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Tekeste Negash. Rethinking Education in Ethiopia

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Negash, Tekeste. *Rethinking Education in Ethiopia*. Uppsala, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996.

Much has been written within the past decade or so which has addressed the fundamental issue of recalibrating, or rethinking African education writ large. Indeed, with the pending entrance into a new millennium many within educational circles — both inside and outside of Africa — use this momentous occasion to rethink the ideological foundations of educational policies. It is in this light of reconceptualization and renewal that Negash offers *Rethinking Education in Ethiopia*.

In his work, Negash calls for an educational system that emphasizes non-formal education at the literal expense of formal educational enterprises. Non-formal education is defined as “any educational activity organized outside the established formal system designed to serve identifiable groups and to serve identifiable educational objectives” (p. 29). This educational ideology is flexible, adaptive and relevant to the immediate needs of a particular learner or group of learners. The author believes that the underlying tenet of non-formal education is “to increase and deepen indigenous knowledge pertaining to technologies of food production, health, clothing and shelter” (p. 42). This utilitarian form of education is necessary due to the largely agrarian nature of Ethiopia and its dependent economy, coupled with the failure of formal education to meet the relevant needs of rural and poor Ethiopians.

To remedy the obsolescence of formal education, Negash walks an admittedly precarious line by proposing a dual-tracked educational system: one track which caters primarily to those with means and access (formal) and an alternative educational track geared to the Ethiopian rural and poor (non-formal). Relying on a loose interpretation of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Negash contends that those with means will always be able to secure a basic, formal education. To the privileged, ample means equates to educational access. Yet for the majority of Ethiopians, access to and utility of a formal educational system is either economically unfeasible or educationally impractical. It is Negash's contention that both equity and utility can only be achieved by promoting relevant, practical and useful educational services to *all* Ethiopians - rich and poor, urban and

rural. Thus, Negash's schema would respond to the individualistic and collective educational needs of *both* urban and rural Ethiopia. Separate, yes, but fiscally and philosophically equal.

It is in Chapter 2 (of 6) that Negash specifically addresses and wrestles with the construct of non-formal education. This is, by far, his most striking and poignant chapter. In it, the author presents a very compelling, historical overview of Ethiopian education while infusing economics, politics and geography into his argument. It is here that the entirety of the author's argument resides. It is a powerful handful of pages crafted with both reason and emotion which begs the reader to look at the issue with both head and heart.

Yet, in the following two chapters (3 and 4), any momentum the author may have garnered is quickly lost. These chapters address issues of bilateral donor relations and international aid concerns respectively. Though important in their own right, they read as peripherally pertinent to the issue of non-formal education. The author struggles to relate international aid to the relevance of non-formal education for the Ethiopian poor. Thus, these chapters seem a bit misplaced within the framework of the author's argument.

Tekeste Negash's *Rethinking Education in Ethiopia* is a convincing argument for the promotion of a concerted non-formal educational system in Ethiopia. In this regard, the work is quite useful in illustrating both need and utility for such an educational ideal. Yet the book suffers from a glaring lack of consistency. Peripheral issues are given prominence here which serves to alienate the reader by detracting from the thesis of his argument. This work reads more as a fragmented patchwork of musings rather than a well conceived synthesis of ideology and action. For those interested in rethinking Ethiopian education, unfortunately, Negash doesn't sufficiently challenge us nor is this work as thought provoking as one might wish.

Tim Lintner