

**The Young and the Urban in Addis Ababa: Towards a popular history of the
1974 Ethiopian Revolution, c. 1950s-1974**

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Declaration

I, Semeneh Ayalew Asfaw, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

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Dedication

To

My father, Ayalew Asfaw

Abstract

This is a study about the Ethiopian revolution through the social and cultural developments that formed the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. The largest participants in the social protests of 1974 were predominantly young Addis Ababans with a range of class and social formations. They were the authors of the Ethiopian revolution. In addition to documenting the social protests of 1974, however, this study is also interested in tracing the subject formation of the youth in Addis Ababa between the 1950s and 1974. By giving special focus to developments in the post 1950 period, where demographic, social and cultural transformations take particular intensity and form in the making of Addis Ababa, this study seeks to expose the linkages between the subject formation of the youth in the two and a half decades leading up to the revolution. By examining the processes that went into the formation of dissidence, this study asks whether factors (other than university student militancy) were significant to explain the emergence of the Ethiopian revolution. The material for this study comes from three main archives: 1. Non-literary works: newspapers and magazines; 2. Literary works: mainly novels and musical productions; and 3. Interviews. By integrating written and audio-visual archives and oral materials, this study examines and analyses the history of subject formation of the youth before and during the Ethiopian revolution. The significance of this study lies in its emphasis on the multiplicity of social actors in the making of the Ethiopian revolution as well as its attempt to demonstrate that subject formation was a function of everyday life and social and cultural production of rebel sensibility in Addis Ababa. In its attempt towards writing the popular dimensions of the history of the Ethiopian revolution in the Ethiopian capital, this study examines the conditions in which the social protests of 1974 occurred, and the social and cultural context in which the revolution became “thinkable”. It demonstrates the interconnections between the social and cultural formation of subjects, the political formativeness of cultural phenomena, and explicitly political protest.

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Introduction

What the study is all about

The meta-narrative of the Ethiopian revolution tends to privilege the socialist political ending of the revolution, reading retrospectively the political outcome (the establishment of a socialist military government) back into the process that led to the 1974 revolution. Even if scholars differed in the emphasis they give to economic, political or cultural factors as causes of the Ethiopian revolution, the ideological origin of the revolution is universally agreed upon to be the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM). This meta-narrative traces the history of the radical impetus of the revolution to the militancy of the student movement. In effect by tracing the genealogies of revolutionary militancy to the ESM does is obfuscate, first the subject formation of other social groups who took active part in the social protests of 1974. In order to deal with this narrowly conceived account of revolution, this study opens up urban space as a site of subject formation of popular classes and social groups, mainly young, who constituted the majority of the protesting groups in the popular uprisings of 1974. This is in contrast to the conventional method used in the literature that traces the revolutionary subject formation in the space of Haile Selassie I University, the bastion of student activism between the 1960s and 1974.

Before going into the discussion of what this study seeks to achieve, it is necessary to include here a brief note on what informed the dominant student-centric narrative of the revolution. And why some gave elements of the military—the status of the vanguard of the revolutionary movement? Part of the explanation for the dominance of a state and student-centric account of the Ethiopian revolution, could be found in the elite and state bias of the political history of Ethiopia. The history of militancy in Ethiopia, at least since the second half of the 20th century, is traced almost always back to the Ethiopian Student Movement. The other reason has however to do with factors internal to the ESM. The student radicals at least since the 1960s advocated and called for a socialist revolution. And when the revolution “erupted” in 1974, it was seen as a prophecy coming true, even if the revolutionary outbreak came suddenly and surprised everyone.

The student radicals are portrayed as “historically... destined—by social ascription or self-arrogation” to play the most important role in generating the Ethiopian revolution (Bahru 2009: 1; Bahru 2014: 265-266). But this is not unique to Ethiopia, as the history of student militancy show similar accounts in other African contexts, where students are projected as a “unique” social category in African societies, advanced in their studies (Zeghidi, 1995: 364); (Dwyer and Zeilig, 2009: 262) whose militancy is traced back into their formation in the university (Zeilig, 2013: 33). The notion that students “derived” their “power” from the “political nullity” and “the feebleness of other social classes” in Africa (Cliff cited in Zeilig 2013: 32), was quite widespread and resulted in such narratives to hold a hegemonic place in the writing of the Ethiopian revolution.¹

As opposed to this dominant narrative in the secondary literature that assumes a direct continuity and cause-effect relationship between the protests of 1974 and student militancy in the decades leading up to the revolution, this study seeks to document the role of social groups other than student radicals in revolution. What this study seeks to do is examine the social and cultural context of subject formation of the protesters of 1974 to understand the cultural forms dissent took in the decades leading up to the Ethiopian revolution. While the secondary literature tends to locate the ideological origins of the Ethiopian revolution in student politics and by doing so tends to regard high school students either as conduits or mere extensions of university student militancy, this study seeks to show the social nexus between high school students and the unemployed who reside in the capital to demonstrate the role of these social groups in the protests of 1974. This study, seeks to elaborate the social and cultural context in which the revolution occurred. By examining subject formation in the capital, one of the epicenters of the social protests of 1974, it demonstrated the interconnections between subject formation of the youth, the political formativeness of cultural phenomena, and explicitly political protest.

¹ See for a more elaborate discussion on student radicals and the Derg as vanguards in Semeneh Ayalew Asfaw “The *figure* of the vanguard in the Ethiopian Revolution: A critique of the historiography of revolution”, Campus Forms, A Special Issue in *Journal of African Cultural Studies* (forthcoming).

This study is an attempt towards writing the popular dimensions of the history of the Ethiopian revolution in one of the most important theatres of social protest in 1974, the capital—Addis Ababa. It seeks to do this by tracing the social and cultural formation of the youth, the main actors in the protests, in the years and decades before the revolution to document subject formation in the spaces of the city. It explores and examines the cultural context in which the social protests of 1974 occurred in the capital and the social and cultural conditions that made the revolution “thinkable”. While this study deals with the popular social protests of 1974 (February-June), its most important focus is on the pre-history of the revolution. It documents subject formation of the youth in Addis Ababa to understand the processes that went into the making of young rebels. This emphasis on social and cultural formation of the youth and the context that made the revolution “thinkable” in the postwar period (1941-1974) makes this study different from other studies of the Ethiopian revolution. Since 1974 a rich body of academic literature, memoirs and accounts of the Ethiopian revolution were produced. With regard to the academic literature, historians, scholars from humanistic studies and social scientists tried to identify the causes of the revolution, its ideological origins and chronicled the processes that went into the revolution and its outcomes. The existing academic literature looks to four major areas to (re)construct the history of the Ethiopian revolution. 1. The political system of the postwar imperial state and its structural weakness to satisfy the interest of new social forces unleashed by modernization (Andargachew, 1993); (Clapham, 1988). 2. The contradictions that the socio-economic structure of the imperial regime engendered that created the condition for the outbreak of the revolution (Addis Hiwet, 1975); (Andargachew, 1993); (Halliday & Molyneux, 1981); (Lefort, 1983); (Markakis & Nega, 1978). 3. The Ethiopian Student Movement to locate the ideological origins of the revolution and document radical subject formation in the pre-revolution period (Bahru, 2014);² Paulos, 2006); (Messay, 2008, 2011). 4. The 1974 protests and the subsequent ascendancy of the Derg³ into state power and its rivalries with the

² Bahru regards increasing student militancy after the mid 1960s as the “prelude to revolution” (2014: 153).

³ The military government that began to creep into state power in June 1974 that established the Provisional Military Council in September the same year.

civilian left parties.⁴ The account of the revolution that deals with the social protests of 1974 and the early years of revolution is animated by a debate on “who is the most important revolutionary subject?” Those who portray student radicals as the vanguards of the revolution (Markakis & Nega, 1978: 178-179); (Bahru, 2014: 279, 2015: 190-191) and those who contend that the Ethiopian revolution was a revolution “from above” and its vanguard was the Derg, held the two dominant positions in this debate (Halliday and Molyneux, 1981); (Marina & David Ottaway: 1978).⁵

Bahru argues, “The rise of the Ethiopian student movement had an element of inevitability about it. In the absence of any organized political opposition to a regime that was not prepared to introduce much needed political and economic reform, students rose to the challenge” (2014: 279). In a context where political parties were not allowed to exist, he contends, “[students] or the forces they unleashed supplanted the imperial regime” (2015: 190-191). Similarly, Andargachew considers students vanguards. But after the outbreak of the revolution he sees the armed forces competing with the educated elite for the “vanguardship of the popular uprising” (1993: 56). Clapham explains the outbreak of the revolution as a product of a disgruntled “intelligentsia thirsty for power” (Clapham, 1988: 30-35) and Paulos (2006) and Messay (2008, 2011) regard “western education” as the single most responsible factor behind the radicalization of students and by extension the Ethiopian revolution. Messay considers modern education as “alienating” and

⁴ This aspect of the Ethiopian revolution is a common thread that garners a lot of attention in the literature.

⁵ The major proponents of the Derg as the vanguard of the revolution are Halliday and Molyneux who borrow the notion of “revolution from above” from Ellen Kay Trimberger. The notion of “revolution from above” in the way Halliday and Molyneux use it contends that a revolution that is generated by a group that takes state power becomes the agent of that revolution (1981: 26). They argued, the Derg became the vanguard revolutionary force, once it has taken over state power in September 12, 1974 and implemented the radical socialist policies in 1975. For them without the Derg the revolution would have either been stalled or would have remained a “political revolution” lacking in radical socio-economic transformation (Ibid: 268). The Ethiopian revolution became a “social revolution” when the Derg “took” the revolution to the countryside through its radical reforms and policies (ibid). Marina and David Ottaways also advance a similar argument as Halliday and Molyneux with regards to the place of the Derg in the Ethiopian Revolution. For them it was Derg’s entry into the protest that brought “a grassroots explosion of politics”. The Ottaways understand “grassroots politics” as an effect of the “revolution” that is generated by the Derg. They say “the military...remained the prime mover of the revolution during its first three years” (1978, 11-13).

“dislocating” (2008: 37 and 45) and Paulos stresses the centrality of “western education” in the making of rebellious students. He says, “careful analysis shows that Haile Selassie was not overthrown by the military... Rather, the crucial and decisive deathblow that crashed Haile Selassie emanated from the methodical forays of the students and teachers who were the products of the modern school system” (2006: xix).

The secondary literature sees the Ethiopian Student Movement as the birthplace of the “ideological origin” of the Ethiopian Revolution. Despite differences in emphasis as to what the “fundamental causes” of the revolution were (as different works underscored socio-economic, political or cultural factors), there is almost a universal agreement in the existing literature as to who its “main” generators were. A direct link is traced between the Ethiopian Student Movement and the Ethiopian revolution and radical university students are earmarked as the single most important revolutionary subjects. The Ethiopian Student Movement is treated as the “ideological origin” of the revolution despite concrete evidence to show the “cause-effect” link between that movement and the events of 1974. What the secondary literature does instead is read the outcome of the revolution—the installation of a socialist military state after September 1974— back into the process that led to the emergence of the revolution. The subject formation of university students in Marxist-Leninist ideology in the 1960s and 1970s is taken as evidence that demonstrates the ideological genesis of the revolution in student militancy in this period. This study, on the contrary, instead of explaining “causes” and looking for “ideological origins”, it emphasizes on elaborating the social and cultural context in which the revolution occurred. By choosing the capital as its place of inquiry it documents subject formation of not only student militants but also diverse social groups inhabiting the broader social and cultural scale in postwar Addis Ababa to show interconnections between these subjects.

This study shifts the discussion of the revolution away from the focus on (university) students (revolutionary formation in the Ethiopian Student Movement, movement) or movement in the military barracks that led to the ascendancy of the Derg, or power struggle between the Derg and the civilian left. Instead, it pays attention to the

popular character of the social protests of 1974 and the social as well as cultural context in postwar Addis Ababa that created the condition of possibility for the emergence of the revolution.

This study has two main components. The first focuses on the popular and expansive character of the social protests of 1974 that generated the Ethiopian revolution. This theme is discussed in the second chapter. The other theme of the study that makes up the bulk of the study is discussed in the four subsequent chapters of this study. This part highlights the subject formation of the youth in postwar Addis Ababa. It deals, among others, with the political formativeness of everyday social practice in the years and decades leading up to the Ethiopian revolution.

The study will give a special focus on developments in the post 1950s, where demographic, social and cultural transformations take particular form and intensity in the production of subjects and the making of Addis Ababa. In its examination of the cultural field of Addis Ababa the study highlights two key processes. One is the creative living practice of young urban subjects, their cultural identity and their sociality. Two is the popular culture that emerged in the city-center and entertainment spaces of the capital. These two developments in postwar Addis Ababa will be used to document the conditions in which the rebel youth was birthed.

The objectives of the study

This study has two main objectives. It intends to trace the self-activity of the youth and their subject formation in Addis Ababa especially between the c.1950s and 1974. It also seeks to demonstrate the role and significance of popular groups who took part in the social protests of the capital between February and June of 1974. While this study aims at an alternative reading of the Ethiopian revolution, that by no means discounts the place of the Ethiopian Student Movement in revolutionary subject formation, but offers a reading of revolution that incorporates and documents subject formation of the rebel young in a broader social and cultural scale in pre-revolutionary Addis Ababa. It argues this was an important part of the story of revolution that was popular and expansive.

Questions that matter

This study has two principal questions that inhere from its main objectives. The first question pertains to the relationship between militancy/rebelliousness and revolution. It asks whether the formation of rebel subjects was limited to the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM). It inquires whether there were other sites in the pre-revolution period that played a key role in the formation of rebel sensibilities among the youth other than the university. It asks whether political formation in the pre-revolution period was traceable only to explicit political activity, as in student politics, to challenge imperial authority. By asking this question this study sets out to explore if other forms of disobedience were significant and politically formative of youth subjects. It probes whether other factors were implicated in the production of young rebels and investigates the processes that went into them in postwar Addis Ababa.

The other question is concerned with understanding the significance of popular groups such as the unwaged youth, women, Muslims etc. in the making of social protest in the 1974 revolution. It asks, how do we understand the modes of protests of such groups and the nature of their demands and the insight they offer to appreciate their social aspirations and visions of revolution?

Towards an expansive account of revolution: Theories that inform the study

As stated above, this study will tell the story of the Ethiopian revolution in two parts. While the first part discusses the social protest events of 1974 that launched the Ethiopian revolution, the second is a discussion of the subject formation of the youth inhabiting postwar Addis Ababa, especially between c.1950s and 1974. This component focuses on the popular and expansive character of the social protests of 1974 in the capital Addis Ababa. This part strategically foregrounds the role of popular social classes and social groups whose participation in the revolution is underplayed or seen as derivative of those considered the vanguards of the revolution in the making of the urban protest movement, hence the revolution. This is discussed in chapter one of this study. This part that documents the explicitly political protest

moment of the Ethiopian revolution is informed by Theda Skocpol's *States and Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (1979) and CLR James's *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938).

By working with the notion of “conjuncture” and “conjunctural unfoldings” as an essential aspect in the emergence of revolution from Skocpol, the first part of the study seeks to show interconnections between various groups and processes that resulted in the Ethiopian revolution. Moreover, in a situation where the bulk of revolutionists were popular classes whose spontaneous social action was not motivated by the taking of state power, the first part of the study also pays spontaneous mass action in the making of revolutions. In this regard C.L.R James's theoretical insight founded on histories of revolutions and revolt in African and Caribbean societies is employed to examine the aspirations and desires that motivated social protests of popular social groups who were not necessarily driven by taking state power.

The second part of the study that focuses on the process in the lead up to the social protests of 1974, which receives the most consideration in this study. Here the process of subject formation of the youth in postwar Addis Ababa will be documented. Subject formation is examined closely through the accounting of the social and cultural formation of the urban youth and their social practices in the cultural field. The birth of the rebel youth: their in-built disobedience in the spaces of the city (Addis Ababa) and their cultural rebellion against the normative order of the imperial regime will be demonstrated in four chapters (3 to 7) by focusing on the pre-revolution period, between the 1950s and 1974. CLR James's theory of revolution that is attentive to the *process leading up* to the event of revolt is particularly instructive to this part of the study.

Method and sources

Various sources are examined to understand the social and cultural context and the intensity of social and cultural change in Addis Ababa in the postwar period- the major ones being oral interviews, newspapers, literary works and audio-visual productions. The source material for this study comes from two main archives from the period under study: 1. Non-literary works: newspapers and magazines and 2. Literary works: novels, poems and musical productions. Interviews with selected social groups are used to document the cultural and political formation of the urban youth by looking into their shared experiences in postwar Addis Ababa. These were young Addis Ababans in the pre-revolution period- such as taxi drivers, Muslims, and workers without formal unions- whose role in social protest has been largely ignored by the literature despite their participation in the social protests of 1974. Other groups with whom interviews were conducted were people who came of age in the 1960s and 70s and frequented the profane/entertainment centers of the city: azmaris, artists and sex workers. Through these interviews attempt was made to unravel the formative experiences of the youth in the city in the years leading up to 1974.

Newspapers and magazines from the period are used to construct both the social and cultural life of Addis Ababa in imperial Ethiopia (between the 1950s and 1974) and the social protest of (February-June) 1974. The government daily *Addis Zemen* is used mainly to document the social protests of 1974. The two popular magazines of the postwar period *Addis Reporter* and *Menen* are consulted mainly to examine and reconstruct the social and cultural life of Addis Ababa, as their circulation and main focus was the capital. By integrating archival materials and oral recollections this study documents the history of subject formation of the urban youth before 1974.

Literary and musical productions are also used along with newspaper archives to understand the process of social and cultural change in Addis Ababa mainly between the c.1950s and 1974. This corpus of literary and artistic productions-particularly novels, poems and musical productions and audio-visual materials-from the period is deployed to augment and enrich accounts from oral and written archival sources.

Needless to say that these cultural productions are used not just to counterweigh sources acquired from interviews and newspapers, but to get more insights into the spirit of the period under study. Creative works such as novels and musical productions, even if fictional, can tell us a lot about the desires, aspirations and tensions of the social context they were produced in, as well as the social groups they describe and discuss. For instance, musical productions are used to “read” songs to write a social history of urban cultural identity of the youth. Thus, the notion of *arada* and *aradinnet*, key markers of urban cultural identity in the postwar city, will be given special focus in the study of musical productions to understand social and cultural processes in the capital. This study has, therefore, benefitted from putting the various sources in dialogue with each other and in ways that supplement each other.

Summary of Chapters

The first chapter discusses the “urban protest movement” in Addis Ababa between February and June 1974, where the social protests were “ubiquitous” and broad based. The chapter shows that the popular uprisings enlisted a broad spectrum of social groups and popular classes, mainly youth, of the capital. Inflation and famine provided key conjunctural contexts in politicizing protests in this moment of widespread popular upsurge in the capital. The main objective of this chapter is to highlight the popular character of the protest and the expansiveness and heterogeneity of those who took part in these protests. As such, it demonstrates that participation in the social protests of 1974 involved peasants fleeing famine, pastoral leaders, school students, the unwaged, Muslims and such diverse groups. To do so, the chapter pieces together newspaper archives on these protests, oral interviews and accounts on the February 18th 1974 taxi strike, the Muslim demonstration of April 20, 1974, and interviews and video documents on peasants who picketed the gates of the parliament fleeing famine and Afar pastoralist elders petitioning the government. I would argue that rather than the leadership or inspiration of ‘vanguard’ groups, it was the interconnections between various social groups who took part in the protest that coalesced in autonomously staged protest events that made the *popular* revolution possible. By underscoring the multiplicity of social actors in protest, the role of this chapter in the overall study is to show why it is necessary to trace and understand

subject formation of the diverse social groups in Addis Ababa in the years and decades leading up to revolution. This chapter thus sets the scene and the rationale to a deeper examination of subject formation before the revolution. The chapter is premised on the commitment that *popular* and ubiquitous character of the revolution necessitated an excavation that documents the emergence of “the popular” in the capital in the pre-revolution period.

Chapter two lays out the theoretical framework. It discusses three key themes in this study: *the popular*, *the urban* and *the modern* and their relationship with revolution. In conceptualizing the popular, I work with Stuart Hall’s theoretical intervention to understand “the popular” in “popular culture”. I draw on Hall to argue that “the popular” in postwar Addis Ababa was a product of the collective consciousness that the youth developed in the course of living in the city. Henry Lefebvre’s notion of “social space” as a space of social practices of making life, by urban dwellers who played a key role in the making of postwar Addis Ababa, in addition to the state and structural factors. The urban form in this study is conceived as much as a product of a process of city making from below, not just as a product of structures and circumstances beyond urban dwellers. The study draws on Desta Tekle Wold’s conception of *zemenawi* (the modern) as “born of a time”—as spatio-temporally specific phenomenon to argue that the modern in postwar Addis Ababa was part of the popular experiential lived practice. By problematizing the city to elaborate the setting in which the 1974 revolution occurred, to show the ways in which the popular emerged in Addis Ababa in the pre-revolution period, and by demonstrating that popular modernity was a lived practice in the in-built delinquency of the city, this chapter shows that (the popular, the urban and the modern) were “independently” developing phenomena that were however intermeshed, in the process of emergence of the revolution.

The third chapter is about the emergence of “the popular” in postwar Addis Ababa at the intersection of the modernist project of the imperial state, the self-activity of the urban youth and media discourse that constructed a collective identity among the young. This chapter examines the making of the city “from below”. It charts the

emergence of “the popular” as a product of interlinked processes that occurred as a result of population influx into Addis Ababa from the countryside, especially since the 1950s, and the informalization of work and settlement in the city. By highlighting the popular and socio-economic dimensions of city making it seeks to demonstrate the significance of rural urban migration and informalization of work and settlement in the capital. It also shows how the popular classes residing in Addis Ababa were discursively constructed as the people by the state media.

The creation of a shared public sociality of the predominantly youthful city, Addis Ababa in the postwar period is taken up in chapter four. By zooming in on a neighborhood in the city-center, Wube Bereha, this chapter shows first, how popular classes transformed the physical spaces of the city. And second how the public sociality of the neighborhood became crucial in the transformation of the public sociality of the city in general. By doing so the chapter lays out the spatial and cultural context in which dissident subjects were casted in the capital. It discusses the self-consciousness of the youth while showing its emergence in relationship to the social conventions of the dominant culture advocated by the modernist imperial state. It seeks to demonstrate the ‘dialectic of containment and resistance’ between the modernity that was sponsored by the imperial state and the public sociality of the youth that was engendered by the social and cultural changes of the postwar modernization of the capital. It exposes the vexed relationship between the imperial modernist state’s projected embrace of modernity and what it regarded as the excesses of “western culture” along with practices that it supposedly unleashed such as—excessive drinking, smoking, public indecency, disregard to authority and disregard to Ethiopian traditions and customs. The modernist state projected itself and the emperor as the bringer of “modern civilization”, while at the same time it admonished the youth for their uncritical and indiscriminate acceptance and wholesale appropriation of “western culture”. The main objective is to show the link between “social and cultural formation” and consciousness. This is done by explicating the ways in which the youth, from different social classes, developed a shared self-consciousness as a result of the public sociality that emerged in the capital and grew to become ubiquitous in the 1960s and 70s.

Chapter five delves into modernity as a key cultural phenomenon in subject formation in postwar Addis Ababa. The formativeness of modernity in this period was mediated by the modernist projects of the postwar imperial state. However, modernity was also a popular experiential lived practice and the social practices of young residents of the capital. The chapter combines a discussion of theories of modernity propounded by scholars (about Ethiopia as well as elsewhere) and a discussion of the tradition vs. modernity debate in media/public discourses. The chapter also proposes a theory of modernity specific and relevant to the postwar context of Addis Ababa. It does so by adopting a conception of *modernity as practice* and as temporally and spatially specific phenomena that was part of popular consciousness and key in subject formation in the postwar period.

The sixth and the seventh chapter synthesize insights from discussions in chapter three, four and five. They bring together the emergence of “the popular”, and “the *zemenawi*” to show how *popular modernity* was forged in postwar Addis Ababa. These chapters deal with the ways in which changes in public sociality in the postwar period—produced by the inbuilt delinquency of urban space— led to the birth of the *rebel youth*. Chapter six shows that the birth of the *rebel youth* as a product of cultural brokers—women bar operators and artists—operating entertainment spaces of the city. This chapter also deals with the making of *aradinnet* as a quintessential urban youth identity in the two and half decades before the revolution. In this chapter *aradinnet* as a new way of being young and urban in the capital is shown to be a product of nightlight, dance and a particular aesthetic of dress considered *zemenawi*. It was also associated with frivolity, freewheeling lifestyle, and disrespect to social convention and authority. The chapter demonstrates how *aradinnet* began as a collective shared experience of street smartness by poor city-center hustlers and vagrants, but evolved to become a generalized urban sensibility, a way of being *zemenawi* and young in the capital especially in the 1960s and 70s. In short, this chapter shows how important the city was as a theatre of *shared experience* for the youth who come from different walks of life and classes. The chapter documents how the everyday social practices of the urban youth—particularly in cultural and

entertainment spaces operated by cultural brokers actively subverted the social conventions of imperial postwar Ethiopia and brought critique to bear on its normative foundations.

Chapter seven like chapter six is interested in the making of popular modernity in postwar Addis Ababa. It does this through the study of popular music. It examines how the arada musical trope was formative of the sensibility of the young. It demonstrates how popular music contributed towards the making of the rebel youth in Addis Ababa particularly between the late 1950s and the emergence of the 1974 revolution. The chapter extends the discussion on *aradinnet* as an urban youth culturally modern identity by highlighting certain sets of urban social practices by analyzing songs about arada. It demonstrates the significance of popular music and popular culture (particularly the cinema and sporting activities) in creating platforms for social congregation, the forging of community and the building of solidaristic ties between young Addis Ababans throughout the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s. In a nutshell, the chapter seeks to show the centrality of popular music and culture in the forging of youth collective consciousness and identity in pre-revolutionary Addis Ababa.

The concluding chapter reiterates the popular nature of the social protests of 1974 to stress that it was a “popular revolution”. It underscores the folkish solidaristic *coming togethers* these protests registered where different social groups coalesced around various protest events. It then shows why it was necessary to trace back this popular, solidaristic glue that brought disparate social groups together in the prerevolutionary Addis Ababa. This chapter also exposes the interconnections between subject formations in urban space and the formativeness of the modern in postwar Addis Ababa. It stresses the emergence of youth rebels in the spaces of the city as a function of their everyday experiential social practices. It also discusses the insight it garnered from American historians writing about the French Revolution to trace the cultural context in which revolution occurred by focusing in pre-revolutionary France. While acknowledging the debts of this study to these works, the concluding chapter also shows its point of departure from them. It argues that the social practices of the youth, their wayward ways and disrespect for the politics of respectability defied the cultural

normative order of the imperial regime and its public morality. The “source” of “desacralization”, the chapter contends, was not so much the *ideas* produced by seditious literature or the expose of “private lives” of monarchs in legal briefs (as Robert Darnton or Sarah Maza argued for France), but the youth engaged in living practice in the spaces of the city. The chapter then ends with a note on the heterogeneous groups who took part in the revolution and the visions they had and the meanings they attached to the Ethiopian revolution.

In short, this study is an attempt at expansiveness, a trial at a pre-history of revolution and its popular dimensions in Addis Ababa. Despite my attempt at expansiveness, however, I am very well aware that the social and cultural context in which the Ethiopian revolution occurred was very complex and could not be limited to an account of processes in the capital, Addis Ababa.

Chapter One

The popular, the city, the modern and the Ethiopian revolution: Theoretical framework of the study

1.1. The political formativeness of everyday life

This chapter lays out the theoretical frame of the thesis through a discussion of *the popular* and the production of a popular cultural sensibility in Addis Ababa in the postwar period (1941-1974). It problematizes the city in postwar Addis Ababa to elaborate the setting in which the 1974 revolution occurred. This study treats these developments: the emergence of “the popular”, the formation of a culture of delinquency in the spaces of the city and the popular revolution as interconnected phenomena.

Adolph Reed in his *Class Notes* criticizes the tendency in contemporary left scholarship on what is politics and “the political” that “spin narratives that ultimately demean concerted political action by claiming to find ... [politics] everywhere” (Reed, *Class Notes*, 86). Reed is correct in signaling caution in this regard. If everything is politics basically politics is rendered meaningless. While taking this critique seriously, it is at the same time important to note that the notion of “everyday life as politics” could be a useful way to recognize the political formativeness of everyday social practices and their linkages with explicit and/or organized political action. With this in mind, my work is interested in the political implications and formativeness of everyday life and practices. It traces a prehistory or a before life of the Ethiopian revolution (as opposed to its “ideological origins”) through the formation of delinquent urban young subjects in the spaces of the city (the in-built-delinquency of postwar Addis Ababa) in the decades leading up to the Ethiopian revolution. It proposes a theory of the emergence of “the popular” within the process of urbanization and the making of Addis Ababa in the postwar period. The formation of urban outlaws in the cultural field in postwar Addis Ababa (1941-1974) is investigated in the context of the enunciation of the modern/*zemenawi* as a collective consciousness built in experiential social practice.

1.2. The emergence of “the popular” and the city

The 1974 Ethiopian revolution is conceptualized in this study as a product of the coming together of social forces, folkish spontaneous nexuses, mutually inspired diverse protesting groups, as well as conjunctural contexts that politicized these “situated”⁶ disparate groups. The builders of the different edifices of the Ethiopian revolution came from almost all social classes: the urban poor, the unwaged, employees, students, teachers, taxi owners and drivers, Muslims (rich and poor alike), priests, women, sex workers, domestic workers, parliamentarians, the intelligentsia, professionals and others. While the first chapter demonstrates this *popular* character of the revolution, the two subsequent chapters seek to understand how these disparate social groups and social classes came to form folkish spontaneous nexuses in the decades preceding 1974 in the capital. The *emergence of the popular* is traced in social, economic and cultural processes happening in postwar Addis Ababa. I use Stuart Hall’s “Notes on the Deconstruction of ‘the popular’” to develop a theory of the emergence of “the popular” by giving popular culture a particular attention in subject formation. I expound on the cultural matrix that went into the making of shared popular social and cultural formations of those inhabiting the capital in the postwar period to explain, among other factors, the convergence of social groups in protest in 1974. I do not, however, claim to provide a comprehensive account of the formation of all the disparate groups who emerge as revolutionaries in the capital in 1974. Rather, here, I make an attempt to show the expansiveness of the revolution and acknowledge that there were multifarious variables that explain the formation of revolutionaries who were responsible for the popular protest movement.

Stuart Hall defines “the popular” as “those forms and activities, which have their roots in the social and material conditions of particular classes; which have been embodied in popular traditions and practices” (Hall, 1998: 449)⁷. The main take away for this study from this theory of the popular is that socio-economic factors and material

⁶ See discussion below on Skocpol (1979: 18) for the vitality of structural factors in revolution.

⁷ Here Stuart Hall signals that this theory of “the popular” is tentative. It is also centered on an appraisal of English history in the late 19th and early 20th century.

conditions form the basis of cultural formation. By accounting for demographic processes, socio-economic formations and social change in postwar Addis Ababa, I show how the social and cultural context in postwar Addis Ababa gave rise to a widely shared popular culture that was politically formative of subjects inhabiting the city. In this sense, “the popular” is understood as a product of social, economic and cultural formations of urban subjects.

At the same time the emergence of “the popular” was also a function of its relations with what Stuart Hall (1998: 449) called “the power block”—the ruling classes. The ruling class in imperial Ethiopia through the “privileges of birth” and “inherited position” (Andreas, 2013: 12) wielded both economic and political power over the vast swathes of Ethiopians inhabiting urban and rural spaces. They presided over a very unequal society. A particular focus is given in this study to the process of “city making from below” that was key in the emergence of the urban underclass in postwar Addis Ababa. However, the popular included other social classes in the city who have come to share a certain cultural affinity and urban identity with the urban underclass. The popular is therefore a reference to the city’s ruled population outside “the power block”, who form the motley social groups and differentiated social classes—mainly young—that were connected by a widely shared urban cultural life and identity. The popular were, thus, variously situated subjects in the political economy of the postwar city. I show that among other possible factors, the popular emerged in the capital as a result of three major processes—the imperial state’s modernist project, the self-activity of urban dwellers (through migration and the proliferation of “informalization” of work and settlement), and the emergence of the mass media as a key factor in the formation of urban subjects.

In this study, class position is vital in the constitution of the popular. But a shared practice of sociality is also taken to be the other key factor that brings otherwise diverse social groups and social classes in the making of the popular outside the power block. Therefore, the popular in postwar Addis Ababa were those heterogeneous social groups that included university students, school students, the professional intelligentsia, taxi owners, merchants, daily laborers, sex workers, artists, azmaris,

petit traders, brokers, civil servants, formally employed people, the unemployed, soldiers, the *asheker*⁸, the *chulo*⁹, vagrants, street hustlers and others.

1.3. Social practice in the spaces of the city and the emergence of a widely shared cultural sensibility among the youth

As a study of postwar Addis Ababa, the work is also concerned with the ways in which urban space is “produced” as a result of state activity, the activity of dominant classes as well as “social practices” of variously situated social groups inhabiting it.¹⁰ As opposed to seeing space as a “product and residue of historical time”, where *time* acts on space while space remains “immobile” (Lefebvre, 1991: 22), this work emphasizes on the ways in which everyday people produced the capital. Addis Ababa—as an urban space is considered a key site of protest action during the 1974 revolution in the secondary literature. However, the existing academic literature does not make urban space part of its problematic to understand subject formation before or during the Ethiopian revolution. The space that is given a lot of attention in tracing the ideological origins of the revolution has been the space of the university, rather than the spaces of the city produced as a result of the social practices of everyday people (i.e., outside the university).

As Henry Lefebvre (1991: 35) says, “social space” is a space of “social life” where “all 'subjects' are situated in” and “a space... [that these subjects] ... may both enjoy and modify.” Social practice by everyday people in the spaces of Addis Ababa in the postwar period will be emphasized as vital both in the production of the city and its urban subjects. The spaces of the city will be examined to understand subject formation in postwar Addis Ababa. The city-center will be given particular attention, in this regard, due to its “hyperfrequentedness” (Lefebvre, 1996: 209) as well as its emblematic status in the making of the cultural identity of the youth in the decades

⁸ A form of personalized domestic labor without a formal contractual relationship between the *asheker* (the servant) and the *geta* (the landlord). *Ashker* is different from *gered*, usually women, who provide paid service for a regular amount of money. *Gered* was the common term used to refer to house helps during the imperial period. The term was largely retired from official use after the revolution for its demeaning connotation.

⁹ *Chulo* is a form of labor usually paid in kind or food.

¹⁰ Lefebvre calls “social space... the space of social practice” (1991: 11).

before 1974.

While underscoring social space as a space of social life and social practice, this study is also attentive to the situatedness of subject formation in the spaces of the city. Here, I show how a popular culture that emerged from within the trenches of the underclass—the street hustlers and vagrants of the city center become a widely shared cultural sensibility by Addis Ababa's youth in the post 1950s. *Arada* or *aradinnet*, a shared cultural sensibility of disobedience and in-built-delinquency in the spaces of the city impacted the disparate social groups and social classes that inhabited the city. This shared cultural urban sensibility and identity underpinned the ways in which being modern and young were defined in postwar Addis Ababa. *Arada/aradinnet* became part of the shared urban identity of the youth that constituted the majority in the city. Its association with a freewheeling life style, penchant for a life of drinking and frivolity, irreverence to codes of respectability and disregard for valuations pegged on privileges of birth and inherited position undermined the imperial normative order. The cultural rebellion *aradinnet* brought to bear on the spaces of the city—in entertainment centers, the city-center and the streets “desacralized” social conventions of the postwar modernist imperial state especially in the years following the 1950s.

However, by showing that there was a widely shared urban popular culture among the young in Addis Ababa in the post 1950s, I do not mean to argue that there was only harmony and agreement between the youth, as disparate and heterogenous as they were. The youth were never a monolithic entity— their gender, social status and situatedness, as well as the diverse political, religious, ethno-cultural and class positions they held in urban society meant that there was conflicts, divisions, incongruities and dissensions between them. For instance, as I will show in chapter four changes in public sociality—such as the proliferation of women wearing the miniskirt, the expansion of sex work, the spread of practices like smoking, social drinking and nightlife were seen not only the imperial state, but also by a section of the youth and the rest of urban society as signs of “cultural degeneration” and crisis and generated a lot of public debate and disagreement in the postwar period. For

instance, those elements in postwar society who were suspicious of the increasing public visibility of women and the changes in their public sociality, used the media to try to put them *back in line* or chastise and shame them for their unacceptable independent streak or wayward ways. It is in a response to such fears and anxieties in society that the state, as well as elements in society tried to put a check on the public conduct of women in an attempt to try to re-inscribe their socially accepted roles as *chewa* (respectable) women.

1.4. The struggle over the meaning of the modern: *zemenawinnet* in the city

In this study cultural developments and processes in the cultural field is taken as a key phenomenon to explain the nature and content of subject formation. Popular culture that emerges in the spaces of the city—in entertainment centers and the city-center is theorized as a site of struggle over the meaning of “the modern”, (*zemenawi*).¹¹ This struggle was most apparent in postwar Addis Ababa especially in the post 1950s. The modernist imperial state for the first time in history was striving to create an Ethiopian modern/*zemenawi* subject—አዲሱ ኢትዮጵያዊነት¹² “the New Ethiopianess” (Shimeles, 2011: 529)—through its educational institutions, its arts and the media. In tandem, a popular modernity was emerging in the spaces of the city as a result of the living practice of everyday people. In an attempt to understand subject formation in postwar Addis Ababa, I adopt a conception of modernity as practice collectively experienced. This *popular modernity* emerged as an experiential lived practice and produced cultural outlaws in the city-center and entertainment spaces of the city, impacting the cultural identity and sensibility of subjects inhabiting the city.

This theory of modernity as practice is drawn from Desta Teklewold and Kidane Wold Kifle (both distinguished scholars of Amharic and Geez). Desta defines *zemenawi* (the modern) as ዘመን የወለደው “born of a time” (Desta, 1970: 496). It is by starting from

¹¹ This follows from Stuart Hall’s theorization of popular culture as a “struggle” over the meaning of culture (1998: 453).

¹² Here Shimeles takes the notion of “New Ethiopianness” from Dr. Minase Haile’s speech, Minister of State for Information and Tourism on the 25th year commemoration of Ethiopia’s Victory over Italy in 1958.

this conception of *zemenawi* that I investigate *zemenawinnet* (modernity) as a popular lived practice in postwar Addis Ababa. As such, *modernity* as practice enunciated in the context of the city, departs from the common view of modernity/the modern as foreign, and as a ready-made *ideal* brought to Ethiopia from outside.

This outlaw culture born mainly out of the city-center and the red-light districts of the city gradually became a widely shared cultural sensibility across classes and social groups, especially the youth. The culture that emerged from the poor quarters of the city and in spaces operated by *azmari*¹³ cum bar operators was not an “authentic” culture of the lower classes that was uncontaminated by dominant cultural norms of the imperial social order. Popular culture “oscillated” as Stuart Halls would say, between “the double movement of containment and resistance” (Stuart Hall, 1998: 443), simultaneously buckling to the influences of the dominant culture and resisting it. This study acknowledges, despite its recalcitrance, *the popular modern* as an experiential practice remains always susceptible and permeable to the ‘influences’ of the imperial modernist state and the hegemony of western modernity. It is circumscribed and infected by them, and thus unable to inhabit a space outside of them. But then as a form of resistance, this popular modernity expressed in living practice interrogated the cultural conventions of the imperial state that sought to create deferential, respectable subjects who were “responsive to authority” (“Christmas Message”, December 1958-January 1959: 61).

Moreover, even if the urban youth in postwar Addis Ababa had a widely shared popular cultural practices, this does not mean that their social practices, and spaces of self-expression and social position were not determined by their class, social status and gender. For instance, as elaborated in chapter six *arada* and *aradinnet* was interpreted and taken up by different sections of society differently. While some associated the meaning of *arada* with lowly born young members of the streets of the city center, the hustlers and vagrants, for others the *arada* and *aradinnet* who appealed to them were “the higher *arada*” (salaried, educated, who frequented Wube

¹³ Minstrels working in drinking parlors, bars and clubs.

Bereha, the restaurants and *zemenawi* spaces of the city). *Aradinnet* was also a way of being that was gendered, and furthermore evolved in the 1950s as a set of attributes and character traits such as open-mindedness, responsiveness to change that was associated with the appreciation of “the new”. This last aspect of *aradinnet* or more accurately *arada* sensibility that got accepted across gender and class lines to inform the self-consciousness of the youth in postwar Addis Ababa. The sense that people are inhabiting “new times” helped popularize *zemenawinnet* (equivalent of modernity) a widely shared culture of lived practice, especially among the youth, in the postwar period. The need for *zemenawi silitane* (modern civilization) was advocated by the state and found institutional expression in schools, the media and the bureaucracy. And as a cultural phenomenon—*zemenawinnet* was associated with and widely accepted as a practice of freedom (for example: in dress and public sociality) and a sense of appreciation for “the new”.

However, “the new” did not always mean “the modern” as a borrowing from outside. In this study “the modern” is conceptualized as a product of a “regime of circulation” and a function of interlocking connections with different sources (Subrahmanyam, S. 2010), and emergences rather than a phenomenon that originates from a single privileged source. In this sense, popular modernity is conceived neither as an imitation of a “western modern” form nor as an authentically Ethiopian modern. It is conceived as a product of a spatio-temporal context that was a function of a regime of circulation of cultural artifacts, both from home and abroad. Popular modernity as an experiential practice brought critique to bear on the imperial state’s modernist codes of respectability (ጭዋነት) wrought in the name of conserving “Ethiopian culture” to regulate social behavior of postwar subjects of the city. It is theorized as a social and cultural lived practice of everyday subjects, informing their political behaviors as well as expressing their sentiments, social visions and aspirations.

Similarly, just as much as *zemenawi* subject formation in postwar Addis Ababa was not a mere mimicry of western modernity or a form of “westernization”, so wasn’t urbanization. I contend, urbanization describes process and the urban space is not treated here as an alchemy, as a machine that acts upon people in ways that makes

them lose their “rural” or “traditional” identity to produce them as “urbane” subjects. As Lefebvre says, since all urban space or all space for that matter is a “dominated space” (1991: 280)¹⁴ urban inhabitants do not live in circumstances and conditions of their own making. In whatever ways they are situated, however, subjects make life. They are engaged in a creativity of living practice, despite their conditions and class positions.

In this sense, therefore, city-making was never a mere product of urban design, state intervention and western architectural knowledge and techniques of the grid city. As stated already, this work emphasizes on the impact of the process of city making from below on the identity of postwar Addis Ababa and its inhabitants. The implication was that the city was far from being a mere conduit of western modernity (culturally or architecturally). This is perhaps best shown by the ways in which the popular historian and journalist, Mamo Wudineh, described Addis Ababa of the 1970s. He called it — “ገጠራዊ አዲስ አበባ” — the rural Addis Ababa (Mamo Wudineh, 1966: 1 and 3). In this period, Addis Ababa was neither ‘fully’ urban nor ‘fully’ rural both in its social and architectural make-up. It was a city produced by the social ingenuity of its sizable, fresh from the countryside, migrants and poor and young underclass inhabitants. Its residents occupied an in-between social space. In this city that was *rural-urban*, I conceptualize subject formation as an examination of situated “hyphenated-ness” (Gedamu Abreha, 1969: 10-14).

1.5. Balancing between the process and the event in the theory of revolution

The conception of revolution that this study works with centers everyday social practice of “situated” social actors. It seeks to balance process with event to understand the ways in which the Ethiopian revolution emerged. To achieve this, theories of revolution that give special emphasis on process, everyday social practice and the actual situatedness of social actors will be given particular attention in this study. Therefore, even if I am aware of and acquainted with the vast body of scholarly

¹⁴ Here Lefebvre argues, “State power endures only by virtue of violence directed towards a space”.

work on revolution and theories of revolution, here, I do not go into an elaborate review of this literature. This is also partly because the review of the literature is already adequately covered in other works¹⁵. Instead, I have made a conscious decision to focus on two key theoreticians of revolution that provide crucial significance and insight to understand the Ethiopian revolution. The first is CLR James, whose theory of revolution, as developed in *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1989) and *A History of Pan African Revolt* (2012) have a special importance in providing insight to this study. James' attention to cultural processes and the "self-activity" of everyday people in the emergence of revolution is critical to conceptualize revolution and understand revolutionary process.

The other theorist of revolution that informs this study is Theda Skocpol. Her *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979) provides this study with key conceptual tools to understand "the social" content of revolutions. Skocpol's emphasis on conjuncture as an essential factor in the emergence of revolutions and the centrality of structural factors in the outbreak and process of revolutions is of particular importance to this study.

When it comes to the theories of revolution that inform this study, it is important to note that the first consideration is to have an approach to revolution that is attentive to social and cultural developments and processes. The second consideration is an approach that sees revolution as a product of convergence of social forces and 'conjunctural unfoldings'. As stated already, more than a study of revolution that is centered on explicit protest, this study's main preoccupation

¹⁵ See for instance Theda Skocpol's introductory chapter "Explaining Social Revolutions: Alternatives to Existing Theories" in *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979) for an appraisal of major theories of revolution such as the Marxian theories of revolution, "aggregate psychological theories" of revolution, "systems/value consensus theories" of revolution, and political conflict theories of revolution (also commonly called "political opportunities" approach). For "the political opportunities" approach and theory of social movements and revolutions (pioneered by Charles Tilly in the 1960s but developed by others in subsequent decades) see Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jaspers (eds.) *Contention in Context: Political Opportunities and the Emergence of Protest* (2012). See Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts* (2015) for theories of social movements.

is understanding and documenting the out of the scene setting and stage of revolution. It documents the cultural formation of urban subjects—the disparate social groups and classes inhabiting Addis Ababa in the postwar period.¹⁶

The Ethiopian revolution was a revolution whose Marxist content was bestowed upon by militant university students. However, at the same time, it should be noted that the bulk of the revolutionists in Addis Ababa were workers, school students, Muslims, taxi drivers, unwaged and unemployed youth, teachers, immigrants from the countryside, civil servants, sex workers, priests, domestic workers, artists, etc., who had little or no acquaintance with Marxism-Leninism. These motely urban subjects that constitute the majority did not have Marxist orientation—even if it could not be said that Marxist ideas never permeated their activities and political action in 1974. Addis Hiwet, the brilliant theorist of the Ethiopian revolution, said this about the majority of Ethiopians who took part in the 1974 revolution. The revolution “drew [sic] masses of people into political life...by a bout of political action” owing to the politicizing vibrations of the “popular” social protests of 1974 (Addis Hiwet, 1984: 34 and 37). To my mind, what Addis Hiwet was describing is the *popular revolution*—that was the product of the “political life” that the popular risings of 1974 engendered. While, Addis Hiwet saw entrance into ‘political life’ as a product of participation in explicit protest, he was sensitive to the spontaneous character of urban protest. Moreover, discerningly he drew a clear distinction between political life through participation in protest and “the enlightenment” that is acquired as a consequence of one’s exposure to Marxism-Leninism (Ibid: 37).¹⁷ Beyond seeking to understand the

¹⁶ This study is similar in this sense with works that focus on the social and cultural context pre-revolutionary period from which revolutions emerged, for instance France. Notable examples include Robert Darnton (1971, 1998) and Sarah Maza (1993).

¹⁷ The question that the revolutionary pressures finally ended up with a Marxist-Leninist ideological coloration can be explained by various factors. One and most obvious perhaps was the global context of the 1970s where socialism (and Marxism-Leninism) was seen as key tools to end socio-economic exploitation, as well as cultural and political oppression, especially in Africa and many other parts of the Third World. But the other important factor was the Derg after it securely climbed onto state power, in competition with the civilian left, adopted scientific socialism as its ideology. The concern for social justice, at a time when the country was being devastated by a catastrophic famine that killed hundreds of thousands and affected millions socialism was seen by many as the fitting ideology that could ensure economic justice.

explicit political action of the disparate revolutionists during the popular protests of 1974, it also goes back to the decades before 1974 to examine the process of their social and cultural formation in the capital.

While some actors took part in protest with the intent of changing the regime, and controlling state power to replace the existing political system, others attacked the cultural foundations of the system without vying to take state power. The student radicals were the most important social group that invested in the socialist content of the revolution. But the student radicals were a very small group based mainly in Haile Selassie I University. The heterogeneous social groups who rose in protest in 1974 were formed in the spaces other than the university. It is key to note that the revolution reflected the differing visions and social aspirations of variously positioned social groups and social classes. The socialist outcome, of the revolution, espoused most ardently by militant university students, (and sections in the army), should not be confused with the vision of the majority of revolutionists. Neither should their social vision be read back into the process that gave rise to the revolution to either privilege the socialist aspirations of the revolution over the aspirations of other social actors. Nor should the socialist aspiration of the revolution be used to narrowly conceive “the origin”, or the prehistory of revolution. The history of student militancy in the HSIU was key in understanding the formation of revolutionaries. But it was just part of the story, not the whole story. The formation of revolutionaries had “many more sources” than the Ethiopian Student Movement.

For this study the aspect of the revolution that broke out in 1974 that is highlighted is the popular rising and not the establishment of a military socialist state, i.e., *the outcome* of the revolution. This is why the focus of this study is on the social protest period (between February and June 1974) and the decades before the revolution where the political formativeness of everyday social practice is documented as a key element in the formation of urban subjects.

CLR James’ theory of revolution, as expounded in the classic *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1989) and his other works will

be used to understand revolution and the formation of revolutionary subjects outside the confines of university¹⁸. CLR James' theory of revolution is instructive to this study primarily because he attaches key importance to cultural processes of everyday life as the fundamental rudiments of explicit political action in revolution. James emphasizes the "self-activity" of everyday people as a crucial revolutionary force. For James, the autonomous activity of everyday people (his focus being "masses of black people"), their cultural and artistic practice as well as their "instinctive consciousness", has long been the leitmotif of revolution in modern history (James, CLR. 2012). I find linkages he makes between the social-cultural activity of everyday people in their quotidian lives, and their (explicitly political) risings particularly enlightening to understand the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and its accretion over the years. As Anthony Bogues notes, in James's theory of revolution, the rejection of domination and revolt by a dominated class comes as a process—as a long-term accretion of popular humours. It was the process of "ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries [which] bursts into volcanic eruption" that culminates in the rising of the slaves of San Domingo in 1791 (James cited in Bogues, 2017: 205).

The significance James attaches to culture in revolution is for instance to be found in the parallel he draws between the North Rhodesian revolt of the Copper Miners in 1935 (Zambia) and the 18th century events of San Domingo (James, 2012: 233). The ways in which the revolts in North Rhodesia unfolded, in the absence of formally organized labor unions through "personal networks, dance societies, religious organizations, and...mass meetings", were for him very similar with the secret meetings of the slaves in San Domingo that led to the revolutionary outbreak (Forsdick & Hogsbjerg, 2017: 10). Such similarities in the mechanics of revolt inform James' theory of revolution that conceives mass rising as an autonomously staged revolutionary event, mediated by the "creative self-activity" of everyday people. James's historically grounded theory of revolution and his unusual attentiveness to the different forms and not so obvious ways in which revolutions unfold make his

¹⁸ Of particular importance to this study from James's other works are *Facing Reality* (2006) and *A History of Pan African Revolt* (2012).

theory sensitive to complexity of factors that go into the emergence of revolutions. James' appreciation of cultural lives of everyday people— their “feelings” and practices as formative of their political and revolutionary activities (Forsdick & Hogsbjerg, 2017: 12); (Fick, 2017: 64), (Hill, 2017: xvi)¹⁹ is just one example of the expansive character of his theory of revolution. Besides the expansiveness of James' theory of revolution his attention to the ‘self-activity’ of groups and societies considered too ‘backward’ to develop ‘revolutionary consciousness’ (James cited in Fick, 2017: 64),²⁰ gives his theory of revolution yet another appeal to this study.

C.L.R James emphasizes the role and significance of popular classes in revolution. The “instinctive consciousness” and the “instinctive desires” of popular groups for freedom from political and economic subjugation take a central place in his revolutionary theory (James, 1989: 89); (Maldonado Torres, 2005: 180-181 and 183). For James in the Haitian revolution, the revolutionary act that was the ultimate expression of revolutionary consciousness was the spontaneous revolt of the mass of slaves against their masters. However, that is not the whole story, the Haitian Revolution was for him also a product of the process, the “ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries [which] bursts into volcanic eruption” (James cited in Bogues, 2017: 205). It was, James says, “the strength of the mass movement which dragged in its wake revolutionary sections of those classes nearest to it” (James, 1989: 243).

Therefore, for James, revolution is chiefly a product of mass action as opposed to vanguard agitation. In *The Black Jacobins* for instance, it was the slave masses that comprised about half a million strong that were considered revolutionaries (James, 1989: 89). As Anthony Bogues observes, in *The Black Jacobins*, James considers the independence of Haiti in 1804 as a culmination and an outcome of the Haitian Slave Revolution. James sees this moment not as an event that captures the revolutionary

¹⁹ See also Robert Hill's comments on how James in *Beyond a Boundary* (2013) works with the linkages he makes between culture and radical “emancipatory” politics. Here Hill describes *Beyond a Boundary*, as a work “animated... by a similar conception of culture hinted in the 1938 preface [of *The Black Jacobins*] ... a radical ideal of cultural emancipation”.

²⁰ Here Fick argues that the primacy James gave to “the revolutionary and creative power of untaught slaves” was a reflection of the potential he saw in the “black masses” in future struggles for liberation.

consciousness and the desires of the mass of slaves, but as “a secondary event to the revolt of the slaves” (Bogues, 2017: 204). What is *primary* to revolution for James is the revolt of the slaves against their master-colonizers. This distinction between the “primary” and “secondary” event to revolution, that can otherwise be considered problematic, due to the hierarchy it assumes between events in a revolution, can also be instructive. In the case of the Ethiopian revolution for instance, and for this study in particular, it helps distinguish the popular upsurge of 1974 from the outcome of the revolution, the coming to power of the Derg. This demarcation can be useful as it helps us to delineate between the social visions and aspirations of the various revolutionary actors.

The other theory of revolution that informs this work is Theda Skocpol’s approach in the study of social revolutions. Skocpol’s perspective to social revolution incorporates structural factors both political and socioeconomic ones and external international context to explain causes, processes and outcomes of social revolutions through a comparative approach (Skocpol, 1979: 5 and 6). Skocpol’s insight and attention to the complexity of actions by “diversely situated groups” and “intermeshing [of factors] that shape the revolutionary process” (Skocpol, 1979: 18) is vital to this study to understand the Ethiopian Revolution. The study will demonstrate the emergence of the revolutionary situation in 1974 as a product of the *coming-together* of various factors and processes that were “separately determined” (Skocpol, 1979: 41 and 320) rather than a mono-causal phenomenon generated by purposively acting agents. Moreover, it conceives the Ethiopian revolution as a product of the activity of variously situated social groups.

In her seminal work *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, Skocpol highlights the centrality of “conjunctural unfoldings” and “world-historically developing” phenomena (Skocpol, 1979: 18) to explain the emergence of “social revolutions”. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the convergence of conjunctural factors (such as famine, the rise of oil prices following the Arab-Israeli War of 1973) and structural conditions (political as well as socio-economic) are considered key in creating the condition of possibility for the

emergence of a “revolutionary situation” in 1974 Ethiopia. Similarly, the 1970s saw “the world historically developing” “decolonizing moment”—the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist currents were of great significance in providing the content in which the Ethiopian Revolution erupted. Even more important to this study is the cultural movement and circulation of the “global 60s” that were crucial in the cultural formation of subjects in the capital (Jaji, 2014: 207-208). Skocpol’s approach also incorporates both economic and political factors²¹ as well as the role of “particularly situated acting” groups to explain the outbreak, process and outcome of social revolutions (Skocpol, 1985: 88 and 94). Despite, her attention to structural transformations and economic situatedness of specific social actors, however, Skocpol’s conception of social revolution remains decidedly “state centric”. It is here that this study demarcates its point of departure from Skocpol’s theory of social revolutions. Her approach tends to desubjectify revolutionary actors by making it look like revolution is a product of structures beyond human agency (Sewell, 1985: 61).²² Moreover, even if Skocpol “expands” the context in which social revolutions emerge by incorporating international factors and processes (Jaspers, 2011: 3 and 15), for her, the outbreak or outcome of social revolutions is primarily determined by the state’s ability to contain or coerce collective mobilizations by protesting groups.²³ Therefore,

²¹ As Skocpol correctly notes grievance theories of revolution such as Ted Gurr’s *Why Men Rebel* (1978) and Tilly’s “political opportunities” approach to revolution such as Charles Tilly’s and his followers fail to give adequate attention to “structural transformations” to explain the emergence of revolutions. Skocpol’s conception of social revolutions “draws heavily upon Marxist emphases on social-structural change and class conflict” and “refuses... to abstract away from issues of structural transformation” unlike grievance theories or political conflict theories of revolution. By focusing on psychological factors (in the case of Gurr) like anger and frustration or by giving primacy to the “political” structure with little or inadequate attention to the economic and the structural transformations that it generates (Skocpol, 1979: 13). Skocpol argues “in historical revolutions, differently situated and motivated groups have become participants in complex unfoldings of multiple conflicts. These conflicts have been powerfully shaped and limited by existing socioeconomic and international conditions” (Ibid: 17). Therefore, for Skocpol “a structural perspective” is one that should be attentive to socioeconomic and processes factors “at home and abroad”, as well as “international contexts and developments ... that affect the breakdown of the state” (Ibid: 5). Moreover, despite its attempt to pay attention to political context as essential in determining the outbreak and process of revolutions, the political opportunities approach tends to treat collective action not as a function of factors internal to protesting groups but as something that is generated in response to external factors.

²² In this review essay William Sewell criticizes Skocpol’s approach to social revolutions for having a “far too reified conception of social structure” conceived as an “extrahuman force”. Sewell’s critique suggests that such a notion of structure tends to minimize or see as secondary the role of social actors in the emergence of social revolutions.

²³ According to Skocpol “to explain the causes and outcomes of social revolutions” the state must be seen as a relatively “autonomous” administrative and coercive organ distinct from “socioeconomic

her conception of social revolution not only desubjectifies social actors but also tends to place the state's (in)capacity to contain collective action above the popular energy, visions and aspirations of those who rise against it. The "political opportunities model as well as Skocpol's conception of social revolution consider the strength or (actual or perceived) weakness of the state as a decisive factor that determines the course and outcome of revolutions. By doing so, they "abstract away from" a serious appraisal of the processes that lead to revolutions. To do this one should not feel necessary to privilege the "motivations and choices of protesters" (as in Ted Gurr), the political context (as in Tilly) (Jaspers, 2011: 3), the economic situatedness of protesters and the political and international context in which they protest (as in Skocpol) to understand the emergence of revolutions. The key is to keep the balance between the processes that lead to revolution and the events of protest that trigger its outbreak. The motivations, visions, consciousness and interests of protesters should not necessarily be denigrated to give prominence to the political context in which collective action occurred. Similarly, economic factors should not be privileged over political or socio-cultural factors to explain the emergence of revolutions. Rather than resorting to a theory of revolution that is based on the privileging of a single most important factor, revolution should rather be seen as a product of the *coming-together* of various factors.

1.6. Summing up: How the various themes tie together

In short by expounding on how the popular emerged in the decades before the revolution, this study provides a retrospective account of the Ethiopian revolution. One that starts with the social protests of 1974 in Addis Ababa and moves back to trace the social and cultural context in which the revolution occurred. By doing so, it stays away from a linear (direct cause-effect) reading of revolution, where delinquent social practices of the young were translated into explicit political action in 1974. Instead, it emphasizes on the interconnectedness between explicitly political acts of

interests and structures" (Skocpol, 1979: 14). Similarly, another major figure, John Markoff, responsible for further elaborating the "political opportunities" approach to collective action and revolution considers the international context in the emergence of revolutions (Markoff, 2011: 53).

rebellion (in 1974) and the cultural rebellion of the pre-revolution period. Therefore, as opposed to being yet another study that explains the fundamental causes of the Ethiopian revolution, this study seeks to expound the social and cultural context in which “change”, “new beginning”²⁴ and revolution (as freedom or liberation from oppression) were publicly desired by a large section of Addis Ababa’s population, especially the youth, as the next chapter on the protests of 1974 clearly shows.

In this work, everyday social practice in postwar Addis Ababa as a politically formative experience to show the linkages between everyday social practice and consciousness of the youth, and the emergence of revolution. It conceptualizes “the cultural” rebellion of the youth in the pre-revolution period and “the explicitly political” expression of dissent in 1974 as interconnected and imbricated processes. Like the spring harvest that comes before the summer, the former should not necessarily be seen as *causing* the later, but they could be seen as interlinked processes that formed part of a circuit of life phenomena. In this sense, therefore, the spring that made life in the prerevolutionary period is seen in this study as inseparably interlinked with the summer of social protest that 1974 was.

Beyond showing how the popular emerged in the postwar period the notion of modernity (ዘመናዊነት) and popular culture serve this study as the two main conceptual features and overarching themes that are used to examine subject formation in the social and cultural context in which the revolution emerged. It is the inherent “modernity” of revolution that makes it necessary for this study to include an elaborate discussion of modernity. Moreover, explicating the contests over modernity and its agenda between the imperial regime and various categories of youth were crucial to the development of popular culture and popular spaces of resistance and revolutionary behavior. It is for this reason that the cultural field of the postwar capital is conceived as a site of struggle and contest over the meaning of

²⁴ In *On Revolution*, Hanna Arendt considers the inherent “modernity” of revolutions and contends that “the idea of freedom” is “crucial... to any understanding of revolutions in the modern age” (Arendt, 1990: 29). She says, “...violence is no more adequate to describe the phenomenon of revolution than change; only where change occurs in the sense of a new beginning... can we speak of revolution. And the fact is that although [the] history [of antiquity] has always known those who...were eager for new things, the revolutionary spirit of the last centuries, that is the eagerness to liberate and to build a new house where freedom can dwell, is unprecedented and unequalled in all prior history” (Ibid: 35).

modernity—"the new". It is conceptualized as a struggle between the dominant normative order of the imperial state and popular modernity as a widely shared culture of lived practice born out of the spaces of the city. By focusing on elaborating the setting in which the Ethiopian revolution emerged, this study seeks to document the delinquency "in-built" in the social practices of the youth, the breaking of norms and the making of disobedient subjects in the pre-revolution Addis Ababa.

Chapter Two

The *Popular* Revolution: Social Protest in 1974

In this chapter, by situating revolutionary change in a broader social arena, I explore the making of a popular social protest movement in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. Here, convergences between protest events and the comingtogether of social groups in protest are discussed in a context of “conjunctural unfoldings” (namely inflation and famine) that politicized diverse social groups in the capital in 1974. An attempt is thereby made to document the complex social nexus forged during events of protest. My discussion on social protest in Addis Ababa focuses mainly on the months between February and June 1974 to highlight the expansiveness of the revolt and the diversity of the actors. These five months saw the burgeoning of autonomously staged social protests and social action in Addis Ababa. The end of June 1974 is marked as a cut off point when the Derg came to power sharing government with the Endalkachew Cabinet and eventually forced the cabinet to accept a servile position (Andargachew, 1993: 67 and 70).²⁵ After June, autonomous self-activity saw a steep decline, mainly due to the military’s role in clamping down riots, petitions, strikes, demonstrations and all sorts of political gatherings after the Derg exclusively installed itself in state power (Ibid: 85). My main source here is *Addis Zemen*, the Amharic language government owned daily newspaper.

The primary aim of this chapter is to show the expansiveness of social protests that occurred in Addis Ababa in 1974. Particular attention is paid to four protest events and platforms—the taxi strikes of February 18-24, parliament picketers and youth self-activity (March-June), the Afar petitioners and employee strikes (March-April), and the Muslim demonstration of April 20. While the first and the last were specific protest events (that enlisted diverse actors), the second and the third were broad platforms that I read as interdependent developments. The emphasis on these protest events and platforms is not an argument for distinguishing Muslims, taxi

²⁵ According to Andargachew the Derg’s takeover of state power was only formalized later in September 12, 1974 with the deposition of Emperor Haile Selassie I and the monarchy.

owners (and drivers) or Afar petitioners as the most important agents of revolution. As opposed to identifying a single most important “revolutionary subject”, my emphasis on the events and platforms is to try to understand the expansiveness of the urban protest movement by examining the mechanics of their organization and their processes, as well as their interconnectedness and the broad-based popular character of the different protest events.

The protesters used the capital city as their theatre of protest. Taxi drivers and owners, university students, high school students, teachers, the unwaged, workers, civil servants, peasants from famine affected zones, provincial petitioners, employees, Muslims, priests, sex workers, domestic workers, workers in manufacturing and small-scale industries, prisoners, artists, vagrants, all staged independent protests in these months, making the urban protest movement, as Andargachew called it “ubiquitous” and all encompassing. They used various modes of protest including petitions, riots, demonstrations, strikes, pickets, class boycotts and gatherings. Rather than a blow-by-blow account of every protest, this chapter highlights the agitation and protest activities of neglected social groups in the 1974 popular protest movement in Addis Ababa.

Echoing the overall structure of the thesis, this chapter demonstrates the popular and diverse character of the protest movement. This chapter is a starting point that aims to stress the need to trace subject formation of the makers of revolution beyond university students (whose militancy and formation is adequately documented in the secondary literature), to explain the ideological “origins” of the revolution.

2.1 Social protest events and platforms (February-June 1974)

2.1.1. The Taxi Strike, February 18-24, 1974

On the eve of the Ethiopian revolution, the problem of structural urban inflation, especially the mounting price of food items, was aggravated by the oil crisis following the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. The war resulted in the soaring price of

petroleum globally and overlapped with enduring structural ailments in the Ethiopian economy. The imperial government was forced to purchase petrol from the international market “for three times the previous year's price” (Andargachew, 1993: 38). The imperial economy was characterized by low agricultural productivity in the countryside, the recurrence of crop failures and drought that also resulted in and coincided with the catastrophic famines that battered the country in the early 1970s. Moreover, inflation of food items and commodities in cities and towns that had been on the rise at least since the early 1960s worsened the economic condition of the bulk of urban society and shook the imperial state from its foundations. In the Ethiopian capital, this crisis further exacerbated the rising cost of living for large swathes of the urban population. In response, the Ministry of Trade and Industry announced a 50% increase in oil prices on January 8, 1974 (*“yenedaj zeyit lay yewaga lewut”*, 1966: 1, 2 and 4); (*“yemamelalesha agelgilotoch tariff”*, 1966: 1 and 4). Two days after the increase in petrol price, on January 10 1974, the government was preparing to take further measures to regulate commodity prices (*“yemamelalesha yewaga chimari endaydereg”*, 1966: 1 and 3). On this date and 37 days before the taxi strike began, the Postal, Communication and Transportation Minister, Endalkachew Mekonnen (who became prime minister a few weeks later) gave a press conference indicating the need for regulations on commodity prices. He also warned public transportation providers to desist from making unilateral increases on transportation tariffs (Ibid). By doing so, the imperial government was trying to avoid further increases in commodity prices, a problem that had been afflicting the inhabitants of the capital for many years.²⁶

It was in response to the imperial state's 50% increase in oil prices and its attempt to restrict tariff adjustment by taxi owners and drivers that the taxi strike began on February 18, 1974. The imperial government maintained that taxi tariffs must be adjusted by the state after a proper study was conducted to determine the implications for the public (*“yemamelaleshawoch gizyawit tarif weta”*, 1966: 1 and

²⁶ As will be discussed in the following pages, it was in response to their frustration with authorities regulating transport tariff taxi owners called the taxi strike in February 18, the protest event that inaugurated the urban protest movement of 1974

3). Even if reports coming from the imperial government in the aftermath of the taxi strike insisted that it was staged on the 18th of February before taxi owners and drivers submitted their petitions to the government (*“sele samintu huneta yetesete meglecha”*, 1966: 1 and 3), the fact that the strike was called more than 40 days after the state’s announcement of the increase in petroleum prices suggests that the state was disinclined to adjust taxi tariffs in the capital to compensate for the rise in petroleum prices. In fact, two weeks after the 50% increase in petroleum prices, the state adjusted tariffs for long distance transportation while it refused to make similar adjustments for taxi transportation within Addis Ababa (*“yemamelareshawoch gizeyawi tarif weta”*, 1966: 1 and 3). The taxi owners’ association waited for 40 days after the state’s announcement of price-increase, expecting tariff adjustment. According to sources from the association, it also submitted a petition for the increase to be lifted in a month’s time. However, the state neither lifted the 50% increase nor made tariff adjustments. This was when the association called a general assembly meeting on the 16th of February to announce that a strike would be in effect starting February 18 (Birhanu Semu, 2003: 240).²⁷

Even if taxi drivers were vital actors in the strike, the strike was called, contrary to conventional wisdom (Andargachew, 1993: 38) not by taxi drivers but by the Kokeb Taxi Owners’ Association.²⁸ The secondary literature tends to consider taxi owners, and other social groups who are economically better off, as unlikely agents and participants of protest and thus indisposed to revolutionary politics. Not only were taxi owners organized, but they already had the experience of making demands of

²⁷ Andargachew estimates their numbers as being “over a thousand”. But since there were members who owned as many as 20 taxis, the number of the taxis in operation must definitely be more than the number of its owners (Andargachew, 1993: 38).

²⁸ According to Takele Bedassa, taxi drivers were not allowed to form their own unions and the first taxi drivers association was officially established after the revolution in June 1975. According to Takele, this association was a product of the revolution and not the other way round (Takele interview transcript in Birhanu Semu, 2003: 244-247). Kokeb Taxi Owners Association was not the first association of taxi owners, since there were others that preceded its formation. The first such association, Ergib Taxi Owners Association, was founded sometime in 1960 (Birhanu, 2003: 237).

the imperial state before the strikes began in February.²⁹

The emperor promised to decrease the price of petroleum three days into the strike, on the 21st of February. The strike, along with street riots and demonstrations, was able to force the emperor to declare a 10 cents reduction in domestic petrol tariffs, even if the original increase was 25 cents. Moreover, a state representative sat in a meeting at the Chamber of Commerce with the strikers on the third day of the strike to convince the strikers to resume their services. Despite such placations, the strikers refused to budge and the meeting ended without agreement. In defiance, the strikers went to the premises of the Lideta Cathedral, a church located next to the garage and office of the Kokeb Taxi Owners' Association, to have a separate meeting.³⁰ As the meeting was in session, gunshots were fired and police raided the meeting and detained hundreds in attendance (Andargachew, 1993: 39).³¹²³ They were taken first to a police station in Janmeda, then to the camp of Sendafa Police Training Center, just outside the capital. The strikers were not released until the 25th of February (Birhanu, 2003: 240 and 245); (Andargachew, 1993: 40); (Mekonnen Desta, personal interview, 2015 April 12); (Tewelde Desta, personal interview, 2015 April 14). Of course, the taxi strike was not aimed at starting a revolution. But in effect, it heralded a carnival of diverse autonomously staged social actions by various social groups in the capital and officially inaugurated the urban protests of 1974.³²

The taxi strike was accompanied by other autonomously staged demonstrations. The Ethiopian Teachers' Association with 18,000 members also called a

²⁹ One of their questions was the reduction of what they considered high annual tax imposed by the imperial state in 1967, which amounted to 144ETB. Following the state's imposition of this new tax, the association took the case to the city government, the emperor and even to the court to get the decision overturned (Birhanu, 2003: 237-241). The February 18, 1974 strike should be seen in the context of these longstanding issues taxi owners' associations raised with the imperial government.

³⁰ Hailu Metaferia, a taxi owner and driver, is identified as instrumental in persuading the strikers not to resume work satisfied with the 10 cents reduction (Birhanu Semu, 2003: 241).

³¹ According to Kiflu Demena, the secretary of the association who was present in the meeting 515 members were detained by the Police in Sendafa (Kiflu Damena interview transcript in Birhanu Semu, 2003: 241). The Police report puts the number of detained at 358 ("sele samintu huneta yetesete meglecha", 1966: 1 and 3).

³² In the words of the participants the aim of the strike "was not about starting a revolution" (Birhanu, 2003: 244).

demonstration and a strike on the 18th of February. School students boycotted classes on the same day. Like taxi owners, the teachers' association was also involved in lengthy negotiations with the government for "pay increases and salary scales, for at least six years" (Andargachew, 1993: 38). This day February 18, 1974, witnessed a coincidental convergence of protest events and sparked what Andargachew called "the urban protest movement" of 1974. These strike actions and demonstrations on February 18 and others in subsequent months were independently staged, but they also formed part of a dense web of social action that were interconnected to one another (Andargachew, 1993: 37-38).³³ What is particularly significant about the taxi strike, to which is paid very little attention in the literature, is that it gave the urban protests a broad social base. It enlisted the participation of the unwaged youth—what some described as the lumpenproletariat — as well as school students (Andargachew, 1993: 39).

Paying closer attention to the procession of this strike moment, who started it and who joined it and why, is crucial to grasp the impact of the strike and the motivations of the disparate groups who took part in it (Andargachew, 1993: 39).³⁴

On February 24, *Addis Zemen*, the daily government newspaper, came out with a

³³ Here Andargachew reports that the armed forces mutinied in Negele Borana, located in the eastern parts of the country, a month earlier. Privates and NCOs of the Fourth Division of the army arrested their officers demanding "pay and pension increases, better food allowances, injury benefits, improved living quarters, removal of disciplinary injustices, price control and access to water wells". This was followed by other units of the army: the Air Force and the First, Second and Fourth Divisions setting up committees to organize their activities.

³⁴ According to the police, "24 criminals vandalizing cars were caught red-handed", and 350 taxi drivers "carrying weapons and firing and injuring riot police". In addition, 4 people were apprehended distributing placards and leaflets and another 558 were detained for "robbery and beatings" ("Sele samintu huneta yetesete meglecha", 1966: 1 and 3). Abdelkader Zghal discussing the "bread riots" of 1981 in Tunisia provides a typical example of what is to be achieved by examining the process of the protest event. Zghal's analysis by taking a case study of a riot in a small village town of Al Mabrouka shows that rather than a broad discussion of "bread-riots" at a national level to understand the nature of these protests. Zghal gives us a close account of the event. Despite Zghal's dismissal of the "political participation of the popular masses" as "disorderly" and "anarchic popular explosion" (Zghal, 1995: 129), and a display of anger and emotion devoid of political vision, Zghal account offers an extremely important insight into the "bread-riots" by "track[ing] the evolution of the delegitimation process of the single party" system in Tunisia (Ibid: 100). He tells us that about 200 female textile workers initiated the demonstration, enlisting the support of unemployed youth, high school students, and civil servants. What we witness here is clearly a coming together of workers, whose social action or protest is not generated by their unions or their formal organization. Workers along with the unemployed, and the urban underclass stage a social protest against the regime despite the absence of formal platforms to organize their uprising (ibid, 107-109).

police report cataloguing the damage to lives and property that the 7 day taxi strike caused in Addis Ababa. While the report blamed striking taxi drivers for igniting this “lawlessness”, it made responsible, what it called “young hooligans and students who failed in their exams and [are] dismissed from [their] schools” for the loss of lives and damage in property that accompanied the strike. According to this report these young hooligans were responsible for the loss of three lives, injury of 22 individuals and the destruction of 75 public buses, 37 public vehicles, 7 diplomatic cars, 38 houses, two train locomotives and one motorbike (*“Sele samintu huneta yetesete meglecha”*, 1966: 1 and 3). The taxi strike created the context for a riotous youth to come out in the streets and to make the strike more potent. Transport came to a stop as youngsters stoned cars, buses and damaged property, both private and public (Andargachew, 1993: 39). Moreover, the pandemonium that the riots created made the streets unsafe for the usual bureaucratic and economic life to continue. By doing so, the riots that accompanied the strike broke the peace and order on which imperial rule rested. The youth, who constituted the city’s majority population (Getahun, 2000: 69)³⁵—predominantly unwaged—found a forum in the strike to register their outrage against their socio-economic and political conditions. They drew energies from each other through different modes of protest including riots, public demonstrations and class boycotts.

Moreover, as this report clearly shows, the imperial government was fully aware that proliferation of social unrest in the capital was closely linked to the rise in petroleum prices and rising inflation on vital food items and commodities. The report, by citing sources from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism urged calm, and claimed that riots were unjustified since prices of vital food items like *teff* and other staples were not that exaggerated. The report argued, price increases of key staples and food items were caused by pest infestation and shortage of the short (*belg*³⁶) rains. It blamed the general inflationary situation on the fluctuation of oil prices and imported commodities in the international market (*“Sele samintu huneta yetesete meglecha”*, 1966: 1 and 3).

³⁵ According to Getahun this was true throughout the 1960s and 70s.

³⁶ Ibid. The *Belg* is a season of small rains in November and December in many parts of the country.

Despite these justifications by the state however, calls by teachers and armed forces for salary increment, as well as price regulation of commodities (Andargachew, 1993: 37-39), reveals that the impact of inflation and rising cost of living was a commonly shared factor that brought together various social groups inhabiting the capital. The problem of rising food and commodity prices aggravated economic hardship of the general urban population, including the unemployed and unwaged youth, who made up a substantial section of the capital. What made the taxi strike unique from among the social protests that ensued in subsequent months in Addis Ababa was its capacity to bring economic and bureaucratic activity to a standstill. In the context of postwar Addis Ababa where there were limited means of public transportation, buses and private cars, taxicabs were the blood stream of the city. They were the means of transportation not only to transport people, but also goods. Various shops and convenient stores, including those in the central open market, Merkato, used taxi cabs in their daily business affairs. The taxi strike, as a result, represented an assault on the economic and bureaucratic structure of the capital and exposed the limits of the imperial state's repressive powers.³⁷ It became one of the rare protest moments that halted business, trade, work and bureaucratic activity in the city, in addition to fomenting a spirit of popular rebellion and militancy.

The February 18 1974 taxi strike, which continued for seven consecutive days, was the act of protest that brought the regime to its knees. This was not just because teachers demanding higher pay and students boycotting classes coincided with the taxi strike. What made the taxi strikes a momentous and unique event in the history of the urban protest movement, was that it became that lethal moment in the start of a popular protest that brought everything to a halt. Its significance rested not so much on its radical goals, but rather in giving the urban protests of 1974 a broad

³⁷ Since 1974, taxi strikes have been potent modes of protest to state authority in Addis Ababa. This was particularly true for taxi strikes of 1974, 2000 and 2005, which were met by heavy government clampdown by the EPRDF government. Therefore, taxis beyond serving as vectors for the circulation of ideas, and as "mobile bodies of meaning", as many works on African cities have emphasized, they could also be seen as key vectors in conscripting urban social groups for collective action in times of political convulsion and protest.

popular base and participation. Participation in the strike took two forms: those who participated in it of their own volition and those who were coincidental and unsuspecting actors in it. This was because, beyond taxi drivers and their owners, the strike created a platform for other social actors. Among these actors were the unwaged youth, including the school students that the February 24 police report accused of “colluding” with taxi drivers (“*Sele samintu huneta yetesete meglecha*”, 1966: 1 and 3); (“*kepolis serawit teqlay memriya yetesete megelecha*”, 1966: 1 and 7).

The strike moment became pivotal in the evolution of protest into an urban mass movement that became the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. It created a platform for discontent among the poorest sections of society against imperial authority. The unwaged sections of urban society, who were made to endure structural violence, inflation and the rising cost of living and unemployment, found in the protest a space to stage their particular mode of revolt—street riots that included the destruction of property. Therefore, while university students had been dreaming and speaking about revolution and organizing for many years, at least since the early 1960s, it was actually the taxi strike that ignited the revolution. As a student aphorism from the time had it, “the students prepared the meal but the taxi drivers are cooking it”.³⁸ A closer examination of the processes that led to the convergence of various social elements around the February taxi strike expose the limits of a voluntarist explanation that portrays university students as “the dramatists” of the Ethiopian revolution. As much as it is incorrect to argue that the strikers saw their actions as a conscious act meant to bring about *the revolution*, it is equally far-fetched to argue that the students who had envisaged the revolution determined its course through their purposeful calculated actions.

The implications of strike action by those in charge of the circulation of people and goods, is greater than is appreciated in the Ethiopian revolution literature. The capacity of transport strikes to shut down the urban economy, and to paralyze

³⁸ Here Darch reports, “A student aphorism of the time had it that ‘the students prepared the meal. The taxi drivers are cooking it, but the army will eat it.’”

business and bureaucratic activity made them lethal weapons of protest during the 1974 revolution and later revolts in Addis Ababa, chiefly the 2005 taxi strike.³⁹³² It is only if we pay attention to processes of the event of protest, who was involved in it and how it impacted the state, that we understand the importance of the platform that the taxi strike created in allowing the participation of other actors in that particular protest event. This is particularly important for social protests, without articulated and/or written agenda or formal organization.

The taxi strike, therefore, provided the popular discontent of the times a particular expression by fusing strike with street riots. It politicized school students, the unemployed and precariously employed to take part in riot and destruction of property. As Addis Hiwet would say, it brought sections of the society who were not seen to be active in explicit acts of political confrontation with the state to “political life” (Addis Hiwet, 1984: 34 and 37). The youth who constituted the city’s majority population⁴⁰³³ were predominantly unemployed and hence considered “vagrants”. They were among the most marginalized sections of urban society, who found a forum to exhibit and register their outrage against their conditions through open protest. The unwaged youth and school students used the platform that the taxi strike provided and drew energies from each other to come out in riots in the streets of the capital. The taxi strike enlisted various sections of society, triggering the urban protest movement and giving it a broad social base. By doing so, it enabled the protest to have a particular potency that came to have serious consequences on the future of the imperial regime.

In seven days taxi owners and drivers who controlled and operated this important

³⁹ A similar transportation crisis involving long distance and bulk transportation of oil, grain and other goods and services occurred in the beginning of June. Had it not been in effect for just 6 days (between June 5 and 11), the implications would have been devastating. Even for the 6 days it was in effect it resulted in sudden price hikes of grain and other food items. It caused scarcity of oil and petrol for transportation services throughout the country and created difficulties for the transpiration of food aid to famine affected zones as well as circulation of goods and commodities in the capital (“Yekebad mekina shuferoch sera maqom yaseketew tata”, 1966: 1, 3 and 7); (“Yekebad mekina shoferoch serachewun aqomu”, 1966: 1, 3 and 7); (“Sele chinet mekina shuferoch abetuta yetesete megglecha”, 1966: 1 and 7); (“Yekebad mekina shuferoch sera jemeru”, 1966: 1 and 7).

⁴⁰ This was true throughout the 1960s and 70s (Getahun, 2000: 69).

means of kinesis, the taxicab, succeeded in obstructing economic and business activity and compromised the smooth running of the state bureaucracy. It is only the detention of taxi strikers and police clampdown on rioters that finally made it possible for the city buses to start their usual transport function, 5 days into the taxi strike (“Sele semonu yetesete meglecha”, 1966: 1 and 2).⁴¹

The February taxi strike, therefore, gave popular discontent further intensity, by fusing strike with riot. The 1974 taxi strike, whose agenda and organization was limited to effecting the reduction of the price of petrol in the domestic market, quickly morphed into a popular revolution when it was accompanied by the riots of the unwaged youth (students and the unemployed). The strike also coincided with other autonomously organized protests—the strike of teachers and the demonstration of university students. In short, the taxi strike, in addition to coinciding with protests by other sections of urban society, also enlisted two forms of responses from the population of the capital. On the one hand, it drew in a substantial section of the urban populace as willful, conscious participants in revolt, who used it as a podium to stage their protest. This was most evident for instance in the case of the unwaged youth who used street rioting to show their discontent. On the other hand, it made traders (big and small alike) as well as employees, incidental accomplices of protest. For instance, the strike prompted merchants and business people to close their shops and obliged civil servants, factory workers and other employees to stay at home.

However, the end of the taxi strike did not mean that the city returned to its usual calm. It continued to witness a diversity of protest action for months. The teacher’s strike continued for another three weeks after the taxi strike was foiled (“*Selememihiran guday keministeroch mikir bet yetesete meglecha*”, 1966: 1 and 11).⁴²³⁵ On the 12th of March, the Council of Ministers responded to some of the

⁴¹ According to this communiqué, buses stopped their operations in the capital for only 4 days. But since they resumed operation on the 23rd of Saturday (according to the same report), it means they were not in operation for a total of 5 days between the 18th and the 22nd of February.

⁴² In this press statement the cabinet said salary adjustment (raise) was made to teachers two years earlier. Because of “inadequate revenue” at its disposal the government claimed, and the state of the “current problem” it is unable to expend an additional 7,623,622 ETB in funds to be able to fulfill the

teachers' questions and promised to consider salary increment. Finally, on the 18th of March, after registering its objections to the unsatisfactory response of the Council of Ministers, the Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA) decided to end its month-long strike—only after getting assurances that the state would respond to its demands in due course. ("*Yemela ityopiya timhirt betoch sera jemeru*", 1966: 1); ("*Timhirt betoch zare yikefetalu*", 1966: 1 and 7).⁴³³⁶

The imperial state, aware of the linkages between the protests in the city and the inflation of food and commodity prices, tried to convince the general urban public that inflation was a product of increases in oil prices and price fluctuations in the international market. Desperate to address conflicting interests in society, the state vowed to the public its commitment to enforce price regulation, while simultaneously trying to show merchants that the purpose of price control was not to undermine their profits ("*Sele semonu yetesete meglecha*", 1966: 1 and 2).

In a communiqué published in *Addis Zemen* on February 26, in the midst of the protests, the state argued that the problem of rising cost of living was a global problem and that it was compounded in Ethiopia "by the [recent] outbreak of drought". Hence the state urged "every citizen to try to hold a balanced view" of the situation. It said, "price control does not in itself resolve [the] rising cost of living" and entreated the citizenry for their "cooperation" and understanding in these difficult times ("*Sele semonu yetesete meglecha*", 1966: 1 and 2). However, workers, employees of governmental and semi-governmental organs as well as privately owned industries and manufacturing establishments, adopted strikes in the days and months that followed. The convergence of protest events and disparate social groups made the taxi strike a powerful expression of popular rejection of imperial authority. The unwaged sections of urban society and school

demands of teachers. The statement further beseeched teachers to do what they can to "share the burden" with the new cabinet.

⁴³ This *Addis Zemen* report states that ETA submitted additional demands including the right to free association, permanent employment, and the right to hold demonstrations. The association also insisted that teachers must participate in curricular development and educational design, and supported students' calls to have the right to form councils in high schools and colleges.

students joined the strike in spontaneous street riots and uprisings. Teachers also called their own separate strike on the very day the taxi strike began. The cumulative impact of these acts of protest by various social groups, that started with the taxi strike, led to the resignation of the Aklilou cabinet by the end of February (*"Janhoy lehizbachew yaderegut negigir"* 1966: 1 and 6).

One of the key factors behind the proliferation of protest was the impact of inflationary prices, especially of food items, that brought various social elements together. While the ever-rising inflation was the principal factor behind the demand for wage increments for the employed, the unbearable cost of living for the unemployed and the unwaged prompted the poorest and younger sections of the capital to riot. Inflation in Addis Ababa was accompanied by distress in urban life that was also a product of other long standing structural urban problems, such as the prevalence of poverty and the rising cost of living and meager income of the majority of the urban population⁴⁴³⁷. In a desperate attempt at control, the imperial state boosted its efforts to enforce price regulation to penalize merchants and businesses that sold items above the price cap set by the government. The state threatened confiscation of the business license of transgressors, as well as fines and imprisonment (*"Yewaga qutitir"*, 1966: 2); (*"Legara chigir maseb"*, 1966: 2). Price regulation by the state started before the February protests, but the months after February saw violation being enforced more seriously (*"Bewaga amekagnitew sekuar qetilew yeshetu 6 sewoch \$300 teqetu"*, 1966: 2); (*"Yemebil zeyit waga asebelitew yeshetu 2 sewoch \$300 teqetu"*, 1966: 1); (*"Begonder bejima waga asebelitew yeshetu 5 sewoch \$140 teqetu"*, 1966: 3).

Inflation played an important role in creating the conjunctural context for the flowering of social protest in Addis Ababa by helping various social groups to articulate their demands around a common issue. It instigated the police, soldiers and civilians to demand a pay rise and increase in salaries (*"Yemidir torna yepolis serawit lejanhoy misgana aqerebu"*, 1966: 1 and 3). The problem affected

⁴⁴ The social and economic condition of the urban populace will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

everyone, except the rich. It brought together everyone else in the city: teachers, civil servants, workers, priests, employees of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (*"Yebete kihinet memhiran chimari lemeteyeq tesebesebu"*, 1966: 1 and 8); (*"demewoz kaltechemere kahinat sera enaqomalen yilalu"*, 1966: 1 and 7), and other sections of the city (*"Yemidir torna yepolis serawit lejanhoy misgana aqerebu"*, 1966: 1 and 3); (*"Teqlay ministru sele memihiran guday meglecha setu"*, 1966: 1 and 3); (*"Yemazegaja bet serategnoch 23 teyaqewochin aqerebu"*, 1966: 1 and 7); (*"Yesedist meseria betoch serategnoch abetutachewun aqerebu"*, 1966: 1 and 7); (*"Yekahinatu tiyaqe"*, 1966: 1 and 3); (*"Yekahinat demewoz besebekagubae bekul likefel new abetuta alaqerebum tebale"*, 1966: 1 and 3); (*"Yebete kihinet serategnoch yetesetewun wesane teqawemu"*, 1966: 1 and 8).⁴⁵

A statement by Fisehatsion Tekeé, the secretary general of CELU (Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions) demonstrates the centrality of inflation in the proliferation of protest. The secretary general explained the purpose of the general strike that was in effect between March 5 and 8, 1974. The general strike that was called by CELU involved 85,000 workers (*"Yeserategnoch qal kidan"*, 1966: 2) and was described by Fissehasion as a strike that was meant to "expound the impact of the 60% inflation in our country". In the absence of a minimum wage, Fissehatsion argued, such exorbitant inflation greatly slashed the buying capacity of workers. This problem, he said, was made worse by the increase in the price of petroleum in January 1974 that pushed all other prices up further (*"Teqlala sera maqom adma lemin endet tederege?"*, 1966: 1, 3 and 7).

Therefore, while the increase in the price of petroleum pushed taxi drivers to stage a strike, the immediate as well as structural impacts of inflationary prices of vital food items and unemployment created the conjunctural context for the uprising of the unwaged youth of the capital (Ibid);⁴⁶ (*"Serategnoch laqerebut tiyaqe kentibaw melse setu"*, 1966: 1 and 5); (Andargachew, 1993: 39). The unemployed and school

⁴⁵ See also Addis Zemen issues on Megabit 7, 8 and 12 that discusses the petition of priests and the decision made by a committee that the Patriarch set up to look into the matter.

⁴⁶ Fisseha Tsion says that there have been plans to stage a general strike four years before this one, i.e., in 1970.

students came out during the taxi strike carrying slogans like “Bread for the hungry” (Gedeon cited in Bahru, 2010: 130)⁴⁷ and disturbed the “peace” on which imperial (dis)order sat. University students came out in the streets of Addis shouting revolutionary slogans (Andargachew, 1993: 39). Chants like “ኃይለ ሥላሴ ይሰቀል” (“Haile Selassie to the Gallows”) were heard in demonstrations on the streets of Addis during these months of protests (*Twilight Revelations*, 2009: 52:40’).

The significance of inflation in the social protests of 1974 did not lie in triggering the urban population to rise up against the imperial regime. Its power rested more in conjoining various groups around a shared concern or problem. As Tekalign Woldemariam underscores, it is problematic to take rising food prices as an “immediate factor” behind the 1974 convulsions (Tekalign, 1995). But it is also incorrect to argue that the conjunctural moment that the 1973 oil crisis created was not significant in intensifying social discontent that was also a reaction to the economic distress that structural inflation fostered.

Bealu Girma, a renowned author, who was then the editor in chief of *AddisZemen*, writes in *Addis Zemen* on March 5, 1974 that inflation “imposed a yoke of suffering on every individual in society” and pointed out that people cannot be blamed for voicing their demands (Bealu Girma, 1966: 1 and 3).⁴⁸ The state’s response to rising inflation was mainly focused on price regulation that sought to set price caps, especially on vital food items and commodities (Ibid); (Merse Hazen Abebe, 1966: 3). But these measures proved ineffective to stem the impact of inflation, and were thus unable to quell the protests of 1974 (“*Yeadis abeba ketema yehizb nuro tinat tejemere*”, 1966: 1 and 9); (“*Negadewoch kewaga belay endayshetu teezaz telalefe*”, 1966: 1 and 8).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Here Gedeon Woldeamanuel recalls that “taxi drivers” and “high school students” coming out in the streets in February carried this slogan.

⁴⁸ See also a similar linkage between the social protests of the time and rising cost of living (“*Waga min yahil tewedede*”, 1966: 1 and 3).

⁴⁹ The ineffectiveness of such repeated attempts to determine the price ceiling of food items and grain was said to be lack of personnel who would be able to enforce these price caps (“*Yeehil jimlana chiricharo waga tewesene*”, 1966: 1 and 3). For price control measures taken during the time of social protests to curb inflation (see: “*Yewaga qutitir samint programe tezegaje*”, 1966: 1, 2, 3 and 8 and, *kenigd serana Waga meqotateria kifil*, 1966: 2 and 3).

The other conjunctural context that linked the capital with the countryside and that helped to politicize especially the youth was the disgrace that the famines of 1973/74 brought to the imperial regime. This factor contributed to the further restiveness of the urban masses in Addis Ababa, as will be discussed shortly. These two factors—inflation and famine— thus created the conditions of possibility for the outbreak of social protests in the months between February and June 1974.

2.1.2. The parliament picketers and youth self-activity (March-June)

The social protests coincided with a catastrophic famine that was raging since 1972, affecting mainly “the densely populated central highlands of Wollo, Tigray, North Shoa and Eritrea, as well as Gamu Gofa, in the southwest” (Kissi, 1997: 159). However, the famine and its magnitude did not seem to be a cause for public alarm in Addis Ababa before the start of the urban protests in February. This section is a discussion of the event that brought broad based agitation, perhaps more than anything else.

By the end of March 1974, 500 people (this number is according to *Addis Zemen* while others, including the state minister of Finance, Fantaye Wolde-Yohannes put their number in the thousands) squatted outside the gates of the parliament (*Twilight Revelations*, 2009), about three weeks after the CELU strike of March 4-8. These squatters came from Tigray and Wollo, the two most famine- affected provinces in the North, after walking a remarkable distance of 400-700 kilometers to get to the epicenter of imperial power, Addis Ababa (Ketazabiyeqerebe, 1966: 1, 6 and 7). Their arrival and entrance into the capital was not a mere coincidence. It appears that the disturbances in the city that were in full swing in March and early April seem to have created an opening for this famine- battered persevering lot, to have their presence felt in the seat of imperial power. People were trying to enter Addis Ababa fleeing from famine zones at least since the beginning of 1973 (Ibid). *Addis Zemen* reported the presence of hundreds of people walking from South Wollo all the way to the outskirts of Addis Ababa, presumably barred from

entering the capital and staying in towns like Addis Alem and Sendafa in January and February of 1973 (Ibid). Most of these squatters “refused to vacate the gateways of parliament” picketing and demanding to be heard. According to *Addis Zemen* many of them were escaping the famine, while “some of them” left their homes in an attempt to escape land tax or after losing their plots to landlord creditors as well as to avoid predatory government officials (“*Amist meto chigeregnoch keparlama beraf anhedim yilalu*”, 1966: 1 and 7).⁵⁰

At the time, the regime tried to block their entrance into Addis Ababa in an attempt to conceal the magnitude of the famine from the population of the city and the world. As the state minister of Finance, Fantaye Wolde-Yohannes recalls, their arrival in Addis a week or so after “a senior official of the Ministry of Interior... announced on the radio that there was no famine in Wollo. [And that] in fact it is customary for people from Wollo to migrate” caused a scandal (*Twilight Revelations*, 2009). These reports indicate that long marches to the capital and other places, by hundreds of people escaping the scourge of famine, were not uncommon. What makes the parliament picketers different was that they marched all the way from Tigray at a time when the city was rocked by social protests. The fact that their arrival coincided with the outbreak of the social protest meant that their presence could be reported more openly. Moreover, their refusal to leave the area, demanding assistance, put the imperial government under further public scrutiny, and caused resentment and rebellion within the parliament. Fitawrari Amede, member of the higher house of parliament recalls parliamentarians asked, “why is the government suppressing the news? How did the government remain silent when the entire population of a province⁵¹ locked their houses and went into exile?” (*Twilight Revelations*, 2009).

This astonishing long march by victims of a catastrophic famine who came to the capital and squatted in a square overlooking the parliament to put demands to the

⁵⁰ State minister of finance at the time of the social protests, Fantaye Wolde-Yohannes reports the picketers were from Wollo (*Twilight Revelations*, 2009: 43:18-45:05'). But since both Tigray and Wollo were the most famine-affected zones, it is safe to conclude that they came from these provinces.

⁵¹ Perhaps a reference to Wollo.

imperial state, became the linchpin around which collective action was organized in the capital in response to the famine. Their picketing in front of the parliament (located next to the Menilik Palace where Haile Selassie resided) was by itself a remarkable exposé of the level of crisis that imperial rule reached. Their arrival and presence calls our attention to a mode of protest common to the peasantry and other marginalized groups that involved a combination of pleading, petitioning and refusal.⁵² The picketers sent messengers with demands and petitions to various state institutions including the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Law and the parliament (*"Amist meto chigeregnoch keparlama beraf anhedim yilalu"*, 1966: 1 and 7), as they were refusing to leave the Constitutional Square. Therefore, these parliament picketers did not just become a spectacle around whom autonomous popular relief efforts were organized. They were and must be seen as part of the score of protesters confronting and exposing state power by using the capital city as a theatre of their protest. They remained on that ground for weeks, occupying in a sense the seemingly unfringeable domains of state power, the Constitutional Square (Ibid).

This act of defiance gives insight into our understanding of the social protest event in the capital that launched the Ethiopian revolution. First, the picketers were hungry peasants from the countryside who made it to the capital against outstanding odds. The fact that they were rural subjects migrating to the capital - their place in their society being the "wretched of the earth" - tells a tale of the composition and nature of protest in 1974. It punctures a hole in the narrative of the social protest as an "essentially urban" phenomenon and indicates that rural and urban spaces and their subjects in postwar Ethiopia need to be seen as continuous spaces with hyphenated subjects.⁵³ Secondly, the issues the picketers

⁵² This is inspired by my conversation with (Tekalign Woldemariam, 2020 October 3).

⁵³ The rural and the urban must be seen as continuums rather than split spatial categories. "Hyphenatedness" as a characteristic feature of urban subject identity and formation will be themes that will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. Fanon, theorizing about revolution and revolutionary consciousness in colonial Africa saw an umbilical connection between "the city" and "the country". He saw "the countryside" and "the city" as spaces in a continuum linked by their "starvation" and marginalization. And the subjects, who inhabit these spaces, for Fanon, would in their "most spontaneous" risings constitute the radical revolutionary forces of colonial Africa (Fanon, 1963: 110). For Fanon writing about colonial Algeria, the nexus between rural and urban spaces lies in the critical

articulated somewhat condenses the fundamental structural problems of the empire—famine, unjust land relations and heavy-handed regulation of peasants by the state. Thirdly, the event of their march and squat before this seat of state power is also testimony to the dissipating imperial authority that was registered by the mood of the times of social protest in the capital, as well as the politicizing effects of the famine. They questioned imperial authority, or at least exposed its corruption and inadequacy by their relief activities, as will be shown below.

Fantaye Wolde-Yohannes describes the picketers as follows: “they looked terrible, their faces and clothing caked with dirt, they cuddled their dying babies in their arms” (*Twilight Revelations*, 2009). The attention the picketers attracted became a site of student and youth activism around famine, and a platform around which a mutual aid community⁵⁴ begun to develop in these historic times of social protest and defiance. Their presence created the opportunity for university students and other residents of Addis Ababa to engage in relief work, independent from the government. It triggered the two days’ hunger strike by HSIU students. In what seems to be a response to the relief activity of HSIU students on April 4-5, 1974 (“*Yeuniversity temariwoch beakfilate migbachewun leterabu akefafelu*”, 1966: 1 and 8),⁵⁵⁴⁸ where the students distributed food and clothing to the squatters, the Haile Selassie I Charitable Foundation tried to show its relevance by stating its “readiness to help those suffering” from the famine (“*Amist meto chigeregnoch keparlama beraf anhedim yilalu*”, 1966: 1 and 7). University students organized events around the famine, boycotted classes and staged demonstrations in the campus premises carrying slogans like “poverty is not a crime”, “land to the tiller” and “freedom to write and speak” (“*Yerehab awaj enditawoj yeuniversity*

alliance that would be forged between the peasantry (in the countryside) and “landless peasants in the city”—the lumpenproletariat (in urban centers) (ibid: 110 and 128). What has been crucial to this study has been Fanon’s attention to the political energies of marginalized sections of society and their vision for radical social and political change. He highlights the role of spontaneity as characteristic of the inherent strivings of popular social groups and marginalized section of society as “the reservoirs” of the revolutionary struggle (ibid: 10) not its extras.

⁵⁴ A phrase borrowed from Asher Simiso Gamedze (personal conversation), August 8, 2019.

⁵⁵ The reporter of this news piece records a conversation he claimed to have heard between two people. One coming from the church and asking the other passerby “by the way where is the food [that is being distributed] come from?” and the other person responds with a question “Of course it is [university] students. Who else does such things?”

temariwoch teyequ", 1966: 1 and 6). Their hunger strike was organized to connect the famine situation with other national popular demands such as the release of political prisoners; and for a state of emergency to be declared to deal with the famine problem. The students began relief activities in March 1973, long before any other group, and used the occasion to expose state inefficiency and its conspiracy to conceal the famine from the urban populace ("*Yeuniversity temariwoch beakfilate migbachewun leterabu akefafelu*", 1966, Vol. 33, No. 374: 1 and 8). In the following months relief work multiplied in the capital aiding the picketers as well as in the famine affected zones, especially by school students who distributed food and clothing.

In the days after the arrival of these peasant congregants, *Addis Zemen* started a column with the goal of pulling contributions from different sectors of society to assist people affected by the famine. The paper published the names of individuals, associations and organizations who made donations to communities in famine affected zones through a bank account *Addis Zemen* created. Paulos Gnogno, a popular journalist (and a public historian) of *Addis Zemen* organized fundraisers to feed and clothe the parliament picketers. Almost two weeks after university students declared their hunger strike and brought food and clothing to the fleeing peasants, the number of those squatting along the parliament continued to swell by the arrival of batches from Northern Wollo in April ("*Leand shih chigeregnoch yefasika gibjha tederege*", 1966: 1 and 6). Paulos, along with other volunteers provided food and clothing on Easter day and two consecutive days (Ibid). The city folk participated by serving food and making contributions. Other residents came to witness the Easter feeding event as "spectators" (Ibid). Worried that the picketers would not leave, the government urged them to go back to their homes and promised to provide seeds to continue to till their plots (Ibid). Despite such assurances they continued to congregate in the area.⁵⁶ 49 Civil servants from

⁵⁶ How long the squatters stayed on Constitutional Square is not clear from *Addis Zemen*. There is a report on *Addis Zemen* that indicates they have been there for about a month by the time the Paulos fundraiser distributed food and clothing for them ("*Soset meto sewoch ande shih chigiregnoch*", 1966: 1, 6 and 7).

the Ethiopian Commercial Bank, the Birhan ena Selam Printing Press, *idirs*,⁵⁷ as well as private individuals took turns to feed them. The squatters became the focus around whom workers, merchants, and other residents formed a mutual aid community of volunteers (“*Mozvoldna serategnoch ledirk kebele 92shih birr setu*”, 1966:1); (“*Yenegadewoch idget derg abaloch ledirq qebelewoch erdata qetilewal*”, 1966: 1 and 3); (“*Ande tiyaqe alegg*”, 1966: 7); (“*Soset meto sewoch ande shih chigiregnoch*”, 1966: 1, 6 and 7) Youth associations (*mahabers*) and student associations were engaged in relief activities feeding the picketers, and most importantly they organized large-scale relief work by going to the sites of the famine.⁵⁸

The pages of *Addis Zemen* in April, May and June carried news of these autonomous relief activities. School students and members of informal youth associations were the most important social force behind these activities. Young people organized in their neighborhoods through *mahebers*,⁵⁹ schools, religious youth clubs and collected clothes and money to take provisions to famine zones throughout these months (“*Wetatoch ledirq qebelewoch erdata sebseba qetilewal*”, 1966: 1 and 6). Others distributed their own food rations. Boarding schools and teachers’ training colleges collected contributions by going door to door of residents of the city. These relief activities were directed either to those who had come to take shelter in various quarters of the capital, fleeing famine, or by taking them directly to the famine zones (*Ibid*).⁶⁰ Relief activities in the famine zones required hundreds of kilometers of traveling. These autonomous relief activities organized and executed by high school students, women’s associations,

⁵⁷ A form of community-based self-help associations engaged in funeral and mourning services.

⁵⁸ According to (Melaku Tegegn, personal interview, 2019 January 8) the football clubs that were flourishing in the postwar period in Addis Ababa were youth initiatives that brought the young together in various safars and helped cement solidarity amongst the youth. They fostered mobilization during and after the revolution. Their networks and solidarity ties were also eventually used by the various leftist political organizations that propped up after the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution.

⁵⁹ Community associations like “Selamawit Almaz Kibebe”, “Senait kibebe”—possibly women associations, religious mahibers such as “Yegenete Tsige Kidus Giorgis wetatoch mahaber” and secular mahabers such as “Yetiyit Bet Akababi Wetatoch Andinet Mahaber” are among the various types of youth associations that were active in independent relief activities in famine affected zones.

⁶⁰ Young people organizing ad hoc committees in their villages such as Shola and Arat Kilo are identified in this report as engaged in relief activities in the capital as well as in the famine- affected zones.

clubs and youth associations, also collected grain and clothing and delivered them to the famine zones, mainly to Wollo ("*Wetatoch genzebena lebis lemadel wede dirq qebelewoch lihedu new*", 1966: 1 and 7); ("*Temariwoch leaser shih chigeregnoch lebis alebesu*", 1966: 1 and 3). The efforts of coordination, organization and commitment some of these relief efforts demanded, are suggestive of the passion that was driving these activities. In one such effort for instance student volunteers of the Tegbare'ed School, a vocational school in the capital, spent 18 days in various localities in Wollo distributing clothesrenovating houses and building granaries for more than 10,000 people in support of relief efforts by other organs ("*Yeirsha berena zer lemagegnet kemeteleyaw yewetaw weloye lememeles dej yitenal*", 1966: 1 and 3).⁶¹

The sense of purpose with which the youth carried out their relief activities suggests their active participation through their various associations in the provision of food and clothing to famine affected members of their society. It is apparent that the relief effort that the youth were engaged in, nurtured their autonomous self-activity outside the domains of the state. Before the start of the social protests in February, youth associations were created in various zones of the city, in *weredas* and the 14 provinces of the country under the auspices of a national organ. The Ethiopian Youth Services Association controlled and supervised "youth services". This supervisory organ was composed of representatives of the imperial government and parent committees comprised of self-help associations (*idirs*). Its representatives worked closely with the city government ("*Beqirqos yewetatoch dirijit tequaquame*", 1966: 3).⁶² What the moment of social protest did was to multiply independent youth self-activity towards famine relief. The energy

⁶¹ In addition, they also distributed seeds to some peasant families along with food items. In another report ("*Wetatoch bedirq qebelewoch 25 sewoch aseferu*", 1966: 1 and 8). It is stated that a club, "Semayawi Kokeb" resettled 25 families in Hayq area, in Wollo by providing oxen, seeds and constructing houses for people affected by famine. The money was raised by organizing a music festival whose proceeds was used to provide this assistance ("*Temariwoch leaser shih chigeregnoch lebis alebesu*", 1966: 1 and 3).

⁶² Such associations were set up by the state and they were aimed at "disciplining the youth" and harnessing their energies by controlling "illegal activities" in the different *weredas* of the city and directing the youth to engage in "useful" endeavors. The leadership of the national organ and its activities was made the prerogative of state officials and parent committees from various *idirs* in the city.

that the protest and organizing around the famine infused in this moment is seen in the flourishing of new autonomously operating youth *mahabers* and networks in addition to the reinvigoration of existing ones, by breaking away from the control of the state (*"Yeteklehaimanot wetatoch keityopia wetatoch dirijit wetu"*, 1966: 1 and 7).⁶³

On the part of the state, the outgoing Aklilou Cabinet was used as a scapegoat to absolve the emperor, who was the head of the state and the government, of responsibility. But ultimately this rather disingenuous strategy used by the mass media to separate the emperor from his administration and clear him of responsibility for the catastrophic famine proved to be a mirage. Acquiescence to Haile Selassie's power gradually dissipated and his culpability in the ravages of the famine became apparent. The publicization of the famine by *Addis Zemen* and other media organs also opened discussion on the relationship between state and society, famine and the land tenure system, freedom of information and government accountability.⁶⁴ The antipathy and grievance against the regime (and the emperor) further corroded the regime's legitimacy. A film on the famine showing images of the emperor feeding his pets juxtaposed with images of emaciated bodies of children, was broadcast live through the Ethiopian Television (ETV) and open screens in Addis on the night of the Ethiopian New Year, a day before the Derg overthrew the emperor (*"Bewolo yederesewun rehab yemiyasayew yetelewihin film endegena zare yitayal elqit film lemeqeale hizb taye"*,

⁶³ It is stated in this reportage that the Tekle Haimanot Wereda branch of the Ethiopian Youth Services questioned the independence and representativeness of the national organ and broke away from it to form an independent youth association. The Tekle Haimanot branch of the national youth association broke away from the national organization not only after it accused it of bidding the wishes of the state and not the youth, but also at a time when it was engaged in relief activities to 4000 peasants in famine zones. The National Youth Services was seen with suspicion by high school students and the youth in general as a state organ. Its autonomy is contested by the youth who were increasingly seeking to create their own independent associations. Student representatives who sat in a meeting with the National Security Commission in the beginning of May demanded that the national union must be disbanded to make way for the establishment of an independent youth association (*"Kefitegna biherawi yetsetita comishen letemariwoch guday wesane sete"*, 1966: 1, 3 and 6).

⁶⁴ Yohannes Afewerq (1966: 3 and 7) argued, "to prevent the problem of Wollo from going back to worse" where he lays in the introductory passages the issues the famine problem raised in public discourse after the outbreak of the February protests. See also Fentaye Yimer (1966: 2 and 8) where she discusses the exploitation of the peasantry of Wollo by capricious state officials.

1967: 1 and 7).⁶⁵ Subsequent screenings of the film in provincial capitals and other cities destroyed whatever was left of the idealized image of the monarch (*“Yewolo elqit film lemeqeale hizb taye”*, 1967: 1 and 6).⁶⁶ The same news and communication organs of the state that had been decorating Haile Selassie with words of praise and veneration now accused him of greed and avarice. Even charges of human sacrifice were levied against him. The militancy of parliamentarians was testimony to “the evaporation of deference to the Emperor and the challenge to his authority that lethal famine in the early 1970s engendered” in the country (Kissi, 1997: 173-174). Even before the monarchy was overthrown, famine politicized the urban populace (especially the youth) delegitimized the imperial regime and tarnished the image of the monarchy.

The famine introduced a period of autonomous youth self-activity that continued until the end of June 1974. It galvanized popular sentiment and public action and became a platform for the politicization of youth associations and networks in Addis Ababa. These autonomous initiatives by the youth transpired at the time when social protests were proliferating, particularly in the months of March and April of the year of revolution (Andargachew, 1993: 49).⁶⁷ The famine created a political context where the rest of the Addis Ababan youth found a common cause and a niche to politically organize, without being seen to be political. As stated above, some youth associations broke away from the national organ, Ethiopian youth Services, and asserted their autonomy (*“Beqirqos yewetatoch dirijit tequaquame”*, 1966: 3); (*“Yeteklehaimanot wetatoch keityopia wetatoch dirijit wetu”*, 1966: 1 and 7). The catastrophic levels of the famine made it possible for school students and informally organized youth associations to participate actively in an issue of high political significance. It is apparent that the youth,

⁶⁵ Television sets were installed in major centers and squares of the city such as just outside the municipality building in Piazza, Teklehaimanot Square, Mesqel Square and near the imperial palace in Arat Killo for people to watch the film

⁶⁶ This screening in the provincial capital of Tigray was the first to be shown outside Addis Ababa.

⁶⁷ Here Andargachew observes, “the protest movement in April was so ubiquitous that in moments of flippancy the story was told that such peripheral communities, as the beggars and prostitutes, also demanded the doubling of alms to be received and payment for services rendered, and went on strike until such time as their demands were met”.

especially school students, who resided in the city in large numbers⁶⁸ were the most actively engaged in these activities. The famine of the 1970s provided perhaps one of the unique occasions in the history of the modern autocratic empire, where popular self-activity and social action was directed and mobilized to tackle a national problem.

As mentioned above there was a convergence of protest events and the forging of informal social networks between the unemployed and school students, say for instance during the taxi strike of February. The police report of February 24, 1974, mentioned above summarized the situation and the groups it accused of fomenting the unrest, as follows, “Because some taxi drivers and teachers stopped working, students who did not go to school and vagrants wrecked havoc” in the streets of the capital (*“Kepolis serawit teqlay memriya yetesete megelecha”*, 1966: 1 and 7). Despite its statist language this was a rather accurate examination of the nature of social protest that will continue to characterize student activity in March, April and May. The unwaged students and the unemployed continued to be the force behind riots and demonstrations that the city witnessed in subsequent months. Even when teachers ended their strike, school students in Addis Ababa continued their class boycott in subsequent weeks (*“Keadis abeba timhirt betoch yetesete masasebiya”*, 1966: 1 and 7). And the main instrument high school students used to defy the state was class boycotts. Interestingly, they did not attend classes while using school premises to organize, make political gatherings and plan relief activities.

Despite calls by the city’s education bureau for students to recommence classes, they continued their class boycotts. The bureau’s statement said, students busied themselves “with meetings and gatherings” during class hours (*“Keadis abeba timhirt betoch yetesete masasebiya”*, 1966: 1 and 7). While sustaining class boycotts, students were engaged in various political activities including

⁶⁸ Tebeje Molla in his study on higher education in Ethiopia at the time of the revolution, he shows that the majority of high school students of the country resided in the capital in 1974. The capital, together with Dire Dawa and Harrar constituted 55% of the total secondary school population of the country (2018: 94).

demonstrations. This student presence, outside the classroom was an effective mechanism by which the broad base of the urban protest movement was maintained in subsequent weeks. A communiqué on April 5, from the Ministry of Education and the Arts explained that these recalcitrant students were not just from the capital's high schools. The communiqué explained, "most schools in Addis Ababa and some in the provinces" were closed as a result. The communique blamed striking teachers and "students' disinterest to learn" (*"Ketimhirt bet lemiqeru temariwoch mastenqeqiya tesete"*, 1966: 1 and 8). The statement proceeded to warn students that they would be dismissed from school if they refused to attend classes by the 7th of April (Ibid). Despite repeated directives, communiqués and threats by the Ministry of Education and the Arts, the class boycotts especially by high school students continued throughout April and May. In another directive on the 24th of April the Ministry threatened that those who do not start classes would have their files scrapped from the school registrar. The directive labeled the political gatherings that students were holding in school premises as "disruptive [sic] of the peace and order" not only of schools but of their surroundings. And in yet another futile attempt to end these disruptions and political activities, the Ministry declared that they would close schools "until an unspecified time" (*"Lehuleteгна dereja timhirt betoch yetesete tizaz"*, 1966: 1 and 3); (*"Yewelaj komitewoch betemariwoch guday segno yisebesebalu"*, 1966: 1 and 7).⁶⁹ Even the National High Security Commission, a military body that took key political decisions that foiled strikes in April and May, was not able to persuade or force students to start classes (Andargachew, 1993: 50-51); (Fisseha Desta, 2008: 70). The commission operated as a command post during this time was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense (and was chaired by its minister Lt General Abiye Abebe). The commission's meeting with student representatives from high schools in the beginning of May failed due to disagreements about student unions. In the meeting, student representatives insisted that the right to form school councils and a national student body were not negotiable. The

⁶⁹ It is stated here that even if high school students were at the forefront of such activities, there were also elementary students who continued to provide bodies to the popular social protest through their class boycotts.

commission argued the Ministry of Education and the Arts had already prepared a guideline to form unions, and students could form “school councils [only] when they reach an agreement on the guideline with the Ministry”. The commission dismissed the establishment of a national student union as premature. It tried to assure the student representatives that the right to demonstrate and create student newsletters could be postponed to a later time after the promulgation of the new constitution. The students, perhaps seeing this as a ploy to persuade them to postpone the realization of their key demands, rejected the commission’s proposal. With the failure of these negotiations, the commission, on the 10th of May 1974, instructed students to restart classes as of the 12th of May (“*Kefitegna biherawi yetsetita comishen letemariwochguday wesane sete*”, 1966: 1, 3 and 6). However, this instruction was ignored and students continued their class boycott (Andargachew, 1993: 54).⁷⁰

On their part, class boycotts (by high school students in particular) were, at least partly their way of pressurizing the state to heed to their demands. The two most important of these demands were the right to form student councils and the establishment of a national student union, where they can participate actively and freely, as they put it “without any government interference”.⁷¹ The teachers’ strike between 18th of February and 18th of March, as well as their own class boycotts in subsequent weeks in March, April and May, could be seen as an extracurricular pedagogical moment that politicized and radicalized students.⁷² They used school grounds and the surroundings of schools for demonstrations. Unlike what the Ministry claimed, students made their schools spaces of self-learning and self-activity. The persistent class boycotts, besides making possible the provision of abundant bodies to the urban protest movement, gave the movement its continuity. Student political engagement in coordinating relief efforts was a

⁷⁰ Andargachew asserts that this attempt to put students back to class did not work even after this warning by the National High Security Commission.

⁷¹ Students of HSIU left their campus in support of the demands of high school students, demands by all workers and called for the establishment of “Peoples’ Government”, “land to the tiller” (“*Yeaddis abeba temariwoch kifil algebum*”, 1966: 1 and 7).

⁷² Insight from conversation with Asher Gamedze, 2019 August.

productive affair that continued perhaps for the remainder of the academic year (“*Yetequaretew timhirt endijemer nigigir tederege*”, 1966: 1 and 7).⁷³

As demonstrated by the foregoing discussion, the taxi strike, the parliament picketers and student boycotts were connected events of protest that brought together various social groups against the imperial regime. Conjunctural unfoldings of inflation and famine moved social forces as diverse as workers, taxi owners and drivers, teachers, students, civil servants, priests, the unemployed, and people fleeing famine zones, migrants into the city, as well as merchants. They had an overarching impact on the overall protest movement and politicized most sections of Addis Ababa’s urban society.

At the end, as Edward Kissi notes, it was university students who first alerted the public to the famine problem that the state was trying to hide.⁷⁴ Students made “the first publicized large-scale domestic relief operation in Ethiopian history in May 1973” by collecting money for relief and starting a relief effort to help famine victims (Kissi, 1997: 168-169).⁷⁵ Despite the devastations the famine was causing and despite its expose by HSIU students (ibid), it took the arrival of the parliament picketers and the social protests for *Addis Zemen* and other state owned newspapers to report the famine regularly.

2.1.3. ‘Yiwuredulin’: The Afar petitioners and employees on strike

April was the most raucous month of the protest year. The pervasiveness of protest in this momentous month was due to the proliferation of revolts, demonstrations,

⁷³ According to this *Addis Zemen* reports a meeting by parent committees of various schools in the capital on May 2, 1974 to mediate between students’ who were not budging, and the Ministry of Education and the Arts to persuade students to resume classes.

⁷⁴ *Addis Zemen* came out with news, for the first time, in April 24 1973 about the famine “announcing that the government had sent 10,000 quintals of grain to Wollo and North Shewa to help victims of drought” (*Addis Zemen* cited in Kissi, 1997: 168-169). Kissi notes, “Students and faculty of Haile Selassie I University... gave fuller details of the famine to the public” after it was discussed in the closed

⁷⁵ Until March 1974 the reporting on famine by *Addis Zemen* was very sporadic and highly truncated that downplayed the magnitude of the problem. And when it was reported what is emphasized is the assistance obtained by the government from foreign countries (“*Janhoy yezayeru meri ledirq qebelewoch yelakutin ye200 shih dolar erdata teqebelu*”, 1966: 1).

petitions and strikes both in the provinces and in the capital (Andargachew, 1993: 49). These provincial rebellions were joined in the capital by striking workers, civil servants and employees of service delivery organs like telecommunication, bus transportation and aviation (Ibid); ⁷⁶ (“*Yejima hizb qinena tamagn balaseltanoch yishomulin ale*”, 1966: 1 and 6; (“*Parlama bearat teqlay gizatoch guday weyyit aderege*”, 1966: 1 and 8); (“*Beasela yedesta meglecha tederege*”, 1966: 1). These protests should be seen as a web of protest actions connected to each other by similar demands. The demands included, among others, calls for the dismissal of officials in the provinces as well as governmental and non-governmental agencies in the capital. This was popularly known as calls for *yiwuredulin*⁷⁷ meaning ‘sack the officials’, a call that served as a paradigm, in the provinces and among employees of the capital to congeal key demands (Ibid: 46). On March 22, employees of the Addis municipality submitted a 23-point petition to the mayor—including pay raises and the right to form unions. While agreeing to consider pay raises on March 24, the mayor insisted that unionizing for civil servants was against the law, suggesting that he would not even consider it. Dissatisfied with the response, the employees of the city “went on strike for sixteen days until 12 April, and managed to have the mayor dismissed by the central government” (Andargachew, 1993: 48). This and other *yiwuredulin* demands show that the dismissal of officials and management was not necessarily of primary importance. This call was almost always accompanied by other demands and strikes which were staged usually with long list of petitions. In the case of the employees of the city municipality for instance, the call for the dismissal of the mayor came after 23-point petitions were submitted and the right to unionize was rejected.

The lengthy strikes began in March, but proliferated in April. Employees of service

⁷⁶ According to Andargachew in Jimma the demonstrations in March 27 that involved people from all walks of life were reportedly as large as 5000 people and the response by the government was harsh. A week after the Jimma incident similar outbursts occurred in other provinces. In the province of Sidamo (now Sidama) people rose up and demanded the dismissal of rapacious officials, objected to misappropriation of public resources, arbitrary seizure of rish land and expropriation of land allocated for pastoral use in Awassa. In the province of Arussi (now Arsi) similar popular demands resulted in one of the first dismissals of a provincial governor. It was reported 15,000 people came out in the streets of the provincial capital, Assela, celebrating the dismissal of the governor.

⁷⁷ (Fiqerte Wondimu, personal interview, 2019 June 9)

delivery organs put a significant strain on the economy and demanded that the dismissal of officials was seen as a precondition to stake other demands. The first such strike was staged by employees of the Civil Aviation Agency and lasted for three weeks between the 11th of March and the 1st April. The employees ended their strike when they managed to get members of the management dismissed. Workers of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Company followed suit and held their strike for more than a month between the 6th of April and the 9th of May. The strike was ended with the dismissal of more than a dozen officials (Andargachew, 1993: 48). Petitions that included twenty-five demands by employees of the Telecommunications Board were also followed by strike action that went on for nearly 5 weeks between the 30th of April, and the 5th of June. Other similar agencies such as The Light and Power Authority, The Highway Authority, The Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, and The Ethiopian Coffee Board began their strike on the 30th of April and made various demands including the dismissal of officials and the right to form unions (ibid). Employees of the Lion's Bus Company, the only bus company in the city, went on strike on April 6, 1974. The strikers submitted a 30-point petition among which were demands for salary increment and the dismissal of ten members of the management (*"Yatobus serategnoch aser shumoch kaltenesu anseram yilalu"*, 1966: 1 and 3). The strikers insisted that they would not go back to service before those members of management were dismissed (*"Yeanbesa' atobus mahaber bord leserategnoch sera maqom wusane sete"*, 1966: 1 and 7). Unlike the taxi strikes of February, this strike saw neither street riots nor was it able to bring all public transport to a halt. That happened just for a day when taxis were stoned by rioters on the 23rd of April in key business and commercial centers of the city (*"Beadis abeba yehizb mamelalesha tequarete"*, 1966: 1 and 3); (*"Yeadis abeba taxiwoch sera jemeru"*, 1966: 1 and 3).⁷⁸ On the 22nd day of the strike, the military reacted by arresting some members of the management of the Company on the 28th of April (ibid). Additionally, the army chief, Lieutenant General Weldeselassie Bereka, pressured the strikers to negotiate and finally succeeded in ending the

⁷⁸ More than 20 taxis were reportedly damaged as a result.

strike on the 30th of April (*"Anbesa atobus sera jemere"*, 1966: 1 and 7).⁷⁹

Calls for the removal of officials and the push to form unions also enticed those with precarious employment positions and status in society, such as artists. Artists of the Hager Fiker Theatre and the Haile Selassie I Theatre submitted demands to the Ministry of Information. Forming unions and the dismissal of unfit officials were not however prioritized over other demands. They came in tandem with other pressing demands like pay increases and employment security. Moreover, artists were struggling to be part of the civil service system. They were barred from enjoying some of the benefits of this system such as formal contracts and annual leave (Surafel, 2018: 166); (*"Ye qedamawi haile selasie ena yehager fiker tewanyan bekine tibeb yebesele sew yimtalini yilalu"*, 1966: 1 and 6). These demands, Surafel Wondimu notes, "spoke ...[to] the systemic problem that denied their dignity as artists and as citizens" in a society that looked down upon and stigmatized them (Surafel, 2018: 166). Sex workers and domestic workers⁸⁰ also raised similar demands including treatment with "dignity", and the right to form unions. Sex workers who made up a significant section, up to 25% of the more than 80,000 female adult population,⁸¹ came out in the streets demanding free health services and the right to unionize (Paulos Gnogno cited in Surafel, 2018: 207, footnote 74).

Strikes as a mode of protest to secure the right to form unions was also tried by workers in private businesses such as workers in small workshops, manufacturing and small-scale industries. Unlike employees of the state and formally employed semi-governmental agencies, workers in private businesses who dared to gather clandestinely to avoid the preying eyes of employers, often risked automatic dismissal and loss of employment (*"Hulet shih buna abetariwoch kesera tebareru tebale"*, 1966: 1 and 3); (Hunegnaw Birhanu, personal interview, 2015 June 13); (Kinde Ayalew, personal interview, 2015 June 5). For these workers securing the

⁷⁹ Reportedly, the bus drivers went back to work agreeing to the demands of the company that they would not be paid for their 24 days out of work.

⁸⁰ (Zenebework Tadesse, personal interview, 2015 March 18).

⁸¹ See discussion on sex work in Addis Ababa in upcoming Chapters.

right to form unions (and the freedom to assemble) was an absolute prerequisite. Moreover, employers used their own right to form unions to bar their workers from enjoying similar rights of association, making the struggle harder for workers in private businesses (Ibid).⁸² Therefore, as the foregoing discussion shows, rather than seeing calls for *yiwuredulin* and the right to form trade unions as demands that were prioritized over others, as some do (Andargachew, 1993: 46), these demands should be seen as prerequisites by workers and employees with multifarious concerns. The *yiwuredulin* call was used more as a rubric to preface the demands of these protesters rather than one that was given primacy over others. After all, forming trade unions or the dismissal of officials could not be an end for waged labor battered by low salaries,⁸³ inflation, problems of tenure security and other concerns that were articulated in the often-long petitions of employees and workers. It is also key to note that while the government was more forthcoming in dismissing unpopular officials in these governmental and semi-governmental organs, it remained largely adamant in and denied the right of civil servants and service delivery agencies to form unions (Andargachew, 1993: 47-49).⁸⁴ It is apparent that the reasons for such intransigence on the part of the imperial government was the fear that unions would unravel the structural inadequacies of the employment and labor structure. Therefore, these two demands were fronted by the protesters as part of the mechanics of protest to realize structural changes in the employment system in the city and politico- economic relations in the provinces.

There were various demands of provincial communities voiced in these *yiwuredulin* calls, as there were numerous demands enumerated in the petitions that accompany or precede strike actions of employees in the capital. Some of these 'provincial' questions and demands were raised in the capital. Similar to the hungry

⁸² Hunegnaw Birhanu and Kinde Ayalew shared their recollections as workers in two different wood workshops in Piazza, where employees were secretly meeting to form unions and elect union reps. Hunegnaw claims that he was one of 85 workers in a wood workshop, where eight (including him) were fired after they were singled out as ringleaders stirring up trouble.

⁸³ As shown towards the beginning of this chapter pay raise was a prominent and universal demand by employees and workers of all types in the capital.

⁸⁴ See also a report citing the rejection of the demands of employees of the Ethiopian Light and Power Authority to form trade unions ("Yemebrat hayle serategnoch", 1966: 1 and 4).

peasants who squatted and picketed on the gates of the parliament, Afar petitioners from the province of Shewa came to the capital to demand answers. The demands of the Afar petitioners were more expansive, structural and radical beyond a mere plea for a rather cosmetic removal of state officials that did not address systemic problems. This case gives us a chance to look closely into the complexity of the *yiwuredulin* demands, especially those that came from the southern and eastern provinces of the empire.⁸⁵ The petition that representatives of the Afar submitted to the Ministry of Interior,⁸⁶ shows a clear discontentment with the ways in which the Afar were made to bear the weight of imperial domination and could be taken as a symptom of the larger malaise in the culturally, nationally, economically and politically dominated sections of the Ethiopian empire.

Addis Zemen gives us a long report on this petition entitled “The people of Afar submitted a petition to the Ministry of Interior” in its 18th of April issue. In this reportage, the petition was submitted to the Minister of Interior by around 100 petitioners comprised of Afar elders, presumably from the province, and Afar students who resided in Addis Ababa. On the whole, the petition focused on the impact of commercial agriculture in the Awash Valley Authority in the lower Awash valley area (“*Yeafar hizb leager gizat minister abetuta aqere*”, 1966: 1 and 7). The authority dispossessed Afar pastoralists of their land and leased it mainly to foreign proprietors (Markakis, 2011: 138).⁸⁷

The petitioners accused the director general of the Awash Valley Authority, Assefa Difaye and another official, Fitawrari Ahmed Geba Haji Ali, of misappropriation of land, nepotism, mismanagement as well as of subjecting the Afar people to much suffering and abuse. The petitioners are reported to have come with protest

⁸⁵ These provinces were a product of Menilik II’s ‘southern marches’ in the late 19th century.

⁸⁶ The Afar inhabit the eastern part of the country.

⁸⁷ Here Markakis notes, by 1971, 31,000ha of land was brought under commercial agriculture in the Lower Awash Valley area. Commercial agriculture restricted pastoral movement and access to the Awash River in addition to causing severe reduction of land for pasture use. The Awash Valley area was a continuation of the imperial government’s commercial agriculture scheme that begun with the establishment of a sugar plantation and processing industry in Wonji in 1951. It was expanded to include the production of other cash crops in 1962 and established the Awash Valley Authority (AVA) in the rest of the Awash Valley area, predominantly populated by the Afar.

banners with captions on them that read, “We demand [our] true rights”, “we are capable of tilling our own land”, “Enough with drought and Assefa’s exploitation”, and “Our [Afar] nation is at the brink of extinction”. The protest was attended by over a hundred people, who also insisted on presenting their case to the Minister. They told the Minister that they had been presenting their case for various ministries in the past three years and charged that their pleas were simply ignored. They complained that their calls for restitution of land taken away from the people of Afar, as well as “the violation of their fundamental welfare” was given a deaf ear by the outgoing Aklilou cabinet, the parliament and the ministries of interior and agriculture. Exposing the imperial prejudice towards pastoralism and pastoralists, the petitioners schooled the Minister of Interior that pastoral land cannot be regarded “government land”. They said, “The perverse notion that all pastoral land is government land has to be abandoned, and both the pastoral and sedentary people” should be treated equally as legitimate “tax paying” members of the community (“*Yeafar hizb leager gizat minister abetuta aqere*”, 1966: 1 and 7).

As is clear from the above account, even if the Afar petitioners were using the language of mismanagement by officials to get their grievances across, what they were actually seeking was a resolution for fundamental and structural problems facing their community. These included the right to maintain a pastoral way of life and putting an end to expropriation of land. They say their way of life was “at the risk of extinction” by the imperial policies of commercial agriculture and prejudice against pastoralism (as an unviable economic activity). Fundamentally, their petition critiqued imperial domination that degraded Afar national/ethnic identity and pastoralist existence by treating pastoral land as ‘no man’s land’ and hence belonging to the state. Moreover, implicit in their critique was a rejection of the consigning of pastoralism as an inferior and transient economic system that has to evolve into a sedentary system of agriculture (“*Yeafar hizb leager gizat minister abetuta aqere*”, 1966: 1 and 7).⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Reportedly, Dejazmach Zewde Gebreselassie, the minister of interior, in response to the petitioners told the petitioners “to improve the living standard of nomads, it is not enough to focus on animal husbandry but also necessary to make them farmers”.

The critique that could be gleaned from such petitions to the Ethiopian empire could be used to show the different layers that this moment of protest unravels. This call for *yiwuredulin* that came from the southern and eastern provinces, as well as striking and petitioning employees, should not be reduced to mere advocacies to replace rapacious administrators. Even if Andargachew sees these calls as technicist demands for the appointment of “honest” administrators (1993: 46-47),⁸⁹ they should be understood as protests with demands for better wages, a freer labor environment and fairer access to key resources such as land. They connected the city and the provinces show that social protest did not always cascade from Addis Ababa to the provinces. Neither is it necessary to argue that the provinces “spearheaded the demand for the dismissal of government officials” (Andargachew, 1993: 46). These demands were generated by similar (but not identical) structural conditions that existed in the provinces and the capital in combined but uneven ways. At the same time, it is crucial to underline that the *yiwuredulin* wave of protests in the provinces and the capital was also a rejection of repressive and malfeasant authority that united the city and the country especially in April 1974.

2.1.4. The Muslim Demonstration of April 20, 1974

Muslim holidays such as Eid al-Fitr were moments where select Muslim religious leaders were expected to go to the palace of the emperor, in what appears to be a show of allegiance by Muslims as loyal subjects of the empire. This practice of a delegation of Muslim clerics and elders going to the palace to pay homage to the emperor had been a clear display of the subservient place Ethiopian Muslims held in postwar imperial Ethiopia (*“Girmawi Janhoy Talalaq Yeselimina Haymanot Meriwochin Teqebelu”*, 1966: 1 and 3). Throughout this period Muslim holidays were not recognized by the state as official holidays. No government

⁸⁹ According to Andargachew, “Between 29 March and 6 April, it was reported that there had been strikes and demonstrations in all of the provincial capitals with police actions against the demonstrators being at their severest in four of them: Jimma (Kefa), Metu (Illubabor), Asela (Arusi) and Arba Minch (Gemu Goffa). In these four provincial capitals almost all of the adult male population - 300,000 people in Metu alone - seem to have come out onto the streets demanding the dismissal of their governor generals (heads of the provincial administration) and other officials”.

representative was sent to address their congregation in the capital where their gathering was confined within the premises of the Anwar Mosque in Merkato (Hajji Mufti Omar Idris, personal interview, 2015 May11). While open public festivities of Christian holidays in spaces such as the Mesqel Square and other gathering spaces such as Jan Meda, officiated as indeed sponsored by the state, the same was not true for Muslim celebrations (Ahmedin Jebel, 2008: 267).⁹⁰ This lack of official recognition of Muslim holidays by the state and of Muslims as equal citizens in their country was one of the main demands of the Muslim demonstration of April 20th. This event was one of the most spectacular moments in the history of the protests of 1974, as it puts to test a regime that officially and brazenly called the country a “Christian Island”.⁹¹

In the thick of the social protests in early April, a delegation of Muslims representing their community visited the palace, this time not to pay homage but to submit demands protesting the maltreatment of the Ethiopian Muslim community. They presented their case to Prime Minister Endalkachew Mekonnen on April 8. *Addis Zemen* in a two-line report mentioned the visit in passing, but did not say what the conversation between the delegation and the prime minister was about. It was said only that the prime minister assured the delegation that “their case” would be looked into (*“Teqlay menisteru yeislemina haymanotin tewokayoch teqebelu”*, 1966: 1). The opacity and briefness of the report says more by saying less. For a regime that was under fire from every direction, it is not surprising that it was disinclined to reveal the full content of the conversation with the delegation. The demands included such sensitive issues like religious equality and equal citizenship, issues with far reaching political consequences.

Ahmedin Jebel’s excellent account of the Muslim demonstration and its precedents

⁹⁰ One can see the kind of coverage Christian holidays received in the state media (*“Yegena beal bemela Ityopiya kef bale sereat tekebere”*, 1966: 1).

⁹¹ According to Hajji Mufti Omar Idris, (personal interview, 2015 May 11) five months after the demonstration, in September 1974, after the installation of the Derg as a Muslim delegation that went to the palace demanded Lieutenant General Aman Andom, the first president of the Provisional Military Administrative Council that overthrew Haile Selassie, to come to their celebration as recognition of their equal status with Christians of the country.

documents what was going on in the early months of 1974 at the beginning of the social protests. Students from different schools and young working people in various employment in the capital started secretly meeting in the Abadir Institute to discuss what to do to improve the conditions of Muslims in the country (Ahmedin, 2008: 262-263).⁹² These secret meetings finally led to the selection of a committee to present the case of the Muslim community to the Prime Minister (Ahmedin: 269). The members of the committee included two people from the Young Muslims Club and five elderly members from the general Muslim community (Ahmed Zekaria, personal interview, 2015 May 15).⁹³ A week after setting the committee up, the Muslim delegation had a follow up meeting with the Prime Minister. Ahmedin claims, Endalkachew called this meeting that occurred on the 17th of April to convince the delegation and their community to call off the demonstration that they were planning to hold on the 20th of April (Ahmedin, 2008: 282). *Addis Zemen* reported the second meeting and mentioned that the Muslim delegation submitted a 13-point petition. It did not say anything about the content of these demands, nor did it disclose the scheduled date of the demonstration.⁹⁴ It is apparent that the regime was troubled by the demands and the looming prospect of a demonstration by a substantial section of the capital's population with deep-seated grievances. The demands that were submitted to Endalkachew on April 8th included: 1) the freedom of worship and assembly, 2) for the right to establish Islamic youth associations, 3) for every restrictions to be lifted for Muslims to make fortune, and own property, 4) for Muslims to have the right to own *rist*

⁹² Ahmedin Jebel traces the beginning of organized Muslim activity in the capital in what was known as "Id Party", a gathering of Muslim students on Muslim holidays. University students were instrumental in its formation and were used as a platform plays, lectures and speeches on Islam. High school students who were privy to the activities of Id Party would later start in the early 1970s the "Young Muslims Club".

⁹³ One of these members was Ahmed Qello had just come back from his studies abroad and was employed in the Road Construction Authorities. He is considered to have played the leadership role in these activities (Ahmedin, 2008: 276).

⁹⁴ The prime minister classified the demands into "administrative" and "right related". He assured the delegation that he gave "instructions to the responsible bodies of government" to deal with "administrative" problems facing Muslims, and said that he referred those demands that has to do with "rights" and "the law" to the body that was appointed to "revise the constitution" ("Teqlay menisteru yeityopyawian islemochin tewokayoch teqebelu", 1966: 1 and 7). Those who met Endalkachew on the 18th of April are said to have told the prime minister that they "cannot stop the demonstration" (Ahmedin Jebel, 2008: 282).

land, 5) for Muslims to have the right to elect their leaders to form a national Islamic council, 6) for Muslims to have the right to be adjudicated by Sharia Courts, 7) for Islamic religious holidays to be officially recognized, 8) for the state to desist from using the sinister phrase “Muslims in Ethiopia”, 9) for the separation of the state and religion, 10) for the state to facilitate for Muslims to participate without restriction in the military, in diplomatic, agricultural, administrative, and judicial affairs; 11) for Muslims to have the right to propagate their religion in the media; 12) for Muslim missionary work to be given a legal status; and 13) for the state to build mosques as it does churches and for the state to contribute to finance their functions (Ahmedin Jebel, 2008: 271-275).⁹⁵

As Ahmedin Jebel documents, in one of the meetings held at the Anwar Mosque a few days before the demonstration hundreds of Muslims gathered to discuss how to bring the community to the streets. Reportedly, a daily laborer proposed that Muslim *idirs* be used to summon the community to come to the rally. The organizers then used the networks of 50 *idirs* to announce the scheduled demonstration. Despite objections by some about the participation of women, those who advocated for their participation got the upper hand. Placards were distributed through the *idir* leadership that called upon people to join the march.

The placard read, “[Ethiopian Muslim] merchants, governmental and non-governmental employees, students, workers ... irrespective of your gender are invited to this sacred mission.” (Ahmedin, 2008: 275 and 278-279); (IES Manuscript Section, Dossier: 2396/02/5). The April 20th Muslim demonstration was certainly one of the outstanding moments in that year of protest. Its gigantic proportions, unparalleled in terms of the number of people who “poured out” onto the streets of the capital to take part. At least one out of nine people residing in the capital (i.e. 100,000⁹⁶ out of 900,000) participated in this rally. Moreover, this mammoth

⁹⁵ The petition also said if the separation of the state and religion is not upheld the state should also provide budget and financial support for various activities of Mosques and Islamic assemblies and Islamic content should enter the curricular system and be given in schools as Christianity already enjoys this privilege (IES Manuscript Section, Dossier: 2400/01/4).

⁹⁶ Ahmedin Jebel puts the number at 300,000 (2008: 294). Others like Markakis and Nega (1986: 94) estimate the number to be not more than 100,000.

procession covered a distance of more than 12 kilometers moving around in the city. It started at the Anwar Mosque and proceeded to Piazza, through De Gaul Square to, Miazia 27 Monument (in Arat Killo), and slopped down to Mesqel Square and then up the Churchill Road via the Lion of Judah Square. The procession returned back to its starting point through Piazza at the Anwar Mosque. *Addis Zemen*, which was reluctant to disclose the particulars of the 13 point demands two days earlier, did not, at this time, hide its excitement with the completion of a peaceful demonstration. The paper came out with a glowing and detailed report of the event. It described it as “unprecedented” and “grand”. It said, “even if it was a demonstration that was attended by a multitude of people, never seen before in Addis Ababa, it was surprising for many that there was not even a speck of disturbance registered in its account”. The mood of the march was such that “spectators standing on the side ways watching were clapping for the demonstrators, enthusiastically” (*“Yeityopiawiyān eslamoch beadis abeba kefetegna selamawi self aderegu”*, 1966: 1 and 6). In fact, this demonstration was the biggest the country and its capital would see for the next four decades, until the 2005 demonstrations against the EPRDF regime.

The demonstration was attended by people of all ages—“the elderly [men and women], the middle aged and the young” (Sheik Mustafa, personal interview, 2015 May 3).⁹⁷⁹⁰ University and high school students as well as Christians joined the demonstrators in support. Sheikh Mustafa, recalls that he joined the Muslim demonstration in his mid 20s not because he supported a “socialist revolution,” but because for him revolution⁹⁸ meant “equality between Muslims and Christians and better employment for the poor” (Sheikh Mustafa, personal interview, 2015 May 3). Revolution or more popularly *lewut* (change) as Mustafasaw it was about the

⁹⁷ Sheikh Mustafa recalls that the participants of the demonstration included Muslim business people, petty traders, educated people, working people, religious leaders, shopkeepers and chiefly young people. Ahmedin Jebel claims that people came from other cities like Bahir Dar, Dire Dawa, Jimma, Aksum and Debre Markos to participate in the demonstration (Ahmedin, 2008: 285).

⁹⁸ Sheikh Mustafa uses the term *lewutu* (“the change”). This is a popular marking of the time of revolution, a reference to *abiot* the Amharic term for revolution.

fulfillment of aspirations for religious equality and official recognition of Islam.⁹⁹92 In one of their songs that was more like the soundtrack of the march, the demonstrators used a famous aphorism associated with the emperor, “religion is personal, country is communal” (አገር የጋራ ነው ሀይማኖት የግል ነው), criticizing the discrimination of Muslims in a country that is also theirs. They chanted: “Why is the maxim ‘religion is personal, country is communal’ not practiced” (“አገር የጋራ ነው ሀይማኖት የግል ነው የሚለው መሪ ቃል ቢሰራበት ምነው?”). It was chanted by the procession and it was “repeated time and again” by the demonstrators, as *Addis Zemen* noted (“*Yeityopiawiyān eslamoch beadis abeba kefetegna selamawi self aderegu*”, 1966: 1 and 6). Not only was this an attempt to mobilize speech that was associated with the emperor in an effort to stake the protesters demands for religious equality and equal citizenship, but it simultaneously served as a moral condemnation of the insincerity of the regime that in fact denied Muslims equal rights. As *Addis Zemen* observed, the demonstrators were calling for this “motto to be actually practiced” (Ibid).

Equally ingenious was the demonstrators’ inversion of the “Christian Island” dictum. They carried a slogan “Ethiopia is an island for [all] Ethiopians” (“ኢትዮጵያ የሁሉም ኢትዮጵያውያን ደሴት ናት”) in an attempt to radically transmute the Orthodox Christian exclusivist ethos of the empire into one that democratizes the country as equally belonging to all (Ibid).

The Muslim demonstrators mounted a paradigmatic critique to the ethos of the imperial Ethiopian state. They disputed the notion of አንድነት (“oneness”) that represents the “homogenizing visions” of the Ethiopian state and exposed its systemic discrimination against Muslims through their slogans. This slogan “Ethiopia is an Island of [all] Ethiopians” exposed that Ethiopia was not home in the same way to every group who resided in it. It was a precise articulation of a mass

⁹⁹ The young Mustafa came to Addis in the 1960s from Gondar seeking education in his late teens. He started out his life in the city as a dependent in a household of a merchant in Merkato. He lived and worked near the Anuar Mosque for about 12 years until c.1976 (Sheikh Mustafa, personal interview, 2015 May 3).

gathering whose relevance goes beyond the Muslim community.¹⁰⁰⁹³ Other slogans that were chanted and written in signs and posters of the demonstration include: “Islamic holidays should be made national holidays!”, “A government that is not privy to criticism does not last!”, “Unity is the key to development!” and “Religious favoritism is an obstacle to national unity!” (Ahmedin, 2008: 288); (IES Manuscript Section, Dossier: 2396/02/5). The demonstration was about foregrounding an important social question—the question of religious equality and equal citizenship. According to the Ethiopian revolution literature, the two most important questions of the revolution were “land to the tiller” and “the national question” (national equality). It has to be stressed that this demonstration brought to the limelight another extremely important social question, religious equality. Even if this question was not given prominence by student activism and politics before the revolution or by leftist political organizations in the years that follow, the Muslim demonstration gave this fundamental social question centrality. The question had a particular poignancy in urban spaces like Addis Ababa that denied Muslims open public worship and celebration, since religious celebrations were confined to the premises of mosques. The symbolism of the lack of official approval of Muslim holidays and an unfettered public celebration was not insignificant to Muslims. In fact the early morning cannon fire¹⁰¹ to mark the beginning of Muslim holidays was brought up by Muslim clerics and elders in a meeting with Lieutenant General Aman Andom (the president of the PMAC or the Derg) on the 18th of September (“*Letenal general aman yeislemina meriwochin tegebelu*”, 1967: 1 and 6); (Hajji Mufti Omar, personal interview, 2015 May 11).¹⁰²

The Muslim rally also made palpable other inequalities of imperial Ethiopia. Slogans

¹⁰⁰ Ahmedin Jebel contends that university students, both Muslims and non-Muslims were responsible for the slogans carried by demonstrators in 20 April (Ahmedin, 2008: 284). While this might be true, it should also be noted that slogans and songs in demonstrations are, also impromptu articulations and might not all be prearranged before the event. Moreover, Ahmedin’s suggestion that the slogans were written by university students should be taken with a pinch of salt, in a demonstration and Muslim mass movement that was organized mainly by youth and high school students, by Ahmedin’s own admission (see discussion below). Even if the Muslim demonstration was planned and organized earlier and the organizers had time to prepare slogans for the rally, it is only reasonable to assume that hundreds of thousands of protesters also come with their own slogans to the rally, as usually is the case in such moments of mass outpourings.

¹⁰¹ This is a ritual in Ethiopia to mark national holidays. Cannon fire marks the beginning of the holiday. This is done usually around 6 o’clock in the morning, the time when, according to the Ethiopian system of counting time, the day begins.

¹⁰² Aman Andom met with Muslim leaders on the 18th of September 1974 after the deposition of the emperor.

like “Separation of the State and Religion”, “Stop ethnic and religious [discrimination] in Ethiopia”, “No unity without equality”, and “Equality for all Ethiopians” provided foundational critiques to the narrative of Ethiopia that the imperial regime broadcasted. These slogans exposed that the image of Ethiopia, as a land of “harmony and unity” was a fairy-tale that was insensitive to religious, national and cultural discrimination. In their show of explicit solidarity, Christians and others who joined the demonstration also gave a sense that they endorsed the contents of the rally. In response to Muslims chanting:

Our Christian
compatriots March on
our side
In our [struggle] for [equal] rights

Non-Muslims and Christians chanted and sung along:

Your Christian
compatriots We march by
your side!
(“*Ityopiawiyana islamoch beaddis
 abeba kefetegna self
aderegu*”, 1966: 7”).

These chants celebrated the camaraderie that Muslims aspired to build with their Christian counterparts—and the freedom and justice they desired to achieve. Since “songs do not simply accompany political events” and actually constitute them (Gillespie and Naidoo, 2019: 227), these chants and songs were the expressions of the politics of the march. These songs lubricated the rally and served as political commentaries of its present, as well as the future aspirations of the Muslim community. 100,000 bodies moved together for kilometers and spectators from the neighborhoods provided water and cheered the demonstrators on. The camaraderie added to the excitement of the rally (Sheikh Mustafa, personal interview, 2015 May 3); (Zenebework Tadesse, personal interview, 2015 March 18). This demonstration was another example that saw the convergence of diverse social groups around a particular protest event and platform. University and high school students as well as Christian residents of the city joined the demonstration (Ahmedin Jebel, 2008: 284). Such convergence of social forces was a manifestation that allowed for the possibility of spontaneous formations, more

than a pre-meditated event organized by calculating and purposive actors.¹⁰³⁹⁶

The solidarity expressed by the Christian contingent was partly aided by the care the Muslim demonstrators took to avoid antagonizing the Christian community. This caution by the Muslim rally and its simultaneous radical imagination is perhaps best expressed in the placard the organizers of the rally distributed to address their Christian counterparts.¹⁰⁴ The placard read:

... We ask your support in our effort to eliminate religious and administrative bias. ...Our blood is your blood, your flesh is our flesh, your features and our features are the same... we are ... the same people. There is no doubt it is beneficial [for all of us as a community] to eradicate the divisions that are wrought upon us by religious differences. [Let us come together] for the sake of our progress... and our national unity (Ahmedin Jebel, 2008: 281-282); (IES: Manuscript Section, Dossier 2396/01/7).

As the above excerpt shows, while the demonstrators invoked and celebrated Ethiopian nationhood, they at the same time exposed the lies about a harmonious Ethiopia without discrimination. They showed their patriotism while at the same time rejecting the prejudices they face in their country. Moreover, they objected to discrimination against Muslims, which prevented them from enjoying equal participation in administrative, military and political affairs of the state. Slogans like: "We cannot afford to remain second class citizens!", "We demand equal participation in administrative affairs [of the state]!", "Out of 14 Enderases none of them is a Muslim!", "No Muslim is General!", "Out of 20 Ministers only two are Muslims" (IES, Manuscript Section, Dossier 2396/02/5); (Ahmedin, 2008: 289-290); are all expressions of their rejection of the conditions in which Muslims were kept in the country.

The Christians, who came to the rally, from high schools and the HSIU, carried

¹⁰³ Markakis and Nega (1983: 94) describe the Muslim demonstration as a function of the infusion of the radical energies of Christian demonstrators" that politicized an otherwise "politically passive" and "introverted" Muslim community. See also Skocpol's critique of such voluntarist interpretations of revolution (1979: 17-18).

¹⁰⁴ See also some of the slogans in the demonstration, which celebrate unity and patriotism such as "Unity between Ethiopians for Eternity", "Let Ethiopia make forward strides with her children", "Ethiopia's problem is a problem of all Ethiopians!", "Our demand is for equality not superiority!" (IES Manuscript Section, Dossier: 2396/02/5).

slogans with their own demands, while proclaiming their support for the Muslim community and their struggles (*“Yeityopiawiyān eslamoch beadis abeba kefetegna selamawi self aderegu”*, 1966: 1 and 6). As was the case in the taxi strikes, the Muslim demonstration also won the support of high school and university students (ibid). Appreciating the interconnectedness of these demands and the coming together of diverse groups in particular protest events to stage their own demands, while standing in solidarity with their compatriots, is key to understanding the popular character of such events. It is apparent that protest events were autonomous social actions by particular social groups that were, however, attended by disparate social elements that found inspiration in one another.

2.1.5. The popular revolution

1974, especially the months between February and June, was a year of unrest that pervaded almost every section of urban society, with the notable exception of the upper echelons of the imperial regime. The “mood of rebelliousness” was so pervasive that even the most despised sections of society took part and had their say in these months of widespread popular protest. Of these outcasts, sex workers that constituted a substantial chunk of the female adult waged population of Addis Ababa took out in the streets and demanded legal status and fair treatment.¹⁰⁵⁹⁸ A gathering of nurses, predominantly women, on the 30th of March, to demand pay raise, free health care, life insurance and equal rights of pension with their men counterparts, was met with persecution and raids by the police (*“Setoch yetureta mebtachin yetemuala ayidelem yilalu”*, 1966: 1); (*“Nersoch yaqerebut tiyaqe agibab alew?”*, *Addis Zemen*, 1966: 7).¹⁰⁶ Workers who were employed in small workshops and private businesses had to dodge the preying eyes of employers that fired those singled out as ring leaders or their protests (Hunegnaw Birhanu, personal interview, 2015 June 13); (Kinde Ayalew, personal interview, 2015 June

¹⁰⁵ A reader reportedly wrote to Paulos Gnogno after hearing that “Addis Ababa’s prostitutes appealed to the government...” and the reader is reported to have asked “what did they [prostitutes] contribute to the ... [country] to pose these demands?” (Paulos Gnogno cited in Surafel, 2018: 207, footnote 74).

¹⁰⁶ As the organizer of proclaims, nurses’ demands for equal rights of pension was made “on behalf of all women in services”.

5). On some occasions these workers faced indiscriminate lay offs, as happened to two thousand women coffee winnowers who were laid off for meeting to submit their petition of demands to their employer (*"Hulet shih buna abetariwoch kesera tebareru tebale"*, 1966: 1 and 3).

Since 1974 represented a peculiar year that saw the rising of rebellious spirits in almost all sectors of society in the capital, there were few, if any, who appeared impervious to the rebellious spirits of the times. Even prisoners, living in conditions where almost all basic rights were curtailed, enclosed in strict disciplinary and security regimes, living on the edges of society, were not left out in voicing their demands (*"Yeiseregnochin teqlala huneta yemiyatena komite tequaquame"*, 1966: 2). This is even despite the consequences for daring to rise in protest to be heard.¹⁰⁷ Other sections of society, such as priests and relatively well-off members of urban society (such as taxi owners), who are customarily considered unsusceptible and indisposed to progressive demands, were politicized by the spirit of the times.

As discussed earlier, an important aspect of the popular protests of 1974 was a phenomenon characterized by the convergence of social groups around protest events that were staged autonomously by specific social groups. These protests were not a function of one revolutionary subject steering the wheels of radical social and political change. The spontaneous revolutionary rising was *popular* in character and was facilitated by *conjunctural coming togethers* that created the conditions for the emergence of a revolutionary situation. There were diverse actors that coalesced in protest events, but none of these actors were "dramatists" (Eric Hobsbawm cited in Skocpol, 1979: 18). Those who made the revolution possible witnessed its arrival like everyone else knowing full well that it "will come in a form we cannot yet imagine..." as Aditi Jaganathan says. In 1974 the Ethiopian revolution came and when it - in a word commonly used - "erupted" (ፈነዳ). No one had the capacity to prefigure the time of its arrival, nor its process and

¹⁰⁷ Reportedly 107 prisoners were either killed or wounded on the 30th of March 1974 when the prison police fired live bullets accusing them of rioting to escape. According to Addis Zemen a committee was set up to examine the situation and listen to prisoners' demands (*"107 sew yemotebetena yeqoselebet yewehni bet elqit eskahun wusane alagegnem"*, 1967: 1).

outcome. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there were no *makers* of the revolution. It only means the makers were not a uniform block. Diverse social groups *became* the builders of the different chambers of its edifice. The revolution in this sense was popular—made up of the shared sentiments and aspirations of its disparate makers. The process of a revolution or its outcome could not be foretold or foreseen. The revolutionary situation eventuates from the structures conditioning the social, economic, political and cultural realities of revolutionaries: the actors that build its different compartments.

The subsequent chapters will trace the cultural formation of this popular revolutionary sentiment in the two decades before the 1974 revolution. The next chapter will set the scene by laying out what I mean by “the popular”.

Chapter Three

The making of postwar Addis Ababa: social ingenuity and the emergence of the popular (c. 1950s-1974)

... [My] definition of the “popular” ...looks, in any particular period, at those forms and activities which have their roots in the social and material conditions of particular classes; which have been embodied in popular traditions and practices (Stuart Hall, 1998: 449).

Social space ... remains the space of society, of social life. Man does not live by words alone; all “subjects” are situated in a space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves, a space which they may both enjoy and modify (Henry Lefebvre, 1991: 35).

Introducing the chapter

In this study, the emergence of *the popular* in postwar Addis Ababa is conceived as a function of complex and imbricated state and societal processes. *The popular* was an outcome of the imperial state’s modernist project - the making of the city from below - and state and media discourse that started in the late 1950s. *The popular* emerged in an urban social context comprised of situated subjects and classes. As discussed in chapter two, *the popular* in this study refers to disparate categories of social classes who constitute the large swathes of Addis Ababa’s ruled populace. They are outside “the power block”, but connected to one another by a shared public sociality and urban culture. In this chapter, I show how the popular classes, described here as the urban underclass, were formed in the postwar city as a result of the twin processes of migration and the informalization of work and settlement. Here I seek to show how the state media also discursively constructed these popular classes. I show how the majority of the city’s poor emerged at the intersection of demographic processes that involved migration, informalization of work and settlement, the imperial state’s modernist project as well as how the state media constructed “the people” starting in the late 1950s. “The Ethiopian people” as a collective were labeled as culturally predisposed to procrastination. Migrants into the city are castigated as “idling” peasants roaming the cities, and the youth were admonished for their wayward and frivolous ways. All were defined

and blamed for impeding the material progress and development of the country and for lacking “self-application” and “diligence”. While the emergence of the popular was also a product of socio-cultural processes occurring in the city, this discussion will be part of the subsequent chapter.

While this dissertation draws on social, economic, cultural and political developments in the postwar period, the post 1950s is particularly important for the current chapter. This is because the intensification of rural-urban migration and informalization of work and settlement, both crucial in the process of “city- making from below”,¹⁰⁸ became more apparent in the 1950s. These twin processes reflect the social, economic and spatial dimensions of the emergence of *the popular*, while the cultural dimension of the emergence of the popular is discussed in chapter four. Even if the state led projects of modernization are not the focus of this study or the chapter, state activity (state design and urban planning) is taken as a key dimension in the making of the city. State led modernization in postwar Addis Ababa resulted in the expansion of the state bureaucracy, educational institutions, the development of postwar architecture and city planning, the establishment of premier cultural institutions like Haile Selassie I Theatre, the modernization of municipal administration, and the expansion of the state media. These infrastructural developments and modernist projects of the state were critical to both city making and the emergence of *the popular* in an urban setting in the postwar period.

The popular is a disparate conglomeration of social groups and social classes of postwar Addis Ababa. It includes the vast swathes of the city’s underclass (such as small traders, laborers, domestic workers, sex workers, cart drivers, porters, brokers, street hustlers, brokers etc.), as well as factory and other formally employed workers, professionals, students, civil servants and employees of service delivery agencies and other social and occupational groups outside of “the power block”. As Stuart Hall says, the popular is made up of the “material

¹⁰⁸ The notion of the making of the city “from below” is taken from an article by Daniel Immerwahr “The Politics of Architecture and Urbanism in Postcolonial Lagos, 1960–1986” (2007: 21).

conditions” of their lives and their sociality is an expression of their “embodied... popular traditions and practices” (Hall, 1998: 449). While this chapter focuses its attention on the ways in which the city’s underclass was produced in the postwar years, it also seeks to show how they also transformed, modified and produced Addis Ababa, “from below” through their practices and lives.

The focus of this and the next chapter on *the popular* is linked to the overall objective of this study that seeks to examine the social and cultural context in which subject formation occurred in the years and decades leading up to the revolution. The secondary literature on the Ethiopian revolution examines subject formation in the pre-revolutionary years and decades by tracing the ideological and political formation of revolutionaries in the Ethiopian Student Movement. So far this has been done largely without an attempt at linking student politics with other social groups and social classes in the revolution, and without situating student politics in broader social and cultural change processes occurring in Addis Ababa. It is with the aim of exploring the links between subject formation and larger social and demographic process that this chapter explores the ways in which such processes were instrumental in the making of Addis Ababa in the postwar period. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the emergence of the popular as a product of migration and informalization of work and settlement. However, at the same time the process of urbanization of Addis Ababa was not a mere function of rural-urban migration and the informalization of work and settlement. It was also a consequence of architectural design, public work, educational and bureaucratic expansion and road networks that were all parts of the imperial state’s modernist project. This dissertation in general and this chapter in particular, understands urbanization as a dialectical process in which the city makes its subjects and everyday people produce the city. In this sense, urbanization is a process whereby situated subjects circumscribed by the structural conditions of the city and their material lives make life and produce the city. As Daniel Immerwahr says about informality in post-independence Lagos, “the culture of the informal economy” and its informal settlements were “shaped” by everyday people that dwell in the city, but the structures and the circumstances in which these informal settlements and the

“informal economy” were “not chosen by them” (Immerwahr, 2007: 21).

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first is a brief background note on the history of Addis Ababa to set the stage for the subsequent discussion. This section is followed by two main sub chapters. The first is about the key importance of rural-urban migration and informalization in the making of the capital. These processes created the basis on which popular classes came to form the majority in postwar Addis Ababa. I argue that city making in postwar Addis Ababa was not just a product of state design but also an outcome of social ingenuity. This section provides the socio-economic and spatial dimension of the emergence of the popular in the process of the making of the city “from below”. The following section is a discussion about structural conditions that were key in the material foundations of the making of the capital in the postwar period. Famines, harvest failures and inflation are discussed as vital long-term and systemic structural factors that were instrumental in the production of the countryside and the city in combined but uneven ways. Their links with rural-urban migration and informalization of work and settlement will be examined with the aim of showing the imbricated nature of subject formation in Addis Ababa that was neither *fully urban* nor *fully rural*. The third section is a discussion on how state media constructed “the people” since the late 1950s and how state discourse became instrumental in the emergence of the popular in the postwar years.

3.1 A brief note on the history of the city

The political history of Ethiopia and its history of independence from European colonial rule gave its cities, including Addis Ababa, a specific formation (Bahru, 1987: 45). However, what Catherine Coquery-Vidrovic calls “new urbanization” in the 19th century following “the arrival of Western Capitalism proper” (Coquery-Vidrovic, 1991: 30) also impacted urban formations in Ethiopia. Following this “new” urban form, Addis Ababa as a “modern city” strived to incorporate modern European city forms such as European style buildings, the modern bureaucracy and the expansion of modern state institutions and road networks.

Despite Addis Ababa being a homegrown Ethiopian city, it did not grow to become the city it is without connections to developments happening in the broader regional and international contexts. As Pankhurst observes “the establishment of the capital [Addis Ababa] marked a turning-point in Ethiopian history [as]... it laid the foundations for the development of a modern state” (Pankhurst, 1961: 117).

Moreover, Addis Ababa was a product of expansion of the empire to the southern parts of present day Ethiopia. It was founded by a ruler of an African empire, Menilik II (r. 1889-1911) in a context of European colonial expansion into the Horn region. It emerged as a “garrison town” settled by Menilik, his military officials and their followers in a conquered land previously dominated by the Gulele Oromo (Pankhurst, 1961: 105 and Foucher, 1987: 33; Eshetu, 1987: 79). Addis Ababa’s foundation as the capital of the Ethiopian empire, therefore, came in a regional context of a hovering European colonialism threatening to swallow Ethiopia. Eight years after the foundation of the capital, in 1896 the battle of Adwa was fought with Italy in which Italian colonial ambition was foiled, but the fragility of this victory was highlighted by the continued occupation of Eritrea and the encirclement of the nation by three colonial powers: the Italians in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland; the British in British Somaliland, the Sudan and Kenya; and the French in French Somaliland (Djibouti). And in the mid 1930s the Italians were able to make a come back and occupy Ethiopia for five years (1936-1941).

The development of Addis Ababa as a city was not impervious to the pressures of modernity, as modern Ethiopian nationalism and notions of “territorial integrity” and “sovereignty” were products of the country’s struggles to keep European colonialism and domination at bay. Modernization was thought to be the only sure way of maintaining the hard won, but fragile political independence of the country in the pre-Italian period. After the country fell to Italian rule and suffered for five years under it, the drive towards modernity and modernization characterized the aspirations of the empire. In the postwar period (1941-1974) modernization and its twin project of urbanization were seen as a way of preserving the “territorial integrity” of the country (Shimeles, 2011: 591).

As Shimeles Bonsa notes, the capital city took the crucial space in imagining and modernizing the nation. “The search for the nation and ‘the goods of modernity’ became an Ethiopian preoccupation” after 1941. Haile Selassie in the postwar period “underscored the symbolic import of the capital as a place” to “lay down the foundation of the nation” and “create and disseminate civilization and development.” (Shimeles, 2013:172). Moreover, “modernization” along with “state building” remained the two “most important political projects” of the Imperial State (ibid, 167). The “modernist project” of the postwar Haile Selassie years was intimately linked to the question of maintaining the country’s independence. Addis Ababa was seen, as Shimeles says, as “the crucible” and “showcase” of the country’s modernity (ibid, 170). During the post 1941 period, for a country that just came out of a five years of brutal Fascist rule, “modernity” meant the maintenance of its political independence, “territorial integrity” and “progress” (Shimeles, 2013: 200).

In the early years of the capital, settlement was premised on the logic of camps or “safars” which were put up by military officials of the conquering army of Menilik II. The early foundations of the city show that it was made up of *safars* circling the palace. As Bahru says, the *safars* were “veritable slums” constituted of Menilik’s officials and their followers and “servants [who] could not afford to erect imposing structures and their descendants have continued to live in these hovels” (Bahru, 2008: 489). The Gebbi (Menilik’s palace) being its central “node”, Addis Ababa developed as “a collection of different camps” each surrounded by large circular settlements occupied by servants, attendants and workers associated with the *gebbi*, as well as the officials of Menilik (Bahru, 2008: 489). In the postwar period the large plots of land in these *safars* were owned by the descendants of Menilik’s entourage. Later, during the occupation period, the plots were given away to Italian settlers, whose numbers reached more than 30,000 by May 1939 from a mere 550 in 1936 (Pankhurst, 1987: 128). The removal of “natives” and the establishment of the “native market”, the Mercato in the Tekle Haimanot area (which is described as the “most living” legacy of Italian rule (ibid, 127-128)),

resulted in one of the largest concentrations of what we would now call poor informal settlements of the city.¹⁰⁹

In its attempt to organize urban space, the imperial government had the objective of using the capital city as a medium and as a casting machine to forge a cohesive “nation” through the “instrumentality” of the city space as a platform of national integration and “homogenization” (ibid; 171- 172, 178 and 181). Despite the wishes of the imperial state, however, rural-urban migration, often condemned by the state,¹¹⁰ and its impact on the conditions of the city, created congested and poor quarters, which were far from being “respectable” urban dwelling spaces. Despite its lack of facilities and access to “clean water services, toilet facilities and refuse collection,” the city grew in the postwar period at an exponential rate. The migrant population constituted the majority of the city’s population in the 1960s and 1970s (Shimeles, 2011: 397; Mesfin, 1966: 32-33).

In the postwar period the imperial state came with a renewed vigor for modernization and urbanization. Privatization and commodification of land in the capital became a marker of the “country’s growing...incorporation into the world economy” (Shimeles, 2013: 171; Markakis, 2011: 108). The capital saw expansion in services, bureaucracy, the construction of roads, and modern buildings, particularly from the 1950s into the 1970s (Getahun, 2007: 102 and 208).

The first master plan of Addis Ababa was proposed five years after liberation in 1941, and other city plans were designed to transform the city into a modern metropolis (Shimeles, 2011: 408; Getahun, 2007: 45-6). Despite its aspirations to modernize the city and its quite aggressive construction of modern buildings, ministries, theatres and cinema halls throughout the 1960s and 70s (mainly after

¹⁰⁹ Despite its briefness Italian rule had an important impact on the city and its prospective development (Mesfin, 1966: 20-21); Horvath, 1970: 82). For instance, the social impact of the removal of “natives” from the city center to settle them in the Merkato area resulted in the large-scale expropriation of land, which according to Pankhurst resulted in “over four thousand owners were deprived of over five thousand houses” in just four years from the city center (Pankhurst, 1987: 125 and 127).

¹¹⁰ The intensification of rural urban migration alarmed the state, perhaps after the late 1950s. The state media decried migrants from the countryside as “loiterers” and “idlers”. This will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter.

the mid 1950s) (Shimeles, 2011: 583-584; Getahun, 47-49), the imperial government was largely unable to implement most of the proposals of the various master plans that it commissioned.

In these postwar decades, Addis Ababa did not see the materialization of substantial state projects of building residential spaces in the city, with the exception of the construction of middle-class housing projects mainly in the Old Airport and Bole Area (Shimeles, 2011: 422-423 and 608-609). This is despite the aspirations of the imperial government to transform the city along modern European lines (Shimeles, 2013: 173-174). On the other hand, the construction of modern buildings, squares, infrastructural development and the establishment of ministries and construction of public buildings in Addis Ababa, had a major impact on the organization of the spaces of the capital. In addition to these infrastructural developments and expansions, Addis Ababa was also made “from below”. The social ingenuity of popular groups migrating into the city from the countryside and the informalization of work and settlements played a big part in the production of the city from below, as will be shown in the next two sections of this chapter.

3.2 Making the city from below

In this section, I demonstrate how *the popular* emerged in the process of the making of Addis Ababa from below by highlighting the social and demographic processes that produced the city. I show that city making was not just a product of state design, but also an outcome of social ingenuity and popular creative activity. I argue that the broader national structural context and the modernization projects of the imperial state, through their capacities, limitations and symbolisms, resulted in rural-urban migration and informality, which played a crucial role in the making of Addis Ababa as an imperial metropolis. Everyday people modified the unequally owned, used and dominated spaces of the capital through their everyday social practices and ways of being and doing. The population composition of the city was heterogeneous in terms of the work they do, their gender and their

national/ethnic origins. Therefore, the popular in postwar Addis Ababa was first and foremost expansive and disparate in its nature. The majority of the city made up the urban underclass. Those who were employed were mainly employed in the informal sector. The number of dependent adults (those who live with their relatives coming from the countryside) as well as the unemployed and precariously employed were substantial in number. Those who were formally employed were meager in number.

3.2.1 Rural-urban migration and informalization

In postwar Ethiopia, demographic processes, particularly rural-urban migration, was crucial in the transformation of the capital.¹¹¹ As in the rest of Africa, rural-urban migration transfigured, both urban and rural spaces in Ethiopia, from the 1940s into the 1960s and 70s (Catherin Coquery-Vidrovich, 1991: 49). Addis Ababa saw a dramatic upsurge in its population growth due to rural-urban migration that responded to the urbanization, and modernization schemes that the imperial government was undertaking. The period between 1955 and 1968 is described as “the boom period, which saw a building activity unprecedented in the history of the city” (Dejene, 1987: 206). The population of the city ballooned from a mere 100,000 in 1941 to about 400,000 in 1950, a number, which continued to grow to finally hit seven digits in the 1970s (Getahun, 2007: 40-42)

Massive rural-urban migration into Addis Ababa came with the problem of unemployment (Getahun, 2007: 62, 67 and 216). Migration concentrated a large percentage of youth in the capital and gave urban poverty a particular face in the postwar years. In a context where there was little industrialization and manufacturing (ibid, 97-99), rural-urban migration resulted in the production of the urban poor: the petty traders, the unemployed, domestic workers, sex workers, dependents and other social and occupational groups who led a precarious existence in the city. It intensified old and new forms of servitude relations and

¹¹¹ Getahun Benti's works on migration into Addis Ababa city are notable in documenting the process of migration into Addis Ababa (2007, 2002).

produced *ashekeroch*, *chulowoch*, porters, wood and water carriers, bakers, cart drivers, guards, and others who were engaged in menial work in the city (Asenakech Kebede, Birhanu Mengesha, Belaynesh Endalemaw, personal interviews, 2014 March 2-10); (Emiyu Bekele, Kinde Ayalew, Hunegnaw Birhanu, personal interviews 2015 June 5-June 13). In short, Addis evidenced the “informalization” of settlements and work that became one of the chief characteristics of the urban economy of the capital (ibid, 213-214 and 216; Laketch, 1991: 127). Informalization of settlements in the postwar period involved a creative act of using dominated space by modifying and transforming the physical spaces of the city and social relationships. Informalization of settlements is what the prominent Ethiopian historian Bahru calls “spontaneous growth” in describing much of the history of Addis Ababa (Bahru, 1987: 45). Bahru asserts, Addis Ababa in its growth and development as a metropolis, followed the “contours of nature rather than the lines of the planner’s map” (ibid). Even if the view is problematic that informality or “spontaneous growth” of the city did not have its own logic and is without its rationale, Bahru’s notion of “spontaneous growth” shows the immediacy of settlement patterns that modify space according to the needs of city dwellers in the making of Addis Ababa. The early neighborhoods of Addis Ababa such as Arada, Dejach Wube Sefer and Serategna Sefer, that were originally settled by the royal retinues of Menilik, or workers of the Ghebi (the Palace), continued to be inhabited by their descendants, their servants and workers, who modified these neighborhoods to make them amenable to their lives. They continued to thrive as important commercial and entertainment quarters in Addis Ababa after the construction of road networks, European style public and commercial buildings, commercial centers, and monuments (Techeste, 1987: 248). The informalization of settlements and work in Addis Ababa and other petty trading activities became characteristic of the urban economy throughout the postwar period (Getahun, 2007: 213-214 and 216).

The expansion of sex work and the flourishing of *shay*, *tej* and *tella betoch* and bars in places like Dejach Wube Sefer, Serategna Sefer and Erri Bekentu provided the occasion for city making by women beer brewers, garment workers, petty traders

and such social figures who were part of the urban underclass in the postwar period (Zermu Aghozi, Kinde Ayalew, Hunegnaw Birhanu, personal interviews 2015 June 5-June 13). Therefore, Wube Bereha's social innovation and creative energy was used by the state to build its cultural institutions. Dejach Wube Sefer, which was originally founded by Dejach Wube Atnafseged, one of Menilik's officials, was later transformed into the most important red-light district and entertainment centers in Addis. This was a result of the creative energies of poor beer brewers, sex workers, women and soldiers. The descendants and servants of Dejach Wube continued to live in the neighborhood and sublet their houses to small bar owners and sex workers operating small kiosks (Laketch, 1991: 125-126). Social innovation and social agency was therefore at the core of the making of the neighborhood. And in this *production of the city* women brewers, sex workers and poor working people played an important role. It was a neighborhood that provided a means of livelihood for bakers, maids, cart drivers, guards, saddlers, porters, as well as people of high social standing and the nobility (and their descendants) who settled in the area at the time of the foundation of Addis Ababa (Kibebe Demissie, 2014 March 8). The largest majority who resided in the area included poor people engaged in various petty trading activities and lived by giving personal and social services as saddlers for the nobility, cooks, domestic workers, guards, cart drivers and sex workers (Belaynesh Gebre, Belaynesh Endalemaw, Askale Demissie and Kibebe Demissie personal interviews, 2014 March 2-10). Intense rural-urban migration in the 20th century, particularly in the period after 1941, resulted in the expansion of petty trading activities and menial work in addition to sex work.

Social ingenuity was not just limited to neighborhoods of the city center like Dejach Wube Sefer. City making from below was also a characteristic feature of other neighborhoods in the city. Arguably the most prominent historian of Addis Ababa, Shimeles Bonsa notes, city-making was not just a product of state design, but was also a product of "city-shaping agency of the urban majority". (Shimeles, 2011: 623). As Shimeles notes, "equally significant [as the designs and interventions by the state and its leaders] in the production of the city was ... the complex of networks and relationships the urban majority forged and the dynamic practices in

which they were engaged” (ibid; 523). These “urban majority” meaning the everyday people who inhabit the city, transformed the physicality of urban space in the way they used and inhabited space, as well as its social life through their networks and social practices. City making in AddisAbaba expressed the everyday practices and strivings of its inhabitants. The making of the city “from below”, through the active and innovative role of everyday people populating the city, meant that the city imbued and exhibited the social and cultural practices and images of the majority of city dwellers. The link between migration into Addis Ababa and the proliferation of work and settlement in the city was direct. This was a key manifestation of city making as a social, popular work, and an aspect that strongly defined the experiences of urban dwellers in postwar Addis Ababa. In many ways, Addis Ababa as an imperial metropolis was a product of the heavy “in-migration” that followed the postwar period. A substantial section of urban society was composed of immigrants from rural spaces engaged in various labor in the city (Shimeles, 2011: 397). This production of the city was dialectically linked to the emergence of the popular as a phenomenon intertwined with the informalization of settlement and work. This is why influx into the city and informalization have to be seen not only as interlinked but as twin processes that prop one another in the making of Addis Ababa from below.

The inability of the state to engage in industrial expansion and infrastructural development that matches the demographic flow into the city meant that social innovation and creative activity of everyday inhabitants of the city became a necessity to make the city, in ways that resembled their daily social practices. However, this did not mean that the urban masses were “free” and “autonomous” to carve urban space. This was because there were mechanisms other than urban design that were instrumental in making sure that spaces were “dominated” and that the urban masses would be excluded from them.¹¹² Social relations inbuilt in the *ballabat*¹¹³ system organized and dominated society and allocated space

¹¹² As Lefebvre says, “state power endures only by virtue of violence directed towards a space” (2011: 280).

¹¹³ An Ethiopian system of land ownership based on “privileges of birth and inherited position”.

differentially. The military officials of noble origin who accompanied Menilik, and were central in the establishment of the early *safars* of Addis Ababa, were granted tenure security for their vast holdings as early as 1907 (Bahru, 2008: 490). This made them landlords occupying vast tracts of land in the city. Their descendants who continued to have servants, slaves, saddlers and hangars, or their tenants, formed part of the mass of urban society along with petty traders, sex workers, domestic workers, and menial workers in the postwar period. Urban land was controlled by a very small section of the city population who were mainly associated with the land-owning class of the regime that excluded 90% of the city's adult population in the 1960s (Shimeles, 2011: 671).

Postwar Addis Ababa mechanisms of organizing urban society through the imperial, *ballabat* hierarchical system—in articulation with capitalist market forces—structured social and labor relations. But the urban masses operated and modified the city within the structural constraints of imperial Ethiopia and the global capitalist economic system that it was part of. An important aspect worthy of note in colonial African cities is the separate-segregated existence of what Nuttall and Mbembe called pockets of “misery” and “privilege” (Nuttall and Mbembe, 2004: 357). In the case of Addis Ababa, the “slums” making up the *safars* were not distinct spaces occupying separate locations from the residential spaces of the ruling classes. The settlements surrounding the original residential spaces of Menilik's officials were a single space, which tied in hierarchical social and labor relations, the ones who ruled with the ones who followed and served. As Shimeles observes “higher degree of mutual entanglement, ...without ... any blurring of crucial class and status distinctions” (Shimeles, 2011: 423)¹¹⁴ characterized social-economic relations especially in the old *safars* of the city.¹¹⁵ These interactions were far from symbiotic. They actually involved highly exploitative and oppressive labor and social relations, relations of governance and domination.

¹¹⁴According to Shimeles “the rise of community based settlements, both occupational and ethnic” as well as the emergence of upper and middle class neighborhoods since the 1960s most notably in the Old Airport and Bole neighborhoods on the other hand introduced their own logic of settlement.

¹¹⁵As one of my interviewees, Woizero Deribe, said about Serategna Sefer, the neighborhood she grew up in “dehaw ena habtamu tesebatro new yeminorew”, the poor and the rich live together interspersed (Woizero Deribe, personal interview, 2015 June 7).

The process of migration to Addis Ababa in the period after the expulsion of the Italians was a result of multifarious factors, which included unjust land relations and productivity, the availability of employment opportunities, availability of transportation and the increasing importance of the city in the economic life of the country (Getahun, 2007: 45-50 and 97-101, Shimeles, 2011: 397). As a result, Addis Ababa maintained a position throughout the postwar period as “the single largest recipient of migrants” from different parts of the country. Its more developed social services and its promise of “the modern life” and opportunities of employment all made the capital attractive to migrants from rural areas (ibid; 6, 147). For women, forced marriage, divorce and “presumed freedom” in urban centers propelled migration (Getahun, 2007: 147 and 151). As a result, migration continued to be one of the most important factors that boosted the population of the city.

Formal employment absorbed only a meager section of this burgeoning urban population, including migrants. Most were employed in the informal sector in the transportation and communication sector, in “community, social and personal services” and the construction sector mainly as daily laborers (Getahun, 2007: 103). The industrial and the civil service sector, which had a high attraction for rural migrants, employed a small section of job seekers. The civil service sector for instance employed a mere 22, 761 people in 1968, while the industry sector employed 35, 985 people in a city with a population closing 700 thousand inhabitants¹¹⁶ where total employment stood at 285, 375 people (ibid: 104 and 108). The “informal sector”, which continued to grow exponentially in subsequent decades, far more than the growth of industry and manufacturing, absorbed the majority of employment in the city. Addis Ababa became a melting pot of various national, religious, and occupational groups, and an arena of diverse regimes of labour relations. The diverse labor and employment composition of the city and its predominantly youthful population characterized the demography of post 1950s Addis Ababa. In 1967/68, 68% of the total population of the country were under 30 (Staff Reporter, 1969: 19 and 20). Increasing informalization of work that created

¹¹⁶ Getahun Benti, estimates the population of the city in 1967 to be 655,000 (2000: 67).

precariously employed people as well as rural urban migration, produced urban social problems such as unemployment, inflation and economic hardship.¹¹⁷

Informalization of work garnered the subsistence needs of the majority of the capital's residents, despite Addis Ababa being the site of most of the industrialization and manufacturing developments of the country (Shimeles, 2011:586).¹¹⁸ As Shimeles argues "the development of a national and modern economy centered in Addis Ababa" did not save the city from extraordinary social inequality (ibid; 451). This was due to unjust land relations, evictions, widespread tenancy, women running away from forced marriage, migration motivated by the desire for better living conditions, better employment opportunities, access to education and services (Shimeles, 2011: 397; Laketch, 1991:130 and Getahun, 151). For instance, in 1967 most women migrants above the age of 15 were already divorced when they migrated to the city. Women's migration to urban centers, especially Addis Ababa, shows that migration was closely linked to two related issues that connect the countryside with the city— divorce in the countryside and the expansion of domestic work and sex work in the city (Laketch, 1991: 31; Getahun, 151). Migrant women who ended up in Wube Bereha for instance, the main red light district in the postwar period, left the countryside due to disagreements with their husbands, divorce and problems in the family. Others came in search of better livelihood or education (Laketch, 1991: 31-35); (Sinkenesh Kebede, Asenakech Kebede, Belaynesh Gebrepersonal interviews, 2014 March 2-

¹¹⁷ Urban centers in the period prior to the Italian occupation did not witness large urban populations, perhaps remained a hundred thousand according to estimates left by European visitors or foreign residents in the city (Getahun, 2007: 39). Even after the expulsion of the Italians, the population of Addis Ababa remained within five digits. As late as the early 1950s it was a little more than 400 thousand. But this changed dramatically since the late 1960s and already reached about 1.1 million in 1976 (Ibid; 42). Getahun by tallying municipal sources shows us that the city's population increased by 40% between 1961 and 1967, at a time when the city evidenced high level of "in-migration" from different parts of the country (Ibid: 211).

¹¹⁸ Shimeles documents the "structural inequity that characterized the relations between Addis Ababa and the rest of the country". This is manifested by "...the concentration of economic and social establishments and opportunities in the city. By 1973/74, for instance, Addis Ababa had 32.5 per cent of all secondary schools; 70 per cent of all the factories, 61 per cent of the output, and 79 per cent of the fixed assets in the entire country. In 1975/76, the city, with Asmara, accounted for 75 per cent of all the communication services, 45 per cent of all the power capacity, and 38 per cent of all weather roads. By then, however, Addis Ababa had only 3.4 per cent of Ethiopia's total population" (Shimeles, 2011: 386).

10). Females came to exceed males in number residing in the city, especially after the 1960s.

As Catherine Coquery Vidrovic notes with relation to this period in time in Africa, “from the 1930s, during the Great Depression because of rural impoverishment and even more after 1935, and above all after the Second World War, as the global rhythm of demographic growth accelerated and the need for cheap labor increased, cities began to expand.” (Coquery-Vidrovich, 1991: 49) Postwar Addis Ababa was no different.¹¹⁹ The “advance of capitalism in colonial Africa” led to various social and cultural changes in African societies (Freund, 2007: 66-68). Likewise, the integration of Ethiopia with the global capitalist market started in earnest after 1941 and evidenced deeper contradictions between the town and the countryside with the intensification of new capitalist relations. The increased privatization and commodification of land in the capital in the postwar period was a clear testimony to the “country’s growing... incorporation into the world economy” (Markakis, 2011: 108).

Many set out to study “social change” in urban centers in colonial Africa in the 1950s. For the most part, the objective was to understand “the contemporary social and cultural life of African peoples” living in “modern” settings, such as towns, cities and mining areas. By examining how migration and settlement in these settings impacted the lives of Africans they tried to document social change in urban and “modern” centers. The main impetus for these studies was thus the dramatic increase of migrants into urban centers from the 1940s.¹²⁰ It was colonial rule that brought about contradictions in a continent that saw the emergence and intensification of workers movements, and nationalist mobilizations. The postwar period in Ethiopia also represents a time of crisis of imperial rule. Increased

¹¹⁹ As in the rest of the continent (Coquery-Vidrovic, 1991: 48), in Ethiopia too the scale of migration before 1935 was limited even if the process of migration started here since the foundation days of the city in the late 19th century. The push factor behind migration into the capital was perhaps mainly to the devastating famine (known as Kifu Qen or “The Great Famine”) that plagued the country between 1889 and 1892 (Eshetu, 1987: 143).

¹²⁰ See for instance studies by Southall & Gutkind (1957) and others coming out of Makerere Institute of Social Research and Witwatersrand Institute of Social Research.

urbanization and modernization projects that were accompanied by an upsurge in rural-urban migration and increasing urban poverty characterized this period that climaxed in the eruption of the 1974 revolution.

The expansion of the city in Africa in much of the 20th century and its modern establishments as well as the concentration of social services and education in cities made *the primate city* to grow and expand at the expense of the countryside. Even if the city had long been a node of capitalism (Freund, 2007: 68), this was anchored on the transformation of relations between the town and the countryside, transmuting both spaces in “combined but uneven” ways. Similarly, the postwar years in Ethiopia also saw the concentration of infrastructural developments such as roads, schools, health facilities, the expansion of industries (albeit limited) and the bureaucracy, making Addis Ababa the node of modernity.

Ethiopia saw expansion of services, the bureaucracy, the construction of roads, modern buildings and its first serious effort at industrialization (mostly concentrated in Addis Ababa) particularly between 1957 and 1974 (Getahun, 2007: 102 and 208).¹²¹ As a result, the city symbolized “modernity”, freedom, economic betterment, and gave to many the hopes and promises of an urban and a “better” life. All these developments made Addis Ababa the epicenter of social and cultural change and dynamism. However, the symbol and the actual existence were not matched by what the city was able to offer to those who fled the countryside to reside in the city. Moreover, the interplay between the high concentration of young people and the expansion of centers of entertainment made the city a site of cultural and social transformations, as well as contradictions.

Rural-urban migration played a central role in the making of Addis Ababa as an imperial metropolis at a period when the city saw unprecedented urbanization and population increase in the postwar period. The capital became, to a large part, a city of immigrants, the majority of whom made their living through informal work

¹²¹ See also Shimeles’ discussion on the unequal development of Addis Ababa at the expense of the rest of the country (2011: 285-286).

(Mesfin, 1966: 32-33); (Shimeles, 2011: 397). Many immigrants who came to inhabit the city became dependents on their relatives and family members (Getahun, 2007: 110). Moreover, the aspiration of young immigrants of getting employment in the state bureaucracy and living a respectable life, proved difficult for many, if not most. Once they came to the city, the majority stayed with relatives, sometimes with distant ones, and getting educational opportunities or completing high school was not easy in these circumstances (Kinde Ayalew, personal interview, 2015 June 5); (Wro Deribe, personal interview, 2014 March 7); Ato Mulugeta, personal interview, 2015 April 9). Young people who were in school found themselves forced to drop out to seek employment. For women the problem was even worse. Many of them would stay with their relatives and the housework alone was too much to be able to attend school. Many as a result were forced to resort to domestic work or sex work to earn an independent living (Sinkenesh Kebede, personal interview, 2015 March 5); (Ato Mulugeta, personal interview, 2015 April 9); (Kinde Ayalew, personal interview 2015 June 5); (Zeru Agozhi, personal interview, 2015 June 6); (Asenakech Kebede, personal interview, 2014 March 2), Belaynesh Gebre, personal interview, 2014 March 6).

Inequality inherent in the making of the city became more “entrenched” in the postwar period. Rural urban migration that was seen by the imperial state as a social malaise, as will be shown in the course of the chapter, led to various social, economic and political problems. Chief among them was unemployment (Getahun, 2007: 62, 67 and 216) which concentrated a vast swathe of urban poor and slums in Addis Ababa (Shimeles, 2011: 589) and gave way to concentrated urban poverty. Inequality in the city became more entrenched with the high population increase. In the 1970s more than half of the city’s population lived on meager income. More than 67% of the adult population of the city lived in rental houses and food products and retail price rose by 67.5% between 1963 and 1971 (Shimeles, 2011: 670-71 and 678).

Such demographic processes brought about informalization of labour, congestion, unemployment and other urban social problems. These processes in postwar

Ethiopia have to be seen as part of a broader regional context. In the 1930s and 40s throughout Africa, “economic and demographic shifts” “transformed the nature of urban poverty” (Burton, 153). By the second half of the 1960s those with high school diplomas and even college graduates (who were highly sought after in much of the 1940s and 50s to fill the public bureaucracy) began to feel the pinch of unemployment. As a result of the demographic upsurge in urban areas, unemployment and inflation began to present a serious challenge to the capital (Markakis, 2011: 162 and 164).

However, migration into the capital, at the same time, served as a key site of social innovation where rural subjects grafted themselves in the capital and engaged in various work and made something out of nothing to *survive in and the city*. Not only did they have to be creative in the way they made a living in the city, but they also produced the city through their work, settlement and their other social practices. Addis Ababa became largely a city of immigrants who built the city from below while contending with the structures that circumscribed their newfound urban existence. It was in the process of this city making from below that the heterogeneous social groups of the city came to coalesce to form the city’s underclass that constituted the majority of *the popular*. These motley social groups that survived in and the city were engaged in, what is called in the academic literature, informal work. However, informality was in postwar Addis Ababa, and still is, a way of being in the city that goes beyond work. It was also about settlement. Below, is a brief discussion of the notion of informality and how it was instrumental in the making of Addis Ababa in the postwar period.

3.2.2 Informalization in and of the city

Informality is a notion that has been in use since the 1970s to describe a key phenomenon in urban centers in Africa in the African urbanism literature. It is employed to capture the heterogeneity of economic activities and settlement

outside 'formal' employment and settlement patterns.¹²² It borrows concepts from development economics, to refer to social actors that do not pay taxes to the state. In this sense, the notion is used to emphasize the lack of formal employment and the construction of homes informally against the rules and regulations of the state.

The ways in which informality is discussed in the African urbanism literature can generally be categorized under three distinct historical periods: the colonial, the post colonial period of state developmentalism (between the 1960s and early 1980s) and the era of Structural Adjustment in the post 1980s/1990s (Hansen and Vaa, 2004: 11-12). In all the three periods the informal is treated for the most part as a way of managing the crisis of urban modernity and the failures of the modern state in Africa. Informality is largely portrayed as a crisis generated social phenomena.¹²³

Even if informality has been treated as a rubric or as "an umbrella for a multitude of 'stories'" (Simone, 2004: 24), it tended to suggest a residual category, a throw-back concept that is mobilized to talk about work and settlement considered unofficial and unviable in African cities. Abdou Maliq Simone in his seminal work *In the City Yet to come* (2004) shows the view of informality as "inadequate" and as a composite of "compensatory strategies" that were invented by the city's poor to "save those who might otherwise fall through the cracks-or gaping holes" in African

¹²² More recent works criticized this binary opposition between the "formal" and "informal" in African urbanism. For instance, Nuttal and Mbembe emphasize the growing interdependence between the formal and the informal. "Rather than opposing the 'formal' and the 'informal', or the 'visible' and the 'invisible,' they argue, "we need a more complex anthropology of things, forms, and signs in order to account for the life of the city in Africa" (2008: 8).

¹²³ The colonial literature on informality, particularly after the end of WWII emphasizes on the criminalization of informal employment and unemployment in the colonial city. This is something that did not exist in Ethiopia except during the five years of Italian occupation (1936- 1941). Many works in Eastern Africa chronicled this phenomenon of criminalizing informal workers and settlements in the colonial period and some extended their discussion into the post independence period to show the continuity of similar policies in postcolonial states (Burton, 2005: 12-13, 150-153 and 229-336). The persecution or forcible removal of informal workers and settlements from urban centers (ibid, 6 and 15), the expulsion of informal workers and settlements, zoning residential spaces according to racial and class lines (Brennan & Burton, 2007: 42) were common practices in colonial cities like Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. In Socialist Tanzania for instance, Burton documents the ways in which informal workers and settlements were portrayed in official narratives as "parasites... loiterers...enemies of the policy of socialism and self-reliance" (Burton, 2005: 4). According to this literature informality and the "urban underclass" it created was a product of "anti-urban prejudices" of the state and an upsurge in immigration from rural to urban areas (ibid, 9-10).

cities (Martin, 2005: 139-141), have failed to see informality's "productivity". Simone challenges this dominant view of informality as compensation for the failure of the modernist project of the African state, and argues that informality is a site of an alternative urban form from which a "sustainable urban configuration" can be crafted (ibid: 9 and 15). Moreover, informality is driven by different logics and practical considerations that determine its rationality in different contexts (Myers, 2011: 83). Simone's conception of informality as a "not yet," as a gamut of "possibilities of urban becoming", characterized by uncertainty and by an urban form that is in a constant state of "emergence of... new thinking and practice ... [that is] unstable and tentative" (Simone, 2004:3 and 4), helps us to grasp the precariousness of the majority of urban dwellers in many parts of the African continent.¹²⁴ At the same time, however, like most studies on informality the focus for Simone is on its economic, social and political dimensions. The efficacy of informality and its implications on cultural life and cultural change has not attracted the attention of many.

In Addis Ababa in general and the red-light districts of the city such as Wube Bereha and Serategna Sefer in particular, the proliferation of beer brewers, bar owners, a substantial section of sex workers, petty traders, domestic workers, brokers, *azmaris* and others (Asenakech Kebede, Birhanu Mengesha, Belaynesh Endalemaw, personal interviews, 2014 March 2-10) fall into this category of work. Some of these ways of being and doing existed much earlier than the 20th century. The "informality" of urban spaces in Ethiopia and the rest of Africa in the first half of the 20th century "[found] legitimacy in economic, social and cultural structures which originated in the pre-colonial period" (Locatelli and Nugent, 2009: 7); (Simone, 2004: 17). Despite "the emergence of a new [mode of] urbanization" in Africa since the 19th century as Catherine Coquery-Vidrovic argues, old urban

¹²⁴ Abdou Maliq Simone in *The City Yet to Come* and other works examine and describe the properties of informality in the age of Structural Adjustment. In this period, he argues, African urban subjects might not always be seen as confined to or imprisoned by the challenges and constraints of national urban spaces. He shows that they construct their own systems of 'worlding' or ways of navigating global markets and at times manage to break out of the confinement of the national space even in the absence of formal mechanisms of networking and trading (2002: 27 and 28).

forms and sensibilities of utilizing space continued to persist (1991: 30 and 36). This is why informality should not be seen as a phenomenon whose origin was traceable only to colonial and postcolonial times, or more broadly to the context of European type urban modernity. Therefore, rather than using informality to figure out “why African cities do not conform to Western... norms” (ibid.), it is useful to appreciate the possibility that informality might have its own rationale of organizing urban social life, work and ways of being in African cities like Addis Ababa both during and after the postwar period.

Conceptualizing informality, as a survival strategy to “compensate” for the failures of the modern state can be useful to understand the ways in which the urban underclass survived the city. However, at the same time, informal work that employed the majority of residents of Addis Ababa was a “productive” way of being, whose poignancy goes beyond survival. As will become apparent in the next chapter, postwar Wube Bereha’s cultural innovations had an overarching impact on the emergence of the popular culture of the postwar capital. There were social-cultural meanings embedded in the associated life that informality was enmeshed. For instance, red light districts of the postwar city that became key sites of sex work and *azmari* music, became urban arenas where the urban elite as well as the urban underclass converged in quarters of the city like Wube Bereha and Serategna Sefer during the postwar period.¹²⁵ These ways of being in the city would transform the cultural life and the cultural identity of the youth in the post 1950s as will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. As Nuttall and Mbembe say about Johannesburg, the city has a “visible” “surface” and an “invisible” “underneath”—an “underworld” that produces migrants, criminals, and sex workers. This underground is often home for creative living and innovation, “utopian dreams” and transformative “insurrections” (ibid, 21-23), cultural or otherwise. By paying attention to the cultural and artistic aspects of informal work and settlements and the kind of “ways of being” that it induces, informality can be re-conceptualized to help us understand the various ways in which everyday people - the city’s

¹²⁵ Serategna Sefer and Wube Bereha’s cultural ingenuity and the role of sex workers, beer brewers and *azmaris* will be discussed in chapters four and six in greater detail.

underclass - survived the city innovatively and made the city from below. Doing this allows us to see the ways in which informal work and settlements impacts ways of being culturally in order to understand both the material foundations of the making of the city and the social and cultural artifacts that go into subject formation of its inhabitants.¹²⁶

Informality defined the demographic and class composition of Addis Ababa in the postwar period and was a big part of the making of the city from below. As a phenomenon closely interwoven with rural-urban migration, it became one of the key socio-economic and material bulwarks that made up Addis Ababa as an imperial metropolis. The emergence of the popular in the postwar period was predicated on the new face of urban poverty that was at least in part the function of the increasing informalization of work and settlement that produced the city's slums and its underclass. As will be explicated in subsequent chapters, it was in the belly of the informal—the hustling *arada* figure,¹²⁷ sex workers and *azmaris* that that the inner-city urban sensibility of postwar Addis Ababa—*aradinnet*, emerges. This sensibility eventually became a key part of the subject formation of the urban youth. The urban cultural identity of the youth in postwar Addis Ababa was a product of the popular culture and was born in the heart of the city's informal settlements in the city-center. Its cultural efficacy lies in its far-reaching implications on the political formativeness and cultural identity of the Addis youth. The popular culture that was produced in the city center was appropriated by youth from all social classes, except perhaps by those who were part of “the power block”.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ However, Mbembe and Nuttal's emphasis on the “superfluity” of the city, its “leaking” and “fleeing” character (2004: 354) does make it look like the structures that built the city are “fleeing” as well. By emphasizing the “superfluous” and the “unstable” one wonders if they are treating the criminal figure for instance more like a ghost or a metaphor of the underworld (2008: 23 and 24). The images they give us of social groups in the informal domain as “fleeing” figures might be “read” as a “text” thin in texture and materiality.

¹²⁷ This was a label associated with the street hustler operating in the street economy of the city center (especially in and around Piazza and Merkato) in postwar Addis Ababa and the decades after. A detailed discussion of the *arada* figure will be made in subsequent chapters.

¹²⁸ A detailed discussion of *aradinnet* as an urban sensibility that cut across class gets formed among the youth in the spaces of the city and how this was connected with the emergence of the popular will be made in chapter six.

The making of Addis Ababa resulted in key socio-economic, cultural and political changes. These changes were accompanied by, as Shimeles notes “the emergence of new social categories: the elite middle class, the majority urban poor, the unprecedented growth in social and economic inequalities, the rise of a generation that was critical of established values and aspirations, and the views of the ‘war generation’” (Shimeles, 2011: 597). The structural context in which the city evolved and developed with limited formal employment in industry, manufacturing and in the state bureaucracy necessitated the expansion of informal work that made up the majority of the city’s employment. In this sense, the urban underclass, especially those engaged in informal employment, were an intrinsic part of the urban imperial modernist Ethiopia, even if informal workers and their informal settlements were not created intentionally by design, but were the undesired residual products of modernization.

3.3 Famines, harvest failures and inflation, in the city of immigrants

Rural-urban migration and informalization created a condition where urban problems such as unemployment and urban poverty and inflation, became increasingly pronounced in Addis Ababa especially in the 1960s and 70s. The problem of inflation in the city was intertwined with the recurrence of crop and harvest failures and famine. The closely linked problems of inflation and food shortage of agricultural products, therefore, became perhaps among the most impactful structural issues affecting the countryside and the city in combined but uneven ways. Of course, migration into Addis Ababa was not just a function of famine, crop and harvest failures, exploitative land relations, low agricultural productivity, “Pull factors” of the capital were all important factors that prompted migration into the city. Inflation gradually became a serious problem in Addis Ababa especially in the 1960s and 70s and impacted the urban folk in an economy that was increasingly monetizing. Even if the imperial state made sure that Addis Ababa had a stable supply of food items throughout this period, inflation distressed the expanding underclass of the city. The problem was compounded by harvest failures and famines that pushed prices up in the city while causing the peasantry to experience further depletion of their assets. This forced many of them to leave

the countryside to urban areas in search of better livelihoods and opportunities. Recurrent crop failures and famines, as well as shortages in food supplies, especially since the late 1950s were important factors behind “sharp” price fluctuations in grain in the postwar period (Tekalign, 1995: 346, 380-381 and 384).

The state attributed the condition of underdevelopment both in the city and the countryside and what it saw as the *lag* in “national progress” on the work ethic of “the people”—the peasantry and migrants into the city (“*Lemisera ej yemisera sera*”, 1963: 2); (“*Yidres leanbabiyan*”, 1963: 3). It was in this context where inflation and famine as long-term structural conditions circumscribed the lives of people in the city and the country, that the social protests of 1974 erupted. As discussed in the second chapter, these two were key conjunctural factors that politicized and created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a revolutionary situation in 1974. As opposed to triggering the social protests of 1974 as “immediate causes” and “catalyzing” factors behind the popular protests, inflation and famines were structural keystones that conditioned subjectformation both in the city and the countryside throughout the postwar years.

Tekalign Woldemariam in a key study, “A City and its hinterlands: The political economy of land tenure, agriculture and food supply for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1887-1974),” demonstrates that Addis Ababa had a fairly stable supply of food items through “the transfer of rural resources to the capital” (1995: V). Simultaneously, however, it is important to note that the city also experienced inflation of food items through the 1960s and 1970s (Ibid: 424 and 426). And throughout the 1960s and 70s, inflation in the capital was also closely tied to rising cost of living and the problem of housing. The linkages between harvest failure and famine with inflation were crucial as systemic problems that connected the countryside with towns and cities. Inflation that was generated and propelled by systemic food shortage affected the inhabitants of the capital in the postwar period (Ibid: 388). The first most serious shortage of supply and sharp rises in grain prices in this period was evidenced during the famine of 1958. The 1958 famine and the harvest failure it caused affected most of the northern and central parts of the

country. The price of basic commodities, Tekalign notes, such as *teff*, maize, peas and lentils went up by 60 to 150 percent in the eight months between January and September 1958” (ibid: 380). This and subsequent crop failures and famines in the 1960s and 70s, as well as the vested interest of the landed aristocracy in the price and supply of food in the capital, were key factors behind inflationary food prices. The landed class, who were key players in grain supply, prevented the effective operation of the Ethiopian Grain Corporation (established in May 1960 following the crisis of 1958) to respond to similar future price hikes and supply shortages (ibid:382 and 384). Concurrently in a city that was highly informalized whose population was rising exponentially, inflation was also a product of high house rent.

In its attempt to deal with the problem of inflation in the capital, the imperial state looked away from the deeply unequal ownership structure of urban land and the dominance of the landed class in pricing and distribution of grain. Its emphasis was mainly on price regulation. Even this continued attempt by the imperial regime to control commodity prices since the 1960s (Bealu Girma, 1969: 11-14) was more an effort targeted at preempting social unrest in the capital, rather than an interest in dealing with the problem of inflation and food shortage in a systematic manner. In the lead up to the Ethiopian revolution, for instance, characteristic of this approach, the imperial state presented rising food prices to fluctuations in the global market and refused to accept its links with harvest failures, famine and structural inequality in the country. In fact, the director of the Ethiopian Grain Corporation announced in the second week of January 1974 that “the year’s grain harvest is the greatest ever”. The director contended, “the Ethiopian Grain Corporation has no problem at all feeding the people of Addis Ababa year in year out” (“*Yezendiro yeityopia yeehil azmera kemangnawum gize bilcha endalew tegelete*”, 1966: 1 and 2). And yet, he did not say anything about the famines of the 1970s, already devastating provinces in the north, the south west and parts of Shoa. Between 1963 and 1968, the cost of living in the capital rose by 28%. This forced the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to impose a profit ceiling on businesses in 1967. The price of food items in the late 1960s was such that people

who earned below 400birr, spent almost half of their income on food products (Bealu Girma, 1969: 11- 14). Rising cost of food prices coupled with serious shortages of housing and rising house rent meant that the majority inhabitants of the city resided in shacks and mud houses. Out of the total number of houses in Addis Ababa, 150,338 in the year 1967/68 more than half (83,076) were classified by the Central Statistics Office as “semi permanent mud/wood” dwellings (Staff Reporter, 1969:15-17). In December 1969, food prices increased by 42% and food crops by an alarming 58% (Birhanu Zerihun, 1969): 14-15).¹²⁹ In Addis Ababa for the month of September 1969, for instance, important staples like *teff*, wheat and cookingoil saw significant increases in price, 34%, 33.3% and 31.7% respectively (Asaminew Gebrewold, 1962: 19).¹³⁰

The problem of rising food prices in Addis Ababa continued to show surges in the 1970s. Tekalign Woldemariam attributes this problem “to the frequent harvest shortfalls in many parts of the country and ... the impact of the economy of rising prices of oil and other imported commodities” (Tekalign, 1995: 427). Therefore, inflation had been a serious problem in the capital since the late 1950s and constituted a structural challenge that resulted in the rising cost of living in a city whose population was rapidly expanding. Between 1967 and 1976 the city’s population bulged by almost three fourths.¹³¹

Price hikes on food items were evidenced in the capital even when Addis Ababa enjoyed better access to road networks and “a food market [that] was able to draw on a much wider zone of supply than” for instance during the pre-war years. As Tekalign observed, “a wider catchment of the [Addis Ababa] market meant also

¹²⁹ Ihil Berenda was the main crop market in the city located in Merkato, the central market of Addis Ababa.

¹³⁰ Asaminew attributes the causes of the inflationary problem to the increasing number of resident expatriates that pushes prices up, presumably due to their higher earnings. He says the city hosts most of the 67, 600 foreign residents in the country, which is more than 10% of the city’s population. He calls for price regulation by the state and advises urban Ethiopians to be hard working and not to consume “more than they need”.

¹³¹ Getahun Benti shows that in just a period of 10 years the city’s population increased by “nearly three fourth” in 1976 reaching 1,099, 851 from a population of 637, 831 in 1967. The increase in population registered during the mid 1960s was astounding. The population size of the city in 1967 was 42% from the figure before 5 years, in 1962 (2000: 69 and 262).

that, unlike the prewar period, isolated and small-scale harvest failures in the hinterlands would have little or no impact on” supply (ibid: 388). The preoccupation of the imperial government to control rising food prices and guarantee a stable supply into the capital was a long-standing concern throughout the postwar period (ibid: 410). However, a stable supply did not guarantee that inflation was kept in check, partly because of crop failures and harvests in the late 1950s as well as the mid 1960s and early 1970s¹³².

The concomitant rise in the cost of living and housing created a structural condition that exposed the systemic nature of inflation and the rising cost of living in the capital, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. The housing problem in the city was a reflection of “the fundamental unevenness” of the land-owning system of the imperial regime. What we get in the 1960s and 70s, as Shimeles notes, is an outrageous picture of urban land proprietorship in the capital. The ownership structure of land during the postwar period excluded 90% of Addis Ababa’s adult population who were above 19 years of age. In the year 1961 for instance, 67% of the city’s adult population lived as tenants in rented houses (Shimeles, 2011: 671). 1,768 people—members of the landed aristocracy—owned 58% of all land in the city, while the church owned 12%, government and embassies 12.7% and the royal family 9.9 %. Together these “large proprietors” owned 92.6% of all land in the imperial metropolis, leaving a mere “7.4 to 24, 590 small holders owning less than 100,000 m² or an average of 150 m² of land per head.” This trend continued unchanged in the early 1970s until the revolution (Shimeles, 2011: 308-309).¹³³

¹³² See Tekalign (1995:388-398) on the structural strains on agriculture due to crop and harvest shortages and failures.

¹³³ Shimeles compiles these figures for the 1960s and early 1970s before the revolution. He notes, “There is no more testimony to the fundamental unevenness of the [imperial] system—its structurally class nature—than the distribution of land ownership in the capital in which the same rural landed aristocracy was also the biggest urban land aristocracy. By the 1960s, the aristocracy (numbering 1,768 large proprietors) owned 58% of all urban land in the city, each with an average of 71,000 m², the church 12%; government and foreign embassies 12.7%; 9.9% of land was declared ‘royal land’ (of which the emperor is said to have owned 2.2%) which the remaining 7.4% was distributed among 24,590 small holders owning less than 100,000 m² or an average of 150m² of land per head. The figure was generally the same for the early 1970s as can be seen from the following details: 19,894,509m² of land owned by twenty churches and monasteries in the city; 8,852,476 m² by ten members of the royal family, notably, the emperor; 5,334,869 m² by members of the aristocracy; 6,465,004 m² by eleven senior officials in government and the military; and 988,361 m² by twenty prominent merchants.” See also

By 1968, there were only two mortgage companies that provided access to credit to buyers of residential houses in the capital.¹³⁴ Both targeted middle-income people who were a mere 25,840 people in the capital that made up only 2.5% of the total population of the city. In a city which was growing in population by 42% between 1962 and 1967, and in a city where more than half the population 335,210 (out of the total 644,200) in 1967/68 lived in rental houses, this was a very meager target population.¹³⁵ Housing and the ever-increasing rent were, therefore, among the most important urban problems in the 1960s and 1970s that pushed the cost of living further up. Coupled with high food and commodity prices, housing presented a serious challenge to urban life. The erratic behavior of landlords who were not binded by housing contracts, and the absence of regulations to control rent as well as speculation, pushed the price of rental housing to levels that were perceived to be wild by the city's inhabitants. Abiy Mekuria writing in *Mennen* in September 1970 complained that the Municipality instead of "seating (or sitting Agi asked) on its palms" and see rent go wild, should get their acts together and put a price ceiling on residential rental housing ("Yeangetmedebegia chigir", 1963: 10-11 and 14).¹³⁶ The 1970s wore on with an oblique picture in terms of housing and a rising cost of living.¹³⁷ Dilapidated slumhousing constituted more than 80% of the city's built space and more than 50% of the city' residents lived in highly crowded conditions, as high as 200 persons per acre (Shimeles, 2011: 397).

Less than a year before the revolution, the Amharic magazine *Mennen* came out with a feature story, on the housing problem in Addis Ababa and other urban

for figures in the 1960s Pankhurst, 1966: 154); and for figures in the 1970s "Ye Ityopya Wetaderawi Gizeyawi Astedader (Derg), Yeketema Botana Terf Bet Yemengist Nebret Lemadreg Selawetaw Awaj Meglecha", 1967: 3-10). Shewarega Kidane, 1966: 1).

¹³⁴ Creditors were expected to pay 9.5% (for the Mortgage Company) and 6-7% (for the Ethiopian Imperial Government's Saving and Credit Housing Public Association) in interest payable in 5 to 16 years in addition to the collateral in property or money buyers are expected to put to purchase homes (Bealu Girma, 1969: 12-15).

¹³⁵ In 1967 it rose to 637, 831, a 42% increase from the figure in 1962 (Getahun, 2000: 69 and 262).

¹³⁶ 129 Bealu Girma writing in the late 60s also made the same point. That house rent has gone "over the top" in Addis Ababa (1969: 12-15).

¹³⁷ *Mennen* also reported complaints of tenants about their ill treatment by landlords. See for instance "hulet ayinet eroro", 1965: 17 as well as other columns in the same issue.

centers, describing the problem as a “national crisis” that should not be “ignored” or “sidestepped.” The key to resolving this crisis, it argued, was the construction of low-cost residential housing for the city’s majority poor inhabitants. In a city, whose population was estimated at 900, 000, where 50,000 people were added every year, the construction of low-cost housing, *Mennen* warned, was a necessary and essential measure if the housing crisis is to be checked. The feature article mentioned, as a good example and practice, the construction of low-cost housing financed by the city municipality in the Kolfe area, apparently the first and only project that targeted inhabitants with limited income before the revolution (“*Bet bet bet!*”, 1965:10-13 and 42).¹³⁸ It was in recognition of and in response to this crisis of housing that the Derg in late August took, as one of its earliest policy measures, a measure to prevent arbitrary increases in rental prices (“*Ketor hailoch mastebaberia derg sele bet kiray yetesete meglecha*”, 1974 EC : 1).¹³⁹

The postwar period, therefore, saw increasing inflation, rising cost of living and rising housing prices problems that were exacerbated by continued and rising influx into the city from the countryside. The imperial regime did not approach these problems as systemic, structural and interlinked problems affecting the city and the countryside in combined but uneven ways. Low agricultural productivity, harvest failures and famines in the countryside on the one hand, and inflation, the rising cost of living and housing in cities (especially the capital) on the other, continued to deepen the contradictions of imperial Ethiopia. And the regime’s failure to see these as closely linked problems undermined its ability to deal with them.

¹³⁸ The series of articles of this issue on the housing problem underscore the absence of low-cost housing projects to alleviate the crisis. There had been construction of residential quarters, but most are said to be out of reach for the majority of the city’s population. The contradiction of the state of affairs lay, they argue, in the continued construction of houses and buildings targeting higher income people, which stayed closed since there were only few who could afford to rent them. See also page 15 of the same issue under the titles “*genzeb keyet yagegnalu*” (where do you get the money from?) and “*bet man yiseralwotal?*” (Who will build the house for you?) for a discussion on the real estate companies, the credit institutions to build houses for middle- and upper-income families.

¹³⁹ The Derg’s decree prohibited landlords from making rent increments on residential and commercial establishments. This decree anticipated the Derg’s urban land and extra housing bill of March 1975. The declaration stipulates “starting from Nehassie 1, 1966 EC (August 9, 1974) all rent levied on housing should not be subject to increase. Landlords are not allowed to evict their tenants for reasons having to do with rent increment.”

3.4 Famine generated state propaganda: rural-urban migration and “the lag” in material prosperity, c. 1958-1974

The capital was one of the sites where social and cultural contradictions of the post-war imperial regime were most apparent. Addis Ababa became the centerpiece where rural-urban migration, economic marginalization and unemployment, and cultural ingenuity of the youth all converged concurrently in the city. Impoverishment in the countryside and rural urban migration into the city were intertwined processes that produced the city and the country as continuous social spaces. As a *Mennen* article published in April 1970, noted, የችግረኞች መነሻ ገጠር መድረሻው ከተማ መሆኑ ተረጋግጧል (“It has become evident that the source of the destitute is the countryside, and their destination, the city” (Terefe Aserat, 1962: 7). The imperial metropolis became a melting pot, whereby migrants from the country constituted the majority of its inhabitants. 54% of the city’s population in 1967 and 64% of the city’s population growth rate were products of rural urban migration in the late 1960s and 1970s (Shimeles, 2011: 396); (Mesfin, 1966: 25).

This demographic make-up of the capital also made the contradictions of the city, the biggest recipient of migrants in the country, an intricate and inseparable aspect of what was happening in the countryside. In the post-war period, especially in the 1960s, Addis Ababa became a city where large swathes of its inhabitants came to be “grafted” onto the city from the countryside. Not only its inhabitants, the city itself, bore a rural character. As Mamo Wudineh, the famed writer and historian, described the city (in an article published in August 1974) as “rural Addis Ababa”. He said, “rural Addis Ababa... is receding into its rural environs and merging with them... transmuting [itself] into the countryside” (Mamo Wudineh, 1966: 1 and 3). This was an apt description of the process of urbanization that gave rise to Addis Ababa as a metropolis in the postwar period. The capital was neither fully urban nor fully rural. It was a product of the social ingenuity of its sizeable, fresh from the countryside, poor underclass. And in a city that was *rural urban*, subject formation should perhaps be seen as a documentation of “hyphenated-ness”, to use Gedamu and Abereha’s phrase, to depict the cultural identity of the urban youth in the late 1960s. Any discussion that assumes a ‘split’ or a clear demarcation between

Addis Ababa, “the city” from “the countryside” would thus miss to grasp this organic—demographic and physical—connection between the capital and the countryside as continuous social spaces.

Migrants to the city were marked by the state as “loiterers”, “prostitutes” or dismissed as slack and negligent who leave the countryside “awestruck by the glitters of the city” (“*lemisera ej yemisera sera*”, 1963: 2).¹⁴⁰ Rural-urban migration was blamed as the fundamental cause of all manners of social ills of the city—impoverishment, the housing problem and unemployment. As a poem published in *Mennen* by one Asefawossen Wodajo captures the essence of the state propaganda unleashed throughout the 1960s and 70s. The state presented “return to the countryside” as the antidote for the multifarious social problems of the city and the country at large. For development to be achieved, Asfawossen proclaimed, those who come to the city should “go back” to the countryside and cultivate the land. He said:

ውጥ አገሪህን እርዳ አንት የከተማ ሰው አትዙር ከመንገድ ቁጭ አትበል ተነሳ] ስንት መሬት ሞልቶ ለስራ
የሚያገባለሁኑ የሚያሳሳ

Leave the city help your nation
Don’t idle [in the city] and crowd its streets
[Enjoy] the alluring beauty [of the countryside]
And work the abundance of its lands (Asfawossen Wodaje, 1965: 42).

The above is an excerpt from a long poem “*Wuta yeketema sew*” (Go Out leave the City!) where the author makes a distinction between rural migrants in the city based on gender. The male migrant was depicted as a loiterer and vagrant clogging the streets of the city while the female migrant was caricatured as a bar worker, who lives by getting herself “sold in the bars and drinking parlors” of the city (Ibid). Such calls for return to the countryside—to agricultural work and farming—as the

¹⁴⁰ In this editorial “Work for those hands that work” Mennen warns “if the number of those racing to the city saying ‘never the mofer’, ‘never the qember’¹³³ is not curbed [in time] more serious problems are set to follow”. The editorial advises the Ethiopian people need to take more initiative and engage in activities to “help themselves”, if they desire “a healthy national development”.

panacea for the lag in national development became a pervasive state discourse in the print media since the late 1950s. Such calls for the youth to “leave the city” or say “Goodbye [to] Arada” were common in the media throughout the 1960s and 70s. They were part of the media campaign to deal with rural urban influx that was seen as the cause of both rural and urban underdevelopment (Birhanu Zerihun, 1962: 12-13).

To reconcile its narrative of progress with the realities of impoverishment and underdevelopment in the country, the postwar imperial state staged a concerted media campaign that blamed the lag in “national prosperity” on ‘the people’ and their poor work ethic. The state’s claim that the city was inundated with an “oversupply” of people from the countryside who were unwilling to work “abundant” rural land, ignored the deep structural inequality in the class system of the country as an explanation for underdevelopment (Terefe Aserat, 1962: 7-9). The emperor and the state media pushed the narrative that Haile Selassie’s reign ushered in a “new era” of “progress” and “modern civilization” as will be discussed in the next chapter. This narrative was accompanied by a rather convenient state discourse that put the burden of prosperity on the self-application and “hard work” of “the people”. The Ethiopian people were accused of “indolence”, “laziness” and a “cultural” propensity for “procrastination”.¹⁴¹

The state’s “call for work” and self-application appears to have started in the aftermath of a major famine, the 1958 famine that affected northern and central Ethiopia.¹⁴² This media discourse remained to be a major theme in the media throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps, this was the first time when ideas about Ethiopians as a people who lack diligence, self-application, and a people with poor

¹⁴¹ For instance, Birhanu Zerihun in an article entitled “dehna hugni arada” (Goodbye Arada) in Mennen (1962: 12-13) he encourages the urban young to venture into farming and agriculture if they want personal advancement and prosperity. This is a call for the young to leave the city to and work the land. Humera, an area in the west bordering the Sudan, is curiously compared to the “American west”, an undeveloped “virgin” land.

¹⁴² The famine started with drought that led to harvest failures claiming thousands of lives and affecting various provinces in the country—Harrar, Tigray, Parts of Central Shoa (an important source of food grain supply for Addis Ababa) as well as western and southern Eritrea. The famine was made worse by locust infestations and malaria outbreaks in key famine zones, which resulted in considerable number of casualties (Kissi, 1997: 139).

work ethic became a state sponsored discourse in the history of the country. In addition to the huge impact of the 1958 famine and harvest failure on the fluctuation of grain prices in the capital, the famine was the historical event that generated this state discourse. Apparently, the need to reconcile the imperial state's self-consciousness as a modernizing state with the reality of famine, forced the state to shift the blame on poor work ethic and even "laziness" of Ethiopians to explain the dearth in material progress. Moreover, for the postwar imperial state coming to terms with the reality that the 1958 famine had made the country a recipient of food aid was another challenge. The 1958 famine threw the state into a publicity crisis not just abroad, but also at home. For a state that projected Ethiopia as a country with abundant fertile land, and a potential breadbasket that could export grain to the outside world,¹⁴³ the famine was a jarring reminder of the fatuousness of its project of modernization.

A year after the famine outbreak, editorials and articles in *Mennen* stepped up the campaign. These media reports based themselves on two state radio addresses by the emperor on August 30 and September 18, 1959 respectively ("*Yafetete zenebale*", 1952: 4). Haile Selassie's speech was a "declaration of work" as one of *Mennen's* editorials called it. His speeches were a direct response to the national "embarrassment" that the famine represented, the editorial argued. Hamere Selassie Bete Mariam, a columnist of *Mennen*, who would later become its editor in chief, asserted, "We" the public "should not forget that it is our indolence that put [the country] into the embarrassment of seeking food [assistance] from abroad". She said, "What had befallen upon us last year" referring to the 1958 famine, must "give us the motivation and the lesson" to strap our boots and rise to the occasion to apply our energies to "work hard". She concluded, "Achievement is not a fruit of desire it is a fruit of hard work. We can see this message from the

¹⁴³ The imperial regime projected Ethiopia as a potential "bread basket" of the Middle East. In an interview Haile Selassie gave in April 5 1948 with the Editor of The Voice of Ethiopia, he says the following: "Undoubtedly Ethiopia is a large country whose future potentialities are satisfactory in every way...we have introduced modern agricultural techniques in Ethiopia hoping to make Our country capable of providing food grains not only for her own increasing population but also for the outside world" (Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967: Apr. 5, 1948).

guiding words of our Great Emperor” (Hamere Selassie Bete Mariam, 1952: 15). Reiterating the emperor’s words, *Mennen* came out with subsequent commentaries and opinion pieces emphasizing the need to step-up to the challenge and employ ‘our’ personal and collective initiative to create businesses, by “appreciating the value of self-help through cooperative labor” (“Promise of the New Year: A Commentary”, 1952: 10).¹⁴⁴ *Mennen* criticized the moral laxity and lack of self-application of the youth as the main cause for the country’s poor performance in the economic sector, and emphasized the need for a vigorous self-investment and work (Ibid); (Hamere Selassie Bete Mariam, 1952:15).

Citing the emperor’s plan to provide loans and financial assistance for those who were committed to put their energies in various economic endeavors, an English editorial published in the *Mennen* October 1959 issue claimed that people do not any more have excuses not to work hard to change their fortunes. The editorial argued, since the emperor provided “these all-embracing facilities and assistance in finance... would appear to leave no loophole through which the would-be heedless can escape into the sloth of inactivity and laziness”.¹⁴⁵ By underlining the “forward strides” the emperor was able to make over the years, guiding the country along the path of “progress”, the editorial reprimanded the Ethiopian people for their inactivity, despite the tireless effort of the emperor and his government. It asked, how long would the Ethiopian people “be carried on the shoulders” of the emperor? “A people”, it said, “should not live [eternally] piggybacked” (“*Yafetete zenebale*”, 1952: 4) on the back of their leader. The editorial charged, it was high time for the Ethiopian people to play their part to change the circumstances of their lives and their country’s fortunes. Prosperity, the editorial asserted, ultimately rests on “the people’s” exertions, their diligence and “dynamism” (Ibid); (Hamere Selassie, 1952:15). On a similar note, *Mennen*’s Atnafseged Yilma called on the Ethiopian people to “respect the wishes of [their] Emperor... and work for the collective good and not just for personal gain” (Atnafseged Yilma, 1952: 9). This

¹⁴⁴ These are words directly quoted from the emperor’s September 18, 1959 Speech cited in this issue. See also for a similar discussion in (“*yafetete zenebale*”, 1952: 4).

¹⁴⁵ Atnafseged says, “Let’s respect the wishes of our Emperor. Let’s work for the collective good and not just for personal gain... Let’s work, work, work!”

media campaign or as it was called, “declaration for work,” put the blame squarely on Ethiopian “indolence” and lack of application for the lack in material “progress”. The imperial state targeted migrants in the city who were accused of idling in the streets, and blamed the famine on their lack of industriousness, and the Ethiopian cultural predisposition for “procrastination”.

Other elements in society whose way of life compromised hard work, by wasting money in frivolous activities were also reproached. As Hamere Selassie argued, the sons and daughters of the landed aristocracy, should also be held responsible for not valuing “money accumulated by their fathers... through sweat [and hard work]” (Hamere Selassie Bete Mariam, 1952: 15). By marking the youth’s wayward ways, their alleged wild consumption as well as the “selfish” desires and “heedless” characters of those born in privilege and wealth (“Promise of the New Year: A Commentary”, 1952: 10), as drains on the national wealth (Atnafseged Yilma, 1952: 9), the campaign highlighted its concern that the social practices of the youth would jeopardize the prospect of the country. But more important to this campaign was rural-urban influx that was seen as driving the peasantry to cities in hundreds of thousands. The English *Mennen* editorial, discussed above, accused the peasantry for their “laziness” and singled them out as the group with the proverbial example of Ethiopian cultural tendency for procrastination. It directly linked rural urban migration with the 1958 famine. It stated:

It appears obvious that there is no shortage of labor in Ethiopia. Indeed, there seems to be an oversupply in the cities. Meanwhile, as the Emperor indicated *there is work to be done in the rural areas. Loitering and panhandling by able-bodied persons in the cities is certainly a most unproductive form of human endeavor, all the more so when able-bodied persons can be put to productive use in the countryside.* Lolling idly under sunlight and electric lights in the cities is a squandering of time and potential productive labor. Therefore, it is only appropriate that His Imperial Majesty warned that ‘*those who are physically able shall not be allowed to loiter about the cities.*’ (Emphasis mine) (“Promise of the New Year: A Commentary”, 1952: 10).

Such accusations aimed at migrants as the source of underdevelopment in agriculture, expose the imperial state’s attitude towards rural urban migration and

bulging populations in cities, especially Addis Ababa. The regime saw rural- urban migration as one of the fundamental causes behind agricultural unproductivity as well as famine. Migration into the city was also blamed as the main cause behind urban overcrowding, loitering and prostitution. The imperial state presented famine and rural underdevelopment as an unnecessary problem in a country with “an abundance of rich and arable land”. The country’s lack of material progress was presented as a preventable and needless want in the presence of “minerals in the earth; ... [and] an abundance of working hands” (“Promise of the New Year: A Commentary”, 1952: 10). The abundance of “working hands”, the “oversupply” of people in the city as well as the mass of people living in the countryside, were condemned for lacking the necessary work ethic to generate economic prosperity. In short, the public at large—migrants, wayward youth born in privilege and peasants—were made responsible for low agricultural productivity and the crisis caused by famine. The symptoms of these structural ills, such as rural urban migration were identified as the principal causes of underdevelopment of both the countryside and the city. While cultural explanations like poor work ethic and lack of initiative were identified as essential causes of famine and low economic prosperity, the nature of the extractive economy that the imperial regime presided over and problems inherent in “the physical and technical dimensions of agricultural production” (Tekalign, 1995: 387 and 424), as well as structural ills in the urban economy, were conveniently avoided as explanations of underdevelopment.

As Edward Kissi observes, the imperial state, hell-bent on preserving the image of Ethiopia as a rich country with fertile arable land, compromised its ability to deal with the problem of famine as a systemic, periodically recurring structural problem. This “view... of famine ... perpetuated [the problem] and sabotaged the [state’s] ability to relieve it” (Kissi, 1997: 129). The imperial state’s determination to maintain this false image went as far as exporting grain to other countries throughout the 1950s and 1960s, even when parts of rural Ethiopia were facing hunger and famine (Kissi, 1997:129-130). The factors that turned drought into famine, as a result, continued to afflict drought-affected communities and caused

the death of thousands, in 1958, (ibid 142) and prevented communities from effectively coping with the impact of periodic and systemic droughts (Kissi, 1997: 147-148).¹⁴⁶ While the imperial state succeeded in explaining away famine as a “temporary national disaster” abroad (Kissi, 1997: 131), at home, it embarked on a propaganda campaign that strived to convince Ethiopians that famine was a function of poor work ethic and lack of “cooperative labor”. This famine generated state discourse to counter the bad publicity of the 1958 famine continued to guide the imperial state’s allocation of its subjects through the 1960s and 70s. The state presented hard work, ‘cooperative labor’, ‘self-help’ investment in agricultural, commercial and business activities as remedies to low agricultural output that would generate economic prosperity (“*Iconomina yefilagot medanitoch*”, 1952: 4); (“His Imperial Majesty’s Throne Speech”, 1952: 17-23);¹⁴⁷ (Kifle Wodajo, 1952: 24). Therefore, the 1958 famine, and later the famines of the early 1970s exposed the serious fragilities of the modernization project of the imperial state. This media campaign that located “the solution” to underdevelopment in diligence, self-application, cooperative labor and investment in agriculture and commerce, impaired the state’s ability to address the structural problems facing the country, both in its cities and its countryside (“Blatta Girmachew Teklehawariat Delivered the following speech...”, 1953: 43-46).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶The regime so preoccupied with the international image of the country found it difficult to reveal or admit, in good time, the severity of the 1958 famine. Initially, the government was not even sure whether it “should accept external assistance”. It was only when the regime was forced by its severity that it finally publicized the famine in September, only days before assistance from the American government arrived (Kissi, 1997: 142).

¹⁴⁷ In this speech, the emperor states, “the past year [1958] has brought, also a challenge to our energies and resourcefulness in meeting the severe conditions in Tigre, Eritrea and Ogaden, resulting from locust invasions and lack of rainfall” (20). He calls for the need to develop the country’s capacities through increased commercial activities and what he called a “broad program of land development”. See also the article “*wede qim godana*” (On the road to vengeance) (1952: 40) that urges people with capital to invest in productive activities to help themselves and others. Otherwise, it says, citing the emperor, “If ones’ wealth is not shared, it will nurture an attitude of resentment (vengefulness)” among the poorer sections of society. It also blames “capitalists” who it said were not investing their capital on gainful productive activities.

¹⁴⁸ Blatta Girmachew then a minister urged the youth “to double their effort” and be diligent to respond to the economic needs of their country, while at the same time the minister stressed the need to combat “the lack of cooperation”, “the spirit of malice” and “egotism” as “poisons”, that undermine economic progress in Ethiopia. See also similar calls for diligence and hard work in (Elleni Fetene, 1962: 8-9); (Terefe Aserat, 1962: 7-9). In an editorial “*Sera lenuro mashashaya bicha ayidelem*” (Work is not just to for personal advancement (1956: 1) it is stressed that whatever setbacks Ethiopia has had with making economic progress, the solution is diligence and hard work. The source of the economic woes

Droughts continued to turn into famine and in the early 1970s the problem reached catastrophic levels compounding the structural issues of the country. These famines resulted in incalculable human carnage: killing hundreds of thousands and affecting millions. Along with other factors, the famines of the 1970s became a key factor behind the “desacralization” of the emperor and the monarchy, and contributed to the downfall of the imperial regime by politicizing the youth during the popular protests of 1974. The regime dealt with the problem, as it did with the famine of 1958, by trying to hide it not only from the rest of the world but also from Ethiopians, especially those residing in the capital. As mentioned above, even if the government’s price regulation reached “new heights” in the months leading up to the popular tumult of 1974, rising inflation and its direct link with harvest failures and a raging famine in the north, the southwest, and the province of Shoa (the region supplying most of the grain to the capital), were denied by the regime. The imperial state insisted that the problem of inflation was caused by price fluctuation in the international market (“*Yezendiro yeityopia yeehil azmera kemangnawum gize bilcha endalew tegelete*”, 1966: 1 and 2).

The problem of low agricultural output, exploitative land relations in the countryside, famine, rural-urban migration, low industrialization and inflation were inseparably linked to one another—they were all structural problems at the root of the underdevelopment of the country. The imperial regime’s attempt to explain impoverishment by blaming it on Ethiopian cultural predisposition was a sure way of misrecognizing these structural issues.

As the foregoing discussion in this last section tried to show the imperial state’s discourse and its construction of “the people” did not emerge ipso facto from the state’s mere perception of “the people”. Apparently, it was generated to respond to the 1958 famine, a historical development or event of serious significance. Likewise, the portrayal of the post-war imperial state as the bringer of

of the country, it says, is to be found essentially in “laziness” and “procrastination”. Such calls for hard work and self-application to address economic problems are to be found throughout the 1950s and 60s in Mennen.

modernization, as will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter, was on the one hand a response to the five years Italian Occupation of the preceding period (1936-1941) and the modernist state project that unleashed multifaceted modernization efforts in the fields of education, state bureaucracy, architecture, urban design and public works of the postwar period. The modernist projections of the imperial state in this period were also aspirational. It was the aspirational projects of the state that came into crisis due to the widespread famines of 1958 and that necessitated its media campaign in the subsequent years. But what made the 1958 famine peculiar from the crop failures and droughts that occurred before it was that this famine and its impact came into conflict with the projected images of the country as a “bread basket” and as a country undergoing modernization. This was because previous shortfalls in harvest and famines, did not really affect the stable provisioning of food supplies to the capital. The 1958 famine did (Tekalign, 1995: 380).¹⁴⁹ The reality of the famine and its severity contradicted the discursive construction of the state and the country both at home and abroad. At home, the 1958 famine exposed the hollowness of the state’s modernist project and the construction of the “New Ethiopia”. Abroad, it threw into crisis the image of Ethiopia as a country with potential to export food to the outside world by forcing the state to accept food aid.

The impact of this media discourse following the 1958 famine: its calls for diligent self-application, its attempt to discourage rural-urban migration and its admonition of “the people” for inactivity and laziness, furnished the state with propaganda to blame lack of material progress on the people. On the other hand, however, ultimately, the paternalistic sermon of the state media was not effective enough to prevent the youth in 1974 from militating against the regime that handled another, and more devastating famine, that occurred in the 1970s. As we have seen in the second chapter, the famines of the early 1970s unleashed a popular wrath

¹⁴⁹ Here Tekalign argues, “It was the shortages in the wake of the harvest failures of 1957 and 1958 that for the first time seriously tested the security and stability which Addis Ababa’s provisioning had enjoyed ever since the Italian period. Unlike the many small scale harvest shortfalls and other calamities, the crisis of 1958 in particular was much more general, affecting not only the hinterlands of the capital but also most parts of northern and central Ethiopia”.

against the regime and brought the youth together to form a mutual aid community to deal with the famine problem.

To sum up, in this chapter, rural-urban migration and the informalization of work and settlement are discussed as key elements of the production of post-war Addis Ababa by popular social ingenuity. The intertwined structural issues of famine in the countryside and inflation and cost of living in the city in this period sought to show what is achieved by seeing the city and the country as continuous spaces produced in combined but uneven ways. The chapter mapped some of the ways in which the popular emerged in postwar Addis Ababa at the juncture of state activity (the modernist projects of the state and its media discourse) and social ingenuity (migration into the city and informalization). The *popular* in postwar Addis Ababa emerged at the intersection of the modernist project of the state, their own self-activity in the making of the city, as well as state discourse since the late 1950s. The chapter traced the ways in which the emergence of *the popular* in the postwar period was connected to the popular *revolution* that broke out in the 1974 popular protests discussed in chapter two. In the next chapter, we will move to a discussion of the emergence of *the popular* and its linkages with the popular of the city that provided the bulwark for the social and cultural formation of delinquent urban subjects in the pre-revolution period. The next two chapters examine and show the ways in which *popular modernity* was enunciated in the spaces of the capital and how it impacted subject formation.

Chapter Four

In Between and Beyond Containment and Resistance: The urban youth and the state in “the age of transition”

In the study of popular culture, we should always start here: with the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it. The study of popular culture has tended to oscillate wildly between the two alternative poles of that dialectic containment/resistance (Stuart Hall, 1998: 443)

Introducing the chapter

This chapter is a continuation of the previous one in the sense that it is interested in the emergence of the popular in urban space. But here, my interest is to talk about the creation of the shared public sociality of the predominantly youthful city, Addis Ababa, in the postwar period. By using material from the city-center of Addis Ababa, I will demonstrate the ways in which social, economic and cultural processes led to the production of “the popular”— as a heterogenous category constituted of disparate social groups and social classes that shared key common cultural attributes. I talk about the self-consciousness of the youth, and explore the conditions of its emergence in relationship to the social conventions of the dominant culture advocated and upheld by the modernist imperial state. As such, the discussion here is about the ‘dialectic of containment and resistance’ between the modernity that was sponsored by the imperial state and the set of social practices that were embedded in the public sociality of the youth. These are ~~both~~ products of the social and cultural changes of the postwar modernization of the capital where dissension between the state and the youth was registered, but also where divisions between the disparate social classes and situated social actors was evident. This chapter discusses the vexed relationship between the imperial modernist state’s projected embrace of modernity and what it regarded as the excesses of “western culture” and the practices that it supposedly unleashed—excessive drinking, smoking, public indecency, disregard to authority and disregard to Ethiopian “culture”, tradition and custom. On the one hand, I show how the modernist state projected itself and the emperor as the bringer of

“modern civilization”, while at the same time admonishing the youth for their uncritical and indiscriminate acceptance and wholesale appropriation of “western culture”. To this effect the state tried to control the public conduct of the youth. It placed emphasis on the public sociality and identity of women, while at the same time trying to fix their roles in the home sphere, roles which in turn were used to define their functions and position in the public sphere. This chapter draws heavily on the Amharic monthly magazine published from 1955 to 1973, due to its interest in examining the relationship between women and the youth with the social conventions of the day. *Mennen* was a prestigious state-owned magazine, named after the empress—Mennen Asfaw and was founded with the stated and primary purpose of inculcating the values and attributes that the state desired to see in *modern* women in particular, and the youth in general (Keazegaju, 1948: 5). *Mennen* is used to explore the prescribed social identity of the imperial state and how this was resisted and internalized by women and the youth in the postwar period.

In *Production of Space*, when Henry Lefebvre talks about the various actors involved in the production of urban space, he argues that space is produced by state design, the “hegemonic class,” as well as the ruled and the dominated. While the hegemonic class tries to impose its will and manage society, “...with the help of knowledge and technology, imposing analogous, if not homologous” (Lefebvre, 1991: 23), the ruled either “lose themselves [in it or] ... enjoy and modify [it]” (ibid, 35). As Lefebvre says “... even technocratic planners and programmers, cannot produce a space with a perfectly clear understanding of cause and effect, motive and implication” (ibid, 37). This implies that there is always an effect in the production of space that is unplanned. People ‘modify’ space according to their needs and the circumstances of their lives. It is precisely what happens as a result of this relationship between these two ways of *producing* space (by the state, “the power block”, on the one hand, and the ruled on the other) that interests this chapter. The emergence of *the popular* in postwar Addis Ababa is understood as lying in the intersection of this struggle to dominate space and modify it. It is the public sociality that is created as a result of this struggle and the popular culture and sensibility that emerges from this interface that is the concern of this chapter. On the other hand, in connection to the changing public sociality of the

youth, this chapter is also interested in showing how the changing public conduct of women impacted the new ways of being young and urban, and aims to use this discussion to suggest that there was also dissensus between social actors—such as the ones between men and women—as to what the public comportment and social practices of the genders ought to be. Besides ‘struggling for the city’ to reposition themselves in society women of postwar Addis Ababa played a key role in defining the culture of the youth.

The chapter shows the ways in which the youth, from different social classes, developed a shared self-consciousness as a result of the public sociality that emerged in the capital and grew to become ubiquitous in the 1960s and 70s. By so doing, it seeks to document the link between “social and cultural formation” and consciousness.¹⁵⁰ In the postwar decades, cupped as the “age of transition”, I argue that, what Gedamu Abreha and Solomon Deressa called ‘The Hyphenated Ethiopian,’ characterized the cultural identity of the youth in that period. As Gedamu and Solomon argue, the youth of postwar Ethiopia “developed a human interdependence that...forced” them to be Ethiopians while at the same time being purveyors of “foreign” cultures. This hyphenated-ness was not, however, one that characterizes the youth only. Its salience is extendable also to understand the nature of city making in postwar Ethiopia and the character of the capital. While hyphenatedness describes the dilemmas and hybrid identity of the modern urban young Ethiopian subject, it also describes the grafting of rural subjects in the city in Addis Ababa. As discussed in the previous chapter, the city was neither “fully” urban nor “fully rural”. That is why I extend this notion of hyphenated-ness in this dissertation to talk about both youth urban identity as well as the identity of the city.

The chapter is divided into three parts. I start my discussion with the ways in which the imperial state in the postwar period tried to regulate the roles of women to preempt the disruptions of modernity in the social and cultural life of urban society.

¹⁵⁰ A similar attempt to show the link between “social and cultural formation” with class-consciousness can be found in Edward Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, (1966: 9).

The section provides the context and the role of the media in regulating women by prescribing and re-inscribing what it considered the “primal” roles of women as wives and mothers, and as custodians of a moral and respectable living in their society. I then move on to a discussion of the birth of a new public sociality centered on the social changes that the city-center was undergoing in that period. These changes impacted social practices and produced an urban culture that was shared by various social groups and social classes. The third section is a discussion of the self-consciousness of the youth in a postwar period that was branded as “the age of transition.” Here the attempts of the state to order and discipline the youth, to instruct their cultural identity and public sociality, and its attempt to create a modern respectable subject will be discussed. It demonstrates the struggle of the state to create modern respectable citizens, but also to contain their self-activity especially in places it regarded as abodes of moral corruption, referred in this study as *profane spaces* (nightclubs and bars operated by women). The fourth and last section of the chapter comes back to the state’s definition of women that came at loggerheads with the ways in which women tried to redefine their cultural identity in the spaces of the city. Here the “politics of dress” will be used to highlight this contradiction—the effort by the state to define women according to its desires and women’s resistance of such definitions.

4.1 The postwar state and women’s “primal” social roles

In this postwar period of dramatic social, economic and cultural changes and unprecedented modernization, controlling the role of women - their public conduct and fixing their position at the home sphere - were considered key to maintaining “social harmony and unity.” In the capital, the population expansion and the informalization of work and settlements, the construction of modern buildings, road networks and the expansion of education and other social services as well as their concentration in urban areas set in motion enormous social and cultural changes. These developments and socio-cultural and economic processes were accompanied by social innovation and creativity that at times undermined the desired outcomes of the state’s modernist project by creating outlaw sociality that modified the spaces of

the capital according to their needs, as we have seen in the previous chapter. It was in the context of the emergence of a distinct youth public sociality and the proliferation of sex work and their impact on the cultural identity of women, that the imperial state tried to regulate and (re) inscribe women's social roles in postwar Ethiopia.

The inaugural issue of *Mennen* was launched on the silver jubilee of Haile Selassie's coronation in 1955 and the monthly magazine remained in print until the end of the imperial regime. The magazine targeted young modern urban subjects in Addis Ababa and had a stated objective of giving "advice" to young ladies in particular and the youth in general, on how to "lead a better life" (Keazegaju, 1948: 4). *Mennen* was thus one of those state attempts established to create young disciplined modern urban subjects. In its first editorial message in November 1955 the monthly Amharic magazine *Mennen* stated that the main objective of the magazine was to help the "advancement" of women and the youth (Ibid). It read,

...from the education and knowledge that ... [the youth, especially women] acquire from this magazine they would be able to improve their lives by managing their homes, respecting their husbands and fiancés, caring for their families and raising their kids, keeping them clean and taking care of their wellbeing, [as well as] looking after their own hygiene and sanitation to create social harmony, love and virtuous living [in their society] (Keazegaju, 1948: 5).

The emphasis of the state on women at least partly arises from the perception in the postwar period since they were seen as the main custodians of moral and respectable living. Women were thought to be responsible for attaining "harmonious life and social unity" (ማህበራዊ አንድነትና ፍቅር) through the "proper management of the household" and as care givers of their children and families (Ibid). Women were defined primarily as wives and caretakers of their family and the community at large. Their primary role was, thus, associated with the household, even when they were encouraged to acquire knowledge and engage in civil professional endeavors (through the pursuit of modern education and by taking up professional positions in the public sphere). Their education was not supposed to take them away from these 'primal'

responsibilities. The postwar imperial state saw the educational endeavor of women as an enterprise that would affirm their supposedly “traditional” social roles, rather than stirring them away from them.

In this period, sanitation and hygiene came to constitute a state agenda, mainly when it came to the imperial regime’s desire to create a modern, urban “respectable” youth. But sanitation, beautification and hygiene, were highlighted especially in relation to women. Not only were young modern females schooled in personal hygiene maintenance and sanitation, they were also expected to be the stewards of cleanliness and sanitation of their families and of the society at large. This was one of the key attributes that the imperial state desired to see in young modern urban woman. *Mennen* served as a key broadcaster of these ideas. In the first issue of the magazine, “the true young woman” was described as one who keeps her clothes, hair and body clean, and one who wears mascara and perfume and does her nails (“Yewetatoch amid”, 1948: 1); (“Wuha lewubet yetawege wedaj new”, 1948: 16); (“Lefitachihu qoda asibulet”, 1948: 23); (“Tiqit bilhatena zede Ymiteyiq sera”, 1948: 9); (“Liyu teqami mikir”, 1948: 11); (“beqoshasha lay yemidereg zemecha”, 1948: 13); (“Min gizem wub hono lemenor”, 1948: 19-20); (“Lewubet yemiyagelegilutin negeroch bekentu alemabaken new”, 1948:23); (“Yebet wust gudayoch”, 1948 : 24); (“Yemoya mistir”, 1948: 29). Skills in the technical management of the body, sanitation and hygiene, were considered a defining mark of being a modern urban woman. Throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s, women were instructed on how to be good mothers and how to care for their children. (“Lewetatua enat yetetsafe debdabe”, 1948: 16-17). In sum, sanitation was regarded as a mark of *silitane* (civilization).¹⁵¹

This attempt to preoccupy women with roles that were considered “primal” and “natural” to them was not exactly intended to alter their public standing as students,

¹⁵¹ In an article “tiqit bilhatena zede Ymiteyiq” (Task that require some knowledge and skill), (1948: 9) *Mennen* provides a list of advice for women about how to keep the house clean, sewing, cleaning and washing. The interest of the imperial state in sanitation, personal cleanliness and hygiene were also exerted towards cleaning the city and “modernizing” it. In fact, throughout the 1950s and 60s “the idea and practice of a clean and healthy city was publicized” through the print media, the radio to generate public awareness. Such campaigns targeted individuals as well as neighborhoods, urging them to clean their houses and keep their neighborhoods clean (Shimeles, 2011: 474).

professionals, and workers. It was meant to temper their public mien and manage and perpetuate their social roles as mothers and wives in the home sphere. These mechanisms of social control could be seen as a reflection of the general anxiety on the part of the imperial state and the dominant interests in society. This regulation of women was done with the intent of reducing the disruptive effects of modernization, including the opening up of new avenues for them to stake their claims in society and their position in the public sphere. These include expansion of education that gave female persons access to modern education and the increasing number of women taking up formal employment and engaging in professional pursuits.

The public roles women assumed in the formal sector were earmarked for them by the state. The institutionalized training of females in the school curriculum affirmed and attended to preserve their supposed ‘traditional’ roles as caretakers of the home and their families. Formal schools offered lessons in family care, home care, sewing and childcare just for female students in the expanding modern school system of the postwar era (Roman Work Kassa, 1948: 6-7). The Empress Mennen School—the first female modern school established in the prewar period, for instance, gave such lessons for female students in the 1950s. The integration of these additional lessons in the school curriculum to train female students was rationalized by their alleged “natural inclination” towards and “preference” to these subjects. It was argued that there was “need to give weight to the historical” role of mothers in “the vocation” of home management in the school curriculum, so that women continue to carry similar roles in modern Ethiopian society (ibid). Female students, it was said “should not be limited” to the formal academic curriculum and the modern school should be able to prepare them for tasks that await them on the home front (ibid).

The modern school was one of the institutions that inculcated the notion that female persons despite their active role in the public sphere as students, employees and professionals, have an obligation to perform their *natural* duty as wives, mothers and homemakers (Tesfaye Demissie, 1948:16). Poems, plays, and theatres comparing “the good woman” and “the bad woman” tried to ensure women’s obedience to these norms. As the following poem published in *Mennen* on January 1955 by Tesfaye

Demissie shows, women's loyalty to their husbands and their homes was central to their definition by the state:

A good woman [gives] life to her husband
A bad woman is a flame on his feet
A good woman is a shining light to her home
She removes darkness [and lit the house]

Women's public lives, and their professional endeavors, were designed to carve for them roles in services associated with care, support and sanitation. The social roles that were ascribed to them in the household were in a way rearranged to define their public and professional pursuits. The training of young women as nurses at the college level and their grooming since high school to take up positions in the fields of nursing and services (particularly as secretaries) is a reflection of this state design. To care for the sick and the elderly was for instance seen as a role that was in alignment with women's "natural" predilection to perform tasks related to care-taking and stewardship of the sick and the needy. Women were even said to have a natural predisposition towards nursing, and towards performing support roles as dressers and secretaries ("Wetatoch yemiqerbilachewin timhirt betiniqage yiteqemalu", 1948 : 25-26).¹⁵² To this effect, in addition to creating nursing schools for female students, the state also encouraged women to form charitable associations, which care for orphans, the elderly as well as train women in home management and family care.¹⁵³

The state's attention on the creation of young urban modern women subjects was intended to ensure social harmony— stable family life and social wellbeing ("Ye'ewunetegnayitu enat", 1948: 17). As an article with the title, "The true mother", published in *Mennen* in February 1956 reasoned, the "true mother" must hold her family together, care for the kids and take care of household chores. The father, it contended, must stay out of the household chores, as he needs to be the head of the household who instills the virtues of "discipline" and respect in the children (Ibid).

¹⁵² It is argued here that women should have priority over men for jobs in nursing and as dressers due to their natural predisposition to such roles.

¹⁵³ One such organization that was set up by the initiative of the empress was the Ethiopian Women Charitable Association ("Yeityopia setoch yebego agelgilot mahiber", 1948: 11 and 12).

Naturalization of social roles for females and males was part of the design of subject creation by the postwar imperial state.

Women transgressed social restrictions and roles prescribed to them by the imperial state and the dominant social and cultural order of their time. As we have seen in the foregoing discussion, the impact of the proliferation of sex work in Addis Ababa on the identity of women who walked out on their “traditional” roles as mothers and wives, was one such transgression. However, as will become apparent in the course of this discussion, such transgressions became more and more generalized and pervasive among the female population of the postwar city as the 1960s and 70s wore on. This was expressed in dress, in the changing public sociality of women, their expanding roles in the public sphere, as well as their public comportment.

4.2 Cultural activity in the city center

As the previous chapter demonstrates, rural-urban migration and informalization of work and settlement gave rise to a large swathe of the city’s underclass in postwar Addis Ababa. These popular classes constituted the majority of the urban population. A section of them were precariously employed in the informal sector while others were either unemployed or resided in the various quarters of the city as dependents. On the other hand, however, the city was also inhabited by a growing youthful student, formally employed, professional, military and police personnel, civil servant and middle class population who were excluded from the ruling elite (the power block). In postwar Addis Ababa these disparate social groups and occupying different social classes were predominantly young and they came to share a public sociality that was distinct from the older generation and those who form part of “the power block”. Explicating this phenomenon is the principal aim of this section and forms the most important objective of the current chapter. I argue, the popular, included all those social groups and variously situated social classes that were excluded from the power block. They inhabit a social field that was simultaneously contested but at the same time prompted a widely shared public sociality. Here experiences of *the popular* in the

city-center that resulted from the social and cultural changes of the city, between the 1950s and the mid 1970s, are highlighted. By focusing on a neighborhood in the city-center, Wube Bereha, I show how the sociality of the city-center brought about a city-wide transformation in the public life of the youth.

In this section by focusing on the city center of the postwar capital, through the documentation of local memory and oral testimonies from Wube Bereha, I show how cultural activities transformed the public life of the youth in the city. Though the section also draws on accounts and experiences from the rest of the city-center, much of the discussion will be devoted to Wube Bereha, one of the early *safars*, founded during the reign of Menilik II. The neighborhood became the premier red-light district of postwar Addis Ababa. It is argued that social and cultural changes in the city in general and the city center in particular, transformed the ways in which people comported themselves in public.

Wube Bereha was the entertainment nucleus of the capital for much of the postwar period. It was part of greater Piazza, the city center. Wube Bereha, as the entertainment hub of the capital, became a meeting point and a rendezvous for the urban youth. What I refer to here as greater Piazza include neighborhoods adjacent to Piazza. These neighborhoods include Serategna Sefer, Erri Bekentu, and Doro Maneqia to the south of Piazza and Arada and Wube Bereha to the north. They were part of what we would call the Piazza cultural orbit since they had and still have a shared *yepiassa lij* sense of belonging.¹⁵⁴ Wube Bereha along with the Arat Kilo-Piazza Axis¹⁵⁵ was instrumental in defining the cultural identity of the youth and the capital, as will be shown in the course of this chapter and subsequent chapters.

The construction of Menilik Palace, *the ghebbi*, in Arat Kilo in the early 20th century, set in motion the settlement of big neighborhoods such as Fit Ber, Basha Wolde Chilot and Serategna Sefer, which were parallel to the palace and along the road that goes

¹⁵⁴ See Fiqeru Kidane (2005: 63) for discussion on who *yepiassa lij* were in the postwar period.

¹⁵⁵ Arat Kilo is until today the seat of power where the Menilik II Palace is located. It is located a kilo meter and a half from Piazza.

to Piazza. Piazza became the city-center after the Italians built it as an exclusively white residential and business quarter during occupation (1936-1941). Located adjacent to the historic city-center, Arada, Piazza became the postwar center of the city due to its numerous cafes, *shay betoch* (tea houses), boutiques, restaurants, laundry shops, shebeens and drinking parlors (Fiqueru, 2005: 76-77). As Shimeles notes, Haile Selassie's postwar state inherited "the ideology of [western style] planning" (Shimeles, 2011: 385), and its notion of "modern and respectable living" from the Italians. Among other things, the postwar modernist state also learned from the construction of public and commercial buildings in the Piazza area (Ibid, 2011: 562).

After the Italians shifted the central market of Addis Ababa from Arada to Mercato, neighborhoods like Doro Maneqia, Erri Bekentu, Serategna Sefer, Arada and Wube Bereha were seen as part of the Piazza cultural orbit by inhabitants of the city (Fiqueru, 2005: 63). During much of the postwar period until the revolution, greater Piazza was closely tied to the other two important neighborhoods that formed the core of the city, Arat Kilo to the east and Mercato to the West (Fiqueru, 2005: 63); (Shimeles, 2011: 663).¹⁵⁶ Young people who lived and frequented greater Piazza shared a common self-consciousness. Its residents and frequenters were seen by others and saw themselves as the embodiment of what was considered *modern* in the city. It is no coincidence that the notion of *yearada lij* or *aradinnet*¹⁵⁷ came to be associated with these neighborhoods. The city's first red light district with electric lights, numerous teahouses, mesheta betoch (shebeens), nightclubs, bars, cafes, restaurants, barbershops, boutiques, beauty salons as well as three out of the 5 cinema houses were located in the greater Piazza area (Fiqueru, 2005: 62-63 and 132-133). Posh restaurants like Castelli, Lombardia, Omar Khaim; pastries like Enrico and coffee houses like Tomoca; Hotels like Taytu with their modern bars, tennis courts and barbershops, all catered for those with 'modern taste'. Espresso, Macchiato and

¹⁵⁶ Mercato, due to its demographic composition, inhabited as it were, by majority Muslims, its trading and ethnic communities such as Adere Sefer, Geja Sefer and Guraghe Sefer, as well as owing to its commercial vitality as the business and entrepreneurial center of the city, came to have a distinctive character as a neighborhood (Abdul Mohammad, in group discussion, 2015 March 21).

¹⁵⁷ While Arada was the historic city-center of Addis Ababa located close to Piazza, *aradinnet* is used as a signifier of swag, trendiness and city-smartness. As will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, this concept became a referent of popular urban modernity in Addis Ababa in the postwar period.

Cappuccino became more and more common in hotels, restaurants and cafes of Piazza (Fiqu, 2005: 76-77) transforming the public sociality of the city and the palette of especially the middle income and educated youth. Working people also frequented the *tej* and *tela betoch* (drinking parlors selling honey wine and local beer) of Piazza and went to teahouses as part of their daily lives.¹⁵⁸

4.2.1 The city-center and the birth of a new public sociality

The social and cultural changes in postwar Addis Ababa, particularly through the transformation of the city-center, its spaces of social gathering, the opening of beauty salons, and the increasing adaptation of western style clothing, were crucial for the changes registered in public sociality. However, perhaps the most significant changes in public sociality occurred in the bars, nightclubs and drinking parlors of Wube Bereha. A new form of being young and urban emerged in the post war period, especially after the 1950s. The urban space that was undergoing a process of profound social and cultural change, became the site of emergence for a distinct public sociality whose emergence was largely tied to the city-center. The predominantly young and disparate urban masses that came to inhabit the spaces of the city in the postwar period, mainly through the processes of migration and informalization, came to develop a public sociality that distinguished them from the older generation and the culture that was promoted by the “power block”.

Different social-economic, political and cultural developments contributed to the emergence of the public sociality that became a prevailing way of being in the city in these postwar decades. In addition to Arada, the historic city-center of Addis Ababa, up until the Italian occupation, which had *tej betoch* and sex workers in the prewar period (Eshetu Assen, 1987: 84 and 87), it seems that Basha Wolde Chilot and the Selassie area were important sites for *mesheta betoch* and *tej betoch*. The *azmari*

¹⁵⁸ According to Fiqu, women also frequented places that were thought to be out of bounds for them. Frequenting the cinema and the Theatre became more and more common in the 1950s and 60s (2005: 63-64 and 132-133). This is also confirmed by my interviews with Emeyu Bekele and Kinde Ayalew (2015 June 5-13).

since Menilik's reign were associated with tej betoch as the nobility and merchants with cash, frequented these entertainment centers. The tej betoch were exclusive in that they only accommodated persons of high standing nobility, people associated with the *ghebbi* or merchants (Ethiopians and expatriates) with cash (Teclehaimanot Gebreselassie, 1987: 162-163).

One key social group, whose existence in the city preceded the postwar years, was the military and police personnel in the capital. The creation in the early 20th century of the *Dhawarria* (1906) and also the *Tirumbule* (1912)—both police units established to enforce curfews to guarantee public decency and keep the peace and order of Arada - introduced a salaried police force in the city (Eshetu Assen: 1987:83-84).¹⁵⁹ This set-in motion a process where by a military class in urban Ethiopia grew to become an important social group as the 20th century wore on. Even in the prewar period, when the modern civil bureaucracy was in its infancy, military personnel were stationed in the city. The reign of Haile Selassie I (1931-1974) introduced the establishment of the Imperial Body Guard, in the capital, and saw the founding of the Holeta and the Harar military academics as well as the Air Force, further expanding the state's military apparatus in the postwar period (Bahru, 2001: 148 and Bahru, 1999: 120-124 and 150-159). The existence of military and police personnel in the capital and the emergence of drinking parlors and shebeens in the Arada area, were connected to each other after the postwar period.

The participation of the Ethiopian armed forces in the Korean War (1950-53) was the key event that played an important role in the making of Wube Bereha as the principal entertainment center of the city (Kibebe Demissie, personal interview, 2014 March 8); (Senksar, 2004). In this period, the military also became the most important institution that put together orchestras, produced and performed music throughout the postwar period (Simeneh Betreyohannis, 2008: 26-31; Shimeles, 2011: 651-653). Members of the various military units—the ground forces, the Police and the Imperial Body Guard - popularized and expanded consumption of manufactured alcohol in the city

¹⁵⁹ But the practice of paying salaries to military personnel in the service of the state began even earlier, during Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855-1868) in the second half of the 19th century.

(Simeneh, 2008: 84) in places like Serategna Sefer and Wube Bereha. This period also witnessed the growth of civil servants and merchants who had money to spend.

The expansion of sex work and the flourishing of shebeens and bars in Serategna Sefer, Wube Bereha, Erri Bekentu and other neighborhoods adjacent Piazza, provided an occasion for city making in the postwar period (Kinde Ayalew, Hunegnaw Birhanu, Zermu Agozhi, personal interviews, 2015 June 5-13). Cultural and entertainment centers, in the form of *tej* and *tela betoch* (Asfaw Damte, personal interview, 2015 June 16), bars, and nightclubs, flourished in Wube Bereha especially after the Korean War (1950-1953) (Belaynesh Endalemaw, personal interview, 2014 March 6); (Kibebbe Demissie, personal interview, 2014 March 8); (Tsfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 March 23); (Tsfaye Abebe, 2014, March 25). The presence of wartime returnees from the Korean War who had money to spend transformed the entertainment and cultural scene of Wube Bereha. This was not just because these wartime returnees were coming with “new tastes” of music and dance, but also because the presence of these personnel, among other things, created the conditions for sex work to expand.

Neighborhoods like Serategna Sefer¹⁶⁰ and Fit Ber¹⁶¹, at foundation were organically linked to the palace (*ghebbi*) and the officials of the imperial state. These neighborhoods grew out in close relationship with the *ghebbi*, which was the node around which the soldiers, workers (particularly smiths) and their families settled (Bahru, 1987:44). In the post 1950s these neighborhoods seem to have acquired new identities with the increase in the number of inhabitants, but also the expansion of the neighborhoods to accommodate the bulging numbers. With the increase in people residing in these neighborhoods and the introduction of new livelihoods, the link between these neighborhoods and the palace began to wane. Their inhabitants acquired various economic activities and most of them were not linked to the palace or imperial retinues in the course of the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

¹⁶⁰ Serategna Sefer means “the workers quarter” in Amharic.

¹⁶¹ Fit Ber means “front gate” in Amharic and is a reference to the front gate of the Meniik palace.

Despite their origin as sociologically linked social spaces with the palace, they metamorphosed to become more diverse and more economically independent from the palace and royal retinues. More and more people with diverse occupations including daily laborers, women selling local beer, sex workers and petty traders came to inhabit these neighborhoods (Kinde Ayalew, Hunegnaw Birhanu, Kinde Ayalew, personal interviews, 2015 June 5-13). The economic activities and settlements of these neighborhoods, largely informal, were in the main products of rural urban migration. For instance, Serategna Sefer, which was no longer inhabited by smiths and working people linked to the palace, continued to retain its old name (Serategna Sefer— ‘the workers quarter’ in reference to smiths). In the 1950s and 60s the neighborhood was predominantly inhabited by such groups like sex workers, petty traders, shoe shiners, errand boys, street hustlers, and criminals (ibid). Similarly, Erri Bekentu, another neighborhood in greater Piazza, grew to become a space for vagrants, sex workers and criminals, “The nameless street haven of muggers and undertakers” as Worq Aferahu Kebede writing in 1969 in *Addis Reporter* called it (Worq Aferahu Kebede “, 1969: 8-9).

However, even if sex work grew in close association with the presence of military personnel, merchants who had money to spend, civil servants, professionals and students, trading in sex should not be seen as a mere derivative of the presence of these social groups. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the postwar decades saw the expansion of sex work in the city in general and in the city-center in particular. Many women escaping forced marriage and divorce arrived in urban centers looking for employment. But cities like Addis Ababa offered little opportunities for formal employment and many of these women ended up as domestic workers, got involved in various petty trading activities and others became sex workers (Laketch, 1991: 90; Getahun, 2007: 147 and 151).

Dejach Wube Sefer was one such neighborhood that was founded by Dejach Wube Atnafseged, one of Menilik’s officials. Later the neighborhood came to be called popularly, Wube Bereha, a label that signified its association with sex work after the 1950s. Bereha (lit. desert) was the colloquial name given to it by its frequenters who

saw it as the *wilderness of beauty and sex*.¹⁶² Before the 1950s, the nobility and people of high social standing came to Dejach Wube Sefer to drink *tej* (honey wine) and fraternize with others in their own social class (Kibebe Demissie, personal interview, 2014 March 8); (Belaynesh Endalemaw, personal interview, 2014 March 6). The 1950s witnessed the expansion of kiosks and extemporaneously emerging mud houses as well as concrete (one story) commercial buildings. Small bars and drinking parlors were set up in these buildings, and mud houses gradually mushroomed in the neighborhood. They were rented out to individual sex workers.¹⁶³ With wartime returnees frequenting the neighborhood and its drinking parlors, Wube Bereha began to open up for social drinking and entertainment for diverse social groups. This was supplemented by the popularization of factory processed beer, spirits and the construction of a wine brewery in the area. These developments enhanced the democratization of the place, opening it up first for wartime returnees from Korea and then gradually for males of different social classes and walks of life. Modern music and bottled spirits started to make headways in the social life of the predominantly youthful city (Ibid).¹⁶⁴ Cadets from the air force in Debre Zeit, the police, airborne commandos, professionals and university students came to the famous bars of Wube Bereha in the late 1950s, 60s and 70s (Kibebe Demissie, personal interview, 2014 March 8); (Belaynesh Endalemaw, personal interview, 2014 March 6) (Tesfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2014 March 25); (Tesfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 March 23). The city's poor also found their place in Wube Bereha. Working people and daily laborers came to have *tej* (honey wine) in Edme Qetil Tej Bet and cheap Italian Vino from the small bar, while military and police as well as the educated, went to nightclubs such as Patrice Lumumba and YeAfrica Andinet Club, meaning The African Union Club (Birhanu Mengesha, personal interview, 2014 March 4); (Tesfaye Abebe,

¹⁶² It was common to refer to Wube Bereha as a wilderness of beauty. See for instance (Terefe Asrat, 1969: 17-19).

¹⁶³ Fiqeru in his recollection of his Piazza years also recalls that wartime returnees from Korea brought in foreign ways (Fiqeru, 2005: 73).

¹⁶⁴ Even if the manufacturing of alcohol started in the prewar period, its consumption in scale did not come about before the 1950s. The population expansion of the city as well as increased monetization of the economy must have contributed their part in this increase in consumption of processed alcohol. Moreover, the increasing prestige attached to bottled spirits and beer appears to have raised their attraction.

personal interview, 2014 March 25); (Tesfaye Gessesse, personal interview 2014 March 23): (Tadesse Gebre, 2014 March 4).¹⁶⁵

The expansion of the city's population, mainly due to rural-urban migration, created the possibility for popular activity and transformed the neighborhood. The drinking parlors, nightclubs, and bars of Wube Bereha were owned and operated by women—mesdames, beer brewers and sex workers. Wube Bereha came to be marked by the allures of nightlife and sex work in much of these postwar decades. Wube Bereha was commonly referred as a “desert”, a wilderness of beauty that “brings to mind pictures of beautiful women, and scenes ranging from street fights to scandalous affairs” (Terefe Asrat, 1969: 17-19). Erri Bekentu was also associated with similar attributes. It was described by an *Addis Reporter* columnist as “a sort of low class Dejach Wube Sefer” (Ibid) with its numerous shebeens and drinking parlors that were frequented by working people and the poor.

Wube Bereha's popularity for its elite clubs, bars and nightlife soared in the city. Its nightclubs and bars were owned and operated by famous Mesdames like Asegedech Alamirew, Yeshe Keremelo, Tayech Lemma and other small players (Tesfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2015 March 25); (Tesfaye Gessesse, 2015 March 23). Numerous small bars, kiosks of individual sex workers as well shebeens catered for working people and the poor (Askale Demissie, personal interview, 2014 March 8); (Tesfaye Gessesse, personal interview 2015 March 23); (Laketch, 1991: 125-126). The neighborhood was also a center for *azmari* music ¹⁶⁶ and gradually modern band performances. Prominent *azmari* figures like Nigusu Ayele, Nigatua Kelkay, Ferede Golla, Assefa Haile and Ketema Mekonnen performed in Wube Bereha and resided in

¹⁶⁵ The feminist scholar women rights advocate Zenebework Tadesse (personal interview, 2015 March 18) conjectures that another possible contributory factor to the growth and expansion of sex work and proliferation of bars and brothers in Wube Bereha and other quarters of the city “was the war in the Congo and the Ethiopian contingent that went and returned from there. She says, “I imagine, for example, the name Patrice Lumumba is a result of that experience, whereas Ye Africa Andinet Club is related to the formation of the AU and the debate surrounding it. I remember this phase clearly because Messay [her cousin] dropped out of high school and went to Congo as an interpreter (French) when he returned [and] flushed dollars, it made a huge difference to our social life but more so to the cohort of military and civilians who came back from Congo”.

¹⁶⁶ Azmari is a singer, a minstrel commonly associated with an Amharic folk musical tradition, but were also found in other highland cultures in the country: Tigray, Oromo and Keffa (Shimeles, 2011: 656).

or in the vicinity of the neighborhood (Misrak Fekade, personal interview, 2014 March 24); (Belaynesh Endalemaw, personal interview, 2014 March 6). *Azmari* music that was the dominant musical entertainment in the decades before the 1950s, met a serious challenge from modern band performances playing foreign instruments in the years after (Shimeles, 2011: 656).¹⁶⁷ In the postwar period, the introduction and popularization of processed and bottled alcohol went hand in hand with the emergence of “modern Ethiopian music” performed by the military bands. However, *azmari* music continued to be a common form of entertainment among working people who frequented the *tej* and *tela betoch* of American Ghebbi, Wube Bereha and Gesho Tera throughout the postwar decades (Interview: Tesfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2015 March 25); (Kinde Ayalew, personal interview, 2015 June 5); (Zeru Aghozhi, personal interview, 2015 June 6).

For the decades to come, Wube Bereha became the most important red-light district in Addis Ababa. The descendants and servants of Dejach Wube Atnafsegged continued to live in the neighborhood and sublet their houses for a high rate to small bar owners and sex workers operating kiosks and bars. The high property price and rent (Laketch, 1991: 125-126); shows the neighborhood’s centrality to the cultural life of the city.¹⁶⁸ Residents and their social energies that were at the core of the making of the neighborhood produced Wube Bereha according to the needs of its inhabitants. Women—mesdames, sex workers and the poor played a key role in the making of the neighborhood from below. Thus, the making of Addis Ababa in general and neighborhoods like Wube Bereha in the postwar period were, as Shimeles puts it, a product of the “city-shaping agency of the urban majority”. (Shimeles, 2011: 623). “Equally significant [as were the designs and interventions of the state and its leaders] in the production of the city was ... the complex of networks and relationships the

¹⁶⁷ Not only modern Ethiopian music but also American popular culture including soul, funk and meringue became popular among the educated and the middle classes in this period. The famous nightclubs of Wube Bereha as well as other discotheques and nightclubs in the city were remembered for a soul crazed meringue and cha cha loving young people (Bahre Negash Belete, Mimi Tilahun in group discussion, 2015 March 21).

¹⁶⁸ According to oral sources high rent was true to other parts of greater Piazza like Serategna Sefer, where sex work and bars were important means of livelihood in these neighborhoods (Emeyu Bekele, Kinde Ayalew, personal interview, 2015 June 5-13); (Belaynesh Gebre, personal interview, 2014 March 6).

urban majority forged and the dynamic practices in which they were engaged” (Ibid; 523). Therefore, due to the limited capacity of the modernist state and its ability to realize its modernist projects, popular social activity played a key role in the organization of urban spaces in Addis Ababa, akin to other African cities especially in urban environments where there is informality of work and increasing demographic expansion. Informal settlements were socially generated in these cities to build the city “from below” (Immerwahr, 2007: 7). What becomes obvious from the making of Addis Ababa is that creative energies, “contingent collaborations” and networks established in African cities by residents inhabiting the informal domain (Simone, 2004: 13) were responsible for the making of the city according to their needs.

4.2.2 Surviving the city creatively

The proliferation of bars, clubs and shebeens was just one aspect in which Wube Bereha and other similar social spaces of the city were modified and recreated by popular activity. Social activity went beyond the transformation of physical spaces of the city. Perhaps more important was the social and cultural makeover that was underway in these spaces of the city in the postwar period. Wube Bereha dazzled the young residents of the city, especially on Fridays and Saturdays. Members of various military units from the capital and its vicinities came to Wube Bereha to enjoy themselves when they were “released” from their barracks and camps on weekends. Members of the air force from Debre Zeit (a town located 46 kilometers from Addis), as well as cadets and members of the Imperial Body Guard, let loose in Wube Bereha. They turned Wube Bereha into a field of “festivity” in the words of Fiqeru Kidane (Fiqeru, 2005: 168). The military and police were awaited by the women of Wube Bereha. Weekends gave the neighborhood a particular vibrancy. University students, civil servants and professionals were the other regular frequenters and members of the Wube Bereha scene.

Wube Bereha became a space to experiment with new ways of being young and urban. Social practices associated with “typical city boys”—*Aradoch, Yepiazza Ijoch* (lit. the children of Piazza) such as drinking bottled spirits, smoking, dancing and escorting with sex workers, and other ways of defying social conventions of

“chewannet” (respectability),¹⁶⁹ were increasingly taking root and gradually becoming part of mainstream urban youth culture in the 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁷⁰ The imagery and portrayal of Wube Bereha as the quintessence of ketemennet (urbanity) and modernity was reflected in the literature and music of the postwar period. And as will be shown and discussed in the next chapter, the imperial state launched a campaign against such practices in its media, in various state sponsored art forms and in its educational system.

The literary Amharic masterpiece, *Letum ayinegalign* (“My Endless Night”), a novel by Sibhat Gebreegziabher or the Amharic musical standard “Arada” sung by such musical luminaries like Asnakech Worku and Ketema Mekonnen, immortalized Wube Bereha and portrayed it as the archetype of the modern joyous youthful life of the postwar years. The neighborhood’s association with beauty, modernity, chicness and joie de vivre characterized the youth that frequented its bars and nightclubs. Wube Bereha became a platform for personal as well as cultural “liberation” of the urban youth, as Tesfaye Gessesse described it. In the words of another Wube Bereha veteran, Fiqeru Kidane, the youth “went to Wube Bereha from Meskerem 1 to Pagume 5” (meaning year in year out)). He went further to liken Wube Bereha with the St George Cathedral (one of the prestigious cathedrals of the city). While the Church was a space of “spiritual” cleansing, Wube Bereha was a space of “sexual freedom” (Fiqeru, 2005: 169, 166); (Tesfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 March 23). Wube Bereha (*the Wube desert*), was idolized by some as the place where male youth reveled in the liberating atmospheres of sexual license, music and dance. However, despite such romanticization of Wube Bereha from the male gaze, others reviled the place—denouncing its corrupting nature and “degenerative” experiences.

Wube Bereha’s cultural effervescence was recognized, albeit veiled, even by the state. Wube Bereha became the place to see dancers and singers from modern theatres and

¹⁶⁹ See for instance Fiqeru Kidane’s detailed description of the social practices including courting between young men and ladies and the description of the sexual adventures of the male youth in Wube Bereha (Fiqeru, 2005: 166-168 and 132-133).

¹⁷⁰ This point will be made clear from subsequent discussions about transformations in the public sociality of the youth as a result of their daily social practices in upcoming sections of this chapter.

bands, like Hager Fiker, Haile Selassie I Theatre, Ras Theatre and the military bands like The Imperial Bodyguard Band, The Army Band and The Police Band in the 1950s and 60s (Simeneh Betreyohannes, 2008: 26-31; Shimeles, 2011: 652-653); (Tsfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2014 March 25); (Yohannis Afework, personal interview, 2014 March 24); (Aselefech Ashine, personal interview, 2015 March 30); (Tsedale Gebre Mariam, personal interview, 2014 March 27). Female artists continued to work in the clubs of Wube Bereha while employed in these state-owned cultural establishments. Famous artists, both male and female, came to perform in the posh nightclubs of Wube Bereha.¹⁷¹ The double role of female artists who owned small clubs and bars and worked in modern theatres and bands ¹⁷², was seen with suspicion by the authorities. They were accused of “defiling” modern public institutions of culture. Wube Bereha’s social innovation and creative energy was appropriated by the state to build its cultural institutions, even if the imperial state’s relationship with it was conflicted. Therefore, the imperial state had conflicted relations with Wube Bereha that oscillated between recognizing the creative energies that it harbored and by trying to sever its links with it. Whatever the relationship of the state with Wube Bereha, the influence of the neighborhood and the social practices it made possible, continued to impact the culture of the state, as well as everyday people in the postwar period.

The culture of the red-light district impacted the social identity of the women sex workers in Wube Bereha and other centers of entertainment in the city. Laketch Dirasse’s pioneering study conducted in the early 1970s on sex work points to the social and cultural impact of sex work in postwar Addis Ababa. In *The Commoditization of Female Sexuality: Prostitution and Socio-economic Relations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*, Laketch argues, in 1973 the number of sex workers in Addis Ababa was about 80,000, 25% of the total number of adult females in the city (ibid; 2005 124). Laketch

¹⁷¹ Famous artists like Tilahun Gessesse, Alemayehu Eshete who used to perform in Wube Bereha, found themselves persecuted by the authorities for desacralizing their profession (Tsfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2014 March 25); (Yohannis Afework, personal interview, 2014 March 24); (Aselefech Ashine, personal interview, 2015 March 30).

¹⁷² According to Aselefech Ashine, a famous artist working in Hager Fiker Theatre who was also owner of a club in Wube Bereha, those artists who work in Wube Bereha were called “balconi debdabi”—one who beats/drums the balcony (Aselefech Ashine, personal interview, 2015 March 30).

categorizes sex work under the “informal labor market” and asserts that it was “a strategic occupational choice by women under severe formal labour market constraints” (ibid; 127 and 130).

Laketch identifies six types of sex workers in Addis Ababa: the streetwalkers (the fewest and the lowly paid), the kiosk consorts (the largest in number and the ones who operate from “small rooms, shacks or kiosks”), the bar consorts (those who work in small bars or big nightclubs and either get salaries from their employers or are “provided only with free room and board”), the freelance consorts (these were “young women who work out of the big nightclubs”), the petty-Mesdames (those who operate small bars and drinking parlors and complement their income with the sale of liquor) and Mesdames (those who own big bars or nightclubs “who recruit young women to work as bar consorts” and receive high returns from their business) (ibid: 125). The two types of sex workers who were most commonly found in Wube Bereha were what Laketch calls the bar consorts and freelance consorts. The former who worked in big nightclubs were called *ashashach* (lit. sales person). Of the two categories, the kiosk consorts made up the majority of sex workers in Wube Bereha. The *ashashach* were usually recruited from rural spaces (Tesfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 March 23); (Tesfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2015 March 25); (Sinkenesh Kebede, personal interview, 2014 March 5) and took on new-urban ways and identities in terms of the ways their dress and practices. The Mesdames (Hunegnaw Birhanu, personal interview, 2015 June 13); (Woizero Deribe, personal interview, 2015 June 7); (Tesfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 March 23)¹⁷³ who were considered more respectable, enjoyed some social standing, and could also become *qimit* (concubines) for notable members of society, including the nobility, high-ranking state officials, public figures or wealthy merchants (Tesfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 March 23); (Tesfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2014 March 25).

¹⁷³ According to my information the relationship between the Mesdames and the *ashashach* was comparable to other institutions of servitude such as the *geta-asheker* (lord-servant), which existed in the city as well as in the countryside. The *asheker* can be unpaid, as the relationship between the *geta* and the *asheker* was mediated by longstanding familial links or some kind of patron client relationships. It is not a forced labour as the *asheker* were not legally obliged to be in the service of the *geta*.

Even if some might be inclined to question the figure and the percentage of sex workers that Laketch provides in her 1973 study in Addis Ababa, it is necessary to acknowledge that the prevalence of the practice had an impact that went beyond spaces of the city such as Wube Bereha, Serategna Sefer or Senga Tera.¹⁷⁴ The social impact of the number of sex workers making up a substantial section of the female population of the city in the early 1970s, by itself must have been enormous. As discussed above, these women took on new identities in the city: they smoked, drunk and carried themselves in public in ways that were viewed as indecent and unrespectable. These women also walked out on what were considered at the time “primal roles” of women—marriage and motherhood. The way they dressed and carried themselves in public was altered by their social roles as sex workers. The impact of their practices and experiences on their own public persona and the public sociality of women in general was huge, as subsequent chapters will show. Sex work and the proliferation of nightclubs and bars had a special impact on the public sociality of the urban youth. Key in this regard was that it was associated with women walking away from their marriage and motherhood responsibilities that signaled the emergence of a new female identity in the postwar city (Zenebework Tadesse, personal interview, 2015 March 18).

The lack of formal employment opportunities for women,¹⁷⁵ the conditions in which women were brought from the countryside, for instance trafficked by their relatives or people they know (Tesfaye Gessesse, perosnal interview, 2014 March 23); (Tesfaye Abebe, perosnal interview, 2015 March 25); (Sinkenesh Kebede, personal interview, 2014 March 5), or women in desperate situations escaping bad marriages, made sex work one of the very few options of livelihood for women who arrived in the capital.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ All popular spaces of the city where sex workers operated in numerous nightclubs and bars.

¹⁷⁵ The historian Luise White in her study on sex work in Nairobi shows “absence of formal employment opportunities” for women migrants into the city in the colonial period was one important factor behind women’s entry into the occupation (Luise White, 1991: 1).

¹⁷⁶ Phillipa Levine in her study of sex work in the British empire argue that “although it was commonplace for British travelers and colonial officials to claim that paid sex was rampant across the [British] empire, they rarely acknowledged that the changes wrought by colonial rule had profound consequences on the shape of the prostitution. Trading in sex was certainly not a phenomenon brought east by British colonists, but the effects of colonialism were often visible in new forms of commercial sex which arose directly from the material circumstances that colonialism imposed.” (Levine, 2004: 159)

At the same time, even if sex work was a despised occupation and a “strategic choice” for many as Laketch notes, it cannot be concluded hastily that it was always a low paying occupation, nor does it mean that women joined sex work as a last resort. Laketch, for instance notes that sex workers did not represent the downtrodden of the city. In fact, some like the Mesdames and petty-Mesdames earned well and there were women from the city who joined sex work even though they were from the capital and had acquired formal education. Even if these categories of sex workers may not have been a lot in number, it cannot be concluded that the majority of sex workers in the city lived any worse (Laketch, 1991: 125-126) than say petit traders, laborers and industry workers. Other studies in the rest of Africa reached similar conclusions about the economic status of sex workers, and argued that sex workers were not at the lowest end of the wage hierarchy.¹⁷⁷

The significance of sex work and its appeal as an important employment and income generating occupation was recognized by the modernist imperial state, that was engaged in campaigns and propagandas against sex work and sex workers, as will be discussed in the course of this study. Beyond propaganda campaigns, since the 1920s, laws and regulations targeted urban social behavior such as alcohol consumption and gambling and also criminalized sex work. Curfews were imposed to regulate the closing hours of bars and clubs in Wube Bereha (Yohannis Afework, personal interview, 2014 March 24); (Tadesse Gebre, 2014 March 4). Failure to respect these laws and regulations was penalized by a fine as well as revocation of licenses for bars and nightclubs (Shimeles, 2011: 627-28 and 631).¹⁷⁸ Despite the hostility by state

Similarly, Italian rule and its impacts on sex work transformed the nature of trading in sex. Even if the practice was there in Ethiopia for centuries, the Italian period Laketch argues “gave rise to a more commercialized type and an increased incidence in prostitution” (Laketch, 1991: 127)

¹⁷⁷ For instance, Luise White, in her study of sex work in Nairobi argues, “Nairobi's sex workers-like other entrepreneurs in colonial and postcolonial informal sectors were not degraded by low earnings. Their working and living conditions were no more deplorable than those available to waged workers. They were not just surviving; they were prospering.” (White, 1986: 272)

¹⁷⁸ There were debates on how to deal with sex work throughout the 1950s by the Addis Ababa's city government, Shimeles shows. Attempts at criminalizing sex work, along with other social problems like vagrancy, unemployment, drunkenness, beggary, and “vagabondage” in Addis Ababa were registered in the 1950s and 1960s (Shimeles, 2011: 634-6).

agencies and society towards sex work, nightlife and alcohol consumption, places like Wube Bereha and Serategna Sefer continued to define the public sociality and the cultural identity of the youth in the capital throughout the postwar period.

While I've focused on sex work, nightclubs and bars with relation to the social and economic practices of residents of neighborhoods like Wube Bereha, this does not mean that these neighborhoods should just be seen as centers of entertainment and music and as sites of the voyeur of the female body. Wube Bereha was also home to and provided livelihoods for bakers, maids, cart drivers, guards, saddlers, porters, dependents, as well as the nobility (their descendants) and servants. Rural-urban migration in the postwar period meant that the expansion of petty trading, menial work, brokering, domestic work, and beer brewing, in addition to sex work (Kibebe Demissie, personal interview, 2014 March 8); (Askale Demissie, personal interview, 2014 March 8); (Belaynesh Gebre, personal interview, 2014 March 7), also contributed to the changes registered in the social make up of and cultural transformations in old *safars* like Wube Bereha, and other quarters of the capital in the postwar period.

Migrant women who were particularly vulnerable on the job market were usually inserted in forms of labor and servitude relations that the structures of the urban economy allowed (Asenakech Kebede, personal interview, 2014 March 2), Belaynesh Gebre, personal interview, 2015 March 6); (Belaynesh Endalemaw, personal interview, 2014 March 6); (Emuye Bekele, personal interview, 2015 June 13); (Birhanu Mengesha, personal interview, 2014 March 4). Many young males and females migrating from rural areas came to the city and stayed with relatives and family members. This dependency status more often than not involved extractive social relations where dependents provided their labor to their hosts, often times without monetary remunerations, in return for shelter and food and sometimes access to education (Ato Mulugeta, personal interview, 2015 April 9); (Kinde Ayalew, personal interview 2015 June 5); (Zeru Agozhi, personal interview, 2015 June 6); (Asenakech Kebede, personal interview, 2014 March 2). For many women, urban dependency was not very different from unpaid backbreaking domestic labor. This forced many to look for other options including domestic work or sex work when these relations became

too exploitative.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, despite the critical importance of social innovation and ingenuity in the production of Wube Bereha or other similar neighborhoods, it must be recognized that these spaces of the city were also parts of structures that govern social relations. They were not free zones of self-activity and liberation.

Summing up, the foregoing discussion has shown that apart from structural factors, demographic dynamics were instrumental in the making of the city from below. They were vital material foundations of cultural change in Addis Ababa in the postwar period. Cultural and entertainment centers in the city-center in quarters such as Wube Bereha, became principal sites where what was considered urban and modern were outlined in the postwar period. Wube Bereha in particular and the city center in general, became spaces of the city where new forms of being young and urban were experimented upon and produced by subjects whose origin was not entirely from the city. The twin processes of rural-urban migration and informalization of work and settlements transformed both the population composition of the city and its settlements. These demographic and social developments created a large swath of popular classes who were mostly employed by the informal sector. The sociality that arose from the city-center, particularly its centers of entertainment (nightclubs, bars and drinking parlors) eventually became the prevailing public sociality of the capital that was predominantly young. The emergence of the popular, as a distinct but heterogeneous social category in postwar Addis Ababa was thus the product of these demographic, socio-economic and cultural developments in a modernizing city that in the process became a metropolis.

4.3 Social and cultural formation of the youth and their consciousness in postwar Addis Ababa

Going to bars and even to cafeterias considered inappropriate for many only a decade ago¹⁸⁰ became part of the daily practice of young people with the proliferation of

¹⁷⁹ See the stories of the sex workers that Laketch interviewed (Laketch, 1991: 107-121 and 130-131)). One of my interviewees, Belaynesh Gebre, a migrant woman from Wolayita notes such relations were “oppressive” and did not usually offer migrants future opportunities of better life and employment that they came looking for in the city.

¹⁸⁰ (Conversation with my father, Ayalew Asfaw, 2010).

cafés, nightclubs and bars in Wube Bereha, Piazza proper, Serategna Sefer, Erri Bekentu and other parts of the city in the 1950s (Tesfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 March 23); (Aselefech Ashine, personal interview, 2015 March 30); (Mimi Eshete, Bahre Negash Belete, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21).¹⁸¹ The changes in public sociality of the youth that were culturally formative began to challenge the conventions of the dominant culture propagated by the imperial state through its media and institutions of culture. However, as will become clear in the course of the chapter, women's public identity contested this norm. Their practices threatened to reorder the dominant social conventions of the time. A typical example in this regard was the prevalence of the miniskirt in the second half of the 1960s. As much as the state and society were trying to define their roles, young females were engaged in their own self-definition through their daily social practices.

The imperial state's consternation with the cultural changes that were happening in cities could be traced back at least to the 1950s. This was a reflection of the anxiety of the state in a city and society undergoing major social and cultural changes, and the perceived infiltration of "western culture" and values and practices considered "alien" to "Ethiopian culture". The notion of *chewannet* (respectability) of the modernist state, therefore, did not just apply to women. Attempts to control male sociality were as important, even if the standards were different. These ideals of *chewannet* disapproved public courting between the opposite sexes, eating out in public and social drinking (Ermias Kebede, 1952: 31-32); (Azeb Desta, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21); (Woizero Deribe, personal interview, 2015 June 7).¹⁸² In addition, the growing popularity of the cinema also fed into the changes in public sociality. Poor-working people and middle-income people, professionals, and students alike frequented the cinema. The cinema houses of the city hosted cinema hungry youth on weekends and weekdays.¹⁸³ According to Fikeru Kidane, the cinema was a

¹⁸¹ Neighborhoods including Senga Tera, Nifas Silk, Kazanchis among others also witnessed the emergence of nightclubs and bars in the 1960s. See Simeneh (2011: 69-71) for discussion on bands.

¹⁸² See also Wube Zegusquam (1961: 28-29) on the need "to retain and respect one's own [culture] and conducting oneself respectably".

¹⁸³ During weekends the cinemas showed up to 4 films a day and in the rest of the weekdays one film was shown every evening (Fikeru, 2005:132).

“communal event” where young teenagers from all over the city came to watch movies, and went back to their neighborhoods to talk about the films (mainly Hollywood movies) they watched and imitated the actors and their mannerisms (ibid; 132).

Even if there were definitely more restrictions put on young females in the public life of the city,¹⁸⁴ they too went to the cinema (Emiyu Bekele; personal interview, 2015 June 13); (Bahre Negash Belete, Elisabeth Woldegiorgis, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21). In fact, sex workers from Wube Bereha were among the avid theatre and cinemagoers of the Piazza area (Tsfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2014 March 25). Young unmarried couples, who would not walk to the cinema house together, met inside to sit together in the cinema hall and made out, veiled in the darkness when the lights were out (Fiqueru, 2005:148); (Bahre Negash Belete, Endalkachew Tesfa, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21).¹⁸⁵ Going to the cinema, was usually accompanied by other habits and practices, both for males and females. They ate out, went to teahouses, cafeterias and smoked cigarettes (Ibid). Youngsters drank Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola after Teferi Sharew, a prominent businessman, opened a beverage factory in the middle of Piazza, near the famous King George Bar (Endalkachew Tesfa, Ewunetu Ashebir, Bahre Negash Belete, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Going to drinking joints or the soccer field (which was one of the common pastimes for males in the postwar decades) were considered improper for females (Azeb Desta, Mimi Eshete, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21).

¹⁸⁵ According to these sources, Asnakech Worku and Alemayehu Eshete, both famous singers in the postwar period, who earned popularity among the youth at that time, were particularly worth mentioning in this connection. Alemayehu reportedly came to Cinema Ethiopia (in Piazza) on horseback and left the horse in front of the famous Texas café, supposedly to imitate the cowboy looks of Elvis Presley. Asnakech's various pictures from the 1950s and 1960s are now hanging in the foyer of the National Theatre (formerly Haile Selassie I Theatre).

¹⁸⁶ King George Bar was one of Piazza's landmark joints, a famous bar during the postwar years (Tsfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2014 May 25); (Tsfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 May 25). Hailu Gebreheywot (personal interview, 2015 April 15) recalls that the bar was at first seen as an exclusive site of congregation for white people, especially in the years immediately after the Italian Occupation. Later, however, perhaps due to the expansion of the bureaucracy and the emergence of budding professionals, officers, the modern educated elite and middle-class Ethiopians, the bar came to be frequented also by Ethiopians in addition to the expatriate business and diplomatic community residing in the city.

The youth made themselves into a café, teahouse and cinema going, American khaki, miniskirt and jeans wearing public (Wizero Deribe, personal interview, 2014 March 7); (Tamiru Kebede, personal interview, 2015 June 7); (Azeb Desta, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21). Their attitudes toward what they understood as Ethiopian customs and culture became very different from their parents' generation. They associated the city-center, the streetlights, the cinema, the nightclubs and bars, with modernity (Getachew Abate, audio recorded interview by Agazit Abate, 2018 September) and felt they were living in an "age of transition", occupying a special place in their society as subjects straddling between "the traditional" and "the modern".

Katrin Bromber in "Improving the physical self: Sport Body politics and Ethiopian modernity, ca.1920-1974" argues that "the promotion of physical education, as well as the inclusion of a disciplined and healthy body in ... [Haile Selassie's] conceptualization of 'the modern' Ethiopian elite was part and parcel of subject formation as a social process" (Bromber, 2012: 79). What made sports attractive for the imperial state was the fact that sports were a favorable site to create a disciplined, healthy and fit modern young subjects. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the stadium, school clubs and the military served as key grounds for sporting activities (ibid: 81, 84 and 94). The emperor was the patron of the Ethiopian branch of the YMCA which was established in 1951 in Arat Kilo next to the Trinity Cathedral in 1953. As Bromber says, the YMCA "incorporated [sic] sport as a morally positive activity ... [and] a powerful strategy for the creation of a certain life style" (ibid: 86). This lifestyle included instilling discipline of the body and "controlled behavior" that were seen as central to the promotion of sports by the imperial state (ibid: 93 and 97). While the state used institutions like school clubs and the YMCA to create disciplined modern urban subjects in the capital and other urban areas, the Addis youth used sports for social congregation, to build a *sefer* (village) identity and forge social ties. The stadium was one of the sites of congregation for the youth of the capital. Just as the cinema was a "communal event" going to the stadium was another key site for the building of community (Melakou Tegegn, personal conversation, 2014 April 8); (Abdul Mohammed, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21). Interestingly, while sport was used by the state to create disciplined and well-behaved young modern subjects,

poor members of the gang group like the china club, were engaged in bodybuilding to survive the city through criminal activity. These urban outlaws operated in Arat Kilo and Piazza area; they caused havoc in Wube Bereha (Senksar, 2004) and robbed young middle-class students going to school or organizing day parties (Melakou Tegegn, personal conversation, 2014 April 8); (Gash Seifu, personal interview, 2015 April 9); (Mimi Eshete, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21).¹⁸⁷

As stated already, the expansion of sex work, the flourishing of discotheques, cafeterias, day parties and nightclubs, facilitated the transformation of the cultural identity of the urban youth. Simultaneously, the urban youth saw themselves as occupying a different cultural world separate from their parents' generation. Wearing "European" clothes (by the poor, elite middle class and the rich alike) (Tamiru Kebede, personal interview, 2015 June 7), dating and dancing in disco houses and gathering at day parties, as well as public courting between lovers, became increasingly common in the 1960s (Fiqueru, 2005: 166-167). Day parties that were organized by young people from elite middle class families (Azeb Desta, Mimi Eshete, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21), young couples going to pastries and cafeterias in central Piazza (Jarso Mulugeta, Azeb Desta, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21) or the various disco houses like Osibissa, Asanti, D' Afrique, Tunnel, Flamingo (Interview: Mimi Eshete, Endalkachew Tesfa, Abdul Mohammad, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21), as well as working class males going to the small bars and drinking parlors in Erri Bekentu, Serategna Sefer and Mercato (Hunegnaw Birhanu, Zermu Agozhi, Kinde Ayalew, personal interviews, 2015 June 5-13), were all instrumental in bringing about these changes in the public sociality of the youth, and the emergence of a youth urban self-consciousness in Addis Ababa in the 1960s and 70s.

The cultural transformation and the self-making of the youth through their everyday social practices produced a young generation conscious of their differences with their

¹⁸⁷ "China Group" a gang with training in bodybuilding and Karate from YMCA in Arat Killo is remembered for assaulting, robbing young people from rich families, especially young ladies. The day parties, discotheques, elite schools like Nazareth School and St Joseph School used to be the target of their criminal activities.

parents. These same developments and changes gave cause for the state and the old generation to mark school-going young people of the city as victims of “foreign” (alien) cultural influence. The youth were seen as a confused lot who had become unable to appreciate their Ethiopian heritage, “culture” and national identity.¹⁸⁸ As an editorial (1966) by *Mennen* warned, without “respect for tradition” and “good morals” “advancement in education and professional life” will be pointless (“Be’ewqet ena besera meshashal kebahil ena ketebay gar endihon yashal”, 1958: 1). The youth negotiated their place in this age of “transition”¹⁸⁹ and came to defy accepted social conventions and codes of respectability through the consumption of alcohol, smoking, and women wearing the miniskirt and frequenting spaces that were regarded inappropriate for “respectable” women. The culture and public sociality of the youth in postwar Addis Ababa must be “conceived”, as Stuart Hall would say, as “not as separate ‘ways of life’ but as ‘ways of struggle’ ... [that] arise at the point of intersection” (Hall, 1998: 451). The struggle lay in the constant “intersection” between the cultural prescriptions of the state and the public sociality and cultural identity of the youth that were developing as a result of their social practices. The relationship between these cultural impulses of the state and of society were not separate from one another, rather they emerge at the point of intersection and struggle. Therefore, the state’s and the public’s ideas and visions of (urban) modernity were not always two distinctive categories of political and cultural imagination. Moreover, the state’s attempt at containment was not always coherent and was not without its own incongruities, as much as the newly developing public sociality of the youth were not accepted by all members of society outside the power block. The public sociality of the popular could not be said to be “authentic” or a self-contained “independent formation” from that of “the culture” of the power block. Their sociality and culture cannot be “outside of the larger field of social forces and cultural relations” (Stuart Hall, 1998: 443). This is why popular culture, i.e., the public life, cultural practices of the popular could not be seen as independent of the influences, dominations and

¹⁸⁸ See for instance *Mennen*’s editorial, “Timhirt waza ayidelem”—Education is not a joke (1956: 1) that criticizes those who go to modern schools for their tendency to “look down upon” “Ethiopian culture”.

¹⁸⁹ See the next section for a discussion of the characterization of the postwar period as the “age of transition” and “modern civilization”.

“containment” of the power block (Ibid: 444). As Stuart Hall says, such cultural formations and socialites “tended to oscillate wildly between [the double movement of containment and resistance,] the two alternative poles of that dialectic” (Hall, 1998: 443), which have to be seen, not as binaries, but as two poles in a spectrum of relations. In this sense the public sociality of the popular was created in the struggle that occurs in the cultural field, both between the state as well as between different social forces (social classes, genders etc.).

The changes in public sociality of the urban youth, as much as the informality of work and settlements that we discussed in the previous chapter, were products of structural contradictions in the imperial modernist project. This project that sought to create “a new ... [modern] citizen fit for membership in a modernizing nation and state” (Shimeles, 2011: 529) ended up with “citizens” who were different from what it desired. The proliferation of bars and nightclubs, sex work, urban “vagabondage”, for instance, became challenges to modernist aspirations of the imperial regime and its normative conventions throughout the 1950s, 60s and 1970s (Shimeles, 2011: 627-631) (Aselefech Ashine, personal interview, 2015 March 30); (Melakou Tegegn, personal conversation, 2014 April 8).

As discussed, even modern cultural institutions of the state were not impervious to the influences of these cultural changes wrought by the creative energies of urban subjects. Azmari’s, sex workers and dancers of Wube Bereha made it into the various military bands as well as the modern theatres (Tsfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2014 March 25); (Tsfaye Gessesse, personal interview, 2014 March 23); (Tsedale Gebre Mariam, personal interview, 2014 March 27). The city brought azmaris/artists cum sex workers in the limelight while at the same time despised them as social invalids. Their ways of being in the city came to be seen as an affront to the age-old conventions and values of the dominant social order that saw women as custodians of custom and embodiments of respectability—as mothers, wives and homemakers. In this sense the very presence of women who juggled the bar and the modern institution of culture undermined not just the carefully curated “modernist-project” of the state, but also as Shimeles said, its aspirations of transforming the city into a

“respectable” modern African metropolis (Shimeles, 2013: 170-171 and 634-635). The state reacted in response, not just by prohibiting artists and azmaris working simultaneously in its institutions of culture and the nightclubs of Wube Bereha, but also by controlling the activities of profane spaces. It imposed curfews on nightlife and was engaged in media campaigns to persuade the youth to reject practices it regarded as the influence of “western culture” such as excessive alcohol consumption and paid sex (“Min hono yihon”, 1966: 13).¹⁹⁰ But these attempts of social control by the state did not stop the new public sociality and urban identity of the youth from becoming the new normal.

The modernist project of the imperial regime that erected schools, monuments, the modern bureaucracy, built roads and modern theatres and cinemas, also had its parallel— informal networks of survival with practices carved by the creative living of the poor and the marginalized. From these outlaw social spaces of survival, the urban underclass “got by” through sex work, vagabondism, hustling the streets, theft, illicit trading in arms and such illegal or extra-legal activities. These outlaw social spaces of illegal or extra-legal existence of the city’s underclass such as Erri Bekentu represented, as Shimeles says, the “terror” of the city’s “modernity” (Gash Seifu, personal interview, 2015 April 9); (Worq Aferahu Kebede, 1969: 9).¹⁹¹ State modernity which aspired to take the mantle of orderliness, respectability with its modern buildings such as the National Bank of Ethiopia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (designed by famous local and foreign architects), developed in tandem with the “squalor” and disobedience of outlaw social spaces. The city and its city-center were, therefore, thriving not just because of European style commercial buildings, but also due to the activities of urban outlaws and their dissident practices that subverted the imperial project of modernity. In this sense, neighborhoods like Wube Berha, Serategna Sefer and Erri Bekentu continued to be the mainstays of dissident subjects

¹⁹⁰ Fiqru tells us that young males took 3 or 4 concubines in Wube Bereha. This was, he says, the norm rather than the exception (Fiqeru, 2005:168). Such behaviors alarmed the authorities and the media campaign against the moral laxity of the youth was rampant throughout the late 1950s and 1960s.

¹⁹¹ Shimeles also notes the notoriety of Erri Bekentu and Doro Maneqia for the rampancy of theft, mugging and vagabondage and says these neighborhoods “signified the terror of modernity” (Shimeles, 2011: 663).

and their disobedient and “morally corrupt” practices throughout the postwar period. These outlaw “social spaces” of the city were coextensive with and emerged parallel to the state’s modernization activities alongside the public square, the modern cathedral, monuments, and modern schools. Even if the social practices by dissident subjects of the city could not be considered conscious acts of resistance that targeted the domination of space, they were nonetheless dissident quotidian social practices key in the social and cultural formation of the city’s subjects. Azmari/artist cum sex workers who made their way into the citadels of the state’s institutions of culture, played a role in marking the cultural identity of the urban youth.

4.4 The “age of transition” and the self-consciousness and identity of the urban youth

The budding state media characterized the postwar period as a “transitional age” and went as far as proclaiming the emperor, Haile Selassie I “The creator of an era” (Viola Ilma, 1952: 11-14). “Modern civilization” was the phrase used to describe the “new era” with the strides the country was said to be making in modernization after the coming to power of Haile Selassie in 1930. It was a term used in the media that contrasts Ethiopia under Haile Selassie (especially after the postwar period)¹⁹² with the period “before”, which was seen as a long past of Ethiopian “traditional civilization”. Modern education was considered one of the most important elements of this age of “modern civilization”. The emperor stressed the centrality of modern education as “enlightenment” (“Christmas Message”, December 1958-January 1959: 61)¹⁹³ and the state media reiterated it in its reports, articles and columns throughout the postwar period. A decade after liberation in his 1951 speech about the progress made in education and the importance attached to it by his regime, Haile Selassie says the following:

If we have made so many sacrifices for the education of Our youth, it is because we are convinced that only through intellectual progress and universal

¹⁹² The era of progress that Haile Selassie ushered in to the country was seen as rudely interrupted by “the cruel invasion” of Fascist Italy 5 years into his reign. The postwar period was thus regarded as a period of independence where this progress would be made unfettered.

¹⁹³ This was a message delivered by the emperor “to all Ethiopian students” transcribed in this *Mennen* issue.

education can Ethiopia come into its own and make its just contribution... We believe that from truth alone is born liberty and that only an educated people can consider itself as really free and master of its fate. It is only with an educated people that representatives and democratic organs of government can exercise their influence for national progress. Our address from the throne therefore testifies to the importance which we attach to education and, at the same time, to ...[the] role [of students] as representatives, in the development and progress of Our people... (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967*: Nov. 3, 1951).

Educating the youth was seen as imperative to “progress” and modernization. Modern education was considered as a cornerstone of the country’s modern civilization, the modernization of its political system, the pillar of the country’s continued “liberty” and political independence as well as its “material progress” (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967*: Nov.3, 1951). As the education scholar Tebeje Molla notes, “The Imperial Government put education at the core of its modernization and economic development plans. To underscore the importance of the sector, the government heavily invested in the expansion of primary and secondary education and the Emperor held the position of Minister of Education until 1966” (Tebeje, 2018: 93). Not only did the imperial state invest heavily on education constructing thousands of schools especially in the 1950s, and 60s, its educational expansion brought hundreds of thousands of kids to school, especially in urban centers, with a particular emphasis on the capital. In 1952, there were 540 schools nationally and twenty years later, the number of primary and secondary schools rose to 11,950. This exponential expansion in education brought the number of students in the country in the formal school system to nearly 900,000 in the early 1970s (Ibid). The enrollment rate in Addis Ababa reached 70% in the early 1970s before the revolution (Abeje, 2018: 93). While there was only 1% enrollment rate in pastoralist areas, urban dwellers that made up only 10% of the total population of the country enjoyed 50% of the investment in education (ibid: 93-94).

Access to modern education and formal school, was, therefore, one of the factors that distinguished those with modern education from those without. Modern schooling

was associated with *silitane* (Amharic for civilization) and modernity.¹⁹⁴ Educational expansion in the postwar period was also received with much excitement. Aberash Jembere, a high school student from the city of Harar, writing in 1956 to *Mennen*, testifies to the popular sentiment the expansion of education received. Aberash refers to the time she came up in the school as a “historic age” where the expansion of schools provided access to modern education to girls. She praises the emperor for making *zemenawi silitane* (Modern civilization) accessible to females through education (Aberash Jembere, 1948:14).

Even if Haile Selassie and the state media saw education as a key source and ‘foundation’ of “modern civilization”, the discourse on education and its decisiveness to modern civilization was crafted to stress that modernity without the proper regard to the values and spiritual wealth of the “traditional civilization” would be imprudent and even hazardous. Haile Selassie repeatedly said in his speeches and addresses that “the spiritual and morale welfare of Our people is as important as their material well-being” (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967*: Nov.3, 1951). While projecting the centrality of modern education in making material progress through scientific and technological advancement, Haile Selassie and his media reiterated, that progress in science and modern education that is not attended by “spiritual and morale welfare” could be detrimental and cause harm to the people and the country.

The emperor seems to have foreseen the disruptive role that “modernity” would bring to his rule. Strides in scientific advancement that unheeded the customs and values of Ethiopia’s traditional civilization, chiefly one that was a product of its Orthodox Christian legacy, forestalled havoc. In a 1948 interview with the editor of *The Voice of Ethiopia*, Haile Selassie underlines the imperativeness of “modern civilization” and its destructive force, when it ignores ‘spirituality’. He says,

¹⁹⁴ Even if modernity was not entirely about modern education since exposure to urban life including theatre, cinema, club life, modern music, European clothing etc. were also seen as important aspects of modernity in the postwar period

[Modern] civilization can serve man both for good as well as for evil purposes. Experience shows that it has invariably brought great dividends to those who use it for good purposes while it has always brought incalculable harm and damnation to those who use it for evil purposes. *To make our wills obedient to good influences and avoid evil, therefore, it is to show the greatest wisdom. In order to follow this aim one must be guided by religion.* Progress without religion is just like a life surrounded by unknown perils and can be compared to a body without a soul...

It is only when a people *strike an even balance between scientific progress and spiritual and morale advancement that it can be said to possess a wholly perfect and complete personality and not a lopsided one.* The type of progress we have chalked out for Ethiopia based on these fundamental principles” (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967*: Apr. 5, 1948, emphasis mine)

A balancing act of “scientific progress and spiritual and morale advancement” as well as the capacity to discriminate “the good influence” from “the bad” when it comes to introducing modern civilization, was regarded key to the success of the state’s project of modernity. Haile Selassie and his postwar imperial state wanted to create a modern subject with “a wholly perfect and complete personality” attentive to both scientific and spiritual advancement. “A lopsided” subject developed in only one of these dualities was regarded problematic and ungainly for the country’s progress. According to these precepts, this modern subject with a “wholly perfect and complete personality” should respect and be obedient to the values and spiritual legacies of Ethiopia’s traditional civilization.

Mennen stressed these precepts since its foundation in 1955. In one of many editorials and columns written in 1967, the paper argued, “our time, the present we Ethiopians are [living in] is neither like the past nor like the future... In the past our forefathers were using [old customs and traditions]. But us, who live in these transitional times have an obligation to combine our own traditions with the modern civilization” (“Andu bandu siseq...” 1959: 3). Similarly, Negash Gebremariam, a prominent journalist, in an article published in *Mennen* on October 1968 argued, this “age of transition”, required the youth to think twice about what they take from ‘western culture’. In this age, he says rather than falling into the trap of the “consumption” culture of the west, the youth should prioritize hard work and discriminate between the useful and the not

useful influence (Negash Gebremariam, 1961: 26-28). Indiscriminate consumption of western culture (seen as interchangeable with modern civilization) was consistently discouraged. Respect for tradition and Ethiopian customs and Ethiopian national legacy was stressed in the state media throughout the postwar period. This media line was to a large extent diffused from the speeches and public pronouncements of the emperor.

The modern educated subject with a “wholly perfect and complete personality” was demanded not only to respect the country’s legacies, its “traditions” and “mores”, but also to “modify them”. In a speech Haile Selassie made while laying the cornerstone of the Arts Building at HSIU in September 1963, he emphasized that modern education should train individuals who were able to harmonize the lessons they “accumulated” through their education with “the economic and social aspects of ... [their] own community” to be able to adopt them creatively “in a new situation”. This “inventive” application meant that modern education was intended and desired by the imperial state to serve as a mechanism of maintaining and “modifying” Ethiopia’s “cultures and customs,” as opposed to dismantling them. As the emperor says, these cultures and customs “more than ... the [mere] historical legacy of our past, [they] are characteristics of our Ethiopianness. We do not want our legacies and traditions to be lost. Our wish and desire is that education develop, enrich, and modify them” (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967: Sep. 23, 1963*).

As the foregoing discussion shows the urban youth, due to their daily-lived practices, became conscious of their “difference” with the generations that came before them and the majority of their country folk residing in rural spaces. Access to modern education was one key contributing factor for this difference between the city-folk and those who resided in the countryside.

The self-consciousness of the Addis youth did not simply “well up” from within. As the foregoing discussion shows, it was a product of complex factors, including a relatively widespread access to a key-modernizing factor, modern education. Moreover, the youth’s cultural identity was also determined by their public sociality in the spaces of

the city as well as their definition by the imperial state. Their daily social practices in the spaces of the city and their perception by the state as *tiraz neteq* (half-baked) lot, unable to discern the frivolous from the non-frivolous aspects of modern civilization (“western culture”), were critical to their self-consciousness. The media propagated Ethiopian customs and traditions as “precious” and urged the youth to combine what was useful from “western civilization” with these customs and values. As Wube Zegusquam writing in *Mennen* in 1969 argued, even if it was necessary to embrace aspects of “western civilization” such as scientific and technological knowledge and skills to bring about material development, young Ethiopians who are going to school should keep away from practices that “would violate the sovereignty of age-old traditions of our fathers and grandfathers” (Wube Zegusquam, 1961: 28-29). *Mennen* editorials repeatedly bombarded the youth with messages like “advancement in education and professional life should be accompanied by good morals and respect for tradition” (“Be’ewqet ena besera meshashal kebahil ena ketebay gar endihon yashal”, 1958: 1); (“Timhirt waza ayidelem”, 1956: 1). The youth, especially those who had access to modern education, were seen as reluctant towards *their own tradition*. They were perceived as straying away from “the Ethiopian national character”.

An editorial “Yafetete Zinibale” (unscrupulous behavior), in *Mennen*, published in October 1959 reprimands urban youth for failing to value hard work and Ethiopian “culture”. The editorial asks, “Where is the motivation to work? Why don’t you [the youth] have the same motivation to work as you have for dancing and partying?” It blames the “half-baked” youth both for their ambivalence about their cultural/national identity and their heedless obsession with western culture that was “poisoning” Ethiopian culture with foreign ways and practices (“Yafetete Zinibale”, 1952: 4). The fears of contamination by “western culture” were apparent from the media discourse of the postwar years. Bekele Seyum, in an article “The influence of foreign culture”, published in *Mennen* in November 1959, argued, even if “western culture” has been useful for technical and scientific development in the country and “improvement in the intellectual aspect of culture...such as music, dancing, acting and other fine arts,” he says “western culture has a lot of unnecessary things.” Chief among them were what he terms as “wrong patterns of behavior” such as smoking

and other “foreign” practices (Bekele Seyum, 1952: 19). The youth were castigated for their moral laxity (Atnafseged Yilma, 1952:13). And the state took the “responsibility” upon itself to guide them in their journey and help them discriminate between the “good” and the “bad” from western culture (“modern civilization”). While progress necessitated the introduction of “modern civilization”, the capacity to differentiate between the appropriate from the inappropriate was considered critical to the success of the state’s project of modernity.

As stated above, the perception that Ethiopia as a nation joined a “new era” (the era of modern civilization) in its long history of “traditional civilization” was a central theme in the media discourse of the postwar period. The restoration of Haile Selassie’s government in 1941 was dubbed “Addis Zemen” (New Era) and this was marked by the name of the daily Amharic newspaper, *Addis Zemen*, that was established in the same year. The repeated reference of the country as *Adisitua Ityopia* (The New Ethiopia), the reference of the postwar period as the “age of transition” (Negash Gebremariam, 1961: 24-26), the portrayal of Haile Selassie as “the leader of the new era” (“His Imperial Majesty the leader of the New Era”, 1950: 4) and the “architect of modern civilization” (Edgetachin Betalaqu Meriyachin”, 1950: 7), was all matched by a distinctive self-consciousness of the urban youth. Owing to their social and cultural formation in the spaces of the city, the Addis youth saw themselves as inhabiting “transitional times”. The urban youth felt that they occupied a *new present* and a society in transition not only due to state propaganda but also due to the distinctive experiences they had living in urban spaces. They felt that they were living at a time and in a society on the cusp of social, economic and cultural transformation. They were conscious of the actual and latent social and cultural transformations of the times. Negash Gebremariam (1968) saw the spirit of the times as one characterized by a generational conflict. He described the cultural and perceptual differences between the older and the younger generation as follows, “In our age while the old rebukes the young for [their] impoliteness and disregard for old customs and tradition, the young on their part claim that they are civilized and educated”. Such mutual disapproval—the definition of the younger generation by the older generation as uncultured and the older generation by the younger generation as unschooled and

thus not up to speed with the times, Negash asserted, “is where the difference [between the two generations] arise” (Negash Gebremariam, 1961: 24-26).

In sum, the changes in public sociality that the urban youth came to experience seem to have been responsible for nurturing and instilling in the youth, it appears, a collective consciousness. This consciousness was associated with the expansion of modern education that was associated with “civilization” (Negash Gebremariam, 1961: 24-26). The capital’s unfair advantages over other cities and towns from the expansion of education was crucial in the development of this consciousness in the postwar period. Moreover, in addition to being the first generation of people in their community to go to modern schools in mass, the urban youth in this period were the first generation of Ethiopians who, as a group, had access to schools, frequented the cinema regularly, and were exposed to the media (newspapers, the radio, and later the TV). They developed a distinctive public sociality substantially different from their parents’ generation and the majority of Ethiopians living in the countryside. The public sociality they inhabited as well as their access to services, especially education, made the capital in particular and urban centers in general the epicenter of “modernity”. Young people who went to modern schools and those who did all sorts of menial jobs— such as petty traders, the unemployed and the precariously employed, shared a *keteme* (urban) identity through their consumption of, among others, Coca Cola and “European” style clothing (Tamiru Kebede, Kinde Ayalew, Emeyu Bekele, personal interviews, 2015 June 5-13). These widely shared social practices gave the youth with different social positions a rapport and a distinctive generational cultural identity. Immigrants to the city often went back to their home localities showing off their latest *keteme* (urban) antiques—clothes and ways of being, charming others to aspire to city-life (Sinkenesh Kebede, personal interview, 2014 March 5); (Ato Mulugeta, personal interview, 2015 April 9). In short, Addis Ababa in the postwar era was seen as a “symbol” and “locus” of “the nation” and its future, both by the state and society.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ As Shimeles puts it for the imperial state “the objective of creating a modern state in the capital...contrasted with the conventional construction of the rural as the cultural homeland or the

Either through “social ascription or self-arrogation” (Bahru, 2010: 1; Bahru 2014: 265-266), the self-consciousness of those who joined the university saw themselves more than others as uniquely endowed with the intellectual resources and skills to resolve the country’s ills. However, seeing oneself as the champion of the people and developing a self-identity as a result of exposure to sets of practices are two different things. In the later sense, the urban youth in postwar Addis Ababa were exposed to distinctive sets of social practices that made them inhabit a ‘hyphenated’ cultural identity that was also politically formative. The urban youth saw the period as an age where the new was being born (Shimeles, 2011: 449).¹⁹⁶ They felt that they inhabited an “emergent society” “transitioning” to something new, “better” and “modern”. As one Getachew Haile writing in *Addis Reporter* in 1969 called it, the period represented a “changing society in its transitional phase” (Getachew Haile, 1969: 14).¹⁹⁷ The youth, especially those advanced in their education, tended to perceive the long history of Ethiopia as a history of “isolation” from the rest of the world and characterized it as a history of “stagnation” (ibid); (“His Imperial Majesty the leader of the New Era”, 1950: 4); (“Edgetachin Betalaqu Meriyachin”, 1950: 7). The young felt a “rift” between their own generation and the generation of their parents (Getachew Haile, 1969: 14). They were “hyphenated” beings, straddling between their own Ethiopian cultural identity and a “foreign culture” (Gedamu Abereha and Solomon Deressa, 1969, 13-18); (Gedamu Abereha and Solomon Deressa, 1969b: 10-14).¹⁹⁸

Gedamu Abreha and Solomon Deressa, key literary figures who flourished in the 1960s, highlight the nature of cultural change and the impact on the way of life of the urban youth in an impressive article published (February 1969) in the celebrated

spiritual homeland of the nation... the city provided the nation with the tools for imagining and contrasting its future” (Shimeles, 2011: 115-116).

¹⁹⁶ Shimeles also characterizes the processes of modernization of Addis Ababa in the postwar period as “a transitional [period]...where the hold of the old was declining but not yet dying”.

¹⁹⁷ What makes Getachew’s article very interesting and revealing is that it exposes the prevailing attitude among the educated young and “modern”. He calls the society that the young inhabited an “emergent society”, and characterizes Ethiopia’s history before this “modern age” as a long history of “isolation”.

¹⁹⁸ This condition of “hyphenatedness” is examined by Gedamu Abereha and Solomon Deressa in an article “The hyphenated-Ethiopian” that was published in two long exquisitely written subsequent issues of *Addis Reporter*.

English monthly, *Addis Reporter*. They titled their piece, “The Hyphenated Ethiopian”. While, *The Hyphenated Ethiopian*, emphasized life experiences of those advanced in their education and professional middle-class people, hyphenatedness could be descriptive of the cultural identity of the Addis youth, as we will see in the course of our discussion. Gedamu and Solomon say,

The hyphenated Ethiopian ... caught within the frame of weddings (Ethiopian), endless cocktails (expatriates), funerals (Ethiopian), we have developed a human interdependence that has forced us to live on both borrowed time and money, and yet might prove a national problem for most and a nationally-lucrative business for the few who have the nose to smell money out of the innards of the dead and bowels of the earth (Gedamu and Solomon, 1969b: 11-12).

Hyphenated-ness of the modern urban subject, for Gedamu and Solomon, was the act of straddling between two worlds—the “Ethiopian” cultural world and the “foreign” (Western) cultural world. The “borrowed time” Gedamu and Solomon refer to here was the paradoxical existence of a country perceived as lagging behind in time in a modern technologically advanced world, and the contemporariness of its urbanized modern subjects who also had similar experiences with other moderns of the world.¹⁹⁹ The “borrowed money” they refer to was the “conspicuous consumption” of western products—material or cultural—that urban residents and “hyphenated Ethiopians” have become increasingly dependent on (Ibid). They depict young Ethiopians of advanced education, as the most typical “hyphenated” subject. They call this figure “a convoluted mass man, a jack- ‘o-lantern: a collage of a wily peasant, a wheeler-dealer, a jazz buff, a fan of Pele, a devout reader of ‘Time’ magazine, a Lasagna fancier and Scotch imbiber and a Willy Loman” (Ibid). For them educated Ethiopians exemplify “Ethiopia in transition,” occupying a unique place in their society and thus representing the future image of the country.

As stated above even if Gedamu and Solomon see the educated elite as the quintessential hyphenated Ethiopian, they were aware of the impact of this age of

¹⁹⁹ Gedamu and Solomon considered educated Ethiopians as representing what the future of Ethiopia would look like and “vicariously at least”, they argue, the educated Ethiopian, “truly live not in a given community, but in the world at large” (Ibid: 13). This was to emphasize that this group share similar experiences with other fellow “cosmopolitan” subjects in the rest of the world.

transition on the cultural identity of the urban youth. They argued the urban youth were engaged in “conspicuous consumption” of foreign products including food, clothes, and sanitary goods, albeit with varying degrees depending on the differentiation of their taste as well as income. Sugar, meat, alcoholic beverages, soap and sanitary products as well as “modern” clothing were consumed by urban dwellers in the country, which constituted 8% of the total population (according to a 1966 census they cite). They say, “...the imported *shash* which used to be a head gear of the upper-class women...has now gone down [in this age of conspicuous consumption] the economic ladder and is worn mostly by those who work for them” (Ibid). They note that growing integration of the country with the global capitalist market, impacted social and cultural life. They were conscious of the transformation of way of life, way of dress and cultural identity in general. In another instructive passage Gedamu and Solomon encapsulate the changing mood of the times they lived in as follows:

The period of the hyphenated Ethiopian is a period of tension—the tension of the transitional situation. An uneducated reaction to any situation is immediate whether the immediacy is one of moral relapse or reflex violence (Gedamu and Solomon, 1969a: 13).

The “tension” of the “period” for them was, thus, one that brought about a knee jerk reaction. The social and cultural changes this age wrought, was a different cultural identity that was in tension and conflict with old conventions. For Gedamu and Solomon this tension was to lead to the birth of a new era where the hyphenated Ethiopian and the period, s/he typifies and represents, becomes less “willy-nilly”, more solid and more grounded. They say: “a highly organized but static way of life is being replaced by what seems like a disorganized and dynamic way of life in Ethiopia” (Ibid: 14). For them, this transition period points to the way of the future, a future where the stasis of a highly organized “traditional” society was being replaced by the dynamism of modern existence. They describe modern existence as an “age of sanitation and research”²⁰⁰ and “a period of... drastic deviations from what was”, i.e.

²⁰⁰ Gedamu and Solomon do not define what they mean by “the age of sanitation and research”. But sanitation seems to be a reference to the association of sanitary and hygienic life with modern

from traditional existence (Ibid). They saw the country transitioning into another age (Ibid: 13-14).

This perception that a new age was on the horizon, was widely shared by various social and state elements in postwar Ethiopia. The imperial regime saw the birth of *Adisitu Ityopia* (The New Ethiopia) in this era of modern civilization. Despite the accolades the state media gave to the emperor as “the creator” of this era and bringer of modern civilization, it also propagated that Ethiopia could only achieve the heights of “modern civilization” that the west achieved through the investment of popular energy, hard work and technical education. The efforts of the emperor no matter how profound, were not enough in themselves to bring the country to the pinnacles of progress and material “prosperity” (“Christmas Message”, December 1958-January 1959: 61). Unlike Gedamu and Solomon, who appear to want to see their country march into progress by embracing the dynamism of modernity, or the student militants of HSIU who saw a transition into a revolutionary age, the imperial state saw transition into an age of material prosperity by maintaining Ethiopian “tradition”, its religion, respect for authority, discipline and good morals. A tendency among the urbanized and educated youth to “look down upon” tradition and Ethiopian culture was repeatedly reprimanded by the state media. To the contrary, modern education, it was said, should be able to make those in modern schools appreciate their own culture rather than disregarding it (“Timhirt waza ayidelem”, 1956: 1). The youth and those who attend schools were also rebuked for neglecting to observe age-old religious practices like fasting during lent and for ignoring “customs and traditions”. One *Mennen* editorial (published in March 1964) went as far as writing against “eating and drinking without limit”. It said such excess “breeds arrogance” and nurtures “bad-manners”. Modern education, the editorial claimed, “need not be a barrier that separates civilization and observance of [one’s own] cultural practices” (Asamere Mengesha, 1956: 6); (Atnafseged Yilma, 1952: 13).

existence. Similarly, “research” seems to be a reference to the association of “scientific knowledge” and rationality with the “modern age”.

There were differences in the aspirations of various groups as to what future the country should “transition” into. This was as much the case for the state as it was for the urban youth. The urban youth, as a group, might have all hoped for a “transition” into a more prosperous society. But despite sharing a common cultural identity, they were by no means an internally coherent and monolithic unit. For the student radicals, this “future” should be a revolutionary socialist one. For other sections of the youth who were not burning with the flames of socialist revolutionary change, a prosperous future can be achieved through the “imitation” of the west and its culture. And there were of course other diverse aspirations of the future that rarely made it in media reports, books and speeches.

The aspirations of the imperial state, and its visions of the future were clear - it wanted a country ruled by imperial power with subjects that respect its authority. It was interested in producing “obedient”, disciplined and hardworking young modern urban subjects who were “responsive to authority”, as Haile Selassie said in a speech to “All Students of Ethiopia” in December 1958 (“Christmas Message”, December 1958-January 1959: 61). The ultimate sin was disobedience to authority and condescension to custom and tradition. Obedience was described as a “true Ethiopian character”. As a *Mennen* editorial (June 1966) stated, “disobedience” to parents and disregard for ones’ own culture was identified as the most serious of vices. Ill-mannered youth who were disobedient were labeled “sanctuaries of contempt” (የንቀት ጎጆዎች) that must not be allowed to contaminate others with their “bad influences” (“Beewuqet ena besera meshashal kebahilina ketebay gar endihon yashal”, 1958: 1).²⁰¹ While the imperial state was a modernist state determined to entrench “modern civilization”, it tried to contain the disruptive cultural and social changes it brought to society. The state used various means to create respectable, obedient modern urban subjects to realize this vision. Shimeles Bonsa argues the imperial state in the postwar period had

²⁰¹This editorial, states: “The government is disappointed when seeing young people contaminated with bad behavior...spread their bad influence on others”. See also Wube Zegusquam “Bahilina limad yehager new wud” (Customs and traditions of our country are precious) *Mennen*, Tir 1961 EC (January 1969 GC), Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 28-29, about the need “to retain and respect one’s own [culture] and conducting oneself respectably”.

an objective of creating a modern urban and disciplined subject, cast in the spaces of the city - “the New Ethiopianness”.²⁰² It desired to create such a subject through “the instrumentality of urban planning, architecture, the building of transportation networks, public work projects, and administration” (Shimeles, 2011: 529). The other and perhaps more important “instrument” that was used to produce such a subject was modern education. Modern education was desired to produce youth that were not only well equipped with ideas, scientific knowledge and skills, but also those who “respect” and “modify” Ethiopian mores and traditions as the emperor himself put it (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967*: Sep. 23, 1963).²⁰³ As Haile Selassie made clear during the first graduation of the students of HSIU, the primary goal of university education was to serve as “an effective aid in combining modern education with our noble traditions”. He says, “it is Our earnest desire that this University shall jealously guard the wealth of our heritage and pass it on to the succeeding generation with all its richness and glory as reflected in modern education.” The emperor even goes as far as stating, “any foreign training not assessed in the light of one’s long-standing traditions, is detrimental to the well-being of the individual and the country, and in no way useful. We are confident, therefore, that... [HSIU] will produce useful citizens by inculcating these views in the minds of its students” (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967*: July 12, 1962).

According to Shimeles the “new postcolonial citizen fit for membership in a modernizing nation and state” (Shimeles, 2011: 529) must be a “respectable” citizenry that can “collectively imagine a sense of national identity” (ibid, 530). The qualities that the imperial state desired to obtain and instill among the youth were, however, undermined by enormous cultural changes occurring in the city space that produced a different kind of modern young urban subject, as we saw in the foregoing discussion. Key in this regard was the ways in which the imperial state went about creating a

²⁰² Shimeles uses this term “New Ethiopianness” from Dr. Minase Haile’s speech, Minister of State for Information and Tourism on the 25th year commemoration of Ethiopia’s Victory over Italy in 1958 (Shimeles, 2011: 529).

²⁰³ Haile Selassie in this speech Ethiopian culture and customs as being “more than ... the [mere] historical legacy of our past, [they] are characteristics of our Ethiopianness. We do not want our legacies and traditions to be lost. Our wish and desire is that education develop, enrich, and modify them”.

“respectable” modern young urban subject through didactic theatres, plays, and textbooks, as well as through an incessant media effort to discipline the young. The Ethiopian Patriotic Association under whose wing *Mennen* was published, that was also in charge of the activities of the Hager Fiker Theatre was one of the most important state-owned institutions of culture in the country. As one, Solomon Bekele, writing in April 1956 on behalf of the association remarks, the state’s main interest in theatre is to “remedy bad behavior and unscrupulous habits” through “instructive advice and criticism” (Solomon Bekele, 1948: 13). Editorials of newspapers such as *Mennen* came out with columns denouncing the new trends in urban sociality that involved, among other things, drinking, dancing and courting sex work. The youth were blamed for their wayward ways, their penchant for excessive drinking and were criticized for their loose morals and “headless consumption” and “extravagance” (Hamere Selassie Bete-Mariam, 1952: 15).²⁰⁴ The paper propagated discipline and hard work for the youth to be “useful” citizens beneficial to their government and society (“Yafetete Zinibale”, 1952: 4); (Atnafseged Yilma, 1952: 13). The extravagance, moral laxity, excessive drinking, smoking and indecent sexual behavior in the city space was associated with and blamed on the excesses of modern civilization (western culture) (Atnafseged Yilma, 1952: 13); (Ermias Kebede, 1952: 31-32) and the disposition of students who look down upon age old-customs and “traditions”.

Modern education was, therefore, a sort of a double bind for the postwar imperial state. On the one hand, the imperial state considered the expansion of modern education foundational to its modernist project, while others associated modernity with “foreign” culture that was full of negative influences (“Timhirt waza ayidelem”, 1956: 1). The prevailing perception of the imperial state towards the urban youth that were seen as revolting against “Ethiopian” customs, norms and mores, was perhaps described best by Negash Gebremariam writing in *Mennen* (1969). The “identity-crisis” of the youth, he argued, can be understood to be a result of their awkward in-between position in their society. He said, “[the young] swum in the sea of foreign

²⁰⁴ In this article the author castigates the urban young middle class for being “selfish”, unscrupulous, and “extravagant” in their consumption of goods like clothes, cars and their unrespectable behaviors like spending much of their time in brothels.

culture. Neither do they immerse [fully nor do they] cross” (Negash Gebremariam, 1961: 24-26). He associated the identity crisis of the youth as being a product of their *tiraz neteqinet* (half-baked), their superficial understanding of “foreign” culture and their inability to strike a balance between what they should take and what they should not (Ibid). The characterization of the postwar era by the state as an age of modern civilization was used by the Addis youth to re-configure, in their own terms, what it meant for them to be *modern*. In the following section, I discuss the crucial role women played in the postwar period in upsetting social conventions and ideas of public morality in Addis Ababa.²⁰⁵ I demonstrate, in this section, despite the state’s intentions, young women became the embodiments of revolt against the established conventions and norms of the imperial state and dominant societal cultural tendencies.

4.5 On “the miniskirt question”

The imperial state advocated girls’ education, and women taking up employment in various capacities. At the same time, it tried to control the ways women carried themselves in public and the ways in which they related to their male partners. As a poem by Hiwot Tesfaye, published in *Mennen* (January 1969) indicates, there was a particular kind of femaleness the imperial state desired to see in modern urbanized women. As the poem says, the “good woman” should respect her husband, should be calm and talk little, love her job and think about her reputation in society and at work (Hiwot Tesfaye, 1962: 1).²⁰⁶ This poem perhaps more than anything reflects the anxiety of the imperial state towards the fast-changing public sociality of women

²⁰⁵ Even if I focus on the capital, as a methodological choice, this is not in any way to suggest that challenges to social convention and changes in public morality were limited to Addis Ababa. In fact, there are many indications that these changes were also taking shape in other urban spaces in the country.

²⁰⁶

Who is She?

She is not talkative, she loves her job
 She is not spoiled, she respects her husband
 She has a good reputation
 She has been well-behaved all the years of her life
 She says ‘using the phone [from the office] for personal use is improper’
 She says a true woman does not idle around (*zewarinnnet*).

especially in urban centers. This anxiety became apparent at least by the 1950s. This could be seen in an article written ten years earlier (in February 1959) in *Mennen*.²⁰⁷ This article titled “Notice to Tourists” illustrates the anxiety of the imperial state about the social and cultural changes occurring especially in cities where modernization was most apparent. Even if the article was written in Amharic, a language largely inaccessible to “tourists” that the article claims to addressed itself to, “the notice” was essentially an instruction to the audience of *Mennen*, urban women, particularly those in Addis Ababa. The article lists the qualities and attributes of the “true” Ethiopian woman. It says: “Ethiopian women wear... their long dresses which stretches up to their knees, and put on their shawl and walk calmly with dignity. Ethiopian women laugh without showing their jaws... [They] smile with their mouths closed... Ethiopian women are decorous and self-respecting, and appreciate men who respect them. Ethiopian women are proud [and do not accept] casual invitations from men.” Dress code and restrained public demeanor, even timidity, were regarded commendable attributes of “respectable” women (Leturistoch masasebia” 1951: 56-57).

Addis Ababa became an important site where women became increasingly visible in the public sphere as students, workers, traders, artists, and professionals. The visibility of women in the public sphere generated a lively debate throughout the postwar period on what roles women should take in society. From among these debates on the position of women in their society, if there was any single issue that could encapsulate the role of women being at the core of the undermining of the normative structure of the imperial system and its notions of *chewannet* (respectability) in this period, it was certainly the debate on the miniskirt. The miniskirt debate was essentially about the public conduct of women. It was a contentious debate occurring in press circles that also riled up the emotions of the general public. In the following pages the debates on the meaning of the miniskirt and its implications on the cultural identity of women in urban centers will be explored.

²⁰⁷ *Mennen* was also the name of the most prestigious all-girls school established in 1931 (Tebeje, 2018: 126) next to the Haile Selassie’s Genete Leul Palace, while later in the 1960s became the HSIU. The magazine, *Mennen* was founded in 1955 following the 25th silver jubilee of the coronation of Haile Selassie I.

The miniskirt served as the fault line where the public sociality of women in urban space was debated. The debate was a response to the ways in which women started negotiating their place and definition in their society. Along with their prescribed role as the custodians of a hygienic and sanitary life, women were socialized and instructed to become the embodiments of the moral sanctity of their society. More often than not, women wearing the miniskirt were accused of violating the decorum of respectability. They were disparaged by outspoken male (and women) critics that took it upon themselves to be guardians of “Ethiopian culture”. The debate was joined, even by parliamentarians like Rabia Abdelqadir. Rabia, denounced the miniskirt as indecent and suggestive and called it “nude exhibitionism” (ራቂታቸውን ሲኒማ እያሳዩ መሄድ). She called for it to be outlawed arguing that it was encouraging men to make sexual advances and had been a cause for the break-up of marriages and resultant family instability (Terefe Asrat, 1961: 17 & 20-21).²⁰⁸ Wearing the miniskirt was seen by its zealous critics as sacrilegious and a violation of Ethiopian norms of *chewannet*. The debate was centered on the woman’s body as the site of social control.²⁰⁹

The miniskirt’s prevalence in the spaces of the city was widespread in the late 1960s. Addis Reporter called it “The new look of Addis Ababa” (Worq Aferahu Kebede “, 1969: 7-9). The debate that was raging in the late 1960s attracted lots of opinion pieces in

²⁰⁸ See also concern about perceived increase in divorce reported in *Mennen* in “Yezendirow miazia wer bizu gabicha tefetsemebet” (1953: 7 and 8), “yefichiw mugit economy ayigodam yihon?” (1962: 2) and Elleni Fetene (1962: 13-15).

²⁰⁹ The woman’s body as a site of social control has been part of many scholarly engagements in the African continent. See for instance Karen Transberg Hansen’s, “Dressing Dangerously” (2004: 166-185) and Jean Allman’s “Let Your Fashion be in Line with Our Ghanaian Costume” (2004: 144-165). In Allman’s account of a regional contest (between Northern and Southern Ghana, in the postcolonial period) she shows that the female body represents the “principal” site of social control. Especially after colonialism the binary discourse of the clothed South and the “nude” north carried a gendered overtone and was delivered in nationalist rhetoric of the “oneness” of a modern nationalist Ghana according to Allman (2004: 148). Allman, shows that women and marginal social groups as important sites of social control and scrutiny. Hansen’s focus is more on the gendered inequality embedded in dressing and cloth and the “differential regulation of the gendered body” by society (2004: 167). She questions the reason why there were attempts to ban miniskirts in Zambia since independence. She emphasizes that the proposed ban on miniskirts was an attempt towards controlling the roles of women and their sexuality in Zambian society by patriarchy, which associated miniskirts with women’s disobedience, rebelliousness and moral laxity (2004: 172). The debate to ban the miniskirt in the first period was, like in the case of Ethiopia was clothed in a nationalist anti-western discourse of cultural nationalism that associated miniskirts more with western culture.

the print media both in Amharic and English. *Addis Reporter* was one of the papers that came out with favorable op-eds and positions rejecting the ideas of the critiques of the miniskirt as fanatical. Getachew Haile of *Addis Reporter* even went as far as calling miniskirt wearers “avant-garde girls”, insinuating that they were innovators and trailblazers in the cultural transformation of their country. He said, “...it is the considered opinion of *Addis Reporter* that the avant-garde girls of the country should be left alone to decide how and how not to cover up their pre-Fall selves” (Getachew Haile, 1969: 5). In addition to those ‘for’ or ‘against’ the miniskirt, there were also those who saw the miniskirt as part of the “inevitable” process of social change and cultural evolution: one brought forth by the forward march into “modernity” and “progress” (Ibid).

Those who were opposed to the miniskirt were particularly vicious in their attacks of miniskirt wearing women and considered the practice “un-Ethiopian” and thus an affront to Ethiopian culture (“Anbabiyan min yilalu”, 1962: 2-3).²¹⁰ The miniskirt riled up public emotion so much so that it led to the establishment of a voluntary association that called itself yebahil atebabeq kommite (Cultural Protection Committee). Its purpose, as stated in the committee’s communiqué and call for action, was to rid “our country of the sudden penetration of corrupt cultural practices, which are infecting [harmonious] social life” (Birhanu Zerihun, 1962:19). The committee set up its office on the premises of The Ethiopian Patriotic Association, the premier institution established to protect and promote Ethiopian culture, history and nationalism since the prewar period.²¹¹ The goal of the committee was to see to it that legal action was taken to ban the wearing of the miniskirt, even if the zeal to make dress a legal matter was not endorsed even by all strident critiques of the miniskirt. As one such critique of the fury over the miniskirt, Elleni Fetene, a *Mennen* columnist argued, if wearing the miniskirt becomes a subject of the law, then the law must also regulate dress code for men (Elleni Fetene, 1963: 20-21); (“Maksis ibdet naw?”, 1962:

²¹⁰ While many of the readers’ comments are critical of the miniskirt, a few argue that the issue is trivial and should not have attracted the attention it is getting in the media and the public.

²¹¹ Solomon Bekele “tiyatir ena tiqimu” (Theatre and its value), *Mennen*, Miazia 1948 EC (April 1956 GC), Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 13.

8).²¹² The call for legal action was also enthusiastically opposed by *Addis Reporter*, which became the defender of miniskirt wearers and ridiculed the scare of invasion by alien culture by those who saw themselves as guardians of Ethiopian culture and tradition.²¹³

Despite opposition, the miniskirt became a popular dress among thousands of young women. But its popularity among the capital's youth was seen by its critiques as an epitome of moral crisis and decadence.²¹⁴ The militancy of some went as far as ratifying the whipping of miniskirt wearers. Some associated the miniskirt with loss of self-respect. As one Megersa Beri from Addis Ababa charged, "we must vote for a candidate who will condemn these unscrupulous apes [miniskirt wearers] and clean the Addis streets and restore human dignity" ("More on Minis", 1969: 3); (Worq Aferahu Kebede, 1969: 7-9).²¹⁵ Beyond its impropriety, the miniskirt was denounced (Birhanu Zerihun, 1962: 19-20, p. 19)²¹⁶ as a practice that would lead to the "degeneration of the proud Ethiopian culture" (Worq Aferahu Kebede, 1969: 7-9)²¹⁷ and was seen by its critics as a reflection of a broader malaise in Ethiopian urban society. The miniskirt was presented as a "crisis" brought to the country by modern civilization. It was flagged as the most typical illustration of "cultural invasion" that was considered to be plaguing the country, particularly its younger generation ("Anbabiyan min yilalu", 1962: 2-3).

The miniskirt's popularity had a mixed reception in the quarters of the state. For some in the Patriotic Association of Ethiopia that hosted the Cultural Protection Committee,

²¹² In this issue *Mennen* rejects making dress a matter of the law, even if it disparagingly refers to the miniskirt as "dwarf skirt" (*denk qemis*) that "exposes the part of the body that should remain covered".

²¹³ See subsequent discussion.

²¹⁴ See for instance comments in *Addis Reporter's* "Reader's Corner" (1969: 3).

²¹⁵ Cited in Worq Aferahu, Hirut Befekadu, a young professional woman claims that "those who are... [wearing the miniskirt] are only paving the way for the Ethiopian culture to go down-hills" (7).

²¹⁶ Here the miniskirt is derogatively labeled by Birhanu Zerihun, a popular journalist and literary figure, as "quntsil qemis" (to mean *half a dress*), a description that remained in use for some time in *Mennen*.

²¹⁷ Worq Aferahu cites the official daily paper, *Addis Zemen* as well as *Voice of Ethiopia*. He reports: "When the mini-question was raging in Addis, the daily *Addis Zemen* had warned in an editorial: "The mini-skirt is but the first step which will lead to nudes walking on the streets." The now-defunct *Voice of Ethiopia* cautioned: "Those who are defending the mini-skirt are advocating the degeneration of the proud Ethiopian culture." (7).

the popularity of the miniskirt was disconcerting as it was perceived as a reflection of a youth culture with disregard for Ethiopian customs and ways of dress and tradition. For others within the imperial state, who were keen on promoting the country's image as a nation that "arrived" in modern civilization, the miniskirt might not have been a serious enough threat to warrant legal action. For instance, the crown sponsored annual beauty contests in public venues including Haile Selassie I Theatre, and Haile Selassie I University.²¹⁸ Such events were seen by some in the state as public spectacles that showcase the country's headways into modernity (Terefe Asrat, 1961: 17 & 20-21). The first of these contests was called "embarrassing" by *Adisitua Ityopia*, which criticized the beauty pageant as "un-Ethiopian" and without value to the "civilization" and "economic improvement" of the country ("Tizibt yemelabet mata", 1948: 12-13). Seyoum Gizaw of *Mennen*, on the contrary, criticized the article by *Adisitua Ityopia* and hails beauty pageants for boosting the self-esteem, confidence as well as personal wellbeing and health of women. He argued that beauty contests also help women to keep themselves "fit", "slim" and "beautiful". This, he says, is one of the ways in which women can "keep their husbands" and remain attractive to them (ibid).

Similarly, the conflicting perceptions within the state and between the state media (between the Amharic press such as *Mennen* or *Addis Zemen* and the English media, *Addis Reporter*), with regards to the miniskirt, is a reflection that the state was not an internally coherent institution always consistent in its narrative. It also exposes the contradictions inherent in the state's project of modernity, which saw itself, simultaneously as the advocate of modern civilization, and the protector of the cultural authenticity of the nation (its customs and traditions). This contradiction in the narratives and interests of the state, were accentuated by its interest in crafting and maintaining a certain idea of womanhood in urban society. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the state believed and advocated that women's worth rests

²¹⁸ The imperial government organized in Haile Selassie I Theatre annual beauty contest programs. See for instance *Mennen*, Meskerem 1956 EC (September 1963), Vol. 7, No. 12, pp. 5 and 6. Pictures showing beauty contest held in the premier institution of culture of the time, Haile Selassie I Theatre ("Yehuletegnaw amet qunjina wudidir", 1957: 16-17 and 32).

on their ability to perform their roles as a mother (custodian of family care) and a wife, and thus it prepared women for marriage and instructed them to live under the tutelage and authority of men. This ideal of the “true” woman that was central to the regime’s desire of creating modern urban young women subjects had to coexist with modern ideas of women’s beauty and women’s increasing role in the public sphere as students, employees, workers and professionals. In short, what women became and made themselves to be in public spaces, sometimes contradicted with what the state desired them to be, highlighting the paradoxes of the imperial modernist project.

The miniskirt debate was, thus symptomatic of a larger dispute about the role of women in postwar society and their public comportment. The opposition against the miniskirt was not limited to some elements of state power, such as its institutions of culture and the media. Rather, the increasing visibility of women in the urban sphere: in schools, in the state bureaucracy and the workforce seems to have generated anxiety within postwar society as well. Whether women would continue to perform their traditional and “natural” roles was a cause of concern for those (especially men) who worried about the obligation women had in maintaining “social harmony” and the “stability of the family” (Terefe Asrat, 1961: 17 & 20-21); (“Keazegaju”, 1948: 5). The expectation that women were and must continue to be the embodiments of the moral sanctity of their society meant that their public conduct and their social roles must be regulated. What they wore, how they socialized and what roles they played at home and in public, were all under the gaze of dominant interests in society, both imperial and patriarchal.

Many times, such instinct for regulation prompted state action to reaffirm the “historic” social position of women, as discussed already. Those elements in postwar society who were suspicious of the increasing public visibility of women and the changes in their public sociality, used the media to either put them *back in line* or chastise and shame them for their independent streak. For instance, working women were accused of idling in the office space, of “laziness”, wasteful dawdling

(*zewarinnnet*), partying, and drinking (Asaminew Gebrewold, 1961: 22-24).²¹⁹ It is in a response to such fears and anxieties that the state, as well as elements in society, tried to put a check on the public conduct of women and tried to re-inscribe their socially accepted roles as mothers and caretakers of the family (Asaminew Gebrewold: 14-15).²²⁰ Therefore, working women, miniskirt-wearing women, sex workers, and women who were outgoing, all unsettled “a vision of idle frail womanhood” in postwar Addis Ababa.²²¹ This is why developments as diverse as the expansion of sex work, women wearing the miniskirt, or women engaged in activities that were deemed improper and unrespectable such as drinking alcohol and smoking, were seen as forms of disobedience. The strictures put forth by the imperial state and the normative structure of the dominant social order condemned such practices and tried to contain them throughout the postwar period (“Min hono yihon”, 1966: 13).²²²

The popularity of the miniskirt among urban young women in the capital and other cities in the provinces meant that the miniskirt also had its defenders. The miniskirt, “The New Look of Addis” became prevalent among young ladies in the capital (Getachew Haile, 1969: 18); (Worq Aferahu Kebede, 1969: 7-9)²²³, and “the miniskirt invasion” was such that it was making its way even into small provincial towns by the

²¹⁹ The reknowned journalist Asaminew Gebrewold in this article reports interviews he conducted with men about what their attitude towards workingwomen Asaminew Gebrewold, shows that all men that he talked to said that working women “should know their rightful place in society” and they should recognize and respect that “the man is the head of the household. Illustrations with captions accompany the report showing workingwomen in different situations. They show woman dancing, woman drinking a lot and missing work, woman at work speaking over the phone for over an hour etc. In another article, Asaminew entitled “Competing with breastfeeding” (1961: 14-15) scolds women for failing on their household responsibilities like breast-feeding their babies. He instructs women to spend more time at home and claims that workingwomen and urban women are absconding on their obligations because they are outgoing and spend a lot more time than they should outside their homes. Another regular contributor to Mennen, Abiy Mekuria associates the proliferation of beauty salons and the use of cosmetics with cultural invasion by the west and indecency (“Abiy Mekuria”, 1961: 11-13).

²²⁰ A repeated shaming of women as *zewari* (n. *zewarinnnet*) Amharic for idling and dawdling is found in many such reports. *Zewarinnnet* was associated with laziness and indecency and thus considered unwomanly. Another such term repeatedly used to castigate woman is *qebet* (n. *qebettinet*). The parliamentarian Rabia Abdelqadir for instance refers to miniskirt wearing women as *qebet*. *Qebet* is associated with showing inappropriate behavior in front of men, equated with making sexual advances or indecency (Rabia Abdelqadir, interview, in Terefe Asrat, 1961:17 & 20-21).

²²¹ See Levine (2004: 159) for discussion on similar anxieties elsewhere.

²²² See also the foregoing discussion on the moral laxity of the urban youth.

²²³ In this article to show that the mini and its variants were here to stay Worq Aferahu Kebede says, “Wait around until the Micro-micro-mini and ‘Hello Officer’ mini get to Addis. And then, oh my God, what about the ‘Oh my God, mini?’ (9).

1970s. Young women wearing the miniskirt and fashion enthusiasts were given a name, “Jolly-Jacks” and their endeavors “Jolly-Jackism” (Muluye Bezabih, personal interview, 2017 January 8); (Tejitu Gebre Medhin, Azeb Desta and Mimi Eshetu, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21). After it hit the streets of Addis in the second half of the 1960s, it went on to invade offices, campuses and other spaces in the city. As Worq Aferahu Kebede of *Addis Reporter* notes, “The local miniskirt revolution started on the streets of Addis two years ago [in 1967] ... At first people laughed it off away: ‘Ah the ferenjis²²⁴... But then the mini-skirt invaded the different spaces of the city—offices and campuses. Ethiopian girls began showing first their knees and then their thighs, and it was no longer a laughing matter” (Worq Aferahu Kebede, 1969: 7-9).

Unlike *Mennen’s* largely disparaging position towards the miniskirt that it derogatively referred to as *quntsil kemis* (lit. half a dress), *Addis Reporter* consistently defended it.²²⁵ In a short commentary titled “Talking in Reverse,” *Addis Reporter* stated, “talking of mini-skirts...—it is the considered opinion of *Addis Reporter* that the avant-garde girls of the country should be left alone to decide how and how not to cover up their pre-Fall selves” (“Talking in Reverse”, 1969: 5). As it becomes apparent from this *official* position of the magazine, not only did the paper-defend women wearing the mini-skirt, it also saw them as “avant-garde”. The portrayal of miniskirt wearing women as avant-garde was not an accident; it is consistent with the view of *Addis Reporter* that “western culture” was vital for social advancement and, therefore, should be welcomed in an “undeveloped” society like Ethiopia, which needed innovative ideas and cultural artifacts from the outside. Gedamu Abereha and Solomon Deressa criticized those who complained about “cultural invasion” for having “a flair for ritual” (Gedamu and Solomon, 1969b: 11). They argued the “undeveloped

²²⁴ Amharic term for ‘white people’.

²²⁵ *Addis Reporter* defended miniskirt wearers and came out with denouncing remarks against the Dire Dawa police, who arrested a young lady for wearing the miniskirt (“Dire Dawa cops”, 1969: 10). Despite its defense of the miniskirt, however, *Addis Reporter* did not come up with opinion pieces written by women about the miniskirt, with the exception of women commenting on the debate that appeared on its “readers corner”. In fact, women and issues like the miniskirt concerning women were male centric. This comes out very clearly when we read for instance Getachew Haile’s pieces on the miniskirt. Getachew became almost the voice of *Addis Reporter* when it comes to the defense of the miniskirt. Typical of this male-centric view he says, “woman’s attitude towards fashion seems to be her desire to get recognition by man and save him from his boring enemy: monotony” (Getachew Haile, 1969: 18).

world”, to which Ethiopia belongs, inhabited a “transitional situation”, which should and will inevitably be transformed by outside cultural influences (Gedamu and Solomon, 1969a 13 and 14). Many in the 1960s and 70s shared their view.

Addis Reporter understood the vital place that the “mini-question” had in the broader debate on how to deal with the question of cultural change and modernity. Contrary to the views of the “vernacular press”, the magazine came out strongly against those who “bully” miniskirt wearers. In one of its issues, it said, “especially in this enlightened age of female emancipation it is wrong to bully women into a state of permanent submission to the petty whims of certain conservative males” (“The Week’s Fanatics”, 1969: 6).²²⁶ In another commentary, *Addis Reporter* argued that the anxiety among sections of society that foreign influence is a threat to the preservation of Ethiopian cultural identity is problematic as it is a call for “return” to old traditions and customs. It said, “In this enlightened age of ours... [and] in this age of driving internationalism certain cultural fanatics must be just waking up from 3,000 years of blissful slumber. Since this country is part and parcel of the rest of the world, she must leave her doors wide open to all foreign influences—and, of course, may the most vital culture win” (Ibid).

Young women wearing the miniskirt continued to increase despite assault by vigilante groups and even police arrest (“Dire Dawa cops”, 1969: 10); (Ras Work Mengesha, 1969: 3); (Azeb Desta, in group discussion, 2015 March 21). As one of them responding to the flurry of criticisms and intimidations of miniskirt wearers in the print media said, if there is anyone who is not willing to see women wearing miniskirts he can “emigrate to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia” (“2 Rings, 2 Husbands”, 1969: 8).²²⁷ Another woman wondered why Ethiopian men were so preoccupied with women wearing the miniskirts, which she said was a simple “change of convention in style” and a “slight”

²²⁶ In this commentary *Addis Reporter* insists that “to argue—as some fanatic writers have been arguing—...everything foreign is bad is to advocate return to the ancient age of isolation” and emphasizes the useful things that Ethiopia must take from foreign cultures.

²²⁷ Here another miniskirt wearing young lady who is mocking one Derebachew Gemechu for his disparaging remarks in one of the Amharic newspapers of the time, *Ya Ityopia Dimts* about the miniskirt, reported to have said in reaction “Poor dear, why doesn’t he emigrate to Djeddah, Saudi Arabia, you know”.

expression of the “emancipation” of women. She wondered, “Are they [Ethiopian men] so exhausted of ideas that they must use the same old clichés?” (“Miss S.Y.D from Addis Ababa”, 1969: 3).

In spite of the miniskirt’s condemnation as “indecent”, “suggestive”, “un-Ethiopian” and as a sign of “degeneration” (“‘New Look’ Arouses Comments”, 1969: 3); (“2 Rings, 2 Husbands”, 1969: 8), women wearing miniskirts saw it as a new way of expressing themselves and as a way of negotiating their position in society by deciding to wear what they want. “Worn with the right stockings and shoes, the miniskirt is just as fit and proper as anything else” Salome Yilma, a Nazareth School student told *Addis Reporter*. One, Azeb Zera Yohannes announced “it [the miniskirt] is beautiful and graceful for young slim girls” (Worq Aferahu Kebede, 1969: 7-9). “Mini-clad-girls” not only saw the miniskirt as “appropriate” and befitting of Ethiopian young females and their looks, some like Azeb, even saw it as a “graceful” attire (Musisi, 2001: 171-2).²²⁸ Indeed women “transgressed” “imagined” boundaries and social conventions to recreate and redefine themselves and their position in society. The wearing of the miniskirt was one such occasion that enabled women to push back against strict boundaries of respectability that undermined their independence and threatened to contain their self-activity. By wearing the miniskirt, urban women simultaneously resisted attempts at defining what type of public persona they should have and carved a new way of self-expression for themselves. In the words of one of them, while society saw women wearing the miniskirt as “corrupting [Ethiopian] culture, we [young women] saw it as a way of liberating ourselves” from the strictures of social convention in postwar Addis Ababa that suffocated women (Azeb Desta, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21).

The urban youth in the postwar period saw themselves as occupying a life world and cultural milieu very different from the older generation. It was in this context that the miniskirt became popularized in the late 1960s and 70s in Addis Ababa and other urban centers. Wearing the miniskirt became one of the new ways of being a modern

²²⁸ As Musisi in her study of women in Kampala-Kibuga notes, “social censure” and vicious criticism does not necessarily discourage women from social practices to “reclaim” their bodies.

woman. Initiation into modern urban womanhood in postwar Addis Ababa involved some kind of iconoclasm of cultural codes about 'decency' and 'respectability'. It was in an attempt to re-define the meaning of being a modern young woman, that women in postwar Addis Ababa experimented with new cultural artifacts like the miniskirt. It was a reflection of young Ethiopians trying to negotiate their place in society. Or in the words of Getachew Haile writing for *Addis Reporter*, the miniskirt was one way in which the young tried to "mould [sic] their ... future" by "imitating" forms from outside sources (Getachew Haile, 1969: 13-14). By wearing the miniskirt, women not only asserted "their rights" as adults who should be allowed to wear what they like and what they consider fitting to their desire, but they also used it as a way of "self-expression" and freedom (Azeb Desta, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21) from the constraints put forth by the dominant social order.

As we have already seen, women's invasion of urban space was a pervasive phenomenon, which was not limited to the miniskirt. As the 60s wore off, women also encroached sites like the nightclub, the discotheque and other spaces that were considered out of bounds for them. Women took up roles as students, workers, as traffic police, professionals etc. Some roles were more contested than others, and some expressions of public sociality became more controversial than others. The 1960s saw the visibility of women and their steady ascendancy in the public life of Addis Ababa. By wearing the miniskirt, women conflicted with accepted norms (Getachew Haile, 1969: 19) of women's respectability, and in effect defied social conventions that saw women as custodians of the moral sanctity of their society and the cultural "authenticity" of the nation (*Voice of Ethiopia* cited in Worq Aferahu Kebede, 1969: 7-9).²²⁹

Haile Selassie talked about "Modern Ethiopianism" to emphasize the centrality of a modern system of government and education to expand the basis of "modern civilization" and guarantee material progress (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial*

²²⁹ This editorial of the *Voice of Ethiopia* reportedly stated, "Those who are defending the mini-skirt are advocating the degeneration of the proud Ethiopian culture."

Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967: Nov. 2, 1961).²³⁰ The attempt to instruct how women live and carry themselves in public, as well as what kind of social roles they should play in an increasingly modernizing urban contexts, was part of the imperial state's desire to create "addisu Ityopiawinnet" (the new Ethiopianness") by using the female body as a site of social control. Since women were considered custodians of family care and the moral sanctity of society whose onus it was to keep social harmony and the stability of marriage and the family, regulating their public conduct was seen as central to this project of the New Ethiopianness. For an imperial state that tried to find a balance between launching modern civilization full-scale while keeping an 'Ethiopian' cultural identity, regulating the social roles and public identity of women in particular, and the youth in general, was crucial to the creation of the *New Ethiopianness*.

Women's roles in their daily social practices in times of changing public sociality and morality was crucial in structuring the cultural and political identity of the urban youth. However, as discussed in this chapter, the postwar imperial state was not just interested in regulating women, but used sports, the media, institutions of culture like theatre, the educational system as well as city planning, architecture and public works, to create a respectable modern urban young subject. It regulated public behavior and campaigned against moral laxity, cultural degeneration and even "excessive modernism" (Katrin Bromber, 2012: 78). The changing public sociality of the urban youth, their social practices in the spaces of the city and their changing cultural identity and self-consciousness provided an occasion for a paradigmatic questioning of the normative structure of the postwar imperial order in the capital. Social conventions of the imperial order, its strict social hierarchy built around ideas of "marriage between equals", its notions of *chewannet* ("respectability") that discouraged open courting between young males and females, its scorn for urban sociality involving public café life, social drinking, sex work, partying and public

²³⁰ See also discussion on "Modern Ethiopianism" in Katrin Bromber (2012: 78). Bromber argues, this notion "apart from being a modernist project, it was first and foremost a nationalist project with ideological implications, such as; defining the highland culture as a benchmark." However, there is nothing in the emperor's speech that alludes to defining Ethiopian modern nationalism on the basis of "highland culture" and that "Modern Ethiopianism" is about that concern.

displays of affection, all came under attack by the daily social practices of the urban youth. The everyday practices of the urban youth—particularly in the profane spaces of Wube Bereha, Serategna Sefer and the city center in general— subverted these social conventions and brought critique to bear on its normative foundations. In these postwar decades, social conventions and its codes of respectability were on trial in Addis Ababa. The popular protests of 1974 occurred in the context of these social and cultural formations, of the growing self-consciousness of the youth, as well as in the context of paradigmatic transformations in the cultural economy and cultural life of the capital.

Chapter Five

Debates on Modernity: Towards a theory of *zemenawinnet* as popular social practice in postwar Addis Ababa

This chapter is about modernity as a key cultural phenomenon in subject formation in postwar Addis Ababa. The formativeness of modernity in this period was mediated by the modernist projects of the postwar imperial state. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, postwar Addis Ababa was a product of the state's project of modernization as well as popular and social ingenuity of its residents and their social practices. The main interest of this chapter is to posit a theory of modernity as an experiential practice, or *praxis of modernity*. Two of the first subsequent sub-chapters discuss theories of modernity propounded by scholars elsewhere and those who work on Ethiopia. The third section sets out to discuss what is sometimes called the tradition vs. modernity debate in public discourse by using discussions in *Mennen* and *Addis Reporter* published in the postwar period. This section also examines selected speeches of the emperor as vignettes that informed this debate. After laying out various theories, perspectives and understandings of modernity in and outside of Ethiopia that have been part of scholarly and media discussions in Ethiopia, I posit a theory of modernity to understand the phenomenon as a social and popular practice in postwar Addis Ababa. In an attempt to understand subject formation in the capital in this particular historical period, I adopt a conception of *modernity as practice* in the last section of the chapter. While the chapter in general shows that the meanings attached to the modern or modernity in this period were variegated, the chapter ends with a theory of modernity as practice that will inform subsequent chapters of this study. This section draws from two Amharic and Geez scholars of the first half of the last century, Desta Teklewold and Kidane Wold Kifle, to argue that modernity (*zemenawinnet* in Amharic) should be understood as a temporally and spatially specific phenomena. It highlights *zemenawinnet* as a popular social practice that was key in the formation of subjects in the postwar period.

Desta Teklewold defines *zemenawi* (ዘመናዊ)—the modern as ዘመን የወለደው “born of a time” (Desta Tekle Wolde, 1962: 496). By conceiving *zemenawinnet* as a practice enunciated in the context of the city, this study departs from the common conception of modernity as a foreign, ready-made *ideal* brought to Ethiopia from outside. The theory of modernity posited and explicated in the current and the two following chapters adheres to an understanding of the phenomenon as one created in a particular spatio-temporal context. Rather than seeing modernity as an *ideal*, it focuses on its history and vintage in a particular spatial context. As will be shown in the last part of this chapter, empirical studies elsewhere have shown that “the modern” was a product of a “regime of circulation” and a function of interlocking connections (Subrahmanyam, S. 2010). For this study, modernity is a story of *emergence* rather than of *origins*. In this sense, modernity is understood neither as an imitation of a “western modern” form, nor as an authentically Ethiopian modern form. It is conceived as a product of a spatio-temporal context (postwar Addis Ababa/Ethiopia) that emerged from a globally staged “regime of circulation” of cultural artifacts both from home and abroad. This chapter shows that the tradition vs. modernity debate came to carry a huge social currency in the postwar period where state projects of modernization provided the condition of possibility for questions of what is modern and its relationship with “Ethiopian culture,” to gain poignancy. The expansion of educational institutions, the mass media (mainly audio and print), as well as other infrastructural developments facilitated the creation of a public debate on the meaning of *zemenawinnet* and its relationship with *bahil* (‘Ethiopian culture’). It is within this context, I argue, *zemenawinnet* was a public good (part of popular social practice) beyond elite concerns in the postwar period, especially in the post 1950s period.

5.1 Notes on theories of modernity

In his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Jürgen Habermas, one of the most influential western theorists of modernity defends the universal efficacy of “the project” of the modern and the philosophical foundations that the Enlightenment

provided to it. He laments that the notion of modernity has been emptied out of its “cultural” meaning as a result of the popularization of the conception of “modernization” in the 1950s. This conception, Habermas contends, has functionalized modernity, by “dissociating” it from its “European origins”, its “cultural” import and limiting it to “social scientific functionalism” that bracketed and narrowed its meaning to economic advancement (Habermas, 1990: 2 and 3). For Habermas, modernity is “self-conscious” and it creates its own “normativity out of itself”. The modern period in the history of Europe, he says, came about with its own type of thinking and logic that was informed by the history of Europe since the 15th century (ibid: 7). It created a new form of thinking anchored around the idea of *the Subject*. The emergence of *the Subject* with modernity as autonomous and rational, as a result of the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, provided a historical foundation for modernity as a cultural and intellectual phenomenon (ibid: 17).

Since the late 1980s, such a conception that perceives Europe as the source and origin of modernity has been under criticism by some scholars from the non-European and western world as Eurocentric. The assumption that “the modern” is necessarily western and that everyone else receives modernity from the source (Chatterjee, 1997: 14), has been attacked by scholars like Arjun Appadurai who insisted on using the notion of “plural” “alternative modernities” to argue that different societies experience modernity differently (Ferguson, 2005: 166),²³¹ and that there are “multiple”, alternative modernities in the global scale. For Appadurai, “Euro-colonial” expansion created the condition for modernity to flourish in different parts of the world in what is called “the early modern period”, heralding western global hegemony (Appadurai, 1990:2). This sets the stage for a “new global cultural economy,” which has to be conceptualized as a “complex, overlapping, disjunctive order” (ibid: 6) that

²³¹ Ferguson in *Expectations of Modernity* (1997: 251-252) also notes that “scholars have ... [in the 1990s] arrived ... [at] the realization that global modernity is characterized not by a simple, Eurocentric uniformity but by coexisting and complex sociocultural alternatives... and that the successful negotiation of it may hinge less on mastering a unitary set of “modern” social and cultural forms than on managing to negotiate a dense bush of contemporary variants in the art and struggle of living.”

produced “alternative modernities” in different contexts.²³² The notion of alternative modernities as well as the view that different societies experienced modernity differently and what is “modernity” to one may not be “modernity” to another (Chatterjee, 1997:3), allowed for the appreciation of the “plurality” and historical specificity of the modern experience (Trouillot, 2002: 224-225).

In *The Black Atlantic* Paul Gilroy notes that impassioned defenders of modernity (such as Marshal Berman and Jürgen Habermas) who have “deep faith in the democratic potential of modernity” conceive it, to a large part, as a positive story of progress. Gilroy says, “Modernity is understood as a distinct configuration with its own spatial and temporal characteristics defined, above all, through the consciousness of novelty that surrounds the emergence of civil society, the modern state, and industrial capitalism... Modernity is apprehended through its counter-discourses and often defended solely through its counterfactual elements”. He observes that even when such writers acknowledge the “histories of barbarity” of modernity “yet their analyses [of modernity] remain substantially unaffected by [these histories]” (Gilroy, 1993: 49). Even within the west, Gilroy demonstrates that modernity has a multi-colored history. By focusing on the experiences of Black Diaspora communities, he shows “the modern experience” is not only “varied” and “discontinuous” but also “decentered and inescapably plural” (Gilroy, 1993: 46). Modernity’s use as a theoretical concept has also been criticized for its tendency to carry a metaphysical overtone, what Robin Kelley called, the “modernist sublime” with a universal theory. Kelley argues, “The sublime... is something that has to be evoked, not described”. It is something that lacks concreteness and determinacy and as all sublime things, Modernity with capital “M”, he asserts, is “beyond actual delimitation... [similar to] ‘things’ such as God or terror, nature, justice, or love” (Kelly, 2002: 262).

²³² The Camaroff’s similarly argue that modernity despite its origins in Europe also saw the birth of “new political cultures... from countless couplings of “local” and “global” worlds, from intersecting histories that refocused European values and intentions—thus rerouting, if not reversing, the march of modernity” (Camaroff, 1993: xii).

Such notions of modernity have been useful in showing “the complexity of local variation in the patterns of modernity” (Mitchell, 2002: 2). However, at the same time, the notion of alternative modernities should not be “a way of” “not talking about” “worsening” global hierarchies and economic inequalities that western hegemony and its projections of the modern created (Ferguson, 180); (2002: 248).²³³ This is because whatever its content and variations may be, any ‘modern’ formation has been mediated by the global economic and cultural dominance of the west in the “modern era”. Moreover, as Timothy Mitchell notes, even the notion of alternative modernities, despite its emphasis on the variegated experiences of the phenomena, essentially conceptualizes modernity universally as having a “singular logic or rationality” (ibid).²³⁴ In addition to the need for appreciating the variations of experiences of modernity in different parts of the world and the contingent nature of what it means to be modern in different locales and times, Mitchell points in the direction of an understanding of modernity that should not be assumed to have a single universal logic or rationality.

On the other hand, however, many, if not most, theorists agree on the idea that the notion of modernity comes with its own type of thinking and logic about time (Habermas, 7; Andreas, 2013: 1 and 2). One such essence attached to modernity is that it always entails rapture from the past. Even skeptics of a Universalist modernity see it as rapture. Despite its “many versions” the concept of modernity, Latour argues, always signifies “the passage of time...[and] designates a new regime, ... a rapture” (Latour, 1993: 10). Donald Donham maintains, “to invoke the modern involves a particular rhetorical stance and a way of experiencing time and historicity, with a certain structure of progressive expectations for the future. The past is separated from the present and expectations are reoriented to the future” (Donham, 2002: 244). Along the same line, John and Jean Camaroff also insist that modernity is associated with “an imaginary construction of the present in terms of a mythic past” (Camaroff,

²³³ Donald Donham for instance criticizes the notion of alternative modernities arguing, “By pluralizing and relativizing, it suggests that each modernity is on an equal footing.” (Donham, 2002: 242).

²³⁴ Here Mitchell contends that “the vocabulary of alternatives... implies a fundamentally singular” modernity and “it is only in reference to this implied generic that such alternatives can be imagined and discussed”.

1993: xiv). In this sense, therefore, the notion of modernity as rupture or break has been predicated on an idea of a mythical past “before modernity”. Often times this past is defined as “archaic” and “stable” and it is also associated with a belief that *the modern* represents “time’s irreversible arrow”, its progressive march into the future (Latour, 1993:10).²³⁵

The idea that modernity represents a *different time* not like any other time before it, and thus a break, is something perhaps commonly shared by both those who conceptualize modernity as a universal story as well as their critics. Despite modernity’s invocation of a notion of historical time that provides the use of the concept some theoretical coherence that captures “its self-consciousness”, one using the term should be aware of the serious difficulties associated with its deployment. Not only is the term *modernity* “inexact” and “vague”, as noted by many, but it is also laden with numerous assumptions for it to be used as an effective analytical category (Ferguson, 2005:167; Donham, 2002: 241-242; Kelly, 2002: 259). What is necessary is perhaps to bracket it’s meaning in a specific spatio-temporal, socio-economic and cultural context. In this study, the term modernity is used not for its conceptual clarity or because it provides a unique analytical power, but because it “evokes” certain “sensibilities” that other terms do not capture, about “modern experiences” in postwar Ethiopia.²³⁶ That is why it is imperative to make a distinction between “modernity” as a theoretical concept and “the modern experience” in a specific geography as an empirical phenomenon within a historical locale (Donham, 2002: 241-242). Such a distinction spares one from being bogged down by the “inexactness” and

²³⁵ This is for instance true for the postwar imperial state in Ethiopia. The state media portrayed Emperor Haile Selassie as the bringer of a “New Era” an era of “modern civilization” that conceived the Ethiopian “past”, i.e., before Haile Selassie as civilized but stagnant while the present and the future were seen as “dynamic”, fast changing and imbued with a promise of “progress” and economic and technological advancement (see chapter four for a detailed discussion of this).

²³⁶ Ferguson vets for the continued use of the term because modernity has become a pervasive, household term, a “folk category” (Ferguson, 2005:167) that has been used by both common people and scholars to describe certain conditions of life, a period or specific sets of sensibilities for us to do away with it easily. Similarly, Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that we should continue to use this term, despite its problems, because it “evokes sensibilities, perceptions, choices, and indeed states of affairs that are not captured as easily by other words” (Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 2002: 222).

conceptual blurriness of the term (Donham, 2002: 241-242).²³⁷ Moreover, such an empirical and historically specific conception of modernity is further made more accessible by an attempt at understanding its enunciation in a particular locale, a spatio-temporal context.

To underscore the variegated “meanings” and content that modernity embodies in different places, Partha Chatterjee underscores, “...There cannot be just one modernity irrespective of geography, time, environment or social conditions. The forms of modernity will have to vary between different countries depending upon specific circumstances and social practices” (ibid: 8). I would like to queue after Chatterjee and argue that modernity cannot be assumed to retain its “original” meaning everywhere it “comes to”. Rather its meaning in a given spatial and cultural context carries a specific history. The social history of its making in a particular setting is the aspect that this study is primarily concerned with.

It was the idea that modernity has to be harnessed to serve a particular purpose that motivated the postwar imperial state in Ethiopia to preoccupy itself with the question of how to sift “the good” and the beneficial from the “corrupting” practices of “western culture” to forge what Chatterjee would call “a distinctly national modernity” (Chatterjee, 1997: 18). Fashioning ‘a distinctly national modernity’ for the imperial Ethiopian state, among other things, meant disciplining a culturally itinerant urban youth by instilling in them a sense of obedience to authority, as discussed in previous chapters.

The attempt to create a distinct national modernity by non-western states throughout the 20th century was manifested in attempts at organizing thought, art, literature and science, as Chatterjee emphasizes (ibid: 18-19). The Ethiopian imperial state too, in the postwar period with its modernist projects, desired to create a modern Ethiopian state and society that was in sync with its own cultural legacy. However, since modernity was not a mere state project, the history of modernity and the modern

²³⁷ Here Donham notes, “the modern experience” as a location specific experience can be distinguished from modernity, as a “theoretical” concept that is “above the ground” and thus with a “tendency to colonize theoretical space...[and] gather about it all sorts of assumptions”.

experience in a given spatio-temporal context also gives rise to social classes and social groups with “modern identities”. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes about the Caribbean, the modern experience represents “the production of a modern self—a self-producing itself through a particular relation to material production”. During plantation slavery, for instance “a sugar striker was a modern identity, just as being a slave violinist, a slave baker, or a slave midwife” (Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 2002: 229). Similarly in postwar Addis Ababa that saw unprecedented levels of modernization, the *ashashach setegna adari*, the broker, the taxi driver, the street hustler, the Mesdames, the student, the domestic worker, the petit trader, the worker all were modern subjects. They were an example of a self-producing itself through their daily social practices and class positions in that imperial metropolis. None of these subjects were no *more* or no *less* modern than the western educated intelligentsia student radicals of the 1960s and 70s, or the middle-income professional class of postwar Ethiopia.

5.2 Theorizing modernity in Ethiopia

Scholarship on Ethiopia treats modernity largely as a project by ‘modern’ elites and the state. Moreover, the subject of modernity is mainly subsumed in discussions of the “socioeconomic phenomena of modernization in the context of development” (Elizabeth, 2010: 82). As Elizabeth Woldegiorgis, observes “the discourse of Ethiopian modernity has often been informed by the socioeconomic phenomena of modernization in the context of development and where modernity, modernization, and Westernization are considered identical” (Elizabeth, 2010: 82). Academic discussions on modernity in Ethiopia that take into account “the broad historical movement of modernity” and engage the matter by “looking at the totality of the political, social, and cultural phenomena” of the modern experience (ibid), are in short supply in the study of Ethiopia. While *modernity and modernization* are terms used very frequently in state rhetoric, the media, policy documents, and scholarly works, attempts at unraveling their differences have not received adequate attention in the

Ethiopian scholarship (Shimeles, 2013: 381).²³⁸ In this section, I will show how modernity is conceived in the Ethiopian scholarship by focusing on selected academic engagements on the subject. The debate on the meaning of modernity has been widespread in the print media especially after the postwar years. However, its beginning can be traced back to the publication of the Amharic weekly, *Birhan ena Selam*, in 1924. In the prewar period, the operative term was *silitane* (“civilization”), while in the postwar period *zemenawi* (“the modern”) became pervasive in media, state and academic discussions. Despite the existence of the debate on what modernity means to Ethiopia in the media, academic works until recently dealt with modernity largely as an economic, technological and infrastructural phenomenon, and thus functionalized its import by treating it as a means of economic advancement, especially post 1950s. Modernity’s political, cultural and philosophical substance has, therefore, been largely missing in Ethiopian academic engagements of the phenomena.

This notwithstanding, there have been important attempts at understanding the history and meaning of modernity in recent years. Noteworthy among these is the work by Bahru Zewde that deals with the theme of modernity and modernization in relationship to the intellectual history of 20th century Ethiopia. Bahru Zewde’s *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* is an important contribution to understanding the intellectual and political formation of the intelligentsia who flourished in the late 19th and early 20th century Ethiopia. Bahru’s “pioneers of change” had varying degrees of training in the western academy. He considers them “modernizers” and bringers of “reform” and change in their society. By using the weekly newspaper *Berhanena Selam*, writing books and by assuming important state and church administrative posts, these intellectuals articulated modernization and became actors in the process of modernizing the state, its infrastructure and the society at large (Bahru, 2002: XI and 175-182).

²³⁸ As Shimeles notes despite the fact that the imperial state used modernization to “describe” processes like state centralization, expansion of the bureaucracy, and infrastructural developments in the postwar period it did “little by way of interpreting what the term meant”.

In an attempt to frame and situate the intellectual history of the *pioneers* and their contributions in the political, social and cultural life of their country, Bahru devotes an introductory chapter where he discusses the ways in which modernization is perceived and engaged in different parts of the world. This chapter offers a particular emphasis on Japan, a model country, which was posited for ‘emulation’ by many Ethiopian intellectuals especially in the prewar period (ibid: 1-13). Bahru gives us the most detailed account of the ideas and biographies of the “early intellectuals” to date and expounds on their preoccupations on such notions as “backwardness”, “civilization”, “progress,” “nationhood” and other themes that could be used as material for a comprehensive understanding of the *modern experience* in Ethiopia. (Bahru, 2002: 99), Bahru’s *pioneers* are projected primarily as “reformist intellectuals” who attempted to bring about social and political change in a deeply conservative country who treated western education as a necessary condition for reform and socio-economic and political change (Bahru, 2002: 209-210). This association of reform and radical change with modern/western education is a key supposition that informs the debate on Ethiopian experiences of modernity. Bahru’s work opens up a discussion and inspires more inquiry into the meaning, experience, and historical specificity of modernity in the Ethiopian context. But as Elizabeth notes, in *Pioneers*, Bahru “freely interchanges notions of modernization theory with modernity, short of producing a coherent framework that situates Ethiopia and Ethiopian intellectuals in the scaffold of global modernity politics” (Elizabeth, 2010: 82).²³⁹

The other work that is of significance here is Messay Kebede’s *Survival and Modernization. Ethiopia’s Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse*. It was authored in 1999, three years before Bahru’s *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*. While Bahru’s *Pioneers* deals with the question of modernization and modernity within the prism of intellectual history, *Survival and Modernization* is a work on philosophy with the aim of developing a “theory of modernization” where the project of modernity in Ethiopia is seen as a misadventure that resulted in disastrous political and economic

²³⁹ Bahru recognizes that the “ethnocentric bias” of the notion of modernization and acknowledges its “close association with the Western experience”. At the same time, he asserts that it is this ethnocentric bias that explains the treatment of the concept in the Ethiopian scholarship (including his own work) as if it is synonymous with westernization. (Bahru, 2002: 1).

consequences. *Survival and Modernization* represents a rare attempt at grappling with the question of modernization as a philosophical question and evaluates the modernist project in 20th century Ethiopia as a failure. Messay argues, the success of modernization in Ethiopia depended on its capacity to allow the country to retain the legacy of *tradition* while introducing “impersonal rules” to its political and bureaucratic system (ibid: XVIII and XV).

In two subsequent works (Mesay, 2008, 2011), Mesay Kebede deals with this postulation of the failed modernist project in Ethiopia and identifies the introduction of western education into Ethiopia as the culprit. He contends that western education has culturally “dislocated” Ethiopians and produced a culturally alienated educated ‘elite’. For Messay, the educated, in their attempt at “reinstating cultural integrity and reversing backwardness,” took a “misguided detour” that led to their further cultural estrangement that pushed them to spawn the 1974 revolution (Messay, 2008: 84).²⁴⁰ For him, the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) was not a champion of positive social and political change, but a bringer of political, economic and cultural tragedy to the country. Messay sees the 1974 revolution as a typical failed modernist project that followed another botched modernist project of imperial autocracy that came before it. As a consequence of the revolution, he claims, the installation of a socialist state that squandered the possibility of restoring “cultural authenticity” plunged the country into further “cultural dislocation”. For Messay, the expansion of western education, that was central to the modernist project, resulted in the internalization of Eurocentric values and cultural disarticulation in the country (ibid, 11 and 38).

Messay’s conception of modernity is neither an inherent negation of nor is it extrinsic to “tradition”. In a scholarship that sees a simple uncomplicated binary between “the modern” (the western) and “the traditional” (Ethiopian culture), this is a novel perspective. For him, it’s not a *lack of* adequate dosage of modernity that is seen as the cause of the failure of the country’s modernist project, but the inefficacious modernity that was chosen. Despite such insights into modernity, Messay’s

²⁴⁰ Paulos Milkias (2006: 30 and 49) also has a similar argument.

assessment of the history of the Ethiopian modernist project depicts “western education” as the cause of all evils. He blames almost all that went wrong in the post 1960s period on western education and student radicalism—his central explanation for “cultural dislocation”, “underdevelopment”, as well as authoritarian politics. Such an explanation treats Ethiopian social actors, the educated in this instance, as objects of history by making them victims of “influences” from the west. It also relies too much on a mono-causal “culturalist” explanation for multilayered, complex structural (both economic and political) problems. By opting for a free-floating cultural explanation for revolution, that is not structurally grounded, Messay’s approach simplifies an otherwise complex historical development that was a product of socio-economic and political factors. Moreover, his view of the tragedy of Ethiopia’s modernist project is based on the nostalgia of a glorious Ethiopian past, which modernist misadventures in the 20th century are projected to have interrupted.²⁴¹

Another important contribution to the debate on modernity, a stimulating inquiry into “its advent in Ethiopia,” is offered to us by Andreas Eshete, a philosopher who was also an active member and opinion leader of the Ethiopian student movement in the 1960s and 70s. Andreas Eshete’s powerful article “Modernity: Its Title to Uniqueness and its Advent in Ethiopia” (2013) examines the kind of thinking and historical consciousness that modernity as a universal phenomenon engenders. It is one of the few efforts at understanding modernity as a historical consciousness in the study of Ethiopia. Andreas attributes modernity’s advent in the country to the “midwife” position of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) in the postwar period. He singles out Ethiopian student radicals of the 1960s and 70s as the archetypal social group who played the most critical role in the history of modernity in Ethiopia. The history of ESM, he asserts, represents the most serious effort to expand freedoms, which he considers

²⁴¹ For him the modernist intervention in 20th century Ethiopia threw the country into a cultural identity crisis. The country’s political tradition of “supra ethnic” ideology and the opportunities available for “elite mobility” were stalled by the misadventures of the modernist project (Messay, 1999: XVIII-XIX and XXII). Messay’s ideas of Ethiopia’s traditional assets and its “unique” cultural identity are essentially confined to its Orthodox Christian ethos and its religious ideology defined by the Christian “founding myth, the *Kibre Negast*” (Ibid: XXI). This idea of Ethiopian “tradition”, thus excludes the non-Orthodox Christian population of the Ethiopian region.

to be the central logic and essence of modernity²⁴² (Andreas, 2013: 2 and 5).

Andreas asserts that modernity arrived in Ethiopia couched in the language of socialism and revolution (ibid: 13) through the midwife of ESM. He says:

... It is with the Ethiopian Student Movement that all essential elements of modernity—popular legitimate rule by free and equal citizens, the abolition of all privileges of birth or inherited position, equality of faiths and cultural communities, industrialization, and secularism—were championed and advocated together in the name of socialism (ibid: 12).

For Andreas the Ethiopian Student Movement, which was committed to social, political, economic and religious equality became the purveyor of its ideals and aspirations. Through socialist articulations and the vehicle of revolution, the student radicals became the vanguards and champions of modernity: its notions of equal citizenship and its “abolition of all privileges of birth”. Modernity, according to Andreas’s is, therefore, located in the domain of ideals, values and aspirations for equality, and the expansion of freedom and “fraternity”. These ideas and ideals have their birthplace in Europe (ibid: 1). What makes modernity “unique”, Andreas argues, is that “it either represents the full realization of freedom, or... it furnishes all the conditions necessary for the achievement of freedom... The public ideals realized in the modern age are ideals for all human beings.” The fact that modernity has a particular birthplace means that it has an origin, but not an end point, since it is, according to Andreas, the “common destiny” of all humans (ibid: 5). Moreover, modernity as a ‘unique’—universal phenomenon that makes all humans “contemporaries” (ibid) with a shared “common destiny”, was once a particular human experience intelligible to only those in its birthplace.

Andreas’s definition of modernity assumes that the phenomena has only one meaning throughout the world, which is either the realization or the condition of possibility for the realization of the “public ideals” of freedom, equality and fraternity. He says, “modernity... is not just a shared destination, it is [also] a shared destiny, and a shared public culture” (ibid: 7). Such perspectives of modernity even when they acknowledge

²⁴² Andreas asserts that the modern world is self-conscious of its uniqueness and that it is as an age where “the possibilities of human freedom are realized” (Andreas, 2013: 5).

the “dark record”²⁴³ of modernity in its history, tend to depict its objectionable past largely as a glitch compared to the possibility it furnishes to humanity. The celebratory and positive view of modernity and its assumed inevitability as the “common destiny” of humanity tends to downplay its complex history, its “histories of barbarity” and the different meanings it carries for different communities and societies. This notion of modernity appears to limit the theorization of modernity at the level of ideals and aspirations, and is disinclined to account for its actual histories and politics in our world. It declares modernity as a “closed totality”, as a bounded “whole” or “system and conceptualizes it as a foregone conclusion (Schwartz, 1993: 207) that is a “common destiny” to all humanity. As Paul Gilroy highlights, for instance, the history of chattel slavery, racism (based on discourses of biological superiority and inferiority) and colonial capitalism are characteristic, if not endemic, to Euro-American modernity. Despite its marred history, however, such annals of the modern experience usually slip from the valuation of modernity by those bent on a universal theory of the phenomenon (Gilroy, 1993: 49).

While Andreas saw modernity as a universal historical consciousness seeking to expand freedom and equality, mediated by the student radicals to enter the Ethiopian political and economic terrain, Elizabeth Woldegiorgis emphasizes on the specificity of modernity as a “historical consciousness” (Elizabeth, 2010: 82). Elizabeth’s writings on the subject pays closer attention to the history and politics of modernity in Ethiopia, rather than the ideals it represents. This is particularly apparent in Elizabeth’s insistence on the need to appreciate the centrality of the question of “otherness” and “alterity” of Ethiopia in “global modernity politics” dominated by the west (Ibid: 83). Elizabeth’s invocation of “alterity” stresses that the hierarchy and othering of global modernity politics is central to its cultural ordering of the world. This, she notes, gives modernity a specific history and meaning in an Ethiopian context. Elizabeth extends

²⁴³ Andreas for instance claims that, “Despite [some] dark record, it is undeniable that modernity provides the possibility of shared values, aims and bonds among all human beings and peoples, and hence, the modern form of solidarity that I call fraternity. Indeed, it is striking that it is only in the modern age that we are all contemporaries. Modernity is the era where humanity shares a common destiny” (Andreas, 2013: 5).

her inquiry on “Ethiopian modernity” in the prewar period to the postwar period, with a particular focus on the artistic modernism of artist intellectuals (Andreas, 2013:16).²⁴⁴ Her works on the subject provide a comparative perspective on the history and politics of modernity by contrasting the attempt to reconcile the project of modernity by state affiliated prewar intellectuals of the 20th century with artist intellectuals of the postwar period, who saw a vision of modernity in “radical change” and transformation of Ethiopia, through revolution (Elizabeth, 2015: 11).

In “Charting out Ethiopian Modernity and Modernism”, Elizabeth contends that modernity is a “spatio-temporally-based concept” and thus must be understood in its local specificity. She says, “[Ethiopian] scholars have attempted to talk about the projects of Ethiopian modernity, in a narrow range of meaning that neglects to construct the processes of modernity within the discursive space of its multiplicity and cultural specificity.” (Elizabeth, 2010: 82). She emphasizes that the discourse of modernity in prewar Ethiopia was saturated with feelings of “otherness”. The intellectuals of this period, who are regarded as introducers of modernity to Ethiopia, Elizabeth notes, were deeply self-conscious of Ethiopia’s “otherness” and “alterity” or its difference *from* Europe (ibid: 95-96). This consciousness of the intellectuals was central to and was a “foundational narrative of Ethiopian modernity and modernism” in the prewar period (ibid: 83 and 84). Elizabeth, as does Bahru, periodizes the “arrival” of modernity in Ethiopia to the last decades of the second half of the 19th century (Bahru, 2002: 5). Her examination of Ethiopian modernism and modernity is a refreshing account that acknowledges not only modernity’s impulse for technological, infrastructural and “economic development”, but also conceptualizes it as an engagement with “shifting attitudes” and “sensibilities” that came along with historical processes that accompanied modern Ethiopian history (Elizabeth, 2015: 11). By extending her assessment of the role of elite groups on modernity from the prewar period into what she considers to be a “project” of “Ethiopian modernism” by “avant-garde” artists of the postwar generation, Elizabeth allows us to see the changing

²⁴⁴ Andreas asserts that “Ethiopian modernism furnished a powerful expression of the ethos of modernity” and is “another candidate for the title of midwife of Ethiopian modernity”.

visions and sensibilities toward modernity across time.

According to Elizabeth, for the postwar period, one of the characteristic features of Ethiopian modernism was the transaction between the visual and the written text. She says, “artists and writers [in the 1960s and 70s] brought with them a new imagination that subverted and jettisoned all boundaries between visual imagery and the written language” (Elizabeth, 2015: 1). These modernists moved between genres and art forms, straddled across disciplinary boundaries and developed sensibilities prone to seeking “radical change”. This, she argues, was unlike the prewar intellectuals that saw the preservation of imperial authority²⁴⁵ as a necessary precondition for a successful project of modernity. The artist intellectuals, on the other hand, “concentrated on subverting the dominant ideological structures of society” and had a “deconstructionist” tendency that they believed was imperative to the success of the project of modernity (ibid: 10 and 12). The achievement of social justice and the end of exploitative social and labor relations was central to their notion of modernity (ibid: 12).

What becomes apparent from the forgoing discussion is that Ethiopian scholarship conceives modernity largely as an intellectual project envisioned from the top and implemented and diffused to the rest of society. These debates assign a social group, namely the educated elite, with the task of introducing modernity into Ethiopia and subsequently focus their attention on the educated and the state. “How the nation [was] imagined and articulated by these [early 20th century] intellectuals” Elizabeth contends, “informed the discourse of modernity that translated [the] state and its citizens in the configuration of Ethiopian modernity” (Ibid: 83). Elizabeth suggests that the weekly *Berhanena Selam* was the most important platform in the “foundational” discourse of Ethiopian ‘political modernity’ in the early decades of the 20th century.

²⁴⁵ Not only did the early intellectuals “provide an alternative approach to modernity” by projecting imperial monarchical power (under Teferi later Haile Selassie) as a requirement for modernity to take root, which they defined mainly as a “technological and economic development”²⁴⁵ (Elizabeth, 2010: 91), but also came up with Japan (their favorite example of a successful modern non-western nation) as a living example and justification of the potential success of a modernity project carried out under imperial authority. This view of imperial authority as a champion and patron of modernity, however, came to be rejected by the subsequent generation of radical students of the 1960s and 70s.

Similarly, Bahru's designation of the intellectuals of early 20th century Ethiopia as "Pioneers of Change" mirrors the place the educated elite hold in modernity.²⁴⁶ According to Elizabeth the focus of the scholarship is either on "political modernity"²⁴⁷ or in the case of Bahru, the modernization of the state apparatus and its bureaucracy (Elizabeth, 2010: 82). Similarly for Andreas the poignancy of modernist aspirations is essentially political in substance. The ESM, for him, represented a desirable "[call] for a clean break" from "absolutist public authority" which he saw not only as reactionary, but also as a "relic of a premodern past" (Andreas, 2013: 13). Even if Andreas faults the student movement for "sidestepping" a vital commitment to "political justice" and the expansion of democratic values (Andreas, 2013: 14 and 15), he saw student-sponsored modernity as an ideal borrowed from elsewhere and introduced to Ethiopia.

Despite his ferocious criticism of the students, Messay too, treats modernity as an elite or state driven project. He saw the students' "adventure with Socialism" as the main cause of political, cultural and economic crisis. He castigates the Ethiopian state's attempt to modernize throughout the 20th century as one that confused modernization with westernization. For him it is this confusion that resulted in the alienation of the country from its cultural identity and its political traditions and that allowed for "elite mobility" (ibid: XVIII-XIX and XXII). For Messay, the imposition of imperial autocracy during Haile Selassie's reign, the intensification of class oppression and "social ossification", the imperial and socialist centralization of power, and the violent socialist revolution were all instances of the failed modernist project that led to the country's "underdevelopment" (Messay, 1999: XXII).

Andreas and Bahru, on the other hand, posit the experience of modernity as a positive and progressive movement of history.²⁴⁸ Andreas' conception of modernity as an

²⁴⁶ Bahru (and also Elizabeth) consider *Birhanena Selam*, a weekly as one of the most important forums in the prewar period where the question of modernity, modernization and tradition were discussed and debated (Bahru, 2002: xi).

²⁴⁷ I am using political modernity here in the sense in which Dipesh Chakrabarty uses it in his *Provincializing Europe* as "the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise" (2007: 4).

²⁴⁸ The aspect of historicism that is ideological that conceives history as a linear progressive march into the future as Chakrabarty says "enabled European domination of the world". For him "...historicism is what made modernity...look not simply global [universal] but rather...something that became global

expansion of freedoms; Bahru's celebration of the *pioneers* as "progressive" intellectuals and as advocates of modernity and modernization counter disposed against "conservative elements" of the imperial Ethiopian state and society, are prominent examples of this narrative architecture dominant in the scholarship on Ethiopia. The treatment of modernity as a move away from "arcane tradition" or the remnants of the past (Andreas, 2013: 13), and the projection of artist intellectuals of the 1960s and 70s as bringers of revolutionary social justice (Elizabeth, 2015: 47), however differently, project modernity as an importation from the outside, whose definition is seen as a purview of elite groups. Elizabeth's account of artist intellectuals of the 1960s and 70s acknowledges the contradictions between their "attempt to detail the urgency of change" and their "decentered and fragmented [modern] self" (Elizabeth, 2015: 78-79). However, like Andreas, she too considers these artist intellectuals as "avant-gardes" and purveyors of social and political change.

This elite and state-centric view of modernity seems to rest on the assumption, as Chakrabarty notes, that bifurcates society in the non-western world into "more modern" and "less modern" elements (Chakrabarty, 2007: 9).²⁴⁹ The educated (the intelligentsia and student radicals) were conceived as the element that constitutes the more modern, open-minded elements of Ethiopian society. They were seen to be attuned to more progressive ideals and predisposed to the advancement of social justice, while the soldiers, for instance, who came to power after the revolution, tend to be treated in the revolution literature as authoritarian and "less modern". The characterization of student radicals as vanguards of radical social change is a typical example of such an anatomization of Ethiopian society. The clarion call of the ESM for Andreas, "for a clean break" from "absolutist public authority," which is seen as a leftover from a bygone era, a dreg from the past (Andreas, 2013: 13), demonstrates this view. Imbedded in this assertion is the assumption that imperial autocracy, which was centralizing and authoritarian, was a phenomenon that cannot sit with the

over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it" (Chakrabarty, 2007: 4). Such notion of modernity thus schematizes world societies into "modern" and "less modern" (ibid: 9 and 12). It associates with modernity an essential logic, i.e., the achievement of a modern state, bureaucracy etc. Historicism in this sense enabled an idea that Europe is the original and everyone everywhere else will be *over time* a replica of this original.

modern, “the progressive march of history”.²⁵⁰

On the whole, however, we are yet to have a fuller debate in Ethiopia on the meaning of modernity, not by just celebrating the positive aspirations it represents, but also by incorporating its dark aspects to better inform our analysis of it.²⁵¹ In a country where—imperial or Socialist militarist—state centralization and autocracy produced two subsequent revolutions (in 1974 and 1991), the meaning of “modernity” and “our” experiences of it must be interrogated by making the dark histories part of the examination of “our” modernity. Such analysis requires going beyond the simplistic binary of the common view that conceptualizes modernity as positive change and tradition as inertia. It has to be noted for instance, imperial autocracy was a modern phenomenon in postwar imperial Ethiopia, enabled by state centralization, the expansion of the media, the sanctioning of a one language state policy, rather than an anachronistic left over from the past. Elizabeth’s approach that emphasizes Ethiopia’s “alterity” in the global politics of modernity, and her attention to modernity’s cultural specificity as well as Donald Donham sensitivity to the ways in which modernity was experienced differently by different social groupings, represent significant breakthroughs in our understanding of the modern experience/s in Ethiopia.

Donald Donham’s contribution to our understanding of modernity in Ethiopia offers insights from anthropology and social theory and documents the Ethiopian revolution as a product of modernity. In *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (1999), in addition to highlighting the cultural specificity of modernity, Donham also gives us a textured account of revolution that shows its variegated meanings among different sections of society. In addition to context

²⁵⁰ Imperial autocracy under Haile Selassie, with state centralization, the attempt to create a nation state and so on was a product of the imperial state’s incorporation of the nation state form in the 20th century. This modernist project was intensified more vigorously during the postwar period (See discussion for instance the move towards centralization in Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*, Addis Ababa University Press, 2001).

²⁵¹ See a similar discussion by Bill Schwartz on Nazism and Fascism as quintessentially modern phenomena despite their “appeal [sic] to the mythic past of the German Volk and...Mussolini’s invocation of the glories of Ancient Rome” (1993: 216). Schwartz reminds us the dangers of pronouncing modernity “in wholly normative terms of good and evil” (ibid).

("time-space") that determines the content of modernity,²⁵² modernity is shown to be a phenomenon that was experienced in revolutionary Ethiopia by variously culturally situated groups in **various** ways. For Donham, Maale Protestants, students, and soldiers like Mengistu Haile Mariam who rose to the highest political power, were all revolutionaries who appropriated and interpreted modernity to create their own variants of "Ethiopian modernism". Their modernism, he says, were "conversations, carried out [on a world stage] in so many dialects in so many contrasting accents...[within] underlying set of modernist cultural assumptions and...[within] a certain kind of political economy" (Donham, 1992: 56). For Donham, "coupling" between a hegemonic notion of modernity with locale cultural artifacts and "resources" results in an "ideological synthesis," creating various iterations of modernity appropriated by different social actors, with different interests and ideologies, not just the elite (ibid: 43 and 56-57).²⁵³ Donham's sensitivity to the permutations in the meanings of modernity, and his attention to everyday people and those from oppressed nationalities gives us a rich and textured account of the modern experience in Ethiopia. Donham's investigation of the varying meanings of modernity and revolution in Maale land Ethiopia that takes into account the situatedness of modernity in a specific cultural and political economy, makes the work particularly insightful.

His account of the Ethiopian revolution sees the revolution primarily as a pursuit by "dreamers of 'progress'... acting on a world stage," to construct a better future, to "catch up" with the industrially advanced world (epitomized by Europe), mobilizing cultural resources and appropriate narratives from various locations to do so

²⁵² Donham argues that there can be no universal theory of modernity as modernity is determined by context. Donald Donham, "Modernity: There is no there there" in Ethiopia: Modern Nation—Ancient Roots, Scholarly conference, 27-25 October 2020. Held Online.

²⁵³ Donham's account of revolution as a product of modernity demonstrates that revolution and modernity have different meanings for different actors: "variously situated groups interpreted events of the Ethiopian revolution" in various ways (Donham, 1999: 12). The Christian Maale who welcomed the Zemecha students (students who came from Addis Ababa to Maale land to help implement the 1975 land reform after the Derg's assumption of state power) associated revolution with "modernity", which meant better health, good standard of living and education (ibid, 11-12 and 114). For Maale 'traditionalists', the revolution invoked hope of "return" to tradition to the years before Ethiopian imperial rule was imposed (ibid, 80-81).

(Donham, 1999: 23). Like Messay, Andreas and Elizabeth, he too considers the radical students of the 1960s and 70s as the vanguard force that instigated the Ethiopian revolution. He argues, the relationship of the student radicals with "the West" produced "hostility" and "double rejection" of both the West and "tradition"(Donham, 1992: 38-39). Donham traces the roots of radical politics and enthusiasm to revolutionary ideas among the Maale to processes like "influence" from American Protestant missionaries that predisposed Maale Protestants "to support almost any forward-looking social change" (Donham, 1999: 52-53) and infrastructural developments, like media broadcasts from the capital.

While fascinating and important to the scholarship of modernity and revolution in Ethiopia, Donham's view of modernity shares the drawbacks of one of the most important assumptions of theorizing modernity in Ethiopia and beyond. This view projects the same originary discourse of modernity that exists in the rest of the Ethiopian literature. In Donham's account of the Ethiopian revolution, modern education, radio broadcast and Protestant missionary influence are regarded as "elite ideas" (regarded as *the source* of modern ideas) that were, however, there to be appropriated by other social groups and social classes²⁵⁴ (ibid: 38). The "arrow of" consciousness in this sense starts from an external source even if the meaning of revolution or Marxism has to be "understood ...in the context of local history" (ibid: 35) where hegemonic ideologies of the modern from the west interlock with locale cultural resources to result in "unexpected couplings" and give rise to "new ideological synthesis" and meanings of modernity (ibid: 56-57). Revolutionary consciousness and modern consciousness are projected as "elite ideas" introduced by such actors like missionaries, radical students and modern infrastructures such as the radio.

²⁵⁴ While Marxism offered "answers" to the social, economic and political problems of Ethiopia to many students during the Ethiopian revolution, Donham argues, "in 1974 a disgruntled son of a Maale chief adopted the concept of oppression from radio broadcasts from Addis Ababa" (Donham, 1992: 56), presumably to articulate his political agenda in revolutionary terms. This "world conversation, carried out in so many dialects" was for Donham a product of "consciousness of acting on a world stage" that began in Europe, with the French Revolution (ibid: 34). While it should not be denied that the ideals and "ideas" of the French revolution were not important in the framing of political discourse in the Ethiopian revolution, it is going too far to claim that a Maale chief's son needed to borrow the notion of "oppression" from a radio broadcast to articulate his political interest and join the revolution. Revolutionary consciousness was a product of diverse consciousnesses and visions for us to be able to trace their genealogy to one "source".

Let me conclude this section by highlighting the gap that the deliberation on modernity in the Ethiopian scholarship leaves us with. Largely the literature conceptualizes modernity either as a state project rolled out in policies of modernization or as sets of ideals and aspirations towards the achievement of social justice, freedom, and equality. In this context, modernity is narrowly conceived at the level of state power, or is discussed as an intellectual-political project that was meant to transform both state and society. Donald Donham's intervention that shows modernity's permutations and varying meanings, that pays close attention to its appropriation by various social actors when its analysis is anchored in local history, is a very significant corrective to this elite bias and state-centric narrative of modernity.

The view that conceives consciousness as a product of "ideas" and tends to pay little attention to consciousness as a result of lived experience and practice, remains one of the most persistent trends in the Ethiopian scholarship on modernity and revolution. As we have seen above, modernity is projected in the scholarship either as an elite coinage or one brokered and rolled out by educated sections of society and the state. Moreover, for the most part, the literature on modernity does not concern itself with the experiential aspect of modernity and modern experience. The transvaluative vitality of public culture in urban spaces, such as postwar Addis Ababa, in the transformation of public sociality and the impact of modernity on social and cultural life, is not given attention. The dramatic transformation in public sociality that was witnessed in the postwar period, and its impact even on the formation of artist intellectuals and radical students of the 1960s and 70s is virtually missing in the literature. In the main, in academic discussions on modernity in Ethiopia, the intelligentsia, radical students and artist intellectuals are portrayed as the agents of social/political and radical change, for good or for worse (Bahru, 2002: xi and 5).²⁵⁵ They are regarded as the introducers of modernity from elsewhere into Ethiopia. As

²⁵⁵ Bahru here sees for instance an evolutionary growth from "reform" to "radical change" of society in the ideas of intellectuals with western education in the 20th century political history of Ethiopia. He treats the "early intellectuals" of the century as predecessors of the revolutionary students of the 1960s. He considers the 1974 revolution as "the finale of ... the process of modern transformation in Ethiopia".

will be discussed below, these scholarly debates on modernity were preceded by and are part of a public debate on the subject that was underway, at least since the postwar years. While the term *silitane* (Amharic for civilization) was the most common term used to describe material, social and cultural *progress* during the prewar period, *zemenawi silitane* became the most commonly used term in public debates to describe modernity in the postwar period.

5.3 The Tradition vs. Modernity debate: Views from Mennen and Addis Reporter

The deliberations made by scholars in the later decades about modernity in the academy were part of public debate and conversation in the postwar era. In the prewar period, as demonstrated by Bahru and Elizabeth, *Berhanena Selam* was the main print platform where questions of “silitane” (civilization) were discussed.²⁵⁶ What was qualitatively different about the postwar period was the introduction of the term *zemenawi* in the political and cultural lexicon of the state and in public discourse. In this section I will focus on the coverage of the tradition vs. modernity debate in the print media during the postwar years. I do this to demonstrate the popular currency of the terms *zemenawi* and *zemenawinnet* in this period. Two magazines published during the postwar years, the Amharic monthly *Mennen* and the English monthly *Addis Reporter* are consulted to show the nature of the debate. More focus will be given in this chapter to the views presented in the English magazine *Addis Reporter* as they provide most of the critique to “Ethiopian culture” often equaled with

²⁵⁶ This debate appeared in the media in the early decades of the 20th century mainly with the beginning of the publication of the weekly paper *Birhan ena Selam* in 1924. The term that was poignant during this time was “silitane” (civilization) that was used to describe European modernity. Moreover, Ethiopian intellectuals started publishing books and tracts on the need to “civilize”. One prominent example in this regard was Gebreheywot Baykedagn’s *atse menilik ena ityopia (Emperor Menilik and Ethiopia)*, which was published in 1914 that raised issues of “civilization”, “progress” and education and comparing Ethiopia to other colonies more advanced in economic and infrastructural development (Elizabeth, 2010: 94-96); (Bahru, 2005: 51-52); (Gebreheywot Baykedagn, 1914: 21-22). It can be said that the debate on what it meant to be civilized was very much an elite affair in the prewar period, involving prominent personalities and a small circle of intellectuals mainly in Addis Ababa. It is also believed that because the reading public in the prewar period was not substantial, those outside of the elite and Addis Ababa were largely unable to engage in these discussions taking place in *Berhanena Selam* and other papers (Bahru, 2002: 210).

“tradition”. My goal here is not to provide a comprehensive discussion of these deliberations but rather to underline some of the major issues at stake.

I use the Amharic terms *zemenawi* (ዘመናዊ) and *zemenawinnet* (ዘመናዊነት) in this and subsequent chapters instead of their respective English equivalents “the modern” and “modernity”, in order to contextualize modern experiences in postwar Ethiopia. These Amharic terms are preferred to their English equivalents, modern and modernity, because the later terms come with a claim of universality, while the Amharic terms help to localize “modern experiences” in the Ethiopian context. Moreover, these Amharic terms became a “folk category” in the postwar period and were used frequently in the print as well as other medias (the radio and later television).

Shimeles Bonsa summarizes the debate on modernization in the postwar period by dividing those who entered the conversation holding “two broad positions”. He says, “One was to modernize (or to westernize, which was a related if not a synonymous appellation) and had two variants, total modernization and modernization with choice. The other was not to modernize. The former equated modernization with national survival, the latter saw it as cultural colonization” (Shimeles, 2011: 381). Despite the fact that the imperial state used modernization to “describe” processes like state centralization, expansion of the bureaucracy, and infrastructural developments, it did “little by way of interpreting what the term meant” (ibid). Even if those described by Shimeles as holding a position more critical to modernization by emphasizing that its risk of “cultural colonization” could not be said to be absent, a position that was against modernization appears to be a fringe voice in postwar media discussions. The most important concern in the period was how much the country should seek to modernize, rather than whether or not it should modernize. Determining what was considered useful and beneficial from *zemenawi bahil* or “modern culture” (western culture) and what was considered detrimental, and therefore unbeneficial, was the essential question that animated public debate throughout the postwar period. What needs to be noted here is that this debate also

involved a discussion on how much dose of “tradition” needs to be retained while modernizing or incorporating *zemenawi bahil*.

The view that *bahil* (Ethiopian culture) and *zemenawinnet* are contrasting and even opposite categories became a truism in the postwar period, especially in the post 1950s. The tradition vs. modernity debate gathered immense popularity. Apparently, this was because, among other reasons, the expansion of educational institutions, the increasing relevance and impact of the mass media in urban public life, especially through the radio and print, as well as the wonders of the television and other infrastructural developments, facilitated the creation of an urban reading, listening and watching public. Given these circumstances, I argue that *zemenawinnet* acquired the status of a public good beyond elite concerns, perhaps more importantly in postwar Addis Ababa. After this brief note, let's now go to the concrete ways in which this debate proceeded in *Mennen* and *Addis Reporter* in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

Mennen, along with other Amharic newspapers, took a more critical position towards *zemenawi seletane* (modernity) as a cultural phenomenon. This is apparent from our discussion in the previous chapter where that paper became the mouthpiece of the imperial regime's desires of what the modern urban young subject should be like. Respectability and obedience to authority were at the core of the regime's instructions of the youth. It admonished the young and urban for *un-Ethiopian*, wayward practices. The didactic nature of the regime's instructions and its moralistic teachings dominated the tenure of the Amharic print media. Moreover, the patriotic inflection and cultural nationalism of the “vernacular press”—*Mennen* being one such example—associated *zemenawinnet* with western culture. As we have seen in previous chapter, the “excesses” of *zemenawi seletane* were equated with prodigality and inappropriate social practices such as “idling” in hotels, prostitution, and extravagant alcohol consumption (Ermiyas Kebede, 1952: 4). *Mennen* made frequent calls to the public, particularly the youth, to selectively pick from the “menu” of *zemenawi silitane*, modern civilization (Ibid). The urban youth were urged to differentiate the frivolous from the non-frivolous and the virtuous from the harmful in *zemenawi bahil*. Such voices reflect the official view that there should be a dose of

zemenawi silitane that the country needs for its economic and technological advancement, while “preserving” its age-old traditions and values (“teyayajh arist: yeirmija hail”, 1952: 31-32).

It was reiterated that Ethiopia should take from the west its science, skills and techniques. As Hamere Selassie Bete Mariam writes in December 1959, the “struggle” of the youth in this era should be primarily to acquire technical skills in manufacturing which is considered key to progress. By contrast, she urges the youth to be vigilant about the harmful “influences” of the west—its extravagant spending and consumptions, moral incredulity, sexual license, and its indecent practices that would take away from what should be the youth’s principal attention, the learning of skills (“Timhirt mindin naw?”, 1953: 4); (Hamere Selassie Bete Mariam “tigil yiluhail kebiret gar”, 1952: 35).

Such instructions on what the country should take from the west, by admonishing, especially the youth, who were seen as drawn to “decadent” “western” ways, were in line with the emperor’s vision of what kind of *zemenawi silitane* was suitable for the country. For Haile Selassie, Shimeles notes, “sought to modernize the country without destabilizing the traditional foundations of state and society” (Shimeles, 2013: 383). Ethiopian *zemenawinnet*, therefore, meant marrying *chewanet* (respectable living) and regard for “Ethiopian” values with the necessary skills and application to achieve “material prosperity” (“Yeamerica egzibishin”, 1958: 13, 24 and 30). The emperor proclaimed, “What We seek for Our people is not only material prosperity, but also self-knowledge that is based on regard for its [own tradition], and respectable life that offers the joy of living” (“Ahun lederesnibet gize: bemulu besetenew denb hulum halafinetun wesdo mesrat alebet”, 1958: 2-4). In a speech delivered on the 13th of Megabit 1958 (March 21, 1966), the emperor insisted on the need to preserve “the legacy of ancient knowledge and practices” of the Ethiopian people while at the same time emphasizing the “need to synthesize age-old wisdom with the *zemenawi*” (ibid).

In this public address not only did the emperor see himself as the benefactor of *zemenawi silitane*, but also as unequivocal in his declaration about “feudal practices”

and “harmful” practices that the country needs to overcome. He said, the “elimination of feudal practices” was an “onerous and difficult struggle” that he took upon himself to make the forward strides in *zemenawi silitane* (Ibid). Overcoming these feudal practices that the emperor talked about were said to be critical to carry out political reform, such as the creation of a modern government, with the promulgation of the first constitution in 1931 (Ibid).

As much as there were traditional practices that were a drag on progress, there were practices that the regime associated with *zemenawi seletane* that were regarded as detrimental to material prosperity. In this speech, the emperor defined the terms of the debate on Ethiopian *zemenawinnet* by propagating the need for amalgamating ‘good’ old practices with “the new” for the material prosperity and cultural advancement of the country. He maintained, “What [the people] lack is the [initiative to] take responsibility to work hard and [instruct] others to [do the same]” (Ibid). The association of economic advancement with diligence remained to be one of the most enduring aspects of the state’s prescriptions for “the people”. Technical and scientific skills as well as modern systems of government and administration were regarded as key aspects of *zemenawi seletane* (Ibid). Moreover, in his “Christmas Message” for Ethiopian students in 1958, the emperor commanded, “...the growth and expansion of ... [Ethiopia’s] national endeavors make it imperative that you, students, prepare yourselves for your responsibilities by being obedient to your teachers and responsive to authority” (“Christmas Message”, December 1958-January 1959: 61). Respecting authority was emphasized as a traditional value that helps preserve the cultural authenticity of Ethiopia while modernizing. The preservation of “Ethiopian culture” and custom was seen as an innovative act that helps synthesize “ancient” customs and traditions to fit the “new era”.

These guidelines, notwithstanding, the path to Ethiopian *zemenawinnet* was not to be solely decided by the wishes of the powers that be. While the state and elements in society were keen on the preservation of old customs and tradition, there were also those who doubted the fear of cultural invasion as a legitimate concern. These elements in state and society saw cultural preservation as an attempt to turn back the

cloak of time—a scaremongering by “conservative” elements in society. The champions of this view that rejected cultural preservation were to be found in the postwar period, more in the English press, most particularly *Addis Reporter*. One contributor to that paper went as far as calling those who gravitated towards western ways, “innovators”. He argued the “innovators” should be given the chance to define the future of their society. (“Sunning Thighs”, 1969: 3).

Getachew Haile, in “The Question of Culture” in *Addis Reporter*, August 15, 1969, unapologetically states that he writes “in defense of the innovators”. “The innovators” for him were young Ethiopians, miniskirt wearers and those others trying to “imitate” foreign ways to “mold [sic] their own future”. He lists “six important reasons” why he thinks, “an alien culture becomes so easy and irresistible to adopt” for Ethiopians in urban contexts (Getachew Haile, 1969: 13).²⁵⁷ For Getachew wearing the miniskirt was a reflection of young Ethiopians engaged in “creativity” and self-making through “imitation”. He says, “we imitate in order to acquire the know-how, then we may aspire for originality...In fact our big problem is our lack of imitating sufficiently due to our prejudices and other social mores” (Ibid). Intolerance to “alien culture”, he charged, was a recipe for stagnation and a futile effort to stop the “inevitable” force of the time—the spread of western culture. Even if these transformations and foreign influences were causing the young to “weaver” and lose their “equilibrium”, Getachew argued, it was “imperative” that the youth continue to try new ways by imitating the west (Ibid). He asserted, “In fact if any culture flourishes, irrespective of the opposition by the indigenous one, it is because of its novelty and value to the prevailing society” (Ibid: 14). Culture, it is said, must be adopted or maintained only in consideration of its “utility” and “practicability” (Getachew Haile, “Question of Culture—Rejoinder”, 1969: 7). Getachew saw the imitation of western cultural forms, not only as something that “cannot” be avoided but also as something that Ethiopians can’t “do without” if they seek modernity (Ibid).

²⁵⁷ Getachew argued one of the reasons that explain the popularity of the miniskirt was “economic consideration”. “While a national costume costs fifty to seventy dollars”, Getachew opines, a modest miniskirt cost only ten to twenty at the most”. In addition to its cost effectiveness, he claims, the miniskirt allows “freedom of movement” and the “appreciation” of the “female form”.

Even if Getachew's propagation for imitation may sound rather excessive, some like him saw failure to emulate the west as an obstruction to the attainment of progress. Getachew has this to say about "enlightenment" and the "benefit" that could be attained as a result of "contact with other civilizations".

... As more and more people get the benefit of enlightenment through education and contact with other civilizations... I feel that the two generations [the old and the young] have come to live in worlds so different that the youth must be permitted to *define their own term* of satisfactory aesthetic existence (emphasis mine) (Ibid).

Wring in response to the establishment of the "Committee for the Protection of Culture", in another issue of *Addis Reporter*, Haile Mariam Goshu deploys a scathing critique of those who want to conserve the past at the expense of the future. In addition to criticizing the committee and supporting the miniskirt wearers, Haile Mariam, defends "the new" from the assault of what he called "the age old", "inward looking" and "parochial" impulses of Ethiopian society. He chides the committee for sacrificing "diversity" to preserve "the unity of culture". He accuses the Amharic media and social elements that he disparagingly refers to as "cultural prophets", for striving "to arrest the tide of change" (Haile Mariam Goshu, 1969: 21). Haile Mariam Goshu's condemnation of the objective of the committee could also be read as a coated critique of the yearning of the social order to maintain "conformity". He said:

... The movement towards conformity, where all dress alike, behave alike, paint alike and entertain an accepted standard of thought, I am afraid, might lump everything into a sort of common porridge. Lack of variety might here render life uninteresting and boring (Ibid).

He characterizes such cries for cultural preservation as "anti-modernist" and anti-change that ultimately threatens to put the country in a state of what he called, "geographical parochialism" (Ibid). He said, "Cultural changes have always broken [old conventions] ... and... altered people's attitudes and behaviour" (Ibid). For him Ethiopians should continue to break "stale" traditions rather than struggle to arrest the march of time by holding on to old conventions. He contended, one must side with

“the new” and give it a chance to flourish. He concluded, no matter what they do to try to stop the march of time, “the new finds its fullest expression” anyway (Ibid).²⁵⁸

By far the most influential and insightful piece on *zemenawinnet* in *Addis Reporter* came from Gedamu Abereha and Solomon Deressa. In “The Hyphenated Ethiopian”, the authors present an elegantly written and nuanced assessment of *zemenawinnet* for the postwar Ethiopian context. “The hyphenated Ethiopian” became a paradigm that was emulated by writers and journalists in *Addis Reporter* to talk about the conditions that *zemenawinnet* imposed to postwar Ethiopia. Gedamu and Solomon saw this condition in qualitatively different ways from those who conflated “western culture” with *zemenawinnet*. One of the questions *The Hyphenated* raised was whether in this age (they called it “the age of research”) conformity to age-old values and customs has any place at all. They ask, “Should [deference] be given to the archaic values of traditionalism?” in an era captured by the etiquette of professionalism and dynamic change. “Traditionalism”, they argued, “bows to the cosmos of stratification and the age of research pays deference to the austere world of ‘professionalism’” (Gedamu and Solomon, 1969b: 14). Yet, they came with a critique both to “traditionalism” and “the new”. On the one hand, they emphasize the pitfalls of the hierarchical world of “traditionalism”—its obsession with deference and its “stratification” (implicit reference to the privilege of birth of the imperial social order). On the other hand, they chastise European modernity as saturated with “antiseptic professionalism”. Moreover, with the expansion of education, they saw a growing number of Ethiopians adopting foreign ways and leading a globalized cultural existence. For them the quintessential hyphenated figure of postwar Ethiopia was the educated Ethiopian. “Vicariously at least”, they say, the educated Ethiopian “truly lives not in a given community, but in the world at large”. In this age of modernity, the

²⁵⁸ See also criticisms of Getachew Haile and Haile Mariam Goshu. A certain Tedla Yesheawawul in a rejoinder to Getachew Haile’s “Question of Culture” wrote “Mere imitation of foreign behavior such as smoking cigarettes, coloring the hair, using lip-sticks, wearing mini-skirts, etc. does not surely make us foreigners or, in the words of the Major, “creative”. It makes us mere thoughtless mimics”. (1969: 8.). See also criticism of Haile Mariam Goshu’s piece by readers who supported the establishment of the “Committee for the Preservation of Culture” and its attempts to “eradicate” the miniskirt and “microskirt” from Ethiopia (“Led Astray”, 1969: 4).

educated and urbanized Ethiopian shared common experiences with other “cosmopolitan” subjects in the rest of the world (Solomon and Gedamu, 1969a: 13).

For Gedamu and Solomon, this in-between, hyphenated and divided identity position educated and urbanized Ethiopians occupied created an obstacle to develop a solid identity. They regarded educated and urbanized Ethiopians as a group that lacked rootedness in a culture and a coherent identity, torn between divided selves.²⁵⁹ They argued neither imitation (wholesale embrace) of “western culture” nor “traditionalism” (“archaic values” and “statification”) provided the right path for Ethiopian *zemenawinnet*. They criticized those lamenting and “editorializing about invasion of Ethiopian culture by the west” (Gedamu and Solomon, 1969a: 15), while at the same time did not see Ethiopian *zemenawinnet* as a mere wholesale imitation of western culture. All influences from the west, they charge, “both bad and good are equally destructive”. And if Ethiopians should overcome this double bind, they can only do so through constant consumption. For them indiscriminate consumption of western products was necessary not because these products from the west were desirable and lead to progress but because “the only way to have one’s cake and eat it would be to produce one’s own cake while devouring what is thrust on to one’s plate” (Ibid: 15). They saw indiscriminate consumption of western products as unavoidable. Solomon cleverly clarifies this in another article, “Translation—A Necessary Art?” (June 6, 1969), where he notes that indiscriminate consumption and “borrowing” is a strategic decision in a context where modernity is a condition that we have to come to terms with. He says, “We borrow from others not because they are better than us but because they have what we don’t have.” He asks, “Whoever heard of a good businessman refusing a loan that he can pay back because there is pride in being self-sufficient?” (Solomon Deressa, 1969c: 19).

²⁵⁹ The cover of Addis Reporter where *The Hyphenated* (February 14, 1969: cover page) appeared came out with a human figure with three heads and four hands that hold 4 flags: “Made in Engand”, “Made in France”, “Made in USA” and “Made in Canada”. This is an image characterizing the urbanized Ethiopian in this age as a divided character, constituted of western culture and lacking a solid Ethiopian identity. Hyphenatedness is not necessarily a desired condition—divided identity seems to be understood as the reality of the zemenawi Ethiopian.

Solomon and Gedamu saw that *zemenawinnet* with an Ethiopian character and substance can be achieved, not by deciding to insulate the country from the outside world, but with revamped production of “a vast quantity of works of the spirit”. For them *zemenawinnet* need not be a mere consumption of western products. They write, “instead of bemoaning the maiming of our spiritual values by alien invasion, [lets rather] turn the anger into producing a vast quantity of works of the spirit out of which a large enough number of truly Ethiopian items would emerge” (Solomon and Gedamu, 1969a: 15); (Solomon Deressa, 1969c: 17-18).²⁶⁰ However, despite the nuance they introduce to the debate, their contemporaries and academics studying the period often regard Solomon and Gedamu and *The Hyphenated* as pious advocates of western culture. Solomon and Gedamu’s critique of “traditionalism” was understood simply as a rejection of “tradition” in its totality. Moreover, enough attention was not given to their critique of “the age of research” (the age of modernity characterized by western dominance). What they mean by “traditionalism” was different from “Ethiopian Culture”. “Traditionalism” in *The Hyphenated* was a reference to “stratification”— as stated above, the rigid social hierarchy of imperial Ethiopia sustained through deference for authority and inherited position. When it comes to the age of modernity dominated by the west, they regarded influences from the west as “destructive”, but a condition that Ethiopia can do little to avoid. In addition, Solomon and Gedamu’s evaluation of the ‘professionalism’ of modernity as “antiseptic” appears to be a commentary on the detached (if not insipid) rationality of bureaucratic life of European modernity, rather than a commentary on the nature of *zemenawinnet* in Ethiopia.

When Gedamu and Solomon said “a highly organized but static [traditional Ethiopian] way of life” should be “replaced by [a] dynamic way of life” (Solomon and Gedamu, 1969a: 14), they were not proclaiming that all Ethiopian assets—cultural and material—should be “replaced” by what came from the west. It was not disregard for Ethiopian assets or inability to notice the destructive force of western influence that

²⁶⁰ In the later article, “Translation—A Necessary Art?” Solomon argues that a culture that tries to keep out “foreign cultures” shows that that culture doubts its own self-identity. He says, “Being self consciously oneself is a step toward doubting one’s identity”.

was at the heart of *The Hyphenated*. Rather, for them, “dynamic way of life” could be achieved in Ethiopia only through a proper critique of both “traditionalism” and the damaging influence of the west. Therefore, it was because Ethiopia could not avoid influences from the west, that Solomon and Gedamu called for continuous consumption of what the west produced (its cultural and material products) and learn from its products and institutions. What Ethiopia should do realistically, they argued, was not to resist western institutions and their products, but to embrace them to be able to produce its own “truly Ethiopian items” (Ibid). They saw the transformative capacity of “anger”—the anger towards Ethiopia’s inferior economic position, a feeling, they said, that can set the country on the right path to produce “a vast quantity of works of the spirit out of which a large enough number of truly Ethiopian items would emerge” (Ibid); (Solomon Deressa, 1969c: 17-18).²⁶¹ Therefore, the goal of consumption was not an end in itself. It was a means that could create a pedagogic moment to “study” and learn from the west. For Solomon and Gedamu, this learning moment was accompanied simultaneously by the production of bona fide Ethiopian “items” that ultimately gives rise to a truly Ethiopian *zemenawinnet*. In short, *The Hyphenated* saw Ethiopian *zemenawinnet*, not as an imitation of the west, neither a preservation of Ethiopian culture by keeping out western ‘influence,’ or as a mere rejection of Ethiopian assets. They saw a realistic and feasible road to Ethiopian *zemenawinnet* through the study of the west aimed at producing “truly Ethiopian items”.

What becomes apparent from the foregoing discussion of *Addis Reporter* is that the criticism the paper brought on those who lamented the contamination of Ethiopian culture by outside influences represented, in different ways, an implicit critique of the imperial social order that sanctioned conformity to old traditions and values. This critique that *Addis Reporter* championed in its brief existence of two years, was more than a criticism of those writing in Amharic newspapers like *Mennen* in defense of “cultural preservation,” advocating for the preservation of “cultural uniqueness” and

²⁶¹ In the later article Solomon argues that a culture that tries to keep out “foreign cultures” shows that that culture doubts its own self-identity. He says, “Being self consciously oneself is a step toward doubting one’s identity”.

authenticity of the country (Haile Mariam Goshu, 1969: 21). The late 1960s represented a moment where young Ethiopians were grappling with the issue of modernity and what it means to be an Ethiopian. While their colleagues in the Amharic press were trying to find a balance between *modernity* (that they understood to be an importation from outside and western) and “Ethiopian culture”, some strident advocates of “the new” in *Addis Reporter* went as far as calling for imitation as the way to go. Solomon and Gedamu chose a much more nuanced approach. While they criticized those “moaning cultural invasion” for their ill-considered knee-jerk reaction against “foreign cultures”, they understood that a wholesale, uncritical appropriation of “foreign culture” and products was not “desirable”. In “Translation—A Necessary Art?” Solomon sees *zemenawinnet* for Ethiopia as a work of translation and “refashioning”. He suggests, civilization has always been a product of appropriation of “borrowed” and foreign products, including cultures, and about finding new *use* (for these products) in the society and country where they are brought into. He cites Axum as one such Ethiopian civilization that thrived as a result of its history of “borrowing”. He says,

The greatness of Axum lies not in its borrowings, but in what it did with what it imported [from other civilizations]. For instance, amphoras in which Mediterranean wine was imported ended up being used by the Axumites as coffins for infants. This, in a sense is, is translation. No doubt many other items came in from China, Arabia, Greece and Rome and here found a use that the original makers had not dreamt of. *If you want to be biased you can call it a demotic use of objects. But in reality it is no more demotic than using mineral oil to produce synthetic fiber and high protein food* (Emphasis mine) (Solomon Deressa, 1969c: 18).

What Solomon did in the above excerpt is show that translation, i.e., putting something “borrowed” into new use, is not domestication of foreign products no more is that true for any scientific innovation. It is no different from, for example, turning mineral oil into synthetic fiber. The circulation of products, for him from different places and its adoption into new use was what constituted *zemenawinnet*. For him *zemenawinnet* was a work of translation—adoption into a new language and cultural lexicon, and in that sense, the creation of something new. And translation

always requires an elaboration of one's own language—culture. It is a way of “giving meaning to” what is brought from the outside. Solomon says,

Besides aesthetic considerations and convenience, an abundance of translated classics no doubt will start more Ethiopians composing their own original works... Translating a good novel is like going through a period of apprenticeship during which the translator learns what he doesn't already know about his trade. It is also a period in which one can become more aware of the nuances and possibilities of one's own language...It is not without basis that the Amharic word for “to translate”, *metergom*, also carries the connotation of ‘giving meaning to’ (Ibid: 18-20).

His understanding of what was considered “western culture” (a synonym of *zemenawinnet*) is unorthodox for his time. He was baffled by the notion of cultural “authenticity” and “originality” and saw cultures as always in dynamic circulation and “mobility”. It was in this context that Solomon understood *zemenawinnet*. He observes:

...Screaming one's head off at the miniskirt or asking the Government to pass laws against it is, to put it mildly, superfluous. *The miniskirt is not what our teenage girls choose. It is what's happening to us...* [Therefore] the ways of the west cannot be kicked out. Nor need they be. Palaeobotanists have pointed to Ethiopia as the first domesticator of some 36 varieties of cereal. Imagine the United States stopping growing wheat just because it is not *originally American*. *But then, what is originally American?* (Emphasis mine) (Ibid)

Solomon saw culture, ideas, and technology as dynamic, as “superfluous,” and regarded emphasis on where they come from, compared to what we can do with them. What he called “the self-appointed guardians of Ethiopian culture” were to him fighting the wrong fight. Rather what is more realistic and doable, he argued, was “an analytical understanding of the invader, the proper emotional reaction to the best of what he brings along, and in the process of understanding it, doing what the Axumites did to the wine-container. The attempt should not be at tragic grandeur and purity, but rather at a constant taking and refashioning” (Ibid). In a cultural context “where cultural invasion...is bombarding the whole world from America,” what is necessary

and feasible for Solomon, was a “constant taking and refashioning” of cultural and other products coming from “the invader” (Ibid). Western modernity, so to speak—cultural influences from the west and their products, materials or others, were not desirable, but, desirable or not, they are regarded as conditioning the lives of Ethiopians and the whole world. Western influence was imposed, not chosen.

As Solomon anticipated, the didactic dissertations of the media to keep the youth away from practices that were seen as undermining and disrespecting age-old customs and traditions, were constantly disregarded by the urban youth who created an alternative youth sociality in the capital. Wayward practices, the wearing of the miniskirt, smoking and social drinking became a way of being young and urban especially after the 1960s and into the 1970s. The emperor’s speeches urging the youth to be responsive to authority and adhere to religious customs as well as rituals were challenged at least in the practices of the youth. A recalcitrant urban *zemenawi* youth that challenged the conventions of respectability of their society were also beginning to question the mores and rituals of the Church. As a member of that generation, Solomon (and also Gedamu) saw “western influence” and modernity as impositions, not choices. Solomon’s view of modernity was very similar to his contemporaries elsewhere on the African continent. The South African scholar Bernard Magubane, responding to studies of social change and western influence in African societies that were proliferating in the 1950s and 1960s, in 1971 exhibits similar views. Magubane says, “Colonialism imposed the urban order on the indigenous societies of Africa” and what was called “acculturation” or “westernization” of Africans that imitated white settlers, in the case of southern Africa, and “adopt ‘urbanism’” were not merely imitating anyone, but “synthesizing” existing systems, cultures and knowledge with the new that was imposed on them (Magubane, 1971: 430-431). Per Magubane “If [urban Africans] drink bottled beer, listen to recorded music, use furniture in their houses, and wear suits, they are merely taking their places in the scheme of things as they are” (ibid: 431).

A critique of “tradition” came in the media in general and *Addis Reporter* in particular, also in the form of a rather coated pushback on the religious authority of the Ethiopian

Orthodox Church and the imperious social mores that it sanctioned in postwar urban society. Challenging, at times even bordering agitation against authority, therefore, came in the form of questioning the pervasive influence of the church and the public conduct that its authority circumscribed. The explicit critique of the imperial state by the Ethiopian Student Movement, both in student writings as well as in student public demonstrations was a very significant development in the history of protest against imperial authority in this period, especially in the 1960s and 70s.²⁶² The criticism of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the state media was particularly apparent in *Addis Reporter*. It was rare to find criticism of the Church in the Amharic media such as *Addis Zemen*, as well as the carefully controlled *Ethiopian Herald*, that basically acted as a mouthpiece of the state. Columnists and opinion pieces in *Addis Reporter* that came out in 1969 and 1970 were an exception in this regard.

Addis Reporter in its August 1969 issue, comes out with an article entitled “Of Meat and Milk”. It complained about the “disappearance” of milk and meat from the market during the fasting season, sanctioned by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). It jested, “One would be persuaded to believe that these butchers should be prosecuted for high treason, for to one’s knowledge no rules or regulations have been laid down specifying when they should open and close their shops” (“Of Meat and Milk”, 1969: 9). It goes further to argue that “whether one should fast or not is entirely up to the individual concerned to decide and should not be imposed on the people by a bunch of butchers ... What one should now do is to see to it that meat-shops are open year round” (Ibid). In a city of “tens of thousands ...who have no earthly quarrel with meat at any time of the year”, it opined, butcheries should not be closed. Hinting that in this age where humans have climbed the moon, Orthodox Christians should be given the choice to fast or not to fast, they wrote, there were “[Orthodox] Christians of the Space Age” who did not care about fasting (Ibid).

²⁶² For a detailed discussion on this see Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia* (2014).

In spite of the circuitous manner in which the article argued its point, its critique was directed at the social mores that force people to observe religious practices and the amount of power and authority the church commands among its congregants and its influence on society at large. However, *Addis Reporter* was not always indirect in its critique of the Church. In “Test of Fire” the paper has the following to say about the Church: “... practice of closing down meat shops during the Lenten season should be abolished”, it argued, as Orthodox Christians were not the only residents in the capital (“Test of Fire”, 1970: 4). The article went as far as daring the EOC to play a more useful role in society by instead of banning “beneficial food items like meat, milk, butter, and eggs, including in the “fasting list,” alcohol and nicotine and focusing on charitable activities.” (ibid). Not only does this commentary challenge the cultural and religious hegemony of the EOC, but it puts the Church to a “test of fire” to play a more productive role in society. Such provocations that seem to advocate the banning of alcohol and nicotine were not calls for prohibition, for a paper that said in one breath those who do not fast should not be forced to observe that ritual. It is apparent that in this piece, the paper was more interested in exposing the overbearing influence of the Church over the lives of inhabitants in the capital. It was challenging the church’s control of public behavior. It was saying, what members of society choose to eat or not should not be dictated by the conventions and rules that a single institution sets. Moreover, by demanding the “abolition” of the practice of “closing down meat shops”, it was in effect calling for the separation of Church and State.

The paper also encouraged subversive activities against the conventions that the Church sanctioned. In an editorial commentary “Meeting the Meat Problem” *Addis Reporter* (April 4, 1969) came out with an interesting story about the spread of the *Shifinfin* during the Lenten season. *Shifinfin* a meal, which “looks like” a Lenten meal, to which meat was added to cater to the growing number of non-fasting, non-religious urban youth in the 1960s and 1970s. *Shifinfin* was most probably a postwar invention in a city with growing recalcitrant youth. In *Shifinfin*, meat is buried inside the scrambled *injera* deliberately hidden, allowing the client to order the meal during the fasting season without attracting the attention of a discerning public. The commentary narrates,

Lo and behold, an innocent-looking hunk of *injera* emerges from the kitchen. Our city slicker smiles, surreptitiously turns his back on the other customers and devours what looks like a perfectly legitimate, albeit somewhat non-nutritious, Lenten meal [—] ... all parties to the deal seem to profit from the arrangement... And probably it even tastes better—after all, ‘stolen kisses are sweeter’ (“Meeting the Meat Problem”, 1969: 5).

What is noteworthy about this commentary was not only the changes that were being registered in eating habits but also the transgression of norms and the transvaluation of social mores of the urban youth in Addis Ababa. Moreover, we notice that the treatment of the spread of the *Shifinfin* phenomenon in this commentary is without moral judgment against the practice. In fact, the commentary encourages the practice, hence the subversion of a sacred religious ritual, through the illicit agreement between buyer and seller (Ibid).²⁶³

While fasting was a favorite subject *Addis Reporter* used as a point of entry to challenge and question the church and its enormous powers in postwar Ethiopia, it was not necessarily the most potent one. The Church’s numerous religious holidays were associated with poor work ethic and “laziness”. The media, both in English and Amharic, publicized this perception at least since the 1960s. The Church’s implication on the persistence of poor work ethic among the peasantry in particular and the Ethiopian people in general, was perhaps the most serious of criticisms directed against it by the media. The Church was criticized for the “plethora of holidays” that it allegedly sanctioned on its members. The prohibition of work during religious holidays, it was argued, posed a great hindrance to the development of a strong work culture that in turn compromised material prosperity and national development. In an article provocatively titled, “Days of Indolence,” *Addis Reporter* insinuated that the church promotes “indolence” through its superfluous holidays. This editorial

²⁶³ The *shifinfin* phenomenon seems to have been quite widespread in the city. So much so a famous play was made titled “Shifinfin” was shown in Hager Fiker Theatre (date). *Shifinfin* was not the only instance in which the new generation of Ethiopians were “defying church wishes”, as *Addis Reporter*, reported. There was also a Kitfo Beit (*Kitfo*—meal made of minced meat with butter and spices) that was “doing business at the peak of the fasting season. During lunch and dinner hours one can see scores of people wending their way there defying church wishes”. This Kitfo Beit, we are told, was located “right behind” the headquarters of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Arat Kilo, close to the St. Mary’s Cathedral. “Meet the Meat Problem”, 1969: 5).

comment claimed, “Holidays constitute a veritable hindrance to the progress of the country” and stated that even state officials “absent themselves from work” to observe church holidays (“Days of Indolence”, 1970: 5). The editorial criticized the Church for providing the peasantry with a perfect pretext for their “laziness”.

In a similar article in *Addis Reporter*, “All Play and No Work” Worq Aferahu Kebede rather hyperbolically, claimed that Ethiopian peasants do not work the land for 299 out of 365 days of the year due to Christian holidays. Worq Aferahu’s accusation was directed against both the peasantry, who were said to be too religious and too lazy to work, and the church and the priestly class who insist on the preservation and sustenance of such antiquated religious rituals (Worq Aferahu Kebede “All Play and No Work”, 1969: 7). Both the church and the peasantry were fronted as elements representing “tradition”, and thus portrayed as anti-progress.²⁶⁴ Such practices, another issue in *Addis Reporter* argued was, “too burdensome for this enlightened age of ours”, implying that such rituals were anachronisms and thus must be either abandoned or at least reformed (“Easter in Ethiopia”, 1969: 13). The paper repeatedly mocked the church leaders who defended these “omniscient and omnipotent” practices(Ibid).

The church was also criticized for sponsoring sound pollution in the city. *Addis Reporter* said, through its loudspeakers and sound “bombardments” the church was “turning sinners deaf”. All these seemingly slight, but offensive remarks against the Ethiopian Church were used to criticize the church in subsequent issues of the paper. They not only disrespected but also ridiculed the church through their witty remarks (“Turning Sinners Deaf?”, 1969: 5). They represented an affront to sacred norms, such as fasting and the observance of religious holidays of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. *Addis Reporter* and to an extent the Amharic press, advocated openly for the elimination of work restrictions imposed on religious holidays. In effect such calls were

²⁶⁴ Compare this with the discussion in chapter three, where *Mennen*, throughout the 1950s and 60s, is shown to be disparaging towards the moral laxity of the youth and their lack of respect for religious values. While the former seems to be conservative and toed the official line, *Addis Reporter* appeared more independent.

advocacies for the “reform” of the church.²⁶⁵ Such challenges directed against one of the most powerful institutions, and the officially sanctioned state religion of the country, were a symptom, it appears, of the larger changes in social convention happening especially in the 1960s and 70s. The church was seen as the most important custodian of culture, tradition and an embodiment of an authentic Ethiopian character. Such attacks, coated or explicit were emblematic of the thorough going cultural changes occurring in the postwar period, especially among the urbanized youth with access to education. And the recalcitrance of *Addis Reporter* must also be seen within the context of student radicalism that was growing in the HSIU campus especially since the mid 1960s. Many of the writers and staffers in *Addis Reporter* were fresh graduates from HSIU. Solomon Deressa, Sebhat Gebreegziabher, Bealu Girma were among the prominent figures.²⁶⁶ But their rebellious energy was also linked to their formation in the spaces of the city such as Wube Bereha, as well as their experience overseas as students.

I would like to sum up this section with two key points. First, the tradition vs. modernity debate contributed to exposing the cracks within the cultural conventions of the empire. Just as the notions of *chewanet*, and public conduct were interrogated by the public sociality of the urban youth, this debate also exposed instances of “defying church wishes” and authority. Recalcitrant youth emerged in the universities and colleges of the country. As will be shown in the next chapter, disobedient youthfulness became an in-built popular character in the spaces of the city. And the existence of “cultural” rebels in the city, in the making at least since the 1950s, challenged the normative structure of the postwar imperial social order. Moreover, the tradition vs. modernity debate also shows that *zemenawinnet* became part of

²⁶⁵ The view that the superfluity of religious holidays has created a pretext for the “laziness” of the peasantry was also common in the Amharic press in the 1960s. While the Amhari tended to criticize the peasantry for using holidays to abscond on their farming responsibilities, *Addis Reporter*’s criticism was directly more on the Church. See for instance, issues that explained lack of material prosperity and economic progress through the dearth of work discipline in *Mennen in the late 1960s*. See for instance (“yidres leanbabiyan”, 1962: 3); (Negash Gebremariam’s “Keman aneshe”, 1961: 26-28).

²⁶⁶ See discussion on Solomon’s and Sebhat’s literary works about Wube Bereha in one of the subsequent chapters.

popular consciousness of postwar Addis Ababa society. It became a folk category that animated political and cultural discourse, even if it meant different things for different groups. And *zemenawinnet* was not confined to the imaginaries of the “educated elite” or the imperial state. The urban youth in general were the linchpin around which transformations in public sociality and the debate on *zemenawinnet* was centered in the postwar period. This was more so especially in the post 1960s.

Second, the tradition vs. modernity debate that largely equated *zemenawi silitane* with western culture reduced the debate mainly to a rhetorical stance by those who posed as opposing the invasion of western culture and those advocating for imitation of the west. The debate largely projected an image of the west as a *giver* of modernity. Modern systems of government, bureaucracy as well as science were seen as western inventions. It conflated *zemenawinnet* to western culture. The debate stripped Ethiopian culture to ‘a few’ customs, habits, “patterns of behavior”, “some traditions of dress” and deference to normative conventions such as respect for authority, obedience and inherited position. Such conception of Ethiopian culture emptied out the rich knowledge systems: institutional practices, technical and architectural wealth. “Tradition” came to be confused with customs, religious practices and rituals that were considered not just part of the time honored “traditional civilization” of Ethiopia, but also trans-historical - little changing collections of rituals from time immemorial. While those who advocated the wholesale imitation of western culture tended to see Ethiopian culture as a collection of stale rituals, “a throwback to the laws of inertia”, those who saw themselves as custodians of tradition were inclined to see it as a collection of age-old customs that need preserving.²⁶⁷ Despite a rhetorical lip service about the need for “inventive” application of modern education to “develop, enrich and modify” Ethiopia’s traditions (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967*: Sep. 23, 1963), there was little to none that was done to synthesize borrowings from outside to existing knowledge systems or technical know-hows in the country. Even if people like Solomon and Gedamu, tried to understand what *zemenawinnet* should mean for Ethiopia, the media was replete

²⁶⁷ The argument of this paragraph has benefitted from insight obtained from Frantz Fanon’s discussion in *The Wretched of the Earth* on the meaning that is associated with “culture” in Africa (1963: 236-238).

with polarized knee jerk reactions either against “cultural invasion” or calls for imitation as innovation. Both these poles tended to caricature the debate. On the one hand, those who saw themselves as the “custodians” of Ethiopian culture seemed to also perceive modernization unavoidable (and appeared to call for confinement when they lamented “cultural invasion”) did not come up with a strategy of *how to modernize*. In that same vein, those who saw and advocated mimicry as innovation did not even attempt to design a strategy of how to modernize. Those who tried to design a strategy of how to modernize in a way that is contextual, in a way that taps into the richness of homegrown knowledge systems and technical expertise, remained on the fringe lines of the debate. Even with the likes of Solomon and Gedamu, who were influential members of this debating public, the nuance and complexity of their ideas fell into the cracks or were largely not picked up to further advance the tradition vs. modernity debate. Therefore, *zemenawinnet* as a transformation of what is “borrowed” from the outside to put into “new use,” that was common in everyday social practices of popular culture, artistic practice, and popular music (as the next two chapters will show), was not developed intellectually in ways that transformed, for instance, the country’s educational system or its system of government. Therefore, it is with the desire to move beyond the terms set by the tradition vs. modernity debate and examine the ways in which *zemenawinnet* was manifested in the social practices of the popular, that the next section proposes a different theory of *zemenawinnet*. This move is necessary because the tradition vs. modernity debate conflated, as discussed above, Ethiopian culture with customs and habits and modernity with western culture. By adopting a conception of *modernity as practice* that draws on the works of two Amharic and Geez scholars of the first half of the last century, I argue that *zemenawinnet* in postwar Ethiopia should be conceived as a temporally and spatially specific experiential practice, rather than as a ready-made set of *ideals* or *practices* imported from the outside.

5.4 *Zemenawinnet*: “born of a time” and place

As demonstrated in the earlier sections of this chapter, modernity is narrowly conceived either at the level of state power or as an intellectual project. In the rest of this chapter, I attempt to complicate the discussion by challenging the unidirectional,

diffusionist conception of the history of modernity as a top-down project by the state to the rest of society. Taking a cue from Donham, first I argue that modernity was not just a purview of elite groups and the state. It was invested with new meanings by everyday thinking people, who transformed its meanings according to their interests and needs. Second, I go further to challenge the common view in the scholarship that conceives modernity as something that was introduced from the outside into Ethiopia—specifically from Europe through the midwife role of local elites and the channels they used to propagate and spread its key assumptions. To challenge the idea that modernity had a single source of origin and place of birth, Europe, I draw on Sanjay Subrahmanyam, the renowned Indian historian, whose works on the early modern world, especially South Asia and Eurasia document a different *history* of modernity.

As Subrahmanyam shows in his broad range of works from art, economic history, philology and public culture there is a need to “delink the notion of ‘modernity’ from a particular European trajectory (Greece, classical Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and thus ‘modernity...)’”. He argues that, ‘modernity’ “represents a more-or-less global shift, with many different sources and roots, and—inevitably—many different forms and meanings depending on which society we look at it from” (Subrahmanyam, 1997: 737). The “sources” and “roots” of modernity come from different parts of the globe and the phenomenon was given differing meanings in different localities and by different actors. Subrahmanyam for instance, contends that “rather than treat the European voyages of exploration as the sole or even the single most important focus, we need to bear in mind that the period witnesses the expansion in a number of cultures of travel, as well as the concomitant development of travel literature as a literary genre, whether the routes explored are overland (trans-Saharan, trans-Central Asian) or maritime” (ibid). Such “shifts of global dimensions” occurred in other fields such as demographic changes, ecological transformations and alterations in political ideology (ibid: 738-739)²⁶⁸. Unlike the

²⁶⁸ Subrahmanyam notes, the notion of “Universal Empire” as a political ideology was “reworked” during the early modern world in different locales such as the Ottomans, in Iran, Pre-Columbian America, in Southern and Central Africa and other places simultaneously.

Universalist claims of modernity as a phenomenon birthed in Europe, Subrahmanyam's point has long been to show the "global and connected character of the early modern period" (ibid: 740), which is held up by many as the time of origin of modernity. By stressing the "conjunctural" coming together and "transmission" of ideas and commonly shared cultural assumptions in different regions of the world (ibid: 750 and 758), Subrahmanyam demonstrates that modernity was a product of interlocking connections rather than one that spreads from a single source (1998).²⁶⁹

Akin to Subrahmanyam, my engagement with the history of *zemenawinnet* in postwar Ethiopia starts with a definition of *zemenawi* (modern) by Desta Tekle Wolde. Desta, was a distinguished church scholar of the first half of the 20th century. He authored what is arguably the most authoritative Amharic dictionary to date, *Addis Yamarigna Mezgebe Qalat: Bekahinat ena Behagere Seb quanqua* (*New Amharic Dictionary: In the Languages of the Clergy and Folk Culture*) more than seven decades ago. This work took Desta about thirty years to complete. He commenced the project in the late 1920s and completed it by the end of the 1950s (c. 1929-1958). Desta was a mentee of the illustrious *geez* scholar *Aleqa* Kidane Wold Kifle (c.1871-1943), who penned another key work, a dictionary of Geez, the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.²⁷⁰ He completed this dictionary in the early 1930s but the work was published posthumously decades later, in 1956 (Desta Tekle Wold, 1970: 4). In *New Amharic Dictionary*, Desta Teklewold gives us a meaning of *zemenawi* that is different from the ways in which the concept is used in academic and media/public discourse in the postwar period. Desta defines *zemenawi* as ዘመን የወለደው "born of a time". *Zemenawi* is understood as a product of a particular *zemen* (age). This is very different from conceiving modernity as, a Universalist ideology with a single meaning or origin. Both Desta and Kidane Wold understood *zemenawi* more as a product of a particular time. This is why they give us a specific definition of *zemenawi* and not of

²⁶⁹ Here Subrahmanyam argues, "modernity is historically a global and *conjunctural* phenomenon, not a virus that spreads from one place to another. It is located in a series of historical processes that brought hitherto relatively isolated societies into contact, and we must seek its roots in a set of diverse phenomena—the Mongul dream of world conquest, European voyages of exploration, activities of Indian textile traders in the diaspora... and so on" (1998: 99-100).

²⁷⁰ Geez is also in use by the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Geez language, as the Orthodox church is part of the shared history between the two countries.

zemenawinnet. However, similar to contemporary academic theorizing of modernity as a dynamic phenomenon, their definition assumes that *zemenawi* in one period can be superseded by another *zemenawi* in a subsequent period.²⁷¹

By using Desta Tekle Wold's and Kidane Wold Kifle's definition of *zemenawi*, I examine the application of the term in an Amharic linguistic milieu in the postwar period and seek to understand its praxis by showing the discrepancy between the ways in which *zemenawinnet* (as an ideology) was framed in public discussions since the 1950s, and how it was actually experienced at the popular social scale, as a lived practice. Moreover, by placing emphasis on the linguistic import of the notion of *zemenawi* and the history of its practice in the context of postwar Addis Ababa, this chapter departs from the common view that essentially understands modernity as a foreign, ready-made product brought from outside to Ethiopia for mere consumption or synthesis. What I do different in this study is examine modernity as an experiential practice in postwar Addis Ababa. I show that modernity was borne out of creative lived practice of everyday people. The focus of the literature on the educated elite as bringers of modernity meant that *zemenawinnet* as an actual lived and experiential social practice was left largely unaccounted for. It is in an attempt to fill this lacuna that this chapter attempts to foreground *zemenawinnet* as a popular consciousness, a folk category that was also part of their lived practice. I take Desta Tekle Wold's definition of *zemenawi* as a heuristic device to understand *zemenawinnet*, as an experiential phenomenon, as opposed to an ideational one.

In the 1950s, the meaning of modernity came to be infiltrated by a conception of modernity functionalized by modernization theory. The 1950s and 1960s saw the "heyday of modernization theory." Walter Rostow's, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1959) and auto critiques such as Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968) were part of this intellectual and political tradition that came out of the American social sciences to understand "development" and "social change" in "developing societies" (Fukuyama, in Huntington 2006, p. xi). Countries categorized as

²⁷¹ As Donald Donham (2020) argues, "whatever is taken as modern at one moment will inevitably be overtaken by a new definition given the dynamic of modernism".

“developing” or “backward” were marked as sites of modernization locked in a “constant state of catching up” with Europe (Bromber, 2012: 77), a continent that was held up as the pinnacle of economic and technological advancement. This discourse of modernity that was conflated with modernization—introduced and pervaded much of the non-west in subsequent decades these countries were told to strive to realize development by emulating Europe (Fukuyama, in Huntington 2006, p. xii), the towering model of successful “development”. It was through this conception of modernity that the treatment of “tradition” and “modernity” as binary opposites was entrenched in discourses of modernization in the post 1950s. The only path for progress for any developing nation, this view claimed, was for its economy to “take-off” by following the west’s path to modernization and prosperity (Ibid); (Rostow, 1959: 14).²⁷² In an “attempt to create an integrated, empirical theory of human social change”, American social science used newly independent countries all over the world “as a laboratory for social theory” (Fukuyama, in Huntington 2006, p. xi and xii). The popularization of modernization discourse in the 1950s the world over tended to limit modernity’s significance to “social scientific functionalism”. The same discourse on modernization that confined the meaning of modernity largely to its role as a tool for economic improvement, as Habermas argued (Habermas, 1990: 2 and 3), conversely projected a picture of the “non-west” as the bastion of “tradition” that is more often than not seen as plagued by backwardness, and thus publicized as needing infusion from and imitation of the creative dynamism of the west in order for it to achieve “progress”. As we have seen already, in Ethiopia the west was portrayed not only by the advocates of imitation as innovation, but also by the seers and custodians of “tradition” as the source of science, technological know-how, as well as a bureaucratic and educational systems that needs to be copied by the “non-west” if such societies desire progress.

²⁷² Even, modernization theory’s critiques from within the American social sciences such as the political scientist, Samuel Huntington went only so far. True, Huntington questioned the efficacy of economic advancement as a certificate to a modern status and emphasized that a stable political system must be a prerequisite, not a by-product, of economic advancement. However, he did not question the novelty of imitating Europe’s “modernity” as the bringer of progress. Vehement critiques such as Bernard Mugabane notwithstanding, in following decades, the theory found intellectual heirs and conscripts in African and other non-western countries (Magubane, 1971).

In this binary, *bahil* (Ethiopian culture or “tradition”)²⁷³ was regarded as time immemorial, while *zemenawinnet* came to be associated with an inherently dynamic western culture. In this sense *zemenawinnet* was seen as the force of the time (universal time, as opposed to a product of *a particular time*) that cannot be avoided and thus must be plagiarized. The idea that *modernity* (as a European good) was the way of the future and that its spread was inevitable (more like a “virus” as Subrahmanyam would say) whether Ethiopians choose it or not, preempted any meaningful introspection into the rich wealth of homegrown knowledge systems and the technical expertise found in them. Systems that could be systematically studied and synthesized to transform “borrowings” from the outside, to put them into “new use,” as Solomon would say. Technical, specialized as well as theoretical knowledge that was considered homegrown was ambiguously labeled as “Ethiopian culture” and conflated with customs and habits. In the post 1950s—a period of vigorous modernist push by an imperial state determined to modernize Ethiopia—pushed for the appropriation of European style technical, scientific and professional training, as well as methods of schooling considered imperative to achieving material progress. This was done with almost virtual disregard to homespun technologies, skills and knowledge systems.

Ethiopia was seen as rich with “tradition”—especially spiritual knowledge, while it was projected as devoid of a consequential technology applicable to the 20th century. Therefore, the way to extricate the country from the pit of material deprivation was by consuming knowledge from the west. This attitude categorically dismissed homegrown knowledge systems. Skills, know-how, administrative practices and technological knowledge that was regarded as Ethiopian was seen as inferior at best

²⁷³ A brief but brilliant treatment of what “tradition” has come to mean in the context of colonial Africa is found in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. As Fanon notes “African culture” or “tradition” came to mean the stripped down customs, what Fanon calls the “dregs of culture”. “Culture” under colonial rule or “African culture”, he observes, came to mean “a throwback to the laws of inertia” (Fanon, 1963: 237). Fanon argues, tradition in colonial Africa was made “more and more shriveled up, inert and empty” as it was arrested, “stereotyped” and made immobile after centuries of colonial conditioning (Ibid: 238). African “culture” in this sense, he argues, has been equated with an idea of “tradition” that was reduced to the “automatic habits, some traditions of dress, and a few broken-down institutions. Little movement can be discerned in such *remnants of culture*. After a century of colonial domination, we find a culture which is rigid in the extreme, or rather what we find are *the dregs of culture, its mineral strata*” (Emphasis mine) (Ibid).

and arcane at the worst. Solomon Deressa lamented such categorical dismissal of homegrown knowledge and expertise. In an article, “The Dream Machine” in *Addis Reporter* (April 25, 1969), Solomon cites the example of the architectural sophistication of the Sidama Tukul, to show that homegrown knowledge and expertise should not be “eradicated” in the name of modernity. He said, “the failure to impress [upon]... the difference between improving on and eradicating the most beautiful of Ethiopia’s native architecture—the Sidamo tukul—might in retrospect appear as self-denigration.” Such acts, he charged, “boorish” and shortsighted, represented a “blind destruction of accumulated knowledge in the name of progress and modernity” (Solomon Deressa, 1969b: 17).

The west was posited as an almost singular bastion of superior science and technology, higher to whatever technology and expertise that was considered homegrown. Implicit in this assumption was the thinking that science and technology was alien to Ethiopia, and thus, must be acquired from the west. Even when prewar and some postwar intellectuals flagged Japan as the most advanced modern nation state outside the west “as a model to imitate”, what was held up to be emulated was its successful adoption of “Western ways to escape feudalism and to leapfrog ahead to modernity” (Donham, 1992: 36), not how that country capitalized on its already existing knowledge, technical and technological assets to attain the level of advancement it reached in the 20th century.

Similarly, western way of organizing knowledge, administration, bureaucracy, its system of government, its institutional taxonomy, its methods of social ordering, as well as the substance of its education to produce technocrats, professionals and technicians, was considered superior and thus touted as a model to be copied. “Ethiopian culture” which was reduced to its supposedly stable essence—religious rituals, servility to authority, codes of respectability (*chewannet*) sequestered in *balabatawi* (lordly) privileges of birth, inherited privilege and deference to authority, was projected as the desired character of the *New Ethiopianness* that postwar citizens should combine with the attributes of the *zemenawi*.

Education came to mean knowing about the west and its achievements. Public intellectuals like Haddis Alemayehu and Eguale Gebreyohannis protested this demotion of homegrown knowledge systems, methods, skills and institutions in their writings in the 1960s. Haddis Alemayehu in *Ityopia min ayinet astedader yasfeligatal?* (*What kind of Administration does Ethiopia need?*) Haddis insisted that there was a need to design an Ethiopian political system that tries to marry homegrown institutions of law and administration with “eastern” (socialist) and “western” (liberal) political administrative systems (Haddis, 1974: 3).²⁷⁴ Eguale Gebreyohannis in *The Method of Higher Education* (“*yekefitegna timhirt zeye*”) (1963) insisted on the need to synthesize homegrown episteme with western ones without privileging the western model over the Ethiopian (Eguale, 2003: 14 and 77-79). Similarly, Haddis Alemayehu’s view on what kind of education and modernity Ethiopia needs is expressed unequivocally in the novel *Yeelm Ejhat*. He seems to be divulging in the novel his disagreements while he was State Minister of Education in 1961 (Alene, 2015: 33-34). He says, “[Modern education] should complement what is missing in [the ancient Ethiopian education and tradition] ...” He criticized those who argued in the ministry that, “Ethiopia needs to throw away all that which connects her to her ancient education and tradition to embrace western education and culture to fast track its modernization” (Haddis, 1988: 215). He laments that the views of his detractors prevailed and found acceptance by the Haile Selassie regime (ibid).²⁷⁵ However, such debates on how to “modernize” without abandoning homegrown resources, and nuanced ruminations on the meaning of *zemenawinnet* proposed by people like Haddis, Eguale and Solomon in the postwar period, were becoming increasingly fringe voices and were receding from public discourse. This gave way to what became the conventional wisdom—that modernity was foreign and can only be achieved by mimicking the West at least in key sectors of social-scientific and

²⁷⁴ This was written initially in 1955 EC (1962 GC) as a reflection on the political crisis that the aborted coup d’état of 1960 by the Neway Brothers represented. The emperor did not appreciate his proposal for the reform of the political system and he was allegedly “rebuked” by the emperor (Alene, 2015: 33). The pamphlet was later published as a book only after the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution. See also (Haddis, 1974: 1).

²⁷⁵ This discussion in *Yeelm Ejhat* is perhaps a reflection of Haddis’s own experience as State Minister of Education.

technological development. This meant relegating homespun systems of educational organization and method, ways of knowing, technical skills and resources by denying them the attention they deserve in the country's endeavor to "modernize". Western style modernity came to be understood as the desired destination for the country. The ways in which *zemenawinnet* was deployed in postwar public debates not only largely conceptualized it as an off-the-rack product imported by the elite and consumed conspicuously by the rest of society, but also posed *zemenawinnet* as the opposite of *bahil* ('Ethiopian culture'). 'Ethiopian culture,' thus, was regarded as infertile in terms of providing technologies for material prosperity and "progress".

However, as mentioned above, as opposed to its public and academic framing since the 1950s, the notion of *zemenawi* did not always entail a mere foreign transplantation from outside. 'Homespun intellectuals' like Kidane Wold and Desta had a different understanding of what is *zemenawi*. It was after the introduction of the term *zemenawi* into public-media discussion, after it became a public good in the postwar period, that *zemenawi* became synonymous with western culture and came to mean something alien, something imported from outside and something superior to what was held up as Ethiopian or "Ethiopian culture". Kidane Wold Kifle and Desta Tekle Wold's conception of the *zemenawi* was not infiltrated by the Universalist ideology of modernity. These scholars, who had their intellectual formation in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the prewar period, whose erudite studies of linguistic works on Geez and Amharic by Ethiopian church intellectuals and European Orientalist alike, had a different take on the meaning of *zemenawi* (Desta Tekle Wold, 1970: 5-7).

Contrary to those who debated about tradition and modernity in the media during the postwar period (especially after the 1950s) Desta Tekle Wold, described *zemenawi* as "born of a time". Both Kidane Wold and Desta did not have the ideological baggage of those writing in *Mennen* and *Addis Reporter* in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, who saw tradition and *zemenawinnet* as opposites. One of the reasons why their notion of *zemenawi* is prescient for this study is because their view of *zemenawi* provides us with an alternative meaning to "the modern". Their definition of *zemenawi*, unencumbered by the ideologically laden modernization theory that equated human

“progress” and “development” with mimicking the west, is more liable and open to an understanding of *zemenawinnet* as experiential phenomena in the postwar period. Their definition of *zemenawi* helps to account for the discrepancy between the intellectual framing and conceptualization of the term on the one hand, and its practice in postwar Addis Ababa, on the other.

Desta Tekle Wold understood *zemenawi* as something that is a product of a particular time, something that is enunciated as a result of everyday social, cultural practices in a particular context, rather than that, which comes from an extrinsic source. He uses the terms ዘመናዊ (*zemenay*), ዘመናዊ (*zemenawi*), and ዘበናዊ (*zebenay*) interchangeably, since they carry similar connotations. He states that *zebenay* is an Amharic equivalent of the Geez “*zemenawi*”, meaning something that is characteristic of an age or something belonging to a particular time. He defines *zemenawi* as “born of a time” (ዘመን የወለደው) or something that is “a product of a time” (ዘመን ዓመጣኝ, lit. brought by a time) (Desta Tekle Wold, 1970: 496). For him the things that are associated with *zemenawi* include cultural artifacts such as music, lifestyle; and material things with practical utility such as dress (ibid). For Desta, *zemenawi*, therefore, was a product of everyday things— social and cultural practices and artifacts in the quotidian life of everyday people that expresses a particular time and context. Desta saw *zemenawi* as a countenance of an age. The non-permanence of things, *zemenawi* becomes apparent also in Kidane Wold Kifle’s characterization of the term in his Geez dictionary where *zemenawi* signifies transience. For Kidane Wold too *zemenawi* is a thing that is “useful for a particular time”, something ephemeral (Kidane Wold Kifle, 1948: 423). The ‘time’ that Desta Tekle Wold and Kidane Wold Kifle alluded to in their definitions of *zemenawi* is not an abstract “self-conscious” time, a time that is a destination in the progressive march of history, it is not in a social and political vacuum. Rather, it is *a time* that is not unlike any other. It is a time that is *enchanted* by the social, political and cultural energies of the place and space of its articulation. Therefore, Desta and Kidane Wold offer a definition of *zemenawi* as sets of social practices, countenances, cultural artifacts and socialites expressing a particular time and context. As opposed to being a desired place of destination, these

intellectuals understand *zemenawi* as the fleeting manifestation of a specific period in history. Such understanding of *zemenawi* furnishes an appreciation of *zemenawinnet* as an experiential practice in the postwar period as opposed to an intellectual and abstract phenomenon.

This definition of *zemenawi* as an expression of a particular time, ዘመን የወለደው, “born of a time” or ዘመን ዓመጣሽ, “product of a time” (Desta Tekle Wold, 1970: 496) occurring in a particular place, is used here to argue that *zemenawinnet* can alternatively be understood as a system of social practices and mobilization of cultural artifacts from a particular time. I focus on its emergence in a particular spatio-temporal context and socio-cultural developments specific to that context rather than as an ideology, as a finished superior product imported from an external location. This is not an argument for an Ethiopian national modernity that is *authentic* and *unique*. Rather, it is an attempt at underlining socio-cultural developments that account for *zemenawinnet* as part of popularly shared lived-experience of everyday people, whose diverse “roots” and “sources” were both local and foreign.

By placing emphasis on the life *zemenawinnet* took in everyday practice in Addis Ababa, what I seek to show is that *zemenawinnet* was a product of encounters between domestic and foreign artifacts. Its enunciation in postwar Addis Ababa as a result of social and cultural practices by everyday people had its roots in various parts of the world. This theory of *zemenawinnet* tries to understand the various artifacts, both domestic and foreign, through their coming together from different places, and their formation in the impulse of social life and lived practice, create a *zemenawinnet* that was particular to a spatio-temporal context, but not authentic and bounded to it. Such an emphasis and alternative conceptualization of *zemenawinnet* to understand lived practice in the postwar period could illuminate our understanding of subject formation in this period. The subject formation of the urban youth in postwar Addis Ababa, especially in the 1960s and 70s, as we have seen in preceding chapters, including this one, was characterized by hyphenatedness. The identity of the youth was a bulwark of cultural inspirations from different parts of the world. The

“influence” did not come only from the west, but was also homegrown and mobilized from other parts of the world. The theory of *zemenawinnet* spun in a particular cultural, spatial and temporal context is used in this study to understand subject formation of the Addis youth in the postwar period.

What Kidane Wold and Desta Tekle Wold offer is, therefore, an alternative perspective that helps contextualize the meaning of *zemenawinnet* and our understanding of subject formation, as a result of creative living practice. Basing myself on Desta Tekle Wold’s and Kidane Wold Kifle’s conceptualization of *zemenawi* as a contingent social practice expressing a specific spatio- temporal context, I will show in the next chapter how *zemenawinnet* was born from encounters between domestic and foreign artifacts and everyday social practices of urban youth to produce what I refer to here as *popular modernity (hizbawi zemenawinnet)*.²⁷⁶

Such a historical perspective of modernity—like the one that is proposed by Subrahmanyam and a spatio-temporally specific understanding of *the zemenawi* as found in Desta and Kidane Wold exposes not just the diverse “roots” and “sources” of modernity but also the different meanings that locally specific considerations, applications and interests invest in its meaning. An interconnected world and its “circuits” of transmission facilitated appropriation of ideas, artistic and cultural elements by culturally located subjects (Subrahmanyam, 2010).²⁷⁷ As developments in art for example make explicit, artistic elements incorporated by a particular artistic tradition could serve as a catalyst in the emergence of new trends and transformations in that particular tradition. This for instance could be said about modernist art in Europe in the first half of the 20th century. The most famous example is perhaps Pablo Picasso’s incorporation of “primitive” “African-mask” to produce something new—

²⁷⁶Note here the discrepancy between Desta Tekle Wold’s definition of *zemenawi* with the ways in which *time* is understood in Universalist definitions of modernity or “the modern age”. Habermas notion of a ‘self-conscious’ modernity that was drawn from Hegel, is an example. As noted towards the beginning of this chapter, modernity (the modern age) for Habermas (1990: 17), creates its own “normativity out of itself” due to its uniqueness in human history as an age not like any other.

²⁷⁷ Subrahmanyam shows in this lecture how artistic elements of Mughal paintings in circulation in the Netherlands were incorporated in Rembrandt’s religious paintings, and Mughal artists appropriated tropes from European paintings.

cubism, in European modernist art. Cubism—one of the most emblematic western avant-garde artistic traditions was born out of the connections that existed between Africa and Europe as parts of a “regime of circulation”, colonization and domination in the 19th and 20th century (Sims, 2000: 2).²⁷⁸ The same could be said about Reggae, rumba, calypso and Ethio-Jazz.

In conclusion, this chapter sought to outline some of the main contours of the theoretical debate on modernity, as discussed by scholars on Ethiopia and others. Then the chapter proposed a theory of *zemenawinnet* as an experiential phenomenon enacted in a creative living practice in the specific spatio-temporal context of postwar Ethiopia. Rather than seeing Modernity, with a capital “M” as having a single source of origin, it is shown here, by drawing on Sanjay Subrahmanyam, that it was a product of a connected world with “regimes of circulation”. While modernity was a globally staged affair with different “sources” and “roots”, it is also shown in this chapter that ‘the modern’ (*zemenawi*) was “born of a time” and, thus it is conceived as spatio-temporally determined phenomena. The *zemenawi* as “born of a time” is a definition by Desta Tekle Wold and Kidane Wold Kifle, Ethiopian church scholars of the past century. By using this notion of the *zemenawi* as “born of a time” this chapter critiques the Universalist theory and ideology of modernity that was broadcasted and disseminated by modernization theory and that permeated public and academic discussion on the subject of *zemenawinnet* in the post 1950s. The chapter also showed that the tradition vs. modernity debate in the postwar Ethiopian media strived to make sense of *zemenawinnet* in an Ethiopian context. However, with some significant exceptions, such as Solomon Deressa and Gedamu Abereha, *zemenawinnet* was perceived largely as mimicking the west and educating Ethiopians in the ways of Europe, by both the critiques of its excesses as “deculturation” (*Herald* cited in

²⁷⁸ As Lowery Stokes Sims here writing about the life and works of Wifredo Lam argued, while “European and Euro-American artists exercised a proprietary ownership of the primitive ... [and] appropriated with scant regard for their [African] original meaning and context”, artists like the Cuban Wilfredo Lam “reoriented the trajectory of [European] modernism... [in the 1930s and 40s] by introducing “the primitive” [Lam himself—as an Afro Cuban] into “primitiveness” [the artistic movement].

Solomon and Gedamu, “Non Sequitur”, 1969b: 13)²⁷⁹ or those advocates of imitation of the west as innovators.

By proceeding from Desta’s and Kidane Wold’s conception of *zemenawi*, I will investigate *zemenawinnet* as a popular lived practice in postwar Addis Ababa in the coming two chapters. These chapters will present—as a result of the mobilization of cultural artifacts both from internal and foreign sources— a brief social history of *zemenawinnet*. They will highlight the political formativeness of social and cultural practices in the postwar capital. By accounting for the everyday social practices of the urban youth in postwar Addis Ababa, these chapters will seek to demonstrate how *zemenawinnet* was lived at a popular social scale.

²⁷⁹ Here the authors state that in its June 29 1969 issue, the English daily, Ethiopian Herald reported to have accused *Addis Reporter* as involved in an act of “deculturation” by allegedly promoting the miniskirt. The *Herald* issue reportedly charged, “... It is humiliating (for Ethiopians) to wear a European one, because we have got our own national dress which clearly indicates the existence of a highly developed, advanced, and great culture”

Chapter Six

The making of popular modernity: of cultural brokers, Aradas and profane spaces

Every new configuration contains masses of the old. I think of the new not as breaking completely with the past—[rather] always as reconfiguring the elements of the past with some elements that are new. Each time that comes, it does require a change of perspective. Sometimes [even] a change of paradigm. Stuart Hall (The Stuart Hall Project, 2013).

This chapter is about the practice of *zemenawinnet* as opposed to *zemenawinnet* as a *theory-ideology*. It synthesizes insights from discussions in previous discussions. The chapter brings together the emergence of “the popular”, and “the *zemenawi*” to show how *popular modernity* was forged in postwar Addis Ababa. To contextualize the meaning of *zemenawinnet* in postwar Addis Ababa, it draws from Kidane Wold Kifle and Desta Teklewold’s understanding of the *zemenawi*. This chapter bases itself on the conception of these intellectuals to theorize about *zemenawinnet* as a notion that is borne out of a particular time in a particular location. It shows how the changes in public sociality in the postwar period generated by the inbuilt delinquency of urban space resulted in the birth of what is called here the *rebel youth*. The birth of the *rebel subject* will be shown in this chapter, as a product of cultural brokers as operators of profane spaces of the city as well as *aradinnet* as a quintessential urban youth identity, in a fast-changing urban society. In postwar Addis Ababa *aradinnet* was a way of life associated with the *zemenawi* urban youth. I will argue, *aradinnet* as an urban sensibility and sets of practices, grew in the midst of poor arada hustlers and the arada-vagrant figure of the city-center²⁸⁰, as a collectively shared experience of street smartness. But it later became a generalized urban sensibility, a way of being *zemenawi* and young in the capital especially in the 1960s and 70s. This chapter uses

²⁸⁰ Marco Di Nunzio in his study of contemporary Piazza, argues that *irdina* is about poor members that hustle the streets by using street smartness as their shared collective experience to “make [sic] something out of...[their] everyday life” (Di Nunzio, 2012: 436). The same can be said about the postwar period. This period, however, requires an understanding of arada as a cultural sensibility that was crucial in the formation of the cultural identity of the urban youth, as I will show in the course of this chapter.

the story of *zemenawinnet* as an experiential phenomenon as a way of writing a social history of subject formation in postwar Addis Ababa. By examining *zemenawinnet* from the “point of its effect”, i.e., as an everyday lived experience in the spaces of the city, it shows that it was always in relationship to the modernist project of the imperial state. As opposed to an imported, free floating culture phenomena or one that comes about as a result of a cultural script from the outside. *Zemenawinnet* is understood as a stuff that comes into existence through the impulses of social life as a corporeally deployed cultural phenomena. The elaboration of the domestic cultural lexicon in the production of *popular modernity* (music, dress, hairstyle etc.) should not be seen as the “reproduction” of the past—the “traditional” and its ‘perpetuation’ in the postwar present. Rather cultural forms adapted and utilized in a particular context, were transmuted and “synthesized” with “foreign” cultural resources to take new forms to respond to the particular spatio-temporal needs of urban society in postwar Addis Ababa.

In this period when student radicals and artist-intellectuals and scholars of modernity articulated *zemenawinnet* in a revolutionary language of social justice, fraternity and freedom, *zemenawinnet* was part of the lived experience of the urban youth through their day-to-day social practices. The changes in sensibilities that scholars such as Elizabeth Woldegiorgis write about among students and artist intellectuals were part of a broader social and cultural change and the radical transformation in public sociality in urban Ethiopia. These changes were transformative of society as a whole as they called into question the efficacy of the normative structure and the dominant social conventions of the imperial social order. They challenged notions of “respectability” and authority. The students and artist intellectuals themselves were also products of the processes of urbanization that led to the subject formation of the youth in Addis Ababa. On the other hand, the youth in Addis Ababa (and presumably other urban spaces) were ‘trained’ by their public life on how to be *zemenawi* through their daily social practices and shared experiences. They redefined their social positions, transgressed social conventions, despite the structural circumstances that

circumscribed their lives.²⁸¹ By strategically foregrounding the lives of women azmari/artist cum bar operators, this chapter seeks to show the ways in which zemenawinnet was experienced as a way of life in the spaces of postwar Addis Ababa. These women were influential in the forging of *popular modernity* (*hizbawi zemenawinnet*) through their music and lifestyle as well as through their roles as operators of the sites of entertainment in the city center. They became *cultural brokers*, and were at the forefront in *translating* “the new realities of their times” imposed by the imperatives of urbanism and modernity.

The chapter has two main sub-sections. The first is a discussion of social and cultural practices as constitutive elements of urban youth subject formation in the postwar period. I discuss how *cultural brokers* became key translators of the *zemenawi* who played an important role in forging popular modernity (*hizbawi zemenawinnet*) in Addis Ababa. In connection to this, I will also show how conventions of respectability were challenged and rejected by a new urban youth identity informed by social practices in profane spaces of the city operated by these figures. The second section examines selected literary works to understand *arada* and *aradinnet* as a metaphor of youthful urban cultural modernity. By bringing the various images of *arada* (drawing on cultural documents in literature), the place of *arada* and *aradinnet* will be documented in the urban cultural modernity and the formation of the cultural identity of the youth in pre revolution Addis Ababa.

6.1 The figure of the azmari/artist cum bar operator

As we have seen in previous chapters rural-urban migration, informalization of work and settlements as well as changing public sociality in the capital in the postwar period were at the heart of the emergence of “the popular”. The city-center as a

²⁸¹ My emphasis on “the collective power over” the process of urbanization by city-folk does not of assume that it was just the city folk who were going through radical transformations in this period. In this study the city and the countryside are understood as continuous spaces mutually constituted by one another. They were affected by modernity—the global capitalist economy and the modernist project of the imperial state—in combined but uneven ways.

hyperfrequented space and the cultural effervescence of its profane spaces created the condition of possibility for the urban youth to experiment with the *zemenawi* and articulate a distinct sense of urban identity. In this section in order to show social and cultural practices as constitutive elements of urban youth subject formation, I foreground the experiences of azmari/artist cum bar operators. I will discuss particularly the versatile public life of Meri Armide, an azamri/artist, club owner, dancer, dance teacher and seamstress to demonstrate how such figures became key translators of the *zemenawi* to forge popular modernity (*hizbawi zemenawinnet*) in this period.

The “performance culture”²⁸² that azmaris/artists cum bar operators created in the dominated spaces of the capital was a key event where the *zemenawi* was lived in practice in postwar Addis Ababa. The individual lives of Meri Armide and others like Asnakech Worku in entertainment sites in the city-center are used here as material to tell a wider story of urban social and cultural change and the making of *popular modernity* in the city. I center the role of azmari/artist cum bar operators in the forging of *zemenawinnet* as a popular culture that came to inform the shared experiences of the urban youth in postwar Addis Ababa. Here I use the notion of *translation* as a process of not only synthesis but also the elaboration of domestic cultural forms. In this connection I employ the notion of “cultural translation” to speak broadly about the process of adaption and reinterpretation of foreign and domestic cultural repertoire into the experiences of the urban youth in postwar Addis Ababa. The notion of “cultural translation” illuminates *zemenawinnet* as a practice involving a process of transformation of imported forms and the reconfiguration of domestic elements.²⁸³ As Lawrence Venuti, a renowned scholar on translation asserts, the process of

²⁸² See the ways in which Nate Plageman (2012:17) uses “performance culture” in his study of *High Life* in Ghana.

²⁸³ Magubane critiquing the assumption in anthropological works of “social change” in urban areas in African settings in the 1950s and 60s said the following about the inevitability of synthesis during the meeting of “two cultures” — ‘the African’ and ‘the western’. He said, “When Africans join the industrial system, even under colonial rule, and begin to adopt ‘urbanism as a way of life,’ they do not thereby become bad imitations of anyone... Where tow cultures, differing in their technological development, meet, adjustments are inevitable. Yet the culture that is ‘inferior’ in terms of technology does not simply yield to the other. The two cultures yield to one another, undergoing profound modifications” (1971: 431).

translation from a foreign language into a target or host language is not a “simple communicative act”. “Translation”, he writes, “never communicates in an untroubled fashion... [and] the foreign text...is not so much communicated as inscribed with domestic intelligibilities and interests” (Venuti, 2004: 482). I argue and show in this chapter that a similar process of “inscription” occurs not only when a “foreign” idea or text is translated into another language but also when sets of social and cultural practices that are considered “foreign” are adapted into a “domestic” cultural lexicon. This process of inscription involves negotiation of meanings. As Solomon Deressa noted, translation is also a process of “giving meaning to” (Solomon Deressa, 1969c: 18). In the end, the product of translation is always more than a mere implantation of the “foreign” but a synthesis between and “reinterpretation” of social and cultural practices found in the foreign and domestic setting. Translation encompasses “reinterpretation” and “reinvention” of the foreign (Venuti, 2004: 484) as well as the reconfiguration of old elements from the domestic repertoire onto the foreign. Therefore, translation is the adoption of the “foreign” into the cultural grammar of the domestic culture. In this sense, as Venuti notes, translation starts with the “[description] of domestic cultural norms” that “involves the release of a domestic remainder” (ibid: 484 and 485). Translation “creates a new community of interest around the translated text”, or around the translated cultural practice. This audience puts the translation that is made intelligible to their specific cultural and spatial context into various uses (ibid: 491). They at times adapt the object of translation in their repertoire of daily social practices in manners that position them to negotiate and redefine their place in society.²⁸⁴ If we apply this process of translation that Venuti

²⁸⁴ Here it is very important to note that there is a difference between translation from one text to another text and translation of cultural practices from one cultural and spatial context into another. One significant difference is, in the later, ranges of cultural practices having to do with style of cloth, ways of comporting oneself in public, popular music etc. are translated (adapted) into specific spatial and cultural contexts by a collective, a cultural community, differently from the way a ‘host’ language is translated into a ‘target’ language by one or a group of people with determinate objectives. Cultural translation, on the other hand, occurs mainly at an experiential level: as a result of a daily-lived life of a large number of people without necessarily having a predetermined goal. The event of translation from one text to another, as Gayatri Spivak (2005: 95) notes, requires the translator to “grasp the presuppositions of [the] author but also...inhabit...the many mansions, and many levels of the host language” i.e., the translator/s cannot proceed with their translation without making some effort to understand the presuppositions of the author in the original text but are also expected to have the language skill and capacity to do the translation. Such onerous expectations are not imposed on those

calls “the domestic remainder,” to understand cultural translation, “the release” of the domestic remainder means an elaboration and reinterpretation that results in the reconfiguration of the old with elements of the new, making translation without reinterpretation unthinkable. What is reinterpreted and reconfigured in this process is both the “foreign” and the “domestic”. In this sense, *zemenawinnet* is a phenomenon where the foreign is translated and the domestic is elaborated in a particular spatio-temporal context. In creating “new realities”, therefore, *zemenawinnet*, both as manifested in state projects of urbanization and expansion of infrastructure, as well as an experiential lived practice, taps from the domestic and the foreign and fashions them to respond to the specific spatio-temporal context. What is mobilized in the process of translation is not just meaning injected from outside. As Solomon Deressa argued, translation could be seen as involving *giving meaning* to what comes from outside by the “release” of artifacts from domestic culture.²⁸⁵

6.1.1 Meri Armide and her azmari cabaret

After the 1950s, the city-center, and its quarters Serategna Sefer, Wube Berha, Arada etc. became key centers of entertainment. As discussed already, prominent azmari figures like Nigusu Ayele, Nigatua Kelkay, Ferede Golla, Assefa Haile and Ketema Mekonnen performed in Wube Berha and resided in or in the vicinity of that neighborhood. It was in this setting that Meri Armide, Asnakech Worku and other women flourished in the city-center as azmari/artist and bar operators.

Meri Armide (c.1930- 1988) was raised near St. George Cathedral, in the heart of the historic city-center of the capital, Arada.²⁸⁶ Her given name was Merema. As a young azmari singing in the famous *tej betoch* of Arada, Merema anglicized her name and became Meri. She is sometimes called Meri *Aramde* (instead of Meri Armide), a tweak

translating cultural practices in their daily lives since cultural translation is not so much an “intellectual” work as an experiential one occurring in daily social practice.

²⁸⁵ See discussion in the previous chapter on Solomon Deressa’s “Translation—A Necessary Art” published in June 1969 in *Addis Reporter*.

²⁸⁶ Arada was also the entertainment center of Addis Ababa with numerous *tej betoch* (mead houses) and *mesheta betoch*. These *tej betoch* and *mesheta betoch* were also enlivened by azmari performances.

on her parental name: *aramde* meaning—one who sets the pace.²⁸⁷ She was considered a neoteric. She was a woman with a flamboyant personality as she lived through the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Her name, both the Anglicized Meri as well the altered second name *Aramde*, testifies to her association with the *zemenawi* and the popular perception bestowed upon her as an “innovator” of new ways of being young and urban. In the early 1940s, as a teenager (“Yemeri weg”, 1965: 43), Meri must have grown up hearing about the famous Azmari personalities of the prewar period like Nigatua Kelkay, Bafena Wolde and Tiru Birge who performed in the Arada area. Negatua Kelkay, for instance, rose to fame and became a court azmari, in the prewar period (“Yematetelq Jember”, 2005). Similarly, Meri’s azmari years in Arada earned her a reputation, as she rather vainly described herself in a retrospective look at her place in Arada as, “yearada setoch merri” (meaning the leader of the women of Arada). In a rare interview she gave to *Mennen* in March 1973, the Arada women that she refers to were apparently the community of azmaris, sex workers, and bar operators of the 1940s.

In this interview, Meri recalls that during the Italian period (1936-1941), she was sent to a missionary school to attend classes. She says she was later dismissed from the school for failing to meet the disciplinary requirements of the school’s catholic administrators. She said “they” (the school administration) did not like her passion for (azmari) music and considered it as an improper inclination for a schoolgirl. Consequently, Meri reports, she was kicked out of school owing to the bad “influence” her love for music could have “on the rest of the well-behaved kids”. Her dismissal seemed to have fast-tracked her career as an *azmari*. It launched her azmari career as a teenager in the *tej betoch* of Arada, and beyond (“Yemeri weg”, 1965: 43). Her popularity as azmari soared after she opened an azmari cum cabaret club where she also trained and employed women dancers who performed in the club. Meri’s entertainment business became a training ground for dancers/artist cum sex workers who would later become bar operators in Wube Bereha, in the 1950s and 60s. The women “danced with underwear and bare feet” making her club the go to place for

²⁸⁷ *Meramed*, to pace in Amharic came to be associated with *teramaj* or progressive.

entertainment in the city (Ibid). Apparently, this club became popular in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In its heydays members of the Imperial Bodyguard, the *mekuanint* and expatriates living in the city frequented the club especially on the weekends (Ibid).²⁸⁸ Meri recruited her dancers from Kesel Tera, a village where women brewers and sex workers sold *tela* in small *shebeens* (Ibid).²⁸⁹

Meri claims that she started her club inspired by a French woman, a certain “Lisa” whose second name she does not disclose, whom she befriended as a young person. She credits Lisa for teaching her Ballroom dance, which was popular in the 1930s and 1940s (Ibid).²⁹⁰ Piazza, the city center since the Italian period, saw a remarkable increase in the number of modern buildings during and after the Italian period. It also became an important commercial center of the capital where popular boutiques, famous restaurants, cafes and most of the cinemas of the capital sprouted along with small teahouses (*shay betoch*), *tela* and *tej betoch*. Meri’s club emerged as a famous hang out in the late 1940s and was located in Piazza, where the popular boutique Modanova was later built (Ibid: 43). At Meri’s *azmari cum cabaret*, the women danced Tango, Vales (Waltz), Mazurka and Tip Tap with their clientele (Ibid: 45). The performance started at 9:00pm and attracted a lot of customers. Meri recalls, she had to employ bouncers to handle bar fights, especially when the club was packed with people on the weekends (Ibid).

What was innovative about Meri’s club was not so much her role in making dance styles considered European known to an Ethiopian urban public. Rather it was her

²⁸⁸ In Meri’s words the club was frequented by people of “English and American [nationalities] as well as the *Mekuanint* (the aristocracy)”.

²⁸⁹ Meri claims that these women, before she trained them as dancers used to be wondering *azmaris* in Kesel Tera (alias *cinco tera*. Cinque is an Italian translation for 5, a reference to money used to pay for sex.).

²⁹⁰ During the Italian period, there were mainly Italian owned nightclubs emerging in the segregated European quarter of the city, in Piazza. However, even after the end of Italian occupation, Italian clubs like La Mascote continued to operate in the city. During the Italian period these clubs must have been sites where European dance styles became part of the white urban cultural scene (Simeneh, 2008: 41). The city’s European population was substantial and reached more than 33,000 in 1939 at a time when Addis Ababa’s total population was in the neighborhood of 100, 000 people (Pankhurst, 1987: 132-133). A substantial number of sex workers, both Ethiopian and Europeans worked in such clubs (Ibid: 125).

combining foreign dance styles and Ethiopian *azmari* (Simeneh, 2018: 12)²⁹¹ music with *kirar* (a five string Ethiopian instrument) performance at the center. Meri's exquisite *kirar* performances—passionate lyrics, husky voice and charming delivery, is evident from her cassettes and rare TV recordings in the 1960s and 70s. What Meri did was basically graft foreign dance performance and the modern record player (the gramophone) onto the Ethiopian *azmari* music tradition to create a new *azmari cum cabaret club scene*. She not only used foreign dance style and music and recreated them by adding her own imagination (like incorporating performance of topless, bare feet dancers) but also made the *azmari* music tradition pliable to an urban club scene, Ethiopian edition. Meri created an in-between musical trope, where *azmari* music was performed in a club setting that heralded the beginning of an age when the “wandering *azmari*” found an institutional home in a club setting with *zemenawi* dancers. What makes the performances in Meri's *azmari cabaret* different from both the wandering *azmaris* of her time and the post revolution *Azmari bet*²⁹² was this. *Azmaris* ordinarily performed by wandering around different *tej betoch* or on occasions such as weddings, and banquets, while few performed as court *azmaris* (Simeneh, 2017: 10) ;(“Yematetelq Jember”, 2005). Meri's *azmari cum cabaret club* was perhaps the first fixed place where clients came to watch the *azmari* perform. Meri's club delivered an amalgam of *azmari* performances with *zemenawi* dance (revised European dance styles). Meri, in effect, elaborated a “domestic” musical tradition—the *azmari* performance, by integrating it with an interpretation of foreign

²⁹¹ According to Simeneh “the *azmari* tradition in Ethiopia was practiced in a tremendous geographical and demographic/ethnic expanse” stretching from northern to central and southern Ethiopia: Gondar, Wollo, Gojjam, Shoa, and Keffa.

²⁹² According to Simeneh Betreyohannes “the first *Azmari Bet* was started [in 1977] by the prominent [*azmari*] Rahel Yohannes... She allowed *Azmariwoch* to perform in her bar and receive tips from their audience” (Simeneh, 2010: 72). The post Derg development of the *Azmari bet* as Simeneh says “reversed the old tradition of *azmariwoch* going to an audience, by having audiences come to the *azmari*” (2018: 25). But this was a development that actually started earlier in the pre-revolution period where Meri Armide in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the balcony *debdabi* in the 1970s. They too, as their post revolution successors, had audiences come over to see them perform rather than them going to their audiences. Even if the *Azmari Bet* proper was a post revolution phenomenon as Simeneh contends, it has to be noted that one of the first persons who institutionalized *azmari* music and combined that form with new foreign elements was Meri Armide. Meri's previous experience as *azmari* in the *tej betoch* and *mesheta betoch* of Arada distinguished her club. In addition, artists like Aselefech Ashine operated bars in Wube Bereha where they sung and performed for their clientele while they were working employed in state institutions of theatre before the revolution, in the 1960s. They too were considered *azmariwoch* and were called the “balconi *debdabi*” (Aselefech Ashine, personal interview, 2015 March 30).

dance styles such as Tango and Waltz.²⁹³ But Tango and Waltz also get transformed in the process, making them products of the particular spatio-temporal context. Meri's azmari performance had *kirar* at the center while conventional azmaris sung in pairs, with a male Masingo player performing along a female vocalist. Moreover, the dancers in Meri's club drank and went out with their clientele blurring the distinction between performing artists and sex workers ("Yemeri weg", 1973: 45). Meri incorporated the red lights, which were to become the most dominant symbol of the club and bar scene of the city in subsequent decades, into the *azmari* repository. The red lights were later popularized in clubs of Wube Bereha and other neighborhoods in the post 1950s. She reports that it was after the Addis Ababa Municipal Administration passed a law that outlawed women dancing in underwear, and after facing tough competition from other nightclubs (most probably from Wube Bereha), that Meri was forced to close her azmari cabaret (Ibid).²⁹⁴ However, even after the closure of her club, she continued to leave her mark on the cultural life of the city.

Meri's inventive activities impacted the way women carried themselves in public in urban spaces. She opened a hair salon possibly in the early 1950s in the Serategna Sefer area at a time when straitening hair was uncommon among Ethiopian women.²⁹⁵ She is also credited for popularizing the "kemekem", a rounded haircut, resembling the later *Afro*, which became trendy among women in Addis Ababa in the 1950s and 60s. She also taught dance, tailored foreign style bridal wear and costumes for rent

²⁹³ Tesfaye Lemma, one of the most prominent music writers and composers and the chief personality behind creating Orchestra Ethiopia in his (*yeityopiya yamuziqa tarik*,) *A History of Ethiopian Music* argues that azmarinnet as a means of livelihood started with the foundation of Addis Ababa, as the Ethiopian capital. The azmari used to perform as a duo, male and female. The woman azmari (also called *areho*) was the main vocalist while the male azmari played the instrument, usually, the *masenko*—the one string Ethiopian instrument (2013: 26 and 27). A women azamri playing the instrument, *kirar* was something unusual—before Meri Armide. Tesfaye considered Meri "one of the few *kirar* players" that influenced Asnakech Worku (ibid: 240). These two were among the few azmari women who incorporated the *kirar* into the arzamri repository in postwar Addis Ababa.

²⁹⁴ The city was granted a chartered status in 1954 (Shimeles, 2013: 451). It appears that it was after this time that municipal legislation determined to make the city modern and respectable, mounted a serious crackdown on prostitution, drunkenness, vagabondage and other practices, which were considered indecent and corrupting to the public (Ibid: 629-630).

²⁹⁵ It is reasonable to assume that she opened her hair salon in the 1950s if she had closed her club in the late 40s or early 50s with municipal office flexing its muscle to make Addis Ababa a modern respectable city. Meri continued to own the salon for decades at least through the 1970s ("Yemeri weg", 1973: 48).

(“Yemeri weg”, 1973: 47-48).²⁹⁶ Women’s hair salons became an important part of the city’s cultural landscape throughout this period (Ibid).²⁹⁷ The name she made for herself as a dance trainer and a seamstress stationed in the city-center later earned her a job at the Municipal Theatre Center as a dance teacher and costume maker. She was then transferred to the premier cultural institution of the country, the Haile Selassie I Theatre, when it was opened in 1955 due to her standing in the social and cultural life of the city and the perception about her as a cultural innovator (Ibid). These state-owned cultural institutions used the creative energies and cultural innovations of personalities like Meri Armide from the red-light districts of the city-center. State institutions of theatre and music depended on the interpretations and translations of “the modern” in creating what Elizabeth Woldegiorgis in her studies of artist intellectuals of the 1960s and Surafel Wondimu on his study of the stage and theatre, describe as Ethiopian artistic and theatrical modernism. What was drawn from the cultural and entertainment spaces of the city-center came to be incorporated in the cultural repertoire of state institutions of culture.

Meri’s azmari cum cabaret club as well as her role in women’s fashion and hairstyle were acts of cultural interpretation of the *zemenawi*. Meri’s club was a powerful example of the cultural changes that were underway in the public persona of women in particular and in the making of cultural modernity. Moreover, the performance of

²⁹⁶ Meri claims that she learnt dance, hair styling and bridal dress making in Paris, which she says she went with her friend, Lisa. Meri Armide, an interview with ETV (undated) *Meri Armide The First Ethiopian Woman that discovered modern Hair Style*. Published in August 22, 2013 by Idet Yene. In this interview with the Ethiopian Television (ETV), Meri tells us that she introduced western hairstyle to the Addis public by working on three married women, three dancers and four prostitutes to promote her business. She tells us that straitening hair became popular and attracted a lot of market from the women of the capital.

²⁹⁷ By Meri’s own reckoning, she jolted women especially sex workers in her songs to compel them to style their hair, straiten or do the Kemekem. Also see the lyrics in one of her songs *ehihi* (እካካ), similar provocations to sex workers. It goes,
 የጽጉርሽ እቡዋራ አይኔን ሊያጠፋኝ ነው (the dust from your hair is making me blind)
 እስር ብር መጠየቅ ደረጃሽ ገና ነው (your class does not allow you to ask for ten birr)
 ውሰጂ እምሳ ሳንጉቴም ይሄም ሲበዛ ነው (take 50 cents, and even that is a lot [for you])
 መልሼ እስር ሳንጉቴም ሲጋራ መግባቱ ነው (return the change, the 10 cents, its for [my] cigarette.) (Meri Armide, *Habibi*, Ibex Music Shop: 1993 (?). Also see the same album in Nahom Records 2012 in CD and Vinyl). It appears that the sex workers of Addis were among the people who were among the first to style their hair in the city. The way women carried themselves in public and their public sociality in the city was changing as a result of cultural changes led by entertainment centers in the city-center, brokered by people by Meri.

topless women in that club was symbolically significant in the transformation of the public sociality of the *zemenawi* youth in Addis Ababa. Meri's songs and performances expressed the social realities of women as well as the perceptions of how the social and cultural life of young people were changing in the postwar years. Meri's songs and songs by other artists expose the human condition of the postwar decades and testify to the changing public morality of the youth in this "transitional age". Meri sung about the conditions in which sex workers and other urban subjects, male and females, lived. The club was both a pioneer and anticipator of what was to come: the more widespread and popular cultural changes of the urban youth in the post 1950s—brokered by the drinking parlors, brothels and night clubs of Wube Bereha, Serategna Sefer, and such other centers of entertainment in the imperial metropolis. Cultural brokers like Meri Armide did not just pave the way for women in postwar Ethiopia to assume roles incommensurate with what the conventions of respectability of the period prescribed. They also created an urban cultural environment where the youth adapted a cultural identity different from that of their parents and the older generation. Cultural brokers particularly *azmari*/artist cum bar operators who straddled between these occupations were key in redefining the public sociality of the urban youth as will become more apparent in the course of this chapter.²⁹⁸

Meri epitomized both continuity and change in the cultural life of Addis Ababa in the postwar period. While she popularized *kirar* performance as part of the nightclub culture of the city, she also synthesized foreign dance and hairstyle, which came to be part of the daily social practice of the urban youth in this period. These represented the cultural modernity of the city by reconfiguring "the old" with tropes from "the new". While Meri popularized the practice of straitening hair, she also made the "kemekem"—a preexisting hairstyle in Ethiopia—part of the popular modernity of

²⁹⁸ In እህህ (*ehehe*) Meri talks about what seems to be her own experience as a bar owner. She says, ምን ውድጅ ባበዛ በላሽር ብሰክር እንተን አልረሳህም ስላሴ ይመስክር. (Lit. even if I am involved in [endless love] affairs and go out with many lovers, the Trinity are my witness I won't forget you) (Meri Armide, 2012). Here it is important to note that Meri uses the term "lover" in English in her Amharic songs. In another verse in the same song, she says, በከንቱ መኝታ እየተጋደምኩ ቅር እያለው ሆኔ ኩነኔ ገባሁ (Lit. I sleep [around] casually—I feel guilty and sad for condemning myself to a life of sin [and moral corruption])

young women in this period (“Yemeri weg”, 1973: 47).²⁹⁹ Her *kirar* performances paved the way for others to use *kirar* centered azmari performances in club settings. Celebrated *kirar* players such as Asnakech Worku, Kassa Tessema, Ketema Mekonnen, either frequented Wube Berha or performed in clubs in this period (Tesfaye Sahilu, interviewed in *Yeingeda Chewata*, 2000); (Aselefech Ashine interviewed in *Yeingeda Chewata*, 2011); (Asnakech Worku interviewed by Alemneh Wassie, 2013). Meri’s role in popularizing *kemekem* and other hairdos, her incorporation of the red light and *kirar* performance into the azmari repository, as well as her revision of European dance forms to popularize them to a post liberation Ethiopian urban community, were all instances that attest to her role in defining the pubic sociality of the city in the postwar period.

6.1.2 The artist cum bar operators of Wube Bereha

After Meri, women from Wube Bereha such as Asnakech Worku, and many others, who straddled between bar life, sex work and artistic endeavors (Surafel, 2010: 47 and 48 Getachew Debalqe, 2005: 16 and 36) became key figures in interpreting *zemenawinnet* as urban public culture and practice.³⁰⁰ Prominent artists such as Aselefech Ashine and Zenebech Tadesse operated bars in Wube Bereha while working in state theatres as dancers or actors (Interview: Aselefech Ashine, Surafel, 2010: 47-48); (Tsedale Gebre Mariam, personal interview, 2014 March 27). These artists, for instance, opened nightclubs and performed and worked in bars (Girma Fisseha interviewed in Sinkessar, 2004). Their public appearances in bars as well as their musical and theatrical persona gave such artist cum bar operators a key place in the cultural modernity of the state as well as the city.

²⁹⁹ Also, TsiTsi Ella Jaji’s provides an example, in *Africa in Stereo* (2014: 116), about the ways in which cultural modernity is forged by people/women who combined old ingredients and methods of shining hair with colonial products to create African modern hair shining methods. Jaji shows that women in colonial Africa were not simply conspicuously consuming foreign products by mixing ‘traditional’ ways of moisturizing with new products. Later in the 1960s the Afro became ‘the new look’ of young and urban Ethiopia, for the 1960s the inspirations came from other centers, including but not limited to the Black Panthers of the US and American popular culture, especially soul.

³⁰⁰ See Tsi Tsi Jaji’s (2014: 146) discussion on Pan Africanism “not [just as] a position, but also as a practice”

Asnakech Worku, who first came to wider public attention in the 1950s, became one of the first women actresses employed in Haile Selassie I Theatre, while she was a sex worker (Getachew Debalqe, 2005:16). The fact that such personalities occupied this liminal position between state owned institutions of culture and the bar, gave women like Asnakech a wider reach to broadcast their interpretations of *zemenawinnet* through their practices—both on the stage and in the spaces of the city. Asnakech and other artist bar operators who were known for their *aradinnet* (arada ways) and their beauty became public spectacles and trendsetters in fashion (Getachew, 2005: 23) and became the new face of femaleness in the capital. Their place in the cultural landscape of postwar Addis Ababa as popular artists on stage and the profane spaces of the city, gave them a peculiar role in defining what it meant to be young and urban in Addis Ababa in the postwar period.

Wube Bereha, Serategna Sefer, Talyan Sefer, Gesho Terra, Erri Bekentu, Arat Killo, Fit Ber were the mainstay of sex work in the city. The prevalence of sex work was but a function of the social inequalities and unjust economic and social relations of the city (Getachew, 2005: 49). As an occupation where women, as Getachew Debalqe, writes, “did not need educational qualification, favor [or] inherited position...to [enter]”, sex work employed lots of women in the city as it was one of the few occupations that was easily available for women (Getachew, 2005: 36). The spaces, which became the mainstays of sex work in the capital, also became the wellsprings where women artists and dancers of state institutions were drawn from. This was one of the ways in which the cultural and popular modernity of these spaces found their way into state owned institutions of culture.

As discussed already, profane spaces in Wube Bereha became the most important recruitment sites for dancers and singers for the modern theatres and bands including the Hager Fiker Theatre, Haile Selassie I Theatre, The Army Band and The Police Band throughout the 1950s and the 1960s (Tesfaye Abebe, personal interview, 2014 May 23); (Yohannis Afework, 2014 March 24); (Aselefech Ashine, personal interview, 2015 March 30); (Tsedale Gebre Mariam, personal interview, 2014 March 27). The state extracted the innovative energies of such places and their cultural vibrancy to build its

modern institutions of culture. In this sense, the bars and state-owned centers of theatre and music were both products of 20th century Ethiopian urban cultural modernity. Ethiopian modern music in its various forms and modern theatre were linked to and benefitted from the cultural effervescence of the city center and its centers of entertainment. However, at the same time, these state-owned centers of culture attempted to devalue the cultural efficacy of popular centers of entertainment and defined themselves in contradistinction to them. Artists like Asnakech Worku and Aselefech Ashine were threatened that they would have to quit working in bars or risk losing their jobs in these state institutions (Surafel, 2010: 47-48). While the state fetched its cultural ingenuity from these profane spaces to build its cultural modernity, it at the same time tried to dissociate itself from the social spaces that nurtured the creative lives of these women outside the stage.

Asnakech was recruited and employed in the Theatre and Music Expansion Unit of the Addis Ababa Municipal Office, while she was operating a bar in Wube Bereha (Asnakech Worku interviewed in *Meet ETV*, Clip 1 of 2, 2011).³⁰¹ Her first stage performance was a play called “yefiqir chora” (The Light of Love) staged in May 1953 that catapulted her to instant fame (Getachew, 2005: 20-23); (Asni, 2013). Asnakech’s role in another theatre *Dawit ena Orion* (David and Orion), the play that inaugurated the opening of the Haile Selassie I Theatre in 1955 (that also marked the 25th coronation anniversary of the emperor) made her one of the promising female actresses in the country. Other prominent artists like Telela Kebede, Askale Ameneshewa, Mulumebet Hailemariam and Beletu Atnafu also gained reputation (Getachew, 2005: 28).

Zenebech Tadesse recounted her experience in the other prominent center for theatre, music and dance, the Hager Fiker Theatre in an interview she did a few years before her passing. Zenebech was nicknamed, *chira qeresh (the wild)* that described

³⁰¹ Asnakech’s bar activities in Wube Bereha and Churchill Road started before she became a prominent artist and singer in the 1950s (Getachew, 2005:1-5). She joined the Imperial Body Guard Band (known as Kibur Zebegna Band) before she was transferred to the Haile Selassie I Theatre according to Tesfaye Lemma

her skittish performances in Hager Fiker and as a dancer in Wube Bereha (Zenebech Taddesse interviewed in *Yeingeda Chewata*, undated).³⁰² Her popular song *lomi biwerewur* (“If I threw lemon”) coupled with her seductive waist movements earned her both infamy and public attention in and outside the Hager Fiker. Nigatua Kelkay, arguably the most renowned azmari singer of the prewar years, allegedly left the Hager Fiker Theatre with Zenebech’s entrance (“Yematetelqew Jember”, 2005).³⁰³ Zenebech reports, Nigatua said, “now that chira qeresh joined ... [the Hager Fiker] I have to leave it”. Nigatua herself recollected in an interview, she had two reasons for leaving Hager Fiker. Besides her dissatisfaction with the salary she was making, she said it “would be unbecoming” for her “to perform... with the youngsters” given her reputation as a respectable woman and a pioneering artist. Nigatua considered the new breed of artists like Zenebech licentious and unrespectable, “lacking moral scruple” — *newur* (Nigatua Kelkay interviewed in *Yechewata Engida*, undated).

What came to be considered *zemenawi* in the postwar period was considered impolite to the moral codes and conventions of the older generation of azamris like Nigatua. The older generation admonished the young for lacking propriety (Ibid).³⁰⁴ The young and the freewheeling artists and azmaris, who took over and came to dominate the cultural scene in these postwar years put their mark on the changing public sociality and urban cultural identity of female persons. But their impact was not limited to women only. It extended to alter the public morality of the urban, *zemenawi* and young in general. These women of Wube Bereha and other profane spaces of the city-center were at once looked up to and loathed by urban society. They legislated in public the moral codes and public conduct of women. By wearing two hats as employees of the “respectable” modern institutions of culture as well as operators of

³⁰² *Chira qeresh* literally means, “the only thing you do not have is a tail”.

³⁰³ Nigatua was among the few females who joined the Hager Fiker Maheber (The Patriotic Association) when it was founded in the eve of the Italian Occupation. She was later formally employed in Hager Fiker Theatre when it was reestablished immediately after liberation.

³⁰⁴ People like Asnakech emulated Hollywood actors they saw in movies. Asnakech for instance imitated in her way of dress Elizabeth Taylor, Maria Montez and such other Hollywood celebrities (Getachew, 2005: 36). Asnakech says, “I like dressing like them...for example Maria Montez...I dressed up like her. It made me very happy to dress like them as in the films” (Asnakech Worku in *Meet ETV*, Clip 1 of 2, 2011).

entertainment centers in profane spaces of the city, they made space for the urban youth to break free from the suffocating conventions of *chewannet*.

While some in the state and society despised these women who transgressed cultural boundaries and defied conventions as culprits of cultural degeneration, they were also followed and emulated by others. Their detractors gave them names like “set asedabi” (lit. one who brings shame to women) and “ayin awuta” (shameless) (Getachew 2005: 35). But others saw them with awe and admiration. They represented the birth of a new femaleness in the city with their ways of dress and their freewheeling attitudes. They exposed the structural inequities that gave birth to sex work and the hypocrisies of the system that faulted women for wearing the miniskirt and putting on lipstick (ibid: 35-36) in a country that was too keen to adopt western institutions and ways of being. Women tried to throw away the shackles of *chewannet* (respectability) to reposition themselves in their society. Their performances on the stage and their way of life served as transvaluative tropes of the changing social and cultural convention of their society. They interpreted *zemenawinnet* through their daily practice and way of life. They projected their image of a ዘበናዊ (*zebenay*) uninhibited modern woman in ways that challenged the representation and portrayal of female persons by the dominant convention of the imperial order.

Meri Armide as well as others like Asnakech used state owned platforms like the theatre to interpret *zemenawinnet* in their performances. A typical example of how such figures used state theatres as platforms to (re)present a liberated *zebenay* women could be found in the following recollection by Asnakech Worku in an interview she gave in her old age. Asnakech remembers her role in one of the plays she took part in at the Haile Selassie I Theatre, *deme merrara* (“Bitter Blood”). She says:

...in the French play [adapted into Amharic] Bitter Blood, the character I played was that of a restless woman over whom men fought. The set was exceptional. But the wardrobe was not there. I refused to wear the costume they had which was unbecoming. I bought a first class dress for the play and dominated the stage. I was acting alongside the late Wogayehu Negatu. She [the character I

was playing] was a restless French [woman]... so much so that one of the papers was critical about my acting. 'Stop Asnakech from showing off her thighs on our stage,' the paper lamented... The character is restless. And I was young. They did not like me doing that... I told [the Haile Selassie Theatre administration] to write a rebuttal—that it was not [I], but the character in play (Asnakech Worku in *Meet ETV*, Clip 1 of 2, 2011).

The fact that Asnakech brought her own costume to the stage in the most important theatre house in the country is suggestive of the latitude actors like her had in such platforms to present their own interpretations of the characters they played and what they wore. In this particular performance, Asnakech was presenting what she considered a carefree, uninhibited (*zebenay*) and “restless” woman. She used her own costume instead of the one provided the theatre house to interpret what she considered a *qibitbit*³⁰⁵ sensuous woman expressed through Asnakech’s youthful energies. Also outside the stage, Asnakech’s costumes and public persona attracted public attention and she was considered a fashion trendsetter and a symbol of the *zemenawi* urban woman (Getachew, 2005: 47).

Similarly, sex workers of Wube Bereha would for instance walk to Piazza around 5 pm before the clubs and bars opened for the night. That was the time when they showed themselves off to the public (*Asni*, 2013). They frequented the cinemas and theatres of the city. The men would come out in the streets of Doro Maneqia, Piazza and Serategna Sefer and hang around in cafeterias such as Trianon, Dihad Hotel or Saint George Club to watch them and then have drinks as they prepare to start the night in Wube Bereha. Those men with limited means would have their *tej* in Edme Qetil (the popular Tej Bet in Wube Bereha) or in adjacent neighborhoods before they would go to Wube Bereha for the night (Girma Fisseha interviewed in *Sinkesar*, 2004).

These women were centers of attraction and it was around their public figure that the youth formed their public sociality in postwar Addis Ababa. Some were attracted to their bodies, and yet others to their attires, style and the new ways of being young they represented. Both platforms—the bar and the state theatre/modern band—gave these women access to the urban public who loathed but at the same time, followed

³⁰⁵ Meaning restless in Amharic.

and emulated them. State institutions of culture and profane spaces were intertwined in the development of a new cultural modernity in postwar Addis Ababa. The energies of these spaces flowed into one another and popular artists and dancers in state theatres and bands like Tsehay Mentolia (a dancer in Kibur Zebegna), Belaynesh Amede and others, operated nightclubs in places like Wube Bereha, Gedam Sefer (Ibid). Wube Bereha and other profane spaces in the city-center, also gave young men a chance to “showcase” their *zemenawinnet*, as a Wube Bereha veteran said, through dance, dress and sexual adventures (Ibid). Social drinking and taking-up different ‘lovers’ (sex workers) became part of the cultural formation of the youth. Profane spaces of the city-center were one of the key sites where young men and women challenged the disciplinary strictures and the dominant cultural tendencies and social mores of their society.

As the foregoing discussion attempted to show, the practice of modernity in postwar Addis Ababa was neither merely uprooting and dislocating, nor was it just an ideal or an aspiration that was brought from outside for dissemination through the mediation of elite groups and avant-garde artist intellectuals. On the contrary, *zemenawinnet* in this period involved a complex process of imbrication between foreign cultural artifacts and those that have been in situ in the domestic culture. It emerged as a result of everyday practice by common people and key social actors such as the azmari/artist cum bar operators in hyper frequented spaces such as popular entertainment centers of the city-center. *Zemenawinnet* in the postwar period was, in this sense, a practice that was a product of the “reconfiguration of [sic] the elements of the past with some elements that are new”, as Stuart Hall would say. It represented a moment of “tension” between the younger and older generation as commentators discussed in previous chapters of the period noted. However, at the same time, this tension was not so much one that was marked by the “dying of the old” with the superimposition of “the new”³⁰⁶ but one where some old elements in the past were modified and subverted, while others were retained and elaborated.³⁰⁷ An instance in this regard was what we have seen in the preceding section. Meri Armide’s idea of

³⁰⁶ See Getachew Haile’s “The Question of Culture” in Addis Reporter discussed in previous chapters.

³⁰⁷ This discussion has benefitted from insight acquired from a conversation with Carli Coetzee.

“European” dance that incorporated topless women dancing bare feet was more a reinterpretation of ballroom dancing than it was mere “imitation” or mimicry. Moreover, the *kemekem* hairdo that Meri popularized as part of “modern” hair style was actually a restitution of a preexisting hairstyle than a brand new importation from outside.

These women who straddled between occupations played a crucial role as cultural brokers and translators of *zemenawinnet* and put their mark in the changes of public sociality of urban space. The drastic ways in which public sociality was altered in turn was instrumental in the birth of the rebel youth and the cultural outlaws of the 1960s and 70s. In this period going to the *azmari* cabaret of Meri Armide, the balcony debdabi *azmari betoch* of Aselefech Ashine and Zenebech Tadesse, frequenting popular night clubs and live musical performances in Wube Bereha, wearing the miniskirt, going to the cinema and dancing Meringue and *cha-cha* as well to tunes of Amharic vinyl recordings in the late 1960s and 70s, all became integral to the social life of the youth in the capital.

Developments in modern music and theatre should be seen as a product of these linkages between popular centers of cultural expression in the city-center and state-owned institutions of culture. Popular nightclubs and bars in the city-center were instrumental in the musical breakthroughs made by the modern military bands such as the Imperial Bodyguard Band and the Police Band throughout the 1950s and 60s. It was not just western style “modern” Ethiopian popular music that was flourishing, but also the “Bahil Orchestra”, which was pioneered by the Hager Fiker Theatre and expanded to greater effect and technical proficiency by “Orchestra Ethiopia”, was established as part of the Cultural Center of Haile Selassie I University (HSIU) in 1963. *Azmari* music adapted itself to new conditions, where the establishment of “Yebahil Orchestra” (Traditional Orchestra) in Hager Fiker Theatre, brought *azmariwoch* to perform together with musicians playing various Ethiopian instruments and dancers in “traditional” ensembles (Simeneh, 2018: 24). “Orchestra Ethiopia”, with Tesfaye Lemma as its driving force, put together an ensemble of Ethiopian instruments and incorporated western musical notations to its score. Tesfaye became the lead

arranger of this ensemble and brought the orchestra to national and international fame in the 1960s and 70s (Tesfaye, 2013: 224-225³⁰⁸ and Shimeles, 2011: 644-645). He saw his work as an attempt towards “preserving” and excavating Ethiopian musical heritage including folk and *azmari* traditions (Tesfaye Lemma, 2013: 31 and 227-231).³⁰⁹ Orchestra Ethiopia was seen as a response to the increasing influence of western style music, especially soul, pop, funk and rock and roll—genres that gained enormous popularity with imported vinyl recordings and that were commonly played in nightclubs of Wube Bereha and other entertainment centers.

6.1.3 Arada: popular modernity and the making of an urban popular culture

In this section *arada* as a form of popular music will be discussed in postwar Addis Ababa. *Arada* became in this period one of the Amharic musical standards, circulating in the capital, recounting and accounting lived experience and the human condition in the city. It was associated with place (the old city-center, bearing the same name, Arada, and in the postwar period with Wube Bereha), with concrete subjects in the city center (the *arada* figure—the poor hustlers and vagrants of the city-center) as well as a sensibility, a way of being young and urban. Besides being a description and celebration of place (in popular songs), *arada* is part of local memory as an archetypal representation of urban youth culture and identity in the postwar period. Songs like *aderech arada* (“she spent the night in Arada”) or *megen yearada lij* (lit. “Oh the child of Arada”) were sung by generations of artists for decades and often as a celebration of youth gaiety. The *azmari* inflected *arada* trope, as a musical trope became a defining characteristic of urban youth identity in the imperial metropolis in the postwar period, even if its origin dates back to the first decades of the 20th century (Simeneh, 2017:

³⁰⁸ The founder of Orchestra Ethiopia was an Egyptian American music professor Halim El-Dabh. However much of the actual work of arranging the musical performances of the orchestra were shouldered by Tesfaye Lemma (2013: 279)., due to the premature departure of Halim El-Dabh.

³⁰⁹ See also Worq Aferahu Kebede’s “Soul Music invades Ethiopia” in *Addis Reporter* (March 1970: 16, 17 and 19). Shimeles (2011: 644-645) notes, “Modern music in fact became a powerful signifier of Ethiopian creative genius whereby local and western musical traditions and materials were fused to produce innovative musical genres, styles and forms. Such a productive exchange without however losing the indigenous basis was the mission of the founding of the Yared Music School in 1970 and represented later on in the works of Iyobel Yohannes and Tesfaye Lemma, in which Yaredi and folk materials were combined with western musical notation”.

16). In this section my objective is to show that *arada* as a metaphor of youthful urban cultural modernity and as a musical trope could be used to tell a social history of urban youth subject formation in postwar Addis Ababa. By bringing in the various images of arada (in literature and popular music), I demonstrate arada's significance in the urban cultural modernity of the youth in the capital. I situate modern experiences in postwar Addis Ababa to appreciate the ways in which arada was crucial in the subject formation of the urban youth in that period. I will examine popular music by using songs about Arada and Wube Bereha with the objective of showing the importance of popular culture to understand modern experiences in Addis Ababa. I will also examine the various meanings associated with arada by using selected literary works to read along with songs on and about Arada. This section attempts to unpack the various stratum and notions of arada to recognize its layered meanings and history in the postwar period, with the aim of showing its vitality in understanding urban youth identity and subject formation. In the rest of the chapter, I discuss the various facets of arada—as place, concrete urban subjects and as a metaphor of popular modernity in the city. These various images of arada are analyzed through the history of the place as well as by using cultural documents—novels, poems and popular music.

Cultural anthropologist Karin Barber notes in her studies on popular culture, the cultural and political significance of popular culture in 20th century Africa. She argues, popular arts and culture allowed urban African publics to “appropriate” and “self-position” themselves in the societies they live in (Karin Barber, 1997: 356). These publics as « audiences » and « consumers » of popular and artistic culture participate in the process of meaning making of popular cultural products. Barber notes, “consumption is the act of self-production” as interpretation is determined by the dispositions, attitudes and social positions of social actors (ibid, 359; Barber, 1987: 58). The story of arada as told in the rest of this and the subsequent chapter demonstrates the ways in which dispositions, attitudes and social positions of young Addis Ababans were formed as a result of their social and cultural practices in the postwar period.

6.1.3.1 The place

Arada was not only the historic city-center of Addis Ababa, but also the name of the central market of the new city up until the Italian period. The *gebbi* (Menilik's palace) and *Arada*—the historic city-center— “were the two nodes around which Addis Ababa emerged in the beginning of the 20th century” (Bahru, 2008: 489). The role of Arada as the commercial center of Addis Ababa was later replaced by Mercato (a neighborhood to the west of Arada) by the Italians that created the later as the central market of the “indigenous” population (ibid, 495). The establishment of Addis Ababa as the capital of the empire made it the epicenter of social and cultural developments in the country since the late 19th century. According to Simeneh Betreyohannes, the nobility were the main “customers of high-level bars” that sprouted in Arada during the first and second decade of the 20th century. This was especially the case during the ascendancy of Lij Iyasu (r. 1913-1916) that succeeded Menilik II (r.1889-1913) (Simeneh, 2018: 16). Azmaris performed in the *tej* and *mesheta betoch* of Arada in the prewar period, as well as during the Italian occupation (“Yemeri weg”, 1973: 43). Even if these drinking parlors were no more the famed sites of social drinking for the elite in the postwar period, they continued to be frequented by popular groups (such as workers and daily laborers) and the poor.³¹⁰

Arada was the political, commercial and cultural node of the capital throughout the prewar period and remained the cultural hub of Addis Ababa since its foundation until, and in some sense after, the Italian Occupation. Emperor Menilik administered his Negus Chilot (Royal Tribunal) in Arada; Arada hosted the central market; was the site of the famous *tej* and *mesheta betoch* of Addis Ababa and the first city municipality was set up in Arada during Iyasu. The biggest cathedral of the prewar period—St George and the statue of Menilik were erected in Arada during the reign of Empress Zewditu (r. 1916-1930) to commemorate Menilik's victory at Adowa (1896) against the Italians. Arada remained a key cultural and entertainment site of Addis Ababa during much of the postwar years as well, even if its commercial and administrative

³¹⁰ Kiros Adera, “A History of Arada”, BA Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University: 1983.

importance was superseded first by the moving of the central market of the city to Merkato, and later with the steady southward shift of the center of the capital with the construction of modern roads, buildings and the first boulevard of the city in Mesqel Square in the postwar period. This steady southward shift of the capital highlighted by the construction of the first boulevard, the Grand Palace, the headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Mesqel Square and the Haile Selassie I Theatre since the mid 1950s, created the citadels of the city's modernity further away from the historic city center. However, the Arada—Piazza—Wube Berha area remained key centers of entertainment during much of the postwar period (Bahru, 1987: 49-52). Piazza, which was administratively part of Arada, continued to be the center of cinema houses, modern boutiques, and cafeterias throughout this period.

The foundation of the modern city was laid during the brief period of Italian rule (1936-1941). The Italian period witnessed social and physical dislocation, especially in Arada. The segregationist policy of the Italians which removed “natives” and the Arada market from the historic city center, the system of military control that imposed curfews and restricted movement of “natives”, the large scale expropriation of land in Arada, which according to Pankhurst “[deprived in] four years over four thousand owners ... over five thousand houses” (Pankhurst, 187: 125 and 127), as well as the humiliation and prejudice of the Italian occupiers, created a sense of dispossession and bred resentment against the invaders. Land expropriated from “the natives” was given away to Italian settlers whose number rose to more than 30, 000 by May 1939 from a mere 550 in the beginning of the occupation, in 1936 (ibid, 128). The removal of “natives” and the establishment of what the Italians referred as the “native market”—Merkato in Tekle Haimanot continued to be the most emblematic “living memory of Italian legacy” (ibid, 127-128) in the postwar period. Merkato remains, despite significant changes in the past 15 years, the central market of the city and one of the most destitute, congested neighborhoods of the city with a large concentration of informal settlements.

On the one hand, the Italian period impoverished many by expropriating land and residential spaces in Arada and by setting in motion the congestion of the city, most especially in the Tekle Haimanot area. Piazza integrated Ethiopians in subordinate social positions. Street life, vagrancy, and sex work grew in size. Ethiopians worked for Italians as maids, servants, waiters, errand boys and assistants (Tefaye Sahilu interviewed in *Yeingeda Chewata*, 2000); (Tefaye Sahilu interviewed in *Sinkesar*, 2004).³¹¹ Even the process of urbanization that was “accelerated” during this period with the construction of good roads, modern buildings and the establishment of administrative and commercial towns in the country (Mesfin, 1966: 20-21); (Horvath, 1970: 82), was a typical marker and manifestation of foreign dominance and imposition. The postwar period, after the restoration of Haile Selassie in 1941 did not have a choice but to launch intense state modernization on the foundations laid by the Italian invaders and in a sense, in competition with them. Modernization continued to have an enduring impact on the make-up of the city. The social and cultural transformations it engendered in the postwar period-intensified social inequality and socio-economic contradictions in the capital.

After liberation the population of the city rose first by “postwar patriots” returning back to the city (Getahun, 2007: 41), but more importantly due to intense migration into the city, a process that continued throughout the postwar period. Sex work, beggary, and crime as well as vagrancy were rampant during and after the expulsion of the Italians. As Shimeles notes, “Living in the streets, in abandoned houses and buildings, on verandahs, or in the compounds of churches became regular sights in the city”. The problem of homelessness, begging and vagrancy were accompanied and exacerbated by “the spread of firearms in civilian hands”, which created instability and became a cause for serious security concern for the municipal administration (Shimeles, 2013: 321). Homelessness came along with other modern urban problems such as unemployment (*ibid*: 325), which persisted and increased in proportion in the course of the postwar years. Homelessness and unemployment were key structural

³¹¹ Tefaye in these interviews recollects his experience as a young boy growing up during the Italian period doing all sorts of odd jobs under various Italian masters, as a medical assistant, a waiter and as an errand boy. Tefaye also reminisces his love affair with a young sex worker in Erii Bekentu.

factors that gave rise to the arada figure—street hustlers and vagrants populating the city-center especially Greater Piazza and Merkato. Petty crimes like theft, vagrancy and robbery as well as other forms of street hustle became more engrained and tenacious aspects of urban life. These activities continued to be part of the mainstays of the arada figure in their struggles to survive in the city.

But street robbery, curfews and criminal activities were not post occupation phenomena, even if they became more engrained during the Italian occupation and after liberation. Arada harbored such practices since the prewar period mainly due to the numerous bars the neighborhood hosted. The active presence of the Arada Zebegna, a police force tasked with the role of keeping peace and order as well as ensuring that curfews are respected by bar goers is testimony to this fact.³¹² This continued in the postwar period when Wube Bereha also became notorious for its frequent bar fights as well as street robbery. Doro Maneqia, Erii Bekentu, Wube Bereha and such neighborhoods in Greater Piazza reared street boys—the arada figure that were as much involved in criminal activities, as they hustled the streets to survive the city as brokers, illicit arm sellers, errand boys, market leads etc. Along with other adjacent neighborhoods like Serategna Sefer and Tekle Haimanot, Arada saw large population concentrations in the city (Bahru, 1987: 52).

Owing to lack of formal employment and population growth of the city, the postwar period also saw the emergence of gangs such as the “China Group” (Mimi Eshete in a group discussion, 2015 March 21); (Melakou Tegegn, personal interview, 2014 April 8).³¹³ They operated mainly around Arat-killlo, Basha Wolde Chilot, Serategna Sefer and Piazza (Aselefech Ashine, personal interview, 2015 March 30); (Melakou Tegegn, personal interview, 2014 April 8). Arada hustlers who made it in the city as market leads, brokers, illicit traders as well as those involved in petty criminal activities; sex workers of Wube Bereha and other profane spaces; street boys and girls in the city-

³¹² (Citation Kiros Adera and Meaza Lemma).

³¹³ The name China Group is a reference associated to their ability to use their body as weapons and their alleged Karate skills. China Group are said to be a youthful gang residing or operating in Merkato, Arat Killo and Piazza areas.

center, as well as the “China Group,” were all part of the same social make-up of the Arat Kilo-Piazza-Mercato axis. They inhabited the interstices of the city’s nucleus that included Arada and Wube Bereha. The modernist project of the imperial state that created Addis Ababa’s schools, monuments, ministries, modern buildings, road networks, commercial buildings, theatres and cinemas also produced parallel-alternative informal networks of survival. From these alternative social spaces of survival, the urban underclass “got by” through innovative ways of living in the hyper frequented spaces of the city—the city-center, its commercial centers and its spaces of entertainment. Their informal work including hustling, petty crimes and other extralegal activities such as illicit trade in arms, were part of the economic mainstay of this lot who were products of the urban social space. Arada was one such urban social space that throughout the postwar period had been used as a synecdoche where this part of the city was made to (re) present and symbolize the city as a whole.

6.1.3.2 The figure

In the postwar period, perhaps more so than in recent times, there were two related but distinct *arada* identities. The first as Marco Di Nunzio stated for the contemporary moment, is mainly about poor members of Greater Piazza that hustle the streets by using street smartness as their shared collective experience to “make [sic] something out of...[their] everyday life” (Di Nunzio, 2012: 436). The association of the arada with street smartness was true for the postwar period as well. As Di Nunzio notes, the “main characteristics” of arada is *irdnna* that is an expression of “a shared description of street smartness that people had to have and manage in order to get by and navigate the streets” (Ibid). The other aspect equally essential in understanding youth urban identity in postwar Addis Ababa was the deployment of arada in this period as a metaphor of urban modernity abstracted from the concrete arada figure of the city-center.

For the postwar period, therefore, Arada was much more than a place. The term was associated with the arada figure, young lowly born subjects inhabiting the city-center

engaged in the street hustle to *survive in the city*. These subjects, the arada figure were products of a fast urbanizing city that served as a social index that testifies to the pauperization of the city, especially in the postwar period. The most vivid descriptions of the arada figure³¹⁴ for the postwar period, is found not in historical or sociological studies³¹⁵, but in cultural documents dealing with the postwar period.

Cultural workers—artists, novelists, poets—working and producing cultural documents in times of profound social and cultural change expresses the “new realities” of their times. And the characters or subjects in the artistic/cultural product embody the changes unfolding around them. These characters expose, (re)present and interpret the new realities of societies and the transformations that were underway in them. In times of intense social change, the creative person or the cultural worker, through their characters, as well as the “desires” and “passions” of these characters, express the realities of the times. Even when the characters are fictitious— the feelings, emotions, dilemmas or certainties they express are products of the times they (re)present and inhabit. Hence their sentiments as they appear in these cultural documents are “real enough” (James, 2001: 119) for historians to take them seriously in their attempt to (re)construct the past. These sentiments as well as the ways in which they were expressed are mainly born out of the particular socio-historical context that the creative work is located in relation to the creative person and the time s/he inhabits (Ibid: 115) rather than a mere figment of her/his “mind”. This makes social life and creative work “inseparable” from one another. Cultural products in this sense are a document of their times of production, “inseparable” from social life (James, 2001: 125) but also constituting it.

Characters or protagonists in artistic productions, James argues, “are a composite of a realistic base from which an imagination and logic build a complete whole [of

³¹⁴ The term “figure” draws on Baudelaire’s the figure of the flâneur, discussed for instance in Marguerite S. Murphy (2012: 117, 187 and 223).

³¹⁵ Sociological studies tend to see street life in broad categorical frames such as “street children”, “beggars” or sex workers in Ethiopian cities. The most notable work in regards to the study of the arada figure came from the anthropologist Marco Di Nunzio. His *The Act of Living* (2019) and other anthropological works represent an in-depth study of the daily lives of the arada figure in the 2000s.

societies and their realities that the creative work expresses]” (ibid: 69). It is in this vein that novels and other cultural works are used in this chapter as important sources of history to document the changing times and the way artists/creative people used new languages to express the changes their society was undergoing. The characters or subjects presented in cultural productions are to be “found in the world around” and “the world *outside*” and “do not originate” from “*the mind*” of the author/artist (Ibid).³¹⁶

In the subsequent pages I will be using cultural documents to talk about and write a social history of arada, the figure, and its different images in the postwar period. The first cultural document discussed here is a novel, *Yeelm Ejhat* (Unrealized Dream)³¹⁷ by Haddis Alemayehu. Haddis was a renowned novelist, a public intellectual and a state official who worked in various capacities in the imperial government in the postwar period. Among others, he was a State Minister of Education for a brief period in 1961 (Alemu Alene Kebede, 2015: 33). In the 1940s and 50s he served as ambassador of Ethiopia to Jerusalem, London, and the UN (in Washington) and as Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (Ibid: 31-33). Haddis is, however, widely known through his works of fiction, even though he also authored non-fictions. His magnum opus *Fiker Eske Meqabir* (*Love unto the Grave*), a novel, is considered a classic in Amharic literature. But the subject of our discussion here is *Yeelm Ejhat*, another work of fiction he published in January 1988. Most of the writing of this work was done before 1972 (*Yeelm Ejhat*, 1988: 5). The protagonists of *Yeelm Ejhat*, Haddis tells us, were those in society regarded as “outlaws who disrespected the governing laws, [and] disobeyed the cultural mores of their society” (Ibid: 7). The novel is set in the postwar period, between the 1930s and the mid 1950s, mostly in Addis Ababa. The three key social groups that Haddis explores in *Yeelm Ejhat* are migrants from the countryside to the capital (through Demeqech), sex workers (through Bafena) and the arada figure

³¹⁶ James claims (in Conversation with Stuart Hall, *Channel Four TV*, 1986) that a “sensitive” writer, a writer that is attuned to what is happening in society undergoing fundamental change finds a “new language” and a new “expression” for the new reality that is occurring in the society that they are writing about.

³¹⁷ See poem by Demeqech and discussion of the unrealized dream of *Woizero Bafena* in *Yeelm Ejhat* (1988: 493-494 and 347).

(through Beshah). The later were poor young male street hustlers who operate in the city center that he calls *yearada lij*. Haddis portrays the “renegades and castaways” of society, to use James terms, in this novel to talk about Addis Ababa during the Italian Occupation and in the postwar period. The arada figure and sex workers are characterized in *Yeelm Ejhat* as urban outlaws (Ibid: 182 and 332-336), rebels against the injustices and cultural conventions of the imperial social order that greatly undermined their social and economic position in society. Women migrants represented in *Yeelm Ejhat* by Demeqech, the protagonist who comes to Addis with her little boy (Tekeste) to become a maid escaping a difficult marriage, was also a rebel against the conventions of marriage that disregarded the wishes of the partnering couple, especially women (*Yeelm Ejhat*, 1988: 7 and 9). The arada figure that Haddis deals with in *Yeelm Ejhat*, is a product of the pauperization of the city and the informalization of work and settlements in the postwar period discussed in previous chapters. The arada figure survived in the city by hustling the streets, shining shoes, brokering, trading in smuggled goods, by operating as thieves, vagabonds, and petty criminals.

Beshah Zelele—one of the main characters in *Yeelm Ejhat*—is presented as an archetype of the arada figure and is depicted as an urban outlaw with an amplified sense of justice. In this novel that is a searing critique of the law and social conventions of the imperial social order, we first meet Beshah in Merkato operating as a market lead (who takes people around the market for money) (Ibid: 167). His formation as a young rebel during the Italian Occupation is told in the novel through a flashback and Beshah’s reminiscences of his life as a young boy. Born and raised in Addis, Beshah becomes an orphan after his father was killed in Maychew, when the Italians defeated Ethiopian forces in 1936, and after his mother died as a result of an epidemic. The death of his parents forces Beshah to hustle the streets, thieving, vagabonding, and shoe shining for survival (ibid: 190). After liberation, his knowledge of the city’s inner corners allows Beshah to navigate the city and jostle his way for survival (ibid: 176). Beshah embodies the arada as someone who knows the ins and outs of the city, convivial, extroverted and street-smart. *Yearada lij* “ሁሉ ቤቱ ነው” (*Yearada lij is at*

home anywhere), he is someone “... who enters every door without needing to knock it” (ibid: 177). The arada, “did not have formal employment, but made, following the works of others, their means of livelihood” (ibid: 167). They lived off the streets and are depicted in *Yeelm Ejhat* as products of the unequal social and economic relations of the city (Ibid: 176, 179-180 and 203).

In the novel, the rejection of authority, the inequities of the law and social conventions, is depicted as an outcome of an “instinctive” consciousness that inhere from everyday experience. The rebellious disposition of Beshah Zelele, for instance, is illustrated as a consequence of his experience working as an assistant for a stern Italian master during the occupation. The indignities Ethiopians received under Italian rule prompted Beshah’s revolt against the invaders. Beshah says,

...Once the soul is roused to the feeling that one is ‘looked down upon, despised and mistreated’, it is difficult to feel anything else but that. Once my heart and spirit were woke [to such sentiments] I started seeing and hearing things I had not paid attention to before... I watched Ethiopians beaten, imprisoned [and] killed for nothing... All my senses were shut to feel for anything else [but spite for the invaders]. It was as if [my wits] opened up to see, hear and smell only [their] prejudice and cruelty. Thereafter, I conquered the demands of my body, abandoned everything, and became an outlaw (Ibid: 181).

Even if the experiences of social degradation and prejudice that Italian colonial arrogance bred that pushed Beshah to become an outlaw, the formation of the arada-vagrant was not just a product of social degradation and the impertinence of rule under a foreign invader. Beshah explains to Azajh the conditions that gave rise to the arada-vagrant in the city center as follows “all arada-vagrants were forced [to become vagrants] due to unjust [circumstances]. They abhor and revolt against injustice wherever they find it, driven not by their mental reasoning but by their instinct” (ibid: 182). He characterizes the condition of the arada-vagrant as a product of impoverishment in the city—the circumstances that orphans, unwanted children and children of paupers and beggars face in the city. Beshah says,

... It may not be obvious to arada kids who became vagrants due to such

circumstances, who the culprit is for the injustices that they face, they may not be able to [clearly] assign blame either to man or God. However, they instinctively understand that they are made to endure this sentence, not due to any fault of their own. They rebel against injustice, revolt against the prejudiced and will be the first to help those who are victims of injustice (Ibid: 182-183).

The arada figure, poor and marginalized, were condemned to live in “perpetual war” to survive the oppressions and the injustices of the capital. The arada, were “... forced by the vicissitudes of survival to steal, snatch, [and] rob. [They are] beaten and apprehended to serve prison time, and then be released [only] to go back to their crimes and live in perpetual war” (Ibid: 203).

The protest of the arada against those in authority (both against the Italians) and the postwar imperial state was neither a product of their patriotism,³¹⁸ nor their well-articulated critique of state power.³¹⁹ The consciousness that gave rise to the arada outlaw in *Yeelm Ejhat* was, as Haddis explains, an “instinctive” consciousness that spurs a rebellious attitude in marginal subjects against the social order, its laws and structures that sustain their marginalization. It was the arada—vagrant’s tactile reaction against the everyday experiences of injustice and the grievances that they generated, that provoked a rejection of the social and economic (dis)order that they found themselves in. As Haddis shows in *Yeelm Ejhat*, the arada as outlaws undermined the laws, the social conventions of the system (ibid: 185); and troubled

³¹⁸ While Haddis makes an exception of Beshah, from among the arada, as a thinker and nationalist hero, he at the same time makes clear that patriotism and “love for country” were not the motivations behind the rest of the arada-vagrants who fought against the Italians. Haddis makes a distinction between the patriots who fought the Italians and the arada-vagrants who left the city to join this fight in the bushes. He suggests that the former were motivated by feelings of nationalism, while the later fought due to their loyalty to Beshah—their leader, their backer and benefactor. Haddis says, “... Since [the arada-vagrants] never had a country that cared for them or provided them with food, clothes, education... and their overall upkeep, they... could not have [possibly] been persuaded by the love of country, they never had” (*Yeelm Ejhat*, 1988: 202).

³¹⁹ Similarly, C.L.R James sees revolutionary consciousness as a product of everyday experience of domination. In *The Black Jacobins*, James (1989: 89) argues, the Haitian Revolution was the product of the “instinctive desires” of the masses of slaves for freedom that inhered from their experiences of exploitation and subjugation. For James, the slaves were the most exploited and the most revolutionary.

the state, both the colonial Italian (Ibid: 188-189 and 191-192) and the post liberation imperial Ethiopian (Ibid: 214-232).

The association of the arada figures in particular and *aradinnet* (as an urban sensibility) with rejection of social convention is also confirmed by popular music and local memory, as will be discussed in the course of this chapter. Moreover, *araddinet* has been associated with all sorts of tricks and cones of the street hustle.³²⁰ Surviving in and the city required more than resenting prejudice. Criminal activity, theft and fraud were among the means by which the arada figure survived the city. As we have seen in previous chapters, the arada figure, shared the alternative social spaces of the city-center along with sex workers, female brewers, brokers, the unwaged and precariously employed of the postwar city. These alternative social spaces of the city that were left out of the state's modernist project, became sites where a culture of popular modernity emerged. The ways of being of the arada figure, their attitudes and sensibilities, that were a product of the street hustle—street-smartness, conviviality (*hulu bête*), and their tendency to disrespect social conventions and undermine the law, were generalized to become a way of being young and urban in Addis as the postwar years wore on. The ways in which the arada sensibility from the trenches of the city-center became generalized as a quintessence of being young and urban in the city is the subject of discussion in the rest of this chapter. The arada sensibility circulated both in time and space, and part of the reason why it was taken up by poor and middle class alike, across class divides was that everyone who grew up in Addis Ababa were attracted to and identified with the allures of *ketemennet* (urbane) and city-smartness. While I use cultural documents that came out of the postwar period, to show its appeal to the educated in the rest of the chapter, I will discuss in the next chapter how it, as a musical trope, appealed also to the working poor of the city.

³²⁰ Asnakech in the track "Arada" (1996) describes the arada ("aradaw") as "molachaw" (hoodwinker), "samunaw" (the trickster) and "chelataw" (the smooth talker).

6.1.3.3 The metaphor

Vagrants, robbers and pickpockets were part of the social fabric of the Greater Piazza area and the city center in general in the postwar period.³²¹ They were part of the social-make up of especially the city-center of the capital. The urban cultural modernity of the capital was in this sense part of the actual lived life and experiences of the arada figure—the hustler, the vagrant, and the sex worker. This, however, was just one image and aspect of arada. The other was a notion of arada that emerged as a symbol of modern urban identity—a way of life, attitude and sensibility abstracted from the actual lived life of the arada figure. This arada culture or *aradinnet* grew out of the lived life of the arada *deha adeg* (lowly born) figure and was a product of their socio-economic position in the city. The culture that was born among these poor arada figures—their sense of folkish solidarity, their disrespect for established authority, and joviality became one of the key aspects of the *zemenawi* urban youth culture and identity embraced variously by different social groups of postwar Addis Ababa.

The sensibilities and ways of being of the poor hustling arada figure came to be shared by youth who held different social and class positions but engaged in social practices in different spaces of the city. This disposition informed the sex workers, azmaris, artists and their clientele in the profane centers of Greater Piazza and other neighborhoods of the city such as Senga Terra, among others. The materially grounded culture of the arada figure were incorporated and appropriated by the Addis youth, with varying class positions to redefine their place especially in the 1960s. This, along with the social practices generated by profane spaces that were operated by the cultural brokers discussed in the beginning of the chapter, became instrumental in the birth of the young cultural rebels of postwar Addis Ababa. The material foundations of arada as a cultural modernity born out of the lived practices of the poor arada figure; and the significance of women who operated profane spaces of the city, makes

³²¹ The China Group, poor young males operating in the city-center and it's surrounding for instance, preyed on rich kids from elite schools and Wube Bereha partyers (Interview: Mimi Eshete; Interview: Leulseged, Sheger 102.1 in *Sinkesar* by Nebiyu). According to Leulseged the Derg assassinated many of the China Group members during the early years of the revolution.

explicit the crucial importance of structural foundations of cultural change and ways of being young and urban in the capital in this period.

This culture, even if born among the poor arada figure, was not bound to them, nor was it an authentic culture that was separate from the interference of the modernist state and its projections of what it means to be modern. It was precisely due to the mobility of this culture of arada—as a metaphor—that poor unemployed as well as middle income professional aradas emerged in the postwar period. The material foundation that structured the subject formation of the Addis youth created variegated and classed youth urban subjects in the postwar period. At the end, not all arada were poor, unwaged and precarious subjects. Some were educated, university students and professionals in the civil service bureaucracy—who formed the incipient intelligentsia. This later arada are the main characters of another cultural document of the postwar period, a novel—*Letum Ayinegalign*—from the 1960s by the renowned literary luminary Sebhat Gebreegziabher.

Sebhat's *Letum Ayinegalign*, is discussed here to talk about arada as a popular urban modernity shared by the urban youth especially those advanced in their education and who were part of the professionals of the postwar state bureaucracy. The novel is set in pre-revolution Addis Ababa and is a tale of sex workers and their clientele in Wube Bereha. Sebhat gives us a portrait of arada different from that of Haddis Alemayehu in *Yeelm Ejhat*. The arada figure in the later were lowly born young members of the streets of the city center. In *Letum Ayinegalign*, it is young professionals and university educated males, who were associated with the freewheeling youthful way of life of Wube Bereha and their women partners—the sex workers of the bars and clubs of that neighborhood. Both these novels *were about* rebellion—young people rejecting the social norms and cultural mores of the imperial social order. In *Letum Ayinegalign*, Sebhat does not refer to these youth as *arada* but *arradinnet* is a given in the novel as the most essential aspect of the social cultural life of the youth in Addis Ababa in the 1960s. In the words of Getachew Abate, a Wube Bereha veteran and a self-defined arada, there were two categories of arada “the higher arada” (salaried, educated, someone who knows the ins and outs of the city—

the restaurants and *zemenawi* spaces etc.) and the arada of the streets— the hustlers, “the lower arada” (Getachew Abate, audio recorded interview by Agazit Abate, 2018 September).³²² The arada experience that Sebhat centers in *Letum Ayinegalign* is the one of “the higher arada” and their women “lovers”. And in my analysis I see *aradinnet* as a way of being that is gendered, but also as a set of attributes that described the character traits of both men and women. However, I choose to focus on the male arada in my discussion of *Letum Ayinegalign*. This is because the life experience of the female arada is foregrounded through my discussion of the cultural brokers in the previous section. As shown already women, like Meri Armide, Asnakech Worku and Zenebech Tadesse articulated their cultural place in postwar society and their relationship with the modern.

Letum Ayinegalign is chosen here as a book to talk about *aradinnet*, because it is a novel about place, a biography of Wube Bereha—the neighborhood considered the epitome of *aradinnet* in the 1950s and 1960s. Sebhat saw Wube Bereha, as a space from which the formation and cultural identity of the urban youth in pre-revolution Addis Ababa should be understood. Their social practices could be considered a form of *aradinnet* in entertainment sites that nurtured the dispositions and urban identities of the youth. Sebhat once described it in an interview, as “a whorish prostitute place” and as a “place in Ethiopian history that was unique...[and] strange” where “the women were not [just] prostitutes. [The prostitutes and their clients] treated each other like human beings, except that money has to [be involved]”. Sebhat’s portrayal of Wube Bereha, as a “strange” and “unique place in Ethiopian history” was not an exaggeration. Rather, it shows Sebhat’s attentiveness and his “sensitivity” to the new realities, socialites and cultural transformations that were happening in the lives of the Addis youth and the impact on their identity. In *Letum Ayinegalign* Sebhat explores *the meaning* of the lives of Wube Bereha’s sex workers and their salaried, educated urban young males in the 1960s. As his editor Demissie Tsige says, Sebhat tells it like it is—lays-bare the life of the urban Ethiopian youth and exposes their “untold stories”, going against the belief that “what should be written about is our courage

³²² See also a similar distinction between the arada made by Marco Di Nunzio in *The Act of Living* (2019) for more recent times.

rather than our cowardice, our beauty rather than our ugliness” (Demissie Tsige “Preface” in *Letum Ayinegalign*, 1993). By writing about Wube Bereha, Sebhat exposes the fracturing of social conventions in a society that was dramatically transforming. By exposing the “ugliness”, Sebhat was trying to leap into the meaning of the social changes that were happening in postwar urban Addis Ababa.

The novel represents Sebhat’s ruminations about why Wube Bereha captivated young men and women of the capital. Their practices, their desires, sexual escapades, and anxieties were examined to understand the tenor of the times in this biography of a place. The practices that went into the formation of the Wube Bereha frequenting urban youth were documented in the evenings and weekends of Wube Bereha. In the words of Demissie Tsige in *Letum Ayinegalign*, Sebhat “divulges the identity” (Ibid) ³²³ and the practices that formed the urban youth and their deep social and cultural significance. Indeed, Sebhat saw a profound meaning in Wube Bereha than went beyond sex and alcohol. His explorations about the “uniqueness” of Wube Bereha in the 1960s and why it should be the place from where the social and cultural formation of the young and the bold should be studied from is apparent from the following excerpt. The first-person narrator of *Letum Ayinegalign*, Minase says,

The reason why, we, men, come to Wube Bereha is not for the sex. If it were for that, we would not have needed the music and the dance—the women and their beds would have sufficed...Drinks in the *desert* [Wube Bereha] cost much higher. So if it were for the drink we would have gone to other places (*Letum Ayinegalign*, 1993: 95).

The appeal of Wube Bereha for Sebhat was the community that it made possible. Its attraction went well beyond carnal pleasures. Wube Bereha was a place where, “...among men friendships were [forged] and with women, love...all kinds of love...careless love, complex love, ... time tested love...” was discovered (Ibid: 95-96). Wube Bereha was the “city of love” (ibid: 96), love that appeared for outsiders “mysterious”, strange (Ibid) and even decadent. Sebhat’s depiction of Wube Bereha,

³²³ Demissie uses the Amharic word ምንነት (meaning or essence) to argue that Sebhat “divulges” the essence and identity of the social categories that he discusses in *Letum Ayinegalign*. In the main these were university educated young Wube Bereha frequenters and sex workers.

thus, humanizes “this whorish prostitute place” by “divulging” as Demissie said, its deeper meaning, as a space where the urban youth found a new community in a society of sex workers and young Wube Bereha frequenters, the cultural degenerates and outcasts. The alienated women divorcees who come to Wube Bereha like Tirsit (ibid: 134), found acceptance and a sense of belonging in this community—in youthful friendships, in love; away from the suffocating disciplinary regimes of the imperial social order. The university educated, estranged, hyphenated extraordinaire of urban society, who Solomon and Gedamu write about, found acceptance in Wube Bereha. And as Tesfaye Gessesse says, they found “release” from the strictures of the oppressive moral codes of the imperial social order. Minase narrates,

Most of us are working people, with small offices and small salaries, small responsibilities... Our bosses are small people... who act as big officials... and make us say “yes sir!” “sure sir!” ...

Who wants to go home after work? What is there at home? Man is not chicken who roosts when the sun sets... Man is not a lizard or a snake that curls under the stone to while away the evening... [and its loneliness]

We come to Wube Bereha running away [and fleeing] from our loneliness... we find those, like us, who are chased by their loneliness; [There] we get acquainted with women who came scuttled away by their solitude (ibid: 96).

Letum Ayinegalign represented Wube Bereha as a place of refuge to these young men and women who felt lonely due to the alienating social conventions of marriage and *chewannet* that the imperial social order prescribed. It is portrayed as a sanctuary where the urban youth found new ways of being young and social in the city. The dramatic transformations occurring in urban society, most notably Addis Ababa in the postwar period, was seen as shaping the formation of two separate cultures and a “generational conflict” between “the old” and “the young” as Negash Gebremariam and many others argued. Sex workers who came to the city escaping early marriage and divorcing older husbands were defying social convention. Young men taking up lovers in Wube Bereha were disrespecting the codes of *chewannet* (respectability) of

the postwar imperial modernist state. They were contravening and undermining its desires of creating modern urban subjects who were responsive to authority and who cherished the social mores and legacies of ‘Ethiopian culture’. Young university students and Wube Bereha frequenters of the professional type, spoke in English, dressed and danced in European and American styles. They were a “Lasagna eating”, cinema going public, who were seen as culturally dislocated subjects in their society.³²⁴ As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the *hyphenatedness* of the urban youth in general and the educationally advanced in particular, resulted in a distinct collective self-consciousness of the urban youth. Their social and cultural experiences in urban areas distinguished them and prompted them to see themselves as inhabiting a distinct cultural world different from the rest of society—those without access to modern education (described as “illiterate”) and those who resided in the countryside.³²⁵ Sebhat’s repeated reference of the older generation as “የድሮ ሰው”, meaning those people of the olden days, with antiquated values and attitudes that were not up to speed with the times (Ibid: 19 and 136) in *Letum Ayinegalign*, attest to the self-consciousness of the younger generation, especially those university educated. This sense of distinction and hyphenated cultural existence of the university educated as “vicarious” consumers of cultures from elsewhere, and the sex workers of Wube Bereha who walked away from their womanly responsibilities and engaged in un-womanly affairs, were the causes of the “loneliness” these youngsters felt as described in *Letum Ayinegalign*. By seeking the life of adventure, love and friendship the urban youth were carving a community in Wube Bereha.

Frequenting Wube Bereha became a way of being young and urban in the postwar period. It gave the youth a sense of distinct cultural identity and in effect became a

³²⁴ See for instance Sebhat’s description of the clothes Petros and Birhanu wore, the restaurants they went to and the conversations they had in English (*Letum Ayinegalign*, 1993EC: 99-105. See also the fight the two got into with a man who heard them speak in English and charged “‘Listen, is it because our language is not [cool] enough that you speak in a foreign language? ... Is it because you are contemptuous of the King’s language [that you use English]?’” (Ibid: 99).

³²⁵ The perception that the postwar period represents a new age and a time of “transition” induced the idea that urban youth inhabited a *new present* due to their distinctive experiences of living in urban spaces, most notably in Addis Ababa as discussed in previous chapters. See for instance Negash Gebremariam, 1961: 24-26). The experiences of the urban youth and the changes in public sociality were instrumental in the creation of a collective consciousness of the urban youth in the 1960s.

space where moral conventions were “desacralized” and “delegitimated” in the 1950s and 1960s.³²⁶ Wube Bereha became the place where the urban *zemenawi* youth defied the normative structure of the postwar imperial social order and disregarded its decorum of respectability and deference to authority.

The characters of *Letum Ayinegalign* are described as fashionable, with a lifestyle characterized as carefree and unconventional, and full of adventure. They are in the main shown to be given to drinking and are depicted as sexually liberated or even philandering. Those even more daring like Kinfe are admiringly described as smooth talking city slickers and great dancers (*Letum Ayinegalign*, 1993 EC: 62-63). Tilahun ረብሽ (lit. Tilahun *trouble*) and represent the other face of *arradinnet*—they were the “desert heroes”—the fierce fighters celebrated for their courage and physical strength (*Letum Ayinegalign*, 1993 EC: 23-25 and 34-37 and 46).

Another attribute associated with the arada in *Letum Ayinegalign*, as well as in popular music (as we will discuss a little later), is generosity and a sense of justice and solidarity

³²⁶ This notion of “desacralization” is inspired by discussions in works dealing with the social and cultural “origin” of the French Revolution in the past four or so decades. These works challenged the dominant argument that saw the Enlightenment as the source and ideological origin of the French Revolution. These American historians ventured a fresh look at the cultural and ideological context of pre-revolution France. They made connections between the French revolution and what is called “desacralization” of the monarchy in the public sphere and in public culture. The most influential of whom is perhaps Robert Darnton (2019), who argued that the “ideological origins” of the French Revolution were found not so much in “High Enlightenment” and the Philosophes like Voltaire or Diderot, but in the pornographic writings and the “sedition books” that wrote about the “scandals of the monarchy” books of pornographic content, and “popularized Enlightenment tracts”, “light fiction” and so on produced by ambitious writers and wanna-be philosophes, while acknowledging the “deep penetration of the Enlightenment” and Enlightenment thinking in French society in the decades leading up to the revolution. For him the “delegitimation” of the French Monarchy was key in providing the conditions for the outbreak of the revolution. A less convicting case was made by Jeffrey W. Merrick in *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century* (1990) shows that the desacralization of the French monarchy in pre-revolutionary 18th century France as a result of the controversies that ensued between the “institutions of the old regime: the magistrates, the crown, the clergy and the parlements” was key to explain the cultural roots of the French revolution (ix-x) “discredited” the monarchy and exposed its fallibility (1990: 79-81 and 103). For Merrick such processes and controversies are shown to be important cultural developments that should be taken into account to expose the “cultural origins” of the French Revolution. Sarah Maza, in *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (1993) complicates Darnton’s contention that the ideological origins of the French Revolution should be found elsewhere, other than the High Enlightenment, by arguing that “the writing and reading of sensational courtroom literature contributed to the birth of public opinion and of a new public sphere in the decade just before the French Revolution” (1993: 3) She further points out that the ideological turmoil that prepared the way for the revolution had many more sources than ‘the Enlightenment’ (Ibid: 6).

with the poor and the lowly. As we have seen in *Yeelm Ejhat*, solidarity with the poor and the homeless comes with a certain sense of resentment to authority. In *Letum Ayinegalign*, a connection is made between *arradinnet* and fair mindedness or compassion. For instance, Tilahun *trouble* that is portrayed as otherwise notorious for his belligerence, drunkenness, and fighting exploits, is instantaneously shown to be a kind-hearted, empathetic person who treated homeless, lowly teenage moonlight walkers with compassion and generosity, and as sisters (ibid: 48). Postwar recollections nostalgically depict the *arada way* in a similar vein as generous and socially agreeable. Getachew Abate proclaims the *arada* as someone who “knows no greed. [They]... share what they have—they are generous. [They] do not discriminate... they can be friends with anyone... even the devil” (Getachew Abate, audio recorded interview by Agazit Abate, 2018 September).

Characters like Tilahun *trouble*, who distinguished themselves for their fighting prowess, take on the appearance of real-life figures like Getachew *dula* (*dula* meaning *stick*), Mengistu Worku (a popular football player and a fearsome fighter) and Meles Birrara, men still remembered in the popular memory of Wube Bereha for their legendary reputation for fighting (Sinkesar, 2004). Sebhat emphasizes that fighting and displaying one’s masculinity was part of being young, male and *arada*. “Wube Bereha was not just a place where one comes and dances and sleeps with women and leaves”, Sebhat’s first person narrator says. “In a place where men gather, it is imperative that one is [distinguished] above all others” (*Letum Ayinegalign*, 1993: 25). In Wube Bereha, distinction, due to inherited position and privilege of birth, was replaced with other merits. One way of claiming the *arada* title was by distinguishing oneself as a fierce fighter. In stressing this merit, Minase says, “human civility ... rendered [the] law of the might irrelevant... only in outward appearance. [In fact] what still applies is the law of the might. If you notice in this *desert* it is the one with the muscle who sleeps with any woman he likes” (ibid: 26). The other desert heroes “pay tribute” and obeisance to the ultra-male *arada* figure—not in reverence to his *chewannet* or his honored lineage, but in homage to his fighting exploits. Therefore, in this sense, *arradinnet*, whether in its masculine exhortations or in its compassionate solidaristic overture, was an everyday social practice born out of lived experience. It

is something that one becomes rather than something that one inherits, is born in or receives, unlike inherited positions and privileges of birth. It is important to note how masculine attributes of valor got re-inscribed in the profane spaces and urban scenes of the postwar period.

Kinfe, another character in *Letum Ayinegalign*, represents perhaps the most archetypal image of the arada in Wube Bereha. He is archetypal in the sense that he appears to embody all the attributes of the freewheeling arada. Kinfe is a mixed bag, someone who is the best and the worst expression of the Wube Bereha arada. He is portrayed as a great dancer, a fashionista, a humorous smooth talking young man on the one hand, and a deluder and a debauched character, without regard for sexual mores on the other (*Letum Ayinegalign*, 1993 EC: 61-63).³²⁷ Kinfe was the city slicker par excellence—the new face and the new definition of a *zemenawi* young man, free from the trappings of restrictive cultural conventions. For the first-person narrator Minase, Kinfe is a riddle. Minase narrates, “For me... ‘Kinfe’ is someone who is above social convention, a prophet of freedom who lives despite God’s covenants. Or should I call him a beloved rascal” (ibid: 136). Kinfe’s typical Wube Bereha ways— his unconventional ways, and his indecorous sexual liberation, knows no bounds (ibid: 63).³²⁸ At the same time, he is distinguished as a “beloved rascal” for his sense of freedom and rebellion against the normative and moral edifices of the society.

The other formative practice of the Wube Bereha arada figure was the routine bar fights that were part of being young and arada in this period (*Sinkesar*, 2004). As the saying goes “yearada lij yefit tirs yelewum” (lit. “*Yearada lij* does not have front teeth”, meaning yearada lij would lose their teeth due to habitual bar fights). Like the unbridled lifestyle of figures such as Kinfe, or the sense of camaraderie with the poor as exhibited in the character of Tilahun *trouble*, the display of manhood also infected

³²⁷ See also a description of Kinfe in the eyes of the women of Wube Bereha in *Letum Ayinegalign* (1993: 79).

³²⁸ See for instance discussion of Kinfe sleeping with various women from Wube Bereha, all friends, in one night in a single bar in *Letum Ayinegalign* (1993: 63).

arradinnet as a sensibility and way of life for the *zemenawi* urban youth. Distinction was due to ones fighting prowess and adventures, articulated with values of patriotism and gallantry as defender of the land, while undermining chivalry and the attributes of nobility and *chewannet* it was associated with.

We see new attributes of courage associated with the Wube Bereha arada figure in *Letum Ayinegalign*. Birhanu, another character in the novel, for instance, is described as a “lanky” (ከሰከ) young Wube Bereha frequenter. Despite lacking in any remarkable quality as a muscle man (ibid: 26), Birhanu is distinguished and admired as “tenfold a man above all others” (ibid: 27). What makes Birhanu the new image of the young and the bold in the novel is his audacity³²⁹ “to bring [his] whore [lover] to Piazza” out in the open. In a conversation with Tilahun *trouble*, Minase asks “Who [among us] comes to Wube Bereha during the day to take [his whore lover, Tirsit] to the hospital? ... If we consider prostitution like filth... can you imagine what kind of manhood it requires to wash and remove [that filth]?” (Ibid). Birhanu’s *aradinnet* might not come from his fighting ability, his style or looks. Rather it is exhibited through his defiance—the defiance of a cultural rebel— a new way of being young, urban and *zemenawi* in Addis Ababa of the 1950s and 1960s. These attributes of defiance and desacralization of the social codes of *chewannet*, mark Birhanu as the new face of the city.

The arada introduced alternative ways of being in the city. The character traits associated with the Wube Bereha youth, the quintessential expression of *arradinnet* during the postwar period, became the cipher of urban popular modernity. They served as a resource that the youth pooled from to carve for themselves a distinct self-identity different from their parents’ generation. These youth, who might not have otherwise identified themselves as *arada*, were nonetheless the vectors of *aradinnet* in the 1950s and 1960s. As mentioned already in *Letum Ayinegalign*, Sebat does not identify his characters with arada or *aradinnet*. Nonetheless, his characters embodied the cultural attributes originally associated with the arada figure—the

³²⁹ In *Letum Ayinegalign* audacity and courage is used interchangeably with “manhood”.

arada-vagrant-hustler of the city-center, which became the most pervasive cultural popular modernity of the 1950s and 1960s Addis Ababa. These cultural attributes and sensibilities became the most dominant way of being young and urban in the capital. This has been perhaps the most enduring dimension of arada and arada ways due to its impact in the production of the rebel youth in the city. Such values redefined and subverted the imperial state's notions of a modern urban respectable citizens encapsulated in the notion of *Addisu Etyopyawinnet* ("The New Ethiopianess")³³⁰ or "Modern Ethiopianism". They undermined the deferential attitude to "tradition" and social convention that prescribed genuflection to authority and *chewannet*. In such revaluation of what it means to be young, urban and *zemenawi*, in and 1950s and 60s, Wube Bereha stands out perhaps as the most memorialized synecdoche of the capital, the part of the city that was regarded as the *essence* of the city.³³¹

The imperial regime—its drive to modernize and produce a *zemenawi* young subject found a hearing in the young cultural rebels of the city. However, the youth became *zemenawi* also in their own terms through their own social practices, and not only by imbibing the imperial regime's prescriptions of the "New Ethiopianness".³³² They lived the arada way and became *zemenawi* in this "age of transition," disrespecting the respectability politics of the postwar imperial state. Their revaluation of the values of the imperial social order brought critique to bear on the regime's normative structure. Their cultural rebellion is one of the most emblematic aspects of the arada way of life. *Arada* as an attribute that was abstracted from the *arada-vagrant* figure, introduced a different public morality and public sociality in the spaces of the city.

Affirmative character traits were associated with arada such as trendiness, open-

³³⁰ According to Shimeles for the postwar imperial state the "new postcolonial citizen fit for membership in a modernizing nation and state" must be a "respectable" citizenry that can "collectively imagine a sense of national identity" (2011: 529-530).

³³¹ This will be discussed in better detail when we deal with the notion of arada in popular music in the next section.

³³² Serawit Bekele Debele in a brilliant article on marriage during the imperial regime (2020) shows the preoccupation with marriage and the debate in the media to persuade and even force people to marry went as far as imposing taxes on single people was one interesting example that captures the public concern of postwar imperial Ethiopia.

mindedness, liberality (especially in sexual behavior and public morality) and the courage to defy social convention. These attributes expanded the meaning of *arada* and *arradinnet* beyond the *arada*- hustler-vagrant figure and the image of the *arada* as an unscrupulous drunkard. *Arradinnet* also entailed the open-minded cultural rebellion that subverted the imperial normative order in the dramatically changing capital in the 1950s and the 1960s. This was because, as *Letum Ayinegalign* showed, the youth went to profane spaces in Wube Bereha and other neighborhoods in the city not just for sex and drinks. In addition to the colorful nights that were punctuated by violence, robbery and theft in the streets, these spaces of the city were also sites where the youth developed a collective self-consciousness with its rebellious undercurrents. These spaces were sites where the social and cultural formation of the youth was cemented, and their rebellious attitude nurtured. Solomon Deressa, describes the Wube Bereha figure's defiance as follows, in one of his poems in *Lijinet* (an anthology published in 1970) “እምቢ አሌ ወልዱ” (The Defiant Son):

ዋኝበት ጫዳውን	Swim the plain
እሩጦው ባህሩን	run [on] the ocean
...	
ወንዝ አትሁን	don't be a river
ልቀቅ ጎዳናውን	leave the streets
ጥንት የሰከነውን	ordered in ancient times.
ተሰናበት አባቶችክን	Say good-bye to your fathers
እራስህ አባት ልትሆን	to become a father, yourself
...	...
እምቢ በል	say no
አትቀበል	don't accept

The first section of this poem is both a reflection of the spirit of youth in Wube Bereha as well as a “declaration of war” against established order. It represents a celebration of new ways, and the defiance of ‘the old’. “Say no”, Solomon says, “don’t accept” what is “ordered in ancient times” by your fathers. It is your turn to become “a father, yourself” by saying farewell to their ways. This poem was a revolt on cultural convention that speaks to the depth of the changes at work in the spaces of the city. The poem continues:

በረሃ ሁኖ ጊዮርጊስ ጎሮ አራዳ	in the desert, in the backyards of Arada-Giorgis
ፋኖ ዘላኑ	Fano, Fano, Fano ³³³ the nomad
ክራር ሲጫታ	playing the kirar
...	...
እምቢ ባዩ ወንዱ	the rebel—the defiant son

Solomon dedicates this poem apparently to a friend, Tsegaye Gebreegzi. The defiance and bravery (ፋኖ) of “the rebel—the defiant son” that Solomon is referencing here, is the revolt against “the old” in the wilderness of Wube Bereha, and it captures the essence of what it meant to be young and *zemenawi* in the postwar city. “The nomad” playing the *kirar* is a representation of the wandering azmari who found a home base in the profane spaces of the city and exhibited their descriptions and interpretations of the times and its “new realities” (to use James’s terms) through their music and the *kirar*.

As we have seen in preceding discussions, the subject formation of the urban youth in these years saw major transformations. Changes in public sociality resulting from the everyday social practices of the youth became instrumental in the reevaluation of cultural conventions, which in turn produced the rebel youth. The artist cum bar operators of the city-center, the arada-hustler-vagrants of *Yeelm Ejhat*, and the freewheeling arada figures of *Letum Ayinegalign*, produced an urban culture that defied and rebelled against conventions. They introduced new ways of being young and *zemenawi* in the imperial metropolis in the 1950s and 1960s. These changes in public sociality as a result of everyday subjects and their social practices, made the urban youth into the cultural outlaws of urban society. The arada way of being young and urban became part of the urban cultural modernity of the capital. They impacted youth of various class positions. Popular music, as will be seen in subsequent discussions, also played a crucial role in the social and cultural urban formation of the youth in Addis Ababa. It was these different images and the various social meanings associated with arada and *arradinnet* that served as a cultural tool in the production

³³³ An Amharic saying or song about male bravery usually sung to praise military prowess and to encourage heroic deeds!

of the rebel young in the pre-revolution period. These different facets of social and cultural formations of the urban youth are central in (re)constructing a social history of rebel subjects in the years preceding the 1974 revolution.

Chapter Seven

The making of a popular modernity: The Arada musical trope and popular music in postwar Addis Ababa

The right to the city is... far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization. (David Harvey, "The Right to the City", 2003: 1).

Various situated social groups and classes tried to negotiate and reposition themselves in a fast urbanizing city by dealing with the imperatives of modernity that created new realities in postwar Addis Ababa. *Popular modernity*, as the previous chapter showed, was one way of dealing with these imperatives by urban subjects who synthesized cultural artifacts—mobilized both from home and abroad—to deal with social and cultural change. *Popular modernity* emerged as a consequence of this process in a cultural milieu where a “double movement” of absorption and reworking of foreign cultural artifacts and reinterpretation of preexisting practices and resources from domestic sources, were enmeshed in urban social and cultural life. By accounting for the everyday social practices of the urban youth in postwar Addis Ababa, this chapter is interested in showing how *zemenawinnet* was lived at a popular social scale. The attempt here is to document the ways in which a different meaning of *zemenawinnet* was generated through social practice and the urban elocution of *zemenawinnet* in quotidian life in postwar Addis Ababa. The chapter seeks to show the forging of what is called here the *popular modern* in the cultural field. Popular music, dance and dress are strategically foregrounded and examined as sites where *popular modernity* was enunciated in a particular spatio-temporal context.

This chapter explores the making of popular modernity through popular music in three sections. The first section examines the political implications or formativeness of the

arada sensibility that was constituted and reproduced by the arada musical trope. It demonstrates how it contributed towards the making of the rebel youth in Addis Ababa, particularly between the late 1950s and the emergence of the 1974 revolution. The second section is a discussion about *aradinnet* as an urban youth identity. It shows the various ways in which the youth acquired this identity by highlighting certain sets of urban social practices. It discusses *aradinnet* as a popular experiential practice that was key in the making of the cultural modernity of the youth. The third section demonstrates the significance of popular music and popular culture (particularly the cinema and sporting activities) in creating platforms for social congregation, the forging of community and the building of solidaristic ties between young Addis Ababans throughout the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s. The two main objectives of this chapter are the following. One is to use the arada musical trope to tell a social history of youth subject formation by analyzing songs about arada. The second is to show the centrality of popular music and culture in the forging of youth collective consciousness and identity in pre-revolutionary Addis Ababa.

Cultural descent in the capital was becoming a common social practice in the city as the 1960s and 70s wore on. As shown in chapter five, for instance, the miniskirt that was attacked by the stalwarts of cultural authenticity became “the New Look of Addis” and invaded the streets of not just the imperial metropolis but also other urban centers. The cultural currents engendered by the popular culture of the youth in general and popular music in particular, appear to have played an important role in popularizing *aradinnet* through their praise and ratification of the arada way in songs and popular culture. As the following pages will show, popular music was instrumental in forging arada ways of being in the city as part of the popular modern experiences of the youth. I will examine in the forthcoming discussion the ways in which popular music, especially the arada musical trope, constituted the urban identity, especially of the youth, and how it impacted their formation as cultural dissidents.

Cultural workers do not necessarily produce popular arts and music with the intention of subverting authority. Nor do their works always necessarily aim at critiquing power (state or other type of authority). However, at the same time “the audiences” and

“consumers” of popular music do not always use cultural products innocently and may mobilize them for subversive ends. Deliberately or not, the social practices popular music constitute, form or inform public behavior and conduct. As Karin Barber says, “[It is] ...through the gaps, evasions and contradictions in art—that popular consciousness stubbornly maintains and renews its independence” in society (Barber, 1987: 68). This way, the social behavior that the performative practices of popular music and culture, necessitate the subversion of conventions and norms.

On the other hand, as we have seen in the previous chapter, cultural documents, such as novels, manifest the social realities and changes that were registered in postwar Ethiopia. As CLR James, notes a “sensitive” writer; a writer that is attuned to what was happening in society undergoing fundamental change, finds a “new language” and a new “expression” for the new realities that are occurring in the society that they are writing about (James in Conversation with Stuart Hall, *Channel 4 TV*, 1986). The characters and figures that cultural workers depict and sung about in the postwar years, represent particular social groups (workers, students, azmaris, beer brewers, street hustlers, sex workers, professionals etc.) and their lived realities. The singers, poets, novelists and playwrights use individual characters and figures to talk about a category of people as archetypes of a social group, as much as they expose the interiority of individual persons in society. Characters like Tirsit, Tenfyelesh, Mamit Eshururu, Tilahun or Kinfu in *Letum Ayinegalign*; Beshah or Demeqech in *Yeelm Ejhat*; or the *yearada lij* in popular music were as much or even more about archetypal images of social groups residing in urban space, than they were about the stories of individuals.³³⁴ This of course does not mean that the interiority of individual lives is secondary to the presentation of archetypal social groups. The interiority of individual lives with personalized meanings and feelings are actually used by cultural workers to express the feelings, anxieties, desires and aspirations of situated persons in society and the social categories that these characters are made to (re)present.

³³⁴ C.L.R James argues that Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* puts aside “individual characteristics... and see men in terms of the work they do”. For James what “determines [the] social characteristics” of individuals is the “specific type of work” they perform in society (2001: 79).

The social critiques of the normative structure and the status quo contained in creative productions simultaneously reflect and constitute subjects. This was true for arada as a musical trope in the postwar period, which through its popularity challenged the cultural and normative foundations of the imperial social order by celebrating the way of life and way of being, advertised among the general urban youth. The images of arada influenced public sociality of the youth and “new” ways of life in Addis Ababa in this period. Popular art forms were one of the means through which consciousness is “articulated and communicated”, while at the same time they reflected an already “constituted consciousness” (Barber, 1987: 4). This is what this chapter aims to document—the ways in which popular music reflected the times and “constituted consciousness” of the urban *zemenawi* youth in the postwar period. I also aim to document the subversive potentials and challenges popular music posed to unjust political authority (ibid, 1987: 8 and 124), and its instrumentality in promoting and expressing social consciousness.

7.1 The politics of the arada musical trope

The significance of popular music and popular culture in Africa and its impact on wider social change in rapidly changing cities in the post 1940s have been documented by historians and anthropologists studying social change and popular music. Nate Plageman, in his work on colonial and postcolonial Ghana, highlights that popular music and new styles of dress, among others greatly impacted social and cultural life in African cities throughout the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s. In addition to music and dress, frequenting the cinema and theatre, “social drinking” and engaging in sport activities were important ways through which various social groups residing in cities “articulated distinct...and different ...forms of community” (Plageman, 2012: 6). Plageman notes, the urban youth and migrants from the countryside, among other groups, used highlife music and performance including “song lyrics, dance, dress, and sociability” to effect social and cultural change (ibid: 12). Various social groups used highlife performance “to meet nonrecreational aims”. By participating in highlife performances such as dance, dress and by adopting the sociability it entails, urban

dwellers “defied established conventions, reconfigured existing relationships, and produced new forms of consciousness”. People used Saturday highlife “to alter and impact the remainder of the week” and by so doing they “upset the social status quo” (ibid: 12 and 13).

Similarly, the arada musical trope “spoke to the realities that characterized life” in the rapidly changing imperial metropolis.³³⁵ The way of life of the Wube Bereha going youth was a critique and a way of negating the strictures of the imperial social order—its suffocating politics of respectability and deference to authority. Profane spaces and their public sociality were animated by the popular music of the day. Their sociality in the evenings and weekends of Wube Bereha and other centers of entertainment defied the rules of *chewanet* and the deference to social convention and authority they were made to bear with during the day—in offices, work spaces and the classrooms. Additionally, “drinking was a social and communal act that commemorated newly found freedoms” of being urban, young and zemenawi in these spaces of the city.³³⁶

Popular music coming out of the various state-owned military bands of the postwar period, especially the Imperial Bodyguard, served as a soundtrack of the times in the 1950s. Youngsters talked about music and tuned to the radio—such as the Teqil Radio (the radio broadcast of the Imperial Bodyguard) that was popular in the late 1950s (ibid: 73-74; Tesfaye Lemma, 2013: 149-150). Young teenage males met in the various teahouses of the city (Abdul Mohammed, in a group discussion, 2015 March 21)³³⁷

³³⁵ See discussion on the relationship between music and how musical productions reflected and expressed the changing realities of rapidly transforming urban centers. Plageman asserts in his work on highlife music in Ghana “throughout the twentieth century, dance band musicians consistently composed songs that spoke to the realities that characterized life in rapidly growing towns” (2012: 19).

³³⁶ Noelle Plack in “Intoxicating Revolution” (2016), an essay about the link between alcohol and the French Revolution, makes a case for the relationship between wine drinking and transgression of authority. Plack says, “Alcohol often oiled people’s resolve, released constraints and pushed them to do or say things they had not dared to otherwise. Wine barrels were opened and their contents consumed, often accompanied by music from drums and violins, while the tollhouses were set afire. By freeing people’s inhibitions and bolstering their confidence to transgress authority, wine did play a role in these events; but this should not be conflated with deranged inebriation, as this only fuels Taine’s negative characterization of popular revolutionary actors”

³³⁷ Teahouses played music through the radio to advertise their place and people gathered in teahouses. They served as public spheres for the youth.

and talked about music or soccer. Such spaces served as the most common sites of congregation for young people throughout the 1960s and 70s (ibid: 102). Popular music created a key platform for the urban *zemenawi* youth to forge and develop a strong sense of community in pre-revolution Addis Ababa. Let's now look at an example as to the ways in which popular music and sites of entertainment were linked to the emergence of a rebel sensibility among the urban youth in pre revolution Addis Ababa and how popular music disseminated and ratified attributes associated with *aradinnet*. Here is a discussion of Asnakech Worku's song "Throw Lemon", a song about arada that expose ways of being young, *zemenawi* and urban in the capital.

*Lomi talubat (Throw lemon)*³³⁸ was recorded in Addis Ababa as part of the Phillips Ethiopia records. Asnakech's album was called *Krar Songs* (1974). The song goes:

Throw lemon on her chest

On her chest

She is of noble birth, privileged.

Throw lemon on her chest

On her chest

[But] she too will die and her body will turn into ashes.

Rinse her hair with milk

Her hair is made of silk.

Her breasts are bleeding,

what happened?

Is it the bite?

the sharp teeth of that young man?

Those noble men fought over her,

Those men of honor battled to have her,

But it's that *yaarada lij* who [finally] won her heart.

Tell us her name! What do they call her?

She is of noble birth, born into privilege.

Water isn't proper to wash her legs,

Wash her legs with honey, so they stay tender.

³³⁸ "Throwing lemon" is a metaphor for asking someone's hand, a woman, for marriage.

He is a lemon tree (a plant) from the *desert*,
Poor and wretched and without people [and prestige],
[But] she is a lemon tree (a plant) from the shores of the Nile.

The second stanza is an expose of the popularity of the arada way and its idolization and authorization by popular music as the new way of being young. Asnakech recorded this label at the height of her career and at a time when she was known for her activities, not just in the modern theatre but also in profane spaces of the city. The second stanza also exposes the critique of inherited position and privilege of birth contained in this song. It goes—

Those noble men fought over her
Those men of honor battled to take her,
But it's that *yarada lij* who [finally] won her heart.

The moral of the song is despite the noble men fighting to get her consent (the protagonist of the story) for marriage, eventually the *arada lij* wins her heart and takes her hand for the merriment. In the last verse of the first stanza (“[But] she too will die and her body will turn into ashes”) we see that even if she is of noble birth, she dies like everyone else. *Asnakech* here is commenting on the ultimate meaninglessness of coming from a noble family as all humans die and turn into ashes. This is a critique of the hierarchical imperial social order that ranks those with, “privileges of birth” and “inherited position” as superior to those with humble origins, those of the unprivileged majority. The song proclaims the victory of the *arada lij*, who is neither wealthy nor with noble birth, but who wins the heart of the female protagonist. The last stanza points to the significance of space in the reevaluation of social convention and distinguishes the arada way of being:

He is a lemon tree (a plant) from the *desert*
Poor and wretched and without people

The “desert”, the wilderness, was also a common reference to Wube Bereha.³³⁹ “The son of Arada”, despite being “poor” and “without people” has his *aradinnet* as his resource in the city. The “desert” as a reference to Wube Bereha, the place that

³³⁹ See for instance Asnakech’s refers to Wube Bereha as the “bereha” (the desert) in one of her interviews with Alemneh Wasie (Asnakech Worku, interviewed by Alemneh Wassie, 2013).

Asnakech hailed from, is a celebration of the *arada* way. She also alludes to Wube Bereha as a space where the *arada* outshines and thus, the rules of *chewannet* are undermined by the carefree lifestyle of the *bereha* youth. “Throw lemon” is a testimony to experiences of the youth in profane spaces like Wube Bereha (described as “wilderness of beauty”), Serategna Sefer and Senga Tera. It is a song about the struggle between the dominant culture of the imperial social order and the emerging dissident public sociality of the youth in pre-revolution Addis Ababa. In this song Wube Bereha is posited as a space where young cultural rebels, through their practices, subverted the social conventions of the dominant order, most notably, its marriage etiquette. This song documents an act of transgression of a norm—the norm of “marriage between equals”— of the pre-revolution imperial social order. The basic rule of this custom was that marriage should be consummated only “between equals”—between those who come from similar social origins, particularly lineage and ancestry. This is echoed by Haddis Alemayehu’s deliberations in his preface to *Yeelm Ejhat* where he writes “it seems to me from the ways of thinking and customs of the ancient social system [of Ethiopia], the one that was most detrimental for the advancement of knowledge and progress had been the attitude that favors being poor and being born into a “noble ancestry” rather than being rich through hard work” (*Yeelm Ejhat*, 1988: 7).

In the 1960s and 70s, distinction based on inherited position (“noble ancestry”) was undermined in the spaces of the city, with new ways of being young and *zemenawi* emerging in public culture. In the postwar period *araddinet*, *zemenawinnet* and *ketemenet* (urbanity) were associated with attributes like open-mindedness, liberality and permissiveness to new ideas and cultures (Getachew Abate, an audio recorded interview by Agazit Abate, 2018 September). With modernization came not only infrastructural developments but also transformations in public sociality. Meri Armide proclaims these changes in public sociality, in one of her songs, she says,

ያገራችን ልጆች እንዴት ስለጠኑ
እንክዋን ለውሽማ ለሚስትም አይቀኑ

How civilized our [women] have become
Let alone the concubine, they are not even jealous of the wife

It is apparent that the above excerpt associates, “civilization” (*zemenawinnet*) with loose sexual behavior and acclaims women’s transgression of the sexual mores and moral code of their society as markers of sophistication. Such acts of desacralization of the norms of the existing social order that were staged in nightclubs also contested societal expectations about women. Young city folk, who saw themselves as having distinctive ways of being, came to distinguish themselves from the rest of society. As Meri says in another of her songs *habibi* (2012) እሳቱን አንድዱት አልወድም ጩላማ -- የዚህ አገር ልጅ ነኝ የዚህ የከተማ “burn the firewood, I don’t like the dark, I am bred here [in the city] I am a city girl”). Such association of urban identity with streetlights, the cinema, nightlife and bars were part of the Arada story, both as a place and as a symbol of popular modernity - *hizbawi zemenawinnet* (Getachew Abate an audio recorded interview by Agazit Abate, 2018 September). Arada’s cultural and popular modernity was connected with the *tela* and *tej betoch*, the red-light district, and the cinema. As oral testimonies show, the cinema houses were important [landmarks]— [that] were at the core of *aradinnet* (Ibid). The youth forged a distinct self-identity around popular music and other forms of popular culture, including neighborhood-sporting congregations, going to the cinema as well as talking about movies in neighborhood shay betoch. Going to the cinema to watch Hollywood films, as Melakou Tegegn recounts was “not an individual affair, ... [those who] went to watch the cinema, did with the responsibility of their neighborhood kids on their shoulders”. They were expected to come back and narrate “the entire story” for those who did not have the chance to watch the film, those who were not allowed and those who did not have the means (Melakou, 2011: 17). Similarly, a strong sense of community by the urban youth was also forged through soccer—by going to the stadium. Sport activities cemented a sense of solidarity among young males in various neighborhoods of Addis Ababa (ibid: 89-90). Young males played soccer in their neighborhoods, formed village teams and competed with teams in other neighborhoods. They congregated in the numerous teahouses of the capital talking about movies they watched in the cinema

or listening to music on the radio. All these practices nurtured their collective consciousness.

But the transformations that were occurring in the cultural landscape of the city were paradigmatic and wide ranging that went beyond solidifying parochial neighborhood sociality. As we have seen in chapter six, artists, performers and operators of profane spaces mediated these cultural transformations in the capital. The influence of the *azmari* was particularly noteworthy with regard to their relevance for the majority of the city's working poor, while the high class bars of Wube Bereha catered for middle income people and professionals. The *tej betoch* and *shebeens* of the city were, on the other hand, frequented by laborers and they were found in various neighborhoods in the city—mainly in Wube Bereha, Serategna Sefer, American Ghebbi, and Senga Tera—within the Arat Killo-Piazza-Mercato axis. As Simeneh Betreyohannes notes *azmariwoch* “shared the same event and platform with modern bands” in institutions like Hager Fiker Theatre and Haile Selassie I Theatre (Simeneh, 2018:22). Moreover, the *azmari* inflected *arada* musical trope orchestrated in modern bands as well as accompanied by the *kirar*, was popular among the youth across class and educational status. As one of my interlocutors, Getachew Abate mused, “artists sung for us [the *arada*], they performed for us with their *Masinkos* in the *tej* and *tela betoch* [of the city] as well as in modern bands” (ibid). The *arada* musical trope, performed in Meri Armide's, Ketema Mekonnen's, and Asnakech Worku's one-instrument (*kirar*) songs as well as the *arada* trope incorporated in modern bands, popularized the *arada* way of life. The Hager Fiker Theatre and modern bands provided the platform for the popularization of the *arada* musical trope. Both *azmariwoch* and “modern singers” drew from an urban social material and celebrated the attributes of the *arada*—*zemenawi*, trendy, loose and care free. As Karin Barber notes, the essential character of popular arts lies in their appeal to heterogeneous groups in a fast changing urban environment, which also gives them the opportunity to travel and transmit (Barber, 1987: 13-14). The flourishing of profane spaces in the city, and their visitation by the urban youth from all classes and social backgrounds, as well as the popularity of the *arada* musical trope “patronized” by “wide urban constituencies,” became one of the nodes around which the public sociality of the capital was changing between the

1950s - 1970s.³⁴⁰ The social life of the urban youth were formed and even enchanted by narratives that circulated about arada in public discourse and social practice. Licentious way of life and being—associated chiefly with Wube Bereha—as well as freedom from the strictures of convention, was a key notion that attested to the recalcitrant arada way of being.

As the forgoing discussion indicates, the arada story had its gender dimensions. The following stanza is one of the most popular verses in the arada standard and offers a gendered perspective on the meaning and image of arada.

መገን የአራዳ ልጅ እነ ድንጋይ ክዋሱ	Oh <i>yearada lij</i> whose ball is the stone
ጠበንጃም የላቸው ሽጉጥም የላቸው	They don't have rifles, they don't have pistols,
በየደረሱበት መለኪያ በምባቸው ³⁴¹	wherever they be their bomb is their melekia. ³⁴²

Here the young urban and *zemenawi* arada are compared to the *balabat* (the nobility) who went around with their rifles and pistols, displaying their manhood by carrying arms. The arada without rifles and pistols are shown to be different. They caused trouble in the bars just by the cool act of throwing bottles and glasses as their weapons. While fighting is a mark of distinction, the arada way was associated with a specific type of masculinity: love for drinking, fighting in bars and good times. The other famous line in this standard መገን የአራዳ ልጅ አይፈረም ኪሳራ-- ጃኬቱን አስይዞ ገባ ሰንጋ ተራ (Oh *yearada lij*, he is not afraid of being broke—[when] he [runs out of cash he] would use his jacket as payment [to have a good time] in Senga Tera)³⁴³, is another celebration of the freewheeling arada.

³⁴⁰ See for instance discussion by Plageman on how highlife in colonial and postcolonial Ghana gradually became an art form patronized by “wider constituencies” from a musical form initially sponsored exclusively by the elite (2012: 16). This is comparable to the ways in which Wube Bereha and its creative artistic products were democratized in the post 1950s. Refer back to discussion in chapter three on this.

³⁴¹ See for instance Asnakech Worku’s track “Arada” (1996).

³⁴² A small glass used to drink *areqe* (a strong alcoholic drink, a spirit, usually taken in small doses).

³⁴³ Senga Tera used to be one of the popular red-light districts in Addis Ababa in the postwar period. See an excellent description of the place in the 1950s and 60s (Melakou, 2011 EC: 33-34).

Excessive drinking and carefreeness were associated with the arada as shown in the above memories of place contained in popular music.³⁴⁴ The lack of inhibition and little regard for money, respectability and the depiction of arada as having an unconstrained public life, was characteristic of arada as representing the cultural rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s. As Getachew Abate says, “for one to be arada you usually have to rebel against your parents, defy their rules [their authority] ... When they give up on you and let you be on your own, you [then] become arada” (Getachew Abate, an audio recorded interview by Agazit Abate, 2018 September). Defiance of authority was hence the most defining characteristics of being arada, which became the essence of the popular modernity of pre-revolution youth urban culture. The arada were also described as loose and non-committal የአራዳ ልጅና የሻሽ መቀነት ሲያጠብቁት--አይወድም ሽብ እንደ ዘበት (lit. yearada lij and the *meqenet*³⁴⁵ don’t like to be tightly [held], [what they like] is when softly [handled]). Asnakech’s “Arada”³⁴⁶ corroborates the association of the arada hustler figure with their street-smart “act of living,” which we previously discussed. In Asnakech’s “Arada” they are equated with “the trickster, the silver-tongued and the crafty (አራዳው ሞላጬው ጨላጣው ሳምናው). However, the craftiness of the arada and their hustle is presented as harmless and benign, and hence celebrated and praised.³⁴⁷ In fact, as we have discussed already in *Yeelm Ejhat* as well as *Letum Ayinegalign*, compassion and generosity are also attached to the arada and portrayed as a characteristic feature of *arradinnet*.³⁴⁸

Asnakech’s “Arada,” like many other arada songs, draws from the local memory of the historic city center, Arada, and from Wube Bereha in the postwar period. Arada as a

³⁴⁴ See for instance Ketema Mekonnen’s and Menilik Wosenachew’s versions of the same song መገን የአራዳ ልጅ.

³⁴⁵ *Meqenet* is a shawl used as a belt, to wrap around the waste, usually for women. It is usually paraphernalia that goes with the Ethiopian *shema* dress made of cotton.

³⁴⁶ See for instance Asnakech Worku’s track “Arada” (1996).

³⁴⁷ Getachew Abate says, “[the arada] don’t normally lie. But if they do, they do it well and their lie is not malicious [since] they don’t do it to hurt others” (Interview by Agazit Abate, 2018 September). It appears that lying comes with the territory for the arada ‘city slicker’ and hustler, but in a sense, it was also a way of surviving the city—for street operators of the city-center. Also see the description of Kinfe as the city slicker captured in *Letum Ayinegalign*, for instance.

³⁴⁸ Asnakech says, (ከአራዳ ልጅ ጋራ አብረው ቢሰደዱ--ቢያገኝም ያበላል ቢያጣም ያዝናል ሆኖ, means if you run away with yearada lij, he would share [whatever] he lays his hands on, or if he doesn’t have nothing, you will get his compassion).

metaphor traveled in space and time and its meaning was not tied to the memory of the historic city center, Arada. This was why Wube Bereha became the spatial embodiment of the notion of arada and the social and cultural transformations of the 1960s. In fact, the notion of arada has iterations of meaning in different times in the history of Addis Ababa. *Arradinnet* (being arada) for postwar Addis Ababa, as Getachew Abate says, was about “ነገረ ሁኔታ” — about one’s attitude and the way one carries himself/herself (Getachew Abate, an audio recorded interview by Agazit Abate, 2018 September). It was a recalcitrant sensibility that was not confined to just one place. The arada of the prewar period was, on the contrary, confined to the bars in the commercial and administrative center of the capital, Arada. The postwar generation, on the other hand, saw the expansion of the imperial metropolis, and the image and meaning of arada along with the shifting city-center of the capital, also became more expansive and mobile.³⁴⁹ The behavioral attributes associated with *yearada lij* in the arada standard discussed above, reinforced and corroborated the various social meanings associated with arada and *arradinnet*.

The arada story should not be taken as a story of male solidarity, sexual adventure and fighting exploits. The focus in this chapter and chapter six on male characters and arada figures reflect partly the emphasis given in popular musical products to male figures. Moreover, even if *Letum Ayinegalign* exposes the lives of sex workers, my discussion on as azmaris/artists cum bar operators adequately demonstrate the lives of Meri Armide and Asnakech, who were self-defined aradas. Meri claimed that she was “the boss of the women of Arada”. Similarly, Asnakech in one of her interviews with ETV a few years before her death noted that, it was when she joined the life of Wube Bereha in the 1950s (Getachew, 2005: 16)³⁵⁰ that she “*became arada*”

³⁴⁹ As Getachew Abate relates (Interview by Agazit Abate, 2018, September), it was in these postwar years that Merkato, the commercial center of the city, “became an arada city on its own”, implying, Merkato’s arada sensibility that developed in the course of the expansion of the city was becoming distinctive in ways that reflected the political economy of the market place and the peculiar sociality it engendered.

³⁵⁰ What Asnakech refers to as Arada here is perhaps Wube Bereha since she opened a bar there in the 1950s and continued to operate bars in other profane spaces of the city even after she joined Haile Selassie I Theatre

(Asnakech Worku interviewed by Alemneh Wassie, 2013).³⁵¹ She associated her *aradinnet* with a “frivolous life” a “freewheeling lifestyle” and “mindless consumption”. She said, “We changed clothes...and bathed in perfumes” (Asnakech Worku interviewed in *Meet ETV*, Clip 1 of 2, 2011).³⁵² Therefore, even if *aradinnet* as a way of being was gendered, it nonetheless was a package with sets of attributes that described the character traits of both men and women. The gendered hierarchy of postwar imperial society also extended itself in the ways in which the *aradinnet* of males and females manifested in the capital. The female arada image was disproportionately linked to azmaris, artists and sex workers. This is despite its incorporation by those beyond the entertainment sector such as students, professionals and office workers etc. The sexism and prejudice attached to females based on their gender is not one that male aradas experienced.

7.2 Becoming arada: popular music in the postwar city

This notion of *becoming arada* illuminates our understanding of *aradinnet* as a cultural phenomenon. It attests to the heuristic and experiential dimension of its popular modernity. It is something that is acquired through practice, rather than something that one is born into. It is a culture one learns and performs. On the one hand, as far as Wube Bereha and other profane spaces of the city were concerned, women enter this world mainly through *azmarinet* (being azmari), sex work or by opening a bar or a club. Men enter it less through *azmarinet*, and more importantly as clients of the booming sex work, club and bar life. On the other hand, *aradinnet* was appropriated as a cultural way of being from the arada-hustler-vagrant figure. In *becoming arada* the youth of postwar Addis Ababa drew from the conference of social meanings associated with *aradinnet*. Many did so even without self-identifying as arada. Defying social norms, as we have seen from the foregoing discussion, was the key tool and cultural disposition that characterized *aradinnet*. It was manifested in challenging the

³⁵¹ Asnakech says, “arada honku, arada gebahu”, meaning I got into arada (a reference to Wube Bereha) and became Arada (Interview in *Meet ETV*, Clip 1 of 2, 2011).

³⁵² In this interview Asnakech remembers, “the freewheeling lifestyle in our times was great. We were unbridled...we were happy.”

marriage etiquette of the imperial social order, open courting of young lovers,³⁵³ women “jolly-jacks” wearing the miniskirt, freewheeling youth challenging codes of respectability (through for instance excessive drinking) as well as artists, sex workers and women mocking the image of the idyllic proper woman with their public conduct.

The nostalgic invocations that songs about arada implored in the above discussed songs show that the arada trope, as a musical genre, represented sedimentation of social memory of both youthful experience and place. The chorus of this Amharic standard, “ወይ አዲስ አበባ ወይ አራዳ ሆይ አገርም እንደ ሰው ይናፍቃል ወይ? (Oh Addis Ababa, oh Arada...is it possible that I miss a place [a country] as if it is a person [a lover]?), gets repeated in various iterations of arada songs during and after the postwar period, and sometimes accumulates additional verses from different times.³⁵⁴ In the postwar period, this poem was associated with Wube Bereha more

³⁵³ See the love and sex taboos of the society in Melakou Tegegn (2011 EC: 105). Melakou remembers, “at that time neither our parents nor our schools trained us on how to be in a relationship as males and females. This was considered impolite”.

³⁵⁴ Note Ketema Mekonnen’s version of መገን የአራዳ ልጅ. Ketema’s version of the same song is by and large similar to Asnakech’s. This testifies to the composition of most of the verses of the song during the postwar period, even if there are additional verses (such as the praise of Wube Bereha as ያለፍት ያለባት ያሳደገኝን (as “the place that raised me without a father and a mother” testifying to the charitable social environment of the neighborhood). Ketema uses Wube Bereha and Arada interchangeably, indicating the postwar identification of Wube Bereha as Arada. መገን የአራዳ (Megen yearada lij) by Ketema Mekonnen and Asnakech Worku (Ambassel Music and Video Shop, Addis Ababa Ethiopia, undated).

መገን የአራዳ ልጅ እነ ድንጋይ ኪሱ
ምን ጊዜ ተጩሆ ምን ጊዜ ደረሱ
መገን የአራዳ ልጅ አይፈራም ኪሳራ
ሺህ ብሩን መንዝሮ ገባ ሰንጋ ተራ
አጣ ተሟሉኝ መገን የአራዳ ልጅ አጣ ተሟሉኝ
በኬሻ ጠቅልለው ገደል ይጣሉኝ
የመጣ እንደሁ አውቆ መገን የአራዳ ልጅ የመጣ እንደሁ አውቆ
አወይ መገላገል ዘጠኝ ወር ተጩንቆ
መገን የአራዳ ልጅ ጠበንኛም የላቸው
መገን የአራዳ ልጅ ሽጉጥም የላቸው
በየደረሱበት መለኪያ በምባቸው ብርጭቆ በምባቸው
ቢተወው ነው እንጂ ነገሩን ቢንቀው
አራዳ ነበረ ወትሮ የሚያስጩንቀው
መገን የአራዳ ልጅ የሽምብራ አሸት
ቢበሉት ቢበሉት ጡብ አይል አንጀት
አንዱንም በጡጫ ነበረ በሃላችን
አንዱንም በካልኝ ነበረ ልማዳችን
አንዱንም በጡጫ አንዱን ቱስታታ ነበረ ልማዳችን
ሚስት አገባንና ልጆች ወለድንና ፈሰሰ ሃሞታችን
በእግርሽም በእጅሽም አርጊው ገፋ ገፋ
አራዳ ያንቺው ነው ድራሹ ታልጠፋ

than any other neighborhood in the city. This makes the arada musical trope, both about the memory of place as well as the contemporary moment of its rendition. The images of arada exhibited in the arada musical trope are also consistent with the image of Wube Bereha in the local memory. Long after the place had lost its allure, sayings like “Wube Bereha Aderegegn Deha” (“Wube Berha made me poor”) is still narrated by current residents of the neighborhood. “ወይ አዲስ አበባ ወይ አራዳ ሆይ አገርም እንደ ሰው ይናፍቃል ወይ? (Oh Addis Ababa, oh Arada...is it possible that I miss a place [a country] as if it is a person [a lover]?). It is a line denoting nostalgia of youthful joy and entertainment in the postwar period. In this sense, the song represents a lived experience and uses part of the city as representative of Addis Ababa as a whole. Arada (mainly identified with Wube Bereha in the postwar period) served as a synecdoche to talk about the defining experiences of urban youth cultural identity.

As stated already, arada represents a conference or a broad canvas of social meanings rather than one unified disposition or place. It is this multiplicity of meaning, its expansiveness (as opposed to being a bounded identity or culture) that makes arada/*arradinnet* an important area of focus in this study to understand urban youth subject formation. From the two songs discussed above, for instance, two major images of arada, but not exclusive, become clear. One is where the arada is portrayed as an unbridled, non-committal, and smooth-talking character with penchant for a life of drinking and frivolity, irreverent to notions of respectability. The other is the image of arada that is open-minded and that disregards valuations pegged on wealth, lineage or inherited position. Arada/*aradinnet* also emerged from socio-economic structures of the postwar city that was deeply unequal. The arada is not a free-floating cultural

መገን የአራዳ ልጅ እይጠጣም ቅራሪ
 ወድያም ወድያም ብለኸ ጠጅኸን አጣሪ ዊስኪኸን አጣሪ
 አረ ገላባ ነኸ
 ቢተወው ነው እንጂ ነገሩን ቢንቀው
 አራዳ ነበረ ወትሮ የሚያስጩንቀው
 መገን የአራዳ ልጅ ሲያበላ ሲያጠጣ እንደ ነበልባል
 አሁን የት ይገኛል አራዳን የሚያህል
 ገዳዩ ገዳዩ ዘመዴ ዘመዴ

figure—it is a sensibility that emerged from a particular material and socio-economic structure—a culture that emerged in the interstices of the inner city from within the throes of lowly born arada-vagrants and street hustlers. It was appropriated by those better positioned economically, in the course of the late 1950s and 1960s. What emerged as a way of surviving the vicissitudes of postwar urban life for the unwaged and precariously employed youth, was generalized to become a popular cultural modernity of the youth in postwar Addis Ababa. These multiple social meanings and images of arada described above might at times appear contradictory. However, what connects these images was their disloyalty to the public conduct that the imperial social order issued to the youth. The in-built delinquency of the city, especially its hyper frequented quarters, forged a cultural popular modernity through the production of disobedient, rebel subjects.

The arada way of life, “lubricated” by a life of drinking, sexual license as well as popular music, facilitated the rebellion of the youth and corroded the normative strictures of the system of values the imperial state nurtured through its media and its institutions of education. Popular music played a key role in the production of the rebel youth in the spaces of the postwar city. Beyond serving as a vehicle that “merely reflected [sic]...social realities”, it also became a “process of communication and creation” whereby social groups and individuals participated in the “construction” of their social realities (Plageman, 2012: 12 and 13). Similarly young cultural rebels in Addis Ababa were produced both due to their own daily social practices, but also due to the activities of cultural brokers who played a central role in molding the “contours of ... social change” through their songs, dress, dance and sociality. As Laura Fair notes “pastimes and politics were not discreet categories of experience” (cited in Plageman, 2012: 17). Therefore, changes in public sociality of the youth and the formation of youth subjects were deeply imbricated phenomena in pre-revolution Addis Ababa. The “cultural” formation of the youth in the city as a result of their sociality, dress, and their social practices such as their engagement with popular music, cinema, theatre, sports and nightlife, could not be dissociated from their “political” attitudes. These “cultural” experiences were politically formative. It was the social and cultural transformation that the city was undergoing through the cultural dissent of youthful

urban society who rebelled against and desacralized the dominant social convention of the imperial order, that prepared the ground for the 1974 revolution.

7.3 Music and dissent in pre-revolution Addis Ababa

The salience of popular music in solidifying the sense of collective youthful identity in the postwar period was by no means limited to the *arada* musical trope. Popular music produced by the military and police units of the imperial state were made available for urban mass consumption for the first time in this period. The availability of the radio in open squares and in individual homes, the public performances of the military units in the various theatre houses—mainly the Haile Selassie I Theatre and Hager Fiker, as well as the Teqil Radio broadcast of the Imperial Bodyguard Band especially from the second half of the 1950s,³⁵⁵ all created the conditions for the consumption of popular music and the arts in the capital. In addition to theatres and plays, Haile Selassie I Theatre and Hager Fiker also staged annual live musical performances on the eve of the New Year celebration. The availability of the gramophone in the night clubs and the live performances of modern bands in clubs like Patrice Lumumba and The Africa Andinet Club, as well as in the emerging discotheques (particularly from the 1960s onwards), enlivened the cultural and entertainment centers in the city-center, Piazza and Wube Bereha as well as other neighborhoods invigorated by the ways of being young, urban and *zemenawi* in postwar Addis Ababa. Popular music cemented a sense of collective identity of the youth and served as the soundtrack of young lives in the city. The youth listened to popular music from the radio in the various teahouses of the city (Melakou, 2011: 55) and danced first to English tunes by American and Funk singers in the nightclubs and bars of Wube Bereha, Senga Tera and later in the 1960s in discotheques such as Tunnel and Osibissa, foreign owned nightclubs such as La Mascote and Olympia (Tsfaye Lemma, 2013: 198), as well as in the newly opened hotel dance floors of Genet, Wabi Shebele, Ras, Ghion and Hilton Hotels (Tsfaye Lemma, 2013: 196-199). Hager Fiker and Haile Selassie I Theatre also broadcasted their musical productions through the radio. Melakou remembers, “due to the radio,

³⁵⁵ Melakou Tegegn reminisces around 1956/57 that the Dutch radio company Philips put out radios for sell to the public, which he says “reduced the number of radio listeners in the open square of Maychew [later Mexico Square]” (2011: 56).

we memorized and sung after the vocalists of Hager Fiker Theatre. The *shilela*³⁵⁶ of Nigussie Mehin, the *zeleseigna*³⁵⁷ of Teshome Habte Mariam, the songs of Assefa Abate, Yitna Tedegegn, the youthful Firew Hailu, Etagegne Haile, Aselefech Ashine, were all memorized by heart” (Melakou, 2011: 55). Radio Ethiopia became famous for its broadcasts of musical productions of The Imperial Body Guard Band featuring musical prodigies such as Tilahoun Gessesse, Mahmood Ahmed, Bizunesh Bekele, Tezera Teklemichael and Tefera Kassa. Journalists such as Getachew Desta became popular for their music selections and for putting out songs based on listeners’ choice (ibid: 57).

“Traditional” Ethiopian music— represented by the “Bahil Zemenawi” band of Hager Fiker or *Orchestra Ethiopia*—were as *zemenawi* as Mulatu Astatke’s Ethio-Jazz. Both types of music—those regarded “zemenawi” and “bahilawi,” mobilized musical artifacts from home and from outside to create a cultural modernity that was Ethiopian. As Shimeles notes, the musical productions of Orchestra Ethiopia and Mulatu Astatke’s Ethio-Jazz “should ... be seen as representing not two extremes, one local and the other foreign, but important stages in the continuum of Ethiopia’s musical trajectory in which two cultures interacted, exchanging their elements and enriching each other in the process, while at the same time losing their respective authenticities” (ibid: 650). While it’s true that these two versions of Ethiopian music were formed at the point of intersection and exchange between cultures, they mobilized musical rhythms not only from “western music”, but also from other musical repertoires to establish an Ethiopian *zemenawi* musical tradition. They blended various cultural artifacts, beyond “fusing” just the “two cultures”— “the western” and “the Ethiopian”. Mulatu’s compositions and arrangements including but not limited to “Gara Sir New Betish”, “Ebo Lala”, Yetintu Tiz Alegn” and “Mot Adeladlogn” drew not only from western soul and pop traditions, but also incorporated “Puerto Rican, West African and Ethiopian beats” (Worq Aferahu, 1969: 17 and 19). Mulatu’s Ethio-Jazz, for instance, as a *zemenawi* Ethiopian musical genre,

³⁵⁶ *Shilela* is an Ethiopian folk war song for heroes and is sung to celebrate and prop up patriotism.

³⁵⁷ *Zeleseigna* is a religious worship song performed during the Lenten season, and used also for worship.

much like the musical arrangements of Orchestra Ethiopia or Hager Fiker's Yebahil Orchestra, was a utilization of various cultural resources from different parts of the world to make them part of an Ethiopian musical grammar. Ethiopians, beyond conspicuous consumers and imitators of western styles of music, dance and culture, were creators of musical genres and traditions through a linked and dialectical process of reinterpretation of transmutation of foreign forms and elaboration of domestic genres, styles and rhythms.³⁵⁸

Ethiopian popular music was widely consumed through the radio in the city space especially from the mid 1950s onwards. Popular music from the Bahil Orchestra of the Hager Fiker Theatre was a pioneering effort to start the first Ethiopian Ensemble from homegrown musical instruments,³⁵⁹ while the musical innovations of Orchestra Ethiopia brought together rare musical instruments including the embilta (a horn instrument) and the negarit (a big drum) from all over the country to update them to fit its orchestral performance (Ibid: 225-231). All these efforts used musical artifacts—rhythms, notations and inspirations from home and abroad to create an Ethiopian musical modernity in the spatio-temporal context of postwar Addis Ababa. Ameha Eshete, an ambitious young man and a lover of soul music, put together not only the Soul Ekos Band, one of the first and most popular private bands of its time (Tesfaye Lemma, 2013: 247), but also created the first Ethiopian record label. Ameha Eshete's most indelible mark on Ethiopian music of this period came from the beautiful recordings of this label, which bear the name of the creator, Ameha Records. He recorded Ethiopian music with European companies like Led Zep. Between the year 1969 and 1975, he published around 102 records and c.45 LPs. Famous musicians like Tilahun Gessesse, Teshome Mitiku, Alemayehu Eshete, Mahmood Ahmed, Eyoel Yohannes and many others recorded their songs in vinyl with Ameha Records. Ameha also distributed these records and LPs from his Harambe Music Store conveniently

³⁵⁸ Mulatu Astatke the internationally acclaimed jazz composer entered the modern private band scene of Ethiopia as a member of the Soul Ekos band in the late 1960s (Worq Aferahu, "Soul Music invades Ethiopia", 17 and 19). See also Tesfaye Lemma's (2013: 271) discussion on Mulatu's music and its incorporation of South American rhythms.

³⁵⁹ The person credited for putting together this ensemble was Beshah Teklemariam. The ensemble was created a few years after liberation in the 1940s (Tesfaye Lemma, 2013: 120-121 and 124).

located in the capital. These recordings and their distribution was a milestone moment in Ethiopian popular music as bars and nightclubs, radio stations and individuals started purchasing and playing them regularly. They enlivened and enchanted the streets, bars and homes of (middle income and well to do Ethiopians) and became part of the popular life of young people in the city, reigning in the city's sonic scape (*Ethiopiquest*, 2017). They became the soundtrack of the times and earned wide popularity. Before these records were made available in the market, clubs in Wube Bereha and other centers of entertainment played mainly American pop, soul and funk music (*Asni*, 2013). The late 1960s also witnessed the flourishing of private bands in the capital. The most prominent ones include the Soul Ekos, Ras Band, Ibex, Dahlak, Walias, Shebeles, Zula, Ethio-Star and Venus and performed in various hotels and nightclubs (Tesfaye, 2013: 196-199).

Popular music and dance deepened the cultural transformation of the youth and their way of life in the 1960s. American culture and music through the cinema and record labels played in numerous teahouses and night clubs of the city located in Piazza, Wube Bereha Mercato, Senga Tera and Nifas Silk throughout the 1950s and 1960s (ibid: 198 and 199). The establishment of private bands and the Ameha Record label was a shifting point in this regard as these developments made Ethiopian popular music very popular amongst and accessible to the young public. In a city where “modern” dance was associated with American music, booming private bands and record labels playing Ethiopian popular music was a welcome addition for dance lovers. Before the private band swell in the city, Tesfaye Lemma remembers, hotels like the Wabi Shebele hired the Ashanti Band from Nairobi, convinced that “there were no good Ethiopian bands that fit the class of [Shebele's] dance night program” (ibid: 196). This changed with booming private bands in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The two technologies, the radio and the gramophone, that turned urban Ethiopians into listening publics, made popular music part of the daily lives of the dwellers of the capital, especially young people. Added to the list in the second half of the 1960s, the wonders of television gradually but steadily created watching publics. Before the introduction of the television in the lives of the inhabitants of the capital, the cinema

was already enthralling young people, and it played a role in their formation as urban, *zemenawi* subjects. The capital's bars attracted customers by setting up the television in their entertainment and past time establishments. Television programs such as the *Hebret Tere'it* (a program where an assortment of musical performances were presented) and the English Premier League, grew in popularity (Melakou, 2011 EC: 57). These experiences further connected the dwellers of the city, especially young people, together and gave impetus to their collective consciousness.

The 1960s represented a moment where most of the dramatic transformations came to a head in the capital. In addition to the changing social and cultural infrastructure of the city, the cultural consciousness of the urban youth in Addis Ababa was also impacted by the culturally and politically heady 60s/70s. The "global 60s" left their mark on the transformation of consciousness in Ethiopia as in the rest of the continent. Urban Ethiopians began to feel more connected than any time before, to the rest of the continent in the 1960s. The Ethiopian peacekeeping force under the UN was sent to the Congo in 1960, the country's role in the establishment of the Organization for African Union and the creation of its headquarters in Addis Ababa in 1963 were key historical developments that made African consciousness stronger among the urban. The 1963 summit that established the Organization for African Unity was broadcasted on television screens, installed in front of the UNECA headquarters on the way to the Mesqel Square. The inhabitants of the city came to watch the proceedings and the speeches by various African leaders. The radio and the print media widely reported the event and celebrated the struggle against colonialism and European supremacy (Melakou, 2011EC: 85).³⁶⁰ In his seminal work on the history of the Ethiopian Student Movement *The Quest for Socialist Utopia*, Bahru reflects on the impact on university students of major political developments happening in the rest of Africa in the 1960s, both those still under European colonial rule and those already independent. One such instance that "reverberated" on the university campuses of Haile Selassie I University was the assassination of Patrice Lumumba (Bahru, 2014: 104-105).

³⁶⁰ See also reporting on the OAU first summit on issues of the *Ethiopian Herald*, *Addis Zemen* in late May and early June 1963.

Such singular moments as the murder of Lumumba had a “lingering impact” in cultivating African consciousness among Ethiopian students (ibid). This “reverberation” that followed the brutal killing of Lumumba was not limited to university students. It also extended among the inhabitants of the capital. This was mainly due to the increasing reporting of African issues in the Ethiopian media in the 1960s. The radio and the print media informed the urban public about the situation in Congo. The names Lumumba and Moise Tshombe, and the problem in Katanga became household names. Melakou remembers, “there was no country in Africa that received as much media reporting as the Congo. The people [of the capital] followed the situation keenly... [They] loved Lumumba while they considered Kasavubu and Tshombe as traitors. [This was why] many people grieved when Lumumba was assassinated” (Melakou, 2011 EC: 74). The 1960s/70s saw the growth of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial sentiments tangled with a sense of Africanness that was not limited to university students. Such sentiments were also part of a growing self-awareness among young urban Ethiopians, especially those with access to modern education in the capital. Some young people moved around the city wearing their “Lumumba beard” suggesting that there was a growing African consciousness that was becoming part of youth public culture. The reporting of the Congo situation was so extensive that people were aware of the regional conflicts within the Congo. As a result, the raucous, thronged section of the capital’s football stadium, Cambolojo, was named “Katanga” by football watchers (Melakou, 2011EC: 74), after the secessionist war Tshombe led in that region. Issues in the rest of the continent were thus instrumental in the growing African consciousness of the inhabitants of the capital. It was no coincidence that the two most important clubs in Wube Bereha, the premier red-light district of Addis Ababa, were called Patrice Lumumba Club and Africa Andinet Club (The African Union Club). These developments reflect that the urban populace, especially the youth, was coming of age in a time of affirmation of their Africanness.³⁶¹

³⁶¹ This growing African consciousness, however, was not without its contradictions for a country and society that saw itself apart from the rest of the continent. Ethiopian exceptionalism, and the racial marking of Ethiopians especially in Gambella and the Omo Valley area testify to the vexed relationship the country and the society has with its blackness.

The 1960s and 70s in Ethiopia should also be seen in the context of this world current. The political and cultural consciousness of urban young Ethiopians drew from regional and trans regional locations. The revolutionary energy as well as anti-imperialist sentiments (accompanied by deep-seated anti-Americanism in some places) was a key evolving momentum that also lent its impetus to the Ethiopian revolution. The anti-imperialist struggle of Vietnam for instance inspired young people and students throughout the world, as it did Ethiopians. As Kristin Ross writing about May 68 and “its afterlives” in France says, “in its battle with the United States, with the world wide political and cultural domination the United States had exerted since the end of World War II, Vietnam made possible a merging of the themes of anti-imperialism and anticapitalism” (Ross, 2006: 80). This was certainly true for Ethiopians, where Ho Chi Minh along with Che Guevara became part of the struggle hymns of students in the years leading up to the revolution. “Fano Tesemara Fano Tesemara ende *Ho chi mini* ende *che guvera*” was the anthem of revolution chanted in demonstrations by HSIU students throughout the 1960s and 70s. Struggles for decolonization, “developing [sic] in a chain reaction” in the late 1950s and the 1960s, was of global significance, in which independence movements and popular struggles were waged in most African countries (Nkhrumah, 1968: 275-276).

In addition to the decolonization moment, the cultural consciousness of the urban youth in Addis Ababa was also impacted by the cultural and political impetus in the rest of the African continent and the global 60s/70s. Tsi Ella Jaji in *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity* describes that the 60s in Africa represented a unique cultural moment in which soul music found “affinity” in African musical traditions. She says,

Soul music was indeed a crucial shared reference point for youth aspiring to hipness, whether African or American... What becomes clear when considering the historical record through national archives, memoirs, ... oral history interviews with musicians from this period... is that the soul music of the 1960s and 1970s constituted a chronotopia in which multiple layers of African affinity for African American musical culture were sedimented. Soul music effectively created an archive of

expressive memories that can still be accessed through the citation of songs, fashion, and dance moves (Tsisi Ella Jaji, 2014: 207-208).

The Pan-African sentiment such affinities prompted between continental and Diasporic black communities, mainly among the youth, also became part of the language of being young. The “hip” in soul music represented the liberality of spirit that soul music and dance furnished on the continent. This was certainly the case in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, that saw the flourishing of private bands playing soul music such as Ras Band, Zula, and Soul Ekos in the late 1960s and early 70s.

James Brown was once described as “the most popular man in Africa”.³⁶² Even if “the most popular man” label was obviously an exaggeration, it was true that James Brown became a household name in Addis Ababa, as in many other parts of the continent, especially among the urban youth. Ethiopian musicians like Alemayehu Eshete used to imitate his musical style and mannerisms (Alemayehu Eshete, *Lib Tatefialech*, 1969).³⁶³ However, as Jaji describes, Africans were not merely imitating soul music from America. They were using soul rhythm, as a resource, among others, to create and forge their own cultural modernity. Ethiopian musicians who recorded in Ameha Records not only created what is now called “modern Ethiopian music” where they appropriated and elaborated various Ethiopian musical genres and rhythms like *tizita*, *bati*, *ambassel* and others, they amalgamated them with soul and funk musical registers to create distinctive Ethiopian repertoires and styles. There was a flourishing of Ethiopian popular music as a result of the linked developments of burgeoning popular centers of entertainment in the city, state-owned institutions of culture and orchestras of military and police units in the 1940s and 50s (Tesfaye Lemma, 2013: 20), and the establishment of private bands especially from the late 1960s (Ibid: 198-

³⁶² A reference to James Brown by Don King, the renowned African American boxing promoter. *Soul Power, A film* by Jeffrey Levi-Hinte, DASFilms LTD, 2008. This documentary is on “Zaire 74”—a concert organized by the South African Jazz legend Hugh Masekela and Levin Stewart in Kinshasa. The concert was staged in connection with the title fight between Mohammad Ali and George Foreman. The concert was aimed at bringing together musicians from the continent with their African American brothers and sisters from the Americas.

³⁶³ It is interesting to note that what is instead much talked about is Alemayhu’s imitation of Elvis Presley’s looks (Tesfaye Lemma, 2013: 187) rather than the affinity of his music with soul singers like James Brown.

199) and the increasing popularity of Orchestra Ethiopia in the 1960s. (Ibid: 225-231) This flourishing of musical scores that drew from various Ethiopian folk musical genres and the *azmari* tradition, were examples of the significance of popular music in the lives of the dwellers of the city.

The forgoing discussion showed the significance of popular music and culture in the circulation and production of delinquent and rebellious practices in the city. It showed, along with chapter six, that young Ethiopians “shaped” the sociality of postwar Addis Ababa and forged their distinct sets of subversive collective practices in the city. A city that was also a product of a modernist state and a capitalist economy that was not their own choosing. They inhabited and navigated the political and cultural worlds of the 1960s/70s (“the global 60s”). Dance and popular music became the ways in which, especially those residing in urban centers, experienced the cultural worlds of the heady 60s. The confluence of cultural processes through the reinterpretation of domestic artifacts and their synthesis with foreign ones, helped create Ethiopian traditions of musical and cultural popular modernity. The 1960s and 1970s represent a major world historical cultural moment that was crucial in the development of a cultural impulse that formed the youth in Addis Ababa in ways that connected them with the rest of the continent and the world at large. As Solomon and Gedamu observe in “The Hyphenated Ethiopian”, the urban *zemenawi* youth lived “not in a given community, but in the world at large”, as they say, “vicariously”. (Gedamu and Solomon, 1969a: 13). This world historical moment furnished the youth with cultural resources and artifacts from different sources to mobilize from. But the “cultural” formation of the young and the urban did not occur in separate domains delinked from the “political” developments of that era. Cultural and political formations of the youth were imbricated and mutually constituted. The youth, especially the educated, absorbed the spirit of decolonization and anti-colonial liberation movements on the African continent, in the process of carving their place in urban society.³⁶⁴ The cumulative effect of all these processes produced the

³⁶⁴ Anti-American feelings and identification with the plight of African Americans and the civil rights movement as well as awareness about white supremacy and apartheid in South Africa, Rhodesia and the Vietnam contributed to the anti-imperialist sentiment growing among young people of the capital,

hyphenated urban young *zemenawi* figure that negotiated their place in a society that was undergoing dramatic socio-economic, cultural and political changes.

The youth rebelled against the social conventions of the imperial social order and aspired to a freer world, which they expressed in their dress, music and dance. The “imperial social formations”³⁶⁵ that the global capitalist order and the Ethiopian imperial state imposed, produced the structures that situated various social classes and social groups in the city. They were produced by these structures, while at the same time producing the city and themselves through their creativity of living.

The cultural dissent that the youth registered in their everyday social practices and the social and cultural processes that went into their formation in the spaces of the city, led to the birth of the rebel youth. Popular music played a key role in the circulation of the *arada* sensibility across social classes and became one of the defining identity traits of the young and urban in Addis Ababa. In the postwar period, the rebellion of the youth however did not manifest itself in a large-scale mass movement engaged in explicit political confrontation. This did not happen until the overarching and popular social protests of February-June 1974 that led to the emergence of the Ethiopian revolution.

with access to education in the 1960s, especially among students of HSIU (Melakou, 2011: 85, 117 and 119); (Bahru, 2014: 104-106). Anti-American sentiment and hostility to liberalism and its association with imperialism provided strong motivations for university students, in particular, to embrace Marxism-Leninism in the 1960s and identify with anti-colonial struggles in other parts of Africa and the world. As Paulos Milkias argues, the “penetration of American culture” (Ibid: 30), the “Americanization” of the education system (ibid: 93) that pushed liberal ideology and western values (2006: 49) created a backlash among the educated elite and students (Ibid: 23) and fostered sentiments of hostility against western liberalism and the USA (Ibid: 89 and 111).

³⁶⁵ In a highly insightful theoretical reflection “Mapping the Imperial Social Formation: A Modest Proposal for Feminist History” the Indian feminist scholar Mrinalini Sinha discusses the significance of empire in the formation of British and Indian feminism in “combined, but uneven” ways. She calls this structuration “imperial social formations” (Sinha, 2000: 1077); and argues that “The... point of bringing British and Indian feminisms into the same field of analysis ... is to demonstrate their co-implication in the history of the combined but uneven evolution of a system whose economic, political, and ideological reach was worldwide” (2000: 1079).

Conclusion

The 1974 summer of protest and its pre-history

The popular revolution and its past lives

1. In Summary

The urban protest movement started with a taxi strike on the 18th of February. University students' boycotted classes and teachers began their strike on the same day. High school students and the unwaged youth—shouting “Bread for the Hungry”—turned the strike into street riots in the capital (and its environs) ultimately putting public transport to a stop in a spontaneous rising. This spontaneous rising brought divergent protests together and launched the urban protest movement that would continue almost uninterrupted for the next five months of 1974. Similar coalescing of variously situated social forces in urban society gave these months long protests a popular character by bringing together various social groups to congregate around the otherwise autonomously staged protest events. The popular energy that flowed into these protest events saw the emergence of folkish solidaristic networks that resulted in the Ethiopian revolution.

The Ethiopian revolution of 1974 that saw the coalescing of various social groups and classes was described by Addis Hiwet as a revolution that was “phenomenal in its spontaneity...[that] drew [sic] masses of people into political life” (Addis Hiwet, 1984: 34 and 37). The multiplicity of its actors, its *popular* and spontaneous register and the extemporaneously developing broad based solidaristic ties that enlisted variously situated social groups in autonomously staged protest events with specific demands, became defining of the Ethiopian revolution. All these properties went into the evolution of the independent protest events of the first five months of 1974 into an “urban popular movement”. As I have argued in chapter two the coming together of mutually inspired protest events that were however autonomously staged, made the Ethiopian revolution, a “popular revolution”. The popular revolution is a reference to

the solidaristic ties that connected the motely social actors who participated in the making of the revolution.

As shown in chapter two, protest events such as the taxi strike of February 18, the Muslim demonstration of April 20, and the parliament pickets of peasants fleeing famine zones, attracted folkish solidaristic coming togethers where different social groups coalesced around autonomously staged protest actions. It was in order to explain this popular, expansive and solidaristic glue that brought disparate social groups around particular protest events, that the subsequent chapters tried to document and trace, in prerevolutionary Addis Ababa, what I called in this study, the emergence of “the popular”. The dissertation locates the emergence of *the popular* in postwar Addis Ababa at the intersection of three main processes—the modernist project of the imperial state that built the city and its modern infrastructure, the social ingenuity of those inhabiting the spaces of the capital and the construction of the collective identity of “the people” by the mass media. While the countryside stayed largely out of reach for the media machine, in the capital and perhaps in other cities, the print media, radio and later the television played a key role in the construction of a collective consciousness of “the people”, separate from the ruling block.

As the third and the fourth chapter demonstrate, the modernist state project and the self-activity of everyday people inhabiting the city and the media, created the conditions for a collective consciousness of the popular to emerge in the capital. At home, the media projected the imperial state as the bringer of “modern civilization” and a “new era” of progress. Abroad, the diplomatic machine and its foreign allies carefully crafted an image of Ethiopia as a breadbasket of the Middle East. However, these two mutually reinforcing images of the country as a nation “at the door steps of [modern] civilization” (“sera lenuro mashashaya bicha ayidelem”, 1956: 4 and 5)³⁶⁶ conflicted with the reality of the 1958 famine that forced the imperial state to start a media campaign that described “the Ethiopian people” as lazy, and as a people lacking

³⁶⁶ Here the emperor is described as chiefly responsible for the achievements Ethiopia was making in modern civilization and the country and its people are described here as “egna zare kesilitane ber qomen yeminetay ityopyawiyen” (We, the people of Ethiopia who are standing at the doorsteps of civilization).

diligence and strong work ethic. It admonished migrants from the countryside for their idleness and blamed the youth's wayward and frivolous obsession with "western culture" for the country's lag in material prosperity. In short, *the popular* in the postwar period was referred to in the media as "the Ethiopian people" or simply *hizbu* (the people). They were defined in contradistinction from the power block.

The popular in the postwar city was not however just a product of state activity, it was also a product of the creativity of living practice by urban subjects themselves. In fact, this is the main focus of this dissertation. Despite structural factors—both national and global—that determined the conditions in which urban subjects operated, everyday people participated in their own subject formation through their quotidian social practices. A bulk of migrants from the countryside became city dwellers in postwar Addis Ababa making the capital's residents "hyphenated" subjects who occupied an in-between urban social space. They were neither 'fully' urban nor 'fully' rural (Mamo Wudineh, 1966: 1 and 3). With the increasing informalization of work and settlements, city dwellers also became instrumental in the production of the city from below. They acted upon the "dominated spaces" of the city and transformed the physical, cultural and spiritual realm of the capital, as well as its sociality according to their needs. The city became an arena in which a distinct popular urban sociality was forged as part of the social innovation of everyday living practice. This study shows that the sociality and the ensuing collective consciousness was thus a product of the ingenuity of its sizable migrants from the countryside, as well as the poor and predominantly young of the capital.

Chapters five through seven further expand on the emergence of the popular in the capital as a heterogenous category with widely shared cultural attributes. Chapter five introduces a conception of *modernity as practice* and further complicates the emergence of the popular in the postwar city. Here, modernity is posited as a temporally and spatially specific phenomenon that was key in the subject formation of the popular in the postwar period. Chapters six and seven demonstrate modernity as a popular experiential practice in the everyday social practice of the urban youth. These two chapters expose the political formativeness of modernity by strategically

foregrounding the role of cultural brokers (women bar operators and artists) as well as popular music and culture in the formation of a rebellious youth that subverted the social norms and cultural conventions of postwar imperial Ethiopia. In these chapters, aradinnet—the dominant urban cultural identity of the youth in postwar Addis Ababa - is projected as key in the construction of a dissident youth in the decades leading up to the revolution.

And yet despite the multiplicity of the social actors and the popular character of the Ethiopian revolution, the secondary literature lionizes student activity as the most important “subjective factor” in the generation of the revolution. The literature appears to be predisposed to highlight the role of university students and the Ethiopian Student Movement (1950s-1974) as the principal agents of revolution. It magnifies the role of the student movement in the Ethiopian revolution, and projects student radicals as *the main revolutionary subjects*. The dominant view of the Ethiopian revolution tends to project a voluntarist approach that presupposes a linear and direct link between radical student activism and the events of 1974.³⁶⁷ Looking at the social, cultural and political formation of subjects other than the student movement to document the energies that went into the eruption of the revolution is rarely attempted. This is true for all three major interpretations of the Ethiopian revolution: those who give special emphasis to socio-economic factors as the fundamental causes of the revolution,³⁶⁸ those who see the primacy to the political as *the cause* of the revolution³⁶⁹ and those who underscore “cultural” factors as the fundamental *causes* of the revolution.³⁷⁰ Arguably, the most important historian of

³⁶⁷ Skocpol (1979: 15) observes that there is a tendency in Marxist oriented interpretations to treat revolutions as products of “purposive movements”. Some could also project purposive action as a process occurring over a “prolonged” time.

³⁶⁸ The broadly Leftist-Structuralist interpretation of the revolution includes most notably Addis Hiwet’s pioneering *Ethiopia from Autocracy to Revolution* (1975), Markakis and Nega (1978), Halliday and Molyneux (1981), Marina and David Ottaway (1978) and Henry Lefort (1978) and more recently Bahru Zewde’s *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: A History of the Ethiopian Student Movement* (2014).

³⁶⁹ The broadly liberal interpretation of the Ethiopian revolution to which major works like Clapham’s *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (1988) and Andargachew Tiruneh’s *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987* (1993) belong, tends to read the Ethiopian revolution as a function of crisis in the political system and the state.

³⁷⁰ A “culturalist” approach and interpretation of the Ethiopian Revolution is a more recent trend. Paulos Milkias’s, *Haile Selassie, Western Education and Political Revolution in Ethiopia* (2006) and Messay Kebede’s two works *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation* (2008) and *Ideology and Elite Conflict*

20th century Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Student Movement, Bahru Zewde, traces directly “the eruption of the Ethiopian revolution” to “the cumulative effect of... [student’s] unrelenting opposition”. For Bahru, factors like the famines of the early 1970s, the Eritrean liberation struggle and the 1973 price hike in oil were mere “contributing factors”. For Bahru, the Ethiopian Student Movement was the single most important event and cause that explains the Ethiopian revolution (Bahru, 2014: 263). In an imperial regime where political parties were not allowed to exist, he argues, “eventually... [students] or the forces they unleashed supplanted the imperial regime” (Ibid: 190-191). Such a student-centric view of the Ethiopian revolution remains the most dominant perspective in the secondary literature and has been so since the immediate aftermath of the revolution (mid 1970s). Despite differences in identifying and emphasizing the “fundamental causes” (socio-economic, political or cultural) of the revolution, there is almost a universal agreement in the secondary literature when it comes to the assumed direct link between the Ethiopian Student Movement and the events of 1974, hence the revolution.³⁷¹

This emphasis on student activity tends to downplay the significance of the subject formation of social actors other than students who took active part in the making of the revolution. Instead of documenting subject formation of the broad urban youth (by far the most important social category that generated the social protests of 1974), the literature tends to predetermine the “ideological origin” of the Ethiopian revolution in radical student politics. By doing so, the literature, narrowly conceives the discussion of the formation of revolutionary subjects by exclusively tracing the “origins” of the revolution to the Ethiopian Student Movement. University students were, of course, a key social element in the making of the Ethiopian Revolution as they were the ones who gave the demands and social questions of the revolution a socialist formulation, in addition to participating in the actual social protest. Through their activism, at least since the mid 1960s, university students articulated a socialist vision

(2011) fall under this category. These scholars explain the revolution by emphasizing the role of “western education” in the process of radicalizing Ethiopian students.

³⁷¹ See for instance Markakis and Nega (1978: 178-179); Clapham (1989: 282, 1988: 30-35); Andargachew (1993: 28-30 and 39); Paulos (2006: xix) and Messay (2008: 32 and 84).

of revolution long before *revolution* (abiyot) was part of the popular vocabulary. They aspired to capture state power and stir socialist revolutionary change. While there is no denying the longstanding commitment of university students and their critical role in the making of the 1974 revolution, it is also critical to note that their role in the urban protest movement of 1974 should not be assumed to have privilege over the role of other social actors. The “ideological origin” of the events of 1974 is not backed by concrete evidence to show the “cause-effect” link between the student movement and the revolution. Nor should the formation of students in the university be considered more important than the subject formation of other social actors who took part in the urban protest movement of 1974.

In view of this, the main objective of this study has been to complexify this dominant view that predetermines the role of the students as the most important revolutionaries by documenting the pervasiveness and multiplicity of actors in the Ethiopian revolution. This dissertation also demonstrates the social and cultural formation of subjects in postwar Addis Ababa, highlighting that rebel sensibility was part of the cultural identity of the youth of the capital and that it was not limited to the student radicals and their activism in the Ethiopian Student Movement. Departing from the tendency in the secondary literature to assign revolutionary agency to students or soldiers³⁷² (as vanguards), the study documented the role of other social groups in the urban protest movement. It discussed in detail the social protests of those sections of society who were not exposed to Marxist-Leninist ideology, and showed the critical importance of these protests in the making of revolution. These social groups were not additives or subsidiary players in the urban protest movement. They were revolutionaries like the student radicals. These protests pressed the imperial regime and were autonomously staged by variously situated social groups and popular classes.

³⁷² Some considered the Derg (the committee of soldiers who took power in June 1974) the vanguard of the Ethiopian Revolution (Halliday and Molyneux, 1981: 26); (Marina and David Ottaway: 1978: 11). Student vs. soldier binary characterizes the two poles to which revolutionary agency is assigned in the secondary literature.

University student activism became a common site of opposition against the imperial regime as many scholars have documented, in particular since the 1960s. However, student militancy in the university had a narrow social base and they did not have formal channels through which to mobilize the popular urban movement of 1974. As the first chapter emphasized, interconnections between different protest events expose its popular and spontaneous character. Even if mutinying soldiers in Negele Borana clamoring for pay raises ignited the protest era, it is only a month after, in February that the protests took a truly urban popular dimension and continued to gather momentum in the months to come. This popular protest movement of 1974 in Addis Ababa embraced strikes, petitions, pickets, street outings, and riots and were staged by virtually all sections of urban society including peasants fleeing famine affected zones and representatives of pastoral communities petitioning the regime, making the capital the nucleus of protest action. University students were neither the instigators, the masterminds of these protests nor the chief social group behind these protests. As the popular expression of the revolutionary outbreak has it—the revolution “erupted”—due to spontaneous popular rising and not as a result of the action of any one single “dramatist” that acted as the single most important driver of revolution. The student radicals were one among many protesting social groups who had divergent, and at times conflicting, visions and aspirations of *lewut* (lit. change), the name popularly given for the revolution. There were diverse actors in revolution but none of these actors, including those who are said to be the vanguards were “dramatists”(Hobsbawm cited in Skocpol, 1979: 18). Those who staged the social protests of 1974 witnessed its arrival like everyone else. The process of a revolution or its outcome could not be foretold or foreseen. The revolutionary situation eventuates from the structures conditioning the social, economic, political and cultural realities of revolutionaries as well as the actions of social actors - the revolutionaries who build the different compartments of its edifice.

This rising up of various social groups and social classes in the capital were motivated by “specific conditions” of protesting groups (Ottaways, 1978: 2). While these social protests were linked to one another, their interconnectedness should not be read as causal links. As the Ottaways correctly note, during the first months of the revolution,

“[university] students could not do much more [in influencing the popular protests] for they had no organized links” to the “broad masses” (Ottaways, 1978: 36). The urban protest movement in confrontation with the imperial state was peopled, and autonomously staged by disparate social groups inhabiting the capital. The critical role of the students between February and June 1974, as well as in the immediate years after, was mainly in giving the revolution its socialist character and articulation. Their role in revolution was “critical intervention,” not “vanguardism”.³⁷³ The function of university students and the offspring political organizations of the Ethiopian Student Movement were key in formulating the revolution around a socialist agenda. The framing of “social questions” of the revolution (chiefly “Land to the Tiller” and the “National Question”) in Marxist-Leninist terms in the Ethiopian Student Movement should not, however, be conflated with “spearheading” the urban popular movement nor should the student movement be seen as the generator or “source” of these social questions.³⁷⁴ While it is important to trace the intellectual framing of these social agendas, an originary discourse that earmarks the student movement as “the origin” of these social questions is, to say the least, problematic. These social issues animated popular struggles in the country in the postwar era. These social questions were part of the broader social consciousness of the Ethiopian society that was fashioned by Ethiopian students in the language of Marxism.

During the protest movement between February and June 1974, Addis Ababa’s urban environment served as a theatre where multiplicity of carnivalesque social protests unfolded. If it is problematic to argue, as some have, that the revolution was

³⁷³ For the distinction between “critical intervention” and “vanguardism” see Noel Ignatiev’s “Introduction: The World View of C.L.R. James” (in CLR James, 2010).

³⁷⁴ Jon Abbink in an article “The Ethiopian revolution after 40 years” reflects the scholarly convention that the “origins” of the Ethiopian revolution as well as the social questions it raised could be traced in the Ethiopian Student Movement. Abbink says, “As is well known, the origins of the revolutionary ferment were in the Ethiopian student movement, domestically generated but strongly influenced by, if not a full part of, global revolutionary currents seen among youths in the rest of the world, notably in the 1960s. Marxism was the attractive ideological language because of its abstract, “covering law” approach to history, class relations, and social inequality” (2015: 336). He further claims (drawing on Clapham) even if the Ethiopian Student Movement was “guided by a domestic agenda” it was drawn to a “politics of emulation...the emulation of foreign models” (Ibid: 337). The two most important agendas of the revolution— “Land to the Tiller” and “The National Question” is, therefore, seen as cases of “emulation of foreign models” by the student radicals (Ibid: 336 and 341).

“essentially urban” in its “origin” (Andargachew cited in Tekalign, 1995: 426),³⁷⁵ this is primarily because the city and the countryside were so imbricated that talking about a sociological “split” between the urban and the rural is impossible when speaking about the postwar period. Subjects of the city were as much grafts from the countryside. As discussed in the third chapter rural energies flew into the city, transforming settlement patterns of urban spaces, further informalizing work, and injecting cultural effervescence into the capital’s entertainment centers in the postwar period. Also, during the social protests of 1974, peasant picketers from Tigray and Wollo and pastoralist petitioners from Afar formed part of Addis Ababa’s protest scene. The capital was used as a theatre of protest, where social questions that connected the city and the provinces were staged. The *yiwuredulin* wave of protests in April 1974 for example (that clamored for the sacking of rapacious officials) in the provinces and the capital, showed that protests in these early months of the revolution did not always cascade from Addis Ababa to the provinces.

Moreover, class factors were key in conscripting variously situated groups in the social protests of 1974 to challenge imperial authority. The classed and variously situated subjects had aspirations that were economic such as pay increases or “Bread for the Hungry”. However, participation in the social protests of 1974 was not a mere expression of the desire for economic gain or as some argued in the secondary literature, it was not the students who “spearheaded” the “politicization” of “corporatist” demands by various social groups involved in the social protests of 1974 (Andargachew, 1993: 28-29). The desire for change (*lewut*) was extant among the youth of all classes, as the diversity of the social actors of the protests clearly shows. Elements in the imperial bureaucracy, the professional bourgeoisie³⁷⁶, the clergy, and social groups theoretically thought to be the natural allies of the imperial regime, were sympathetic to the social protests of 1974. As Haddis Alemayehu, writing in 1963 witnessed, there was a popular “movement” and a “feeling of humiliation and anger”

³⁷⁵ Andargachew argued, “the uprising of 1974 was based on the urban residents who numbered about 3 million out of a total population of almost 32 million” Ethiopians (1993: 55).

³⁷⁶ Note for instance the participation of Michael Imiru, Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Haddis Alemayehu, Seyoum Haregot, Kifle Wodajo, Bereket Habteselassie and many others in various capacities supporting the *lewut*. Many of these individuals were part of the educated intelligentsia who worked in high official capacities within the imperial government.

swelling among the ranks of “the new generation” long before the outbreak of the popular protests of 1974 (Haddis, 1966: 1). I argue in this study that this feeling of discontent with the social order was expressed in the capital in the postwar years with cultural rebellion and disobedience. Much of this study is devoted to documenting the social and cultural formation of this “new generation” (the youth) in Addis Ababa in the postwar period.

What the secondary literature does, is read the outcome of the revolution—the installation of a socialist political system— back into the process of subject formation of students to argue that the ideological genesis of the revolution was found in the radical activities within the Ethiopian Student Movement. This study, instead of explaining, “causes” and looking for “origins”, emphasizes on elaborating the setting and showing interconnections. The expansiveness and popular character of the protest movement points to the need to appreciate that the revolution had many complex roots—socio-economic, cultural and political. This study is an attempt at documenting the social and cultural formation of the urban youth, by far the most important force behind the social protests of 1974, to understand subject formation of the youth in Addis Ababa between the 1950s and 1974.

By going beyond the history of radicalization located in the Ethiopian Student Movement, this study casts subject formation in the capital in a broader social and cultural scale during the postwar period. It shows that the emergence of youth rebels in the spaces of the city was a function of their everyday experiential social practices. It takes insights from studies by American historians in the past four decades on the French Revolution that advance what can be called the “desacralization” thesis. Robert Darnton was the first among these American historians who questioned the direct link between the “High Enlightenment” and the French revolution that was believed for more than two centuries to be the “ideological origin” of the French revolution (Darnton, 1971: 113-114; Maza, 1993: 3).³⁷⁷ Darnton and others showed how the monarchy and the ancien régime were “delegitimated” at the social and

³⁷⁷ Here Robert Darnton argues that it was not “the social history of ideas” of the Enlightenment that explain the ideological origins of the French Revolution.

cultural scale, especially in Paris, through the greater circulation of “seditious”, “forbidden” literature and legal writings that exposed the private lives and scandals of the monarchy and its social codes.³⁷⁸ Similarly, Sarah Maza in her *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (1993) shows how “new public spheres” other than the one created by “High Enlightenment” thinkers, were created in prerevolutionary France that “undermined” the perception of monarchs and members of Old Regime France. Maza focuses primarily on legal briefs or “mémoires judiciaires” written by legal scholars as well as their “publicity” and greater circulation in the public sphere. She argues, these legal briefs “contributed to the birth of public opinion” in the second half of the 18th century and “undermined” the public perception of the private lives of monarchs (Maza, 1993: 3-4 and 14-15).³⁷⁹ However, while taking inspiration from this approach to the study of revolution, this study stressed on experiential lived practices to document the process of delegitimation of the imperial social order in postwar Addis Ababa. Rather than focusing on what people “read”, it emphasized on what people “did” and their social practices in the spaces of the city. This focus on the experiential is, however, not an attempt at privileging “practice” or “doing” over “reading”. It is rather a suggestion of the significance of practice, and not a dismissal of the importance of “reading” publics in the making of a dissident and revolutionary city-culture. In postwar Addis Ababa, what the youth did collectively—how they dressed, the places they frequented, and how they carried themselves in public are shown to be key arenas of their social and cultural formation, which contributed to the questioning of the dominant social convention. The social practices of the youth, their wayward ways and disrespect for the politics of respectability, defied the cultural normative order and its public morality. The

³⁷⁸ See discussion on Darnton in note in Chapter six; See also Darnton’s response to criticism directed against his thesis in Darnton “Two Paths Through Social History of Ideas” (1998).

³⁷⁹ Maza states, “While lawyers’ briefs were in use throughout the Old Regime, their role was in theory just advisory and entirely private. The printing of mémoires in large quantities, their growing popularity as a form of pamphlet literature, their increasingly open appeals to lay readers to judge the cases for themselves, became a powerful tool in propagating the need to reform France’s system of justice. And inasmuch as judicial power was the foundation of monarchical power in France, the political impact of mémoires that called upon “public opinion” to perform a function once invested in the king alone... Stories give us both an individual and a collective sense of identity and purpose; they can undermine our world just as easily as they order and confirm it. For these reasons there is much to learn about a nation’s sense of itself and of its future in the stories that held sway over its reading public some two hundred years ago”.

corporeality of embodied living practice and popular culture of the urban youth is seen and projected as a generative practice that gave birth to disobedient young members of society. The “source” of desacralization was, in this study, not just the ideas produced by seditious literature (as in pre-revolution French writers that Darnton called “Grub Street hacks”) (Darnton, 1998: 1),³⁸⁰ but was also the product of youth engaged in creative and re-evaluative living practice in the spaces of the city.

Moreover, unlike works such as Jeffery Merrick who use the desacralization thesis to emphasize cultural explanations and downplay socio-economic and structural factors (as explanation of revolutionary outbreak in 18th century France),³⁸¹ this study sought to show that there was a strong link between cultural and socio-economic formation of urban subjects in postwar Addis Ababa. In this study, culture is materially grounded in socio-economic relations. Moreover, by moving away from establishing “the ideological origins” of the Ethiopian revolution, this study focused on elaborating the setting to document the broader social and cultural formations of the urban youth that constituted the bulk of the revolutionaries in the social protests of 1974. In addition to the shift from locating “origins” to elaborating setting, this study has also been interested in establishing interconnections between social groups and various processes (socio-economic, political and cultural) in the making of revolution. It documented the broader cultural context that made the Ethiopian revolution “thinkable”.³⁸² Chief among these interconnections was the political formativeness of cultural processes. As shown in previous chapters, changes in public sociality, collective consciousness and the cultural identity of the urban youth were imbricated processes that were crucial to their subject formation in postwar Addis Ababa.

³⁸⁰As Maza notes, Darnton’s “Grub Street hacks” were “denizens” and “frustrated” up start writers who made a living by writing books (1993: 4).

³⁸¹For Merrick (1990: ix-x) “social conflicts” and class factors at the popular social scale or the does not explain adequately the desacralization of the monarchy that made the French Revolution possible. He regards conflict occurring at the level of institutions and the literate public as the main site where the Old Regime was desacralized (Ibid: x).

³⁸²See the review of Roger Chartier’s approach to understand the structural and cultural context that made the French Revolution “thinkable” in Maza (1993: 8).

2. The urban, the popular modern and the rebel youth

In the 19th and 20th century, a particular form of urban formation and modernity mediated by global western economic and cultural hegemony, subordinated homegrown institutions, systems of governance, ways of knowing and being in the non-western world. Urban dwellers found themselves constricted by the domination of a space where global and national “imperial social formations” were articulated in a given spatio-temporal context.³⁸³ After all the “urban order” and “modernity” of the 20th century form was largely an “imposition” either by European colonialism or western hegemony on the African continent.³⁸⁴ Despite the structures of domination imposed upon them, however, urban dwellers negotiated their place in society through their creative living and social ingenuities. They navigated the imperatives of global capital and the unequal social and economic relations that it instituted, in articulation with national imperial formations that were particular to the Ethiopian state. The imperatives that integrated Ethiopia in the global capitalist system, determined the conditions in which the postwar imperial state carried out its modernist project. Modernity that was overdetermined by the scientific, technological, military, political and economic superiority of the west consigned this state and the Ethiopian society through its totalizing discourse, especially in the post 1950s. This was done by projecting the west as the epitome of modernity that should be emulated to achieve progress.

And yet, the postwar modernist state tried to create an Ethiopian modernity that combined respect for Ethiopian customs and traditions with “modern civilization” (a reference to western science, technology and education). By using its media, its educational institutions as well as its infrastructures of social control, the imperial state prescribed and attempted to create a modern, urban citizenry that abided by its codes of respectability based on inherited position and privileges of birth. On the

³⁸³ In “Mapping the Imperial Social Formation: A Modest Proposal for Feminist History” the Indian feminist scholar Mrinalini Sinha points to the “combined, but uneven” “imperial social formations” that impact different societies differently (2000: 1077).

³⁸⁴ See Bernard Magubane’s criticism of anthropological works on “social change” in Africa in the 1950s and 60s who conceives “the urban order” and “modernity” as impositions “on the indigenous societies of Africa” (1971: 430).

other hand, postwar Addis Ababans, especially the urban youth used *zemenawinnet* that departed from the state prescribed modernity, to reposition themselves in urban society. They too produced the city to make it pliable to their needs and desires. Among other things by informalizing work and settlements and through migration from the countryside, urban dwellers transformed the physical and demographic make-up of the capital in the postwar period. Their migration from the countryside represented their struggle to claim the city, its services, infrastructures, opportunities and resources. They reinterpreted *zemenawinnet* through their lived practice that grew in relationship to the state's modernist project that sought to contain the youth and their social practices that it considered wayward. The urban youth forged a popular modernity and in doing so, renegotiated their place in society by creating a distinct public sociality that subverted the social conventions of the state. They reevaluated public morality and resisted the suffocating social and cultural codes of the postwar imperial social order. And through their social practices, they created a distinct urban cultural identity and the creative living of the urban youth gave birth to cultural outlaws and rebel subjects.

In this period, the state's discourse of Ethiopia's entrance into the age of transition and "modern civilization," legislated *modernity* as the triumph of "the new". However, different groups interpreted *zemenawinnet* differently, to advance particular interests. *Zemenawinnet*, gave license to many to freely express themselves through dress and way of life and transformed public sociality and public morality in urban society. Urban women used it to improve their social position—some rebelled against the strictures on the public conduct of women that controlled the way they dress and comport themselves in public, some left oppressive marriages and others absconded on or delayed their motherhood responsibilities. Some educated young people rejected Ethiopian culture (*bahil*) and advocated imitation of the west to be "truly modern". Many defied the codes of respectability of the imperial social order that sought to maintain distinction based on inherited position and the privileges of birth. A large section of the urban youth were engaged in social practices considered impolite and disobedient. As Bernard Magubane in his appraisal of studies of social change in African urban spaces in the 1950s and 60s, noted that these practices of the

urban dwellers in the context of “social change” should not be seen as a form of “acculturation” or “westernization” of “indigenous” Africans. This view that African societies undergoing social change eventually and inevitably adopt “western culture” as modernity penetrates these societies is an extension of modernization theory that has universalism at its heart. In this view, “catching-up” with Europe (meaning emulating Europe) to achieve economic progress was a precondition for modernity.³⁸⁵ Such views, as Magubane rightly observes, ratifies “white cultural supremacy” (Magubane, 1971: 430). Contrary to “catching up” with the west, these are practices of taking one’s “place in the scheme of things” to quote Magubane. Urban dwellers adapted these practices in their quotidian repertoires not just to imitate “the west” but because these forms of “urbanism” and “modernity” were impositions that they cannot avoid.” It was this yielding and reinterpretation of cultural artifacts that became *zemenawinnet* as a lived experiential practice in postwar Addis Ababa. It was what urban dwellers did with these practices and cultural artifacts to redefine their social position that resulted in recalcitrant urban subjects and cultural rebels.

The popular modernity of postwar Addis Ababa that registered dramatic transformations in public sociality, was a product of the desires and aspirations of the urban youth. The youth in their different ways used *zemenawinnet* to try to break free from the oppressive strictures of the normative structure maintained chiefly by the authority of the state, the church, and the patriarchal tendencies of dominant society. This normative structure that was founded on a deeply uneven economic system perpetuated class, religious, national and gender inequality. *Zemenawinnet* that

³⁸⁵ The fundamental assumption in modernization theory that saw modernization of “political institutions” as automatic byproduct of economic modernization was critiqued within the American social sciences, most notably by Samuel Huntington in *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Huntington argued political instability and the absence of a modern political system and developed institutions in “changing societies” would lead to “political disorder” and revolution (Fukuyama “Forward” in Huntington, 1996: xii); (Huntington, 1996: 186-187 and 188-191). Huntington argued political stability is a prerequisite for economic and social modernization (1996); Fukuyama, “Forward”, 1996: xiii). Unlike what Fukuyama would like us to believe *Political Order in Changing Societies* did not “kill... modernization theory” (“Forward”, 1996: XIII). Rather it reproduced a version of modernization theory that puts first in sequence, as a prerequisite, the modernization of the political system and its institutions for social and economic modernization to be realized. It was based on the idea that the political has primacy over the economic Christopher Clapham (1987: 53) argued the Ethiopian Revolution was a product of a political disorder that ensued as a result of the failure of a “traditional” political system that lacked modernization to absorb and satisfy the intelligentsia.

became part of popular consciousness and experiential practice in the postwar era somewhat made freedom from these inequities and injustices thinkable. Cultural modernity that was forged at the experiential level in the spaces of the city by cultural brokers - the everyday social practices of the youth in profane spaces, the artistic modernity of Yebahil Orchestra of Hager Fiker, Orchestra Ethiopia and Ethio-Jazz - all represented a creative synthesis of foreign elements with homegrown forms, elements, sounds and rhythms to transform both the domestic and the “borrowing.” This created a distinctly Ethiopian popular and cultural modernity in the postwar period.

It is important to note however that the social ingenuity that was employed by everyday urban dwellers to reconfigure and synthesize different elements from the outside as well as domestic sources to forge a cultural *zemenawinnet* that is akin to their desires, largely failed to succeed to transform state institutions in the postwar period. Similar and successful synthesis was not opted by the imperial state to transform its modern institutions such as the educational system, the system of government, law or architecture. Despite the rhetoric and the desire of the imperial state to forge a “distinctly” Ethiopian “national modernity” as Chatterjee (1997: 18) would say, this remained a dream unrealized during and after the fall of the imperial monarchy. Perhaps, most notable in this regard was the incapacity to “synthesize” homegrown knowledge systems with “western education” that fringe voices like Haddis Alemayehu fought for in the Ministry of Education. The failure to systematically study the homegrown and the foreign was not limited to education, however. There was no significant attempt to investigate and systematically examine homegrown systems of government, architectural knowledge, technical expertise in the fields of agricultural management, technology etc. in an attempt to “marry” these knowledges and technical know-hows with “borrowings” from outside. Moreover, debate on what kind of modernity Ethiopia needs was marginal and fringe in this period. What dominated public discourse and the media in the postwar period was the sterile debate between those who saw imitating the west as the only way to go and those who insisted that Ethiopians should preserve their Ethiopian character (by preserving their traditions and customs) going forward. Those calling for imitation

tended to start off by overlooking or even dismissing skills, know-hows, technological knowledge and the theoretical import of homegrown knowledge systems that they saw as inferior or altogether arcane, and thus unfit for the 20th century. The defenders of custom, on the other hand, were obsessed with “conserving” Ethiopian customs to maintain an “authentic” Ethiopian cultural character as a shield against “cultural invasion” (as Ethiopian Herald called it “deculturation” (Ethiopian Herald cited in Solomon and Abereha, “Non Sequitur”, 1969b: 13). They saw Ethiopia as a country rich with spiritual knowledge and custom, but poor with scientific and technological knowledge. Much like the seers of imitation, not only did these “custodians of tradition” pay little attention to the complex wealth of homegrown knowledge systems and the technical expertise contained in it, but they also saw the west as the source of science and technological know-how that needed to be copied if material progress was to be achieved.

Therefore, the lack of robust public and intellectual debate on what modernity and modernization means to the Ethiopian context, especially in the post 1950s—its institutions, its educational system and system of government—could be taken as a major factor that explains the inability of the postwar imperial state to come up with a design of “a distinctly national modernity”. Solomon Deressa’s displeasure with the destruction of homegrown “accumulated knowledge” “in the name of progress and modernity” (Solomon Deressa, 1969b: 17) is a typical example of the lack of imagination by the state and the elite to envision a *zemenawinnet* with the necessary regard for the homegrown, but one that is not too insecure to “borrow” from “outside”. As a result, Haddis Alemayehu’s lamentations or Solomon’s regrets about the demotion of homegrown knowledge were peripheral voices from the country’s modern elite in the postwar period. Haddis Alemayehu’s plea to the state to make a serious effort to marry homegrown knowledge systems (Haddis Alemayehu, 1966), systems of government and law, with foreign traditions to overhaul modern education and reform the country’s political system or Solomon and Gedamu’s interventions to elevate the debate to chart new directions to come up with innovative ways to understand what it means to modernize in an Ethiopian context, was not used to

transform the tradition vs. modernity debate in significant ways (Alene, 2015: 33-34).³⁸⁶

The prevalence of *zemenawinnet* as an experiential cultural practice in the postwar city, thus, was not employed to rework the official stance and ideology of modernity by the state and the elite that saw it as a finished product imported from elsewhere. This view continued to authorize and posit the singular preeminence of the west as the birthplace of superior science, technology, knowledge, system of government and bureaucracy. This was even when the imperial state mused with the rhetoric that modernity has to be harnessed and contextualized. Much of the effort of the state in this regard was invested in disciplining the culturally itinerant urban youth towards regulating their public conduct. The state tried to instill in the youth respect for authority, respectability, and preservation of Ethiopian customs and religious practices (such as fasting). The urban youth were bombarded with didactic dissertations to sift “the good” and the beneficial from the “corrupting” practices of “western culture”, while maintaining an authentic Ethiopian character. Forging an Ethiopian “national modernity” was thus in effect, reduced to creating a modern respectable citizen that combined regard for Ethiopian customs, habits and rituals with the ‘beneficial’ aspects of “western culture”.

The lack of a robust public discourse on how the country should “modernize” ultimately undermined the prospect of forging a *zemenawinnet* that fit the Ethiopian context—a *zemenawinnet* that was neither iconoclastic about all forms of homespun knowledge systems, nor that which was frightened of all foreign “borrowings”. Maybe such *zemenawinnet* with a capacity to transform “borrowings” from outside and synthesizes them with homegrown wealth of knowledge to forge a distinctly Ethiopian *zemenawinnet* in the fields of education, architecture, technology, systems of

³⁸⁶ Some intellectuals like Kebede Mikael (1946), Haddis Alemayehu (1966) and Eguale Gebreyohannis (2003) continued to be preoccupied with the question of what it means to modernize in an Ethiopian context. Kebede Mikael’s *japan endemin seletenech?* (1946) was an important work that grapples with the question of how to modernize. Interestingly, there is a video of Haile Selassie reading this book immediately after his detention by the Derg in early September 1974. See also discussion on “the Japanizers” in Bahru (2002).

government and so on, was one that was dreamed of by Solomon Deressa.

3. Multiple meanings, visions of revolution and its futures

David Harvey in *Rebel Cities* makes an important point about the 1848 revolution in France and the Paris Commune of 1872. He notes the different visions of revolution that unemployed workers and the republican bourgeois had in the case of 1848, and the “conflictual forward looking visions” of those desiring “centralized hierarchical control” and those with “decentralized anarchist visions of popular organization” and how this conflict brought the Paris Commune into crisis (Harvey, 2012:7-8). What is key for us to note here is that any revolution contains in itself different aspirations and visions by differently situated revolutionaries. In the study of the Ethiopian Revolution, Donald Donham’s *Marxist Modern* is the only study that pays close attention to the multiple meanings that different social actors attached to that revolution. His ethnographic study of the Ethiopian revolution from a small community in southern Ethiopia, the Maale, offers a “cultural” reading of the Ethiopian Revolution that exposes that the “specificity” of revolutions is a reflection of the “cultural” context in which they occur. For him, revolution “grows as much out of a recurrent clash between cultural systems as out of an ensuing hegemony of a new ideological synthesis” (Donham, 1992: 56). But more importantly for our purposes here, Donham demonstrates that revolution might contain different meanings for different social actors. “The Ethiopian revolution is hardly a unitary entity”, he says (Donham, 1999: 35), “variously situated groups interpreted events of the Ethiopian revolution” in various ways (ibid, 12).³⁸⁷ But meanings are submerged in the course of revolutions and in the course of time. Often, Donham observes, in revolutions, a “single story” mutes or “suppresses” narratives of “heterodox” groups (ibid).

³⁸⁷ Donham contends that the Christian Maale who welcomed the Zemecha students (students who came from Addis Ababa to Maale land to help implement the 1975 land reform) associated revolution with “modernity”, which meant better health, good standard of living and education (1999: 11-12 and 114). For Maale ‘traditionalists’, he notes, the revolution invoked hope of “return” to tradition to the years before Ethiopian imperial rule was imposed (80-81). In short, the different social groups among the Maale attached their own specific meanings and aspirations to revolution. Donham uses this material to conclude that the Ethiopian revolution was made possible by the alliance between various groups and thus should not be seen as a “unitary entity” (35 and 37).

The story of the Ethiopian revolution is one of erasure of many narratives and imposition of hegemonic ones. Two dominant and often competing stories of revolution become apparent from the secondary literature. There is the story that magnifies the role of student radicals and the educated as the torchbearers of revolution and the story that portrays the Derg as the vanguards of revolution “from above”. Other meanings, desires and visions of *lewut*/revolution have been largely muted or passed over. This “suppression” of narratives, may not always be “active” as Donham observes (Donham, 1999: 37). It might not even be intentional. At times it is the hegemonic status that certain narratives assume that in effect silences other narratives.

In spite of the hegemony of some narratives of revolution however, what becomes apparent from this study is that the most copious actors in the revolution or those who wanted to see change and harbored aspirations for a better future, were by far the youth. They were also mostly poor, unwaged and constituting the majority of the inhabitants of the capital. The postwar period, considered the “age of transition” ushered in popular social expectation and a desire for a different future that became the foil for revolutionary activity and confrontation with the state. Popular discontent blended with popular political aspirations and visions for a better future, propelled by conjunctural unfoldings expressed themselves in the social protests of 1974. The political aspirations and social visions that various groups who participated in the revolutionary outbursts of 1974, differed based on their specific conditions, but were commonly united by their subject formation as *disenchanted but aspiring subjects*.

The social aspirations of the variously situated groups about the *lewut* with the exception of student radicals and the leftist parties that were the outgrowth of the Ethiopian Student Movement is a subject rarely discussed in the secondary literature. *Lewut*, the colloquial term used to describe the unfolding of the change process that began in February, was a popular way of ‘marking time’. The political aspirations of the mass of people who took part in revolutions are expressed in their languages, songs, poetry, symbols, slogans as well as their actions. These groups, as CLR James

would say, are those “who do not write books or make speeches”. They come to the revolution formed by their lived experiences. In addition, the masses of people who become the makers of the revolution also find themselves formed by the moment of their revolutionary rising and their actions in it. As Addis Hiwet notes, “political action” in times of revolution creates a moment that invests social actors with revolutionary identity.

For those who saw themselves as vanguards of the revolution, seizing state power was key to introducing radical transformation in their society. University students and the militant section of the educated class were the most vocal in this regard, and saw themselves as champions of the oppressed masses, especially of the peasantry. The two social agendas they incessantly voiced were “Land to the Tiller” and “The National Question”. Later, after the eruption of the revolution, calls for a “Peoples Government” and other demands of programmatic nature were added in the public pronouncements of student radicals and civilian parties. But for the majority of those who participated in the popular upsurge of 1974, taking state power was not at the top of their agenda. The revolution as aspired and envisioned by the motely social groups who took part in it was motivated by economic factors, but also by political aspirations and visions for “*lewut*” (revolution) in their rejection of authoritarian power and political un-freedom—gendered, national, social and religious depending on the specific positions social groups occupied in society. This rejection of unrestrained power was inseparably tied to material demands as well as a life without indignity. Specific aspirations of *lewut*/revolution were expressed in the demands of concrete groups. It is exhibited in the riots of the lumpenproletariate (during the taxi strikes of February) and unwaged youth that militated against the political and economic order that sanctioned their continued marginalization by destroying property. It was manifested in artists demanding the formalization of their employment in the state bureaucracy questioning their subservient “position” in society—imploing (“Who are we [in this country]?” (Surafel, 2018: 179); (Conversation with Fikerte Wondimu). It is expressed in sex workers demonstrating in Wube Bereha and the streets of old Arada (Conversation with Fisseha Desta, cited in Surafel, 2018: 208) demanding the right to unionize, the right to have access to health

care, and desiring a life without indignity and derision. It was apparent in working people that demanding better pay and the right to form unions (for unrestrained union activity without the preying eyes of employers or state restrictions) was a central ask. The unwaged youth and high school students, who formed a substantial section of the youth in the capital, came out with slogans “Bread for the hungry” and “Work for the unemployed” (Gedeon Woldeamanuel cited in Bahru, 2010: 130). It was palpable in provincial communities (like Keffa), where teachers and students created “spontaneous committees” to form “popular” communes of self-government in the thick of the social protests of 1974 (Andargachew, 1993: 60 and 72).

The Muslim demonstration that represented one of the most important social questions of the revolution—equal citizenship and equal religious rights, opened up the possibility for the reordering of the Ethiopian state. Its slogans made central the question of equal citizenship and resonated with the desires of all those who lived in the Ethiopian polity—diverse national groups, women, and occupational minorities. Even if it is usually presumed to be a narrow struggle for “religious equality”, the Muslim demonstration with its slogans and its gargantuan display of demonstrating bodies, brought critique to bear on the notion and imaginary of Ethiopia as a “Christian Island” and questioned its narrow cultural definition of Ethiopia. The state’s pretended notion of *andinnet* (literally meaning oneness in Amharic that is usually confused with *hibret*, “unity”) was challenged by the demonstration’s proposed alternative of “national unity based on equality” that reverberated in future struggles for equality and freedom. Identity politics in its national and religious forms that became the most prominent expression of politics and political agenda in the post 1991 period had one of its harbingers in the Muslim demonstration of April 20, 1974. The Muslim march, and its politics, was not about usurpation of political power. It rather engendered a form of identity politics that was about *free expression of community* more than anything else. Embedded in it was an expansive paradigm of equality, freedom and justice that goes beyond a politics of mere “recognition”.

The Muslim march shared affinities with other movements and strivings in the past and in its contemporary moment. The Bale rebellion of the 1960s by Oromo and

Somali peasants and pastoralists that militated against the imperial regime's economic, political and national domination was notable among the struggles against Abyssinian imperial arrogance that preceded the Muslim March. The petitions to the Ministry of Interior by Afar community representatives in March 1974 protesting what they saw as the danger of "extinction" of their "nation" was another brilliant example of imperial economic, cultural and national domination. Their demands for the end to land expropriation exposed the blatant imperial prejudice against pastoral ways of life and the indignities they suffered on account of the conceit and avarice of empire that consigned "nomad land" as "government land". All these struggles for self-affirmation were part of the autonomously staged popular and collective struggles of the Ethiopian revolution. They all reflect the desire for free and open expression of community and publicness and they all point to the future struggles of identity politics—not only the ones that unfolded in the form of the armed struggles that violently overthrew the Derg in 1991, but also the strivings already present in popular groups before, during and after 1974.

The meaning of revolution, therefore, was different for different sections of society. While most desired to see a prosperous future society, different social groups had different aspirations and visions for this future society. The meaning different social groups attached to *lewut* or revolution tended to reflect their view of what it means to modernize. As discussed in the preceding pages and chapters, the imperial state saw itself as the bringer of "the age of modern civilization" and saw postwar Ethiopia as an age of transition *towards* the establishment of a more modern and prosperous Ethiopian society that is different from Ethiopia's past "traditional civilization". The imperial state projected this image of postwar Ethiopia as a land of modern civilization to place Emperor Haile Selassie I as the "bringer" of this "new era". Others, such as the student radicals of the Ethiopian Student Movement, saw a prosperous and more modern Ethiopia as an inevitable future that must be realized through revolution. Yet others saw *zemenawinnet* as the way of the future that needs to be brought about by a mere imitation of the west. This group tended to see modernity, and in that sense *lewut*, as a radical shift away from what is Ethiopian. Others like Haddis Alemayehu, saw *zemenawinnet* as a design that seeks to marry homegrown institutions of law,

government and administration with “eastern” and “western” forms, in order to find a happy medium that could fast track the country’s progress (Haddis Alemayehu, 1966). In his *What Kind of Administration that Ethiopia Needs?* published in the thick of revolutionary fervor, Haddis argued that the *lewut* that was unfolding must seek to synthesize the homegrown with the foreign.

Whatever meanings and aspirations were attached to *zemenawinnet* and by extension to *lewut*, however, *zemenawinnet* became a public good in postwar Ethiopia. It became part of popular consciousness and experiential practice of the youthful majority of the postwar capital, Addis Ababa. The urban youth instrumentalized *zemenawinnet* to reposition themselves in society and push back against the disciplinary restrictions and normative constraints of the dominant imperial social order and its normative structures. In this sense *zemenawinnet* and by extension *lewut* was seen as a break from the suffocating strictures of dominant conventions prescribed by the imperial social order. It represented a form of rejection of authority and cultural dissent expressed during the postwar period in music, dress and sociality that became part of the daily social practice of the urban zemenawi youth. Unlike the common view, *zemenawinnet*, thus, did not always mean a rejection of what is Ethiopian. In fact, as a cultural notion, it was a phenomenon that mobilized homegrown artifacts and foreign ones to reorder the dominant social conventions and normative structure of the imperial regime and the society that it presided over.

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