Introduction

Genealogies of the Modern and the Anti-Modern

> The secret of Elvis' art lay not in an act of substantive creation but in a recasting of one traditional style in terms of another. To make such a transposition, you have to be stylistically sophisticated. You have to see all the familiar styles lying before you like so many spots of colour on a painter's palette. Such sophistication would have taken many years to develop in the premedia world of popular music. Once, however, every American child started growing up with unlimited access to every kind of music provided by radio, any boy with a good ear and the necessary talent could get hip fast.
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> Albert Goldman, *Elvis*,
> quoted in Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix*

There is perhaps no concept more central to modernism than revolution. Indeed, for us moderns, it is difficult to see the idea of revolution as culturally constructed. We live within a set of concepts and a series of material practices that make revolution—the promise or threat of it—appear almost a natural feature of politics. But such was not always the case. It was only after 1789, in fact, that the contemporary concept of revolution crystallized in Europe, the notion of revolution, that is, as an attempt rationally to design a *new* political order. "The modern concept of revolution, inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before is about to unfold, was unknown prior to . . . the eighteenth century."[1]

In the sixteenth century, the meaning of revolution applied to political affairs was no different from that relating to the movement of planets; indeed, the second was often seen as influencing the first. Embedded in a circular view of time, revolution meant, not the creation of a new order, but a return to a previous state of affairs. Thus, when the French king, Henry IV, converted to Catholicism and thereby won over his op-

ponents, the political change was widely described as a revolution—a reversion to the status quo ante, a coming back that occurred, it seemed, "as irresistibly as a planet rotates."[2]

Gradually in the modern era—incompletely in the English revolution, further in the American, but most dramatically in the French—the contemporary concept of revolution emerged (and, along with it, the idea of the *ancien régime*). According to Keith Baker, the new notion of revolution reflected a new reckoning of historical time; time was linearized as the past was separated from the present, and expectations reoriented toward the future.[3]

From the standpoint of this linear, secular time, revolution became *the* way to jump "ahead." And as the shape of time changed, so did the identity of social units embedded in history. By the early eighteenth century, nations—horizontal communities held together by putative cultural commonalities—began to emerge from the debris of old (vertical and mostly multicultural) empires.[4] Nations thus conceived were seen as in "front" or "behind" one another, all on a straight line defined by relative wealth, power, and knowledge.[5] With the partition of Africa toward the end of the nineteenth century, virtually the whole world was caught up in this—what I shall call—metanarrative of modernity. By the twentieth century, local elites everywhere had to react to it, in one way or another, in order to define who they were.

In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx pointed out that revolutionaries have continually accomplished their ends in historical blackface:

> Just when [people] appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes so as to stage the new world-historical scene in this venerable disguise and borrowed language. Luther put on the mask of the apostle Paul; the Revolution of 1789–1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman republic and the Roman empire.[6]

While Marx looked forward to a socialist revolution that would dispense with this (in his terms) timidity, in fact such a day has not arrived. Modern historical actors across the globe have always been involved in crosstalk[7] —French revolutionaries with Roman republicans, Russian with French revolutionaries, Chinese with Russian revolutionaries. Indeed, actors' consciousness—condescending or painful—of their place in an unequal world is one of the distinctive features of modernity compared to previous eras. For China, Joseph Levenson pointed out:

> [Imperial] Peking neglected to send George III an English version of the Confucian classics. But [Communist] Peking thoughtfully broadcasts far and wide, in English, Spanish, Arabic and everything else, the thought of Mao Tse-tung. . . . Mao, quite unequivocally, represents himself not as a Chinese sage prescribing for the world, but as a world sage in a line of sages (Marx, Lenin, Stalin . . .), bringing China—agreeably, to the nationalist spirit—to the forefront of history, everybody's history. To the culturalistic Confucian spirit (Ch'ien-lung's), Chinese history was the only history that mattered. To the nationalistic Communist (Mao), the satisfaction comes in having Chinese history matter to the world.[8]

This consciousness of producing *a* history in relation to other histories was initiated in part, as Benedict Anderson has argued, by the reception of the French revolution into a world conversation of print:

> Once it [the French revolution] had occurred, it entered the accumulating memory of print. The overwhelming and bewildering concatenation of events experienced by its makers and its victims became a "thing"—and with its own Name: The French Revolution. Like a vast shapeless rock worn to a rounded boulder by countless drops of water, the experience was shaped by millions of printed words into a "concept" on the printed page, and in due course, into a model.[9]

Lately, the means by which political actors connect themselves with others—including the ghosts of past revolutionaries—has expanded beyond print. Whatever the political effects of this change in the overdeveloped world core (and they seem to have been conservatizing), the consequences for places like Ethiopia have been destabilizing. The relative detachment of political actors from local contexts, the quickness with which social groups can be mobilized, and the resulting power of very small groups to effect fundamental historical changes: all these aspects of modern times have introduced new processes, new rhythms, and new juxtapositions.

In the new and interactive universe that has developed—one characterized, in Arjun Appadurai's apt phrase, by a "new condition of neighborliness"[10]—cultural and social differences themselves have become objects for self-conscious manipulation and commentary. Viewing cultural styles and political ideologies not so much arranged in a natural hierarchy but as a simple horizontal array of possibilities—so many spots of color on a painter's palette—people have begun to pick and choose, juxtapose and combine, to create complex socio-semantic fields in which boundaries are blurred and shifting, sometimes intentionally so. In short, everyone, not just southern white boys like Elvis, has begun

to "get hip fast." As I shall show in succeeding chapters, Mengistu Haile Mariam became revolutionary Ethiopia's preeminent Elvis—an Elvis with a gun.

ANTI-MODERNISM

The modern notion of revolution is one necessary backdrop for the Ethiopian events I shall describe. But another, equally necessary, is anti-modern Christianity—specifically, a "faith" mission, the Sudan Interior Mission, that came to inspire the development of probably the largest Protestant denomination in Ethiopia. Since Max Weber, cultural theorists have been hypnotized by the Enlightenment's self-representation. Secularization and the disenchantment of the world have proceeded for some groups, during some periods of time, in some places. But the larger outline of what might be called cultural "modernization" is arguably better captured as a set of continuing, if intermittent, cultural wars than a supersession of one cultural regime by another. According to Susan Harding, anti-modernist Christianity represents "a willfully 'mad rhetoric,' and speaking it (being spoken by it) is a political act, a constant dissent, disruption, and critique of modern thought."[11]

Daniel 7:23. Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.

24. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise; and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.

25. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

26. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end.

27. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

28. Hitherto is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me; but I kept the matter in my heart.

How did anti-modernist Christianity—which was eventually to furnish Maale's principal revolutionaries—originate? As it turns out, the recep-

tion of the French revolution not only let loose a worldwide discourse on modernism—how to reshape and improve human society by the application of human reason—it also provided the occasion for the birth of a significant anti-modernism. In an important sense, the second shadowed the first. It was "part" of the first. In Britain, this reaction crystallized in a tradition with a much longer history—namely, millenarian strands of Christianity:

> The violent uprooting of European political and social institutions forced many to the conclusion that the end of the world was near. . . . [Believers] became convinced (in a rare display of unanimity) that they were witnessing the fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13. The Revolution brought the cheering sight of the destruction of papal power in France, the confiscation of church property, and eventually the establishment of a religion of reason; the final act occurred in 1798 when French troops under Berthier marched on Rome, established a republic, and sent the Pope into banishment. Commentators were quick to point out that this "deadly wound"' received by the papacy had been explicitly described and dated in Revelation 13.[12]

Across the Atlantic, the effects of revolution on religious outlook—in this case, the American revolution—were generally the opposite. The view of a progressive and improving social project was strengthened. The future of both the state and of Christianity, these two increasingly identified in what became known as the American civil religion, looked bright. In the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, the dominant view among North American Christians (called postmillennialism) was that the church would progressively expand to include the whole world, that human society would be steadily improved until—history acting on its own—a millennium of peace and harmony would be reached. *Then* Christ would return.

> The millennium seemed easily within reach through the dual agencies of revival and social reform. Evangelists prodded sinners to be born again, and evangelical do-gooders founded societies for the abolition of slavery, for temperance, for alleviation of the miseries of the poor, and the like, in order to make the country as Christian as possible. So successful were their efforts that by the mid-1830s evangelical leaders were declaring that "the millennium is at the door" and "if the church will do her duty, the millennium may come in this country in three years."[13]

Meanwhile in a Britain considerably more affected by the dislocations of industrialization—with the example of the darker French revolution much nearer at hand—a different Christian worldview was be-

ginning to form, one dramatically more pessimistic and therefore urgent, one destined to influence North Americans by the end of the century. So-called premillennialists in Britain gave up faith in secular progress and even in the church's ability to stem the tide of evil. As the situation irreversibly deteriorated, Christ would return—any day now, according to the signs of the times—*before* the millennium, not after. Christ's sudden intervention in history would mean salvation for the blessed few but damnation for the sinful many.

This new conviction not only transformed the shape of history as it was experienced by believers—times were getting worse and worse, not better and better—but far from the modernist disenchantment of the world, it emphasized the role of the supernatural in the mundane aspects of everyday life. Premillennial anti-modernism made "room for angels, demons, lakes of fire which burned forever, and a personal Son of Man who was coming soon on the clouds of heaven to put an end to evil and establish the perfect order."[14] Human history was produced, then, not as a series of secular cause-and-effect relationships, but as the outcome—set out by prophecies in the Bible decipherable by any believer—of an all-encompassing struggle between the forces of good and evil: "The great conflict preceding the millennium would be a terrible confrontation between the hosts of Christ and the minions of Satan. This coming conflict, moreover, would mark the culmination of a fierce struggle that dominated all of history. Accordingly, Christians must view themselves as caught between two powers, Christ and Satan."[15]

Perforce, the leaders of premillennialism did not believe that they could do anything to change the overall shape of history. Yet, their view of a foreordained future hardly led to a quietism, indeed, if anything to the reverse—an increased anxiety and urgency, an escalating commitment to oppose apostasy wherever it occurred, and most particularly for the events I shall describe, an enlarged emphasis on evangelicalism and foreign missions.[16] "Although apparently paradoxical it is possible to show that the [pre]millenarians were at the same time convinced of the irreversible downgrade tendencies at work in human society and the utter futility of attempts to ameliorate the effects of sin, while working for the success of their own movement when that success was defined as awakening Christians to their peril."[17] In 1827 in Britain, one Henry Drummond went so far as to state that the "first fifteen chapters of Revelation had already been fulfilled and that . . . European history was hovering somewhere between the twelfth and seventeenth verses of Revelation 16."[18] And across the Atlantic in upper New York State, William

Miller announced the actual date of the second coming: 22 October 1844.[19] When that day came and went as any other, premillennialism was discredited for a generation within North American Christianity.

By the 1870s, however, a new kind of premillennialism called "dispensationalism" was beginning to attract many adherents in the United States and Canada. Unlike the discredited Millerites, dispensationalists "denied that prophecies were intended for the church age as a whole, [hence] they were for the most part relieved of the dangerous and often embarrassing task of matching biblical predictions with current events."[20] By the end of the nineteenth century, premillennialism in its dispensational form maintained:

> The belief that acceptance of the divine authority of Scripture required that the believer expect a literal rather than spiritual fulfillment of the prophecies; the belief that the gospel was not intended nor was it going to accomplish the salvation of the world, but that, instead, the world was growing increasingly corrupt and rushing toward imminent judgement; the belief that Christ would literally return to this earth and the Jews be restored to Palestine before the commencement of the millennial age; and the belief that this whole panorama of coming glory and judgement was explicitly foretold in the prophecies where one could, if taught by the Spirit, discover the truth and be ready for the coming of the bridegroom.[21]

If premillennialists were still a minority in North America in the 1870s, they were by no means seen as cultural deviants. They fitted easily within a wider group of evangelical, revivalistic Christians who, in fact, enjoyed cultural preeminence. "In 1870 almost all American Protestants thought of America as a Christian nation. Although many Roman Catholics, sectarians, skeptics, and non-Christians had other views of the matter, Protestant evangelicals considered their faith to be the normative American creed."[22]

A mere fifty years later, matters would be altogether different: "Christendom," remarked H. L. Mencken in 1924, "may be defined briefly as that part of the world in which, if any man stands up in public and solemnly swears that he is a Christian, all his auditors will laugh."[23] Impressed by the discoveries of natural science, its social life transformed by urbanization and the industrial revolution, its world power confirmed by the results of World War I, parts of public culture in the United States had been rapidly and dramatically secularized.

It was in reaction to these changes—and to what became known as modernism[24] within Protestant denominations themselves—that a militantly anti-modernist Christianity formed, one that built itself on the re-

vivalism and premillennialism of the nineteenth century and that by the 1920s termed itself "fundamentalist."[25] It was out of these streams of North American cultural development that an interdenominational "faith" mission was established in Canada at the end of the last century. The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) would bring Christ's "good news" to southern Ethiopia by the 1930s.

ON NARRATIVE

A tour of Israel with Jerry Falwell's Old-Time Gospel Hour Tours seems not unlike a tour of Greece with a secular tourist agency. Familiar landscapes and events and actors from history "come alive," and what was a two-dimensional story about the past, about the "the origin of civilization," pops vividly into three dimensions. One feels and sees oneself walking within history; history, somatized, becomes somehow "more real." But the two tours are also absolutely unlike each other, for Jerry Falwell's Holy Land tourists also find themselves in the future, walking its landscape, knowing its actors, foreseeing its events. They walk within the scenes of Christ's First Coming two thousand years ago and of his Second Coming, which they know will be soon. They know they will be with him, among his troops, as he returns to rule on earth for the Kingdom Age. So real, immediate, specific, and unarguable is the future they foresee that the Old-Time Gospel Hour tour guide and teacher Harold Willmington buried a Protestant Bible wrapped in plastic in one of the caves in the Valley of Petra for the Jews who will hide there after the "destruction of the Jews" begins during the Tribulation. . . . In the Bible he inscribed this note: "Attention to all of Hebrew background: This Bible has been placed here on October 14, 1974, by the students and Dean of the Thomas Road Bible Institute in Lynchburg, VA., U.S.A. We respectfully urge its finder to prayerfully and publicly read the following Bible chapters. They are: Daniel 7 and 11; Matthew 24; II Thessalonians 2; Revelation 12 and 13."[26]

Narrative figures in at least two ways in the following analysis. The first and most obvious is in the overall arrangement of the book itself—what I have called *my* narrative, a story that is meant to highlight a certain recurrent dialectic among modernist, anti-modernist, and traditionalist stances, a kind of ratcheting interaction that led, in the end, to the modernization of the Ethiopian state.

To paraphrase Louis Mink, narrative converts congeries of events into storied concatenations—a task whose object is not so much to isolate social laws as to develop an understanding of contingent connections. Stories have a unique ability to convey this kind of knowledge:

> Narrative is a primary cognitive instrument—an instrument rivaled, in fact, only by theory and by metaphor as irreducible ways of making the flux of experience comprehensible. . . . Theory makes possible the explanation of an occurrence only by describing it in such a way that the description is logically related to a systematic set of generalizations or laws. One understands the operations of a spring-powered watch, for example, only insofar as one understands the principles of mechanics, and this requires describing the mechanism of the watch in terms, and *only* in terms, appropriate to those principles. . . . But a particular watch also has a historical career: it is produced, shipped, stored, displayed, purchased, used; it may be given and received, lost and found, pawned and redeemed, admired and cursed, responsible for a timely arrival or a missed appointment. At each moment of its career, that is, it is or may be part of a connected series of events which intersects its own history, and at each such moment it may be subject to a particular description, which is appropriate only because of that intersection. . . . This is what narrative form uniquely represents, and why we require it as an irreducible form of understanding.[27]

Renato Rosaldo was the first anthropologist to emphasize the central role of narrative in ethnographic history. Americanizing W. B. Gallie's discussion of cricket, Rosaldo used baseball as an example to convey the analytical work that narrative accomplishes:

> Perhaps the most economical way to convey a sense of how narratives can embody the historical understanding is through the example of a game of chance and skill. Consider for a moment the game of baseball, an often used example of what is involved in telling about and following a complex event through time. As the action starts, the perceptive fan begins to think strategically by considering who is at bat (an often-dangerous pull hitter now in a slump), who is pitching (a fresh reliefer whose knuckleball is as often erratic as it is effective), who is on base (an able base runner, on first), how the fielders are playing (at double-play depth), and what the score is (one out, bottom of the ninth, the tying run on first). Clearly there is a vast difference between merely knowing the rules of the game and having the knowledge required to follow the game in the manner of an experienced fan of fine judgment. . . . A storyteller wishing to achieve a proper sense of proportion and possibility would require a peculiar double vision, focused at once on each unfolding moment and on the totality of the long-term course of action. On the one hand, a sense of proportion would come from seeing the particular game in the context of the entire season. How important, after all was said and done, did this single game happen to be? Was it a turning point? On the other hand, a sense of open-ended possibilities would emerge from the forward-looking vantage point of each significant instant of play. Like the avid fan, the storyteller might plot strategies several moves ahead as she or he thinks about who is in the bullpen, possible pinch hitters, how to play the infield if the batter is walked, and so on.[28]

But issues of narrative occur at another level as well. As philosopher David Carr has argued, social actors themselves experience time in terms of culturally specific stories. Modernists, anti-modernists, or traditionalists in Maale only became so *through narrative*, through contrasting temporalizations of history. If this be so, then the anthropologist's or historian's analysis does not arbitrarily impose narrative conventions on a nonnarrative reality (as some postmodernists such as Hayden White have suggested).[29] Rather, social actors themselves experience time through particular patterns of beginnings, middles, and ends. Carr, expanding upon Husserl, offers the example of "following a melody":

> What is remarkable about hearing the melody is the manner in which consciousness spans past and future to encompass the melody as a whole and construes the note sounding as a part within this whole. When I experience a melody, I do not experience my hearing as an object; but the temporal phases of my hearing stand in the same part-whole relation to each other as do the notes of the melody I hear.[30]

In other words, one's experience of a note at any moment in time exists only in relation both to past notes and to expected future ones. When the future surprises us, "then in an important sense the past is changed. That is, earlier, now-retained phases have become parts of a different whole and thus change their significance for us altogether."[31]

Marshall Sahlins, Sherry Ortner, and J. D. Y. Peel[32] have all emphasized related points within ethnographic history: How historical actors apprehend events about them and therefore what they do in any particular situation depends, in part, upon their expectations for the future, expectations shaped by local narrative conventions.

Let me illustrate this contention with examples that will appear in succeeding chapters. For anti-modernist evangelical Christians, the future is mapped out in the prophecies of the Bible; today and tomorrow are determined by an epic struggle between Christ and Satan—one that Satan will win again and again until Christ reverses the slide of time by returning to bring world history to an end. The shape of this future is so real for believers that any number of consequences follows: an Old-Time Gospel Hour tour guide buries a Bible in Israel for the use of Jews who, in the last days, will either convert or be lost. The same sense of God's plan takes missionaries to southern Ethiopia, there to endure hardship after hardship (setbacks that are, after all, only the Devil's apparent victories). By spreading the word of God, missionaries bring the end of time nearer by completing Christ's Great Commission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Modernist conceptions of the future are dramatically different from evangelical Christians ones. But they are—particularly during revolutionary times—no less self-assured. An eyewitness of the Russian revolution described the exhilaration of one of his friends, Nadya, who had given her life to the revolution. Nadya worked as a cadre to collectivize peasant villages:

> Impassioned revolutionary that she was, she could not and would not be concerned with the hurt of the individual. Not that it had passed her unobserved, but it failed to stir her sympathy. She seemed no more concerned with the peasant's perplexity than is a surgeon with the pain of the patient over whose body he is wielding a scalpel. Her mind and heart were fixed on the glories of tomorrow as she visualized them, not on the sorrows of today. The agony of the process was lost to her in the triumph of achievement.[33]

The modernist future that anesthetized Nadya to the agonies of the present is one evacuated of gods and spirits, one that is now unknown and open—indeterminate and therefore accessible to human intervention and human rationality. At any one point in time, progress depends only upon a willingness to take up the scalpel of history. But in a larger sense, the shape of the future is also determined, for human rationality, in the end, cannot be repressed and has to lead to gain and advancement. Thus the past is experienced as "behind" and the future as necessarily "ahead" of the present. Because of the arrow of progress, particularly of technological progress, the future continually arrives ever more quickly. Time speeds up.[34]

Finally, the distinctive Maale conception of the future, anchored in the notion of divine kingship, is different yet again. The first king of Maale brought "fire"—knowledge, custom, culture. The struggle of the present is, then, a struggle to maintain that fire (this is not my imagery but that of a number of Maale rites and myths). Because Maale believe that people inevitably make mistakes—for one reason or another, they stray from tradition—the future continually threatens to fall apart. "Our country is destroyed. The rains are not coming. Our women are not having children. Our cows don't calve. Our goats don't kid." It took me some time to understand these statements, which I heard over and over again, not just in their literal senses (sometimes droughts *did* occur) but in their wider symbolic connections. Even during what an outsider might interpret as "good times," Maale traditionalists did not expect that the future would match the past.

As a threatening space in which tradition would have to be protected, as a definitely better place to be reached through science and

rationality, or as an imminent millennium that makes meaningful any amount of current hardship—differently constructed futures affected how variously situated groups interpreted events of the Ethiopian revolution. And people did what they did, in part, because of these understandings. This is the second sense in which narrative figures in what follows—in this case, actors' own (past) narrative outlines of the future, what Reinhart Koselleck called "futures past."

What is the relationship between these two levels of narrative—actors' own narratives and those of the analyst? The first does not issue in any simple or direct way to the second.[35] Yet, it is the first, in a particular context, that conditions the events that become the subject of the second.

In summarizing, it is difficult to write about revolution without suggesting a sense of inevitability. What happened in Ethiopia beginning in 1974 was hardly inevitable. It depended upon the contingent coupling of a series of conditions, all the way from the constitution of peasant societies like Maale to the international system of states and the Cold War. What I have sought to accomplish in this book is to construct a narrative of narratives that illuminates these contingencies, that tells its story through the stories of Ethiopian actors themselves. It's stories all the way down—stories of stories of stories.