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I, Meskerem L. Debele, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Curriculum & Instruction.

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Utopianism and Anti-Utopianism in the Ways Older Ethiopian Children Construct their National Identity and Implications for Social Studies Education

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Utopianism and Anti-Utopianism in the Ways Older Ethiopian Children Construct their National Identity and Implications for Social Studies Education

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by

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Abstract

Using critical exploration method (Duckworth, 2006) and constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2003), this in-depth qualitative research explores older Ethiopian elementary school children’s conceptualization of their national identity. Twelve children between the ages eight and fourteen were recruited from one private and one public elementary school in Ethiopia. They were interviewed on their knowledge, beliefs, and attitude towards their country and their national in-group.

Their responses were analyzed in light of the age-old tension between utopianism and anti-utopianism—a tension that translates to the Tewahedo (Oneness, Unity) versus Dualism debate that became more visible in the 5th century separation of Roman Catholic and Oriental Christologies. The analysis showed that six children gravitated towards the anti-utopian (dualistic) cognitive orientation where as the other six showed a more utopian outlook of their society and their national identity. The two groups had deep differences in their perspective on twelve major areas. These were: on the value of money, on how they see being “human” and in relation to being “Ethiopian,” on the purpose of work and the public sector, on the what and why of technology, on what counts as valuable knowledge, on the cause and implications of inequality, on what counts as excellence, success, and victory, on nature/environment, on the balance between masculine and feminine principles in the social and natural world, on women and motherhood, on a sense of national continuity and the meaning of change, and on the nature and function of government. The children in the anti-utopian group saw these areas mainly from masculine, militaristic, and dualistic perspective on themselves, their society, their environment, and societal institutions.
The findings from the children’s interview were further triangulated by analysis of grades three to five environmental science and social studies textbook contents and insights drawn from social studies teachers’ interview. The textbook contents were found to have ironic, self-contradicting, and dehumanizing messages that likely sustain the anti-utopian distortions in the world outlook of the children in the anti-utopian group. The teachers also expressed doubt in their capacity or the curriculums’ instrumentality to equip children against the threats of the kind of future (utopia) they hoped for the children (the country).

The bigger picture gained from the data analysis revealed that the political, social, economic, cultural, religious, and educational direction the 21st Ethiopia is taking is heavily influenced by the dualistic impulse of the Greco-Roman pagan views (specifically, Gnosticism and Mithraism) in the twelve areas listed above. The study suggested twelve corresponding themes for alternative social studies curriculum organization that allows children to learn these topics from a Utopian/ Ethiopian/Christian perspective.
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Chapter One

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Since its inception in the early 20th century, modern education in Ethiopia has been viewed as the major tool by which national integration could be achieved through economic development and structural modernization (Wagaw, 1979; Zewde, 2002). Various development models which call for different levels of social change have informed the educational philosophies/approaches of the imperial (1930-1974), the socialist (1974-1991), and the current democratic regime (1991 to present). What has always been very visible about all those educational approaches was their lack of harmony with the practical condition of the country and among each other (Adisu, 2005; Mennasemay, 2010; Milkias, 2006; MoE, 2002; Negash, 1996; Wagaw, 1979; UNCT, 2011). Consequently, like in several other developing countries, the quality and coverage of modern education in Ethiopia has not been able to produce a satisfactory mass of skilled workers with a well-anchored social outlook to be able to fully participate in the social, economic, and political life of the country. Not surprisingly, relevance and quality of education has been the most recurring theme in the critical assessment of all educational models implemented (UNCT\(^1\), 2011; UNESCO, 2011, p. 9).

Recent criticism about the relevance and quality of education in Ethiopia can be understood as two types. The first are those who focus on the pragmatic failures of the education system due to paradoxical, non-feasible, unrealistic, incompatible, and/or risky policies and

\(^1\) United Nations Country Team
reforms. These, for example, include criticisms on the controversial policy of mother-tongue as languages of instruction (Alemu & Tekleselassie, 2006; Dea, 2010; Woldemariam, 2007), the top-down initiatives in teacher education programs which are contrary to participatory decision making and learner-centered pedagogy (Bitew, 2008; Kassahun, 2006; Mekonnen, 2008; Tesemma, 2006, 2007, 2008), and the policies and practices that call for compulsory universal school attendance without consideration to the centrality of child labor which the majority of poor households rely on for income (Abebe, 2008; Admassie, 2003; Woldehanna, Jones, & Tefera, 2008). These critics assess practices based on the assumption that a rather more planned and sound implementation of the above practices is possible and can create a positive impact.

The second group of critics, however, questions the very purpose and philosophy of formal education in Ethiopia. They call for a nation-wide dialogue in order to come up with a clearly articulated and collective purpose with which school curricula and higher level education can be aligned to guide a coherent social, economic, and political course of action. For example, Negash (1996) questioned the justifiability of considering the current Ethiopian formal education system as a strong variable for the country’s overall development in the first place. He recommended limiting formal education, which he believed has “an inbuilt bias against the world view of the peasant,” to urban areas where it can sustain itself (1996, p. 29). In its place, he recommended that more investment be made on non-formal education which “rely on and make use of the elaborate knowledge systems and traditions of education which prevail in the rural communities” (Negash, 1996, p. 29). He mentioned that questions such as “could there be an Ethiopian way to social, political, and economic development?” should be raised and discussed in order to address philosophical questions behind policies (Negash, 1996, p. 25). In his most
recent critique of the quality of education, Negash (2006, 2010) suggested starting from steps, such as substituting English with Amharic and Oromiffa as a language of instruction at all levels.

Similarly, Tedla (1995) recommended an African style of education based on the informal culture of knowledge production and transmission that existed before the advent of modern education. She recommended an education system which aims at creating cultural excellence, academic excellence, spiritual development, community-building skills, and physical fitness/health based on African thought, history, and aesthetics. Other critics like Milkias (2010) also recommended a cultural and value-based education to resist the uprooting effects of urbanization and the resultant social fragmentation. Kebede (1999), more specifically, suggested starting from a more inclusive and updated re-definition of the myths and legends enshrined in the historical document of Kiïbrä Nädäst that defined the Ethiopian national identity for the past three millennia in order to answer the currently sensitive question of national and ethnic identity in general and educational philosophy in particular. Much in line with that notion, Mennasemay (2010) called for a broader and well-articulated definition of the imagined utopia that can be drawn out of the traditional education system in order to give modern education a critical framework by which it can be guided and evaluated. Using the surplus-history definition of Bloch (1986), he contended that it is from the repressed and “aborted” views and hopes of the mass that education can get its emancipator visions (Mennasemay, 2010, p. 76).

Based on the concept of surplus-history, Mennasemay (2010) described three “we”s in the current discourse: the hegemonic “we,” the ethnic “we” and the “we” of the surplus-history (p. 77). He then posited a question on which utopian vision of “we” should inform the education of the youth who are “the architects of the future” (p. 77). Mennasemay responded to his question by choosing the surplus-history which “tacitly asserts that there is a qualitatively
different alternative to the established order” (2010, p. 77). He stated that a critical exploration and extraction of the surplus-history out of Ethiopian traditional religious education is possible.

What is stated by Mennasemay—the need to have an educational theory that stems out of an Ethiopian utopia—can be understood as the central theme that informed the quests and suggestions of the above researchers. Unless there is a theory that has stable and broader ideals which are genuinely rooted in the Ethiopian worldview, it cannot be possible to critically assess the role and impact of education or to improvise it. Evaluating the success of curriculum, teaching, and learning at one grade/level simply based on whether or not it enables learners to pass to the next grade/level or to graduate, as it is often done currently, is not simply ineffective, but also dangerously illusive. This study is based on the conviction that it should instead be evaluated based on how much it inculcates the core principles and ideals of the desired society in children and youth so that they will have a critical interpretive framework through which they can understand events, trends, and changes in the local and global context.

In this study, I attempt to take this broad concern regarding education down to the level of how social studies education can be made more relevant to help children and youth have a stable world view and social outlook which enables them to envision an Ethiopian utopia. For that, the very definition of the age-old national and individual identity called “Ethiopian” and its complex interaction with current changes in the national and global context is used to guide the inquiry in this study. The study specifically seeks to find out how children perceive their society, why elementary social studies is currently not contributing towards an integrated understanding of their national identity and their individual selves in relation to it, whether teachers impact and understand this dynamics, and how elementary social studies curricula can be modified to communicate a utopian vision to children.
1.2. Problem Statement

Even though, as discussed above, growing number of critics are now calling for a critical examination of the philosophical background of formal education, it is difficult to translate recommended research and educational directions into a concrete practice. Most of the available works are opinion papers or philosophical discourses urging that more systematic research gets done on the ground. Those studies that are well-systematized and detailed are currently limited in their focus to factors that affect progress towards meeting international commitments such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), Education for All (EFA), or the implementation of the Child Right Convention (CRC).

Although these areas are very relevant to be studied, as discussed in the previous section, they need to be complemented by and put into the context of discussions on a clearly articulated collective purpose and national direction that is rooted in the core values that constitute Ethiopia. This becomes more important due to the fact that more nationally and regionally impactful discourses, conflicts, and political processes in the Horn of Africa often get their constructive or destructive impulses from issues related to ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and political relations which ultimately affect sense of identity and entitlement. How these discourses affect children and youth is not adequately studied and discussed in Ethiopia.

Consequently, current efforts to find and bring to light a collective purpose that stems from the “Ethiopian” national identity are uncoordinated and unfocused. These efforts, for example, include attempts to stir up discussion on the importance of religious and moral education, preventing the weakening of Amharic as a language of communication among children and youth in Ethiopia and abroad, reminding parents and teachers through artistic and musical works about the importance of familiarizing children and youth with the diverse cultures
and the history of the country, or attempting to use traditional social structures, historical texts, and cultural artifacts to assist formal educational efforts. However, such attempts, too, often become limited to responding to urgent problems as perceived, and, then, falling back into irrelevance instead of actually helping the youth to have a clear collective vision. This makes selection of educational contents from the history, culture, geography, or religion of Ethiopia random and, sometimes, purposeless.

This study is based on two assumptions regarding the importance of utopian perspective in education. The first is that this can only be possible, not by focusing on the means while the end is not in sight, but rather by focusing on the end, and creating goals that have outcomes based on a specific vision. That means, hoping for some utopia to spontaneously come out of educational research and practice is not considered as a viable option. It is rather assumed important to start from defining the desired utopia and then coming back to aligning the means with it. The second assumption is that the utopia conveyed in education should be the imagined “Ethiopia” itself that has been in the hearts and minds of generations to be preserved, protected, and continued, as well as restored whenever things get off track (see section 1.3 for theoretical perspectives).

Based on these assumptions, this study seeks to draw some basic insights that can help address the problem of the long-existed failure to anchor modern education (in this particular study, elementary social studies) in an Ethiopian utopia. The study focuses on children in grades three to five in an urban context. It hopes to begin by finding out the underlying assumptions, paradoxes, inconsistencies, distortions, and fragmentations constellated around the imagined “Ethiopia” as envisioned by children, and possibly also by teachers. This is considered relevant based on the belief that the “emancipator potential” of the “utopia” can only be unleashed by
guiding social studies curriculum development in such a way that they address ideological, philosophical and world-view conflicts perceived by learners and practitioners. It is believed that these perceptions, which can be conscious or unconscious, have the biggest impact on children’s views of themselves in relation to the collective and their future.

1.3. **Theoretical Framework and Rationale for Qualitative Approach**

Two theoretical frameworks guided the methodology and the interpretation of findings in this study. The first is the overall philosophical background that describes the “Ethiopian” utopia. It is based on the only comprehensive work in this area by Wolde-Yesus (1997), which articulates the literal and the practical meaning of “Ethiopian” and “Ethiopianess.” It is used to make a general sense of the content of participants’ response. The second is the Societal-Social-Cognitive-Motivational Theory, which informed the structure and activities in the data gathering tools.

1.3.1. **“Tewahedo”—Oneness, Unity: The Ethiopian Utopia**

Among the critics of the present Ethiopian socio-political condition and its education system, perhaps none is as straight forward as Wolde-Yesus (1997, 2004) in defining the Ethiopian utopia. He does not believe there is a need of searching for a new definition of utopia; rather, he calls for an acceptance of the “Truth” which he said is currently repressed and seriously compromised (2004, p. 17). Wolde-Yesus (1997) denoted that the word “Ethiopia” is essentially related to the very notion of “Utopia.” He explained that historically ancient philosophers and authors used the word “Utopia” in their writings inspired by the just, spiritual, and egalitarian lifestyle practiced among the people of “Ethiopia” and derived by the belief that this kind of society has been and can be realized on earth. This utopia, Wolde-Yesus (1997) asserts, is embedded in the Seven Covenants out of which the worldview, the values, and the
principles guiding all aspects of the lives of an “Ethiopian” and “Ethiopians” stem from. These
covenants are: the Covenant of Adam and Eve, the Covenant of Noah, the Covenant of
Melchizedek (Ethiopis), the Covenant of Abraham, the Covenant of Moses, the Covenant of
David, and the Covenant of Mercy. Wolde-Yesus (1997) asserted that these Covenants define
“Ethiopia”/ “Utopia” and there is no other definition for “Ethiopian” or “Utopian.” He states:

The existence of Ethiopia and the life of the Ethiopian are both based on and intertwined
by these Covenants. Not only do the religious, the cultural and the social fabric of the
Ethiopian’s lives, but also their educational, economic, and political principles emanate
from these Covenants. (1997, p. 19)

In his in-depth elaboration of these Covenants and how they direct social practices,
Wolde-Yesus showed that the central ideal is the idea of Oneness (Tewahedo) and the Trinity
that accompanies it. Hence, the unity of mother, father, and children, the unity of the three races
(Shem, Ham, and Japhet), the unity of the body, mind, and spirit, the unity of the people, the
government and the clergy, and the unity of the Divine and the Human emanate as social
embodiments of utopia. The general implication is, then, any philosophy, or ideology that
measures any of these parts/aspects of a society by different standards and/or treats them as
moving towards different ends will, by default, lead a society away from utopia and towards
dystopia.

In its proper context then, Tewahedo, the Ethiopian utopia, is more than simply a
religious denomination. Rather, it is a comprehensive ideological construct, which gave rise to
“Ethiopia”—the geographical and cultural melting pot of races/ethnicities who accept its
precepts. As a philosophy, Tewahedo, can be located in relation to the genealogy of the Western
theoretical traditions of knowledge, knowing and teaching that is illustrated and elaborated by Davis (2004). Although he did not acknowledge the concept as such, Davis (2004) has left a space where “Tewahedo” can easily be located as indicated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1. An illustration of Utopia, Dystopia, and the Ethiopian concept of Tewahedo in relation to Davis’ (2004, p. 185) genealogy of Western thoughts of knowledge, knowing, and teaching

Whereas the Western conception of epistemology and teaching begins by acknowledging the branching away of the Metaphysical and the Physical from each other, the Ethiopian view of epistemology, teaching, or the universe does not, in principle, get into that split. Thus, the
Ethiopian Utopia (*Tewahedo*) does not acknowledge any form of ideological dualism or bifurcations, which continually form a thesis and an anti-thesis out of a parent thesis. Since it holds on to the belief that the ideal or mythical utopia is realistically and pragmatically possible (as “Truth” has become corporeal in the very Incarnation of Divinity— *Tewahedo*), it does not separate or polarize, be it in the form of Physical versus the Metaphysical or the ideal versus the pragmatic. The branching away of the Western ideology from Utopia became especially visible in the 5th century separation of the Ethiopian Christian doctrine of *Tewahedo* (sometimes equated with Miaphysitism) and the Roman Catholic Christianity (Dyophysitism).

The Western world view has bifurcated and branched multiple times at different points in history giving rise to the various theories of knowledge, knowing, and teaching. Modern education in Ethiopia—which is adapted from the West—is, however, not informed by any of the historical processes that gave rise to these bifurcations. Instead, concerns that mostly emerged in the 20th century were the reasons for the beginning of modern education in Ethiopia. The main concerns were the need to equip the country with modern technology to defend itself from foreign intrusion and to modernize the ways administrative structures functioned. Due to such trend of responding to contingencies, modern education has mainly been geared towards risk reduction while the social system (global and national), as will be discussed in Chapter Two, is increasingly becoming anarchic, competitive, and dystopian.

In light of this, it can be expected that all the complexities in participants’ responses in relation to their understanding of Ethiopia/Ethiopian can be understood as the tension between utopia and dystopia. The study seeks to find out how and in what forms this tension is present at a level perceptible to children and intends to suggest ways of translating them into themes that can be opened up for relevant discussion in elementary social studies curricula.
**1.3.2. The Societal-Social-Cognitive-Motivational Theory (SSCMT)**

In addition to the relationship between Ethiopian identity and Utopia, the interrelatedness of the concept of national identity in the history of utopian thoughts makes national identity an important aspect to deal with in the study of utopian vision in the country’s education system. Therefore, studies conducted on children’s national identity development are consulted for methodological ideas. Most of these studies, which often are carried out in European countries, are largely informed by two theoretical traditions: the Cognitive-Developmental Theory and the Social Identity and Self-Categorization Theories of social psychology.

Studies that employ the Cognitive-Developmental Theory (CDT) to understand children’s conception of nations and national identity (or other levels of social identity, such as ethnicity) mostly focus on tracing the age-related change in children’s cognitive capabilities (Aboud, 1988; Aboud & Amato, 2001; Jahoda, 1963a, 1963b; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Piaget & Weil, 1951; Piché, 1981; Weinstein, 1957). The studies primarily examine qualitative changes in children’s pattern of thinking through the course of middle childhood and early adolescence, and the resultant changes in the way the children construct an understanding of their social identity.

Unlike the CDT, the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the Self Categorization Theory (SCT) (Oakes et al., 1994; Turner et al., 1987) focus on the social aspect of the child’s development. The SIT postulates that an individual strives to have a positive self-concept and he/she wants to be part of the social group that contributes positively to his/her self-esteem. On the other hand, the SCT focuses on explaining how individuals act as a group. Some of its central themes are the presence of multiple concepts of the self due to membership in
different social groups and the functioning (or not) of these multiple parts of the self as an interrelated psychological system (Turner, et al., 1987).

Several ideas have been developed from these theories to understand intergroup and intragroup processes in national identity (Barrett, Wilson, & Lyons, 2003; Bennett, Sani, Lyons, & Barrett, 1998; Nesdale, 2004; Verkuyten, 2001). However, only some aspects of the theories were confirmed, and important nuances were left unexplained. For example, the SIT could not adequately explain how children hold consistent positive attitudes toward the national in-group despite low degree of identification with the national in-group (Bennett, et al., 1998); and, the SCT could not explain why the importance children ascribe to their national identity could not be affected by the presence/absence of a comparative out-group (Barrett, Wilson, & Lyons, 2003).

Limitations in the explanatory power of the CDT, the SIT and the SCT have led researchers to use integrated theoretical approaches to understand the impact of a particular social context on the development of children’s national identity. Some of these theoretical approaches are: the interactive approach, which views children as active agents in the construction of their national identity (Habashi, 2008; Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006), the integrated cognitive-affective approaches that use tools to elicit children’s image of social groups (Teichman, 2001), and the conceptual development approach which treats the development of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes towards a national and/or ethnic identity as a concept development process (BarTal, 1996). These integrated approaches are mostly qualitative unlike those guided by the SIT or the CDT theories. The approaches were better able to explain complexities and nuances of the process of social and national identity development in children who live in peculiar local and national contexts. For example, Habashi’s (2008) qualitative study of Palestinian children’s (aged 10 to 13 years-old) construction of their national
identity showed that children’s understanding of their in-group and relevant out-group (Israel/Jews) was informed by a range of global and locale discourses on Palestinians’ current economic, political, and social state. Similarly, Scourfield, et al.’s (2006) study of Welsh children’s understanding of their national identity showed that children creatively constructed Welshness amidst tensions between imagining Welshness as a distinct identity and promoting a Welsh identity that is inclusive of diverse religious, ethnic, political, and economic groups.

Given the rapid and multi-dimensional changes currently taking place in Ethiopia and elsewhere, one can expect that the development of children’s understanding of national identity is a complex interaction of a variety of factors. Family, neighbors, school, media, books, religious institutions, civic organizations, and a host of other bodies can influence a child’s personal, social and political outlook. Therefore, it is plausible to use a framework that is broad enough to stimulate participants to discuss as many of these factors as possible.

Perhaps the most convenient theoretical framework for this is the Societal-Social-Cognitive-Motivational Theory (SSCMT)—a framework proposed by Barrett (2007) (See Figure 2). Barrett emphasized that the development of the child’s national identity is not shaped by any single factor, but rather by a complex interaction of the societal, social, cognitive, and motivational contexts the child is located in. The main societal factors Barrett identified in his extensive review of research are the school and the mass media, whereas parents, teachers, peer-groups, and other people in the extra-familial circle constitute the social context. The cognitive and motivational aspects of the theory follow from the view that the child is an active co-constructor of knowledge who attends certain cues more attentively than others to construct meaning in his/her own way. This theory ties together all the contexts that enrich children’s understanding of their national in-group and how they place themselves in relation to them.
Figure 1.2. A diagrammatic summary of the societal-social-cognitive-motivational theory (SSCMT) of children’s national enculturation. (From Barrett, 2007, p. 289)
1.3.3. Using the theories to frame the present study

The various theoretical approaches briefly reviewed above are used to support this study at different stages. The SSCMT is used to inform the content of the data collection tools to engage children in spontaneous talks about as many of these factors as possible, whereas studies that are conducted following the SIT, the SCT, the conceptual development, and the integrated cognitive-affective approaches are used to inform the kinds of activities and questioning strategies in the data gathering process with child participants. The concept of Tewahedo—the process by which individuals come to personal, social, political, and metaphysical oneness, and the contrasting concept of dualism is used to make sense of the manifestation of utopian-dystopian tension in participants’ perception of the collective “we” and their relationship to it.

1.4. Research Questions

The questions this research study will attempt to answer can be summarized as follows:

i. What utopian (Ethiopian/Tewahedo) and anti-utopian (dualistic) perceptions exist in the children’s understanding of their national identity?

ii. How do social studies education, school, and/or other social and societal institutions play a role in Ethiopian children’s perception of their national identity?

iii. How do social studies teachers evaluate the role of social studies curricula in guiding children towards the Utopia/Ethiopia they imagine?

iv. What are the implications of the findings as to what themes should guide the organization of Ethiopian/Utopian elementary social studies curricula?
Chapter Two

2. Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to establish a broader context for discussion on current primary school social studies curriculum and their role in children’s national enculturation in Ethiopia. Currently, there is little research both in Ethiopia and in the West that explicitly links utopian visions and education in general or social studies education in particular. Therefore, broader discussion on utopia is made in this review with special emphasis on the national and global context that forced utopian thinking out of formal education in Ethiopia. Quality and relevance of education are often brought up in the review since they are directly or indirectly related to the presence/lack of utopian vision in education.

2.1. The Role of Utopian Thinking in Education

Utopian thinking, or utopianism, is generally defined in Western social science tradition as “a tendency to think of the world as a place to be made more perfect” (Bartkowski, 2008, p. 561). The term *Utopia* is the title of an influential novel written by Sir Thomas More (first published in 1516). More wrote a detailed description of an ideal island where justice, equality, prosperity, and happiness prevailed. Although the term “utopia” is associated with More’s *Utopia*, his novel is not the only work on an ideal place where everything is almost perfect. The 16th and the 17th century are marked by several such works, such as Johann Valentin Andreä’s *Christianopolis* (published in 1619), Thomasso Campanella’s *The City of the Sun* (published in 1623), Francis Bacon’s *The New Atlantis* (published in 1626), and Denis Veiras’ *The History of the Sevarambians* (published in 1675). The tradition of utopian thinking and writing has continued, although later utopian fictions and related works do not share most of the essence of
the ideal social organization portrayed in the classical utopian novels. The classical novels, for example, have strong traditional religious and mythical/legendary contents. Later utopian works, such as Karl Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s feminist utopia of *Herland* (1915) do not share those views.

Regardless of their specific content, there is a general agreement that utopian works have profoundly influenced the political and social thoughts of their contemporary Western societies. One of the numerous ways these works influenced the West through is by giving a different vision of the purpose, way of provision, and content of formal/state education (Fisher, 1963; Halpin, 2001, 2003; Mannheim, 1997; Ozmon, 1969). Grand educational ideas such as systematized and formal education, a well-defined curriculum, universal education, and character education are greatly shaped by utopian thinking and a utopian genre of writing (Fisher, 1963).

Perhaps due to the diverse, and often conflicting, arrays of social issues contemporary utopian novels deal with, there is no consensus on what specifically constitutes utopia. Currently, dystopian (an imagine of a place where everything is bad) views of social organization and the future dominate what continued to be referred to as the “utopian” genre (Parker, Fournier, & Reedy, 2007).

**2.2. Evidence that Ethiopian Education is not Utopian**

Not to disregard the above lack of consensus on what exactly constitutes utopia, utopian education is initially defined in this review as an education with a vision of a certain ideal society. If evaluated in light of this definition, it is possible to see that Ethiopian education is not utopian. This is perhaps the single common feature of all models of modern education practiced in Ethiopia since the imperial regime. In the next section, the different ideological and practical
problems that show the non-utopian character of modern education in Ethiopia are discussed, followed by a brief look at how this general problem is manifested in social studies curricula.

2.2.1. **Discontinuities and multiple educational models**

As briefly mentioned in chapter one, education in the 20th century Ethiopia has been characterized by a significantly disjointed and fragmented nature of the implementation of educational models adopted from different countries. During the imperial regime (1930-1974), the school curriculum was in the hands of expatriate teachers who came from various countries with different educational ideas and models (Adisu, 2005; Kebede, 2010). The education models at that time played a very little role in political socialization of the Ethiopian youth (Thomas, 2010). Although, gradually the curriculum development and implementation has been taken over more by Ethiopian educators, the ideological frameworks have always stayed diverse, discontinuous, and foreign. Often, curriculum models in the 20th century Ethiopia were copied from the experience of countries that were diplomatically close at one point (MoE, 2002).

More than the simple importation of curriculum, however, what was more problematic and telling of the desperate need to re-orient the education system philosophically was that when a new educational model was adopted, the achievements, goals, aspirations, and approaches of the previous model were typically abandoned indicating that there has been no continuity towards a particular direction. There was enormous extent of change in the grade-school and higher level educational philosophy, structure, curriculum, and material when the socialist regime replaced the imperial regime, and, later, when the current revolutionary democracy replaced the socialist regime.
This shift, which is frequent and fragmented, does not happen only when regimes fall and rise. It also takes place within one regime as well. A recent example can be the adoption of a centralized Plasma TV broadcasting system for secondary schools on the one hand, and the promotion of student-centered pedagogy in teacher education institutions on the other. The first example is in line with neo-liberal market initiatives and ICT-based globalization efforts, whereas the second example was initiated in accordance with democratic principles of making education relevant to the local situation of the child. Currently, there is also a growing movement in the private sector to increase its role in the provision of education. Diverse formal and non-formal educational programs are also designed and implemented by non-governmental organizations and international donor agencies impacting both top policy initiatives and grass root practices. As a result, continuous change, rather than stability and collective vision, has become the norm.

2.2.2. Absence of consensus on the definition of quality and relevance

The second main symptom of lack of utopia in Ethiopia’s modern education is the ever growing confusion of the definition of quality and relevance. The oldest and most persistent issue that has been stirring up reforms and major ideological and policy changes in curricula has been this question of quality and relevance. Especially since the 1980s, the decline of education quality was the major discussion topic among ministry of education, educators and teachers (Negash, 2010). Nonetheless, it seems addressing this issue is becoming increasingly difficult.

Neither documents of international educational declarations nor national educational policies and local practices coherently define relevance and quality of education in contemporary Ethiopian context. What exist are only different suggestions (with an explicit acknowledgement that they are only suggestions) which, in the end, point to quantity rather than quality. Available
policy and strategy documents at the national and international level seem to harbor a notion that the sole purpose of education is to enroll more children in schools. They provide little elaboration on any aspired conceptual, personal, psychological, moral, political, cultural, or philosophical profile of an educated citizen and how basic education becomes instrumental to achieve that. What are stated as goals in national education policy documents have stayed too broad and archaic to guide practice, such as “to make students know their rights and duties in society” and “live in equality” (MoE, 2002, p. 33). Regardless of the admission that lack of vision is a concrete problem in Ethiopian education, it is considered by the Ministry of Education as a legacy of only the previous regimes. The Ministry stated that education in the past was:

…divorced from the practical material or cultural needs of the country, it did not instill in the student an appreciation or eagerness for knowledge. As the curriculum lacked in clear objective, and appears to have been randomly designed with no specified target in mind, the profile and behavior of the students at the various levels was not definable (MoE, 2002, p. 28).

The Ministry claimed that this problem is solved in the current curriculum, which is designed with specific goals of producing citizens who stand for equality, justice and democracy, harmonizing theory and practice, integrating national and regional realities, maintaining the level of international education standards, and reflecting the principles of equality of nations, nationalities and gender (MoE, 2002, p. 29). However, the Ministry’s definition of what quality of education means in practice is too narrow. It is defined as the presence of high quality textbooks, quality school facilities, and highly qualified teachers in sufficient numbers (MoE, 2002). In its 2008 quality improvement package, the Ministry equated quality of textbooks mainly with being conducive for active learning, the cover and the papers’ appeal for handling
and attractiveness, and cost-effectiveness in printing (MoE, 2008). There is no discussion on the content and its impact on students’ development of social outlook.

The other areas identified as “pillars” of quality in the Ministry’s quality improvement package, were teacher training, community participation in school funding and administration, decentralized school monitoring, and evaluation of school level impact of various reform efforts (MoE, 2008). All these evaluations of quality invariably point towards input rather than output of the current school system. In addition, the Ministry’s practical translation seem to be understood by researchers and practitioners as more concerned with particularities of visible problems rather than any critical evaluation of ideological cleavages or obstacles in progression towards a certain national vision. Any kind of sensing of the later is either avoided or is briefly explained away by government- or international donor-affiliated researchers. For example, community participation as one pillar of quality within elementary education is understood merely as a structural issue by Beyene, Gaumnitz, Goike, and Robbins (2005)—a team of American and Ethiopian researchers who conducted a study on behalf of World Learning for International Development (WLID).² By tracing the record of community participation in the history of modern education under the imperial, the socialist, and the democratic regimes in Ethiopia, the researchers inferred that the cause of the low community participation in education is the ineffectiveness of top-down approaches of sustaining educational structure. Although ineffective top-down approaches in educational initiatives is a problem, simply considering the structural arrangement (the initiation of policies and reforms by those at the top) as a cause of low community participation is very misleading because it leaves out the true cause that brought

² WLID is a partner with the Ministry of Education on Basic Education System Overhaul (BESO) in Ethiopia.
structural issues and many other problems. It is imposed ideologies and worldview incompatibilities during the three regimes that made top-down approaches necessary in the first place because of local communities’ apparent unfamiliarity with foreign political, economic, and/or social theories. As a result, the researchers’ suggestion for quality improvement was simplistic and reductive. All their recommendations were concerned more with increasing enrollment rather than ensuring any kind of quality of education or outcome of schooling.

The above confusion of definition of quality and relevance of education is not unique to Beyene, Gaumnitz, Goike, and Robbins (2005). In fact, Defining Educational Quality—the often cited work by various international organizations that fund and strategize world education, begins by asserting that meaning of educational quality is confusing as there are various ways of defining it (Adams, 1993). UNESCO (2004) also affirmed this assertion by stating that there is no single definition because quality should be defined according to the purposes the society/country in question wants its education system to serve. Nonetheless, it adds that quality and universal participation in education are interrelated, thereby paving ways to the above kinds of understandings which pose universal school enrollment as confirmation of quality.

In the case of Ethiopia, UNESCO’s general recommendation of aligning the definition of quality of education with the specific social purpose it serves is an unfulfilled task. Universal participation and other international commitments themselves (such as achieving gender parity) are the only aspects of quality that are given attention and worked on relentlessly. Investigation of the holistic impact of education in Ethiopian context or in relation to some Ethiopian purpose is almost non-existent.
Yet, there are various signs from the available national and regional studies themselves that this ignored question is the most sensitive in the quality discussion. For example, donors from various European countries refused to fund civics education—one of the areas in the quality improvement initiative—on the basis that it was “too political” (Berry & Bogale, 2011, p. 85). In another example, Swift-Morgan (2006) extensively studied how community participation was conceived by teachers, parents, school administrators, and government educational officers in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region in Ethiopia. Community participation was understood by almost all participants as financial contribution and infrastructure supply. Some also viewed it as including meeting with teachers to discuss students’ academic performance, to evaluate teachers, and even make administrative decisions such as hiring and firing teachers. However, Swift-Morgan (2006) mentioned that a definition of community participation forwarded by one teacher was exceptionally opposed by others; i.e., participation in teaching children topics such as Ethiopian culture. Teachers strongly contended that parents should have no role in lesson content and instruction since they themselves are uneducated and should leave that to teachers. The toleration of conception of community participation as extending to hiring and firing teachers yet not having a say on what children learn indicates a deep ideological issue rather than structural problems of defining community participation as an aspect of quality of education.

Other areas that are considered as components of the quality initiative are also not clearly defined and understood. Studies on fostering active learning in the classroom as a way of improving quality, for example, are on a rudimentary stage of inquiry, such as how active-learning and student-centered teaching methods are conceived by educators, teachers, and students (Desta, et al., 2007; Serbessa, 2006). In other studies, high teacher-pupil ratio and
classroom environments not conducive for individualized attention are considered as quality problems that affect enrollment (Admassu, 2008; Schaffner, 2004). This poses the very essence of educational quality as a prerequisite for enrollment instead of as an aspect that helps realize certain long term social goal.

In private schools where teacher-pupil or pupil-textbook ratio are optimum and students are well prepared for national exams, the query about educational quality is considered as satisfactorily answered, and recommendations are forwarded for government schools to adopt policies that encourage funding for school choice (Seboka, 2003). What kind of citizens schools are producing and to what long term effect is not seen as part of the quality discourse.

As a result of such tendencies to define quality solely in relation to quantity, the question of addressing quality and quantity seem to have gotten into an endless cycle of mutual impeding. UNESCO recently evaluated many countries’ education system as a failed system, which did not help the youth “to develop a secure livelihood, participate in social, economic and political life” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 9). It is obvious that the UNESCO evaluation also concerns the education system of Ethiopia since many of the facets assessed by UNESCO, such as quality-quantity tensions and inability to reduce intolerance among different sub-national groups, are also evident in Ethiopia. Apparently, the failure to give priority to the fundamental task of giving the education system a social purpose, which emanates from the very survival of the Ethiopian society, is the main reason for the poor performance of the system. Since this foundational task is left to individual countries, it follows that all efforts should be focused on addressing this issue.
2.2.3. Paradoxes and repressed hopes

The absence of clear vision and sound purpose in Ethiopia’s modern education is also evident in the paradoxes observable in its different practices and in the presence of repressed needs, hopes, and wants the education system is ignoring or crushing while striving to sustain itself. As early as in the imperial regime, such repression was evident as in the form of Emperor Haile Selassie’s positioning of politically conservative expatriate teachers of different religious background (mainly Jesuits and Mormons) who did not entertain university students’ heated underground discussion on different political ideologies such as Marxism (Kebede, 2010).

With regards to contemporary elementary education, a critical look, especially on studies conducted on parents’ aspirations for the education of their children, suffices to show this repression. For example, a study on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of child poverty and community understanding of childhood transition in four developing countries, including Ethiopia, showed that parents, especially in rural areas, are in a conflicting situation of wanting their children to go to school to have a prosperous and economically secure future on the one hand, and at the same time, encouraging their children to get married and work for them on the other due to economic challenges (Tafere & Camfield, 2009). Such paradoxes are the central theme of studies on the conflict between child-labor and child education leading some to ask the very purpose of formal education in Ethiopia (Abebe, 2008; Admassie, 2003; Tafere, Abebe, & Assazinew, 2009; Woldehanna, Jones, & Tefera, 2008; Zehle, 2009). This leads one to speculate that the formal education sector has perhaps chosen to both philosophically and practically position itself as capable of performing only at the expense of community stability and sustainability instead of for the sake of it. This stance, however, is not clearly perceivable to
Ethiopian society since what is openly professed is the opposite, and a wider awareness that a meaningful conversation on the purpose and vision of education is desperately lacking.

Another example of a repressed hope is the presence of predominantly top-down policy initiatives and reforms despite the repeated assertion that the government is committed to empowering locals as per the new initiatives of decentralization. This top-down focus can clearly be seen in the ‘language of instruction’ policy in regards to the use of the mother-tongue. Woldemariam (2007) studied the multi-dimensional dissatisfaction and complaints of locals regarding mother-tongue instruction, including their fears that it may limit their occupational mobility and communication with other ethnic groups. Woldemariam acknowledged that the mother-tongue language policy is being implemented in a manner not consistent with the professed commitment of respecting groups’ right. However, she said that it is difficult to get back to Amharic as a language of instruction because it is “no longer an ideologically acceptable option” (2007, p. 233). As a solution, she suggested that the mother-tongue instructional language policy should be implemented fully by developing all languages (more than eighty) into media of instruction and called for the professional investment of pedagogists, linguists, socio-linguists, and other experts in this area.

From the above paradoxes and failures to appreciate the observed reality on the ground, one can only conclude that it is only what is being avoided (aspiration to a collective utopia), and not what is sought to be achieved (the rhetoric of mother-tongue or group rights, for example) that is clear for policy makers, researchers, and most practitioners. This research study is based on the belief that this rejection of collective utopia should be corrected to make education in general, and social studies in particular, capable of bringing about national integration—the very goal that inspired the start of modern education in Ethiopia in the early 20th century.
2.3. Manifestations of Lack of Utopian Vision in Ethiopian Social Studies Curricula

One of the tasks of social studies education is to respond to the impulses of continuity and change and to produce citizens who are explicitly aware of the modes of executing both in a manner that ensures the society’s all-rounded well-being. However, Ethiopian social studies education has long suffered discrepancy between rhetoric and practice that greatly limited its contribute in that regard.

During the regime of Haile Selassie (1930-1974), the rhetoric was largely about modernizing the empire through the use of science and technology and making the nation capable of resisting 20th century economic and military challenges. To realize that, the regime put emphasis on social science disciplines to produce intellectuals that can modernize feudalism and structurally transform it (Milkias, 2010). However, the regime took the continuity aspect (the preservation of the physical, spiritual, and philosophical treasures of the country) for granted, and social studies education never addressed the core issues such as:

…the origin of the Ethiopian nation, the history of the monarchy, the formation of the Ethiopian modern state, the structures and functions of traditional socio-political institutions,… the customs, norms and ways of life of the diverse ethno-linguistic and religious communities (Thomas, 2010; p. 64).

Instead, during the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie, the youth learned in schools, almost exclusively, about the political history, the geographical landscape, and the culture (e.g., literature) of European countries.

During the socialist regime (1974-1991), the rhetoric was guided by scientific socialism, and the aim of social studies education at the elementary and secondary level was to raise the
socialist and political consciousness of learners. The focus of the elementary level social studies education was mostly about the geographical landscape of provinces and the country, and settlement patterns of different ethnic groups. In middle school, the focus was on the major climatic zones of the world, and the origin and migration of different racial groups. The secondary social studies education emphasized history and geography content areas and dealt with topics such as the great geographical discoveries by European explorers, world geography, African geography, ancient African kingdoms, and largely, the 18th and 19th century wars and revolutions such as the French and the Russian revolution and the American civil war. Social studies curriculum that referred specifically to Ethiopia was almost non-existent. For example, in the eleventh grade history textbook, Ethiopia was mentioned only once in relation to Italy and World War II. Students learned Ethiopian history and Ethiopian geography in detail only when they reached twelfth grade which usually lasted no more than four or five months due to the often intensive national school leaving exam preparation.

The rhetoric under the current Federal Democratic Government (1991 to present), highlights the rights and equality of different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups and the reflection of their values (MoE, 2002). The social studies curriculum however teaches facts, events, and topics that only touch upon these issues in a very fragmented manner. For example, throughout the four middle school grades, students learn the following major social studies topics: people, settlement, and location (of Ethiopia, the horn of Africa, Africa, and the world), the earth, the environment/ecosystem, and public agenda (such as HIV/AIDS, international conventions such as child right, human right, regional and international economic organizations, globalization, etc.). Similar trends of presenting a broad spectrum of unrelated social studies education continues in high school. The process, dreams, hope, conflicts, and the driving utopia
(or opposing utopias) of the nations, nationalities, and peoples that created the modern Ethiopia are not discussed in an inter-connected manner.

It then becomes difficult to expect modern Ethiopian social studies curricula to contribute to the fulfillment of the targeted goal of education which is to serve as “a process by which man transmits his experiences, new findings, and values accumulated over the years, in his struggle for survival and development, through generations” to “strengthen the individual’s and society’s problem-solving capacity, ability and culture” (FDRGOE, 1994, p. 1). Today, in addition to the usual topics of food security or economic development, the urgent need to maintain social cohesion and fight social fragmentation has also become an issue to be dealt with by the education system in Ethiopia and other developing countries (UNESCO, 2011). To realize this, the role of social studies education should be to conveniently orient children mentally and attitudinally to make sense of themselves and their surroundings in a harmonious way. This is not possible without some vision of utopia.

2.4. The Limitations of Current Research Approaches and Proposed Solutions

As discussed elsewhere in this paper, most studies conducted on education of children focus on enrollment/dropout rates and factors associated with them instead of how education shapes children’s perspectives on their lives and their society (Admassu, 2008; Engel, 2010; Jennings, Mekonnen, & Gudissa, 2011; Schaffner, 2004; Serbessa, 2005; Tafere, Abebe, Assazinew, & Zehle, 2009). The extent of focus on enrollment rates is especially visible in the fact that researchers often focus not on the children who already are in school, but on those who are not in school yet. More than half of about forty eight studies conducted in the 1990s and the 2000s on Ethiopian children are about marginalized groups, such as urban street children and ethnic minorities, and how to improve their access to schools (Poluha, 2007b).
Recently, however, more qualitative studies on the lives and perspectives of children are being conducted. A growing number of educators, social researchers, non-governmental organizations, and policy makers are responding to the lack of overall failure of educational and social programs by investigating its causes from different directions. Available studies on children are categorized by Poluha (2007a) under five major themes: the biological, mental, and social growth of children, (the tension between) going to school and working, the role of gender in the lives of children and youth, children in textbooks and media, and globalization and its impact on the lives of children.

Some of the specific aspects studied (in those summarized by Poluha (2007a) and in others) include: children’s perceptions of ethnicity, gender roles, and hierarchical relations (Alemayehu, 2007; Poluha, 2004; Tamene, 2007), parents’ and teachers’ use of punishment and reward in child upbringing (Tamene, 2007), children’s and caregivers’ conceptualization of normal and deviant behaviors (Abdulwasie, 2007; Chuta, 2007), parents’ and children’s aspirations about children’s education and their futures (Roschanski, 2007; Tafere & Camfield, 2009), children’s household chores and responsibilities (Abdulwasie, 2007, Abebe, 2008), the use (or lack) of participatory teaching-learning practices in elementary classrooms (Poluha, 2004; Serbessa, 2006), availability and content of child-directed programs in electronic and print media (Kiar, 2007), and awareness and implementation of child-right practices (Abdulwasie, 2007). The studies reportedly emanate from the need to ensure the wellbeing of children, the effective implementation of child-related programs, the uncovering of factors that perpetuate child poverty, and the need to get children’s voice heard on important public issues.

The above studies have useful insights to contribute; however, they do not answer the multi-dimensional questions one can raise about the role of education in general and social
studies in particular on the long-term personal, intellectual, and social development of children within the collective context. If anything pertaining to the relation of children with the collective is studied, it is from the perspective of concerns such as how to lessen the “nodes of social organization” which are assumed to make the Ethiopian society “difficult to change” (Poluha, 2004, p. 201).

Poluha’s (2004) study is one of the few in-depth studies of Ethiopian children’s understanding of their social identity. She studied children’s conception of their gender roles, education, ethnicity, religion, conception of social hierarchy, and national identity in an NGO-funded primary school in a poor neighborhood in Addis Ababa. In her discussions, Poluha explicitly advocated for individualism, atheism, abolition of gender roles, and abolition of hierarchy in family, school, and society. Poluha claimed it is these facets of the country’s culture that are causing political, social, and economic crisis. She stated that the gatekeeper role of adults, especially priests and mothers, should be checked so that “change” can be promoted through introduction of new information in a context where these gate keepers (nodes) do not determine who belongs to the collective and who does not.

Apparently, current studies of Ethiopian children’s education and their conception of their lives and their society are currently being studied from potentially controversial perspectives. Specific traditional practices in religious and civic institutions that could be holding the social fabric together in the face of rising instability, conflict, fragmentation, and inequality are the ones ultimately blamed by researchers for causing the social ills. Unless there is research and consensus on a comprehensive utopia from which critical social and educational theories can grow out of, it will not be possible to come to agreement on what kind of continuity
and change is sought at the national level, what should and should not be part of that dynamic, and how that consensus should be conveyed to children through social studies education.

To enable social studies curriculum address this problem, it becomes imperative to understand why utopia and utopianism is no more a foreground topic of educational research and why it does not inform the goals and approaches of education. Since education in Ethiopia is informed by and responds to global economic, political, and social demands through international educational commitments, it is necessary to understand the current place utopian thinking has in the global context.

2.5. Locating the Lack of Utopia in Education in the Global Context

The above lack of a social vision in Ethiopian education does not seem to have grown spontaneously from some pre-existing situation. The fact that we now live in what is called an “anti-utopian” age better explains why education does not seem to have a social/national plan/direction. Education, just like any other sector, is increasingly being influenced by neo-liberal economic thoughts in many developing nations (Banya, 2010; Geo-Jaja & Zajda, 2005; Hill & Rosskam, 2009). This influence on current education systems—the most social function any state can provide—is very problematic since it is very unnatural for a social service to emphasize economic competition. This is marked by the various ironies and contradictions found in the theories and practices of education in societies influenced by neo-liberal economic thoughts. As discussed below, ironies and contradictions seem to be the defining features of anti-utopianism within education.

To begin with, the general agreement among those who theorize and study utopianism is that utopian thinking, as a form of creating an intentional mode of social organization, has ended
with Marxism (Corrales, 2008; Jacoby, 2005; Jameson, 2005; Kumar, 1987, 2010; Levitas, 2008; Peters & Freeman-Moir, 2006). While some theorists go to the extent of asserting that any form of utopian thinking is slowly dying (and should die) giving way to the anti-foundational and anarchic spirit (Gray, 2007, Jameson, 2005; Popper, 1992), others contend that it has morphed into other forms of expression and is functioning covertly (Bloch, 1986; Garforth, 2009; Kumar, 2010; Levitas, 2008; Peters & Freeman-Moir, 2006). The former thinkers clearly express that utopian thought is a kind of escapism from reality (Gray, 2007), a threat to creativity and diversity (Jameson, 2005), and a dangerous origin of ideologies leading to violence and totalitarianism (Popper, 1992). The later writers however present their argument in a more nuanced manner, emphasizing the way utopian thinking has changed rather than disappeared. They theorize different kinds of changes utopia and utopian thought have gone through, such as from a blueprint to a function and desire (Bloch, 1986; Levitas, 1990), from transcendence to immanence (Garforth, 2009), and from collective/public to a small group/private (Kumar, 2010). Kumar (2010) offered a particularly interesting view that unlike popular thought, current dystopian fictions are simply modern ways of expressing an alternative way of living, and therefore, are parts of utopian genre. Others, like Jacoby (2005), however, strongly reject the association of utopian thought with expressions of dystopian intent of a society plagued by corruption, inequality, or oppression. Nevertheless, the idea of the blue print utopia is mostly rejected and, the “iconoclastic utopia,” a broader description of a just society without providing prescribed details is what is accepted (Jacoby, 2005).

The post-Marxism time is pronounced as an anti-utopian age by both kinds of thinkers. Anti-utopianism has brought a situation in which organized political, social, and economic systems actually have no long-term plan and they function in a dynamics that is inherently ironic.
The irony is especially manifested in the fact that anti-utopian system works by continually contradicting itself in a manner that may confuse an average person. However, from the perspective of anti-utopianism, the contradictions are simply paradoxical situations which work in a dualistic mode continuously forming thesis and anti-thesis in a slow progression towards dystopia (See Fig. 1.1).

These paradoxical, ironic, and seemingly unplanned situations in education and their negative influences are the results of neo-liberal thoughts stemming out of anti-utopian ideology. For example, it is the understanding of those who study globalization that the process in which the world becomes smaller (globalization) and the process in which the world gets larger (fragmentation) are different aspects of the same global integration process (Lundestad, 2004; Piepers, 2006). Anti-utopianism, which is working through neo-liberalism, is quickly taking hold in several countries around the world. However, anti-utopianism functions side-by-side with the rhetoric of democracy, equality, fairness, and universal access to basic needs. Hence, education, as one of the sectors in many countries highly influenced by neo-liberal economic thoughts, is caught in the middle of competition/inequality and social justice.

Among the main discourses on education which can be an example of this contradiction, are the privatization and commoditization of education and the introduction of business like management and efficiency concepts in teacher education in various African countries including Ethiopia (Banya, 2010; Dahlström, 2007; Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). The irony is that the often-promoted principles of democracy, equality, social justice, and national integration for the achievement of commitments, such as Education For All (Universal education) or student-centered education, in practice have the potential for doing the exact opposite of what is intended. For example, in Zimbabwe, the impetus for universal education was not backed by
legal enforcements that strengthen the commitment to equality. As a result, there is more pressure to open more schools and hire more teachers in a manner that compromises quality—which in turn discourages people from joining public education (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). Furthermore, the capitalist model of educational management promotes commercialization and private provision of education opening ways for corruption, which in turn worsens inequality within education (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011).

As discussed in the previous sections, in Ethiopia, universal access to basic education is accompanied by discourse on how it should be funded and sustained by community participation rather than government provision. However, the more the call for community participation in education, the more community participation became difficult due to financial and professional inadequacies of communities to sustain schools, further weakening community’s, teachers’ and students’ trust in their ability to commit to education (Roschanski, 2007). This is only one among the many examples that can be cited to show the inherent paradoxical and ironic nature of educational initiatives in the anti-utopian age.

Dahlström (2007) argues that, in Ethiopian teacher education, student-centered approach to education, which was the result of the call for critical practice in education, has now changed to the tendency to regard the student as a consumer to whom the school/institution should cater. Although student-centered education is not recognized as such in the rhetoric of producing problem-solver citizens, in effect it has been complacent to the demands of neo-liberalism by actually giving students a sense of consumerism. The strongest evidence for this effect can be the currently popular reference to the contemporary grade school and college level students who “know their rights more than their responsibilities” by teachers and teacher educators. As the discourse on student-centered education is being promoted in secondary and higher education
levels, the elementary and middle school equivalent seems to be the discourse on child rights which currently is working to change modes of interaction between adults and children in a manner that threatens the social and cultural fabric.

Such neo-liberal paradoxes are currently being emphasized by a few researchers who are calling for more investigation of the ideological root of neo-liberalism (Hussein, 2006; Tessema, 2008). Hussein (2006), for example, critiqued the confusing practices of teacher education in one of the larger teacher education colleges in Ethiopia, such as the management’s call on faculties, department heads, and instructors to attend to two contrasting demands at the same time: quality of education and minimizing student attrition, and expressed his concern as to why rather more important issues such as “education for social freedom, social action and informed citizenship” are not getting more attention. Tessema (2006, 2008) assessed the contradictory approach of emphasizing active learning within preservice and inservice teacher education while at the same time high schools are being equipped with plasma TV, and the absence of critical discussion on national issues and collective vision among students, teachers, and staff members in secondary and higher education. Apparently, education is no more a collective endeavor at the teacher-education and curriculum design levels, let alone at the K-12 levels in schools.

Just like all the major political and social thoughts of the past, neo-liberalism is the result of its contemporary (anti-) utopian conception. Since neo-liberalism is primarily an economic theory, it does not overtly spell out the human and social elements of a society it aspires to create. Nonetheless, critics of neo-liberalism like Bourdieu (1998) assert that its intention is to create the “lone, but free” individual. It is possible to observe this intention from the practical effect of neo-liberal economic policies, especially in developing countries that are quickly adopting it. For a clearer understanding of the intent of anti-utopianism through neo-liberalism,
it is important to look at dystopian novels, such as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*—the award winning novel by Philip K. Dick (1962). Dick makes mentions of a “negative trinity of alienation, blurred reality and despair” originated by Eldritch—the character who represents neocapitalism and the idea of “god” (p. 232). Ideas of positive trinities such as the organization of government into three branches: Power, Wisdom, and Love, which are in line with the Ethiopian worldview of *Tewahedo* were communicated in utopian fictions such as Thomaso Campanella’s *The City of the Sun* in the 17th century. Obviously, it is an anti-utopian impulse, which is disturbingly anti-human, that is communicated in “utopian”/dystopian novels today.

The most notable nature of anti-utopian thought is its success in introducing and getting accepted definitions of utopia, which are contrary to the traditional conceptualization. It is from this nature of anti-utopianism that the ironies and contradictions it produces emerge. For example, the central notion of anti-utopianism (and its theoretical offspring such as postmodernism) is its emphasis on social alteration as the only constant norm. Ironically, this extreme focus on change is not to encourage change, but to prevent it from taking place, especially in its radical form, thereby effectively causing the “disappearance of the future” of the society and its aspiration towards any ideal order (Garforth, 2009, p. 12).

Hence, the term “utopia” itself can be seen as an obvious satire. While it is supposed to represent the perfect and ideal society/place due to the optimistic and positive contents expressed in its name by Thomas More in the 16th century, the term itself, in a prophetic sense, represents its literal translation of “no-where.” The promotion of constant change and disruption, whether through imperialism, revolution, monetary deregulation, complexity and multiplicity, or any form of chaos is then to lead to a “no-where” situation, and not into some form of stable order as one might be tempted to think.
It is common for several contemporary (anti-) utopianists to claim that utopia can happen in “any” form, including in a situation where there is no coherent intention for the future and actions are only meant to produce a temporary affective state in the mind (Anderson, 2002; Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986; Gardiner, 2000; Jameson, 1982; Jenkins, 2002; Kraftl, 2009; Sargisson, 1996). The pervasiveness of such thought is evident in the thinking of critiques of anti-utopianism. Although they reject the recognition that utopia and utopian thinking have ended, they admit that explicit discourse on utopia is no more legitimate and some version of utopia is probably functioning covertly behind education and other aspects of social (re-)organization in today’s world (Milojevic, 2006; Levitas, 1990; Van den Berg, 1988). It is possible to speculate further that perhaps no utopia (in a positive sense) exists behind current discourses on global society.

It therefore becomes hard to expect a curriculum to have any meaningful intention if the philosophical background of the curriculum stems from anti-utopianism. Ethiopia’s education and training policy professes commitment to implementation of democratic education with an emphasis on producing critical thinkers and problem solvers with keen interest in their country’s social, economic, and political life (FDRGOE, 1994; MoE, 2002). Educational policy, just like the policies of other sectors, mainly originates from and is consulted and financed by, international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank—the forefronts of neo-liberalism. This neo-liberal impulse is animated by the current anti-utopian conceptions which, as summarized by Garforth (2009), is no more “wedded to rationality, perfectibility, and progress” but to “desire, anti-foundationalism, and fragmentation” (p. 10).
2.6. The Limitations of Current Critical “Utopian” Theories of Education

As mentioned earlier, there are a few critics of the neo-liberal impulse in Ethiopian education who speak up against the contradictions, policy incompatibilities, and fragmented educational initiatives (Bitew, 2008; Hussein, 2006; Mekonnen, 2008; Kassahun, 2006; Tessema, 2006, 2007). Often, these critics come from the teacher education institutions, with little to no impact on the heavily top-down policy and reform initiative. Although not having a voice for neo-liberal critics is by itself a problem, the bigger challenge is the fact that these critics predominantly adopt the tradition of critical pedagogy—another version of an anti-utopian thought. Even though critical pedagogists often posit themselves as seekers and advocates of utopian thinking, they actually reject utopia as a system, and accept it only as a critical thinking activity/function that questions hegemony.

Critical pedagogists and those who adapt critical theory in education agree that education without a certain kind of imagined society is directionless (Armstrong, 1996; Bourdieu, 1998; Luke, 1994; McLaren, 1998; Milojevic, 2006; Parker, 2006; Peters & Freeman-Moir, 2006). The particular kind of education they advocate for—democratic education—can be understood as aiming “to prepare youth to live together democratically in an increasingly diverse society and afford them the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to fulfill their political status as members of a self-determining community” (Parker, 2006, p. 13). Critical pedagogists reject covert hegemony, dominance of a particular view, and exclusion of any group from the mainstream. They advocate for conscious intervention of the state to regulate inequalities caused by the market force (which they believe is not free and anonymous, but is animated by particular interests). From the perspective of critical pedagogists, there is no hegemony that cannot or should not be questioned, and there is none that should be endorsed or rejected.
However, in the midst of endorsing none, yet rejecting none, is the perfect ground for the no-place of anti-utopianism. Since contradictory ideologies (views which are supposed to co-exist under “equality” or “justice”) cannot fit together in a unified plan, their bearers will have to secretly compete for dominance. As Parker (2006), for example, discussed in the context of U.S. education, the rhetoric of democratic education has become a “null curriculum” (no more taught) and has left the platform of national and global education for the power and funding of the neo-conservative and neo-liberal front of the military-industrial complex. In Ethiopia, too, the rhetoric of democratic education has little influence on grade school and teacher education curricula. In practice, global economic and social issues which are in line with the process of privatization and deregulation of the education system are given more emphasis. This tells that the neo-Marxist ideology of critical pedagogy and democratic education works as a precursor to, and not in an opposition with, the anti-utopian neo-liberalism.

It is then ironic (or not ironic given the essentially ironic nature of anti-utopianism) that under both the socialist democracy and the revolutionary democracy regimes of Ethiopia in the past four decades, the much talked about questions of marginalized nations and nationalities, diversity, equality, inclusion, and values constituted only a small portion of the social studies curriculum of the grade school and beyond. Instead, the study of the global and the international always had precedence. The particular culture, values, world views, ideologies, and intentions of the various groups, how they played out in the unions and conflicts of the past, and how the past influences the present and the future are currently mute topics. As a result, the sole function of critical pedagogy, at least as practiced by the majority of educators who share its perspective, prevents any particular view/ideology, and, by extension, any utopia, from becoming dominant. As Milojevic (2006) puts it:
… unless there is a dialogue between various utopian, eutopian, dystopian and other futures imaging, dominant social groups and ideologies will continue to define what is seen as utopian (implying impossible and naïve) and what is to be seen as ‘the truth about the future.’ This is problematic because it facilitates the colonization of the future by particular visions and images. (p. 30)

The Ethiopian educational policy equivalent asserts that the aim of social studies curriculum is to:

reflect respect for the identity of all nations, nationalities and peoples in accordance with the principle of equality of citizens… to avoid the tacitly embedded messages of covert and overt chauvinist outlooks in the textbooks… to have textbooks that reflect the true realities and the values of the Ethiopian peoples, nations and nationalities, especially through subjects such as history and social sciences. (MoE, 2002; p. 33)

From this anti-hegemony and anti-foundation spirit, all one is allowed to expect is a critical practice on a previous or existing system without being presented a solid alternative. Utopian practices of imagining other possibilities become effectively discouraged, and the most that can be expected from thinkers, intellectuals, and educators is engagement. Giroux (2003), for example, stated that utopian practice of critical practitioners is primarily to prevent public intellectuals’ “retreat into academic irrelevance and the safe haven of a no-risk professionalism” (p. 105). Through engagement, educators are supposed to advocate for “change and continuous progress towards betterment” (Giroux, 2003, p. 103). As mentioned earlier, advocating for continuous change is the core essence of anti-utopian traditions which ironically aim at discouraging radical change in the long term by making change meaningless and causing “the
disappearance of the future” (Garforth, 2009, p. 12). Therefore, utopian thinking from the perspective of critical pedagogy simply means the practice of anti-utopianism. Not surprisingly, despite critical pedagogists’ opposition, neo-liberal tone in education keeps on thriving.

Ethiopian educational research is caught between these two seemingly opposite anti-utopian traditions: neo-liberalism-induced educational reforms and the tradition of critical pedagogy. On the neo-liberal side, available research focuses predominantly on Non-Governmental Organizations’ (NGO’s) and international commitment-related issues. On the critical side, the few available studies are focused primarily on counting the damages caused by the ironies, paradoxes, and incompatibilities of the neo-liberal reform initiatives. As a result, so far, educators have not been able to move beyond the culture of critique and begin to flesh-out a different alternative blueprint for an alternate social organization structure. As indicated in the introduction, much of the work along this line is merely a call for more excavation of intentions, hopes, suppressed views and dreams that can ensure continuity of the Ethiopianism/Utopianism.

2.7. The Need to Refer to the Original Essence of Utopia

Due to the above problems associated with anti-utopian whims, the importance of bringing utopia back into the discussion is becoming apparent. The particular essence of the utopia that needs to be given attention can be framed as having three defining features. These defining features do not come from what is acknowledged and discussed in the aforementioned literature about utopia, but from what is assumed as no more acceptable (a blueprint utopia), what is omitted (the original distinct Truth about Utopia), and what is overlooked about the consequences of the omissions (such as the current overrepresentation of dystopian views in education and other realms). The lack of clarity and truthfulness among scholars in these three areas has made their assertions contradictory and the current understanding of the present and the
future blurred. The three defining features of the definition of utopia that can mitigate this blur are discussed below.

2.7.1. Utopia as the only source of social power

In current discourse about utopia, utopianism, and anti-utopianism, the idea that societies who simply go through the motion of existing without any utopia are necessarily doomed to perish is an alarmingly overlooked truth. Only a few critical theorists can be credited for emphasizing this point. Although they do not suggest any distinct form of utopia as a solution, they point out the dangers of the invisibility of the future that neo-liberalism holds for humanity (Bogues, 2006; Bourdiue, 1998). Bourdiue (1998) described this best as follows:

The transition to "liberalism" takes place in an imperceptible manner, like continental drift, thus hiding its effects from view. Its most terrible consequences are those of the long term. These effects themselves are concealed, paradoxically, by the resistance to which this transition is currently giving rise among those who defend the old order by drawing on the resources it contained, on old solidarities, on reserves of social capital that protect an entire portion of the present social order from falling into anomie. This social capital is fated to wither away - although not in the short run - if it is not renewed and reproduced (¶ 16).

A kind of society portrayed in the above quote is not unfamiliar in today’s Ethiopia. In the past couple of decades when the neo-liberal development theory was at work, acts of extremism, political conflicts, consumerism, fragmentation, inequality, homelessness, mass emigration, and corruption have reached an unprecedented peak. Looking for security and personal safe havens, a considerable portion of the population fell victim to mental illness, drug
addiction, and disease. Issues brought up for public discussion around moral and social corruption have frequently been marginalized based on the excuse of emphasizing economic poverty as the main problem all energies should be focused on. Such reduction of a multi-dimensional problem related with identity-crisis and social fragmentation to an economic or material problem per se indicates that currently, any form of attempt to deliberate on a collective utopian vision is officially rejected.

Therefore, in the case of Ethiopia, it has clearly become necessary to move past the two traditions prevalent in the current utopian studies: the practice of critique of hegemony without utopian alternatives (critical pedagogy) or the study of immanent utopias which are mainly confined to the individual’s affective and mental satisfactions (e.g., as in liberal arts) and do not have power to have a collective socio-political impact. Utopia should give collective purpose, a vision of the future, and solidarity that can inspire plans and focus efforts. All sectors and their system of governance in society should spring from a clear blue print that can be conveyed to youth at a level communicable to them.

2.7.2. **Utopia as a True form of life with a distinct content**

When seeing the multi-dimensional problems discussed in the previous sections, the common saying “where there is no vision, the people perish” can be a pertinent cautionary advice to those in educational and political administration in Ethiopia. In the colloquial use of this saying, there may be a hidden assumption that a vision that sounds reasonable can serve, at least, part, of the intended purpose in terms of mobilizing a large number of people. However, when it comes to utopianism, perhaps what people need is not a vision, but the vision. It is hard to call Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany both “Utopias” in the same breath, although some nonetheless do (Arendt, 1973; Popper, 1966; Talmon, 1968). The Marxist
notion of utopia as scientific social engineering has caused the subsequent labeling of any intentional social organization and group formation as “utopia” regardless of their content. Utopia is not a generic term that can be applied to all intentional forms of society whatever their content, although more often than not they contain at least some portion of utopia or else they would have not been possible in the first place. The 16th and 17th century utopian books written by Thomas More, Tommaso Campanella, Johann Valentin Andreä, and Francis Bacon are not novels; rather, they are accounts of an actual state of life lived by the children of Shem, Ham, and Japheth who originated from and later came together to realize a nation in the name of “Ethiopia.” As briefly presented in Chapter One, Utopia/Ethiopia has distinct percepts and a mode of governance that, as outlined by Wolde-Yesus (1997), stem out of the Seven Covenants humanity entered into with the Creator through its pioneering and righteous representatives: Adam and Eve, Noah, Melchi-Zedek, Abraham, Moses, David, and the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ (See Section 1.3.1.). Reading the medieval utopian texts only portrays a society that has most likely put these Covenants into practice. There has been no other “Utopia” or “Ethiopia” in history, and all political thoughts, ideologies, and social theories in the history of humanity are either a partial adoption or a subversion of these percepts, including the so called “secular” utopias. No theory can be formed without explicit or implicit reference to this “Utopia.” The only variation is which part of Utopia the ideology accepts and which part it rejects. The greater the number of Utopian percepts the ideology accepts, the more appealing it becomes to be adopted by many and the longer it lasts (e.g., Judaism, Islam, and Christianity). The fewer the number of Utopian percepts the ideology accepts, the less appealing or the more short-lived it becomes. The various modern and post-modern political and social theories in all their variations have appealed to increasingly smaller groups of people causing what is termed by
Kumar (2010) as “privatization of utopia” (p. 554) to which he cited as examples ecotopia, feminist utopias, and science fiction utopias.

Between the earlier relatively broader adoption of utopia and the current “privatization” of utopia stands Marxism—the ideology that rejected the divine, the ideal, the spiritual, and the eternal elements of Utopia and acknowledged only the human, the pragmatic, the material, and the immanent aspects of it. The only element of the original Utopia Marxism did not completely reject was the communal aspect of it, and that, only in reference to the economic dimension. Hence, the end of communism is justifiably understood by many scholars who study utopia as the end of utopia (Bartkowski, 2008; Jacoby, 2005; Kumar, 2010; Levitas, 1990). That point is plausible given how communism brought to an end the millennia old monarchy of Ethiopia which, at different levels of success in different times in history, vowed to see to it that the Utopian percepts were kept among the people and its services were extended to all humanity.

Today, humanity is struggling to preserve this Utopia and its percepts through the various practices that come out of them, such as family values, anti-racism, mode of governance through three houses (Clergy, People, and Government, or Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary), universal education, environmentalism, equality of the sexes, formation of nations based on ideals rather than geography/race, agreements into a common wealth, etc. In the practices where the original Ethiopian/Utopian percepts are kept as intact as possible, there they keep the people from complete destruction.

Unless the True essence of Utopia is clearly understood as such, it will not be possible to understand the ideological tensions and philosophical backgrounds of social practices, including education of the youth and current modes of social reproduction (or destruction). The current
understanding of utopia among major fields of social sciences has run into internal contradictions because of rejection of this basic truth. For example, when describing the 19th century utopian movement in the West, the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences generally asserts that “the tense of the utopian narrative is inevitably the future and the mood is subjunctive,” and later admits that “other such movements looked backward with nostalgia for ways of life that had been lost due to the same irrevocable changes” (Bartkowski, 2008, p. 561). This does not clarify whether the very idea of utopia originated from the vision of a not-yet-actualized future or from the memory of the past.

Another contradiction is that the word “Utopia,” as Thomas More first coined it, is understood as both “Ou-Topia” meaning “no place” and “Eu-Topia” meaning “good place.” Which definition of “Utopia” Thomas More meant is described as “ambiguous” (Bartkowski, 2008, p. 561), “conflated” (Sargent, 2005, p. 2404) and “confusing” (Trompf, 2005, p. 9491) in the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, the New Dictionary of the History of Ideas, and in the Encyclopedia of Religion respectively. Adding to the confusion is why More chose a Greek title for the book he wrote in Latin and why he chose to present the book he wrote for a serious political reform he gave his life for simply as an impossible practice learned from an imaginary island located in “no place.” Very obviously, he meant “Eu-Topia” which today is spelled “Ethiopia.” Almost all of the social, administrative, military, spiritual, agricultural, and other practices described in detail in More’s Utopia are not unfamiliar for an average Ethiopian who knows from the oral traditions and the few existing practices about how society lived in the recent and distant past. More might have preferred to write Utopia in a form of a novel to make it acceptable by the leaders of the then Catholic establishment. It is also conceivable that
specific identifiers of an actual land are mis-translated and/or lost in the other versions of his work, which exist, but are not popular (Morson, 1988).

Further contradictions if utopia is not understood as an actual form of society with specific percepts is the claims about the Western and the non-Western origins of Western civilization. The Encyclopedia of Religion, for example, asserts “many writing including about the Garden of Eden of Genesis or the Chinese Ma¯ha¯yana Buddhist Pure Land of the West can be considered as Utopian in view” (Trompf, 2005, p. 9491). It then says:

But many scholars do not consider this exercise in model building for revolutionary social transformation much older than the eighteenth century …, and they have pointed out the central role of the Western ideal of universal progression toward utopianism’s realization. (p. 9491).

However, the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (Bartkowski, 2008) claims that Plato’s Republic is generally considered as the pioneer in Utopian work, making it difficult to locate exactly what utopia the currently globally dominant Western socio-political thoughts emanated from. The true contents of the original and the particular Utopia should then be understood in order not to be lost in the utopia-dystopia hybrids of modern day ideologies. The importance of “correctness” about the content of utopia is rejected with the rejection of “blueprint” utopianism. However, the rejection itself should be rejected since, in practice, a postmodern definition of utopia (as in the case of immanent utopias) can cost everything, including a stable national vision and a grounded education system. This makes the third defining feature of utopia all the more important:
2.7.3. **Utopia as an ideal that functions via humanity’s individual and collective commitment**

The dominant way of understanding utopia (ranging from utopia as intentional social experiment to utopia as an affective mental state in a confined world) fails to stress another important truth about Utopia: that every single human being on the planet has an ever present task of understanding and making a conscious choice regarding utopia. In his very influential book—*Principle of Hope*, Bloch (1986) described the omnipresence of utopian anticipation among human beings as follows: “Most people in the street look as if they are thinking about something else entirely. The something else is predominantly money, but also what it could be changed into.” (p. 33)

Bloch conceptualizes utopia as a function of hope that drives people through life, but he does not believe in a distinct content of Utopia. However, the fact that this statement is a commonly accepted notion among all who study utopia and utopianism shows that the search for utopia is indeed a concrete truth and not just an optional aspect of life that may or may not have an impact on how individuals think or societies function. In light of this truth, then, the anti-utopian notion that utopia is a “no-place” and everything is meant to constantly change, which promotes an unpredictable future, is devastating to humanity. If utopianism can be viewed as:

…a psychological yearning for an anxiety free and happy world, sociological yearning about social relations, political yearning for an ideal social organization and security, moral yearning about goodness, practical yearning for material prosperity and abundance with natural life, and intellectual exercise of imagining and critical questioning of society, (Trompf, 2005, p. 9493)
then, anti-utopianism necessarily means a culture of self-destructive orientation that invites anxiousness, despair, alienation, anarchism, insecurity, depravity, poverty, environmental destruction, and poor culture of critical and intellectual exercise. It then goes without saying that societies that cannot enable their youth to understand the true origins of this innate yearning for utopia and the right path of fulfilling them, as well as how utopia is intertwined with the way social, political, and economic institutions function, are fated to have no future.

It is the omission of the above three main elements of utopia in current utopian discussions that brings the need to re-define utopia to frame this study. Unlike the current tendency to see utopia as either “desire,” “hope,” “form,” “function,” “system,” “blueprint,” or “imagined perfect society,” it is treated in this study as all of these. Utopia not only informs the question, the method, and the purpose of the study, but also is the question, the method, and the ultimate purpose of the study.

To use Utopia as a method and solution in Ethiopian elementary social studies education, it is important to assess how its absence is manifested in children’s understanding and teachers’ practice. Ethiopian children’s understanding of their national identity and their view of themselves in relation to the collective is the topic which has direct relevance to this inquiry. This is because a national identity (of any nation) is a result of a certain utopia, and the Ethiopian national identity is essentially related to “Utopia.” The assumption in this study is then an anti-utopian world-view which is contrary to this utopian perspective of Ethiopian national identity can be traced in children in different forms of dualisms including gaps, paradoxes, ironies, distortions, inconsistencies, and double standards. From a concrete understanding of these, it will be possible to identify fundamental themes of utopia and utopian thinking that should be incorporated in the social studies curricula to address sense of alienation and feeling of
disempowerment that come from children’s perceptions of the primarily dystopian reality. This research is conducted with the hope that a qualitative data gained from children and teachers of selected schools in Harar—one of the most diversified cities in Ethiopia—will provide insights that can inform research and practice in social studies curriculum design for primary schools.
Chapter Three

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

This study employed the constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2003) in order to acquire an understanding of the nature of the social reality conceived by the children as they mentally interact, explicitly, with the kind of questions posed to them. Grounded theory approach was chosen because it gives room for “theoretical sampling”—“making early links between the empirical world and theoretical ideas and checking them” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 12). The flexibility the approach provides is particularly relevant to this study since the themes in relation to any aspect of the children’s national identity, their utopian imaginations, and views towards and affiliation with the national in-group preferably should arise out of their responses. The analysis of data from textbooks and teachers however are partially guided by the findings from the children’s interview response analysis in order to validly draw any relationship that exists between the teachers’ teaching practice, the social studies curriculum, and the children’s utopian or anti-utopian perception of their national identity.

3.2. City Profile and School Settings

Harar is the capital city of the Harari region in Eastern Ethiopia. It is an old city, which is identified as a Holy city of Islam (UNESCO, 2009). It has an estimated 210,000 population with a diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic composition (EMIS, 2011). The city is a major commercial center with trade routes connecting Ethiopia with countries in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. This has made the city a home of dynamic life, which sets the urban tone for the rest of the country in a manner that competes with Addis Ababa and other bigger cities.
The school-age population of grades 1-8 (between ages 7 and 14) in Harari region is 38,932, of which 34,040 are actually enrolled in schools. Slightly more than half of the school children (17,201) are enrolled in urban schools (mainly in the city of Harar). From the total school children in grades 1-8, 16.3% are enrolled in non-government schools. A total of 61 primary schools (grades 1-8) schools exist in Harari region, with an average pupil-section ratio (number of pupils in one section of a grade level) of 50 (the national average is 51). Teacher-pupil ratio in Harari is about 1:26 for grades 1-8, which is the second best ratio next to that of Addis Ababa (23). There is one College of Teacher Education in Harar, which trains first cycle (grades 1-4) and second cycle (grades 5-8) teachers in a diploma program. There are about 761 teachers, mostly females, for first cycle grades, and 525 teachers, mostly males, for second cycle grades.

Two schools in the city of Harar are chosen to recruit participants from for this study: Nazareth, an elementary to senior-secondary private Catholic mission school, and Walii, a grade 1-6 primary school (both school names are pseudonyms). Participants, especially children, from these relatively privileged school contexts (urban, typical/good teacher-pupil and pupil-section ratio, and/or access to diverse culture and information) are considered relevant informants for this study since it is easy to rule out lack of access to education and resource as a factor for the way school has (has not) influenced their understanding of the Ethiopian national identity. The children from Walii, the government school, are from poor socio-economic background. Some of the participants in this study live in the school’s boarding house which is supported by Ethiopians that live abroad. About 80 children, most of them orphans, live in the boarding house.
3.3. Participants and Recruitment Mechanisms

Two groups of participants were needed for this study—third to fifth grade school children, and their social studies teachers. Recruitment began from third grade because children start studying contents on the national at this grade level. A purposeful sampling plan was utilized to select the children from a pool of potential participants, and available sampling method was used to recruit the teachers.

3.3.1. Gaining entrée

After permission was obtained from the regional education bureau and school administrations, the schools’ records departments were approached to gain access to the teachers and to obtain relevant demographic and academic information on third to fifth-grade classrooms. Facts such as the number of sections in each grade level and presence/absence of special needs classes were inquired to identify sections with typical student composition.

Consent was then obtained from the teachers who received oral announcement from the researcher and recruitment fliers introducing the research study, the recruitment criteria, and incentive for participation (50.00 Ethiopian birr). Then, announcement introducing the research and the researcher was given to the children to involve in the study. A slightly different version of recruitment fliers were given to the children to look at and to take home with them to show to their parents. Interested parents contacted the researcher or sent the children with message, after which the parents of the high-achiever and low-achiever male and female students selected with the teachers from among the voluntary pool were approached. With the help of the teachers and the children, a brief meeting was arranged with the parents to obtain parental consent. Children were asked to give assent after parental consent was obtained. For those children who were 12 and older, a youth assent form was used.
3.3.2. **Students/Children**

A total of twelve children, two from each grade level (3\(^{rd}\), 4\(^{th}\), and 5\(^{th}\)), were enrolled in the study from each of the two schools. When selecting the child participants, diversity of gender, achievement level, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status was given attention. However, the proportion was not even in every respect. There were more girls than boys, more high achievers or upper average students than low achievers, more Orthodox Christians than Protestants, Catholics, or Muslims, and more children from Amhara and Oromo nationalities than Somali, Harari, etc. The disproportionate distribution resulted from the unevenness of the samples that follows the demographics and trends of the population in Harar. For example, majority of the Christians live in towns, and Christian parents are more likely to enroll their children in school than Muslim parents. Second, purposefully making the number of children even in every respect was impossible since participation was only on a voluntary basis. The profile of the children that participated in the study is summarized in Tables 3.1 and 3.2.

Table 3.1.

**Demographic profile of children recruited from Nazareth (private school)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Academic achievement</th>
<th>Ethnic/linguistic group</th>
<th>Religious affiliation</th>
<th>Socio-economic status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simret</td>
<td>3(^{rd})</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>High achiever</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Middle income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abeba</td>
<td>3(^{rd})</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Low achiever</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yegeta</td>
<td>4(^{th})</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High achiever</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Middle income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safia</td>
<td>4(^{th})</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Upper average</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Middle income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lidya</td>
<td>5(^{th})</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Upper average</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Middle income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yenus</td>
<td>5(^{th})</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>High achiever</td>
<td>Harari</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2.

**Demographic profile of children recruited from Walii (government school)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Academic achievement</th>
<th>Ethnic/linguistic group</th>
<th>Religious affiliation</th>
<th>Socio-economic status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gelila</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High achiever</td>
<td>Amhara</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olyad</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Low achiever</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Middle income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worqesh</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>High achiever</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezra</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Amhara</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selam</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Low achiever</td>
<td>Amhara</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meklit</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>High achiever</td>
<td>Amhara</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Low income</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All names are pseudonyms

3.3.3. **Social studies teachers**

In both schools, there was one social studies (environmental science) teacher for each grade level. Two female teachers from Nazareth, and one female and two male teachers from Walii were enrolled in the study. The educational level of the teachers and the number of years, grade level, and subjects each taught are showed in Table 3.3.
Table 3.3.

Professional profile of teachers who participated in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of years taught</th>
<th>Grade and subjects currently taught</th>
<th>Highest level of education received</th>
<th>Other subjects taught before</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menbere</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Walii</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3rd and 4th grade environmental science</td>
<td>Diploma (TTI**)</td>
<td>Oromiffa language, Maths, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aschalew</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Walii</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5th and 6th grade social studies</td>
<td>Diploma (TTI)</td>
<td>Music, sketching and painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alemu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Walii</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5th and 6th grade social studies</td>
<td>Degree (College)</td>
<td>Music, sketching and painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birtukan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4th grade environmental science and 5th grade social studies</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Amharic language, 7th and 8th grade Civics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genet</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1st – 3rd grade environmental science</td>
<td>Diploma (TTI)</td>
<td>Math, Ethics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - All names are pseudonyms

**- TTI- Teacher Training Institutes

3.4. Data Collection

For this study, three data gathering methods were used: Activity-based critical exploration interviews with children, semi-structured open ended interviews with teachers, and analysis of environmental science (3rd and 4th grade) and social studies (5th grade) textbooks. All recruitment and data collection for this study was done in spring 2013.
3.4.1. Interview with children

After obtaining parental consent and children’s assent, audio-taped interview of about an hour in length was conducted with each child in the school compounds. The interview had five semi-structured sections that are mostly activity-based discussions assisted by on-the-spot probing mechanisms recommended for use with children by Duckworth (2006). The Societal-Social-Cognitive-Motivational Theory (SSCMT) and concept development models in social studies teaching were used to develop the activities (See Table 3.4). This is mainly by making sure that questions that invite children to talk about all Societal and Social factors in as many settings as possible (home, school, neighborhood, etc.) were included in the data collection tools (See Appendix E). During the pilot study, the activities were found effective in engaging children with the interview and in assisting them to respond fully. Emphasis was given to adapt the study design tools to the Ethiopian context to capture as many social and societal cues as possible. Third to fifth grade environmental science and social studies textbooks used in public schools were used to create the activities within the children’s reasonable scope of familiarity.³

The interview artifacts in each of the five sections (the cards, the map, and the pictures) were used to represent contexts appealing to the children’s direct and indirect experiences that engaged them in an extended talk about what “Ethiopian” meant to them. The contexts include the self (Section One), the imagined national in-group or “Ethiopians” (Section Two and Five), their formal learning about “Ethiopia” and related symbols and meanings (Section Three), and their significant others, friends, teachers, and other adults (Section Four).

³ Third and fourth grade texts are prepared regionally, where as fifth grade text is prepared by the Ministry of Education at the federal level to be used in all regions. Both private and public schools use the same texts.
Activities in the five sections of children’s interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Names</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-categorization activity (Section I)</td>
<td>Reading labels that describe gender, religion, ethnicity (linguistic group), nationality, and socio-economic status (Afar, Orthodox, girl, Benishangul-Gumuz, Ethiopian, Oromo, Addis Ababa, human, poor, city, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Gambela, South, rural, Tigray, Protestant, rich, Harari, Muslim, Somali, Catholic, boy), choosing the ones that apply to self, rank-ordering them according to their degree of importance to self, and explaining how. Reading four other cards on which the phrases “Very Ethiopian,” “A little bit Ethiopian,” “Not Ethiopian,” and “I don’t know” are printed, choosing which applies to the self and explaining why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs &amp; feelings about national in-group (a) (Section II)</td>
<td>Reading twenty two adjectives, each written on a card (happy, greedy, hard-working, sad, generous, lazy, kind, alone, honest, cruel, together, dishonest, dirty, friendly, fast, clean, unfriendly, slow, good, clever, bad, stupid), choosing those that describe “Ethiopians,” and explaining why. Reading four other cards on which the phrases “I like them a lot,” “I like them a little bit,” “I dislike them a little bit,” and “I dislike them a lot,” are printed, choosing one that describes feeling towards “Ethiopians,” and explaining why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge &amp; concept of geog. location &amp; flag (Section III)</td>
<td>Answering fourteen questions about geographical location of Ethiopia in relation to other countries on African map, the cities/villages they came from, and their knowledge and opinion about the flag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs &amp; feelings about national in-group (b) (Section IV)</td>
<td>Writing the names of family members, friends, and teachers on index cards, Responding to follow up questions such as “Who do you think is ‘very Ethiopian’ from these? Why?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs &amp; feelings about national in-group (c) (Section V)</td>
<td>View twenty six pictures of individuals from different occupational and social groups (doctor, minister, teacher, soldier, priest, boy, girl, sheikh, athlete, singer, secretary, farmer, village woman, village man, young man, young lady, taxi driver, pilot, cook, fisherman, shepherd, carpenter, waiter, journalist, fashion model, beggar) circle one of “very Ethiopian,” “Ethiopian,” “Not Ethiopian ” or “I don’t know” printed below the pictures and giving explanation for choices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the first section—a self-categorization task—children were given twenty three cards on which different descriptive terms related to gender, age, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and socio-economic status were printed. They were then asked to rank the selected cards according to their degree of importance to them and explain why the top ones are very important. The objective was to see which level of social identity (ethnic, nationality, gender, age, and socio-economic status) is close to their everyday view of themselves and where the national identity (“Ethiopian”) stands in this regard. At last, they were given four other cards on which the phrases “Very Ethiopian,” “a little bit Ethiopian,” “not Ethiopian,” and “I don’t know” are printed and were asked to select which one described them and why. The goal was to engage them into discussion specifically about national identity. Probing questions were posed whenever necessary. The activities were adapted from Reizábal, Valencia, and Barrett’s (2007) study of Basque children’s national identification and attitudes towards the national in-group.

Section two is an assessment of the children’s beliefs and feelings about the national in-group (the imagined “Ethiopians”). It is adopted from the same study that section one is adopted from. The children were given twenty-two cards on which different adjectives are printed. Then, they were asked to select those that described their feeling to the national in-group and explain why they felt that way. They were also given other four cards on which the phrases “like a lot,” “like a little bit,” “dislike a lot,” and “dislike a little bit” were printed and were asked to select any one that represented their feeling towards the national in-group and explain why. The children were prompted to give examples or to tell more about the adjectives they chose.

In section three, the children were asked fourteen questions about the geographical location of the country, their opinions about the flag, and their source/s of information about the subject. The objective was to assess their actual knowledge about the country and a relevant out-
group, which they gained from school or media. In this section too, on-the-spot probing was frequently made. The questions were adopted from Weinstein’s (1957) study of children’s conception of flag.

In section four, the children were asked to write the names of their significant others (family members, teachers, neighbors, and friends). Then, they were asked to identify those they believe were “very Ethiopian” and explain why they thought so. They were also asked to discuss what they learned regarding “Ethiopia” or “Ethiopians” at school. Social studies concept learning methods were used to develop this activity (Parker, 1987; Taba & Elzey, 1996).

In the fifth section, the children were given another set of cards on which a wide selection of internet pictures of different Ethiopians from different age, occupational, and gender groups are printed. They were then asked to label each as “very Ethiopian,” “a little bit Ethiopian,” “not Ethiopian,” or “I don’t know” and explain why. They were also asked what would make the “not Ethiopian” ones “very Ethiopian.” This activity was also developed based on social studies concept learning methods (Parker, 1987; Taba & Elzey, 1996). This section allowed children to engage visually with different aspects of identity and cultural contexts, such as physical features, occupation, dress code, landscape, etc. which may not have been discussed in the previous sections.

3.4.2. Interview with teachers

After the children, the teachers were interviewed. Their interviews were about an hour long in average with twenty open-ended questions on teachers’ perspective on the role of school in general and social studies education in particular in children’s national enculturation. The purpose of the interview was to find out what “Ethiopian” meant to the teachers, what kind of Ethiopian utopia they envision, how they believe social studies education and other social and
societal institutions are (are not) playing a role in children’s national enculturation, and how much agency they feel they have in the process. In order to encourage teachers to discuss their personal views instead of responding rhetorically or out of their expectation of what the interviewer wants, each of the interview questions were worded in a round-about way following the recommendation of Maxwell (2005) to construct questions in a less logical way (See Appendix F for interview schedule).

3.4.3. Textbook analysis

The contents of third to fifth grade environmental science and social studies textbooks were analyzed for implicit and explicit definitions of the “Ethiopian” identity, representation of the “Ethiopian” collective identity, and directions for future visions.

3.5. Data Analysis

Following the constructivist grounded theory approach, data analysis began during the interview by using themes identified by the children and the teachers themselves to come up with follow up questions for further exploration. As a result, the bulk of the responses from both the children and the teachers came from these on-the-spot probes. The audio-taped interviews were then transcribed and translated into English.

3.5.1. Analysis of children’s interview

MAXQDA—professional computer software specifically designed for analysis of qualitative data—was used to analyze the children’s responses. The process of data analysis mostly involved inductively developing topical and analytical codes followed by several rounds of memo writing (Richards, 2009). The data analysis followed three major steps:

a) First, free analysis on the software was made during which simple, but many, topical
codes and descriptive phrases were entered on each child’s transcribed interview. Codes and phrases such as “his practical example of friendliness,” “she believes culture made her Ethiopian,” and “Abay Dam as indicator of togetherness” were used as code labels on the particular segments of the transcribed interview they indicate. Lines which reflect similar thoughts and topics were grouped under the same code. Parallel to the coding, specific comments were written on the margin connecting, comparing, and contrasting the ideas of one coded segment with previous ones. These include comments and questions such as “but here she discussed two kinds of citizenship,” “it seems his friends too value friendship,” and “this indicates he is deeply traumatized by the loss of his mother” etc. An average of a hundred codes and parallel comments were entered on each child’s transcription using the software.

b) Then, specific analytical guideline with questions developed from the pilot study was used on a separate set of the children’s transcribed interviews. Pre-developed codes were entered into the software under which sections of the interviews pertinent to those codes and questions were selected and grouped. These included coding topics such as “Describing oneself as Ethiopian,” “Describing others as Ethiopian,” “Sources of information” “Dominant sorts of action,” and “How Ethiopian national identity is concretized to the child.” These codes also have sub-codes. For example, “Describing oneself as Ethiopian” has the sub-codes “physical and categorical,” “traits, dispositions, and behaviors,” and “shared beliefs and values” based on the stages of development of children’s understanding of groups suggested by developmental and social psychologists (Sani & Bennett, 2004; Sani, et al., 2000; Quintana, 1999). “Sources of information” has the sub-codes “family,” “neighborhood,” “peers,” “teachers,” “textbook,” “school community,” “religious organization,” “media,” “child’s personal opinion,” and “other sources” under it. The code “Dominant sort of actions” has sub-codes “knowing/learning,”
“getting/having,” “being,” “feeling,” “appearing,” “saying,” “doing/action,” and “belief/thought.” (See Section I of the analysis guideline in Appendix G.)

c) The third stage of the analysis of the children’s interview was guided by the questions in Section II of the analysis guideline (See Appendix G). These include questions such as “Were the criteria they used to describe themselves as Ethiopian different from that they used to describe others as Ethiopian?” and “Was there coherence of definition along this regard as they went through the different sections?” These and several other questions were used to come up with numerous memos around inconsistencies, gaps, contradictions, paradoxes, ironies, etc. for each child. The memos were later developed into several pages of descriptions of what it means to be “Ethiopian” from the perspective of each child, after which, an attempt was made to determine the presence of fundamental dualistic distortions in the child’s understanding of society and national identity. The frequency and depth of disconnection with self, cognitive dissonance, double standards, imbalances (among, for example, the source of information the child mostly relied on), and so on which were used to determine which of the two groups (“anti-utopian” or “utopian”) the child was categorized in and presented in the findings section.

3.5.2. Analysis of teachers’ interview

The teachers’ interviews were explored for the purpose of triangulating data obtained from the children. Therefore, no separate guidelines were developed. The analysis mostly took the form of the free descriptions and labels made on the children’s transcribed interviews in the initial stage; but, emphasis was given to drawing insight on the teachers’ positions in the areas of distortions identified in the children’s world outlooks. The purpose was to understand teachers’ self-awareness and level of agency in sustaining or challenging the identified distortions.
3.5.3. **Analysis of textbook contents**

The third and fourth grade environmental science texts and the fifth grade social studies content (which are generally referred to as “social studies text” in this paper unless specifically identified) were analyzed for their content to see if they support or challenge any distorted perspective on national identity identified in the children’s interviews. The purpose is to find out if they can reveal important relationships, conflicts and/or contradictions within the philosophical assumptions that guide Ethiopian social studies curriculum design.

3.6. **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

The use of five different sections in the children’s responses was helpful to identify consistent themes and to validate responses from one section by those obtained from the others. My familiarity with the cultural context also gave me an insider perspective thereby reducing possibility of misunderstanding the children’s responses. Comparison of emerging themes and patterns with teachers’ interview responses, textbook contents, and literature on evolution of conceptions of utopia, children’s enculturation, and globalization also added interpretive agreement towards the concluding stage of my analysis. Any influence from global trends and assumptions particularly emanating from dystopian/anti-utopian impulses were investigated by constant comparison to current literature on prevalent utopian/dystopian assumptions and educational philosophy in general.

3.7. **Ethical Considerations**

Participant recruitment and treatment throughout the study was conducted according to the Human Subject protection policies of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cincinnati. There were no identifiable risks for participating in this study. A few minor risks expected were related to participants’ fear to discuss their personal views on issues of national
identity, which is a politically sensitive topic. These potential risks were taken into consideration during the recruitment process by ensuring confidentiality, and care was taken to ensure participants’ awareness of their rights to withdraw from the study anytime.

3.8. The Role and Background of the Researcher

I was born and raised in Harar, Ethiopia. I did my undergraduate studies in Bahir Dar—a city located in the north western part of the country. My Bachelor’s Degree was in Pedagogical Sciences and Geography composite major. As far back as I remember during my grade school years, I have always wanted to do something “real,” something that has of immediate relevance to the kind of social problems I witness such as ethnic and religious conflicts, political strife, and poverty. I used to be impressed by adults who cared to have a wide range of knowledge about socio-political issues and held strong stances as their personal principles or for the benefit of others. I believed if a large number of people had such passion in all societies, then, there would be a positive and productive dynamicity in any field or social sector. However, I began to see some fundamental problems that prevented the development of such passion among several young Ethiopians when I reached high school. I remember being amazed and perplexed by the disparity between the kinds and amount of information, discourses, values, and facts that could foster the sense of community and solidarity among people, but are missing from the social science textbooks and from the professional priorities of curriculum designers and teachers.

During my college study, too, I was dissatisfied by the lack of immediate connection between what I learned and what I saw as concrete and problematic social issues. More importantly, I saw a divide between what I and my fellow undergraduates would love to passionately do and the opportunity we actually had. I also noticed that the unrealized passions and dreams had something in common; i.e., the desire to see society as a functional whole and
the longing to have the ability to locate one’s contribution in it clearly. My experience as an assistant lecturer for two years in the university I graduated from further confirmed to me that discussion on a shared value system and collective philosophy that is linked specifically with national identity is missing.

My personal search for answers to these questions began during my college years and took me through important works of concerned scholars of the past and the present. My resolution, which became the basic assumption for this study, is that there is an “Ethiopian” identity which is a value system that can be assumed by Ethiopians, and can influence, encompass, and give meaning to ethnic identity, place, color, race, name of religion, or economic condition, but cannot be reduced into any one of them.

My next goal was to understand the nature of this identity and to study its implication for curriculum design. I became convinced that it is very important and urgent to develop harmonious and more meaningful social science curricula for students in all grade levels. By coming to the US for my graduate studies, I got a deeper understanding of educational philosophies that I had learned in a decontextualized manner in Ethiopia.

My extended stay in the US for my doctoral studies enabled me to come to understand Ethiopian children better by socially relating with them and teaching language for a few of them in the Sunday School of a local Ethiopian Church. Though the sessions were too short to build a personalized relationship with each child, I occasionally had the opportunity to engage in identity and cultural talks with the kids. My impression so far is that the kind and level of understanding of each child, or, even, basic awareness of the existence of a collective identity called “Ethiopian” is different and may depend on several factors other than age or educational level. I became convinced that focusing on children’s perspective is a good place to start from in order to
study how identity is communicated to, or even produced for, children who are the main focus of my professional commitment. I have come to understand the importance of appreciating this context in a very systematic manner and the need to develop the skill to “enter the child’s mind” to trace the psychological nature of the treasures of stable social identity or the tragedies of social fragmentation. Without this first step, I am convinced that it will not be possible to select and organize social studies content that can begin from where the children are so they can become well-anchored in an Ethiopian worldview.

As an Ethiopian who was born and brought up there, my cultural-in was a positive asset in how to design and conduct this study. I was able to build rapport with children and their families and teachers to conduct the interviews and to have access to textbooks. The fact that I had no hierarchical authority over the children and their teachers made their participation less prone to coercion. Since I was also aware of the heterogeneity of the population, I was able to make the demography of my participants as diverse as possible through purposeful selection. My experience with how to ask sensitive issues related to ethnic, religious, or tribal identity and my stance to bear with this sensitive topic of identity as graciously as possible enabled me to conduct the interview in a respectful and comfortable tone. I believe my personal quests as well as cultural and professional assets have led me to a greater understanding of my research topic.
Chapter Four

4. Findings

Initially, the children’s interviews gave an impression that all children had a similar understanding of their national identity. They all expressed pride in being Ethiopian, wanting to know more about Ethiopia, and a hope that Ethiopia will developed. But, a more in-depth analysis and comparison showed that the children differed fundamentally in their world out-look. Among the twelve children, six children (mostly high achievers) showed strong bent towards anti-utopianism, and the other six (mostly low achievers) showed gravitation towards utopianism. Before discussing the findings from the two groups, it will be important to clarify how a utopian and an anti-utopian world out-look generally differ. From what I was able to understand from the literature review, and also from the difference among the children I interviewed, the fundamental difference between a utopian thinking and its challenging impulse (an anti-utopian outlook) can be outlined as shown in Table 4.1. It is this general guideline that led me to categorize the children in “Utopian” and “Anti-utopian” groups.

Table 4.1.

Comparison of a utopian outlook and an anti-utopian outlook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utopian outlook</th>
<th>Anti-utopian outlook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believes a just, happy, and prosperous society is possible</td>
<td>Believes a just, happy, and prosperous society is a wishful fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes that utopia is what everybody wants</td>
<td>Doubts if people really want a peaceful and predictable life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views social ills as everyone’s challenges that should be solved through united action</td>
<td>Views social problems as facts of life that define winners and losers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because an anti-utopian outlook is not endorsed by conventional traditional, ethical, religious, and humanistic values, a person holding such view will be obliged to conceal it; hence, the double standards, inconsistencies, and ironies. Analysis of how the children in the anti-utopian group portrayed their national identity and national in-group shed light on numerous gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions that show such dualism in their world-view. Their understanding of government, society, societal institutions, environment, and generally, human beings, has several dualistic distortions. As a result, they seem severely disconnected from reality although they are academically more successful.

All the dualistic views observed in the children point to the process by which the 20th century regimes of Ethiopia, especially the current one, centralized their power by separating the meaning of different natural and social phenomena from who/what they refer to in practice and made them abstract. These include aspects of identities (gender, ethnic, religious, national, human), culture (e.g., patriotism), processes (e.g., development), institutions, and the environment. The disposition of a dualistic world outlook that caused all the major social, economic, religious, environmental, and political crises at the national level seems to be already present in the children. It gets grounded in the children’s perceptions so early that the continuation of curricular irrelevance is more than likely if utopian reforms are not made at the elementary education level.

The children in the utopian group, however, demonstrated a genuine, although not necessarily articulate, sense of care, concern, and sense of hope for their country and their national in-group. Some showed this directly. But, for others, it was indirect, and was only inferred from the way they were challenged by the absence of humanistic, realistic, and, at the same time, idealistic view of Ethiopian history, religion, government, people, humanity, or
environment. Unlike the anti-utopian group, only two children were high achievers in the utopian group. However, a combination of various factors, and not achievement per se, determined which of the two outlooks the children adopted towards their national identity.

While maintaining the possibility that they may change their dispositions in the future, the six “anti-utopian” children are presented in this study as prototypes of identities that bear different combinations of dualistic and anti-utopian views. More emphasis was given on the “anti-utopian” group during the data analysis since the main goal of this study is to identify themes around which elementary social studies and environmental science curricula can be re-conceptualized in order to revive the spirit of utopianism in its classic sense. In Chapter Five, the cases of the “utopian” group are presented showing how the absence of, or resistance to, the distortions identified for the “anti-utopian” group were the causes of their utopianism.

As will be discussed in Chapter Six, the contents of environmental science and social studies education were found to be distractive and preventive of children’s natural tendency to engage in a rather utopian way of thinking. This shows that the distortions in the children’s conceptualization of their country, their society, their collective identity, and their general worldview are intentionally created, and are not innocent misconceptions the children temporarily hold due to their not-yet-developed knowledge base about these topics. Teachers also felt personally unconnected to the curriculum, and expressed, though cautiously, their general dissatisfaction in the educational system’s ability to bring about meaningful change in children’s spiritual, cultural, social, and national consciousness. A summary of the twelve major topic areas the two groups of children differed in and their implications are presented in Chapter Seven, followed by twelve thematic strands proposed for a Utopian/Ethiopian elementary social studies education in Chapter Eight.
Findings from the Anti-Utopian Group

The six children who exhibited a dualistic or anti-utopian understanding of their national identity were Gelila, Worqnesh, Lidya, Simret, Safia, and Yenus. The interview data from each of the first four children showed different aspects of dualistic social, political, spiritual, and environmental understandings which are inter-related. They were mostly present in their understandings in the forms of seeing essentially related aspects as separate, not seeing another side of identity/function of themselves, their society, or societal institutions, and confusing opposite phenomena for each other. Safia and Yenus, fourth and fifth grade Muslim students respectively, however, showed a different kind of anti-utopianism; one that is primarily expressed by disengagement, purposeful alienation, and autonomy. Their cases are indicative of the need to reconsider the belief that public education in Ethiopia can meaningfully address the educational needs of children from Christian and Muslim communities. A revival of a Utopian/Ethiopian approach of education requires thinking along a united Christian initiative in Ethiopia, giving Islamic education its complete autonomy.

The inter-relatedness of the dualistic distortions discovered in the interview data from the four children, together with the presence of a corresponding opposite tendency among the more utopian group, confirms the importance of selecting contents from Ethiopia’s religious, political, social, economic, and cultural life and history to directly address these areas. A summary of these dualistic distortions demonstrated in the six children’s understanding of their national identity is presented in Table 4.2, followed by a discussion on each.
Table 4.2.

*Summary of major distortions, omissions, misunderstandings, and confusions held by children in the anti-utopian group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Religious affiliation</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Academic status</th>
<th>Major distortions, omissions, misunderstandings, and confusions accepted as default/normal by the child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gelila</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Walii*</td>
<td>High achiever</td>
<td>- The service (servant) aspect of government unseen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Pretending to accept inequality as normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The invisibility of the utopian aspect of occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- People, natural resources, and cultural heritages as resources to be represented, and not worked with/from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Conscience understood as submissive deference to the rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worqesh</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Walii</td>
<td>High achiever</td>
<td>- Identity viewed as a means to global citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Rural destitution understood as inherent to the places, and not as result of human (in)action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Girls’/Women’s equality located in the government, and not in the girls/women themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Most valuable knowledge as distant, abstract,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
challenging, and not affecting the day-to-day life

- Anticipation of the not-yet-realized future as the major task of past and present Ethiopian generations

- Escaping oppression, and not fighting it, as the foundational principle of the Ethiopian identity

- The nature of government as preserver and executer of bigger ideals than itself missing

- Viewing the poverty of the country and the condition of disenfranchised people as separate phenomena

- Togetherness and cooperation as limited only to times of joy or distress

- “Change” understood simply as saving more money

**Lidya**  5th  F  13  Protestant Nazareth**  Upper average

- Commercial agriculture mistaken for “greenness”

- Technological innovations as unrelated to solving concrete problems in human lives

- Public sector jobs as unrelated to “development”

- An illusionary continuum of hierarchy between technological advancement and agriculture

**Simret**  3rd  F  11  Orthodox Nazareth  High achiever
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yenus</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>High achiever - Low critical thinking disposition due to intentional disconnect with “Christian” Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safia</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>Upper average - Low critical thinking disposition due to intentional disconnect with “Christian” Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Walli- government elementary school

**Nazareth –private comprehensive elementary and secondary Catholic school
4.1. Gelila—The Stoic Defender of the Anti-utopian Hegemony

The ten year old Gelila is academically an excellent third grader at Walii School. She left the rural village in the western part of Ethiopia where she used to live with her mother and came to Harar (more than 700 kilometers away from her mother’s village) to get better access to education. She now lives with her mothers’ aunt in Harar who earns a meager income from selling Injera\(^4\). By the time I interviewed her for this study, she had lived in Harar for three years. She is a popular student with extensive extra-curricular participation. She volunteered to participate immediately when she heard about the research study.

Gelila’s portrayal of her national identity showed five areas of dualistic distortions that were mostly caused by her complete reliance on government media for information. This has set her on the path of developing an aggressive and military-like mind-set, which exists beneath her smoothly flowing and very polite speech accompanied by smiles. Gelila showed the most polarized self-concept and social outlook compared to all the other children in this study. The five areas of dualistic distortions observed in her interview responses are discussed below:

4.1.1. The service (servant) aspect of government unseen

The major and most impactful gap in Gelila’s comprehension of her national identity is her conceptualization of government and government officials merely as triumphant forces to be emulated, and not as people/organization that do things to serve the public/people. She sees government as a role model worthy of imitation. However, this is not for its ideals or the services it provides to ensure the all-rounded well-being of its subjects; rather, it is for its

\(^4\) A thin bread made from teff—a grain staple to Ethiopia
The possession of power that, from Gelila’s perspective, appears to be ultimate and desirable. The function of government as service provider is not consciously rejected by Gelila; rather, it is simply out of view from her angle. She does not seem to know that a government is, in principle, involved in serving the public, although the current regime does profess so. This hole in Gelila’s worldview is significantly widened by the intense propaganda of the government which currently has subtly assumed a tone of dictatorship despite its claims of serving the public. Ironically, this tone, which has significantly affected Gelila’s self-concept and view of government, has energized her to perform academically and added to her popularity.

Gelila’s main (and, almost exclusive) source of information, the National Television and Radio, mostly broadcast programs aligned with the priority agendas the government of Ethiopia developed in cooperation with donor countries and international organizations. Poverty reduction, agriculture, development, tourism, democratic governance, and compulsory education are pervasive themes. During the interview, Gelila mentioned a wide range of economic, cultural, and political facts, events, and processes that are reflective of these themes, such as: the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam on Abay/Nile, the presence of natural resources and cultural heritages in the country, the importance of maintaining equality among different nationalities and ethnicities, the culture of hospitality and warmness towards foreigners/tourists, enhanced agricultural practices by exemplary farmers, and the country’s involvement in various regional and international events, like meetings, peace treaties, and sport matches. Gelila also seemed well informed about unpleasant political scenarios such as terrorism, corruption, and war with neighboring countries. The large amount of information she has on different subjects and the passion with which she discussed them is not typical for any child of her age group.
With the factual information, however, Gelila also has internalized the judgmental tone of the media to applaud/denounce practices that are deemed acceptable/unacceptable by the government’s standards. Some of the practices she mentioned as acceptable were shedding one’s in defense of the country, working one’s way up towards financially better and prestigious positions, and being enthusiastic and happy about national and local initiatives which are in line with government policies. On the other hand, she denounced practices such as substance abuse and illegal emigration to Arab countries, idleness, begging, theft, and showing unenthusiastic/unhappy face. She linked them with motives to halt development efforts or to avoid responsibility to work in a reasoning that resembles that of government officials. Her portrayal of national identity and related particulars were filled with rhetoric which made her sound like a government authority (especially in the italicized lines):

Those [who do corruption] are people who are not hard-working. They are careless, careless people who do not want to work, and instead solicit bribes. I have seen on Saturday TV program about a guy who was involved in corruption and tried to escape to another country. No one can escape from the eyes of the law; no one! Corruption is a serious crime. We are now working hard trying to eradicate poverty. We, students, are also contributing with what we can in our capacity. Meaning, for example, there is a one-to-five model of organizational structure.⁵ We put that to practice. That is one kind of help. So, instead of learning corruption, it is better to learn what is taught in school and become a hard working citizen loyal to the country.

⁵ A political structure recently introduced by the government for organizing election campaigns, facilitating recruitment of students and government employees, and disseminating the ruling party’s political ideology.
Gelila’s pace, emphasis, and the highs and lows when speaking the above, especially the italicized lines, were incredibly similar to the typical way higher officials and well-known political figures often address the nation on different topics. She used a similar authoritarian tone when talking about other actions considered unacceptable by the government:

For example, the government in Asmara [Eritrea] does not want Ethiopia to develop.

People or governments like that should not be allowed to do harm on the country. They should be advised first. If they refuse, they should be put to trial. I wouldn’t watch silently when my country is being impoverished by someone.

Unfortunately, her presentation of patriotism and loyalty to her country was animated, not by reverence to any Ethiopian heritage or value, but by a strong desire to imitate media rhetoric, as is evident in the below quote which slowly turned into random oratory:

The red [color of the flag] shows the blood our forefathers shed for the sake of the country during the Italian invasion. They have also passed on to us historical heritages. We should be trusted with that and make sure it is passed on to the next generation. We should help the country develop and pay for the blood of our forefathers. There are Ethiopians who do not want the country to develop... But, we do not want our country to be impoverished. We want to be educated; and, even right now Ethiopia is working in cooperation with different countries like China, America, Japan, and Germany.

As mentioned previously, Gelila’s identification with the stances and views of the government did not come from any appreciation of what the government (or a government official) does to fulfill a responsibility towards the people. There was no evidence of that kind of understanding by her throughout the interview. Rather, her identification with the government
comes from the admiration of the exercise of power, control, and superiority which she believes entitles government officials to “advise” the people, as she explained, for example, in the picture task in Section V of the interview (see Table 3.4.):

Gelila- He is “very Ethiopian”

Meskerem- How?

Gelila- I think he is a government officer who helps people

Meskerem- You mean financially?

Gelila- Financially or by advising. Advice by itself is a kind of help.

Gelila’s academic status as a high achiever strengthened her self-identification with government officials, and led her to see herself as a future leader in some capacity. Since she only sees the controlling, dominating, and, at most, the “advising” function of the government, she believes that is her role as far as her present relationship with other school children is concerned. The extra-curricular activities she is passionately involved in give her ample opportunities to develop that part of herself. She was in the student parliament (as a member), student police, and in the anti-corruption circle when she was in second grade. In third grade, she is in the student government, and she is also involved in the recently introduced one-to-five organizational structure model the government employed at every level of political organization—including the school classroom. Stunned by her extensive extra-curricular participation, I asked her what her roles were in all these circles and positions. With the help of my frequent probes, she detailed them as follows:

When I was in the anti-corruption club, I did not do my exam during exam hours. I used to keep an eye on other students until they finish because I am fast and finish mine quickly after the others are done. In the one-to-five structure, I prepare question and
answer program; and I bring to trial those who misbehave; meaning, I take them to the teacher… We are five in the team. But, only some of us are discharging our duties. For example, in my team, there is a girl named Bethlehem. Her sister is an excellent student, but she is not. She likes playing and wrestling with others. I advised her many times. She did not even know “ሀ”6 when we were in second grade. But she has changed a lot now… She can read a passage now although she is slow reader. Now, I try to help her to read fluently. And, so, corruption should be eradicated.

It is obvious from her above descriptions, especially the italicized ones, that Gelila’s activities in the clubs do not train her to see herself primarily as a service provider who views other children as whole humans; rather, they emphasize her privilege to exercise power by controlling, advising, and “bring to trial those who misbehave.” These kinds of extra-curricular activities currently operating in government schools are very appealing to children like Gelila who have a strong ambition and are high achievers. The identification with and passion about government authority, political structures, exercise of power, and enforcement of law that they impressed in Gelila’s mind were very strong. She, for example, labeled the taxi driver sitting on his car in a picture as “very Ethiopian” because “I think he goes when it is green, and stops when it is red.”

Unfortunately, her strong identification with the government and its power to dominate did not actually empower her. Although she is a popular and successful student, the extent to which she personally feels powerful relative to the government is very low. Some parts of the interview made it obvious that she was sharing ideas that came from external sources and what

6 The first letter in the often-used version of the Ethiopian alphabetical arrangement.
she truly feels was actually different. She continually repressed her personal feelings, ideas, concerns, hopes, and understandings while she kept portraying the government as a giant possessor of an ultimate power, almost equal to the power of God Himself. When talking about the origins of the flag and the beginning of Ethiopia, she demonstrated a cult-like view towards the present regime and repressed any information she has that she vaguely feels are contrary to it:

Meskerem- How did Ethiopia begin?

Gelila- [pause] It began by development projects

Meskerem- When do you think it began?

Gelila- Two thousand years ago.

Meskerem- I see. On what basis did you guess two thousand years?

Gelila- Um…[long pause]

Meskerem- Maybe based on the calendar?

Gelila- I think I saw on the Bible [lower voice]. I read Bible in my leisure time. I read about Israel, Egypt, and so on. I read, and, I know the word “Ethiopia” is found in the Bible.

By linking the beginning of Ethiopia with one of the most repeatedly uttered phrases of the current regime (development projects) in the above quote, Gelila, an Orthodox Christian, tries to assert that the current regime is an ever-present founder of the nation of Ethiopia. She also identified the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi as a giver of right to citizens, and believed that the ruling party’s election campaign logo is another Ethiopian flag. She went to the extent of portraying the present regimes’ vision of development efforts as completely unique and qualitatively different from that of, for example, the technologically advanced countries’ development, and, as especially favored by God:
God loves the country and it has spiritual hopes. There are many countries who want to tempt God by trying to climb on the Moon and go to the heavens. God punished such countries by bringing disasters on them. But, on us, he doesn’t. That is because we want to work for the development of our country with the help of God and not tempt God.

On the other hand, Gelila’s diminishment of herself and her importance in relation to the government went to the extent of feeling compelled to assert that her thinking, even without exposure to media, was or would be similar to the contents of the media. After her passionate discussions about investment, development, anti-terrorism efforts, and diversity in Section IV, I asked her when she remembers first hearing the word “Ethiopia”:

Gelila- Ethiopia? [Confused look]

Meskerem- Yes

Gelila- [lower voice] No, I didn’t hear anything. [Pause] But, I used to think,

Ethiopia is a country of lots of resources and nations and nationalities who live in love.

Such extreme identification of oneself with the government and reliance on media has affected her ability, interest, and/or sense of courage to give her personal opinion on topics related to national identity or any social issue. She did not, for example, simply tell her opinion like the other children for the question if a stamp-sized flag would still be an Ethiopian flag. She had to think if she had learned in class something similar to such size-conversion-related activity or content. She responded by mentioning that it can be so if it is related to painting it on a notebook in class (and, they have done that activity in environmental science class).
It is notable that all these tendencies to self-annihilate while imitating the government came, not because the government explicitly communicates that it has an absolute power, but because the service-provider and human-centered role of government in general, and people who are in the government in particular, is not adequately visible in any of the information that is made available to Gelila. It looks, going beyond explaining the impersonal structure of a democratic government and adequately exposing children to the theme of the leader-as-servant is an important task social studies and other supplemental literature should accomplish.

4.1.2. Pretending to accept inequality as normal viewed as a desirable behavior

Because of her tendency to base her identity on the extent to which she mimicked media, Gelila gave importance to saying and appearing as central/main features of identity. The majority of these saying’s and appearing’s in Gelila’s responses were related to concealing the multi-dimensional impact of inequality of income, power, and privilege on oneself, or feeling compelled to minimize the importance of it. Inequality among individuals and groups, which is often associated with, but is not limited to, uneven distribution of wealth (income) is presented by Gelila in a manner that implies it is inevitable, normal, or not-that-impactful. This is not so, of course, when discussing the poverty of the country compared to other countries, in which case, loudly expressing concern about poverty is perceived by Gelila (and most Ethiopians) as, not only acceptable, but also a question of patriotism, identity, and human dignity.

Gelila presented income inequality among individuals in a society merely as non-threatening, as long as people act “friendly” to each other. She explained that “friendly” described Ethiopians because:
I have seen lots of foreigners giving testimony about the friendliness of Ethiopians on TV. I myself am friendly with many people. I often get comfortable with people in just one day. If Ethiopians see someone they don’t know, they do not leave it like that. They want to get closer and know that person. *I haven’t seen anyone who ignores the poor and does not get friendly with them because of their poverty. They are friendly; the rich to the poor, or the poor to the poor.* They are also friendly with people of other countries.

Consequential to this pretention of an acceptance of inequality, Gelila appears unaffected by the national poverty although she expresses assertively that it should be dealt with. She has quickly learned that the call for loyalty to the country and the strong determination to do away with poverty at the national level is all in the saying. Hence, she easily expresses an expectation, both on herself and other Ethiopians, to be loyal to their “Ethiopian” identity despite its poverty. She frequently mentioned that Ethiopians can show their loyalty to their country by *saying* “I am Ethiopian.” So, I had to ask her if the saying depends on any reality, such as place of residence:

Meskerem- Let’s say you went to another country, say, Britain, and grew up there. Would “Ethiopian” still describe you?

Gelila- Yes

Meskerem-Why?

Gelila- *Because I don’t have to betray my country.* If someone *asks* me what nationality I have, I would **say** “Ethiopian” and I am proud to be Ethiopian.

Another example:

Meskerem- Do you think there are people who may be only “a little bit Ethiopian” even if their father and mother are Ethiopian?
Gelila- Um [pause] like, they may be bribed by something, and they may say they are “a little bit Ethiopian.” They may even say they are not Ethiopian at all. But I am not that kind of person.

This pseudo-identity and pseudo-patriotism maintained by “saying” is demonstrated by Gelila also in her understanding of inequality of political power. She equated political equality with the politically correct addressing of the less privileged groups by the politically dominant group:

Gelila- Ethiopia is a country which has several nations and nationalities in it. The stars [on the flag] are together. Ethiopian nations and nationalities also work together and live in equality and unity…. There is no such a thing like “go away! You are Guragie, and I am Amhara. So, I am greater than you” kind of thing. Everyone is equal. That is what the star shows.

Meskerem- Yes. Some people ask if all ethnicities are equal in Ethiopia because they see that most leading EPRDF members are Tigries.7

Gelila- Yes

Meskerem- So, they say “doesn’t this mean the Tigries have become greater than others?”

Gelila- No, it doesn’t.

Meskerem- Why not?

Gelila- Because the star shows the equality of all nations. We can’t say Tigrie is different from Amhara or Guraghe. For example, PM Meles is Tigrig and his parents are from Tigrai. Tigries did not say “the Ethiopian government

7 An ethnic group from which the majority of the members of the currently dominant ruling party came.
is from Tigrai, so, you Amharas do not have a Prime Minister because he
is ours and he doesn’t help you” because all people are equal.

Saying certain things and not saying others is very important to Gelila’s positive
conceptualization of herself as an Ethiopian to the extent that she also believes one’s earnestly
loyal job as a citizen is to make others think and say certain things about Ethiopia and/or
Ethiopians:

Yes, because Ethiopians are very good. When I say “good,” they are good to both their
own people and to foreigners. For example, if another Ethiopian comes from another
city, I should not say “what is he? I don’t know him or what he is up to” because I am
Ethiopian and he is Ethiopian, too. I should not push people from another country, too. I
should be good and be a good representative of all people. The person may think all
Ethiopians are good based on my good conduct and say that Ethiopians are good. I can
make the Ethiopian too think well about his own country people.

Besides thinking and saying favorable things about Ethiopia and Ethiopians, appearing
happy is also considered necessary by Gelila. She gave herself as an example of how Ethiopians
are “happy” and added an enthusiastic note by saying she recommends that other Ethiopians be
happy, too, because Ethiopia has “lots of treasures, natural resources, tourist attractions, like
rivers, parks, wild animals, etc.” She also labeled certain individuals from Section V (the picture
task) as “a little bit Ethiopian” or “not Ethiopian” solely based on the unhappy faces they
showed. All the words she chose to describe “Ethiopians” were positive adjectives. In most of
her explanations as to how these positive words describe Ethiopians (being together, kind, warm,
friendly, equality, etc.), saying and appearing were mentioned as the primary ways she believes these positive qualities are manifested by the people.

However, her heavy reliance on words and appearances, and her conformation to social and political rhetoric about the inevitability of inequality has cost Gelila a great deal. She has no legitimate outlet for her personal experience with inequality and the resultant depression and loss of motivation she experiences whenever thoughts about her personal life rear their head in her consciousness. Gelila is not as happy as she would like her listeners to believe. While writing the names of her significant others, friends, teachers, and relatives in Section IV, she burst into tears when talking about her mother, not as a response to any question, but while talking freely where her mother is and who she is living with currently. She narrated for me in length, with tears, about how she feels deeply sad when she thinks of her mother, who went through and is going through lots of hardships due to a failed marriage, poverty, and domestic violence in her second marriage. She also told me that she is able to attend school because of the aid she gets from a local Protestant Mission Church that gives her money to buy basic school supplies.

However, for Gelila, this aspect of her life is something separate from what she learns in social studies curriculum, and something that should not be linked to all the topics and ideas she discussed throughout the interview, including eradication of poverty, the bright hope due to the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam, the assertion about the presence of equality, or the advice she gives for others to appear, say, and be happy. Therefore, Gelila views low achievers, poor people, beggars, etc. from a very judgmental point of view that does not seem to take into consideration her own family’s poverty or her professed determination to help low achievers. For example, she blames poor people for their condition and says they are not focused on education/work enough, and therefore, have brought their condition on themselves:
Meskerem- How are you seeing poverty being manifested among the people?

Gelila- By undervaluing and not taking care of oneself. There are people who become delinquents and substance abusers by not wanting to involve in development projects and preferring to leave for other countries instead, such as going to Arab countries illegally. It is due to such reasons that poverty is expanding and development is not being realized in our country. There are girls who are 15 years old and lie that they are 25, and go to Arab countries. Instead of returning as disabled people by getting into accidents on the sea when trying to enter other countries illegally, they should stay here and work here with their healthy shape intact. They should be counseled and they should engage in creative self-employment. So, poverty happens when they hate themselves, and hate to be here and want to leave the country by any means.

Meskerem- What do you think they are running away from?

Gelila- Work! A person who has no interest to work for the development of his or her country is so unfortunate person with no concerned adviser. A person who wants to work for his/her country’s development is a person putting effort to eradicate poverty.

She also stated that the beggars presented in pictures in Section V are only “a little bit Ethiopian” because they “don’t have the initiative to work and change themselves.” Obviously, Gelila has learned to despise and be ashamed of the poor, to feel guilty about her own poverty, and to want to do anything to become financially prosperous as a result of her continuous exposure to themes of “eradication of poverty” on media and in school. Her repressed sadness due to her distressful personal life is only soothed by the advice and inspiration she gets from her teachers; and, she
seemed to need a lot of that to be able to continue with her saying’s and appearing’s in order to get through each school day:

I say Miss Meselech is “very Ethiopian” because she works so hard to change her country. Miss Aberach is also “very Ethiopian.” *I never get tired of hearing Miss Meselech’s advice. I wouldn’t mind if she started at six in the morning and went on up to six in the evening...* She is a fine teacher. I have no words to express. …She advises all of us in class, telling us that Ethiopia is poor because of negligence towards education, and warns us not to be distracted by play. She advises us to study instead. *Well, all teachers advise us to focus on our education;* but, hers is kind of special in all she does from the moment we enter the classroom.

For Gelila, the only way to deal with inequality is to press through school while repressing the deeply felt individual poverty and inequality. Therefore, for her, school is not about what she learns. Rather, it is about its prospect for a future way out of poverty. Although she is a high achiever, she lacks enthusiasm to discuss what she learned in class. When I asked her what she remembers most in environmental science or other class, her previous energy vanished instantly. She stopped looking at me, and tilted her head slightly to one side gazing at the table between us, telling me turn by turn and monotonously the topics they learned in class as if retrieving them from where they were first stored in her mind by rote memorization:

*About hygiene, food, saving, and so on. Also about forest, plants, animals, about…um, that plants are necessary for human beings, and that forests facilitates rainfall and gives fresh air, um... that it has lots of benefits. I also learned about lots of harmful practices,
such as that deforestation brings desertification, and that, we have to plant five or six
trees in place of one tree we chopped down for firewood, as if in multiplying them…

Gelila focuses on school content for the sake of focusing, and sustains her morale by
other means. During break hours, she participates in the school mini-media by reading poems
such as “Ethiopia: Our Country” from her English textbook in a manner that can be considered
as pseudo-patriotic and an act of self-conditioning. As will be discussed in the next sub-section,
this attempt to repress unhappiness about inequality, combined with the lack of any presented
alternative or outlet in her school, media, or social exposure, produced in Gelila a repressed
aggressiveness of wanting to excel at any cost—even at the expense of others—and a tendency
to evaluate any work only from the perspective of its financial reward.

4.1.3. The invisibility of the utopian aspect of occupations/professions

The view of government as triumphant force with the power to control the people brought
a chain reaction in Gelila’s view of herself and her society (country). As discussed above, it
affected her view of inequality, poverty, and poor people whose condition she only understands
for being unacceptable by government, and not as the logical target of government’s
humanitarian function. This, by extension, affected her view of work and led her to primarily
see it as an escape route from the blame, shame, and guilt for being poor, and not as an
interesting part of human nature and life. However, this was only visible after deconstructing her
responses which outwardly give the wrong image of an intense and patriotic “we.”

Gelila mainly understands work/profession based on how much they are applauded as
profitable private initiatives in line with government capitalist economic policy, or how much
they are directly related to political tasks launched by the government. There is a repetition on
the media, beyond count, of the two phrases “awachinet,” the Amharic term for “prospect of profit,” and “simin masterat,” which means “getting recognition” for exemplary work. Because media magnifies this aspect of work, there is no way for Gelila, who exclusively relies on media, to appreciate the fundamental truth that the process of work itself is something inherently enjoyable, appropriate to human nature, and practically beneficial to oneself and fellow human beings in an interdependent community. The financial prospect and/or the instrumentality of the occupation for gaining the governments’ recognition blocks the way for such kind of deeper appreciation. This is visible in the picture task where she labeled the carpenter, the hotel waiter, and the fisherman as “very Ethiopian” because they work to reach “somewhere great” by starting from earning humble income. The government official, the secretary, the journalist, and the teacher in the picture task were labeled “very Ethiopian” because they work for the people by “advising” them, working in government office, bringing them news on terrorism, and “advising” children to be good citizen. The farmer was labeled “very Ethiopian” for making Ethiopia “green” and being “determined to bring development.” It is notable that these individuals were not noticed by Gelila for what they do/produce through their profession. The farmer is not viewed, for example, in light of the grains, fruits, vegetables, or other products from his farm. Rather, he is labeled “very Ethiopian” in association with the word “development” which is often presented by the media to refer to the profitability of new agricultural technology employed by exemplary farmers. The carpenter is also not labeled as “very Ethiopian” for his production of different furniture the variety, design, and use. Rather, he is labeled so based on the potential he has to earn more money and profit through this work. In short, Gelila did not show any sign of appreciating an occupation/profession for what it is or for its intrinsic (utopian) worth as a way of contributing to society.
This distorted view of the relationship between human beings and work therefore caused in Gelila’s mind a dystopian understanding of the nature and existential purpose of human beings, both individually and collectively. For her, the sole motive of human beings is to excel financially while playing friendly. By extension, she understands the service of public institutions in the country as helping those who want to get money and recognition. Teachers, for example, are understood by her as people who are hired to “advise” children to strive academically and arrive at financial prosperity because they themselves could not. This was evident in her response to my probe on what she believes the goal of teachers is for her and other children. It had nothing to do with what content, character, idea, or purpose they teach or model to children, or enable them to achieve:

I think if teachers become successful and get another chance, they will help children and other people because they have already taught children. Whether they taught or not, I think they would help them anyway. I think they would want them to grow up and advise other children in turn.

In other words, Gelila believes that if teachers get another chance [of better financial prospect other than teaching], they would directly give the money to the children and other people instead of teaching and advising them to go through the very long path of completing school to get it.

Religious affiliation is also understood by Gelila primarily as being enabled and equipped by the religious institution to compete and get ahead. She believes that people connect with God to gain His supernatural favor to get ahead of others. When explaining how “Orthodox Christian” describes her, she said:
It made me a good girl who worships God. It helped me focus on my education and not be distracted by play and other things. Because I believe in God, I pray. God heard my prayer and helped me stand first from my class.

The presence of the Protestant Mission church which covers her school supply expenditure also reinforced her understanding of social and societal institutions as mainly targeted towards helping individuals to stand out academically, and ultimately, financially. How various kinds of occupations and professions come together in a society to make it a large organic system functioning to ensure everyone is well provided for is a concept that is too alien to Gelila’s mind.

This is exacerbated by the fact that academic achievement, and not multiple intelligences, is the only focus in schools. This has led children like Gelila to believe that academic achievement is the sole desire of all students; and those who do not achieve simply need help. Therefore, Gelila gets advised, and in turn, advises other children to play less and focus more on education. She does not seem to have the understanding that peoples’ talents and potentials in different areas translate into a tool that can come together to solve concrete problems and culturally enrich the life of society. She certainly does not envision herself doing so in the future. In fact, she has already chosen to disconnect from her familial and social context psychologically. This was clear in Section V of the interview where she was unable to label a picture of an old poor woman as “very Ethiopian” for what seems to be a personal reason:

Gelila- [pause] She looks Ethiopian

Meskerem- Do you think she is “very Ethiopian” or “a little bit Ethiopian”?

Gelila- It’s hard for me to say

Meskerem- Why?
Gelila- Um… she is Ethiopian. [Pause] I think she lives in the countryside. And, she collects firewood; and, [pause] I think she is poor.

Meskerem- What would have made her “very Ethiopian”?

Gelila- Um… [pause] I don’t know.

Gelila’s uncertainty in labeling this woman was the exception, and not the rule, in her normally certain and opinionated labeling of individuals in the other pictures. When it comes to this woman, however, she talked in uncertain tone and spoke less loudly with a depressed voice. It was not hard to understand that the old woman in the picture, who is portrayed carrying firewood, reminded Gelila of her own grandmother who has to collect firewood and bake Injera to sell and earn money to support Gelila and herself. Gelila is unsure what would make this woman “very Ethiopian.” She does not know, or is not helped by the official curriculum to envision, any hopeful scenario about the fact that she and her peers are, theoretically, the ones that will intervene in the system through different professions as they grow up to solve economic problems. As a result of this blind spot, she simply disowns the situation and moves on, but is determined on the inside not to be on the receiving side of any financial inequality like the poor old woman in the picture, and her grandmother.

4.1.4. People, natural resources, and cultural heritages as resources to be represented, and not to be worked with/from

Since Gelila views the purpose of education and work simply as getting recognition and financial reward, she views her country also as ultimately working for that purpose. She does not see the people-focused, service-based, and human-centered aspect of government and jobs/occupations. As far as she can see, the whole purpose of a country/nation is to standout financially from other countries by gaining recognition for some achievement in the international
arena. This made her develop a mental orientation that is exclusively focused on the foreign and the international whenever thinking about national identity.

To begin with, representing others is a prominent aspect of Gelila’s identity, since she is not only a high achiever, but also a popular kid with numerous roles in various school political clubs. Therefore, by extension, Gelila already considers herself as a representative of all Ethiopians. In six out of the ten words she chose to describe “Ethiopians” in Section II, she gave herself as an example to show how Ethiopians demonstrate that quality. For example, she said for “kind,” “…I can also give my example. I help street dwellers with whatever I can. I have given a notebook to one very poor girl in this school;” for “friendly,” “I myself am friendly with many people. I often get comfortable with people in just one day;” for “fast,” “let me give you myself as an example. I am fast in my education, and also in many other things;” for “clean,” “they are not like those who betray their country. … They don’t do that. I don’t say that. I have to show that I have clean conscience;” for “happy,” “let me make myself an example, I am very happy because my country has lots of treasures, natural resources, tourist attractions, like rivers, parks, wild animals, etc.;” and for “good,” “…I should be good and be a good representative of all people.”

The sense of entitlement by Gelila to represent Ethiopians because of her status as a high achiever and leader is dangerously combined with media and school messages which create a false sense of patriotism out of gaining international recognition, not only in friendly competitions such as in sports and beauty pageants, but also in “introducing” cultural and natural resources. On media, competing and excelling globally by representing Ethiopia or setting up conditions for the unique or significant resources, historical heritages, and achievements of Ethiopia to be visited and recognized by outsiders is presented as the ultimate achievement
because it is directly linked to tourism and getting foreign currency. Currently, there is an
abnormally continuous and hyped-up talk in Ethiopian media on globalization, global
competition, international relation, transformation, age of change, foreign business relation, and
so on. Resources like ethnic and religious diversity, green landscape, natural resources,
historical sites, and cultural heritages are primarily discussed and presented in light of such
global interaction and international trade, and not from the perspective of examining, enriching,
developing, extracting, and using them to enrich local life, or ease local problems. This seems to
have had unsettled the general atmosphere in which economic, cultural, and political issues are
discussed, and children are also affected by this.

There are several examples that show Gelila’s exclusively outside-focused attention when
it comes to her conceptualization of national identity. For eight out of the ten words she chose to
describe Ethiopians in Section II of the interview, she made reference to Ethiopian’s interaction
with foreigners. For example, Ethiopians are “trustworthy” because “many originally-Ethiopian
and other foreigners come to visit. Ethiopians receive them and provide the needed service
properly and kindly until they go back to their country;” Ethiopians are “clever” because they
defeated the Italians; Ethiopians are “kind” because “they are generous; they receive foreigners
warmly;” Ethiopians are “together” because “the Ethiopian government, together with other
governments, interfered to bring peace” when South Sudan and Uganda were troubled with
internal conflict; Ethiopians are “friendly” because “I have seen lots of foreigners giving
testimony about the friendliness of Ethiopians on TV,” and “they are also friendly with people of
other countries [in addition to being friendly with fellow Ethiopians, she being the example];”
Ethiopians are “clean” because “when foreigners come, they receive them with decency;”
Ethiopians are “good” because “they are good to both their own people and to foreigners.” She
also made reference of foreigners indirectly when explaining how Ethiopians are “happy” by giving herself as an example about why she is happy:

> By “happy,” let me make myself an example, I am very happy because my country has lots of treasures, natural resources, tourist attractions, like rivers, parks, wild animals, etc. Even the landscape is beautiful.

For Gelila, a foreigner is one who has money, but not cultural heritages and natural resources. Therefore, in her thinking, foreigners come to Ethiopia with money attracted by natural resources and historical heritages, and, therefore, being “Ethiopian” means is to help foreigners get what they want with “clean conscience”:

Meskerem- How are Ethiopians “clean”?

Gelila- Yes, they are clean. When I say “clean,” they are not like those who betray their country. They are pure [in their conscience] and they are kind. When I say “pure”, like, for example, when foreigners come, they receive them with decency. That is because they are pure. If they were not pure, they would have thought like “these are high income people; they came from a rich country. So, let’s rob them since they are on our land.” They don’t do that. I don’t say that. I have to show that I have clean conscience.

As mentioned previously, Gelila also relates development mainly with working with foreigners:

But, we do not want our country to be impoverished. We want to be educated and …even right now, Ethiopia is working in cooperation with different countries like China,
America, Japan, and Germany. For example, with China, I have seen on TV that they have signed treaty to work together.

Gelila’s over-simplified understanding of herself and foreigners misses two interrelated aspects of the reality. First, Gelila does not seem to be aware of the human, social, aesthetic, and spiritual ends that natural and cultural resources are, and can be, used for locally. Instead, she is flooded by media and school messages that amplify financial gains out of tourism and foreign investment. Second, what equivalent human, social, aesthetic, or spiritual ends foreigners use or study cultural and natural resources for is also out of view for Gelila. The second omission only reinforces her first blind-spot on how natural and cultural resources serve local human needs.

At the core of these two oversights lays a third and most important omission which strongly indicates that Gelila’s emerging world-view is fundamentally imbalanced and anti-utopian. This is her inability to see any difference between a fellow Ethiopian and a foreigner, not in a positive way in which she sees both as close to her, but in a negative way—seeing both as equally distant from her. This is especially visible in the similarity of the way she talked about a foreigner and a fellow citizen. For example:

Ethiopians are very good. When I say “good,” they are good to both their own people and to foreigners. For example, if another Ethiopian comes from another city, I should not say “what is he? I don’t know him or what he is up to” because I am Ethiopian and he is Ethiopian, too. I should not push people from another country, too. I should be good and be a good representative of all people. The person may think all Ethiopians are good based on my good conduct. I can make the Ethiopian too think good about his own country people.
What Gelila feels she is obliged to personally do with a fellow citizen and a foreigner is basically the same (being good by not acting strange towards him/her). Another example is found in the quotes mentioned under the previous topics:

For example, the government in Asmara does not want Ethiopia to develop. People or government like that should not be allowed to do bad on the country. They should be advised first. If they refuse, they should be put to trial.

Just like she described the government of a neighboring country currently considered as an enemy (Eritrea), “advising,” and, if not successful, then “putting to trial” is how Gelila believes an Ethiopian should be treated:

Meskerem- What is your role in the one-to-five structure?

Gelila- In the one-to-five structure, I prepare question and answer program; and I bring to trial those who misbehave; meaning, I take them to the teacher.

By definition, constituents of a certain society become of the same nation with one another because they share a utopia; and, a foreigner can be understood as one that does not share that utopia and is not obliged to work towards it. However, Gelila’s responses to the various questions throughout the interview do not reflect any sense of what she shares with a fellow Ethiopian, apart from the shared repulsion to “poverty.” They do not answer the question on what is there in life (from what she concretely sees and can imagine) to share with another human being that shares the same identity and land with natural and cultural resources. She is rather more aware of her role as representative of her country people in a business interaction with foreigners. As far as personal relation goes, a fellow Ethiopian and a foreigner are equally foreign to Gelila.
The above chains of distortions show that what it means to share a country, natural resources, culture, and a common vision of a happy life that makes use of all this should be the first topic children become introduced to early in their school life in a Utopian/Ethiopian social studies education. In addition, children should not be exposed to concepts that are mostly distant to them such as tourism and international trade. They should be sheltered from media messages that consistently present Ethiopia from the foreigner’s eye-view. It is too obvious from Gelila’s case that children may not be able to deal with such messages without fundamentally disconnecting with themselves and their own people.

4.1.5. **Conscience understood as submissive deference to the rich**

Gelila’s equation of conscience with being respectful towards the national and global financial status quo deserves specific attention. As seen in Section 4.1.2., she presents herself as unaffected by inequality of income/wealth in her society. She also tries to assert she is not contemptuous towards low achievers although she bases her identity on excelling and “advising” others. This, aided by media which focuses on national image building for an international business relation, extended to her view of foreigners to whom, she believes, she should be good and friendly in service with “clean conscience.” Her definition of conscience in this way is particularly troubling. It shows that Gelila has internalized the guilt projected on her (and, generally, poor people) as not content with their fate and potentially rebellious out of dissatisfaction, perhaps by engaging in actions she disapproved, such as breaking the law to halt the development effort or robbing foreigners—an act which she believes is not conscientious.

Perhaps the net effect of all the distortions discussed above is this instillation of guilt in the minds of children of poor communities, who then will grow up in the intense internal conflict between their refusal to accept their condition on the one hand, and their inability to find ways of
discussing on their concern without sounding potentially destructive. Since this can cause a strong sense of disempowerment in poor children, there is a need to give particular attention in the social studies curriculum to make sure that it lifts the “conscience” off of poor children and define it both ways (meaning, as also necessary to be given attention to by the rich).

4.2. Worqnesh—the Grateful Enabler of the Anti-utopian Hegemony

Worqnesh, fourteen, is a fourth grader at Walii. Like Gelila, she came from a rural province in the Western part of Ethiopia (but from a different town) to get better access to education. Worqnesh also had an additional reason for coming to Harar. She had to escape the social condition that was particularly harsh for girls in the rural culture. She began the subjective self-identification task in the interview by expressing a grateful appreciation of the better rights she was able to enjoy in the city compared to the rural life where she was burdened with household chores.

Nonetheless, there were a few more challenges Worqnesh had to face when she came to Harar. One was change of language class requirements. In Harar, children learn in Amharic; but they also have to take Oromiffa and Harari—languages of the two major ethnicities in the region. Therefore, Worqnesh had to start from third grade, although she was a fifth grader in Awasa (a city she briefly lived in before she came to Harar). In addition, Worqnesh still has to support herself by working after-school. Nevertheless, she managed to excel academically and stood first from her class in the previous semester. There is some sense of confidence and maturity she has developed which can be clearly felt from how she responds to the questions in the interview.

Worqnesh’s view of herself in relation to society and national identity resembled that of Gelila’s in certain areas. Like Gelila, academic excellence is important to her. She hopes to
reach somewhere great in the future. She also thinks showing hospitality towards foreigners is an important part of her identity. Most of her understanding about her national identity is also in line with media and school text. However, her ambition to excel does not seem to have turned into an urge to dominate, and is tempered by her relatively more meaningful involvement in social and religious activities. She identified herself as “Orthodox Christian” and explained that she serves in the Church. She was also well aware of the cooperative culture present in the traditional associations in villages, an involvement which might have had added to the chores she was burdened with when she was in the rural town. The social, traditional, cooperative, cultural, and religious aspect of her life on the one hand, and the academic, excellence-based, competitive, forward looking, and challenging line on the other (as she portrays them so) have formed two divergent identities in Worqnesh. This created five areas where a Utopian/Ethiopian social studies curriculum should intervene in order to straighten the distortion of perception of reality caused by such dualism.

4.2.1. **Identity as a means to global citizenship, and not as existential purpose with human goals and roles**

When explaining why she likes Ethiopians “very much” and how most of the positive words describe them, Worqnesh talked about cooperative culture, local solidarity, love, and unity in a captivating way. She has awareness of and practical participation (as giver or receiver) in some of the functions of traditional and modern community organizations which aim at looking out for one another and making sure everyone is provided. For example, she elaborated how Ethiopians are “together” by discussing the works of organizations formed by voluntary individuals to help children of poor families. She brought up several traditional organizations such as “Edirs” that help members who lose their loved ones go through the funeral process. She
also expressed a very strong sense of belongingness with, and compassion towards those who leave the country and face unfortunate situations, expressing that she hopes everyone gets a satisfactory livelihood at home in a cooperative setting:

I like them [Ethiopians] a lot because, for example, we hear about Ethiopians who go to other countries, like America [Libya?] or others, and see on TV that they are tortured in different ways like the woman who was burnt with fire and gas. Such things sadden me very much. We love each other and do not want one of us to get hurt. So, we want them to be able to live and work here. We don’t want a single finger, let alone a person, to leave us and stay there…

Worqnish’s professed belief in the importance of economic self-sustenance and administrative independence was also strong. Although not accurate, she has some knowledge of Ethiopian history which she used to portray these things as achieved and achievable. For example, when explaining how she believes Ethiopia was begun, she said:

I think all black Africa was Ethiopia. But, Ethiopia went alone because it refused to be ruled and controlled by other nations. I think it is people like Haile Selassie that made it independent.

When narrating how she first heard the word “Ethiopia,” she sounded patriotic:

I first heard “Ethiopia” when I went to register for school in Awasa. I did not know anything about school before because I was in a rural town. I heard them asking our citizenship. I heard them saying “Ethiopia” and I asked what “Ethiopia” is. I did not know where the word came from. The teacher told us in class that Ethiopia became well established when Italy came to invade in old times and Ethiopians defeated them. She
told us that it was when Ethiopians brought back the obelisk the Italians took and stood it on their land that they were recognized very well.

Worqnesh also indicated that Ethiopia is an economically independent country when explaining how Ethiopians are “clean”: “Ethiopia is especially clean because it is self-sustaining. It is not involved in other things, crime-related or other. It is independent and stands alone.”

Yet, for Worqnesh, the above “Ethiopia,” which is her identity, is separate from, not only her citizenship as Ethiopian, but also her ethnic, religious, and residential affiliation. Economic self-sustenance, political independence, and culture of cooperation of “Ethiopians” are not implied in her conceptualization of her Ethiopian citizenship or any of these aspects of her social identity. Citizenship implied her academic and individual realm of her life as a “girl” whose right she feels is better protected by the government. In Worqnesh’s view, concepts and visions of political independence, gender equality, economic self-sustenance, and so on are not present in her ethnic, religious, rural, national, or individual identity. All the later aspects of her identity are understood by her simply as ways of getting legitimacy for gaining an official recognition as an “Ethiopian” by the government whose sole task, she believes, is to represent her in the global arena. As far as Worqnesh can see, the recognition and the right to get service (currently, education, and later, official documentation to go abroad), is the result of her particular religious, ethnic, or residential affiliation which is recognized as “Ethiopian” by the government.

Although this view has brought its own chain of distortions in Worqnesh’s perception of reality, it is not completely ungrounded in the actual situation. Her experience with moving to Harar and the process of her admission of school which involved some ups and downs was enough of an indicator in this regard. She was very grateful that she was finally “recognized,” as
Ethiopian, and was admitted. Her explanations to how her national, religious, ethnic, and residential affiliations describe her all reflect this sense of “recognition”:

Meskerem- How does “Ethiopian” describe you?

Worqnessh- It shows that I can get the right to live, speak, learn or do whatever I want in any country as I am a citizen of Ethiopia. If I live in any country, I get my rights to live because I am Ethiopian.

Meskerem- What do you think made you Ethiopian?

Worqnessh- I am Ethiopian because I live by its culture. I follow Ethiopian culture in what I wear, how I eat, and so on. Even, there is distinguished cultural attire specifically worn on celebrations and mourning in every ethnic group. Ethiopia became independently recognized as Ethiopia for having its own ancient culture and history.

In other words, Worqnessh understands that since she has cultural affiliation with ethnic group recognized in Ethiopia, she can be Ethiopian; and by being recognized as Ethiopian, she can leave the country and live anywhere. This very simplistic utilitarian view of national identity is in-built in her explanations of the purposes of her religious and ethnic identities:

Meskerem- How about “Orthodox”?

Worqnessh- Orthodox Tewahedo is a religion that has been in Ethiopia since old times. It shows that I can be a servant in any of its Churches because I am a regular fellow in the Church and am recognized as a follower of the Orthodox Tewahedo religion.

Meskerem- How about “Oromo”? 
Worqnesh- There are lots of ethnic groups in Ethiopia. From among them, one is Oromo.

We are all different in our cultural attires and the languages we speak. What I wear and what language I speak shows what ethnicity I am. So, I am recognized as “Oromo.”

Even when explaining how “girl” describes her, Worqnesh mentioned recognition, although this time by another authority—her family:

Meskerem- Why is “girl” very descriptive of you?

Worqnesh- Firstly, male and female are not equal. Also, my name shows that I am female, and that I am recognized as female in my home. Sexually, I am different from boys; and the way I dress is also different. It shows that I am female.

It is almost possible to say that Worqnesh (and perhaps many other children) understands her very life purpose as passing through the education system as a preparation to leave the country, and this, for her, is the default function of schools, government, and public institutions. Although no explicit content exists suggesting this on the media or in the school text, this view is already deeply engrained in Worqnesh. Her knowledgeable, mature, pro-solidarity, “traditional,” and “patriotic” side also does not seem to outbalance it. Worqnesh can be understood as an academically and economically ambitious citizen who hopes to enjoy the rights and privileges to compete and work globally that come as a result of being recognized by a government official (who thinks globally like Gelila). It looks the presence of historical heritage, ethnicity, culture, language, national, and religious affiliation officially recognizable in Ethiopia has simply boiled down to Worqnesh to a sense of internationally recognized identity so that she feels safe to leave,
expecting all the promise of rights to receive education and any service internationally, just like she feels entitled to receive them locally if she moves from one region to another.

In short, for Worqnesh, her identity as Ethiopian comes out of her recognition as Ethiopian, and not because *she is* Ethiopian. Since her recognition is to be given by the government, it implies that the government has successfully taken the Ethiopian identity out of Worqnesh, and located it in itself. A Utopian/Ethiopian social studies education would enable children to view Ethiopian identity as intrinsic to them, and not dependent on any recognition.

### 4.2.2. *Rural destitution as inherent to the places, and not as result of human (lack of) action*

The migratory mentality of Worqnesh is further reinforced by her static view of rural villages/towns as naturally impoverished. This view is not unique to Worqnesh. Both she and Gelila have faced particular social conditions that were not convenient for their lives in the rural area, and they are allowed by their society and the government to understand that they do not have to tolerate it. They also are given the consciousness that they should not be oppressed by lack of access to education, and can move to the city where they can go to school and eventually gain economic independence. However, they are not given an equivalent understanding that the rural villages and towns too should not have been oppressed by those lacks of access. For them, impoverishment is what rural areas *are*, and not what *happened to* them. Unlike what adults may assume as given, these children do not see that there is any “could be” to rural areas, both in terms of educational opportunity, access to roads and technology, better economic condition, well-respected women’s right, and living enriched and satisfactory life.

Gelila did not communicate a “dead-end” view of rural areas directly; but, Worqnesh did so when explaining how “city” describes her:
Cities are different from the countryside. I have access to education and lots of other things because I am a city dweller. I can go to a nearby school. Also, the way of dressing and eating is incomparable to the countryside. Those in the countryside often wear an unclean cloth. Besides, there is no access to education; especially, for the girls, because of heavy burden of household chores. The fact that we can freely tell what we feel and what we think about our rights to our teachers shows that we live in a city.

Worqnesh associated all her new found educational privileges and citizen rights with her residence in a city, and not with the presence of people in cities who ensure she gets such services. The first view shaped Worqnesh’s understanding of the phenomenon of oppression/privilege or poverty/development as inherent to the places themselves; whereas the later would help her locate these phenomena in human actions. Unfortunately, the human factor that produces rural impoverishment or development is not discussed in the curriculum; and the rural/urban binary and the widening gap between the two is not clearly presented to children as a less-than-ideal condition. Therefore, children easily come to internalize that leaving rural areas by itself is the emancipation from oppression and disadvantage. When less-than-ideal conditions are also faced in urban areas, then, for them, leaving the country becomes the emancipation, as they have now learned to locate quality of life in the places and not in human choice of actions. Worqnesh found out that she still has to work after-school to support herself in the city; and, she is not happy about it:

Meskerem- How does “poor” describe you?

Worqnesh- It describes that although I have access to education, I cannot study the way children of rich people do. I have to work at home until 12 PM. I support myself by cracking peanut shell. I have a sister who does the same thing. She is in fifth
grade. We support ourselves doing that. We can’t get all school supplies we need like others. Here at school, I am regularly given exercise books. So, I have to look for such assistance means I am poor.

And, as discussed in Section 4.2.1, Worqnesh is already determined about leaving the country.

4.2.3. **Locating girls’/women’s equality in the government, and not in the girls/women**

Just like the way she counts on the government to recognize her as Ethiopian, Worqnesh also seems to consider that girls/women are equal to men because they are recognized so by the government. The government’s benevolent pose in this regard, although helpful to encourage girls and women get education and well-paying jobs, enabled it to implicitly take credit for the idea and to be perceived as the originator and giver of gender equality. Worqnesh seems to harbor a belief that the equality of women and girls is not in the nature of girls and women:

Meskerem- Why is “girl” very descriptive of you?

Worqnesh- *Firstly, male and female are not equal.* Also, my name shows that I am female, and that I am recognized as female in my home. Sexually, I am different from boys; and the way I dress is also different. It shows that I am female.

The italicized part in the above quote could be understood as an indication of belief in the inequality of women and men in the most natural setting, which is home. The equality, for Worqnesh, comes in the context of school, city, and government, as she described in the rights she was able to enjoy as a result of coming to the city:

Cities are different from the countryside… *especially, for the girls, because of heavy burden of household chores. The fact that we can freely tell what we feel and what we think about our rights to our teachers shows that we live in a city.*
Therefore, Worqnesh has come to see gender equality as something located in a place and setting, and not in herself. Supposedly, empowering girls and women, or giving them rights, was meant to help them see the later—how they are “equal.” However, the way girls’ education and women’s right is currently discussed in Ethiopia (and perhaps in many other democratic countries) does not allow girls and women, and certainly, not boys and men, to see what makes the two sexes equal, and more importantly, why both genders are needed for a healthy society—a topic that is likable and appropriate, especially during the childhood of both sexes. This would require a revived interest in understanding the essence of masculinity and femininity and appreciating them for their inherent worth and role in realizing and sustaining a strong, well-functioning, and happy society.

4.2.4. Most valuable knowledge as distant, abstract, less sensitive, and not affecting the local

Although the subject of valuable knowledge might be regarded as a very advanced area of debate with an implication most appropriate to educational policies and teacher training, I have come to understand from this study that it is one of the fundamental areas children need explicit instruction and guidance in. In the previous section, I discussed that Gelila seemed disengaged from the topics she learned in class. This was even more so for Worqnesh who was focused on giving correct responses to my question as quickly as possible using the terms found on textbooks and media. In several occasions in the interview, she ascertained to me that replying to my questions was easy, sometimes citing for me the sources for her answers. For example, when describing what the Ethiopian flag looks like, she described the colors and their meanings and added, “and, it is not difficult to describe the flag because it flies high even in running races and the like on TV.” Similarly, when describing why she said the soldier is “very Ethiopian,” she expressed certainty and cited her source by saying “It is possible to tell that he is
a Derg⁸ Army who stands for his country. He is wearing a military uniform. His look is also Ethiopian.” Her explanation for how Ethiopians are “kind” began by ascertaining that it is “a well-known fact.” Worqnesh explicitly used different phrases that reflect this “I can tell” or “it is not difficult to know” connotation about sixteen times in the interview; and, where she did not use such phrases, her answers clearly had such an undertone.

By the end of the interview, it was obvious that Worqnesh would have been more satisfied had I asked her “more difficult to tell” kinds of questions. She was occasionally passionately engaged when talking about issues like her challenges as a girl and the fate of some Ethiopians abroad; but, she did not seem to consider these topics as the “main” parts of our discussion. She tended to quickly wrap them up after talking on topics of personal or social nature for a while, and then expected me to shift into more “academic” ones that purely test her memory or general knowledge. Obviously, for Worqnesh, education is a challenge an individual must pass through, and the personal and collective life condition as community or country is not supposed to be addressed by it, no matter how deeply felt it is by the individual. Apparently, what is missing from Worqnesh’s angle of view is a sense of what valuable knowledge is. It seems what kinds of knowledge are valuable and available to be possessed by human beings to form and sustain satisfactory individual and collective lives is an important topic area that Utopian/Ethiopian social studies (and other subjects, such as language arts and aesthetics) should expose children to.

⁸ “Derg” is the military junta that disposed the Imperial regime of Haile Selassie and took power in 1974 to form the socialist government (1974-1991).
4.2.5. *Anticipation of the not-yet-realized future as the major task of past and present generations*

The last major area of distortion in Worqnesh’s world view in relation to her national identity is her assumption that the hopes of both the present and the previous Ethiopian generations are located in the future. Her view of the country’s existential continuity has a linear conceptualization of history—a conceptualization which views human beings as progressing towards some better future. Worqnesh views Ethiopia’s progression towards “development” as something that has been slowly accumulating over the ages and particularly given impetus by the advent of technology, Western education, and modern infrastructure such as roads, to reach where it is now and how it will continue in the future. This can be vividly sensed in how she elucidated by what she meant when saying Ethiopians are “fast” and “trustworthy”:

Ethiopia is fast. From what we are told and taught, *Ethiopians had nothing before*. They lived in a condition where they were obliged to travel long distances on foot because there were no roads. *But, now, when technology arrived, Ethiopia was able to get to where it is now because it is fast.* We also have found ways to get access to education.

… Another thing that makes Ethiopians “trustworthy” is that, as our forefathers told us, those who lived long before us loyally handed down the country and whatever it has to us. *They have helped it reach the development it has reached now.* So, they are trustworthy.

This view is not unique to Worqnesh or any child. In fact, it is an assumption universally held among scholars who have a futuristic view of utopia. Nonetheless, in addition to the fact that it can be rejected by others who do not share it, this view has an inherent drawback of
distancing children from their own nature as human beings—which is their natural tendency and capability of both dreaming and acting towards the realization of utopia at any scale. It takes away children’s ability to imagine themselves as agents that can realize a better life here and now, and, instead, locates the agency in the time, which is the future. This is visible in Worqesh’s binary understanding of the past versus the present which is both historically inaccurate and practically unimaginative of a good life at the individual or collective level. For example, when explaining how she thinks Ethiopians are “hard-working,” she said:

Ethiopians are hard-working because our country did not have much development formerly; and they are working day and night to change that. The teachers are teaching energetically; the doctors are doing their job swiftly; everyone is contributing to the country’s development by working hard in their respective areas. So, Ethiopians are hard-workers.

In the above quote, while the first italicized line indicates inaccurate conceptualization of “development” and a tendency to anachronistically evaluate the past by the standards of the present, the second italicized line shows the word “development” simply being used as a cliché as it is most frequently said on the media to give some vague vision of material prosperity in the future. The result is, as mentioned above, the disengagement from using imagination first hand, causing the placement of utopia in the time (future), and not in the self, robbing the individual of his/her initiatives for choices and actions in the present.

From the classical Utopian/Ethiopian perspective, time changes; but vision of the good life continues. In the futuristic view of utopia, however, vision changes, but time continues (to reach its millenarian destiny). Such linear conceptualization of history and the vision of an ideal
world as something to come yet are first held by society and then, they are communicated to
children in different ways without much reflection. A change from the later distortion to the
former would require training children to examine generations, theirs included, in light of their
respective now evaluated by the standards of the ever-present vision of a happy Utopia/Ethiopia
where equality, morality, creativity, spirituality, unity, and prosperity are parts of everyday life.

4.3. Lidya—the Aspiring Utopian Held Back by Pseudo-pragmatism of Here and Now

Lidya is a thirteen year old fifth grader at Nazareth, a private Catholic school. She is an
upper average student and ranked 10th out of nearly sixty students. Lidya talked about her
academics and her social life in a balanced/mixed manner. Her interview showed that her
relationship with family members, friends, and neighbors have depth and intimacy although her
social life does not have breadth of acquaintance. Lidya spoke slowly with thoughtfulness and
sounded mature for her age. Caring for other peoples’ feeling and trying to please loved ones is
very important to her, and she based her opinion of others based on to what extent this is
important to them also. She is born to a medical doctor and a housewife, and has active
involvement in the nearby Protestant Church where she is a member of the choir.

Lidya is located in the middle of the tension between the “culture of togetherness” of a
genuine caring relationship, on the one hand, and the individualist and materialist impulse
coming from the government (media), school, and her church on the other. She frequently
shifted between these two views, and, yet, demonstrated an almost equal sense of certainty when
talking about each side. The tension is only observed from some of the inconsistencies in her
interview. Nonetheless, it has caused a visible lack of fulfillment in Lidya, who seems to want to
have a meaningful purpose in life and a better comprehension of her society. There are five
major gaps and distortions in Lidya’s understanding of her national identity, and are presented below, with the most impactful one first.

4.3.1. **Escaping oppression, and not fighting it, as the foundational principle of the Ethiopian identity**

The major distortion in Lidya’s understanding of her national identity is her conceptualization of the beginning of Ethiopia as the outcome of the coming together of people who escaped oppression in other countries in order to form their own country. This distorted understanding, seems to be created by the imbalance in the focus when Ethiopian history is narrated in school, on media, or by religious institutions which emphasizes Ethiopia’s role as a refuge for different racial and religious groups at different times. Since government represents “Ethiopia” and is repeatedly associated with the country, any Ethiopian government can take the place of the historical “Ethiopia” that was a refuge to different groups in the mind of the children, regardless of the time it is formed or its deeds. The consequence of this imbalance is none other, but the usual aggrandizement of “government” and the installation, in the mind of children, a sense of subservience to it. This has certainly brought a negative consequence in Lidya.

To begin with, Lidya described how she thinks Ethiopia began the following way:

Lidya- I think it came from human thought.

Meskerem- what kind of thought?

Lidya- [pause] meaning… [longer pause]… meaning to make it a country….something like…when something begins, it begins from human mind. I think it came from a big thought.
Meskerem- I see. A big thought, like people who wanted to do something and had big thought and wanted to have a country, …something like that?

Lidya- I think it is to make it a country, meaning, out of their own initiative, and it can also be from their practical needs, such as, if they were oppressed in other peoples’ country, they may come together and come up with the idea of having their own country.

Lidya’s depiction of Ethiopia’s beginning vaguely brings to mind the historical fact that Ethiopia received and hosted the Jews, the early followers of Islam, early European Christians, Arab survivors of the Medieval Crusade, etc. Some of this historical content is also present in the children’s textbooks. However, the portrayal of Ethiopia as a refuge per se has rendered forgotten in public discussion the preceding and more important fact that Ethiopia is a birthplace of visions to fight the roots of oppression itself. The fact that early and medieval Ethiopians purposely went out (of Ethiopia or to other Ethiopians) with the vision of conquering the roots of oppression (which has a multi-dimensional aspect, including the spiritual) is a content that is not even remotely touched on in any official presentation of Ethiopian history. Yet, this is the existential purpose and default duty perceived by Ethiopians of antiquity as core to their identity. Lidya’s religion, Protestant Christianity, also did not help fill this omission since it too has impressed in her a sense that identity, including a religious one, is meant to be a refuge from unsafe things of the world:

I think it has kept me safe from many things…For example, in any religion, there is a religious order/structure to follow. Because I was able to be led by this order and because I live in that willingly, I am safe and I describe myself as Protestant.
The bringing to the foreground of only the former (escaping oppression), without the later (duty against oppression), when narrating Ethiopian history communicates a sense of passivity and a view of the self only as submissive to the government—which is seen as the country. From such a perspective, the idea of living by the rules, without any strong sense of duty or purpose, becomes a satisfactory expression of identity by itself. Therefore, Lidya explained why she is “very Ethiopian” as follows:

If my Ethiopianness is testified, if I like it, if I want it, I am very Ethiopian. If I respect my culture and the Constitution, I am very Ethiopian. For example, if I steal and transgress the Constitution, I may be “a little bit Ethiopian”. But, as long as I live by the rules and I love my country, I say I am “very Ethiopian.”

Lidya feels this loyalty and obedience can also be demonstrated by others in their ability to maintain a positive attitude towards work and education, and to cooperatively be involved in government initiatives. For example, she labeled the secretary in the picture task as “very Ethiopian” because “I think she respects her job and does it without complaining about how boring or difficult it is.” She labeled the carpenter as “very Ethiopian” because “it is people who work without attitude about the prestige of their vocation that can grow.” She labeled the waiter “a little bit Ethiopian,” because “…he is doing this job without contempt towards it is good for him. But, [pause] you don’t see good thing on his face…he looks bored…he should work harder.” The smiling school boy was labeled “very Ethiopian” because “he looks happy; I think he learns with enthusiasm.” Collective obedience to government initiative was also emphasized by Lidya as part of the Ethiopian identity:
I see people getting engaged in activities for the quick development of our country without complaints of boredom or exhaustion. For example, in the case of the construction of the Abay Dam, it is being built with a great perseverance. So, I think there is strong courage and hard work among students, teachers, and the whole society in their respective areas. Hard work means not complaining about exhaustion and not to be tempted to give up. I don’t think there is such a thing among the people. Rather, they inspire you to change yourself and your country by doing the same themselves.

The net effect of the above distortion is double sided. Firstly, as discussed also in the cases of Gelila and Worqnesh, it conceptually relieves the government from its duty as a service provider and nurturer to ensure the well-rounded development of the people. It depicts the function of a government in children’s minds very minimally and reductively as only letting citizens know that they have the right to live, work, and earn. Secondly, it causes children not to view the human and humanitarian aspect of their nature and their national identity. From the perspective of the Ethiopian world view, the existential duty of a human being is to give a fellow human being a practical vision and guidance towards a utopia in which spiritual, social, and economic wellbeing is ensured. It involves forming real and expanding relationships, not unlike the model of the Agape of the early Apostles. Developing that kind of both a missionary and a humanitarian personality requires well-rounded social, spiritual, intellectual, practical and economic personality and skills. Although at a much weakened state, this is what animates and is emphatically nurtured by the Ethiopian “culture of togetherness” which Lidya appreciates.

However, portraying Ethiopia, and by extension, the government, as a provider of rights per se brought about the complete placement of the responsibility for the condition any one is in on the person himself/herself. This is seen, for example, in Lidya’s view of the rights of women
and girls as already ensured by the government, and therefore, the specific unfavorable condition of a woman/girl as a result of her inability to use her rights. Defining, making, developing, preserving, and giving meaning to life is entirely up to the individual in a refuge using the opportunity he/she is given for which he/she should be thankful. But, this is only logical in the context of a government as an overseer of a place originally meant to be a refuge, and not a country of birth. It is essential that the concept of government or country as a refuge in social studies curriculum be purged from any distortion or omission that exclusively portrays it so in order to prevent the implicit positioning of natives as refugees.

4.3.2. The nature of government as preserver and executer of ideas bigger than itself missing

Partially, because of the above distortion, and partially because of the neo-liberal ideology currently influential, Lidya views government only as a mediator for the people to reach certain consensus (often, the constitution/law), and not as a preserver of ideals that precede and succeed the generation. Lidya did not portray working to preserve some visions/ideals inherited from previous regimes as a “thing of the past” for Ethiopia; neither did she portray it as another form of government. Rather, for her, continuity is simply not in the nature of government to begin with. In her view, any kind of continuing from where a previous government left off is totally optional and might be done by the public in a form of remaining loyal to the regime that started it. She demonstrated this belief when talking about the continued construction of the Abay River Dam:

I think Ethiopians do not give to perdition something that is entrusted to them. For example, the construction of the Abay River Dam is delegated to the people by our leader. Up on his death, people could have forgotten about it and considered it passed.
But, because they are trustworthy and loyal, they continued the construction in good condition.

It is possible to say that Lidya understands government as “ever-provisional.” Therefore, not surprisingly, the only political role of people in the government and the public, according to her, is to express their ideas. She labeled the journalist and the government official in the picture task, for example, as “very Ethiopian” because “it is better to exchange ideas with two or three other people and work together” and “people can’t benefit their country if they don’t speak what they have in mind.” According to Lidya, government is the one ultimately responsible to make something out of expressed ideas and translate them into plans of action. These plans of actions, Lidya believes, should be executed immediately by all, again, without complaint. For Lidya, this is the founding principle of not only the national, but also the familial and the local.

Meskerem- How are Ethiopians “clever” (“courageous”)?

Lidya- I said Ethiopians are clever in everything as I see. That makes me happy. They have a determined attitude when dealing with something. For example, at home, when something happens, my parents take measure immediately. They don’t dwell on issues unnecessarily or they don’t back down. At school, too, when something is decided, it gets implemented. I think this shows courageousness.

Yet, the above understanding of government and its relationship with the people as ever-provisional has created a gap in Lidya’s perceived sense of satisfactory awareness about her country, her society, and herself. This is best seen in her expressed wish to learn more about ancient Ethiopia in social studies, her favorite subject, and what the previous generation went through to help hand down the country to posterity:
I like learning] about ancient Ethiopia… because it is something I did not pass through, meaning, I like learning how things were. I even ask to know. I like learning how the past generation passed whatever they passed through and handed the country over to us.

As can be understood from the above quote, one significant gap created by Lidya’s conceptualization of country and government as temporary entities formed out of “practical” needs is the dualist assumption of a difference between the task of enabling continuity and a pragmatic concern of the here and now. The former task, for Lidya, belongs to “the past generation,” and the latter is exclusively the realm of the government. In other words, she thinks society (past generation or present) and government are, by default, two distinct bodies constituted by two (or more) kinds of individuals with no common interest. They only come together and exchange ideas because they are separate entities and need to discuss to function in unity. This distortion is, in fact, found in the current reality of Ethiopia. However, the fact that a government is, in principle, constituted by people that come out of a society with identities and visions inherited from the people seems unfamiliar to Lidya.

In addition, both Lidya’s understanding of the beginning of Ethiopia as the coming together of people who escaped oppression from different countries that are basically strangers to each other shows that she has no awareness that Ethiopian people, and in fact, the human race, descended from the same genealogy of early Ethiopians. The inclusion of content on the discovery of early human fossils around Ethiopia, a topic Lidya said she is particularly interested in, does not seem to be capable of ridding her belief that, naturally, Ethiopians are alien to each other as well as the government.
4.3.3. Viewing the poverty of the country and the condition of disenfranchised people as separate phenomena

Lidya is very emphatic when speaking about her love for Ethiopia, which she believes is most apparent in her preference to live in the country rather than go abroad. She talked about her happiness in being Ethiopian despite the country’s poverty. For example, after explaining why “Ethiopian” is most descriptive of her by mentioning her birth and residence in Ethiopia, she added “but, I am happy.” She also believes this is what differentiates her from people who are “not Ethiopian” or are “a little bit Ethiopian.” She stated “some people may not like their citizenship; but, I do.” For Lidya, many Ethiopians’ preference to live abroad is also a sad fact:

[The pilot is “a little bit Ethiopian” because]…um… I think she goes to other countries often. That is a little annoying. But, that is good. But I would prefer if no one leaves their country. However, most people love other countries; so nothing can be done about it.

Therefore, for Lidya, professing pride in Ethiopian national identity and preferring to live in the country despite threats of poverty is the ultimate form of patriotism that would make one “very Ethiopian.” It appears she shares this belief with her father, who came back from abroad to live in Ethiopia, a place, Lidya said, “he loves very much” although it is poor.

However, Lidya’s pride in her national identity despite its poverty did not transfer to her attitude towards the poor people of the country, towards which, she is rather, critical. She is not proud of poor people; and, she thinks poor people should be very concerned about their condition. This is expressed, for example, in her elaboration of why she thinks the beggars she saw in the pictures are “not Ethiopian”:
Instead of sleeping on the street, I mean, I think these people can work. They can at least do some labor work to change themselves. But, because most street dwellers are engaged in robbery and things like that, they are lazy and they can’t change themselves. So, they are not Ethiopian.

She was also critical towards the poor old woman in the picture task whom she labeled as only “a little bit Ethiopian”: “When you look at her, she looks like a person who does not want to change; like, I think she is a hard worker, but it looks she does not want a rapid change.”

Lidya’s disapproval also extended to unprivileged people in rural areas, who she believes their condition is the result of their (or their parents’) choice. She labeled the shepherd boy and the rural girl as “a little bit Ethiopian” and explained why the following way:

The problem is not with him, but with his families. If he comes to a city and go to school, he can get somewhere great. But, it looks he spends his day herding cattle and goes home at night. If he doesn’t get knowledge, we can’t say he is fully Ethiopian.

And, about the rural girl:

[Long pause] the good thing about her is that she is kind of happy. But, I think she lives in a rural area. I think she can advise her parents and reach somewhere better in her life. But, I don’t think she does that. So, I think she is “a little bit Ethiopian.

Lidya’s predisposition to locate the poor and underprivileged condition of an individual in the individual himself/herself is closely related to her view of government as refuge and provider of opportunity, and individuals as totally responsible to come up with ways of using this right to “change” themselves. For Lidya, if individuals do not “change,” then, it shows that they are satisfied in their existing impoverished condition. She believes people should not be content
with their not-so satisfactory level of economic security either. How she explained her labeling of the dressed-up young gentleman in the picture task as only “a little bit Ethiopian” shows her belief in this regard:

He looks prideful. People like him may even give respect to their job; but, because of pride, they can’t straighten up. So, instead of being prideful, he should humble himself and work to reach somewhere bigger than this.

Such “pride” is not in line with the kind of enthusiasm Lidya thinks people should have for the realization of the “quick development of the country,” which she frequently talked about.

Yet, in a conflicted manner, she occasionally mentioned her mother’s, her neighbors’, and her own compassion and generosity towards the poor:

Often, if I see poor people, I feel compassion to them. When I am given money, I give it to them. My mother, too, is very [emphasis] kind. She doesn’t want to bypass poor people. I don’t think I have seen anyone who is cruel in my village. My families are generous, so are my neighbors.

She also commends humane treatment of poor people despite their condition. She believes, for example, that Ethiopian women who work in Arab countries should be treated fairly, like a family member.

Lidya understands the national call to work for “the quick development of the country” as an effort which she strongly believes everyone should be committed to; yet, for her, this call is completely unrelated to commitment to improve the lives of underprivileged people. Abstract concepts such as “development” and money—which turned out to be the goal of development
activities—seem to obstruct her visualization of the process by which an individual works for the betterment of the life condition of another individual as a practical translation of development. Therefore, for her, people work to develop different things, such as cities, which she described as “in the process of development.” The corresponding fact that cities are places where people get service from other people for their own development is missing from her point of view. Construction of dams, roads, schools, infrastructure, and financial growth are all understood by Lidya in this way without any implication to how they improve and enrich the lives of human beings. Her description of the athlete in the picture task as running “to develop his country” also indicates how national “development” has come to mean almost anything related to money and nothing at the same time.

In fact, this disconnect is inherent in the way “development” is currently conceived in Ethiopia, and is not a product of a blind spot unique to Lidya’s world-view. However, it is certain that Lidya will be one of the millions of other children who will sustain this sterile conceptualization of “development” if an aggressively utopian and human-focused educational intervention is not made. The earliest mention of poverty in elementary social studies education should clearly show the simplest and truest bottom line that poverty and disenfranchisement are human conditions that are the results of lack of a system for personalized interaction among those who possess different resources. A Utopian/Ethiopian social studies education should enable children to understand development at the national level primarily as universally improved human lives due to human interactions.

4.3.4. Togetherness and cooperation as limited only to times of joy or distress

Another distortion in Lidya’s social out-look is her view of cooperation and togetherness, either inter-personally or nationally, only as reactions to particularly distressful or enjoyable
events/situations, and not inherently as the default ways of life. Although she expressed appreciation to the “culture of togetherness” she enjoys with her friends and neighbors, this does not imply for her any collective initiative towards economic, environmental, cultural, educational, or political development or achievement. All the later seem to be areas which are systematically rendered abstract as the meaning making about them is owned mostly by the government. What remains out of the “togetherness” is then the sharing of feelings and the temporary alleviation of others’ problems (or a national problem) when the need comes. For example, Lidya explained how Ethiopians are “happy” the following way:

By happy, I mean…I think even when some adversity befalls on them, they accept it happily and move on. And, when something good happens, they enjoy together. I don’t think there is wickedness among Ethiopians. The joy comes from the culture, I think. There is no culture of avoiding each other. There is a strong culture of togetherness.

And, “together” was explained as follows:

Like at times of distress and sorrow, like for example, when our leader died, everyone mourned together. Even I cried my share. I don’t think there is anyone who was happy. There was a spirit of togetherness and determination about, for example, the Abay River Dam construction. I don’t think there is a tendency of wavering or looking down on others’ initiative.

The above kinds of descriptions by Lidya are sincere and pervasive in her interview. But, they do not provide an answer to the central utopian question: what do people do with each other when there is no national call/emergency or particular local incident? This gap has brought an effect on Lidya which is partially similar to Gelila’s conceptualization of people, natural
resources, and cultural heritages as meant to be represented and not to be worked with first hand towards a desired goal. Although Lidya does not envision herself representing other Ethiopians in international business relations like Gelila and shows appreciation of togetherness, she too, is affected by this same void of a comprehensive purpose of life with a fellow Ethiopian. Since “togetherness” is mostly limited to particular situations and events, Lidya must find another purpose of life for the other times which does not reflect “togetherness.” This is related to work and money on which she feels entitled to comment on by mentally alienating herself from other Ethiopians and their works. For example, she stated that the farmer (in the picture task) needs advice on how he should “work harder,” “produce more grains,” and “save some for himself for the bad times… instead of consuming everything he produces.” When it comes to work and money, the “bad times” are not times to be faced together according to the “culture of togetherness.” Such distancing is not surprising given the fact that work has come to be viewed as confined to the realm of the individual in an impersonal system in Ethiopia.

It is hard to envision any Utopian/Ethiopian social studies education that makes the “social” part of it meaningful if such distancing of others and self-alienation is considered normal for day to day work and economic aspirations and abnormal for national or personal calls, events and incidents. There should be a comprehensive vision that answers not only what fellow countrymen do with each other and their resources, but also why they live in the first place, and why together. In other words, this is the topic of existential purpose of human beings both as individuals and as society—a topic neither of which is brought up anywhere in elementary or secondary Ethiopian education. There is a general absence of public discussion in Ethiopia on what constitutes a good life, and all the tasks, arts, and creative duties that stem out of it although the Ethiopian religious tradition has a lot to offer to fill this void. Organizing
contents around the topic of the existential purpose of human beings, from the Utopian/Ethiopian worldview, is a topic of great importance that needs to be entertained in all subjects in elementary education, social studies included.

4.3.5. “Change” understood simply as saving more money

“Change” is the word children frequently hear these days. In Ethiopia, it is one of the most often mentioned words, and generally implies improved standard of living. Almost all children in this study talked about the need of “change” of one kind or another although it was most frequently mentioned by Lidya. She used the word mostly to refer to using modern technology and producing/working more to grow financially. The farmer ploughing could “change his country through agriculture,” the poor village woman should work harder to “change herself,” and the fisher man who uses traditional tools needs to modernize his work by “changing his boat.” The teacher teaches to give vision to children so that “they will change.” The fashion model does not look “very Ethiopian” because “she did not wear her own cultural cloth; although, her change and her dressed-up look are good.” All these uses implied working, learning, and using modern tools or cultural products for an economic betterment of some kind.

Lidya’s simplified definition of “change” became a problem when she had to talk about people who do not have the above kinds of “change” in the sense of education, modern tools, or taste of looks, but do seem to earn a lot of money. One of the pictures in Section V portrayed a smiling old man standing on a farming field which is promising for a good harvest. Lidya had to think what label to give this man; and, after a little pause, she stated that this man too has to change economically by saving more and cutting back his spending:
If I got the opportunity, I would advise him to produce more grains, and to work harder. There are times for plowing and everything, right? Um…if possible he should work to expand the farm through hard work. Everyone changes through hard work. Farmers earn a lot more than government employees. *The problem is they spend or consume everything they get without saving.* If he saves, I am certain he will grow.

Apparently, all the messages children get from school, society and media about “change” have the simple meaning of getting money. Phrases such as “working to change the economy,” “expanding education to change the country,” “changing oneself through education,” “using technology to change old ways of doing things,” etc. only point children towards getting money regardless of the width of topics media or other governmental institutions might claim they were trying to communicate to the public through these phrases.

Social movements for “change” that altered the political landscape of Ethiopia in the 20th century did not start from defining “change” as more money (or even more technology per se); rather, the wide ranging problems in the cultural, inter-personal, psychological, environmental, and administrative areas were at the core of the claims for the yearning for “change.” Then, real “change” must imply a different vision and a different way of doing things in all these realms. Social studies should give children a rich, stable, meaningful, authentic, and intrinsically valuable definition of “change” from the Utopian/Ethiopian perspective. More importantly, the mental journey one makes from the disbelief in the possibility of Utopia to the conviction that it is possible to realize it, and the resultant alignment of action with that conviction, should be a theme children get repeatedly exposed to through biographies, literature, and other contents from relevant historical, cultural, religious, and sociological trends.
4.4. Simret—the Unreflective Follower of the Anti-utopian Hegemony

Simret is an eleven year old third grader in Nazareth School. She is one of the high achievers. She scored more than 90 (out of 100) in all subjects in the previous semester and ranked 2nd from her class. Born to an academician father and a homemaker mother, she lives in a middle-income household where she enjoys the privileges of being the only child. She has cheerful politeness and warmness. She greeted me enthusiastically whenever she saw me in the school after I interviewed her.

What was most notable at first glance in Simret’s interview data was her use of several words and catch phrases from media and social studies text without much thought on what they mean. She talked about concepts such as “greenness,” “technology,” “contribution to development” with a partial, distorted, or incorrect understanding of what they imply in both rhetoric and practice. Below are discussed the four areas of distortions and blind spots inferred from her depiction of these aspects of the country which prevent her from having a Utopian/Ethiopian vision of the “good” life.

4.4.1. Commercial agriculture mistaken for “greenness”

Simret frequently mentioned “green” in relation to farmers and the landscape of Ethiopia in a manner that would first sound like a correct association. For example, when explaining why she is proud of being Ethiopian, she said “the people of Ethiopia are kind, and Ethiopia is green. I think it is these things that made me say so.” She asserted that the green color on the Ethiopian flag represents “Ethiopia’s green landscape,” and labeled the farmer in the picture task as “very Ethiopian” because he is “a man who works hard to make his surrounding very green.” She also mentioned that exemplary farmers get awards for being more productive using improved technology when explaining why she thinks Ethiopia is a developed country:
The evidence of the country’s development are, for example, if one farmer is hard-working and gives us production, we follow that person’s footstep, because that person contributed to us; and in technology as well, if one person gets some new technology, we develop following the example of that person.

A second look into her responses, however, gives insight to a distortion that makes one wonder whether this is how most, if not all, children currently understand “greenness” in Ethiopia. Simret clarified what greenness of Ethiopia implied to her in Section II of the interview, by saying “formerly, Ethiopia was poor. Now the land is green; and when I see the people, I get happy.” Her comparison of Ethiopia’s current greenness with an obscure past appears to resonate with the claim the current regime makes in terms of scoring better economic advancement than the past regimes by focusing on improving agricultural practices. It seems Simret understood this comparison as implying a better greenness of Ethiopia.

This understanding is obviously distorted in two ways. First, traditionally, preserving or valuing the greenness of Ethiopia, as represented by the green part of the flag, has never implied agricultural investment for commercial and industrial reasons. The later is obviously targeted towards profit maximization, and includes all the environmentally and socially harmful practices of using chemicals (pesticides, fertilizers, etc.), making genetic modifications on crop seeds, displacing populations, and undertaking land grabs. “Greenness” always had a connotation of the intrinsic worth of preserving nature both for ensuring the sustainability of agricultural productivity, as well as for social, aesthetic, spiritual, and ecological values. Secondly, in terms of increased greenness of Ethiopia compared to former times, it is rather the opposite that is taking place with all its threats of permanent loss of several species of plants and resultant imbalance in the ecosystem. Apparently, this aspect has simply gotten ignored in environmental
science education in Ethiopian elementary schools. Repeated association of commercial agriculture and exemplary practices with the words “green” and “development” by the media may be conditioning Ethiopian children to link “greenness” with commercial agriculture and accept the later as the natural and historical default despite its enormous implications to the ecological and economic condition of the country. This confabulation will certainly legitimize large-scale commercial agriculture and land grab in the minds of children. Although the consequence of commercial/industrial agriculture on the environment is a well discussed issue among adults, it is hard to expect children will naturally have a correct understanding and appreciation of what “green” is unless they are deliberately helped to.

4.4.2. Technological innovations as unrelated to solving concrete problems in human lives

It is odd to think of technology in general without its purpose to alleviate basic human problems; yet, that is what seems to be getting impressed into the minds of children like Simret. She hopes that her education will enable her to be a user of technology and an agent of technological advancement in Ethiopia in the future. Unfortunately, along with this hope she has developed a sure, but incorrect, understanding about the place of technology in relation to development. For Simret, technology is something people should “follow” its inventor, and not invent it themselves or use it for a goal they themselves defined for their society.

In Simret’s view, those who are public workers and government employees “serve” the country; those who are engaged in private business “contribute to the development of the country;” and those who bring some new technology, “we develop following the example of that person.” This system of classification is so pervasive in Simret’s understanding that it is the major, perhaps the only, schema she uses to understand identities, roles, and responsibilities in her society. This was especially visible in her reasoning when labeling individuals in the
pictures in Section V. She associated giving service to society strictly with those who do public or rural work: the journalist, the soldier, the office secretary, and the farmer; and contributing to the development of the country to most private employments, such as the waiter, the carpenter of the fisherman. For Simret, there is no such a thing as to “invent” or use new technology and to “serve.” The strongest evidence for the presence of this dualism in her thinking is her inability to label the medical doctor as either “very Ethiopian” or “a little bit Ethiopian.” As the profession involves a mix of both science/innovation and service, he did not “fall into place” neatly in one of the two categories (service versus technology/innovation) for her. Therefore, she simply said “I don’t know” because “I don’t know his personality.”

From what can be seen in the contents of the governments’ recent initiatives for K-12 technology education has almost come to exclusively mean Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The expansion and use of ICT has come to be generally understood as an end goal by itself in Ethiopia (Takeuchi, 2008). Since ICT is introduced in Ethiopian schools with the general technology-driven aim of facilitating communication and allowing competition in the global knowledge economy, and not using a problem-based approach that comes from analysis of problems in sectors, it is not surprising that the view towards technology as a tool of service to solve day to day problems in human lives is becoming less emphasized in general education. Hence, an overview of where technology fits in a well-functioning society is an important dimension of education for science and technology, with the power to give correct social outlook for children like Simret, and create a genuine interest in them in the field of science and technology that goes beyond “following the examples of the person” that brings “some new technology.”
4.4.3. Public sector jobs as unrelated to “development”

The other side of the above distortion is Simret’s understanding that “serving the country” and “contributing to development” are essentially separate. She related the first primarily to jobs in the public sector, and the second, exclusively to private employments and works involving technology—which she linked with financial growth. For example, in the picture task, she said the fisherman “works for Ethiopia by earning money in this work; meaning, if he grows financially, others will follow his footsteps and the work will grow widely in Ethiopia.” About the carpenter: “I think this man wants to bring out wood work in Ethiopia. I think he is a hard worker and very Ethiopian.” And about the hotel waiter, “I think he is working to earn money and contribute to the development of Ethiopia to make her one of the [more developed] countries.” However, government employees, like the teacher, the secretary, the journalist, and the soldier were all mentioned as servants of the country, and not contributors to its development.

This mental orientation is in line with the neo-liberal economic policy currently operating in Ethiopia and the media rhetoric that accompanies it. For example, more emphasis is being given to the fields of science and technology than the social sciences in Ethiopia. This is evident in the recent decision of the Ministry of Education to limit the quota of enrollment in the social science and humanities fields only to thirty percent of the student population (MoE, 2010). However, if one looks at this closely enough, it is obvious that the call from advocates of globalization to do away with the national government and local hierarchy for a more direct control by the International Organizations is at work (Lingard, 2000). As the public sector is becoming highly influenced by politics and becoming financially less rewarding, it is no more appealing to the dreams of children and youth as a career aspiration. Therefore, as far as Simret
is concerned, she is going to school to be prepared to contribute to the technological advancement of Ethiopia, and not to be a public servant. This is best seen in her labeling of the teacher as “very Ethiopian” because “she works to contribute to the development and technological advancement of Ethiopia by teaching social studies to children.” As a girl, Simret, also hopes to meet the government’s expectation of making the “name [status] of women reputable globally by being a strong student and a high achiever.”

The fact that this false dualism between public service and technology on one hand and disconnection with the public sector on the other takes root in children as early as in third grade is a concrete problem and a very challenging endeavor given the anti-utopian policy route the government is consciously following in line with global market impulses. It is even more troubling when seen in combination to other children’s identification with the government (public sector), as in the case of Gelila, which is not only based on a drive to dominate others, but is also focused on a business relation with foreigners by “representing” the country’s people, resources, and cultural heritages. Gelila, a third grade high achiever, prepares for this role; and Simret, another third grade high achiever, prepares to “follow” it without seeing or reflecting on it. As far as the official curriculum is concerned, these two roles are the only alternatives available to them. Yet, a public sector is what defines a country, and its structure is what enables a sensible communication and implementation of a utopian vision. Therefore, it must survive first in order to be utopianized/Ethiopianized. Children should be guided to have an appreciation of the public sector as a venue of serving the people—people they know, people they are affiliated with, and people they love.
4.4.4. An illusionary continuum of hierarchy between technological advancement and agriculture

If one claims technological achievement (e.g. invention of computers) is superior to agriculture (production of grains), it is obvious that any listener would strongly disagree insisting that agriculture is superior since it is concerned with the most basic needs of human beings—food, cloth, and shelter. It may also be expected that he/she would add an explanation on how technology has only a secondary role in human lives and emphasize that it should not be overrated. While such debate is conceivable among the adults, it seems children in Ethiopia grow up simply believing the opposite—that technology is superior and agriculture is inferior. They grow up imagining an illusionary continuum of hierarchy between the two aspects of human life. Many Ethiopian children like Simret learn this belief indirectly, and express it in indirect ways that would only sound acceptable, and even, patriotic, especially if expressed together with phrases like “development of the country.”

As discussed in the previous sub-section, Simret thinks people who are financially and technologically successful should be “followed,” and she believes that is what she is doing by going to school. She expects that she has a very high prospect of success given her status as a high achiever. In her mind, technology is “up there,” while agriculture is “down here,” and her job, as a student, is to pass the ladder of the grade school to go away from agriculture (the ground) and get nearer to technology (the space). Therefore, her view towards those who did not get the opportunity to be educated is patronizing since they are “below” her and “nearer” to the ground. For example, she labeled the little girl in a rural village as a “very Ethiopian” hard worker who “if we mention another country for her, she may not know.”
Much can be said about the alienating impact of modern education on the educated workforce and its tendency to distance them from the agrarian society in developing countries. In addition to problems such as social fragmentation and system failure, it is obvious that one of the reasons for this crisis is the inconvenience of the modern education setting to provide adequate opportunity for children to learn practical skills, including agricultural ones. But, the problems are also exacerbated, I believe, by the presence of this unchallenged belief in children about hierarchy between agriculture and technology that does not exist in reality. One of the major tasks of a Utopian/Ethiopian environmental science and social studies education is to prevent this illusion of hierarchy from gaining ground in children’s mind through a balanced presentation of the two in a manner that is closer to reality as well as following what can be envisioned as an ideal balance.

4.5. Yenus and Safia—the Players and Victims of Dual Power in the Anti-utopian Context

The cases of Yenus (boy) and Safia (girl), fifth and fourth grade Muslim students in Nazareth School, demonstrate the principle of “dual power” and its unintended consequences to the bearers. “Dual power” was a term first used by Lenin (1917) to refer to the process by which the Soviets managed to get legitimacy side by side with the Provisional Government of Russia after the 1917 revolution, and later supplanted it. The principle that works behind dual power is simply creating an alternative form of an organization and maintaining autonomy. This position may also include non-cooperation and non-identification with the dominant ideology or the co-existing power. In Ethiopia, which is a Federal Democratic Republic, there is no official ideology of political or religious nature that the state holds and endorses. As per the principles of Constitutional democracy, this is meant to empower different ethnic or religious groups by allowing the decentralization of power and granting them political autonomy. However, from
the perspective of dual power, the autonomy often has another side to it—disengagement from issues of national significance other than those identified by the Federal or Provisional Government which is responsible to make sure that no ideology gets adopted by the collective.

In Ethiopia, such disengagement is often seen among non-Orthodox Christian religious and denominational groups. Although such form of autonomy, in combination with other factors, can lead to gaining more political ground and legitimacy, it also has unfavorable consequences on the mental disposition of members of such groups. One of these consequences, as can be seen from the case of Yenus and Safia, is Muslim students’ non-engagement in any form of genuine thinking about commonly identified problems and social ills that may be equally affecting all groups. It was clear from Yenus’ and Safia’s interview that they both consider themselves as “others” in relation to the “Christian” Ethiopia, both historical and present day. Yenus did not acknowledge the presence of Orthodox or other Christians in his interview. Safia however, did mention some aspects of the social life she shares with Christians, and talked about, for example, the priest in the picture task with a few more details compared to Yenus who simply said “I don’t know.” But, they both portrayed Ethiopia as a problem-free country, and did not raise any social, political, or economic crisis from a concerned standpoint. Compared to Olyad (next chapter), a son of a convert woman from Christian to Muslim, they were not either constructively or disapprovingly critical of what they observe in the society, in the government, in school, in family, or in other ethnic or religious groups. However, this mental disengagement has negatively affected their disposition to engage in problem solving and critical thinking. How this disengagement is seen in their portrayal of their national identity is discussed below, with more emphasis on Yenus’ because his sense of affiliation to the collective is adequately descriptive of Safia’s understanding of her identity as Ethiopian as well.
4.5.1. *Yenus*

Yenus is a twelve year old fifth grader at Nazareth School. He was born to a wealthy merchant and a housewife from the Harari ethnic group, which is predominantly Muslim. He is a top student with the highest average score of all subjects from his class in the previous semester. Social studies is Yenus’ favorite subject.

The Constitution of the current regime which declares the rights and equality of religious and ethnic groups has a very important place in Yenus’ understanding of his identity. He made frequent mention of Constitutional rights, such as the right he has to “follow whatever religion I want,” the pride he feels as member of the Harari ethnic group, the “unity” and the “rights” of “nations and nationalities,” and the love he has to his country, which he confessed “I don’t know how to express.” He resembled Gelila by sounding like a government official when talking about “Ethiopia” or “Ethiopians.” He used objective-rational words and phrases peculiarly used by government officials when addressing the public on the media, such as “there is peace in Ethiopia and this is an important condition for development;” and “sitting and begging like this is unacceptable.” His description of his sex (boy) also sounds militaristic: “it makes me think that I have nothing to fear and I confront any adversity I face.” But, the most important difference he has with Gelila is his conscious choice to adopt government rhetoric without compromising what he actually thought about himself, “Ethiopia,” or “Ethiopians.” Out of this came the major gap in his inclination to engage in a genuine thinking about his national identity and his relationship to it.
4.5.2. **Low critical thinking disposition due to intentional disconnect with “Christian”**

**Ethiopia**

Yenus sounded confident and enthusiastic when doing the interview. He was well informed about a wide variety of issues going on nationally that are presented on the media or textbook, such as, particular setbacks that happened during Gilgel Gibe Dam construction, the Civil War before the coming to power of the current regime, and the secession of Eritrea. Nevertheless, conceptually, his responses did not go beyond a couple of issues which mainly employ political information. His criteria for describing “Ethiopians” and his significant others in sections II to V were mainly either hard work (e.g., his father), familiarity of occupation (e.g., the journalist, the soldier, and the farmer were labeled “very Ethiopian”), or membership in ethnic minority (e.g., the Borana man). The rest were simply labeled “a little bit Ethiopian” with little explanation or simply “I don’t know.” His response to the question “how did Ethiopia begin?” was also initially “I don’t know because I have not learned a lot about Ethiopian history” although he was exceptionally particular in his description of ancient kingdoms in East Africa when discussing the topics he likes from social studies class:

The Punt Kingdom started, I think, in 4000 B.C.... And, King Ezana deposed the government of Meroe. Next was Da’amat dynasty. It was a kingdom in Northern Ethiopia before 2500 years [B.C]. Then, I think it is Axum Kingdom. It has lots of accomplishments. It started in 150 [B.C]. And starting from 1262 [B.C], the Punt Kingdom started to collapse....

He later answered the probing questions for “how did Ethiopia begin?” in the following manner:
I guess, Ethiopia [pause] was started by Abraha.... And there also was Najashi, and there were also many kings, I don’t know. And later the Derg came; and then EPRDF and Derg fought and EPRDF won. It is EPRDF who made the country progress to its current stage.

The italicized part in the above quote is related to the controversial claim recently made by Ethiopian Muslims about the Islamic affiliation of the Ethiopian king Armah who gave asylum to the family and early followers of Prophet Mohammed. Yenus mentioned that he reads lots of stories other than what is written in Amharic and English subject textbooks, and was more interested to discuss them during the interview (only partially) than the content of class texts.

Regardless of the above hints that Yenus probably has rich knowledge of other versions or views on Ethiopian history, culture, or religion from Islamic perspectives, his choice to limit himself to the official rhetoric in his interaction with non-Muslims and non-Harari Ethiopians also seems to have decreased his inclination to think of human experience in diverse ways. This was especially visible in his lumping together of two or three adjectives as basically having the same meaning to describe Ethiopians. For example, “happy,” “hard working,” and “together” meant almost the same thing to him. The descriptions and examples he gave for the three can each be understood as “working together,” and they had no distinction. Similarly, “kind,” “good,” and “generous” were all interpreted by Yenus as giving aid to poor people. “Friendly” and “trustworthy” were also almost similar to him. They mean not being violent against others and minding one’s own business. In addition, only three priorities frequently came up in his interview as important to “Ethiopians”: working hard to earn money, donating to the poor, and minding one’s own business. Unlike the other children, Yenus also did not mention any favorable or unfavorable phenomenon in society he feels particularly concerned about or wants to explore. The only problems of such kind he raised were related to harmful traditions such as
female circumcision, about which educational efforts are mostly directed towards Muslim communities in the region.

It is possible to say that Yenus’ case shows a spirit of neutrality, and thereby disengaged mental disposition, caused by the intentional avoidance to connect with the (Christian) history of Ethiopia. This is exacerbated by the current exclusive discourse on “rights” which does not go further into discussions on what is “good.”

4.5.3. Safia

Safia is a thirteen year old fourth grader, born to a Somali mother and a Harari father. She is an upper average student and ranked 10th from her class in the previous semester. Safia talked about many aspects of personal and social lives with detailed descriptions; but, content wise, they were very shallow and over-simplified. They either closely follow media information and phrases, or they are strictly related to the “fun” aspect of her personal life. For example, in Section I, many of her descriptions of herself and others as “Ethiopian” were associated with birth and residence, and therefore, citizenship, in Ethiopia; and not being Ethiopian was associated only with birth and residence outside of Ethiopia. Also, her elaborations on why she chose certain words to describe “Ethiopians” in Section II were unreflective of any serious personal opinion apart from describing what happened nationally or what is funny to her in her personal life. In Section III she talked about her favorite subjects and passages, which were all chosen because they were either entertaining (ICT) or funny to her. In Section IV, she talked about her significant others, among whom, she chose her Christian friend as “very Ethiopian” because she “doesn’t ignore others’ feelings.” In Section V, she used the criteria of familiar looks and occupations to label individuals in the pictures as “very Ethiopian,” “a little bit
Ethiopian,” or “not Ethiopian.” In general, there was no sign of a well-thought or internalized view of society from a personal standpoint.

It does not mean, however, that Safia does not have views, observations, and stances. It is possible to see the way she elaborated some concepts with good maturity and wordings, like in her explanation of how Ethiopians are “fast”:

When I say they are fast, Ethiopia is now prospering and developing. We can take the Abay River Dam as an example. When the Prime Minister was alive, there was a lot of campaign about buying bonds; and a lot of contribution was made. Those who could not buy bonds contributed some money (without hurting their pocket) from their monthly salaries. So, they helped their country and were fast in this regard. They want to do something good for the country and are good citizens. That is why I said they are fast.

Her explanation of how “girl” describes her is also indicative of her adequate attention to things that she believes concern her: “I am a girl, I should be careful in many things.” Rather, Safia might be simply disengaging from serious discussion intentionally. For the most part, she portrayed conditions in Ethiopia as completely positive using positive media words. Nonetheless, there were a few exceptions. The first was the condition of the beggars she saw in the pictures in Section V, which she talked about because she was probed with the pictures. The second one, however, could be the result of a more personal view. In Section I, she said “rural” describes her, although she was born and grew up in a city, because “there aren’t many people there; it is a developing country, and I want to help.” This point is particularly interesting because her way of presenting the issue brings to mind not the problems that exist in rural areas, which she never touched on; rather the call of (informal) Muslim leaders who try to persuade
Muslims to work to hold ground in rural areas while Christians are going through displacement due to various economic and political reasons. Otherwise, the official rhetoric maintains that both rural and urban areas are threatened by over-population.

It can be understood from Yenus’ and Safia’s cases that social studies education in public schools cannot not be effectively planned and executed with the genuine interest of Christians at its core. It rather accommodates the kind of distance the various Muslim ethno-religious groups would like to maintain between the Islamic Ethiopia and the Christian Ethiopia. As will be discussed in Chapter Six, there is even an implicit endorsement of an Islamic Ethiopia in the social studies texts. But, obviously, there is an urgent need to address the dualistic distortions like those mentioned in this chapter from the perspective of the Ethiopian/Utopian version of Christianity. It will eventually be necessary to separate schools as well as curricula for the Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, six children’s dualistic perceptions of different aspects of Ethiopia’s social, political, and economic life were presented. All the children were either high achievers or in the upper average group in their classes. Four of them were Christians (Orthodox and Protestant), and two were Muslims. Their perceptions often included seeing essentially related aspects as separate, not seeing another side of identity/function of themselves, their society, or societal institutions, and confusing opposite phenomena for each other.

Among the six children, Gelila, a third grader at the government school, showed the most anti-utopian understanding of herself and her country. She viewed government as controller and possessor of ultimate power, and the concept of government as servant of its people seemed out
of view from her angle. She observed the government as a role model to be imitated, and mostly envisioned herself working with foreigners representing her people, culture, and the country’s natural resources, like the government does. She has developed a sense that conscience is manifested by respecting the rich and serving foreigners with “clean conscience.” The fact that, ideally, an individual works with his/her fellow countrymen to create, develop, and/or enrich cultural or natural resources for the betterment of the common life is not close to her thought. She is also mentally disconnected from poor and abused people like her mother and her grandmother, and is engaged in constant repression of her unpleasant feeling about inequality of income and power. Maintaining a happy and satisfied appearance is important to Gelila, and, yet, she is determined to aggressively pursue any line that allows her to financially prosper.

Worqnesh’s dualistic distortions were mostly located in her view of national and social identity, knowledge, gender equality (value), and prosperity as located in the time, government, places, or people, and not in the person himself/herself and his/her choice of action. The fourteen year old fourth grader understood her Ethiopian identity as primarily existent in the government’s recognition of her as such and the resultant privilege she gets to work and live anywhere, including abroad. She viewed rural areas as impoverished and inconvenient by default, and not by human action/inaction. Her view of gender equality is also setting-specific. She seemed to believe girls are given rights by the government because male and female are not equal, and that the right is better enjoyed in cities. She did not show any hint of appreciating her worth as girl/female because of her gender itself. Worqnesh also has a distorted view that sees valuable knowledge as difficult/distant and not pertaining to personal and social problems. She has a vague sense of some distant future which she believes Ethiopians have been working towards since antiquity, especially since recent times after the advent of modern technology. She
seems to perceive herself as “on-board” with this train of history that travels to this future utopia, and does not appear to have a sense that people work to realize and live utopia now by taking control of what they know, they have, and they want at the present.

Lidia, a fifth grader at the private school, understood the beginning of Ethiopia as associated with people escaping oppression from other countries, and not with fighting the roots of oppression itself. Therefore, she mostly viewed government as provisional, and saw obedience and expression of ideas to the government as the ultimate role of a loyal citizen. This prevented her from developing an understanding that working towards the development of the country means going beyond waiting for and following the government (which limited its role only to providing rights) and taking initiative to do practical actions to improve the lives of the poor and the underprivileged. Her understanding of development and change are abstract, and do not imply improvement of human individual and collective lives apart from financial growth.

Simret, a third grader at the private school, mostly has her distorted understandings around technology. She confuses commercial agriculture for greenness, and viewed technological innovations as separate from problem solving activities. For her, integrating technology in life implied using it for the sake of following its inventors. She also does not consider herself as a future public servant because she sees technology as disconnected with public service and considers herself as being educated to bring technological advancement. She views jobs in the public sector as “serving the country” and not as “contributing to its development.” She associates public service either with people who work for the government or people who live in rural areas and live on agriculture who she viewed as inferior because of her understanding of technology and agriculture as related to each other in a hierarchical manner.
Safia and Yenus, fourth and fifth grade Muslim students, did not show genuine social concern or care when talking about Ethiopia, Ethiopians, and their identity as an Ethiopian. They were mostly interested in discussing only a few realms of their lives, such as personal belief in the importance of religious right, importance of work, non-aggression, and entertainment. The few issues they mentioned that were serious topics of social and national significance were colored by controversial views on Ethiopian history and rural demographics from the perspective of Islamic fundamentalism indicating that public education may not be genuinely effective if it continues trying to address the educational interests of both the Christian and Muslim community.
Chapter Five

5. Findings from the Utopian Group

In this chapter, the findings from the six children who exhibited more utopian views of their national identity are presented. Two of them, Vegeta and Meklit, are high achievers; and one child, Ezra, is an average student. The remaining three, Olyad, Abeba, and Selam are low achievers. The children in this group showed relatively concrete concern, hope, and/or sense of personal engagement in the collective life compared to those in the anti-utopian group. However, for Abeba, Selam, and Ezra, this was not directly so. Their utopian aspirations were inferred from the challenges they were facing because of the presence of threat or the absence of a nurturing environment that could translate their idealism into a reality/action.

The major difference the children in this group had with the anti-utopian group is the presence of certain assets, to different degrees, in their lives that challenge and balance the isolating, competitive, dualistic, and disconnecting influence the political and school culture can have on them. These assets are mainly related to belongingness to a community that is tied by familial, ethnic, and religious relationships, the presence of a strong mother figure who has social, spiritual, and political consciousness, the presence of space in their personal time to engage in system thinking guided by their natural curiosity, and influence from close adults who have compassionate view towards society. To the degree the children have these assets in their lives, they exhibited more sense of care, concern, and interest in their society. What assets and challenges are present in each child’s life are presented in Table 5.1., followed by a discussion on each case for its implication to social studies curriculum themes.
Table 5.1.

**Summary of major assets and challenges present in the perceptions of national identity by children in the utopian group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Religious affiliation</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Academic status</th>
<th>Major distortions, omissions, misunderstandings, and confusions accepted as default/normal by the child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Yegeta | 4<sup>th</sup> | M | 10 | Orthodox | Nazareth | High achiever | - Rich social relationships that provide shelter from media anti-utopian messages  
- Appreciation of aspects of identity for their intrinsic worth  
- Closeness and affectionate attitude towards mother  
- Work/Occupation viewed as a form of relationship and a way of direct contribution to fellow human beings  
- Helping human beings “revive” and “multiply” as the founding principle of Ethiopia  
- **Area of challenge**: Not prepared to expect challenges when trying to help others |
| Meklit | 5<sup>th</sup> | F | 13 | Orthodox | Walii | High achiever | - Humanized view of institutions and their founding pro-human principles  
- Favorable attitude towards mothers, women, and girls |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Area of challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olyad</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Walii</td>
<td>Low achiever</td>
<td>- Area of challenge: struggling against the internalization of shame and guilt about poverty</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Belongingness to a large ethno-religious community that critically evaluates media information</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- More presence of mind caused by appreciation of manual works and the countryside</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Close and strong mother figure with critical socio-religious and political consciousness</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Area of challenge: Unhappy about the purpose of school being learning English to become “tour guides”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Area of challenge: Ethno-religious defensiveness causing inability to see oneself bearing social responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abeba</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>Low achiever</td>
<td>- Area of challenge: the urge to see a practical and personalized “unity”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Area of challenge: The need for opportunities to apply systems thinking that integrate social with environmental concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Ezra  | 4th   | M      | 12  | Orthodox | Walii   | Average     | - Areas of challenge: Existential fear caused by loss of mother  
- General fear of authority figures who are viewed as triumphant forces, and not as servants  
- Education as unconnected to valuable knowledge and occupational contribution  
- Emerging moral questions on money versus friendship, and beyond |
| Selam | 5th   | F      | 13  | Orthodox | Walii   | Low achiever | - Area of challenge: National identity as not involving the social and the personal aspects  
- Area of challenge: Aesthetics as a field away from “serious” thoughts |
5.1. Yegeta—the Joyful and Optimist Utopian

Yegeta showed a strong utopian outlook in his conceptualization of his national identity compared to all the other children in this study. He not only demonstrated a sense of care, concern, and hope to close and distant “Ethiopians” as a collective group, but also held a harmonious view of several seemingly competing or opposite priorities—a central character of Utopian/Ethiopian thinking. He is a 10 year old fourth grader at the private school. His description of family, neighbors, school peers, and religious community portrayed rich social experience. All of them, especially his family, contributed to Yegeta’s genuinely positive attitude towards society by helping him appreciate positive historical and religious facts and their meaning to Ethiopians. The most important feature of these perspectives on historical and religious facts is that they are all contextualized to him in a sense of active duty one has to others out of love and concern, and not as academic or recognition-focused information on “history” or “cultural heritage.” Because of this, for Yegeta, work, relationship, study, pleasure, and, even, international relations are all the same in essence; i.e., they are all about service and concern to others which aim at producing mutual happiness. The five assets which brought this utopian cognitive orientation to Yegeta are discussed below, followed by one area that currently seems to be challenging Yegeta’s utopian outlook.

5.1.1. Rich social relationships that provide shelter from media anti-utopian messages

Yegeta and his two older siblings live with both parents—a retail merchant father and an accountant mother. He also has many close friends in the neighborhood and at school who share his sense of friendship and compassion. In his neighborhood live a shop owner family Yegeta frequently mentioned for their good reputation and their kind service. He also has several uncles and aunts in Addis Ababa whom he visits every year and is personally very close to. He chose
all positive words to describe “Ethiopians” and cited examples for each from his social experience. For example, he said his family are “very Ethiopian” because:

My father is a citizen very concerned about Ethiopia, my mother is a fast worker, my brother is building our house by himself, and my elder sister tells me about Ethiopian flag and things like that.; and, I [am “very Ethiopian”], because I wish the best to my country people and everything in my country.

Yegeta also spoke highly of his neighbors for their kindness to the villager. They were the examples mentioned for most of the positive words he chose to describe “Ethiopians” in Section II, such as: Ethiopians are “trustworthy” because “some people who live alone put keys, money, and other stuff there [in the shop] when they go to work, and everything is kept safely for them.” Ethiopians are “kind” because “the shopkeeper understood them [customers who did not have money] and sold them what they needed on credit.” Ethiopians are “fast” because “they open their shops in the morning at six and help each other arrange their markets,” and so on.

Yegeta’s peers also add to his affirmative social life; like Enoch, whom Yegeta admires for being humble enough to run errands, not only for the teachers, but also for his classmates. Yegeta said, “He likes everyone!”

Yegeta’s family and friends are not only his good companions, but also sources of information about his national identity. He rarely referred to media and school for information on his identity, his society, or his country. It seems his family and friends have sheltered him from media information and balanced for him the media-like content he gets from school. For example, his older brother told him about the flags during the previous regimes before the current one, and his friends told him about the origin of Ethiopia.
This rich and positive familial, extra-familial, neighborhood relation has caused Yegeta to view his country as “home” and the people as family members. He strongly valued being in the country and belonging to one another. For example, in Section V, he said the beggars in the picture were “very Ethiopian” because “whether outside or inside [a house], they are still in their country.” For most of the individuals in the pictures in Section V, he used one criterion; i.e., whether or not the person lives and works in Ethiopia. As will be discussed in the next sub-section, Yegeta does not strictly associate valuing one’s own country with not leaving the country. He simply suggests that they come back to work and live in the country consistent to his belief that life itself should be a collective endeavor to which everyone must contribute.

5.1.2. Appreciation of aspects of identity for their intrinsic meaning/value

For Yegeta, the academic, ethnic, religious, social, and national dimensions of his identity are intrinsically worthy, and are not things to be viewed in comparison or competition with others. They are not viewed as instrumental towards recognition and identification, either. It seems Yegeta’s family—his major sources of information—train him to understand and appreciate social and historical phenomena for what they are. His view on the importance of the flag, for example, was different from that of most other children’s which focuses on the need to distinguish the country from other countries or to use it to get it recognized internationally. Yegeta related it to something his family wanted him to gratefully appreciate—peace:

When we hoist a flag, we show that we are living peacefully. Back when Derg and EPRDF were still fighting, there was no flag flying because there was no peace. But we can hoist it now because it is peaceful.
Historical information often related to patriotism also appear to be presented to Yegeta in light of
the values that were defended instead of the sense of triumph and reputation they brought:

Formerly, we were slaves; meaning, during the colonial era. We were enslaved by
Italians. Those who were born outside were born there. But we were recognized as
slaves here. But later we won. I am proud of being Ethiopian.

Although factually not quite accurate, the above elaboration shows the perspective from which
Yegeta is taught to view significant events in the country’s history. They are used by his family
and relatives to inculcate in him an appreciation of what is intrinsically worthy—in the above
cases, peace and freedom. It appears that the main goal of his family and friends is to build in
him a positive spirit and favorable attitude towards his country and his national in-group.

A similar inclination is observed in his description of his ethnicity and religious identity.
He related his ethnic identity (“Oromo”) with “joy”—a meaning he feels it gives him. He also
has an intimate observation of and appreciation to religious ceremonies in his church, and talked
about particular aspects, such as the palm-frond ring people make and wear on Palm Sunday.
Generally, “love to”, and not a comparative “pride in,” justified most of his explanation on his
social identities, as well as the other words he chose as descriptive of him, such as “Addis
Ababa” and “girl.”

Academically, although he is a high achiever, he does not seem self-conscious about it.
He did not mention anything, whether gratefully or in a sense of accomplishment, the fact that he
is a good student. In fact, it seems he and his friends fight the feeling of self-distinction that
comes out of being a high achiever:

Meskerem- What about Wondimu [his friend] makes you think he is “very Ethiopian”?
Yegeta- He cares for other people. We met only this year. But, we like each other a lot.

One day, we were studying together. Some other kids came to us, and when I closed my book, he said “why do you study only for yourself? Let’s study with them.” So, he is concerned for others as well.

Such concern for others in academics is significantly admirable in the current culture of school in Ethiopia where competition among students is often focused on academic achievement (test score and percentiles) and is fiercely pursued.

Yegeta’s self-unconscious concept of himself and his tendency to see the inherent value of utopian qualities of society, such as peace, love, and freedom, has also permeated his view of the country. Unlike Gelila, for example, who imagines Ethiopia in light of its image in front of foreigners, Yegeta viewed Ethiopia for what it is for itself. For example, he labeled the journalist as “very Ethiopian” because “she works to bring true information to Ethiopians about Ethiopia.” Yet, this inward looking orientation of Yegeta is not exclusivist at the same time. He has ample information about places out of Ethiopia. He was also the only participant in this study that mentioned direct acquaintance with a foreign student in his school whom he approached to befriend. In addition, unlike Lidya, for example, who strictly links loving Ethiopia with not leaving the country, he values people going abroad to learn and work. The only problem, in his view, is that they do not come back—a stance, which comes out of his preference of togetherness, relationships, rich social experience, and continuity.

5.1.3. Closeness and affectionate attitude towards mother

The role of Yegeta’s mother in his social outlook is strongly felt from how he expresses his appreciation to girls and mothers. Yegeta is the only boy in the study to choose “girl” as
descriptive of him “because mothers are female, and I love them.” He also said the word “girl” reminds him of his mother’s love. Consequently, he has a favorable view of those who are affectionate and obedient towards their mother, like his friend, Kyle, whose name he picked first as “very Ethiopian” from among all his friends because “he works hard at home, and helps his mother at night.” Apart from mentioning that she is “a fast worker,” Yegeta did not give details about his mother. But, it is possible to tell she is a strong familial, social, and spiritual figure in his life.

5.1.4. Work/Occupation viewed as a form of relationship and a way of direct contribution to fellow human beings

The life-affirming experience of Yegeta was not simply for personal enjoyment. It produced in him an inclination to see work/occupations as simply another form of human relationship, and caused a strong urge in him to want to contribute to others. Yegeta was the only child in this study to describe occupations based on their content/processes, values, and direct contributions to another human being. He was also the only participant who expressed interest in learning about different types of occupations in Ethiopia.

Work was the most frequently mentioned activity in Yegeta’s interview. Almost always, it was mentioned in interpersonal contexts and in a manner that explicates the different roles people have in a system. For example, he labeled the farmer as “very Ethiopian” because “he works in agriculture to feed Ethiopians;” the shepherd because “he fishes and feeds those who come to Awasa to visit;” the journalist because “she works to bring true information to Ethiopians about Ethiopia;” the taxi driver because “he works to serve people to safely get them where they want;” the priest because “he is working to protect his country from evil spirits;” the athlete because “he runs for Ethiopia;” and the teacher because “she is teaching social studies to
Ethiopian children to help them grow.” Although far from complete, there is some sense of aggregate system of efforts coming together that can be read from Yegeta’s description of the role each individual has in a functioning bigger community (the national) by positively affecting another human being. He also paid attention to the value of some occupations when learning about works in environmental science class: “we learned that agriculture was formerly a profession held in contempt. But now, it is held in high regard, and good farmers even get award.”

Therefore, for Yegeta, work, help, service, and friendship are different forms of the same thing—relationship. Being “friendly,” “together,” “hard-working” all point him towards relationship, which is also found, for example, in play/pleasure:

Yegeta- Ethiopians are “friendly” because people listen to and obey each other. They also listen to the idea of others although their ideas are different, like discussion.

Meskerem- Have you seen people doing this?
Yegeta- Yes
Meskerem-Where?
Yegeta- In our soccer team in my neighborhood; as well as in the open air market where people have to agreeably share their selling lots.

Yegeta later added “‘together’ means they work together; it goes with ‘friendly.’” “Happy” was also, in essence, related with working together for Yegeta. It shows “they work joyfully,” which, for him, means they are enthusiastic about what they do with each other and for each other.

This, Yegeta believes, makes them “fast” and, so, they “open their shops in the morning at six and help each other arrange their markets.” Being “clean” is also described by Yegeta as
something that is practically done by “Ethiopians” to others through, for example, selling “unadulterated things.” His feeling towards others is also based on how people successfully link relationship with work. He stated that he likes those who “are hard workers and friendly” a lot; and, those whom he likes only “a little bit” are: “People who are stubborn in business …like, there are some shopkeepers who do not give any discount even if they know that the customer is in financial hardship. I like those only a little bit.”

Yegeta’s case shows that the genuine appreciation of and the real attention to the details of the nature and the purpose of work comes in the most nurtured and relationship-filled environment, and not in competitive and individualistic condition. This life-affirming and relationship-focused view of oneself and society that is held by Yegeta, which he got from his familial and extra-familial circle, seems to emanate from a different understanding of the founding principle of Ethiopia, which is discussed next.

5.1.5. Helping human beings “revive” and “multiply” as the founding principle of Ethiopia

Yegeta’s view on how Ethiopia began seems to be the origin of the above discussed life-affirming impulses that enliven his appreciation of aspects of life regarded as necessity, mundane, or are easily taken for granted, such as family, friends, classmates, neighbors, relatives, places, work, peace, and freedom. He was not sure whether or not he could rely on his memory on the information he got about how Ethiopia began; nonetheless, it shows the basic nature of information available to him through family and friends on the subject. Although inaccurate, he discussed a story that resembles the story of Noah, mixed with certain other historical events in antiquity:
Yegeta- Ethiopia is two thousand and five years old, but I don’t know how it started.

Was it small at the beginning?

Meskerem- May be. How do you think it started? Like, tell me how you will explain to others if you were free to guess?

Yegeta- I would say [pause] at the beginning there was a war, and when …I think I know how humans disappeared and how they revived…

Meskerem- I see, so tell me.

Yegeta- There was a war at the beginning, and not very many people lived. One guy, I don’t know his name, brought male and female humans from different countries to Ethiopia, and they multiplied.

Meskerem- So, the man saved the people from going extinct because of war?

Yegeta- Yes.

Meskerem- So he brought them to Ethiopia?

Yegeta- No, there were people in Ethiopia already; but there was war everywhere. I am not sure where. He brought them here.

Although not accurate, the story comes from an important point of view which is often missing from the “patriotic” information, like the one that is held by Gelila, which is currently being made available to children from secular and religious sources. It is also different from “pragmatic” views on the beginning of Ethiopia, such as the one held by Lidya who thinks Ethiopia began out of the contemporary practical needs of people who came together to have a country. Yegeta’s perspective on the beginning of Ethiopia and humanity has a sense of pro-life intent and a purposeful direction. It gets its survival impulses from inside, instead of from

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multiple out-side sources. It is expansive in outlook; i.e., it assumes a small beginning and envisions the multiplying of human beings. It accommodates the need and possibility of revival after adverse situations. It depicts the leader as having the responsibility to provide a kind of service that is both protective and redemptive. It is deliberate about the inclusion of the two sexes. And, it portrays the country as home, origin, and refuge without contradicting the spread of human race that originated from Ethiopia. The view of protecting human beings from “destruction” so that they can “revive” and “multiply,” in his words, seems to be somewhere at the background positively affecting how Yegeta’s family and social circle understand the meaning of life.

The above sentiment is also observed in Yegeta’s perception of Ethiopia’s role globally as he could glean from significant historical events and facts. For example, he mentioned that the Ethiopian flag was used by other countries with slight modifications, most likely remembering what he heard about the role of Ethiopia’s concept of freedom in the independence of African countries. In a similar focus on what positive impact can “flow out” from inside, Yegeta mentioned that Ethiopians are “generous” because “I heard the country donated for another country that was in drought.” He did not specifically remember the country Ethiopia donated to; yet, again, the story demonstrates the human-relation and service aspect dominant in Yegeta’s worldview coming into play in his understanding of international relations.

The main implication of the difference between the consequences of Yegeta’s conceptualization of his national identity and that of the children’s who are in the anti-utopian group is the fact that there is a need to distinguish the true essence of utopianism found at the core of Ethiopian national identity from a false sense of patriotism that has the power to infiltrate messages from media, school, and religious organizations. The latter is mostly based on imperial
and triumphant world outlooks. It is promoted by injecting essentially competitive, aggressive, and pro-war sentiments in the major accomplishment of the past, including political, economic, religious, and cultural ones. As visible, especially, from Gelila’s and Worqesh’s, cases, this orientation has the potential to create dangerous blind spots in children’s self-concept, their independent thinking skill, their ability to keenly observe the concrete reality around them, and their tangible grasp of basic information about their national in-group and about others.

However, the essentially Ethiopian/Utopian view of the kind Yegeta holds is not given emphasis in school messages despite its foundational worth on which familial, communal, social, national, and global understanding should be based. The presence of this asset, although vague, seems to be the major factor that made Yegeta “more utopian” than the other children. But, it is not adequately and systematically brought to the foreground, even in Yegeta’s understanding of life and its meaning, either by religious or secular education. One of the major tasks social studies education should therefore seek to accomplish is linking Ethiopianism/utopianism to expansive, pro-life, transcending, and life-affirming principles that inculcate the value of life and the dignity of human beings in children’s minds.

This is important especially given the fact that children like Yegeta need to be educated to press-on and have endurance of character when a positive social context they are used to or yearn for is no more present. Children may not know what they should expect and how they should handle non-conducive situations and make a pro-human context and outcome out of it; and yet, that is where the lesson that can stretch them towards becoming critical thinkers and problem-solvers lies. Unfortunately, as will be discussed next, the present elementary school curriculum, including subjects other than social studies, have, not only neglected this area, but also seem to be subtly discouraging children like Yegeta from thinking along this line.
5.1.6. Not prepared to expect challenges to a good cause

Yegeta partially satisfies his inclination to learn about different ways of contributing to society through work by reading out-of-school supplemental materials. He, for example, mentioned that he read a book which is the compilation of the stories of great minds in history. It was the story of Europeans although Yegeta did not seem to know this fact; nonetheless it has created a strong impression in him about wanting to positively impact society and facing challenges in the process:

Meskerem- What Kind of Ethiopians do you dislike a lot?

Yegeta- [pause] um…. those who….. um, I read a book once. Its first few pages were missing. I think it was about Albert Einstein, like about great minds. It says from forty-four such people, about four of them were murdered. I hate [emphasis] the murderers.

Meskerem- You hate them because they killed people of great minds?

Yegeta- Yes.

It is clear that the work Yegeta read has introduced him to the general fact that people may face challenge and rejection although they have great minds and do significant things to humanity. How he should respond to such information is not clear to Yegeta, or at least, not yet. However, stories of individuals who would like to contribute to society, but are halted by ungrateful people, are fast permeating Yegeta’s early awareness of the world in different forms. One is through passages from language subjects. Some passages, like “The Lion and The Rat” from English language class, do encourage “kindness and sympathy,” and, therefore, quickly catch Yegeta’s attention:
Yegeta- The rat was playing on the lion at the beginning, and the lion gets angry and catches her. She promised she will be of help at another time and he lets her go. When she left, he was trapped in a net, and was screaming. So, she came back to help him and bite the net through for him. So they became friends.

Meskerem- What do you like about this story?

Yegeta- I like the idea of kindness and sympathy.

Others, such as “The Ostrich and The Crocodile” from Amharic class, however, are not so encouraging:

Yegeta- The crocodile wanted a servant that always picks remnants out of his teeth. The Ostrich always picked for him. One day, he screamed and begged her to pick his teeth. When she came close to his mouth, he ate her.

Meskerem- Oh! He ate her?

Yegeta- Yes

Meskerem- Oh. So, why do you remember this story?

Yegeta- When she came to help kindly, he was waiting to ensnare her. I feel so sad for her.

Yegeta was not the only child to remember this story from his Amharic reading class. Yenus and Ezra too, remembered it. This shows that children need explicit instruction about expecting and dealing with challenges from others while they follow their utopian impulse to influence others positively.

Although family, relatives, and close friends are caught up in building a positive world outlook in Yegeta, he is entirely sheltered from disappointing realities that require one to have
strong character and endurance. The current Orthodox Church education, which does not enter much into the “secular” realm of work and community service, does not seem to be helpful enough for Yegeta to have some early sense of vision of dedication and conviction. On the other hand, the anti-utopian and individualist ideology embedded in media and school message do not deal with any strong collective principle apart from, perhaps, “shedding blood to defend borders” or “fighting poverty—our number one common enemy.” It is clear that, for Yegeta’s emerging sense of utopianism to flourish despite discouraging situations, a larger and more rewarding purpose than simply enjoying mutual relationships should be made visible to him. This requires depicting to him (and all other children) the fundamental humanistic and pro-life principle at the core of the foundation of Ethiopia as the ultimate goal towards which all human activities should be directed. The central concept social studies should then emphasize on is the value and dignity of human beings and the portrayal of society as the coming together of duties of all forms in service.

Enabling Yegeta to begin to adhere to principles despite unpleasant situations also requires helping him to be a self-inspired observer of society. Yegeta primarily depends on his family who do most of the “utopian thinking” for him. His interview did not give a hint of finding out facts for oneself or engaging in a curious observation of the social and natural surroundings although he generally has a positive attitude. Yegeta can be compared along this regard with Meklit, a fifth-grader at Walii, who showed greater tendency to engage in self-initiated observation. What factor is different in her case is examined in the next section, together with other assets and challenges present in her worldview.
5.2. **Meklit—the Utopian Fighting against Internalization of Shame and Guilt for Being Poor**

Meklit, a 13 year old fifth grader at Walii, was born in Jijiga, the capital of the Somali region of Ethiopia. She used to live with her mother until some unfortunate event suddenly took both of her parents out of her life. Meklit is not told by her relatives about her parents’ whereabouts or what happened to them. She mostly lived with her aunt after her parents disappeared, and eventually moved to Harar because the language of instruction in the elementary schools of the Somali region changed from Amharic to Somali. Meklit was admitted to the boarding house of Walii because her aunt, who used to work as a janitor in a government office, could not support her financially.

However, against all odds, Meklit has not only managed to be a high achiever, but also maintained a positive outlook towards her society, with a sense of care, concern, belongingness, and compassion to her national in-group. This is not simply seen in her expression of her feeling towards her country people; but, more meaningfully so, from how she closely observes the details of what people do to help other people. It is also visible from her hope to know more fully in the future how systems function at the national level so that she can contribute her share. She goes further than Yegeta and demonstrates stronger tendency to pay attention to often talked about social problems and align her academic interest (e.g., her favorite subject) to these problems. Unlike Gelila, she is not disconnected from her personal views on social issues; and, as will be discussed below, she relies on the media for information in a different manner. However, there is also one area where she is challenged. The positive factors that contributed to these essentially utopian cognitive orientations are discussed below, followed by her challenge.
5.2.1. *Humanized view of institutions and their founding pro-human principles*

Meklit observes with particular attention those who work to help others, and notices what kinds of people they help and how. She was, for example, very specific when reasoning how Miss Qalkidan, the administrator of the boarding house is “very Ethiopian”:

I think she is “very Ethiopian” because she communicated with agencies abroad to help poor Ethiopian children. There are many children who are from poor household or who are not comfortable with the education given in schools. For example, children like me were not able to learn when in Jijiga because everything was taught in Somali. In addition, she has helped poor families. So, she is “very Ethiopian” because she is helping Ethiopia.

Her curiosity about how she and the other children in the boarding house are helped took her further to find out about the people Miss Qalkidan corresponds with to get funds for the boarding school. She was very particular when naming the countries the private donors lived, when they came to visit, and their nationality. She is also attentive to how they communicate and what their intents are. She said, for example, that “Ethiopians” are “trustworthy” because the staff members who work in the boarding house “make sure that the money sent for us from abroad is spent on us, and they do not use it for themselves.”

The way Meklit appropriates information about national processes is also shaped by the same inclination to notice the intents of people involved and the methods by which works get done. This has humanized the way she views people in different positions, including the government. What she notices from news on the construction of Abay River Dam shows this:
Ethiopians are hard-working. For example, if we see the Abay river dam, we see that PM Meles realized the construction of the dam and enabled the river to flow our way only by making speeches, and not war. The people have helped financially during the construction. So, they are hard-working.

Technically, what Meklit described about making the river flow “our way” may not be accurate, but the spirit of the message shows her perspective when making observations. Its primary focus is on how people communicate; i.e., in this case, the late Prime Minister and those parties with whom he had to discuss and make negotiations instead of war (the Ethiopian people themselves, and, perhaps, Egyptian representatives). In Ethiopia, how the construction of the Dam became agreed upon through discussion or other peaceful means is not the most emphasized aspect of media information on the Dam. Meklit’s focus on this aspect of the Dam’s construction comes from her tendency to notice the human aspect of how the system operates; i.e., in this case, how the public and the government officials communicate over a joint issue. Her understanding of how governments are “trustworthy” reflects this humanizing leaning in her social outlook: “They keep the money the people contributed and do not touch it. They make sure it is spent like the people wanted. Governments are trustworthy.”

Institutions and professions are also understood by Meklit primarily from their “human” sides that are embedded in their foundational principles. For example, how poor children and other at-risk groups get help from hospitals informs Meklit’s view of Ethiopians as “kind.” For Meklit, there is no dualistic distinction between kindness as personal disposition and kindness as professional or institutional quality. Therefore, she mentioned the procedure by which HIV patients get free medical treatment in hospitals as one demonstration of the kindness of “Ethiopians.”
Meklit’s bent towards looking at the pro-human side of professions, institutions, and activities affected her in a much similar way as it did with Yegeta. It made her want to envision how she will contribute in turn in the future. Personally, she knows that she likes math and has interest in science and technology fields. But she has gotten an early sense that this is not all that she needs to know to realize her dream of contributing to the development of Ethiopia. “I want to learn those things that can help Ethiopia develop,” said Meklit when elaborating how she believes she will become “very Ethiopian.” She expressed her hope that she will know more about Ethiopia in the future so that she can understand what she can do to help. For Meklit, knowing only factual information about, for example, the diversity of the people of Ethiopia only makes her “a little bit Ethiopian”:

I am “a little bit Ethiopian” because right now, I am learning. I don’t know all about Ethiopia yet. But, I do know that Ethiopia has different ethnicities and languages. When I learn more, grow up, and start working in my country, I will know it very well.

Meklit and Yegeta are similar in their general interest to want to be part of a functioning, organic system. Their difference is, while Yegeta mostly looks at the individual’s personal positivity towards others and occupational input in the same spirit, Meklit goes further and also sees institutions as functioning in a similar personalized and humanized manner. This seems to have widened the range of experiences Meklit observes for the social processes going on in them unlike Yegeta who is mostly limited to well-meaning and compassionate people he personally knows. It is apparent from Meklit’s case that one of the fundamental goals utopian social studies should work towards is enabling children to have a compassionate outlook towards society by exposing them to practical examples of the attitudes and deeds of people who hold such views. It is important that children be helped to look beyond fragmented acts of charity and start
appreciating the whole system of human interaction, professions and institutions included, as ways of relating and connecting with people at a personal level in order to exchange services necessary for mutual benefit and happiness.

5.2.2. Favorable attitude towards mothers, women, and girls

Meklit has a positive view of women and girls. She has a positive memory of her mother. Like Yegeta, she picked “girl” as descriptive of herself and explained “I love my mom; I love girls.” She admires her aunt, Miss Wubit, whom she adores for being considerate of her needs and compassionate towards her. She was briefly absorbed in a deep thought when telling why she thinks her aunt is “very Ethiopian”:

She [long pause], she does not have a job. She worked as a janitor in government office. She also wanted me to learn, and she did not want to abuse me as a servant in her house. Some aunts do so. But, she works as janitor and also works in a hotel and buys some things for me. Still, she wants me to be with her; it is only because it is not convenient for my education there that she sent me here.

Her aunt seems to be a strong mother-like figure in Meklit’s life, and a likely source of her pro-society outlook. It appears her aunt also maintains a network of like-minded female relatives who help Meklit. Meklit knows no one in Harar outside of the school and the boarding house community; but, she does not feel isolated or lonely since she regularly visits her relatives (most of them aunts) who live in Jijiga.

Meklit’s positive experience with her mother and aunts has influenced her view of girls and women in general. It appears that she even has a tendency to pay attention to positive information she gets about women/girls. When I asked her what she remembers most from her
social studies class, she quickly listed the names of the three fossils of young female ancestors who’s (supposedly) millions of years old relics were found in the north eastern part of Ethiopia: “We learned about the archeological findings of, um, I forgot his name, um, he found the fossils of Selam, Illaltu, and Lucy. We have learnt that.”

This favorable attitude towards women and girls has impacted Meklit’s world outlook in a significantly “utopian” way. It had the power to humanize the competitive education situation she faces at her level which could potentially cause her to think along more dystopian lines. She is a close friend with her competitor—Bemnet—who outranked Meklit and is first from class the previous semester. Meklit does not seem to think about this when talking about her friend. Like Yegeta, she does not seem self-conscious about the fiercely competitive aspect of academics—a very morally questionable tradition maintained in Ethiopian schools by the system. Contrary to this, Meklit speaks very highly of her friend who she believes became a good student simply to do what is right for her country:

I think Bemnet is “very Ethiopian” from all my friends. She is a very strong student who always stands first in this school. She lives with us in the boarding house. She will be able to do great things for her country when she grows up. What she does now shows her love for her country.

Meklit is also an admirer of Miss Qalkidan, not only for corresponding with donors to help poor children like her, but also for not quitting her education. “She is still learning; she didn’t stop going to school,” added Meklit to validate why she believes Miss Qalkidan is “very Ethiopian.”

Meklit’s case strengthens what is observed from Yegeta about the strong impact of considerate and compassionate women in children’s pro-social outlook. The women with the
strongest impact on children are not only personally kind, but also have religious and national consciousness and possess stances about how society should function together. Although this is not clear from Yegeta’s case, it is more clearly seen in Meklit’s. As can be inferred from the next sub-section, Meklit’s aunt appears to have maintained a larger sentiment of belongingness with the Orthodox Christian population which has contributed to the prevention of Meklit’s outlook from devolving into a dystopian one. The strong impact of women with a maternal personality, pro-community stance, and a religio-political consciousness is even clearer in the case of Olyad whose mother, a convert to Islam, impacted the world view of her son from a perspective that can be labeled “critical utopian.” His case is discussed after Meklit’s.

5.2.3. Struggling against the internalization of shame and guilt about personal and collective poverty

Meklit’s view of herself and her national in-group is generally positive and hopeful despite the unfortunate condition of her parents, some of the socially unfriendly experiences she passed through when she was in Somali region, and her aunt’s financial difficulty. Most of her understanding of social ills is related to depraved behavior of some, such as that of murderers’ and rapists’. She also added the anti-Christian acts of some people as very dislikable, which she depicted as prevalent among “some ethnic groups.” It seems, like many other Christians (mainly Orthodox), Meklit has been the target of threats when she was in Somali region. This could be an additional factor that obliged her aunt to send her to Harar which Meklit was able to describe only indirectly. Regardless of these facts, and perhaps also because of her understanding of Ethiopia as “mostly Christians,” she professed a strong liking towards her national in-group with an exception to those who commit crimes.
But, this general positive outlook gets threatened by the poverty consciousness she is just becoming aware of. Although she can easily denounce criminal acts and attributes them to morality or personality, she is unsure how to deal with poverty, which she now understands not only threatens her individually, but also is talked about as the number one enemy of her country.

Two factors account for Meklit’s struggle in this area. Firstly, the perspective from which she is made aware of her country’s poverty through the media poverty rhetoric is primarily from the foreigners’ eye view, and not from that of her own or her society’s. This has apparently started to impress in her a notion very similar to Gelila—that development is about maintaining image that can make foreigners think or say Ethiopia is not poor. Her choice of the word “Addis Ababa,” the capital of Ethiopia, as descriptive of her was directly related to this:

Addis Ababa is the capital of Ethiopia and Africa. It is also a developed city contributing to the development of Ethiopia. When people who come from abroad see Addis Ababa, they do not say that Ethiopia is poor. So, Addis Ababa describes me because it is the capital of Ethiopia.

It can be observed from the above quote that Meklit’s earlier focus on immorality or anti-human dispositions as causes of social ills became challenged by an impersonal definition of poverty as less financial prosperity, low infrastructural development, and poor international image of a city. Therefore, it appears she has started to see crimes (or other immoral and anti-social acts) and society’s poverty as not having any cause-effect relation, and perhaps as two separate things:

Meskerem- How does “poor” describe you?

Meklit- I didn’t think of it as describing me. It is just that I think children of poor people have more decency than children of rich people.
Meskerem- I see. So, you are not sad because you are poor?

Meklit- No, I am not. Rather, I am proud of it.

It is apparent that children need to be exposed to a systems view of poverty that portrays inhumanity, inequality, immorality, and fragmentation as the core problems. Current Ethiopian social studies curriculum has abstract concepts such as “foreign trade imbalance” or “cycle of poverty” which, as can be seen from Meklit’s case, only shifts their attention from what matters most (conscientious and genuine human relations) to what matters less (e.g., foreigners’ eye-view of the development of a city).

5.3. Olyad—the Rebelling and Critical Utopian

Olyad is a nine year old third grader, born to a soldier and a housewife. Since his mother is a convert from Orthodox Christian (in his word, “Amhara”), to Islam (in his word, “Oromo”), he has grown up hearing lots of comparison between the political, economic, and social outlook of Christians, particularly, the Amharic-speaking Orthodox Christian, and the Muslim community. He has lots of criticisms towards the Christian community, which he views as one and the same with the current regime. He does not directly disparage Orthodox Christians; yet, they are the significant others at the background of his thoughts in all of his talk about “Ethiopia” and “Ethiopians.”

Like Yenus and Safia, Olyad implicitly considers himself as “other,” and sometimes refers to Ethiopians as “they.” However, he is more engaged in his discussion about Ethiopia, and makes serious points, sometimes satirically. His critiques communicate his (and his mother’s) yearning to see not only a better Ethiopia, but also a better Christian community, whom he believes (or heard from his ethno-religious community) have changed because of
modern education. This perception of modern education in connection with an imagined Christian hegemony affected his view towards education negatively, and made him a low achiever despite his mental agility which is recognized by his teachers. However, regardless of his academic performance, his natural ability to make realistic observation of his surrounding is intact. The assets present in Olyad’s life that contributed to his mindfulness are discussed below, followed by the areas in which he struggles.

5.3.1. Belongingness to a large ethno-religious community that critically evaluates media anti-communal messages

Like Yegeta, Olyad is shielded from the media and school political indoctrination by a community of extended family tied together by familial, religious (Islam), and ethnic (Oromo) relationships. His grandfather, who was a farmer in the rural Tigrai province (Northern part of Ethiopia), moved to Harar with Olyad's mother when Olyad was two years old. His father stayed in Tigrai and continued in the army. Olyad’s relatives in Harar and Addis Ababa are active in Mosques by organizing services for the Muslim community.

Olyad's and his families' understanding of themselves, the country, and the world generally comes from this ethno-religious perspective. His family are not only the source of diverse social information for him, but also the major influence on how he perceives and interprets what he gleans from other sources, especially the media. Compared to the high achievers in this study, he knows diverse groups of ethnicities, places, types of people, forms of social relations, and political events in the country. For example, he picked eleven words as descriptive of him unlike most other children in this study who picked only five or six. He chose not only words that describe his national, ethnic, religious, or gender identity, but also cities he
likes and ethnic groups whose music he enjoys. He identified individuals from diverse ethno-
national groups, as well as named political figures by name.

Olyad relied more on his family’s interpretation of the information presented by media. It appears his family is very critical of government, community, or individual acts that upset the ties and togetherness of the Muslim community. For example, he explained the symbolization of the red color on the tri-color flag differently than the other children in this study who generally described it as representing the blood of forefathers shed to defend the country. He described it as the blood of those who were killed by wars with neighbouring countries and by the country’s previous regimes, especially the socialist Derg—implicitly suggesting that Ethiopians should pose and reflect on their own acts before blaming outside forces.

Olyad also sounded certain when talking about national issues, even about those that are politically sensitive. He was outspoken about his opposition of America's involvement in fighting terrorists, and portrayed it as an anti-Muslim campaign inappropriately embarked on by the Ethiopian government. It seemed as though it was impossible for him to think about Ethiopians collectively without thinking about America or Americans:

Meskerem- How do you think you are different from people who are not Ethiopian?
Olyad- I am different because um [brief pause] Ethiopia has lots of historical heritages. America, um I mean Ethiopia, for example, let me take Harar as an example. In Harar there is Jegol Gimb and many other historical heritages. Since Harar is in Ethiopia, I chose “Ethiopian.”

One of the words he chose to describe Ethiopians was “kind,” and it was chosen in comparison with Americans as “Ethiopians are kind. They are not like Americans. Some Americans are
kind, some are not.” Olyad identified an Ethiopian soldier in Section V as “a little bit Ethiopian,” and his reasoning was satirical: “I think he is born in America; but, he defends Ethiopia.” After some experience with decoding his style of talking, I was able to read the sentence as “I think he is born in Ethiopia; but, he defends America.”

Olyad’s above criticism of “Ethiopians” (who, for Olyad, are Orthodox Christians), Americans, or the Ethiopian regimes came out of the ethno-religious, economic, and political unity valued by his community. His personal relation with others primarily revolved around careful observation of others' sincerity and affection towards him. In this regard, he is predominantly shaped by his ethno-religious community's watchful interaction with others, especially with Amharic speakers and Orthodox Christians who, at least from Olyad’s immediate circle’s perspective, are viewed as pro-America, anti-Islam, and government-affiliated status quo maintainers. Olyad's attention on such relations is at the foreground of his interaction with others in school and his neighborhood:

Meskerem- Have you seen other Ethiopians out of school being kind to each other?

Olyad- Yes. All my friends in our neighborhood are kind. I am kind too. There is one boy. He is short. When he buys things, he shares with others. But, if he leaves out one person, that person will not share him whatever he buys on another time. That boy is kind. This one isn’t. His name is Mohammed. He is short, but he is fifteen. He is older than me. Most children bully him calling him “shortie!” and run away. But, I don’t say anything to him. I play soccer with him. He is kind. He is not greedy. That is why I chose “kind”.

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Olyad is reacting to the isolation of Mohammed, a Muslim friend, who he feels is unfairly outcasted by other children. By being close to him, he puts into practice the advice of his family and his ethno-religious community to stand together in solidarity to protect psychological and physical attacks as a result of being "othered" by the government, which has come to be associated with American-Christian hegemony.

Although being part of such stories of isolation and reaction is not pleasant due to the extreme sensitivity of religious and political tension, the core act of defending a community that is living in close ethno-religious ties has benefited Olyad in a very significant manner. First, the involvement of his religious community in qualifying the message he gets from media seemed to have shielded his childhood spirit and his self-image not to be affected negatively and be pushed into guilt, shame, or any other form of existential crisis. Olyad went to great lengths to defend his ethno-religious identity, and, in it, his own self-image as an individual. When I asked him to explain how “cruel” describes Ethiopians, he told me instances in which Muslims and non-Muslims alike can be involved in homicidal acts, and, therefore, there is nothing especially “cruel” about Muslims:

Olyad- Ethiopians are cruel because, um, like there are many terrorists who kill others and run away to another country and hide.

Meskerem- I see. So these kinds of Ethiopians are cruel?

Olyad- I have never seen Ethiopians who do that. I see about that on BBC. Now it is on ETV too.

Meskerem- I see. So, there are some Ethiopians who are terrorists?

Olyad- Yes. There are some who gun down their own family members. I saw on Police program. They are cruel.
By the programs on TV, Olyad was talking about recent broadcast on the National Television about the “terrorist” act of certain fanatics who committed atrocities in the name of Islam. Although Olyad first seemed to admit and, then, reject the existence of Ethiopian “terrorists” who kill and hide in another country, the center of his argument was not primarily about whether the information presented on TV was right or wrong. Rather, by pointing out that there are residents (who could be non-Muslims) that kill people for non-political reasons, he resisted not to “take in” the message that he is part of a group that is exceptionally terrorist, and thereby, defends his self-concept.

Secondly, his rich familial and ethno-religious circle which emphasized community for economic and political security gave him a perspective that seems to be the most convenient angle from which, not only realistic social observations, but also critical assessment on potentially divisive politics can be made. This is one of the major perspectives missing in Gelila, Worqesh, Lidya, and Simret’s view of their national identity. In their cases, anything close to this community sentiment was full of unpracticed rhetoric that did not involve practical, economic, religious, and political unity. Therefore, it did not allow them to critically look at their society and their government—the source of the distortion of their self- and world-view.

5.3.2. More presence of mind caused by appreciation of manual works and the countryside

Olyad’s attentive observation of arts and crafts and other manual works, especially agriculture, was significantly positive. He seemed to admire, for example, how his mother sews the bags and the mats she makes for herself, and used it to explain why he thinks Ethiopians are “fast,” but they do not always need to be so: “when you sew something, you may hurt yourself with the needle if you try to do it fast.” He also expressed appreciation to agriculture and chose “countryside” as descriptive of him because he likes it.
Olyad’s positive attitude towards manual works and countryside seriously conflicts with what he feels are valued in school. It seems he has developed an aversion to “education” of the school kind:

Ethiopians are clever. Illiterate Ethiopians constructed the stelae of Axum without any education. I myself get amazed and silently watch about it on TV. If uncivilized residents of Axum chiseled the rock using traditional instruments to make that kind of stelae out of it, *it shows that Ethiopians are clever if they are not educated.*

Although he quickly changed to a non-satirical style of talking to my later probes, his belief in the cleverness of Ethiopians “if they are not educated” seemed sincere. He talked about how one can survive through hard manual work even if they are not educated:

Meskerem- How are Ethiopians “hard-working?”

Olyad- Ethiopians are hard-working. ..... For example, if one is not educated and does not have professional job, at least he has some skill. My mother, for example, does not have a job. But, she knows how to make mats for a coffee ceremony. She also makes bags.

This attention to and appreciation of manual work and the countryside gave Olyad more presence of mind. He curiously observes things “on the ground” and relies on his own way of making sense of things when, for example, comparing how things get done in different places:

Meskerem- What do you think it means when flags fly at those places [schools, military hospitals, etc.]?
Olyad- For example, what I saw in Addis is interesting. Here, we sing the national anthem when the flag is hoisted. But, there, they hit the pole and everybody stands still until the flag is raised. Then, they hit the pole again, turn around, and walk away.

He also cited first hand observations whenever giving examples. He talked about different kinds of people he encountered, like tourists he saw on the hills near his village, cultural cloth of Afar region people he observed when he was there, the location of the place where his family is building a house, the street dwellers in Addis Ababa, and so on. In addition, he uses information he gets about distant places to occasionally fantasize about things that are of interest to him—such as trains and railways:

Meskerem- How does “Dire Dawa” describe you?

Olyad- I went to Dire Dawa only once. I hear about it on the news. I hear people saying Dire Dawa has a rail way, and I wish there was a train in Harar, too. I like trains. That is why I chose “Dire Dawa”

Olyad’s case attests that the intellectual, social, and attitudinal benefit children can get out of seeing manual works and learning to appreciate their benefit in a bigger social context is immense. In the short term, this is informative to what can be added as a major cognitive and attitudinal goal in elementary schools. In the long-term, however, it requires rethinking the role of schools in training children in manual works while helping them envision its place in the bigger context.
5.3.3. **Unhappy about the purpose of school being learning English to become tour guide**

It could be that someone wanted to motivate Olyad to do better in school by telling him that working with foreigners is unavoidable; or maybe he heard his family commenting on Ethiopian education as giving children nothing much valuable, except perhaps teaching them English language to be able to interact with foreigners. Whatever the source, Olyad understands the whole goal of his education as a process of mastering English so that he can help foreigners visit the cultural heritages of Ethiopia. Although he did not seem very enthusiastic about it, there was no sign of mocking, lying, or pretending in him when talking about historical heritages and about helping foreigners visit them. He even went to the extent of associating not being able to help in this regard with being “a little bit Ethiopian”:

Olyad- For example, if a tourist comes to Ethiopia, they talk to them in English. That means, they did not introduce their culture well. They say they are only “a little bit Ethiopian”

Meskerem- I see. So, how do you think they should introduce their culture well?

Olyad- Um…um… when a tourist comes, they should take them to the historical heritages and introduce them with the culture to show their Ethiopian identity.

Olyad sounded upset and convinced about this purpose of education at the same time. He sees it as unavoidable. Although uncomfortable with it, he is not openly rebellious about it either. His only complaint is related to his perception of the English language as a bit hard to master:

Meskerem- How are Ethiopians “unfriendly”?
Olyad- Those who are unfriendly are, for example, those who cannot talk in English with a foreigner. When the foreigner gets confused, a person who can speak English comes and translates for him. So, they communicate even if it is hard.

The extremely reductive translation of national identity and education into developing a “tour-guide” mentality has permeated the whole message directed towards citizens so powerfully that children have begun to take it as their existential purpose. Olyad’s case adds to the previous insight from Gelila’s and Worqesh’s cases about the importance of sheltering children from early exposure to news on foreign relations. Rather, developing children’s inward-looking ability and giving them more presence of mind allowing them to be in touch with their local social and natural surrounding is imperative. Introducing them to ranges of valuable knowledge, occupations, human, and natural resources is important elements of such endeavor.

5.3.4. Close and strong mother figure with critical socio-religious and political views

The third asset in Olyad’s life that helped him to preserve a realistic and critical outlooks is the presence of a strong mother figure in his life that is, not only close to him in his everyday life, but also critical about social, religious, and national dynamics. It appears that his mother’s conversion has probably resulted from, and/or caused her to do, an intensive comparison that must have informed her social observations and discourses. Although it is not possible to say that his outlooks came solely from his mother, it is obvious that her influence is significant given his father’s job as a soldier (and, therefore, often not home), and his social experiences which, most of them, are around the neighbourhood in the camp where he lives with his mother. Olyad observed every detail of his mother’s work (like the sewing of the mats and the bags) and interaction with other people when he is arround her:
All Ethiopians are friendly with each other and they can work together. For example, my mother doesn’t speak Oromiffa. She only knows Amharic. And, the maid at my grandmother’s place speaks only Oromiffa. They can’t understand each other. But, they communicate using sign language. For example, once, there was a nursing mother in our house. The maid said “let’s prepare ‘shiro’.” My mother was like “shiro for a nursing mother?” “Shiro” means “porridge” in Oromiffa…But, they understood each other when the maid showed her by sign that she meant porridge.

He is also appreciative of not just his mother, but mothers in general, and their affection towards their children. He elaborated this in relation to “happiness” as manifest among Ethiopian children beautifully:

Meskerem- How are Ethiopians “happy”?

Olyad- Ethiopians are always happy, so, no one creates a problem. In our school, no one shows a grumpy face. Everybody goes home happy. My friends in my neighborhood are also happy. When they get spanked or something by their mothers, they take that graciously. They cry, but, they wash their face and become happy again and go to school without even remembering that they were spanked.

As seen from the cases of Yegeta, Meklit, and Olyad, such appreciation of and opportunity to enjoy the role of mothers who are active in the social networking and critical national consciousness is one of the significant differences present in children who demonstrated a strong sense of “utopian” outlook and those who did not. It is one of the major areas that should be closely looked at when revisiting the social studies curriculum accordingly.
Reconsidering the individualistic, competitive mental set girls are encouraged to develop through rights-focused education, and, inspiring both boys and girls to think beyond competitiveness by giving them a sense of connection with this maternal and social role of women can be considered as a basic necessity for children in a “utopian” education system. Working towards helping women teachers assume this role and helping children to reconnect with the mother figure (starting from the essential personality of “Mother Ethiopia” historically communicated through generations) is undoubtedly one of the themes school in general, and social studies in particular should be deliberate about.

5.3.5. Inability to see oneself bearing social responsibility caused by ethno-religious defensiveness

Although Olyad has a wide social circle, a strong mother figure, and an alert mentality with critical outlook, not all is “utopian” in his social and political views. He is a Muslim and an Oromo, a religious and an ethnic group that currently are in a political struggle against political and economic marginalization by the "Orthodox" Ethiopia. Olyad views “Ethiopians” and “Ethiopian government” as fundamentally detached from him and his ethno-religious group. One of the immediate consequences of his detachment is his lack of interest to envision himself bearing social responsibility to solve social ills, much like Yenus and Safia. The defensive mentality he developed because of the primary concerns of his ethno-religious community has prevented his, otherwise natural, propensity to want to help others and contribute. Although Olyad's individual identity is not based on the need to excel academically or gain recognition in other respects, his group identity got him into this very game of comparison, competition, and fierce need to be Wittier than others.
As a result, Olyad's perception of himself and his ethno-religious identity was primarily dependent on comparison with government forces, Amharic speakers, and Orthodox Christians. It seems he is always on the watch, evaluating, and sometimes, experimenting with how individuals he meets act towards him while being completely absorbed in an attempt to figure out their intentions. His conduct towards others is also fixed on figuring out what he needs to know and say to avoid vulnerability. Consequently, he has developed some cunning ability, though inchoate, which includes subtle mocking, insincere mimicking of clichés, outright lies, deception, and even vindictiveness—the very characters he is watchful of in others. There were many instances in the interview where he was explicit about adjusting his talk to the listener:

Boy and girl are not different; they are different only in their sex. Although it is often said male is more courageous, I would say females are also courageous. Sometimes men get afraid, too. I myself sometimes become afraid, so I simply agree when people say [that men also get afraid].

The above may be an attempt to pro-actively defend his religious community, which is often stereotyped for giving lesser rights to girls and women. He also goes to great lengths not to make his true feelings about the national identity known:

Meskerem- Suppose someone showed you a piece of cloth and it was just as little as a stamp and was green-yellow-red and a star in the middle, what would you say if he asked you if it can an Ethiopian flag?

Olyad- If I don’t know, I’d tell them “I don’t know.” If I do know, I’d tell them that I know.

Meskerem- If you know what?
Olyad- If I know the flag

Meskerem- But, you know the flag?

Olyad- Yes. So, *if they say it can be an Ethiopian flag*, I’d say “yes, it can be.”

Meskerem- What if they say it can’t be because it is too little?

Olyad- I’d say to them whether little or big, it can be an Ethiopian flag.

Meskerem- How about if the cloth is as big as a football field?

Olyad- Yes, it can be an Ethiopian flag.

Meskerem- Okay.

Olyad- *But I said “it can be.” I don’t know for sure.*

There were instances in which he was too careful to the point that he sounded like an outsider:

Meskerem- Okay. Why do you suppose Ethiopians wanted to have a flag?

Olyad- A-A! I don’t understand this [smile]

While he is absorbed in trying to hide his true opinions, he is also very critical of others’ moral behavior. He talked about street dwellers, not in relation to their poverty and what can be done about it, but in relation to how trustworthy they are when charging for their daily labor. Obviously, he does not hire daily laborers to do some work for him. Rather, it seems he has heard his family comparing them to less trustworthy groups who only outwardly appear to be from a better class, as can be seen in the below two (implicit) comparisons:

Meskerem- Okay. How are Ethiopians “trustworthy”?

Olyad- There are some Ethiopians who grew up on the street. They sometimes tell lies, but sometimes, they don’t. For example, among them, there are daily laborers
who carry stuff for people. If the charge is five birr, they don’t ask six birr. They are trustworthy.

Meskerem- I see. How are Ethiopians “untrustworthy”?

Olyad- Those who are untrustworthy are people who do nothing but burglary. They are thieves. Thieves live off of other peoples’ belongings. So, they are not trustworthy. When people wear new clothes and walk on the street, I do not assume that it belongs to them. I think they may be thieves.

The current education policy rhetoric in Ethiopia maintains that the goal of education in Ethiopia is to produce problem-solver citizens. But, children like Olyad are fundamentally disengaged from such interest. In Olyad’s case, the question of ethno-religious identity prevents not just the development of problem-solving ability, but the very interest in staying “Ethiopian” in the first place. The self-imposed otherness of Olyad’s ethno-religious community is caused not by the ethnic identity, which, Yegeta, Simret, and Worqnesh also have; but from the religious identity—which made him exhibit a kind of disengagement from the “Christian Ethiopia” that is essentially similar to that of Yenus’ and Safia’s. His critical perspective with valuable insights into the religio-political dynamics seems to have come from his mother, who was an Orthodox Christian. Olyad’s case adds to the assertion in the previous chapter that public education in Ethiopia should be re-thought to address the needs of Christian communities, as the Islamic perspective does not recognize any “Ethiopia” at its core.

5.4. Abeba—the Isolated Utopian Struggling with some Fundamental Questions, Alone

Abeba is a nine year old third grader at the private School. She is a shy girl with a serious countenance. It was not easy to get her engaged during the interview, and at first, I had to gently remind her that she does not have to do the interview. But, she wanted to continue. It
was only after analyzing her interview that I was able to see she was struggling with important questions based on her observation of her surrounding from a child-eye view. But, because she did not get confirmation from anyone that her questions are relevant and note-worthy, she responded by becoming a generally withdrawn child. Yet, she knows she has some important observations she has made, and shares enthusiastically to anyone interested in her views.

She identified herself as “rich,” “Catholic,” and “Oromo.” Her mother runs a printing press and clothing shop, and her father has one. She is the only one to pick “rich” as descriptive of herself in the economic sense, and is self-aware about it. Abeba is the third child from a total of four. Her parents have two apartments in a condominium building; and she, with her parents and siblings, lives in one of them. The biggest issue for Abeba is her loneliness. Except her younger brother, she has no one to play or spend time with. Her parents are too busy for most part of the day. The family goes to church every Sunday; but there is nothing she remembers much from church, apart from a few ethics instructions, such as “do not lie.” She is not close with other children in school. She is far from media, does not pay much attention in class, and does not perform well on tests. Yet, according to her principal, she is “a lioness”—a child with great potential.

On the other side, Abeba’s isolation from the most common sources of information for children—family, school, media, and religious institutions—seem to be a blessing in disguise. Her natural curiosity is intact. She critically observes her social and natural environment. She is, for example, interested to know why, although there are millions of people in Addis Ababa and Harar, most of them do not know each other and there are many lonely people. She also wonders why there is an empty garbage bin outside, and people keep on disposing waste on the ground. Abeba’s concern, discomfort and withdrawal stem from the conflict between her natural
utopian impulses and the lack of similar idealism in the school or other activities in which she is engaged. Her unsatisfied utopianism longs for two things—practical unity among people and more interaction with the environment.

5.4.1. The urge to see a practical and personalized “unity”

Abeba has strong interest in connecting with others and comparing experiences, but she finds not enough opportunity to do this. She likes to figure out similarities among people, places, and things at home, in school, in her neighborhood, or in other places. Many of her descriptions of people, places, and phenomena contained a quick rejection of indications of peculiarities or imbalanced power relationship. For example, the Ethiopian flag “…flies here in the school, and also in all other schools;” her family is sometimes happy and sometimes sad “…and all people are like that;” “clean” does not describe Ethiopians because “there is a lot of trash in my village, and in other areas, too;” her parents tell her to take out the recycle bin quickly, “and I tell them to, too.” For a while, she obliged me to share some of my own experiences that are similar to hers, and our conversation became full of the phrase “me, too.” But, her lack of fulfilling experience in this regard caused her to struggle to figure out why people do not live together. She sometimes goes to Addis to visit her relatives, and it was during her visits that she began to realize the fact that many people do not know each other, which, in her view, is very unfortunate:

I didn’t choose it [the word “together”] because in my family my brother and I do not meet other people much. Also, only a few people across Addis Ababa and Harar are acquainted with each other, and they do not meet often. So, they are not together….I would be happier if we all lived together.
The above natural utopianism of Abeba has developed in her a need to find some explanation on why people do not live together. At first, she had to figure out if there are others who are lonely like her. And she found one group—the beggars. As mentioned above, Abeba is self-aware about her family’s relatively better economic condition, and loneliness is a big concern for her. These two have put Abeba in an anxious state and caused her to believe it is because she is rich that she cannot get together with others. Therefore, in addition to not finding the opportunity to connect and share experiences, being “together” also has an economic dimension for Abeba. She said she feels different because she is rich. She also elaborated on why she said Ethiopians are “lonely” by linking it to lack of initiative to deal with inequality:

We don’t get together with beggars. So, that means, the beggars are lonely. They may say they are lonely….if I were the government, I would buy them clothes; and I would do whatever they want for them.

Abeba’s straightforward child-eye view attributes the problem of poverty and alienation to economic inequality and peoples’ refusal to come together to solve it. She is agitated by her inability to get together with others, not just freely, but also meaningfully, so that collectively acting on problems causing social alienation becomes possible. She sees people giving left-over food to beggars, and she commended it by mentioning it as an example for why she said Ethiopians are “good.” However, that does not solve the problem of social alienation which Abeba has come to realize is the problem of not only the beggars, but also “many people in Addis Ababa and Harar.” There is nothing in school or in Church that encourages Abeba to continue her inquiry or find practical answers for it that is more meaningful than occasionally giving the poor something to eat. This seems to have brought a basic mistrust in Abeba about
school, where textbooks begin, for example, by condemning practices of begging and encouraging people not to be lazy.

These ponderings of Abeba attests to the validity of what is inferred from Gelila’s case. It implies that Utopian/Ethiopian social studies education should emphatically give attention to helping children understand that social alienation and inequality is indeed abnormal. It needs to validate their feeling of discomfort with it, and they need to be encouraged to envision creating strong social bonds, which they can develop through meaningful economic, religious, and political unity, especially among all the “Christian” denominations. This would likely cause a sense of empowerment in the children by helping them think that they are the makers of their own unity, and would affirm to them their early sense that unity involves togetherness both in the concrete (material, economic, physical) and ideological senses.

5.4.2. The need for opportunities to apply systems thinking that integrates social with environmental concerns

For Abeba, her problem of alienation is also an impediment to her interest to go out and explore what is there in the environment. She expressed a sense of dissatisfaction when saying that her brother and she do not go out often because they do not know places in Harar. But, Abeba is keenly observant of nature, and has used the few touring opportunities she got with her uncle to notice natural resources and man-made infrastructure, which she was particularly delighted to talk about. The Tis Abay waterfalls near Bahir Dar, the lion in the backyard of the famous Medieval Church of The Holy Trinity in Gondar, the names of the buses they took to go to places, and even the Addis Ababa city bus, were all discussed by her with enthusiasm.
Unlike most other children, her tendency to apply systems thinking is also strongly observed in her primary focus on purposes, intentions, meanings, and functions. For example, when I asked her if there are any foreigners in her school, she mentioned that the school principals came to Ethiopia to establish the school. The flag is also understood by her as serving the purpose of indicating that the area belongs to Ethiopia. Her frequent mention of the garbage cans was also related to confusion about and dissatisfaction with peoples’ inability to use them for the purpose they are meant to serve. Her interest in understanding how things work is, however, not being met because people are mutually estranged. This makes it inconvenient for her to explore the environment and imagine what can be done with natural and man-made resources.

Abeba’s interest in getting together with people and exploring the environment can be considered as the two initial impulses children commonly have. However, social alienation poses the biggest obstacle to these impulses. It prevents people from appreciating natural resources together and acting on environmental issues. Certainly, divisions along sensitive political lines and economic stratifications have a direct consequence in children’s ability to do what they are naturally inclined and entitled to do with nature. Hence, utopian environmental education should help children deal with both aspects at the same time—the natural and the social/cultural. Perhaps environmental education can be used to safely instill in children the distaste towards division by linking it directly to its contribution to preventing them to explore the environment and make optimal use of natural resources, like land, water, and living things. Exposing children to different exercises of building environmental utopias by encouraging them to observe their surroundings together and imaginatively constructing rural villages, urban
towns, and protected wild areas could be an appropriate exercise to help children develop the tendency to break away with both alienation and sense of disempowerment.

5.5. **Ezra—Challenged by Dystopian Threats while trying to Hold on to the Utopia of Peace and Love**

Ezra, the 12 year old fourth grader at Walii, lives in the boarding house of the school. He was born in Afar region where he lived with his parents and relatives, and later moved to Addis Ababa for a short while. Ezra’s mother, a devout Orthodox Christian, wanted him to pursue the traditional Church School. He briefly attended Church School in Addis Ababa, until his mother suddenly passed away from a car accident. This unexpected event was shortly followed by the loss of his cousin who was a close friend and supporter of the family. Ezra eventually moved to Harar with his father and his older brother; but, the loss, together with the poor income Ezra’s father earned as a daily laborer, obliged Ezra to seek admission at the boarding house of Walii.

When I met him for interview, he was in a visibly poor condition (torn uniform, barefoot, etc.). But, he tried to maintain a high spirit by talking optimistically about everything. Bringing up something to laugh about when replying to the interview questions was not uncommon for him, like the following:

Meskerem- How did you like it [Addis Ababa]?

Ezra- Right at the entrance of the city, there are many sellers. I think it is near St. Michael Church—where they learn. There is a lot of water there. When I was walking, I thought it was grass; but, it was all water underneath. So, I was soaked [smile]

For Ezra, life, as he discussed through what being “Ethiopian” means to him, is all about two things: appeasing and submitting to those he perceives as more powerful than him, and
managing to stay in school despite his poor and heartbreaking life conditions. He spends a great deal of time thinking about how to stay in peace with his friends and avoid conflicts, and how to become a high achiever (he is an average student) so that he can secure a better future. He pays attention to information on academics, and even talked about some college requirements.

Sometimes, Ezra is challenged to view life from a more dystopian perspective. He occasionally ponders on unlawful and unjust things some of his schoolmates do to get their way. Ezra’s areas of challenge socially, psychologically, and academically confirm the importance of the factors identified for the other children; mainly, the importance helping children have feminine/motherly figures that displays both power and nurturance, get the opportunity to see and envision the humanistic and service-provider aspect of institutions and government, and learn the work and service aspects of education and knowledge. One additional challenge visible in Ezra’s case is the attitude of children towards money, which is one of the major factors that divide utopian thinking from a dystopian one. The gaps and challenges in Ezra’s understanding of himself, his society, and his future, are discussed below.

5.5.1. *Existential fear caused by loss of mother*

Ezra lost his mother shortly after he refused to go abroad with his aunt. His aunt could not take him after his mother passed away. Apparently, his insistence to stay with his mother did not pay off. After his loss, he became psycho-socially and economically insecure. He has developed a sense of submissiveness which was partially manifested in his all-time polite smile that tries to sooth his inside from hurting. He wants to tell what happened to him in life very badly, and I was a good venue to vent. He hid nothing, including his fear that he may become a beggar in the future and that he gets shocked when he sees one:
They [Ethiopians] may give 50 cents or one birr when they see poor people. They also help disabled people if they see one. I have once seen a guy who had a broken toe. My father gave me money to buy food for myself. When I saw the guy, I was shocked. I quickly dropped the money to him, prayed, and left. I was afraid.

Ezra sees beggars as people who lost their mothers when they were little, just like him. He labeled the beggars in the picture task “a little bit Ethiopian” because:

Even if their mothers died when they were little, they can struggle to live by getting education. But, they don’t have money to go to school… They may continue as beggars; but, may God not let that happen to them.

His interview was full of the above kinds of expressions of fear. The only outlet he sees is finishing his education by resisting all kinds of temptation to dropout, and securing a livelihood by getting a job. Staying focused on this was so important to him that all of his labeling of “very Ethiopian” and “a little bit Ethiopian” in Section V were strictly based on his guess about whether or not the person in the picture has finished his/her education.

These two unfortunate aspects of Ezra’s life, loss of mother and poverty, have unduly determined his identity and caused in him an existential fear. He has come to see both as necessarily interrelated, and he views them as his identity. Throughout the interview, he described himself and others strictly from these two perspectives; meaning, for him, there are only two kinds of Ethiopians: those who are like him due to their similar conditions of parental loss or poverty, and those who do not have such problems, and therefore, are economically and academically privileged. “Ethiopians” generally means to him the children in the boarding
house; and, every time, they were described from these two perspectives (family loss and
poverty), like in the case of how Ethiopians are “together”:

From what I saw here, there is one who goes to junior high from among us who live here.
He is not friendly to those who are not friendly to him. But he wants to be together with
others as much as possible. He doesn’t have any siblings. His father is dead. His mother
lives abroad. Sometimes his grandmother comes; sometimes he gets money sent from his
family in Adama.9 His grandmother lives in Adama. He likes to be friends with others.
Once, he was searching for a friend; and, when we walked to the park here, he ran into
us. He told us that he wants to be with us and that he does not want to be alone.

Preventing Ezra (and other children like him) from entering into a tunneled vision of
themselves that focuses on an identity crisis would require giving them a larger view of a mother
figure that links belongingness (being “Ethiopian”) with power and nurturance. Indeed, the
staffs in the boarding house and the teachers, who are mostly women, might be playing that role
to Ezra and other children. The children who participated in this study, especially those at Walii,
confirm that these women do take their time to encourage children to go through emotionally
challenging aspects of their lives. But, they may not be doing that adequately for children who
are not high-achievers or visibly promising in any sense. It is also important that they extend
their efforts through the curriculum itself to impact the children’s world more strongly and
profoundly. This has an implication to how elementary school women teachers need to be
educated to bring together Christianity, Ethiopian identity, history, and the concept of

9 A name of a city located to the east of Addis Ababa.
nationhood to children. It also implies that social studies should include themes that link
children with influential women who got political power or social influence through their role as
a nurturer/protector. Social studies can and should encourage children and expand their
intellectual and social outlook via stories of women in Ethiopian political, cultural, and religious
history that were influential, motherly/nurturing, and utopian. In addition, they should also be
allowed to see that loss of parents or guardians does not mean they do not have a larger
belongingness or they are doomed to a life of poverty. Children should be allowed to link
poverty not as an individual condition that is pre-destined to be poor, but a system failure that
comes due to social alienation and fragmentation among members of society, to which a solution
is available in their hands as well as other individuals.

5.5.2. General fear of authority figures who are viewed as triumphant forces, and not as
public servants

Like Gelila, Ezra views government officials, or any authority figure, as exceptional
individuals that should be unconditionally obeyed, and not as service providers. In Section I, he
stated that he believes he is different from non-Ethiopians by his “ethical conduct.” His
explanation for how that makes him Ethiopian was presented as “if they misbehave or commit
something wrong, they may be imprisoned.” The imprisonment was to be done, supposedly, by
the later Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, who, Ezra thinks, began Ethiopia in 1999. Ezra sees the
role of the Prime Minister as the controller and guardian of the country:

Ezra- Yes. I think Meles was assigned to control the world because he is clever. It may
be so that he can guard Ethiopia.

Meskerem- I see. Who do you think gave Ethiopia to Meles Zenawi to guard?

Ezra- I don’t know the man that gave him. I heard this when my friends talked about it.
Meskerem- I see. But, how do you think Ethiopia begun?

Ezra- There are others who are proud of their country. If Meles is known worldwide, I think he was made to take the responsibility of guarding Ethiopia.

It is possible to explain easily that such understandings in children are the results of exaggerated media propaganda. They may also be exacerbated by the authority figures’ posing as such, although not directly. Whatever the cause is, the net effect in children like Gelila and Ezra, and the one that is not being addressed in schools, is their conceptualization of government as controller by nature. Therefore, they view any hierarchy merely as indicative of the amount of power one can exercise over those below him/her, and consider this as normal/default. There is no source of knowledge that challenges this by introducing them to the principle of accountability that guides governments’ conduct and its role of ensuring the wellbeing of their subjects. It may be the case that such tendency to view government and authority figures as triumphant forces to be feared and obeyed is triggered initially by less than ideal conditions in the parent-child relationship (in Gelila’s case, witnessing mother’s domestic abuse; and in Ezra’s case, losing a mother). Presenting to children government’s service-giver and nurturer side brings out its “feminine” aspect; and, foregrounding Ethiopian women’s powerful and visionary aspects makes their “masculine” sides visible. This can bring the necessary balance in the children’s spiritual, psychological, emotional, and cognitive relationship with their national identity.

5.5.3. **Education as unconnected to valuable knowledge and occupational contribution**

Ezra stood 27th out of 61 students in his class in the previous semester (the one who stood first was Worqnesh). He views this as a significant improvement compared to his rank (30th) in the earlier grades when he was in another school in Afar. His average score for all subjects was
71. But, he hopes to score even better and be an excellent student. He attentively observes what the high achievers do in order to score well on tests:

[Ethiopians are “fast” because] …There are some who are fast when they read and study. There are some others who are weak in these areas. Those who read do so night and day. They want to understand what they read and know all of it by heart if possible. They also read other materials.

He talked in detail about those who hire tutors when exams approach, those who read “whatever they get” and make sure they answer all questions on exams, and others who do not care and are asked to leave the exam room. He sincerely admires the “clever” students. Ezra’s labeling of his family members, friends, and teachers as “very Ethiopian” was also strictly based on academic excellence. For example, he labeled his older brother “very Ethiopian” because “he often ranks 1\textsuperscript{st} or 2\textsuperscript{nd} in class; and even gets tearful when he stands 2\textsuperscript{nd}.” Adugna (his friend) was also labeled “very Ethiopian” because he stood 14\textsuperscript{th} from class although he was ill. Miss Qonjit, his favorite teacher was labeled “very Ethiopian” because “when we talk in class or get distracted and fail exams, she teaches the topic again and writes it to those who failed.” Moreover, Ezra viewed completion of college and job as an “award” given by the government to those who stayed in school and completed their education.

It appears Ezra gets messages from his desperate family members who most likely depict school for him as the only hope he has out of poverty. From Ezra’s perception of education, and also Worqnesh’s understanding of what counts as academic knowledge, it is possible to see that content relevance and meaningful purposes are only additives that, if present, can spice up school and lessen the agony of staying in it for the children.
Obviously, school is not helping children to have an all-rounded and humanistic view of themselves and their society. As the focus became completion and securing economic future, the fact that knowledge gained from school and college is ultimately meant to solve human problems is not made visible to children. Contents are, in effect, identity-neutral; meaning, they have nothing to say about what Ethiopians, as people of a nation, need to do or know in order to function well as a whole. The role social studies should play in doing away with this gap is then linking work with Ethiopian identity for children. As seen from Yegeta’s and Meklit’s cases, work/occupations and institutions become meaningful to children when viewed in relation to their contribution to the society that children feel affiliated to. From the Utopian/Ethiopian perspective, work is a personal, spiritual, relational, national, and professional venture—all at the same time. Children need to be exposed to a systems view of work and the relation different occupations have with various fields of knowledge.

5.5.4. Emerging moral questions on money versus friendship, and beyond

Ezra tries to maintain his hope in the possibility of a peaceful friendship now and a better economic prospect in the future. But, it seems he occasionally thinks about options of getting money through immoral means. He hears about children who steal money from their dorm mates that are sent money from relatives, and wonders why they do not use it well:

If one boy wants to take another boy’s money, it may be because he is such a remorseless person. But, if he happens to befriend him, he would share the money with him. There is no befriending and abandoning a person at the same time. He may later tell him it was him who took the money and may apologize. But there are some who steal money and jump over the fence to escape. They may steal up to hundred birr. But, they use it up soon. They don’t save it; I don’t know why.
Ezra also hears about children who use knives and do “cruelties to each other.” I asked him if this happens most of the time:

There may be someone who acts arrogantly towards us every once in a while; and, if that happens, we don’t play with him. We go somewhere else. If we have nowhere else to go, we stay in the dormitory or study.

It is conceivable that inequality in physical power and economic inequality is a big concern for Ezra and the other children in the boarding house, especially the males. For most of the children, this is the time and the situation they form their basic moral values around alienating or hurting a friend for the sake of money. The fact that Ezra wonders why children who steal money do not save the money makes one question what Ezra’s reaction would be if they do. As long as education is portrayed to children by society as a means to a better economic future, the long path called “education” does not make sense to children if there is a shortcut to it. Ezra may get tempted anytime to adopt Gelila’s way of thinking along this regard, or even go further to follow an immoral path over the conventional one.

The question of money is central to any classical utopian thinking since money has the inherent power to corrupt human behavior. It is one area that has the power to make children like Ezra join the “anti-utopian” group in their social outlook. Children need to explicitly learn the due place money has in society, and the primacy of the common good over an individual financial gain if the goal of education is to help children think in a utopian direction. The nature of Ezra’s question on the action of the children that steal money shows that the early nature of moral dilemma children start to sense around money and associated moral integrity is related to trying to understand what is ultimately valuable. Although Ezra did not articulate it clearly so,
his assessment “but they use it up soon; they don’t save it. I don’t know why” can also be read as “I wonder what valuable purposes the money could have been spent on instead.”

One theme social studies and other subjects should then focus on is helping children see the difference between what inherently counts as true wealth and what does not. This theme can help all children put into perspective their early confusions and misconceptions around several topic areas, specifically those identified in this study: people, resources, development, country, culture, knowledge, education, power figures/position, reputation, occupation, money, etc.

5.6. Selam—the “Epicurean” on the Verge of Escapism

While Gelila can be labeled a stoic, Selam can be understood as an epicurean. The former avoids “fun” and relaxed social interactions; the later shuns anything “serious” and focuses on entertainment, fantasy, and friendship. Selam is a thirteen year old fifth grader at Walii, and is one of the low achievers in her class. Her mother died of HIV, and her father sent her to Harar where her aunt lives. She was admitted to the boarding house, and every once in a while, she gets visits from her aunt and her aunt’s friends.

It appears Selam was enrolled in the study because she likes to meet new people and see what they have got to say. But, as the interview went, it became clear that she was not prepared to expose much of her true feelings and views on issues of either personal or national significance. Perhaps, for the most part, she has trained herself to ignore them. Nonetheless, her seemingly disengaged gesture when responding to most of the questions still pointed to a couple of important areas Ethiopian social studies education should strive to help children in order to inspire them to become an engaged individual that actively imagines utopia in its classic sense.
5.6.1. National identity as something that does not involve the social and personal aspect

Selam mostly talked about herself in relation to her friends at the boarding house whom she referred to as her “sisters and brothers.” She picked “rich” as descriptive of herself, not in its economic sense, but in this social sense. She referred to the act of caring for one another and closeness as the “wealth” of Ethiopia, and stressed its role in making her “very Ethiopian.” She was the only participant in the study to interpret the red part of the flag as “love” and “peace.” She frequently used the expression “he/she is ours” to say “he/she is Ethiopian” in the picture tasks. She considered the ability and/or opportunity to live in love and peace with others the main force that energizes one to want to live:

Meskerem- Do you think there are people who are born and live here, but are not Ethiopian, or have “lost” their Ethiopianness?

Selam- When he/she no more wants to live and loses peace, he/she says “I am not Ethiopian!”

Meskerem- I see. What do you think these people want?

Selam- Death.

Yet, for the most part, when she talked about “Ethiopians” collectively, she did not use social life and bond as the most defining criteria. Rather, she resorted to contents from media and textbook to find some “politically correct” ways of addressing some questions about the country at the national level. For example, she defined those Ethiopians who are “a little bit Ethiopian” as people who “kill endemic animals and prevent tourists from coming to visit them.” She linked adjectives such as “fast,” “clever,” “hard-working” with the construction of Abay Dam and academic excellence. She also described some people in different occupations/professions in Section V using official rhetoric by consciously avoiding her personal
views. For example, she referred to the farmer standing in a field as “very Ethiopian” because “the harvest… um, foreigners may come to visit the landscape.” But, all such descriptions required her to think in a way she normally would not. She is rather interested to talk much about things like how dressed-up people look (the criteria she used in Section V often), dramas she likes (which she did not know if it was okay to bring up in an interview about national identity until I encouraged her to), and romance novels she reads.

One can choose to understand Selam’s disconnect from public issues in light of the long existed debate and discussion in the social sciences on how to teach the youth to care, have a sense of political agency, and develop interest in civic engagement. But, it can also be understood from the other side of the issue; i.e., the disengagement of the politics and dominant definition of national identity from the social and personal aspects of the lives of citizens. For Selam, her “duty” as an Ethiopian never goes beyond pleasing the “stoics”—politicians and all those in the government structure—by telling them things from media or textbook which she believes is what they want to hear. For her, joy, pleasure, fun, love and friendship are completely separate from work, study, service, education, national identity, or any other “serious” endeavor. This dualism is also true for the “stoic” children like Gelila who advise other children to watch that they do not get distracted by friends, play, and fun.

The repressive structural and ideological hegemony of the current (and previous) regimes that brought about this dualism is at the core of most of the political tension that is only voiced informally. Especially in the early years of the current regime, words and phrases such as “love,” “heart,” “belongingness,” and “sincere mutual understanding” were frequently raised by the people, both informally and through the free press, to express dissatisfaction about the quality of relationships between the leaders and the people. Many felt they are not “loved” by the
officials as humans, and they felt they are reduced to an “it” whenever listening to the official speech of prominent government representatives. Several political opponents and intellectuals made infamous speeches, back in the 1990s when freedom of speech was relatively better, emphasizing that officials need to show more heart and tone of belongingness when addressing the people. Unfortunately, the situation has changed for the worse, and currently, the issue is no more about relationship, but about economic sustainability. Children like Selam who want meaningful relationships perceive the politics essentially for its “stoic” tone.

This non-humanizing, impersonal tone entered the school textbooks long ago, even before the current regime, affecting both how the public and young politicians thought and discussed issues of public significance. It replicates what goes on nationally in the classroom by dividing between children like Gelila and Selam. Those who accept it, usually out of desperate and unhappy familial situation, adopt fierce competitiveness and maintain an out-ward patriotism—like Gelila. Others get repulsed by it and throw away any sense of belongingness to politics, only to embrace escapism—like Selam. It is possible to say that this is where the challenge of the link between politics and social studies education lies.

Social studies, or any supplemental reading and literature available to children, should play a role of intentionally breaking this dualism between imposed stoicism and reactionary Epicureanism. It is imperative to make sure that children are exposed to enough content from the country’s major religious, cultural, political, and historical events from the perspective of individual participants in the events who are animated by friendship, love, sacrifice, protectiveness, noble character, and commitment to transcending spiritual ideals. The long history of Ethiopia is full of such cases, and it never fails to catch attention whenever researched and reflected in novels, songs, paintings, and other artistic products. Often, such artistic works
are considered “unofficial” and, generally, are not allowed in schools. Yet, Selam, who could not remember most of what she learned in social studies class when I asked her, confessed that she likes reading novels. One of the novels she mentioned was a recently published utopian novel on the theme of Ethiopian renaissance, which also involves the story of two young lovers and their struggle with religious, economic, cultural, and political issues. The novel is widely read in Ethiopia. From the complexity of the political and intelligence issues it raises, it is possible to tell the novel is not meant for young readers. However, the novel’s success in getting the attention of young teenagers like Selam indicates the importance of making informative and fictional literature with such themes that purposely link the personal (human) and the political available to children as supplemental to the official social studies curriculum.

5.6.2. Aesthetics as a field away from “serious” thoughts

Since politics has become sensitive, religion divisive, and creativity in culture stagnant, most contemporary artists avoid publicly raising these topics through their works. This has caused the banality of contemporary creative works and general mistrust of many in the potential of these products to create genuine effect in peoples’ spirit apart from simply their entertaining purposes. Children, too, are affected by such thinking. Selam has interest in the arts. She not only has interest in novels and dramas, but also in painting and music. During our interview, I was able to see on one of her palms a very complex and detailed design painted with a pen. She was embarrassed and did not want to say what it represents or who drew it. Later, I also observed her handwriting was exceptionally beautiful and the lay outs were accurate although the paper I gave her was a simple blank sheet with no lines. For Selam, these talents, which are part of her personality and life, are simple distractions that have no place in the “official” stream and therefore, are not to be discussed with “serious” people like me. The reason is not the fact
that children do not get exposed to artistic elements of historical, cultural or religious heritages; rather, it is the fact that they are not systematically guided to appreciate the bigger ideals and values that are considered worthy by the makers/producers who wanted to communicate them with others through such works.

Chapter Summary

The findings from six children who showed a more utopian perspective on their national identity were presented in this chapter. Two of the children, Yegeta and Meklit, are high achievers, Ezra is an average student, and the remaining three (Olyad, Abeba, and Selam) are low achievers. Yegeta showed the strongest sense of utopianism compared to all the other children in the group, followed by Meklit who seems to be struggling against certain aspects of anti-utopian thinking. The other four children’s utopianism was communicated mostly indirectly in the form of dissatisfaction, criticism, insecurity, or escapism.

Yegeta, the fourth grader at the private school, portrayed a rich social relationship with members of his family, school peers, neighbors, and religious community. All of them played a role in building Yegeta’s positive outlook of himself, his national in-group, and his country. They helped him appreciate aspects of his identity (ethnic, national, and religious) primarily for their intrinsic worth (joy, independence, peace, sense of community) rather than for their instrumentality to gain a competitive edge over other groups/nations. He also did not seem to have a sense of distinction because of his status as a high achiever. He expressed affectionate attitude towards his mother, who seems to have strong impact in his national, religious, and social identity, and expressed appreciation of his sister and girls in general. Yegeta viewed work as a form of relationship, much like play, friendship, and family life, and expressed a strong desire to know the varieties of occupations in Ethiopia. He communicated an assumption that
the country is a home to a big family (his national in-group) and showed a practical interest in knowing about foreigners and their influential figures. His understanding of Ethiopia’s beginning is related to an incident that resembles the story of Noah, and this understanding gave him a sense that the purpose of Ethiopia and an Ethiopian leader is to help human beings revive and multiply by saving them from extinction caused by adversities. Although this general life-affirming view of an existential purpose helped Yegeta maintain a positive outlook, he has begun to struggle with his emerging awareness that not all people appreciate those who want to help others and do great things for their country people.

Meklit, the thirteen year old fifth grader at Walii, lived with her aunt after her father and mother went missing. She came to Harar and got admission at the boarding house of Walii. Because of her aunt’s caring and considerate conduct towards her, Meklit seems to have adopted most of her aunt’s positive perspective towards Ethiopians in general and Ethiopian Orthodox Christian majority in particular. She is a keen observant of how institutions and authority figures function in order to help others. She observes their intents, manner of communication, and their personal beliefs that energize them to work to help others. She also goes further than Yegeta by going beyond observing individuals and appreciating the human-focused missions of public institutions as well. Like Yegeta, she does not seem to possess a sense of distinction because of academic achievement. She also expressed a positive attitude towards women (mothers), girls (her academic competitor included), her aunties, and female ancestors (fossils of women hominids). Although like Yegeta she has a sense of inspiration to do something in the future that helps her country people, she is becoming aware of foreigners’-eye-view of Ethiopia’s poverty that seems to be unsettling her understanding of the roots of social ills. She seems to be caught up between her own a personalized understanding of poverty as a condition caused by anti-social
acts on the one hand, and her emerging impersonal understanding of poverty on the other that equates poverty, for example, to a city that does not meet international standards. In the middle, she is struggling not to internalize a sense of shame and guilt for being poor from which she defends herself by claiming that she is decent because she is poor.

Olyad is a nine year old third grader at Walii. He is one of the three low achievers in the study (the other two being Abeba and Selam). As a son of a woman who converted to Islam (“Oromo”), Olyad’s worldview comes largely from a critical perspective towards Orthodox Christians and the current Ethiopian government which, he believes, has allied with the West against Muslims. Olyad’s ethno-religious group gave him a critical perspective towards media content which helped him greatly to protect his self-concept. He has also internalized his mother’s and his ethno-religious group’s criticism against the education system for not preparing “Ethiopians” for practical jobs other than fluency in English language to work with foreigners. As a result, he is not attentive to what he learns in school. Instead, he observes other things in his natural and social environment driven by his natural childhood curiosity and compares what he sees at one place with that he observes at another. Although Olyad observes small scale manual works and arts and crafts with a good presence of mind that can help his mental ability, he also spends a good deal of time curiously watching the conducts of Christians in anticipation of potentially hostile actions. The later seems to have prevented him from thinking about his country from a concerned and engaged perspective. However, like Yegeta’s mother and Meklit’s aunt, Olyad’s mother is a strong social, religious, and political figure in Olyad’s life that positively affected his sense of self as well as his perspective on other children and their relationship with their mothers.
Abeba is a nine year old third grader at Nazareth. The shy and withdrawn girl struggles with certain fundamental areas she believes no one is paying enough attention to, such as the loneliness of the beggars, the improper use of the recycle bins, mutual estrangement among people in Harar and Addis Ababa, lack of ample opportunities to explore local natural resources and man-made infrastructure, and her own sense of alienation which she has come to believe is because she is born to a rich family. Abeba speaks with a clear sense of dissatisfaction about these problems, and there is nothing that is validating her sense of concern along these lines from family, school, church, or teachers. She hopes to live Harar one day to live with her relatives in Addis Ababa.

Ezra is a twelve year old fourth grader at Walii. Like Meklit, he lives in the boarding house of the school. Ezra’s view of his national identity and national in-group is shaped for the most part by the two aspects of his life: loss of his mother and poverty that gave him a fear that he may end up becoming a beggar. Ezra sees education as the only hope for his survival, and tries to observe high achievers to become like them. His greatest concern currently is to maintain peace with other boys in the boarding house who may get violent every once in a while. But Ezra also wonders sometimes what it is like to possess money by stealing from others, as some of the boys do. Nevertheless, he appreciates the importance of living ethically (which he believes is equal to being Ethiopian) because of his awareness of the presence of a punishment (imprisonment) system for delinquents. He thinks the imprisonment is done by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi whom he believes was a brave man known worldwide and therefore was assigned to control Ethiopia by another more powerful man.

Selam is a thirteen year old fifth grader at Walii. Like Abeba and Olyad, she is a low achiever. She lost her mother and her father sent her to Harar where she got admitted to the
boarding house of Walii. Selam is repelled by the impersonal and stoic nature of politics and academics. She likes reading novels, talking about drama and other TV shows, and, if possible, getting dressed up and getting together with friends to entertain. For Selam, being Ethiopian is all about living a happy life with as many friends as possible. Although she has a good taste of art—as demonstrated in her hand-writing and sketching—she does not think it has much value in “serious” national and academic discourses. However, one of her favorite book was a novel about Ethiopian renaissance with a very political message at the core, but has a touch of romance, religion, patriotism, and personal struggle intertwined with the main story.
Chapter Six

6. Findings from Textbook Analysis and Teachers’ Interview

The findings from the textbook analysis show that the dualistic distortions observed in the world-views of the children in the anti-utopian group are also found in the environmental science and social studies textbook contents. The children’s anti-utopian cognitive orientation could be either gained from or sustained by the environmental science and social studies curricula. Although it is not possible to conclude that the children’s anti-utopianism is caused by the textbook contents, it is possible to see that anti-utopianism is an officially endorsed worldview as far as the formal curriculum is concerned. The teachers’ interview also revealed their concerns along these lines, although not directly. The teachers expressed doubt in their capacity or the curriculums’ instrumentality to contribute towards mitigating the threats against the kind of future (utopia) they wished for the children. Major themes that came out of the textbook analysis and the teachers’ interview can be discussed under four major categories:

1. Origin of human beings and Ethiopia/Ethiopians, life, and mothers
3. Concepts of change, time, education/knowledge, hope, and ideals
4. Relationship, community, leadership, inequality/poverty, and work

6.1. On How the Textbooks Portray Human Beings and Ethiopia/Ethiopians

The grade three to five environmental science and social studies texts portray human beings to children from dystopian, dehumanizing, and reductive perspectives. This is through common topics and ordinary bodies of knowledge that seem safe to assert, but are significantly anti-human (anti-utopian) when seen in light of the findings from this study. Although the
teachers felt that subtle dehumanizations exist in the texts, they could not explicitly and specifically articulate them. Some of the contents and the major distortions the contents seem to support are discussed below together with related concerns teachers expressed in the area (all names are pseudonyms).

6.1.1. Human beings as living in the cycle of working-eating-working

Human beings (or “sewoch” meaning “people”) are presented in the first chapters of grades three and four environmental science textbooks—Man and His Life—as doing ultimately four things: eating, working, earning, and buying food and other necessities. The sub-sections in the chapter are linked to four things man needs to survive: food, energy, time, and money. All these are discussed in detail, with the most emphasis on money in the third grade textbook. It discusses the importance of money for life and the existence of money in human history in different forms, including the bartering system, which the textbook describes simply as another form of conceptualizing money (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 9). The text discusses food in relation to the fact that “sewoch” (people) need to have energy and avoid diseases in order to be able to work so that they can earn money and buy food—which they need to survive and be able to work again. Peoples’ social relation is also mainly discussed in the context of trade relationships, which is also described as providing services and products in order to earn money that is necessary for survival. The fourth grade environmental science textbook follows the same pattern of content selection and presentation, only with more details. The fact that human beings are capable of and ever-caught up with a longing to the higher, the bigger, the beautiful, the enriched, and the fulfilling experience of life throughout the ages is simply absent from the definition of “human being” in the textbooks. Miss Genet, the third grade environmental science teacher at Nazareth,
expressed her concern to this reductive approach in the curriculum, although she was not able to specifically point out what it lacks:

By the way, the topic “Man and His Life” is found in first, second, and also third grade. In first grade, it is about body parts. In second grade, it is about family. In third grade, it is about food. I teach all grades. I know it all. I teach from my mind; I do not even need note. And, there is a contradicting thing. In second grade they learn about their region; and in third grade, too, they learn about their region...And, it really puzzles me. It is really short. It is about body parts, and family. Now, what is that about man and his life?

6.1.2. Human beings/Ethiopians as living to die

The content on ancient fossils found in the region of East Africa in general, and Ethiopia in particular, is often perceived in Ethiopia as a very “Ethiopian” and even “patriotic” topic. Especially after the discovery of the remnants of Lucy (Denqesh) in 1974 and the subsequent laudation of the achievement around the world accompanied by tours, the phrase “Ethiopia—the origin of human race” had become a prideful expression among Ethiopians. Yet, what meaning it has for children is not examined from their perspective.

Like adults, children may take up the cliché to eagerly learn about themselves and their country, but, only to find out that that is all there is to the topic. The discussions imply no identity, existential purpose, or duty which could be helpful to the children’s personal and social identity development. For example, Lidya—the aspiring utopian held back by pseudo-pragmatism of the here and now—mentioned the topics of ancient Ethiopia and the fossils as her most favorite topics from the fifth grade social studies class. She expressed an interest to learn about ancient Ethiopia to understand how early Ethiopians lived and what they went through; but
the official curriculum gives more space to speculations on how they died and how their fossils were discovered. The content is not only incapable of satisfying the children’s aspiration to know about their origin, learn the meaning of life, and get a sense of continuity, but is also gravely depressing and dark for it links the beginning of life (ancient Ethiopia, early race of humans) with death—the only thing the fossils are known for.

 Teachers feel unease around the topic of the beginning of Ethiopia or any discussion of its existential purpose. This is best seen in the case of Miss Menbere—the third grade environmental science teacher at Walii. She is a middle-aged, devoutly religious (Orthodox Christian) woman who is compassionate towards her colleagues and her students (according to the random testimonies I heard about her from other teachers and her students). Menbere deeply feels culture and religion are central to the Ethiopian national identity; however, she was not sure if she had to mention that in the secular academic setting:

Meskerem- Let’s say your students asked you personally, “how did Ethiopia begin?” how would you explain to them?

Menbere- umm… well, hmmm, it is difficult. The founding of Ethiopia is difficult to describe. I don’t even know where to begin [small laughter]. But, …I don’t know. I think I would answer to them saying Ethiopia is …um….I think… it has a long history,…and when founded, I believe, is related to religion. That is what I think. It is difficult to describe,…it is very difficult.

Lidya’s dissatisfaction and Menbere’s doubt (regardless of their denominational difference) shows the extent to which a secular and archeological approach to explaining the beginning of Ethiopia has prevented teachers and students from a more meaningful discussion on
this important topic. Linking the beginning of Ethiopia to an active purpose of realizing a spiritual and temporal utopia and the struggles involved in it should be one of the primary tasks of Ethiopian social studies education.

6.1.3. Human beings as inherently bad, so as needing guidelines to live orderly

In both third and fourth grade texts, ethics is discussed from the perspective of a series of “don’t’s” that are, occasionally, worded in a demeaning way to human nature. Several important points are raised, but all from the perspective of indirectly pointing out negative consequences that could happen if certain ethics guidelines are not followed, and not from positive results that come out of positive actions. Concepts such as mutual respect, mutual trust, loyalty, tolerance, truthfulness, and helping each other are presented in the third grade textbook with a primary emphasis on the importance of non-aggression (passive or active). Therefore, being punctual and doing what one is told to do (such as studying, for children, and working, for grown-ups) are presented as demonstrations of respect, which the text portrays as necessary for people “to defend their advantages” (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 26). Mutual trust is defined as having no doubt about others’ intention and being loyal to family members, relying on the knowledge of professionals, not having doubts about teachers’ knowledge, and therefore listening quietly in class, etc. (p. 27). Truthfulness is defined as telling the truth to friends and others, enduring to fulfill a goal, returning assignments to teachers on the due date, not destroying school and government properties and friends’ properties (returning it on time without destroying it), not taking others’ belongings, respecting others’ culture, accepting the equality of all human beings and the difference between the two sexes (p. 27-8). In short, all possibilities of mutual attack, competition, mistrust, doubt, questioning, criticality, and sense of rebellion are brought up and
disapproved in such portrayal of ethics. No intention of humans to do positive is implied by any of the discussions on works, social life, or ethics in the texts.

This lack of sight of a nobler vision and, instead, the tendency to focus primarily on watching out for injustice that could be done on oneself is felt by the teachers in different ways. The most significant one was through the topic of children’s rights. For example, Alemu, the fifth and sixth grade social studies teacher at Walii, feels the emphasis on children’s rights and the disregard to any communication of broader purpose/vision to the children is distracting and harmful. He cited several defensive behaviors of children already becoming rampant, and teachers not being able to discipline the children in order not to offend the children’s “right”:

For example, when it is their turn to clean their classroom, they collect money from their group and hire janitors. They do not clean themselves. They could learn work ethics and sense of responsibility if they took turn to clean it themselves. But, look! This is how they exercise their rights [laughter]. They are so good at defending their rights if you ask them why they do that.

He believes all responsible governmental and social institutions (including NGOs and religious institutions) are not discharging their duties in the urgent task of bringing children towards a stronger interest in some common (national) goal. Alemu described the Ministry of Education as only working on children simply out of duty, and not vision. He also stated that teachers lack global awareness, both due to their own negligence towards updating themselves on national and international directions, and due to the inability of intellectuals to contribute in this regard. He also pointed out that religious and social institutions, like NGOs, are not doing inclusive work on giving vision to children and youth. Their only involvement with children’s
education, he observes, is limited to responding to government educational initiatives on HIV, harmful traditions, etc. “We talk a lot about education; but I can say nothing is done on children,” Alemu says.

6.1.4. *Implicit distinction between “Ethiopia” and “Ethiopians”*

The texts also use tones that make “Ethiopia” and “Ethiopians” appear distinct by associating Ethiopia indirectly with the government. For example, one of the paragraphs under “Ethics” sub-section says to the children:

“When you grow up, you will know what you should contribute to your country as a citizen. You will also distinguish and understand what your country should do for you. You will [should] put effort to protect your country’s [public] properties from damage. You will keep the environment clean. If you do this, you become true citizens of your country.” (p. 28)

In the above paragraph, the government directly “talks” to the children, telling them that what they need to do now and in the future to become/stay citizens/Ethiopians. In a similar manner, the fifth grade text explains how “the capacity of Ethiopia’s natural environment to support the livelihood of the population has dwindled because of rapid population increase;” (p. 63) and how:

“The amount of money needed to provide social services is very high….The country must allot a huge budget to cover for all this; and rapid population growth worsens the problem….so, the country faces difficulties to provide social services; and this causes unsatisfactory social services.” (p. 80)
The implied message is that the government is Ethiopia, and the populations (the people) are the ones that are being helped/supported/served by Ethiopia. The factual truth that the people, and their children, themselves are Ethiopia is hence omitted. This seems to be the first impression children get from school which separates their identity as a person and as a human being from their national identity. A contract relationship called “citizenship” alienates the children from their inherent Ethiopian identity. This distinction between “Ethiopia” and “Ethiopians,” either generally, or particularly in the case of the children, does not seem to be noticed by the teachers. This could be because of the general pervasiveness of the problem and, therefore, the teachers’ inability to specifically notice how this curricular hegemony manifests in textbook contents. During the interview, the teachers expressed in different ways that they feel professionally, ethnically, and politically pushed aside from the decision making process, both at the regional and at the national level.

6.1.5. The original Ethiopians as unknown and the current Ethiopians as descendants of immigrants

The fourth grade text maintains that the current Ethiopians are descendants of the preceding settlers in the region and the later immigrants to the country from different regions. The text says: “History confirms that the people of today’s Ethiopia are the descendents of the people who lived in the region before and who later immigrated to the country from neighboring places” (Teshome, 2007, p. 137). It details the ethnicities and tribes from the later immigrants: Semitic, Cushitic, Nilotic, and Hamitic who are described as emigrants from Asia. The preceding settlers, however, are not described, leaving the origin of Ethiopia or Ethiopians open to speculation yet to be discovered through fossil study. Ethiopia—the origin of human race—is then effectively stripped off of its status as such, and the connection between the beginning of
humanity and the beginning of Ethiopia is severed. For children who internalized this point, Ethiopia is not home. The children in the utopian group are also challenged by this notion of estrangement from Ethiopia. Some of them, like Yegeta, find their own explanations from family, while others, like Abeba and Ezra, rely on their best guess about the origin of the country which they know by now is not directly theirs. In the middle of this vagueness, of course, the government authority figures, or some unknown powerful men (as Ezra imagines), pose as the originators of Ethiopia in the children’s minds.

Miss Birtukan, the fourth grade environmental science and fifth grade social studies teacher at Nazareth, expressed dissatisfaction in the way Ethiopia is presented as founded by the influx of people from other nations. She feels this presentation is purposeless and not clear about what it wants to teach children. In fact, she believes this is the best example that shows social studies is not effective in teaching children about Ethiopia or Ethiopian identity:

For example, this aspect is often taught from our own understanding or from the teaching aids prepared by other teachers before us. The text has nothing in this regard. It only says “this tribe entered Ethiopia this way; that tribe entered Ethiopia that way, the Semitic entered at this time,…” so on and so forth. But, it presents nothing, either in picture, or in detail. It lacks something. It just mentions this. Then it is silent. But, these things should be taught well to children

**6.1.6. Presenting the existence of most children as unwanted**

In relation to the above, the topic of population explosion is also of strong opposition to the kind of utopian curriculum the children need. Much like the topic on ancient human fossils, population explosion and its associated crises is a subject matter that has been heard so
frequently by adults that pondering on it from the fresh perspective of children is difficult. The fourth grade textbook has one sub-section that is entirely dedicated to showing children how Ethiopia’s poverty is related to its labor force shortage, and how that is directly linked to the disproportionately greater number of children below fifteen years of age who are dependent on the workforce (Teshome, 2007, p. 107-109). In addition, it connects population growth with environmental problems such as depletion of natural resources (p. 112-113). As seen under the above sub-section, the fifth grade text also presents population growth as the major reason for environmental degradation (Gebrehiwot, 2010, p. 63) and unsatisfactory social service provided by the government (p. 79). The fact that the first thing children are expected to know about themselves, is their negative impact on the environment and Ethiopia’s economy is a fundamentally dystopian message. Nonetheless, Ethiopian’s population explosion is the topic children continue to be exposed to throughout middle and high school social studies and geography (demography) subjects. None of the teachers, however, identified population explosion as a problem to Ethiopia’s economic backwardness. They also did not comment on the inclusion of the topic in the textbooks—showing the possibility that this is a topic not noticed by them for its potential negative impact on children.

6.1.7. Culture and religion presented solely in the context of inter-group differences

The texts also maintain a top-down and alienated view of different religious and cultural groups. Ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversities are presented in the text books mainly from the perspective of an independent spectator (the government) with a tone of advice to the groups to live in mutual respect and tolerance. The third grade textbook mentions that there are various ethnic groups in the Harari region and there groups live in equality, mutual respect, and help. It also states that they have different food, clothing, and social culture, with a
tone that the children should be aware and not be surprised (Tefsaye, 2007, p. 147-148). The fourth grade also follows the same pattern of presenting cultural differences. It briefly touches other dimensions of culture, such as the transfer of culture from one generation to another and the communication of love and belongingness to the group one belongs. The fifth grade text mostly emphasizes religious tolerance and harmful traditions in more detail than the third and fourth grade texts (Gebrehiwot, 2010, p. 10-14, p. 74-78).

The above kind of presentation of culture is obviously not supportive of the children’s utopian inclination to understand systems and appreciate cultures for their basic purpose. It rather encourages inter-group comparison and implies sensitivity of relationships across groups. It does not help children learn the central purpose of cultures as ways of nurturing the human potential to realize a happy life, pursue order to achieve common goals, and coordinate modes of service and production to ensure mutual interdependence. It ignores the ideals of dignified personality found at the core of cultures, which caused the emanation of all the unique strands of attires, rituals, initiations, beliefs, relations, roles, duties, and practices that produced the cultures (or the cultures produced). In other words, it takes utopianism out of cultures, portrays them as stagnant, and limits them only to the emotional and outward aspects of human relations.

Miss Menbere and Miss Genet, the third grade environmental science teachers at Walii and Nazareth, shared their concern on the trivialization of the way culture is currently understood. They both expressed their appreciation of the Nations and Nationalities Day that recently began to be celebrated annually in Ethiopia. (Children in all schools bring their respective cultural attires, traditional ethnic music, foods, and so on to school and celebrate the day). But, together with it, they expressed their serious concern that children are missing significant moral lessons they could have gotten out of cultural studies. Menbere said:
I think the children may lose their culture in the future, meaning, like their cultural attires etc. In addition, they may lose their Ethiopian identity. When I say “Ethiopian identity,” …Ethiopian identity is something…something frightening; it is not easy; it is a dignified identity. I think they may lose that…. it is…it is a magnificent thing to be Ethiopian. Former Ethiopians were way better in several things, starting from the way they dress and conduct themselves graciously, but now…I don’t know.

Genet described it more directly and linked it to the growing threat on children’s moral development. She discussed at length the impact of Harar’s location near the eastern border (a trading front with the world’s important trade centers in the Arab world), and, therefore, its vulnerability to an influx of commodities and cultures, which are threatening the generally conservative culture:

Satellite dish is cheap. Some families buy DSTV (Digital Satellite TV) to watch soccer. But the children download something else. They circulate the downloaded memory amongst themselves in school. I caught one child holding one. He was only fourteen.. ... What I saw was very unacceptable. Do you understand? [M: yes, I do] …” This grieves me. The problem is not being dealt with adequately. The children have gone way out of line. It is spreading very fast among children.

In Ethiopia, the development of a very coordinated network of a counter-cultural movement which facilitates, not only the audio-visual circulation, but also of children’s initiation into controversial and underage sexual practices, especially in major cities, is a topic that is recently gaining the attention of private presses and blogs. Semi-formal talks with teachers, school administrators, and other adults during the data collection period of this study revealed
the unspoken, but widely spreading and shocking taboo of sexual assault on boys which is told more with a sense of terror, fear, and deep insecurity rather than simple disapproval of an immoral behavior. Leaving this wide topic aside, the concern of teachers like Genet, who deeply struggle with such realities is unmet by a satisfactory teacher-education program that would prepare them to contribute towards positioning children as early as possible towards a more spiritually, morally, and intellectually sound direction. In light of this, the trivialization of discussion on culture and religion in social studies education to refer only to diversity and inter-group comparison is a distracting approach.

6.1.8. Motherhood presented only in association with social problems and death

While the absence of discussion on women, motherhood, and the related concept of nation is by itself a questionable curricular gap in elementary grades, the texts go further by mentioning motherhood only in association with harmful or unaccepted cultural and social phenomena in society. The third grade text does not discuss women in relation to motherhood and only mentions them under the section of economic activities that Harari women generate a lot of income for their household by making and selling traditional home decorations (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 138). The fourth and fifth grade texts, however, briefly bring up mothers, but, only in a negative context. The fourth grade text states that one of the reasons for the undesired rapid population growth in Ethiopia is that one mother has too many children on average whereas the death rate in the population is stable (Teshome, 2007, p. 109); and the only context of a mother-child relationship being brought up in the fifth grade text is in relation to pre-natal and post-natal case of HIV transmission from mother to child (p. 77). This, coupled with contents about Selam—a fossil of a child deceased during infancy—and the widely acclaimed Lucy who is introduced as the “mother” of human race, presents mothers in association with death in
elementary social studies texts. Whether this is intentional or is simply the result of inadvertent configuration of different topics is a question this study cannot determine. However, when such presentation of mothers/motherhood is viewed in light of the findings from this study on the importance of women of compassion, power, influence, care, nurturance, and national and social consciousness in children’s lives, it becomes apparent that the contents are not only unhelpful, but also potentially harmful to children.

It seems Mr. Alemu has noticed this lack of positive discussion on the role of women as mothers and nurturers. For my question on how he would enrich social studies education if time and resource were not limiting factors, he spontaneously brought up the topic on women as an example:

Just like we can talk about Tekeze and other tributaries when we mention the river Abay, we can discuss several dimensions of any particular topic. For example, we can teach about women by exploring her many dimensions: she is a mother, she is a sister, she is a worker, etc. She has many roles. So, we can teach any topic broadly by touching on its multiple dimensions.

Alemu’s assertion does not seem to be the result of a conscious awareness of the children’s fundamental need to have a sense of attachment with a mother figure that has broader social, intellectual, spiritual, and national significance. Nonetheless, it is an indication that the void in the curriculum in this regard is felt by the teachers one way or another.

6.1.9. Presenting Christianity as European imposition and Islam as Ethiopian/Indigenous

In regards to religion, all of the analyzed textbooks show a subtle tendency to present Christianity as foreign imposition on Ethiopia, and Islam as indigenous to the entire East Africa,
including Ethiopia. This leaning can be considered relatively more expected in the third and fourth grade texts since the texts for the two grade levels are prepared by the Harari Regional Bureau of Education. However, the fifth grade text, which is prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education, has even stronger direction of claims in this regard compared to the third and fourth grade texts, showing that the Islamization impulse is national.\

The third grade text makes very peripheral mention of religion, and when it does, it directly mentions Catholic, Red-Cross, and Islamic non-governmental organizations (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 146). However, it refers to Ethiopian Christianity (Orthodox Christian) only indirectly (without naming it) by referring to ancient religious books as one of the tourist attractions in the region (p. 142). The fourth grade text discusses Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia in relation to ancient civilizations and trade relations. While doing so, the text avoids the discussion of the presence of a Christian population in Ethiopia in ancient or medieval times. Rather, it mentions the kings and their dynasties in distinction and discusses their accomplishments mostly as individual Christians (Teshome, 2007, p. 144). Ancient Axumite civilization is discussed for its relations with ancient Greece, Rome, and Persia (p. 142) setting the stage for subsequent assertions that major features of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian tradition were importations from other countries (p. 144). Muslims are, however, explicitly mentioned as populations for their trade activities in the region since, at least, the medieval times (p. 146).

The fifth grade text goes further in its assertion of the dominance of Islam in the region of East Africa. Unlike the third and fourth grade texts, it does mention Christians as a population.

\[\text{The new Ethiopian social studies texts of fifth grade and beyond are printed in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.}\]

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But, it gives emphasis on their tolerant relationship with Muslims. It commends, for example, the decision of the Zagwe kings (12th century) not to side with European Christians against Arabs (p. 11). The text discusses a competition for political power between Muslims and Christians in the medieval era and concludes by mentioning that the Christian government was weakened since then—leaving children with the impression that there has been no Christian government after the 16th century in Ethiopia (p. 12). After that, it goes into a discussion on Islamic Sultanates, and states that Imam Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim El-Ghazi (Ahmed Gragn) was the ruler of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa from 1529-1543, whereas the historical fact is Ahmed Gragn was a leader of an Islamic jihad against Ethiopian Christians which caused bloodshed and destruction of Christian heritages later concluded by Gragn’s defeat. The text does not acknowledge the presence of any Christian government after the 16th century. The 19th century incident of Ethio-Italian war, for example, is discussed for its implication to the benefit of unity among the people which is presented as the result of the long process of uniting Ethiopia that opened the way for modernization. In short, it leaves children with the impression that Christianity was not a major part of Ethiopia’s national life after the 16th century. This foreignization of Christianity and indigenization of Islam shows an attempt to prepare the minds of children from both groups for a possible Islamic take-over of the political power in Ethiopia.

Miss Genet—the third grade environmental science teacher at Nazareth, and Mr. Aschalew, the fifth and sixth grade social studies teacher at Walii, expressed concern along this area more explicitly. Miss Genet underlined the importance of unity among different Christian denominations in order to resist the Islamic culture that she believes is spreading fast in Eastern Ethiopia. As a previous member of the Orthodox Church (she is a convert to Protestant), she
explained what her concerns are in regards to the Orthodox Church’s neglect around the education of children both in Church and in households through parents:

…You know what saddens me these days? We have place for TV; we have place for “Bercha,” but we don’t have place for the children to learn prayer. Had they been taught this, something could change. This is what I believe priority should be given to.

For Mr. Aschalew, checking the expansion of fundamental Islam is not a matter of cultural or moral superiority, but a question of the very survival of Ethiopia. He was, for example, deeply dismayed when describing the partial administrative system of Harari Region which treats differently Muslims and Christians (which, for the region, coincides with the Harari ethnic group versus other ethnic groups) in economic and political administrations. Aschalew believes currently Ethiopia is vulnerable to attack that may break out anytime from any direction (inside or outside). He feels the country’s security is taken for granted while the current decentralized administration system has left the country open to divisions. In his utopia, the military plays more of a role in the public’s day to day lives. The entire social organization, Aschalew feels, should emulate a military system. He believes orderliness, alertness, advanced infrastructure, and united action against internal and external (mostly Islamic) threats are the ideal shape Ethiopian society should assume. As an indication of this fundamental belief, his proudest moment of being Ethiopian was the military triumph Ethiopia had over Somalia during the 1977-1978 Ethio-Somali war. He remembers vividly how frightened the entire population in

11 A traditional ceremony common in eastern Ethiopia said to be inherited by inhabitants of Harar from the Islamic tradition that prevailed in the Arabian Peninsula for over a thousand years. It involves the ritual of using khat—a narcotic drug consumed by chewing the leaves of the plant catha edulis, drinking coffee or tea, smoking tobacco or shisha, burning incense sticks, and, sometimes, worshiping through divination at the peak of the mood. In the past couple of decades, the tradition spread very fast to other areas of the country, blending with other traditions.
Eastern Ethiopia was at the beginning of the war, and tells with real satisfaction the relief that came as a result of the effective, well-coordinated, and quick intervention of the military:

In 1978, Somalia invaded Ethiopia. Many Ethiopians left the Ogaden area and entered Jijiga. Some even retreated up to Harar. It was a chaotic time. Explosives used to be thrown by the Somali from distance in the direction of Harar. Many residents of Harar even left to Dire Dawa loading their entire property on rented cars. And then, those that retreated from the Somali region and those that came from central Ethiopia mobilized themselves against the Somali, and launched an effective counter-attack and drove them out of the region of Ethiopia. I was satisfied in the speed by which our army controlled the legitimate region of Ethiopia because the way they marched to Ethiopia was frightening… I was so relieved to see that the Somali were checked before they made any further advance; and the unity and the might of the Ethiopian force was simply great.

He wishes to see more unity, and if possible, intermarriages among different ethnic groups so that ensuring the country’s security—an important pre-condition before all other initiatives, including educational—can be undertaken. Unlike Ms. Genet, Mr. Aschalew does not see the education of children from Christian perspective as one of the pre-conditions.


The way agriculture, the countryside, and nature, including animals, are portrayed in the texts includes some questionable contents that might have fueled the distortions in children’s understanding of the environment. Simret’s tendency to confuse commercial agriculture for greenness and Worqnesh’s static view of rural areas as impoverished by default are supported by the environmental science curriculum. The texts’ contents may not be the initial causes of the
children’s misunderstandings. Nonetheless, the fact that the distortions are found in the texts shows that the children are being intentionally mis-educated along these lines. Some of the distortions are sensed by the teachers, and some others are not, as presented below.

6.2.1. **Manmade products as the ultimate solution to agricultural backwardness**

The fourth grade text introduces children to the major landscape of vegetation in the country and the status of agricultural activities. It explains in detail that poverty and famine in the country are the results of backward agricultural practices that do not make use of modern technology and manmade products such as fertilizers, genetically modified seeds, pesticides, lack of veterinary care for livestock disease, and so on (Teshome, 2007, p. 116). The inclusion of such contents which assert the desirability of some controversial productivity-enhancement practices is an addition to the already problematic nature of school-based environmental education the effectiveness of which has long been questioned in Ethiopia and other developing countries. The text content simply presents traditional farming and animal rearing practices as inconvenient to optimally use Ethiopia’s agricultural potentials that are endowed by nature. Yet, one of the biggest concerns in Ethiopia’s environmental protection activities (at the level of environment protection agencies and development researches) is to find ways of preserving indigenous agricultural and environmental knowledge and linking the youth to more concrete experience with agriculture and preservation of natural resources (Bekalo & Bangay, 2002; Gebre Egziabher, 2009; Maureen, 1990). None of the teachers in this study directly brought up this contrast between the texts’ prioritization of industrial-enhancement of agricultural practices and the national environmental policy or traditional agricultural practice in their discussions.
6.2.2. **Reforestation as a commercial venture**

The fifth grade text dedicates a chapter to an in depth discussion on the importance of maintaining ecological balance by accompanying it with attractive pictorial presentation of different indigenous trees and wildlife. It describes the interdependence of different animal and plant species in a healthy ecosystem, and goes on to touch upon the problems of extinction of plant species, desertification, and the fleeing of wild animals due to the endangerment of their habitat. The chapter concludes by giving suggestions on the importance of reforestation as a key to maintain ecological balance by restoring the natural habitat for birds, wild animals, etc.

However, the way the suggestion is worded is curious. It tells children that reforestation should be done by planting “different types of trees which can grow quickly for consumption, which can help fulfill daily needs, and have economic benefits” [emphasis mine] (Gebrehiwot, 2010, p. 65).

Of course the text makes this suggestion as to be done where there were no forests before. But, at the same time, this practice is presented as a solution for wildlife fleeing and ecosystem imbalance leaving no room for children to appreciate the necessity of reforestation by planting indigenous and diverse wood species.

Among the five teachers, Menbere gave the most attention to the importance of reforestation in her interview. She stated that sometimes, she takes the children out of class to show them from a distance the nearby mountains that, only a couple of decades ago, were covered by forest. She expressed a longing to see environmentally conscious future generations. She stressed the importance of paying enough attention to reforestation side by side to the infrastructural building, which she feels has currently taken all of the limelight. Mr. Alemu shares Menbere’s concern in this regard. He believes the current environmental and social studies curriculums fail to kindle a genuine interest in and concern for the environment in the
children. He appreciates some aspects of the texts’ contents, such as the inclusion of practical group activities like gardening in school compounds. But, he observes neglect towards urgent concerns because there are neither informative contents nor organized effort that could encourage children to actually explore local natural resources:

On the topic of endemic animals, the texts present rare Ethiopian species like Walia Ibex, and then, jump to other countries and talk something else. Why? Is Walia Ibex all the children need to know about their country? There are many things in Ethiopia. Even here in Babile [30 kilometers east of Harar], the elephants were about 300 in number; now only 50-60 are remaining. Shouldn’t the children learn about them?

The main difference between the teachers’ view on how children should learn about the environment and the texts’ approach of discussing the environment comes from the fact that the texts emphasize the commercial purpose of environmental resources (through commercial agriculture or international tourism), whereas the teachers come from the perspective of preserving nature (e.g., the natural/indigenous forest and the elephants in a local countryside). However this difference of motive behind the two perspectives is not discerned by the teachers who view the problem with the contents simply as a matter of lack of emphasis.

6.2.3. Animals and plants described only in light of their utilitarian purpose

Although it is not entirely problematic, the way animals and plants are described in the textbooks brings to mind a potential area of challenge. Animals and plants are solely presented in light of what they can be used. The several pages of content on their benefits can be summarized as having the following sense: we (humans) use animals and plants for food, for medicine, for cloth production, for shelter, for industries, as a beast of burden, for security and
hunting (e.g., dogs), and for foreign currency. Ultimately, the impression they give is that they are “things” to be used and sold, and not much more. This, coupled with the fact that first and second grade environmental science textbooks begin for children from non-living things (liquid, solid, and gas) makes one to wonder if the perspective children are given about nature is intentionally meant to be unlively.

6.2.4. Static and negative depiction of the rural with a subtle suggestion of abandoning it

The fifth grade text discusses the difference between rural and urban areas in relation to differences in settlement patterns in the country (Gebrehiwot, 2010, p. 26-27). It describes rural society as mostly agrarian and of a different culture than the urban. But, the main features it depicted rural areas with are negative, and are not used for the urban areas for parallel comparison. For example, it divides rural areas into two based on the permanency of the population settlement. The first one, it describes, is the temporary, which implies nomadic lifestyle. It describes in three sentences that nomads move from place to place due to inconvenient climatic conditions and shortage of pasture and water. Then it moves on to describing the relatively permanent rural settlements that are composed of agrarian society, which includes owning properties and land and living in one area, adding that this settlement is “for unspecified duration.” (p. 27) While the text used permanency of residence to describe rural areas, it focused on other aspects to describe urban areas, such as the diversity of economic activities and the accessibility of different services in cities (p. 27). Trade, mining, administrative services, hospitals, courts, schools, industry, metal works, woodworks, etc. are presented as non-agrarian activities found in cities, with a confirmation that “all these are not found in rural areas” (p. 27). The tone of the content is biased in favor of urban areas and does not help children envision an improved rural life. It subtly suggests the abandonment of rural areas and presents population
movement towards cities as if it is the norm of life. This is odd especially given the fact that the poverty reduction strategy the current Government of Ethiopia follows is agriculture and rural-development, and this is clearly acknowledged in the texts.

This bias in the general economic and demographic condition of the country is most directly mentioned by Menbere—the environmental science teacher at Walii. She stated that the neglect of rural areas is one of the biggest threats for the realization of the Ethiopia she wishes. Menbere feels the ideal Ethiopia has narrower differences between the standard of living in urban and rural areas. She feels rural communities are seriously neglected in practice regardless of the rural-focused development initiative professed by the government. Fighting crimes against women and girls, eradicating harmful traditions, and promoting education and other rights, etc., according to Menbere, are not strongly pushed in rural areas in actual practice. She wishes to see more balanced economic, political, and social relationships between rural and urban areas so that they can grow together “hand in hand.” But, Menbere did not mention the environmental science content or the general school curriculum in relation to these issues. The bias in the texts is indirectly commented on by Miss Genet—the third grade environmental science teacher at Nazareth. Genet feels rural and urban areas, in the current context of Ethiopia, do not have similar educational needs, and therefore, should have a separate set of curricula that takes their cultural and economic difference into consideration.

6.2.5. Negative portrayal of cottage and light industries

The fourth grade text discusses cottage and modern industries (light and heavy) in its section on economic activities. The text underlines that heavy industry is the key for economic development (Teshome, 2007, p. 118). Cottage industries are described as unattractive to many
and often stigmatized, and therefore, underdeveloped (p. 118). Light industries are presented with a more positive tone, yet, as incapable to contribute significantly to the economic development of the country (p. 118). The sub-section concludes by reminding children that the country follows agricultural development-led industrialization strategy and that rapid and heavy industrialization is necessary for the country’s economic development (p. 119). It generally portrays cottage and light industry as essentially different from heavy industry, giving an impression that the path towards heavy industry begins from somewhere else, and not from studying and improving the techniques and goals of cottage and light industries themselves.

Miss Genet has expressed her concern in this regard most explicitly, but without hinting on any discernment of the environmental science texts’ bias against cottage and light industries. When commenting on how she thinks the curriculum is (not) guiding children to the kind of Ethiopia she wishes to see, she brought up the disappearance of the arts and crafts from the Ethiopian elementary schools, which she saw as alarming. She nostalgically remembered the old days children (both sexes) used to learn arts and crafts, such as sewing, knitting, and spinning, and talked at length about her fear that these arts may permanently disappear in the future:

….Arts and crafts has simply disappeared from Ethiopian education… I mean, for example, isn’t painting worthy of learning? Isn’t that a great skill? I see many paintings in the Orthodox Church; all of them are ancient. Have you seen Jati Kidane Meheret Church in Addis Ababa? It has very beautiful paintings on the glasses…I mean on all of the glasses. I grew up attending the Holy Trinity Church here in Harar. I know its paintings; but, look what the children do. All they can paint is monsters and cartoons with horns and circled faces and wide mouths. They are not in the arts and crafts at all. I wish the arts and crafts make a comeback in Ethiopian schools….Weaving [the
traditional cotton dress] is an art that is currently disappearing; do you know? I myself knew about the artistic skill needed to do weaving only recently. I saw on a TV program that they have to paint first before they actually do the weaving. I didn’t know that…I regret the loss of those kinds of arts.

Miss Genet mentioned that she was ridiculed by her colleagues for bringing up the idea of teaching children the basics of home arts. She stated that she nonetheless continued to carry her needles to school and contribute by sewing the children’s torn uniforms whenever she sees one. The situation obliges one to seriously question how far modern education has really progressed in Ethiopia since the beginning of the 20th century, especially given the fact that one of the components of the modernization process that were the targets (at least rhetorically) of modern education was to fight the tradition of despising manual works.

6.2.6. A focus on advanced and theoretical physics concepts in environmental science

While the textbook contents make a contrasting/preferential comparison of cottage/light industry and heavy industry based on economic significance, they ignore the creative, technical, and useful nature of the tools these industries use. The technical/scientific concepts are discussed separately, and at a level difficult to be understood by children. Most of the contents in the environmental science portion of the texts present advanced theoretical physics concepts such as energy, force, pressure, density, fulcrum, heat wave, sound, etc. Children do not receive much help, either in the texts or out of class experience, to understand these concepts concretely.

6.3. On How the Textbooks Portray Change, Time, Education, Hope, and Ideals

The texts also widen the major gaps in the children’s understanding of the nature of valuable knowledge, the purpose of education, the meaning of continuity/change, and ideals
which guide the collective. Generally, the distortions present in the anti-utopian group along these lines are exacerbated by misrepresentation of these features in the texts as discussed below.

6.3.1. Technology as the only content of “change” (human dimensions of “change” ignored)

All the texts depict “change” and civilization as the progress of tools and resultant change in infrastructure. The textbooks’ portrayal of change is too materialistic, both in tone and content. The third grade text, for example, generally defines change as a new discovery (innovation) that happens while trying to solve problems in daily work (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 150-151). The fourth grade text uses “change” and “civilization” interchangeably. It states “civilization means progress/betterment,” meaning progress in tools of production, modes of transport, health care, education, and so on (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 141). The fifth grade text also portrays change mainly as adoption of modern infrastructure such as currency notes, transport, banking, roads, communication technology, modern education, hospital, hotel, printing press, plumbing water, electricity, and modern defense department (standing army) (Gebrehiwot, 2010, p. 19-22). Although all these are indeed significant changes worthy of explaining to children, the priority given to explaining the material manifestation of “change” without any hint on the change of views/ideals/visions/intents in human beings that brought about the changes is a dualistic omission. It removes the human agency and trivializes “change” to mean anything, causing unstable and inauthentic varieties of “change” that are devoid of any sense of what is “good” change. As especially observed in the case of Lidya, children will be left with a faulty understanding of what constitutes “change” by linking it to less fundamental or outward changes, such as using modern boats for fishing, saving money, or adopting modern clothing style. This approach of portraying change to children disconnects them from the natural human thought process and the reality of what brought about the changes they observe around them. It also has
an additional effect of giving them the wrong impression that ideals are the spontaneous or accidental results of invention and not of vision and sense of agency to impact society in positive ways. The later perspective would be a correct reflection of the history of most innovations in the history of humanity, as well as affirming to the children in the utopian group.

The same lack of appreciation of the human side of “change” (of visions of the good life) that causes technological advancement is observed in the teachers. All of the teachers see arrival of modern tools of communication and production in Ethiopia as desirable and inevitable. But, none commented on what they believe the children are learning or should learn about technology, apart from mentioning some concerns such as disciplinary problems due to exposure to illicit media contents or the shifting of the focus from practical environmental exploration. The fact that these concerns about the lack of balance among the technological, environmental, and the social were expressed by the female teachers (Miss Genet and Miss Menbere) also points to the possible difference of perspective on this issue between male and female teachers.

6.3.2. Linear conceptualization of the history of humanity

The perception that development is an accumulation of material culture over the ages towards a better technological future is also supported by a presentation of history as such in the texts. This view, which is clearly embraced by Worqnish, has a notion that both past and present generations of Ethiopia lived anticipating a technological utopia which started to be realized by the advent of modern technology. The texts support this view. Apart from the establishment of modern infrastructure and adoption of technology, the only other changes (or directions of change) the texts discussed are population explosion and environmental degradation. The conceptualizations of life (personal and collective) that gave rise to the processes by which how cities, towns, settlements, institutions, etc. came to be are absent from all the texts. Its
description of cities or ancient and modern states is static. For example, the third grade text
describes the City of Harar as a trade center since ancient time and describes its population
settlement patterns (Teskaye, 2007, p. 134-152). There is no hint that, as a town, it has gone
through changes of various kinds throughout the ages. The fourth grade text is straight forward
when presenting technological advancement as the sole goal of humanity throughout history, and
gives an impression that other aspects of life are constant or insignificant. Similarly, the fifth
grade text discusses the ancient and medieval kingdoms in East Africa, and concludes the section
by linking it to the process of uniting Ethiopia—which is only presented as the ground work for
the adoption of technology and the advent of modern infrastructure (Teshome, 2007, p. 8-22). In
short, progress towards technological advancement and associated foreign trade relations is the
only direction children are pointed towards as the history of humanity (Ethiopia/world).

Mr. Alemu and Mr. Aschalew seem to embrace this view. Alemu believes that “the
major point lies” in economic development and infrastructure expansion. He locates poverty at
the root of all social crises, and believes there would have been no brain drain, civil war,
ignorance, moral corruption, social ills, and identity loss had the previous and present generation
been focused on catching up with other countries in technological and material development:

If children ask me how Ethiopia began… I would tell them that Ethiopia is an ancient and
historical country. It was comparable to ancient Egypt, Byzantine, and Roman
civilizations. Today, these countries have advanced greatly; and Ethiopia is left behind.
But, I would also tell them that we are awakening from our long sleep. We are
undergoing “renaissance” and are struggling to change ourselves. If they ask me why we
are backward, I would tell them internal and external factors. The history of Ethiopia is
predominantly a history of internal civil conflict…
6.3.3. The dualism of continuity vs. change translated as society vs. government

In relation to the above, government is portrayed in the texts as a change agent. In all texts, there is a sharp distinction between culture as located in the realm of society, and change as modernization, and therefore, in the realm of government duty. Since the government is the major voice that “talks” to the children through the texts, the people of Ethiopia are presented with a distancing tone while the government maintains a neutral, stoic identity. In the third and fourth grade texts, for example, the transfer of notions of belongingness through generations, traditions of solving conflicts, establishing and maintaining help associations, traditional ways of production, religious heritages, etc. are classified as the dominion of the peoples’ culture (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 144; Teshome, 2007, p. 139-140). The only area the government associates itself with is the modern institutions such as courts, banks, and insurance. This association of government only with change and modernity has already made the children assume that government is by default alien to the people, and is a recent and provisional institution. This produces or supports the gap of understanding on the nature of government as preserver of ideals bigger than itself (a distortion more clearly observed in Lidya’s case). None of the teachers seemed to have noticed this division of roles between society and government in the texts.

6.3.4. An indirect suggestion that school is the only reliable source of knowledge

Under the “Ethics” sub-section, the third grade text tells children that trust is one of the important virtues one should have to be accepted by society. When elaborating what constitutes trust, the text gives examples like trusting a taxi or bus driver because of confidence in his/her ability to drive the vehicle. Likewise, the text recommends, children should trust the knowledge of their teachers, and therefore, sit quietly, listen, and do what they tell them to do (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 27). The problem lies, not in the instruction for children to listen to their teachers, but in
the absence of equally explicit advice on the relevance of knowledge children may get from family, community, nature, and personal reflection. In the “Plants and Animals” section, for example, it presents traditional use of plants for medicinal purposes as unreliable and potentially harmful, and asks them to collect information on what kinds of plants are used for disease types in their local areas together with their side effects (p. 44). This is the only instance in the text that asks children to gather information from their communities on a relevant subject matter. No exercise exists that encourages children to connect with family or the local communities on investigating a relevant topic of environmental or social nature that can enable them to appreciate the wealth of beneficial knowledge their community may have.

The same is true for the fourth grade text, which invites children to collect information from their community on a topic of their choice, giving them a hypothetical example of fire outbreak (Teshome, 2007, p. 47-52). The goal of the sub-section is to introduce children to the basics of scientific research methods. The fifth grade, the one prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education, gives children a range of events and phenomena to investigate in their local areas at the end of each sub-section. These include when the modern institutions in their local areas were established, what the use of forests looks like in their residential surrounding, and what kinds of harmful practices exist in their communities. But, like the texts of the earlier grades, it does not refer them to family or community for knowledge of any kind that they can appreciate as useful. The fact that tradition and culture also have an intellectual side, and are products of thought, which could be sensibly deciphered, is a perspective that is missing from the texts.

Contrary to the textbook, teachers feel families and communities, as well as traditional, civic, religious, and non-governmental organizations, should work with children more than what they are currently doing. Except Mr. Aschalew who feels children’s education is not the major
area to focus on for utopian reform, all the other teachers wished to see more involvement of social institutions in the children’s education by suggesting that they go beyond only focusing on charity works that only temporarily alleviate economic problems (Miss Menbere and Miss Genet) and the limitation of their role to a government-defined agenda such as fighting harmful traditions (Mr. Alemu).

6.3.5. Innovators mentioned primarily for the distinctions they got

Simret’s and Lidya’s understanding of education and scientific innovation as a way of gaining more prestige, money, or recognition is supported by the textbooks’ presentation of innovators primarily for the distinctions and awards they received. The topic on “Great Thoughts” both in the third and fourth grade texts, presents accomplished academicians who did scientific research in Ethiopia and abroad. For example, the third grade text presents the specific fields two academicians from Harari region became known for: “molecular medicine” and “statistics.” The text uses the English terms except that they are written in Amharic fonts. The names of the prestigious universities abroad where the individuals received their degrees and the professional associations that gave them recognition and awards are also listed in a manner that explicitly portrays education and innovation to children, not as a problem-solving endeavors, but as pursuits of fame and prestige.

6.3.6. No ideals, visions, imaginations, or hopes presented as ever guiding the collective

In their discussion of both the past and the present, the texts do not make noticeable comments on visions, imaginations, or ideals of any kind as guiding particular or collective achievement. Ancient or medieval kingdoms, archeological findings of material remains from the past, churches and mosques, fortresses, and different historical relics are discussed not in light of the larger vision the people that brought these achievements had to their society, but
simply as achievements that resulted from convenient conditions (such as peace). The only vision-related work the text briefly discusses is the work of Zara-Yaqob, a 15th century Ethiopian philosopher. Unfortunately, his work is retrieved recently and is only controversial among Ethiopian Christians due to the existence of various interpretations to his works, the inaccessibility of the original texts, and the uncertainties around the very identity of the person.

In general, there is an absence of discussion on the vision, hope, change, or ideals, behind civilization, history, material culture, educational achievement, aesthetic products, traditional practices, new inventions, or religious relics. As a direct indication of this, nine of the twelve children in this study did not remember what the yellow part of the Ethiopian flag officially represents although all of them remembered what the green and the red colors represented (greenness/prosperity and patriotism/sacrifice). The inability of the nine children to remember the meaning of the yellow color (vision, hope, endurance) may be due to the absence of discussions on ideals and visions in the curriculum. The children’s experience in school is obviously unable to capture the children’s spirit and elevate their imagination to any “good” way of collective life worthy of directing their individual efforts towards.

The teachers in this study directly or indirectly described the above lack of stronger sense of purpose and its impact on children. Each of them gave different explanations as to why schooling is not allowing children to grow in those regards. For example, Menbere attributed it to the fact that curriculum is now designed at the regional level, and therefore, is narrow in scope producing in children a certain level of narrow-mindedness. Low family involvement and the emphasis on children’s right are the other factors she thinks might have contributed. Mr. Alemu shared Menbere’s observation in many respects. He also gave his experience with college students he personally tutors as an example for how the children reach high school or university
without a broader view on life, humanness, or social consciousness. He described them as self-centered and unable to exhibit genuine inclination to be involved in society with a sense of purpose. Miss Genet mostly held religious institutions as accountable for the lack of the maturity she feels is becoming rampant among Ethiopian children, about whom she concluded her thoughts saying “God help this generation!” But, none of the teachers felt sure whether or not the factors they mentioned were the main reasons for what they think is going on. Neither did they comment on other possible reasons such as the way money is portrayed as a major necessity of life in the texts.

6.4. On How the Textbooks Portray Relationship, Community, Leadership, Inequality/Poverty, and Work

Two goals are achieved by the text books’ anti-utopian perspectives on relationship, community, work, inequality, and leadership. These are: the indirect endorsement of a fierce and absolutely competitive lifestyle by discouraging any sense of service through work or leadership, and the absolution of the government from any economic or social ill. The distortions observed among the anti-utopian group in these areas, such as Gelila’s inability to perceive government as peoples’ servant and Lidya’s view of unity (“togetherness”) only as a condition of times of joy/distress have, again, a curricular backing. The contents that sustain such a distorted understanding of the social, political, and economic aspects are presented below.

6.4.1. Saying and appearing encouraged as social skills

The grade four textbook introduces children to four social skills—all of them related to expressing ideas. These are: expressing one self, distinguishing truth from falsehood, finding evidences to back one’s own claim, and persuading others and accepting others’ persuasive arguments. The content in these areas highlights the tendency to repeat oneself, shyness, fear,
hurrying, insisting that one’s idea is correct, etc. as poor social skills that prevent the individual from being accepted by society, getting support, and getting whatever he/she wants (Teshome, 2007, p. 46).

In practice, most of these skills are learned by children from media. In this study, the children in the anti-utopian group were more articulate and fluent in expressing their ideas than the children in the utopian group, and this came from their ability to use media clichés. They were self-conscious about their fluency and some of them occasionally began again when they think they did not respond well. They also mentioned wide ranging information garnered from media compared to those in the utopian group; yet, most of what they described was simply a reflection of what they heard, and not what they themselves think or do. The children in the utopian group exhibited all the tendencies of poor articulation in speech; yet, it was possible to view their life experience and personal view through it. Their social interaction with others is also rich, genuine, and personalized compared to those in the anti-utopian group. Definitely, the content on speaking skill for social acceptance must have been less than sensible to them, for they follow their natural tendency to tell what they experienced or saw their family/community doing first hand without such social skills. What really matters when living with others in a society, which is the central focus of children with utopian leaning, is ultimately not adequately answered by “self”-expression skills.

According to Miss Genet’s explanation, this situation seems to be noticed by both teachers and parents. Genet presented two types of reactions from parents when it comes to some children’s increased fluency and articulation due to more emphasis on debates and speeches as part of civics education. Some parents commend the teachers for teaching their children how to express themselves; while others were alarmed their children were becoming
“talkative” and came to school to find out why. Although at first sight this can be seen as “culture conflict” between a “conservative tradition” and a “participatory democracy,” this explanation becomes less plausible given the presence of a general understanding among many Ethiopian families that some children simply grow into being more expressive. What is being perceived here rather seems to be a case that parents are noticing their “talkative” children becoming less in touch with themselves, and, hence, their coming to teachers (not to the playground, neighbors, playmates, etc.) to find out why. As was observed in the cases of Gelila and other children in the anti-utopian group, political indoctrination could be the main process going on through civic education and media exposure, and not “self”-expression.

6.4.2. Discouraging a systems view of society and occupational interdependence

It is discussed under the “textbook portrayal of human beings and Ethiopia/Ethiopians” subtitle that there is an emphasis in the textbooks on a mechanistic definition of the entire purpose of life. There is relatively wider coverage of money-related topics at the beginning of the chapters, with some remarks and suggestions that draw curiosity, such as asking children if they have ever been paid for a work they did (Tefsaye, 2007, p. 10). Repeatedly, the texts present growing financially as competing with the social/relational and cultural aspect of life, even when such dualistic distinctions are not necessary. For example, the third grade text discusses spending money on practices such as wedding parties, prayer services for a departed soul, and other invitations and parties of social kind that, “in the name of culture,” weaken saving (p. 21). The fourth grade text presents the priority given to numbers in a flock of cattle for the sake of social esteem, rather than quality, as one of the factors that caused Ethiopia’s inability to benefit from animal husbandry (Teshome, 2007, p. 117). However, there are no
instances that present social relation or culture as potentially advantageous or supportive of one’s economic advancement.

When it comes to discussing work in the context of society, there is a general tendency in the texts to amplify random acts of charity over occupational/professional service in a more functional system, as in the case of, for example, helping friends and relatives to solve their temporary problems or helping street dwellers and HIV patients. No exemplary or hypothetical cases exist that encourage the coming together of various talents to form a sustainable and interdependent whole and the possibility of impacting others positively through occupations or professions.

The teachers generally called for more unity and economic cooperation among Ethiopians, and none of them expressed a particular belief in the competitiveness of individual financial/material prosperity and social/communal ties. However, none of them critiqued the text contents from this perspective either, most likely due to the high tolerance developed to messages of such nature that became frequent and too familiar in the past couple of decades.

6.4.3. Government absolved from any duty against social ills

Regarding government function, the texts give only impersonal descriptions of the responsibilities of regional government structure and the major administrative bureaus, and no discussion on personal leadership/leaders is given in any form. Especially in the fourth and fifth grade texts, government is portrayed as attempting to make the best out of an unsatisfactory situation created by bad culture of the people, such as backward methods of farming or population explosion. The texts lament the inexistence of enough money to provide satisfactory service to all, and inhibition of economic development due to too many dependents (children).
Government’s failure to ensure the provision of quality service is conveniently blamed on the people, and humans (Ethiopians, citizens) are not considered anywhere in the texts as potential resources for economic development or agents of social service improvement.

The teachers do not seem to be consciously aware of the governments’ condescending and patronizing pose in the texts; yet, they acknowledged the presence of such tone in their professional relationship with the government. Miss Genet vaguely expressed a feeling of being professionally patronized by the government which she believes is manifested in too much of its undesirable political involvement in teachers’ work where as it makes little attempt to professionally and intellectually empower teachers:

I prefer if politics does not interfere with the work of teachers. I prefer if teachers get allowed to think freely. In addition, if there is a textbook change, there should be some kind of workshop. Teachers should not simply be given the text. Well, of course, we are grownups. It is a matter of spending one day for us to see what the text says. If you get forty-five minutes free time, it is not hard to look over the text and go to the classroom and teach…. But, while a lot of time is dedicated to the politics, how come no workshop gets prepared for teachers on the content? This is what I don’t get.

6.4.4. Portraying inequality as inevitable while presenting poverty as undesirable

The texts indirectly discourages children from questioning why there is economic inequality among Ethiopians by portraying it as unavoidable (default) and by implicitly likening it to other neutral aspects of differences among humans. For example, the third grade text asserts that one of the important ethical principles—tolerance—is manifested by accepting that:
People are different in race, color, *economic status*, and intellect; therefore, it is important to understand that although people are different in these aspects, they are equal in their humanity, and live in harmony and cooperation [emphasis mine]. (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 22)

The fourth and fifth grade texts focus on climatic variations of places in the country and the resultant demographic and cultural diversities as the major causes of economic disparity. There is no hint on collective system failure and disenfranchisement as the possible causes of poverty of the multitude, nor is there an acknowledgement of the concerning nature of the problem. The only groups acknowledged as disadvantaged, and, therefore, needing intervention, are street dwellers and people with HIV. Even so, they are indirectly blamed for their situation—HIV patients for their supposed sexual immorality or reckless health practice, and street dwellers for mostly being orphans who lost their parents because of HIV and live in delinquency (Gebrehiwot, 2010, p. 78). The overall tone of discussion on poverty or economic inequality is not suggestive of any direction towards being concerned about the wellbeing of individuals or communities. It does not give any tangible perspective to children that there are measures that can be taken at the individual and collective levels, now or in the future. Poverty is presented as unavoidable; and, what is portrayed as its most concerning aspect at the national level is solely the unsatisfactory industrialization. In short, the texts portray poverty as caused by problems the solutions of which are simply out of reach or inherently difficult to deal with.

However, economic equality (justice) is one of the fundamental aspects of the utopia the teachers in this study wished to see. For example, Miss Menbere described that in the ideal Ethiopia: “…people would be able to join each other in a kind of social life where everyone is equal and there is no poor and rich…I imagine everyone lives in a measured and balanced
economic status.” Yet, none of the teachers seemed to have noticed the textbooks’ subtle assertion that economic inequality among Ethiopians is inevitable and normal.

6.4.5. A conflicted suggestion on work ethics and occupations

The texts also have conflicted suggestions on work. Of course the manner work and occupations are discussed have particular contexts that make the suggestions sound fitting and reasonable for the particular sub-topic. However, when seen as a whole, the kind of attitude children are supposed to hold regarding the value and the purpose of work (particular occupations or work in general) is confusing. This is most notable in the third grade text. The confusion gets even more visible when the texts are seen across grade levels.

The third grade text discusses the value of work in varieties of ways in the first chapter—Man and His Life. It affirmatively describes the what, the how, and the why of work such as “work is a means by which social existence is ensured” (Tesfaye, 2007, p. 20), “human beings need energy to work” (p. 20), “people (human beings) generate income they need to survive through work” (p. 21), and so on. Under “Work” section, it lists the basic elements of strong work ethics, such as not having contempt towards any occupation, the need to feel ashamed if not working and if expecting the government to provide jobs, the need to create self-employment opportunities for oneself, and not being dependent on others, etc. (p. 21). However, under the “Ethics” section of the chapter, the text tells them that they will know how they can contribute to their country’s development as citizens when they grow up suggesting implicitly that they will have to ultimately wait on the government to guide them on what to do (p. 28). This view is innocently harbored, for example, by Meklit, who stated that she hopes she will know what she should do in science and technology areas to contribute to the development of Ethiopia when she grows up. The topic on work even begins by defining work as “the way people interact among
themselves and with each other in order to fulfill their political, economic, and social interests” (p. 20). In the Amharic version of this statement, the word “political” comes at the beginning of the sentence adding to the impression that “work” is primarily connected with government. This may be an indirect way of preparing children for the recent demand by the government that all college graduates should be party-affiliates in order to get a job. This conflicted suggestion on work as a form of political loyalty versus the importance of feeling shame about expecting a job from government confuses and corrupts the nature and meaning of work for children.

The fourth grade text also has a couple of suggestions on work that, when seen together, have opposing suggestions. On the one hand, it lists the different occupations that exist in Ethiopia introducing them as significant to the existence of society (Teshome, 2007, p. 42, 43). Most of the occupations listed are cottage industries. On the other, as stated in the previous subsection, it presents cottage industry as incapable of significantly helping the economy to grow and the importance of following agricultural development-led industrialization (p. 117-119). Even if these two facts do make sense when seen separately in their own contexts, they are in effect capable of creating a conflicted understanding of the value of work or attitude towards work. The later notion (that cottage industry is not significant in improving the country’s economy) is even more conflicted with the third grade “work ethics” which states that having contempt to any occupation is the cause of economic and cultural backwardness.

From the perspective of a utopian outlook, it is a questionable point if the first thing children should learn about work is the controversies around it, which seem to have been intentionally created. Also, the presentation of national development as primarily linked to the fiscal condition of the country and burgeoning of industries rather than the flow of creativity and improved human life can have a strong impact on children’s early attitude towards different
kinds of occupations. That work is merely presented in the texts as a means of survival, and not as a way of preventing, detecting, and rooting out social ills is another point of concern. This conflict about work/occupations in the texts does not seem to have been noticed by the teachers.

6.5. How the Children Responded to the Dualistic Tones in Texts and Media

Before closing this chapter, it will be important to look at how the children in the two groups reacted to this dualistic (anti-utopian) impulse of school and media messages. Generally, the degree of their appropriation of the dualistic distortions divided them in the extent to which how “human” they felt as “Ethiopian” and also as an individual person. The children in the utopian group exhibited a stronger tendency to link “Ethiopian” with “human” and to rank “human” closer to the label they chose as most descriptive of them in Section I (See Table 6.1). On the other hand, children in the anti-utopian group generally ranked “human” as least descriptive of them compared to the other aspects of their identity (Table 6.2). When it was ranked towards the middle (as in the case of Gelila and Worqnessh), it was simply used by the children to distance themselves from the other labels. In Gelila’s case, she wanted to minimize “Amhara” and “Orthodox” which she felt are no more the political hegemony in Ethiopia, and therefore, most likely not an acceptable part of her future-leader identity. Worqnessh seemed to simply feel less connected to the other labels (“city,” “Harar,” and “poor”) because she came to “city” and “Harar” later in her life and did not want “poor” to describe her in the long-term.
Table 6.1.

The rank ordering of “human” by children in the utopian group compared to other aspects of their identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yegeta*</th>
<th>Meklit</th>
<th>Olyad</th>
<th>Abeba</th>
<th>Ezra</th>
<th>Selam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox Girl</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Rich</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oromo Girl</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Dire Dawa</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Addis Ababa</td>
<td>Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addis Ababa Human</td>
<td>Amhara</td>
<td>Addis Ababa</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harari</td>
<td>Harari</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td></td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Amhara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benishangul Addis Ababa Poor Somali</td>
<td>Harari</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Yegeta seems to have understood “Ethiopian” and “human” as interchangeable.

Table 6.2.

The rank ordering of “human” by children in the anti-utopian group compared to other aspects of their identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gelila</th>
<th>Worqnes</th>
<th>Lidya</th>
<th>Simret</th>
<th>Yenus</th>
<th>Safia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopian Girl</td>
<td>Ethiopian Girl</td>
<td>Ethiopian Girl</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Harari</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Oromo</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Harari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amhara Orthodox</td>
<td>Human City Harar</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, children in the anti-utopian group exhibited a general tendency to relate being “Ethiopian” with citizenship instead of being human. Most of the impersonal and abstract
conceptualization of identity, poverty, development, government, etc. in the anti-utopian group seemed to have directly emanated from this sterile conceptualization of Ethiopian identity as citizenship. As can be observed from the summarized presentation of the children’s subjective self-identification as “Ethiopian”, the children in this group mostly used political phrases to describe themselves as “Ethiopian,” and used it to describe official citizenship than personality or human experience (Table 6.3). The children in the utopian group, however, described what they experienced or what is valued by people close to them, such as family (Table 6.4).

Table 6.3.

“Ethiopian” as citizenship – the anti-utopian Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phrases used and concepts brought up in the child’s responses to the questions on how “Ethiopian,” “very Ethiopian,” or “a little bit Ethiopian” describes them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gelila</td>
<td>citizenship; love to country; don't want to betray country; denounces changing citizenship because of bribery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worqesh</td>
<td>Right to live, speak, learn, and work in Ethiopia; following peculiar and distinguished culture that got Ethiopia recognized; being member of an ethnicity recognized in Ethiopia; not mixed racially with foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lidya</td>
<td>Citizenship by birth, residence, and preference; citizenship that can be testified and showed by respect for rules and the Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simret</td>
<td>Citizenship due to birth and residence in Ethiopia; love to and pride in being Ethiopian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safia</td>
<td>Citizenship gotten by birth and residence in Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yenus</td>
<td>Love to the country; pride in the fact that it is a developing country and the people of Ethiopia live in tolerance and love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.4.

“Ethiopian” as being “human” – the utopian group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phrases used and concepts brought up in the child’s responses to the questions on how “Ethiopian,” “very Ethiopian,” or “a little bit Ethiopian” describes them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yegeta</td>
<td>Citizenship gotten by birth and residence in Ethiopia; peace and love; freedom from slavery and colonization; love to the country because of the high number of diverse nations and nationalities in Ethiopia; pride in Ethiopian heritages, such as the alphabet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meklit</td>
<td>Birth and residence in Ethiopia; hope and interest to know what Ethiopia needs to develop so that contribution becomes possible in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olyad</td>
<td>Knowing that one is Ethiopian; birth and residence in Ethiopia; speaking Amharic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezra</td>
<td>Likes the place due to ethics of the people and convenience of the place compared to Afar (he thinks Harar, the city he is living in, is Ethiopia; and Afar, the region he was born in, is outside of Ethiopia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abeba</td>
<td>Love to the country and everything in it which are enjoyable and beautiful, such as waterfalls and wildlife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selam</td>
<td>Birth and residence in Ethiopia; friendliness in Ethiopia; pride in Ethiopia's wealth of taking care of each other; peace and love; wanting to live</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For both groups, the beginning of Ethiopia was related to the beginning of humanity, but very vaguely and in a manner not indicative of any difference in their responses to the question “How do you think Ethiopia began?” There were both right and wrong/distorted/confabulated answers in both groups. The utopian/anti-utopian distinction was rather clear only from a contextualized interpretation of their response to the questions. There was also no discernible difference on the answers they gave to the question on how “human” described them although the children in the anti-utopian group were relatively more articulate when responding. Generally, “I am different from animals because I can think” or “God created me” were common answers in both groups.
The fact that Ethiopian children are not taught how Ethiopia began by linking it to them in a personalized manner is the biggest educational gap. This gap allowed the government to become “Ethiopia” and to appropriate an illusionary, yet, powerful privilege to grant or withhold the “Ethiopianness” and the “humanness” of Ethiopians. The children who accepted and internalized this status quo are mostly those in the anti-utopian group, who are academically high achievers. The implication is that these children are more susceptible to messages of subtle dehumanization—a defining feature of a dualistic (anti-utopian) whim in the texts. The struggle, rebellion, withdrawal, and escapism observed in the children in the utopian group is, therefore, ultimately a resistance to this dehumanizing arrangement although not consciously.

**Chapter Summary**

Generally, the texts remove the human, natural, service-focused, ideal, spiritual, and collective aspect of life, identity, development, economic activities, government, and institutions. As discussed in the literature review, the nature of an anti-utopian thought is its irony—the propagation of one thing and the actual practice of the exact opposite. In the textbooks, topics such as the origin of Ethiopia and the lives of humans are presented in the first units in acknowledgment of their importance; yet, both are presented only reductively and dehumanizingly emphasizing the mechanical aspects of human nature (working-earning-eating-working-dying-decaying...). In addition, only the aggressive tendency of human beings is discussed under the topic of “Ethics,” and no acknowledgement of human’s positive aspiration to build a just, prosperous, and happy life is made in the texts. Discussions on motherhood and population increase also have a negative tone with a potentially depressing effect on children. Motherhood is mentioned only in association with illness (HIV transmission to the embryo), social crisis (having many children and resultant economic crises), and death (the fossils of
women and an infant girl discovered in East Africa). Furthermore, the fact that the proportion of young is greater than the country’s adult labor force is presented as the main reason for poverty—potentially giving children the impression that their existence is unwanted. Cultural continuity and Ethiopia’s Christian heritage is presented with an undertone that they do not have significance in the modern and future Ethiopia.

The ways nature/environment, ecosystem, and the rural are presented in the texts are also supportive of the distorted world-view of the children in the anti-utopian group, and unhelpful to the aspiration for practical and grounded experience by the children in the utopian group. Manmade products such as fertilizers, pesticides, genetically modified seeds, and so on are presented as the ultimate solution to agricultural backwardness. Likewise, reforestation is treated as equivalent to a commercial activity involving the plantation of quick-growing tree species useful for economic consumption, and not for conservation of biodiversity and the ecosystem which is widely discussed as threatened. Animals and plants are described only in light of their utilitarian purposes with an un lively tone that they are “things” to be used. In relation to this, rural areas are portrayed as places occupied temporarily, and the absence of diverse industries and services compared to urban areas is presented as their inherent feature. Nonetheless, the texts emphatically assert at one point or another that agriculture and rural development policy of the current government is the right direction that should be pursued to ensure development. Cottage and light industries are discussed widely, but only to conclude that they are not contributing to the economy significantly and to suggest that a heavy industrialization is necessary for the country’s development. In addition, science and technology are discussed with a heavy focus on advanced and theoretical physics concepts in a manner that do not assist children appreciate the basic place of science and technology in the bigger context of human life.
Not surprisingly, the way change, time, education, hope, and ideals are portrayed in the texts is only capable of adding to the uprooted understanding of Ethiopia, human beings and the environment by the children. The human race is portrayed as progressing linearly towards a technological utopia in the future, and past civilizations are presented as if they were partially successful attempts to get closer to that utopia in different times. No stable content/standard of a happy life available to all generations is identified by the texts. In addition, education and technological innovation are portrayed as pursuits of prestige rather than problem-solving, and they are not defined in the larger context of social reproduction and continuity. Government and society are presented as two separate entities with government as responsible for change and modernization, and society as responsible for tradition and continuity, worsening the dualistic understanding of time and utopia.

Inter-personal relationship, community, leadership (government), and inequality/poverty are also presented distortedly in the texts to endorse competition, irresponsibility (of workers, professionals, government), and passive admission of the inevitability of inequality/poverty. Fluency and self-expression skill are presented as the marks of well-developed social skill. However, occupational and cultural interdependence among society are subtly discouraged, and work ethics is defined in a contradictory manner (e.g., expecting a job from government is reproved in one section and indirectly suggested in another).

Such suggestions and affirmations of two opposites are the texts’ significant features. The dualisms are also embedded in the messages coming from media to which children are not protected from. Compared to the children in the utopian group, children in the anti-utopian group have internalized these outlooks more deeply. The result seems to be an increased disconnection of the children from their identity as human beings/Ethiopians which is clearly
seen by their tendency to rank “Ethiopian” as most descriptive of them and “human” as least
descriptive of them showing the bottom-line that they do not feel “human” in this “Ethiopia.” For
a more humanized and grounded cognitive orientation of children as Ethiopians, the
aforementioned topic areas should therefore be presented to them from the Utopian/Ethiopian
perspective in a reformed social studies curriculum.
Chapter Seven

7. Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of older Ethiopian children’s conceptualization of their national identity and the role of social studies education in the process of their national enculturation. In addition to social studies education, the role of teachers, parents, community, peers, media, religious institutions, and cultural and non-governmental organizations were investigated. As discussed in Chapter Four, among the twelve children interviewed, six children showed an anti-utopian outlook, characterized to different degrees by disconnect with self, others, the physical surrounding, the social reality, nature, time, and the principles one professes to hold. In the other six children was observed a leaning towards utopianism, meaning, the tendency to yearn for collective wellbeing and prosperity, abundance, growth, harmony, vision of the common good, rich social relations, and happiness (Chapter Five).

The difference in the world-view of the children in the utopian and the anti-utopian group is deep and sharply contrasting. The fact that such contrasting perspectives on what it means to be Ethiopian is already present in the children as early as in third grade is not noticed by the teachers in their schools. What is more troubling is that the children with anti-utopian perspective are regarded by teachers as having a promising potential for future leadership positions. The teachers cannot tell, and no demographic information on gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, age, or school type predicts which perspective a child holds regarding his/her Ethiopian identity. This confirms that, while the “Nation of Ethiopia” is constituted of individuals with a utopian outlook regardless of their particular demographic group, those with anti-utopian disposition can use inter-group differences to create and advance
alienating/oppressive views. In the following sub-sections, the summary of the findings and the conclusions drawn are presented.

7.1. **Summary of Major Areas of Difference between the Two Groups**

The findings from Chapters Four and Five are summarized below under twelve topic areas in which the two groups showed difference in their world-views. I have also reiterated how the social studies textbooks support the distorted world-views of the children in the anti-utopian group. How teachers end up letting the anti-utopian indoctrination of the children continue, either due to their unawareness of the dualistic nature of media and textbook contents or their hesitation to trust their own feeling about how the children should be educated, is also presented in context. What the synthesis of the findings tells about the two versions of the Ethiopian national identity (the utopian and the anti-utopian) currently available to children is presented in Section 7.2.

7.1.1. **On the value of money**

The fundamental feature of the anti-utopian thinking among the first six children (Chapter Four) is that they see money as the main goal of life. They seem to have quickly taken in the various suggestions by the textbooks, media, and perhaps, people close to them on different ways of securing a better financial future. These include becoming a politician (Gelila), becoming an independent, recognized, and marketable world citizen (Worqnesh), promoting more production with modern tools, saving, and “changing” (Lidya), getting education and keeping up with the latest technological innovation (Simret), and disengaging from the larger national in-group to work with an alternative utopia in mind (Safia and Yenus). While the main goal in all these pursuits is money, the children do not present their passion as directly so. Rather, they say them in a more acceptable and “patriotic” ways, such as the need to work with
other countries to develop Ethiopia (Gelila), the importance of ensuring economic and political independence of Ethiopia (Worqnesh), the need to “change” and technologically advance Ethiopia (Lidya and Simret), and the need to get one’s personal, religious, and political rights or privileges (Safia and Yenus). This makes them predisposed to readily absorb available media clichés. However, a double standard comes when trying to justify the financial motive. The children are obliged to use different mechanisms, such as reaction formation, denial, and projection to conceal it. Examples are Gelila’s strong anti-corruption talks, Yenus' and Safia’s denial of the existence of the Christian Ethiopia and its challenges, and the judgmental attitude towards poor/under-privileged people that is harbored by all.

For the children in the utopian group, however, a collective pursuit of happiness is the main purpose of life. For them, money is subservient to the formation of a happy society where: personalized relationships in all respects are valued over money and competition (Yegeta), one is given the knowledge and opportunity to help the poor (Meklit), education emphasizes practical economic and social skills (Olyad), people live together in a clean environment (Abeba), every family is safe, has both parents, and is economically secure (Ezra), and the society functions as a large family where one feels belongingness to another (Selam).

The textbooks encourage the anti-utopian view over this money-versus-utopia tension. Money is presented as the most valuable necessity and as an ever-present part of human history. The texts do not discuss ideals or bigger visions that exist behind historical, religious, and cultural achievements. Teachers observe the impact of this indirectly in the form of “narrow-mindedness,” immorality, and irresponsibility among the children and youth. They mentioned different factors, such as narrow scope of curriculum, low family involvement in children’s education, lack of religious education, and the children’s right movement that is wrongly
understood and practiced. But, none of the teachers mentioned the textbooks’ and media’s portrayal of money as a possible reason for the children’s lack of sense of a bigger purpose.

7.1.2. On being “Human” and “Ethiopian”

As indicated in Section 6.5, the children in the anti-utopian group ranked “human” as the least descriptive of them compared to other aspects of their identity although they ranked “Ethiopian” as most descriptive of them. The implication is that they do not connect being “human” and being “Ethiopian” although the textbooks and the media present Ethiopia as “the origin of human race.” They also understood being “Ethiopian” predominantly as citizenship, and used political terms such as “right,” “constitution,” “citizenship,” etc. to explain how “Ethiopian” described them. Their understanding of “Ethiopians” also mostly came from the media, and they talked little about people in their lives, or did not talk unless probed.

Children in the utopian group, however, ranked “human” as equally descriptive of them as the other identities—some putting it towards the top, some towards the middle, and others towards the end. For some of them (Yegeta and Selam), being “Ethiopian” simply means being “human,” and they understood it as connected to a life-affirming impulse (wanting to live, multiplying, reviving, etc.). In addition, unlike the children in the anti-utopian group, they spontaneously mentioned examples from their own lives (family, neighbors, friends, etc.) when trying to describe “Ethiopians.” In a manner that seems to be the direct result of this, they are more to-the-ground in their observation of their surrounding, and are at the same time more idealistic in their yearning for a humanized relationship among Ethiopians.

The texts, however, endorse the anti-utopian group’s disconnected and dehumanized understanding of being “human” and being “Ethiopian.” The children and the country are
presented as having a contractual relationship, and the government subtly takes the identity of the “country” by patronizingly positioning the children and citizens as dependents. Human beings are also portrayed as living in the cycle of working-earning-eating-working in a way that makes one suspect that the children are being prepared to become docile labor forces. Cultural and religious groups are also presented from a top-down, stoic, and distant eye-view of the government. The intellectual contribution or utopian legacy of cultures and religions (e.g., their ideas about the meaning of life) is largely unacknowledged. Although the teachers expressed concern, such as the narrowness of the unit “Man and His Life” in the texts (Ms. Genet), they did not comment on the way government poses in the texts with alienating and patronizing tone.

7.1.3. On the purpose of work and the public sector

Children in the anti-utopian group were found to have a perspective on occupations, professions, and the public sector that is affected by their attitude towards money and impersonal understanding of identity. All of them portrayed work (occupations, future career aspiration) as individual financial pursuit although they used more acceptable expressions such as the need to work for the “development of the country.” Development is understood by them simply as more money and infrastructure. This is expressed more directly by Worqness, Lidya, and Simret. Interestingly, public sector jobs are understood by them as “serving the country” which is unrelated to “developing the country”—showing that the children understand development as impersonal financial phenomena. Working in the public sector does not seem to be part of the children’s future career ambitions, except perhaps in the case of Gelila who would like to become a politician. Even so, that does not aim at “serving” the country (See Section 4.1.1.).

The children in the utopian group, however, see work as a form of relationship, much like play, friendship, or international relations (e.g., Yegeta), as a concrete act of producing useful
goods (e.g., Olyad), and as satisfying other peoples’ needs and wants (all children).

Development is understood by them as improved human life condition due to human action. For example, Meklit expressed a desire to learn what can contribute to the development of Ethiopia in the context of helping the destitute (See Section 5.2.1.). The children in this group also see public institutions as places of personalized interaction and view them in light of the intended positive impact on human lives. Meklit’s understanding of hospitals’ free service to poor children as the manifestation of the “kindness” of “Ethiopians” is the best example. All children share this general sense, except Ezra whose perspective on work is colored by his threatened economic, social, and emotional wellbeing.

The textbooks have conflicted suggestions on work and the public sector that only correspond to the dualistic perspective of the children in the anti-utopian group. They assert that it is a poor work ethic to expect a job from the government, and that one should not despise low paying occupations. But they also tell children that work is a political pursuit and that they will know how to contribute when they grow up. In addition, they present cottage and light industries as not significantly contributing to the development of the country, and tell children the importance of heavy industry, although they have asserted previously that it is not appropriate to despise low paying jobs. The teachers expressed concern that both a sense of responsibility and arts and crafts are disappearing from the young generation; but, they do not seem to have noticed the textbooks’ conflicted portrayal of work ethics and occupations.

7.1.4. On the what and why of technology

Technology is seen by the anti-utopian group as the latest device or as ICT. They seem to have limited curiosity about how simple and traditional tools work, as seen in the case of Lidya’s suggestion that the fisherman needs to modernize his work by “changing his boat” (See
Section 4.3.5. Innovation is considered as a prestigious pursuit, and is understood mainly in association with getting recognition or award (e.g., See Section 4.4.2.).

In contrast, the children in the utopian group showed interest in both old and new technological products and their local uses, such as trains and railroads in a nearby town (Olyad) and city buses and commercial buses (Abeba). In addition, innovation is understood by the utopian group in the context of problem solving. Meklit’s interest to become a scientist and Yegeta’s interest in innovators (“people of great mind”) is an example of this inclination.

Nonetheless, the textbooks do not support the utopian children’s view on technology. In addition to portraying cottage and light industries in a negative/mixed manner, they mention innovators primarily for the distinctions and awards they received—encouraging children to adopt an anti-utopian perspective on the nature and purpose of innovation. The textbooks’ environmental science sections also focus on advanced physics concepts, such as energy, force, heat wave, density, etc. that do not help children appreciate the basics of technology and its place in day-to-day life. Teachers do not seem to have noticed the negative impact this may have on children’s ability to have a realistic and practical appreciation of technology.

7.1.5. On what counts as valuable knowledge

Children in the anti-utopian group clearly showed a preference to distant, abstract, and less relevant knowledge, such as “fun” things (Safia), or more serious issues, such as political rhetoric and academics, that do not touch on sensitive personal concerns (Gelila and Worqnesh). Eloquence and expressiveness were clearly highly valued by this group. All of them were articulate, engaged, and mostly, self-absorbed during the interviews. They also said their responses in the most “correct” possible way and re-started it whenever they felt they did not say
it well. Getting a bit defensive in tone if they feel they were being questioned was common to all. Compared to the children in the utopian group, they possessed vast number of pieces of facts and current affairs information. They also wanted to show this in their responses. Irrelevant and fragmented textbook contents seem to have suited them due to their general preference to such knowledge.

The children in the utopian group, on the other hand, preferred to talk about visible human life conditions. They mainly discussed issues that, either concern, agitate, or hurt them, or motivate and inspire them. The first include loneliness and lack of environmental hygiene (Abeba), crimes (Meklit), oppressive acts of the government (Olyad), and loss of mother (Ezra). The second are, for example, adventurous experiences in other parts of the country (Abeba and Olyad) and wanting to do great things (Yegeta). When they feel their main interest (such as art) is not valued, they generally seemed withdrawn (Selam). They were less articulate or needed more probing than the anti-utopian group. They also showed preference to connect with me during the interview and wanted to compare and share personal experiences (they expected me to respond to their responses). In addition, they differed fundamentally from the children in the anti-utopian group by demonstrating curiosity towards underlying principles, forms, and the order of things, instead of pieces of facts and information. They engaged in system thinking and struggled to get the big picture. Examples are Olyad’s wonder about why the way flag is hoisted in Harar and Addis Ababa is different, and Abeba’s expressed bafflement over why, although there are many people in Addis Ababa and Harar, there are still many lonely people.

The textbooks support the irrelevance, triviality, shallowness, and disconnection of the anti-utopian group. Self-expression is introduced as a social skill in the context of debate in civic education. Also, they encourage depending on school and teachers as exclusive sources of
knowledge. Teachers reported that they have mixed feelings about children’s growing “eloquence.” In addition, unlike the textbooks’ assertion, the teachers did not express belief in their ability to give children relevant educational experience single-handedly. Instead, they called for more participation of family, intellectuals, religious institutions, NGOs, and other civic organizations in children’s education. They also desired to see the government preparing workshops to help teachers grow professionally.

7.1.6. On the cause and implications of inequality

As discussed under the previous topics, the children in the anti-utopian group saw financial gain as the main purpose of life. They also used strong anti-poverty rhetoric in their responses. Nonetheless, they portrayed inequality as inevitable and inconsequential. For example, Gelila demonstrated a stance that as long as economically or politically dominant groups do not say “I am superior” economically or politically, their dominance is inconsequential. Saying and appearing happy (despite poverty) is also presented by the anti-utopian group as patriotic. Most importantly, the children in this group held different attitudes towards poverty of the country and poverty of individuals. They all seemed to consider working hard for the development of the country as desirable, and the country’s poverty is repeatedly mentioned by them as a concerning problem. But, they blamed individuals’ poverty on their “laziness.” They have internalized the patronizing and judgmental attitude of the government towards the poor who are understood as lacking strong work ethic. An example would be Gelila’s belief that women who go to Arab countries are “running away from work,” and Lidya’s and Yenus’ belief that beggars are simply lazy. But, generosity to the poor is presented by all children in this group as a demonstration of their kindness, and even as an important part of their religious duty (e.g., Lidya and Yenus).
Children in the utopian group, however, were unequivocal about their view on inequality as undesirable. They expressed genuine concern about poor people, like beggars (Abeba), street children, and HIV patients (Meklit). They also did not deny their concern about their own poverty if they had any. The best example would be Ezra’s expressed fear that he may end up being a beggar (See Section 5.5.1.). Poverty is also understood by this group differently as the result of lack of cooperation, poor education system, violence, etc. and not as a person’s laziness or choice.

Like on the other topics, the textbooks have an anti-utopian perspective on inequality. They present economic inequality as similar to racial or intellectual difference. They also present difference among the living standard of the rural and the urban areas as caused by climatic and cultural differences (and therefore, as not sensitive or problematic). In addition, they maintain the judgmental tone of media/government by indirectly attributing the condition of poor people to their laziness or immorality. An example is the fifth grade textbook’s description of street dwellers’ as children of parents who died because of HIV (therefore, the problem of their parents), and all texts’ attribution of the country’s poverty to poor culture and backward agriculture (therefore, the problem of the people). None of the teachers commented on the textbooks’ explanation of inequality although some explicitly put economic equality as the feature of their ideal Ethiopia.

7.1.7. On what counts as excellence, success, and victory

Closely related to the anti-utopian groups’ view on inequality is their understanding of what academic excellence, professional success, and national victory mean. They talked about standing first from class with a sense of distinction, and attributed it to being “fast,” being the favorite child of parents, and/or being favored by God (e.g., Gelila). Academic achievement is
also considered as satisfactory qualification to tutor and “advise” others (Gelila), or is seen as a pursuit for global citizenship or fame (Worqesh and Simret). Professional success is generally equated by this group to fame, prestige, and power over others. People in different occupations were evaluated based on whether or not they seem to have reached as satisfactory socio-economic status, or did something recognizable. By extension, nationalism and patriotism are understood by these children as triumphantism. Concepts such as development, loyalty, and defending heritage are discussed with militaristic set of tone that does not communicate a genuine appreciation of identity. Historical events such as the Ethio-Italian war or the Ethio-Eritrean war are also described with a conquering tone.

The children in the utopian group differed greatly. The high achievers in this group do not seem to have a sense of distinction because of their achievement, and saw others’ achievement simply as a manifestation of their obedience to put into practice what is laid out (by government, teachers, and society) as beneficial to them and the country. They also saw education as a joint pursuit (e.g. studying with others), and valued relating with classmates in more ways than academic help per se (e.g., Yegeta). The low achievers in this group (Abeba, Olyad, and Selam), however, seemed to harbor a sense of guilt for being a low achiever. This was not directly expressed by them, but was clearly observable in the way they stated their ranks and average scores at the end of the interview.

Professional success and nationalism were also understood differently by the utopian group. The former was equated with making difference in human lives and the later is understood as what is inherently appreciable, such as sense of identity, joy, independence, and peace. Generally, for the children in the utopian group, there exists no tendency to justify the academic, financial, or national success/supremacy of some above others. For them, any form of
inequality is simply one of the unfortunate consequences of lack of active pursuit of utopianism (e.g., not being “together,” not caring about the poor, not committing to one’s responsibility at work, not studying together, etc.).

As discussed in Section 7.1.4., textbooks support the academics-for-recognition notion which adds to the sense of supremacy of the children in the anti-utopian group. In addition, schools’ fiercely competitive culture with an exclusive focus on academic achievement provides a fertile ground for the sense of entitlement of high achievers with an anti-utopian perspective, and sense of failure by low achievers in the utopian group. It is also conceivable that the competitive culture is a turn off for children with a utopian outlook particularly if they do not find adequate academic and emotional support from family and teachers. Unfortunately, teachers spend much time encouraging high achievers and communicating dissatisfaction to low achievers.

What cannot be ignored in relation to this is the role of media in promoting this sense of supremacy in different ways. Pride in Ethiopia’s cultural and religious heritage is abused to feed triumphant notions by religious and political leaders for ends other than genuine nationalism/utopianism. These ends include mobilizing community in support of particular government initiatives instead of for broader and long-term goals, as pointed out, for example, by Mr. Alemu (See Section 6.3.4.). This short-lived and utilitarian spirit of triumphantism that is stirred intermittently ends up causing children like Gelila to understand identity and supernatural favor simply as partiality to those individuals who want to excel, like her, and those countries who “want to develop,” like Ethiopia.
7.1.8. On nature/environment

Because all the children in this study live in an urban area and learn in school compounds with a traditional efficiency-minded set up, it may have been possible to expect that both groups of children would exhibit a similar degree of (dis)connection with nature/environment. But, that was not the case. Much like their view of “humans” and “Ethiopians,” the children in the anti-utopian group have a perspective on natural resources (plants, animals, and the ecosystem) that is heavily influenced by school and media portrayal of agriculture and the environment. Repeated portrayal of industrial agriculture in connection with “development” and nationalism by the media has colored what they know about nature and agriculture in a manner that confuses “greenness” with commercial farms (Simret). Their understanding of the value of natural resources also ultimately points to their financial merit in the international trade (Gelila, Simret) and its instrumentality to bring technological advancement which is simply seen as more important (Lidya, Worqesh).

For the children in the utopian group, however, natural resources are inherently worthy of preserving and exploring. They mostly talked their own enjoyment of and curiosity about resources in the environment rather than their financial merit. Although they did not have greater chance of interaction with the environment compared to the children in the anti-utopian group, they had a more concrete appreciation of the sporadic interactions they made with the environment (visits of waterfalls, the village hills, the water underneath the grass, the countryside, etc.). Their concern to the environment was also less rhetorical. They mentioned specific areas of concern, such as people disposing waste on the ground (Abeba). They also expressed desire to see different places in the country (all).
Textbooks encourage the anti-utopian view of natural resources by presenting manmade products such as fertilizers, pesticides, genetically modified seeds, and so on as the ultimate solution to agricultural backwardness. They also defined reforestation as planting trees for commercial purpose. Animals and plants are discussed with emphasis on what they can be used for in a manner that impedes the development of genuine interest in studying and preserving nature. Children also begin environmental science from learning about non-living things (liquid, solid, and gas) in first and second grades—a sequencing of topic that only prepares them to the utilitarian and unlively approach of studying nature in third grade and beyond. Teachers have concerns both about lack of opportunities to authentically explore local natural resources with children and about the future of the environment in general.

7.1.9. On balance between masculine and feminine principles

It will not be an over-simplification to state that the two groups’ ultimate difference lies in whether or not they see the masculine and the feminine principles of the natural and the social world harmoniously. There is a pattern across the above eight topic areas in terms of how the children differ. The children in the anti-utopian group have an exaggeratedly favorable view of the “masculine” aspect (government, media, technology, competition, hierarchy, triumphantism/patriotism, impersonal) and an unreasonably negative view of or disconnection with the feminine aspects (country/nation, persons/personalized interaction, nature/agriculture, compassion, equality, cooperation, and personal). They divorce the two and identify only with the masculine, creating an uprooted worldview that is distorted. This reveals that the tension between utopianism and anti-utopianism, which is translated as Tewahedo versus Dualism in Chapter One, can also be translated as Tewahedo/Christianity versus paganism, more particularly, Gnosticism.
It is clear to see that the children in the anti-utopian group see their world as rural versus urban, agriculture versus technology, stability versus mobility, practical skill versus intellectual knowledge, past versus future, etc. The children in the utopian group, however, have a balanced appreciation of both components. Olyad and Yegeta, for example, showed an appreciation of the countryside and agriculture by citing their own experiences or by expressing a desire to know more about them. But, they also expressed equal interest in cities, in technology, in other countries, and foreigners, and were able to cite practical examples from their own lives.

Closely related to the two groups’ difference in this respect is their perspective on gender. For the children in the anti-utopian group, gender is an issue. Their perspective does not necessarily come from their actual negative experience as a result of being female. For example, Worqnesh has a lived experience in a rural environment harsh for girls, and therefore, her perspective on gender is the result of an actual experience; but Simret’s determination to make the “name [status] of women reputable globally by being a strong student and a high achiever” is an internalization of political messages about the importance of girls’ equal achievement with boys. Lidya’s and Safia’s association of being female with being vulnerable (be it in the previous social order or the present) and with needing personal care or government intervention for equal rights is also the result of an internalized message, and not of a first-hand experience. Nevertheless, they have a similar understanding that being girl/female is inherently problematic. Yenus, the Muslim boy in the group, also seems to share this view as seen in his promptness to bring up the harmful tradition of female circumcision, which is a source of ongoing struggle between Muslim communities and various campaigners against the practice.

The children in the utopian group, however, do not seem to see gender as an issue; rather, they assume meeting a bigger goal for both genders (all people) is what ultimately matters.
Some children did not pick the boy/girl label in Section I to describe themselves (Ezra), or picked the label, but found the question “how does boy/girl describe you?” odd (Abeba and Selam). Others picked it; but it was to make a different point such as “I love girls” or “I love my mom” (Yegeta and Meklit). Most notably, Meklit did not present her sex as implicative of a problem by default although she had to leave the Somali region partially because of its harshness for girls and women. Her understanding of the problem does not fall for the temptation to see the male/female dichotomy as the problem, and, rather, sees the religious and cultural context that made it a problem. Olyad, the utopian Muslim, seems to be responding to Yenus, the anti-utopian Muslim, when stating that he does not believe girls/women are less courageous than boys/men. By doing so, he seems to be giving an assurance to Meklit that his view is different despite his affiliation with Islam.

Ultimately, what can be understood from the two groups’ view of the masculine and the feminine (in) harmony is that all the dualistic debates at every level (rural/urban, male/female, natural/manmade, spiritual/secular, foreign/local, intellectual-knowledge/practical skill, etc.) cannot be understood in a compartmentalized manner, and that children need to have a basic appreciation of this fundamental principle of harmony to have a utopian worldview. Big topics such as gender equality, environmental conservation, social justice, sustainable development, relevant curricula, etc. are different facets of the same world-view, which is Tewahedo, and cannot have a meaning when each is taken out of the bigger context. In other words having a balanced role for a man and a woman is indispensable to having all the other paired aspects balanced in nature and society.

In light of their above difference, the textbooks’ (and media’s) consistent presentation of the feminine side of society and nature as inferior, as incompatible with the masculine, and as
needing a certain augmentation may be harmful than productive. It is discussed that the textbooks have bias against the rural, the past, the cultural, the traditional, the natural, the social (service), the personal (humanness), the cooperative, and, even, the concept of nation (Ethiopia). The texts encourage abandoning them and moving to the masculine in different ways. Yet, teachers have a concern about this imbalance, and this is more so for the female teachers who clearly expressed concern about lack of balance, such as the gap between rural and urban areas and the general threat against social cohesion and the environment. The male teachers, however, called for more emphasis on developing infrastructure, and even on building more militaristic spirit in the youth.

7.1.10. On women and motherhood

Not surprisingly, children in the anti-utopian group have traumatized or less influential mother figures in their lives. The mother is mentioned either during an unplanned side-talk, as in the case of Gelila, or is not mentioned at all in relation to some wider opinion the child holds (all children). It is not difficult to understand that the mothers are mostly silent in the children’s lives, and are either forcefully subdued (through domestic abuse and poverty) or have submissively accepted the patriarchal status quo in the family and generally in society. Hence, the children find no spiritual and psycho-social shield that protects them from the anti-utopian, militaristic, masculine, and uprooting (Gnostic) messages of media and school.

The case of the children in the utopian group is, however, significantly different. Three of the children have a close and influential mother figure (or aunt) with a strong religious, political, and national view (Yegeta, Meklit, and Olyad). And the other three are withdrawn or threatened directly because of the aloofness (Abeba) or the death of the mother (Ezra and Selam), showing that their utopianism is the core aspect of their identity that is ultimately in
danger because of this. Unlike the children in the anti-utopian group, they have not settled accepting this loss (at least not yet), and are in an unconscious search for a “surrogate” mother figure in the larger social circle (or country) to whom they can belong to.

The textbooks exacerbate this sense of loss and discourage the children’s desire for a mother figure. They portray mothers and motherhood in association with illness (mother-to-child transmission of HIV), social problems (mothers having too many children causing economic problem), and death (Lucy—the “mother of human race”—whose fossils were discovered recently). There is no vibrant discussion of women’s role as mothers, nurturers, leaders, and visionaries. Teachers did not comment on the potential effect of the textbooks’ negative portrayal of mothers and motherhood, and did not show an acknowledgement of the urgency of the children’s need for an intellectually, spiritually, and politically influential mother figure although they generally feel the social studies curriculum can be enriched by adding more contents on the various roles of women.

7.1.11. On the sense of continuity and the meaning of change

The children in the anti-utopian group showed little or no awareness of the presence of a continuous legacy of Ethiopian identity/generations. They see government as ever-provisional, collective actions as optional, and utopia as located in the future. They have a simplified understanding of “change” as financial growth (profit), modern tools, and modern living style.

Children in the utopian group, in contrast, have more sense of continuity with the origin of humanity/Ethiopia. They feel their current struggle is a continuation of what is started generations ago. The more they have this sense of connection, the stronger their utopianism and the better their achievement, as in the case of Yegeta and Meklit who are relatively more
articulate about their understanding of the beginning of Ethiopia (revival of human race for Yegeta, and fossils of women ancestors that symbolize female relatives and the larger Orthodox Christian women for Meklit). The low achievers in this group, however, are less articulate in describing the “origin.” For example, Ezra and Abeba assume (uncomfortably) that the current government is the beginner of Ethiopia, and Selam and Olyad generally reject this notion although they do not have a satisfactory alternative explanation. But the three children significantly differ from those in the anti-utopian group who seem to have whole-heartedly accepted the current governments’ posture as having ultimate authority over the beginning or destiny of Ethiopia/Ethiopians. It is also notable that no child in this group exhibited a special anticipation of the future, and none shared a reductive view of “change,” such as economic growth as the change desired. They each mentioned several areas of concern about their lives and their society although they talked less. Selam’s interest in a renaissance novel is the best indicator to the comprehensive nature of the utopian yearning of the children in this group.

Textbooks support the anti-utopian view by leaving the topic of the origin of Ethiopia/Ethiopians to archeological speculation, by portraying technology as the only content of change, by presenting civilization as cumulative result of the history of humanity, and by endorsing a linear conceptualization of the history of humanity. In addition, they present culture and religion from government’s eye view who explicitly positions itself as an agent of change, and not continuity. Teachers generally feel children need to learn about the origin of their national identity. The female teachers believe that religious and historical knowledge is important for the children. The male teachers, however, seem to view the past as gone and the present as needing to be forward looking.
7.1.12. On the nature and function of government

Last, but not least, is the children’s view of the government. The two groups see two very different governments at work in Ethiopia, and, therefore, respond differently. Interestingly, their response, which is their cognitive and emotional reaction to the political order they perceive is at work, does not necessarily result from their experience with, or knowledge of, the current government. It only depends on whether or not they already have in their minds an assumption, a view, or a perspective on what they believe an ideal utopian government should look like. If they have such an ideal government in their imagination, and, even better, if their imagination of it includes some understanding of how it is (not) supposed to function, then they are likely to exhibit a strong utopian outlook (like Yegeta, Meklit, and Olyad). This allows them not to be affected by the current government’s un-utopian posture or actions (Yegeta), helps them to selectively appreciate aspects of the current government that are utopian (Meklit), and allows them to easily adopt a critical stance against oppressive exercise of authority by the government (Olyad). On the other hand, a weaker imagination of what a utopian government looks like, coupled with absence of a strong and critical mother figure, predisposes children to perceive the current government exactly how it wants to be perceived. This perception threatens their utopianism and pushes them into withdrawal, submissiveness, or escapism, as is seen in the cases of the three low achievers in the utopian group (Abeba, Ezra, and Selam).

The children in the anti-utopian group view the current government simply and directly as it wants to be perceived. They see it as a sender of successful and admirable leaders that should be imitated, as an autonomous power that does not have responsibilities beyond giving rights and recognitions, and as alien to the people, provisional, and not led by values/ideals. The children are in the process of becoming part of that government, and Gelila is leading in that
regard. However, the kind of government the children in the utopian group “see” (Yegeta, Meklit, Olyad) or desire to “see” (Abeba, Ezra, Selam) is very different. It will be very important to reiterate here how this government is portrayed very vividly by Yegeta, the joyful and optimist utopian, when describing the origin of Ethiopia (See Section 5.1.5.):

Yegeta- I would say [pause] at the beginning there was a war, and when …I think I know how humans disappeared and how they revived…

Meskerem- I see, so tell me.

Yegeta- There was a war at the beginning, and not very many people lived. One guy, I don’t know his name, brought male and female humans from different countries to Ethiopia, and they multiplied.

Meskerem- So, the man saved the people from going extinct because of war?

Yegeta- Yes.

Yegeta “sees” a government that sends leaders who save, liberate, provide, and protect. The government is an advanced thinker for the good, as is seen, for example, in the decision of the “guy” to bring male and female humans from different countries to Ethiopia. This kind of function is expected from the present government by the other utopian children, who, for example, want it to do something about the beggars (Abeba), and understand it as trying to allocate natural and financial resources the way the people want (Meklit).

The opposite of that kind of government is described by Ezra, whose utopianism is threatened and seems to be on the brink of joining the anti-utopian camp. Because he has not yet identified himself with the government, he can still describe it in his own words using the
information he got from his friends. Interestingly, Ezra, too, talked about a man/guy he does not know (See Section 5.5.2.):

Ezra- …I think Meles was assigned to control the world because he is clever. It may be so that he can guard Ethiopia.

Meskerem- I see. Who do you think gave Ethiopia to Meles Zenawi to guard?

Ezra- I don’t know the man that gave him. I heard this when my friends talked about it.

Both Yegeta and Ezra assume the existence of a powerful “man”/“guy” behind Ethiopia’s government, except that the first one is a savior, and the second one is more like an emperor.

Is the utopian/anti-utopian tension, then, ultimately a tension between the Servant-Leader and the Imperator? Jesus Christ and the Roman Emperor? Could it be the case that a strong utopianism in children translates to a strong Christian (Biblical) perspective on leadership and governance that is only natural to humans (“Son of Man”)? Will it be safe to extrapolate that the anti-utopian impulse the children in the first group adopted is basically a pagan Greco-Roman conceptualization of governance/leadership? Is the anti-utopianism of the contents of the texts and media the result of the intention to create a pagan spiritual and intellectual atmosphere suitable particularly for those children with an imperator-like disposition?

The findings from the textbook and the over-all evaluation of how the current government positions itself in the contents is only affirmative of the above speculation. The government poses as an alien that does not know the origin and the existential purpose of Ethiopia and Ethiopians, whom it does not see as natives of Ethiopia. It sees Ethiopians ultimately for their potentially unethical behavior, harmful traditions, and backward agricultural practices, and presents itself as trying to make the best out of the unpleasant situation created by
the people. It implicitly portrays the past as a series of promising, but failed or partially successful attempts to build the modern utopia, and represents itself as a the most knowledgeable guide towards that utopia. It is openly vexed by the presence of too many children and the increase in number of Ethiopians, and blames its failure to provide satisfactory services for the public on these factors. In relation to this, it presents mothers and motherhood only in a negative light. It also presents the origin of Ethiopia’s Christianity as related to the Greco-Roman world. The fourth and fifth grade texts subtly suggest that the Axumite Empire (supposedly from 150 B.C – 1200s A.D.) is associated with the Greco-Roman world both in trade and Christianity. On the other hand, much like how it was during the period under the Italian occupation (1936-1941), the texts encourage tolerance towards, and affirm past dominance of Islam in Ethiopia and East Africa. It is therefore, possible to see that the current political socialization of children through school social studies curriculum and media is a continuation of the centuries-old appropriation of Ethiopia’s Christians and Christianity into the Roman Empire through the Catholic Church and its perspectives on the secular education.

7.2. Conclusion

The Ethiopian elementary social studies curriculum is not “irrelevant,” random, poorly-organized, or weak. It is rather a powerful tool for the government, and is doing exactly what it is supposed to do. The way contents are selected and fragmentally presented interacts with other societal sources of information to shape children’s view of the government which is portrayed as an imperator—a “god”—that should be feared and obeyed. It endorses the world-view of those children that have a weakened sense of self, a disposition to adopt clichés in a cult-like manner, and a covertly aggressive and oppressive disposition both to themselves and others. At the same time, it discourages the perspective of children that have the right kind of idealism (a “pragmatic
idealism”), a leadership potential, and a compassionate view of society. To accomplish this, the curriculum, combined with media messages, encourages a sense of alienation from the “Ethiopian” identity and the originally positive “human” nature, legitimizes impersonal/abstract systems and identities, endorses militarism and legalism, and justifies its militarism by pointing circularly back to the supposedly backward and unethical nature of human beings (Ethiopians). At the same time, it draws children’s attention to financial pursuit and excessive materialism, promotes seeing natural resources for their financial merit, and, with the help from media, prepares children for an uncritical submission to the investment demands of foreigners. In short, it attempts to corrupt the children’s perspective in order to justify the government’s judgmental and oppressive view towards Ethiopians.

In order to discourage the natural utopianism of children, which is potentially its greatest enemy, the government takes both the ultimate masculine (father) and feminine (mother) figures away from the children and gives them a deep impression that they are by their own. It does this by repressing any appreciation of a servant-leader role of individuals and the leader-nurturer identity of women/mothers. It discourages curiosity, system thinking, and problem-solving initiatives that are associated with a natural servant-leader mentality, and presents biased perspective on nature, the countryside, and motherhood. It uses guilt induction as a major tool to control children that resist this suppression by making them feel guilty for being poor, low-achiever, withdrawn, rebellious, or an escapist into a fantasy world. The government ultimately presents the children with two alternatives: to agree with the status quo by identifying with the government and becoming part of the docile labor force or to emigrate.
In general, it can be derived from the above summary of the findings of this study that, if the government was to make a speech to the children in school about life in Ethiopia by explicating all the subtle messages in media and texts, it would be something like the following:

“You are on the government’s land, which is Ethiopia. Because you were born here, you are given the Ethiopian citizenship. No kind of identity describes you unless the government of Ethiopia acknowledges and approves it. You have to accept the government as ultimate authority. It has the power to recognize or not recognize you as human; it is also the one that gives you or denies you the right to be Ethiopian. You have to seek the attention of the government and try to be visible. The government does not know you. Everyone here is a descendent of an immigrant.

“Money is the major goal in life you should pursue; you can’t live without it. The government will tell you who you are and what the people around you mean to you; you can’t depend on your own understanding. Everybody works for himself/herself; you should not try to solve anybody’s problem. Instead, you need to see what others have material-wise and work to earn enough money to get it. For that, you should strive to go high-tech. Other small and traditional means of income do not pay much.

“Your mother can’t save you from the government or from anyone else. She is powerless. She is struggling to survive herself. She is weak and may die anytime. In fact, the mother of the human race herself died long time ago. You do not have to ponder on distracting questions, such as ‘what is life all about?’ ‘Who were the people before us?’ ‘What is going to happen in the future?’ etc., because here is a short answer for that: the past was so bad that none of the early humans survived. We can only speculate about how they lived and what happened to them. The best life is yet to come, and the whole world is working towards that. Do your best to contribute towards it; otherwise, you will have no place in it in the future.

“That is why you need education. You will have to believe what you are told in school and learn to say it back. Your teachers are the most trustworthy people in your life. Use them and do your best to get to the position where you will be in charge of valuable human and natural resources. If you see foreigners, talk to them. They have money, and you may be able to sell them resources. You need to know some English, though. Your teachers will help you with that.

“Therefore, ultimately, you will have to try to be in charge of as many people as you can by finding every possible way to show them that you are much better than them and they should listen to you. There you can find true guarantee against poverty. Don’t settle; move! Don’t look at what is near you. See as far away as you can. There is
nothing exciting where you live, and the social and economic crises have passed the point of no return. For the most secure future, make constant wandering your habit in search of a fortune.”

Those children whose life condition resonates with what is portrayed by the government due to loss of mother, domestic abuse, poverty, threat from more powerful people, etc. begin to internalize the message, and they find school contents valid (Gelila, Worqesh, and Ezra). Others find it necessary to support the above assertion of the government simply because it promises power, wealth, and modernity (Simret) or gives justification for another utopia (Safia and Yenus). However, those children whose life is fulfilled by relatively rich familial and social life (Yegeta and Meklit) do not have any problem telling back fragments of what the government is saying in the texts so that they can pass the test. They do not “listen” to the government’s speech (Yegeta), or they “listen” to it in their own positive way and take it as a call for action (Meklit). Others who deeply disagree with what the government is trying to say disconnect with the message, and, therefore, lag behind academically to save their optimism (Olyad and Abeba), or resort to escapism (Selam). The major goal of utopian education can therefore be understood as countering each of the government’s assertion in the above “speech” and showing children a positive reality.

To conclude, it is possible to see that media, social studies texts, and the general school set up are meant by the government to train children to imitate or submit to an imperator-like political authority. Current social studies education is all about the enculturation of children into an “Ethiopia” and a world that is like the ancient Roman Empire in its rejection of the Servant-Leader (Jesus Christ) and the Leader-Nurturer (Virgin Mary) roles of men and women. It seems this is most likely in an anticipation of the “perfect” global imperator that is yet-to-come.
Chapter Eight

8. Recommendations

Correcting the negative impact of the Ethiopian elementary school system on children and reforming the social studies curriculum begins from understanding that, ultimately, it is the spiritual wellbeing of children that is greatly at-risk. Therefore, the major goal of educational intervention and curriculum overhaul should be to strengthen children’s spiritual ability and ensure their emotional wellbeing. This implies that fully exposing children (both boys and girls) to basic traditional spiritual (religious) education that is currently reserved only for the clergy is a necessity. This should be accompanied by giving them fundamental knowledge and thinking skills that affirms their Utopian/Ethiopian perspectives on day-to-day life and the world.

8.1. Recommended Remedial Measures

I have divided the measures that should be taken in order to utopianize/Ethiopianize the elementary curriculum into two major phases: short term remedial measures and long-term curricular improvisation.

8.1.1. Short-term—urgent measures parents and teachers should take

The short-term interventions should aim first and foremost at helping children feel that school is a place where children are cared for. The following series of steps should be taken by parents and teachers within the shortest term possible in order to minimize the spiritual and emotional damage the curriculum and media are bringing on children:

- Significantly reduce children’s exposure to media
- Work to get current citizenship education and school political clubs banned
- Not discuss financial insecurity with children
> Make arts and crafts the main content of extra-curricular activities
> Present occupations to children as enjoyable pursuits
> Build personal relationship with all children (not just with high achievers)
> Make the playground the center for social and physical education
> Allot additional time to literature and aesthetic education to re-connect children with feminine aspects of their physical and social world
> Significantly limit children’s exposure to current media information on foreigners and other countries until perspective changes

8.1.2. **Long-term—awareness creation and curriculum improvisation**

In the long-term, reversing the anti-utopian whim entails starting from awareness creation among Ethiopians in general and Christians in particular. Christianity’s unfortunate reduction into a “religion” (religio) of Greco-Roman paganism should be rejected, and the utopianism/Ethiopianism and humanism found at the core of its tenets should be discussed with renewed interest. It is possible to sense from this study that parents, teachers, and even leaders at different religious, political, and academic positions comply with or critique the education system, most likely, without basic awareness of the pagan, Gnostic, Mithraic (militaristic), and anti-utopian nature of its methods and directions. Investigating the entire grade school curricula from this perspective and rendering the dynamics understandable by the public is an important spring-board for the next step, which is developing an alternative curriculum.

The new elementary social studies curriculum should follow an integrated approach of curriculum development. All subjects can be re-organized around Utopian/Ethiopian themes. Ideally, schools should ultimately become places where experts from various fields meet to educate and train children. Children should also receive foundational spiritual and social
education as part of a formal curriculum organized in collaboration with parents, cultural, and religious organizations. To realize this, an arrangement where children spend a considerable amount of time in fields, working places, play grounds, homes, churches, and community venues, and not just in schools, should be imagined and laid out. Nonetheless, schools can begin from changing contents and learning experiences for children in the traditional school set-up and in the available venues for children’s education, the most important out-of-school venues being social institutions affiliated with the three major Christian denominations (Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic). This also has significant implications to how teacher education should be re-conceptualized as part of the curriculum overhaul. Below, I provide the basics of twelve themes for alternative Ethiopian/Utopian social studies and environmental science curricula leaving them open for further elaboration and refinement in the future.

8.2. Proposed Themes for Utopian/Ethiopian Social Studies Curricula

The twelve themes I propose are based on the twelve topic areas where the two groups showed fundamental difference in. The themes are meant to be a utopian counter-response to the anti-utopian perspective of the textbooks and media on the topics. They reflect the values held by children with a utopian outlook. The themes guide the content selection, purpose, and learning experience of elementary social studies education for children. They are to be addressed mainly through alteration of public school social studies curriculum and creation of diverse and holistic learning experience for children in public schools and religious and cultural institutions. Such change may also begin from making available to children audio-visual and printed materials (e.g., children’s literature) developed around these themes.
8.2.1. Government as Servant-Leader

The first and the most important theme children should be exposed to is the concept of the Servant-Leader as the function of an Ethiopian/Utopian government. The Gnostic (anti-utopian) view conceptualizes the duty of government as going “out” of the world by going “up” the hierarchical ladder (of rank, status, might, power, knowledge, consciousness, etc.), and assumes that the role of the masses is to emulate those on top using the rights they are given (but not the means). In contrast, the Ethiopian/Utopian view establishes that government should administer a nation the same way God administers the world, which is by going “down” and “into” the human race and empowering, enlightening, training, and equipping them to do the same to others. This is most clearly revealed by the Incarnation of Divinity in the human of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent transformation of the disciples into Apostles that were sent to do to others what was done for them.

In line with the above premise, it will then be a sound curricular decision to incorporate the ancient and medieval legacy of “Ag-Azi” or “Ag-Azian” as the major topic area in social studies education. The term “Ag-Azi” is related to the words “Ge-ez,” the liturgical language of Ethiopia, and “Egzi-Abher,” the name of God in Ge-ez. “Ge-ez” means “free”—a designation given to the language to signify that the language is not owned by any particular racial or cultural group. “Egzi-Abher” can literally be translated to mean “Liberator/Lord of a Nation/World.” “Ag-Azi” is a derivation from these terms, and refers to delegates (priests, warriors, judges, and experts in various fields) sent by ancient Ethiopian kings to free oppressed tribes and to educate, civilize, and assimilate them into the Nation of Ethiopia. The liberation can be conceptualized not as an evangelical mission in the modern sense, but as a “utopianization” mission that is all-
rounded and involves different degrees of assimilation. Ag-Azi can be understood as the name, identity, and job-description of the Ethiopian government.

In addition to teaching children the original meaning of “Ag-Azi,”12 the perspective from which past reigns are presented in social studies texts should also change to make them illustrative of this theme. Presently, the common approach of studying past kings, leaders, their kingdoms/regions, and their reigns in Ethiopian schools is very “Roman” in a sense that it compares and evaluates them based on standards such as, military might, expanse of territory, sphere of political influence, and stretch of trade relations, etc. It is necessary to change this approach and focus on the most important aspect of their governance, which is their (wholly or partially fulfilled) role as “Ag-Azian”—liberators, servant-leaders. How in the earlier times, the nation’s leadership equipped leaders in spiritual education, geographical knowledge, and cultural understanding, as well as means of livelihood, and physical fitness to liberate and empower oppressed people, including those destitute and sparsely inhabited areas, is a very important content on the past that should come to the foreground in this theme. Making this concept concrete for children may also require male teachers and administrators to assume the role of Ag-Azi themselves and model it (to be exact, “Him”) to children, such as by selecting children in turns for skills they feel they are best suited and training them to train others. These skills may include most basic how-to’s such as hand-writing and note-book organization, to coordinating group projects and sharing different knowledge and skills in religion/scriptures, language, arts, environmental science, history, physical education, and out-of-school visits and explorations.

12 This name of a marvelous legacy is used in the exact opposite sense today. It is now the name of the special federal government forces known for their brutal attack of civilians, including women and minors, whenever they are sent by the government during crises situations.
The ultimate purpose of a utopian leadership should be clearly and unequivocally presented to children as ensuring that the people live an abundant and happy life, and as doing all things that need to be done to ensure the continuity, increase, and expansion of the people. This should be presented as the good will of leaders to their own society and as a commitment of the leaders in the best interest of their people. In relation to this, children should learn the difference between the Servant-Leader and the imperator more clearly, and any existing or potential “imperial” disposition (imperium or dignitas) in children can be challenged by portraying this aspect of past leaders as undesirable. As the children grow, contents and activities under this theme should involve a broader critical study of cultures, religions, and civilizations focusing on their conceptualization of the role of the leader, and comparing it to the ideal of the servant-leader on the one hand and the imperator on the other. This involves presenting and evaluating leaders and their leadership mainly for the concern and heart they had (have) for their people, including helping them achieve a high level of morality, conscience, natural way of living, and, therefore, authentic happiness. Children should learn all this in contrast to the imperator—who rather pays much attention to the peoples’ deference to his authority, and is concerned more about projecting his success and systematically awakening the greed and hunger for power in his people. Views on women and children (beginning from those in one’s own life) and on nature/environment should also be one of the major aspects children need to be helped to see as starkly contrasting between the Servant-Leader and the imperator. In upper grades, the major confrontations between the two leadership styles, notably the ancient Greek thoughts on a republic versus the priestly kings of Ethiopia/Africa and the Middle East, the Medieval Prester John(s) (priest kings) versus the contemporary European warrior kings, and the ultimate Servant-Leader, Jesus Christ Himself versus the then Roman establishment, should be explored well for
their implication to governance. In short, a comparative and critical study of all the specifics on how the imperator and the servant-leader contrast in their views and practices, as well as best examples from each and the various hybrid leadership styles should be the content of this theme.

8.2.2. Ethiopia, humanity and human divinity ("dignity")

The purpose of the second theme, “Ethiopia, humanity, and human divinity,” is to accomplish three goals: 1) to give children a sense that they are Ethiopia, 2) to help them internalize the fact that they are human beings equal to every other human individual, and 3) to help them appreciate being human as the most dignified and worthy identity. The target of the first goal is to let children have an early understanding of themselves as human beings and Ethiopian/Utopian by nature. To accomplish this, children should be led to see through various contents and activities that the beginning of Ethiopia means the beginning of humanity, which directly resembles their own beginning as individuals. In relation to this, they should be allowed to examine and grasp that their wellbeing means the wellbeing of Ethiopia, and the wellbeing of Ethiopia means the satisfactory life condition of themselves and others in their lives. Strengthening this impression requires also helping them trace and comprehend the flip side of this systems view, which is the fact that the impoverishment, destitution, oppression, immorality, corruption, or discomfort of other Ethiopians (human beings) causes a chain reaction which directly and indirectly affects them. Children should be helped to understand that “Ethiopia” refers to the people as a whole and also the individual Ethiopian.

The second related goal is helping children have a basic understanding of their human nature. This should aim at letting children appreciate that they have physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional resources like every other human being, and that they are a valuable part of the bigger family of the human race. Simplified contents on the genealogy of human race and
activities such as locating their ethnic/linguistic groups and related families on the tree of human
genealogy may be one way of enabling children have a sense of membership and connectedness
to the human race. They should also be helped to decipher the sphere of activities/influence of
human beings in the natural and the social world. For this, they can do activities such as surveys
of man-made infrastructure and products in their local areas, studies of a range of human-caused
changes in the natural world, and examples of methods, organizations, and processes developed
by humans in the social world. The goal is to let them view humans as active agents with intents
and capacities.

The third goal, the affective dimension, aims at helping children have a favorable view of
being human. The Ge’ez word, “Tobia,” which is the root word of “Ethiopia”/”Eutopia” means
“good.” It implies the inherent goodness of human beings and their inclination to be pursuers of
utopia. Educational contents and experiences under this theme should then help children
understand this nature of human beings in connection to their Divine origin, which asserts their
creation in the “Image of God” and, therefore, having a deep desire to express and realize the
already-present goodness found in their nature. This can be explored with children through
studies of inventions, human activity with nature, the establishment of cities and civilizations,
and the refinement and enrichment of cultures both in the past and in the present. The main goal
is to help children have an understanding that human beings strive to create a good life both
individually and collectively, and that all human generations in all places did several things to
make the lives of their people and themselves enjoyable and safe.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the topic of human nature in relation to
Creation is currently regarded as an advanced subject reserved only for the curious few.
However, it is one of the major areas that should be presented in a level understandable by
children in social studies education under this theme. It has the foundation of its teaching in Genesis and its various commentaries which explain the four components of the human physical body (air, water, fire, earth) and the three characters of the human soul—wisdom/ability to conceive, expressiveness, and eternity. Out of these emanate three roles bestowed on them by the Creator as an indication of their existential purpose: nationhood ("Children of God"), priesthood, and royalty. Their duties that emanate from these three identities are centered on sustaining life (of all kinds, beginning from humans’), examining and fighting evil, and actively and deliberately helping the good prevail. An explicit discussion on this topic becomes necessary given the fact that the secular understanding of civic engagement, as seen in the anti-utopianism in the children and the textbook contents, is increasingly taking a meaning of having an awareness of the dystopian reality so that navigating through it with minimal personal cost becomes possible. In addition, what is defined as “evil” (the cause of any undesirable social and natural phenomena) is becoming more and more impersonal, specialized, and even abstract by the official rhetoric (e.g., foreign trade balance of payment /BOP/ rather than whether or not enough of basic necessities are being produced for the local market). Therefore, the birth of humanity in Ethiopia (as Ethiopians) with the posture of an earthly and a heavenly (spiritual) nature for the existential purpose of researching and realizing what is “good” for all (utopia) is one of the themes that should come first in Ethiopian/Utopian social studies education.

8.2.3. Women, Motherhood, and the Nation of Ethiopia

It is observed from the findings of this study that mothers’ wider political, spiritual, and social consciousness gives children the broader perspective on life and the needed confidence to critically observe their society. The influence of women becomes strong in children’s lives when it has three dimensions: personal closeness to the children in their day-to-day lives, involvement
in maintaining a wider social network with relatives, neighbors, and religious communities, and possession of spiritual ("religious") and political consciousness strong enough to affect their decisions for themselves and their children. An Ethiopian/Utopian social studies curriculum, therefore, should seek to provide the cognitive and emotional experience of having such mother-figure to all Ethiopian children. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized given the fact that the majority of Ethiopian children come from households where the mother’s view, voice, capacity, security, health, or very existence is jeopardized by different factors. The goal of teachers and social studies curricula should therefore be: 1) helping children see and feel that there are several mother-figures at different levels in the society that care about their wellbeing, 2) portraying women to children in connection to power, health, hygiene, and happy life, 3) letting children see that women are visionaries of utopia and nurturers of visionaries, and 4) giving children a sense that they have both the power and the responsibility to ensure the continuation this important legacy of motherhood.

Meeting the first goal requires female teachers’ radical re-conceptualization of their roles in elementary grades. They should be helped to have a broad consciousness of the potency of their position to influence a generation and impact a nation. Female teachers’ first goal should be countering children’s early feeling of insecurity due to loss, abuse, or diminishment of mother figure. Helping children have a sense that they are cared for by a community of parents, teachers, professionals, and locally and nationally influential women should be their primary goal. For that, they will need to connect with other women at different levels of society to creatively organize different charity and donation programs, events, educational projects, and social experiences to benefit children as well as to let them see women as capable of acting in their care. Combining these programs with religious, cultural, and aesthetic components that are
free from political terminologies is essential to children’s inspiration and development of social skills. Such programs can begin from coordinating with parents small break-time and after-school events for children at the classroom level.

Closely related to the first goal is the teachers’ clear communication to the children, in words and deeds, that inequality of any form concerns them and that they want to work against it. This is especially important to low achievers, withdrawn/rebellious children, and children from destitute/abusive homes. Teachers need to spend personal time with at-risk children discussing on issues that concern them. These children may also be from rich families who become withdrawn due to the alienation and poverty they witness in others, or they may be children that are frightened by government authority figures. Teachers should be alerted about the breadth of issues children emotionally and cognitively deal with. They may find it a surprise that most of their observations and concerns about themselves, their community, and their country are also found in the children since both children and teachers live in the same society. These concerns which are both personal and collective are what can meaningfully connect children and teachers. Seeing that teachers are concerned about inequality benefits, not only children who are academically, economically, or emotionally challenged by inequality, but also those children who are high achievers or from well-to-do families and are developing a sense of entitlement as a result.

Along with the above practical actions, female teachers should also open discussion with children on the topic of national identity and explore with them what it means to be “Ethiopian” from historical and religious perspectives. Especially if this is coupled with teachers’ intentional efforts to represent “Mother Ethiopia” in their conducts, starting from the way they dress, it will have the power to extend the children’s sense of attachment with their country through a mother
figure. Children need to hear important historical facts and affirmative messages about their Ethiopian identity, primarily, from their mothers or women in their family. But, the female teacher is no less important. In fact, she can facilitate children’s discussion with their own mothers on these topics in small groups and also in bigger events. In such practice, children will get a very important exposure to the intellectual and spiritual side of their mothers, teachers, and other women in their community.

In connection to this, religious education in churches should be clearly emphatic on building children’s sense of connection with the Virgin Mary—the most important figure who is traditionally understood as the impersonation of “Mother Ethiopia” (Wolde-Yesus, 1997). Although in theory prayers and songs to the Virgin Mary are among the first parts of children’s religious education in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, in practice, several aspects of this important spiritual exercise is done irregularly, has gone obsolete, or, in some places, is even non-existent in the actual church compounds and Sunday School rooms. However, as can be learned from this study, it is important that children get introduced to the personality (opinions, views, visions, conducts) of a bigger, more consistent, and more powerful mother figure, for which none is best suited than “Mother Ethiopia”—the Virgin Mary Herself. Although currently not emphasized, it is possible to see that the Church historically gave attention to helping children notice the Virgin’s outspokenness about the wellbeing of humanity in all dimensions. This is seen from the fact that one of the first prayers a child is required to learn by heart in elementary Church education is Her concise, yet comprehensive, prayer recorded in the Gospel which shows Her exemplary historical consciousness (ancestors and posterity) and Her strong stance against economic inequality, political chauvinism, and social despair (see italicized lines):

And Mary said, “My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation.
He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.
He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;
As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. (Luke 2: 46-55, KJV)

The second goal that should be met under this theme is portraying women to children in relation to positive qualities such as health, hygiene, intelligence, happiness, creativity, and power. In addition to female teachers’ and other women’s effort to model these qualities to children themselves, it is also imperative that children get deliberate help to understand these as qualities of women’s nature (and not just as qualities of the obliged or privileged few). Those areas in which women generally tend to have “edges” over men, such as emotional warmth, attentiveness to details and subtleties, relational approach at work, tendency to advocate for peace and stability, tendency to be supportive and nurturing, etc. should be presented to children through informational, literary, and biographical contents. These should aim at helping children see where women complement the male approach to relationships, work, and leadership and letting them appreciate both sexes for their basic constitution.

The third goal—helping children see women as visionaries of utopia and nurturers of visionaries—can be achieved by: introducing children with stories of strong, consistent, and
influential women in the national history and local cultures, by giving children perspective on the distinct features of women’s visions (utopias), and by systematically helping them to have an understanding that women’s role in a family is, in essence, the same with their role in the field, in public sectors, as professionals, as politicians, as scholars, as artists, as warriors, or as producers. Autobiographical, religious, and historical contents are most relevant to advance children’s education along these lines. The main message of this theme should be that in an ideal (utopian) society, personal, familial, economic, religious or political roles of women/mothers simply emanate from their natural human identity as women, and not from competing roles that require constant balancing. It then follows that giving children a utopian vision means helping them imagine a society in which women simultaneously fulfill their roles along these dimensions through single duties/actions. Ethiopian history of Christianity is full of stories of such women which can be conveniently exposited from this perspective. Through such presentation, both children’s emotional and intellectual needs can be met. For these, lessons from this theme should take a form of an empowering message from women ancestors to impress in children’s minds that they not only have the right to live, but also the permission, potential, and obligation to affect their society in a positive way. In relation to this, it will be important to point out that the current approach of studying influential women in Ethiopian history by presenting the degree of influence/interference they had in their husband’s leadership/business needs to change as this treats women’s involvement in bigger matters as the exception and not the rule.

The fourth goal of this theme should be to provide children an assurance that they are not doomed to live an inferior life because of a loss of mother figure, and that motherhood is a continuing legacy. They need clear messages that impress in them a sense of confidence that women will continue to exist, that girls will grow into being mothers, workers, and leaders, and
that they (girls) can fulfill any void they feel and observe in this regard in their own lives and others,’ or contribute (boys) in various ways for this to be the experienced reality of everyone. Exploring with children different factors that prevent girls and women from fulfilling their roles of raising healthy children at home and shaping radiant community in their social/public roles can be linked to showing children that they have the power to prevent those problems. Contents should go beyond discussing harmful traditions and HIV which directly threaten the women’s health and livelihood, or issues of equal opportunity for education and employment to ensure women’s economic security. Although these areas are fundamental and need to be discussed, it should not be done in the context of only ensuring their survival or comparing their achievement with boys and men because this simply invites a sense of existential insecurity and a tendency to view life as competition for survival. To advance the agenda of utopia, girls’ and women’s needs should be explored with children from the perspective of creating a suitable condition where women can fulfill their role in building the ideal society where everyone is happy, healthy, well-provided, well-educated, and spiritually enlightened. Connecting the role of various occupations and professions in the religious, political, scientific, social, and economic realm with efforts to assist women’s wellbeing and the fulfillment of their roles is important to empower children. It is possible to think of various lessons under this theme that can spark children’s interest in professions in connection to women and utopia. Examples can be a story of the dedicated midwife, the fitness expert that studies the physique of young women, the priest who exercises marriage counseling, the lawyer at the women’s affairs, the husband who defends his wife and children against neighbors, the therapist of domestic abusers at the correctional facility, the trainer at the technical and vocational center for women, the war general that leads a rescue mission to free women and children, the office clerk that treats women with kindness, and so on.
8.2.4. *The Golden Mean*

From the Ethiopian/Utopian worldview, all phenomena in the universe function in a masculine-feminine principle. In line with this, there is no equivalent for the Latin “*id*” or “*it*” in Ge’ez (Ethiopic language) as all things are referred to with masculine or feminine pronouns according to their *function*. For example, a leader is masculine, and a country is feminine; God is masculine (not “male”), and humanity is feminine; a farmer is masculine, and land is feminine; human activity or culture/civilization is masculine, and nature is feminine; and the flesh is masculine, where as the soul is feminine. Just like a physical sexual intercourse unites male and female humans to produce offspring, a healthy interaction with mutual deference between the masculine and the feminine enables preserving and multiplying life of all kinds.

As summarized in Section 7.1.9., the basic nature of the distorted world-view of the children in the anti-utopian group is an imbalance caused by perceiving the masculine as dominant over the feminine due to corrupting or neglecting (alienating) the feminine. They accept this (view and/or reality) as the norm, and the view is supported also by textbook/media. Notable such pairs whose relation is most distorted are showed in Table 7.1.

Table 8.1.

*Major masculine and feminine principles whose relation is distorted by anti-utopianism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Their fruit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>A happy nation of servant leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/Leader</td>
<td>Country/People</td>
<td>A stable and expanding population &amp; economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father/Man</td>
<td>Mother/Woman</td>
<td>Children/life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Administrative</td>
<td>Rural/Production</td>
<td>Optimal production &amp; distribution/trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural occupations</td>
<td>Animals and Plants</td>
<td>Increase of natural production</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The anti-utopian view considers the masculine and the feminine as opposites, and, sees the forces/resources in the first column as obtainable only at the expense of those in the second. With an ultimate aim of stopping expansion of life (multiplying, increasing), such Gnostic view encourages dominance of the masculine over the feminine. It creates a hierarchy of knowledge, status, and occupations based on the level it is distant from the material world and the feminine principle. In language subjects, Ethiopian children learn most of the above masculine and feminine entities as antonyms. As discussed in Chapter Six, the texts also contrast the two and do not attempt to show any similarity (relation) between them. Similarly, in upper middle and secondary grade social and natural science subjects, there is a general tradition of giving attention to exceptions that do not fit the golden mean rule (masculine-feminine balance), such as, the rare plant/animal species that reproduce asexually, the only country that exports a certain product in a large amount, or the only individual known for a peculiar quality/performance. While exceptions, peculiarities, and rank orderings are worthy of learning, it is doubtful that
children need to be introduced to the world primarily through that route because the world normally functions according to the rule (harmonious interaction of masculine and feminine principles), and not the exception.

This “rule” in Utopian/Ethiopian thinking, which is the most natural and original state of human cognitive orientation, holds seemingly two opposites in a harmonious unity and balance (Tewahedo). This is implied in the discussions of the theoretical framework of this study (Chapter One), and it is the major stream of consciousness (cognitive orientation) in the ideal societies depicted in the classical utopian novels. For example, as Raphael Hythloday, the Portuguese explorer in More’s *Utopia* narrated, Utopians were secluded societies; yet, they were interested to know as much as they could about other civilizations. They abhorred idleness; yet, they worked only for six hours. They admired the beauty of women; but they strictly punished “illicit affair” before marriage, and so on (More & Ogden, 1985, p. 58).

Unfortunately, Gnosticism affects contemporary politics and education in several third world countries. H.G. Wells wrote his most famous book “*Modern Utopia*” from a Gnostic perspective of the kind which the children in which the anti-utopian group of this study have begun to adopt (Wells, 1967). His “utopia” consists of a world government modeled after ancient Rome, a complete skepticism of knowledge, a complete freedom of the individual from any pattern/tradition of life, a “migratory population,” a drive for creativity which comes out of wanting to be unique (and not problem-solving), an avoidance of rural areas which he simply refers to as “dirty,” a preservation of parks only for the children of the advantaged while reserving most of the countryside for mining, and in short, all forms of the hyper-modernisms that are biased towards the corrupted masculine principles. Alan Jacobs, a British author, recently confirms the fact that Gnosticism has been challenging the Ethiopian utopianism. His
novel which is satirically titled “Eutopia: The Gnostic Land of Prester John,” describes a Medieval “Christian” Ethiopia in an intense pursuit of knowledge (gnosis) through transcendental practices (Jacobs, 2010).

The Utopian/Ethiopian social studies education should respond to the uprooting effect of this impulse by challenging the direction towards which Greco-Roman masculinity shapes (skews) the relationship between the masculine-feminine pairs. This begins in early grades by helping children to progressively learn and appreciate what a desirable balance of power and harmony of function between the masculine-feminine looks like in all major and minor interactions of social and natural phenomena (man and woman, rural and urban, rich and poor, technology and agriculture, leader and nation, etc.). It begins from laying out the main principle—Tewahedo—as capable of explaining the material, social, and spiritual world. It should also include clearly showing them that, like in marriage, the masculine goes towards the feminine to bring about a happy family/society, and that a growing distance between the masculine and the feminine is undesirable. Particular lessons for children can be, for example, doing creative scenario-envisioning activities that challenge them to think of possibilities of educational, technological, and cultural advancement in a rural agrarian setting where subsistence farming is the norm. It is possible to use contents on recent and distant past experiments of settlement programs (traditional, socialist, intentional communities, etc.) that combine both agricultural and technological initiatives. Lessons on the need to balance change with tradition may involve contents from historical and biographical accounts of experiences of people who travel and bring useful experiences that enrich and develop local traditions in a manner that sustains harmony. In older grades, explicit instruction on the need to possess practical manual skills in the arts and crafts in combination with more “mental” fields of
knowledge such as rhetoric, law, and history can also build in children a disposition to think in harmonious and systemic manner. This perspective becomes “utopian” especially when it can impress in children the fact that one cannot be fully known and appreciated without the other.

### 8.2.5. Living with nature

The current formal education setting where children spend most of their day in the classroom does not allow them to acquire the necessary knowledge, skill, and attitude human beings need to have for sustainable livelihood and environmental protection. It is undeniable that children/students need actual interaction with the environment for authentic environmental education and training on important production skills (mainly, agriculture). Currently, several environmental protection and sustainable development experts in Ethiopia are calling for a different look at subsistence farming, organic initiatives, and biodiversity preservation, and are advocating for a renewed commitment to preserve these resources and practices (Gebre Egziabher, 2003; Wassie & Teketay, 2006; Zegeye, Teketay, & Kelbessa, 2006). However, for the short-term, it is important that children be helped in schools to have a positive attitude towards nature/the environment and agriculture.

A Utopian/Ethiopian approach to environmental education in elementary grades should meet two basic goals: 1) providing children a sound reason other than financial ends as to why nature should be studied and preserved, and 2) to give them essential knowledge of the role of humans in maintaining ecological balance and relationship with nature. The first goal—providing children a sound reason for studying and preserving nature—is the most important goal of this theme which can put into perspective all other specific objectives. As Mr. Alemu asked, “…even here in Babile [30 kilometers east of Harar], the elephants were about 300 in number; now only 50-60 are remaining. Shouldn’t the children learn about them?” (see Section
6.2.2.). One can respond by asking, “should they?” If we remove the financial or even recreational goals (tourism) from the answer to this question, we are left with no satisfactory answer, and finding a good reason to be interested in the elephants is going to be the responsibility of the individual child. The same can be said about studying any species of animals or plants, and also other natural resources such as gemstones, landscapes, celestial bodies, etc., especially since they are not immediately linked to basic necessities.

The above lack of purpose can only be mitigated permanently if children are given the perspective that there is an essential relationship between the lives of humans and that of natural resources, especially, plants and animals. Just like children need to understand humans as much more than eaters-workers-earners-eaters, they also need to see that plants and animals are much more than living “things” to be used that survive by hunting, grazing, or photosynthesis. They should be aware that a basic life-impulse that is similar to the kind that is in them is also found in animals and plants and other natural resources. This life impulse is none other but God Himself whose images and characters can be “read” in the lives of both human beings and other creations. Therefore, it sparks in them great sense of connection with and urge to study and preserve nature if they learn to view plants, animals, and other natural resources as creations that, just like human beings, have:

- Biological, social, and “spiritual” life,
- Cycles of life and renewal/rejuvenation,
- Roles, occupations/work,
- Culture, wisdom, diversity, family, races, history, generation (“parents and children”), continuity, and
- A story to tell about the lives of human beings and the Divine
In short, this approach should illustrate to children that humans, nature, and God share several fundamental characters, which includes reproducing (birthing in their “image”), interdependence, not wanting to be isolated/alienated/ignored, going through phases of life, resisting hunger/drought, passing through times of difficulties, seeking help/intervention, “dying,” regenerating/resurrecting, reviving, multiplying, and so on. In the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, no spiritual concept is taught without elaborating it in connection to nature. This is both Biblical and cultural approach. Connecting with the Divine and with the meaning of life (being human) by studying nature is also a central concept in all the classical medieval utopian texts. Elements of nature ranging from most basic grain plants and pets in the house to legendary animals such as the unicorn, the lion, eagle, and other rare bird species, to celestial bodies, can all be studied by comparing them with the qualities of the Divine and the human (especially through the person of Jesus Christ). This approach has the capacity to humanize the spirit of individuals that are severely affected by an oppressive and impersonal/pagan political, religious and educational system, and greatly enhances their acquisition of complex scientific knowledge. Ultimately, it is about clearly portraying to children that human beings, the Divine, and nature are ideally in a triangular relationship, each being giver of their best to the other two (e.g., by caring, nurturing, and providing, by acknowledging) and none is the sole user/abuser.

The second goal of Utopian/Ethiopian environmental education is to give children a perspective on the role of humans in maintaining a healthy relationship with nature. This involves introducing children with important historical facts beginning from the relationship between human beings and the Garden of Eden. The fact that human beings are responsible for the maintenance of all species and elements of nature in their most original state is the bottom
line that needs to be impressed in the minds of children. Presenting a utopia of well planned towns/cities, countryside, and wild areas as manifestations of a desirable kind of civilization is essential. In this context, they should be introduced to the concept of biodiversity, organic seeds, and indigenous wood species. In addition, children should be helped to appreciate subsistent agriculture for its all-rounded worth (social, spiritual, economic, cultural, and national).

Accounts on the early activities of man, mainly the Church’s commentaries of the Old-and New-Testament records, have several contents that can be organized into appealing environmental studies lessons to children. Since several aspects of such contents are linked to the notion of preserving (and reviving) the Garden of Eden, they can impress the value of nature and agriculture in children’s minds. These include accounts of early fathers (e.g. Enoch, Noah) who revived and passed on lost agricultural practices after adverse situations, and traditions of rediscovering and preserving original crop seeds. Several hagiographies of later Saints (of Ethiopian Christians as well as others) also have stories of interaction with nature in peculiar ways (not “magical” or “pagan”), which can be conveniently transformed into environmental education lessons. It seems such an approach to environmental education is the best way to resist the uprooting effect of Gnostic infiltration in both religious and secular education which limited the former to church buildings and the later to school classrooms. Studying nature remains to be the most convenient route to help reconnect the spiritual and the physical.

In relation to the above, children should also be helped to compare the difference between the benefit from organic and enhanced plant and animal species, as well as other natural resources such as rivers and land, with those that are far removed from their most original form. As it is most appropriate in the current case of Ethiopia, building the optimist spirit in children about the possibility of reviving degraded environment and endangered indigenous species by
emphasizing on the capacity of the earth/land to revive itself with a minimum and strategic human/technological intervention would be an appropriate content that fosters the spirit of “renaissance.” The destructive consequence of war, corruption, epidemic, division, conflict, isolation, alienation, poor planning, and so on, not only on human lives, but on natural resources, should also be clarified to children in upper middle grades.

8.2.6. Occupations, professions, and the public sector

The kind of Utopian/Ethiopian perspective children need on occupations, professions, and the various institutions in the public sector ultimately has three goals: 1) to dissolve the false dichotomy between work and human beings and present the drive to work as located in the nature of human beings (that it is their natural disposition), 2) to introduce to children various roles, occupations, and professions as purposeful, life-targeted (man and nature), and problem-solving activities, and 3) to give them a personalized and humanized view of the public sector at large and the various institutions in it.

The first goal of this theme, helping children understand work as the nature of human beings, can be met by showing children that humans are naturally inclined to want to contribute to the wellbeing of their society for varieties of valid reasons (personal satisfaction, accountability to conscience, short-term problem alleviation, long-term benefit for all, and, most importantly, development of one’s own knowledge, skills, and maturity). Helping children in varieties of learning experiences to “hear” testimonies from individuals in different occupations regarding this fact is a valid place to begin from. Inspiring utopianism in children through a positive presentation of public service is not difficult since children’s natural utopian disposition inclines them to want to contribute and simply see how it makes others happy. It is when this is not systematically nurtured that they may succumb into the developmental crisis of, for example,
the types Erik Erikson outlined in his theory of stages of psychosocial development (Stevens, 1983). Specifically, the two developmental stages, Industry versus Inferiority (between ages 6 to 12) and Identity versus Role Confusion (between ages 12 and 18) are stages that shape children’s emerging sense of their roles as potential contributors and providers to society. Social studies education during these years should encourage children’s healthy need to learn and explore ways of becoming industrious and having a meaningful role.

The second goal—presenting work to children as human-targeted problem-solving activity—can be achieved by introducing to them to both invention and occupations/professions as primarily arising from the need to solve or prevent problems that endanger the wellbeing of humans. In relation to this, scientific research method should be presented to them in the context of professional interventions so that they understand research as a systematic investigation of problems in human lives to come up with practical solutions. As discussed in Chapter Six, the current social studies curriculum rather trivializes scientific research by relating it to collecting information on random happenings (such as a fire accident). In relation to this, children should be helped to appreciate the different forms of utopianism (“idealism”) that drive an individual’s ambition in a certain occupational/professional direction. This aims at helping them understand how career paths get birthed out of observing an injustice or any crisis of social or natural nature in one’s own community. In addition, it allows children to learn what varieties of jobs and occupations actually exist out there, both in the countryside and in the city.

The third goal of this theme should be humanizing children’s view of the public sector and helping them appreciate its importance. Social studies education should help children appreciate the public sector for what it really is—the country. For that, helping them see beyond infrastructure building and financial economics as manifestations of “development” and showing
them the direct contribution of public sector jobs to human beings is important. As seen especially in the cases of Yegeta and Meklit, a strong utopianism (which is different from the withdrawn, rebellious or escapist forms of utopianism of the low achievers in the utopian group) comes from choosing to see work in the public sector simply as a larger context of interpersonal relationship. Helping children towards that direction can therefore include in the curriculum that, ideally, the same way members of a family are interrelated in production, provision, and service is how society is interrelated through the public sector. An example lesson can be helping children draw parallels between the following two scenarios: a child (“you”) get sick, and the mother cooks nutritious food for the child. The sister helps by washing the clothes and bed sheets, serving food to the child, and cleaning utensils. The father buys medicine from the nearby pharmacy and consults neighbors, etc. This is basically the role doctors, nurses, and administrators play in a hospital. Such approach can also be used with the children to help them have a parsimonious big-picture that public institutions in various fields (finance, agriculture, transport and communications, education, and so on, or, in other words, Ministries) can also be understood as roles in a family or in a community. Along with this, children should also be exposed to the views, sayings, and deeds of exemplary public servants who worked for decades in public institutions and their contribution to the wellbeing of all. Both the recent and the distant past of Ethiopia have witnessed several such people whose stories can be rendered readable to children as biographies. How various talents, through different occupations and professions, come together to form a well-functioning society is also an important insight children should get from learning experiences designed around this theme. This, too, can be accomplished by helping them draw parallels between children with different talents in the classroom, to possible corresponding occupations, institutions, and public roles in the country.
An important core of this theme is the need to help children see the public sector as a legacy of Christianity. In the long history of humanity, a counter-productive “identity exchange” between secularism and Christianity has taken place which made it seem like utopianism, nationalism, universal humanism, and the public sector is the legacy of secularism where as parochialism, privatization, and construction of personal safe-haven belongs to Christianity. This is the single most destructive mis-conception and that became the breeding ground for several anti-utopian ideologies and mal-practices. It began from the corrupt motives that caused the de-identification of the medieval utopian novels from their origin in Ethiopian Christianity (“the Land of Prester John”). The full picture the identity-exchange that caused the distorted anti-utopian perspective and what the corrected reality should look like according to the true historical facts of utopianism is presented in Table 8.2.

A Utopian/Ethiopian social studies education should lay the foundation in children’s minds to have the correct grasp of Christianity as utopianism and not as religion. For this, no theme is better suited than the theme of occupations/professions as public service. Introducing the public sector institutions and all occupations/professions as works of the Kingdom of God proclaimed in the Gospels is the foundational knowledge children need in order to have a fully-humanized utopian world-view that can resist impersonal/pagan distortions.

13 The idea of connecting the public sector with Christianity to children in public schools can give one an impression that it can be an imposition of one group’s perspective on others, especially on the Muslim population. However, it is important to emphasize that it is because this truth is neglected and poorly observed that various forms of corrupt policies and practices are being created to the agitation of Muslims, Christians, and others. It is also important to consider the proposal in this study as meant to be implemented in consensus among the Christian population which can necessitate an approach to education that is partially or mostly separate from the Muslim community.
Table 8.2.

*A rough outline of the “identity exchange” between secularism and Christianity and its corrected version*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The distortion (“identity exchange”) between Christianity and Greco-Roman dualism/anti-utopianism</th>
<th>The historical truth/reality of Christianity as utopianism (“Caesar's to Caesar and God's to God”)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secularism</td>
<td>Christianity (Tewahedo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Christianity”</td>
<td>Secularism (Greco-Roman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheism, Paganism, etc.</td>
<td>Gospel (Bible)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolution</td>
<td>Creationism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity, all-roundedness, holistic approach (earthly versus heavenly)</td>
<td>Unity, all-roundedness, holistic approach, earthly and heavenly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal/libertarian</td>
<td>Non-bias, equal opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristocracy (caste system)</td>
<td>Aristocracy (caste system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universalism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parochialism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal/libertarian</td>
<td>Liberal/libertarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Roman dualism (earthly versus heavenly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-bias, equal opportunity</td>
<td>Non-bias, equal opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristocracy (caste system)</td>
<td>Aristocracy (caste system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utopianism</td>
<td>Utopianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion/“Religio”</td>
<td>Religion/ “Religio”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universalism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parochialism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parochialism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land redistribution</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feudalism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolutionary, anti-oppressive</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonialism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consciousness-raising, education</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proselytization</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and research, tradition</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established tradition and legalism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established tradition and legalism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“value-free,” anarchic</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism/mission</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“value-free,” anarchic</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

315
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Human right, liberty</strong></th>
<th>Expansionism and forceful assimilation</th>
<th><strong>Human right, liberty</strong></th>
<th>Expansionism and forceful assimilation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public sector</strong></td>
<td>Privatization</td>
<td><strong>Public sector</strong></td>
<td>Privatization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic, humanism</strong></td>
<td>Militarism/Crusade</td>
<td><strong>Humanism, Human divinity</strong></td>
<td>Militarism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic equality (communism)</strong></td>
<td>Material &amp; Financial supremacy (capitalism)</td>
<td><strong>Economic equality (communism)</strong></td>
<td>Material &amp; Financial supremacy (capitalism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equality of races</strong></td>
<td>Chauvinism (“superior race”), patricianism, “golden” races</td>
<td><strong>Equality of races</strong></td>
<td>Chauvinism (“superior race”), patricianism, “golden” races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service/Profession</strong></td>
<td>Charity/Donation</td>
<td><strong>Service and Charity</strong></td>
<td>Charity/Donation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equality, feminism</strong></td>
<td>Patriarchy</td>
<td><strong>Equality, both patriarchy and feminism</strong></td>
<td>Patriarchy, masculine cult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The italicized fonts in each column indicate traditions that originally belonged to Christianity. The straight fonts indicate traditions of Greco-Roman paganism and militarism.*
8.2.7. Commonwealth, culture, and prosperity

The two important goals the seventh theme of Utopian/Ethiopian social studies education should address are: 1) giving children a basic understanding of the real nature and cause of poverty and inequality, and 2) providing children with perspectives on communal economy and culture on their historical and ideological relevance to bring about utopia. Preventing children from harboring a sense of guilt and self-hatred for being poor is an urgent priority in Ethiopian elementary schools where several children come from poor households. The flip side of this first goal is to prevent the judgmental attitude children may develop towards other poor people, which may be the result of their own self-hatred they project onto others if they are poor themselves. Social studies contents for meeting this goal should be free from intense poverty-eradication rhetoric of the present kind which only makes children hyper-conscious about their individual and/or collective poverty. Rather, showing them the fact that poverty is caused by a defective system which prevents the communication and interaction of people with different resources (material, intellectual, cultural, etc.) should be the first step. This removes the sense of shame and guilt children may have about their (or their country’s) poverty, and makes their understanding of the word less abstract.

The second goal is to be met by exposing children to the concept of communal economy. The fact that children who showed a utopian outlook in this study are those that are less conditioned by the anti-utopian media and school messages shows that the utopianism of belief in the possibility of equality (socio-economic, academic, and political) is the natural disposition of human thinking. Communal economy is the core message in classical utopian novels, and is central to any discussion that can be made about systems of culture that existed throughout history. It has shaped the modern world, primarily, through the Apostolic Agape that had been
practiced in Ethiopia longer than in other countries where Christianity spread (Cross & Elizabeth, 2005). It is also found in any tribal, ethnic, national, and religious groups mostly in the form of egalitarian tradition for the realization of which members must assume different roles and function as a whole. Communal economy is not only a “traditional” part of human history, but also the “modern” one. Communes of different kinds (religious utopias, utopian socialism, communal utopias, communism, etc.) have, for example, greatly contributed for the establishment of towns, cities, and large scale farms and industries in the West and around the world. Thus, it is one of the key spectacles that can allow youth to begin to understand the ancient, the medieval, and the modern world most realistically and correctly, including how their own local villages and towns began and grew. Therefore, in social studies, they should be introduced with major models of communal utopias from history, cultures, and religion (mainly Christianity). Presenting cultures as utopian systems with various roles and tools that are organized around ideas of full individual development, collective prosperity, justice, and happiness is the fundamental topic that should come first for children before discussion on inter-group differences and the importance of law, ethics, and tolerance. It is obvious that children will have less interest in prejudice, stereotype, and aggression if they are led to understand that different cultures/religions are basically attempts to respond to the question of ideal social organization and happiness—a question they, too, are caught up with consciously or unconsciously.

In relation to the second goal, discussing the moral side of inequality with children becomes important without compromising the need to allow them to understand the consensual nature of communal economy. Children should be instructed to see communal economy as having the benefit of all in mind (“the common good”) and as attractive model, but not as an
ultimate goal that should be achieved by any means. The process of taking the burden of “conscience” off of poor children should be done, not by creating in them a sense of prejudice towards rich people, but by showing them there are many privileged people that do help and want to help narrow the gap of living standard between the rich and the poor. The simultaneous invitation of children of rich people to imagine ways of realizing a utopian commonwealth should also be a gentle process. It can be accomplished by showing children different ways rich people can help build sustainable economic systems through systematic interventions that go beyond individual charities. Meeting this goal need not delve into deeper economic discussion with children. Giving children an impression that such intervention is both highly encouraged and possible is all this theme needs to accomplish. This is especially effective when coupled with discussions of the fourth theme (“The Golden Mean”).

8.2.8. Tools, machines, and digital technology

The eighth theme is labeled “tools, machines, and digital technology” to make it embrace of non-ICT facilities and apparatus. The goals of this theme are: 1) to instill in children genuine appreciation of technology in all its forms, and 2) to tackle the Gnostic impulse that creates an unproductive dichotomy between modern technological innovations on the one hand and nature, traditional tools, human needs, and production on the other.

The first goal can be met by guiding children to do a survey of simple tools, automachines, and digital technologies around them (including those in their homes) with the goal of helping them notice resources around them and lay the ground for their subsequent training with the tools through extra-curricular activities in arts and crafts. Such surveys can be guided by easy questions to be answered with children, such as: “What are these tools?” “How do they work?” “What are they used for?” “What are they made from?” “Who makes them?”
“How/Where are they made?” “What else can we use them for?” “What resources are locally available to make them?” and so on.

The second goal of this theme is to show children the human ends technological innovations are supposed to serve. Clearly impressing in children the fact that technology is subordinate to human needs, and that inventions are problem-solving attempts is important at the elementary level. Discussing with children a few original contexts that led to the innovation of certain technological facilities could be an effective means of showing them how invention is driven by human needs. In middle grades, questions such as “What kind of technological innovation can we envision for the problems we see in our surroundings?” and “How can we use technology ethically?” can be explored with learners to foster the utopian thinking they are being helped to develop through the other themes. It is also imperative to give them historical perspective on technology by emphasizing the point that, throughout human history, ecological concerns and ethical questions have always accompanied the use of technology at the larger level regardless of the advancements scored in technology. Asserting to students that this will continue to be a relevant question in the future of humanity is necessary in order to remove the uprooting effect of sci-fi fantasies of future technological utopia/dystopia children are widely exposed to today.

8.2.9. Acquiring valuable knowledge

It is clear from this study that children’s ability to cite a wide range of current events or to assimilate pieces of information distant from their personal lives does not necessarily indicate their possession of a well-grounded perspective on any of the things they know. In fact, it seems irrelevance is the way the curriculum promotes children with anti-utopian disposition by allowing an understandable, but unproductive disconnect of the children with themselves. On
the other hand, the case of the children in the utopian group shows that academics (in its current form in Ethiopia), does not measure the child’s presence of mind in the “now,” the concrete, and the natural. Until fundamental reform can be made which emphasizes practical training with production skills, children need to learn, at least theoretically, what counts as “real” or “worthy” knowledge.

The goal of this theme should therefore be: 1) to give children a general sense of the nature and purpose of relevant/valuable knowledge, and 2) to introduce them with varieties of sources of knowledge available to them on different topic areas. While the first goal gives children an early awareness to what things in life human beings generally give most attention to, the second one affirms their natural curiosity and disposition to explore/research.

The first goal can be met by introducing children to basic philosophical understanding of knowledge as wisdom. Valuable/Relevant kind of knowledge can be introduced to them as a value-driven pursuit of understanding to distinguish between what is good and bad/evil for one’s own life and for others. A “very knowledgeable person” can be defined for them as one who uses varieties of information available to him/her to make his/her own and other peoples’ lives secure, fulfilled, easy, and enriched. Introducing them to quotes of wise people/philosophers and spiritual figures/authorities in this area becomes relevant. In relation to this, what various communities and cultures in Ethiopia commonly understand as good knowledge/wisdom can also be a useful place to start. For example, traditionally, old men and women in Ethiopia appreciated individuals who knew: many people at personal level, many kinds of plants including what each are good for, and many places in the neighborhood. Lessons for this theme can therefore encourage children to appreciate such practically relevant knowledge and skills both in academic and non-academic settings.
The second goal of this theme is introducing children to varieties of sources of valuable knowledge. At least four major resources can be presented to children as good sources of knowledge: people, books, nature, and self. Scientific research can be presented as a method in this context. With the teacher’s guidance, children can be given educational experiences to support the claim that these sources and methods should be used and appreciated. For example, they can be helped to value friends, family, old people in their communities, experts, and other people as resources by letting them share their memorable personal experiences with each other and record new things they learned, by giving them oral history projects with parents and elders on certain topics they want to know about, and by giving them interview projects with experts whose professions they think they may have interest in. Books can also be presented to children in interesting ways as diverse in topic, form, and level. Especially given the fact that many children may not have access to books other than texts, it will be imperative to give them awareness that there are lots of books written on every kind of topic imaginable. Especially in middle school grades, it is possible to integrate this topic with language subjects to teach children the varieties of genres books are written on, ranging from religion, history and science, to autobiography, novels, self-help books, recipes, how-to’s on arts and crafts, music notation books, artistic books, etc. It can also be possible to captivate their curiosity by giving them excerpts of well-known works from each of these genres, and discuss with them what the authors are trying to communicate through them and what impact their message had on others.

Nature is the third of the five major categories children can learn about as source of knowledge. The goal of this theme, which can be integrated with the fifth theme (“Living with Nature,” see Section 8.2.5.), is to give children an awareness that lots of insights relevant to day-to-day life can be gotten by observing nature. One example children can be helped to closely
understand is the work of meteorologists (traditional and modern), who, by observing everyday weather throughout the year and across years, came up with detailed understanding of seasons, times, cycles, anomalies, etc. and contributed to the knowledge that guided agriculture, water and air transport, etc. It can also be an enlightening experience to share with children the various instances in history and contemporary culture in which observing patterns of nature inspired people to come up with technological, architectural, musical, and spiritual discoveries and creativities.

The self as a source of knowledge can be affirmed to children by giving them experiences which allow them to get in touch with their own emotions, intuitions, and aspirations. Two major tasks can be accomplished through pertinent learning experiences such as keeping a journal and self-expression exercises through writing, drawing, singing, and other means. The first one can be used to open ways for children to deal with repressed emotions and struggles in their personal lives in a healthy way. This can be accomplished by guiding children to contemplate on what happened on a given day, write how they feel about it, reflect on it, and decide if they need to act on it (e.g., apologize, seek help, report) or take a lesson from it and move on. In relation to this, it can be possible for the teacher to find out personal areas of struggle and recommend to children literatures and books of therapeutic value, as well as excerpts from conventional religious resources, such as the Holy Bible. The second task is to discover their inclinations and aspirations and introduce them to resources that can be of interest to them. This can be accomplished by guiding children to express their wishful desires (fantasies, utopias, dreams) that can point to their professional inclinations or areas of curiosities. In relation to this, children can be introduced to some basic terminologies and phenomena in their emotional and psychological lives, such as commonsense, trial and error, intuition, and so
on, to teach them pertinent moral lessons (e.g., do to others what you want them to do for you, do not let others force you to do things you do not feel like doing, etc.).

Scientific research can be taught to children in the context of occupations and professions (see Section 8.2.6.). It is also possible to introduce it in this theme as a way of becoming more knowledgeable on different topic areas by making our search for knowledge more systematic when interacting with the above sources of knowledge, especially people and nature. The specific objective of such activity under this theme is to make visible to children the benefit of scientific study for the researcher due to the steps he/she went through while interacting with people and physical environment. To achieve this, it can be necessary to walk children through the major steps in a couple of influential research studies that were done by people who paved the way for the discovery of the source of a problem and its solution. Children can be shown that important knowledge that changes several peoples’ practices are often acquired through talking to people who are alienated, ill, or poor. They can also be shown that unexpected insights can be gained about various matters when trying to understand why certain things are not in their optimal condition in the social and natural world (e.g., why people keep disposing waste on the ground although there is a recycle bin). In short, experiences under this theme should make children conscious of all the major epistemological routes that are illustrated in Figure 1.1. (Gnosis, episteme, inter-subjectivity, and inter-objectivity) and set them on the path of a holistic epistemological practice that combines all these valid routes for the ultimate end of securing a good life for self and others.

8.2.10. Excellence, success, and victory

The tenth theme children need explicit instruction on is the meaning of success, excellence, and victory. Generally, it is triumphantism, and not utopianism, that can be sensed in
the anti-utopian children’s view of the desirability of any achievement. Their views of academic, professional, or political success includes acquisition of power, status, and money that allows one to patronizingly look down upon others who are less fortunate. Therefore, it is imperative that children be helped to appreciate the fundamental fact that it is making effective struggle to humanize dehumanized individuals that ultimately counts as the true professional, political, and social success. Meaning, they should be exposed to historical, cultural, religious, biographical, and informational contents that allow them to understand that inspiring fellow human beings to change their practice in certain respects and enabling them do what human beings are naturally inclined to do (be healthy, have hope, work, have enthusiasm, have a happy family, etc.) is the real success/victory a powerful individual, a professional, or a government can achieve. It is also from this perspective that children can be helped to understand the nature of resistance, opposition, and hostility and the need to become knowledgeable, patient, and persistent. They can be taught the biography of individuals that brought a universal/national change of practice in important areas (especially along anti-oppressive lines), all the adversities they had to face, and the final fruit of their struggle which comes slowly but surely. This should begin from presenting the most impactful and comprehensive struggle—the Mission of Jesus Christ and His followers—in this light, and moving on to evaluating other exemplary achievements of martyrs, nationalists, philosophers, professionals, and individuals in day-to-day lives.

8.2.11. Continuity and change (Utopianism and renaissance)

As summarized in Section 7.1.11., children in the anti-utopian group demonstrated a shallow understanding of the meaning of “change” and a tendency to understand continuity as a continued anticipation of all past generations (of Ethiopia) to a not-yet-realized technological era. This results from lack of perspective on a content of life which provides continuity by
defining the existential purpose of humans, and an authentic, comprehensive, and stable meaning of “change” in relation to continuity. Translating “continuity” as utopianism and “change” as renaissance to children is important to help them deepen their understanding of individual and collective life as Ethiopians.

Utopianism as an existential purpose is, from the Ethiopian perspective, equivalent to knowing and narrating the Supreme Being. From this perspective, all personal and collective activities in the day to day life, as well as across generations, are meant to understand and communicate the identity, beauty, deeds, intentions, commands, love, and truth of the Supreme Being—God. How this existential purpose manifests in family, community, society, country, and its different members, roles, chores, occupations, fields, and institutions constitute the “stream of consciousness” of the default life of the individual and the society. Historically, it has been the tradition in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Christian faith to communicate this message via numerous spiritual, social and material cultures, including naming (individuals, communities/groups, places, plant and animal species, days, months, years, eras), dressing codes and hair styles, arrangement and decoration of homes, architectural design of houses, public buildings, churches, and palaces, creative development of social services, organization of social and religious events, method of education, children’s plays, administrative models, and other aspects of human lives. Among these cultures, some are extinct; some exist, but are not developing; others are no more practiced; and some others are reviving. Numbers, letters, and plants and animal species in the environments have been taught to children from this perspective of what they tell about the Divine (His Trinity, His Incarnation, His creations, His Characteristics, etc.) and human beings affiliated with the Divine, most importantly, the Virgin Mary. It is important to present to children through various examples that fashioning nature and
culture in a manner that narrates the Supreme Being has been understood as the major content of life (existential purpose) by generations throughout Ethiopia’s long history. This insight enables preventing cultural stagnation, lack of creativity, loss of sense of purpose, and mental and spiritual fatigue that come due to impersonal (pagan) school contents.

Consistent to the central thesis of this paper, there should be a singular definition of “change” from Utopian/Ethiopian perspective that does not lend itself to every kind of ambiguity. As “utopia” is not any kind of intentional community or creative imagination of a subjective view, “change” should also have that connotation for an individual, an economy, a country, a government, and a society. That definition of “change” has more to do with the concept of “renaissance,” a change in belief from the impossibility or undesirability of utopia (good vision shared by all) to the possibility and desirability of it. Exposition of how this manifests itself in thinking, attitude, and action at both the individual and the societal level is the appropriate social studies theme that needs to be taught to children using literary works that employ contents from history, religion, culture, and other fields. Although Ethiopian history by itself has many examples for such kind of change, the European Renaissance should also be one of the contents for this theme, perhaps at later grades. The English Reformation is especially relevant because it was a reformation effort in all respects mostly in rejection of Greco-Roman pagan culture.

Social studies can therefore collaborate with other subjects, such as language arts and aesthetics to train children to read “serious” ideals (like utopian vision, politics, religion, philosophy, social critique, etc.) as embedded in artistic products. How the utopian concepts of equality, prosperity, greenness, motherhood, pro-social attitudes, unity, education, enlightenment, etc. are communicated through artistic works can be explored with children.
8.2.12. Money versus wealth

As can be learned from Sections 5.5 and 7.1.1, children’s early association of the willpower to live strictly with financial success marks the turn of a utopian mind/spirit into an anti-utopian one. Therefore, it is important to counter this line of thinking by clearly stating to children that money is not wealth, and cannot compare with true wealth such as health, nature, knowledge, skill, happiness, peace, friendship, and character. They should also be helped to distinguish it from production and to see its place as a means of exchange of wealth, and not wealth itself. In relation to this, they can learn money has both advantages and limitations, and that it is not a completely reliable possession and means of exchange. They can be guided to see the susceptibility of money to inflation, deflation, etc. in simple words without necessarily using these abstract economic terms. They should also be clearly taught that (unlike the textbooks’ explicit assertion) there are long periods in human history during which societies existed without money, the best examples being particular golden eras from Ethiopian history of Christianity that inspired utopian novels.

In conclusion, it is possible to see that there is a lot that needs to be done in terms of developing curricular contents and learning projects that can foster the spirit of utopianism in children. The implication of the twelve themes proposed above are not just for how elementary social studies education needs to change, but also for other school subjects, secondary social studies education, and parallel teacher training curricula for both levels. This requires a complete paradigm shift at the level of the Ministry of Education. However, grass-root level movements activated by research think-tanks of concerned professionals, parents, teachers, and religious leaders seem to be the most viable options in the current context.
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Appendices

Appendix A- Informed Consent Form-Parent Permission

Title of Study:
Perceptions of Utopia and Dystopia in the Ways Older Ethiopian Children Construct their National Identity and Implications for Social Studies Education

Introduction:
You are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this research study is Meskerem Debele of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Linda Plevyak. There may be other people in the research team helping at different times during the study.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to investigate how Ethiopian youth express their knowledge, feeling, and emotional attachment with their country. It also seeks to understand how they identify and categorize themselves with other Ethiopians. The specific objective of this study is to see how children perceive social fragmentation in their society, how elementary social studies teachers understand their role in orienting children relative to their collective identity, and how social studies curricula can be modified to communicate national utopian vision to children.

Who will be in this research study?
Approximately sixteen children will take part in this study. Your child may be in this study if he/she is at least eight years old and is third, fourth, fifth, or sixth grade. Your child may not be in this study if he/she is older than fourteen. Your child should also be able to read single words and short phrases and explain his/her answers orally either in Amharic or in English.

What if you are an employee where the research study is done?
Taking part in this research study is not part of your job. Refusing to be in the study will not affect your job. You will not be offered any special work-related benefits if your child takes part in this study.

What will your child be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?

Your child will be asked to:
• Describe himself/herself by identifying cards on which different terms that describe social identity are printed (sex, age, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status) and rank them in order of importance to him/her,
• Answer 15 questions about location and nationality of people in his/her school, village/town, neighborhood, country, and the flag,
• Indicate his/her beliefs and feelings about his/her national in-group by identifying cards on which description of different characters are printed,
• Answer questions about the names of his/her family members, friends, and teachers; and indicate who he/she thinks is “very Ethiopian” and why, and
• Indicate how strongly pictures and names of different people represent the Ethiopian national identity to him/her and comment why.

The entire session to do these activities will take about an hour to an hour and half including the break in between. All the verbal exchanges during the activities will be audio-recorded. If you do not want your child to be audio recorded, you should choose not to involve him/her in the study. Your child may be visited again if he/she doesn’t finish all the activities at the first meeting. All the activities will take place at a location and time of your choice.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?

Some questions may make your child uncomfortable if he/she doesn’t know the answer; and, he/she may feel bored due to the length of the session.

To reduce the possibility of discomfort, the child will be told that the questions are for no evaluative purpose and that it is okay if he/she does not know the answer to the questions. He/she will also be asked if he/she would like to continue doing the activities after the break or do them another day.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

Your child will probably not get any benefit from taking part in this study. But, being in this study may help the PI understand how the way children express their understanding of their national identity can be used to inform social studies education.

Will your child have to pay anything to be in this research study?

Your child will not have to pay anything to take part in this study.

What will your child get because of being in this research study?

Your child will get no monetary compensation from being in the study though hopefully he/she will enjoy themselves and learn something about the Ethiopian culture. Your child can also try a variety of fruits while having a break between the activities. Please let me know if your child has allergies to any fruit.

Does your child have choices about taking part in this research study?

Your child does not have to participate in this research study if he/she doesn’t want to. If you do
not want your child to participate, he/she may simply not participate.

**How will your child’s research information be kept confidential?**

Information about your child will be kept confidential. Any audio and written information about your child (including this form) will not be shared with anyone and your child’s name will not be included in any typed script. In addition, all recorded voices from the audio-recorder will be transferred to a password-protected laptop computer immediately after the interview and the audio file will be erased from the recorder after this research study is done. Written data and forms will be kept locked in a file cabinet in a secure office on campus until the study is finished and they will be shredded afterwards. The data from this research study may be published; but your child will not be identified by name.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

**What are your and your child’s legal rights in this research study?**

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you or your child may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

**What if you or your child has questions about this research study?**

If you or your child has any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Meskerem Debele at 0922-79-59-58. Or, you may contact Dr. Linda Plevyak at (001) 513-566-5106.

The UC Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-S) reviews all non-medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your child's rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the Chairperson of the UC IRB-S at (513) 558-5784. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB-S, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

**Does your child HAVE to take part in this research study?**

No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you or your child would otherwise have. Also, your child may skip any question he/she doesn’t want to answer.

You may give your permission and then change your mind and take your child out of this study at any time. To take your child out of the study, you should tell Meskerem (0922-79-59-58).

Your child will be asked if he or she wants to take part in this research study. Even if you say yes, your child may still say no.
Agreement:

I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my permission for my child to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated Parent Permission form to keep.

You Child's Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Your Child's Date of Birth _______________ (Month / Day / Year)

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature ________________________________ Date _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Permission _____________________________ Date _____
Appendix B- Child Assent form (Ages 8-11)

Title of Study: Perceptions of Utopia and Dystopia in the Ways Older Ethiopian Children Construct their National Identity and Implications for Social Studies Education

You are being asked to do a learning project. You may ask questions about it. You do not have to say yes. If you do not want to be in this learning project, you can say no.

I will show you some words and some pictures from Ethiopia and ask you some questions. We will talk for about an hour and half; but, we will take a break in the middle and we will have a piece of fruit together. If you get tired, we can do the project in two different days. I will record everything we talk about with an audio-recorder. I will not give the recorder to anyone so no one will listen to what you said except me. If you don’t want to be audio-recorded, you will not be in this learning project.

If you have any questions you can ask Meskerem (0922-79-59-58)

You do not have to be in this learning project. You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. No one will be upset with you. You may skip questions that you do not want to answer.

To stop being in the learning project, you should tell Meskerem (0922-79-59-58).

If you want to be in this learning project, write your name and birthday. If you do not want to be in this learning project, leave the lines blank.

Your Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Your Birthday ________________ (Month / Day / Year)

Your Signature ___________________________________________ Date __________

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent _____________________________ Date __________
Appendix C- Youth Assent Form (Ages 12-17)

Title of Study: Perceptions of Utopia and Dystopia in the Ways Older Ethiopian Children Construct their National Identity and Implications for Social Studies Education

Introduction:
You are being asked to be in a research study. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?
The people in charge of this research study are Meskerem Debele and Dr. Linda Plevyak. There may be other people helping as well.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to investigate how Ethiopian youth express their knowledge, feeling, and emotional attachment with their country. It also seeks to understand how they identify and categorize themselves with other Ethiopians. The specific objective of this study is to use information gained from this study to improve social studies education.

Who will be in this research study?
Approximately sixteen students will take part in this study. You may be in this study if you are 12-14 years old, and are in third, fourth, fifth, or sixth grade. You should also be able to read single words and short phrases and explain your answers orally either in Amharic or in English.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?
You will be asked to:

- Describe yourself by identifying cards on which different terms that describe social identity are printed (sex, age, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status) and rank them in order of importance to you,
- Answer 15 questions about location and nationality of people in your school, village/town, neighborhood, country, and the flag,
- Indicate your beliefs and feelings about your national in-group by identifying cards on which description of different characters are printed,
- Answer questions about the names of your family members, friends, and teachers; and indicate who you think is “very Ethiopian” and why, and
- Indicate how strongly printed pictures and names of different people represent the Ethiopian national identity to you and comment why.

The entire session to do these activities will take about an hour to an hour and half including the break in between. All the verbal exchanges during the activities will be audio-recorded. If you do not want to be audio recorded, you should choose not to be in the study. You
may be visited again if you do not finish all the activities at the first meeting. All the activities will take place at a location and time of your parents’ choice.

**Are there any risks to being in this research study?**

Some questions may make you uncomfortable if you do not know the answer; and, you may feel bored due to the length of the session.

To reduce the possibility of discomfort, the questions will not be used for any evaluative purpose and it is okay if you do not know the answer to the questions. You can also choose to continue doing the activities after the break or do them another day.

**Are there any benefits from being in this research study?**

You will probably not get any benefit from taking part in this study. But, being in this study may help me understand how the way Ethiopian youth express their understanding of their national identity can be used to inform social studies education.

**What will you get because of being in this research study?**

You will get nothing because of being in the study. However, you will be offered a variety of fruits to choose from and have while having break between the activities. Please let me know if you have allergy to any fruit.

**Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?**

You do not have to participate in this research study if he/she doesn’t want to. If you do not want your child to participate, he/she may simply not participate.

**How will your research information be kept confidential?**

Information about you will be kept confidential. Any audio and written information about you (including this form) will not be shared with anyone and your name will not be included in any typed script. In addition, all recorded voices from the audio-recorder will be transferred to a password-protected laptop computer immediately after the interview and the audio file will be erased from the recorder after this research study is done. Written data and forms will be kept locked in a file cabinet in a secure office on campus until the study is finished and they will be shredded afterwards. The data from this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by name.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

**What are your legal rights in this research study?**

Nothing in this assent form takes away your rights.

**What if you have questions about this research study?**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Meskerem at 0922-79-59-58. Or, you may contact Dr. Linda Plevyak at (001) 513-566-5106.
Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?

No one has to be in this research study. You will not get in any trouble if you say no. You may also skip any questions that you don't want to answer.

You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Meskerem (0922-79-59-58).

Agreement: I have read this information. I want to be in this research study.

Your Name (please print) _____________________________

Your Date of Birth ________________ (Month / Day / Year)

Your Signature _____________________________ Date ____________

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent _____________________________ Date ____________
Appendix D- Teacher Consent Form

Title of Study: Perceptions of Utopia and Dystopia in the Ways Older Ethiopian Children Construct their National Identity and Implications for Social Studies Education

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?

The person in charge of this research study is Meskerem Debele of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Linda Plevyak. There may be other people on the research team helping at different times during the study.

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the ways that Ethiopian youth express their knowledge, feeling, and emotional attachment with their country. It also seeks to understand their self-identification and self-categorization with the national in-group (other Ethiopians). The specific objective of this study is to gain insight on how children perceive social fragmentation in their society, how elementary social studies teachers understand their role in orienting children in the collective identity, and how social studies curricula can be modified to communicate national utopian vision to children.

Who will be in this research study?

Approximately six teachers will take part in this study. You may be in this study if you are currently teaching social studies in 3rd, 4th, 5th, or 6th grade.

What if you are an employee where the research study is done?

Taking part in this research study is not part of your job. Refusing to be in the study will not affect your job. You will not be offered any special work-related benefits if you take part in this study.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?

You will be asked to respond twenty open-ended questions about hypothetical scenarios with children in an imagined national future. You will also be interviewed about your view of the role of schooling in general, parents, civic institutions, and other bodies in preparing Ethiopian
children for the future. The interview will take about an hour and half, and it will be conducted at a place of your choice. All the verbal exchanges during the activities will be audio-recorded. If you do not want to be audio recorded, you should choose not to participate in the study.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?

Some questions may make you uncomfortable; and, you may feel bored due to the length of the session.

To reduce the possibility of discomfort, the interview will be conducted in private and data from the interview will be kept confidential. We will also have a short break in the middle of the interview if you want.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

You will probably not get any benefit because of being in this study. But, being in this study may help me understand how teachers feel schooling in general and social studies education in particular is (is not) helping children learn more about their collective future and their role in it.

What will you get because of being in this research study?

You will be paid 50.00 birr upon completion of the project as a thank you for being in this study.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?

If you do not want to take part in this research study you may simply not participate.

How will your research information be kept confidential?

Information about you will be kept confidential. Any audio and written information about you (including this form) will not be shared with anyone and your name will not be included in any typed script. In addition, all recorded voices from the audio-recorder will be transferred to a password-protected laptop computer immediately after the interview and the audio file will be erased from the recorder after this research study is done. Written data and forms will be kept locked in a file cabinet in a secure office on campus until the study is finished and they will be shredded afterwards. The data from this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by name.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

What are your legal rights in this research study?

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does
not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

What if you have questions about this research study?

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Meskerem at 0922-79-59-58. Or, you may contact Dr. Linda Plevyak at (001) 513-566-5106.

The UC Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-S) reviews all non-medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your child's rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the Chairperson of the UC IRB-S at (513) 558-5784. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB-S, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?

No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have.

You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Meskerem (0922-79-59-58).

Agreement:

I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Participant Signature ___________________________________________     Date ______

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent ____________________________     Date ______

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Appendix E- Activities for Critical Exploration with Children

1. **Subjective Self-Identification Cards (3” x 5” cards)**

Select all those cards that describe you.

Rank those that you selected from the most important to the least important.

Why is being ... most important for you?

Which of the following are you? (3” x 5” cards)

Why are you ...?
2. Questions about geographical location and flag

   a. What is the name of your school?
   b. Are all the students and the teachers in the school Ethiopians?
   c. Is there anyone in the school who is not Ethiopian? If yes, what nationality is the person? How did you know?
   d. Is there anyone in your village/neighborhood who is not Ethiopian? If yes, what nationality is the person? How did you know?
   e. Where is Ethiopia on this map?

   f. Do you know any of the surrounding countries?
   g. When do you remember first hearing about Ethiopia?
   h. Suppose someone came to you and said that they had never seen an Ethiopian flag and asked you what it was like. What would you tell them?
   i. What else does the flag have?
   j. Have you ever seen another kind of Ethiopian flag?
   k. Who taught you first about the flag?
   l. If you had a piece of cloth and it was just as little as a stamp and was [describing the characteristics reported by the child], would that be an Ethiopian flag? If the cloth was as big as a football field, would that be an Ethiopian flag?
   m. If you took a tablecloth and painted it with (characteristics reported), would that be an Ethiopian flag? Would it be a flag if you left it on the table and used it as a tablecloth? Why?
   n. Why do you suppose the Ethiopian people wanted to have a flag?
   o. Where does the Ethiopian flag fly? Why?
   p. How do you think Ethiopia began?
3. Feelings and emotional attachment assessment cards (3” x 5” each)

Which of these words do you think describe “Ethiopians”? How does each describe “Ethiopians”?

How much do you like the Ethiopian people? (Like a lot, like a little bit, dislike a little bit, dislike a lot) (3” x 5” cards)

Why do you...?

4. Beliefs about national in-groups: oral questions about significant others

What is the name of your (father/mother/school principal/teachers/friends)?

Who do you think is “very Ethiopian” from all those? Why?

What was discussed about Ethiopia in your social studies class?
5. Beliefs about national in-group: Internet pictures cards (All pictures of Ethiopians, and printed with size- 3” x 5’’)

Circle “very Ethiopian,” “A little bit Ethiopian,” “Not Ethiopian,” or “I don’t know” after you look at the person on each picture.

Sample:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Ethiopian</th>
<th>A little bit Ethiopian</th>
<th>Not Ethiopian</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Other cards show pictures of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A doctor</th>
<th>An athlete</th>
<th>A taxi driver</th>
<th>A journalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A teacher</td>
<td>A singer</td>
<td>A pilot</td>
<td>A fashion model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A soldier</td>
<td>A typist</td>
<td>A cook</td>
<td>A beggar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A government official</td>
<td>A farmer</td>
<td>A fisherman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A priest</td>
<td>A village woman</td>
<td>A shepherd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little boy</td>
<td>A village man</td>
<td>A carpenter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little girl</td>
<td>A young lady</td>
<td>A waiter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sheik</td>
<td>A young man</td>
<td>A janitor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why is (are) ... “very Ethiopian”?

What should .... do/be to become “very Ethiopian”? 
Appendix F- Interview schedule for teachers

1. Tell me about yourself.
   When and where were you born?
   Where did you go to school?
   Why did you become a teacher?
   How long have you taught?
   What subject(s) and which grade(s) do you currently teach?

2. Let’s say your students asked you personally, “How did the country of Ethiopia begin?” how would you respond to them?

3. If your students asked you, “What is the country doing now and where is it heading?” how would you respond?

4. Who would you refer them to if they told you they want to know more about how Ethiopia began and where the country is heading?

5. Suppose a hundred years from now, only children and youth are living in this country and they do not know what happened or who they are. What pictures would they need to have of the present time to understand Ethiopia?

6. What events and peoples’ actions of today would you take a picture of, if the future children and youth ask you they want to learn from the mistakes of the past?

7. What kind of society do you think they would build if they were successful in re-constructing Ethiopia?

8. Suppose the concept of citizenship or country boundaries would not exist then, and the children and youth can live anywhere. Do you think they would still be Ethiopians?

9. Personally, what was your proudest moment of being Ethiopian?

10. What was your saddest moment of being Ethiopian?

11. Suppose the multitude of problems Ethiopians here and all over the world are facing were gone. What kind of life do you think people would live? Please describe in detail:
    a. What would people you randomly meet on the street be like?
    b. How do you think social life would change?
    c. How do you think politics would change?
    d. How do you think the environment would change?
e. What kinds of things do you think the people would plan to do nationally?
12. What things do you believe should change today for that type of world to exist?
13. How do you believe Ethiopian children, like those you teach, are getting prepared to build that kind of world?
   a. How do you see what students learn in social studies as helping or hindering them?
   b. How do you think families are helping or hindering them?
   c. How do you think media is contributing or not contributing?
   d. How do you think traditional institutions, such as religious institutions, associations (Edir, Equb, Mahiber, etc.), are contributing or not contributing?
   e. How do you think social and economic institutions such as merchants, trade unions, NGOs, international organizations, etc. are contributing or not contributing?
   f. How do you think people in liberal arts (music, dramas, and literature) are contributing or not contributing?
   g. How do you think socio-cultural events (family events, holidays, festivals, ceremonies) etc. are contributing or not contributing?
   h. How do you think those in the leadership area: academicians, educators, scientists, professors, researchers, politicians, etc. are contributing or not contributing?
14. How do you think you are helping children prepare to achieve that kind of world?
15. What is helping you in (hindering you from) helping children prepare to achieve that kind of world?
16. How would you change the social studies curriculum/textbook, if you had the time and resource, to make it contribute more in this regard?
17. What contents do children learn in your social studies class?
18. Which contents do you give the most emphasis on in class? Why?
19. Do you feel children are being adequately educated about Ethiopia and Ethiopiawinet in social studies class?
20. What grade/education level do you think they should reach in order to have most satisfactory understanding of their national identity and their collective future?
Appendix G - Analysis Guideline

SECTION I

1. Sources of information:
   i. family,
   ii. neighborhood
   iii. peers
   iv. teachers
   v. textbook,
   vi. school community
   vii. religious organization
   viii. media
   ix. child’s personal opinion,
   x. other sources

2. Characterization of Ethiopian Identity
   a. Dominant sort of actions
      i. Knowing/learning (child’s questioning, curiosity, wondering, etc.)
      ii. Getting/having
      iii. Being
      iv. Feeling
      v. Appearing
      vi. Saying
      vii. Doing/Action
      viii. Belief/Thought
   b. Describing (oneself or others) as Ethiopian
      i. External characteristics/traits/entities
      ii. Traits/dispositions/behavior
      iii. Shared beliefs/ideals

3. How national identity is concretized/personalized to child
   i. Child’s understanding of sense of entitlement
   ii. Child’s understanding of sense of agency
SECTION II

4. Coherence/inconsistency
   a. Was there coherence of definition of what being “Ethiopian” means to the children as they went through the different sections?
   b. Were the criteria they used to define themselves as “Ethiopian” different from that they used to describe others as “Ethiopian”?

5. Balance/polarization of self-concept and social out-look
   a. What is the most influential/dominant source of information for the child on society/national identity/the world?
   b. Is there any indication of the child’s awareness that shows his/her understanding of the socially available information as deliberately directed to him/her?
   c. Is there any inconsistency/conflict between the information among the different sources that is felt by the child consciously or unconsciously?
   d. Where does their social studies classroom experience play a role in their understanding of themselves in relation to their society and their national identity?

6. How does the child’s understanding of what being “Ethiopian” means correspond to what he/she got from the above sources/social cues? (consistency across 4 & 5)

7. Who does the child think is the “cause” or beginner of the Ethiopian identity?

8. Who does the child feel has a legitimate power/authority to determine what is “Ethiopian” and what is not?

9. What contexts make national identity salient to the child (bring to his/her conscious mind)?

10. Does the child see Ethiopian national identity as expanding or as shrinking?

11. Does the child view the Ethiopian identity as having some constancy (continuity, stability, essential content)?

12. What does the child think disrupts/threatens the continuity of Ethiopian identity?

13. What aspect does the child perceive as unwanted in relation to Ethiopian identity?
   a. What things do they believe are devalued by Ethiopians?
   b. Are these devalued things the same to what they say will make some people “a little bit Ethiopian” or “not Ethiopian”?
   c. What preventive or remedial measures do they think should be taken?

14. What general or particular ambiguities, incorrect information, omissions, gaps, disconnections, misunderstandings, etc are present in the children’s description of anything related to “Ethiopia,” “Ethiopians,” or being “Ethiopian”?