

BULLETIN

Of the Forum for Social Studies

MEDREK

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Book Review

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L - T O E

*The Forum is a Center for Research and Debate on
Development and Public Policy.*

This is the first issue of the new and improved *MEDREK*, our quarterly publication which is now in its fifth year. Sustaining a serial publication of any quality, even a humble in-house newsletter, is no mean achievement. The great lesson we have learned since the launch of *MEDREK* some five years ago is that sustaining a debate in the written medium (as opposed to the oral medium) is a very difficult undertaking in this country. Without such a debate we shall be condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past.

MEDREK is no longer a newsletter but instead has become a *Bulletin* which will be devoted to carry discussions of public concern. It has a new image and a new "mission". We have redesigned the cover and the page layout to reflect these changes. We have kept the name *MEDREK* to maintain continuity with the past but otherwise the publication has significantly been changed. We hope *MEDREK* will now serve as a forum for discussion of pressing issues in public policy and development.

We intend to publish short articles to reflect FSS' concern and the public's need to know. This issue is on *Destitution*, a subject that has not been addressed in this country. As several FSS publications have shown, the debate on poverty in this country has been quite limited and unsatisfactory. This is all the more worrying considering the fact that Ethiopia is now considered

to be just about the poorest country in the world. One may argue that this should not be surprising because poverty affects not only material well-being but also intellectual ability. The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS, especially among young people, may be best understood within the framework of destitution. We would like to invite further debate and reflection on the subject. Other issues which are also of particular public concern are resettlement, environmental conflict, and endemic famine.

Bahru Zewde's new and original study of the first generation of Ethiopian reformist intellectuals was recently published by the Oxford based publisher, James Currey, and has also just been issued by Addis Ababa University Press. We are happy to publish Shiferaw's review article which is based not only on a close and appreciative reading of the book but also other works related to it.

FSS' publication list has been steadily growing in the last five

years but we still have a long way to go before our publications become an important input to the public debate. To help promote this goal, we will be publishing in each issue of the *Bulletin* not only a new list of FSS publications but also the abstract of each work. This we hope will give readers some idea of the subject of the publication in question and will encourage them to purchase copies.



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Introduction

It has become apparent that due to population growth and land degradation, crop and market failures associated with droughts and other environmental factors, as well as low access to assets, the prevalence of poverty and destitution has reached unacceptably high levels in Ethiopia – an estimated 47.5% of all rural households and 13.8% of households in the Northeastern Highlands are thought to be poor and destitute, respectively (MEDAC 2002; Devereux, Sharp and Yared 2002). Using data on the growing frequency of famines, declining food consumption and increasing malnutrition, Dessalegn has argued that the proportion of destitute households in Ethiopia has increased substantially over the past half century (Dessalegn 2002). Although the broader parameters of poverty and destitution are well known, the multiple and inter-linked ways in which individual households fall into and out of poverty and destitution are less well understood.

This article discusses the causes and processes of destitution experienced by households in two communities of Wag Hamra and South Wello zones. It utilizes qualitative data from group interviews and household case studies including life histories that were used to document people's perceptions and experiences of destitution.

In a recent study, destitution was defined as a state of extreme poverty in which households cannot meet their basic needs, lacked access to the productive assets that were necessary to escape poverty, and were dependent on formal or informal transfers (Swift 1989; Devereux, Sharp & Yared 2002). The concept of destitution not only represents an extreme form of food-insecurity, poverty and vulnerability, but goes further because it also highlights how and why households become susceptible to them. Destitution therefore not only signifies an outcome in terms of welfare and capabilities, but is also useful in illuminating processes of impoverishment (Devereux, Sharp & Yared 2002). A process approach is important because it demonstrates that destitution is a function of varying contexts, conditions and combination of causes and variable vulnerability of households, that result in different trajectories towards it (Yared 2002).

The article first discusses the various causes of destitution such as crop failure due to drought and other causes, lack or shortage of land, events associated with the household developmental cycle, idiosyncratic events such as illnesses and accidents or combinations of such events. The next section of the article presents household experiences of processes of destitution and demon-

strates some of the special conditions, combinations of events, and distinctive routes that characterize their fall into destitution. Some households do manage to escape destitution and some of the typical strategies, local conditions and asset requirements that make this possible are discussed at the end.

Causes of Destitution

In the study area, the most common cause of destitution was crop failure occurring mainly due to droughts or inadequate and untimely rainfall but also due to other hazards such as pests, hailstorm, and frost. Severe droughts which occurred with varying frequency in different areas often caused mass destitution by bringing about the death and distress sale of livestock. Households commonly have to migrate to relief camps or to areas relatively unaffected by drought, returning with almost nothing. The famine of 1984-85 is remembered for causing a scale of destitution from which many households and communities have not yet recovered. While a single crop failure can impoverish many vulnerable households, repeated crop failures have to occur before more resilient households are reduced to the same state. More recently, droughts or rain shortages occurring repeatedly over several years particularly in the *belg* areas, have thrown and kept a

large number of households in destitution. Loans taken up for inputs can combine with crop failures to cause indebtedness, forcing households to sell critical assets such as oxen and other livestock, thereby becoming destitute.

Another important factor behind the destitution of many households is the lack or shortage of land. Growing population pressure and degradation of land due to repeated use has meant that a large number of households have inadequate landholdings, which severely constrains their productivity and possibilities of acquiring assets. Although land redistribution carried out by local officials in the eighties led to relatively equal access to land and made land available to female household heads and the youth, households who lost land, those who fared less well in the lotteries and who were not favored by corrupt officials, young people who were not old enough to be eligible for land allocations during the redistribution and returnees from resettlement now have access to relatively smaller and infertile plots of land which has enhanced their vulnerability to destitution. The fact that family size was not considered in the allocation placed large households at a disadvantage. The redistribution which reduced the more substantial landholdings are also widely perceived to have minimized the scope for land fertility maintaining practices such as fallowing and crop rotation. This was thought to have a very negative impact on productivity resulting in overall impoverishment of communities.

Apart from the impact of the land redistribution, those who did not succeed in getting much land from their parents in the form of marriage endowments or inheritance also sometimes sustained land shortages. Some households who were facing shortages of labor, draft power or seed possibly due to a crop failure were forced to rent out their land which reduced the grain supplies or animal feed they could expect from it, an outcome which was likely to perpetuate their destitution.

The socio-economic impact of people's life cycle also accounted for the destitution of a large number of households. Included in this category are some recently formed households who are severely short of land because the last land redistributions preceded their formation and who also may not yet have overcome the effects of a poor endowment that they may have received from their parents. Female-headed households who have sustained the loss of critical male labor and management skills as well as division or reductions of their landholdings and other assets due to divorce or the death of a spouse, constituted a larger proportion of destitute households. The elderly, who were either forced to rent out their land or were unable to make full use of it for lack of labor, and who may have seen the gradual attrition of their landholdings and other assets due to the endowments they may give to their marriageable children, were also highly vulnerable to destitution. Alternatively, a large family size can place a huge consumption burden on house-

holds and push them towards or perpetuate a state of destitution. Apart from such environmental, institutional and social factors that constituted systemic causes for the destitution of many rural households, various idiosyncratic events experienced by individual households could also reduce them to a state of destitution. Thus, illnesses, accidents, theft, major expenditures associated with social events such as funerals or weddings, or personality traits such as laziness or wastefulness could cause destitution. A common perception among local people is that people's possibilities of becoming either well-off or destitute was a matter of fate or luck.

Destitution is not only a result of a sudden or single disastrous occurrence, whether of a natural, economic or social nature. The combined impact of a number of events such as a drought and reduction in one's land holdings or the repeated occurrence of one factor such as crop failure are also very prevalent pathways to destitution. A gradual slide into destitution due to an imbalance between households' consumption needs and productive or income-earning capacities, usually arising from shortfalls in productive resources, is common as well.

Processes of Destitution

The above discussion indicates that destitution is a complex process that occurs as a result of a variable number and combination of events. The consideration of destitution as a process also reveals that households experience varying trajectories

towards and degrees of vulnerability to destitution because they are characterized by different asset levels, strategies, demographic and social characteristics, and social and economic contexts. The following typology of destitution processes, derived from household case study data, reveals how such factors combine to bring about distinctively different pathways towards destitution.

1. Rapid Onset of Destitution due to Crop Failure.

The most common way by which households became destitute was by experiencing severe or repeated crop failure due to drought or other natural causes which led to the sale or death of their livestock assets. This was a relatively rapid form of becoming destitute. The following case of Muhaili depicts such a drastic process of destitution.

I spent my early childhood in my grandparent's house. I then started to work as a servant for many years. I had been able to acquire two oxen, when I rejoined my parent's household in order to help them out as they were facing food shortages in 1984/85. I sold the oxen for 200 Birr each to buy food for the joint household. My parents also became sick at the time. We all had to go to Asosa (a resettlement locality), including my sister, and brother who died there.

Tadele experienced a similar process of destitution but under the impact of repeated crop failures.

Our crops failed partially in 1983/84 and we got only 5 quintals. I had 2 children in town and 5 children here at the time. I had to sell my two oxen that year. I cultivated my land, exchanging my labor for oxen, but the crops failed totally. I was also sick from August to October. We therefore left for the relief camps where four of our children died, leaving us with only one child. We stayed there only getting small amounts of food aid. I also worked as an assistant in the camps, receiving payment in injera. We did not return in 1984/85 because the rains failed again. The Derg, which had lost Sekota to the rebels, recaptured it in 1985, and we stayed there that year receiving food aid. We left some of our land fallow and sharecropped out the rest for a third of the output which amounted to 4.5 quintals, due to lack of seed and draft power. We cultivated our land in 1986, after begging for draft power, but the crops failed again because the rains fell short in August.

2. Destitution due to crop failure compounded by asset degrading strategies.

Other households had experienced an initial crop failure which forced them to take up strategies that compounded their state of destitution. Moges, for instance, had been destituted by repeated crop failures. He resorted to renting out his land afterwards which reduced his annual grain supply in a sustained fashion, exacerbating and prolonging his destitution.

bating and prolonging his destitution.

Our living conditions were fair until 1972 when both of my parents died in a single month. Their assets were divided among five siblings. I got only 3 beehives. Part of their landholdings was taken by the kebele as motekeda (the land share of the dead alienated for redistribution) and I was left with only 2 timad of land. We began to fall short because the land was not enough for our needs. The crops also failed in 1983/84, and we left for the camps in Korem where we stayed for 4 to 5 months....., receiving 20 to 30 kgs of grain per month from food aid. I did not have sheep and goats to sell, but I sold one ox that year. We planted our land using mekenajo – oxen sharing arrangement – and seed that we bought after selling the ox, but the crops failed completely in 1984/85 as well. We therefore went to Belesa (an adjacent region) in October to work harvesting crops, leaving an ox with relatives in the dega area which later died.... After we returned, we sharecropped our land to two of my brothers for half of the output. I have become poor since 1984/85, due to the death of our oxen and lack of seed. We only got 2.5 quintals of grain in 1986..... We sharecropped out our land again the following year, but the crops failed due to drought and damage caused by rats.....

3. Destitution due to land shortage/landlessness

(possibly in combination with other factors).

Lack of access to adequate amounts of land is an important factor explaining destitution in the case of many households. After having survived the 1984/85 famine, lack of land in the case of Shambel's household has led to a permanent state of severe food-insecurity which forced them to sell off two oxen consecutively.

The [year after the famine], we bought seed and planted about 7 timad of land that belonged to people that had been resettled. My father had previously given an ox to somebody who sold it off but later repaid him. We ploughed the land sharing our ox with others (mekenajo) until we got enough for one more ox. We cultivated the land for three years after which we gave it up when its owners returned from the resettlement areas. We sold one ox, after which we started to trade in goat skins, buying them at Debe (a market 3 to 4 hours away) for sale in the local market of Adame. It was not very profitable. Our remaining ox got sick and was sold for 300 birr to buy food. My uncle had given us 0.75 timad of land that my mother had inherited, when we came back to this area. We requested draft power from others and hand tilled the rest of the land to get fresh maize and 2 quintals of sorghum. We make ends meet by trading goat skins.... We survive by rationing our food, especially in July and August.

4. Destitution due to

poor access to resources at the time of household formation.

Some households appear fated for destitution because they had very poor access to key productive resources such as land, oxen and sometimes labor from the time they were formed. This was true in the case of Mohammed Yimer, who had returned from the region of Shewa where he and his brother had been working as migrant laborers having saved enough money to buy one bull each. He appears to have missed the land redistribution and was therefore not able to claim land of his own. The fact that he sold his bull to cover the costs of his wedding and the small size of the land he had access to relegated him to a state of destitution that he was not able to escape from for a long time.

We begged for draft power that year till ours matured. I started to plough 4 timad of my father's land, giving him half of the output. I then got married but my wife did not bring any assets. I sold my ox to cover the expenses of the wedding and continued to use my brother's which had now become a pair. I brought an ox in a yegeرافي arrangement in order to reduce the burden on him. We used to get about 3 quintals that we shared equally with my parents. The grain we got, i.e. 1.5 quintals, was only enough for 3 months even after rationing by eating only 1 injera per person a day. I have also been sharecropping-in some of my uncle's land, getting from 1 to 2 quintals. The total amount of grain we get only lasts seven

months. I have not been able to rent more land because of lack of seed and labor for weeding. Land for rent is available in adjacent gots, but not in ours. This year, my father gave me 2 timad out of his 4 timad, leaving 2 timad for his son and himself. The land is stony and unproductive.

Alemnesh who did not get a proper marriage because of her parents death never received livestock nor had enough labor to cultivate the land she inherited, and was therefore destined for destitution from the outset.

My parent's died in the early eighties and my brother and I inherited their land, which amounted to 4 timad. He left for Korem during the 1984/85 famine and was never heard from. I did not get any animals from my parents because they died soon after. I started to rent out the land..... I continued to rent out land until the 1990 land redistribution, when I received only 2 timad of infertile bereha land and 1 timad of wejed (plots which are near and distant to one's house, respectively). I sharecropped out the land for a third of the produce to two young men who had not received any land. I used to get 1 quintal of barley, 1 quintal of sorghum or 1.5 quintal of wheat. The grain runs out around April, so I have to sell dung and wood every 3 to 4 days, until the rainy season. We then subsist on pumpkins and kale that we plant in the backyard as well as injera once in a while.

5. Onset of Destitution due to Social/Demographic Developments.

Events in the social development of households can also push them towards destitution. The most common way this happens is when women lose their husbands due to divorce or death and are forced to head households without critical male labor or management skills. The death of her two husbands sends Amemoye well on the way to destitution, a process which was completed by the drought of 1984/1985.

I was raised by my mother after my father died as a child. We grew up in poverty, with 2 of my brothers. I got married as an older teenager to a man who had 2 oxen. We lived well, producing 10 quintals. I had 3 children before he died six years after we got married. We subsequently became poor, sold the oxen and sharecropped the land. I raised the children by myself and married-off two of them. I then remarried after a long time but he got sick and died after 5 years in 1984/85. I did have a daughter with him. Our living conditions did not improve since he did not have much.

6. Destitution due to idiosyncratic occurrences.

People can also fall into destitution due to idiosyncratic events such as illness, accidents or deaths, occurrences which may be compounded by other events as well. This appears to have been true in the case of Beyu,

70, who due to the unfortunate deaths of her four children and a severe physical disability, has not been able to sustain a viable marriage and therefore has been relegated to a prolonged state of destitution and dependency on her sister.

I was born and got married here in this kebele. For six years, we were living well with my husband who came here from another locality. We had a pair of oxen but he used to have his land ploughed for him in his natal kebele. I had four children who all died, so he left me without leaving me anything. I then began to live with my sister. I have had a bad leg since I was a child so I was not able to remarry for another 5 years. I then married an elderly man who had only 3 timad of land which we sharecropped out. We remained in poverty so we got divorced. I therefore started to live with my sister again.

7. Destitution due to inadequate production or income in relation to consumption needs.

Some households gradually slide into or remain in a state of destitution because they no longer have the assets that would allow them to produce enough for their consumption needs let alone for investment purposes. Thus, Muhaili, who we saw had lost his oxen due to crop failure is forced to remain in continued destitution and food-insecurity because he has to rent out part of his land for lack of draft power.

The following year, my rela-

tives ploughed some of my land for me while I sharecropped out the rest for lack of oxen. Only part of the land is productive. I got 2.5 quintals from the sharecropping arrangement and 5.5 quintals from the rest. I was not able to acquire more livestock that year because our output did not exceed my family's needs which had grown to a size of four..... I had to sell my ox for food when the crops failed, after it was ready to start ploughing. Since then I have been begging others to have the land ploughed for me. Our annual grain output fluctuates from 3 to 6 quintals. When we produce less, I sell charcoal and borrow money from traders and farmers, making a payment of 50 kilos of teff and 100 kilos of sorghum for a loan of 60 birr. The lack of oxen is the main constraint that we face. Otherwise, my total landholdings would have been enough for my needs.... I have also leased out a third of our landholdings for two years because we run out of food. We have been hurt by this. I am eager to get our land back and I will not rent it out again.

Escaping Destitution

Although destitution is a real threat and a common outcome for a significant number of households, many of them who have experienced destitution due to various natural and social causes manage to emerge from it and form viable livelihoods. The possibilities of escaping destitution depend on the strategies pursued by different households, the assets that

they are able to access and the general conditions that they face while attempting to reconstruct a livelihood. The following typology of the main routes by which people escape destitution demonstrate the role of these factors in this respect.

1. Investing in Agriculture.

Having become destitute, there are some households that escape this state to regain their livelihoods. One of the ways such households achieve this is by investing in agriculture and using surplus to rebuild their assets. The success of this strategy usually depends on sufficient access to land and labor as well as favourable crop conditions. This was the case in Ali's emergence from destitution after he came back from resettlement.

We came back with nothing however, and started to plough some of the poor land that I had inherited – about 7 timad. Our relatives – brothers, uncles – helped us for a year by giving us grain. A relative gave me a bull. We ploughed with it for one year but it died soon after. I had brought 150 birr from Asosa which I used to buy two goats. I bought an ox subsequently after selling grain and the 2 goats, and purchased an ox and a heifer in the following years. We thus escaped poverty with the help of my relatives. I now have 2 oxen, 1 cow and 2 calves.

2. Mutual Reinvestment Between Crop and Livestock Sectors.

Other households are able to rebuild their assets base in a sustained fashion by combining surplus from the crop and livestock production to enhance their assets and productivity in each sector. This strategy also requires sufficient access to land and labor as well as favourable crop performance if it is to be successful. Having been reduced to destitution by crop failure, Mohammed Yassin and his family received assistance from relatives to restart their productive activities, and then capably used surplus and assets from each of the crop and livestock sectors to enhance their productivity in the other.

We had a good harvest in 1987, so we bought a cow which gave birth to six animals subsequently. We are now left with three of them after having sold the rest to pay the rent on the land that we have been contracting in the past 6 years. The rent has been as much as 650 Birr for one timad for 3 years. It is a good piece of land that we plant with sorghum, oats, wheat and teff.

3. Combining Farm and Off-Farm Income Earning Activity.

There are households that escape destitution by successfully resorting to both farm and non-farm activity to gain the resources that they need to invest. This type of strategy requires a substantial amount of skill and labor. Hussein, for instance, returned from resettlement to engage in a variety of off-farm and migrant employment opportunities in addition to exten-

sive involvement in land transactions, to eventually attain a substantial asset base and productivity. His ability to diversify his income by engaging in migrant labor allowed him to invest in draft animals that he used to enhance his agricultural productivity which became the basis for a sustainable livelihood.

I stayed [in the resettlement areas] for a year and came back by myself when I was in my twenties. I got employment as a ploughman in a household for a salary of 200 birr and 1 quintal of grain a year. But I quarreled with my employer after 4 months and left to stay with relatives, selling charcoal to gain income. I then went to Asayita in place of someone drafted to harvest cotton who paid me 40 birr. I stayed there for 2 months and returned with 200 birr. I bought 2 bulls for 130 birr each while I stayed with relatives. I then hired out as a farmer near Harbu for 35 birr per month for 4 months. I also went to Asayita again to earn enough income to buy a 3rd bull. I then began to stay with an aunt, ploughing her farm in exchange for half of the output which amounted to about 8 quintals..... I have been sharecropping-in as much as 15 to 20 timad, getting up to 10 to 15 quintals from it per year. The land in our area is generally not very productive, so we are able to get some grain only by cultivating a large area of land. I have also started to rent in land for cash for the past three years. For instance, I rented-in land from Muhaili paying him 490 birr for three

years, and 600 birr to rent-in land for eight years from a farmer who does not have oxen. I sell grain as well as goats to pay the rent on the land and other needs.

4. Receiving Support from the Community or Urban Kin.

Households that have succeeded in escaping destitution have often been beneficiaries of a helping hand from their kin or other members of the community that helped them 'get back on their feet'. This could be in the form of grain or cash loans when they were facing severe food or seed shortages, or donations of labor and oxen as well. We saw above that the support that Ali received in this regard was instrumental in eventually allowing him to regain his livelihood. Other households may receive aid from their urban kin to achieve the same outcome. This type of assistance was critical in allowing Mohammed and his family to launch a successful effort in rebuilding their cropping and livestock-raising activities, as we saw above.

When our crops failed in 1984/85, we remained in the area, selling our cattle, sheep and goats for food. We sold two oxen whereas two of our oxen, 2 cows, 4 goats and 4

sheep died. Our cousins who used to live in Addis also helped us out by sending money....In 1986, some relatives gave us oxen and money for seed that we used to plough 2 plots of land. We got 10 quintals of grain that year. This was enough for our needs because the size of our family was small. My cousin sent us 600 Birr to buy 1 ox for his mother and 1 ox for ourselves. In return, we ploughed for her. We had a good harvest in 1987, so we bought a cow which gave birth to six animals subsequently.

Conclusion

This article has discussed some of the factors and routes that result in the destitution of households. The most common way in which households became destitute was by experiencing severe or repeated crop failure due to drought or other natural causes which led to the sale or death of their livestock assets. This was a relatively rapid form of becoming destitute, although in the case of some more resilient households this outcome occurs only with the impact of repeated crop failures or due to subsequent asset degrading strategies. Other households appear fated for destitution because they had

very poor access to key productive resources such as land, oxen and sometimes labour from the time they were formed. Events in the social development of households can also push some households towards destitution. The most common way this happens is when women lose their husbands due to divorce or death and are forced to head households without critical male labour or management skills. Recently-formed households who have missed the last local land redistribution and who may have received a very small marriage endowment from their parents, as well as the elderly who lack labour and may have passed on much of their land and livestock when marrying-off their children are also vulnerable to destitution. An extended process of destitution can be sustained by some households because they lack the assets that would allow them to produce enough for their consumption needs let alone for investment purposes. Idiosyncratic events such as illnesses or accidents can also bring about destitution in some households unless mitigated by other factors. We have also seen how, given favorable conditions, availability of certain assets such as land and labor, and the efficacy of their strategies, some households can escape destitution to form viable

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Problems Faced by Youth

Traditional practices and poor living conditions often lead young people to engage in sex at an early age. In a survey conducted among high school students in Addis Ababa, 38 percent reported that they were sexually active. Of these sexually active students, 71 percent experienced first sex between the ages of 14 and 16. Similar situations have been observed in other Ethiopian cities: 58 percent of students from the Gondar Medical School, 55 percent of 18- and 19- year-old youth from Harar, and 32 percent of unmarried youth in Jimma were reported to be sexually active.

The two major risk factors for the spread of STDs among youth in Ethiopia are the practice of having multiple sexual partners and the limited use of condoms. A study conducted in high schools in Addis Ababa indicated that 54 percent of sexually active youth have experienced sex with more than one partner; 43 percent of sexually active students reported knowing about condoms at the time of their first sexual experience, but only 18 percent said they had ever used condoms.

Lack of family support and limited educational opportunities have led many youth to turn to life on the streets. Currently, there are about 100,000 street children in the country, with

40,000 in Addis Ababa alone. The majority are boys between 14 and 17. Both boys and girls face a difficult and violent life. In-depth discussions with 32 of the young girls living on the streets indicated that 12 had been raped, 9 others were sexually attacked, 21 were beaten, all of them were robbed, and 7 had had at least one pregnancy. The major problems faced by the boys were frequent beatings and theft. Addiction was a problem among both groups, and included chewing chat (leaves from a locally grown plant), sniffing benzene, and consuming alcohol and hashish (the latter mostly among older teens).

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS cases have been reported in Ethiopia since the early 1980s. Although the prevalence of HIV was very low in the early 1980s, it has been increasing rapidly over the past few years. It is currently estimated that about 3 million Ethiopians live with HIV/AIDS, a prevalence of about 7 percent. According to the HIV sentinel surveillance of mothers seeking antenatal care, prevalence is 11 percent among those age 15-19 and 15 percent among those age 20-24. By the year 2010, the total HIV population is projected to grow by more than one million overall and by 910,000 among those age 10-24. Women and girls are most vulnerable to infection.

The DHS data show that most young Ethiopians have heard of AIDS, with men somewhat more likely than women to have heard of the infection. More than four in five young women and nine in ten young men age 15-24 are aware of AIDS. A relatively high percentage of youth (70 percent of women and 84 percent of men) believe that there is a way to avoid getting AIDS.

Teens are less likely to have heard of AIDS than youth in their twenties. Awareness is also higher among ever-married than never-married youth and among those who are sexually experienced than among those who have never had sex. Urban youth and youth in more urban areas of the country (Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Harari) are much more likely to have heard about AIDS than their rural counterparts. Education exerts a powerful influence; nearly all youth with primary or higher levels of education are aware of the infection.

Community meetings are by far the most important source of information on HIV/AIDS among youth in Ethiopia, with about three in four women and two in three men who have heard of AIDS having heard it from this source. This emphasizes the importance of collective meetings and the ease with which the right information on the infection can be transmitted to young people. The most im-

portant media source is the radio, with over one-third of women and half of men having heard of AIDS through this media.

As mentioned earlier, young women are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection than young men. A number of social, cultural, and biological factors may contribute to this greater vulnerability among girls than boys. Using condoms has been proven to be an effective means of preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS. However, its use is contingent on the cooperation of men. Women may be shy, or culturally reticent, to ask men to use a condom. More often than not, a man is older than his female partner and this, coupled with a male-dominated relationship, may render women powerless to insist on condom use. Although condoms are supposedly freely available from government health facilities, DHS data show that only 16 percent of young women in Ethiopia know a source for condoms, and 15 percent say they could get one if they wanted. Knowledge and access is lower among women age 15-19, ever-married women, and uneducated women. DHS data also show that condom use is extremely low among young women. Less than 2 percent of sexually active women age 15-24 have used a condom during their last sexual intercourse with any partner. Condom use is substantially higher with a non-cohabiting partner than with a cohabiting partner. Condom use among men is much higher: one in five sexually active men age 15-24 have used a condom with any partner at last intercourse.

Use with a non-cohabiting partner is twice as high among men as among their female counterparts. Condom use with a spouse or cohabiting partner is almost nonexistent.

Very young women are biologically more prone to contracting sexually transmitted infections than men or older women. Discussion of HIV/AIDS prevention among the young is therefore a critical component of any program aimed at controlling the spread of infection. DHS data show that there is much scope for improvement in this area. Only 30 percent of young married women and 38 percent of young married men have ever discussed HIV/AIDS prevention with their partners. Ongoing research at the Miz-Hasab Research Center shows that discussing sex and sexuality is considered taboo in Ethiopian society. Since HIV/AIDS is mainly transmitted through sexual relations, its discussion and disclosure is highly sensitive.

Policy Recommendations

The preceding sections have shown that young people in Ethiopia are in a vulnerable state and that the problems they face are complex. Policies and programs that deal with youth reproductive health need to address some key areas for improving the general health and well being of young people in Ethiopia. These are summarized below.

Access to Reproductive Health Information and Services

Young people in Ethiopia are

disadvantaged relative to older people in their ability to access information and services for their reproductive needs because of the absence of a youth-friendly service delivery system. There is an inherent bias in the health care system against the young. This is due in part to the cultural tradition that girls marry at a young age to preserve their chastity, and are encouraged to bear children soon after. There is reluctance on the part of health care providers to inform young women, and especially young unmarried women, about the health implications of bearing children at a very young age, and to inform and encourage them to adopt family planning to delay the onset of childbearing. At the same time, there is little recognition that the very young are at increased risk of complications from pregnancy and delivery, and hence need encouragement to seek out professional health care.

Targeted family planning services can prevent high-risk and unwanted pregnancies and have the potential to significantly reduce maternal and childhood mortality. Increased access to information about family planning and improved contraceptive services for young women at risk could facilitate improvements in coverage, quality, and effectiveness, of maternity care services. Health programs should be geared toward educating health care providers to be more sensitive to the special needs of young women, including training health personnel to recognize and deal with all aspects of youth reproductive health. Programs should be geared toward all youth

whether female or male or married or unmarried. Residence plays a major role in access to education, health services, employment opportunities, and exposure to the mass media. Most youth in rural areas have little access to information on reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases. They have limited knowledge about effective use of contraception, the negative effects of early marriage and childbearing on the health of young mothers, or the effect of having many children on the quality of life. The young in Ethiopia, and especially rural youth, are also more vulnerable to harmful traditional practices. An effective and successful youth reproductive health program should encompass both urban and rural young.

Eliminate Harmful Traditional Practices

Ethiopian women face many disadvantages. They have fewer opportunities to access education, health services, and social and economic services. They are victims of harmful traditional practices, and bear the burden of having many children, managing household matters, and working predominantly in agriculture. As seen in this report, young women in rural areas have little access to reproductive health and family planning services and minimal exposure to mass media. They marry young and bear children soon after; some are victims of abduction and rape. Young women have little knowledge of reproductive health, and limited power and control over their reproductive lives. Female genital cutting is widespread.

All of these factors have contributed to young women having a higher probability of exposure to infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Family planning knowledge is low, especially among rural women, and use is minimal. Women are also more vulnerable to divorce and separation and many migrate to urban areas in search of financial support and eventually end up taking menial jobs because they have little or no education, or are forced into prostitution. Young urban women, though better off than their rural counterparts have less access to information, education, and employment than men. Premarital sex, which is relatively higher among urban than rural women, increases their exposure to sexually transmitted diseases. Unwanted pregnancy and abortions are more common among young urban women than young rural women, increasing the probability of exposure to reproductive health complications and infections. Many are at increased risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS.

Policies and programs to address youth reproductive health need to consider the varied circumstances facing urban and rural women and should be more context-specific. There should be intervention programs that put a stop to early marriage, rape, abduction, and other harmful traditional practices. Education is essential to empower women with decision-making capability. Affirmative measures need to be in place to secure employment for women. Education should go hand-in-hand with help in securing gainful employment aimed at minimizing the risks faced by

this vulnerable group. Schools and health facilities should be used as a forum to inform women about these harmful traditional practices and provide avenues for them to seek help if they are in an exploitative environment.

Information, Education, and Counseling on HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is fast becoming the number one threat to young Ethiopians. Although a relatively large proportion of youth have heard of AIDS, specific knowledge about the infection is limited. This has negative implications for adopting safe practices to avoid contracting HIV/AIDS and to help contain the spread of the infection. Much improvement is needed in educating youth about HIV/AIDS and other STIs and in publicizing the risk factors associated with HIV infection. Since community meetings are important forums for youth education, this avenue needs to be exploited to the fullest to inform youth about harmful sexual practices, to promote safe sex, and to expand knowledge about STIs. Programs should be implemented in health care centers to expand voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) services, to encourage youth to come to these centers for testing, and to provide follow-on care for those who tested positive. The general public and especially religious leaders need to be co-opted into designing programs to educate youth, that would at the same time tackle some of their own inherent biases about the infection and be a helpful self-educating process. Programs

should address the cultural biases that hinder and prevent youth and especially young women from protecting themselves against HIV/AIDS. The government needs to recognize the gravity of the situation facing youth in the country and seek help from external donors to address the spread of the epidemic, through improving the health care system and infrastructure.

Low attendance in schools, unemployment, poor living conditions, and high mobility among urban youth encourage risky behavior and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Although HIV/AIDS has also been the cause of death among many educated and well-to-do groups, the disease is disproportionately higher among high-risk groups such as the unemployed, out-of-school youth, urban youth employed in low paying jobs, and commercial sex workers.

The Ethiopian government has taken some initial encouraging steps to address and combat the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STIs. However, existing education campaigns focus on the modes of prevention, without sufficient attention to care and support of persons living with HIV/AIDS. At the same time disclosure and openness to VCT services is minimal. More attention is needed to address the economic needs of youth by encouraging them to complete their basic education and by expanding employment opportunities to secure sustainable income and hope for the future.

Educate Today's Youth

Education is the basis for so-

cial, economic, and behavioral change. In order for education to meet its intended objectives, it must be well thought out and educational programs should be designed to solve the social, economic, and cultural problems of targeted groups. Education programs should be relevant for the needs of today's youth. They should prepare young people for a sustainable and independent life after schooling has ended. Many urban youth who finish high school are unemployed because their education is not focused on acquiring marketable skills, and because the economy has not grown fast enough to absorb them. The lack of a social support system in the urban environment—away from friends and family—is an additional burden on young people. They have lots of time on their hands and few alternatives to channel their energy.

The Ethiopian government has recognized the gaps in its education system and is attempting to emphasize a purposeful education that is more relevant to the needs of the country. An education policy aimed at making education, particularly primary education, accessible to all children of school age, has been introduced. The government has initiated an education sector development program that expands access, equity, relevance and quality. It has revised the curriculum to emphasize vocational and adult education. The present trend toward making secondary education more vocation focused is believed to be more relevant to the needs of the country and today's youth, and will better prepare young people to accept

adult responsibilities in a work environment.

However, a lot has to be done to make education accessible to rural women and to retain children in the educational system. The school dropout rate for children in rural areas, particularly females, is high and somewhat discouraging. The proportion of youth attending secondary and higher education continues to be very low. Moreover, the school curriculum has given little attention to adolescent reproductive health. Sex education, with a focus on adolescent sexual needs, reproductive health, sexuality, and family planning, need to be incorporated into the existing school curriculum. Youth need to be educated about their physiology, risky sexual behavior, and HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

Added attention should be given to educating parents of youth to continue providing social support during this critical period in their lives.

Improve Exposure to Mass Media

Mass media plays a critical role in educating the public by sensitizing the audience to pertinent issues affecting the community. Exposure to the media impacts knowledge, attitudes and behavior. Rural youth have little access to mass media. The radio is the most important source of information for most youth in the country, especially in rural areas. Television is a more popular media source in urban areas. The usefulness of printed media is dependent on the level of education of the audience. It is critical that in-

formation on youth reproductive health be transmitted to a wide audience and one way to do this is to increase exposure to the media. Community meetings are another important way to promote critical information in Ethiopia, and this strategy needs to be exploited to the fullest. Youth clubs are increasingly being recognized as an important avenue for disseminating reproductive health information to the young. Media content needs to be sensitive and relevant to youth to be successful in encouraging them to adopt or modify behaviors. Reproductive health information should be attractive, informational, and focused. Programs should be geared toward all youth irrespective of residence. Attempts should be made to broadcast programs relevant to youth in all the local languages. Innovative means should be employed to inform and maintain the interest of uneducated youth. For example, traveling dramas or musical shows have been successful in exposing youth to important messages on HIV/AIDS transmission. Media exposure among youth and the wider acceptance of media messages would improve if youth themselves were involved in writing, directing and

promoting context-specific messages.

Good media content requires highly trained, imaginative staff. A well thought out media program can effect major changes in attitudes and behavior. Therefore, programs geared toward addressing youth reproductive health should consider media exposure a crucial component of success.

Access to Employment Opportunities

Unemployment is a serious problem among all youth and is especially serious among urban youth. Most young people are engaged in agriculture primarily because the country's economy is predominantly dependent on agriculture and is therefore the main source of employment. At the same time, because of the low level of education among most Ethiopians, and the relatively small service-oriented sector, there are limited alternative sources of employment for young and poorly educated youth. A large proportion of youth not in school end up being underemployed, idle away their time, or become engaged in illegal activities detrimental to their health and well-

being. Moreover, the high mobility of youth in search of gainful employment has had a negative impact on their ability to acquire valuable work experience, engage in meaningful and lasting relationships, and mature and take on adult roles in society.

Programs to address youth reproductive health need to provide alternatives for youth who drop out of school at an early age. Besides taking measures to encourage youth to stay in school until the completion of their studies, education should be geared toward vocational training. This would provide greater opportunity for young people to enter a trade upon leaving school and to sustain themselves. Programs should also consider providing initial monetary assistance through loans or grants to encourage young graduates to start and maintain small businesses. Employers should encourage participation in after-work education programs. On-the-job training should form a core part of all employers curriculum. Programs should also focus on funding more recreational facilities to attract out-of-school and unemployed youth and to focus their energy in more

End Note

* This article has been taken from the monograph entitled *Youth Reproductive Health in Ethiopia* by the same authors.

BOOK REVIEW

Challenges of Evaluating the Intellectuals of the Early 20th Century: A Review Article

Shiferaw Bekele

Bahru Zewde, Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century Oxford, Athens, Addis Ababa: James Currey, Ohio University Press, Addis Ababa University Press, 1995. ISBN 0-85255-453-2 (James Currey cloth), ISBN 0-85255-452-4 (James Currey Paper). Xii + 228pp., and 21 photos. Price (paper) £16.95

Early on November 2 [1931], Ato Metaferia Wude took me to the residence of the District Governor [Chercher in Hararge], H.E. Azazh Worqneh [a major character in the narrative of the book under review], and introduced me to him. Thus started the account of Ato Emmanuel Abraham (b.1913), one of the educated Ethiopians cited in the same book, of his first employment in his long career in government service. Werkneh had employed him to serve “in secretarial work.” That day by coincidence marked “the first anniversary of the coronation of H.I.M. Haile Selassie I.” Emmanuel met his future patron while waiting for the arrival of the guests invited for the occasion. When the reception started, the governor addressed the audience, as Emmanuel recalls, by wishing

Good health and long life to H.I.M. and then proceeded to make remarks concerning a matter he had been pondering over for some time – education. He made it quite clear that while the rest of the world had far advanced in education and technology, the Ethiopian people had lagged far behind, that this was a matter for sadness and preoc-

cupation, that the number of the schools in the country was minimal, that there was no place to learn in Asbe Tefari, and that therefore he intended to open a school in the town. But since there was no fund in the treasury allocated for this purpose, he urged the officials, the parents and others there assembled to make contributions to this worthy objective so that a school could be started quickly. He then announced he would contribute five hundred Birr. Those in the hall also indicated the amounts they could contribute and a list was made. Over two thousand birr was collected and placed in the treasury. (Emmanuel Abraham, 1995:25)

Immediately, construction of a small four-room school started next to the house of the governor. As there were apparently no skilled carpenters in the town, the authorities had to fetch them from Addis to “make desks and benches as well as blackboards. A white soft limestone was found and served as chalk.” (*Ibid.*) With this, they thought that preparations were complete and they opened the school only a month later, on November 30, 1931 with 18 students. As there were

no persons qualified to teach, Emmanuel was pressed into service.

So goes the story, a remarkable story of how this modest beginning slowly grew to a bona fide school. There are two elements in Emmanuel’s narrative that we should take note of – lack of government funds and complete absence of trained manpower. When they opened the above school, twenty-five years had gone by from the establishment of the first government school (1907). And yet, no curriculum. No textbooks. No corps of professionally trained teachers. And all of this was primarily because the government did not have money – a key factor to understand not just the sluggishness in the expansion of education but also many other things in the transformation of the country in the first four decades of the 20th century. It was also one of the critical variables to understand and evaluate the intellectual contributions of the educated Ethiopians of that period. I will come back to this same issue later in this review.

It was in order to overcome the problem of shortage of funds that the leaders (Haile Selassie himself and publicists like Deressa Amante) gave so much weight to the raising of money

by public contributions. Very often, fund raising did not stop with the opening of the schools. For instance, Werkneh had to purchase from his own pocket stationary and other materials needed for the running of the school from Addis Ababa and textbooks from London. This must have been a hard decision on his part as he was the father of over ten children! Without doubt, he was a selfless and dedicated person, a true patriot – remarkable attributes, indeed. The educated Ethiopians of the imperial era were also a remarkable group of people from another angle. They counted, from among them, no less than thirty very high officials and dignitaries who published at least one book (in most cases they had several to their names) or serious articles in newspapers. These included three *rases*, at least twenty-five ministers and senior government officials. This record would make the imperial regime stand out among the three radically different regimes of the 20th century. The emperor himself had to his name a two-volume memoir.

Haile Selassie, who presided over that period, was indeed the subject of bitter condemnations for many things that took place in his reign, particularly in the twilight years of his rule. Indeed, he was a leader with his share of weaknesses and shortcomings. Yet, he was not without his intellectual achievements. He was a remarkable man of culture – he was a great goer of theatres where he encouraged the playwrights, he savoured classical European music performed by orchestras in his palace and in the Na-

tional Theatre (in his days called Haile Selassie I Theatre), he used to go to art exhibitions where he bought paintings, and encouraged and patronised artists, he was a lover of literature (Kebede Mika’el was his favourite poet and he had a high appreciation for Haddis Alemayehu’s masterpiece), he read at least all the major writings by his ministers and officials and expressed his opinion about them.

This may be the case; but subsequent generations of intellectuals do not seem to be aware of the extent and depth of these publications, let alone to use them. For instance, the revolutionary writings of the young radical intellectuals of the 60s and 70s are not cluttered with references to them. By comparison, Russian and Chinese revolutionary thinkers drew a lot more from the works of the earlier generations of writers of their respective countries. Development discourse, in the true sense of the word, made its appearance on Ethiopia’s intellectual landscape in the 1960s. Without claiming to have exhausted all the publications in this regard from the 1960s to the present, I think it is possible to state that this discourse did not link itself to the productions of the pre-war period.¹

That the pre-war intellectuals were overlooked by revolutionaries and development thinkers was, however, only one side of the coin. When we turn over the other side, we discover that these intellectuals were the subjects of extensive and profound studies from different angles. A good number of literary scholars (both Ethiopians and ex-

triate Ethiopicists) have devoted their attention and energy to the study and analysis of the literary works produced in the period. These same works became subjects of a good number of dissertations by the students of the Department of Ethiopian Languages and Literatures. So individually some of the intellectuals were studied and restudied. Nor were those that dealt with non-literary themes overlooked. They too have attracted wide-ranging interest. History students at Haile Selassie I University (later AAU) made them subjects of research for their dissertation as of the 1960s. A not negligible number of these dissertations draw on primary sources and are therefore original and useful. Most were not published and so are not easily accessible to the wider public. And even the published materials are not within easy reach of the public, either. The articles that appeared in international journals in Europe and America are not always available in Ethiopia except perhaps in the library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. In addition to these, a good number of articles and books are written in Italian, French and German, languages that are not accessible to the Anglophone public of Ethiopia. (See Taye Assefa and Shiferaw Bekele, 2000 for a bibliography) It is the good merit of Bahru’s book that all these works (in different languages and scattered in many publications) are synthesized into one master narrative and analysis. The other merit of this work is that it brings together many intellectuals of significance – published and unpublished, prominent and forgotten – in

spite of some misses.²

Bahru has divided his book into seven chapters. In effect, however, the book can be grouped into four parts. The first part, consisting of chapters one and two, establishes the setting by presenting the international background (the response of Asia and Africa to the multifaceted rise of western hegemony), the conceptual framework (the concepts of modernization and westernisation, which he uses as organizing tools of his book) and the educational background (the introduction and expansion of modern education in Ethiopia). After thus setting “the global and continental framework within which Ethiopian intellectual history unfolded” (p.13), Bahru proceeds to present his characters (the intellectuals of the era before the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935) to his readers in the next two chapters (3 & 4). Though the two chapters neatly fall into a single unit, their treatment of the protagonists displays a nuanced difference – while chapter three gives individual profiles of fifteen intellectuals, which the author calls “The First Generation”, chapter four abandons this approach in favour of group sketches (“The Second Generation”) by placing them into six categories by virtue of their countries of training or (in one case) by their religion – the Middle Eastern transit, the French-educated, the Italian-educated, the British-educated, the American-educated and the Catholic group. After thus briefly introducing his heroes, the author then moves on to the discussion of their ideas in chapters 5 and 6. These two chapters constitute a sizeable section of the book

running into 61 pages, a clean one-fifth of the work. They present the whole gamut of ideas proposed by the intellectuals of the period by placing them under seven broad rubrics – national independence, economic transformation, administrative change, legal modernization, modern education, historiography and Amharic literature. He winds up his book by taking up the challenge, in the final chapter, of “assessing the impact of their lives and ideas on Ethiopian society” (p.162) – not an easy task given the nature of the sources. Yet he comes out of it fairly successfully.

This is indeed a successful book in more ways than one. Its success emanates from the extensive use of sources that the author has studied and from his style of presentation and analysis. He deploys information culled from a wide range of primary sources – published and unpublished memoirs by the characters themselves and their other writings, the weekly *Berhanena Selam* newspaper (1925 -35), European archives, Ministry of Pen archives, correspondence and diaries, oral information. Not only did he exhaust the secondary literature (including dissertations, particularly BA essays) in various European languages and in Amharic, he also digested them very well. Bahru has shown a remarkable capacity to make sense of data obtained from disparate, scattered and apparently unrelated sources and to stitch them into a coherent narrative and analysis. To my knowledge, no scholar has drawn to date on the articles published in *Berhanena Selam* as extensively as Bahru does. He has

moreover succeeded in showing that all these pieces on so many seemingly unrelated topics have an internal coherence. His mastery of the secondary literature has enabled him to weave a solid synthesis of the profiles of the intellectuals. Yet, he has added fresh information from his research, which enables him to write a very original work. He shows a knack for selecting humorous and dramatic anecdotes from his sources with which to leaven his narrative and his analysis. His prose is elegant, thus producing a highly readable book. This history will remain an authoritative reference work on the intellectuals of the period.³ Indeed, it deserves a place on the shelves of, not just the specialist of the period, but also teachers, journalists, literary critics, culture specialists, development thinkers and others interested in the subject. The author should therefore be congratulated on the success of his work.

Its very success leads us into a series of reflection. Now that Bahru has furnished us with the groundwork, we are in a position to go one step forward and take up some of the historical problems that hamper the interpretation of the period. These include firstly, what I would like to call, the Haile Selassie factor, secondly the more common problem of sources, and thirdly the challenge of understanding the period, of grasping its socio-economic dynamics within which the intellectual activities we are concerned with took place.

This book is about intellectuals and, as I stated above, the author has included within his

study most of them. So it is a very comprehensive account, in fact the most comprehensive account on the subject to date. Yet, when one looks carefully at the book, eight intellectuals occupy centre stage in it. These are, in alphabetical order, Afewerk Gebre Iyesus, Gebru Desta, Gebre-Hiwet Baykedagn, Hiruy Wolde Selassie, Taye Gebre Mariam, Tekle Hawariat Tekle Mariam and Werkneh Eshete. Next to them come Deresa Amante, Gebre Egziabher Gila Mariam and Tedla Haile. Behind them all looms the figure of Teferi/Haile Selassie (we use this awkward combination of his actual name and his regnal name to indicate the period of his regency and his reign). The nature of the relationship between him and all the intellectuals (not only the above-mentioned ones) runs like a thread throughout the book. This is fair enough as the man played such a crucial role in the careers of these educated Ethiopians in one way or another. Thus, the way the researcher understands the place of the emperor in 20th century Ethiopian history will shape his/her interpretation of the contributions of the men under discussion. For instance, in Bahru's account whenever there were differences between the intellectuals and the emperor, the benefit of the doubt is given to the former.

The radical students of the 1960s were the first to propose a thorough re-examination of their country's history within the framework of the Marxist-Leninist conceptual apparatus. As a point of departure, they recast the image of Haile Selassie in the darkest of col-

ours. Armed with the conceptual tools of Communism, the young historians went back into the past in search of heroes. Without going much, they discovered them in the real, and at times imagined, opponents and critics of the monarch – like saying whoever was his enemy or critic could only be a person with a good cause. Abiy Demisse (1964) wrote his senior essay on Iyasu in which he repainted the young prince with fresh colours as a misunderstood leader who had anticipated the progressive ideas of religious and ethnic equality. Bahru Demisse (1970) saw the antecedents of his own radical generation in the educated men of the pre-Italian period. He called them “progressives” – a term at that time reserved to leftist and left-oriented intellectuals. Addis Hiwet, in an influential book published in 1975, saw in Asbe Haylu (to cite one among his many heroes) a precursor of the anti-feudal intellectuals of his generation for calling attention to the plight of the *gebbar* in a short 1927 article. It is clear that Addis Hiwet was much impressed by the criticisms of the social order by some of the intellectuals of the 20s, and without much ado he dubbed them “Japanizers”, a term that seems to have taken root in the historiography of the period.

What impressed most the youthful leftist historians in the intellectuals of the period were the sharp criticisms that the latter levelled at the socio-economic order. They saw these critical articles as signs of intellectual prowess. Little did they realise that criticising the socio-economic order of the

1900s or the 1920s for someone who was educated in Europe was as facile as pouring contempt on the life style of the small ethnic groups in the Omo valley or on the ignorance of the peasant.

If these were only youthful approaches to an aspect of Ethiopian history, they would not have deserved a serious attention. But the trend has demonstrated a strong staying power.⁴ What was a student view in the 60s and 70s has now become standard interpretation. It is time that this approach, which I have called the Haile Selassie factor, should be questioned. Put simply, a leader of Haile Selassie's stature and longevity of rule deserves a better treatment. It is time for a dispassionate reconstruction of the sovereign's rule in which full recognition will be given to his achievements just as much as to his failures and shortcomings. The monarch was not only a passive recipient of new ideas; he had his own ideas because he too was educated – at least he was as much educated as most of the dominant intellectuals of the pre-war period. He also liked to read. He too had his visions for his country but he had to work within the framework of serious constraints. As a pragmatic politician, he had to be flexible in light of the reality within which he had to operate.

Under normal circumstances, one would only appreciate Haile Selassie's decision in 1932 to send Tekle Hawariat to Paris, Geneva and London as Ethiopia's diplomatic representative. Because the country could not simply afford

it, the government decided to send just one person as ambassador (with the rank of minister) for all the three otherwise key cities. And in a country which did not have a pool of highly qualified and senior officials from among whom to select the appropriate diplomat, it was only fair if Haile Selassie chose one of the tiny few who had gone to an advanced school abroad (a military academy in Russia) and who had had a brief stay in France. If, rather than accepting the high confidence and trust thrust upon him, Tekle Hawariat chose to read into the appointment an intrigue to banish him from the centre of power, as if Ethiopia did not have suitable banishment areas for recalcitrant politicians, one would not expect a historian to take it at its face value. The relations with Italy soured very rapidly in the following two years, and therefore it was felt that it was better to have an ambassador exclusively for London. Tekle Hawariat would then focus only on Paris and Geneva. Again Haile Selassie appointed Werkneh Eshete, the best possible choice at the time. Werkneh in turn chose Emmanuel Abraham to go with him to London as his assistant. Ato Emmanuel's presentation of his patron's designation in his memoir is so interesting that it is worth quoting at some length:

The activity of the Italian government [following the December 34 Welwel incident] was such that the Emperor and the Ethiopian government were seized with apprehension and, in addition to doing all they could

to obtain military equipment and alert the people, they realized that it was most important to do their utmost in the diplomatic sphere. To this end it was decided to select some trustworthy persons and send them to Europe.

Azazh Worqneh, the governor of Chercher, happened to go to Addis Ababa after the Walwal incident. The Emperor summoned him one day and consulted with him about the threatening attitude of Fascist Italy and about his fear that it might invade Ethiopia. Recalling that in those days the number of Ethiopians who could stand to Europeans and argue with them was negligible, he told Azazh Worqneh of his desire to send him to Britain as his Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. Azazh Worqneh reminded the Emperor that his training was in medicine and not in diplomacy and that he was therefore afraid the task might prove to be too much for him. His Majesty then said that he was an Englishman in every respect except his ethnic origin and pressed him to go to London for him. Seeing that the Emperor felt that he would be of use to him, he accepted the assignment. (Emmanuel Abraham, 1995:29-30)

In the same way it can be said that Afewerk Gebre Iyesus, who had been appointed to Rome in 1932, was the closest that one could go to be an Italian and therefore he was the best for the post in Rome. If he

was a traitor in 1895, it could not necessarily be held against him in 1932, as he had apparently displayed much patriotism for many years in between. That he fell into his old sin while in mission should not be used to question the wisdom of Haile Selassie's decision to make him his representative. There was indeed a serious character flaw in Afewerk as it was proved in his despicable behaviour during the period of Italian rule.

When Ethiopia was overran, Tekle Hwariat at first fled to Aden and eventually to the French colony of Madagascar where he sat out the occupation. There were plenty of opportunities for him to get into contact with refugees in Djibouti, British Somaliland, Kenya or the Sudan or Palestine and even with the patriots in Ethiopia if only he had wanted to. He did nothing. If in his unpublished autobiography he tries to give a favourable account of this and of all his other activities, and if he blames the emperor for his failures, it is perfectly understandable. The challenge to the historian is not to be underestimated, however – the challenge to ferret out the truth given the paucity of sources to countercheck this self-serving presentation.

In fact when we carefully examine the careers of quite a good number of the intellectuals, the monarch comes out as a highly understanding, tolerant and benevolent ruler. Beshahwured got into trouble with the French while he was the mayor of Dire Dawa (they were not always the ones to be blamed) and when they bitterly pleaded

for his removal, all Haile Selassie did was to transfer him to a much higher post and to get him closer to the palace. (Shiferaw Bekele, 1989) Some of the educated people we are given to admire (Afewerk, Gebre-Hiwet, Tekle Hawariat, to mention the most prominent) were men who had serious difficulties to adjust into the Ethiopian environment due possibly to temperament and certainly also to protracted stay abroad. "Obstreperous" is the word that an American diplomat in Addis used for Afewerk (p.55), not wide of the mark for him as well as for the others I mentioned above. Calling them "misfits" may be a rather hard term, but it comes close to describing them. In spite of this however we see the monarch giving them high and at times sensitive offices (like Rome and Paris/Geneva). Why did he bend over backwards to accommodate them? This is a problem to which future historians have to address themselves.

The second problematic to which I directed attention above is the mundane challenge of the nature of sources. Some of the intellectuals have been the object of much publicity. Also, a good number of them were not above publicising themselves. If we take Afewerk, for instance, from day one of the appearance of his first book right through to the present, an array of heavy-weight Italian and (later) French professors have come out with their full power to show to us what a great intellectual and a brilliant prose writer Afewerk was. The last in the line is Alain Rouaud who has written an excellent full-scale biogra-

phy of the man (the only one of its kind!) but who tries to persuade us that his hero became a traitor... for patriotic reasons! (Rouaud, 1991) From very early on, generation after generation of Ethiopian commentators joined the chorus of admiration. It is definitely a challenge to push one's way through all this thick forest of hyperbolic expressions and arrive at the true man, at the frequently verbose, at times turgid and at other times brilliant prose, at the author whose writings do not show much originality of thought, and at the pioneer for which he should get much credit!

It is the same with the other dominant figures - Gebre Hiwet, Gebru, Heruy, Tekle Hawariat. Let us take Gebre Hiwet as another instance. He was without doubt one of the most brilliant intellectuals of the period. He anticipated the famous Dependency Theory as far back as 1919! A breathtaking achievement, indeed! When they discovered this, the generation of the last quarter of the 20th century that came from a Neo-Marxist background, were overwhelmed. In their studies (Ayele Zewge, 1981; Dereje Wolde Medhin, 1987; Tenker Bonger, 1992; Alemayehu Gedda, 2002) they expressed much admiration. When they saw that Gebre Hiwet had even deployed economic theories like the labour theory of value in his analysis of the economic conditions of Ethiopia, they were even more impressed. All this is good. Historians should have no problems with this. But to them the question of how much Gebre Hiwet understood the economic realities of his

day is a cardinal question that no deployment of sophisticated theories can replace. Even if a satisfactory answer to this question presupposes the presence of solid and comprehensive studies of the economic history of the time, which unfortunately is not yet the case, it is possible to raise some issues for discussion on the strength of the available literature.

One of the most critical economic challenges that the leaders faced in the last quarter of the 19th, and the first half of the next, was the shortage of money. The need at that time, the crying need was quite literally for had cash, for real money. There was indeed very little money in the hands of the government or of the rulers or of the people at large. Hard evidence is certainly lacking regarding the revenue of the government, the volume of money in circulation and the volume of its import and export (we are dealing here with the silver Maria Theresa thaler, which of course had its intrinsic value). Nevertheless, there are estimates that give us a picture of the magnitude of the problem involved. For the sake of illustrating our point, we can take the estimates of a man who had every reason to know whatever is to be known about money (he claims to have examined the palace books of Menilek) - MacGillivray, the first governor of the newly opened Bank of Abyssinia. R. Pankhurst extensively quotes from his 1905 report, which we can use for our purpose. The total revenue and expenditure of Menilek for 1902 are as follows:

“Revenue and Expenditure of Menilek for the Year 1902”*

	Revenue	Expenditure
Gold	327,560	17,520
Dollars**	2,067,122	920,941
Salt	854,427	647,864
Ivory	175,100	166,600
Cloth	216,720	174,630
Total	3,640,929,	1,927,555

* title added

** Dollar stands for Maria Theresa Thaler

Source: R. Pankhurst, 1968: 538.

The figures speak for themselves. It should also be noted that there was no separation the revenues of the emperor and those of the state. The picture for the next two years shows only minor variations. At the current state of our knowledge, there is no way of establishing the weight of these estimates. Nevertheless, they can serve our purpose if we take them as indicators. Over the years we see a steady but slow increase in government revenue and expenditure. Nevertheless, the income in money was always low as against the needs of the country for cash. When this abysmally low revenue is seen together with the volume of money in circulation, the picture becomes infinitely more dismal than the dismal science of economics:

Estimates of the number of coins circulating or hoarded in Ethiopia are largely conjectural. An American report for 1918 put the circulation at 3 million, of which only half a million dollars were actually in use, but believed that 25 to 50 million were buried or otherwise stored. Less than a decade later in

1927 another American report gave a much higher estimate, stating that 6 to 7 million dollars [MT thalers] were in use, but that [MT] coins on arriving in the country “rapidly” disappeared, “being transmuted into ornaments and hoarded by those who were able to accumulate wealth.” “...There are in Ethiopia at present probably more than 50,000,000 of the Austrian coins.” Most observers accepted such estimates. Thus de Coppet hazarded the guess that there were 30 million [MT] dollars in the country in 1930, while the governor of the Bank of Ethiopia quoted the figure in 1934 of 35 to 50 million. The actual turn-over of cash must, however, have been much lower, and was estimated by Hans at 15 to 20 million. (Pankhurst, 1968:490)

Three strands can easily be drawn out of this quotation. Firstly, one cannot but see the need for the monetisation of the economy. The use and circulation of money being so limited, much of the trade was either by

barter or by the use of crude media of exchange (the most popular being a salt bar called *amole*). These had to give way to money if any meaningful transformation of the economy had to take place. Secondly, the currency was still the foreign Maria Theresa Thaler with all that this implied for the autonomy of the economy. Menilek’s attempts to replace it by Menilek thaler were not successful up to that time. Thirdly, the silver coins must give way to token money. This is related to the point raised above – monetisation. In a rather primitive economy such as Ethiopia’s, the people would not find it easy to transfer from money that had pristine value to token money. The transition would take (and indeed take!) a long time.⁵

How much did Gebre Hiwet factor into his analysis this feature of the economy? Not really much. His explanation of the failure of the Bank of Abyssinia to earn profits for several years should have taken this monetary element into account. His concern for the danger of dependency should have been preceded by an analysis of how

to introduce token money and spread its use, how to put in place the credit system and expand its services, in short how to monetise the economy. It is a sign of great intellectual power to see the possibility of dependency many years down the road and for this he is rightly appreciated. But the analysis would not be of much immediate use to the policy makers of the day because the major problems of the economy at that particular time were only marginally addressed.

Indeed, shortage of money was perhaps the biggest drag on the government at that time. Lack of sufficient revenue explains why Ethiopia did not build a sizeable army in time to withstand foreign aggression, why infrastructural development was so sluggish, why Teferi/ Haile Selassie was unable to expand education as much as he wanted to, why he was reluctant to open as many embassies abroad as would have been necessary. Here as well Ato Emmanuel's testimony will come in handy:

In 1935, Ethiopia's diplomatic service had not been organized on modern lines and trained personnel were non-existent. Moreover, the amount of money spent for the purpose was extremely limited. When a minister plenipotentiary or a consul was sent abroad, therefore, he was allowed to take along with him someone of his choice to assist him as secretary. (Emmanuel Abraham, 1995: 30)

For the sake of non-historian readers, it has to be added that

in the era before the Second World War it was not easy to get external loan; external assistance and grant-in-aid would be further in the future. The Bretton Woods institutions would not be created for another decade or so. On the other hand, as we have seen above, the domestic sources were not at all helpful. It is within this context that we appreciate the full force of the writings of Deresa Amante. Deresa seems to have had very little formal education. Yet, he was one of those tiny few that put his finger on key issues of the country. He wrote a series of articles arguing that spread of education should be given priority (a correct assessment!) but that, since the government did not have any money in its coffers to allocate for it, all those Ethiopians (members of the nobility and others) who had money should make contributions and open schools in their localities. The fund raising activity of Werkneh cited at the very beginning of this piece was part of this general campaign. A number of governors did respond to the call. Nevertheless, he must have realized after a short while that there were not as many altruistic Ethiopians as he expected for him to come up with a more realistic proposal – introduction of education tax. There is considerable evidence to show that Teferi/ Haile Selassie fully shared these views. The position of the Ethiopian sovereign cannot thus be compared with those of the westernising monarchies of Egypt, Persia and Thailand, not to mention Japan. The oriental rulers had vastly superior finance at their disposal when they set out on their westernisa-

tion drives. This, among other reasons, enabled them to pay for large-scale transformation projects that in turn led to their more rapid development.

That Gebre Hiwet did not highlight these issues does not of course detract from the brilliance of some of his ideas and theories. I have brought up the issue to demonstrate the need for a more balanced judgement. It is the same with his famous proposals for political, military, educational and administrative changes, which he had outlined in his 1912 article. There are as many bright ideas in the essay as there are naïve and impractical ones. (Shiferaw Bekele, 1994) His views on ethnic inequality equally suffer from imbalance. Be this as it may, he should get credit for drawing attention to the ethnic inequity prevalent at the time. (Shiferaw Bekele, 1994) Bahru comments quite rightly that Gebre Hiwet should be appreciated for drawing attention to the plight of the Tigreans in the reign of Menilek and for blaming the king for the neglect of the people. (pp.133-4) At the same time, Bahru does not pass without mentioning the fact that Gebre Hiwet "has few sympathetic words for [the Oromo]". (p.131) Since Gebre Hiwet was European educated (though we do not as yet know the level of his academic attainment!) where he lived for several years as a black person amidst a white population in an era of open expression of white superiority, one would expect him to express as much sympathy to the plight of the Oromo and the other ethnic groups of the south in Menilek's Ethiopia as to that of the Tigreans (his own ethnic

group). In present day parlance, his position would have been called “narrowness” or “narrow nationalism”. Putting aside this cumbersome verbiage (good, old “tribalism” would have been a much better term), I think Gebre Hiwet can properly be criticised for not going beyond his immediate horizon and for not seeing the wider Ethiopian context. But this shortcoming was not his alone.

The intellectual, as Bahru writes, who devoted considerable attention to the Oromo situation was Tedla Haile. This man owes his place in this book due to the MA thesis he wrote to the Colonial University of Antwerp in Belgium. In fact, we are indebted to Bahru (who discovered him in the course of his research) for our knowledge of Tedla and of his thesis. He proposes assimilation of the Oromo into the Amhara stock as a solution to the problem in his dissertation. To begin with, some questions have to be asked about this thesis. Did the author exhaust the ethnographic literature on Ethiopia of that time? Did he also refer to the major historical works and chronicles in print up to that time? If at all it is possible to give opinions on the strength of Bahru’s comments, the answer to these questions would not be positive. In any case, if Tedla proposed “assimilation”, it should come as no surprise

given his ethnic (scion of a leading Shewan lineage, the Moja) and his educational background. The Shewan empire builders took assimilation for granted as one way of stabilising the empire. Assimilation was also the dominant theory in the Francophone colonial world of the time. What is surprising, even shocking, is the degree to which Tedla retained a number of ideas, which can be called, in today’s parlance, “chauvinism”. For a black man who did his university education in Europe of that time to entertain ideas of chauvinism towards another ethnic group in his country, which was similar in every way to his own, does not reflect favourably on his intellectual calibre as a social scientist.

On the other hand, it is perfectly understandable if the Eritrean Gebre-Egziabher Gila Mariam bitterly condemned Menilek for abandoning Eritrea after his Adwa victory. After all, given his limited education, Gebre-Egziabher should not be expected to have a wider view and to comprehend the immense difference in balance of forces between Ethiopia and Italy. When, however, the same position comes from the pen of Tekle Hawariat, it shows a serious intellectual shortcoming because we have to judge him by a different standard – after all, Tekle Hawariat had gone to an advanced military academy,

which, we expect, would have equipped him with the necessary conceptual apparatus to understand the vast disparity in military and other resources between the two sides that would have made it impossible for Menilek to attain that goal. If Tekle Hawariat thought otherwise, he should have gone to considerable length to explain why he thought liberating Eritrea was possible for the Ethiopian monarch. What Tekle Hawariat preferred to do was simply to level criticism, which, if anything, shows lack of intellectual depth, a pronounced feature of the man.


The point at issue is not just the depth of Tekle Hawariat’s thinking – it is rather one of methodology. The historian should apply different yardsticks to evaluate the intellectuals of the period. A rigorous evaluation will make it possible to distinguish between the brilliant and the mediocre writer and between the original and the non-original thinker. But this task is not as easy as saying it due to the nature of the sources. We have come so far in our reflections only thanks to the achievements of Bahru in painstakingly reconstructing a comprehensive history of the intellectuals of the period. It is quite fair to expect that this book will continue to give rise to more discussions and debate.

End Notes

¹ Messay Kebede (1999) is an exception to this generalisation because he consciously tries to ground his philosophical discourse in Ethiopian history and in the intellectual productions of the earlier generations.

² I would like to draw attention to four personalities - two significant intellectuals of the period, Haile Mariam Serabion and Mersé Hasan Wolde Qirqos, one apparently educated official Beyene Yimer and a traditional scholar, Feseha Giyorgis – who have been overlooked by the book. Haile Mariam was born and went to school in the 19th century, had a stint abroad and was employed in the service of Menilek upon his return. He conceived and got designed the imperial coat-of-arms for Menilek, which continued to serve, with minor modifications, up to 1974. He wrote a book (1898 E.C.) to explain and interpret the symbolisms of this coat-of-arms as well as of the Ethiopian banner.

The following FSS publications, which came out recently, will be of interest to our readers.

 ***Ethiopia: The Challenge of Democracy from Below.* Edited by Bahru Zewde and Siegfried Pausewang. (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala and Forum for Social Studies) 2002.**

Abstract

Democracy is a concept reflecting European philosophies, struggles and concerns. Many Ethiopian ethnic groups have traditions which may offer more satisfactory and culturally acceptable foundations for a "sovereignty of the people" through time-honoured ways of voicing political and other ideas. In line with modern urban life Ethiopians also organize and express their interests in non-governmental organisations, the independent press and advocacy groups representing political and social alternatives.

The contributors to this book analyse the democratic potential of these movements and practices, their ability to give a voice to the view from below and their potential contribution to a more genuine participation by the majority of Ethiopians in democratic decision making and bringing the sovereignty of the people a step closer to reality.


 ***Livelihood Insecurity Among Urban Households in Ethiopia.* (FSS Discussion Paper No. 8). Dessalegn Rahmato and Aklilu Kidanu. October 2002.**

Abstract

This study is based on a survey of households undertaken in the last quarter of 2001 for ILO as part of the project entitled People's Security Survey (PSS). The main objec-

tive of PSS was to try to capture people's perceptions and normative values of "livelihood" security. The towns in which the survey was undertaken were Addis Ababa, Debre Zeit, Mojo and Nazareth.


The findings of the study reveal a population that is fearful and anxious about its basic subsistence, which is dependent on low and insecure income, inadequate social services, a shrinking labor market, and which is faced with gloomy prospects. It was evident that the great majority of households are weighed down by livelihood insecurity, with the threat of impoverishment and loss of means for basic sustenance hanging over them as a matter of course. The study reveals a great deal of pessimism on the part of many: pessimism about one's basic security, about employment opportunities, and the chances for self-improvement. Most households are doubtful if there will be economic growth, or if the problem of poverty will be successfully tackled.

 ***Rural Poverty in Ethiopia: Household Case Studies from North Shewa.* (FSS Discussion paper No. 9) Yared Amare. December 2002.**

Abstract

The qualitative approach undertaken in this study goes beyond measurements of incomes and expenditures in assessing poverty to characterize the significance of varying levels of access to key production assets for household economic status, the nature of poverty in a specific context, and the attributes of locally relevant economic categories of households. The process-oriented approach to poverty provides a fuller

and more accurate assessment of the factors explaining why households fall into poverty. It also shows how consideration of the 'active' and subjective aspects of various peasant livelihood strategies brings out the potential of and constraints on each of them. Furthermore, it demonstrates that social phenomena such as networks of mutual assistance, resource exchanges, the social development and adaptive changes in the structure of households, which are best studied through qualitative methods, have significant implications for household economic prospects and patterns of rural poverty. Finally, peasant perceptions and experiences of various government development interventions and institutions are considered in assessing their potential and shortcomings in terms of poverty reduction.

 ***Some Aspects of Poverty in Ethiopia: Three Selected Papers.* (FSS Studies on Poverty No. 1). Edited by Dessalegn Rahmato. March 2003.**

Abstract

The three papers published in this volume were originally presented at the First International Conference on the Ethiopian Economy held here in Addis Ababa on 3-5 January 2003 and organized by the Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA). Following the request of EEA, FSS hosted a special panel on poverty at the Conference in which the three papers and an oral presentation by Prof. Bahru were delivered for discussion.

The Papers included here are: "Poverty and Agricultural involution" by Dessalegn Rahmato, "Poverty and Urban Governance Institutions" by Meheret Ayenew and "HIV/AIDS and Poverty" by Aklilu Kidanu and Hailom Banteyerga.

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