

PART THREE

BEYOND RACISM AND RELIGION: Wahhabism, Arabs, and Ethiopians

By Tecola W. Hagos

SECTION I

I. General: Civilization and Philosophy

“If you want God to laugh at your jokes, just tell Him your life-plans.” Putting in mind this quotation as a profound statement, even if it is a cynical sneer at the effort of a rather pitifully fragile life form (mankind), I will attempt to discuss some hopeful projects and relationships with neighboring nations and peoples. Before I embark on such perilous effort, I will first address some issues I have with the recent essay by Dr. Fekadu Bekele posted in this Website. The essay has generated some interesting discussion on the current political situation in Ethiopia, and that is what a good essay is supposed to do: bring out important issues for discussion, and if possible provide some solutions. Fekadu Bekele in a lengthy and valuable essay has articulated the political and economic problems facing us all and pointed out the main reasons why we, as a people, failed repeatedly from bringing about meaningful political and economic changes in Ethiopia. I applaud greatly Fekadu’s effort. Moreover, in the hope of expanding the discussion, I have written few paragraphs below on certain specific and limited issues discussed in Fekadu’s essay. I do have points of divergence in that essay, and the least of which is Fekadu’s repeated use of the word “backward” in a general characterization of Ethiopian civilization, social life, or economic situation.

Although I was finished writing my article before I read Fekadu’s essay, I have added this section to indicate some of the delicate concepts in Fekadu’s article, but most importantly to express my admiration for such engaging piece, and express how I am grateful for his candor. Fekadu’s admiration of Prometheus, my favorite character (in Greek mythology) coming out of our universal human ethos, reminded me how far religious concepts based on Judo-Christian and Islamic self-serving Messianic imagery as well as the concept of eschatology (end of time) had distorted the true symbolism of mankind’s tragic struggle against an overwhelming and indifferent universe. As far as I can tell, the philosophers who have truly understood/felt this human tragedy of ones awareness of ones pathetic limitations are Schopenhauer and Unamuno, and especially Unamuno as he poetically illuminated his inner most sympathy to the human condition in his wonderful book The Tragic Sense of Life [in Men and Peoples]. From one of our own contemporaries, the words of John Lennon frames this tragedy of human existence, i.e., existing alone, surrounded with overwhelming force. endowed with a great imagination et cetera. but acutely

fragile: “Life is what happens to you while you are making plans.”

A. What does it mean to be “Backward”?

It is precisely the Promethean myth cited by Fekadu that is the basis of my comment on the issue of being “backward” as mentioned in Fekadu’s essay. There are other writers from the past and some current political leaders who have used the word “backward” to describe certain societies. I find such descriptions to be pre-structuralist thinking i.e., before the enlightening works of Boas, Levi-Strauss and others. Of course my attempt here is cursory, for it would require a book or two to do justice to the issue. However, I can still be able to show in large brush-work the problem of using such loaded word “backward” when there are other expressions that could impart the state of the economy of a society without stigmatizing or degrading human beings in that community.

Should we make distinctions between moral/ethical standards and excellence in technological advancements? And if we do which one should be given greater emphasis? In an introductory course on ethics I teach undergraduate students, the one barrier that we attempt to overcome in that class [the class is composed of students from different nations from all over the World] is to look beyond the barrier that technology has erected between diverse societies and see the humanity of the members of different communities. The idea of shared human nature as opposed to strictly materialist or empiricist consideration of human life leads us to very many ennobling and enriching activities. In its ugliest extreme in the past, judgments based on the “backwardness” of certain communities has led to the establishment of the institutions of slavery and colonialism. The Nineteenth Century colonialism was mostly justified as a “civilizing” mission from the technologically advanced West to the technologically “backward” people of Africa, Asia, Oceania, Australia, and the Americas. The legacy of that human degradation still is holding in its clutch men and women, who received their “civilizing” tutorial as house maids and servants, laborers and farm hands et cetera from their colonial masters, who after liberation end up calling those “others” who were untouched by such degrading process “backward.” The tragedy of slavery and colonialism is long lasting even persisting long after those structures had been destroyed. The deformity and corruption it caused in the human psych lives on (in so many people) all over the world in the children and grandchildren of those first victims.

Even with such understanding of ethics, history, and the dynamic process of change, people can easily fall into that type of trap of making distinctions between peoples and communities on some form of external materialistic standards. At a moment of great passion, trying to elevate us all, I too fell to such trap of judging communities by such external measurements [See my “Response...” article in this same Website below] and ended up devaluing my fellow Africans. This concept of “backward” distorts our perception of the value

of human beings by emphasizing the wrong ethical or moral standard. The danger here is when what is contingent is being considered as an intrinsic attribute or quality; it polarizes and corrupts all possible decent relationships between people or communities and results in horrific atrocities and genocidal behaviors. There are numerous convincing examples in recent or past World history for our consideration.

As far as I am concerned, the most “backward” people are those people who have a penchant for mass murder and genocidal hatred for people they differentiated from their group on the basis of race, esoteric religious commandments, and culture. Certainly, Ethiopian leaders throughout their history have shown great restraint, humane consideration, and minimized the murder of people they subjugated. Ethiopians have never dropped nuclear bombs or poison gas on cities and murdered indiscriminately non-combatants, children, men and women; never carried out on any one group of people genocide or ethnic cleansing; never forced any people to convert into a religion or prosecute them for practicing a different religion; never enslaved and treated people like animals and property; and never hated any people because of their ethnicity or race. Such ethical great people cannot be identified as a “backward” people. None can call Ethiopia/Ethiopians “backward” on any meaningful scale of measurement. No individual from our part of the world should be taken in by the high-rises, sophisticated killing machines, high consumption (at great cost to the rest of us), and the glitter of the West as a standard of being civilized.

B. Philosophical Diversion

In the hope of refocusing the discourse, I address the issue of using Socratic/Platonic ideas on government as a measuring rod in discussing current or past Ethiopian political situation. Although much distinction is attempted by several people to distinguish Sophist ideas from ideas of Socrates (Plato), we should be aware that Socrates too was a Sophist. He used his dialogue/rhetoric as the Sophist did with the exception that he was less relativistic than the Sophists who are usually identified with Protagoras. At any rate no Greek philosopher, except Diogenes the Cynic (the dog) since he treated everyone with the same degree of contempt, of the time of Socrates/Plato believed in equality of human beings. As a matter of fact, the social structure in Plato’s Republic is based on the assumption that human beings not only have different abilities but are also inherently unequal by nature. Thus, the concept of “equality” is not really a Greek concept as we understood the concept of “equality” in our time. Moreover, the concept of justice is a particularly Greek concept that has impacted upon the philosophical thinking of several political and philosophical thinkers down to our own time.

In terms of the metaphysics and epistemology of philosophers in general, the better idea is to classify them as foundationalists or non-foundationalists rather than Sophists or Platonists. In which case, both the empiricists (Aristotle, Locke,

Hume) and rationalists (Plato, Leibniz) are foundationalists. Since Kant embraces elements of each, he too is a foundationalist in some aspect and non-foundationalist in others. This type of identification allows us to group the Positivists, Linguistic-atomists, Phenomenologists, Existentialists, Structuralists, and Deconstructionists as non-foundationalists. This is simply a matter of focusing either on the most common characteristics or on differences of the essential elements in any school of thought. These designations are not hermeneutically sealed categories. At any rate, it is refreshing to read a piece that refers back to the sources and foundations of serious philosophical basis for political ideas. It all comes down to one singular issue such that what greatly matters to the individual is not the vast distance between galaxies, but the closeness of the next human being in a community. In other words, one must look at the world in all its possibilities and also in all its actualities.

C. Ethiopian Intellectuals and Their Legacy

The problem with Ethiopian intellectuals is not ignorance, but lack of intellectual integrity, curiosity, and ethics. Fekadu emphasized the inability of Ethiopians to formulate correctly the problems and solutions dealing with Ethiopian social, economic, and political lives due to lack of knowledge. I would add on that important point my observation that I find the analytical capacity of Ethiopians to be quite sophisticated, and informed. However, what I find to be lacking is intellectual integrity, curiosity, and ethics. In addition, their deliberate avoidance of controversial issues has aggravated the problem. It is well known that whether they are historians, philosophers, political scientist et cetera there is an unhealthy degree of utilitarian even mercenary quality to the works of a number of Ethiopian intellectuals. It seems that Ethiopian intellectuals do not take to task anyone in real or perceived power who may hurt their careers. Examples abound on this score. Have we ever challenged the assumptions and at times outrageous sweeping generalizations by foreign authors on Ethiopian history or society challenged? May be one or two of us may have done that. And that is not a record that would instill confidence or pride in the achievements of our intellectuals.

The problem, as I see it, has to do with the inability of Ethiopian intellectuals or writers to listen to each other. Another problem is their lack of curiosity to investigate or challenge age old assumptions. The overwhelming desire not to stand out by being challenging to the norm has killed our abilities to come up with original works. There are numerous subjects, events, and situations that deserved close scrutiny and investigation in matters concerning Ethiopia, but we have failed by not doing the work. Instead, we settle for third-rate works by intellectual tourists who visit Ethiopia for few months and turn out books that we cite as authoritative. We are more interested to look at the academic credentials of people rather than absorb or critically evaluate the merit of what is presented to us.

The most disconcerting and devastatingly sophomoric characteristic of some Ethiopian intellectuals is their god-like worship of “Ferengi” intellectuals, who seem to have a monopoly on Ethiopian intellectual life. It is both sad and comical to me how some Ethiopians value any validation by Westerners. Equally devastating is the pathological greed those well known Ethiopian intellectuals, who have succeeded in their academic lives out in the West, have displayed by closing the door of opportunity after their entry into the rarefied halls of academia, not ever cultivating young Ethiopians to carry on the intellectual torch after them. How many Ethiopians have been protégées of well known Ethiopian intellectuals in the last thirty years? None! If those elderly Ethiopian intellectuals were really concerned about the survival of Ethiopia, there would have been over a hundred young Ethiopians plugged to the system by now on the sponsorship by each of those aging Ethiopian intellectuals. However, those same “successful” intellectuals usually turn around and accuse Ethiopians for not being productive. It is clear to me that no civilization is possible on the disconnected “excellence” and effort of few people.

As a reminder, I want to emphasize the fact that Ethiopia has the longest running literate culture in the world. Even though we identify the culture of the written word with that of the version of Christianity that is authentic to Ethiopia, such association is only a partial picture, for Islam’s literate culture too has a very long tradition in Ethiopia as well. With such long standing tradition of learning why is Ethiopia’s education system in shambles? To this day, the oldest literate culture in the world does not have a doctoral program except in Medicine in its colleges. The multi-headed obstacles that had arrested the development of advanced programs in colleges were the few Ethiopians with advanced degrees who fought against such logical growth from taking place during the time of Haile Selassie all the way to our own time. Ethiopia is cursed with such selfish individuals who have exploited the opportunity a suffering people provided in educating themselves, but have become a hindrance in more ways than one against the developmental rights of all Ethiopians.

II. The Polarizing Saudi Factor

I read the rambling essay extract of the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, in translation from the original Arabic that appeared first in a Saudi government run daily newspaper, Al-Watan. The Washington Post [June 6, 2004, Outlook, B4] printing of the piece in English translation is a great service to all who may have some doubt as to the fanatical and destructive mind-set of the members of the ruling House of Saud. This piece by Bandar is an alarming and extremely disappointing piece, and it is specially so because it is written by an individual who has spent most of his adult life in the West in schools and important appointments. Bandar is the Dean of Ambassadors in Washington D.C. because of his seniority due to his long term of service of twenty years as Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States. He is a person who had spent most of his professional life in high visibility and

delicate position of power and influence.

It seems that neither education nor experience had any meaningful impact on the state of mind of Bandar, for he sounds in his article no less a demagogue than the fanatics of every type from bin-Laden to the street corner preachers in East London. He used similar language and similar solutions to problems that are very complex and deep seated. I find the piece by Bandar highly irresponsible and juvenile. Bandar preaches, threatens, scolds, and insults not just Saudis, but most anyone who may have in some way expressed a view different than Bandar's; this includes even those who had nothing to do with his type of ersatz political engagement. To some extent, I understand the problem facing Bandar and his fellow Saudis. As a reformists led by the Crown Prince, whom Bandar expressly supports, are in a great dilemma: their desire to bring about much over due reforms is counter checked by the Wahhabist conservative block, which situation translates into a tug of war between two powerful forces that may end up annihilating each other leaving Saudi Arabia in the hands of the most radical and anti-West forces.

Nevertheless, the Janus face of Bandar is obvious. The face of Bandar in the article is very different than the face he presented in American television interviews. On television, Bandar projects humility, sensitivity, empathy, secular politics et cetera with a degree of some native charm. Whereas, in the piece he wrote he used the language of dogmatism, advocating Manichean type of choices and murder in order to solve political or religious dissention. Furthermore, he opted to polarize society with hard-edge distinctions between insiders and outsiders. He stated, "We, as a state and as a people, must insist that all choose between the truth, in which we believe, and the lie, which we think that those who deviate [from the religion] are advocating." Making such a categorical claim that there is only one truth and every body must believe the truth that the Saudi's have discovered is an insult to all. It is this type of claim that has polarized the Saudi society that people live under dread and extreme oppression, and all that is done in the name of Islam. Bandar did not stop there in his remedial prescription to a world in his eyes has gone astray. He added, "In my opinion, with all due modesty and respect, our honorable clerics must call for the ruler to declare Jihad against these deviants, and give him [i.e., the ruler] complete support in this matter, and be determined about it, since whoever keeps silent [and refrains from speaking about] the truth is a mute Satan." This is frightening. Are we all "mute Satan" just because we mind our own business and do not go out on fanatical religious rampage as the Wahhabis? Is this a call for mass murder? For full scale oppression of legitimate dissent?

There are numerous scholarly books and articles on the corruption of the members of the ruling House of Saud and on the brutality of their government that had beheaded fifty two alleged criminals in a single year (2003) for crimes as frivolous as adultery. A few years back one of the members of the House of

Saud had caused the beheading of the lover of his niece, a Princess, and her execution by a firing squad. We do not have to go far to find out how the Saudi government functions. Nepotism, self-serving appointments, incestuous public service are all the hallmarks of an administration that is run like one's own private home rather than a state. Bandar, the son of one of the Brothers ruling Saudi Arabia, has been Ambassador to the United States for the last twenty years. Is this a type of administration standards that enlightened governments follow? The answer is a resounding no! The recorded facts of brutal executions and oppression of the people of Saudi Arabia is not something enemies of the kingdom concocted, but the stark reality of life under the House of Saud.

What is sad is the fact that people never seem to learn from history: oppression of people whether it is in the guise of religion or secular ideology never outlives the wrath of the people, for sooner than later oppressors meet their maker in ignominy. And individuals like Bandar sail through their lives with the illusion that their lives are guided by the highest moral standards, and would use any means to preserve that fragile falsehood to the extent that they will kill those who do not agree with them or have different perspectives. Those marvelous ancient Greeks had a category they identified as the rule of contradictions, the "excluded middle" in logic--a type of fallacy. The statement by Bandar is a classic example of contradictory positions: on one hand Bandar is condemning the "deviants" who follow horrific standard of behavior in their terrorist activities, but then Bandar is recommending the same type of lawless terrorist action against the same "deviants" to murder and destroy them right away without process of law.

In the essay under reference, Bandar made much of the battle of Al-Sabla of 1929, but failed to tell us that it was a relatively minor skirmish or sort of a power struggle between the Salafi Brotherhood, the original Wahhabi movement, which did not warm up to the on going maneuvering of the West to get Abdul Aziz to open Saudi Arabia to oil explorers once independence is achieved. It is to be recalled that Abdul Aziz's success was very much dependent on the fanatical backwoods religious fervor of the Wahhabi movement that was sweeping the area like wild fire with its version of pure form of Islam, a kind of literal interpretation of the Koran taught by a puritan Sunni medieval jurist Ibn Hanbal, and much later Wahhabism was fanatically spread by Mohammad Ben Abdel Wahhab. Ever since the Wahhabists become an integral part of the Saudi government, the oppression of the Shi'ite and all other factions as well as all other religions has been a violent daily occurrence in Saudi Arabia.

In fact, without the Wahhabi religious movement, Abdul Aziz's Kingdom would not have lasted this long. However, that same movement is on the brink of destroying the House of Saud at this point in history. Bandar's article is a blind bravado, sounds more of the last gasp of a dying system lashing out at perceived enemies as is the case of all dying oppressive regimes. Rather than seeking the

problem within the very structure of the government of Saudi Arabia and the most oppressive religious prescriptions on the population, he admonishes his fellow citizens not to examine themselves or the political institutions they live under. “We have a religious and national obligation not to be tempted into following those who have misled us, to pursue us that the flaw lies with us, as a state and a people, and that this terrorist phenomenon is the result of the cultural situation in which we are living... This is a Word of truth that aims at lying.”

Like most “Third World” dictators whether it is Bandar’s or other members of the House of Saud sophistication is severely limited by expediency and narcissism. Whether it is a personal pronouncement as expressed in the article or other occasional statements on behalf of the Saudi Government, all such statements are simple sophistry full of self contradictions and faulty logic. Those leaders of oil-rich Arab nations routinely siphoned the wealth of their respective nations to their own private uses. Whether they called their fiefdom a kingdom or a republic they are all run like the households of private individuals who clocked themselves in public persona and religiosity. There is no proper accounting of public fund, or proper reporting to the public of the revenue from selling of oil. If we take Bandar and any number of officials of Arab governments as examples, other than the fact that of their loyalty to their respective chief executives, they are adroit dealing with often gullible American public; they are also astute business men very often with fabulous private wealth. This is not to insult the individual capacity or intelligence of Bandar or others. In fact, in case of Bandar, he knows how to fly fighter planes (made in the United States), knows to fire sophisticated weapon systems (made in the United States), and hold his own against hostile media people and Television anchors et cetera. All that is fine, I have no problem in the dissemination of knowledge and sharing of know-how as long as its benefit reaches most members of a community.

However, I object when people simply use the benefits derived from Western manufactured goods, and still maintain or keep a mind-set far removed from the culture and social structure that produced those wonderful objects of convenience that are the work-products of the West. I find it highly anachronistic for anyone benefiting from the product of the West without taking into account the cultural content under which those products were created and manufactured. The choice is obvious, either one leads a type of life that fits in context a tradition one wants to preserve, which means that one lives with what ones society can produce, or if one has needs and tastes for western products one adopts some of the West’s standards of behavior and government structure and functions. Western products, goods and services are results of Western culture, social structure, and government. In short, one may not live by the moral and legal content of primitive times and expect the Modern World to look the other way when such anachronistic society beheads adulterers or fornicators, publicly flog or cut off the arms of thieves et cetera as part of a criminal adjudication process.

Starting from the time of the Prophet, Ethiopians have provided a place of refuge to Arabs starting with the Prophet's own family members and his early followers when they were being persecuted by fellow Arabs (Quraish). It was only recently, after oil became a major source of wealth, that the Saudis became self-sustaining wealthy people. Before that they were mostly known as Bedouin Arab nomads eking a living herding camel, growing and harvesting date palms, and rudiment of animal husbandry and agriculture. Both Mecca and Medina were permanent settlements, a kind of crossroads where long lines of caravans of traders crisscrossed, but they were also primitive villagers compared to other great Arab cities such as Damascus, Baghdad or Cairo. Settled life in Mecca or Medina before the time of the Prophet was corrupt with all kinds of influences with unbearable degradation of women and slaves. The Prophet has to be acknowledged as the greatest liberator of women in that part of the World by elevating women to a much higher status of respect, and by establishing new ethical standards and belief in one God replacing all different gods and goddesses and superstition. However, his present day followers in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan et cetera seem to have totally arrested the development of the teachings of the Prophet and turned it into a grotesque instrument of oppression and degradation of women no less worse than the type of dehumanization of Women of that period before the Prophet changed it through his Message.

Urban settlement of any size was shunned by the many tribes of Bedouin Arabs who preferred the relatively uncorrupted open desert, which preference seems to have formed the underlining nature of the Bedouin Arabs of that time. This love of the open desert was part of the material out of which the freedom loving unconfined personality of the people was fashioned. There were no great cities or centers of scholarship et cetera, for such great cities and centers one has to look elsewhere in the Arab World such as Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo and others. In the Twentieth Century with the establishment of the new kingdom by a vigorous and almost mythical personality, King Abdul Aziz, the area was transformed from the backdrop of the Arab world to its pinnacle. As a consequence of the sudden transformation of Saudi Arabia from a poor community to a wealthy one, Saudi citizens who had migrated to different parts of the world seeking better opportunities were either invited back or on their own went back to the Kingdom.

I remember when I was a school boy in Dessie, that the owner of one of the largest department stores was a certain Saudi called Abdul Kareem who left Dessie suddenly with very many other Saudi's to Saudi Arabia. At that time, the rumor was that Abdul Kareem was a family relation of Abdul Aziz, the man who established the present kingdom that bore his name. For hundreds of years, tens of thousands of Arabs, Yemeni, and other refugees from the Middle East were given a home in generous Ethiopia, and were treated with respect and accepted as important members of the Ethiopian society. For Example, in my life time. I have never heard of any Arab ever abused. ill treated. or forbidden to

practice his or her religion in Ethiopia. As a matter of fact, some of those Arabs were accepted even as in-laws in familial relations more than just being refugees. Those Arabs led fulfilling lives with places of worship (Mosques), free fellowship with other Moslems, open and friendly social and cultural interactions with the generous people of Ethiopia. Truly, at least for foreigners, Ethiopia is a Holy land.

This essay is not a criticism of Islam per se. I see the problem between Arabs and the rest of the World specially the Christian World as a misunderstanding rather than a “clash of Civilizations” as Huntington insists. I start by asserting that no ideology or theology can be so clearly stated that no interpretation is necessary. Thus to insist that a particular form of interpretation of an ideology or a theology is the only correct form is a tremendous handicap to any civilization. We know from experience and from history that societies did evolve, that ideas grow and develop, that ancient people have been very ignorant on all kinds of things and have burdened as with their superstitions and pathetic views on human relationships et cetera, et cetera. Acknowledging such human fallibility and shortcomings, we must be ready to reexamine accepted “truths” and habits, custom and ideology or theology. Nevertheless, we need to see certain ideas in the context of a particular time frame and social system in order to be fair in our relationships with our contemporaries and to be just in our judgments of others.

Thus, I suggest that the situation in Arabia would have been even worse were it not for the coming of Islam as a religion at that point in time in that part of the World. It absolutely elevated the moral standard and the standard of individual conduct of the Arabs to a great height compared to the muck they were living under before Islam. This article is not a criticism of Arabs for being Arabs either; it is an article rather to get beyond the polarizing posturing of dictatorial Arab leaders and their exploitation of poor nations around the area, and then address several important avenues of mutually beneficial economic, social, and cultural relationships between Ethiopians and Arabs of several nations in the area. After all, no one can look down at the great achievements of the Arabs in architecture, medicine, philosophy, and literature. To me who greatly admire the philosophical works of great Moslem philosophers such as Abu Ali ibn-Sina (Avicenna) AD 980-1037, Abul Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Rushd (Averroes) AD 1126-1198, Sader al-Din als Shirazi AD 1571-1640, and who adore the sublime poetry of Jalal-e-Din Mohammad (Rumi) AD 1207-1273 and Omar Kahyyam, it is a singular tragedy that a peasant revolt of Wahhabism against intellectual refinement could takeover Saud Arabia to the detriment of all that is meaningful and humane and replace it with an extremely oppressive out of touch orthodoxy.

No medicine to an illness can be prescribed before properly identifying what the ailment is. Thus, let us start by asking first: What did we Ethiopians get in return for our centuries long generosity to Arabs and specially those from Saudi Arabia? What we got was an uniuist and shameful concentrated effort to destroy

our ancient country even contrary to the admonishment of the Prophet himself not to molest or attack Ethiopia. For our kind outstretched hands, we were paid back with the abuse and torture of our citizens working in Saudi Arabia. For our fellowship in the God we all believe in and celebrating the building of Mosques for our Moslem fellow Ethiopians at times right next to our Orthodox Churches, what we got in Saudi Arabia is an absolute ban of any religious building let alone Churches even worship in private homes of Ethiopian Christians was met with brutal attack. *Minew bagorese ijune tenkese*. Who financed the Eritrean liberation movements? Who seduced with money some of the Moslem Ethiopian Officers to abandon their posts in Asmara? Such questions must be asked by all Ethiopians and we need to revisit our relations with Saudi Arabia.

The Wahhabist project to destroy one of the greatest and most tolerant Churches in the World, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in the last twenty years has evolved into an abashed open attack to date. The aggressive mushrooming of buildings of Mosques as propaganda pieces in provocative proximity to Christian areas and Churches, the conversion of Christians by bribing them with petro-dollar, the corruption of young Ethiopian girls et cetera have become the new fact of life in Ethiopia. To add insult to injury, the Saudi Government's brutal abuse of Christian Ethiopians working in Saudi Arabia is not just limited to physical abuse but also involves the denial of the universal right of worship that is in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and numerous other resolutions and conventions. Because the Saudi Government has set its perverse standard of conduct towards foreigners from developing countries as opposed to Europeans and Americans residing in Saudi Arabia so low, private Arab citizens have adopted this lowered standard of behavior and are engaged in the abuse and torture of their employees no less disgusting than the abuse and torture of Abu Ghraib Prisoners. There is not a single Christian Church in the whole of Saudi Arabia. Whereas the Saudi government using so called individual-investors and Embassy personnel have mounted insidious program disguising their evil design in the name of investment to undermine the core Ethiopian civilization by spreading Wahhabist ideology of oppression. The threat to Ethiopia is not just limited to Orthodox Christians but against the Moslem population of Ethiopia as well.

There are certain facts people must understand about Ethiopians and must stop their ill conceived destructive schemes or design on Ethiopia. As Ethiopians we have a remarkable distinct culture of religious tolerance and a long history of giving refuge to people who seek our protection and generosity. Compared to other cultures in our part of the world, we are a culture where women always had great roles both as productive members of society working on farms, or as traders, healers, midwives, mothers et cetera. Respect to our women folks is not something new, but part of our ancient culture. We neither curtail the movement of women nor hide them under veil. We do not micro-manage the lives of our fellow members of our communities. We maintain many of the democratic rights that are ingrained for the last sixty years in the Universal Declaration of

human Rights.

When I criticized human rights abuse of Ethiopian women and children in several of my previous essays, I did that in comparison to an “ideal” condition and not in contrast to the cultures of countries in the region. Ethiopian women through out history have enjoyed great autonomy and positions of influence within the family or in public compared to their counterparts in the region or elsewhere in the World including the West. Thus, Hell will freeze first before Ethiopians will allow Wahhabist ideology corrupt our culture of tolerance and respect of individuals from whatever religion, social status, and gender. Ethiopians will not abandon the human rights that we have fought for and retained for so long. There is no way that we are going to go to the type of oppression that we see in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries in the area. Any social structure that denies basic rights specially oppresses women and children as if they are slaves is alien to Ethiopian ethical standards and history.

Saudi Arabia’s troubling foreign relations has hurt the political and economic development of the Palestinians and those of the Arab people, not to mention the billions of people who had to suffer because of the exploitative pricing of oil and oil products, a natural resource, which rightfully belongs to all people of Earth as much as it belongs to the Saudis. The Saudis have put at the disposal of the West all the profit gleamed from all the peoples of the World further strengthening the economic and military power of the Western nations against all the rest of us. How could anyone be expected to appreciate such behavior? To provide you with a clear example how the Saudi government and the Saudi people are living in some fantasy world, consider the millions of their neighboring people in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, et cetera dying in appalling conditions due to famine and disease since the 1970s while the Saudis are amassing the wealth of the world for their own private disposition. In the 1970s, 1980s, and the ongoing famines in Ethiopia, neither the Saudi government nor its citizens showed any worth while humanitarian assistance to such suffering people. [There was some gesture of kindness but appallingly meager help of that one ought to be ashamed of to think of as some form of assistance to a devastated people and nations.] On the other hand, the Saudis and their leaders spent during that same period when millions died due to famine, trillions of dollars on weapons and frivolous projects of building palaces and resource hotels etcetera. What is the value of projecting an image of Godliness when all your activities show extreme selfishness, greed, and avarice?

The fact that Saudi Arabia has fully cooperated with the West in the destruction of the Taliban Government in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein’s Government of Iraq without first securing some needed conditions that should have contained the brutal policy of Sharon’s Government against Palestinians is a clear example of such failure. In fact, if the Saudi Government had been truly supportive of peace in the Middle East, it could have achieved that goal fifty years ago. The main failure of the Saudi Government was its unrealistic support and instigation

of Palestinian leaders and other Arab governments to obliterate Israel rather than using Saudi's considerable oil wealth and influence on Western nations to bring some judicious settlement between the two contending parties. Looking both at the historical records and considering the concept of self-determination, which allowed Arabs to establish nation states after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire where all Arabs were contained as part of a single Empire and none had been there as independent states for centuries, Arab nations should have recognized the right of Jewish people to form Israel as their sovereign nation-state, and boundary lines could have been delaminated and demarcated peacefully.

Knowingly or unknowingly Saudi Arabia's foreign relations with the United States and Britain has sabotaged Arab solidarity from challenging George Bush's disastrous war against Iraq that has been shown to have been the work of ideologues, rather than the work of seasoned diplomats. The containment of terrorism or elimination of weapons of mass destruction was used as a public intimidation tool. It is sickening to watch in the media the representatives and spokesman for the Saudi Government groveling all over begging and cajoling the West for fear of losing a lopsided "friendship."

SECTION II

III. Working in an Enlightened Relation

Being aware of the hostilities and unrelenting efforts of countries such as Egypt, the Sudan, and their supporters in the Arab League against Ethiopia is not being a warmonger or a political Neanderthal. It is rather the correct state of mind for a member of a nation surrounded by such hostile forces. Ethiopian past leaders have made many crucial strategic mistakes. It is amazing that we have stayed a free country this long. The first and most devastating strategic mistake of our leaders was (and still is) the lack of recognition of the crucial importance of the material and moral development and enrichment of Ethiopian subjects/citizens as the best defense against hostility and a source of national strength and unity. The second most vital mistake is in not strengthening the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church.

It is a fact that tens of millions of Ethiopian Christian families have sent their children to defend with their blood the nation from both foreign aggression and internal destabilizing forces for centuries. The Ethiopians who died defending the nation, keeping the freedom of all Ethiopians were overwhelmingly Christian Ethiopians. Even though such monumental sacrifice maintained the welfare of all Ethiopians, it did so at great cost of loss of life and economic disadvantage of Christian Ethiopians. Christian Ethiopians were the majority of the population for centuries; however, through generations of hardship, and being killed or wounded in prodigious numbers in numerous battle fields, their number has been denuded to below fifty percent of the current Ethiopian

population. For example, the vicious Red Terror of Mengistu Hailemariam disproportionately (over 90%) claimed the lives of Christian Ethiopians (including the lives of the Second Patriarch of the Ethiopian Church and that of an Abun) more than any other religious group. The recent war with “Eritrean” government claimed the lives of more Ethiopian Christian soldiers (some claim over 80%) than any other religious groups.

It is with these facts in mind that we are facing the current seemingly “peaceful” but in fact deceitful project of the Wahhabist campaign from Saudi Arabia against Ethiopia. This insurrection is headed by Saudi Arabia security leaders and Wahhabist agents functioning as “investors” and “friends” of Ethiopia within Ethiopia. The issue of the survival of Ethiopia has become more and more alarming as we witness recent developments. The fact that our earlier mistakes in not seizing up the danger properly and acting accordingly is now coming to haunt us with real painful bite. I have read numerous articles by very many Ethiopians who seem to think that all our current problems were started by the TPLF and EPLF alliance and Meles Zenawi’s lone action or inaction. Such stand is a very limited view of history and shows great lack of understanding of history as a dynamic evolving process. Especially hurtful to our process of learning from our mistakes is such silly denial of the facts of the mistaken activities of our leaders (past or present) international relations of signing agreements and taking money thereby alienating Ethiopian territories and encumbering Ethiopia with limitations and inequitable obligations on its rivers and lakes et cetera. We must not confuse the fact that both TPLF and EPLF and their leadership are symptoms of poor political policies of the Governments of Haile Selassie and later that of Mengistu, rather than the original causes of our current problems. This is not to minimize the treasonous activities of those leaders, especially that of Meles Zenawi.

As we can discern from the history of our leaders, successive Ethiopian governments were more interested in window dressing and appeasement rather than addressing firmly and decisively the problem of civil disobedience and national security at its infancy. The Ethiopian leaders in our recent history tried to play it safe, on one hand appeasing sworn enemies such as the Arab states such as Egypt, the Sudan, and Saudi Arabia, and on the other hand oppressing and brutalizing Ethiopians. Both approaches were not helpful to strengthen a nation surrounded by hostile nations. The correct response should have been to declare a state of emergency and declare a state of hostility if not war on both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The fear of the Ethiopian leaders for not going to the jugular seems to have been that those Arab States might stir up Ethiopian Moslems against the established order. That was the greatest fallacy a number Ethiopians have bought into during the long reign of Haile Selassie. And to this day, the same mistaken fear of the growing number of Ethiopian Moslems still persists. Nothing is further from the truth, Ethiopian Moslems are as patriotic as the rest of their fellow citizens, and they should not have been prejudged as lacking in patriotic zeal. Yes. the Arabs would have tried to escalate their

hostility in some part of the nation more openly, which they have been at for years in a clandestine manner. Thus, the net magnitude of risk confronting us would not have increased by much; however, on the other hand, it would have given Ethiopia the advantage of mobilizing its population toward a single goal.

I understand history to be more of a succession of events, not linear, but complex and tumultuous with whirlwinds of events in the middle of its wide ranging current; nevertheless, directional. I am inclined to believe that it is essentially anti-entropic. This generalized perspective is not offered as a deterministic view of life or the universe. It is not meant as an excuse to the great harm committed against the people of Ethiopia and the State of Ethiopia by the leaderships of the TPLF, EPLF, and by several other “liberation” movements. I could add to the list a number of Ethiopian student movements that helped add fuel to enlarge the flame of dissent that resulted in the type of destabilization that brought about the dictatorship of an army minor officer to power, which was the last straw that destroyed traditional Ethiopian power structure and ushered into power the leaders of both the TPLF and EPLF. The independence of “Eritrea” remains an ill conceived and harmful situation to people in both “Eritrea” and Ethiopia.

If one builds a nation on appeasement and hiding the truth, or glossing over important facts, sooner than latter such a nation will be faced with irreconcilable contradictions. It will fail in establishing a system of governance that is responsive to the needs of its citizens and the security of the nation. I believe that it is an act of tremendous love for the people of Ethiopia for one to admit mistakes of past leadership, as well as in ones own life, in order to build a meaningful social and political structure to bring about a great future for all Ethiopians. The way we tried to remedy past mistakes without acknowledging the weak civic situation and adopting ill conceived, and at times quiet juvenile ideas, such as the premature introduction of Marxism-Leninism political theories of self-determination, and pseudo democratic federalism on the basis of ethnic identity et cetera in a traditional society before building some core centers of well disciplined focused political groups and before raising the standard of life and education of Ethiopians was an error. I realize I am using wide brush strokes to illustrate my understanding of history and that of political change in Ethiopia and the surrounding region, but that is to be expected in an essay of this size where restating background history and political evolution in detail is impractical. In other words, there is no short cut to political or economic development; sooner than later, what we glossed over will rear its ugly head at a time least expected and will swallow up our dreams in the accumulated nightmare we thought we have outrun.

One is respected from a position of positive projection of power and resolve in building an economically and politically strong nation; it is not necessary that a nation has to be wealthy to be treated with a degree of respect. If one is a doormat. one will be treated as a doormat--stepped on! A weak position invites

attack by everybody. And our leaders have not helped us build our self-respect. With their split-personalities one of timidity on one hand, and an insanely violent practice of plunging their swords into the body of their own country men on the other, our leaders have miserably failed in commanding respect in the world. This is a task that ought to be done before anything else. It can be done with minimal change of perspective in our leaders' attitude toward fellow citizens.

My emphasis on economic cooperation with neighboring countries such as Egypt and the Sudan, countries that have had long historical connection with Ethiopia, is not some new revelation. There are numerous essays by international financial organizations such as the World Bank and scholars from several universities on the subject. I believe this is an opportune time for change of paradigm; the old modality of considering Ethiopia as an enemy to be destroyed and its religion to be changed will never result in security and prosperity either to Egypt or the Sudan. Thus it is absolutely necessary to start such much needed cooperation in earnest due to the impending disaster unless something drastic and revolutionary is done without further delay. The scale of human tragedy is going to be something beyond anyone's wildest imagination. Hundreds of millions of people in Egypt, the Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia are going to be victims of famine, epidemics, civil wars, or cross boarder conflicts.

IV. The Blue Nile Basin: A Great Ethiopian Natural Asset

I am at a loss where to begin in emphasizing the great importance of the Blue Nile River not only for Ethiopians but also for hundreds of millions of people in that part of the world. As far as the interest of Ethiopia is concerned, the subject of the Blue Nile Basin has been thoroughly analyzed, dissected, synthesized and clarified by highly qualified Ethiopians, such as Yosef Kiros [J.D., Ph.D], Daniel Kendie [M.Sc., Ph.D] and others. There are several excellent studies and general treatments on related subjects on dams, hydroelectric power, irrigation et cetera for all of us to read and learn about our great assets, such as the Blue Nile River, Lake Tana, and the several major tributaries and minor streams that drain into the Blue Nile. The Blue Nile basin is one of Ethiopia's nine international river basin systems that make up all the river systems and lakes of Ethiopia. All of these rivers are spring feed and rain water drainage of the Ethiopian highlands and plateaus. Over 85-90% of the water of the Nile that finally drains in to the Mediterranean Sea is from this Ethiopian Blue Nile River and other Ethiopian river basins. I had referred a number of times to the great scholarly works of Daniel Kendie in essays I wrote a couple of years ago in connection with the border dispute between Ethiopia and "Eritrea."

The important point Yosef is making in his captivating article, posted in this Website and others, is that it is not to Ethiopia's advantage to engage Egypt and the Sudan and the larger Arab population with attack words because the reality on the ground is such that Egypt and the Sudan are

utilizing effectively the waters of the Nile while we Ethiopians are engaged only in rhetoric hurling words at them. Furthermore, according to Yosef, we will be better off using a more accommodating attitude and negotiate to work with Egypt and the Sudan rather than antagonize them. Only then, Yosef suggests that we will be able to advance our cause some. The argument is profound and should be considered carefully. The problem is not with the fact as reduced to its bones by Yosef, but it is with Egypt and the Sudan. Every negotiation that is to be made with such an understanding is necessarily from a weakened position. It will result in crystallizing hitherto challenged position of Egypt and the Sudan. It is this fear of creeping loss of all the rights of a source country i.e., rights in our own rivers and lakes that made me take extreme position to reject all riparian rights in favor of source countries. We are between a rock and a hard place.

Daniel Kindie is also in favor of negotiation, but at the same time he seems in favor of taking a position of some strength with the idea that Ethiopia has the superior right in the conflict than either Egypt or the Sudan. This, of course, is an oversimplification of a rather complex and well written essay. The importance of the essay is in its detail background history of the conflict of interest between Source Countries and riparian Countries mainly Egypt and the Sudan and the role played by colonial European Countries. The narration on the hydrology of the Blue Nile Basin is another important contribution of Daniel Kindie in addition to several important citations of studies and articles on the Nile and Blue Nile Basin.

There are very important suggestions that Arabs in general and Egyptians in particular should take seriously. To begin with we must acknowledge the fact that there could not be any peace in the region if Ethiopia is marginalized. The sheer size of its population that will reach one hundred million as Egypt's population by year 2025, in a mere twenty years, will cause tremendous social upheaval unless proper steps are taken right away. How can Ethiopia feed one hundred million people with its present economic condition? The same problem of overpopulation within Egypt and the Sudan will result in similar social upheavals. Already source countries and others such as Tanzania included have expressed views to reevaluate and re negotiate the use of the Nile water. Several well noted political leaders have expressed their concern that war and conflict on water distribution may be inevitable under present condition. But it need not be like that.

Ethiopia is truly the "water tower" of Africa. Several dams could be built on several of Ethiopia's river basins saving and accumulating water that could meet the growing demand for fresh water in the region. It is an established fact that the Aswan High Dam has several problems. It has 12-14% annual loss of water due to evaporation. Such high evaporation rate compared to Ethiopia's less than 3% evaporation rate is a good indicator of the disadvantage of building of any dams in either Egypt or the Sudan. Evaporation in the lowlands of such desert

environment with tremendous temperature extremes between day and night is a real insurmountable problem; evaporation represent tremendous annual lose of several million cubic feet of water. Another problem of the Aswan Dam is salination and loss of scares farmland that was covered by the necessity of building shallow dams taking out of use tens of thousands of acres of rich farmland. Construction of dams in Egypt or the Sudan is a real waste of money. Both Egypt and the Sudan will not be able to satisfy their water needs even if one hundred percent of the Blue Nile water is to flow without any obstruction or challenging by equally legitimate contending interests by source nations.

Simply put, the hard fact is that without huge reservoir of water there will not be enough water for the growing population in Egypt, the Sudan, and to a limited extent Ethiopia. The sooner Egypt and the Sudan and the Arab League realize the impending doom, the better for everybody. The right place to build dams is in Ethiopia with its deep gorges and very low percentage of evaporation. For example Lake Tana's capacity could be easily increased by several million cubic feet of water by building a modest size dam where the lake empties and become the Blue Nile River. At least four or five large dams on the scale of the Hoover Dam could be built on the Blue Nile and thereby insure for centuries adequate water and power supply to the Sudan and Egypt. In fact a more comprehensive plan would include dismantling of the Aswan Dam, deepening the water course of the Nile River itself, thereby lessening the exposure of water surface to the elements, and building a system of side holding-reservoirs for distribution to irrigation systems.

Multiple dams on the Blue Nile will free up other tributaries to the Blue Nile for small scale dams as well, for purposes of regulating Annual over flooding that takes place during the rainy seasons in highland Ethiopia. For the Eastern and Southern Regions of Ethiopia Somalia and Kenya, several smaller dams could be built to provide irrigation for large scale farming and cattle breeding, and for electric power. Hydro electric power is the cleanest and cheapest power source. This is where Arab petro-dollar could be used for such long term life-saving projects. The Arabs rather than waste time and effort on promoting conflict within Ethiopia ought to reexamine their long-term needs and realize that their best hope for their continued existence is through good relationship with Ethiopia and not with anybody else. The West will simply exploit and suck them dry of their wealth. For example rather importing tasteless mutton (sheep) from Australia worth hundreds of millions of dollars, they could have invested in Ethiopia for the incomparably tastier Ethiopian breeds of sheep, which are at this point too expensive and reserved only to the very richest members of Arab society in a number of Arab nations. The Ethiopian breeds of sheep have variety unlike any Western and Australian source sheep, and are much preferred by Arabs. Ethiopian cattle/beef is another preferred product that could be developed extensively and could meet the needs of the Arab nations and that of other African nations. There is similar marked preference for Ethiopian cereal if it is farmed and packaged for such market. Ethionia can be turned into the

cornucopia of plenty (Bread-basket) for the whole of Africa and the Middle East

Thus, having deep reservoirs of water is no less than God sent solution to the impending doom in the region, specifically the doom facing millions of people in Egypt and the Sudan, which is going to happen unless drastic projects are undertaken without delay as identified herein. This is a time for cooperation and not a time for conflict or settling old grudges. Rather than being bogged down in the historic hostility by Egypt, the Sudan, and the Arab States against Ethiopia, it time for reconciliation and wisdom. Ethiopia has the key for the salvation of the region. It is “fresh water” that is becoming most important and scares resource in the region and not cheap rhetoric.

Ethiopia has vast under developed potential farmland, grazing range, vast areas that can be reforested, rivers that can be harnessed and stocked with fish, lakes that could be turned into resort areas as well as fish breeding centers. Ethiopia has the greatest potential for being the bread basket, cattle and sheep breeding area than any of the countries of East Africa. The Arabs could invest in Ethiopia for their own national security in terms of supplies for their growing population. In order to carry out all these marvelous projects, they must abandon first their ambition to convert Ethiopia into an Islamic State and accept the fact that such outcome is impossible to achieve, and it will only lead to the destruction of the whole region and not just that of Ethiopia. Arab countries for the sake of their own survival must invest their oil wealth in such long-term projects in Ethiopia.

The trillion of dollars of Arab nations, invested or kept for safe-keeping in Western countries such as the United States, Britain, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Canada is money being used to keep the engine of advance technology and industry, schools and research institutions, which is keeping the West to develop further and arm itself with nuclear weapons while keeping the rest of the world at bay and at its mercy. Arab petro-dollar is keeping the West continue to dominate the world. Is this the type of legacy that Arabs want to be remembered for? One thing for sure, the Arab people will never see a penny of all the trillion of dollars invested or in safe-keeping out in the West. When all these dictatorial Arab governments are replaced either by other dictatorial governments or by democratic ones to a limited extent, in that process of change all that fund is going to disappear in private inheritances and in some dubious schemes of corporate restructuring out in Western nations. One must think of such funds as lost property of the Arab People, and start all over again and learn to avoid similar mistakes committed by the leaders of the Arab World since after the Second World War to date.

How does opening opportunities in Ethiopia for Ethiopians improve the lives of Egyptians, Sudanese, or Arabs in general? Why should Arabs invest billions of dollars in projects that are wholly built or developed within Ethiopia? We can entertain several other relevant similar questions. We must be able to establish with reason and with evidence of overwhelming advantages for Egypt. the

Sudan, and the Arabs in general from such projects suggested above. The first important act of real friendship must come from Egypt, the Sudan, and the other Arab League Members by changing their historic hostility toward Ethiopia. They need to perceive Ethiopia as a nation that would be a life-saver crucible for all of them. Ethiopians can be trusted with such sacred responsibility to be the guardians of the “Water-Tower” of Africa to benefit hundreds of millions of people in the region. After all we own the source headwaters, and our past record of generosity, honesty, respect of international norms, and our singular fear of God of thousands of years of tradition is our bond.

Tecola W. Hagos

July 2004

Coming Up Soon!

Distributive Justice: How to Divide a Small Bread Among so Many

By Tecola W. Hagos

Bill Soderberg in his virile little book, *The Game of Philosophy*, discussed the significance of playing with the “cards down” meaning without looking at the value of each card one is dealing out--a process by which rights and privileges are distributed without knowing who is receiving those rights and privileges. This is also a further development of the idea offered by Sarvepelli Radhakrishnan in his effort to ease the real life consequences of living under a caste system, and in our case, living under a brutal dictatorship and extreme poverty.