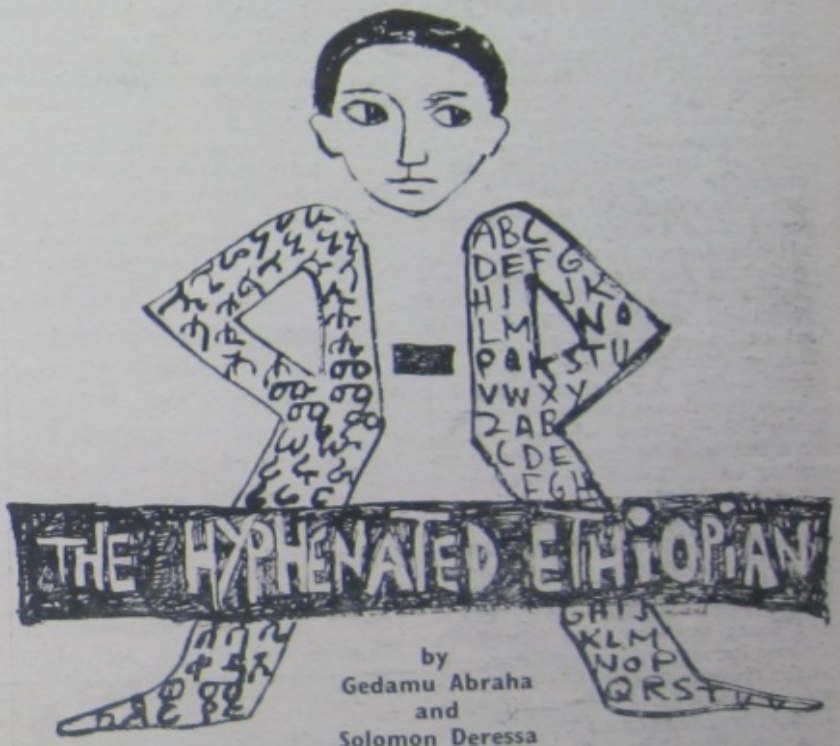
THE HYPHENATED ETHIOPIAN

by
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An educated man worried about the education of the up-coming generation successfully carried out an investigation to determine whether African students retain their lessons better when conclusions are offered first and the arguments then presented or when the arguments are marshalled and then conclusion drawn.

An official presented with decisions based on the investigation, after having paid due compliments to such an impressive study brought to a successful finish, added the following: "But, you see, the real problem is not where the conclusion should come, but how to deliver newspapers and magazines to the hinterland during the rainy season when the feeder roads are impassable. Does the position of the conclusion matter in an article that never reaches the reader?" Leonard Doob, a Yale sociologist, tells a story to this effect in his *Communication in Africa* for an altogether different reason. But the point is well taken.

Not so long ago *Addis Reporter* asked "Shall she be educated or shall she be ignorant?" Perhaps we should ask "Are we educated or are we ignorant?" Leaving definitions of such dubious words as "ed··cated" to those who earn their liv.ng defining and answering, we'll make a simple division that will lead into statements that are really questions.

Coming from immobile life in small communities we have passed into the mobility of life in Dire Dawa, with its multi-dimensional, be it parochial culture; Asmara, with its undertow of Mediterranean gesticulations; and Addis Ababa, uneasily hovering on the verge of metropolitan internationalism. In short, the educated Ethiopian is Ethiopia in transition. The implications are obvious.

Passing from the annual harvest to the monthly salary and from the homestead to the apartment, we have exchanged communal security for individual destinies.

Our physical mobility has towed along a social mobility that has dashed traditional class differences to smithereens. Our prospects are becoming more and more dependent on levels of individual achievement rather than lineage.

Accomplishments have become more the yardstick against which we are measured than the steadfastness of our faith. Roles that used to be ordained by social structure have become manipulable. Might it be right to say that in our society the age of faith is slowly ceding to the age of research and sanitation?

Unfortunately perhaps, communication has gotten to a point where differences in culture are bulldozed. The other side of the coin, however, is that newspaper articles which tell us of other ways of life, books in Amharic that give us the excruciating details of the six-day war before the dead have buried their dead, and television documentaries that take us to the battlefront in the comfort of foam-rubber-cushioned armchairs, lager bottle in hand, daily stretch the boundaries of the individual's imagination. Vicariously at least, we truly live not in any given community, but in the world at large. In a future "Star Trek" age we might even live in the universe at large.

Another way of putting all this is that 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. Education or training puts an attempt at total perception before reaction. A sustained attempt at perceptiveness, so the story goes, leads to vision, which in turn leads to a sublimated release of tension. The product thereof is given such nicknames as "art" or "literature."

Art and literature are the deliberate restructuring of reality so that aesthetic, hence moral, judgements can be made. The consumer in paying for the artist's product buys not only the undefinable elation that it provides, but also the inherent quality of simplifying the helter-skelterness of reality. Perhaps a secular form of salvation. Thus the atmosphere of family life in America is easier to grasp through the Dick Van Dyke series than through spending an equal number of hours in an American home.

Now the opportunities given the elite put on his shoulders the burden of developing the necessary vision to sublimate the inner conflict between ingrained values and values aspired to

by the whole society. Is he showing any indications of attempting to structure reality into a coherent vision?

One thing seems clear. The Ethiopian of the age of sanitation is still asking the question of the traditional man. Whenever faced with anything new he asks "Is it according to my national tradition?" Are the newspapers in which he prints these questions according to his national tradition? His question is a noble gesture, but hardly a luxury that the era of research admits of. The day's query should be "Is such-and-such of practical value and workable?" After all, a highly organized but static way of life is perceptibly being replaced by what seems like a disorganized but dynamic way of life in Ethiopia.

Daniel Lerner in *The Passing of Traditional Society* uses the phrase "mobile sensibility" to describe the prerequisite for the individual's spiritual survival in a period of such drastic deviations from what was. By this he means a sensibility and sensitivity that takes all workable change in its stride because the self has a built-in system for rearranging its inner resources according to need. It would seem as if our mobile sensibility should, instead of bemoaning the maiming of our spiritual values by alien invasion, 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. The styles of these items would in turn comment on the changes in our style of life.

An attempt at coherent vision is necessarily a statement on what our lives are and what we think they should be. It is interesting that the Ethiopian elite, with some help from the well-paid expatriates, is beginning to support the neighbourhood supermarket. The neighbourhood cinema has also made its appearance. Why have we not felt the need to support what our western counterparts have made into lucrative business — the legitimate theatre, the art gallery, the non-dance orchestra, and the bookshop? Isn't using crystal and silver ware imported from Europe, without being interested in understanding the cultural indices that gave them their lines and curves and shapes, the best way of abandoning our spiritual prerogatives as a group that has always had its own uniqueness? Analytic comprehension is the only way of making sure that what is secular will not be taken as sacred to one's own disadvantage. Had the Aztec understood that horses were merely horses and white Spaniards merely soldiers, Cortez might have had a harder time of it.

To take an example of the elite's need to struggle unaided with his individual fate, let's in characteristic fashion dream of academies. Our national language shows the same symptoms of neuroses that the elite does. But rather than wishing and hoping for individual writers of genius who will represent our communal aspirations and at the same time clear Amharic of entangling alien weeds, we look to the French academy, which has not succeeded even in consolidating what French has already gained, let alone charting the road to future development of the language. Witness that the French dictionary *par excellence* is the Larousse and not the academy's, which, naughty tongues wag, is stuck on the word "cocktail." The Hebrew academy has successfully revived, so we are told, a language many centuries dead. Unless we are thinking of reviving Ge'ez only to wish to revive Amharic two centuries from now, the comparison is a *non sequitur*.

"As a result [of the academy] French today is a language both more logical and far more beautiful than English" writes a journalist of the Ethiopian elite. Did Shakespeare fall short of Racine or Corneille? Or Joyce short of Proust? Or T.S. Eliot's language short of Paul Claudel's? In fact, English without an academy is invading French (possessor of the famous academy) to such an extent that the book *Parlez-Vous Franglais?* is five times thicker than Merigeta Yohannes' *Gu-ramayle Kwankwa* and five times as worried.

"The bourgeoisie of an underdeveloped country is a bourgeoisie in spirit only. It is not its economic strength, nor the dynamism of its leaders, nor the breadth of its ideas that ensures it peculiar quality of bourgeoisie. Consequently it remains at the beginning and for a long time afterwards a bourgeoisie of the civil service."

FRANZ FANON

Whether academies are formed or not is immaterial. What is disturbing is the shameless need for constantly shifting responsibility from the individual to the mediocrity of anonymous committees. Using Amharic, like writing a novel or a play or desperately struggling to understand, demands sustained discipline. Is there something lacking in the early training of the hyphenated Ethiopian? Do we, for instance, avoid reading because we learnt to read after boyhood when "all books are books of divination telling us about the future [our future], and like the fortune teller who sees a long journey in the cards or death by water they influence the future"? Why do we second-rate journalists, economists and engineers think we are more useful to the society in ultimate terms than a first-rate *azmari*, *mesenko*-player, painter or poet?

There is tension. The hyphenated Ethiopian has of necessity a compartmentalized soul. So did Tolstoy. Check out the innumerable French sentences in *Anna Karenina*. Government institutions, we complain, use English for correspondence. But even in our private lives some areas of our being can be expressed only in English. Others only in Amharic. And yet others only in tribal dialects.

More useful than prescribing cures in apocalyptic prose would be formulating questions that belong to the age of sanitation and research, or insinuating the problems of this schizoid situation in visionary books, paintings or *begena* chords.

One such book, Franz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre*, puts the problems of the hyphenated man of the third world in the following manner. "The bourgeoisie of an under-developed country is a bourgeoisie in spirit only. It is not its economic strength, nor the dynamism of its leaders, nor the breadth of its ideas that ensures its peculiar quality of bourgeoisie. Consequently it remains at the beginning and for a long time afterwards a bourgeoisie of the civil service. It is the positions that it holds in the new national administration which will give it strength and serenity. If the government gives it enough time and opportunity, this bourgeoisie will manage to put away enough money to stiffen its domination. But it will always reveal itself as incapable of giving birth to an authentic bourgeois society with all the





The hyphenated Ethiopian is also a girl "in transit" form unadulterated nature to bras—made in Paris.

economic and industrial consequences which this entails."

Perhaps the stomach has to be taken care of before the luxury of an orchestrated vision is allowed us. Yet a nagging question lingers. Would a study of history belie our alibi? Generally speaking, the heroic ages produced epic poetry; the age of faith in Europe produced Gothic architecture; periods of fossilization—or perhaps gestation—lead to the expurgation of Shakespeares and the production of futile obscurantist puns; and the period of individual destinies, i.e., bourgeois destinies, produces mobility, the novel, the cinema, the television serial, etc.

The later days of the bourgeoisie have landed humanity in the era of sanitation (plumbing, proper or improper) and research. Michener writes novels based on research. Mailer takes systematic notes to write *The Naked and the Dead*. Henry Moore's sculptures lean heavily on spadework done by Freud and disciples. Yet the hyphenated Ethiopian sidetracks research and editorializes about invasion of Ethiopian culture by the west.

Thus, unthinking assumptions of the destructiveness of bad films on our culture, whereas the truth of the matter is that both bad and good films are equally destructive. The only way to have one's cake and eat it too would be to produce one's own cake while devouring what is thrust onto one's plate. The very fact that we sit and watch an inane "Fugitive" without hurling our coffee cups against the screen in moments of tension when the man on the run is almost caught is forcing on us an interiorization of violence which is of the age of sanitation, i.e., western.

In the early days of the movies Mexicans apparently gunned down the villain when their favourite screen hero was in danger—an effective course of action. Projection had to stop. The reaction of a man who had come in from Wollega and been taken by relatives to a war movie was similar, except that he was not armed. (He later held it against his host for quite a while).

Our rustic cavalier can for the purposes of this article be dubbed uneducated by his well-meaning host. Once again, can the host by the same token be dubbed educated—or shall we stick to "hyphenated"?

Such a retort to the assumptions and presumptions of the educated Ethiopian would have been in good order. By this we do not mean to beg the question or evade it. Rather, we suspect that the very premise itself upon which such complacencies are based could stand a glance or two.

The hyphenated Ethiopian, as we see him and in the larger sense, is that miniscule, urbanized, hopefully literate Ethiopian. We do not believe he is the smug author of couplets which, for the lack of any literary standard, are taken as witty, even pregnant, epigrams suggestive of healthy seeds. We are thus led against our wish to exclude those productively-healthy members of the society who have not had the benefits and advantages of a secondary education.

The emergence (though its presence is still to be felt) of the third world.

the breakdown of the European-centred universe and the rise of the American Empire, the attendant effect of this on knowledge—all these have nurtured a rich literature on the transitional societies of the world; transitional much in the same way a box of cigars is said to be "in transit" from departure point to destination.

The question of the point of departure; the issue of the point of arrival (was it two or three stages? And how many takeoffs?); the question whether this "transit" passage should be left to the gods and their temporal representatives or to those who say "comrades, let us build our heaven here and now"; the exact percentage in the growth of GNP and GDP—these are issues which are better left to the countless technicians of the field.

As we see it (and leaving aside the rate of speed of the transit passage and the qualitative and quantitative nature of the transition) when the son of a peasant (one generation removed from his plot of land) becomes a pilot of an international jet line or a *seicento* driver, a journalist or an art critic, a top-drawer politician or a cantankerous *zabanya*, a practising MD or a structural engineer, then we must of necessity accept that there has been a change—be it skin-deep or thorough-going. A change which unleashes, perhaps impulsively, such queries as "shall she be educated or ignorant?" or earnest and awed statements, "You know, he is a Ph.D—in marketing."

General Eisenhower, who was the favourite butt of intellectuals, liked to recount to his friends a definition of an intellectual (which, he claimed, he had overheard at a cocktail party!): "A man who takes more words than are necessary to tell more than he knows."

We do not know whether the intellectuals quipped it was quite appropriate that such a clumsy definition should have come from the old warrior. But there is no denying that the intellectual is actually a talker. A talker who defies classification.

The late C. Wright Mills, an intellectual gadfly, an irritant of the bourgeois intellectuals of his country, came to the conclusion that they "cannot be defined as a single social unit, but rather as a scattered set of grouplets. They must be defined in terms of their function and their subjective characteristics rather than in terms of their social position. . ."

But resorting to classic formulations or even to those writings of the handful of uncorrupted social scientists has its limitations. And this being simply: a BOAC pilot would not ordinarily be taken in his country as a member of the intellectual or educated class. Whereas here in Ethiopia, it is not only that an EAL pilot is taken or accepted as such; he must be for he is.

The sociological concepts of "cultural shock," "social disorganization," "breakdown of traditional values," etc., have been laboured to sterility though one can still use them as points of orientation when, as in one instance not long ago, a "professional" economist complained that the Ethiopian government is not responsive to the needs of the middle class.

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We are not as such interested in "finding out" whether the college-educated Ethiopian is an intellectual: our point of departure is that yes, he is educated in his field—be it merchandizing or political theory, literature (Chaucer's period!) or vocational education, microbiology or public health administration.

Hopefully, Ethiopia has now reached the stage where one could chuckle over such horrid terms as "locals" and "returnees." At any rate, we have combative and politically aware students of the HSIU who dismiss the "generation of returnees" of the forties and fifties as "graduates of the stone age."

Ethiopia has now reached the point where graduates of the University College hold key positions (associate vice presidents, deans and professors) at HSIU, where Ethiopians are beginning to replace expatriate teachers in the secondary and specialized schools, where "limelight" posts in the foreign-dominated private enterprise sector are being taken over by Ethiopians—in sum that stage where even the first products of the postwar education programme are in turn to be met, confronted and replaced by the younger generation of college-educated Ethiopians.

The "generation gap" is not limited to the rural-based and urbanized Ethiopians, neither is it simply limited to the Bible-spouting fanatical *debtera* and a freshman who has just met Karl Marx, nor merely to the devout Moslem from Harar and his son who has just got back with a Caucasian bride. The "generation gap" exists between a professor (who graduated from the University College a mere six years ago) and an "aggressive" second-year student (who "arrived" from Sidamo 24 months ago) and who has seen it all and knows it all.

Go to the Ras or Ethiopia bar and hang around for an hour or two: a well-paid insurance salesman (he probably majored in political science), a physician, a lawyer, a police major (don't ask him about *habeus corpus*; he might ask "who is his father?"), a glib hustler, a soccer player, a lecturer, a librarian, an army colonel, an aircraft mechanic, a "son" of either "a big man" or a "big grandmother" (*his* only qualification which is, of course, duly flouted), a tourist guide, a city slicker, a naval officer, an assistant minister, a TV announcer—these are the members of Ethiopia's *educated* class.

And how should one refer to this new class of Ethiopia? Should one depend on Gaetano Mosca's "ruling class," the Marxist "bourgeois class," C. Wright Mills' "the power elite," Donald Levine's "new nobility," Tawney's "acquisitive society," Milovan Djilas' "the new class,"—the labels are there but we will not force one on you.

"They" are the members of the "new class"—government officials, university students, entrepreneurs, teachers, lawyers—the "prosperity boys" of the new era and who have made it to the upper drawers by a fortuitous combination of skill (education), skullduggery and sheer doggedness.

The 6th. International African Seminar held at Ibadan in July 1964 in trying to grapple with the forbidding question of *The New Elites of Tropical Africa* agreed on a "working definition" of "elite". The savants decided



The soccer player who has been to Mexico City, Accra and Benghazi is a sham amateur. On the side he is a beer salesman — a de facto member of the hyphenated class.

that the term "elite could be appropriately used to denote those who were western-educated and wealthy (to a high degree relative to the masses of the population), a lower limit of £250 ($700, C.F.A. 150,000) as an annual income being suggested."

The advantage (some will say disadvantage) of such a working definition lies in its restrictive nature: *substantial western education and relative wealth.* The rich but semi-literate or illiterate traders and landowners; the marginal and submarginal but poor (though literate) primary-school teachers, clerks, etc., are conveniently excluded.

That one has to resort to such elaborate and ingenious formulations does not and should not question the very existence or the degree of entrenchment of either the elite or the bourgeois class. It merely emphasises that the attendant qualities of the age of research have not kept pace with the metamorphosis of the social structure and the changing scene of the social life. To wit: five year plans need not only economists and statisticians but also an acceptance of discipline, rationality and purposeness as a way of life. Massive apartment buildings—the symbols of the age of sanitation—need proper plumbing and plumbers, working elevators and skilled elevator technicians.

To what degree is the working definition of the savants of Ibadan applicable to our home scene? The "elite" imagined by the scholars is our hyphenated Ethiopian. But being less academically minded (and given the working assumption of our *trade* that truth is perhaps best captured in qualitative rather than quantitative analysis) we would rather have Laswell's classic definition of the elite: *those who get the most of what there is to get.*

And "those who get the most of what there is to get" are those who have *substantial* western education and who, *consequently*, have relatively well-paying salaried jobs in the civil service, autonomous organisations and private enterprises. In effect, the members of what the Russians call "the creative and technical intelligentsia," i.e. philologist and veterinarian, ballerina and metallurgist (Those who are not *recognised* under the Russian definition — entrepreneurs—form, of course, an *enterprising* part of our hyphenated intelligentsia).

Using the salary-scale of the Ethiopian Government (which is pegged to level of education) an arbitrary minimum monthly salary level of $300—with the usual modifying clauses "substantial western education" and "wealthy relative to the masses"—should help to delineate the hyphenated features.

In April 1966, the Central Government had 16,280 employees on its payroll *in* Addis Ababa whose total pay-checks came to $3,257,267. A partial breakdown of the income group: 669 employees in the $300-350 income group who netted a total of $209,390; 382 in the $350-400 range; 286 in the $400-450 group; 255 in the $450-500 range. There were 441 in the $500-600 group; 250 in the $600-700 bracket; 480 in the $700-800 range.

In the $800-900 income group were 101 employees; 104 in the $900-1000 range; 102 in the $1000-1500 bracket; and 131 netting a monthly income of $1500 and over.

There were 1049 employees earning under $25 per month; 3141 in the $25-50 bracket; 2483 in the $50-75 group; and 3405 clerks, etc. in the $100-200 income group.

An intelligent and fairly accurate profile of this "new class" does not come easily. Indeed it is not entirely without reason that the students of HSIU refer to the "returnees" of the fifties as "graduates of the stone age." The difference in educational background, life experience and political

consciousness between the "returnee" who attended Oxford in the late '40's and the HSIU senior who cannot remember the number of times he has participated in political demonstrations is akin to the difference between Turgenev's fathers and sons.

But differences can and do exist even between two college graduates of the same generation: the medical graduate from the University of Edinburgh would not care to be placed on an equal footing with the graduate of Lumumba University's school of medicine.

One can view it better from the statistical angle: As of August 1967, there were 1,799 Ethiopian students abroad. Breakdown of field of studies: 520 in humanities and social sciences, 361 in engineering, 302 in medical science, 205 in agriculture, 298 in education and fine arts, 62 in natural science, 51 in "other fields."

(The assistant head of the Department of English is an Indonesian! In the early fifties, the English master at Wingate used to complain bitterly that "a Jesuit, a French-Canadian by citizenship, and probably Chinese by origin, lectures English at the University College while I, a born Englishman, a graduate of Oxford, and a loyal subject of His Majesty the King, teach English to nincompoops at a nominal secondary school..." No—times do not change!)

The effect of such a system of staff recruitment and the diversity of educational systems Ethiopians have been exposed to is naturally bound to have a lasting effect on the style of the educated Ethiopians. Whether this style is manifested in a pointed preference for tea ("no sugar, thank you") or vin rosé; Hungarian goulash or cheeseburgers; acquavit, vodka or bourbon ("with branch water, thanks a lot") may not in itself be of great importance.

Unfortunately, it does not stop there. A government official (who majored in primary education) informed us that he sees no reason why university education should be given free; a social worker questioned whether it was in fact necessary for the government to be engaged in social welfare; an "economist" reminded us that the U.S.A. managed to become the mightiest, richest and most developed country in the world without "a single five year plan." (We did not dare remind him about the U.S.S.R.!)



University students may not care for the "graduates of the Stone Age." Most evidently, they see "red" when they see mini-skirts. They detest Samuelson and idolize Fanon. History awaits their judgement on Shakespeare.

There is also the "intellectual" who complains he can't find a single book worth buying at the local bookstore (which we are not willing to dispute) and proceeds to forget the existence of books; another who moans that there are no "intellectual pastimes" in Addis and having said that plants himself in one of the "in" bars around town; the socially aware, sensitive thinker who complains about the increasing number of sluts (you might find him haggling about the "price"); the conscientious civil servant who forgets conscience and all; a foreign service official who has been assigned to foreign posts two or three times and yet remains a feudal *manqué*.

And yes, you will find the serious economist, the dedicated statistician, the competent engineer, the *reliable* salesman, the eager but honest hustler ("how you doin,' man"), the tourist guide who *really* believes tourism will solve his country's economic ills, the obsessed bookworm, the impartial and honest judge—those who have come to realize that education is but a point where one reverts from "cocksure ignorance to thoughtful uncertainty."

The members of the "new class" are contradictory members of contradictory grouplets of a renowned contradictory people. The nightmare of "generalist" reporters, serious social scientists; and quite possibly the nightmare of a nation.

(To be continued next week)