

RODE MOLLA

Virginia Theological Seminary

DECOLONIZING IDENTITY POLITICS THROUGH SUBJECTIVE IN-BETWEENNESS

Churches in Africa do not question the postcolonial and neocolonial imagination of tribes in Africa; instead, using the example of Rwanda, they “reproduce the same tribalization and racialization of the Rwandan society as the colonial and neocolonial politicians.”¹ According to Katongole, the ethnic and tribal conflict in the postcolonial and neocolonial era is caused by the political elites’ need for power and representation. So, Katongole calls for an African political theology and imagination that transcends ethnic and tribal politics in the African context. He argues that the African elites who used Western ideology are alienated from the African historical and contextual belief system. The Western religion and education systems labeled Africans’ myths and religious practices as barbaric. However, for Katongole, myths that come from African religions, Christianity, or the Muslim tradition are a way to change the recruiting political system that made Africans lose their agency. The political theology that comes from religious beliefs and myths of Africans is the power that will enable Africans to imagine their politics and to regain their agency to work for the common nation-building of Africans and for a new social and political imagination.²

At the same time, in the Ethiopian context, the politics of representation created a political governmentality that denies Ethiopians’ subjectivity and agency and eliminates the in-between spaces that bring the diverse identities of Ethiopians together. Maimire Mennasemay, in her article “Ethiopian Political Theory, Democracy and Surplus History,” articulates that the Ethiopian political theorists impose the Western political system without contextualizing it to the Ethiopian context. Mennasemay seeks an Ethiopian model of political theory that comes out of the Ethiopian lived experience and knowledge, what she calls “surplus history.” Mennasemay’s surplus history uses lived and contextual experiences of Ethiopians to interpret the contemporary political struggles of Ethiopians. Mennasemay argues that Ethiopians have not appropriated the knowledge that they borrowed from the West to the Ethiopian social and political

¹ Katongole, Emmanuel. *The sacrifice of Africa: A political theology for Africa*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011. 78.

² Ibid, 83-84.

situation; instead, they directly apply Western theories, not allowing Ethiopians to claim their agency and subjectivity.³

Mennasemay also articulates that the Western theorists who wrote about and studied Ethiopia were not using Ethiopians' lived experience. Mennasemay writes, "This knowledge is produced within the historical horizon of the West and contributes more to the West's self-understanding of Ethiopian society."⁴ Western comparative studies created knowledge about Ethiopia that illuminates the West, but is opaque for Ethiopians. So, Ethiopians experience a Western ideological oppression and domination due to their lack of self-understanding about their political theories. Mennasemay writes:

To overcome this radical lack of political self-understanding, Ethiopians need a political theory rooted in a critical appropriation of their history, capable of formulating political questions and answers in way that post-Ethiopians as active historical agents rather than as more recipients of their intellectual and material productions of others.⁵

Mennasemay recommends Ethiopian surplus history as the source of Ethiopians' political theorization and practical actions. She claims that a political theory that comes from the surplus history of Ethiopia enables Ethiopians to co-create shared spaces in which Ethiopians will be able to live in ethnic, social, and cultural differences. She uses some of the Ethiopian regions as an example to show the hybrid religious, political, and cultural shared spaces among Ethiopians. Wollo, Harer, and Shewa are primary hybrid states in the Ethiopian context. Mennasemay's surplus history approach emphasizes that Ethiopia and Ethiopians are not only ethnic beings or homogenized national identities: "Ethiopia is neither an aggregation of ethnicities nor a homogeneous nation. It is a composite nation of overlapping identities, a commonly shared space wherein the basis of politics has moved from shared ethnicity to shared pan-ethnicity."⁶ However, Ethiopian politics that does not come from the surplus history of Ethiopia creates two main problems in Ethiopian history: nation-centrism (centralization model) and ethnocentrism (fragmentation model). Ethnocentrism focuses on deconstruction in order to resist the political identity that was created by imposed ideologies. On the other hand, nation-

³ Mennasemay, Maimire, *Ethiopian Political Theory, Democracy and Surplus History* International Journal of Ethiopian Studies 2, no. 1/2 Summer/Fall 2005-2006, 1-2.

⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁶ Ibid, 9.

centered politics focuses on universalizing the history of Ethiopia by eliminating Ethiopians' diverse religious and cultural markers. So, Mennasemay claims that surplus history is not focused on ethnic diversity and hegemonic nationality, but it leads us to "the dynamic nature of diversity in Ethiopia."⁷ The fragmentation model keeps the historical wounds open and uses the past as the event that happened now and at the present to create hatred and division among Ethiopians. Instead of using history as an open wound to create division and hatred, Mennasemay recommends a new historical approach that comes from the lived experiences of Ethiopians. As a model for Ethiopian historical interpretation and analysis, Mennasemay uses *merdo*, a practice Ethiopians use to mourn the memory of the past for the death of the loved ones in connection with the present. Mennasemay writes, "By historical *merdo*, I mean a critical historical awareness of the suffering of the past that permits a similar 'work of mourning' so as to settle Ethiopia's account with her past in order to meet successfully the present challenges of poverty and oppression."⁸ The *merdo* approach will enable Ethiopians to avoid the hatred that makes pain a tool of interpreting Ethiopian history. *Merdo* exposes the past pain so that Ethiopians can connect with the past to mourn and heal from the present political and social poverty and oppression.

In addition to *merdo*, another practice to link past and present and claim subjective identity is *yeterikawa adera*. *Yeterkawi adera* means historical accountability that Ethiopians received from their ancestors. This responsibility bridges the gap between the past and the present by reviving the *adera*, or "accountability." Both *yeterikawi adera* and *merdo* are a dialectical recognition for the past and the present. They connect Ethiopians.

"To recognize the dark side of Ethiopian history is to make a transition from a spontaneous to a critical historical consciousness that throws light on the past as a period of shared hopes and struggles of a better life, hopes, and struggles that Ethiopians inherit as uncompleted tasks."⁹

Mennasemay critiques the Ethiopian political system that imposed Western political ideologies, and she believes that, for Ethiopians, the only way out of poverty and oppression is through universal democratic principles and practices. I argue that Mennasemay does not articulate how those universal principles and practices were created, and how those practices

⁷ Ibid, 11.

⁸ Ibid, 16.

⁹ Ibid, 20.

made Ethiopians and other postcolonial nations to be the object of their universal principles. While she proposes Ethiopian traditions and community practices such as *merdo* and *yeterikawi adera*, she does not address how those ideas could be accepted by diverse ethnic groups in Ethiopia. There are so many political and social practices in Ethiopia; indeed, some of the traditions she mentions are dominant practices in the Amhara region. At the same time, even though she suggests lived Ethiopian practices and experiences to be the source of Ethiopian political practices, her theory does not put Ethiopians' lived experience in conversation with other African and postcolonial nations. What does it mean for Ethiopians to exist in the world of the postcolonial? How can Ethiopians use their lived experiences in negotiation with their hybrid experiences and realities due to imported and imposed colonial ideologies? In the following, we will discuss the postcolonial theories and their application in the Ethiopian context in order empower Ethiopians to use their lived experiences to be subjective agents.

Postcolonial Discourse and Its Application in the Ethiopian Context

Though Ethiopia has never been colonized geographically, I argue that Ethiopians' bodies are colonized by internal feudal systemic oppression and imported Marxist and neoliberal governmentalities. Ethiopian modern emperors used religion and politics to create a centralized government, and that did not allow Ethiopians to claim their agency and subjectivity. At the same time, Ethiopian elites resisted these imposed ideologies through the Marxist Western political praxis that made Ethiopian bodies docile. Most theorists have divided the Ethiopian colonial and postcolonial conversation into two parts: some theorists focus on the "inside" colonial discourse, analyzing how the Amhara feudal emperors created a country that did not include all. Others emphasize the "outside," exposing and analyzing how the Western discourses have created a racial and colonial category for Ethiopians. I will integrate both "inside" and "outside" colonial systems and practices in the Ethiopian context to show how colonial ideologies work to create a political and religious system that does not allow Ethiopians to grow and flourish in claiming their agency and subjectivity.

Postcolonial theorists claim that the Western religious, political, and racial categories are integrated to create the colonized "other" that needs to be modernized through Western progressive religious and political ideologies and practices. In *Empire of Religion*, David Chidester argues that, in the era of the empire, the production and circulation of the knowledge of religion were authenticated through the "triple mediation" between the imperial theorists, colonial middlemen, and

indigenous people.¹⁰ Chidester claims that the triple mediation was the source of power and authority for the empire of religion to justify colonization, slavery, labor, and resource exploitation in South Africa and other African countries. The imperial colonial theorists and the missionaries fed each other for the development and the growth of their empire.¹¹ The missionaries collected data, research, and raw materials, and the theorists—in their ethnological, anthropological, philological, and psychological studies—associated, classified, and presented Africans and their religions as savage, irrational, childish, and animist. These imperial comparative religious classifications of Africans were the source of justification for colonization, African labor, and slavery. Africans suffered and still suffer due to the aftermath of colonization.¹²

Achille Mbembe, in his book *On the Postcolony*, addresses both the impact of the universal globalizing ideology of modernity and neoliberal governmentality in the lives of Africans. Mbembe is a postcolonial theorist who critically addresses the colonial discourse and its interpretive and practical impact on Africans' lives. According to Mbembe, modernity and globalizing discourse are negative in that they make Africans the objects.¹³ Western philosophical and political tradition always creates a category of otherness through speaking "I" (meaning the West) and "the Other" (Africa). Those traditions deny the humanity and the consciousness of Africans. According to Mbembe, otherizing discourse denies African consciousness.¹⁴

Mbembe's postcolonial theory challenges the false dichotomy that much African literature failed to address because some of the African discourse addresses identity, and other discourse focuses on material and economic justification. However, Mbembe creates an African discourse that integrates both identity and the material and economic colonization of Africans. Mbembe's postcolonial discourse resists Afro-centric concepts that want to create an African utopia through the new black and African history. The reason that Mbembe resists that type of discourse is that "both the asserted denial and the reaffirmation of that humanity now look like the two sterile sides of the same coin."¹⁵ He claims that neither the colonial ideology of colonization nor the utopic "recovered" identity can enable Africans to claim their humanity and subjectivity; instead, they

¹⁰ Chidester, David. *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, xii.

¹¹ Ibid, 161.

¹² Ibid., 54, 57, 179, 106.

¹³ Achille, Mbembe. *On the Postcolony* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001, 8-9.

¹⁴ Ibid, 9.

¹⁵ Ibid, 12.

are both methods of globalization and colonization. So, Mbembe claims that, in the ostcolony, Africans need a complex understanding of themselves with the past, the present, and the future.

Mbembe's postcolony involves a time, temporality, and subjectivity that integrates many events. Postcolony is complex, not a linear time or age. Mbembe writes:

By focusing the discussion on what I have called the "postcolony," the aim was not to denounce power as such, but rather to rehabilitate the two notions of age and *durée*. By age is meant not a simple category of time but a number of relationships and configuration of events-- often visible and perceptible, sometimes diffuse, "hydra-headed," but to which contemporaries could testify since very aware of them.¹⁶

Mbembe's main inquiry attempts to address the lives of Africans after the end of geographical colonization. He claims that, after the end of colonization, Africans did not create a new world and techniques, but instead, they applied the same techniques and systems of colonization.

In the neoliberal age, Africans experience global warming, world bank debt, internal ethnic and social conflict, and HIV/AIDS. So, for Mbembe, the postcolony is the time of unhappiness and possibilities. Mbembe writes, "We must say that the postcolony is a period of embedding, a space of proliferation that is not solely disorder, chance, and madness, but emerges from a sort of violent gust, with its languages, its beauty and ugliness, its ways of summing up the world."¹⁷ The self-reliance, agency, and subjectivity of Africans in the postcolony is both unhappiness and possibilities. So, the question is: how can Africans claim their subjectivity within this complex? According to Mbembe, the postcolonial people can claim their identity and subjectivity not through subordination, but through a relationship with the command (the colonizer).¹⁸ Mbembe writes, "Further, subjects in the postcolony also have to have marked ability to manage not just a single identity, but several – flexible enough to negotiate as and when necessary."¹⁹

Both modern colonization and the neoliberal governmentality of identity politics make Africans "Other." These two ways of colonization give Africans fixed identities. Therefore, in the postcolony, Africans need to claim their identity and economic and social self-reliance through negotiation with

¹⁶ Ibid, 14.

¹⁷ Ibid, 242.

¹⁸ Ibid, 102.

¹⁹ Ibid, 104.

the past and the present. Mbembe's postcolonial discourse articulates the historical, ideological, theological, and religious power of colonization and their governmentality. The governmentality that Africans face in the postcolony is not only political, but it is also theological and religious. Therefore, there is not an easy way out from modernity. However, Africans should be aware of the complex nature of colonial governmentality. Being aware of the complexity of the neocolonial power will enable Africans to activate their consciousness to relate to the past, the present, and the future.²⁰ Mbembe's postcolonial method addresses the African discourse from a holistic perspective that integrates identity, economic, and political development.

Similarly, his approach to the postcolony is interdisciplinary; he employs theological, religious, historical, and philosophical concepts. Mbembe argues that, in the age of the postcolony, Africans can be agents who are self-reliant through their conscious relationship to the economic and political global governmentalities of the postcolony. Africans' humanity enables them to be flexible and negotiate their identity beyond the stereotypical and fixed claim of neocolonial ideologies.

Colonized Identities

The Ethiopian political theologians Mohammed Girma and Teklu analyze religion and politics that normalize fragmentation, centralization, and marginalization. Girma claims that EPRDF's political system, which focuses on identity politics, disrupts the Ethiopian modern emperors' theo-political approach as well as the *Derge*'s homogenizing communist approach.²¹ In the Ethiopian Wax and Gold Tradition, God was seen as the center, the one who anointed the kings, and the people are ruled by and submissive to the kings. The *Derge* brought the Western progressive history that eliminated religion and God from the public spaces of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. That was not attractive to Ethiopians. The EPRDF brought a new paradigm that deconstructed both the metanarrative of the *Derge* and the Wax and Gold paradigm. The metanarrative of these both paradigms focused on the national identity of Ethiopians or *Ethiopia wint*. The Wax and Gold paradigm employed religion and covenant thinking as a universal belief for Ethiopia and creating a centralized Ethiopian government. On the other hand, the *Derge* employed scientific materialism from the Marxist ideologies as a mere principle to create a progressive and united Ethiopia. But

²⁰ Ibid, 103-102.

²¹ Girma, Mohammed. *Understanding Religion and Social Change in Ethiopia: Toward a Hermeneutic of Covenant* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 13-16.

according to Girma, because of their focus on universal claims of nationalism, religion and development, neither paradigm was able to work at a grassroots level.²²

The EPRDF's political practices emphasize deconstructing metanarratives by giving more space for the indigenous voices. EPRDF focuses on deconstructing the national consciousness or *Ethiopia winet*. Girma argues that the EPRDF and the *Derge*'s differences were not ideological because they both applied Marxist ideologies. However, their difference came from their definition of Ethiopia as a nation. The *Derge*'s program wanted to create a universal and communal consciousness for all Ethiopians. On the other hand, the EPRDF focuses on creating ethnic consciousness and religious practices.²³

In the Wax and Gold paradigm the idea of what it means to be human beings was interpreted through a theo-political understanding of covenant. In the era of the *Derge*, being human was defined through the ability of economic productivity and progress. In the era of compartmentalization, self-determination (even to secession) defines what it meant to be Ethiopian. "The self" becomes the center of being human. The EPRDF does not have a theo-political imagination or practices. In the Constitution, religion and state are divided, giving freedom for people to follow their choice, which is different from the Gold and Wax tradition. So, the challenge of the compartmentalization paradigm is that it exposes Ethiopians to find themselves only as ethnic beings or *homo ethnicus* because the national and common consciousness do not have place in this paradigm. *Homo ethnicus* exposed Ethiopia for fragmentation and conflict because people think of being human only through divisive ethnic identity, and other markers that bring them together were denied by the EPRDF that focuses on creating ethnic animals. So, Girma writes, "The paradigm of compartmentalization has similarities to the postmodern understanding. The emphasis is not on a universal human nature in a Christian sense of *Imago Dei*, nor a Marxist sense of *homo economicus*, but on a particular ethnic identity."²⁴

Similarly, Teklu argues that the fictive Amhara identity created by the modern Ethiopian emperors, faced resistance from the Ethiopian community and mainly university students who believed themselves to be the voice of the Ethiopian masses. The Ethiopian university students rallied by Haile Selassie's modern imagination became the power of resistance against the emperor. Their imagination focused on a radical change in claiming the self-determination quest of Ethiopians. Teklu argues that this romantic quest of students featured a lack of ideological clarity about the Ethiopian historical background and Western Marxist

²²Ibid, 97.

²³Ibid, 97.

²⁴Ibid, 103.

ideologies. This led to the quest for self-determination to end civil war. At the same time, the self-determination quest that the university students raised did not question the fictive Amhara identity that the modern emperors created. Instead, it created a politics of identification and ethnicity that created conflictual and even violent ethnic politics until these days in the Ethiopian context.²⁵

At the time, there were disagreements about how to categorize the self-determination quest of Ethiopians as a national inquiry. One group said that the self-determination quest of Ethiopians defined Ethiopia as a state of colony, with the people living under the colony of Ethiopia needing to be liberated to succession. The other group defined the self-determination quest of Ethiopians through the Marxist ideology of class. There were two big questions raised by these groups: a national question and a colonial question. These conversations did not discuss Ethiopia and Ethiopians' cultural and social markers that bring Ethiopians together, but they focused on categorizing Ethiopia as a colonial state. These self-determination imaginations of radical change created a practice of war for many years, and thousands of Ethiopians were killed. Most of the liberation fronts, such as TPLF, EPLF, and OLF, employed international lexicons and maps that were produced in Europe as a source to justify their practice of war. The ethno-national movements that were born from the claim of Ethiopia as a colony created the current Ethiopian political system that focuses on fragmentation and identity politics.²⁶

I argue that both internal and imported colonial practices and ideologies created homogenized and fragmented identities. They did not allow Ethiopians to claim their agency and subjectivity. I also claim that the hegemonizing and fragmenting identities of feudal emperors, the *Derge*, and EPRDF need to be decolonized through subjective in-betweenness to enable Ethiopians to live in hybridity and negotiation to claim their agency and subjectivity in the in-between spaces. In what follows, I will describe how different postcolonial theorists propose to analyze how colonized nations could claim their subjectivities and agencies through negotiation and lived religious praxes.

²⁵ Teklu, Theodros Assefa. *Politics of Metanoia : Towards a Post-Nationalistic Political Theology in Ethiopia*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2014. 104-105.

²⁶ Ibid., 109.

Resisting Fragmented and Hegemonic Identities through Subjective In-Betweenness and Religions

Postcolonial theorists define identities to resist homogenizing and fragmenting imposed identities. I aim to show how Ethiopians could resist imported and imposed identities through subjective in-betweenness. Subjective in-betweenness resists both hegemonic localization and nationalization by activating in-between consciousness to make Ethiopian bodies the source of their liberation. The oppressed bodies will be the source of their liberation through activated in-between consciousness that will enable them to choose their flourishing, freedom, and development. In what follows, I will discuss three promising conceptual approaches for creating in-between consciousness: cosmopolitanism, borderland religion, and in-between spaces. These theories help me articulate the importance of hybrid identities and religious practices in the Ethiopian context. Their approaches address the importance of border lives and hybrid identities to disrupt imposed and colonial ideologies and identities. However, at the same time, since these theorists do their work in a different context, their approaches are limited to be fully applied to comprehend the complex identity struggle that Ethiopians face.

Cosmopolitanism

The British-Ghanaian cultural theorist and philosopher Kwame Appiah brings a concept of cosmopolitanism to imagine a consciousness of communities and individuals that enables them to live as citizens of the globe. I believe that cosmopolitanism as a cultural or political praxis or individual or communal consciousness may empower Ethiopians to resist identity politics. The cosmopolitan consciousness may enable Ethiopians to live in a shared space with all people regardless of similarities and differences in identity. Cosmopolitanism may challenge the binary policies and limited cosmic consciousness by inviting them to join a cosmic citizenship. The regional state and border conflicts and ethnic violence come from the limited consciousness that could not enable Ethiopians to see beyond. However, cosmopolitanism shows the broader cosmos that makes us privileged and responsible to care for the *polis* with just political and communal praxes.

For Appiah, cosmopolitanism means being a citizen of the universe. His concept of cosmopolitanism comes from the Stoic philosophers of the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE. The Stoics emphasize being a citizen of the *polis* in which each community belongs to the one cosmos. Appiah claims that, in the early

church, the Stoic view attracted even Christian apostles and preachers. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all in Christ Jesus."²⁷

Cosmopolitans have two characteristics. First, they are responsible citizens who love and care for the Other. Second, they are pluralistic; they believe in the existence of different values and belief systems.²⁸ The challenge of cosmopolitans is positivism. According to Appiah, "There is a disconnect, too, between the positivist creed and the relativist counsel that we ought not to intercede in other societies on behalf of our own values."²⁹ Positivism wants to prove that our values are correct, but proving our beliefs and desires is impossible in the cosmopolitan world. Cosmopolitans do not want to prove their truth or impose their beliefs on others because that is colonialist and imperialist. The world of the cosmopolitans is known by celebrating differences in beliefs, values, and desires.³⁰ Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge and understand that our values and beliefs are contextual. Appiah writes, "What it is reasonable for you to think, faced with a particular experience, depends on what ideas you already have."³¹ For example, people in traditional Ghana believe in the continued active presence of ancestors, witchcraft, and traditional medication. For the Western person or even for Protestant Ghanaians, the traditional belief system about witchcraft does not make sense. Cosmopolitans, however, do not need to prove their values; instead, they care for the person who has a different value and belief system from them.

Cosmopolitanism resists the imposition of modernity that has a totalitarian, imperial, and colonial ideology. At the same time, cosmopolitans do not believe in narrow nationalism but in the existence of diverse values beyond positivist and totalitarian views. The cosmopolitan's primary principle is to care for the Other. So, cosmopolitanism resists the othering methods and the categories and principles of modernity and colonization.

Cosmopolitans claim that we all are citizens of the universe with diverse values and faith traditions. In the Ethiopian context, the challenge is that the totalitarian nationalities focus only on *Ethiopiawint*, or national identity, that does not provide spaces for diversity. On the other hand, ethnic nationalists focus on narrow and local identities that do not allow people to live together.

Appiah started from the Stoics' claim of universal citizenship without addressing how the philosophical, political,

²⁷ Appiah, Anthony. *Cosmopolitanism : Ethics in a World of Strangers*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006. xiv.

²⁸ Ibid, xv.

²⁹ Ibid, 24.

³⁰ Ibid, 31.

³¹ Ibid, 39.

and theological ideas of stoicism, modernity, Christianity, and globalization impact the colonized. The question is: do the postcolonial nations and Westerners have the same rights in the cosmos? Could Ethiopians create a cosmopolitan Ethiopia that resists imposed Western ideologies and narrow local nationalism?

Simultaneously, the cosmopolitan moral principles are not facts or beliefs or universal principles but contextual values in which we make sense, not by understanding, but by connecting. The cosmopolitan's moral principle respects each person's individuality (each of us is like no other); we relate to the other not by proofing our moral laws but by acknowledging that the singularity of the stranger has affective power to us and we have the same effective power to the stranger.

Appiah's cosmopolitanism enables me to resist neo-fundamentalism and local ethnocentric nationalism, so it could be a means to reframe hegemonic and fragmented identities. At the same time, Appiah's cosmopolitanism may enable Ethiopians to resist universal political or moral values and principles because cosmopolitan's values are contextual and relational. Moreover, cosmopolitanism focuses on defining and practicing culture and religion as contextual, so the contextual and lived religious practices and definitions are the primary sources for creating contextual values. We make sense, not by understanding but by connecting.

Even though many values and practices make cosmopolitanism applicable to empowering Ethiopians with subjective in-betweenness, cosmopolitanism lacks a thick description of gender, economic, class, social differences, impositions, and colonization. For example, in the Ethiopian context, cosmopolitanism may help create a shared space, but does it help address ethnic, political, cultural, and economic differences?

Border Lives and In-between Lives and Spaces

The cosmopolitanism of Appiah has a relationship with Homi Bhabha's theory of border lives since it resists hegemonic cultural and identity formation. Nevertheless, Bhabha's approach to identity does not start from the Western philosophical concepts, but it starts from the lived experience of himself and the colonized. At the same time, as a postcolonial approach to identity Bhabha's approach has a multilayered definition and critique about culture, religion, and the identity formation of the postcolonial nation. The result of cosmopolitanism focuses on making individuals citizens of the universe. However, Bhabha focuses on empowering the postcolonial nation with subjectivity from national identities in the borderline.

In *The Location of the Culture*, Bhabha addresses identity as the central theme to articulate the struggle of the postcolonial people. For Bhabha, identity is an art, and people shape it through their embodied social, political, and historical relationships. Therefore, the postcolonial identities for Bhabha are border lives, or in-between lives, in which both individuals and communities meet to negotiate and collaborate to shape their identities. Bhabha writes, "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."³²

As a postcolonial theorist, Bhabha's embodied experience has an impact on his theory. He was raised as Zoroastrian-Persian minority in a Hindu and Muslim context. He was born in a British colony to a middle-class family when the postcolonial era started, and the third world nations became free: "I ask myself what it would be like to live without the unresolved tensions between cultures and countries that have become the narrative of my life, and the defining characteristic of my work."³³ His inquiry on how to live and construct an identity in the postcolonial world came from his own personal struggle. Bhabha writes:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with "newness" that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause of aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent "in-between" space, that innovates and interrupts the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.³⁴

In the postcolonial world, the stories and embodied experiences of individuals and communities disrupt singular and universal definitions and categories. Bhabha writes, "The borderline identities are created in the in-between spaces that make those identities to have a hybrid culture and character beyond the fixed and singular identity of modernity."³⁵ So, Bhabha articulates both modernity and its universal claim of globalization and neoliberal governmentality that creates economic, social, and political alienation for the postcolonial nations. According to Bhabha, both the globalizing idea of

³² Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture* New York: Routledge, 2004, 2.

³³ Ibid, x.

³⁴ Ibid, 2.

³⁵ Ibid, 5.

modernity and neocolonial governmentality should be questioned and interrogated through hybrid and borderline experiences and identities. Both globalization and neoliberal governmentalities alienate the colonized from subjective agency through homogenization and fragmentation. So, the only place and identity that the colonized could connect to its agency is in the borderline. The borderline is an in-between space in which the colonized interrogates imposed identities and also creates in-between subjectivity to be present for their diverse identities beyond fragmentation. The borderline or in-between spaces create a possibility and a new way of being and defining one's identity and society itself beyond the imposed subjectivities and normative definitions of identity, cultural, society, gender, and sexuality.³⁶

According to Bhabha, the challenge of the beyond identities is the feeling of unhomeliness.³⁷ Appiah interprets the unhomeliness feeling of the cosmopolitans as strangeness because cosmopolitans do not belong only in one space, they belong to the universe.³⁸ For Bhabha, the unhomeliness or uncanny life of the postcolonial identities comes from living in-between the past and the present. The feeling of unhomeliness comes from their embodied being that dwells in the in-between spaces. However, unhomeliness is not being homeless, but it is living in the moment that integrates public and private, past and present. Therefore, the uncanny feeling comes from living in the time of the beyond, the postcolonial, and the present that meet in the borderline to create new and hybrid identities. In the Western discourses, there are two spaces, the West and the rest. However, the postcolonial theory creates a third space for third world countries to speak beyond the West's terminology and grammar.³⁹ The beyond identities are not nostalgic about the past; however, their past and present meet in the in-between spaces to create new identities that enable them to claim their agency and subjectivity.

Bhabha employs Fanon's psychoanalytical approach to identity. Fanon is a postcolonial theorist who use psychological analysis to interpret the impact of colonization and its aftermath for the colonized nations. Fanon, in his known book, *Black Skin White Masks*, articulates the desire of the white man for colonization and the black man for living in the mask of whiteness. In the colonial world, the colonized people's consciousness is denied. However, Fanon claims that individuals, whether they are colonized or colonizer, cannot make their subjectivity by themselves, because their surrounding social and

³⁶ Ibid, 1-13.

³⁷ Ibid, 13-27.

³⁸ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*.

³⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 7-14.

political situation impacts their identity formation. The colonizer's desire formulates its identity about the other (the colonized). The identity formation of the colonized is also established in his desire due to the tension that is created by the colonizer. That means the consciousness of the colonized is already controlled by the colonizer; he or she cannot create his or her identity without a relationship to the colonizer. For Fanon, the colonized body does not have a soul. That is why he calls them black skin, white masks.⁴⁰

Bhabha's emphasis on identity enables us to learn not only about the past but the ongoing neoliberal, sexual, economic, and racial discourses that are integrated within postcolonial identifications.⁴¹ Additionally, Bhabha's postcolonial discourse addresses how and why identity is created. Bhabha integrates the political discourse with personal consciousness or identity formation of individuals and communities. Bhabha defines identity as a shared constructed subjectivity through individuals and communities' consciousness and their social and political context. Due to its emphasis on identity and agency, Bhabha's postcolonial theory articulates the shared in-between spaces, or third spaces, that are created through the postcolonial nations' lived experiences.

I claim that Ethiopians have been and continue to be colonized through discourse, image, and ideological impositions and interpretations. Both globalized and neoliberal hegemonic identities eliminated the in-between spaces that Ethiopians could use to negotiate and claim their subjectivity, allowing them to live peaceably together at some points in their history. So, Bhabha's discourse enables us to question hegemonizing and fragmenting identities that alienate Ethiopians from the in-between spaces. His theory establishes that the lived experiences of the colonized nations could be the source to resist these imposed identities and increase their capacity to negotiate their hybrid identities.

Bhabha's approach to the postcolonial era does not give us a practical recommendation on how we can create the in-between spaces. Does the in-between space really exist, or is it an imaginary space? In what social institutions or spaces of interaction could such an in-between social identity be formed and practiced? If identity is socially and politically constructed, religion and spirituality have power in the process of identity formation. In the Ethiopian context, both religion and politics are integrated to create national and fragmented identities. Therefore, I claim that postcolonial theorists need to address the

⁴⁰ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 1967, Loc 70-150.

⁴¹ Ibid, 96.

role of religion in the identity formation of the colonized nations and in the construction of in-between spaces.

In a parallel example from a distinct religious and political situation, Gloria Anzaldúa, in her book, *Borderlands: La Frontera*, analyzes Mexican Americans who live in the borderlands of the United States and Mexico with multilingual and multicultural political, social, and religious identities. The Mexican Americans who are living in the borderlands do not match in one context; they do not speak fluent English or Spanish, but Spanglish. In the borderlands, they create their own language in which they practice their religion and politics in their relationship to their diverse sociocultural contexts. The borderlands religion exists in double consciousness, which enables the people to live with hybrid identities and spaces. The borderlands people's religion and consciousness resist linear either/or identities, and they shape and create a third space in which the borderland people can be allies and meet with their own home and identities. The third space, in-between space, resists material oppression, patriarchal and sexist systems, and other forms of oppression.⁴²

Borderland religion resists a mono-cultural way of being and knowing, and "it creates the outsider within identity, enabling the *chicanas* to live with hybrid and double consciousness layered with complexity."⁴³ Anzaldúa employs poetry to define the experience of the *chicanas* and her own experience in the borderlands. Borderland religion does not define oppression as static but fluid because the borderland people have multiple cultural experiences and exposures to oppression. The religion of the borderland is disruptive and transgressive.⁴⁴ Religion is a hybrid identity and allows for hybrid identity-formation through decolonizing either/or categories that create linear binaries about the identities of colonized nations. Anzaldúa imagines borderland lives through the literary or poetic sphere, which emerges from her lived experience in families and homes and cultural settings in the community. However, her literary imagination does not include practical action steps on how to resist imposed ideologies that disrupt the hybrid existence of the *chicanas*. Alternatively, she does not show the public performance and practices of the *chicanas* that enable them to resist imposed ideologies, but Luis D. León does.

Luis D. León, in *La Llorona's Children*, argues that the Mexican American religious traditions are not fixed, but their beliefs and practices are continuously redefined and reshaped through the practices of the devotees. Religion is not limited to

⁴² Gloria A. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007, 7.

⁴³ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 24.

doctrinal teachings of the religious traditions, but religion is “poetics.” Religious poetics means a praxis that the devotees perform in their worship and embodied experiences and practices. León writes, “Poetic, creative religious practices do not occur only at the boundaries of institutions, but within, parallel to, and sometimes in direct conflict with established traditions.”⁴⁵ So, according to León, borderlands religion(s) integrate culture and politics and diverse religious traditions: Native traditions, Catholic beliefs, Evangelical practices, and Pentecostal passion. That means Mexican-American borderland religion is lived.⁴⁶

Robert Orsi, in *Between Heaven and Earth*, defines religion as a relationship between holy figures and humans of all ages. Orsi writes, “These relationships have all the complexities – all the hopes, evasions, love, fear, denial, projections, misunderstandings, and so on – of relationships between humans.”⁴⁷ Orsi disagrees with categories of religion as good or bad; instead, he shows the “ambiguity” of religion in which we could experience it through our relationships and practices. The function of religion as a relationship did not deny social systems and structures that create colonial and oppressive systems. Orsi writes, “‘Relationship’ is a friendly word, but this is not how I use it throughout this book, nor am I focused on relationships as intimate realities apart from the arrangements of the social world in which they exist.”⁴⁸ The sacred figures and images that are used to colonize people become the source of help and liberation through intimate relationships. So, religion becomes a relational web in which the devotees relate to the saints and one another through their bodies and embodied experiences.

Both religious scholars of the Americas, Robert Orsi, and Luis León have similarities. Both León and Orsi claim that religion is lived, something the devotees do, practice, and perform through their bodies. Embodied religious poetics may disrupt established religious practices or beliefs and concepts. For León, religion is the relationship between *la llorona* (the dead) and the living in two cultures, languages, and religion(s). Orsi describes religion as a relationship between human beings of different ages and holy figures, saints, and angels between heaven and earth. The relational function of religion resists official doctrine or imposed traditions. For both León and Orsi, religion is about the presence in the embodied and practical lives of the devotees. The difference between Orsi’s and León’s analyses of religion is their approach to power dynamics. Even

⁴⁵ Luis León, *La Llorona’s Children: Religion, Life and Death in the US Borderlands* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004, 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 18-21.

⁴⁷ Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 2.

though Orsi's relational web is aware of the power dynamics and systemic oppression of the web, he focuses on the personal relationship of individuals with holy figures as a resistance to the official practices from the Vatican. Orsi hopes that his method could be applied in other contexts. Orsi writes, "My examples are drawn from American Catholic history in the twentieth century, but I believe what I have to say about religion as the relationship between heaven and earth is relevant for other cultures as well."

On the other hand, León's borderland religion(s) resists oppressive systems and structures that create systemic and racial oppression and impositions in the lives of Native Americans and Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans have diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. For example, their relationship to the saints is not limited to the Catholic saints because they have a relationship with the native tradition. At the same time, Mexican Americans have Pentecostal, Protestant, Native, and Catholic traditions and multiple languages and cultures. The religious poetics that come from the devotees' lived experiences shape and reshape the religious meanings in diverse contexts. For example, the image of Guadalupe in Los Angeles was not the original image but a replica image. So, the relationship of the devotees with Guadalupe on the streets of Los Angeles disrupts the static images and symbols of religion. Moreover, the devotees' multicultural and multilingual lived experiences and performance and relationship with the replica image of the Guadalupe disrupts official forms of religious traditions. At the same time, the devotees' relationship with the Guadalupe gives them public agency power.

The in-between spaces to which I want to invite Ethiopians emphasize the embodied and embedded experiences of Ethiopians, their "poetics" or complex local practice that resists Western colonization's ideological or hegemonic purity. León's and Orsi's views of religion enable me to show the importance of the integrated nature of religion that includes normative and promotive acts. In the in-between spaces, religion functions as lived, material, and political beyond the exclusivist view of feudalism, a secularist view of socialism, and the current competitive identity politics of the Ethiopian government. I argue that life-giving religious praxis makes Ethiopian bodies agents to decolonize imposed political and religious practices. Life-giving religious practices are political, and they integrate the local, communal, societal, material, and spiritual. They reframe hegemonic and fragmented identities through religious and theological practices, higher education, and political approaches that nurture in-between spaces and the consciousness of Ethiopians.

Conclusion

In Ethiopian history, religion and politics created hegemonic and fragmented identities. So, this article attempts to answer how religion and politics function to create colonized bodies and identities. I also converse with postcolonial theorists and African political theologians to show how identity politics works as a neocolonial power in postcolonial Africa including Ethiopia. In the modern history of Ethiopia, a fictive Amhara identity became a religious conduct and moral ideology that colonized and made Ethiopian bodies docile. Ethiopian political ideologies *Derge* and EPRDF both used identity politics to resist a fictive Amhara identity. However, both approaches are the two sides of the same coin: they continue exacerbating the image, body, and identity colonization of Ethiopians. I interpret the political, religious, and cultural imposition and colonization as neoliberal rational governmentality, cultural imposition, global colonization and identity politics. I also create a conversation to show how in-between spaces and in-between subjectivity might be restored through cosmopolitan, borderlands, and religious practices. As a practical theologian, my descriptive and interpretive tasks thickly describe the individual, communal, societal, and political challenges to show the multilayered political and economic impositions in the lives of Ethiopians as a means to liberate Ethiopians for reframing hegemonic identities and co-create in-between spaces and in-between identities through subjective in-betweenness.