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Chapter XI — Recapitulation and Therapeutic Roadmap

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Chapter XI

Recapitulation and Therapeutic Roadmap

This book revolved around a central theme, which is to show how the imperative to hold on to absolute power derailed the modernization of Ethiopia under three consecutive but radically different political regimes, the irony being that each came to power on the promise of removing the defects of the regime that preceded it. Its main argument can be summed up thus: from Haile Selassie's imperial state, military socialism, to the two versions of ethnic federalism, the framing of modernization in an exclusionary political system and the attendant excluding forms of ideological thinking are responsible in large measure for the derailment. As Kostas Loukeris notes,

All political ideologies currently promoted in Ethiopia share the commonality of political exclusion. This means that all of them are based on particular characteristics that force other Ethiopian citizens to either accept them and thus deny their own ideological orientation or feel excluded from its political system. These processes create grievances and breed conflict.¹

Let us recapitulate the main findings of our study.

Disabilities of Ethiopian Modern State

The three regimes adopted all kind of ideological and political gimmicks to soften the contradiction arising from their declared commitment to set in motion modernization while framing it in an exclusionary political system. The predictable outcome of all this was for sure the delay of modernization, but also the deep and ever-growing social fractures and structural impediments resulting from the continuous derailment. This descent from bad to worse is so true that scholars and political leaders, beyond acknowledging the delay, increasingly refer to the uncertainty of Ethiopia's future as a united country.

The inquiry into the derailment opened with an elucidation of the role of the survival will of nations in unleashing the determination to modernize in various parts of the world. The application of the survival will to the case of Ethiopia disclosed that colonial encirclement and threats had sown the rudiments of an Ethiopian will to modernize. Unfortunately, this will quickly diverted towards the consolidation of the imperial state and the landed class, both made possible by the southern conquest and the victory of Adwa against Italian forces. These two milestones imparted overconfidence to the ruling class. Especially, the victory of Adwa came to be seen as a demonstration of Ethiopia's ability to defend itself. The conquest also increased the authority of the imperial throne, since it supplied the resources needed to bolster the military capability of the state and implement an extensive centralizing agenda. In addition, it strengthened the landed class and

fortified its grip over the country, particularly over the peasantry, thereby establishing a dependable class support for the imperial power.

The rudiment of the will to modernize the country completely lost its national priorities, including the building of a self-reliant and dependable defense system, following the Fascist Italian occupation of Ethiopia and its “liberation” thanks to the decisive intervention of British troops alongside Ethiopian patriotic forces. After the recovery from the traumatic Italian occupation, Ethiopia was independent only in name, since its defeat gave the full measure of its lag behind the Western world. There was nowhere to go but to accept Ethiopia’s dependency on the West and get on with the task of learning and importing many of the features of Western civilization. In default of being able to fly with its own wings, Ethiopia thus resigned to the status of a neo-colonized country under the stewardship of Haile Selassie, who owed his restoration to the throne to the British government. As an offset for this reduced status, the imperial state further consolidated and centralized its power with the highly publicized goal of making available the benefits of modernity to the Ethiopian people.

Charging the state with the responsibility of improving the social and material existence of the people represents a sea change in the conception of the objective and legitimacy of the exercise of state power in Ethiopia. The change reflects, but in a distorted manner, Europe’s own history of modernization. Indeed, previous to modern times, the task of state power in Europe was to consolidate and defend a social order protective of the rights of a group claiming some form of superiority, be it ethnic, aristocratic, cultural, or martial, a good example being the protection of noble privileges under the feudal order. As the modernization of Europe kicked off, the goal of social and material betterment was added to the defense of social order. No longer is the role of the state confined to the protection of social peace; it also includes the improvement of the life of its citizens. These words of John Locke, one of the founders of the most early and accomplished expression of modernity, namely, contract theory, put the matter in clear terms:

The necessity of preserving men in the possession of what honest industry has already acquired and also of preserving their liberty and strength, whereby they may acquire what they farther want, obliges men to enter into society with one another, that by mutual assistance and joint force they may secure unto each other their properties, in the things that contribute to the comfort and happiness of this life.²

The American Declaration of Independence takes further the application of Locke’s principle by including “the pursuit of happiness” among the inalienable rights that people want to protect by setting up governments.³

As pointed out in the introduction of this book, for a lagging country like Ethiopia, adding the goal of material betterment of society to the responsibilities of the state proved to be a Sisyphean task. While in the West, social betterment came as a fallout from the development of the productive forces, in Ethiopia, the direct and major agent of betterment, especially of economic development, became the state. Without a prior sufficient growth of productive capacities, how else could the social goal of betterment begin to materialize but through the postponement of a policy of modernization targeting self-reliance? The postponement means the surrender of a policy centered on national self-reliance and interests in return for a willful insertion into the neocolonial order. Stated otherwise, rather than the hard road of transformation through industrialization and technological advancement, the emphasis on social betterment steered modernization into the much more indolent and by far less

transformational path of becoming a consumer of Western products in exchange for raw materials and cheap labor. In this way, Ethiopia joined the fate of all Third World countries, despite its different interactions with colonialism.

It goes without saying that, under these conditions, the promise of social betterment becomes anything but realizable. The submission to an international division of labor that highly favors the West and the deferment of the development of native manufacturing abilities can only profit the small ruling elites in peripheral countries, provided that they succeed in retaining absolute control of state power. This policy of collecting leftovers from the West explains why dictatorial rule is endemic in developing countries, even when contending elites, who insistently promised democratization, manage to come to power. Obviously, collecting leftovers can never overcome scarcity, let alone develop a poor country. Consequently, only through the exclusive control of state power can ruling elites reserve the scarce resources for themselves. Ethiopia is no exception: the imperial regime and the two regimes that came after it are perfect cases in point.

Recall that the observed common feature between the three consecutive Ethiopian regimes, namely, the enthrallment with absolute power, had another prior source. Through various chapters, this book has emphasized the thesis that the consensus acknowledging power as an object of open competition defined the Ethiopian traditional system. With the recognition of modernization as a necessary requirement for the protection of independence against colonial forces, there emerged views blaming the open power game for Ethiopia's lag behind Europe. The lag is all the more scandalous in light of Ethiopia's paternity of an advanced civilization dating back to the Kingdom of Aksum. As we saw in Chapter V, beginning with Haile Selassie's modernizing attempt, the consensus over the open power game vanished in favor of a conception of power as an exclusive right. The ideological justification for the change of conception was the need to remove the alleged major obstacle to social progress, that is, the persistent lack of social peace and political stability. Politically, the change signified that the one who holds power must prevent competition by all means necessary. Haile Selassie made this possible through a number of reforms in the name of modernization, such as the establishment of a hereditary monarchy, a tight centralization of power, the elimination of regional autonomy, and the banning of opposition parties. In other words, an autocratic and repressive system designed to eliminate would-be rivals replaced the traditional legitimacy of the winner in an open power game. The two regimes that came after the imperial rule did nothing but strengthen the exclusionary power of the state.

It must be sufficiently clear by now that the common character shared by the three consecutive regimes, including the latest version of ethnic federalism, basically means that no position of authority has any basis or reality outside the authority of the tight group or the one person—the former inevitably leading to the latter—who controls the central state. In the traditional system, even if the power of regional nobility and the church was, as we saw, tied to the imperial regime, both the legitimacy and autonomy of that power were facts of political organization that emperors had to contend with. True, emperors could remove from positions of power specific persons, but they could not question the structure of autonomy. Such is not the case with the modern version of the Ethiopian political system. Both regional power and ecclesiastical authority have lost their autonomy in favor of, first, the group and, then, the person who controls the central government. Subsequently, this person alone wields power and authority in the whole country. Whereas in the traditional system, the autonomy of regional power and the church was an integral part of the political structure as well as of the cultural system, in the modern version, any power, at whatever level, is just a prolongation of the person who has the sole grip on the central government.

In sharp contrast to a participatory or power-sharing state, the political system that is designed to exclude is keen for ideological radicalism. In a modern system that allows open competition, the goal of a political party is to defeat its opponents electorally. Not so in a closed system, since exclusion wants nothing else but the elimination of the rival party. As a result, the fight takes a strong ideological demarcation corroborating the incompatibility between the two rivals. Without the impact of ideological radicalism, the so-called incompatibility would simply be no more than a difference, an alternative view and, as such, would invite dialogue and negotiation rather than exclusion. Once ideological radicalism construes other views as incompatible, the rule of exclusion calls for absolute power as a necessary means to subdue and eliminate opposing views. The use of an extremist ideology justifies exclusion, and hence the violent method of elimination. Any other treatment than exclusion is betrayal, since it compromises the rectitude and wholeness of the ideology. Take the case of Haile Selassie's absolutism. It looks less ideological than the socialism of the Derg or the ethnonationalism of the TPLF and Prosperity Party. Yet, his monarchical absolutism was no less exclusionary than the despotism of its two successors: even political views that advocated a form of monarchy that would make some concessions to the requirements of modernization were unacceptable to him. In his mind, the modernization of Ethiopia demanded nothing less than an unmitigated imperial absolutism.

Such a closed and tightly centralized system of power could not but divest the country of competent people and fill the higher echelon of power with sycophants. What is more, as the fallouts of the modern world reached more people in the urban areas, especially through the instrumentality of modern, Western-oriented schools and colleges, the halting of reforms to protect the absolute ascendancy of the imperial power could not but spread discontent and ignite underground oppositions, particularly in urban areas. At the same time, opposition in some peripheral regions evolved into a guerrilla form of struggle, like in Eritrea and Ogaden. In general, the opposition to the imperial regime branched off in two directions, the one towards ethnonationalism, with at times a religious overtone, and the other towards the revolutionary ideology of class struggle. These forms of opposition seem to be logical outcomes of the demise of the traditional social consensus. At any rate, since the liberal kind of open opposition is banned, rising and competing elites could find no other way to organize and mobilize social forces against the autocratic regime than through a class or ethnic ideology. Both ideologies harbor the radicalism and underground style of struggle needed to overthrow and dismantle a long-established regime. In addition, they could appeal to a popular base that was prone to mobilization owing to frustrating conditions of life caused by economic hardships and unequal access to opportunities. Expressed in terms of ethnic or class positioning, individual frustrations thus developed into solidary alignments and organized protests.

The centrality of the power struggle establishes a continuity between the three regimes and the traditional system, except on the issue of the open power game. In all of them, everything (social status, wealth, opportunities, etc.), revolves around one's closeness to the exercise of power. This common feature reveals the underlying meaning of the obsession with absolute power, namely, the fact that the control of state power commands access to privileges, especially economic privileges. In other words, it turns social status and possessions into entitlements, that is, into rights that come, not as a result of hard work or productive investment or any other recognized right, but as prerogatives inherent in the exercise of power. In a modern setting, the assumption is that people who work and produce owe their ranks and possessions to their actual achievements, whatever their fields of activity may be. In a system where power allocates positions, statuses and

possessions do not depend on productive accomplishments; they are entitlements and, as such, they are attached to the position one has. During the time of European feudalism, the privileges of the nobility were considered to be innate so that a person born into a noble family came into this world with special rights. Europe's evolution towards modernity discredited the notion of innate privileges through the assertion of the natural equality of all human beings. As could be expected, in a country like Ethiopia where modernity was an externally induced disruption rather than the product of an internal evolution, political positions were naturally protected from surrendering their privileges, all the more conveniently as the state positioned itself as the principal agent of modernization.

In traditional Ethiopia, privileges accrued from war deeds, owing to the absence of hereditary transmission of hierarchical titles. Indeed, what were *gults* if not privileges stemming from war services to the state? However, as we saw, the enormous difference is that the traditional system maintained an open competition while the three "modern" regimes turned power into an exclusive right. The question is: What made this change possible? Evidently, the answer resides in the expectations triggered by modernization. With the goal of modernization, the objective of political power is no longer confined to the protection of law and order privileging one ruling class or elite group. As suggested a little while ago, it has another additional task, especially among latecomers, which is to bring about change and social betterment. While this task does not exclude the use of state power to benefit a class or group interest, it also invests it with the extra responsibility of promoting social and material progress. In viewing state power as an agent of change, the objective of modernization adds a messianic component to the continued exercise or conquest of power. This messianic dimension has two inseparable components: on the one hand, the absolute control of power so as to exclude rivals or uproot those who ruled previously, in both cases by violent means, and, on the other, the launching of ideological struggles to discredit opponents and the group in power as unfit for the mission of social betterment. A too familiar theme of radical ideologies is their vociferous exposure and condemnation of the destitution of working people because of the greediness of wealthy and powerful people. Naturally, this moral mantle absolves the recourse to violence in the pursuit of justice for working people.

Political Impasse

The usage of the promise of bringing the benefits of modernization to the Ethiopian people to discredit opponents begins with Haile Selassie. Indeed, by seeing and presenting himself as the designer and executioner of Ethiopia's modernization, was he not ideologically demarcating himself from his opponents and discrediting them as traditionalists, as enemies of modernity? Thus, in one of his speeches, he defined himself as the one who "outlined for our beloved country" a program of "modernization and development."⁴ Addressing the Conference of Independent African States in Ghana in 1958, he speaks of "the duty and responsibility of the Independent African States to further this development and to bring the benefits of modern civilization to increasingly large numbers of people in Africa."⁵ Be it noted that the emphasis here is less on the imperative of building self-reliant and independent countries, which would reveal a nationalist inspiration in the Japanese manner, than on the advantages of harnessing African countries to the West, that is, to the neocolonial world.

In order to achieve this stated goal, the first thing that the emperor did was to provide his enlightened guidance, in particular as concerns the importance of modern education. He opened modern schools and exhorted young Ethiopians to learn Western methods and skills in these

schools. His second action was to establish close economic and political ties with Western countries, especially with the United States. His third action was to reform the state with the view of setting up a centralized and interventionist system of government thanks to a widespread bureaucracy, a standing army, and a police force. In his eyes, to implement the program of modernization that he outlined, he must be able to rely on a strong state that is fully dedicated to him, the only way by which he could defeat all those traditionalists who refuse change on account of protecting tradition.

Once a modernizing mission is ascribed to the state, the survival of the ruling political elite depends on how well the promised goal is fulfilled. In light of the autocratic nature of the imperial regime, the full responsibility for the failure of the promise inevitably fell on Haile Selassie. In effect, the mounting discontents, whatever their reasons may be, designated the imperial regime as the only culprit for the failure of the mission. Those who nourished and led the ensuing protests, in addition to designating the culprit, disseminated the idea that a socialist revolution is the sole road to the resumption and successful implementation of the promised modernization. According to them, since imperial autocracy and class privileges blocked the benefits of modernization from reaching the working people, empowering the class interests of workers to the detriment of the interests of ruling elites is the one and only remedy to carry out the promise. The majority of Ethiopian students and intellectuals as well as the military, who appropriated their ideology, adopted the path of applying the socialist program through the absolute control of state power. However, because of various reasons, including the absence of social peace stemming from the politics of exclusion, the expected benefits did not reach the working people. Worse yet, the conditions of life deteriorated to the lowest point imaginable. This failure opened the opportunity for ethnonationalists to argue that the real culprit is the all-round hegemony of the Amhara elite in Ethiopia. Hence the argument that dismantling the centralized state and rebuilding the political system on the basis of ethnonationalist criteria is the only path to equality, freedom, and justice. The path is not dependent on the adoption of liberal democracy, which, ethnonationalists maintain, would neither bring about development nor protect the interests of oppressed ethnic groups. The projected democracy would be a revolutionary one: in this way, the political reconstruction will fully retain the interventionist and repressive power of a strong state while serving the interests of downtrodden ethnic groups.

The three regimes failed to achieve their promised objectives for the same reason, which is that they refused to reform the state, wrongly or deceptively attributing the derailment of modernization to other causes than the structural inadequacy of the Ethiopian state. The extensive myopia to the need to reform the state, to the extent that it puts the blame on other factors, like traditionalism, class or ethnic obstructions, and neocolonial impediments, is clearly the fundamental blind spot of Ethiopian elites. Sure enough, the mentioned factors have their own contributions, but they all arise from the bent imparted by the political system. To put it bluntly, the Ethiopian state is designed and operates in such a way as to suck all power from the society in favor of a group, which, in turn, gives way to the dictatorial rule of one person. So long as the primary focus is not on the kind of reform that gives back some power of the state to the society, neither disruptive social conflicts can come to an end, nor a sustained progress of modernization can take place. Without the institution of a power-sharing system, a lasting end of conflicts is bound to remain unachievable, just as a sustained modernization is inconceivable unless communities and individuals evolve from passive subjects into active participants, a change requiring the recovery of some of their power of agency.

As we saw, the needs of autocratic rule prevented the implementation of necessary reforms under Haile Selassie. With the Derg, the discrepancy between the inherited socio-economic and cultural conditions and the perquisites guaranteeing the success of a socialist revolution, as laid down by Karl Marx (see Introduction), changed socialism into an unrealizable utopia. The attempt to coercively implement the unrealizable promise turned into a ruthless and barren dictatorship with disastrous consequences. As to ethnic federalism, the whole idea of generating a federal system from the consensus of autonomous and sovereign ethnic units quickly deteriorated into disunity that had to be countered by a tight centralization privileging one ethnic group to the detriment of the democratic ideal of federalism. As a result, a new form of dictatorship emerged, this time based on a full-blown ascendancy of a group claiming to represent a special ethnic minority. Their respective failures brought down the three regimes, whose common characteristic was the clinging to absolute power, even as it contravened their claimed modernizing program. Autocracy impeded Haile Selassie's modernizing goal by standing in the way of the reformation of the political system; the dictatorial rule of a narcissistic man combined with a party filled with incompetent sycophants installed a dreadful caricature of socialism; the promised democracy and equality of ethnic federalism reversed into the chauvinist dictatorship of the TPLF.

This last failure added a new danger subsequent to the fanning of ethnic identity, to wit, the possible disintegration of national unity. Both the threat of disintegration and the rebellion against the total dominance of the Tigrean elite led to sustained social protests, notably in the Oromo and Amhara regions, despite the highly repressive responses of the government. These protests and the acrimony against the continuous hegemony of the TPLF ignited an internal dissension within the ranks of the ruling coalition party, the EPRDF. As a result, the parliament nominated Abiy Ahmed as the new Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The nomination of Abiy, who is an Oromo, ended the 27 years of the TPLF's dictatorial rule of Ethiopia. In his inaugural speech, Abiy promised the restoration of national unity, democracy, and peace with Eritrea. He also pledged to wipe out corruption and other social evils and accelerate development in all sectors of the Ethiopian economy. As stated in the previous chapter, after a promising start, Abiy and the dominant Oromo wing of the ruling Prosperity Party shifted in the direction of installing an Oromo version of the TPLF's rule so that, after a brief experience with freedom, the country is back to square one again. Even though the shift announces another uncertain future, one thing is sure: no lasting and progressive march into the path of modernization can be achieved without a deep reform of the Ethiopian political system in the direction of a power-sharing arrangement between all the major stakeholders.

The Imperative of Culture Change

Whatever institutional changes are introduced to give back to society some of its power and raise the participation of people in political and socioeconomic matters, they would still be just empty shells with no hope of yielding the expected benefits unless the people in general and elites in particular develop the values and beliefs appropriate for modernization. We are familiar with the debate opposing the school of modernization and the Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches over the issue of the prime cause of modernization (see Chapter 1). The first school argues that cultural change triggers modernization while the second school ascribes the primary role to changes in the material conditions of life. For modernization school, the primacy of culture change clearly means that modernization occurs when traditional beliefs and values are altered, given the acknowledged fact that where traditionalism prevails the strict maintenance of the status quo in all aspects of life

is *de rigueur*. By contrast, Marxism argues that what breaks the stubborn resistance of traditionalism is not the appearance out of the blue of new ideas and values, but the conditioning material power of needs, challenges, and opportunities springing from the economic system.

Without entering into the various facets of the debate, what we can say is that our study of the Ethiopian case corroborates neither the position that traditionalism blocked modernization nor the idea that changes in the material conditions brought about corresponding cultural changes. Instead, we witnessed the hijacking of imported modern ideas, methods, institutions, and material infrastructure to enhance the political power of exclusive elites and their hegemonic control over society. This outcome tells us that nothing happens automatically in the realm of social life: change in one component does not necessarily entail a concomitant change in the other components. The debate over the question of knowing which, of the material or spiritual, is primary, does not properly capture the problem. What we have in reality is mutual conditioning producing a reciprocal adjustment in the same way as a function and an organ mutually determine each other, organ and function respectively standing here for material and cultural components. Thus, paucity of resources and restricted economic growth shape the function in the direction of exclusiveness, both in terms of values, beliefs, and political institutions. These, in turn, direct and run the material in a way that feeds on exclusiveness.

That is why the issue of culture change must be dealt with on its own, and not simply assumed to derive from material changes, as Marxism has it, or from the internalization of Western values and beliefs, as advocated by modernization school. In dealing directly with the necessity of taking measures to bring about culture change instead of expecting it to happen, we give ourselves the opportunity to design tools and cultivate practices and behaviors that are liable to induce change in due course. Surely, these measures must be those breeding the cultural features associated with modernity. In opposition to traditionalism, which repeats the past, modernization, we said, means the liberation of creativity in such a way that creativity becomes a spiritual need, an inner compulsion. Sustained growth in all aspects of life is unthinkable short of some such liberation. The desire for mere material gain would require neither the negation of the traditional society nor the necessity to constantly innovate. In short, modernization kicks off when achievement becomes a spiritual need beyond and above the pursuit of mere comfort and material gains.

Here, an important reminder is in order. As argued in Chapter I, change is real only if it comes from within the culture, that is, when it is self-change, and not a mere copying of Western values and institutions. As Leopold Senghor warns us, by passively importing Western ideas and institutions, “all that can happen is that we [Africans] become pale copies of Frenchmen, consumers not producers of culture.”⁶ All the more reason for avoiding the servile imitation of the West is the impossibility of transitioning from traditionalism to modernization if the change does not come from inside. We said that traditionalism tends to perpetuate the same values, methods, and type of society from generation to generation. Bound by custom, a traditional society repeats the same methods of production and keeps the same hierarchical structures and norms. In other words, it is a closed society and, as such, it is alien to social mobility because ascriptive rights rather than merit determine the function and status of everyone. Similarly, it is set against improvements in methods of production because it functions on the principle of protecting privileges, not of encouraging competitive performance. This stark difference excludes the possibility of going from traditionalism to modernity through a mere imitation of an external model. The traditional culture itself must develop from inside the same but customized values and beliefs as the West or their equivalents.

It is because the import strategy has failed that this study has underlined the need to understand culture change as self-change. For Ethiopians, it means the generation of their own version of modernity, the Ethiopianization, so to speak, of modernity. This indigenized version cannot emerge if modernization is made conditional on a tabula rasa of Ethiopians' past legacies and cultural features in favor of Westernization. In fact, the chance of hatching up an original modernity highly depends on their determination and ability to integrate the traditional with the modern. The integration amounts to a renaissance, a revival and adaptation of their cultural personality to new conditions of life. Understood as an active adaptation of a living culture to the new conditions caused by the expansion and technological advances of the West, modernization becomes an achievement attainable through the mobilization of creativity, as opposed to being simply an imitation or a byproduct of changed material conditions.

To achieve this self-regeneration, Ethiopians must engage in a constructive criticism of their own legacies, the very one that Senghor advocated when, addressing Africans in general, he invited them "to determine the present value of the institutions and style of life born of these [African] realities and how to adapt them to the requirements of the contemporary world."⁷ Instead of Westernization or assimilation, modernization becomes a process of synthesis in which the peculiar legacies of Ethiopia merge with borrowings from the West. Clearly, this need to adapt a traditional culture to modern conditions makes modernization dependent on the release of Ethiopian creativity, in line with the spirit of modernity. Taking root in reborn Ethiopian legacies while reaching out to the West is the way to self-change, which is the only promising road to modernization.

This synthetic, creative path of modernization is unconceivable, much less implementable without a thorough and sustained policy of decolonization. As previously suggested, even though Ethiopia was never formally colonized, the uncritical adoption of the system of education of the West and of its vision and strategy of modernization has abundantly induced features similar to those of a colonized country. To the extent that a model that came into existence under different material, historical, and sociocultural conditions and, on top of that, prides itself on being superior, is imposed on Ethiopians, the effect could not be anything other than the inducement of all sorts of disabilities. Among these disabilities, the most serious one is the inculcation of a dependent mentality. The latter decenters Ethiopians, with the consequence that they see themselves as being on the periphery of a world in which the West is the center. Because this marginalizing self-perception nourishes a continuous feeling of dependency, it stimulates neither the taking of initiatives nor the planning and implementation of a policy of self-reliance.

No exceptional insight is needed to understand that Ethiopians cannot become creators, and hence modernize properly if they internalize the centrality of the West, thereby fully acquiescing to the racist allegation of backwardness. Amartya Sen's idea that development should be posed in terms of "human agency" rather than just economic factors and indicators, like the expansion of industry and technology, the rise of gross national product and personal incomes, leads to the insightful approach viewing "expansion of freedom . . . as both (1) the *primary end* and (2) the *principal means* of development."⁸ The approach dictates a strategy that gives priority to human agency through the promotion of freedoms and opportunities, among which are the development of democratic institutions and the expansion of civil rights and liberties. The focus on human agency shifts the question of development from pure development economics to the primacy of human empowerment. The vital importance of the expansion of freedom to development goals derives from the realization that what people can do and be is largely dependent on the representations that they have of themselves. If they work in an empowering environment,

they will define themselves in enhancing terms, the consequence of which is that they will set themselves great goals and will believe that they have what is required to achieve them. Conversely, if they live in a sociopolitical environment that causes them to have a low opinion of themselves, they will be less ambitious and less inclined to think that they have the caliber to achieve great goals. Worse, self-debasing representations can lead to beliefs and behaviors that militate against the very idea of defeating poverty and subjugation.

Parenthetically, self-debasing representations go a long way in explaining why in Ethiopia, as is also the case in the rest of Africa, elites, notably political elites, give in easily to the practice of mistreating their own people. The practice divorces them from democratic conducts, despite their frequent talks in which they praise and promise democracy. The reason is obvious: mistreating their own people is their manner of deflecting the debasement they feel from them to their own people. In ill-treating their own people, the elite groups convince themselves that they attain a high opinion of themselves, that they rise above the unenlightened and the backward. Though native of Africa, they represent the exception to the rule: they are, to use a French colonial term, the *évolués*, that is, those who have evolved thanks to Europeanization. Having replaced the white colonizers, no wonder, then, that they think, act, and rule like colonizers. In mimicking colonizers, they persuade themselves and, hopefully, the West that they belong to the Western world. This attitude has little to do with being actually colonized or not. As in the case of Ethiopia, it stems from the internalization of Eurocentrism and the lack of decolonizing therapy, notably as regards the contempt for whatever is not “advanced,” Western. As Franz Fanon warns, good governance remains elusive so long as Third World elites do not get “rid . . . of the very Western, very bourgeois and therefore contemptuous attitude that the masses are incapable of governing themselves.”⁹ The internalization of the colonial contempt and style of government explains the elites’ equation of modernization with a “civilizing mission.” As this study has shown, the equation assumes that modernization essentially originates from enlightened rulers imposing, even by violent means, modern values and methods on native peoples. Because the natives are backward and reluctant to move in the direction of progress, the enlightened native rulers are compelled to use coercive methods.

Another harmful effect of the internalization of the colonial ideology prevalent in Ethiopia, as in Africa, is the mistaken belief that what is good for the West is also good for Ethiopia. The belief forgets that to import norms from the West while Ethiopia is still in a dependent condition is to perpetuate and deepen the dependency. Priority should be given to recovering centrality through a vigorous and consistent effort at decolonization in conjunction with the design and implementation of a policy of self-reliance. For, only after the recovery of cultural independence can the country relate with the West in a critical and pragmatic way, that is, in a way that distinguishes the useful from the harmful. The acceptance of the West as superior and advanced shut off our ability to develop a critical relationship with the West. Cultural decolonization is, to use Sen’s term, a recovery of freedom, of the ability and means needed to launch a successful program of development.

Nowhere is a critical relationship with the West more needed than in the field of education. As is commonly known, it is via the teaching of humanities that the superiority of the West is thrust into the minds of Ethiopians. The courses teach that the most advanced ideas and beliefs, starting from Ancient Greek society, were conceived and implemented in the West. This fact allegedly provides the proof that all that is non-Western is just a cul-de-sac. In earlier chapters, we saw that the notion of world history—a notion that makes sense only from a Eurocentric perspective—attributes all the great breakthroughs and achievements to Europeans. In so doing,

the scheme achieves two goals: (1) it portrays non-Westerners as non-historical peoples, and (2) it positions the West as the center and the driving force of world history. So fashioned, what else could the study of history be but the learning of self-contempt through the systematic exposure of Ethiopia's utter insignificance? The point of decolonization here is not simply to add and include courses about Ethiopian history and cultures into the curriculum borrowed from the West. It is to engage in a paradigmatic change so as to come up with a new curriculum that aims both at deconstructing Eurocentrism and centering Ethiopia.

The Path of Cultural Change

To undertake decolonization, the first step is to get out of the fool's bargain of Eurocentrism: the acceptance of a scheme of world history, as constructed according to Western norms and goals, offers no way out of marginality. The second step is the revival of difference. Indeed, the assertion of difference goes against the Western compulsion of ranking civilizations as superior and inferior in that it argues that civilizations are different. Unlike backwardness, difference says that civilizations, far from failing to attain the same goals as the West, "are traveling along different roads in pursuit of different ends."¹⁰ The recognition of difference entails, among other things, the reviewing and reconstruction of Ethiopian history and cultures, no longer from the Western norm of becoming, to quote Rene Descartes a second time, "masters and possessors of nature," but from the self-assigned goal and norms of Ethiopians.¹¹ Some such approach sees and studies Ethiopians as they saw themselves prior to the arrival of colonizers and advocates the grounding of modernization on the retrieved identity and centrality. Descartes's motto is the very one that colonizers used to marginalize and subdue non-Western peoples, their justification being that they all failed to be up to the universal injunction of becoming conquerors of nature. In other words, in failing to develop the social organization and technological means necessary to subdue nature, non-Westerners give the proof that they do not fully possess the capabilities defining the human essence.

I myself have attempted to construct a narrative—some elements of which are used in this book—that centers Ethiopia in a book I published in 1999 titled *Survival and Modernization—Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present*.¹² In that book, I recount the saga of a polity committed to the defense of Orthodox Christianity in an environment plagued with hostile forces. The defense was not confined to Ethiopians protecting their faith, but, more importantly, it was about fulfilling a divine assignment to Ethiopia, to wit, the guardianship of the true faith under the leadership of God's elected emperors. My study shows how Ethiopia's traditional sociopolitical organization and cultural norms as well as major events of its history closely relate to the need to ensure a viable defense. Hence my bewilderment expressed in this book at the failure of Ethiopian modernization, as nothing could have provided a better incentive to modernize than the call to shore up the divine assignment with the modern forces of industry and technology.

It must be clear by now that the advocated recovery of centrality does not mean a return to the past, but the gathering of support to lean on to move forward in a world fashioned by the West's material power and all-round influence, including democratic ideals. The bare truth is that the acquisition and mastery of modern means is a forced prerequisite for making headway in this world. Precisely, Ethiopian leaders' refusal to understand that they have no other choice than to play the cards dealt by the West largely explains the derailment of modernization. Instead of copying the West, what was and still is needed is a complex, many-sided program of modernization

that both deconstructs the West and recenters Ethiopia while also integrating the positive elements of the West.

Needless to say, the ability to recenter Ethiopia by integrating democratic ideals hinges on the construction of a narrative that includes ethnic diversity in the Ethiopian saga. As a result of Menelik's expansion, ethnic groups with different cultures and traditions were incorporated into the Ethiopian polity. We know, as discussed particularly in Chapter IX, that issues related to equality led to protests and ethnonationalist political movements with demands ranging from equal treatment to self-rule and even secession. We also said that the current solution to the problem, namely ethnic federalism, has two major flaws: one, it is a real threat to national unity; two, it is incompatible with democratic workings, one of the reasons being that the weakening of national unity mandates a dictatorial rule to keep the country together. In conjunction with the recognition of diversity and the reform of the federal system, as suggested in Chapter X, there is, therefore, the need to improve the system with two essential principles of nationhood, which are, as laid down by Ernest Renan, "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories," and the "present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage."¹³ The willingness to live together derives from the hope of a better future, which is conditional on the implementation of the reforms needed to activate modernization and improve the material conditions of Ethiopians. As to the first principle of a common motivating legacy, I see no better way to satisfy it than to recount the active part that the southern peoples played in making the victory of Adwa against colonial forces possible. Here, I hasten to add that the whole southern expansion itself must be narrated as an anticolonial move, as actually it was (see the discussion on the true nature of the southern expansion in Chapter II). Nothing is particularly exceptional in the suggested narrative, since anticolonial movements have given birth, in Africa as well as in other parts of the world, to new nations. The fact that an indigenous ruling class took the initiative of expanding and integrating neighboring ethnic communities to halt colonial advances should be viewed as an additional asset, as the continuation and rebirth of the Ethiopian epic of survival through the common goal of countering colonization. In this way, the southern peoples inherit the history of Ethiopian survival, and this strengthens the faltering sense of Ethiopian nationhood.

Together with a vigorous attempt at decolonization, measures should be taken to reorient the impact of authority. The reorientation has the specific purpose of moving away from traditionalism, that is, from the imposition of the unquestionable authority of the past over the present, as well as from the barren authority that is characteristic of dictatorial rule, which revels in belittling its own people. As we saw, these two forms of authority block the nurture of an innovative mind. On the other hand, it is quite clear that the innovative mind cannot appear in a lax society, a society devoid of rules and power stratification. To say otherwise is to go against the norms defining modernity. Indeed, we specifically defined modernity by the prevalence of achievement and merit over ascription and entitlement. Neither achievement nor merit can become prevalent without discipline and hard work in a society sufficiently inclined to reward accomplishments. Discipline in this case does not mean mere obedience to authorities, but the fostering and cultivation of qualities conducive to achievement, to the realization of great tasks. This kind of authority affiliates more with a coaching than a conservative authority. Nothing great, that is, nothing enabling us to surpass ourselves can be accomplished without dedication and sustained discipline. Since both requirements are acquired attitudes, the right government policy can go a long way in creating a social environment favoring achievement.

Crucial among the measures needed to encourage achievement is the transformation of the authority exerted in the family, notably in its application to child-rearing. A proper child-rearing

system is liable to bring about culture change because a great part of the personality of human beings is formed during childhood, especially in the early stage of the relationships between parents and children. If parents, especially fathers, are too authoritarian, the likelihood is that children develop a passive, obedient personality that would only serve as a bedrock for the continuation of authoritarianism. The observation applies also to early schooling: if teachers tend to chastise initiatives instead of encouraging them, the effect is likely to be the same. In short, if children are raised in home and school environments that stimulate initiatives, its long-term effect is to lay the ground for the emergence of a society that values achievement and merit.

Essential for this liberation of creativity is the empowerment of women. Seeing the importance of mothers in the raising of children, a society that lowers the status and role of women deprives itself of the opportunity to break out of traditionalism and authoritarianism, one of the ultimate expressions of which is patriarchy. What better means is there to defeat the traditionalism embodied in the male-dominated society than the empowerment of women? Where women are invested with status, that is, where they are given the opportunity to get educated and are liberated from the curse of early marriage characteristic of traditionalism, to wit, the curse of becoming child-wives and child mothers, the opportunity to raise the cultural level of the society is significantly heightened because it endows the upbringing of children with new potentialities. The new potentialities stem from the fact that the person most responsible for the upbringing of children is finally treated with respect. This respect, in turn, increases the authority of the mother in her relationships with her children, and this greatly elevates the educational power of the family. As Emmanuel Todd puts it, “the educational power of a family system may well be determined by the strength of maternal authority.”¹⁴ Notably, the elevation goes in the direction of awakening children's self-reliance and the attendant disposition for discipline, the reason being that the loving authority of a mother tends to behave not so much as a model to follow as a constant source of emotional motivation and support. Citing statistics, David C. McClelland maintains that “boys whose mothers did not encourage their early self-reliance, or did not set ... high standards of excellence, tended to develop lower need for achievement.”¹⁵ And if, in direct opposition to traditionalism, the society encourages initiatives by the provision of incentives, it radically lowers the negative impact of authoritarianism. An authoritarian society tends to punish behaviors that seem to defy established or imposed norms. Specifically, since the objective of authoritarianism is to mold obedient people, initiative is viewed as impertinence, even more as insubordination vis-à-vis the established hierarchical order. On the other hand, a society that rewards initiatives shows that the norm, the expected behavior is no longer obedience, but advancement through innovative dissent.

The goal of changing culture can also greatly benefit from a reform of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity as well as, of course, of Islam. As regards Orthodox Christianity, I am specifically thinking of the notion of *idil*. Previous chapters have underlined the importance of this notion, notably the fact that it played an inspiring and justifying role in the open power game characteristic of the traditional system. The sense of being divinely elected injected ambitiousness into individuals and manifested itself in constant political confrontations for positions of authority. While the inspiration was a positive trait, its preferred manifestation in the form of political conflicts was not, because it encouraged war and warlike values. To reform belief in *idil* would then be to steer its propensity for confrontational manifestations towards constructive goals, for instance towards accomplishments in the economic field. In this way, instead of war and war victories, success in the production of wealth would be viewed as a sign of divine election. Nothing could accelerate more the modernization of Ethiopia than this association between the production

of wealth and divine election. Some such divine sanction would detach the production of wealth from greed or the pursuit of comfort and assimilate it to an undertaking defined in terms of accomplishment of a religious calling, thereby turning it into a systematic, innovative, and insatiable effort. Obviously, the values of modernity, that is, the values of competition and achievement in an open and free society, are the royal road to living *idil* fully.

One last point: the emphasis on the need to alter authority in the direction of coaching does not lose sight of the transformations that have already occurred. To tell the truth, it is no longer possible to define Ethiopian society as an authoritarian society. It is fair to say that nothing, outside family ties and religious allegiances, really commands respect and deference. Revolutionary shakeups, the propagation of ethnic grievances, the demonization of inherited legacies, and generalized disappointments over expectations have debunked all that used to be venerated. In particular, the political system and hierarchy have been and remain seriously discredited. As a result of this lack of legitimacy, the state does not command authority: it rules by coercion, violence, and fear rather than by the deference coming from the citizens. Under this condition of generalized disgrace, the very value of the pursuit of achievement and merit is tarnished. Instead, obsequiousness and servility induced by sheer calculation are viewed as the features needed to rise in status and rank.

This loss of respectability to the existing political system makes it quite clear that the progress of modernization principally depends on the reform of the state. However, for the reformed political system to bring about a sustained and consistent march towards modernization, the change of the cultural setup must be undertaken concomitantly. Without cultural change, the reform of the political system cannot be sustained: as previous failures have shown, it will fall back on its ever-present derailing tendency. The need to undertake simultaneous cultural and political changes amounts to saying that modernization does not occur by fiat. It necessitates a lengthy process during which various components interact to produce a common result. The proper political guidance is crucial, just as is the receptivity of society. The advocated modifications in governmental policies and attitudes, in child-rearing and schooling systems, as well as in religious significations and narration of common history, all geared towards the inculcation of achievement values and discipline to the detriment of authoritarianism, ascription, and laxity, are all proven means to nurture the receptivity of society.

¹ Kostas Loukeris, "Contending Political Ideologies in Ethiopia after 1991: The Role of Intellectuals," *Polis, Revue Camerounaise de Science Politique* 12, no. special (2004 – 2005).

<http://polis.sciencespobordeaux.fr/vol12ns/loukeris.pdf>

² John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New York: Dover Publications, 2002), 351.

³ See "The Declaration of Independence & the Constitution of the United States," *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*. <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/guides/M-654.pdf>

⁴ Haile Selassie, *Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie, 1918-1967* (New York: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 97.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶ Leopold Senghor, *Prose and Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 49.

⁷ L. Senghor, "Constructive Elements of a Civilization of African Negro Inspiration," *Présence Africaine* 24-25 (1959), 292.

⁸ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 36.

⁹ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 188.

¹⁰ Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 223.

¹¹ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 35.

¹² See Messay Kebede, *Survival and Modernization--Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1999).

¹³ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, *UC Paris*. http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf

¹⁴ Emmanuel Todd, *The Causes of Progress* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 17.

¹⁵ David C. McClelland, "The Achievement Motive in Economic Growth," *Political Development and Social Change* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1971), 84.