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An Ethiopian Dilemma: Deep Structures, Wrenching Processes

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Please find attached my keynote address presented August 3 at the 4th International Conference of Ethiopian Development Studies at Western Michigan University. Organized by Professor Sisay Asefa, the Conference assembled an edifying blend of thoughtful, forward-looking Ethiopian scholars, and culminated with inauguration of the new Ethiopian Development Studies Association.

First page of the text follows; the complete text is attached as a Word file.

ETHIOPIA 'S MISSED CHANCES–1960, 1974, 1991, 1998, 2005–AND NOW: II

An Ethiopian Dilemma: Deep Structures, Wrenching Processes *

Donald N. Levine
University of Chicago

My title "An Ethiopian Dilemma" stands to evoke an association to the book by Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, which played a signal role in helping Americans resolve their longstanding conflict of values regarding racial discrimination. My hope is to suggest ways in which a social scientist, and a *ferenj* at that, might help Ethiopians get a better grip on their country's problems. Although work by social scientists gets valued often for methods of securing more reliable data, there are three other ways in which our disciplines provide more objective analyses. One is to locate current issues in a larger historical context.   One is to bring to bear sharper theoretical tools. And one is to undertake comparative analyses. Here I shall offer suggestions in all three modes.First, to history. Not since the 16th Century has Ethiopia experienced changes so convulsive as in the past fifty years.   The 16th-century changes were instigated by the Ottoman Empire under Sultan Suleiman, who gave arms and soldiers to satellite state Adal under Ahmad Grañ.

Grañ assassinated the rightful Harari ruler Sultan Abu Beker Mohammed and abrogated the Islamic doctrine that Ethiopia was a righteous land to be spared jihad. His attacks destroyed vast stretches of highland Ethiopia and created a vacuum that invited Oromo peoples to conquer vast parts of the country, initiating the chronically contested multiethnic rulership of the Ethiopian state. Turks later invaded Ethiopia directly and wrested away Ethiopia's historic coastal strip, paving the way for conflict three centuries later.

20th-century turbulence likewise stemmed from invasions: first Sudan, then Italy–twice. These invasions pushed Ethiopia toward deliberate programs of internal change, what sociologists call "defensive modernization." One way or another, however, a push toward modernization was inevitable, given steady engulfment by a global civilization. What was not inevitable was how Ethiopia faced the challenges of becoming modern.

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* Keynote address at the Fourth International Conference on Ethiopian Development Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI: August 3, 2007.

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Parameters of Modernization

When we think about roads to modernity we often invoke the trope of revolution. We link the modern world with the revolutions in America and France, Russia and China–what Eisenstadt (2006) calls the "Great 'Classical' Revolutions." Or we think of generic transformations that use the same label–the Industrial Revolution and the Democratic Revolution. Social scientists may associate to phrases recognized from the work of penetrating originary theorists, terms such as the Managerial Revolution (Burnham, 1941), the Integrative Revolution (Geertz, 1963), the Academic Revolution (Jencks and Riesman, 1969), the Participatory Revolution (Huntington, 1974), and the Disciplinary Revolution (Gorski, 1993).

Whatever 'revolution' is taken to signify, the term connotes *changes of form that combine abruptness and violence.* We tend to suppose that modernization requires societies to suffer a set of wrenching events, in which one complex of deep structures must necessarily be eradicated in favor of another. Lenin's famous phrase puts the matter with crude succinctness: "You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs." But surely the subject demands a more differentiating perspective.

I approach this theme from a lifetime of study of the seminal figures of modern social science, each of whom penetrated a central feature of the modern order. Some analyze modernity in terms of the division of labor, specialization, and increased productivity (Smith, Marx, Durkheim); some consider political centralization, mobilization, and nation building (Tocqueville, Elias); some stress equality and the extension of rights (Hegel, Tocqueville, von Stein). Others stress objectified knowledge and scientifically educated elites (Comte, Weber, Dewey) or the creation of world-shaping ideologies (Pareto, Eisenstadt); still others highlight changes in persons, for example, as becoming more disciplined (Weber, Freud, Elias) or more individuated (Durkheim, Simmel) or more flexible (Simmel, Riesman, Lerner). My

recent work seeks dialogue among these authors by connecting the phenomena they discuss in terms of six major categories: specialization, individualization, social equalization, political unification, cultural rationalization, and personal discipline. I have also sought to specify the costs and dissatisfactions associated with modernization as well as its benefits (Levine 2005, 2006c). [Figure 1]

Figure 1 **MODERNITY REVOLUTIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS***

PROCESS	Differentiation		Democratization		Rationalization	
	Specialization	**Individuation**	**Unification**	**Equalization**	**Cultural**	**Personal**
REVOLUTION	**Industrial**	**Urban-Commercial**	**Integrative**	**Social**	**Academic**	**Disciplinary**
BENEFITS	**Commerce, Goods**	**Freedom**	**Efficacy**	**Justice**	**Knowledge**	**Civility**
DISADVANTAGES	**Personal atrophy; Social deficits**	**Hyper-specialization; Alienation; Consumerism**	**Repressive centralization; Violence**	**Mediocrity**	**"Tragedy of culture"; Jacobin barbarities**	**Psychic repression**

*Source: Levine 2006c, 26

Although the transformations analyzed by these authors often seem to occur suddenly I prefer to view them as the acceleration, albeit occasionally at breakneck speed, of large-scale processes that evolved over centuries. As Donald Donham suggests in his perspicuous account of modernization among the Maale of Debub Kilil, regarding "the question of modernity . . . a long, vernacular conversation has gone on for centuries among ordinary men and women the world over" (1999, 180).[1] But whether or not those rapidly unfolding processes entail *abruptness of change is a variable*, not an inexorable feature of the dynamics of modernization, a central assumption behind *Wax and Gold* (1965).

So, relatedly, is the question of whether or not modernization necessarily entails violence. Although "revolutionary" ideologies tend to rationalize–idealize, even–the use of violence in producing certain changes associated with the modern order, *it has never been demonstrated that these changes could not have come about in nonviolent ways.* Indeed, one of the great theorists of modernity, Alexis de Tocqueville, demonstrated that after all the bloodletting of the French revolution, what emerged was essentially a set of changes that already in place under the *ancien regime* ([1856] 1955).[2]

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[1] In contrast to earlier epochs, these processes have often been greeted with enthusiasm for the sheer fact of their novelty, whereas the word 'modern,' historians of ideas tell us, had previously evoked negative associations.

[2] Even more challenging to the notion that modernization requires abrupt, violent shifts from one state to another, I would stress, as did Max Weber and Georg Simmel preeminently, that *the diverse currents of the modernization process do not all flow in the same direction*. Although at times they support one another–as in Weber's famous argument that the modern commercial order requires the institutions of a stable legal system–at times they also run counter to one another. This can be seen, for example, in Weber's implication that the bureaucrats' obligation to "follow the rules" contradicts the wish to achieve goals in the most efficient matter; in Simmel's analysis of the contradiction between the modern promotion of individuality and precisely its opposite, the need to conform to

We would do well, then, to conceptualize modernization in ways that accommodate variations in whether, how, and how well the challenge to make certain modernizing changes is met. To deal with this variable, I propose now the notion of *structural opening*—a moment of fluidity in which actors imagine and deal with the array of options that every situation presents. Every opening harbors possibilities for change and action that are more or less constructive, more or less beneficial. It requires disinterested analysis to identify and clarify the options available in a situation, in order to enable actors to transcend the inertia and passions of the moment and thereby avert possibly disastrous results.

Within this perspective I shall review openings for Ethiopia that appeared over the past half century, openings which in each case found key players moving in suboptimal directions. I invite you to reflect upon five such opportunities that arguably were mishandled, as these became manifest in (1) the abortive coup of December 1960; (2) the ferment of 1974; (3) the regime change of 1991; (4) the Eritrean war of 1998; and (5) the May 2005 national election.

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objectified structures; or in Luhmann's argument that different institutions of the modern world carry opposing values and languages.

Base Line 1957

It must be hard for Ethiopians today to grasp the confidence about Ethiopia's future that prevailed in 1957.[3] Half a century ago, one could imagine that Ethiopia's future would be benign. Consider what had been accomplished. Regional warlords had given way to a standing national army trained to handle modern technology. Central ministries dealt with justice and tax collection. The slave trade was ended (1923!). Customs barriers impeding the flow of domestic trade were removed. Ethiopia had a written constitution, a fledgling national parliament, a central bank, and a national currency. The country had built networks of schools and medical facilities; industrial plants in textiles, cement, sugar, and electric power; and modern media of transport and communication. The modernizing sector pulsated with the energies of foreign-educated young people and graduates of Ethiopia's new colleges.[4] Things appeared so good that by 1960, when the march of African colonies toward independence raised concerns about their viability, it seemed that Ethiopia, thanks to its long history, might offer a model, averting the internal conflicts that threatened so many of the new states.

Ensuing decades dimmed such hope. The December 1960 coup attempt valorized a pattern of murder to effect social change, and cost an opportunity to move toward consensual liberalization. The Derg takeover of 1974 escalated violence against dissident domestic groups, and against Eritrea, and reversed promising lines of economic development. The regime change of 1991 was met with an escalation of ethnic tensions and new forms of internal suppression. The war with Eritrea destroyed countless lives, resources, and development opportunities. The aftermath of the May 2005 elections plucked disaster out of the jaws of triumph, yielding a fresh polarization of political attitudes.

How can Ethiopia reverse this pattern of missed opportunities? I propose now to revisit those junctures with an eye to raising questions about what might be done to enact more benign solutions in the future. Let us ask: what structural openings had emerged in each case, what forces drove the country toward those less constructive solutions?

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[3] The Emperor's Silver Jubilee in 1955 had inaugurated the Ethiopian National Theater and a constitution allowed the lower house of Parliament to become an elected body. The First Five-Year Plan (1957-61) envisioned a strengthened infrastructure, particularly in transportation, construction, and communications. It proposed an indigenous cadre of skilled and semiskilled personnel to work in processing industries, in order to reduce Ethiopia's dependence on imports, and to promoting commercial agricultural ventures. The emperor maintained contact with his people by traveling around the country; wherever he went, people cheered his presence with *ililtas* and a sense that the Head of State was a *géta* to whom one could ultimately cry *Abét*!

[4] Agricultural Colleges at Alemaya and Jimma, University College of Addis Ababa at Arat Kilo, and the Gonder Health College with its pioneering teams of medical officers, community nurses, and sanitary engineers.

Five Missed Chances

1960: Year of Ferment

1960 saw sixteen African countries achieve independence.[5] With Ethiopia no longer almost the only independent sub-Saharan country, educated Ethiopians chafed that under European powers, other African countries had acquired economic and education systems that outshone their own. As one Ethiopian told me, "Our problem is that we never 'suffered under colonialism.'" Impatience with Ethiopia's slow pace, outmoded hierarchical structure, and conservative folkways grew, especially among Ethiopians returning from education abroad.

It was clear to me in 1960 that some of them yearned to engage in progressive forums of some sort, but were fearful of doing so. One complained, "Our culture praises *gwebeznet* (courage). Why have we become so afraid of speaking out?" What options were there? Progressives could have formed a political party. To be sure, they might have landed in jail, since the regime objected to parties and frowned on all voluntary associations and free publications. Still, they might have created a journal under the umbrella of enhancing civic education. They might have formed discussion groups; some did, but in secret–even the alumni association of Haile Selassie I Secondary School was clandestine.

The alternative was to change regimes by peaceful means. Germame Neway, a US-educated returnee eager for change, accepted this route initially. As provincial administrator in Walayta, he enacted reforms to ease the burden of tenant farmers–with innovations that earned him a transfer to Jijjiga, where he worked to integrate Somali Ethiopians more effectively by offering them schools, clinics, and roads. In Bahru Zewde's words, Germame converted these "exile posts into stations experimenting in equitable administration" (Zewde 1991, 213).

Meeting official resistance, he enlisted his brother General Mengistu Neway, who commanded the Imperial Bodyguard, into a conspiracy that attempted a coup d'état on December 14. They did so while the emperor was in Brazil, hoping he would stay there in peaceable retirement.[6] General Mengistu had refused overtures by his brother to use violence and counted on support from other military commanders. As one Bodyguard officer boasted to me a month before the coup, "When a signal for change is given, *be-and innenesalan*, we shall rise as one." That was the preference of those who marched from Arat Kilo to the Piazza, with placards that proclaimed, "*Ityopiya le-hulatchn be-selamawi lewet*--Ethiopia for all of us through peaceful change." This option also was not taken. Failed communication between Bodyguard and other military units led to a counter-offensive; army and air force troops defeated the rebels.

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[5] Cameroon, Togo, Mali, Senegal, Madagascar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d'lvoire, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Nigeria and Mauritania.

[6] Colonel Sadat's book describing how King Farouk had been deposed by sending him away from Egypt on his yacht reportedly impressed them (Greenfield 1965, 381).

A third option might have been for the rebel leaders, once defeated, either to give themselves up[7] or to flee and issue statements from hiding. Instead, prior to leaving the Grand Palace where the ministers and other high-ranking figures were held, Germame and others machine-gunned the hostages in cold blood.

The coup's failure promoted the consolidation of imperial power, leading the emperor to focus on "rewarding those who had defended his throne, not in trying to solve the problems indicated" by their protest (Zewde 1991, 214). This produced continuing efforts to quell dissent and to spread the hegemony of Shoan Amhara rule, including efforts to marginalize the main other languages–Tigrinya, officially suppressed in 1970, and Oromiffa. It also led to annexing the federated province of Eritrea, in ways that undermined Eritrea's more liberal democratic achievements–multiple political parties and a free press, which the British protectorate had encouraged. In sum, the failure of Ethiopians to pursue constructive options in 1960 sowed seeds of later disturbances: the violence of the Derg, and the alienation of Tigrinya-speakers, Oromo-speakers, and progressive Eritreans.

1974: Revolutionary Breakthrough

The year 1974 created a large opening for structural change at the country's political center. On the one hand, Haile Selassie's waning abilities to govern as before became glaringly apparent. On the other hand, unprecedentedly, diverse groups mounted a series of protests airing a variety of grievances. This led to efforts to achieve the unlikely: a wholly peaceful change of political structure. "*Ityopiya tikdem/ yala mimin dem"*–"Let Ethiopia progress/Without any bloodshed"–became the popular slogan of that heady time.

On the surface, this seemed almost plausible. A new cabinet was formed under conservative Endelkatchew Makonnen, later under the more popular liberal aristocrat, Mikael Imru. A blue-ribbon committee, respected by a wide range of civilian and military elements, drafted a progressive constitution, described as "years ahead of its time in terms of Ethiopia's social and economic development" (Ottaway 1978, 41). Another committee was set up to investigate whether or not figures from the ancien regime suspected for wrongdoing were legally liable. Following the emperor's deposition on September 14, the popular General Amman Andom was selected to head the military committee that had become the de facto governing power of the nation. Amman, an Eritrean himself, was well positioned to heal the country's major festering wound: the rebellion of dissident groups in Eritrea.

The non-violent option was not taken. Already in February an engine of potential violence was forming when a cabal of junior officers organized an Armed Forces Coordinating Committee. As this committee, called the Derg, moved to attain control, senior officers, civilian leaders, labor unions, and friendly foreign governments all stood by. One of its members, a misfit from Harar named Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, came to dominate the Derg. On November 23, Mengistu engineered a

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[7] A leaflet issued by the chief of staff to encourage civilians to capture the fleeing rebels stated: "People who seek to establish a truth should not run away" (Greenfield 1965, 434).

murderous attack on General Amman and then summarily shot 59 former imperial officials. That night, Paul Henze wrote, "The Ethiopian revolution turned bloody. Blood never ceased to flow for the next 17 years" (Henze 2000, 289).

Mengistu's coup became aligned with communist intellectuals who supported his efforts to impose a Leninist-style revolution from above. They proceeded to confiscate budding enterprises, nationalize all land, herd farmers onto unproductive collective farms, and force tens of thousands of people into resettlement sites. Their heavy-handed policies and violent tactics provoked reactions in many parts of the country; the Derg period was marked by insurgencies and severe famine. Their uncompromising military action against Eritrea finally turned that ancient part of the Ethiopian homeland toward secession.

1991: A Multiethnic Polity

1991 offered a reprieve from the Derg and yet another opportunity for non-violent change.[8] The May regime change was painless enough: Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe, senior Derg officials were imprisoned, and EPRDF established control with hardly a shot fired. The turnover was followed by a national conference, which established a Transitional Government. A year later, the country's first multi-party elections were held. Dozens if not hundreds of publications sprang up overnight. A new Constitution was ratified in 1995.

Before long, however, the EPRDF ascendancy mired the country into yet another period of internal discord. Viewed by some chiefly as a takeover of revanchist Tigrean rebels, the EPRDF victory unleashed a storm of protest at the Embassy of the United States, blamed for facilitating the transition. The removal of Shoan Amhara from power coupled with virulent anti-Amhara attitudes in many TPLF leaders stirred waves of Amhara chauvinistic response. The Oromo Liberation Front, central to the new regime's commitment to ethnic regional autonomy, was not satisfied and refused to lay down arms. A similar attitude was taken by remnants of the EPRP group of radicals who had opposed both the Derg and the TPLF. The emphasis on ethnicity as an absolute value, manifest in the EPRDF's commitment to ethnic federalism, traumatized those who considered themselves to be above and beyond tribal allegiances. For its part the EPRDF, reacting to these dismissive attitudes and to implement their own distinctive revolutionary doctrines, became repressive against journalists and individuals oriented to forms of political expression other than what the regime favored.

1998: Competition without Fratricide

After Eritrea became independent in 1993, official relations between the two countries were cordial. Their leaders espoused fraternity between the two countries and a policy of promoting mutual trade and cooperation. Within four years, issues regarding trade imbalance and currency restrictions, and possibly Ethiopia's lingering grief over the loss of the Red Sea ports, began to sour those relations. What is more,

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[8] It was with a sense of the importance of seizing this opportunity that the late Eshetu Chole delivered his challenging paper to the Ethiopian Economics Association, "Ethiopia at the Crossroads," in 1992.

boundaries between the two countries had never been demarcated. These issues might have occasioned an appeal for mediation by an international body, affording an opportunity to stabilize the anomalous relationship between a mother country and its ambitious young offspring. Instead, when Eritreans who entered the town of Badme in May 1998 were met with gunfire from Ethiopian militia, they launched an mounted a massive attack that extended from the Irob area all the way to Sheraro in the west, displacing hundreds of thousands of people and destroying health stations and churches. Full-scale warfare between the two states ensued quickly, producing an estimated 100,000 casualties and some 400,000 refugees. Both countries employed cluster bombs. In June 1998 Eritrea launched air-delivered CB-500 cluster munitions against the Mekele airport, two of which struck a school and residential area resulting in civilian deaths, wounds, and suffering, and similar hits caused dozens of deaths and injuries in the town of Adigrat. In May 2000 Ethiopia bombed two camps of internally displaced persons with BL-755 cluster munitions and hit civilian airports in Asmara as well.[9] The cost of the war for the world's two poorest countries was enormous, and led to subsequent destabilizations elsewhere in the Horn.[10]

2005: Democratizing Breakthrough

The first years of the 21st century found Ethiopia beginning to hit its stride. The economy grew, repressiveness abated. In 2004, for the first time since coming to power, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was removed from Reporters Without Borders' annual list of "Enemies of the Free Press." The government decided to make the 2005 election a surge toward political pluralism. Opposition parties for the first time had access to the media, and televised debates between representatives from opposing parties were aired. The elections were monitored by international bodies, including representatives from the European Union and the Carter Center, who called the elections fair in many respects yet noted serious irregularities before and after the Election Day. The election outcome saw opposition groups leap from 15 to 180 members of parliament and sweep into control over the city of Addis Ababa.

Ensuing post-election complications offered two options. One was to abide by existing National Election Board procedures and accept their verdict regarding disputed contests. Repeat elections in several of them actually resulted in switches of parliamentary seats in both directions**.** A second option, after the CUD party caucused and decided that its members would not enter the Parliament, was a negotiation with the government that went on for several days in late October.

Instead of either of these denouements, Ethiopia experienced fresh outbreaks of violence and stirrings of hatred. Compounding the June killings, the November demonstrations brought total fatalities to nearly two hundred. Tens of thousands were carted off to prison. The government incarcerated more

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[9] "Fatal Footprint: The Global Human Impact of Cluster Munitions." Handicap International Report, November 2006; published online at http://www.handicap-international.org.uk//files/Fatal%20Footprint%20FINAL.pdf

[10] One account concludes: "The Eritrean-Tigrayan elite has been bent on exporting conflicts and engaging in a self-destructive mission in the whole region" (Tadesse 1999, 190).

than a hundred dissident political party officials, civil society leaders, and independent journalists. Their long detention during court procedures judged to be flawed exacerbated animosities between the two sides. Resulting polarization weakened the new government's claim to legitimacy and damaged its efficacy. The points just covered are summarized schematically in Figure 2.

Figure 2   Issues and Openings

DATE	Developmental Issue	Missed Constructive Opportunity	What Happened
1960	Hunger for accelerated economic development and democratization	1. Nonviolent advocacy of reforms 2. Successful nonviolent coup 3. Failed coup without assassinations	1. Nothing 2. Impulsive coup attempt 3. Random assassinations
1974-5	Social class egalitarianism	Differentiated land reforms	Stalinist collectivization
1991	Ethnic egalitarianism	Multiculturalist recognition	Imposed ethnic federalism → polarization
1998	Geopolitical boundaries	International adjudication	Destructive warfare
2005	Pluralist political democratization	Adjudicated multiparty election outcome	Incendiary reactions; deaths, casualties, incarcerations

An Ambiguous Balance Sheet

Before proceeding further, I should emphasize two points. For one thing, probably no society has ever responded to all its challenges in the most constructive and beneficial way possible. Beyond that, although Ethiopia took many damaging missteps in the past half-century, the country accomplished a great deal of progress on the always-difficult paths toward modernization.

In response to the abortive coup of December 1960, the Emperor made a few progressive ministerial appointments, notably Yilma Deressa who transformed budget and appropriation procedures in the Ministry of Finance (Clapham 1969). Ethiopia's first university (Haile Selassie I University, now Addis Ababa University) was established and quickly flourished. The economy developed steadily, with stable currency and a solid financial position. Haile Selassie reached his pinnacle as an African and world leader. Ethiopia's prominence in African affairs was marked by the establishment in 1963 of Addis Ababa as home to the Organization of African Unity and the UN Economic Commission for Africa. Ethiopia stayed on course while much of the rest of Africa deteriorated.

However heavy-handed and destructive, the Derg reforms valorized the public use of languages other than Amharic–notably Tigrinya and Oromiffa–and religions other than Christianity–notably, Islam. Although the quality of education deteriorated, the Derg increased school enrollment dramatically; during the Derg's first decade the number of students in government schools rose from about 800,000 to nearly

3,100,000 and the number of students in higher education likewise quadrupled (Clapham 1988, 150). They started the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in 1984—the first political party in the country's history— and established the *kebele* system still used to organize neighborhoods.

The TPLF victory rid the country of an oppressive dictatorship and such damaging policies as collectivization of agriculture and forced resettlement of hundreds of thousands. TPLF maintained the value of Ethiopia's currency against all odds: Ethiopia may be the only country to emerge from an authoritarian regime and economic collapse without suffering from serious inflation. TPLF also gave unprecedented levels of political autonomy to peoples in the southern parts of the country. The EPRDF regime expanded the construction of modern buildings and roads, and opened hydroelectric plants that doubled the country's energy supply.

For the border war with Eritrea, to be sure, it is almost impossible to find any positive achievement. By contrast, the 2005 elections achieved a great deal. They opened up electoral competition to an array of national political parties and offered them unprecedented access to the media–a major milestone in Ethiopia's journey toward political modernity. The disasters of the Derg period and the repressions of EPRDF can also be "credited" with driving hundreds of thousands to emigrate. That created a large diaspora of modern-educated Ethiopians whose continuing devotion to their homeland makes them part of the new Ethiopian nation–which consists, I noted elsewhere, of three parts: *ye-bét agar, ye-wutch agar*, and *ye-cyber agar* (Levine 2004)–and which positions them to make great contributions to Ethiopia's development.

Such positive accomplishments must be kept in mind. Nevertheless, they came at far too steep a cost. To sum up what of all of us must be feeling about these decades I say: *Ethiopia, you deserved better*! And it is in hopes that whatever produced such dire outcomes might be modified in the future that I inquire into *what factors were responsible for those missed opportunities*. For that, let us review those episodes in a search for possible common patterns.

An Ethiopian Dilemma: Three Troublesome Factors

Wax and gold: a culture of distrust

Two factors involved in these missed opportunities, I suggest, represent customs that were adaptive in pre-modern periods but have become dysfunctional in the present. One is a deep-seated habit of suspiciousness and distrust in social relations. The prevalence of this tendency was thematized in the title of my first book, *Wax and Gold*. For a social order where so much hinged on securing rights to use land, an ethos of manipulative tactical scheming proved advantageous. For a political order in which power and status hinged on strict deference to superordinate patrons, the open voicing of critical sentiments was intolerable; they had to be expressed in some surreptitious manner. That order made it hard to generate trust, and disposed people to be always on the lookout for hidden motives and deceptive maneuverings.

When one examines the episodes I have been describing, this trait is hard to miss. In 1960, endemic suspiciousness and distrust colored the entire social fabric, preventing even those who thought themselves friends from discussing grievances and aspirations openly. This mindset kept them from any proactive para-political initiatives. The coup leaders and the generals who opposed them were presumptive friends, but held back from sharing ideas about the need for change and in the end battled against each other. When General Merid of the loyalist forces visited General Mengistu in the hospital before he was hanged, the latter reportedly told him: "I thought you would understand."[11]

The Crown accentuated the pervasive distrust. Following the coup attempt as before, the Palace discouraged transparency in public communications. After Eritrea was annexed, a number of high school students from Dessie wanted to come to the Palace to express their appreciation of the Emperor's bold move. He forbade their visit, reportedly saying, "If they come now to say they approve of my policy, what is to prevent them from coming in the future to say they disapprove?" This fear of open public discourse lay behind the Emperor's misguided policy of suppressing political parties and the free press in Asmara. It even led to the suppression of Tigrinya in 1970, a grievous error, especially in view of Paul Henze's observation that "Amharic is firmly established as the national language with English in second place. . . . What this goes to prove is that the Imperial regime could have safely afforded to be much more open-minded about language questions than it was" (2007, 214).

The 1974 demonstrations represented a big shift in the openness of public protest. Even so, what proved to be the central political dynamic was kept clandestine and murky for nearly a year after the initial protests of February. How the Derg was organized and where it was heading remained secret. Rumor remained the prime medium of public communication.

Nearly universal relief over the dissolution of the Derg in 1991 gave way to mutual suspicions and incriminations. Although Oromo Liberation Front leaders gained a great deal in negotiations over the new order, they feared laying down their arms following the EPRDF ascendancy. Remnants of the EPRP remained armed. Above all, although serious substantive differences arose between Ethiopian patriotic nationalists and TPLF proponents of ethnic federalism, these differences were compounded by distortions that stemmed from deep suspicions about one another's motives. The TPLF leaders accused the nationalists of being Amhara chauvinists, even though they included numerous non-Amhara people and for the most part Amhara Ethiopians whose allegiance was primarily to Ethiopia as a multiethnic nation.[12] The nationalists accused the TPLF leaders of being agents of their Eritrean comrades in EPLF, even

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[11] According to Greenfield, "an ambiguous reply he made early in 1960 to a remark of Mengistu's and the fact that Merid's grandfather, Dejazmatch Mangasha, had been out of favour with Haile Sellassie, led Mengistu to assume— mistakenly as it turned out—that Merid would support an attempted coup" (Greenfield 1965, 378). And Merid himself, shortly before dying a few years later, reportedly expressed remorse over his suppression of the Mengistu coup, saying "I regret nothing so much in my life."

[12] For an interpretation of the differing narratives that underlay this mutual distrust, see Levine 2006.

though TPLF and EPLF had been enemies during much of the previous decade and seeds of future animosity were not hard to discern below the surface.

These seeds sprouted in 1998, when distrust between brothers yielded to lethal attacks. Medhane Tadesse's searching analysis of the background of the war throws light on how ambiguous communications between the two sides helped trigger the outbreak of hostilities. From the outset, Ethiopian leaders failed to map out guidelines concerning future relations between the two governments and peoples, leaving vague such matters as the legal status of Eritreans in Ethiopia, arrangements for economic cooperation, and border demarcations (Tadesse 1999, 135). Subsequently, he suggests, EPRDF leaders made their attitude toward the EPLF appear warmer than it actually was, whereas the Eritreans "must have expected favours from the Tigray without publicly admitting that they really needed their help" (155).

The tragic dénouement of summer 2005 represented nothing so much as a flagrant manifestation of the archaic pattern of distrust. The regime acted on the suspicion that the opposition was deliberately stirring up anti-Tigrayan hostilities when the CUD leadership explicitly discouraged their followers from doing anything of the sort. They also ran with the idea purveyed in a tract by Negede Gobeze that the opposition should mobilize the populace in an effort to overthrow the regime through a kind of Orange Revolution, when in fact the opposition wanted nothing more than an exact count to be respected. Based on the regime's initial hasty declaration of martial law on Election Day and premature announcement of victory, the opposition went on to distrust nearly every post-election action of the regime.[13] The regime's hyper-vigilance in the wake of their suspicions led them to provocative incidents and well-documented excessive violence against demonstrators in June and November of that year. The latter confrontations, with fatalities on both sides but overwhelming brute violence from government security troops, might have been averted had last-minute daily negotiations at the end of October succeeded. Although those negotiations reportedly broke down when the EPRDF refused to establish a neutral Election Board, it is my understanding that mutual distrust played a role in their breakdown.

Wendinet idealized: a culture of martial honor

The other dysfunctional tendency exhibited in Ethiopia's series of missed chances reflects the prevalence of what I have elsewhere described as a "masculinity ethic and the spirit of warriorhood."[14] I refer here to the traditional code of *wendinet*, masculinity, which prescribes a courageous disposition to

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[13] They studiously maintained that a complete victory had been stolen from them, even though some foreign analysts–even those antagonistic to the regime, like Siegfried Pausewang (2006)–questioned the claim that the opposition might have won the election.

[14] This, too, was something described in *Wax and Gold* and related publications of the time (1965b, 1966, 1968) as well as in later publications (1974, 2005).

fight enemies. Related to this is a sensitivity to personal slights and a commitment to *man yebiltal*–'who in the world is superior to me?'[15] In a society with politics dominated by warfare this value is self-evident.

The *wendinet* factor was at work in each of the missed chances I have been describing. It was manifest in the last-minute decision of the coup leaders to assassinate their hostages in the Green Room of the Old Palace.[16] It underlies a kind of subliminal admiration for the 'tough guy' rebel who shoots his way into power, like Kassa Haylu on his way to becoming Emperor Tewodros, or Mengistu Haile Mariam on his ruthless route to supreme power in the Derg. It informs the passionate heroism of those who endured more than a decade of hardship existence as guerilla insurgents.[17] It was manifest in the grandiose ambitions of those Ethiopians who call themselves Eritreans. Eritrea's leaders voiced illusionary claims to an economic miracle like Singapore and to a mantle of political leadership for all Northeast Africa, which prompted macho interventions in Sudan, Yemen, and Djibouti. They threatened Ethiopia's leaders that "they should know that we are going to give them a hard time" if the latter dared to introduce a new trade policy (Tadesse 1999, 154).

The combination of distrust and *wendinet* has probably impeded Ethiopia's capacity to take advantage of structural openings as much as anything. It casts political options within a schema of "*metazez* or *meshefet*," obey or rebel. The compulsion to obey superiors means that any stirring of dissent must be either suppressed or expressed in devious ways. The ideal of *wendinet* means that if the dissent becomes too intense, the way to express it is to rebel against the leader and to oppose him from afar.

The seduction of revolutionary ideologies

In addition to old patterns that impede optimal courses of action, one can identify a third factor of a radically contrasting sort. This is the proclivity to emulate foreign patterns to a degree that does not fit Ethiopia's own historic and current realities. This factor reflects the doctrinaire quality of the modernizing ideologies with which Ethiopian political leaders identified.

Like his peers, Germame Neway returned from study abroad with an ardor to accelerate the pace of building schools and factories and improving the life of peasants. Like many Western-educated radicals, he assumed that the populace was similarly disgruntled and ready for massive change. This assumption proved erroneous. In words which I am told Ras Imru spoke about him, "*Germame ye-ityopia hizb gemet alaweqem*"–"Germane did not understand the limitations of the Ethiopian people." This was to be a top-down quasi-revolutionary movement, which ran counter to the persisting deference of the people to the

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[15] Saving face is important in all cultures, but in those permeated by martial values it ranks high and valorizes extreme reactions.

[16] Indeed, Germame reportedly egged on his amiable brother when Captain Dereje Haile Mariam approached the palace calling Mengistu to surrender, shouting "Out of my way, woman of a brother!" and shooting the captain dead. The report is from Greenfield 1969 (429), but an eye-witness account credits Mengistu himself with the action.

[17] Meles Zenawi confessed in a Tigrinya publication that he had felt at his best when fighting in the bush, and the standoff in 2005 arguably owes something to a determined pride in not giving in to the other.

authority of the throne, the church, and the aristocracy, all of whom opposed the coup. Accordingly, the coup leaders actually mobilized troops on the grounds that Haile Selassie's position was being attacked and so they needed to defend him! The intensity of Germame's commitment to revolutionary change found expression, finally, in his order to assassinate the hostages.

By the end of the 1960's, Ethiopian students at home and abroad were seduced by the radicalization of students in many countries. They began to identify with the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and with Russia and China as models of modernization. This had two deleterious consequences. For one thing, it inclined them to find the truth about Ethiopia's situation in the intellectual abstractions of the Marxist tradition. It also inclined them to adopt the Manichean perspective of committed Marxists, using the idiom of Marx's vitriolic attacks on social classes and an inclination to demonize the other. These tendencies have haunted all further Ethiopian political conduct, issuing in the violent "anti-feudal" enactments of the Derg and the "anti-Amhara" and radical "ethnic-liberationist" enactments of the TPLF. They marked the bitter antagonism between TPLF and EPLF regarding which group held the more valid socialist revolutionary doctrine, a fight that underlay the virulent mutual incriminations of Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998. They were flagrant in the condemnatory rhetorics of the EPRDF and CUD in 2005.

All these phenomena evince a lack of connectedness to Ethiopian realities on the ground, lack of respect for the common sense of the Ethiopian people, and departures from traditional Ethiopian customs of tolerance and everyday morality. That Ethiopia was in for a horrible time due to such attitudes pierced me when an Ethiopian graduate student said to me in the early 1970's, "What Ethiopia needs to do is what Russia did." When I told him that the consequence of the communist policies under Lenin and Stalin resulted in the deaths of about 10% of the Russian people, he promptly responded, "Well, Ethiopia has 30 million people right now. The death of three million would not be too high a price to pay for progress."

Ethiopia's dilemma of the past two years reflects the persistence of doctrinaire positions and polarizing sentiments on both sides. The points just made can be seen schematically in Figure 3.

Figure 3   Three Factors Leading to Sub-Optimal Outcomes

DATE	Traditional Distrust Factor	Traditional Martial Ethic	Alien Factors
1960	1. Distrust and fear in civilian elite 2. Suspiciousness within military elite	Commitment to violence as a means of political change	Modernization ideologies
1974-5	Distrust of democratic process	Rulership succession through martial combat	Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideologies
1991	Distrust of democratic process	Continued resort to arms	Stalinist ideology of "self-determination of nationalities"
1998	Intense mutual suspicion	Martial pride; drive for revenge	Arabist support for Eritrean insurgency
2005	Intense mutual suspicion and mutual demonization	Fight against the system, rather than within the system	Tenacity of radical polarizing ideology

And Now

To this point, I have sketched a series of openings presented, opportunities missed, and advances made. Today's Ethiopia has taken unmistakable steps toward many of its modernizing goals – bureaucratized administration, codified legal systems, commercial facilities, modern technologies, academic institutions, scientific research, multicultural equity, transportation and communication, and political integration. A plethora of tasks remain, not least to address the increase in chronic poverty outlined by Abu Girma Moges (2007) and Tesfaye Teklu (2007) and the looming catastrophic population growth (Levine 2006b) and health crises (Asfaw 2007). In pursuing these tasks, new tensions might provoke further violence and suboptimal solutions.

Enhancing functionality through trust and civic courage

The diagnosis I have offered suggests ways that may enable Ethiopians to move forward without repeating the costly mistakes of the last half-century. This would mean dealing with the symptoms of chronic suspiciousness and distrust, compulsive combativeness, and inattention to Ethiopia's own traditions and resources. The solution, in each case, involves staying rooted in Ethiopia's traditions while adapting creatively to present needs and modern realities, a solution that involves *structural differentiation*.

Regarding the first factor, it means preserving the wax-and-gold complex where it still belongs – in religious *qene*, in secular poems, and in social banter – and replacing it in the area of public discourse with more straightforward, transparent communication. Regarding the second, it means preserving the warrior ethos when security situations require, but keeping it out of politics and cultivating civic courage to replace martial courage in the latter realm. The fusion of these two traits produces what I am calling the "*metazez* or *meshefet*" complex – either obey and express dissent ambiguously, or exit the system and rebel. Let me relate two personal experiences that may drive this point home.

At 11:30 am on Friday, December 18, 1960, I spoke with Germame Neway just before he left an abortive negotiation with Major Asefa Lemma at the U.S. Embassy and returned to the palace for that fateful shootout. His final words to me were as follows. "Even if our cause is lost and I am killed," he said, "we have at least spoken the truth in this land of deception." Over the years I have come to see more significance in Germame's words than I did at the time: in this land of deception, the only way one can speak the truth appears to be through violent rebellion. *Metazez* or *meshefet*.

Forty-five years later, a kindred thought was voiced by a prominent Ethiopian-American who wrote me in the wake of my efforts to foster dialogue among polarized Ethiopians in 2006: "Ethiopia will never make any progress unless we learn to fight as hard within the system as we do against the system." And now listen to this: when I asked him if I might use his name when citing this inspiring statement, he said, "Oh no, I don't dare to do that."

In a searching analysis prepared for this conference, Salaam Yitbarek (2007) outlines a complex of related Ethiopian traits. He identifies these as personalization of issues, parochialism, mutual suspicion and mutual distrust, paranoia, lack of empathy and empathetic understanding, character assassination, lack of openness, holding grudges, and envy.[18] Importantly, Ato Salaam offers an incentive to move beyond these impediments by noting that *to overcome them is to do something to create more social capital.*

Enhancing functionality through self-understanding and self-appreciation

The third factor that has derailed Ethiopia's efforts to modernize, an ungrounded attachment to alien ideas, can also be addressed through a sort of structural differentiation. How can Ethiopian intellectuals incorporate ideas from abroad into a grounded sense of evolving realities? How can they move from ideological fixities to pragmatic solutions?

One piece of this answer lies all around you: engaging devoted scholars to address current issues and to communicate with one another in forums and media that enhance the chances of sensible interventions to promote capacity building. This effort might well include serious investigation of resources that Ethiopian traditions may contain. Although modernization imperatives remain stronger than ever, they must no longer be understood in terms of uncritical imitation of forms from other places. In recent scholarly work this way of thinking about modernity has been foregrounded by Prof. Shmuel Eisenstadt and colleagues, under the banner of what they call "multiple modernities."

At a more modest level, I propose here the metaphor and the reality of the lesson of the eucalyptus tree. Emperor Menelik II sought to solve Ethiopia's reforestation problems by importing eucalyptus from Australia. It is telling that the Amharic phrase for this tree became *bahr zaf*, "the tree from across the sea" (*bahr*). Eucalyptus has been used ever since as an easy source of wood for cooking and construction. The problem is, eucalyptus trees are invasive, destroying other plants with their rapid growth. Moreover, they are extremely 'thirsty' and dry up rivers and wells. Their dangers became so evident early on that Emperor Menelik issued a decree for them be uprooted and replaced with mulberry trees; this was never enforced. In the meantime, over the past half-century, Ethiopia's level of forestation dropped precipitously.[19] Is it not time to stop planting the *bahr zaf* and start planting indigenous trees that are fast-growing, hardy, and environmentally friendly–as knowledgeable local environmentalists like those associated with Lem Ethiopia have long advocated? Some of these species have been neglected so long that they are now even threatened. These include the *weyra* (olive trees), the juniper, the *tiqur inchet*, and the *Igenica Abysinica* (*kosso*). What could be a more felicitous way to celebrate new millennium than to encourage every citizen of Ethiopia who lives in a suitable place to plant one of these indigenous trees?

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[18] Most of these are traits that I have described over many decades (see especially 1965a, 1965b, and 1995).

[19] This is so even if the widely cited figures of 35% in 1957 dropping to 2.5% in 2007 are exaggerated. What is clear is that erosion due to the decline of woodland has been responsible for flooding and impoverished topsoil, and this at a time when the loss of good soil no longer benefits Egypt but clogs up her dams with silt.

Beyond that: what could be more suitable now than to encourage all Ethiopian leaders to discard attitudes imported uncritically from abroad and make use of indigenous customs friendly to the societal environment. One of these is age-old patterns of inter-group toleration, as manifest, for example, in the multiethnic and multireligious pilgrimages such as at Zuqwala and Qulubi Gabrael. Another is the near-sacred right of peasants to own their own land. Another is the resort to mediation by "elders," *shimgelina*, as a means of conflict resolution. For another, what could be more beneficial than to incorporate and expand the customs of Oromo assemblies, the *gumi gayo*, which open with calls for mutual respect and involve so many felicitous procedures for attaining group harmony? And let us not forget the striking tradition of forgiveness which, as Charles Schaefer (2006) tellingly documents, Ethiopian rulers so often employed as a way of restoring social equilibrium and discouraging impulses to revenge. For one memorable instance of this, recall the gesture of Ras Tafari Makonnen who, following his defeat of thousands of Negus Mikael's followers after the battle of Segele, performed "a remarkable act of clemency," declaring "We are all Ethiopians" (Marcus 1987, 24).

Recovering such traditions yields the additional benefit of moral inspiration. This theme was replayed recently by Jonathan Lear in *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, which tackles the haunting existential question of what a people is to do once their traditional culture has become obsolete. For Lear, the solution "would require finding something in one's own culture or tradition that would enable one to draw new meaning from old definitions that are no longer appropriate." Lear was talking about the Crow Indians of North America, whose great chief Plenty-Coups describes the erosion of Crow culture in the late 1920s by saying: "When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened." Karl E. Knutsson reported a similar sentiment in his study of the Macaa Oromo:

> When gada was destroyed . . .the bull refused to mount the cow. . . the crops that were cultivated no longer grew, and the oxen refused to fatten. . . There were no longer any real elders, and few children were born. . . . When the gada customs were destroyed, everything else was also destroyed. . . the man who had formerly respected truth and justice abandoned them. (Knutsson 1967, 180)

All over Ethiopia, as throughout the world, global modernization entails obsolescence of certain cultural forms. Their loss has been linked with contemporary ills such as vulnerability to demagogues, crime, suicide, substance abuse, and fundamentalism. Ethiopian tradition offers a multitude of resources on which to draw in inspiring a new courage to hope.

A missing revolution

Returning to the paradigm of modernization processes touched on at the beginning, it is clear that Ethiopia has gone a great distance on dimensions of increasing equality and extensions of rights; political centralization, mobilization, and nation-building; specialization and increased productivity; and the creation of scientifically-educated elites (although a goodly portion of the latter live in the Diaspora).

In one domain classically associated with modernization, Ethiopia has yet to make a signal advance. That concerns the process of rationalizing personal conduct in everyday life, a process so fundamental to modernity that it has acquired its own name as "the disciplinary revolution" (Gorski 1993). This involves a complex of traits including a commitment to an ethic of hard work, punctuality, reliability, responsibility, and a sense of vocation. The importance of this dimension in transforming the economies of Western Europe and North America was established in the classic work of Max Weber, who associated it with the new ethical habits introduced with the Protestant Reformation. In other countries, it has been associated with different cultural patterns: in Japan, with an ethic inspired by the samurai code of duty to the collectivity (Bellah 1957), in Russia and China with work ethics associated with communist ideologies.

What could possibly serve as the Ethiopian equivalent of the "Protestant Ethic"? – a question, interestingly, that was posed in a letter sent me on the eve of my first voyage to Ethiopia in 1957, by the late distinguished psychologist Erik Erikson. The chief message of both of my books on Ethiopia was to envision a future built confidently on enduring features of Ethiopia's past. To begin with, it is heartening to note that some of the traditional religions are beginning to adjust themselves to novel challenges and reach out to young people, who are desperately in need of moral guidance. The schools of course have a crucial role to play in moral socialization. Across the board, enhanced economic opportunities are essential for young people to have futures to look forward to. But to engage Ethiopians in ways that mobilize their energies on behalf of self-discipline and striving for excellence requires something more. It requires an overarching vision of the good life in which those traits find meaning. I am doubtful that this can occur if the largest frame of reference is that of tribal loyalty. It requires something of transcendent significance. It would be hard to find something more compelling than a renewed vision of Greater Ethiopia as home to a diversity of citizens and groups enjoying basic rights in an age-old and continuing multiethnic society.

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