



African Studies | Political Science

"Messay Kebede has written an enormously important book. He definitively places the Ethiopian revolution as one of the twentieth century's 'great revolutions,' on par with the Russian or Chinese in terms of scope of transformation. Messay provides a systematic and compelling argument on one of the key puzzles of the revolution: internal power struggles within the military junta known as the Derg. Messay argues, drove this movement of revolutionary change. Everyone interested in contemporary Ethiopia or comparative revolutions will benefit from this book."

—Terrance Lyons, codirector, Center for Global Studies, George Mason University  
"There are books, and then there are books. Messay Kebede has written a book. With sustained analytical brilliance, he demonstrates how understanding Ethiopia contributes to the understanding of the world. *Ideology and Elite Conflicts* represents a major achievement in combining comparative history with political and cultural analysis, all set within a philosophical frame."  
—Donald L. Donham, University of California, Davis

*Ideology and Elite Conflicts* provides a theoretical explanation of the major outcomes of Ethiopia's social revolution, namely, the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 and the implementation of a far-reaching Marxist-Leninist revolution by a military committee (the Derg) and its collapse in 1991. Messay Kebede extensively discusses the question of whether existing theories of revolution shed light on the eruption of a radical revolution in Ethiopia and, most of all, whether they can accommodate the major anomaly of a socialist revolution being executed by a military committee that radicalized after the removal of the imperial regime. Hence the central thesis of the book: both the overthrow of the monarchial order and the radicalization of the Derg must be tied to social conditions that exacerbated elite conflicts for scarce resources, with the consequence that the espousal of radical ideologies (socialism and ethnonationalism) became the sole avenue for the exclusive control of state power.

Moreover, this book shows how the struggle of exclusive elites for the control of the state explains the Derg's need to put its fate in the hands of a providential leader, to wit, Mengistu Haile Mariam. In light of the theoretical debate over the role of charismatic leaders in history, this book establishes how Mengistu's narcissism led him to become the sole owner of the revolution and how his dictatorial rule brought about his own demise and that of the Derg, following the military defeat of the Ethiopian army at the hands of ethnonationalist insurgents. Another fundamental contribution of this book is a theoretical articulation of political conflicts and ideology that critically intervenes in the divisive issue of the primary cause of revolutions. Granted that ideology is more of a justification than a drive, the Ethiopian case illustrates how conflicts between mutually exclusive elites favor the path of political outbidding, mobilizing utopian projects so as to galvanize the support of the masses. The perceived transcendence of utopia from partisan politics gives proof that ideology is a predatory form of thinking in that it hijacks values belonging to different cognitive and affective realms for the purpose of empowering exclusionary interests.

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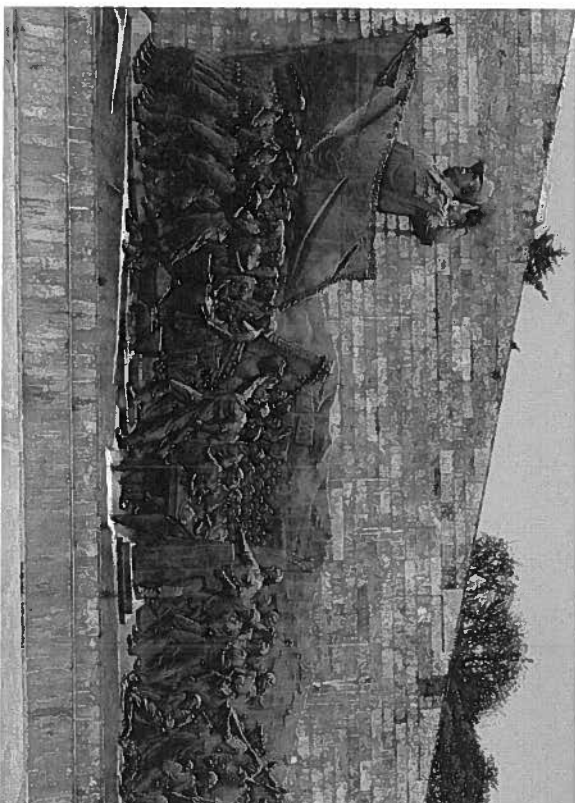


Image courtesy of *Awamba Times* in Ethiopia



KEBEDE

# IDEOLOGY AND ELITE CONFLICTS



AUTOPSY OF THE  
ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION

MESSAY KEBEDE

