Chapter VI

The Radicalization of Ethiopian Students

When one analyzes the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, the aspect that needs to be primarily explained is not so much the uprising against the imperial regime as its precipitous shift toward socialist demands and slogans. Many unsolved problems liable to provoke widespread discontents saddled the regime. None of them, however, required or invited a socialist revolution per se. The decisive impulse toward a socialist revolution came undoubtedly from the Ethiopian student movement. Accordingly, any inquiry about the revolution must begin by unraveling the reasons that brought about the radicalization of a great majority of Ethiopian students and intellectuals. A compelling reason for inquiring is that the movement had grave deleterious effects on the modernization process, if only because it sowed the seeds of an authoritarian culture and elitist style of leadership that repeatedly canceled out (and continue to do so) reformist attempts in favor of extremist directions.

Doctrinal Primacy

The African scholar, Ali A. Mazrui, who gave a talk to a student body in December 1973, characterized Ethiopian students as "the most radical African students [he] had ever addressed."[1] One would expect that this alarming level of radicalization is reason enough for scholars to mobilize their efforts to understand its causes. Yet, the question of why students were so radicalized is never answered in a satisfactory way. Most studies of the Ethiopian student movement miss the necessity of a multifarious approach to understand the complex evolution of the movement. They attribute the radicalization either to the severe socioeconomic problems of the imperial regime or to the resentment against ethnic inequality, or to both, and have little or nothing to say about the impact of cultural factors. To be sure, it would be a mistake to underestimate the impact of social discontents over economic conditions and ethnic inequality, but so also is the reluctance to admit that it is not enough to explain the infatuation of students and intellectuals with Marxism-Leninism.

The argument according to which the gravity of social problems solely dictated the turn toward radicalism is not convincing. It presupposes a type of determinism that amounts to saying: the more acute and widespread the social problems, the greater is the compulsion for a radical, earth-shaking change. Yet, though social systems burdened with acute social problems proliferate in the world, revolutions, especially the kind that Ethiopia went through, are rare occurrences. Moreover, the assumed determinism contradicts the very theory that students are supposed to have followed, namely, Marxism. The very backwardness and stagnation of the Ethiopian social system were nowhere near to requiring socialist solutions to the problems it was facing. Under pain of throwing away the evolutionary scheme of Marxist philosophy, the socialist ideology cannot be deduced from structural conditions unfit even for capitalism. The same can be said about ethnic

resentment: except for the Eritrean movement, which was a demand for independence arising from the assumed illegality of the Ethiopian annexation of Eritrea in 1962, no ethnic movement of any importance seriously threatened the imperial regime. Moreover, whatever discontent there was, the rational solution to ethnic inequality lay in the expansion of democratic rights rather than in the kind of struggle known as national liberation.

In truth, the struggle for elementary rights, such as freedom of expression and organization, and improvements of conditions of life, could have been enough both to mobilize workers and peasants and seriously threaten Haile Selassie's autocratic regime. For instance, the fight for the right to strike would have given workers a better opportunity to improve their conditions of life than the nationalization of the means of production. Likewise, mobilization for the creation of political parties harboring moderate and reformist demands would have shaken up the foundation of the autocratic regime in a way that a socialist revolution is unable to do.

This huge discrepancy between the real problems of the regime and the brandished socialist elixir denotes the intervention of something other than a mere search for a feasible remedy, something that yearned for the satisfaction of a fantasy. Hence the need to involve cultural factors, which are necessary to provide the incentive for students and intellectuals to become enamored with the Marxist-Leninist ideology, given the impossibility of deducing it from the objective conditions of the country. Here an objection comes to mind: What about the argument saying that the imperial regime was so ridden with deep inner contradictions that it was not amenable to reformist solutions? The argument overlooks the greater plausibility of the reverse assumption, which is that the existing system appeared unreformable because of the prior commitment to the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism. Succinctly put, rather than the features of Ethiopia being truly impossible to reform, it is the primacy of the revolutionary doctrine that painted them as unreformable. The ease with which the imperial regime crumbled is proof enough of its vulnerability. Had a popular reformist party steered the social protests, it would have been possible to remove some of the structural drawbacks of the social system.

To say that structural conditions are not enough to explain the radical direction of the revolution does not mean that they are not necessary factors. In effect, many scholars believe that the economic failures of the regime led to the progressive disillusionment of students and intellectuals. This disillusionment took a radical turn when in the late 60s and early 70s acute economic crises affected all sectors of the Ethiopian society, including university graduates, who suddenly found themselves threatened by unemployment. Thus, one analyst of the student movement writes, "the prospect of unemployment shattered the aspirations of the younger generation of the intelligentsia, leading to a rapid spread of radicalism among the students."[2] The generalized economic crisis reached its peak with soaring inflation when in 1973 OPEC quadrupled the price of oil. Added to this was the severe famine that hit the northern provinces of Wolllo and Tigre in 1973: though caused by drought, the famine angered many people because the imperial government first ignored and then suppressed information about the ongoing starvation. Dominating all these drawbacks was, of course, the structural disparity between the northern *rist* system and the prevalence of tenancy in the south. As we saw, the disparity instituted a system of unequal treatment between the north and the south that easily converted into ethnic grievances and backed the theory of the ethnic, even colonial domination of Amhara elites over the southern peoples. Baptized "the national question," many intellectuals and students considered the disparity as the primary contradiction of Ethiopia. In the eyes of many scholars, especially those using the Marxist methodology, the combination of ethnic discontents with the frustration over the socioeconomic downturns, and the complete unwillingness of the imperial government to

implement even a modicum of reformist measures, explain, for the most part, the radicalization of Ethiopian students.

Using an evolutionary approach, Bahru Zewde summarizes the momentum that led to the radical denouement thus: radicalization stemmed from the "growing impatience with a regime which was not prepared to reform itself. As the century wore on, the medicine prescribed also grew in virulence."[3] While the early intellectuals adopted a reformist stand, those of the 60s and early 70s turned revolutionary because the delay of reforms exacerbated the social problems and induced the belief that the regime was completely reluctant to the idea of even minor reforms. The ever-growing belief that the regime is dismissive of the idea of even minor reforms prescribed the necessity of revolution, that is, the complete eradication of the regime by a radical revolutionary insurrection.

Even though the above arguments look strong, they have yet to answer one important question. To be sure, the gravity of the problems called for important changes, but does such an observation really explain the shift of students and intellectuals from the normal course of reformism to the unorthodox path of radical revolutionism? If the belief is that the severity of the socioeconomic predicaments required nothing less than a radical change, such a belief prompts another deeper question, to wit, whether, as suggested above, the problems did not appear to require radical solutions because of prior ideological convictions rather than the other way round. All the more reason for asking the question is that the implemented revolutionary solutions have proved to be not only inadequate but also harmful to the country as a whole. In other words, seeing the great gap separating reform from revolution, the jump from the one to the other appears more credible if we say that it occurred as a result of Ethiopian realities being read through a radicalizing theoretical grid, namely, Marxism-Leninism. The error is to think that the accumulation and aggravation of social contradictions radicalized the students when in reality the prior adoption of a radical ideology changed the reading of the problems in such a way that a radical therapy appeared necessary. Speaking of student publications, Bahru notes, "ideological authenticity or rectitude takes precedence over historical reality," and this is so true that the major preoccupation is not about Ethiopian realities, but about "what Marx, Lenin, and Stalin—particularly the last two—said."[4] As a result, non-Marxist-Leninist approaches were simply dismissed and facts about Ethiopia were misconstrued to fit the prior ideological stand of the student movement.

All the defects of the student movement, such as extremism, dogmatism, and unrealism, point to an activism that a prior ideological conversion propelled. These defects flow from the effort made to be consistent with the theory, even by falsifying the given reality. An Ethiopian scholar speaks of the adoption of an abstract position that "was not grounded in the historically specific contradictions, political traditions, and cultural practices of Ethiopian society."[5] The term "abstract" does indicate the practice of using Marxism-Leninism as an apriori formula with which things must agree. The theory did not conform to facts; facts were made to conform to the theory, that is, they underwent a characteristic reinterpretation that adjusted them to the dictates of the doctrine. A pertinent case in point is the belief that a party that could guide the revolution, seize power, and implement proletarian socialism could emerge in a short time, not only from a precapitalist social system, but also from a country with no prior party system.

A slightly different position of some protagonists of the Leninist version of Marxism argues that things have so appallingly evolved that it was too late for reformism. The socioeconomic problems had reached such a level of severity that mere reforms had become inadequate, even for ordinary people. The contention according to which the time of reformism had passed forgets that the popular movement that overthrew the imperial regime initially came up with reformist rather

than socialist demands. The idea of socialist revolution came from outside the thinking of common working people, namely, from students and intellectuals. While most people understood what reforms meant, the understanding of socialism was limited to the closed circles of Western-educated Ethiopians. So that, the claim that "liberalism as an alternative ideology did not have a strong material base and even as an incipient tendency was already discredited" is anything but factually correct.[6] Reformism was discredited, not because it was judged inadequate to existing conditions, but because it appeared inadequate to students and intellectuals already converted to Marxism-Leninism. We see here the rejection of an alternative ideology before it was even put to the test. Clearly, without the mental orientation that interpreted social problems through the lens of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, a policy of slow and gradual liberalization would have presented itself as the commonsense thing to do, even if it would have probably fallen short of expectations.

The Manufactured Nature of Radicalism

Since the primacy of doctrinal commitment strongly suggests that the radical attitude of students did not directly proceed from the impact of socioeconomic conditions and ethnic grievances, it calls for an approach that handles radicalism as a construct. The necessity of such an approach emanates from the simple observation that the great majority of students were in the beginning and for an extended time either apolitical or professed moderate views. Witness the editorial of March 1965 of *Challenge*, the Journal of the Ethiopian Students Association in North America, complained that "Ethiopia's educated youth, unlike those of other countries, has consistently failed to address itself to them [social issues]."[7] The statement that the aggravation of social crises gradually radicalized the students would still overlook that the existing conditions did not dictate Marxist-Leninist prescriptions, not to mention the fact that, contrary to revolutionism, reformism could have proposed viable solutions. The single argument exposing revolutionism as a construct is that it proposed disastrous solutions, thereby revealing its inadequacy to the real, objective conditions of Ethiopia.

Donald L. Donham posits fairly well the problem when he asks: "Why, at the outset, did a small educated vanguard in Ethiopia become so enamored of the notion of revolution? And why, in a matter of only months, did virtually *all* Ethiopian political actors at the center take up Marxism?"[8] The question amounts to asking how radicals evicted moderates and took the leadership of the student movement. Let there be no misunderstanding: in denying a direct causal link between the conversion of the student movement to Marxist-Leninist ideology and the economic conditions and ethnic grievances, I am not implying, as reiterated in the previous paragraph, that the conditions and the grievances did not play any kind of role. One undeniable fact is that the imperial regime had given students a lot of reasons both to be frustrated and engage in recurring protests. What I am rejecting is the thesis according to which the social situation directly caused the conversion of students to Marxism-Leninism, which, in other words, means that the theory imposed itself on students and intellectuals as being both the appropriate tool of analysis and the correct remedy. My theory on the primacy of the doctrinal commitment was precisely called upon to show that the original disparity between Marxist-Leninist analysis and prescriptions and the Ethiopian predicaments goes a long way in explaining the drastic failure of the socialist experiment in Ethiopia. A better way to understand why the theory was adopted so fervently even though it was inapplicable is to connect the frustrations caused by the imperial regime with other factors, especially cultural ones.

When considering such factors, the first thing to analyze is the takeover of the leadership of the student movement by radical groups. It is imperative to realize that the takeover would not have occurred without a line of communication between the radical groups and the bulk of the student body. Campus seclusion, youth idealism, spirit of solidarity, and peer influence certainly aided the rise of radical groups to leadership, but they do not fully explain it. To understand why most Ethiopian students followed radical groups, one must involve predicaments that created dissatisfaction or anxiety among the large body of students. In effect, the rising number of dropouts and unemployed graduates caused deep anxiety among students, which resonated with militant groups' condemnation of the entire social system. Without the disquieting impacts of the economic failures of the regime on the majority of students, the radicals would have naturally pursued their denunciation of the system, but only as a small minority. The dissatisfaction of the majority enabled them to reach out by harnessing the crises of the educational sector to their denunciation of the whole system. Add to this the distressing and indefensible contradiction of the regime between its ideology of national unity and the disparity and the subsequent unequal treatment between the northern and southern parts of the country. The radicals could not have found a better cause to rally most students against the imperial regime, especially those students who came from southern regions. In fact, the disparity provided the radicals with the battle cry that sealed their victory over the moderates, namely, the slogan "Land to the Tiller." Equally decisive was the input of students from Tigray and Eritrea: owing to the ethnic competition that was customary in northern Ethiopia, Eritrean and Tigrean students were angered and mobilized by the perception of Amhara domination. As a result, many Tigreans became fervent activists and some of them rose to the highest positions of leadership of the student movement.

A no less important link between radicals and the rest of the student body was the reluctance of the imperial regime to do anything to help moderates retain some influence in the student movement. The utter refusal to even acknowledge the validity of the students' grievances and demands greatly facilitated the seizure by radicals of the leadership of the movement. Worse yet, instead of responding by some reforms, however mild they may be, to the demands of students, the government chose the path of violent repression, which further pushed many students into the hands of the extremists. The repeated violent responses did nothing but convince most students that the regime was incapable of change. Such a conclusion vindicated the stand and ideology of radicals, and so eliminated moderation as a viable approach for a great number of students.

Student radicalism is a product of social contradictions, but even more so of the impact of radical groups, who progressively politicize the majority of students. Ordinary students regularly complained about corruption, unemployment, the rising costs of living, mismanagement, etc. The construct, the manufacturing of a radical movement derived from the strategy of a few extremist activists, which was to bring most students into thinking that these problems cannot go away unless a socialist government overthrows and replaces the regime. Without the influence of the Marxist radicals, the social discontent would not have left off the course of moderate demands. An account of the radicalization of the student movement would, therefore, be incomplete unless it gives some clarification on the emergence of the small group that is responsible for the adoption of the extremist course. The manufactured nature of radicalism specifically lies in the effective and extensive indoctrination of students with the idea that only socialism can resolve all the socioeconomic problems. In other words, the social issues turned into a radicalizing cause, not by themselves but, so to speak, via the prior doctrine that the small group of extremists propagated. This is to say that, with the propagation of the galvanizing idea of socialism by radicals, cultural factors come into play.

To pose the problem in this manner is to bring out the singularity of radical groups, a feature whose explanation obviously necessitates the involvement of cultural-psychological factors. Indeed, what defined the radicals was the eccentricity of their values and beliefs, which eccentricity at first isolated them from the rest of the student body until lingering social dissatisfactions gave them the opportunity to cast the social frustration in terms of their cultural eccentricity. To study the occurrence of revolutions is thus to follow "sparks across national borders, carried by small groups and idiosyncratic individuals who created an incendiary legacy of ideas."[9] Starting with small groups with unorthodox beliefs and bent on secrecy and conspiratorial behavior, the idea of social revolution progressively expands and extends its grip on the students' protests.

The case of Ethiopia reproduced this general pattern: Ethiopian radicals initially formed the group nicknamed "Crocodile," whose characteristics were secrecy, single-mindedness, and complete devotion to the cause of the revolution. The term "crocodile" precisely expressed "its underground element, secrecy and, dangerous and unpredictable nature."[10] In full compliance with the Leninist notion of "professional revolutionaries," members of the group saw universities not so much as learning places as forums for political agitation. They were able to prevail over the moderates because of the nature of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, which advocates neither the pursuit of compromise nor a wait-and-see attitude. On the contrary, as a radical opposition, it constantly puts students in a position of confrontation with the hated regime. As such, it appeared as the only genuine and sincere opposition, as the only political stand determined to achieve something. In addition to inculcating a combative mood into the student body, Marxism-Leninism armed students with a clear project (albeit in abstract terms), namely, socialism, and a course of action, revolution. By contrast, the moderate groups had neither a clear ideology nor any rudiment of organizational activity. They were for changes, but they did not articulate the nature of these changes in such a way that they really offered a viable alternative. On top of supplying a powerful tool of social analysis and change, the utopian inspiration of Marxist socialism filled followers with a galvanizing sense of mission as no other social theory could. This sense of mission largely accounts for the boldness of activist students. Where moderates hesitate, radicals are ready to pay any sacrifice for their cause, including the ultimate sacrifice, and this has a magnetic power over students.

Uprootedness and Globality

On the basis of the argument that the presence of acute socioeconomic crises is not enough to radicalize the student body, as shown by the histories of other countries, we defended the need to involve cultural factors. We presented the primacy of doctrinal commitment and the manufactured nature of the student movement as proofs of the cultural basis of the radicalization of Ethiopian students. A complete understanding of the cultural explanation requires that the identified cultural factors be placed in the context of the time, and this confronts us with the issues of globality and cultural globalism. The universalist language of both modernization theory and Marxism imparts the conviction that world history is a single process exhibiting the various stages of realization of a goal that is inherent in all human societies (see Chapter IV). Since this historical scheme imparts the belief that the "advanced" stages trace out the future of the "lagging" stages, it foments the idea that global phenomena necessarily impact local realities. Just as the things that surround us condition us, so too global phenomena reach us through the induced consciousness of being part of a unilinear world history. In brief, a global culture is grafted on local cultures as a result of these cultures being towed by Western universalism.

So defined, globality does no more than aggravate the uprooting effect of the educational system, which is, as we saw, entirely modeled on that of the West. Many authors have reflected on the alienating impact of Western education, but very few have actually linked the alienation with the propensity to espouse radical ideas. Yet, what was taught was so disparaging to Ethiopian culture and history that it could not but unleash the desire to get rid of everything and start anew. For that reason, the Ethiopian Westernized elite wanted not just mere change, but a total break from the past. We saw in Chapter I that a positive process of change reconciles novelty with tradition, and so achieves continuity. Different is the impact of Western education: in line with the theoretical construct setting modernity against tradition, it calls for a fundamental rupture with the past. A quotation taken from *Struggle*, the journal of the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa, puts the matter clearly. It reads:

> In our Ethiopian context, the true revolutionary is one who has shattered all sentimental and ideological ties with feudal Ethiopia. . . . Our rallying points are not a common history, a feudal boundary, the legendary Solomonic fairy tale, religious institutions, regional ethnic, linguistic affiliations, but the cause of the oppressed classes, who are the ultimate makers of history. That is why we are internationalists because the masses have no nation, no home.[11]

The outright denigration of the cultural legacy of a particular society and history leads to a denial of one's membership in said society. Clearly, some such attitude presupposes the internalization of the West's unilinear scheme of history. As we saw, the scheme assigns cultural differences between peoples to local blockages rather than to identities that developed on particular lines. It thus characterizes differences as backwardness, while the history of the West is universalized and turned into a normative reference. Accordingly, one major manifestation of uprootedness is globality, which denotes a thinking pattern outwardly oriented. When a mind is bombarded with the idea that norms come from outside, it naturally develops a marked tendency toward extroversion. Referring to the outward-lookingness of the Ethiopian educated elite subsequent to the internalization of the normativeness of the West, Addis Hiwet writes: "The intelligentsia was dynamically marked by globality. The educational system of which it was a product was its mark of globality, and quite literally."[12]

It follows that the polarizing atmosphere of the Cold War and the subsequent struggle for ideological hegemony between Marxism-Leninism and Western liberalism had a powerful bearing on Ethiopian students. What many observers have in mind when they assert that Ethiopian students became Marxists because Marxism was in vogue at that time is, precisely, in keeping with their sensitivity to global phenomena imparted by the decentering effect of uprootedness. The impact was all the stronger because it was academic, that is, part of the intellectual formation of Ethiopian students and intellectuals. The dominance in the 60s and 70s of leftist ideas among the teaching staff in European and American universities heavily influenced international students and turned radicalism into the apex of intellectual development. This external source of leftist ideas posits the existence of a global "intellectual culture of revolution," which culture has precedence over local social conditions.[13] As a consequence, prior to the evaluation of the appropriateness of Marxist analysis and therapy, the ideological dictate of the leftist intellectual formation of students and intellectuals injected radical creeds into the reading of the existing conditions of peripheral societies. The evidence that Marxism-Leninism owed a great part of its influence to its fashionable status is the near absence of socialist movements in today's world. Indeed, the failure of socialism

in Russia and Eastern Europe seems to have broken the spell of Marxist ideology, even for countries crippled by severe socioeconomic problems.

The point that remains to be explained is why the global orientation of Ethiopian students brought them to side so forcefully and in great numbers with the socialist camp. For one thing, the alliance of Haile Selassie's government with the West compelled Ethiopian students to support the socialist camp as a matter of doctrinal consistency and practical necessity. For another, the global ideological fight seemed to favor socialism in the 60s and early 70s, as liberalism appeared to be on the defensive on various fronts. The war in Vietnam and the large antiwar movement it triggered in America, the continuous student protests in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa condemning in unison American imperialism, capitalism, apartheid, neocolonialism, and internal reaction, etc., seemed to indicate that liberalism was losing ground. Espousing the winning ideology of socialism was, therefore, nothing less than going with the flow of history.

For Ethiopian students, that history moves in the direction of socialism meant a shift of normativeness from the West to the East. The Leninist characterization of imperialism as a decadent, moribund capitalism provided the theoretical basis of the shift. Since capitalism was no longer the driving force of history, socialist countries were promoted to the rank of torchbearers of progress for lagging countries. And no other theory consistently implements the fundamental principle of modernization theory, namely, the opposition between tradition and modernity, than the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism. The latter is the true, authentic expression of modernization theory, unlike Western liberalism, which goes against its own principles to support backward regimes like that of Haile Selassie.

Imitativeness and Elitism

While underlining the necessity of the release of creativity, we saw that modernization theorists paradoxically advocate the West as a model, and so reduce culture change to the assimilation of Western values and institutions through an imported educational system. In so doing, they encourage, not the learning of self-reliance, but of dependency and imitation. Imitativeness blocks self-reliance and, hence, the nurture of innovative capacity. It cannot even produce good copyists, since the Western depiction of cultural difference as backwardness erodes self-respect and self-confidence, thereby depriving people of the qualities and virtues necessary to reproduce the model. Denouncing the effect of black peoples' internalization of inferiority, Edward W. Blyden says: "bound to move on a lower level, they [black peoples] acquire and retain a practical inferiority, transcribing, very often, the faults rather than the virtues of their models.[14] A good example of this is the fate of the word "democracy" in Africa and elsewhere in Third World countries. Even though Third World political elites profusely promise democracy to their people, they rarely deliver it, and when they make an effort to do so, they only succeed in installing a caricature of democracy.

Imitation must be distinguished from inspiration: the former inculcates passivity and self-depreciation; the latter is a stimulation urging to be as achieving as the model, even to surpass it. Stimulation is not about copying; it is an encouragement to strike a new course. As such, it invites one to add a difference, that is, to be creative. On the other hand, the tendency to repeat what already exists derives from the presentation of the West as a model rather than as a stimulus. The description of non-Western countries as lagging behind the West, how else could it define modernization but as the process of catching up with the West? The definition does no more than perpetuate the creative and leading role of the West, since the one who has to catch up is the one who always remains behind. A pertinent example illustrating the difference between imitation and

inspiration is Mao Tse-tung's relationship with Marxism. For Mao, Marxism was just an inspiration, an encouragement to use the theory by adapting it to Chinese peculiarities. Otherwise, he says,

> talk about Marxism apart from China's characteristics, that will be only Marxism in the abstract, Marxism in the void. Hence how to turn Marxism into something specifically Chinese, to imbue every manifestation of it with Chinese characteristics, *i.e.* to apply it in accordance with China's characteristics, becomes a problem which the whole Party must understand and solve immediately.[15]

Such was not the path taken by Ethiopian students: their subservient mentality went straight to imitation. Their inability to adapt, to synthesize Marxism-Leninism with Ethiopian realities, in a word, their failure to be creative drove them to champion an uncritical and dogmatic implementation of the theory. Since their mental dependency prompted them to make reality conformable to the imperatives of the dominant ideology rather than to adopt the ideology to a concrete and particular reality, it unleashed "revolutionary romanticism" together with a tendency to be satisfied with "a crude and superficial digest of Marxist-Leninist ideas."[16] Indeed, because the theory is given a normative function rather than an analytical one, it does not set limits and conditions, and so fosters utopianism. Similarly, the imitative mind does not need to have a sophisticated understanding of the theory, since reality must conform to the theory rather than vice versa. Imitativeness does not analyze; instead, it attempts to subsume reality under alien normative concepts. In so doing, it produces a tendency to infatuation, for the simple reason that concepts are handled as incantatory formulas, not as tools of knowledge.

Another downside of the dependency on imported external norms is the elitist mentality. The debasing of the cultural heritage creates an unbridgeable generational gap: what was traditional and old being identified with backwardness and reaction, whatever appears as Western and revolutionary acquires absolute value, often independently of real merits. Perceived as living fossils, the old lose the authority necessary to transmit the cultural heritage, while school children turn into "more sophisticated and infallible 'semi-gods.'"[17] The loss affects every level of the social hierarchy, including parental authority. It also extends to religious beliefs, with the consequence that the profession of militant atheism becomes a sine qua non of revolutionism. This narcissistic tendency of the educated elite stems from the extremely overrated value given to modern education by the very scheme of modernization theory.

As a result, Western-educated persons—those who would pull Ethiopia out of backwardness—"enjoyed unquestioned prestige."[18] The status of enlighteners and liberators entitled the Ethiopian educated elite to unrivaled political leadership in the very eyes of ordinary people. By taking on the task of modernizing a backward society, the Westernized elite, as mentioned earlier, was willy-nilly adopting the colonial model of "civilizing mission." Modernization is not about letting people act, decide, choose, and plan; it is about a self-appointed tutor acting, choosing, and planning on behalf of unenlightened people. One editorial of *Challenge* writes, "The task of awakening our country from her age-old slumber and liberating our people from the iron grip of remorseless tyranny falls on our shoulders."[19] Is it surprising if, wherever it came to power, as in Ethiopia, this narcissistic self-perception produced totalitarian states under the cover of laying the ground for progress and democracy?

The elitist belief that those who know, those who have liberated themselves from ignorance and reaction, have the duty to liberate the masses, triggered an "over-eagerness to be a protagonist

in revolutionary struggle on *behalf* of the masses rather than *with* them."[20] No notion could be more attractive to this state of mind than the Leninist idea of "professional revolutionaries." Lenin makes the realization of socialism essentially dependent on the formation of a party composed of "a select, highly disciplined, and 'theoretical' cadre of professional revolutionaries."[21] Strongly rejecting the rise of an independent ideology among workers, Lenin writes: "We must actively take up the political education of the working class, and the development of its political consciousness."[22] For Leninism, then, revolutionary intellectuals are not mere representatives of the working masses; they are also their indispensable tutors (in the colonial sense) in that they educate workers by raising their revolutionary consciousness. In so doing, they also decide what their long-term interests should be.

In Ethiopia, having inherited the narcissistic self-perception of the student movement, the two regimes that came after the imperial rule thought and acted as expected. Not only did they fail to disengage from the dictatorial path, but they also implemented a top-down policy of modernization that forced Ethiopians into passivity and resignation. The outcome was and still is the reluctance of Ethiopians to pour vitality and enthusiasm into the social process of modernization. Insofar as ordinary people do not recognize themselves in this exogenous process, their aloofness is actually a normal reaction. As to the liberators, after a start somewhat consistent with their promises of change, their revolutionary zeal soon lost momentum. In its place, the drama of political antagonism targeting absolute power through the sheer elimination of all would-be rivals came into force. The next chapter will elaborate on the degeneration of the revolutionary spirit into an obsession with absolute power, as it manifested first with the rise and consolidation of the Derg.

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[2] Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation, The History of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party* (Silver Spring: The Independent Publishers, 1993), 29.

[3] Bahru Zewde, "The Intellectual and the State in Twentieth Century Ethiopia," in *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies: Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 1 (Lawrenceville, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1994), 490.

[4] Ibid., 489.

[5] Tesfaye Demmellash, "On Marxism and Ethiopian Student Radicalism in North America," *Monthly Review* 35 (1984): 28.

[6] Gebru Mersha, "The Emergence of the Ethiopian 'Left' in the Period 1960-1970 as an Aspect of the Formation of the 'Organic Intellectuals,'" in *The Ethiopian Revolution and its Impact on the Politics on the Horn of Africa*: *Proceedings, 2nd International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York: New School for Social Research, 1987), 71.

[7] Melesse Ayalew, "Editorial," *Challenge* 5, no. 1(1965): 1.

[8] Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xix.

[9] James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980), 7.

[10] Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution*, 1952-1977(East Lansing, MI.: Michigan State University, 1985), 118.

[11] Editorial, *Struggle*, 5: 2 (November 1969), 1.

[12] Addis Hiwet "A Certain Political Vocation: Reflections on the Ethiopian Intelligentsia," *The Ethiopian Revolution and its Impact on the Politics on the Horn of Africa*, *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York: New School for Social Research, 1987), 49.

[13] Forrest D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 14.

[14] Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 76.

[15] Mao Tse-tung, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War," in *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (New York: International Publishers, 1954), 260.

[16] Gebru, "The Emergence of the Ethiopian 'Left' in the Period 1960-1970 as an Aspect of the Formation of the 'Organic Intellectuals,'" 81-83

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