

The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM): My Experiences in ESUNA, 1964-1971*

**[The conference organizers censored this paper and thus was not read at the panel.]*

Alem Habtu, New York February 25, 2015

I regret that I am not able to make this presentation in person due to health issues. The major reason I was invited to this panel is probably because I was a member of ESUNA's executive council for five years from 1965-1970: assistant secretary-general (1965-67), president (1967-68), and editor of *Challenge* (1968-70). My discussion will, therefore, rely on my first-hand or insider knowledge. As a sociologist, I want to employ C. Wright Mills' concept of sociological imagination, i.e., of sociology as the meeting point of biography and history; the private and the public; the personal and political; the individual and the social. Therefore, I will be speaking about my personal experiences in the context of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM), and the left parties that emerged from it.

An Outline of ESUNA Congresses: 1964 to 1968

In the mid-1960s, the total number of Ethiopian students in North America was not more than six hundred and they were widely dispersed. The annual congresses were an important venue for many of us to see one another. In spring 1964, I received a letter from the Ethiopian Students Association in North America (ESANA), later named Ethiopian Students Union in North America (ESUNA), inviting me to its annual congress at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA. There I met some old friends and made new ones. I became a member of ESUNA. I will now briefly point out the major agenda items in the annual congresses from 1965 to 1971.

The 1964 congress ended in a slim-margin victory for an executive council slate headed by Hagos Gebre Yesus, ushering a new chapter in ESUNA's history. The 1965 congress, also held at Harvard, dissociated ESUNA from the tutelage of the Ethiopian embassy that used to fund it. Its resolutions called for meaningful reforms such as: "Greater emphasis be laid on Ethiopian Studies, especially at the secondary and college levels in order to encourage an Ethiopian self-understanding in a proper perspective, and to foster the development of indigenous literary and creative expression." I was elected to serve as assistant secretary-general in 1965.

The 1966 congress, still held at Harvard, exhaustively discussed alternative reformist and revolutionary paths to bringing about change in Ethiopia. ESUNA leaders "in the

mid-60s self-consciously attempted to appeal to as broad a constituency as possible. ... [W]hatever the ideology of individual leaders and members, ESUNA was no more than a broad-based, democratic and progressive association in the mid-sixties ... [D]ecisions were arrived at by consensus ... views of liberal reformists as well as radical socialists were reflected in the decisions” (Habtu 1987, pp. 66-68). In the end, the 1966 ESUNA congress took a firm position against the imperial government. The 1967 congress held at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, took a clear anti-feudal and anti-imperialist stance.

In the 1968 congress at Yale University in New Haven, CT, the main focus was on the limited (only catalytic) role of students as students in the revolutionary process. Following the congress, which highlighted the limited role of students, Dessalegn Rahmato came up with the idea of a Political Education Program for the more activist members in order to better prepare them for a post-student political engagement upon return to Ethiopia.

Two Ethiopian Embassy Occupations in 1969

ESUNA activists occupied the Ethiopian embassy in March 1969 to publicize the imprisonment of students in Addis Ababa and demand their release. During the occupation, students Kebede Wubishet and Abebech Bekele put the military attaché at the time, General Teferi Benti “under house arrest in the name of the oppressed people of Ethiopia.” General Teferi Benti later became the second head of state after Emperor Haile Selassie. Andreas Eshete and Alem Habtu led the occupation and negotiated the demonstrators’ peaceful departure from the embassy without anyone being arrested or charged, once our mission was accomplished. There was resistance from the students to the settlement, and, later, a severe criticism, if not denunciation, of Andreas and Alem by Hagos G. Yesus who made an overlabored analogy between the embassy occupation and the Paris Commune of 1871. As a consequence of the March occupation, two DC police officers were permanently posted to the embassy.

A second occupation of the Ethiopian Embassy took place in July 1969. This occupation was timed, for maximum media effect, to coincide with Emperor Haile Selassie’s arrival at the airport such that the new headline became: the emperor has arrived and his embassy has been occupied. A dozen of us were charged with felonies and served time in maximum security at Washington DC General Prison until we were bailed out with a \$2,000 bond each. The only detainee from Canada, Shibru Tedla (now professor emeritus) was deported back there. Two consequences followed from this second embassy occupation:

- 1) Responsibility for protection of all embassies was transferred from the DC police to the U.S. Executive Secret Service;

- 2) Demonstrations were required to be at least 500 feet away from any embassy ground.

An Outline of ESUNA Congresses: 1969 to 1971

In the 1969 congress in Philadelphia, the major agenda was the problem of regionalism in Ethiopia. It is interesting to note that the regionalism papers presented in that congress preceded Walleign's "The Question of Nationalities" *Struggle* article by three months. Many Eritreans participated in that congress, including Haile Menkerios and Yordanos Gebre-Medhin. The congress delegated the writing of the resolutions to the executive council, which turned out to be unfortunate due to differences that arose within the latter.

In the 1970 congress in Washington, DC, the focus was on imperialism in Ethiopia. On the sidelines of the congress, those of us in the executive council had to address an extraordinary challenge. The Bay Area chapter members under Senay Likke's leadership had a plan to go to Cuba for military training in preparation for their return to Ethiopia through "Bale, not Bole." To this end, they were all living in a spartan commune (except Senay) and were raising funds for the Cuba trip. We spent a couple of nights of exhaustive discussion on the limited (catalytic) role of students and on the necessary subjective and objective conditions for a revolutionary situation in Ethiopia in order to successfully dissuade them from their plan.

In the 1971 congress at the UCLA in Los Angeles, the agenda was revisiting "the national question." The main issue was to support or oppose the Tilahun Takele paper on "the national question." The supporters won the majority of votes, amid rancorous disputes about the eligibility of voters. Senay Likke, the president, led a walkout of the minority group.

My actions at the 1971 Congress were distinct from those of the other "old" ESUNA leaders. For example, I had made a lengthy presentation on "the national question," contrary to the implication in Eshetu Chole's comments cited in Bahru (2014). Further, the major message in the August 1971 open letter written by Melesse Ayalew, Dessalegn Rahmato and Alem Habtu, was not at all to initiate a polemical exchange with the "new" ESUNA as Bahru implies; it was to state that we no longer had any leadership role in the ESM. We had already withdrawn from the New York chapter and formed a study circle to focus on Ethiopian history and society. To that end, Dessalegn Rahmato and Alula Hiwet Hidaru had prepared an annotated bibliography on Ethiopia that was subsequently published by Greenwood Press.

In the 1971 Los Angeles congress, Melesse Ayalew was involved in the walkout whereas I was not. In fact, I had left the rancorous and rather chaotic meeting about 10 pm, believing that the chair, Eshetu Chole, would have the good sense to adjourn the meeting until the following morning.

The “old” ESUNA leadership was not monolithic

Contrary to the general impression, there was a diversity of positions within the “old” ESUNA leadership. There were discernible differences on “the national question,” as represented variously by Melesse Ayalew and Alem Habtu. Alem’s 1969 regionalism article was at variance with the 1969 ESUNA resolution on Eritrea inserted by Melesse Ayalew (see *Challenge* February 1970). Further, Senay Likke’s candidacy for president in 1970 was supported by the majority within the leadership, but was strongly opposed by Alula Hiwet Hidar and Alem Habtu.

There was also diversity in tone, temperament and tact. The generous spirit of the original paper on “the national question” written by Andreas Eshete under the pen name, Tumtu Lencho, is far different from the highly polemical version that came out in *Challenge* (July 1971). Although Bahru says that the editor of *Challenge* (who was Melesse Ayalew) injected polemics into Tumtu Lencho’s article, it was in fact Dessalegn Rahmato who inserted the entire polemics, not the editor (Bahru 2014, footnote 17, p. 209).

After the 1971 split, when the Senay group invited me to their caucus, I was the only one from the “old” leadership to advise them to rejoin the majority and struggle for their ideas as a minority group. As my brother, Mesfin Habtu was leading the majority, Senay Likke and some of his followers came up with the refrain, “blood is thicker than water.” They did so also because of my profound conflict with Senay Likke and Hagos Gebre Yesus on the publication of the so-called open letter in the 1971 *ESUNA Bi-Monthly* issue. Sensing the gravity of the rift that was occurring in the student movement, upon returning to New York, Alem and Mesfin agreed to work hard to call an extraordinary ESUNA congress around Christmas.

I would like to take this rare opportunity to reveal three facts and/or issues that I know first-hand:

1. The “Open Letter”

In his book entitled, *Yidires Lebaletariku* (1985 EC), Tesfaye Mekonnen, in effect, alleges that I opened Mesfin Habtu’s letter and sent it to Senay Likke to be published as an “Open Letter” (p. 98). According to his book, the basis for his allegation is as follows: When he [Tefaye] and Mesfin Habtu spent a night together in August 1971, Mesfin had told him that I had opened his letter and I must have, without his knowledge, photocopied the letter and passed it on to Senay Likke for publication as an “Open Letter”. Based on what he knew at the time, it would have been logical for Mesfin to so speculate and for Tesfaye to believe the scenario. This is a false allegation, however. Tefaye Mekonnen made no attempt to contact me regarding

this matter although my work address is publicly available and has been the same for four decades.

Regarding the history of the “Open Letter” that appeared in *ESUNA Bi-Monthly* (A Publication of the Ethiopian Students’ Union in North America), August 1971, pp. 9-12, I had circulated an open letter addressed to “ESM Activists” dated October 31, 1974. Here is the substance of what I had written then.

Melesse Ayalew, Dessalegn Rahmato, Alula Hiwet Hidaru and I were residing in the same apartment in New York. My brother Mesfin was also staying with us. One Saturday in late September 1970, Melesse Ayalew and Dessalegn Rahmato had gone out for breakfast as they routinely do. About noon, Melesse Ayalew returned to the apartment without Dessalegn and called me out of my room. I was the only one in the apartment at the time. He said he opened a letter addressed to an American name that had arrived at our apartment mailbox. (Since many student activists who wrote to us used to put American names instead of our real names on the envelopes for security reasons, it was not surprising that Melesse opened the letter.)

He said he opened it thinking it was for one of us but that, upon reading its content, he discovered that the letter was meant for my brother, Mesfin. He said he did not know how to explain this to Mesfin. (He also said that the letter accuses us, based on “scientific” evidence, of conspiring with aristocrats like Prince Ras Asrate Kassa to seize state power.) I told him that he should just explain to Mesfin that people from Ethiopia write us using false American names for security reasons and, as such, it was inadvertent. But Melesse was extremely nervous and agitated, and seemed incapable of saying that to Mesfin. I kept reiterating the same advice with increasing bewilderment. He continued to appear completely immobilized and helpless to explain the error and give the letter to Mesfin. Finally, in exasperation, I said that I will give the letter to Mesfin, telling him that I opened it inadvertently and explaining to him that we receive such letters from activists in Ethiopia. I did exactly that as soon as Mesfin came to the apartment, and also discussed the contents of the letter with him. That was the end of the story, or so Mesfin and I believed.

At the beginning of May 1971, Hagos Gebre Yesus sent a letter addressed to Melesse Ayalew, Dessalegn Rahmato and I. In it, he says that he had written an open letter exposing the letter written from my cousin, Benyam Adane in Algeria to Mesfin in New York. This is how I found out that Melesse Ayalew had photocopied the letter addressed to Mesfin before he came to the apartment to tell me about his inadvertently opening the letter. I immediately phoned Hagos to dissuade him from publishing a private letter but to no avail. I wrote him an 11-page hand-written letter arguing that his project was counter-productive, that readers will focus more on the impropriety of publishing a

private letter than on the false allegations therein. He was not dissuaded at all. I warned him that the controversy will come up at the upcoming Annual Congress and that I would denounce the action. He said it was my right. As I kept pressing him, he told me that he had passed it on to Senay Likke and that Senay wanted to publish the Hagos open letter in the name of the ESUNA executive council. I called Senay and asked him not to publish the open letter. He told me that it was already at the printers. I pleaded with him to let all the copies remain at the printers until we meet when he passes by New York on his way to the ESUE Congress in Berlin. He agreed. But he did not keep his word. He did not pass by New York and he took copies of the *Bi-Monthly* containing the open letter with him to Europe, and also had it distributed here prior to the ESUNA Congress.

About the same time in June 1971, Melesse Ayalew and Dessalegn Rahmato revealed to me for the first time that there was an underground organization named MEISON of which they and Hagos Gebre Yesus were members, but that they intended to resign from the organization due to ideological and political differences as soon as they complete coordination of their departure with “comrades” at home who shared the same views as the North America trio. My being told about the existence of MEISON now complicated the “open letter” issue for me. Now two distinct issues were intertwined:

1. The impropriety of publishing a private letter;
2. The false accusations contained in the letter which entail power relations between the two underground organizations.

Discussion of these issues openly would expose to the imperial regime not only the two underground organizations abroad but also a third one inside Ethiopia (that was mentioned in the letter).

Contrary to my expectation, the “open letter” issue was not raised at the Los Angeles Congress. Upon returning to New York, I told Mesfin that I was not the one who opened the letter but that I was not at liberty to say any more, that there were two intertwined issues, and that they were best raised and discussed in an open forum when all questions could be raised simultaneously and let the chips fall where they may. Mutually surprised and unhappy with the ESUNA split, Mesfin and I had agreed in September to push for an extraordinary congress of ESUNA during the Christmas break in Washington, D.C. to bring about a reunification of ESUNA based on open discussion of all issues and criticism and self-criticism. In retrospect, we were both naïve to believe that we could pull off such an initiative. But I had single-mindedly pushed for the reconstitution of ESUNA in the years following my brother’s death. Sectarianism on both sides was too overwhelming to bring about any reconciliation despite the genuine efforts of Tamrat Kebede, Mehari Tesfaye and Dawit W. Giorgis while they were in New York.

2. Alem Habtu's Unacknowledged "Critical Review" re: the ESUNA Split

Bahru cites *Toward An Analysis of the ESM and The Split in ESUNA* (Jan. 1974), which appeared in the name of the Executive Council of "old" ESUNA. I had written a 34-pp. response entitled "A Critical Review of Toward An Analysis of the ESM and The Split in ESUNA (Jan. 1974)" August 3 & 4, 1974, which Bahru apparently did not know about. Here are some extracts from it: "A review of ESUNA during the 1965-71 (pre-split) period attests to an underlying tendency ... toward a conception of the ESM as the vanguard of the Ethiopian masses, toward an exaggeration of the revolutionary situation in Ethiopia and toward 'adventurism'" (p. 3).

My observations on the ESUNA split were as follows: "the split came at a time when the ESM was still in its infancy ... [it] demonstrated ... the limitation in political maturity and organizational sophistication of the ESM in general and ESUNA in particular. ... [it] reflects the political and ideological immaturity of all of us and the organizational weaknesses of ESUNA" (pp. 31-32); "the minimum organizational requirement in our movement [is] anti-feudalism and anti-imperialism" (p. 32). "The split was ... inevitable because fundamentally both sides conducted themselves as if they were members of a revolutionary party or a highly advanced political organization" (Habtu 1974, p. 33).

I ended my review with an appeal and a warning:

Unity is indispensable not only because organizational unification is necessary for the maximum utilization of the resources of Ethiopian students here but also because it will help us and our younger brothers and sisters learn from our past mistakes and failures. We cannot advance unless we recognize failures and correct mistakes. Furthermore, failure to resolve secondary contradictions within the rank of progressives and leftists in good time will necessarily hamper the process and formation of progressive and revolutionary organizations in Ethiopia (Habtu 1974, p. 34).

3. Haile Fida in New York

In April 1972, Haile Fida and Dr. Elihu Feleke (then president of ESUE) came to New York and met separately with both "old" and "new" ESUNA leaders. Presumably, they wanted to have their own take on the field of play in North America. As an aside or not, Haile Fida met with MEISON members Melesse and Dessalegn in the apartment they shared with me. Melesse told me that he had secured Haile Fida's consent to have me join the meeting, although I was not a member but was made privy to its existence in June 1971. A member of MEISON who was visiting from Addis and was staying with us also joined the meeting. Two items struck me at that meeting and have stayed with me ever since. One was that Haile Fida was asking Melesse and

Dessalegn about whether or not they accept the MEISON Secretariat's directive to move to a neighboring country (Sudan). The two responded that they first wanted to discuss the substantive issues of the objective and subjective conditions for a revolutionary situation in Ethiopia, including "the national question." Haile Fida insisted that they would have to accept the secretariat's directive first before substantive issues could be discussed. Due to this deadlock, no substantive discussion took place. Haile Fida impressed me as an organizational man, not as a reflective thinker.

The second item was what transpired as a result of my persistent question of why ESUE abruptly told us to stop all communications with the Algeria group. Haile Fida finally said that he was afraid that an alliance would be created between the "old" ESUNA leaders (who he said were more advanced in the social sciences than their ESUE counterparts) and the Algerian group at the expense of those leaders in Europe. At this point the MEISON visitor from Addis spoke for the first and only time: "Haile that is stupid, simply stupid."

It became clear to me from this meeting that Haile Fida was preoccupied with the issue of political power above all else. MEISON (Europe) leaders and ROLE [Revolutionary Organization for the Liberation of Ethiopia] / EPRP (Algeria) leaders had forged a marriage of convenience against "old" ESUNA in order to sideline the latter.

Periodization of the Ethiopian Student Movement (1960-69) and from Ethiopian Student Movement to Marxist-Leninist Parties (1970-74)

There should be a periodization of the Ethiopian Student Movement:

- 1960-64 was reformist (see also Fentahun 1990, p. 16);
- 1965-69 was independent progressive (anti-feudal/anti-imperialist);
- 1970-1974 when the Ethiopian Student Movement came under the tutelage of clandestine Marxist-Leninist groupings, namely, MEISON and ROLE / EPRP. The major turning point was 1969/70, when Tilahun Gizaw was assassinated in December 1969.

In the wake of the assassination, the Marxist-Leninist leadership of the ESM determined that the moment of armed struggle against the regime had arrived. The Ethiopian Student Union in Europe's (ESUE) piece (April 1971) stated: "... the objective and subjective conditions in our country have almost coincided. ... At this point in time, the people have moved to the offensive while the reactionary regime has been put on the defensive" (Bahru 2014, p. 63). Now recognition of this new fact and immediate preparation for armed struggle were requisite for student activism. The ESM was to be the initial social base for the armed struggle. Hence, correct Marxist-Leninist hegemony over the student movement was an immediate necessity

for MEISON and ROLE / EPRP. As a consequence, the underground parties killed the Ethiopian Student Movement as an autonomous, self-actualizing movement and gave birth to one that is a mouthpiece and instrument of one or the other Marxist-Leninist party. To put it more mildly, the Marxist-Leninist parties transformed the student movement to become instrument, vehicle, and front for the Marxist-Leninist parties. I had observed at the time, i.e., in 1974: “it is an error to create a secret organization, however good the intentions may be, within a mass student organization, instead of outside of it” (Habtu, 1974, p. 20). As far back as 1971, the “old” ESUNA leadership was alone in arguing that the revolutionary process was a “long march”, “*rejim guzo*” (see *Challenge* issue of July 1971).

A Hypothesis

The ESM *qua* student movement, i.e., the ESM as an authentic, self-actualizing movement ended with the end of 1969. Bahru (2014) says: “Ethiopian student unions effectively became political parties ...” (p. 266). It is in fact the reverse. Newly created (*sous terre* or underground) political parties took over leadership of the student movement.

After 1970, the ESM increasingly became the unwitting instrument of underground, post-student, left organizations, notably MEISON and ROLE/EPRP. The leaders of MEISON and ROLE/EPRP, notably, Haile Fida and Berhane Meskel Redda, had determined that the time for armed struggle had arrived and the student movement should serve as the initial social base for the revolutionary armed struggle. To this end, solidarity with the armed Eritrean liberation movements was seen as a strategic and/or tactical necessity. Hence, the primacy of the national question, a euphemism for the Eritrean question. Eritrea, and to a lesser extent Sudan and Somalia, would serve as the rear base for the armed combatants. The MEISON leadership believed that the Algeria group would constitute its armed detachment while it conducted political and organizational affairs. The Algeria group had no intention of playing second fiddle. It successfully discredited the “old” ESUNA leadership, including MEISON members, Hagos, Melesse, and Dessalegn, and put the “new” ESUNA under its hegemony. Soon after, it challenged the ESUE/MEISON leadership on its own turf in Europe.

Then, from 1972 onwards, the power struggle for hegemony of the student movement became between MEISON and ROLE / EPRP. MEISON made sure that ESUE adopted the Tilahun Takele / ROLE / EPRP position on the national question in its congress in August 1971. Of course, the same was adopted by the “new” ESUNA later in the same month. The struggle for control of the student movement took the form of reorganization of Ethiopian students across the world. MEISON called their partisans the World Wide Union of Ethiopian Students (WWUES) while ROLE/EPRP called theirs the World Wide Federation of Ethiopian Students (WWFES). Thus, the ESM was split down the middle between what were called “Union” and “Federation.”

Student unions were newly formed or reorganized by one or the other of the two contending parties in order to secure their hegemony. “The two leftist parties that batted it out for hegemony emerged directly out of the movement” (Bahru 2014, p. 263).” But “...the student movement did not emerge in the context of a peasant or labor movement ... it was an isolated movement” (Habtu, 1987, p. 66).

By the outbreak of the 1974 revolution, EPRP had the upper hand in the ESM. The character assassinations overseas were soon translated into physical assassinations in the streets of Addis Ababa, as I had repeatedly forewarned in 1971-74 in New York to anyone who cared to listen.

Because of their singular preoccupation with immediate seizure of state power, both mistook the trees for the forest. One side [EPRP] thought violent opposition to the *Dergue* would secure them state power, while the other [MEISON], which did not have much of a following inside Ethiopia, thought that tactical alliance with the *Dergue* would bring them to power, after using and then disposing of the soldiers. Both failed in their respective adventures.

What needs to be underlined is that between 1970 and 1974, the vast majority of rank and file students at home or abroad were not aware, at least for a good while, that they were being used as puppets of two underground communist parties that were struggling for hegemony of the student movement, and through it, of the revolutionary process in Ethiopia. After coming out of the closet in 1974-75, both parties continued to use the student movement as their social base. No revolution has ever succeeded with students as its social base. As such, it was inevitable that the student-based communist parties would fail in their quixotic efforts to seize state power. The tragedy is that they used students as cannon fodder for their blind ambitions. As I used to say at the time, the leaderships of these parties have criminal responsibility for the thousands of students who died needlessly.

In his recent book (2014), Bahru asks the question: “Could Ethiopian history have taken a different path in the 1960s and could the country have thus avoided the tribulations that it has been made to endure since the mid-1970s?” (p. 264). But he does not attempt an answer. Let me make an attempt. The answer is yes. There was a clear possibility of experimenting with the 1974 draft liberal constitution with a constitutional monarchy. It would have created desperately needed space for democratic forces to exchange ideas and propagate progressive views. It would have created an opportunity for the political education of the masses and the creation of a democratic political culture. This is the meaning of “*rejim guzo*.” But the left parties and the ESM were at the forefront of denouncing the 1974 democratic draft constitution. The assumption of power by the military was not necessarily inevitable. Even if a liberal civilian government under a constitutional monarchy were to be short-lived, every minute of it would have been precious to a democratization effort. Certainly, a weak civilian government was preferable to a military dictatorship.

Once Haddis Alemayehu's book, *Ityopya Min Aynet Astedader Yasfeligatal?*, came out in May 1974, there was no attempt to consider the usefulness of constitutional monarchy for the struggle of liberals and the left alike. There was immediate negative reaction to the July 1974 liberal democratic draft constitution spearheaded by Addis Ababa University professors. The draft constitution with a figurehead monarch was primarily the work of wise and educated members of the prewar generation including Haddis Alemayehu, Yilma Deressa, Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria and Abebe Retta and outstanding professional members of the 1950s generation but the latter were an exception to their generation. I had written as follows in 1987 about the role of the 1950s educated elite: "the technocratic generation ... dedicated itself to the construction of a modern state structure ... within the imperial system. ... It took the system as legitimate and could not visualize an alternative system that would acquire legitimacy. ... thus, the Germe Neway phenomenon was a fluke" (Habtu, 1987, p. 66). Why? This needs explanation. To the leftist parties, the moment for seizure of state power had arrived with the 1974 revolution!

A Puzzle

Under "the woman question," Bahru (2014) claims: "There is no record of any female student, either at home or abroad, rising to executive position. The only major exception ... was Abebech Bekele, president of the World Wide Ethiopian Women Students Group) WWEWSG" (p. 224). But, for example, Misrak Elias was an executive in the New York chapter of ESUNA (in 1967-68); Zenebework Tadesse was a member of the executive council of "old" ESUNA (1971-72). He writes of Abebech Bekele: "on the basis of her own testimony, the post was literally thrust on her for reasons she could not quite comprehend" (ibid.). He also writes: "WWEWSG came solidly behind the WWFES, which was evolving as the youth wing of what was eventually to emerge as the EPRP" (Bahru 2014, p. 227). Yet he does not explore why.

Let me offer a hypothesis: The boys of one faction wanted to use Abebech and other women in their power struggle with other boys, subordinating "the woman question" to the patriarchal power struggle within and beyond the ESM. Bahru does not appear to have interviewed any women beside Abebech; of course, there were three women in his Nazareth oral history project. One of them, Zenebework Tadesse, a prominent feminist, is not mentioned anywhere in the book! Yet she is the unacknowledged author of a "forty-six page article" on "the woman question" that "appeared in the November 1973 issue of *Challenge*" (Bahru 2014, p. 226). Perhaps it would have been better if Bahru had not bothered at all to pen an all too brief (pp. 221-8) sub-chapter on "the woman question."

A Disconnect

There was a disconnect between the 1920s generation and the 1960s generation because of the failure of the technocratic generation to serve as a bridging generation. It was for the most part co-opted by the imperial system and preoccupied with running the machinery of the modern state. Bahru (2014) writes: "The Ethiopian state was able to produce a cadre of civil servants..." (p. 46). This is a reference to the post-war student generation, the missing link between the generation of the 1920s and that of the 1960s. That intermediate generation did not have any political agenda, or its agenda was to be apolitical, certainly not to push for democratization, including reform via constitutional monarchy. But Bahru does not make any analysis of the inter-generational gap and its serious implications and ramifications for what happens in the 1960-74 period and beyond. This is a serious shortcoming.

Conclusion

The lesson for the post-*Dergue* or for the EPRDF generation is a mixed bag. There are positive as well as negative lessons. On the positive side, students should have the idealism to fight for social justice, no matter the odds. They should be the conscience of society while they can afford to be, as youth without the encumbrance of family and career responsibilities. They should also carry on the love of country, pride in our long, continuous, rich and diverse heritage, fidelity to the solidarity and indivisibility of the Ethiopian people, nurturing the humane values of mutuality and reciprocity.

On the negative side, students should not be blind followers of any ideology. They should guard their independence from any party or state. They should learn from and about the past and build on it, not uproot it; (*ser-neKel lewT* – "uprooting change" - is the worst concept the sixties and seventies generation came up with). They can afford to be free and fearless critics of power and society. They should permit themselves to imagine a just society and fight for it with tact, determination and perseverance.

Seeing the people as subjects of the state - whether the state is imperial, military/communist or developmental - is virtually in the DNA of the Ethiopian body politic. This practice has been maintained, not discarded, by the political parties that the ESM gave rise to. It has continued to be practiced by all political parties to this day, with no exception. The struggle to change subjects into citizens is on the agenda of the current generation.