

***Ethiopians Elites “think” about Satan – “thank” God!  
But they don’t “think-thank” Menelik II.***

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The pronouncement that Ethiopian Semayawi Party (ESP) is to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Menelik II triggered an obstinate debate among local social media users. As usual, the deliberations are predisposed to the categorical judgment with ‘no grey’: ‘*Menelik the slave entrepreneur*’ and “*Mother (èmyè) Menelik.*” If one dares to have his own say, he will be doomed for being “*banda*” or ‘*shifta.*’ Well, I am not here to indulge myself, nor anyone else for that matter, into this saga. Rather am concerned that such historically and/or politically imperative phenomenon is left for these social media thugs to set the public opinion.

You might think that this kind of debate is customary to such politically sensitive issues. The same to the Menelik’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, deliberations on such threads are deemed to instantaneously twist in to a high tempo wrangle. Of course, one cannot evade anti-conceptual arguments altogether as they are the reflections of a low level of comprehension on the subject. And this is archetypal to all underdeveloped nations where social and political problems are barely scrutinized in their entirety.

The political sphere is filled with men whose unthinking loyalty to their belief is what held the whole creaky system together. By and large, the nation’s politics is often framed by thugs who conventionally play the zero-sum blame game, alleging somebody but not themselves. They do hate mongering as a full time job, and spent the rest of their time praying for err of the other group for them to say ‘*I told you so,*’ which is the only way to authenticate their position.

It seems idiosyncratic to Ethiopians that we are all thin-skinned to discuss political issues objectively. In the intellectual sphere, we don’t make a sober assessment on the erroneous assumptions concerning the socioeconomic and political structure of the nation. We don’t examine our ways of doing things. Our political groups are not courageous enough to neither present their social, economic and political programs to be reviewed methodically nor demand the expertise of intellectuals. Intellectuals also failed to boldly criticize the programs and/or scrutinize the activities of local political groups which makes them liable for the prevalence of the current ‘catch-22 politics’ in Ethiopia.

All that I have discussed above is to elucidate that the shared knowledge among Ethiopians on their political affairs is miniature, and are scarcely shaped through conceptual integration and critical thinking. ‘*Political elites*’ are those who are best educated, best-informed and most politically active with an outsized influence on the politics of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

Here you may pose that Ethiopia is not distinct in having a small number of political elites. Yes, of course, we have very few political elites with an undersized influence on politics. But, unluckily, the very few educated/political elites are constricted from playing their role on the politics of the nation. Consequently, the politicking is left for those who are impervious to new ideas and facts clinging to a muddle of unprovoked assumptions about the nation, the modish catch phrase of “*Liberal Democracy*” and tribal prejudices. And, I don’t mind the vigilance of my mother when she said “*Politics is fire!*” But it is eerie when my professor cautioned me with the same ‘*tone*’.

So, what is the ‘*root causes*’ for the very few Ethiopian educated elites to evade politics? This is what I was pondering for a while and come up with three structural problems that obliterate the *active minds* of Ethiopian educated elites. Hence, am arguing that the educated elites dodge politics due these philosophical and/or political problems. For a clear contextual understanding the three problems are abstracted and ordered in three different layers: at World, Continental (Africa) and National (Ethiopia) level, respectively.

### **1. Compartmentalized Minds**

The first reason, which is a common trend in the world, is that the educated elites “compartmentalize” their mind, and then evade politics hoping to find protection from the irrationality that is prevalent in the field. According to *Ayn Rand*, such a prehistorical savagery is made possible by the psycho-epistemology of educated elites who escape into the physical sciences (or technology or industry or business), hoping to find protection from human irrationality, and abandoning the field of ideas to the enemies of reason.<sup>2</sup> She even exemplifies this trend by comparing Albert Einstein’s scientific achievement to his political views.

## 2. Epistemological Crisis

On the second layer, the education system in Africa is the victim of a western epistemological “export,” and “import,” which is distinctive to Ethiopia, which takes in the form of science as ideology and hegemony. Africans generally would have to continue to ponder the entire issue of *decolonization* as long as our sense of selfhood remains obscured, our economies in a state of prostration and our social and political institutions plagued by cancerous disintegration.<sup>3</sup> *Nyamnjoh* asserts that under the western epistemological export, education in Africa and/or for Africans has been like a pilgrimage to the *Kilimanjaro* of western intellectual ideals, the tortuous route to *Calvary* for alternative of ways of life.

Human knowledge, though based on sensory perception, is conceptual in nature, and on the conceptual level of consciousness displays a new feature: it is not automatic or infallible; whether through ignorance or evasion, it can make mistake, distort, or departs from reality.<sup>4</sup> The knowledge that we taught and/or acquired in different scientific disciplines is developed through conceptual integration into set of abstract principles that purports to be either a correct description of reality or a set of guidelines for man’s actions. For most of us (Ethiopians), the knowledge that we learnt in school or college in the form of theories, skills, principles, guidelines, rules, procedures, etc, are, often, do not confirm to the existing reality nor guide our action. Thus, it is habitual for most of “us” to evade this ambiguity with the notion “*good in theory but it doesn’t work in practice.*”

Rather, since the education system is not designed in a way that addresses the predicaments of the nation, the values that we learn are often irrelevant and the knowledge is invalid. *Nyamnjoh* affirms that the knowledge needed for African development is rendered irrelevant by a dysfunctional set of values, and in this regard, development in Africa is hindered and retarded. He adds, the need for Africa to revisit the dominant epistemological underpinnings of western education that are not always sensitive to the predicaments and expectations of ordinary Africans.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, ‘epistemological crisis’ is a structural problem in the whole Africa that makes all our educated elites impervious to new ideas and facts. Due to the wrong epistemological

assumptions and structures “we” all are unable to make conceptual integration on what we learn nor able critically examine a problem in its entirety.

### 3. Red Terror

The structural problem which is distinctive to Ethiopia is purely political phenomenon: the Red Terror which changed the political inclination of the educated elites, and the society in general, for good. From 1976 to 1978 urban Ethiopia was haunted by Terror campaigns which claimed the lives of thousands of citizens, transformed the country both politically and socially and bequeathed it with legacies that continue to be felt to this day.<sup>6</sup> Because of its violation of central socio-cultural ideals in Ethiopian society, it decisively undermine any idea of ‘social contract’ or ‘trust’ between the State and the population which led to a disassociation of civilians from national policy and power structures, and the serious weakening of overall social cohesion.<sup>7</sup> The effect of this phenomenon is so pervasive which significantly affects every aspects of our life, particularly the educated elites as they were the primary targets of the campaign.

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1. <http://research.yougov.com/services/political-elites>
  2. Rand A. (1974), *Selfishness Without a Self. The Ayn Rand Library Vol.1, A Signet Book.*
  3. Sanya Osha (1999), *Quest Vol XIII. No. I-II, 1999*
  4. Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2004), *A Relevant Education for African Development-some epistemological considerations African Development, Vol.XXIX, No.1, 2004, pp.161184*
  5. Piekoff L. (1991), *Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand, New York Dutton, 1991*
  6. *Ethiopian Red Terror Documentation and Research Center: A Brief History of The Ethiopian Terror, <http://ertdrc.com/>*
  7. Abbink, J. (1995), *The Impact of Violence: the Ethiopian ‘Red terror’ as a social phenomenon.*