

The Role of Intellectuals in Ethiopia's Modernization Process: A Case Study of Ethiopian Philosopher Gebrehiwot Baykedagn

Etiyopya'nın Modernleşme sürecinde Entelektüellerin Rolü: Gebrehiwot Baykedagn'ın Durum Çalışması

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Abstract: Modernity is associated with human freedom, social change, and a sense of conscience. Modernity is a catalyst for freedom. It is also based on the idea that people can use reason to free themselves from culture and gain a better understanding of themselves and their surroundings. Although modernity is considered inseparable from Western civilization, the concept of modernity is reflected in different parts of the world. Throughout human history, the idea of modernity has been passed down from generation to generation. Thus, each community strives to demonstrate its increasing modernity and commitment to change. The manifestations of modern ideas in Ethiopian history naturally vary. As a result, we find diverse ideas in art, philosophy, social critique, and modern education. This study answers the question of the role of intellectuals in the modernization process of Ethiopian history, politics, economy, culture, and ideology. Ethiopian intellectual Gebrehiwot Baykedagn sought to

develop a path of progress that combined native art with Western civilization. Gebrehiwot struggled to see his country modernize while maintaining its cultural and political independence.

Keywords: Ethiopia, intellectual, modernity, civilization, politics

Öz: Modernite, insan özgürlüğü, sosyal değişim ve vicdan duygusu ile ilişkilidir. Modernite özgürlük için bir nedendir. Ayrıca, insanların kendilerini kültürden kurtarmak ve kendilerini ve çevreyi daha iyi anlamak için akıl kullanabilecekleri fikrine dayanmaktadır. Modernitenin Batı uygarlığından ayrılmaz olduğu düşünülse de, modernite fikri dünyanın farklı bölgelerine yansır. İnsanlık tarihi boyunca, modernite fikri nesilden nesile aktarılmıştır. Bu nedenle, her topluluğun daha modern ve değişime daha kararlı olduğunu göstermeye çalışır. Etiyopya tarihindeki modern fikirlerin tezahürleri doğal olarak farklıdır. Böylece sanat, felsefe, sosyal eleştiri ve modern eğitimde farklı fikirler buluruz. Bu çalışmada, Etiyopya tarihi, siyaseti, ekonomi, kültürü ve ideolojisi modernleşme sürecinde entelektüellerin rolünü neye benzediği sorusunu için cevap verir. Etiyopyalı entelektüel Gebrehiwot Baykedagn, yerli sanatı ve Batı medeniyetini birleştiren bir gelişme yolu geliştirmeye çalışmıştı. Gebrehiwot, kültürel ve politik bağımsızlığını korurken ülkesinin modernleşmesini görmek için mücadele etmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etiyopya, entelektuel, modernite, uygarlık, siyaset.

Introduction

There is currently an effort to understand the relationship between the role of intellectuals and modern civilization. What interactions exist between intellectuals, modernity, and the culture of society? In Ethiopia, the idea of modernity is often associated with the central government and following the civilization of the Western world. According to Gebre Hiwot, the government has the task of shaping a path of development that combines Western civilization and indigenous culture (Adeleke, 1998, p. 9). This is related to personal freedom, religious equality, and self-learning. In this essay, the researcher will attempt to explore Gebrehiwot's modern ideas. Gebrehiwot was far from the concept of a civilizing mission that characterizes even contemporary African and African-American intellectuals.

Gebrehiwot's call for change targeted certain aspects of Ethiopian society and proposed pragmatic solutions to social and economic issues, without ever falling into thoughts of Ethiopia's superiority or inferiority (Bahru, 1993, pp. 271–295). He assumed that development for Ethiopia could be achieved not through revision, but by adopting an incremental process that aimed to free the country from the constraints of unchanged traditions that had transformed into traditions. The study will begin by exploring the role of intellectuals in modernity. Then, it will observe the nature and meaning of modernity in Ethiopia. Next, it will examine Gebrehiwot's ideas in his books "Atse Menelik and Ethiopia" and "Government and Public Administration" from the perspective of modernity.

Objective, Method, and Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this article is to explore the modernity ideas and role of the renowned Ethiopian political economist and intellectual Gebrehiwot Baykedagn. Gebrehiwot Baykedagn developed his vision of accelerating the growth and modernity of Ethiopia by writing two books, "Atse Menelik and Ethiopia" and "Government and Public Administration." In these works, he aimed to draw a line of development or civilization that combines Ethiopian culture and Western modernity. He sought to demonstrate that modernity should be compatible with Ethiopian culture and tradition. The study is structured using a descriptive research method. Descriptive research aims to collect detailed information about an event, phenomenon, or topic of interest and describe the subject. It seeks to provide detailed descriptions and explanations of events, objects, entities, institutions, groups, and various fields (Punch, 1998). This is a qualitative research study aiming to describe and understand the research subject in detail. This type of research encompasses case studies, biographies, and ethnographic studies. Following a descriptive research approach, the research article aims to examine the works written by Gebrehiwot Baykedagn in connection with the concept of modernity. Based on this, the study argues that Gebrehiwot Baykedagn made or played a fundamental contribution to the development of indigenous governance culture and contemporary ideas as well as local modernization in Ethiopia. This study was conducted using a literature review and analysis of Gebrehiwot's two books. Due to the difficulty in accessing articles published in newspapers at that time (the early 1900s), the researcher did not include Gebrehiwot's newspaper articles.

The Importance of the Study

In the 19th and 20th centuries, contemporary Ethiopian politicians and historians often explained the challenges and backwardness faced by the country as stemming from the feudal systems and traditional leadership structures of the time. While there is some truth to this perspective, the significant contributions of Ethiopian intellectuals who served under Tewodros, Yohannes, Menelik, and Haile Selassie, and who sought to modernize the country and address its issues through meaningful political and social changes, have often been overlooked. The struggles and contributions of these intellectuals have frequently been ignored or forgotten, as the lives of the Ethiopian royal family have been glorified. These important individuals' efforts in shaping modern Ethiopia have either been overly romanticized or completely disregarded. By focusing on the successes of kings and queens, the critical role these intellectuals played in Ethiopia's progress is often neglected.

This study aims to fill the existing gap by emphasizing the critical role played by Ethiopian intellectuals in the country's transition to modernity. By shedding

light on their contributions and struggles, the study seeks to present a more balanced view of Ethiopia's historical trajectory. In doing so, the study acknowledges the often underappreciated efforts of these intellectuals and provides a more nuanced understanding of Ethiopia's past and its path toward a more modern future.

Who Was Gebre Hiwot Baykedagn?

Gebrehiwot Baykedagn was born on July 30, 1886, in Massawa Mesham near Adwa, northern Ethiopia. During the Great Ethiopian Famine (1888-1892), he moved to Eritrea and grew up in a Swedish mission there. Gebrehiwot lost his father at the age of seven in the Battle of Metema. As a child, he attended a Swedish mission school in Massawa, and one day, he and his friends were given permission to tour a German ship in the Massawa port. After the tour, the ship left Massawa, but Gebrehiwot did not disembark. The captain realized Gebrehiwot had not disembarked only after the ship had already set sail. Upon the ship's arrival in Austria, Gebrehiwot was placed with a wealthy family who adopted him. The family sent him to study medicine in Berlin, and he completed his education at the University of Berlin (Teshale, 1995, pp. 4-6).

Gebrehiwot also lived in Germany and Austria for several years until the German government hired him as a translator for a diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa. As Ethiopian historian Bahru Zewde stated, Gebrehiwot was one of the few Ethiopian intellectuals of the first generation who had been educated abroad due to fortunate circumstances (Bahru, 2016). He quickly became a prominent figure in the court of Emperor Menelik II and made good use of his language skills. During the turbulent years leading to Menelik's death in 1913, Gebrehiwot was exiled to Sudan for writing in a newspaper criticizing the new government and Lejyasu (1913-1916).

Gebrehiwot was critical of the state for concealing the cause of Menelik's death. He also criticized the atrocities and oppressions of the new government (Claude, 1998, p. 29). He returned to Ethiopia from Sudan in 1916. After the 1916 coup in Ethiopia, Gebrehiwot was initially appointed as the controller of the railway and continued writing for the newspaper. Gebrehiwot authored two books in Amharic, both published by his friend Paulos Menameno. The first was "Atse Menelik and Ethiopia" published in 1912, and the second was "Government and Public Administration" published in 1921 (Teshale, 1995). Gebrehiwot died on July 1, 1919, at the age of 33.

Role of Intellectuals in Modernity

In traditional societies, an individual's position and status are largely determined by their tribe, ethnic group, religion, and family (Ali, 1985, p. 106). Individuals often find themselves confined within these boundaries, leading to limited

social mobility and opportunities for personal growth. Communication within such societies tends to be intense, with frequent face-to-face interactions and strong community ties. Religion plays a central role, acting as a guiding and all-encompassing value system that shapes people's perspectives and practices (Sulhi, 1999). In these societies, the economy is primarily agrarian, and educational opportunities are often restricted to a select few, typically from privileged backgrounds.

In contrast, modern societies prioritize the individual over traditional group affiliations, offering greater personal freedom and social mobility. Knowledge and views about the world are more diverse and accessible in modern societies, leading to greater opportunities for personal and professional development (Seyfettin, 2001, p. 94). Innovation and openness to new ideas are encouraged, fostering a culture of progress and change. Additionally, modern societies typically embrace a market-based economy, providing opportunities for economic diversification and growth. These factors contribute to a higher standard of living and a more dynamic and adaptable society.

The role of intellectuals in modernity is crucial in bridging the gap between traditional and modern societies. Intellectuals often advocate for education and knowledge dissemination as a means of empowering individuals and promoting social change (Ali, 1985). They can facilitate the transfer of modern ideas and values, while also preserving and respecting traditional customs and beliefs. By fostering dialogue and understanding between different cultural and societal groups, intellectuals help create a more inclusive and equitable society that values both tradition and progress. This delicate balance can pave the way for a more harmonious integration of modernity into traditional societies (Sulhi, 1999; Seyfettin, 2001).

The concept of modern society encompasses a specific type of human being, a particular understanding of the relationships between humans and nature, as well as between humans themselves. It involves a political structure built upon a specific economic relations system and ultimately, a social and economic foundation formed by their totality (Levent, 2004). Upon examining the structure of modern society, it is found that it is based on organization, which necessitates specialization in place of kinship relationships, and it relies on economic, political, religious, and educational integrations. Modern society is characterized by anonymity, mobility, and specialization in roles and statuses, with increased division of labor, a decrease in the power of traditions, and an individualistic approach to family structure and relationships (Sulhi, 1999). Generally, the dissolution of traditional social structures and the emergence of modernism in opposition to it span various areas. The role of the intellectual in the formation and ongoing process of modernism is indispensable.

The role of intellectuals is crucial for the growth of modernity. Over the last two centuries, the influence of intellectuals has steadily increased. Indeed, the rise of secular intellectuals has been a significant factor in shaping the modern world. Looking at history from a long-term perspective, it is a relatively new phenomenon in many ways (Johnson, 1988). In their earlier incarnations as priests, scribes, and prophets, intellectuals claimed to guide society from the beginning.

Edward Said describes intellectuals as passionate narrators of reality and truth, employing their imagination. A more realistic assessment is that the intellectual role involves both criticism and intellectual labor (Edward, 1978). Another role of intellectuals is to critique. Being an intellectual who has written and published means engaging in the political arena. It is here that the intellectual's position relative to power becomes apparent. The intellectual is the one who continuously questions the actions of those in power and brings critique (Gramsci, 1997, p. 12). Questioning and conflicting with power have been part of the intellectual's existence in every era. Both in ancient and medieval times, intellectuals' commitment to the accuracy of understanding based on reason against dogma-driven beliefs often put them at odds with authority. Similarly, 18th-century intellectuals clashed with power with their views on spreading reason to all areas of social life in the light of reason (Ilgaz, 2002, p. 115).

The intellectual, in Said's words, is "marginal, dissident, in exile, oppositional, displaced, homeless." They can shake the very foundations of power. They adopt a critical perspective toward all elements that can exert power and pressure, such as power, authority, tradition, capital, the bourgeoisie, the public, the state, and the status quo. This is because these elements of power may obscure the truth due to their position in the "status quo." Edward Said's depiction of the intellectual as a brave and isolated individual who must "speak truth to power" functions as an almost obligatory context in contemporary discussions about intellectuals and intellectual labor (Edward, 1993). This means that Edward envisions the intellectual as the "voice of the voiceless." This significance of intellectuals is reflected in references to grand concepts like 'modernity' and 'civilization.'

In other words, Steve Fuller argues that the intellectual can still make valuable contributions to the ongoing reformation of traditional knowledge and the future directions of modern civilization. Therefore, for Steve, the true intellectual, who functions as the "superhero of reason," is responsible for ideals beyond the reach of ordinary people and can best demonstrate their credibility by showing intellectual autonomy (Steve, 2002). From these statements, we can conclude that intellectuals, particularly in parts of the world where unjust and abnormal behavior is the norm, act as agents of change. In their own ways, intellectuals around the world contribute effectively to the meaningful development of society and the political, social, and economic aspects of modernity. Therefore, in this study, the researcher aimed to explore how the famous intellectual Gebrehi-

wot Baykedagn's ideas for improving economic, political, and social life relate to these ideas of modernism and the role of the intellectual.

Modernity in Ethiopia

Modernity refers to a system of social values and organization that emerged in Europe around the 17th century and eventually spread worldwide. In general terms, it represents a transformation or change in individual, social, and political aspects of life, involving a break from tradition (Giddens, 2002, p. 1). Modernity has deeply and broadly reshaped and transformed every aspect of social and individual life. It centers reason and humanity, rationalizes social life, relegates religion to the background in social life, and adopts secularism as a principle.

It is important to consider how modernity developed in Ethiopia. The concept of modernity in Ethiopia is closely linked to the spread of Western education, the critique of native culture, and the tension between royalism and Western ideology (Paulos, 2008). This process includes various conflicts and adaptations as Ethiopia navigates the influences of Western thought and practices while grappling with its own traditions and cultural heritage. As modernization spread in Ethiopia, religious institutions, which were centers of knowledge, began to be replaced by modern schools. Modern civilization entails modern economic and political institutions, modern education, and modern thought (Paulos, 2008). Additionally, (Bahru, 2016) concludes that Emperor Tewodros's state-building and central governance efforts demonstrated how the modern goals of modernism conflicted with the religious traditions in Ethiopia.

Emperor Tewodros implemented policies to reduce the number of priests and deacons working in the church. However, Tewodros did not oppose the church's wisdom or doctrine; rather, he was challenging the church's extensive reach or involvement in establishing a centralized government. Paulos (2008) argues that this marked the beginning of modernity in Ethiopia. Emperor Tewodros's efforts were foundational in introducing changes that aimed to modernize the state, balancing traditional religious influence with the need for modern governance.

According to Andreas Eshete (2002), it is difficult to definitively answer when modernity began in Ethiopia, how it differs from the pre-modern world, and whether it has liberated individuals from the system. Andreas suggests that Ethiopian intellectuals sought to undermine the monarchical system, the relationship between the nobility and nomads, and the ideas of equality, justice, freedom, and thought (Andreas, 2002, p. 22). Bahru Zewudie argues that modernism in Ethiopia began in earnest toward the end of the 19th century under the reign of King Zerrubabel and became widespread at the beginning of the 20th century.

One of the prominent Ethiopian intellectuals who advanced modern ideas and criticized the feudal system in the early 20th century was Gebrehiwot

Baykedagn, who played a significant role in developing the concept of modern education (Bahru, 2016). Gebrehiwot's contributions to modern thought and his willingness to challenge traditional structures highlight his pivotal role in Ethiopia's journey towards modernity.

Gebrehiwot Baykedagn's Ideas and Role in Modernity

Gebrehiwot Baykedagn has been portrayed as a European-educated intellectual who was fascinated by European civilization and adopted a critical stance towards the state of his own country. His sharp critique of the Ethiopian aristocracy and economic perspective has been described by Richard Caulk (1984) as a significant aspect of Gebrehiwot's intellectual legacy in "Red Terror." Gebrehiwot's ideas provide important evidence for a class-based analysis of Ethiopian history, as he sought to dismantle Ethiopian militarism and banditry. In the following years, cultural and identity studies challenged economic-based perspectives and largely took precedence (Richard, 1984). Gebrehiwot challenged the existing system and demanded that the government change the system. His stance pushed against the traditional hierarchies and structures in Ethiopia, advocating for transformative changes in governance and society.

According to Donald Levine, efforts to implement modernization in Africa create an unprecedented gap between culture and modernity, modern thought and indigenous knowledge, and Western civilization. It is essential to examine interactions and learning between cultures and ideas (Levine, 2004, p. 14). In Ethiopia, we find the works of Gebrehiwot Baykedagn, one of the scholars or intellectuals trying to develop a unique modernist perspective. According to Bahru Zewde, in his book "Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia," Gebrehiwot's opportunity to study in Europe and acquire Western education was due to a stroke of luck (Bahru, 2016, p. 36). Bahru Zewde further notes that in Gebrehiwot's work "Atse Menelik and Ethiopia," his thoughts are influenced by comparisons between colonial and independent states and the peoples among whom he stayed in Sudan and Eritrea (Bahru, 2016). This exposure allowed Gebrehiwot to gain a broader perspective on governance and development and influenced his ideas on Ethiopia's future trajectory.

In his book "Atse Menelik and Ethiopia," Gebrehiwot Baykedagn demonstrates how a community's history and social development are inseparable. He shows that recounting historical events in a foreboding, audacious, and honest manner can help a community better understand its own identity. Consequently, until a government establishes a well-structured system, it is not expected to remain in power for long (Gebrehiwot, 2007, p. 9). According to Gebrehiwot, modern societies understand that government is a contract among citizens, intended to serve the needs of the people. For a country to have a strong and progressive government, it requires an enlightened and demanding citizenry. In

contrast, a society without vision cannot expect or accept the ideas of its leaders. In "Atse Menelik and Ethiopia," Gebrehiwot questions why the rest of the world remains behind as the world becomes more civilized. He laments that "while peace reigns around the world and minds are enlightened, we live in darkness" (Gebrehiwot, 1912, p. 19). His observations suggest a deep engagement with the challenges of governance, societal development, and modernization in Ethiopia. Gebrehiwot emphasizes the importance of education, enlightened leadership, and critical thinking for the progress of the country. Through his work, Gebrehiwot contributed to the discourse on modernity and the ways in which Ethiopia could navigate its path toward a more advanced and just society. Overall, Gebrehiwot outlines ten ways to achieve modernization goals in Ethiopia.

First, public resources must be properly separated from the king's personal property. Second, there should be a direct connection between personal wealth and taxation. Third, everyone should use the same currency and engage in the same trade. Fourth, further study of Amharic as a common language is necessary. Additionally, fifth, our "Fateha Negest" (an ancient book used by rulers to govern people) does not align with today's public order (Gebrehiwot, 1916, p. 25). Sixth, a modern military army needs to be established. Seventh, our country's trade system and currency need to be improved. Eighth, a legal system needs to be implemented. Ninth, a strong government must be instituted. Lastly, tenth, religious freedom was declared (Gebrehiwot, 1912, p. 27). Gebrehiwot's role in modernity in Ethiopia involved a multifaceted approach: critiquing the established aristocracy and economic practices, promoting education and modern thought, and seeking to reform the system from within. His bold ideas and willingness to challenge the status quo positioned him as a key intellectual figure in Ethiopia's transition towards modernity.

He highlighted the concept of secular discourse in a country where the Orthodox Church played a significant role in the philosophical and practical application of knowledge. By nature and in its origin, he presented a secular discourse that provided an analysis of social and political life, which was unusual for the tenors of the church's discourse. He also introduced the concept of the institutionalization of ideas. This contribution provided the philosophical framework of enlightenment reason, which is objectified and authorized by consenting institutions that are freed from the persistence of the subject. Gebrehiwot also spoke about the importance of the institutionalization of ideas, the necessity of education, and the critical nature of systems for any modernity project (Gebrehiwot, 2007, p. 19). In the book *Atse Menelik and Ethiopia*, he persistently discussed the importance of education for modernity, referring to *aemero yelelew hezb* (people without a thinking mind) and *temehert yelelew hezb* (people without education).

In his second work titled "Government and Public Administration," Gebrehiwot demonstrates how modern societies throughout human history have governed backward and less developed peoples. He argues that wealth is a measure of dominion over the earth, while poor people are its servants (Gebrehiwot, 2007, p. 83). Thus, the wealth of a community can be seen as an indicator of how much a nation controls nature. He criticizes this economic system, asserting that a balance between population growth and employment is essential for the development of a society. Furthermore, the development of communities cannot be separated from the culture of work.

Gebrehiwot poses the question: Are Ethiopians truly free now? A liberated people does not merely mean having an independent government. Modern education and civilization play a significant role in ensuring there is no gap between a country's laws and the awareness of its people. As part of his desire to promote the welfare of all Ethiopians, Gebrehiwot believed that the creation of a new educational system was a fundamental step toward an honorable future for the new generation of Ethiopians. He stated, "knowledge is the immutable, eternal law that governs the world" (Gebrehiwot, 2007). Here, Gebrehiwot emerges as a champion of Ethiopian identity, striving to combine what he saw as the best of both worlds by rejecting the cultural alienation of Ethiopian youth from their own culture. Although the majority of the population may have accepted the government and its administration, Gebrehiwot stood in opposition. He sought to demonstrate the special place of indigenous cultures and views in Ethiopia.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Gebrehiwot's ideas offer a fresh and innovative perspective on the economic and political challenges Ethiopia has historically faced. By emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges from a modern perspective, the study deviates from traditional viewpoints. Examining Ethiopia's challenges through Gebrehiwot's theories illuminates potential pathways for progress and development within the country. Gebrehiwot Baykedagn's philosophical views on modernity are deeply embedded in Ethiopia's history and culture. His approach demonstrates how traditional values can be combined with contemporary thought, showing how these elements can come together and influence one another.

Through his analyses, he reveals how rational, individual, and social development can trigger social change and facilitate the nation's journey toward modernity. Additionally, Gebrehiwot emphasizes the importance of establishing a strong political and economic system to propel Ethiopia's progress toward modernity. He advocates for the creation of an educated and rational society as the foundation of this transformation. By stressing the necessity of systematic reform and education, Gebrehiwot envisions a path for Ethiopia toward a stable and prosperous future, ensuring sustained growth and development.

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