose the creeping anti-Ethiopia movement mounted by both Oromo and Eritrean radicalized students. He introduced as the rationale behind the radicalization of university students and their adoption of Marxism-Leninism as the ideology of choice as a substitute for their eroding Ethiopian nationalism.

“The Marxist devaluation of the West explains why many Ethiopians [students] did not see any incompatibility between Marxism-Leninism and the assertion of nationalism. Aware that Western education was driving them away from tradition, they conceived of Marxism-Leninism as an antidote, in fact as an upgraded form of nationalism. Many young Ethiopians thought that becoming Marxist-Leninist reinvigorated their nationalism. Who could accuse them of lacking in nationalism by succumbing to the West when their Marxism [Marxism-Leninism] made them so fervently anticapitalist?” [Messay, 155]

In fact, Messay included college students across the board, who were Amharas, or Oromos, or Gurages et cetera, in his analysis of the “radicalization” of Ethiopian College students due to feelings of “guilt” in general. I did not detect an iota of ethnic bashing or ethnic bias of any kind anywhere in his book. Messay’s conclusion that Ethnicism has no place in Ethiopia’s political life seems to me as sincere as his effort to explain the radicalization of Ethiopia’s elites and students.

V. The Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church

I have genuine respect for the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church. I came from a religious family and grew up reveling in the Church’s great ceremonies and teachings. In fact, my parents often say that had my Grandfather survived the Italians, I would have been in the Church, probably a church scholar and a teacher. [If they only knew that I would give twice my life over now, if I could only undo time and start all over again as

yekolo temari all the way learning the *fetha negest* in the Church's system of education.] After all, my Great Grandfather was Ethiopia's greatest scholar to provide me with enough ambition. I am not implying any eugenics here, but the fact of motivation and inspiration as a good base for my trajectory of blooming in Ethiopia's traditional Church schools. Thus, it is understandable that I have this endearing emotional attachment to our Great Ethiopian Church. What I regret the most is that I could not attend the great Mass services of our Churches around here that only Ethiopia's clergies are capable of performing such transformative mediations to bridge even for a moment the eternal distance between God and his creation. Our Churches have become polarized with paralyzing political infighting.

A year ago in 2007, in great distress having witnessed the fracture that was taking place within the Church, I wrote a long article, and the one paragraph I quoted here captures my devotion and respect of the Church and the Church Fathers. I wrote then: "I am writing this piece with fear and trepidation, for the members of a segment of Ethiopian society I am awed by the leaders of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church. I believe that no one group is as talented, as well educated, and as powerful as the leaders of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is not without reason Christian Ethiopians have such reverence to our Church Fathers, which respect borders worship. The discipline required of our Church Fathers is monumental. The education and knowledge of an Ethiopian Church scholar is the equivalent of three or four PhDs in linguistics, history, church dogma and liturgy, political science, philosophy et cetera all squeezed in an awesome one huge knowledge powerhouse." [Tecola Hagos, "PART TWO: The Role of Religion in the Political Life of Ethiopia: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church 'Synod in Exile.'" [February 18, 2007. http://www.tecolahagos.com/tecola_ethiopian_synod.htm. It is a snapshot of the page as it appeared on Dec 4, 2008 13:55:28 GMT]

Messay devoted considerable time and effort in annunciating and setting theoretical framework for the roles played by our tradition, culture and the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church in the long history of Ethiopia. [Messay, 121-139] I hold similar views like Messay, in his genuine respect and devotion to reform the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church to help this great Church survive in tumultuous modernizing processes, and continue to guide and mold the moral content of Ethiopia. However, there are some differences between Messay and me that I need to point out here. We both agree that the significance of the Ethiopian Church in Ethiopia's long history is profound. But Messay seems to appreciate that fact in a peaceful context. I believe the Church is best appreciated by juxtaposing it in its long struggle against Islamic countries especially Arabs' relentless attack from all corners to destroy Ethiopia. I believe in actively engaging Arabs on an extended focused unwavering interaction be it peaceful or violent and resolve this problem once and for all. I have no doubt in my mind we will prevail. Ethiopia is a predominantly Christian Country at least seventy percent of the Population is Christian with ten percent being protestant or catholic Christians. Although political leaders and their dynastic rules had changed from one group to the other several times, the one institution that had overcome all kinds of power shift is the Ethiopian Christian Church. This means it is the one institution that provided continuity of the Ethiopian entity as a viable system for at least one thousand five hundred years.

One thing that still infuriates me when ever the issue revolves around the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church is the way the insolent Mengestu Hailemariam and his thugs defiled this ancient Sovereign State and ancient Church murdering both its Dynastic Emperor Haile Selassie and its consecrated Patriarch Tewoflos. Patriarch Tewoflos was murdered by garroting while Mengistu and his thugs were drinking and frolicking participating in such macabre where thirty other individuals were also garroted or killed by hand to hand combat assassins as some form of deranged display of their expertise.

“On Saturday, July 14, 1979, at around 11:00 a.m. he [Patriarch Tewoflos] was taken away by guards with two other prisoners. For thirteen years, no one knew what had happened to them. But after the Dergue regime collapsed, it was discovered that he had been killed with thirty-three others by strangulation and his body buried inside Ras Asrate Kassa's compound in Addis Ababa. Thirteen years after his execution, his body was exhumed on April 29, 1992 and buried the next day in a designated burial place he had built for himself in Gofa Gebriel Church.” [Dirshaye Menberu, “Patriarch Tewoflos (Meliktu Welde Mariam) 1910 to 1979 Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Ethiopia,” Dictionary of African Christian Biography, 2006, <http://www.dacb.org/stories/ethiopia/tewoflos2.html>. It is a snapshot of the page as it appeared on Nov 20, 2008 02:28:23 GMT]

For that crime of insolence and murder alone, I will follow Mengistu Hailemariam, that caricature of a human being, and his thugs even to the gate of Hell to avenge our great Church against whom such despicable act was committed. Even if Mengistu crawls back into his mother's womb, I will wrench him out by the leg and dash his brain out against the granite pedestal of the statue of Abuna Petros. My anger against Mengistu and his close associates, who are still around thumbing their nose at us Ethiopians, is still like a searing red-white hot rode of steel even after thirty years. Mengistu's thugs and executioners should all thank God that it is Meles Zenawi, not I at the pinnacle of power, for justice would have been meted out to them decades ago, wherever found. And all those who trespassed against the greatest Church in the World and against hundreds of thousands innocent Ethiopians, some of whom great patriots who bleed for Ethiopia in battles against the Italians, the Arabs, the Somalis and many others, beware, for the wrath of the people of Ethiopia is going to descend upon your heads.

And lest people forget, let me remind all the fact that some of the people who were murdered by such thugs were descended from the very original people who created Ethiopia thousands years ago. Whereas, Mengistu and his thugs could hardly identify their origin or home base within Ethiopia as recently as their grandparents' time. Unless we make our peace with our past, recognize the fact of our extended suffering has to do with usurpers of Sovereign power, there is no way we are going to survive the Twenty-First Century. In order to do that, we ought to restore Ethiopia to its glorious past. We have to start dismantling this pretentious civility “*yulignta*” where we allowed street thugs and traitors to ascend the sacred throne of our Sovereignty as an ancient people of worth.

More importantly, more than just simple longevity and the capacity of weathering all forms of challenges from within and without, the Ethiopian Church and Church Fathers have conducted our national interest with great dignity, self respect, and magnanimity, and provided us also profound moral guidance. Christians are butchered in Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, and the Gulf States and completely stamped out in a most brutal manner in Saudi Arabia, by contrast it is in Ethiopia that Islam thrived with minimal persecution by the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church compared to the barbaric treatment suffered by Christians in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan et cetera. The contrasts in toleration of different religious practices and different ethnic identity that is observed between Islamic countries and Ethiopia are mind boggling. One hears every mullah and political leader in such Islamist countries barking words of hate against Christians from every minaret, whereas by contrast Ethiopian Church fathers routinely admonish their congregation to love their neighbors irrespective of religion or social circumstances.

VI. Ethiopian Tradition and Culture: a case for asceticism

I would rather speak of Ethiopian cultures, rather than one monolithic or homogenous culture. To use a cliché, Ethiopia is a mosaic of people. It is also equally a mosaic of cultures. Anthropologically speaking, Ethiopia is thought to be the origination point of the prototype of every race of human beings in existence that spread out from common ancestors and now live in all parts of our Planet. Although such identification may be flattering, it has also a dark side to it. Being a prototype while leaving us fossilized in our original form cuts us also from the accumulated mutation or progressive changes that benefited in the survival struggle of those who left Ethiopia a couple of hundred thousands years ago.

The reality of Ethiopian cultures have diversity being heterogeneous, and yet share one disconcerting fact all over the country—lack of hygiene and primitive conditions of life. The lack of hygiene and the primitive quality of life cannot be easily explained away by blaming the system of oppressive government prevalent in Ethiopia over the centuries. For no government on Earth can have that much power to discourage simple hygienic procedure in every home. Ethiopia suffered due to poverty, and most of that was brought on us by ourselves. The socio-political relationship that caused to such steady deterioration of Ethiopians becoming poorer and poorer generation after generation is caused by far subtle but devastating process. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a hand in that process too. And Messay has articulated my argument, although he meant the statement for some other purpose when he stated that “Ethiopians had a deep compassion for the poor and a great admiration for the abnegation of the monk.” [Messay, 115] This is one main reason that I refer to Ethiopian society as self-indulgent wallowing in self-pity.

It is such misplaced compassion that destroyed individual effort and excellence, and made us embrace mediocrity, live in squalid circumstances, and tolerate unacceptable level of unhygienic conditions. Even at the college level, students would tolerate and suffer stoically in classes and meeting halls the body odor and stinking shoes of their classmates when such behavior should have been confronted or given proper notice, for the remedy was simple and available: washing one’s shoes, socks, body and feet. And

then the same students who lack the minimum of discipline even to take care of their own sanitation aspire to clean an old Empire of its accumulated social dirt. It is the same students who endlessly pontificate and argue the virtue of revolutionary change in Ethiopia when they could not even maintain their own hygiene. I believe that if one treats ones own body with respect, one will also respect the dignity and integrity of others. The best way to teach respect for the human rights of individuals is not by reciting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or some such document, but by teaching children at young age to keep themselves clean and hygienic. Thus, that arrow of criticism and revolutionary zeal should have been directed at purging the students from all those anomalous personal activities.

Should I have “compassion” or “tolerance” for the millions of Ethiopians seating in public squares, market places, street curbs et cetera all day long watching the world go by doing nothing except occasionally begging or committing some insignificant crimes? I want disfranchised Ethiopians to be angry, and agitated enough to make a living rather than wait for some governmental action to rescue them. I have a lot more respect to people who do something about their condition in life, even turn to felonious crime of *majirate memtat*, or robbery or attempt to acquire power, than those who wait for miracles and handouts. Such passivity of Ethiopians that I deplore is the result of years of Pavlovian type lifetime conditioning starting in childhood and never ending but following every Ethiopian all the way to his or her grave. As a people, we have lost our discipline, our constructive taboos, our control of the sexuality of our female and male members, our adherence to moral principles, and our connection to our myths and legends. These are all very serious losses. One devastating outcome of all that loss is the destructive population explosion; our breeding without restraint and without thinking is an agonizing death sentence of future generations that are going to live in the dismal condition of poverty and human degradation due to overpopulation. The harm that we have suffered because of our social condition is not the result of lack of political elections or democratic processes. The problem of underdevelopment and cyclical suffering of Ethiopians will continue no matter who is in power. In his book, Messay did not fully address such crucial and devastating underlining perineal problems of our Ethiopian society.

Of late, the problem of hygiene is tied to the lack of development and primitive living condition which in tern is seen to be a result of low IQ. Ideas of eugenics gave grounds to dim-witted plagiarist like Satoshi Kanazawa of London School of Economics to assert by copying unverified and limited data from an article "IQ and the Wealth of Nations" by Richard Lynn and Tatu Vanhanen, in which they calculated 63 as the national IQ of Ethiopia, which is the lowest in the world. However, Lynn and Vanhanen were using highly unscientific test results of Ethiopian immigrant children in Israel by an Israeli researcher who conducted non-clinical, uncontrolled, and totally whimsical tests on new Ethiopian immigrant children just embarking into a life that is totally alien and disconcerting even to adults. It is from such scanty findings that Kanazawa made his quantum leap into his foolish conclusions connecting low IQ with poverty in Ethiopia. Kanazawa never conducted a single test on Ethiopian children or adults, ever.

At any rate, to ascribe poverty to low IQ is to engage in a cyclical argument, and does not advance our understanding of either poverty or of intelligence. What is missing is an empirical study and theoretical explanation for such connection in the Ethiopian setting. Some recent highly contested studies seem to connect poor hygiene with low intelligence. But that is easily refuted by showing the sophisticated system of custom, technical skill in farming and animal husbandry, written language, record of thousands of years continuous government structure, and effective mobilization of hundreds of thousands of soldiers at a moments notice, even though all such attributes have been fossilized for centuries and had not progressed much from such earlier achievements.

Western standard of individual and communal hygiene may have served a peculiar survival niche for western societies. But claiming such standard may not be the right response in the Ethiopian setting. For example, the great cattle breeders of low land areas have a culture of socking clothing in butter and herbs, which may have beneficial protection against dangerous tropical venomous creatures that may take residence in the huts of people. Or the highland culture of living far from river courses and water bodies may have survival evolutionary basis, for water carries all kinds of sicknesses including river-*agannents*. The minimal use of water is already a subject of developmental programs. But it is unfathomable to me that Ethiopians in general, over the centuries, would use such contaminated, dirty, and muddy water without creating some system of filtration and delivery system of such basic life giving material such as water. The little improvement that was introduced came with foreign missions to the country and the with the Italians during their occupation of certain areas of the Empire. I wish Messay saw this problem of hygiene as an important issue fueling the agitation and revolutionary zeal of students in the effort to modernize Ethiopia. However, the obvious conclusion from such intimate appreciation of our cultures indicate also to the contrary fact that we succeeded to survive being one of the two civilizations that did not perish out of the twenty one civilizations Gibbon identified. One must not forget the facts that all cultures and human institutions are utilitarian, in that they serve human beings survive.

Ethiopia's cultures can be identified also for their asceticism. I find it quite incongruent to watch in videos cleanly dressed gorgeous Ethiopian women, with beautiful hair dancing and singing nostalgic songs of remembrance of the greatness of Ethiopia and its civilization and culture, in a setting with shabby tukules or huts with caved-in grass roofs and doors off hinges in badly fitting doorways et cetera. I could not understand what is to celebrate in such set-up that invokes such misplaced pride in the singers and those in attendance of a failed and fossilized civilization that has not moved a step forward from its turn of the Millennium know-how and civilization. I wonder often as to the nature of our pride in such representations. If what we see in rural Ethiopia, in villages and towns, represent the sum total of what we have succeeded to retain from all of our long history, we are really in deep trouble.

There is no creativity in our cultures, for we are doing the same songs in variations and the same dances in exactly the same style to the same drum beats, for scores of years as I recall in my life time. I am pretty sure our parents and grandparents listened to the

same tunes and danced to the same drum beats. Even when it comes to food, where Ethiopia has the largest cattle, sheep and goat dairy animals in all of Africa, and yet there had been very little innovation in producing food items from such abundance. One would expect a thriving cheese making industry with such huge numbers of dairy animals. Except for butter and cottage cheese, there is not much product from such abundance. How do we account for such lack of production? I ask all of us: is the sole measure of success *just* survival? In that Ethiopian cultures have helped their members to survive in very harsh environment, is a sign of success? *Mehedem mehed naw arr eyeregetu*. Messay does not seem to take into serious account the enormous inertia that our cultures have imposed on us, dragging us back hundreds of years even from making modest advances in simple technical matters. If we take into account such diversity of Ethiopia's cultures, then we can see that Messay must have good reason using the single "culture" designation in his discussion, for he must have used the term "culture" as a generic identification as opposed to an element of particularization or discrimination.

One may hear radicalized students speaking publicly the language of social changes and revolutions, but in unguarded moments most express their aspiration for traditional treatment of respect and difference from people. Even Walleign, who is held in such high esteem by many Ethiopians, gambled, visited prostitutes, played the Ethiopian lottery and won ten thousand Bir that he used to buy a couple of taxis to be driven by poorly paid (exploited) drivers. Most of the students by the time they are in their third or fourth years in college would have frequented prostitutes in *Wube Berha*. There was no "deep cultural disorientation" that rocked the value systems of college students in the sense of leading them toward revolutions or social change because they too were part of the corrupt culture that was firmly entrenched in the social milieu of Ethiopian societies of the period. Since Messay has already stated about the education system isolating Ethiopian students from main-stream tradition and culture, I imagine that the system must have developed or created its own culture in a sort of a bubble, it must have also developed its safety system shielding students from such disorientation.

There is this unhealthy tendency to romanticize Ethiopian students that we have to challenge and change. It has been surrealistic and corrupting and can swell anyone's head. Even to date, after having gone through harrowing changes of the atrocities of Mengistu's seventeen years and another seventeen years of Meles's anti-democratic brutalities, Ethiopian students or elites have not learned much from such previous experiences. They still believe that they are entitled by the mere fact of having attended school and graduated with diplomas (BA, MA, PhD. MD et cetera) they have singular authority to pontificate on any subject, or be appointed to high posts in Government organs or in non-public offices. It is quite a tragedy to attend Diaspora meetings for one witnesses Ethiopia's "feudal" culture resurrecting itself camouflaged in academic gowns.

An oversight on Messay's part is his minimal treatment of female students during the period that is covered by his study. He did mention in a negative light the tension that was created in 1968 due to the fashion show organized by the University Women's Club with some female students' participation at the Main Campus. [Messay, 29] One

of the active participants was a female student called Truework, a returnee from the American Field Service, whom I recall well, not for her intellect or leadership, but for her symmetrical legs and her beautiful smooth jet black skin. [Sorry, I could not resist this gaff.] At that time, Tiruework represented what radical students hated most, the American Field Service returnees' hype, their better accented English, and their plaid American jackets and other American clothing. However, it will be a mistake to think of all female students as light-weights and acutely lacking of social concerns. There were very many female students who were as committed to radical social changes as their male counterparts. In 1974, at least one was as heroic, as reckless, and as daring as Walleign Mekonnen and his group of hijackers—Martha Mebrhatu. Martha was a bright student, very tall and very beautiful and very sweet young woman whose death with the hijackers really angered me greatly against Walleign and his group for endangering the life of a female who is not trained in combat.

VII. Cause and Effect: Messay's philosophical underpinning

Philosophy is a specialized discipline; thus, it commands our respect and our difference to those who have devoted a lifetime of studies, reflections, and discourses in philosophy. Messay is first and foremost a philosopher, and yet wears well also several other hats of a political scientist, psychologist, sociologist, historian et cetera. I urge my readers to take my comment on Messay's philosophical discussions (points) with a grain of salt. My effort herein pointing certain problems of the underpinnings of Messay's philosophical exposition and discussions of Hegel, Kant and others is like an apprentice student critiquing the masterpieces of a mature artist. Be that as it may, I am most intrigued and profoundly appreciative of Messay's philosophical approach in discussing Ethiopia's radicalized students and their adult elite counterparts.

Let me for a moment focus your attention to consider how Messay based some of his important ideas in philosophy in analyzing or discussing the Ethiopian Students revolutionary transformation of the politics of the Ethiopian Empire during the period 1960 to 1974 and there after. A very important point that could be easily overlooked is the interpretation of the perception of Westerners of Ethiopia or the rest of humankind. Messay identified such perception as objectifying. In paragraphs that are both profound and exceptional, Messay put to task two of the icons of Western philosophy: G.W.F. Hegel and Emanuel Kant. Furthermore he rightfully extended also the same challenge to Western anthropology. [Messay, 188-189] Of course, anthropology has drastically changed course since the time of Franz Boas and Claude Levi-Strauss with the coming of structural anthropology; thus, both Hegel and Kant, including most philosophers prior to Boas and Levi-Strauss, on issues involving anthropological issues are all passé.

“According to Emanuel Kant, the process of constructivism, human knowledge is not the outcome of the mind passively receiving the imprints of objects; it is a construct deploying a mind actively forming the raw material of objects given in perception. The purpose of knowledge is not to reflect reality, but to construct reality in such a way that the human mind is endowed with an objectifying power.” [Messay, 189]

I dispute Messay's disassociation of object-subject or subject-object relationship as a matter of sequence when it comes to Kant's theory of knowledge, for it seems to me the mind's organization of "raw material" is simply the manner the mind perceives because of its innate wiring of awareness of time and space. If we follow Messay's approach, it will engage us in an infinite regression, because in Messay's interpretation of Kant there is the invitation to a shadow of a third party presence—an evaluating mind. For the process does not seem to me a process of objectifying perceived material but transforming them into universalized knowledge.

"My purpose here is not to dissert on Kant's theory of knowledge, but to indicate that the objectifying nature of Eurocentrism perfectly complies with Kantian epistemological premise. The Hegelian scheme of history agrees with the goal of knowledge understood as construction, and as such results in the empowerment of the West. Western anthropology is not the learning of other cultures, but the transformation of other cultures into witnesses answering Western questions." [Messay, 189]

In fact, I am glad that Messay addressed such important issues of "objectification," for such discussion focuses us on the history of our lopsided relationship with the West and its civilization; it gives us a chance to challenge the validity of using dialectical materialism as a tool for logical arguments; and it allows us to reexamine our "modernization" effort. However, I may have some reservation on Messay's challenge putting both Hegel and Kant in the same basket because by so doing he limited his address from its logical counterpoint of the distinction between "objectification" and "universalization," especially in light of philosophy's long standing dispute between those who support Heraclites and those who support Parmenides. The example of a man pointing at a star would illustrate my point, in the sense of making a distinction in the continuum between looking at the pointing finger (objectification) as opposed to looking at the star (universalization). Messay seems to consider both Hegel and Kant's philosophical perception and knowledge of our world as a similar process of mind "constructed" not "empirical" or "reflected" reality.

The problem here is the fact that there are some qualitative differences of such approaches of Hegel and Kant that do not have a single terminus or similar outcomes. I agree that Hegel's approach did objectify non-Western cultures because of his exclusionary approach, and that is not because of his theory of knowledge but because of his highly flawed understanding of the history of non-Western people. However, Kant's approach is quite a different process of "universalization," and that I believe was why Kant found it necessary to assert the "synthetic-a priori" new approach in order to accommodate our "individualized" but universal reality, which is a consequence of our active mind orientation of "time" and "space" as the fiber of our perception of reality. Hegel attempted to solve such problem, rather unsuccessfully, through his introduction of the concept of the "Universal Spirit." In this regard, I must say that Hegel simply overlooked Occum's razor: "Entities should not be multiplied more than necessary"

I understand the attraction of Hegelian dialectical approach to revolutionaries, and the trilling use of Hegel's triad system of "thesis," "antithesis," and "synthesis" for young

radicals and sober intellectuals alike. There is in that formulation of Hegel's triad system of a monumental presumption of a causal connection in between each of the triad points, without adequate rational explanations. All claims of cause-effect connections are disputable. For example if I take up Hegel's most famous triad of "Being – Nonbeing – Becoming," I see its emptiness of causal content immediately and see such designations as just a rather cute configuration of words on the same order of a Zen koan (philosophical riddle) which asks, for example, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Hegel's triad system had been misused, in my opinion, by both Marx and Lenin and all those who propounded such system of logic. The concept was not directly rendered in the triad by Hegel, but reduced to such configuration by Marx, Lenin, and others from Hegel's Science of Logic. [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Hegel's Science of Logic, trans. A. V. Miller, Prometheus Books, 1989.] It behooves the reader to remember the fact that Science of Logic is the only book Hegel actually completed for publication, for the rest of his books were compiled from his lecture notes, and in one case from the notes taken by his student!

Both Marx and Lenin were not good logicians, for they subverted the science of logical reasoning to promote their political agenda thereby misleading millions and compromising the highest purification of philosophy—Logic. They used both deductive and inductive reasoning in a confused manner. Knowing the fact that they lived prior to the modern expansion and supplanting of traditional (Aristotelian) logic with new powerful tools (symbolic logic, modal logic, et cetera, for example), one may argue to excuse Marx and Lenin for their limited range of rational use of logical arguments. But that does not exonerate them from the fact that they did not even use what was available in the literature of their age, namely the prepositional logic of the stoics, Hume's causal reasoning, and the inductive expansion of Mill's "canons of induction."

Thus, I have concluded that "dialectical materialism" is fallacious not only for its lack of cause-effect clear establishment, but also on far more serious epistemological problem—error in logic. The "being-nonbeing-becoming" (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) triad has serious logical problem. First of all from the categorical syllogism of the classic period that Hegel's logic is entirely based on, we know from "the square of opposition" that the being-nonbeing relationship is not that of "contradictions," but a relationship of "contraries," which means that both universal notions (categorical statements) cannot be true, but both can be false. According to Aristotle's explanations, statements that are opposed as contradictories cannot both be true and cannot both be false, but statements that are opposed as contraries cannot both be true but may both be false.

"An affirmation is opposed to a denial in the sense which I denote by the term 'contradictory', when, while the subject remains the same, the affirmation is of universal character and the denial is not. The affirmation 'every man is white' is the *contradictory* of the denial 'not every man is white', or again, the proposition 'no man is white' is the *contradictory* of the proposition 'some men are white'. But propositions are opposed as *contraries* when both the affirmation and the denial are universal, as in the sentences 'every man is white', 'no man is white', 'every

man is just', 'no man is just'." The Basic Works of Aristotle, De Interpretatione [7 (17b 16-25)], New York NY, Modern Library, 2001, 44.

In other words, the “dialectical” designation in a triad with the scenario that every thesis (as a universal) carries its contradiction is patently wrong because the “antithesis” could only be a “contrary” and not a “contradiction” as long as we use the traditional “square of opposition” as our guide.

At any rate, even assuming Marx and Lenin’s designation of the relationship between thesis–antithesis to be that of “contradictions,” it does not necessarily lead to the establishment of truth even for one of the triad points since both cannot be true and both cannot be false. Where is then the value of “dialectical materialism” when its basic formulation is wrong? Thus, the dialectical method of arguing by putting the aristocracy as “contradiction” to the bourgeoisie (or vice versa), or workers as “contradiction” to management (or vice versa), et cetera has no logical validity or logical support whatsoever. We have been misled to believe that the conflict of individual interest is also an organic conflict of group interest leading into heightened antagonism that can be solved by the destruction of one or the other. Such was the error that resulted in the horror of all revolutionary upheavals of the last one hundred years with staggering numbers of loss of life and of wealth. If we had not stumbled upon Marx, most of the past conflicts could have been solved with rational negotiation and limited use of force, and we would have ploughed all that wasted human energy and wealth into creating a far better world. It is our human tragedy that so many paid with their lives for a philosophy that is seriously flawed.

Hegel’s claim of the “Universal Spirit” as manifested in history’s dynamic progress is at best disputed and at the worst simple gobbledygook. I tend to side with Schopenhauer in his perception of Hegel’s philosophy and his criticism of Kant. [See Arthur Schopenhauer, introd. David E. Cartwright, On the Basis of Morality, translation, E.F.J. Payne, Providence RI: Berghahn Books, 1995.] The fact is that I hold Schopenhauer in great respect no less than either Kant or Hegel because of his far advanced understanding of the concept of “being”; for Schopenhauer has far clearer questions on the subject of perception through the senses whether or not he succeeded to answer them to our satisfaction for his pessimistic view of life in general clouded his brilliant mind. Nevertheless, he goes beyond both Kant and Hegel in his appreciation of the unique intimacy of the individual to his (her) own “self” (body and soul) as distinct of his (her) perceptions of the world around him (her). As an aside, I do not believe the “floating man” would have any self awareness.

It is also difficult to discuss Hegel and Kant without bringing in David Hume into the discussion. David Hume single handedly threatened to topple philosophy from its ivory tower for good, with his enquiry of the problem of properly establishing the relationship between “cause and effect.” More importantly he focused philosophy on an item philosophers had simply either did not know or had glossed over for centuries—the issue of how do we know the truth—the modern search into the brain of human beings to understand cognition is probably the most honest approach to solving that mystery. The irony of it all was the fact that such a dilemma was asked by the pre-Socratic Xenophanes

in a single statement: “No human being will ever know the truth, for even if they happen to say it by chance, they would not even know they had done so.”

The fact remains that Messay’s own approach in discussing the Ethiopian elite and the significant roles it played in the transformation of a traditional country is a way of looking at such changes from a certain philosophical trajectory. The question remains for me to answer where would I place Messay Kebede as a philosopher. The answer is not that essay to come by, for Messay defies simple identification just like other late Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries philosophers. If pressed, I probably will place him close to the Phenomenologist and early Modernist philosophers such as Heidegger, Habermas, Rorty et cetera even though I see also a certain trend of the Frankfurt School of critical theorists and a whiff of the Deconstructionist Derrida (whom I loath as an obscurantist). Simply put, Messay does not have the latter philosophers’ projectionist or nihilistic approach to philosophical thinking.

Messay has tried to give a clear cause-effect relationship between ideology adopted due to alienation and dislocation of culture/tradition and the radicalized student movement. It is always risky to identify cause-effect relationships even in the physical world let alone in the activities and relationships of human beings where psychology plays a major determining role. He had add one additional reason to add weight to his “guilt” driven ideology adopted by Ethiopian students the idea of “deep cultural disorientation” derived from the value/system approach to revolutions. This second idea may run contrary to my experience of having watched and interacted with important student leaders and students in general at HSIU, for the corruption I witnessed supersedes any cumulative effect of cultural disorientation. The obscurantist [not-Messay] approach to philosophical thinking, which is prevalent in skepticism and deconstructionist arguments, has no place in my view. I believe in the sincere effort of each one of us to understand our ideas even if we do not agree on them.

VIII. Conclusion

In its scope and depth, Messay’s book is exemplary. However, it is a puzzle to me why Messay did not discuss the tremendous role played by foreign governments (except mentioning the United States) in the period covered by the book, such as the Government of the USSR, which could even be considered as co-conspirator along with the radical “Crocodile” group that was the seed of all radicalization and revolutionary zeal of Ethiopian Students. Even at that time in 1965 when I was a freshman, the “Crocodile” group was considered as a Soviet implant cell. The other nations that were not discussed by Messay who were actively engaged in the Ethiopian Students fracas with their own agenda to overthrow Emperor Haile Selassie and lock Ethiopia in a civil war for decades were Ethiopia’s historic enemies such as Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Pakistan et cetera. I hope Messay’s book will trigger other Ethiopians as well to study that aspect of our past in depth.

As I go over in my mind looking over a particular village or township anywhere in Ethiopia on questions of its organization, its civic institutions, its sewage system, its sanitation, its water and other utilities, its medical facilities, its workshops, its industry,

et cetera, I often find my self wondering what we, Ethiopians, were doing all these thousands of years of communal life, for the lack of such facilities and socioeconomic institutions is almost complete. The real situation in Ethiopia is far from the delusion of our fabrication of an Ethiopia we wish to have. Ethiopian societies seem to me to be organized to fulfill the barest necessities with minimal governmental or communal involvement in the lives of citizens. The one single item of some contact between the Ethiopian Government and its citizens is the collection of taxes or tributes. In fact, our long history is replete with stories of particular Kings or Emperors of the nation often engaged in looting from their own people rather than building the structure of such long lived society providing services to the public.

It is often difficult to write a conclusion in a book review of a well researched and thoughtful book because of the perennial problem of what to stress as a parting salute to such an author. Messay has truly done us a great favor by writing this thoughtful, objective, and original book. I have focused my review and comment on a limited number of points that I found in Messay's book most intriguing and profound, and my focusing on a limited number of points does not at all discredit his cornucopia of numerous ideas and theories that I did not discuss. The limitation is mine and not that of Messay's book. I used purely a subjective judgment in the choices I made of specific points for discussion in my review and commentary, for any other number of points would have been as challenging and as profound as my choices.

Although it is not a critic's venue or place to personalize matters in critiquing a book, I must be excused for the following rather personal statements. In reviewing and commenting on Messay's book, I realize that Messay is an exceptionally disciplined scholar compared to many Ethiopians even those far older and well established than Messay is, such as Professor Getatchew Haile, an individual I had truly looked up to for guidance and setting of standards, who turned out at this point of his mature life an utter disappointment to me because of his pettiness, his choosing of a myopic understanding of Ethiopian history, his association with intellectual midgets, and his unnecessary ethnic-baiting fragmentary articles.

I am not disrespecting life in general or human life in particular by using very strong words against some exceptionally cruel and murderous individuals, who caused great human suffering directly or indirectly in Ethiopia in my life time, such as Mengistu Hailemariam. I felt a depth of gratitude for Messay, for controlling his *appetite*, a too human trait in Ethiopians in general, and thereby writing this insightful book. He gave me a focal point and a rare chance to vent some of my deeply seated anger and frustration that I had carried with me for many years. I learned much from the book; I understand my enigmatic generation much better now, I hope, than before. Well done, Professor Messay! Ω

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December 12, 2008

Endnotes/Bibliography

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