



Education and State Building in Early Ethiopian Thought: The Cases of Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn and Eguale Gebre-Yohannes

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Abstract

The role of education in state-building and the interaction between the indigenous and modern education systems are among the most researched problems. Despite their potential to illuminate this complex relationship, the works of early Ethiopian intellectuals remain largely overlooked. In light of this gap, this study comparatively analyzes the works of Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn (1886-1919) and Eguale Gebre-Yohannes (1931-1991), with particular attention to their interpretations of the meaning and purpose of education, the interaction between indigenous and modern educational systems, and the role of education in state-building. The study employed a qualitative research method with an interpretative comparative research design using the works of the two intellectuals as primary sources. A close textual, content, and discourse analysis is used to uncover the common and divergent positions of the two intellectuals, founded on a historical contextualization of their works and lives. The study concludes that while both Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes understood education aligned with the Enlightenment notion of rationality and science, Baykedagn was more inclined to craft comprehensive modernization reforms that deny agency for indigenous education. On the other hand, Gebre-Yohannes believed the two systems of education can be tailored together without losing their particular essences. Both intellectuals agree on the vitality of embracing European-modelled education as part of the quest for a modern and capable state that can successfully transcend domestic and foreign challenges.

Keywords: Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn, Eguale Gebre-Yohannes, Ethiopia, education, state-building, early intellectual

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most critical dimensions of state-building, as it influences national identity, political ideology, governance legitimacy, and the overall development and survival of states (Lopez, 2019). In Africa and other colonized regions, the interaction between traditional or indigenous¹ and European or modern² education systems are one of the most contentious elements in the process of state-building (Bereketeab, 2011; Ijeoma, 2018). Indigenous education systems were sidelined as the European-modelled education was installed to promote language, religion, and culture, and to justify colonization as a benevolent civilizing mission. Colonial education did not empower and emancipate societies, as it was geared towards the production of low-level trained administrators and labor, falling short of pushing towards the ultimate purpose of education—awakening consciousness and achieving liberty (Conklin, 1997; White, 1996).

In Ethiopia, despite domestic challenges and foreign threats, independence allowed the domestic agency to play a decisive role in state-building initiatives, making the experience a unique opportunity for reflection on fundamental questions, including how education was instrumentalized in the process. Thus, unlike the rest of Africa, which lately grappled with this concern in the second half of the 20th century, in Ethiopia, the question of the role of education in state-building had been in the air since the dawn of the 20th century. The ruling elite and intellectuals became entangled with instrumentalizing education for state-building and modernization. As Ware (2014) observed, it is the post-colonial African elite that called for the revision of the legacy of colonial education, demanded reconsideration of its place in national identity, and pushed for the integration of indigenous education perspectives as an alternative interpretation of the dominant Western narratives.

However, in Ethiopia, the freedom from colonialism allowed the domestic forces to determine the path of state-building, although the tension between the elements of domestic and foreign domains was inevitable. This tension was particularly evident in the education sector, similar to other non-colonized societies that embarked upon an indigenously driven state-building

¹ As Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019, p. 6) pointed out, the term traditional or indigenous education in this study is used to refer to a knowledge system that is “communal understanding and is embedded and conditioned by the culture of the locality in question.” Thus, for the study, the two terms are used to refer to cultural and religious education systems in Ethiopia. However, given the dominant role of the education system of the Orthodox Church in the state, the terms are applied in this study to refer to this education system.

² As Adick (1992) noted, the term “modern education” has been used to imply the enlightenment notion of education, although its designation as the European education system has pejorative implications on non-Western education systems that are commonly referred to as traditional and indigenous. The researchers used the terms interchangeably as provided by the works of intellectuals under consideration.

process. Even in the absence of colonialism, states like Japan, Iran, and Thailand had to deal with the challenges of importing Europeans to serve their aim of modernization. Japan, which captivated the imagination of Ethiopian modernizers as a model, as Duke (2009) and Platt (2020) noted, represents one of the radical experiments of using European-modelled education for a state-building project within the Meiji reforms. Noroozi (2011) also noted that the introduction of modern education in Iran was characterized by the incongruity in purpose, values, and methodology between traditional education in pre-Islamic times and the Qajar era's traditional education, as well as modern education, an issue that early Iranian modernizers had debated on.

The role of education, both for individual and societal liberation and development, and its epistemic and ideological instrumentalization, makes it both a tool and an end of state-building (Dachi & Tikly, 2003; Kaplan, 2006). In Ethiopia, the church has been the major source of knowledge for 16 centuries, consisting of multiple levels that require more than 30 years to complete (Gelaw, 2017). The relation between traditional and modern education, mainly the fate of the Church education in the face of European education, became one of the major points of debate and tension among the monarchy, the church, and the newly emerged foreign-educated intelligentsia who influenced the quest for a modern state.³ The monarchy and the church were particularly concerned about the ramifications of European-modelled schools on the former. The opening of the first school, Menelik II School, in 1908 was a major change in the position of the emperor and the pope; however, as a compromise between tradition and innovation, fellow Coptic Orthodox Egyptians were assigned as teachers (Zewde, 2022).

Throughout the regimes of Ethiopia, education has constantly served as a key instrument for state-building while shifting in focus: under the Imperial era of Haile Selassie, it centered on elite bureaucratic formation and Western-style modernization (Teshome, 1979; Bahru, 2002); under the socialist rule of the Derg, the emphasis moved to mass literacy and ideological mobilization (Clapham, 1988; Tekeste, 1996) while in the post-1991 EPRDF period, it focused on access, decentralization, ethnic-linguistic inclusion, and human-capital development (Bahru, 2002). In this process, as Marzagora (2017, p. 26) noted, the “twentieth-century Ethiopian intellectuals were fascinated by the interdisciplinary links between Literature, Philosophy, and Political Science, and actively cultivated them.” Several Ethiopian early

³ The concept of the modern state in this study is applied in line with Weberian understanding of state and state-building. According to Dusza (1989), state-building and modernization in the Weberian tradition imply dimensions including building state institutions, monopolizing coercive means, establishing legitimacy, and achieving development among others.

intellectuals produced important works on this subject, including Kebede Mikael's *Spark of Knowledge* (1994) and *Ethiopian and Western Civilization* (1953), Hadis Alemayehu's *Understanding Education and School* (1955), and Asres Yenesew's *Useful Advice* (1961).

However, studies that investigate how early intellectuals canalized education in state building are rare. To fill this gap, this study comparatively analyzes how two important 20th-century Ethiopian intellectuals, Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn (1886-1919) and Eguale Gebre-Yohannes (1931-1991), did this. Baykedagn, who lived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is a key figure among intellectuals who contributed their works in the period that spanned from the post-Adwa to the second Italian Invasion in 1936 in Ethiopia (Mazagora, 2017). Gebre-Yohannes lived in the post-liberation (1941) period when the state-building project was pursued with renewed energy. While Baykedagn witnessed the first attempt to open a European-modeled school, Gebre-Yohannes lived when European education had attained unrivalled priority in the state-building project, as is evident in the opening of the first university in 1953. In Gebre-Yohannes's words, the time was a period of education *par excellence* (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). Thus, the study focuses on how the two intellectuals understood education and its purpose, their perspective towards the interplay between the indigenous and the European Education Systems, and how they situated education within the broader state-building project.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research method with an interpretative comparative research design. To this end, the study used the original works of Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes, written in Amharic as primary sources. Thus, Bayekadagn's *Atse Menelik'ena Ethiopia* (Emperor Menelik II and Ethiopia) and *Mengistina Yehizib Astetedader* (Government and Public Administration) and Gebre-Yohannes's *Yekfeteggn timirt Zeybe* (The Art of Higher Education), published in 1913, 1953, and 1963, respectively, constituted the major sources of data for the study. Although Gebre-Yohannes has another work titled *Bithuan Nitsuahane-Lib* that mainly focuses on virtue embedded in Christianity, this study primarily used his work on higher education. Drawing data from these works as primary sources, the study did a close thematic, textual, content, and discourse analysis by historically contextualizing the lives and works of the two authors within the broader dynamic of the quest for building a capable state.

To supplement the primary data, secondary sources that constitute critiques on the works of Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes published in journal articles and books are integrated

thematically in the attempt to enrich analysis and to explore alternative interpretations of the thoughts. Moreover, the literature on intellectual history, the quest for modernization, state building, and the evolution of education and state building in Ethiopia and beyond are also incorporated in the study as part of the secondary sources. Moreover, the study incorporated data from blog posts and alternative sources to benefit from insightful interpretations on the contributions of the two works, including data from seminary presentations, speeches, and debates on the early 20th-century intellectuals from philosophical and intellectual history perspectives that are available on platforms like YouTube. The data is thematically organized and contextualized historically to systematically interpret and uncover overlaps as well as differences in how Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes understood education and its purpose, the link between indigenous and modern education systems, and the role of education in the pursuit of the modern state.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study emanates from three different and interrelated reasons. The first is, the relevance of the study under investigation is not limited to uncovering how the 20th-century Ethiopian intellectuals articulated education within the context of state-building at the time, but also its implications for current education and state-building predicaments. After more than a century of Ethiopia introducing European modelled education, fundamental questions linger, including its purpose in national identity and development. Moreover, the education sector currently faces the challenges of quality, accessibility, interplay with the indigenous education system, the role of the government in education, the relation of modern education with the government and the state, which are still points of concern and debate. The recent renewed interest in indigenous knowledge systems proves that the questions addressed by early Ethiopian intellectuals still matter to state-building. Thus, studying what early Ethiopian intellectuals addressed the questions of education in relation to state building gives us insights into the origin and evolution of these problems, including current debates on curriculum development.

The other two significances of the study are related to the authors the study investigates and the primary sources that this study relied on. With regard to the first, this study focuses on two prominent 20th-century Ethiopian intellectuals who have significantly contributed to debates on education, modernization, state-building, development, national identity, and other fundamental questions against the background of European systems. As it is mentioned in the first section of the study, such questions are not unique to Ethiopia, as they were concerns in

non-colonized states and in the post-colonial state-building trajectories. State-building literature and the place of education in this process are dominated by Eurocentric views that disregard the perspectives of indigenous education systems and thinkers. Thus, uncovering how these two prominent Ethiopian intellectuals conceptually articulated the fundamental and complex questions of state building and its nexus with state building demonstrates that Ethiopian intellectuals engaged in sophisticated conceptual and theoretical engagements of the non-Western world, thereby contributing to alternative interpretations in the study of education and state building.

The third significance of the study comes from the fact that the study considered works published in Amharic as primary sources. As Marzagora (2017) noted, despite Ethiopia's long literary tradition and indigenous script that constitute domestic experiences and thoughts, it has been overlooked by researchers. As it is assessed in the next Section of the study, both Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes have separately received the attention of contemporary scholars from different perspectives. However, no multi-disciplinary study had comparatively analyzed the works of these intellectuals who have striking similarities in their educational backgrounds, nexus with the state, interest in education's role in state-building, and their particular engagement of Ethiopian state-building agendas vis-à-vis the European system of education and modernity. We hope that this will encourage further investigations into the works of Ethiopian intellectuals from different multidisciplinary perspectives.

Baykedagn's View on Education and Its Purpose

Baykedagn articulated the role of education in state-building as part of the comprehensive reforms he proposed. In this process, education for Baykedagn is a domain that should be reformed itself and that should be employed to create a conducive ground for the implementation of reforms in other aspects. On the chronological and substantially priority of educational reform in state-building, in *Government and Public Administration* (p. 53), Baykedagn argued:

The primary measures of any government that intends to protect its people from dangers should be expanding education. Any society that cultivates knowledge will be able to deal with all challenges and defend itself from enemies. An attempt to introduce reforms without the prior expansion of education is fruitless; rather, such a move will create confusion.

However, although Baykedagn accorded critical importance to education, he did not directly define it. Rather, he approached it in terms of what effects the absence and presence of education have on a certain society. Moreover, he interchangeably used terms like education, knowledge, mind, and system in articulating the reforms he wanted to see in Ethiopia as a deduction of his comparison of the European and the Ethiopian systems. Baykedagn elucidated education through the virtues it equips the society, and the vices its absence creates as an obstacle for personal development. Wolde-Giorgis (2010) noted that Baykedagn used education as a parameter to define the level of development as he described Europeans as people with education, knowledge, mind, and structure, while criticizing the Ethiopian system as deprived of these traits. Baykedagn's dichotomy between Europe and societies that did not embrace the 'European mind' has been the center of the debate on the question of whether he was an advocate of Eurocentric views or an African intellectual.

Salvadore (2007, 2009) argued that Baykedagn considered knowledge as a universal characteristic of human beings that should govern the quest for personal and societal development. Slavadore rejected the critique that accuses Baykedagn as a passive propagator of Eurocentric values and claims that Baykedagn wanted Ethiopia to be a modern state while maintaining its identity. Marzagora (2017), Wolde-Giorgis (2010), and Zewde (2022) also followed the same suit as Salavadore in interpreting Baykedagn's works, focusing on his reforming thoughts that he sought from intellectual history and modernization perspectives. Baykedagn's modernization thoughts are criticized from the 'Ethiopianist' perspective for designation the domestic dimensions, including the education system, as backward. In this regard, Kebdede (2006) denounces Baykedagn's works as a propagation of imperialist values that were defeated by Ethiopia in its struggle against colonialism. He also claims that the major assumptions of Baykedagn's analysis are rooted in Eurocentric/Enlightenment-based values that uphold racial bias and consider the non-West as backward.

Unquestionably, the close reading of Baykedagn's works reveals that his approach towards education was essentially scientific and largely secular. Regarding the first dimension, Baykedagn repeatedly emphasized that it is possible to discover truth through the application of the scientific method, not only in the physical world but also in the social sciences, including history. Baykedagn refers to the Enlightenment notions of reason and science, as the 'European mind', and presents them as the only path of development. He argued that the variance in the level of development among societies was the result of the difference in the extent of discovery and mastery of these traits and their application to exploit nature. In a view that reveals his

belief in objective methodology, Baykedagn (1913, p. 24) claimed that total neglect of these systems would result in the demise of a certain organized society that aspires to survival and development, while he presented that their effective utilization realizes development.

Ignorance prevailed in the old world. But now an exceptionally powerful enemy called the European mind has risen against ignorance. Anyone embracing the European mind will prosper, and societies that refuse to adopt it will be destroyed.

As it is evident in the curriculum he suggested for European modeled-education, Baykedagn tended to focus on secularization of education. He mainly incorporated subject areas that focus on Science, Language, History, and Law, although he provided the Gospel to be delivered as one subject. He explicitly called for the need to follow the European model of schools and to establish language schools in major cities that not only teach foreign languages but also Amharic. The school model he proposed consisted of 4 European and 5 Ethiopian teachers. The former were to teach Mathematics, World History and Geography, English, and French. The Ethiopian teachers were to teach the Gospel, Amharic, Ethiopian History, and Fitihah-Negest (Baykedagn, 1913). In addition to the expansion of modern education, Baykedagn recommended vocational and technical education, mass education, and called for the provision of literacy as a requirement for assigning government officials. Baykedagn (1913, p. 13) used Japan's example to convince the ruling class to comply with the need to adopt European education

The government of Japan did not reject its citizens who studied abroad; rather, it sponsors their studies in Europe. It welcomes Europeans who want to open schools and come into contact with them. As a result, the people opened their eyes, they became wealthy, powerful and respected by others.

Bayledagn argued that no society resorted to demons and angels as the Ethiopian did to explain the rise and fall of rulers, their achievements, and weaknesses. Moreover, he alluded to the fact that Ethiopians lived in poverty and deprivation, despite the rich land they have, and argued that lack of knowledge has been the main factor that has been pushing them into conflict and into the habit of idleness. He made his stance on colonialism clear by arguing that industrious societies that used education to reveal knowledge will gradually become masters of the ignorant and idle people. He also added that the power of colonizers, who controlled the people around Ethiopia, emanated from their education system and noted that their power was expanding

rapidly, and claimed the world seemed too small to contain it. He suggested that the threat from educated societies can only be averted by mastering their game, by cultivating knowledge and education (Baykedagn, 1913). Baykedagn also coined education and knowledge with institutional governance. He forwarded the latter as a basis for stable governance and development. He likened a state without institutions to a house built without a solid foundation and which is amenable to crumble (Baykedagn, 1913).

Thus, Baykedagn accorded vital national purpose to education, without which he argued that institutionalized and stable governance that promotes good governance, national development, and sovereignty are impossible (Baykedagn, 1993). For him, informed citizens are vital for producing capable leadership and an effective bureaucracy, and building human capital through education is not just a priority, but it is essential for any state aiming to strengthen its power and achieve lasting development (Baykedagn, 1993). In this regard, Baykedagn emphasizes the vital role of education and knowledge in building a stable state that can easily adapt to reforming systems and policies. Generally, Baykedagn's understanding of education aligns with the Enlightenment notion of education that relies on reason, rationality, logic, secularism, scientific method, and the view of knowledge and truth as something that has objective and universal existence. Thus, Baykedagn justified the purpose of education by presenting it as the only path for individual, societal, national, and global quests for prosperity, involving the conquest and exploitation of nature.

Gebre-Yohannes's Articulation of Education

In his educational life, which began with studying high school and undergraduate studies in Greece, and postgraduate studies of philosophy in Germany, Gebre-Yohannes had perfected Western philosophy, as it is evident in his articulation of Ethiopian higher education with deep philosophical analysis that ranges from Greek mythology to the developments in the field in the early 20th century. In his philosophical engagement, he mainly draws from this educational background with emphasis on Greek mythology, Socrates, Plato, the Enlightenment, Frederich Hegel, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Martin Heidegger, and Immanuel Kant, among others. Parallel to Western philosophy, Gebre-Yohannes relied on his education background from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in which he grew up and excelled until he departed for Greece. The purpose he defined for higher education in national development and the design he proposed to reconcile Western and Ethiopian education reflect the trajectory of his education and life.

It is possible to say that his approach was shaped by his mastery of the education systems of the two civilizations, which required him to figure out the nexus between the two. Thus, the relation between the two civilizations revolves around the education system embedded within them, the problem he identified, and he assumed the mission of reconciling the two knowledge systems: a challenge he faced as a student who grew up cultivating the world view of one of the traditional education systems but later on was immersed in the Western philosophical tradition. Thus, his book, *The Purpose of Higher Education*, was the result of what he wanted Ethiopia to be in light of his personal experience and educational encounters. Gebre-Yohannes articulated education and its purpose from a broad philosophical perspective and considered his mission mentioned above as part of the responsibility of the Ethiopian intellectuals to reconcile indigenous and European education systems and to point out the path that could effectively canalize education as an instrument of national development. Thus, although his book constituted radio speeches that were not meant for publication as a book, he approached the question of what purpose education should serve in the pursuit of modern statehood in an ordered fashion, thoroughly articulating the what, why, and how of higher education.

According to Gebre-Yohannes, the above questions can not be answered fully without deep philosophical engagement and articulation of the strengths and limitations in each educational system. He denounced remarks made by authorities who were supporting the expansion of modern education at the time, particularly their speeches on the importance of modern education, as shallow observations that are not founded on deeply articulated justifications (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). This non-critical devotion, either for indigenous or European knowledge systems, without systematically and holistically evaluating their nature and uncovering their implication for national development, has also been one of the major criticisms in the post-colonial state-building instrumentalization of education in Africa (Hoppers, 2002). Gebre-Yohannes neither regarded indigenous education as irrelevant nor did he call for the adoption of the European education system in its entirety. His approach was balanced as he acknowledged the existence of relevant education systems in each civilization and he defined education as an element of civilization and argued that the purpose of higher education should be derived from it.

Thus, for Gebre-Yohannes, discovering the right higher education requires uncovering what knowledge systems the Ethiopian and European civilizations cultivate most and what deficiencies they have. Gebre-Yohannes uses Cicero's conception of culture as a major human dimension of civilization and determinant of the essence of the education system. By culture,

Gebre-Yohannes focused on Cicero's concept of *cultural mini* that constitutes the knowledge and virtue in the realm of the human spirit, soul, and consciousness (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963, p. 30). He defined education from the Hegelian conception of knowledge as spirit embedded in the subjective consciousness of individuals and the objective spirit that exists independently from the personal realm and governs social beings as a whole universally. Thus, for Gebre-Yohannes, "education is nothing more than a mediator that interconnects [the personal and objective spirits]" (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963, p. 82). Hegel considered history as a march towards freedom accumulated through time, driven by the awakening of consciousness; thereby, he presented history as the progress of the spirit of knowledge that liberates from obstacles both within and outside of the human mind (Sedgwick, 2023).

Aligned with this interpretation, Gebre-Yohannes presented the history as an evolution of cultivating the mind to realize the liberation from the ignorance of mankind itself and to the journey of transforming the physical world for societal improvement and prosperity. Gebre-Yohannes (1963, p. 12) situated human beings in the middle of this intangible spirit of the mind and the tangible physical world that it is presupposed to be mastered and exploited for the continuous betterment of life by saying:

Human beings are mediating creatures that belong to two worlds. With their physique, they are part of the tangible world. With their spirit, they share the transcendent realm. They abided by all worldly laws that govern creatures, and they share all the freedom that the spiritual world possesses.

Thus, for Gebre-Yohannes, education should guide the pivotal role of human beings as negotiators between the tangible and non-tangible worlds. He argued that the tool that human beings should use in dealing with these two worlds is not only knowledge, but also by virtue, which he presented as the two most important aspects of education. The latter is what differentiates human beings from the lowest beings, that guides human action towards higher missions beyond physical pleasure, which he depicts as distractions from achieving fulfillment and actualization of potentials (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). Gebre-Yohannes tends to see physical and material prosperity secondary to the pursuit of knowledge and virtue, and it seems he considers the latter to be easily achievable if human beings can free themselves from ignorance and are equipped with knowledge that enables them to deal with physical barriers of development. He argued that there are three purposes of education: differentiating humans from the lowest beings by cultivating virtues, serving as a bridge between mind and nature as

exploitation of the latter demands instrumentalization of education, and as a medium of pushing the limits to the unknown (Gebre-Yohannes, 1964). In this process, the two tools Gebre Yohannes (1963; p. 78) accorded to human beings are:

their minds and their hands, according to him, these things are naturally are not significant; they will only transform a society if the mind is imaginative and eager to learn, then the hands can be trained to deal with the physical world through education

Hegel's dialectic method of reaching a reasonable and practical conclusion holds a central place in Gebre-Yohannes's articulation of education and in defining its purpose at the national level and in the lives of humanity as a whole. As Raapana and Friedrich (2005) noted, Hegelian dialectic methods work at three stages in which the thesis is presented as the first claim, the antithesis is forwards as an extreme contradiction to the first idea, and then the antithesis rests between avoiding extremes and taking the middle ground. Gebre-Yohannes (1963) used this method to devise the reconciliation between the Ethiopian and Western civilizations, which he argued that they are theocentric and anthropocentric, respectively. He added, the Ethiopian civilization of Axum that prioritizes offering praise and thanks to God, as it is expressed in the melodies of Saint Yared, and the Western civilization revolves around human beings, both as agents of change and the ultimate beings that the change is expected to serve. He considered the devotion to the indigenous education as a thesis and the call to passively imitate the modern education as an antithesis. As a synthesis, he proposed creating a special bond between the two without each losing their particular essence through unity - *tewahdo*.

Comparative Analysis of the Approaches of Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes

To address the main objective of the study, this section comparatively analyzes the thought of Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes, focusing on their perspectives towards education and its purpose, how they treated the interaction between indigenous and modern education, and their articulation of the role of education in the state-building process. Baykedagn's works are interpreted by a relatively high number of studies, some of which are exclusively dedicated to investigating his thoughts. Focusing mainly on his political economy and modernization thoughts, including Bonger (2014), Geda (2002, 2003), Geda & Abebe (2011) and Rekiso (2019), who investigated the economic thought of Baykedagn, i.e., the reforms he suggested to ensure self-sufficiency and development by transforming the Ethiopian agrarian and subsistence economy. Moreover, Kebede (2006), Marzagora (2017), Salvadore (2007, 2009)

Wolde-Giorgis (2010), and Zewde (2022) have examined his works from the perspectives of modernization studies and intellectual history.

Unlike Baykedagn, Gebre-Yohannes's works did not get the attention of contemporary scholars, as no study is exclusively dedicated to analyzing his works. However, few studies, including Molla (2018) and Wolde-Giyorgis (2021), have consulted his works in their studies that focus on the evolution of higher education and traditional education, respectively. In addition to the works of Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes that this study used as primary sources, this section draws much on the interpretations of their works mentioned here.

On the Meaning of Education and Its Purpose

Intellectuals in other non-colonized states like Japan, Iran, and China articulated the role of education in the broader quest for a modern state. The realities in which these thinkers in non-colonized societies lived have affected their exposure to European ideas and values, perception of domestic challenges, and threat from the foreign sphere have affected their analysis and recommendations they proposed (Chew, 2014; Ergin & Shinohara, 2021). Early Ethiopian intellectuals with foreign education backgrounds were also affected by their exposure to European thought and systems, the domestic stagnation they observed in Ethiopia and the overall intellectual, political, social, cultural and historical context in which they lived and produced their works (Marzagora, 2017; Zewde, 2022). Similarly, how Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes articulated education and its purpose is the reflection of their educational background, the insights they acquired from their understanding of the international dynamics of their time, the challenges they perceived in the domestic setting and changes they sought to introduce, specific objectives they intended to achieve in their writing based on their inclination and relations with the monarchy, and the educational and political contexts in which they produced their works.

Baykedagn was among the intellectuals who witnessed the opening of the first modern school. At this early stage of modern education in Ethiopia, what he wanted to see was the expansion of modern schools and the introduction of European expertise and curriculum. On the other hand, Gebre-Yohanes's time coincided with the establishment of the first higher education institution, when the Genete-Leul Palace was converted into the Haile Selassie I University. As a result of these different historical contexts and stages in the evolution of modern education, the approach of the two intellectuals in assessing the role of the monarchy was different. Baykedagn praised Menelik II for introducing modern education, but was furious towards the

monarchy for the failure to understand the necessity of urgently expanding the European-modelled system he perceived. Gebre-Yohannes was extremely thankful to Haile-Selassie I for his dedication towards education and the decision to open the first higher education institution by turning a palace into a university.

Here, it is worth noting how these intellectuals' treatment of the role of the government partly stemmed from their relationship with the monarchy. While Baykedagn, coincidentally, travelled and studied in Europe, Gebre-Yohannes was among the students who were awarded a scholarship and who were closely cultivated by the emperor as agents of progress to his rule. Both Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes understood education aligned with Enlightenment convictions regarding rationality, empiricism, and the idea of progress. As Boto (2021), Clifford-Vaughan (1963), and Pukshanskii (2016) observed, the Enlightenment, as an intellectual movement, was characterized by criticism, with thinkers seeking to base education and overall human life on reason. Thus, the pedagogy of education in the Enlightenment movement was aimed at liberation from dogmatic and prejudiced thinking and ensured freedom to reason and belief. Knowledge in such education system is assumed to lead to advancement in science and technology, thereby ensuring incremental progress in individual and societal realism.

Salvadore (2009) noted that Baykedagn considered knowledge as a universal law that guides all individuals and societies towards the revelation of the truth, a civil, prosperous, and improved condition of living. As Girgis noted, Baykedagn was disappointed that Ethiopia was labelled as backward vis-à-vis the European systems, and he believed that Ethiopians had both natural resources and human capital necessary for development if changes were introduced guided by knowledge. Kebede (2006) also argued that Baykedagn was deeply convinced in Enlightenment values as the singular path of individual and societal development. The methodological approach of both Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes is fundamentally empiricist, not only because of their conviction that knowledge can be acquired by reason and logic but also their recognition of the scientific method. Baykedagn's allegiance towards this is more radically evident both in his criticism of Ethiopian historiography in *Emperor Menelik II and Ethiopia* and his fascination with the potential scientific method that he presented as capable of uncovering facts and knowledge.

For Baykedagn, objective facts and truth, both in the social and physical sciences, are there to be discovered with the right scientific tools. Moreover, unlike Gebre-Yohannes, Baykedagn

used reason, logic, and science to challenge tradition and customs, treating them as manifestations of ignorance and a lack of thinking mind that are obstacles to development. Although there is no difference in Gebre-Yohannes' Enlightenment-based understanding of education is sophisticated as he presented knowledge as a subjective spirit within individuals, as well objective spirit that universally exists regardless of personal convictions. He argued that the role of education is to awaken consciousness and liberate people from the domination of ignorance, and to use that knowledge to understand and exploit their environments. Thus, according to Gebre-Yohannes, human beings are mediating creatures as they embark upon the discovery of the objective knowledge empowered by education (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). In Gebre-Yohannes's view, in the history of the world, the first obstacle against an enlightened and prosperous life is the ignorance that limits the mind from using rationality and knowledge, thereby making humanity a prisoner of ignorance.

Once humanity becomes free and discovers knowledge, according to Gebre-Yohannes, that knowledge is used to exploit nature and march towards incrementally improving life, which he presented as a civilization that can only be achieved through the right education to reveal knowledge that can only be relentless effort and sacrifice (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). The tension in Gebre-Yohannes's approach exists in his attempt to bring two systems of knowledge production and world, the scientific-based enlightenment system and the religious system that relies on supernatural intervention. Thus, although he defined the history of humanity as a struggle to reveal the enlightened spirit from within and its application to deal with nature, he proposed it as a complement to the system founded on religion. Thus, as it is thoroughly analyzed in the next sub-section of the study, Gebre-Yohannes did not employ an enlightenment understanding of education to confront tradition; rather, as Baykedagn did, he aspired to reconcile the two systems.

The Nexus Between Indigenous and Modern Education

As the guardian of tradition and envy of their dominance, the social and political forces, the church and the monarchy, had been resistant to the introduction of modern education. The introduction of modern education was not solely seen as an introduction of a new knowledge system, but as a catalyst of change that would disturb the age-old domestic tradition and the elite constellation across the church, the monarchy, and the administrative hierarchy. Thus, at the center of the friction in the introduction of modern education and the attempt to prevent it lies a rivalry to dominate ideology, power, economic privilege, and social status. On the other hand, the rejection of the modern education and other aspects of the European system emanates

from Ethiopia's success in preventing colonialism and presupposes the continuation of the state-building project dependent on the assets of the domestic setting. There is a relatively small but influential body of literature that addresses this, including Gelaw (2017) considered this domestically-driven adoption of European systems as "native colonialism" that imposed an alien system of extraction, coercive and epistemic violence, despite the defiance against colonialism that culminated at the battle of Adwa.

Aligning with the narrative of the Ethiopian great tradition, scholars including Gelaw (2017), Kebede (1999), and Mennasemay (1997, 2010, 2014) argued that the quest for modern statehood in Ethiopia has resulted in the rejection of domestic systems that has resulted in the dislocation of the political course, the elite mentality, and ideology. This illustrates that, although Ethiopia was not colonized, in addition to early thinkers, the problematic relation of the domestic system with European modernity is the subject of contemporary debate. Aligning with this body of literature, some studies resemble the post-colonial critique of European-modelled education and call for the reconsideration of indigenous education in the quest for development and state-building. Although Ethiopia was not colonized, these studies, including Berento (2019, 2011), Gagura (2022), Jima (2023), Merawi (2017), and Rabso (2021), focused on how the context in which modern education was introduced and implemented undermined the role indigenous education could play in emancipation from ignorance and foreign dominance, and could provide an alternative perspective for socio-cultural harmony and national development.

Among other things, the above body of literature critically examines with the aim of defining what indigenous knowledge constitutes, what purposes it will serve, and the methodological and ontological similarities and differences from modern education. In rationalizing the purpose of higher education in Ethiopia, Gebre-Yohannes focused on harmonizing the interplay between the education systems. He acknowledged that education is always bound within time and space, and said Ethiopia is neither the most civilized nor lagging too far behind others. He argued that the quest for a modern Ethiopian state was a process in which two civilizations are interacting and proposed that the true purpose of education in this setting can be uncovered by devising a path through which the traits from both domains can go hand-in-hand without destroying each other. In other words, he argued that the two education systems should not be molded to the level that they lose their inherent characters; rather, they must be united together, maintaining their essence and relevance (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). He also identified that there were two options in the tension between indigenous and Western civilizational tensions.

The first, according to him, was abandoning the traits of self-identity and heritages from the previous generation, which he argued was impossible, as one can not erase his/her identity. The second, which constitutes the central thesis of his work, was to reconcile the two civilizations by bringing the most vital and significant dominions, thereby ensuring self-preservation while benefiting from the fruits of Western civilization (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). Although Baykedagn briefly pointed out that the Axumite civilization represented the peak of Ethiopian civilization, he did not use it in the articulation of his modernization reforms. But Gebre-Yohannes used the Axumite civilization to comparatively articulate the European education system. He argued that the spirit of the Axumite civilization was religious (ethnocentric), contrary to the human-centered (anthropocentric) European civilization, and identified poetry, melody, painting and architecture as defining features of this Ethiopian civilization (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). Like Baykedagn, he believed that knowledge is a common human spirit law produced by a clean, concise, and although this was discovered by Europeans. but Asians and Africans can learn and make their own.

In synthesizing the right educational path, according to Gebre-Yohannes, Ethiopians should first know and internalize their education system, then evaluate the European version, and glorify through uniting them- *betahwahdo kebere*. Gebre-Yohannes (1963, p. 79) believed that the primary him and his contemporary intellectuals was to uncover how this could be achieved:

I think the challenge that every Ethiopian intellectual faces is this: figuring out the reconciliation between the indigenous and European civilizations. Reconciling the two civilizations using our spirit as a bridge, bonding them with the heat of our efforts. This is our main mission.

Baykedgan took a different route, which, despite the arguments from several authors that he wanted to preserve domestic traits in achieving the modern state, a close reading of his works shows his indifference towards indigenous systems, as he strictly aligns with the linear interpretation of development provided by the Enlightenment understanding of education. Baykedagn encouraged religious teaching to the level of offering the Gospel as one subject at schools while ignoring the indigenous educational system, and other systems of knowledge production that he derogatorily rejects. In his comprehensive transformations that Baykedagn wanted the Ethiopian state to implement, he expressed his lack of interest in this domain and he was in support of their elimination if they were obstacles to modernization. As it will be discussed in the next sections, Baykedagn seems direct in expressing the non-suitability of the

indigenous system and related traditions for building a modern state that can encounter the might of European modernity.

Gebre-Yohannes (1963) identified four major elements of education that can be derived from any civilization are moral education, natural sciences, technical knowledge, and fine art. Unlike Baykedagn, who focused on natural sciences and technical knowledge, Gebre-Yohannes emphasized the importance of virtue and fine art, both in personal as well as societal development. In this regard, he argued that the Ethiopian civilization takes the upper hand over Western civilization. Particularly, he gives exceptional recognition for *qine* as a pinnacle of achievement in the art that no artistic dimension of other civilizations matches it. As Mennsasemay (2014) pointed out, *qine* is an oral poetry that forms one of the major elements of the Church education. *Qine* represents a sophisticated language, philosophy, and theological knowledge considered a sign of excellence in the church elite. On the other hand, although Baykedagn repeatedly mentions that the European mind can be mastered and canalized towards development, his reforms were radical towards domestic indigenous, cultural and customary practices, as he accused such systems of cultivating vices of aggression, obsession with firearms, laziness, and superstitious thinking (Baykedagn, 1913).

Directing Education in the Quest for Modern Statehood

The rationale behind the works of Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes is contributing for contributing to pointing out directions for the respective monarchs and the ruling class in the attempt to build a modern state. Thus, both Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes believed in the importance of adopting the European system of education for building a modern state. Gebre-Yohannes, writing in *The Purpose of Higher Education*, is exclusively aimed at addressing the question of how to channel education in this process. On the other hand, although Baykedagn's works incorporated reforms in a wide range of issues, including agriculture, trade, taxation, governance, institutional building, and secularism, he forwarded education as a fundamental driving force for creating enabling conditions for all these changes. Thus, both situated education at the center of all the changes and transformations the state had to pass through to ensure its sovereignty and survival. Baykedagn provides the reforms in the education sector and argued that the changes he sought to see can not be achieved if society continues to be people without a thinking mind, and people who are not educated, people who do not have knowledge.

These reforms he articulated have been interpreted from multiple social science perspectives. Baykedagn repeatedly put forward the attainment of knowledge, expansion of education, and having a thinking mind like Europeans, as primary tools for the modernized Ethiopian state he wanted to see. Thus, for Baykedagn, education was the foundation of the state's ideological apparatus, the primary instrument to deal with barrios and tailoring human and material capital for development. Education is not only emancipatory, as Baykedagn enlightened people provide their consent to modernization reforms and social and political order through institutionalized and stable governance. He sees the cultivation of knowledge and skills as key to transforming the Baykedagn identified three things as a springboard for building a modern state: A mind that learns fast learning mind, courageous warriorhood, and rich natural resources Menelik II and Ethiopia II, 16 (1913, P. 9) presented education as the source of both ideational and material power, stating:

People with no thinking mind do not have an institutional structure. People without an institutional structure do not have sustainable power. The source of power is not the size of an army. More than a country with a large territory and population that has no structural institutions, a small town ruled by a systematized structure can accomplish great achievements.

Gebre-Yohannes seems satisfied with the domestic development...the army that warlords command the millions of birrs, the then only bank of Abyssinia, the beverages of European in Addis ...what is left is expanding this (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). To reach its destiny, the Ethiopian people march forward, looking at the great future that is superior to the current state, guided by vision. There are three means to reach this. The first is education, the second is education. The third is education, too (Gebre-Yohannes, 1963). As it is mentioned in the Introduction section, Gebre-Yohannes was extremely satisfied with the role of the government in expanding modern education in Ethiopia, and he believed that education was already playing a key role in the state-building endeavour. He added that his time was a period of education *par excellence*, and he believed Ethiopia was on the right track towards achieving national prosperity through education. On the power of education in national development, Gebre-Yohannes (1963, p. 22) stated that

The ambition and curiosity embedded in the mind are the force that determines history, more powerful than the material forces that influence history. Thus, the spirit in the imagination and the interest to know and learn new things connect

the journey between the quest to satisfy immediate interests and the goal to reach a perfect and beautiful ultimate end, which is a dream that always inspires and motivates.

Despite the lack of published studies that examine Gebre-Yohannes's name is familiar both to the mainstream and emerging media. Insightful articulations of his thoughts are available on blogs, disseminations from seminars, the launching event of his book's 3rd edition, presentations, and speeches. In a very insightful analysis that comparatively examines the thoughts of early intellectuals towards the role of education in state-building, Merawi (2023) identified three groups of intellectuals who encouraged the adoption of the European system: those who supported a combination of the domestic and the European system, and those who argued for a state-building that relies on Ethiopian antiquity. Merawi argued that Baykedagn was in the first camp as he considered the European education system as a solution for the domestic lag he perceived. In the second group, Gebre-Yohanes is added owing to his attempt to combine and instrumentalize education in state building.

Another comparative analysis, Tadesse (2024)'s comparative analysis of the nexus of the thoughts of Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes with Western modernization, argues that the modernization path forwarded by both was fundamentally founded on adopting Western systems. He pointed out that Baykedgan disregards the domestic elements and insistently called for the adoption of the European system, and added that the divine concept of *tewahdo* by Gebre-Yohannes as the solution for the instrumentalization of education in Ethiopian state building was impractical. Yonas underlined the need to differentiate what these intellectuals mean when they refer to the West and the contemporary understanding of the West that constitutes Europe and the political and financial international organizations, they use to channel their global dominance.

Most of the studies agree that Baykedagn pioneered the conceptualization of the predicaments of the quest for development by poor countries in the face of the influence and economic encroachment of wealthy and powerful states and the global system they dominated. This question of development that the post-colonial states in non-Western regions became entangled with in the post-WWII era. Baykedagn provided comprehensive economic thoughts in the reforms he implemented in different sectors, including taxation, land tenure, financial governance, foreign trade, industrialization, and import-substitution (Bonger, 2014; Geda, 2002, 2003; Geda & Abebe, 2011; Rekiso, 2019). Bykedagn placed education at the base of

all these reforms as an enabling factor that creates a conducive environment for the comprehensive transformations that are aimed at building a modern state. However, as it is stated in the previous sub-section, the source of his reforming ideas is debated, although a close reading of his works clearly shows his inclination towards the European system.

Despite his articulation of the role of education in state-building in a fashion that combined the Ethiopian and European systems, Gebre-Yohannes is also subjected to this debate. Unlike Baykedagn, Gebre-Yohannes was satisfied with the state of education, the government's role in expanding education, and the overall socio-economic conditions changes he observed. His primary aim was shaping the conception and expansion of higher education with his obvious objective of maintaining the relevance of the traditional education while ensuring the exploitation of the benefits of European education in national development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how education became one of the most critical elements of state-building in 20th-century Ethiopia after the assertion of independence against the Italian colonial ambition. The quest for urgent transformation of domestic weaknesses and building a modern state was accompanied by intellectual enterprises that articulated the path of modernization. In this process, education was one of the major dimensions of state-building that received the attention of Ethiopian intellectuals across generations who sought to point out the reforms that the education system should pass through and the role it should play in the broader state-building endeavor. Due to its influence on national identity, ideology, legitimacy, and the overall development and survival of states, determining the education landscape in this context had huge ramifications for the interests of major socio-economic and political actors: the church, the monarchy, and the newly emerging class of intellectuals. This study has demonstrated that although education was a vital aspect of state-building anywhere in the world, it had more consequential implications for non-colonized societies that were pursuing domestically driven state-building against the backdrop of the sweeping ideological and material power of the European system.

For non-colonized states like Ethiopia, the question of designing and implementing the right education strategy was even more crucial, given its pivotal role in the quest for modern statehood pursued in the face of colonial threats, as well as the challenge of crafting the right balance between indigenous and European education systems. In this regard, education was one of the more contested areas of state-building due to its direct implications for the Ethiopian

identity, role in the efforts of addressing domestic socio-economic challenges and achieving development, and as a lens that determines the perspective towards the foreign sphere. Thus, like what happened in other non-colonized states, early Ethiopian intellectuals assumed the responsibility of articulating the place of education in the reforms pursued to build a modern state. This study comparatively analyzed the perspectives of Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes towards the instrumentalization of education in the quest for modern statehood. Although the two intellectuals lived in different domestic contexts, different states of modern education, and varying international systems, both were concerned with pinpointing the key role the education sector should play.

This proves the centrality of education across all times and regimes, captivating the attention of the ruling class and intellectuals, and with huge implications for the state in general. Both Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes were influenced by their European education background, the domestic challenges they perceived, their understanding of the international system and their convictions that determined the purpose of their writing. The findings of the study showed that both Baykedagn and Gebre-Yohannes understood education in light of the enlightenment-based notion of rationality and science. However, while Baykedagn argued that this system belongs to Europeans, Gebre-Yohannes claimed it as the trait of humanity in general, although he acknowledges that the contribution of societies in contributing to the revelation of the spirit of knowledge varies. Both agree that non-European societies can adapt this European system and instrumentalize it to achieve liberty and development. On the other hand, the study indicated that the two intellectuals have relatively major differences in their approach towards the relationship between the indigenous and modern education systems.

Baykedagn's reforms were more radical and secular that sought comprehensive transformations, including socio-cultural, customary and religious domains, which he accused of cultivating vices that hinder rational and scientific thought, institutionalized and stable governance, and development in general. On the other hand, Gebre-Yohannes assumed a bold responsibility of figuring out an education path that coalesces the indigenous and the modern education systems without compromising their particular essences. On the role of education to state-building, although Baykedagn articulated education as part of comprehensive reforms, he proposed and Gebre-Yohannes exclusively focused on defining the purpose of higher education; both agree on the vitality of education in state-building and encouraged the expansion of European-modelled education. Education is one of the major research agendas that attracted lots of scholars who investigated the evolution of modern

education, the role of education in national development, the interplay between indigenous and modern education, and change and continuity in education policies across regimes.

Moreover, there is a recently growing body of literature that focuses on intellectual history with particular attention on political and modernization thoughts. However, studies that focus on the articulation of state-building and modernization by the early Ethiopian thinkers are rare. This study has tried to contribute to filling this gap in the available literature, not only by focusing on the role of education in state-building, moreover, it comparatively investigating the thoughts of two prominent intellectuals, mainly relying on their works written in Amharic. Further author-based and comparative studies that use works written in the local language will help to understand the root of contemporary challenges in education, national development and state-building in general. Moreover, such studies will help uncover the intellectual tradition of engaging with critical national agendas as part of the debate among contemporary thinkers and as a recommendation for the ruling class. Thus, the study recommends the expansion of similar studies that focus not only on early intellectuals but also on contemporary works that deal with education and state-building challenges.

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