Theorizing celebrity cultures: Thickenings of media cultures and the role of cultural (working) memory

Preamble

In a Country like Ethiopia where people’s democracy has never been established historically, the more common pattern is one of under institutionalization in which political elites-groups are weak and often fragmented entities-relying on a single charismatic individual for leadership and guidance. These so called political elites, including the current dictator, are weak in the sense of not being able to penetrate society. Peoples political parties are vital to political society and how the party system is constituted and institutionalized matters. Parties are very important in mediating the relationship between citizen and government and tend to be indispensable to the task of forming government as well as constituting an effective opposition.

There is a difference in choosing electoral system between two important considerations/principles: fairness and accountability.

Fairness: Proportional representation satisfies these principles more effectively than the other, because it establishes a close association between percentage of votes and percentage of seats in the legislature.

Accountability: Plurality systems foster accountability in the sense that the single-seat formula encourages closer links between the electorate and their representative.

Another distinction that is often made between the two systems is that proportional representation tends to be inclusive, e.g. it provides more scope for minority representation, while the plurality system tends to create a clear majority on which government can depend in order to carry out its policies.

To bring about the aforesaid epochal shift in the ethnic hate mongers social relations that has been imposed on our humanity will require us to reject and dismantle the habituated structure of human social relations that we are all involved in reproducing and sustaining” through our daily grind of uncritical/reproductive praxis. This, in turn, will require the practice of coherence, that is, the formation of a coherent identity based on developing ideas, values and beliefs that are fundamentally “logical and ethically consistent” and which can help us work through the contradictions of “our multi-layered identities” in order to make sense of the diversity and flux of the contemporary life world.

Institutions are socially constructed set of arrangements routinely exercised by and accepted building blocks of institutional democracy. Democratic institutions are in essence of a set of arrangements for organizing political competition, legitimating rulers and implementing rule. In the modern world they generally involve some form of popular participation, typically through free elections to determine the composition of the legislature and the government, i.e., representative rather than direct democracy. A further essential component is constitutionalism and the rule of laws, which both establish the basic rules of law and ensure that the political and civil rights and freedoms of individual citizens are protected, at least in liberal democracies. Schumpeter (1965) stated: Democracy
is not “and end to itself but a mere arrangement for arriving a political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people’s vote.

The goal of Democratic institution is:

- To enable the participation either directly or through elections
- To avoid tyranny both by autocratic rulers and (in some democratic system) by the majority
- To assure open and fair competition for power on the basis of the popular vote, and thus the accountability of the governments and circulation of elites
- To provide a forum for rational discussion/debate of political problems and the optimum settlement of different and potentially conflicting social interests.

Democratic politics require not only political contestation, but also the contestation be tempered by certain basic moral and political principles, including popular control over government and genuine political elites; and political equality among all citizens.

Those inclusive forms of politics which aim to hold democratic institutions to their democratic promise are characterized by:

- increasing the scope of citizen participation, so that the exercise of power is based so far as possible upon permanent dialogue between government and their citizens.
- ensuring that open and effective challenges can be made to governments and their policies through free and fair elections, the party system and other forms political contestation,
- maximizing the accountability and transparency of the holders of political power and bureaucratic office, at all levels of government,
- guarantying equal political and civil rights for all citizens as well as the basic social and economic entitlements that enable them to fully exercise these rights,
- providing accessible procedures through which these rights and entitlements can be protected, not just through the courts, but also in day-to-day relationships with agents of the state,
- providing mechanism to assure such private or corporate interests can be held accountable by governments and citizens, above all where they impinge upon the public domain and citizens' right,
- guarantying effective citizens against infringements of rights by private/corporate interests as well as by the state.

Where the current Ethiopian people's struggle is heading? What is the ultimate goal of people's struggle? And to what purpose and end? Celebrity politics or people's political revolutionary party?

In American politics, the assumption is that the political use of popular culture is a cynical expression of a desperate populism, one in which presentation and appearance substitute for policy and principle. What is being signified is a crisis of representation, not a realization of it.

Generally in Western society, the celebrity politician is taken seriously in respect of their political views. The measure of this might be found in:
media focus on their politics (as opposed to their art);
political attention (e.g. a willingness by politicians to meet to discuss the particular concerns);
audience support, measured by a willingness to contribute money to the cause or other gestures beyond those typically required of a fan.

The gist/crux of the problem is that celebrity politics undermines any claim to representativeness. This is either because the elected politician impoverishes the relationship between representative and represented by marginalizing issues of political substance in favor of irrelevant gestures and superficial appearances (Military regime leader, the Woyane triplet leaders). Or it is because the celebrity boasts irrelevant qualities and superficial knowledge that do not justify their claim to represent (typical characteristic of Abiy Ahmed). Ethiopians Citizens are now against Celebrity Pundits, they are shouting the slogan of: 'We the undersigned Ethiopians stand against charlatan doctors of politicians abusing their status to speak for us. We do not believe that they have a clear understanding of how we live, what we fear, and what we support' ( 'Our politics, religion, news, values, education). The embracing time has come to dominate politics and political changes, so that we may have reached a point where cosmetics have replaced ideology as the field of expertise over which a politician must have competent control. It appears that politics is diminished: one cannot do political philosophy on television. It is not, therefore, arguments that decide whether voters will support one candidate rather than another, but ‘style’; that is, ‘how Mr. Abiy looks, fixes his gaze, smiles, and delivers one-liner/witty remark.

The hard fact is that the increasing reliance on television as a medium of communication tends to shift the criteria by which politicians are judged and by which they operate. Moreover, television’s intimacy—its use of close-ups and one-to-one conversations—focuses attention on politicians human qualities. The result is that populist empathy rather than elite leadership becomes valued. In such a world, either politicians learn the skills of the medium or those already skilled in it (the celebrity) come to dominate it. This anxiety is still present.

One can conclude from observation, if democracy is nothing but legitimating by the most successful form of communication, then the communication artist is the best democrat, with no effort whatsoever. And if the authentic play of body politics is the most efficacious form of entertaining communication, then ‘briefcase politics’ with its institutionalized procedures and long-winded arguments might as well withdraw from commitment immediately.

For such critics, ‘telegenicity’ or well-suited to the medium of television—has become the measure of representativeness. The qualities of the celebrity politician are ill-suited to the duties of state craft which representatives owe their constituents. These inadequacies are compounded by ignorance. Political celebrities lack the knowledge of, or expertise in, public policy: ‘serious political issues become trivialized in the attempt to elevate celebrities to philosopher-celebrities.

The other feature of celebrity politicians is its aesthetic account of political representation: it borrows its meaning from aesthetics, from the way works of art stand in relation to some notion of reality. They literally re-present objects or ideas. Furthermore, the suggestion that reality can only exist in representational form is used to underpin the current prime minister’s claim that politics too can only exist in representational, static—mutated form. This is when he asserted that "he is the transition" within the framework of the regime he was brought up, and he added "no need of transitional people’s government. Just as art creates a version of reality, making present what is otherwise absent, one contends that political power comes into existence via the act of people’s democratic representation. It is a product of style and creativity of the democratically elected.
Narrating Abiy Ahmed

(I). A Lying Hero - Odyssey imported from ancient Greek

We know that the Greeks revered cultural figures, both gods and humans, who engaged in lying and were sometimes even admired specifically for that. We can use examples from Greek writing to illustrate cultural attitudes. The most prominent, (source from Homer, specifically the Odyssey), example of lying by a god in the Odyssey is the remarkably glib tongued Athena. As a goddess, she is able to do more than merely lie, since she can also appear in disguise and pretend to be someone else. She is so fond of disguises and false stories, however, that she uses them even at times when they are not really necessary, when she might have appeared as herself. This may be the case for her appearance in a dream by the princess Nausikaa of Phaiakia, when Athena poses as her friend, or when Odysseus first arrives on the island of Phaiakia, and Athena greets him in the form of a very knowledgeable little girl, “a small girl child, hugging a water jug.” Another instance of Athena playing with disguise happens when Odysseus first lands back on his home island of Ithaca, when “Athena came to him from the nearby air, / putting a young man’s figure on—a shepherd.” Odysseus is impressed by Athena’s easy ability to mislead and lie about who she is, and he calls her “mistress of disguises.” In addition to the examples provided by Athena, there is evidence in the Odyssey that other gods as well were capable of lying. Even when Odysseus finally lands on his home island of Ithaca, he meets Athena (who of course is also in disguise) and he gives her a false story about who he is. As a goddess, of course, she knows the truth and says to him, “You! You chameleon! / Bottomless bag of tricks!

Odysseus is one of the greatest heroes of Greek literature, and his propensity for conniving, for trickery, for lying is so well known that throughout the poem he is referred to by a variety of epithets to capture this quality: “strategist,” “the great tactician,” “formidable for guile in peace and war,” “the man of ranging mind,” “master of improvisation,” “that sly and guileful man,” “great master of invention,” “master improviser,” “teller of many stories,” The master liar, in other words, and he was much admired in part specifically for that ability.

The Woyane regime, headed by Abiy Ahmed (the “idolized hypocrite”), which is structured in Ethnic federalism, is reckless, inhuman, unheard and untold-kind of political system hitherto existing. It is invaluable for uniting the nation, always narrow, hypocritical, spurious and false; it always remains democracy for the criminals and a swindle for the majority. Moreover, the existence of the waverers-the oscillatory opportunists—is historically inevitable, and unfortunately these elements, who don’t know themselves on whose side they will fight tomorrow, will exist for quite some time. We, Ethiopians, have seen dozens of times how the leaders and opportunists betray the interests of motherland, basic freedom, language and nation, when it is confronted by the revolutionary overwhelming majorities- for People’s democratic transitional government. Ethiopians know that what the Martyrs has accomplished-its struggle and the history of its victory-will be of colossal, epoch-making significance for all the peoples of the their country. A revolutionary party is a party equipped with a revolutionary theory, united within itself by a combination of democracy and discipline, and bound by close ties to the masses, not with an empty vessel narrated by Odyssey’s lies and fiasco. As Ethiopian political goddess, of course, we know the truth and say to him, “You! You chameleon! / Bottomless bag of tricks!

(II). Why does image management matter to Abiy Ahmed (dramaturgy of inopportune intrusion)?

Political propaganda and image management have always been present in politics. George Washington was not defiantly standing in the boat that was crossing the Delaware; Abraham Lincoln’s portrait was doctored to elongate his neck; and a polio-stricken Franklin D. Roosevelt avoided being photographed in a wheelchair. So it should come as no surprise that today’s political leaders seek to control how they are publicly viewed, whether this is Barack
Obama choosing to smoke cigarettes in private, Vladimir Putin fishing while bare-chested or Stephen Harper cuddling kittens, or little Abiy Ahmed Pentecostal -Ethiopian idle-hiding his social insurance number provided by OLF.

At a minimum, politicians must guard against ‘gotcha’ politics where a single blunder can damage their career. Mr. Abiy and the always-egregious liar and notorious opportunist (Mesfin Woldamariam, sorry for his undeserved title of “professorial”: Despised talking animal) undermined the Martyr’s decisive and sanctified struggle for people’s democratic government. Is it lapsus calami or lapsus lingue? Or are they referring to this as unmeant gestures and faux pas that are observed during their inopportune intrusions in the trajectory of people’s revolution? This contributes to the so-called spiral of cynicism that describes citizen disengagement or losing appetite to their inedible political jargon.

However one must recognize that ascribed celebrity is no longer the social norm. It is a failed, futile, and obsolete strategy. History thought us that aristocracy and tyranny have been displaced by commoners -by social movement -who have achieved fame by virtue of their perceived talents in open struggle against these unwanted systems. This leaves ascribed celebrities, like Abiy and his masters, vulnerable to being attacked and ridiculed as elitist or as freedom fighter. A reality that should be understood is in a world of media fragmentation and convergence, fame has become fiasco, ephemeral, and diluted, settled only by the fickle tastes of public opinion.

Charisma is a natural communications talent that cannot be manufactured by image handlers (as it is fabricated by Abiy supporters and his cronies) in a free media system. It is an attribute of the great revolutionary theory of heroes which posits that revolutionary people who exhibit transformative praxis have enchanting personalities. Contrary to this is the danger of Charisma should also be understood explicitly: Charisma prompts followers to form an emotional connection with these super humans and their idealized vision. This captivating magnetism is difficult to pinpoint because it is an ephemeral, ambiguous and/or ethereal concept. The Martyr’s political dedication is carried on by its true revolutionaries-struggling alongside the overwhelming majority. This reality of sacrifice has historical place as measured competence, dynamism, empathy, episodic judgments, integrity, party references, personal style, political positions, political skills, responsibility and social background attributes.

Ethiopians who have been cynical of politics following the disappointing outcomes of the 2017, are once again returning to politics mainly driven by the immensely relegating economic situation, unemployment, and lack of freedom, inundated massacre, ethnic cleansing.

Abiy’s regime is a new apical bud of the Woyane regime characterized by an authoritarian and single party system with following components:

- Little or no freedom of speech, hypocrite leader, wants to be revered or idolized
- No freedom of assembly-unable to hold meetings without the approval of the government
- No freedom of movement-individuals need documents/internal passports to move around inside the country
- No independent judicial system· All sources of information are censored-i.e. media· Any opposition to the regime is harshly punished
- Like all other tyrants and dictators, he exercise strict control over the freedom of the people and will use a variety of methods to hold onto power
- Ethnic cleavage is the theme of its constitution, which leads ethno-fascism
Our Martyrs were not only heroic fighters, but revolutionary thinkers, with a political and moral project and a system of ideas and values for which they fought and gave their life. The philosophy which gave them political and ideological choices their coherence, color, and taste was a deep revolutionary humanism. For the Martyrs, the true humanist, the true revolutionary was one who felt that the great problems of all humanity were his/her personal problems, one who was capable of feeling anguish whenever someone was killed just because of ethnic background, no matter where it was in Ethiopia. Following these exemplary Martyr’s footsteps, Humanism is our way of life. Ethiopia is filled with monuments and memorials to individual historical figures -the Martyrs, the now-revolutionaries, etc., which embody the past and serve the current people’s democratic government and ideological direction of one democratic country.

After suffering horrendous persecutions, witnessing the deaths of friends and colleagues, and experiencing the palpable reduction of forms of sociability during the past wave of authoritarians rule (military junta) that wedged the infamous red-terror, the Ethiopian people, lead by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), became convinced of the desirability of the continuation of the struggle for people's democracy it started decades ago. The EPRP’s guiding principle is succinct and vivid: The transition is the interval between one political regime and another. Transitions are delimited, on the one side, by the launching of the process of dissolution of an authoritarian regime and, on the other, by the installation of some form of democratic state [refer to Democracia Volume 43 # 4]. The hard fact to focus at is the difference between the current moment and the period of demise of authoritarianism by speaking of two transitions: a transition to democracy implies a change of regimes by establishing democratic institutions, and then a transition to a consolidated democracy.

Martyrs shouting slogan for establishment of peoples government: it is monumental and fundamental framework of democracy for the people. It is a reflection of the concrete history of EPRP. This slogan is a deep seated -engraved monumentally in the neurons of young people of not only Ethiopians, but also the entire human universe! It is inevitable phenomena erupted in the politically blossomed land: our Ethiopia!

It is innovative, inspiring, motivational, and we must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from them. With this spirit everyone can be very useful to the inevitable establishment of transitional people's government. Our point of departure is to serve the people whole-heartedly and never for a moment divorce ourselves from the masses, to proceed in all cases from the interests of the people and not from one's self-interest or from the interests of a small group, and to identify our responsibility to the people with our responsibility to the leading organs of the EPRP. The Martyrs thought us that wherever there is struggle there is sacrifice, and death is a common occurrence. But we have the interests of the people and the
sufferings of the great majority at heart, and when we die for the people it is a worthy death. Nevertheless, we should do our best to avoid unnecessary sacrifices.

"Blind belief in authority is the greatest enemy of truth." [A. Einstein]

In a certain sense it is true that the mass of the people in any country is the ultimate depository of political power. The dialectical truth is that democracy is not a metaphysical static political form, it is revolutionary transformative praxis. Some key elements that constitute democracy as a dynamic system are: the institutions of democracy (parliament, elections, constitutions, rule of law, etc.), citizenship (the internalized sense of individual dignity, rights, and freedom that accompanies formal membership in the political community), and the public sphere (or open “space” for public debate and deliberation). On the basis of these key constituents, rule by the people can be exercised through a process of democratic framework.

Finally,

Solidarity is about empathy, and the social meaning of empathy is that each of us sustains the liberty and the equality of the other!

Equality without liberty is an oxymoron!
Transitional democratic people's government is an inevitable reality!

Death to Woyane's fascist leader, freedom to overwhelming majority!