

Surafel Wondimu Abebe

The Africa Institute of Sharjah

Left Ruins in Ethiopia

Imagining Otherwise

Amid Necroepistemic Historiography

Introduction

In this essay, I argue that neoliberal historiography in Ethiopia is a function of what I term necroepistemology, which kills enduring social questions and lingering socio-economic desires, exiling new species, who are other than the heteropatriarchal-capitalist-White Man, and banishes socio-historical utopias. This necroepistemology sustains the neo/liberal status quo, not only by inventing and forcing neoliberal subjects to succumb to its imagination through bio- and/or necropolitics but also through the banishment of the human from both colonial/modern temporality and from lived time-space in general.

I ask: what does a neo/liberal staging of universal history as both progress in time as well as a struggle for (non-socio-economic) *thymos* (recognition of dignity) tell us about its own historicity, in particular, and about necroepistemic historiography in general? How can we think otherwise while shreds of lingering

social questions are swept away and new life is being killed in the name of progress and prosperity?

My essay approaches these questions by exploring the idea of universal history as a forward moving struggle for recognition using a Fanonian negative dialectics and a Lefebvrian production of space as well as Lyn Ossome's feminist materialist methods, which account for chaotic dialectics, the movement of multiple marginalized laboring bodies, and their endless praxis of creating new futures.

With the help of these critical strategies, I wish to recapture the flickering images of enduring social questions that came into being during the 1974 Ethiopian socialist revolution, which are now cast as unwanted remnants of the past. In so doing, I hope to draw attention to new desires which became visible in the post-1974 revolutionary space of contradictions and of the production of relations between hitherto silent political actors. Due to a Rankean methodological privilege accorded to the (written) archive as the evidential basis of History's claim to truth, and because of the Cartesian disregard for embodied knowledge, I look at performance and embodied historiography as sites of this struggle.¹ I focus on one fragment in a theatrical and performance space where female performers collaborated with, and fought against, a male theater maker who staged a critical yet paradoxical Pan-African-transnational idea of Ethiopian socialism.²

Background

On his first visit to Ethiopia, Francis Fukuyama gave a public lecture, "Democracy and the Future of Ethiopia's Developmental State," in Addis Ababa on June 11, 2019.³ The lecture was organized primarily by the Washington, DC-based Center for International Private Enterprise, which had opened its East African regional office in Addis Ababa in 2018. In his address, Fukuyama advised Ethiopians to opt for a private-sector-led economy eliminating the previous state-led developmentalism that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) had advanced (1991–2018).⁴

¹ See Leopold von Ranke, "On Progress in History," in *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers, trans. Wilma A. Iggers (New York: Routledge, 2011), 20–23. For similar use of method in Ethiopian historiography see Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement c. 1960–1974* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2014), 9.

² Here, I am thinking through Walter Benjamin's idea of seizing a ruin to understand an epoch instead of an (positivist) epic history. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

³ Francis Fukuyama, keynote lecture at *Democracy and the Future of Ethiopia's Developmental State Conference*, Addis Ababa, June 11, 2019, <https://www.cipe.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Keynote-Transcript-Francis-Fukuyama.pdf>.

⁴ It is this kind of discursive shift and the renewed attack on the idea of utopia and on socio-historical utopias that I see as a neoliberal intervention in the transitional time-space.

While he promoted the logics of a market economy, Fukuyama advanced his earlier arguments about the triumph of the Western idea of liberalism by amending and reworking the principles of Western liberal democracy to fit the current political situation, which was threatened by the resurgence of right-wing nationalism in the West.⁵ He did so, however, by absolving modernity's ontological ethnocentrism and by holding the homogenized left (or updated Marxism) culpable for these paroxysms of violence. His arguments foreclosed completely any possibility of recapturing *left* ruins in the present. By that I mean leftist and other wreckages that have been left behind. After his public speech at the Hyatt Regency in the center of Addis, Fukuyama hurried to the Ethiopian Prime Minister's office where he handed his book, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* to Abiy Ahmed as a gift. His idea of *thymos*, discussed in the book, arrived both as content and a form. Abiy and Fukuyama, afterwards, planted seedlings in the prime minister's office's yard.⁶

Being a function of global-local processes, Ethiopian historiography is animated by socio-economic and political trajectories in Ethiopia. Though Abiy's and Fukuyama's planting of seedlings seems to be a biophilic enactment, this gesture is reminiscent of a historiographic sensibility which is driven by the death of other utopias.⁷ Let me break down the recent historical and historiographic unfoldings in Ethiopia for clarification.

Abiy Ahmed ascended to power in April 2018 because of mass protests as well as dissident acts within the government that ousted an oppressive ethnic-based coalition, i.e., the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which ruled the country from 1991–2018. Due to his membership in the Oromo People's Democratic Organization, Abiy was part of the EPRDF, which was formed and mainly controlled by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). As the people's struggle got traction, Abiy came to the forefront as part of a dissenting group within the TPLF-led EPRDF.

Emerging from, and established during, the heyday of the student movements of the 1970s, the TPLF had conducted a guerilla insurrection for seventeen years against the socialist military regime (1974–1991) using socialist ideology. The TPLF came to power at the end of the Cold War and was obliged to negotiate as well as collaborate with the West (for instance, in the “fight against terrorism”

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 28.

⁶ I address Ethiopians by their first names according to the convention the country follows.

⁷ Anthony Bogues problematizes the self/other dichotomy in Western thought, Anthony Bogues, “Imagination, Politics, and Utopia: Confronting the Present,” *Boundary 2* 33, no. 3 (2006): 152, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-2006-020>. Ossome notes it well that divorcing economics from cultural politics is a longstanding problem in neoliberal theory, Lyn Ossome, “In Search of the State? Neoliberalism and the Labour Question for Pan-African Feminism,” *Feminist Africa*, no. 20 (2015): 6–22.

in the Horn of Africa). The TPLF/EPRDF claimed to have an anti-neoliberal, pro-poor policy though it ended up creating ethnically allied oligarchs.⁸ For the TPLF, history was the avenue to enter Ethiopian politics.⁹ It articulated history as a politics of “to be” (ethno-nationalism) or “not to be” (chauvinist unity and parochial ethno-nationalism) by remobilizing the 1974 articulation of the national question through ethnic federalism in order to control Ethiopia’s local-global economy through top-down hegemony.

As soon as he assumed the premiership, Abiy started to modify the ethnonational discourse with unionist narratives. His slogan, *Medemer* (synergy), signifies “unity” and “prosperity” through recognition of differences by transcending them.¹⁰ *Medemer* is also about economics, which endorses neoliberal (private sector led) development, or what Abiy terms *prosperity*, which has been used as a roadmap for the country. Painting the TPLF, an offshoot of the 1974 revolution, as the major culprit for the current political crisis, Abiy has made the Ethiopian left of the 1970s responsible, and lambasted them, for current ethnic conflicts.¹¹ It is not surprising that almost all nationalist political groups (be they unionist, ethno-nationalist or those who want to mediate both) craft similar economic programs which flow with the global neoliberal tide towards one goal though they literally fight each other to the death.

An accidental, yet anticipated showdown was inevitable. In November 2020, the TPLF and Abiy’s government, led by his new Prosperity Party (PP), which enlisted most of the former members of the EPRDF, became embroiled in a full-blown war. The armed conflict which also drew in Eritrean forces, have claimed thousands of lives and maimed vulnerable people through the weaponization of rape while aggravating other protracted, ethnicized hostilities that have displaced millions across the country. The ethno-nationalist bourgeoisie, who let people fight in the name of ethnic liberation, and neoliberal conscripts, who engage in combat in the name of unity, turned their victims into killers. Older and new global neoliberal forces are vying for, and meddling in, the reorganization of the East African regional space. Western powers, Japan, China, Russia, and Middle Eastern countries (United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar), with their visible commercial and military presence on the Red Sea, are manipulating the conflicts to reassert their positions in Africa. How did Ethiopian historiography, as an active participant in the global-local socio-political trajectory,

⁸ See, for instance, Berhanu Abegaz, “Political Parties in Business: Rent Seekers, Developmentalists, or Both?,” *Journal of Development Studies* 49, no. 11 (2013): 1467–1483, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2013.822070>.

⁹ See Adhana Haile Adhana, “Mutation of Statehood and Contemporary Politics in Ethiopia,” in *Ethiopia in Change: Peasantry, Nationalism, and Democracy*, eds. Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang (London: British Academic Press, 1994), 12.

¹⁰ See Abiy Ahmed, *Medemer* (Addis Ababa: n.p., 2019), 43.

¹¹ See Ahmed, *Medemer*, 22–23; Abiy Ahmed, *Yemedemer Menged* (Addis Ababa: n.p., 2021), 345–349.

respond to these changes in the constitution of the country in general and in the reformation of subjectivities in particular?

Neoliberal Historiography as Necroepistemology

Following Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari, Anthony Bogues argues that needs emanate from desire, rather than otherwise, in order to show how “desire is firmly embedded within the social and all the materiality of its encumbrances.”¹² Bogues demonstrates how neoliberalism captures desire and imagination by inventing neoliberal life forms and subjects according to the demands and the logic of the market economy. He shows the ways in which neoliberal historiography “presents the modern ways of life as the terminus of human history and progress.”¹³ Capturing desire and imagination serves to recast the neoliberal subject as the sole proprietor of life while proclaiming the end of history marks an end to modernity’s bourgeois utopia, which is now a site of the unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.

These two facets of neoliberal power are manifestations of some aspects of, what I call, necroepistemology. Building on Bogues’s critical intervention, I contend that necroepistemology is not just invested in capturing the imagination to create and reproduce the neoliberal species. I argue that necroepistemological historiography is engaged in an active battle to kill imaginings (the imagined and imagining new) and the praxis of recreating new species with multiple futures. It involves itself not only in a proclamation of the end of history (to accentuate the neoliberal goal) but also in ending history, disavowing critical history that insists on open ended dialectics or endless recreation of lives. Neoliberalism’s historiography incessantly vanishes the human not only from its time and space but also from the general realms of temporality, spatiality, and materiality, making imagining and creating a new humanity impossible. Hence, I approach the question of a new humanity through rethinking time, space, and matter.

Multiple Negations: The Question of the Human as an Issue of Time, Space, and Matter

Theorization of historiography as a universal struggle for recognition and development of spirit in time (towards one goal) continues to inform foundationalist history writing despite its obvious promotion of dislocation of time, space, and

¹² Bogues, “Imagination, Politics, and Utopia,” 153.

¹³ Bogues, 158.

matter; or its disregard for multiple temporalities and spatialities as well as the multilayered texturing of matter. This conundrum necessitates multiple negations.

Fanon writes: “By exploding the former colonial reality the struggle uncovers unknown facets, brings to light new meanings and underlines contradictions which were camouflaged by this reality.”¹⁴ This epistemic, Fanonian sensibility of exploring old truths and uncovering contradictions concealed by the dominant representational practices is a useful dialectical exercise. It has a multi-pronged critical import. It helps us to refute the utopia that old truths advance, to keep the tension between contradictions and affirmations, to go beyond Manichaeism, and to incessantly imagine and recreate oneself through praxis amid reproduction of Hegelian universal history/recognition and the ongoing neo/liberal onslaughts.

For Hegel, history is about time and space. He writes: “History in general is therefore the development of Spirit in *Time*, as Nature is the development of the Idea in *Space*.”¹⁵ Consider, then, how Hegel assigns history to Europe by withdrawing time and space from Africa. A person endowed with the idea of Spirit is aware of him/herself existing separately in Time and Space as a “World-historical” subject. In the “Torid zone,”¹⁶ lacking Spirit and Idea, “man” (a person/thing) remains to be a thing as nature is. Hence, according to Hegel, in “Africa proper”¹⁷ (sub-Saharan Africa), “man cannot come to free movement” because the “heat [is] too powerful to allow Spirit to build up a world for *itself*.”¹⁸ If these “men” were to move in space, says Hegel, only discord and savagery would ensue.

Mutual exclusion between human beings and nature is established and rendered as apparent through uncanny affiliation in *thingness*. As to this principle, let alone to being recognized by the Other (otherness itself is theorized as a privilege that Black People lack), black people are able to recognize neither *themselves* nor *recognition* itself. This violent dislocation, avers Frantz Fanon, is meted out to black lives so that they move neither in time nor in space. Dehumanization is perpetrated through negation of temporality and spatiality. That is why Fanon refutes Hegelian temporality and spatiality when he writes the following:

[W]hat we want is to walk in the company of man, every man, night and day, for all times. It is not a question of stringing the caravan out where groups are spaced so far apart they cannot see the one in front, and men no longer recognize each other, meet less and less and talk to each other less and less.¹⁹

¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 96.

¹⁵ Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 72, *emphases original*.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 80.

¹⁷ Hegel, 91.

¹⁸ Hegel, 80.

¹⁹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 238.

Cognizant of the fact that the issue of the human is buried somewhere else, Fanon says that the question needs to be about “all times,” “night and day,” and uncompressed relational contradictory spaces. Hence, rethinking and reinventing temporality and spatiality is an important aspect of decolonization.

To continue with Fanon, black people are historically produced as *things*. This calls for a different sensibility towards understanding the *object* or *matter*. Consequently, when Fanon writes that the master does not need recognition from the slave but work, he is revealing the ways in which black people’s labor gets extracted out of their personhood.²⁰ Hence, he argues that decolonization is a praxis of freedom through which the “‘thing’ colonized” becomes (hu)man.²¹ With multiple alienation, black lives are effectively evicted from humanity. That is why Fanon argues that “disalienation of the black [hu]man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities.”²²

Henri Lefebvre reminds us that one great achievement of Marxian thinking is the unveiling of particular objects, or “the object,” re/produced and exchanged in an imposed economic relation. Unraveling the object helps us expose the social relationships veiled under reproduction of labor and relations of productions.²³ Hence, Lefebvre’s insistence on social space. According to Lefebvre, space cannot be considered as social unless it contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, which are transformed by social labor and embrace contradictions within spatio-temporal configurations.²⁴ Organization of space from and for the center, does not involve just “contradiction *in* space” but also “contradiction *of* space” since the “contradiction is not extraneous to the production relations embodied in space as a whole, and even less so to the reproduction of those relations.”²⁵

Persons are invented as things. And the things that these persons produce conceal the social relations foundational to the oppressive condition in which they live. Therefore, decolonization can be rethought not only as reclamation and reinvention of temporality and spatiality but also of materiality. In other words, decolonization is, in Fanon’s terms, “quite simply the substitution of one ‘species’ of mankind by another” in a different time-space with a different understanding of materiality.²⁶ Indeed, Fanon’s pronouncements on decolonization are poignant today. Nonetheless, they need to be expanded since the question of the human should rigorously and continuously consider multilayered oppressions along the lines of class, capital, race, gender, sexuality, age, disability, etc.;

²⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 172.

²¹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 2.

²² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 4.

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 319.

²⁴ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 212.

²⁵ Lefebvre, 333.

²⁶ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 1.

or since the sex-gender system of empire cuts black women's bodies and informs organization of labor and relations of production differently. This revision of Fanon can be done with the help of Lyn Ossome, who lends sufficient attention to the neoliberal reorganization of labor under multilayered global-local oppressions.²⁷ Equally importantly, Ossome argues, global neoliberalism makes it necessary for materialist feminist thinkers and organizers to go beyond gender identification in order to avoid slipping into empty identity politics that does not account for inter/trans-sectional social justice. Ossome, then, asks: "What would it mean to place human beings before profits?"²⁸ I now transit to the Ethiopian transitional time-space to see how humans are being placed before profits through neoliberal necroepistemology.

Present Matters: Necroepistemology in Ethiopia

Fukuyama's advice to Ethiopians that they should follow a private-sector-led economy, liberal democracy, and unity through universal recognition of identity, minus economic liberty, concurs with the CIPE's intervention around the globe "to craft business-driven solutions to social-economic problems."²⁹ The CIPE works with more than one hundred Business Membership Organizations throughout Ethiopia at a grassroots level to advance "market-oriented economic reform" and involvement of the private sector in policy formulations.³⁰ It prides itself in being a "pioneer" in having established a public-private partnership in Ethiopia by collaborating also with "think tanks" and "universities" such as Stanford University's Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law. Not surprisingly, the CIPE enlisted Fukuyama as a speaker in the "high-level" conference to also enact a neoliberal script written by and for state sponsored, global-local, private business enterprises.

This neoliberal script abounds in Ethiopia. For example, initiated by people who work at Prime Minister Abiy's office and by intellectuals from outside, *Ethiopia in the Wake of Political Reforms* is a book recently published to mark and evaluate the transition in the country. Almost all the chapters on economic issues privilege and advocate for market-based economics in which the private sector is advertised as the future redeemer while other imaginations are rendered obsolete. In this book, for instance, Lars Christian Moller (a technocrat at the World Bank) argues that Ethiopia should depart from "Histopia" or the macroeconomic policy

²⁷ Ossome, "Labor Question."

²⁸ Ossome, 21.

²⁹ "We Are CIPE," Center for International Private Enterprise website, accessed January 2021, <https://www.cipe.org/?cpage=1>.

³⁰ "Ethiopia: Promoting Participatory Economic Dialogue and Reform," Center for International Private Enterprise website, accessed April 2021, <https://www.cipe.org/projects/ethiopia/>.

of the pre-transition time (before 2018). He also says that the country should “gradually” and “pragmatical[ly]” move towards what he terms “Futopia,” meaning growth “through private investment and productivity” with “more private sector participation and competition in key infrastructure sectors, including telecoms, energy, and trade logistics.”³¹ Being performative, such discursive shift is followed by new policy formulation and action. For instance, Ethiopia recently sold its first telecoms license to a global consortium (Vodafone, Safaricom, Sumitomo Corporation, and the CDC group) for \$850 million. This is what Moller calls “Futopia.” What lies in between “Histopia” and “Futopia,” is his idea of Utopia. Moller writes, “policymakers should not seek to implement Utopia, in which the economy is liberalized overnight.”³² In this theorization, Utopia is none other than neoliberalism’s *telos*. It renders other utopias impossible. Ethiopia lags behind even in this temporality. Moller also writes that this transitional time could be a “Berlin Wall moment” for Ethiopia, invoking the neoliberal triumphant language observed in the wake of the Cold War and suggesting that the country should demolish its other left-leaning imaginings and practices.

The history of the Ethiopian left is much more complex, however. Paradoxically, there are members of the 1970s leftist student movement who were disenchanted by the 1974 revolution and called the socialist quest “utopia.”³³ There are also those from the same generation who are still active in organized politics but through neoliberal programs.³⁴ The issue here is thus not the recuperation of either the leftist political ideologies of the 1970s or the EPRDF’s state developmentalism. The question is, what is being/has been lost amidst this necroepistemic murder of other utopias?

Fragmenting the Ethiopian Left

The components that constituted the Ethiopian left, which became prominent in the 1970s, were heterogeneous. If the left is not to be confined to ideological battles among elites but embrace everyday praxis performed by various segments of ordinary people, we should witness the participation of multiple forces in the

³¹ Lars Christian Moller, “From Histopia to Futopia: A Guide to a Successful Economic Transition in Ethiopia,” in *Ethiopia in the Wake of Political Reforms*, eds. Melaku Geboye Desta et al. (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2020), 265.

³² Moller, “From Histopia to Futopia,” 265.

³³ The prolific historian Bahru Zewde writes that the socialist quest “eventually turned out to be a utopian dream,” Zewde, *Quest for Socialist Utopia*, 279.

³⁴ This is not a new phenomenon and Addis Hiwet noted it in the early 1980s, see Addis Hiwet, “Analysing the Ethiopian Revolution,” *Review of African Political Economy* 11, no. 30 (1984): 40. Teshale Tibebu also produced a similar critique after observing the 2005 election in Ethiopia, see Teshale Tibebu, “Modernity, Eurocentrism, and Radical Politics in Ethiopia, 1961–1991,” in *Ethiopia in Transit: Millennial Quest for Stability and Continuity*, eds. Pietro Toggia and Abebe Zegeye (New York: Routledge, 2011), 31–57.

1970s. Many people, from peasants to soldiers, from taxi drivers to factory workers, from sex workers to university and high school students, from poor priests to wider Muslim communities, from artists to municipality workers, partook in different uprisings and took them to the streets in their struggle against the feudal and nascent capitalist imperial order of Haile Selassie I. Ethiopia underwent “one of the greatest revolutions in modern world history.”³⁵

The 1974 revolution demolished the centuries old Solomonid dynasty effecting radical changes such as the separation of church and state, ending the feudal order under the famous banner “land to the tiller,” altering social class relations, reawakening labor movements, entangling the national question with that of capital and class, and introducing the idea of *dirb dirbirib chikona* (“piles and piles of oppression”) while changing the position of women in society.³⁶ Notwithstanding the fact that Eurocentric Marxism, primordial articulations of the national (ethnicity) question, and proletariat vanguardism all came out as a dominant ideological framing along with polemic and combative political engagement, which resulted in disastrous consequences (such as white and red terrors).

Though narratives written by participants in the 1974 revolution tend to valorize the student movement, another variant of leftist practice and ideology took place in theatrical and performance space.³⁷ Ethiopian artists partook in the revolution by raising fundamental questions to change their position in society and in their theaters. Though reduced to anecdotal status, the ideology of Ethiopian socialism enjoyed an elaborate articulation on the national theater’s stage. One of its main advocates was a philosopher-poet-playwright, Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, who became director of the Ethiopian National Theater and deputy minister at the Ministry of Culture during the revolution.

One of the major differences between Tsegaye’s Ethiopian socialism and other leftist political groups’ ideas of scientific socialism was the question of class and vanguardism, in which the latter conceived the proletariat as a conscious revolutionary who would awaken and lead the other classes. Tsegaye’s aesthetics was entangled with his politics in the sense that his art was intended to expose the

³⁵ Hiwet, “Analysing the Ethiopian Revolution,” 32.

³⁶ Hiwet, 32–47; Dessalegn Rahmato, *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1984); René Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, trans. A. M. Berrett (London: Zed Press, 1983); Waleign Mekonnen, “On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia,” *Struggle* 5, no. 2 (1969): 4–7; Tilahun Takele, “The National Question (‘Regionalism’) in Ethiopia,” *Newsletter of the New York Chapter of Ethiopian Student Union North America* 1, no. 3 (1971); Tumtu Lencho, “The Question of Nationalities and Class Struggle in Ethiopia,” *Challenge: Journal of the World-Wide Union of Ethiopian Students* 11, no. 2 (1971): 3–66; Nigist Adane, *Setoch ena YeHibreteseb Edget* (Addis Ababa: International Publishers, 1976), 13–47.

³⁷ There are a number of books written by participants in the student movement. See, for example, how the student movement is valorized as both the midwife of the revolution and modernity in Ethiopia in Andreas Eshete, “Modernity: Its Title to Uniqueness and Its Advent in Ethiopia,” *Northeast African Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–18. Bahru Zewde considers the student movement to be the culmination of reformist politics and the harbinger of radicalism in the country. Zewde, *Quest for Socialist Utopia*.

struggle and let the audience/people see their errors and strength so that they would decide for themselves.³⁸

The second point in which Tsegaye differed from the other civilian leftists was the idea of scientific reasoning. Whereas the two prominent parties, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (Mei'son), both believed that social science research or positivist reasoning was the "truthful" methodology, Tsegaye critiqued Eurocentric reasoning through his plays and essays. He argued that reason had already died in Europe when Nazi Germany killed millions of Jews and Russians. He noted, "this is the generation where reason is dead" in which the "neutron bomb is even called 'humane' because, it is said, it does not damage the environment and affords humanity a 'clean death.'"³⁹

Tsegaye conceptualizes socialism as *hibretesebawinet* using performance, poetry, and essays. In Amharic, *hibret* means unity and *sebawinet* translates as humanness and/or humanity/ism. For instance, in *Enat Alem Tenu* (an adaptation of Brecht's *Mother Courage*), Tsegaye showed that his ancestors' reasoning and understanding of humanity was premised on respecting difference, self-reflexivity, and open-ended relations. It was not about either a self-contained Cartesian subject or a Hegelian dichotomized and artificially bounded self and other. Tsegaye's conception of relationality was akin to Senghorian seriality in which all selves are posited as others.⁴⁰ As he attempted to critique and rethink universal humanity, Tsegaye brought forth global-local political nuances. Tsegaye's *Mother Courage*, in particular, shows the precarious lived experiences of the Italian fascist-colonial period and Haile Selassie's postcolonial era ending with an emergent revolution. At the opening night of his play, he observed that the survival instinct of *Tenu* (*Mother Courage*) calls for a revolution.⁴¹

Enat Alem Tenu: Performing Ethiopian Socialism

Enat Alem Tenu opens with stage smoke wafting through the dark space, thrusting fog into the auditorium. In this misty space, a lamp's flickering light from downstage confronts the vast darkness while two songs are heard at once: a fascist

³⁸ Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, "Kine tebeb: Kale meteyek ke Ato Tsegaye Gebremedhin gar," *Goh* 1, no. 10 (1975): 28.

³⁹ Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, "World Dimensions of the Community of Black Peoples," *Présence Africaine*, no. 123 (1982): 16.

⁴⁰ See Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Négritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century," in *The African Reader: Independent Africa*, eds. Wilfred Carty and Martin Kilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 179–192; Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, "Hibrete-Seb'awinet Be'Ethiopia Bahl," paper presented at *The Land Holding and Development Seminar*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 6, 1967; Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, *Ha Hu Be'Sidist War ena Enat Alem Tenu* (Addis Ababa: Berehan ena Selam Printing Press, 1975). Tsegaye conversed and collaborated with Pan-Africanists like Léopold Sédar Senghor (conversation on the idea of negritude; persuading Senghor to change his attitude towards the superiority of the French language and to make Wolof the national language; collaboration in staging Tsegaye's play, *Peter the Electron*, in Senegal).

⁴¹ Gabre-Medhin, *Ha Hu*, 1.

song hailing Benito Mussolini, *Duce Duce*, and a song of freedom, *O Ethiopia*. The melodies surge, not as separate tunes, but as part of a *double concerto*, which the playwright calls a *duet concerto*. Tsegaye utilizes the Italian term *concerto* to historicize the post/colonial relations between Italy and Ethiopia.

Tsegaye uses the song, *Duce Duce*, as debris from the five-year Italian colonial occupation (1936–1941) to confront the freedom song, *O Ethiopia*, in the postcolonial moment. In this *double concerto*, the conflict is intensified contrapuntally. Tsegaye throws a song from the colonial-fascist time of Mussolini together with a freedom melody sung in Haile Selassie's postcolonial time. The polyphonic sound, light, and smoke do not just pass through the air in time. As I will show below, Tsegaye spatializes as much as he historicizes in order to expose the embodied struggle on stage.

In the play, there are two Mother Courages as the playwright splits Brecht's Anna Fierling into Enat Alem Tenu (grandmother) and Ade Wiqaw (mother). Tenu is Ade Wiqaw's mother-in-law and is suffering from mental illness due to the anguish her family must endure. Her husband, Dambel, is a freedom fighter during the five-year Italian colonial occupation. In the wake of the victory over fascist Italy, when Haile Selassie regains power following his exile in Bath, England, this freedom fighter is imprisoned.

The body of Bely Zeleqe, an anti-colonial freedom fighter lynched by Haile Selassie in real life, is sagging. Next to this body, Ade Wiqaw draws imaginary lines on the stage, similar to a hopscotch grid, and hops over the lines. She jumps back and forth into a new temporality that is drawn on the space, saying:

From Iyasu [1913–1916] to Teferi [regent 1916–1930]—O time, how fleeting you are.
From Teferi [1916–1935] to Ttale Biru [Fascist Italy, 1935–1941]—O time, how fragmentary you are.
Ttale Biru to Teferi [1941–1974]—Once again, time is troubled and troubled. . . .⁴²

Flying from Geneva to Shewa. From Africa to America. From far west to far East. From Asia to Russia. From here to here. From here to there. . . . It is said that my husband is pardoned and released upon the 80th birthday [of Emperor Haile Selassie] on July 22nd. They also say that my son is going to be lynched.⁴³

Three things become relevant about this travel in time-space: 1) time is spatialized or space lumps time,⁴⁴ 2) Ade Wiqaw's travel into a new time-space is precarious as she stumbles using a single foot, and 3) she moves forward and turns back using similar imaginary lines/spaces while uttering that she is jumping into new epochs.

⁴² Gabre-Medhin, 79

⁴³ Gabre-Medhin, 127.

⁴⁴ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 339.

Tsegaye creates a constellation of the local and colonial empires, the postcolonial time-space and particularly the cold war moment in which a local neocolonial regime moves around the world while being constrained by and negotiating the spaces. As much as the Ethiopian postcolonial state navigated precariousness, which is built into the global order, it also produces precarity in the local space wherein hope and despair riddle the birth of a leftist revolution.

Ade Wiqaw's son, who is Mother Courage's grandson, is imprisoned for saying "the king has to be ousted." On the eightieth birthday of the old King, Haile Selassie I, Dambel gets released from prison but his son is killed. The revolution arrives at this juncture and the play ends when Tenu and Ade Wiqaw bring their dead son to the center of the stage. They sing a song of hope with a chorus as they grieve. Tsegaye staged history as "victory and death."⁴⁵ He brought forth the dead body of a young man as a ruin from the past and contrasted the body/ruin contrapuntally with the new hope of the revolutionary moment, which Tsegaye posited as an open-ended time-space.

Yet, was Tsegaye's space open for female laboring bodies (in this case, for women performers) in terms of restructuring the imperial gendered and sexed patriarchal system? Ironically, Tsegaye's staging of Ethiopian socialism and the theoretical and practical possibilities he engendered in his performances were wrought with patriarchal mechanisms and imperial moral codes. Women performers fought against the theater administration under Haile Selassie's empire because it considered them to be dangerous accusing them of "contaminating" the "pure" performance space. Tsegaye was able to come back to the theater due to the fight that female and male artists instigated. However, once he occupied the artistic directorship and his ministerial position, he did not address any of their demands in spite of their uninterrupted petitions. Female performers continued to pose fundamental questions in the revolution to alter their condition as a cast group and their temporary position at the theater or, to use Ossome's idea, to amend their precarious life that swung between the seemingly formal (theater) and informal economy (cabaret), blurring the boundary between the two spaces.

Tsegaye used the opportunity that the artists' struggle created for him to advance what he deemed critical and important without addressing their demands, such as the establishment of an independent professional association and/or becoming permanent and paid workers of the theater. Although he was well aware of the racialised, classed, gendered, sexed, and ethnicized global-local orders, he paradoxically participated in re-inscribing the age-old patriarchal systems of domination. His discursive critical sensibility simply did not extend to changing the oppressive institutional structure. Apart from that paradox, Tsegaye's actions

⁴⁵ Gabre-Medhin, "Kine tebeb," 28.

against the involvement of female performers in the cabaret business sustained the imperial moral codes that were oblivious to the structural and everyday challenges that women in general had faced for so long in Ethiopia.

Characters and Actors: Feminist Negation of Socialist Role Playing

[T]oday, in this time of freedom and cultural renaissance [revolution], if artists do not refrain from indulging themselves in a defiled lifestyle, *criticizing, correcting, teaching and inspiring people* would be incongruous. . . . Female artists are engaged in and getting special income from a scandalous part-time prostitution and bar business . . . We are utterly unable to preserve and advance the country's culture and arts in the aim of *Ethiopia first* and socialist philosophy [due to your noncompliance regarding closing your cabaret], I and the discipline committee decided to give you a three-month salary in advance and dismiss you from your employment.⁴⁶

. . . I started the bar business as I was on a low salary and for life became so expensive. . . . Let alone at this time of progress under the principle of *Ethiopia first*, I had been strongly defying the expansion of drinking houses even in earlier times. . . . Asking for appropriate compensation that considers my long years of service, I notify you that it's unjust for me to be dismissed with a three-month salary.⁴⁷

The national theater's socialist mission was also crafted by highlighting the roles the theater and its artists were meant to play (inter)nationally. As I highlighted in the above excerpt, Tsegaye crafted the theater's (inter)national socialist mission according to the roles that the artists should play. On the other hand, reflecting on that cultural (inter)national mission, Telela (a woman performer, quoted above, who had fought systemic oppression since Haile Selassie's time) examined her, and other performers' conditions in view of their subjectivity. She said: "The theater wanted only our artistic skills but not us as persons."⁴⁸ She wondered whether her personhood and her long years of service in the arts mattered instead of the role she played for the theater. Telela had worked for the Haile Selassie Theatre (later baptized as the "National Theater") for nineteen years as a singer, dancer, and actor traveling around different parts of Africa, the West as well as the East, participating in a Pan-African, non-aligned movement, and Cold War cultural diplomacy.

⁴⁶ Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, letter to Mrs. Telela Kebede, December 28, 1974.

⁴⁷ Telela Kebede, letter to Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, January 29, 1975.

⁴⁸ Telela said this to me in 2015, reflecting on Tsegaye's words.

Tsegaye sacked Telela because she refused to close her bar business, while he forced almost all female performers to stop working in cabarets. Telela fought back. When Tsegaye wrote the letter of dismissal invoking his consultation with other higher officials, Telela wrote him back refusing to accept his terms by carefully crafting her words to make use of socialist lexicons to her own end. Telela also collaborated with Alganesh Tariku (her colleague, who had her own cabaret) to point out how they represented Ethiopia on national, Pan-African, and transnational politico-cultural stages. They argued that it was not incongruent for them to shuttle between their cabarets and the stage given that the theater did not help them realize the demands they posed in the beginning of the revolution.⁴⁹

It was on March 29, 1974, that representatives of the performers of the Haile Selassie I and Patriotic Association theaters presented the following demands to minister Ahadu Sabure, before Tsegaye was appointed as director of the National Theater upon their request:

We want to know about the position that we should have in the country; We want to have a new director who has artistic maturity [a deeper understanding of the theatrical arts]; We want to see a new civil code that would set the minimum and maximum salary scales; There should also be a salary increase, retirement security, and (50%) health care coverage, royalty payment, overtime pay, annual leave, and maternity leave; A music and drama school should be established so as to train artists who would follow in the footsteps of the existing [mostly self-taught] performers; We would like to get scholarships to equip ourselves with better knowledge.⁵⁰

Tsegaye was appointed as director of the National Theater and deputy minister of the Ministry of Culture because of the artists' earlier struggle. That was why Telela said to me, "It was I who created Tsegaye." As hyperbolic as it may seem, her expression shows the kind of struggle she had on the eve and in the wake of the 1974 revolution. Tsegaye did not advance the above demands that Telela and her colleagues persistently made. Instead, he used their labor to stage his revolutionary ideas and to profit from their embodied knowledge and artistic skills. Tsegaye accused women artists of defiling, thereby, stifling the socialist progress the country was enacting. To make the paradox more acute, Tsegaye critiqued the national sexual labor from which both old and young men profited. Yet he did the same to the female performers who were obliged to shuttle between the state-owned theaters and their cabarets in different red-light districts.

⁴⁹ Telela Kebede and Alganesh Tariku, letter to the National Theater, November 4, 1975.

⁵⁰ "Performers of the Haile Selassie I and Love of the Country Theatres Say They Need a Person with Mature Artistic Sensibility," *Addis Zemen*, March 31, 1974.

In order to elaborate on these contradictions, I will discuss Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's first "revolutionary" play, *Ha Hu BeSidist Wor* (ABC in Six Months) in relation to the female performers' lived experience in and outside of the theater. In the below excerpt taken from *Ha Hu*, two characters, Gene (a female professional wailer) and Tidu (a journalist), are involved in an altercation.⁵¹ Gene is a mourner whom people hire for funeral processions. Her oral performance is needed to make families and friends mourn their dead with a deeper passion. Yet, life obliges Gene to sleep with both an old priest (who has lost his clerical status) and now with a western educated journalist, Tidu.

The journalist, Tidu, offers one dollar as a reward for her performance of funeral dirges and as payment for having sex with her:

Tidu: (After a very brief pause, he immediately turns towards Gene and takes out a one dollar note from his pocket.)

Gene: For what . . . What is that?

Tidu: Payment for your work. Price for the art, for the wailing, for the funeral dirge recording. When the love relation ends, there comes the price of business and labor. It will be deducted from the price that you should pay for my uncle's piled bed rental when your sergeant husband comes back [from far afield]. Isn't it a fact that everybody is a laborer who sweats, judders, and moves up and down as our mother did [when she lived as] a prostitute?⁵²

The play staged sex work as a national labor in which the country itself indulged. Gene also slipped into it due to her precarious life, although her major livelihood was wailing. Tidu records the talent of this professional mourner "promoting" her as an artist through print and electronic media. Yet he does not pay her well. He lives on selling her (metaphorically, the people's) grief, tears. He also sleeps with her and says sarcastically that her sexual labor "deserves" a payment for she "sweats, judders, and moves up and down" as "his" (whom he refers to as "our") mother did before.

While the National Theater in general, and the playwright-administrator in particular, raked in large profits out of successive theatrical productions, the female artists were not paid enough for the creativity and labor they put into their artistic work. The state-owned theaters had been making male and female performers' labor redundant by exploiting the age-old caste system that stigmatized *azmariwoch* (minstrels). Minstrels used to roam around drinking houses and/or feudal lords to get their daily bread as a gift. They lived at the mercy of individual lords and

⁵¹ *Gira Geta* is a title given to a high-ranking clergyman in an Orthodox Church. Yet Gadu is depicted as a former clergyman who has been found to be corrupt.

⁵² Gabre-Medhin, *Ha Hu*, 38.

the people. With the emergence of modern theaters, the state seemed to substitute the traditional patronage. However, despite their “permanent” position at the theaters, the performers either did not get their salaries regularly or they would not be paid at all. They had to appeal to the emperor, who acted as a benevolent arbiter, masking the systemic oppression. A minister once dismissed around 50 performers with impunity, simply to punish those who implored the emperor.

Gendered, sexed, and classed relations complicate the position of female performers and make them part of the national surplus labor. For example, with the high influx of people to Addis Ababa due to internal migration, and because of the high degree of urban poverty, on the eve of the 1974 revolution the highest percentage of “formal” female employment came from “Service, Sport and Recreation.”⁵³ According to Laketch Dirasse, in 1967, this sector employed 34,630 male and female workers of which 27,273 (53.5 %) were women. Lakecth states that “It is likely that most of this category are bar consorts working out of the big bars and hotels.”⁵⁴ In fact, 80,000 women were involved in sex work in the 1970s.⁵⁵

Originally recruited from red-light districts, or later joining the cabaret business, female performers were obliged to straddle spaces of formal-informal economies. After a repeated attempt to address various authorities regarding their challenges, the female performers made it clear that the theater officials kept on saying that their drinking house business “conflicted with [their] profession *without seeking a solution to [their] problems.*”⁵⁶ This is a very important move in terms of exposing the inadequacy of theorization and the staging of Ethiopian socialism. They raised fundamental issues when they asked: how could the theater hold us responsible for contaminating and impeding socialism while it did nothing to change our position in the theater and in society at large?

The fundamental demands that the artists presented to higher officials fell on deaf ears. Fighting against a “revolutionary man,” to whom his patriarchal privilege and institutional power structures availed resources, was challenging for the artists and particularly for the female performers. For Telela and other performers to get back to the national theater, it took them another round of organizing and protest. They used their cabarets, which the state considered profane, as one space for their underground feminist organization. Then, on April 26, 1978, Telela and her colleagues marched on the streets of Addis Ababa to depose Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin from his directorship. Though many were beaten and arrested and one performer from the city hall died, the artists were successful in ousting Tsegaye from the National Theater. They also became “permanent” civil servants who

⁵³ Laketch Dirasse, *The Commoditization of Female Sexuality: Prostitution and Socio-Economic Relations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia* (New York: AMS Press, 1991), 91–101.

⁵⁴ Dirasse, *Commoditization of Female Sexuality*, 92.

⁵⁵ Dirasse, 75.

⁵⁶ Telela Kebede and Alganesh Tariku, letter to the National Theater, November 4, 1975, my emphasis—swa.

would enjoy some benefits as workers. However, the state permanently imposed itself as the owner of the Theater. It continues to sustain the classed, gendered, and sexed structure of domination as its tight censorship constrains criticism.

Conclusion

Using necroepistemology as a historiographic strategy, my essay critiques neoliberal historiography in Ethiopia, which does not just advance its imagination to reproduce its species but attacks to kill other imagining and the creation of new humanity by promoting universal history, defined as a struggle for recognition in the global, neoliberal (private sector led) economy. In its stead, I offer an example of another struggle, the 1974 socialist revolution in all its complexity and singularity. Indeed, as I review Tsegaye's statements, Ethiopian socialism staged affirmative, transnational, universal history in a country liberated from the rule of a monarch, while it paradoxically participated in the objectification, commodification, and sexualization of laboring women, as the exchanges between Telela and Tsegaye suggest. On another level, the essay has shown how grassroots feminist acts of organization participated in the revolution to change the spatial reorganization in and out of the National Theater under a monarchy and even amid a socialist revolution.

While multiple marginalized groups enacted such histories of imagining a different life in the past, the neoliberal historiography of today is posing new threats by diminishing the value of the 1974 revolution or repressing the history of ordinary people's resistance (women performers, for instance), in order to use the affective labor of the artists for its own nationalist and neoliberal ends. Even though artists became permanent employees of the state, their livelihood and artistic freedom continue to live in precarious conditions. Female artists still scramble to survive moving back and forth between the fluid spaces of the formal and informal economies. Women dancers negotiate the patriarchal state-owned cultural institutions that consider them temporary bodies whose life in the theater ends when they are "out of shape" due to childbirth or age. If not viewed as temporary bodies, they must carefully navigate the gendered, sexed, and commodified informal economy in local and foreign (Middle Eastern) nightclubs. They are obliged not only to sweat while performing (erotic) dances but also to wait tables, forced to fondle customers.

Today, what mostly fills the stage of the National Theater are ethnic performances and neoliberal developmental theater. During the transition time, motivational speeches of neoliberal self-care and self-help proliferated, preaching the gospel of prosperity and an (ahistorical and immaterial) envisioning that displaces the notions of the social and public good from the state to the individual. While these are neoliberal mechanisms that capture imaginations, imagining a new life

is difficult under the banner of necroepistemic historiography that attacks the notion of utopia and socio-historical futures.

Devoid of ethics and a sensibility of the human, the seemingly aesthetic work of ethnic dance is currently being redeployed to echo the war drums. While some ethno-nationalist vocalists sing war songs, renowned Pan-Ethiopian artists parrot the state's language of war: "I march [to the war front] to save Ethiopia: Wherever! Whenever! With every weapon!"⁵⁷ Performers of the national theater, Oromo Cultural Centre, and Addis Ababa's municipal theaters marched to military training camps under this banner to join the war using performance as their weapon, as a necroepistemic moment par excellence.

The political in aesthetics, which is supposed to reclaim the social through praxis, is critically wounded in Ethiopia today. Despite budding, critical, independent initiatives such as Sile Theatre (About Theatre), which workshop ideas and stage performances to rejuvenate theater and performance,⁵⁸ social questions and desires articulated in the 1974 socialist revolution in Ethiopia lie in wait under the weight of everyday, mundane, guileful struggles of the majority of Ethiopian artists and the society at large against local-global neoliberal structures of power. Thus, my call for recapturing *left* ruins in Ethiopia is a rousing call against necroepistemology and its neoliberal historiography.

■

Bibliography

- Abegaz, Berhanu. "Political Parties in Business: Rent Seekers, Developmentalists, or Both?" *Journal of Development Studies* 49, no. 11 (2013): 1467–1483.
- Adane, Nigist. *Setoch ena YeHibreteseb Edget*. Addis Ababa: International Publishers, 1976.
- Adhana, Adhana Haile. "Mutation of Statehood and Contemporary Politics." In *Ethiopia in Change: Peasantry, Nationalism, and Democracy*, edited by Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang, 12–29. New York: British Academic Press, 1994.
- Ahmed, Abiy. *Medemer*. Addis Ababa: n.p., 2019.
- Ahmed, Abiy. *YeMedemer Menged*. Addis Ababa: n.p., 2021.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History." Translated by Harry Zohn. In *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Bogues, Anthony. "Imagination, Politics, and Utopia: Confronting the Present." *Boundary 2* 33, no. 3 (2006): 151–159.

⁵⁷ "I March to Save Ethiopia," YouTube video, 1:32, August 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLFLW20gouM&t=115>.

⁵⁸ See ስለ ቲያትር (Sile Theatre), Facebook page, accessed August 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/197354815461929>.

- Eshete, Andreas. "Modernity: Its Title to Uniqueness and Its Advent in Ethiopia." *Northeast African Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–17.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1952.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- Fukuyama, Francis. Keynote lecture at *Democracy and the Future of Ethiopia's Developmental State Conference*, Addis Ababa, June 11, 2019. <https://www.cipe.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Keynote-Transcript-Francis-Fukuyama.pdf>.
- Gabre-Medhin, Tsegaye. *Ha Hu Be'Sidist Wor ena Enat Alem Tenu*. Addis Ababa: Berehan ena Selam Printing Press, 1975.
- Gabre-Medhin, Tsegaye. "Hibrete-Seb'awinet Be'Ethiopia Bahl." Paper presented at *The Land Holding and Development Seminar*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 6, 1967.
- Gabre-Medhin, Tsegaye. "Kine tebeb: Kale meteyek ke Ato Tsegaye Gebremedhin gar." *Goh* 1, no. 10 (1975): 20.
- Gabre-Medhin, Tsegaye. "World Dimensions of the Community of Black Peoples." *Présence Africaine*, no. 123 (1982): 3–19.
- Hegel, George W. F. *The Philosophy of History*. Translated by John Sibree. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004.
- Hiwet, Addis. "Analyzing the Ethiopian Revolution." *Review of African Political Economy* 11, no. 30 (1984): 32–47.
- Laketch, Dirasse. *The Commoditization of Female Sexuality: Prostitution and Socio-Economic Relations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*. New York: AMS Press, 1991.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Productions of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1974.
- Lefort, René. *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?* Translated by A. M. Berrett. London: Zed Press, 1983.
- Lencho, Tumtu. "Nationalities and Class Struggle in Ethiopia." *Challenge* 11, no. 2 (1971): 3–66.
- Mekonnen, Walelign. "On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia." *Struggle* 5, no. 2 (1969): 4–7.
- Moller, Lars Christian. "From Histopia to Futopia: A Guide to a Successful Economic Transition in Ethiopia." In *Ethiopia in the Wake of Political Reforms*, edited by Melaku Geboye Desta et al., 249–273. Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2020.
- Ossome, Lyn. "In Search of the State? Neoliberalism and the Labour Question for Pan-African Feminism." *Feminist Africa*, no. 20 (2015): 6–22.
- "Performers of the Haile Selassie I and Love of the Country Theatres Say They Need a Person with Mature Artistic Sensibility." *Addis Zemen*, March 31, 1974.
- Rahmato, Dessalegn. *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1984.

- Ranke, Leopold von. "On Progress in History." In *The Theory and Practice of History*, edited by Georg G. Iggers, 20–23. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Senghor, Léopold Sédar. "Négritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century." In *The African Reader: Independent Africa*, edited by Wilfred Carty and Martin Kilson, 179–192. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Takele, Tilahun. "The National Question ('Regionalism') in Ethiopia." *Newsletter of the New York Chapter of Ethiopian Student Union North America* 1, no. 3 (1971).
- Tibebu, Teshale. "Modernity, Eurocentrism, and Radical Politics in Ethiopia, 1961–1991." In *Ethiopia in Transit: Millennial Quest for Stability and Continuity*, edited by Pietro Toggia et al., 31–57. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Zewde, Bahru. *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement c. 1960–1974*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2014.

Abstract

Left Ruins in Ethiopia: Imagining Otherwise Amid Necroepistemic Historiography

This essay uses the notion of necroepistemology to expose the killing of the other as executed by the neoliberal historiography in Ethiopia. Utilizing Fanonian negative dialectics, it critiques the ahistorical, immaterial, and reified object, as well as universal history, promoted by the official Ethiopian historiography's absolute time, space, and matter. It does so to reveal the ways in which the enduring social questions and new imaginations are dismissed by this historiography as the work of the global-local left. To counterbalance this practice, I return to the 1974 Ethiopian socialist revolution and to the staging of Ethiopian socialism as a critical transnational rethinking of the human in the country. At the same time, attending to the everyday struggle of women performers in both the imperial and revolutionary spaces, the essay reminds us how the revolutionary practice, which had envisioned a new social human, ended up marking female performers' bodies as dangerous for the socialist movement. Revealing the ways in which women performers collaborated with and fought against a male revolutionary figure, this essay ends with a call to respond to the current necroepistemic moment to draw attention to the historically vulnerable people who are dying in Ethiopia in the here and now.

Keywords

necroepistemology, historiography, neoliberalism, imagination, new humanity, gender, sexuality

Abstrakt

Lewicowe ruiny w Etiopii: Inna wyobraźnia wśród nekroepistemicznej historiografii

W artykule wykorzystano pojęcie nekroepistemologii, aby opisać proces zabijania Innego przez neoliberalną historiografię w Etiopii. Odwołując się do dialektyki negatywnej Frantza Fanona, autor poddaje krytyce ahistoryczny i zdematerializowany przedmiot badań oraz uniwersalizację historii praktykowaną w oficjalnej etiopskiej historiografii, która posługuje

się absolutyzującą koncepcją czasu, przestrzeni i materii. Celem krytyki jest ujawnienie metod stosowanych przez tę historiografię, by marginalizować aktualne kwestie społeczne i odrzucać nowe wyobrażenie jako dzieło globalno-lokalnej lewicy. Szukając przeciwwagi dla tej praktyki, autor powraca do etiopskiej rewolucji socjalistycznej z 1974 i do inscenizacji etiopskiego socjalizmu jako krytycznej transnarodowej refleksji nad podejściem do człowieczeństwa w tym kraju. Jednocześnie, przyglądając się codziennym zmaganiom aktorek zarówno w przestrzeni imperialnej, jak i rewolucyjnej, przypomina, że praktyka rewolucyjna, która niosła nową wizję człowieka jako istoty społecznej, zakończyła się naznaczeniem ciał performerek jako niebezpiecznych dla ruchu socjalistycznego. Esej ukazuje współpracę i walkę aktorek z męskim rewolucjonistą, kończy się zaś wezwaniem do odpowiedzi na obecną sytuację nekroepistemiczną, aby zwrócić uwagę na bezbronnych ludzi, którzy umierają w Etiopii tu i teraz.

Słowa kluczowe

nekroepistemologia, historiografia, neoliberalizm, wyobrażenia, nowe człowieczeństwo, gender, seksualność

SURAFEL WONDIMU ABEBE

Assistant Professor of Performance Studies and Theories at The Africa Institute of Sharjah, UAE. He has served as deputy dean of Humanities and as assistant professor at Addis Ababa University. He is a research associate at VIAD, the University of Johannesburg. He is working on his book project, which studies the ways in which Ethiopian women performers maneuver and reinvent spaces of empires, revolutions, and neoliberal globalization.
