

**A REVIEW ON: GEBRU TAREK, THE ETHIOPIAN  
REVOLUTION: WAR IN THE HORN OF AFRICA:  
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Wuhibegezer Ferede

Department of Political Science and International Studies,  
Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia

***ABSTRACT***

*This is review of the work of prolific writer and an advocator and participant of Ethiopian Revolutionary party which was confronting Dergue after the revolution. The reviewed book has two main pillars viz. war and revolution in Ethiopia. The first part deals with the spirit of the 1974 Revolution, and the second component narratives about war of comrades against comrades or twin revolutions in Gebru's word. Thus, the central idea of Gebru lies on elucidating the destructive and constructive dialectics and reciprocative links prevailing between Revolution and War that elapsed from the Monarchical to the ancien regime and down to the post monarchical Ethiopia. The study provides us details about the emergence of revolution, ethno-national insurgency and wars. He has gathered substantive information from protagonists through a series of interviews. The study is also backed with archival materials collected from the Ethiopian Ministries of National Defense and Internal Affairs. Gebru also used countless maps that depict the war fronts and campaigns of the belligerents. Thought Gebru has de-emphasized the ideological and political substance of the primal revolution and gave overemphasis to the military engagements and mayhems, in the first part, he focused on the genesis and outcome of the 1974 revolution.*

***KEYWORDS:***

*Coup, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Revolution, War*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The reviewed book has two main pillars viz. war and revolution in Ethiopia. Hence, the first part deals with the spirit of the 1974 Revolution, i.e. 1960 coup, peasant uprisings, student movements and the second component narratives about war of comrades against comrades or twin revolutions in Gebru's word. However, for Markakis the Post Revolution war was a counter revolution against what he calls 'Soldiers Revolution' (Markakis and Nega, 1987:177).

Thus, the central idea of Gebru lies on elucidating the destructive and constructive dialectics and reciprocative links prevailing between Revolution and War as its indicated in the citation from Samuel Huntington for 'Revolution' and William T. Sherman for 'War' that elapsed from the Monarchical to the ancien regime and the post monarchical Ethiopia. The ancien regime refers to the feudo- bourgeoisie transitional hybrid that lies between declining feudalism and rising Bourgeoisie capitalism (see Markakis and Nega, 1986:85). The study provides us details about the emergence of revolution, ethno-national insurgency and wars. He has gathered substantive information from protagonists via a series of interviews. The study is also backed with archival

materials collected from the Ethiopian Ministries of National Defense and Internal Affairs. Gebru also used countless maps that depict the war fronts and campaigns of the belligerents.

## 2. SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Thought Gebru has de-emphasized the ideological and political substance of the Primal Revolution and gave overemphasis to the military engagements and mayhems, in the first part, he focused on the genesis and outcome of the 1974 revolution. Thus, he traced the roots of the revolution to the harbingers of 1960 coup which in his words are called 'Decembrist Conspirators' whom I rather prefer to christen them as Palace Revolutionaries. Bahru calls them Conspirator Elites but I felt both terms sounds to be a designator of self-motivated action in lieu of inner revolt against self-directed system (Bahiru, 2002:209).

I found Gebru's argument that modeled Iran as a parallel explanation about the ferments of the coup less persuasive. In this case, he is passing through the same path traveled by Levine, mini intellectual dependence. There is hardly any pressing need to adhere analogical explanation and if there is any it has to be drawn from the continental experience and the aspirations of the activists of the coup. In fact his parallel analysis drawn from Egypt sounds persuasive for there were similar professional profiles and purpose of the anti-monarchical coup leaders though it had divergent consequence in both cases.

Moreover, Gebru takes the coup as nationally awakening eternal spirit. I rather argue con of this assertion on the ground that due to lack of viable media of communication, the socialization of the revolution was not due to the Decembrists' initiative but the student activists. They were serving as media in popularizing the revolution to the mass with which they are holding regular links unlike the palace generals.

For Gebru, the factors that hasten the collapse of the coup lies on the weakness of the activists themselves and the basic flaw rests on their failure to articulate a comprehensive and lasting program that could go beyond the capital to the provinces. In fact, the Decembrists were focusing on avoiding the economic injustice and political inefficiency of the system in lieu of grand regime change and societal transformation. Let alone this, they didn't raise the question of land which was the most pressing demand of the peasant. The type of government they aspire to establish was salaried and constitutional Monarchy. This shows that the Decembrist were aware of the emerging ancien regime which would eventually ended with the establishment of liberal Republic. Here I owe them a credited for they outsmarted the subsequent leftist revolutionary generation that transferred the country from ancient regime to socialism without having full flagged capitalism. The Decembrists experiment was not welcomed both by the armed force and the Church. Sooner the loyalist and conservative force rallied resistant movement and the coup leaders' were physically exterminated.

However, the coup has left far reaching effect in exposing the wrong and challengeable images of the regime. It had awakened the political consciousness and resulted in decade of popular activism. Moreover, the Decembrists extolled as harbingers of the revolution and inflamers of political consciousness of the subsequent generation. In fact, this attempt had left profound positive impact in igniting civilian political protest against the monarchical absolutism. However it has also left bad lessons particularly in the mind of the military about the possibility of intervening in the political affair of the state instead of keeping neutrality because most of the commanders of the coup were highly ranked military officials. Gebru mentioned only the Commander of Imperial Body Guard [B/G Mengistu Neway], the Commander of Police Force [Tsigie Dibbu ] and the Commander of Security [Workenh Gebeyehu]. The latter two gave tacit support and the sprite of the coup was a civilian, Girmame. Moreover, other participants under

the command ship of these generals and the roles played by them are not yet discussed. Gebru mentioned only three of them however Bahru adds more in the list of the participants. We can also argue that the Degue had learnt red terror and its precursors from them. The military had also learnt from the shooting of hostages at Genet Leul palace. Furthermore, this scenario shows us merely a challenge initiated from top by completely annulling former head starts of the lower echelon.

According to Gebru, the coup has 'transformed the opposition from the palace to the open space, from covert to overt, from parochial to popular, from peaceful to violent, from sectional to mass, from centre to periphery.' I negate completely with Gebru about the credibility of these changes which are believed to be concomitant effect with the exception of its inspirational role. Primarily there were overt violent societal protests in the pre coup period. Besides, the argument about the scaling up of the opposition from centre to the periphery, in my view, symbolizes geography not the true scene of power relations.

As it's clearly indicated by Gebru, disregarding the prophetic memorandums of the US advisor of the King and local servant of the regime, Abiy Abebe, about the panorama of the popular upsurge and the urgency of self-adjustment via radical reform, the emperor became indifferent. Instead of rectifying the draw backs of the system, the emperor was preoccupied in worsening it by reshuffling the ministerial posts, expanding the state's security apparatus, censoring and dividing members and as well shifting his seat.

In accordance to Gebru's conviction lack of collective action and purpose, stated driven modernization reforms, lack of societal awakening [conservatism] and fragmentation or absence of solidarity which in turn shaped by societal heterogeneity, poor infrastructure served as main catalysts for elongating the regime's reign after 1960. Moreover, he argues that the modernization of the repressive state apparatus, lack of meritocracy, mutual mistrust among peoples sown by the regime to consolidate its own rule put meaningful hurdles against the unity and there of helped the regime to silence and divide the opposition.

In spite of these repressive and divisive measures of the regime the protagonists of the revolution, the students, the peasants and ethno-nationalists determined to topple the regime via popular upsurge and their efforts brought about popular activism in to the front.

The peasant movements in Bale, Gojjam, Tigray and as well as the student activism of the 1960s, the Eritrean ethno-nationalist insurgency were among the notable struggles against the regime. The students were initially confined to the urban centres yet they were the main catalysts and the heart of the revolution. Inspired by international student movement, socialist revolutions of the cold war period, and African scholarship students in Haile Sellasie I University and their Western teachers, the students championed in asking land to the tiller and raising the nationalities question. The latter has left an impasse in Ethiopian politics. They studied the country's problems and designed a non-capitalist way of development under the Marxist model. The students were dogmatic and uthiopianist. They failed to understand the society with in which they are living in. I believe that the departure of 1960s generation from its predecessors seems to be triggered by the Western education system that produced elites alienated from their society. Under this curriculum the students were extremely westernized yet they were barely indigenized.

Thus, the militant students via their proto communist party association called the Crocodiles waft the country from Imperial autocracy to classical socialism discounting the role of bourgeois liberalism. This has caused a trajectory in the revolution and the students handed over their Marxist-Leninist brain child to the nationalist soldiers who had intervened as power broker due to the absence of party politics and lack of preparation among the students to direct the revolution.

This failure has created vacuum in which a radicalized section of the army was able to revert the popular revolution to ‘soldiers’ socialism.’

As it’s excellently elaborated by Gebru, Haile Selassie’s regime was confronted with an unprecedented wave protest of teacher, student and taxi strikes and mutinies in the armed forces that began in Negelli, Sidamo and Asmara. The armed forces seized Addis Ababa radio broadcasting and arrested the former Prime Ministers. The Emperor appointed a new Prime Minister, Lej Endalkachaw to draft a new constitution to stabilize the situation. The committee of soldiers felt comfortable to depose the emperor and he was deposed on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1974. The political developments of post monarchy Ethiopia provide a critical vantage point on several of the more contested areas of Marxist analysis; the relation between class and state, the place of national self-determination in the struggle for socialism and the role of the Soviet Union in the Third World. The Ethiopian Revolution intervenes in each of these issues. The military immediately suspended the imperial constitution and dissolved the parliament and carried out reforms that dismantle the economic basis of the landed aristocracy via land proclamation and nationalization.

In the second part Gebru has provides us a fascinating description about the Mengistu’s regime military campaigns against the Maoist ethno-regionalist insurgents of EPLF and TPL in the North and as well the relentless struggle with the disgruntled student activists who rally now under political parties. The EPLF which had elapsed under three phases of development was a movement basically caused by the abrogation the federal arrangement whereas the TPLF was prompted by political marginalization. In spite of the intensity in accommodating the tenets both were inspired by Maoist movement in China. In short, this book clearly elucidates how the revolution has consumed its activists, ‘the generation.’ KifluTadess

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## AUTHORS

### Short Biography

Wuhibegezer is an Assistant Professor and Researcher in Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia

