

# **Occupation of Ethiopia/Eritrea** **by Meles & Isayass**

By  
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***“All of us (Ethiopians) are imprisoned,  
be it within narrower (local) or wider  
(national) prison walls of the country.”<sup>1</sup>***

Readers of these recent series of commentaries will recall that we started out by asking the question “How did PM Meles and his TPLF become the jailers and the Kaliti group<sup>2</sup> of patriotic, democratic, and civic Ethiopian public servants like Professor Mesfin Woldemariam and 130 others become their political prisoners?” After briefly profiling the public persona and activities of Professor Mesfin as a representative figure of the jailed, we proceeded in the last two segments to explore aspects of the words and deeds of PM Meles and his TPLF--focusing first on the determinant and sacrosanct pride of place of EPLF/Eritrea. This in turn generated the intriguing question which was broached in the last segment about the real identity of PM Meles (Ethiopian?) -- one may add here even when it is known that he gobbles up raw meat -- and his TPLF vis-à-vis Ethiopia. It is important to keep those questions in mind as we examine modality issues related to the behavior and tenure of the regime in Ethiopia. The current commentary focuses on how the guerilla marauders occupied Ethiopia, severed Eritrea and have ruled from Addis Ababa and Asmera in the first place, with hideous treachery and unmitigated brutality for more than 18 years now. Among other things, this tandem Tigray/Tigrign hegemony over all of Ethiopia from the Red Sea littoral in the North to the Kenya-Ethiopia border in the South has also resulted in a futile but very deadly two-year (1998-2000) “border” war, with casualties in excess of 100,000 people. These tragic figures amount to more casualties in two years than in two decades of secessionist war in Eritrea. PM Meles and his TPLF had claimed that the separation of Eritrea from the rest of Ethiopia would translate into lasting peace for Ethiopia. Eight years after the latest war the region has attained neither peace nor closure.

At the outset, it should be made clear to the reader that this writer is not oblivious to the fact that the forces and factors that explain why and how Isayass/EPLF and Meles/TPLF waged and won a successful military campaign against the self-assertive Derg military establishment in Ethiopia and supplant it by 1991, are numerous and deserve much more space and attention than can be devoted in these pages at this time. However, we shall briefly scan how EPLF and TPLF got to where they are today, in order to focus on what has enabled PM Meles and his TPLF to do his numbers for the past 17 years on the Ethiopian people since his occupation of Addis Ababa. While some of the themes to be explored in this segment will be familiar and, at first glance may appear to be unexceptional, it is hoped that the premise/s behind them and the perspectives that inform the

political analysis would be worthwhile to consider. Some factors ran their course with the defeat of the Derg and the occupation of Addis Ababa and Asmera in 1991, while others continue to be active and determinant with some changes in intensity and style to this day.

## **Key Determinants Enabling Isayass/EPLF - Meles/TPLF to Occupy Ethiopia and Sever Eritrea**

### ***Eritrea First***

There are several intertwined factors that stand out when we seek to apprehend how the two *shifita* “liberation” movements, EPLF and TPLF and their stringers climaxed their tandem (EPLF from 1972 and TPLF from 1975) armed struggles in Ethiopia by occupying the country in 1991<sup>3</sup>. In this segment we shall, in some detail, focus on one of them, namely ‘**Lies, Deceit and Betrayal**’ by EPLF. As we shall see later, this syndrome was passed on successfully to its TPLF surrogates. A fundamental premise of the secessionist struggles in Eritrea was that it was colonized not only by Italy but even worse, by black Ethiopia and as such, it is entitled to independence like other colonies in Africa and elsewhere. A corollary to this premise was that Ethiopia had oppressed and exploited Eritrea and Eritreans, and hence the Eritrean people have a right to struggle for freedom from such “colonial” oppression and exploitation. Another facet of the premise is that in 1962, the UN authorized federal status of Eritrea was ‘unilaterally and forcibly dissolved’ by the Addis Ababa government of Emperor Haile Sellassie and that this was a justifiable *casus belli* for launching the armed struggle to right wrongs<sup>4</sup>. Along with that is also the allegation that Eritreans were exploited, oppressed and impoverished by the ‘colonial’ regimes of Ethiopia. Are or were these premises, claims, allegations or charges by EPLF regarding the historical linkage of Ethiopia/Eritrea true in whole or in part? Alternately, did EPLF base its armed and protracted deadly campaign to sever Eritrea from Ethiopia on the basis of blatant treasonous lies, deceit and betrayal?

As we scan Eritrea’ s colonial background we begin to deal with one of the primary determinant problems that characterize EPLF-TPLF premises on the colonial “history” of the region and their armed struggles for the secession of EPLF/Eritrea. EPLF/Eritrean revisionists ignore or distort the nature of anti-colonial struggles by the Eritrean people under the Italians from 1890 to 1941 and the British interregnum from 1941 to 1950. During much of this period, most Eritreans expressed their sense of nationalism by identifying with Ethiopia and Ethiopian cultural symbols. They referred to Ethiopia as their motherland and called for ኢትዮጵያ ወይ ሞት (meaning ***Ethiopia or Death***). It is a noteworthy historical fact that the Italian colonialists as well as others, referred to Trans Mereb peoples (today’s Ethiopians and EPLF/Eritreans) as Abyssinians. This term was not used for the peoples of the contiguous regions of Sudan, Somalia or Kenya. During the Fascist period a venerable Abyssinian resident in today’s Eritrea dared to raise his cane to protect himself from an attacking Italian dog in Asmara. He was taken to “court” for endangering the dog to save himself. The Italian Fascist “judge” ordered the Eritrean to pay thousands of *lira* as the guilty party, saying along the way “Better one Italian dog than ten Abyssinians” (ካለር አበሻ አንድ የጣልያን ውሻ). When the militant Eritrean, Dejach Bahta Hagos, was told by armed Italians to repeat publicly “***Italy is great,***” he shouted instead “***Ethiopia is greater still.***”<sup>5</sup> Whenever things were unbearable in colonial Eritrea, the people naturally fled to mother Ethiopia. Very early in his tenure as king and Emperor of Ethiopia, Emperor Haile Sellassie made it a point to select young Eritreans and send them abroad for modern education along with their Ethiopian brothers south of the Mereb. Despite the fact that Eritrean Askaris fought on the Italian side in the 1896 Adwa war and during the Fascist invasion in the 1930’s, smaller numbers of Eritreans educated under the patronage of the Emperor not only fought on their Ethiopian side but also later on served as aides and advisors to the Emperor. Alemseged Abbay, author of a volume on jilted nationalism in Eritrea earlier, has recently extended his examination of the subject in a 2006 article for the Journal *Africa*, under the title ‘The Assumptions of “A Colony-Equals-To A Nation” and the Political Accident of Eritrea.’<sup>6</sup>. Among other

things, he points out “whereas in the rest of Africa the transition from a colonial status to nationhood was a foregone conclusion ...the Italian colony of Eritrea could not stand on its own. Most of its enlightened elite favored unity with Ethiopia” He quotes Weldeab Woldemariam, declared the “father of EPLF/Eritrea” asserting in 1946 that “*Eritrea belongs to Ethiopia. It is Ethiopia itself.*”<sup>7</sup> In a conversation with Professor Sven Rubenson in Cairo in 1970, Ato Weldeab is quoted as saying “If I am not an Ethiopian, then nobody is.” There is no record of any widespread or sustained Eritrean nationalist sentiment, movement or struggle by Eritreans as Eritreans *per se* outside of Ethiopian identity. Eritreans moved freely across the Mereb into the rest of Ethiopia **as Ethiopians** throughout the pre-colonial and post-Italian period. Italian colonial operatives were very much aware of this truth and spared no effort to combat and quash such predominant Ethiopian nationalist sentiments in Eritrea. During the late 1940’s when the future of Eritrea was being debated in and explored by the United Nations Organization, Eritrean unionists rallied behind their slogan “**Ethiopia or Death.**” They used the Ethiopian green-yellow-red national flag as their national symbol of freedom. These manifestations were registered and attested to by United Nations fact-finding missions culminating in the world body’s decision in 1950 to create a federal status for Eritrea.

Unlike the case of other African territories that were colonized, Mereb Melash (Eritrea) was forcibly detached from a *bona fide* on-going independent African country—Ethiopia--and occupied by Italy from 1890 to 1941 and by Britain from 1941 to 1951. Following the Second World War, of which Ethiopia was the first victim of Italian *cum* Axis Fascist invasion (1936-1941), Italy forfeited any and all claims to its colonies in Africa and the newly formed United Nations Organization took on the responsibility of deciding the future of Italian colonies in Africa--that is Libya, Somalia and Eritrea. Following several fact-finding missions to Eritrea, exhaustive group and individual interviews, providing venue in New York for indigenous Eritrean representatives with varying and conflicting views as well as for Ethiopia, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 390 A (V) on 2 December, 1950<sup>8</sup>. The Preamble and First Paragraph of the Resolution states:

*“Taking Into Consideration*

- (a) *The wishes and welfare of the inhabitants of Eritrea, including the views of the various racial, religious and political groups of the provinces of the territory, and the capacity of the people for self government,*
- (b) *The interests of peace and security in East Africa*
- (c) *The rights and claims of Ethiopia based on geographical, historical, ethnic or economic reasons, including in particular Ethiopia’s legitimate need for adequate access to the sea:*

*The General Assembly recommends that **Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown.**”*

An elaborate draft Constitution for autonomous Eritrean administration and relations with Ethiopia was crafted under the auspices of the Office of the UN Commissioner for Eritrea led by Enzo Matienzo. It is important to state here that all the federal instruments generated by the United Nations were put into effect after being ratified **not by the United Nations, but by Ethiopian Emperor Haile Sellassie**, who legally represented residual sovereignty over the Federation. Therefore, except for its overall global responsibility under the Charter, the United Nations concluded its mission in Eritrea in 1952. And, unlike the case of the Somalia-Ethiopia boundary where it attempted to arbitrate an agreement, no such effort was either made or considered necessary at the time with respect to Ethiopia/Eritrea.

We now turn our attention briefly to the fraudulent charge by EPLF and its internal and external sycophants that the Eritrean people were colonized not just by Italy, but even worse, by black Ethiopia. Colonialism is not an abstract or abstruse concept or phenomenon for Africans. It is

a syndrome acquired not from books or films but from real life experiences over the span of a century and enveloping the entire continent with the exception of Ethiopia--the 5-year protracted struggle against Fascist Italy's futile effort to colonize it--notwithstanding. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of Ethiopia's coastal territory along the Red Sea called ባሕር ነጋሽ (Bahre Negash) that is Ethiopia's coastal region, renamed by the Italians as Eritrea, was carved off and colonized by Italy for sixty years. The brutality, exploitation, "racism," political autocracy, depopulation and economic impoverishment of the continent spawned by the colonial system, have been unambiguously manifest and—albeit belated—acknowledged and documented for posterity. EPLF-Eritreans whose avowed aim is ሞት ለኢትዮጵያ i.e., **Death to Ethiopia**, today laud and deify Italian colonialism and its "legacy." Some even shamelessly say that Eritreans are inheritors of ancient Roman civilization. Interestingly, some Eritreans had the habit—such as at the battle of Adwa in 1896 and the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930's--of fighting on the Italian side against fellow Ethiopians south of the Mereb at first and then, in the end or twilight of the battles switch over to the Ethiopian side and fight against the retreating Italians. Eritreans chafed under the 1930's the Fascist apartheid system of discrimination. Academics also talk about syndromes of "internal colonialism" as in the case of colorless over "colored" in Apartheid South Africa, Indonesia over East Timor or present day Arabised black Sudan and its brutal black on black hegemony over Darfur today and in southern Anya Nya Sudan for nearly half a century. Eritrea was quickly hijacked by ruthless liars and traitors who organized around the ELF/EPLF secessionist agenda. Foreigners who were in position to know the true picture could not mistake relations between trans-Mereb Ethiopians as being akin to apartheid South Africa, Sudan and Juba/Darfur, Indonesia and East Timor or the Turkey and the condition of the Kurds. But, the interests of individuals, groups and governments on the matter were modulated by fluid "national," ideological or other considerations as well as Cold War concerns and strategic goals.

In the 1950's the United States was the leading actor at the United Nations in mobilizing and galvanizing support for Eritrea's reattachment—be it federal or union with Ethiopia. In the event, Emperor Haile Sellassie courted the United States to zone Ethiopia within its sphere of influence during the Cold War. Consequently the U.S. established the **Kagnew** communications base near Asmera to monitor and relay communications in the region. Changing circumstances following the popular Revolution in Ethiopia in 1974 which toppled the Emperor, subsequently ushering a military junta which shifted its foreign policy stance towards the Soviet Union, Ethiopia and the United States were locked in conflict. The United States often preferred to deal with ruling figures or individuals in the Third World. Just as the United States was well disposed to the Emperor--and vice versa—so it was viscerally opposed to Ethiopia's military strongman, Col. Mengistu Hailemariam who sided with the Soviet Union in Cold War politics. Hence, the United States was prepared to do anything to get rid of him and his regime, even if, in the process, it meant the partial secession of regions like Eritrea or the complete demise of Ethiopia as we know it. Consequently, guerrilla movements such as EPLF, TPLF, OLF and even Somalian invasion of Ethiopia were either tolerated or supported via other neighboring countries such as Sudan and/or regional agent states like Saudi Arabia resulting in the forcible severing of Eritrea from Ethiopia by EPLF and TPLF in 1991. The United States thereby reversed in the 1980's what it did in the 1950's vis-à-vis Ethiopia/Eritrea.

Coupled with the barefaced lies about Ethiopia "colonizing" Eritrea, is the allegation that black Ethiopians especially ኦግራ the Amhara exploited and impoverished Eritreans. This is another preposterous lie with regard to the state of trans-Mereb relations of Ethiopians/Eritreans between 1952 and 1991. Typical of patent liars is Bereket Habte Sellassie, the slick Goebbels for EPLF. He used to get smirks from listeners as he repeated *ad nauseum* his hackneyed saying "*the Italians came to Eritrea and they opened our stomachs but closed our (speaking) mouths. The British who followed closed our stomachs but opened our mouths. Then came the Ethiopians (variants include*

*EPLF's bete noire Shewans, Amharas) who closed our mouths and stomachs.*"<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, Eritreans were truly free when they were associated with Ethiopia during the periods of Italian colonialism and British Trusteeship. They were better educated and more prosperous during the four decades of the federation era and thereafter (1950-1990). All of Ethiopia with its considerable resources and opportunities were wide open to Eritreans without any hindrance. But Eritrean secessionists denied and betrayed all this.

Quite a few Eritreans, including the likes of Bereket and his ilk, took every advantage in the realms of education, commerce, small scale industries, farms as well as government jobs throughout Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Sellassie was conspicuously partial to Eritrea because he considered them as his godsons and daughters or, as Ethiopians like to put it የጤት ልጅ *yetut lij*, meaning one's breast/virtual child. No other Ethiopian ethnicities were treated with so much favoritism. For his part, the Emperor also generally felt free, safe and relaxed when in Eritrea than anywhere else in the rest of the country. In fact, except for his annual semi-religious retreat in July to Harer, he traveled to Eritrea more often than he did to the rest of the country altogether. And, for the most part, many Eritreans savored his partiality towards them and took full advantage. Most Eritreans--Christians and Muslims, highlanders and lowlanders, young and old--appeared to welcome him more enthusiastically than in other regions of his Empire. Furthermore, by the late 1960's for example, capital expenditures by the Ethiopian government for the entire country outside of Eritrea was said to be \$Eth. Birr 188,768,000 (about US\$84,000 in the exchange rate of the day) and a whopping \$Eth.153, 595,000 in the province of Eritrea<sup>10</sup>. While increasing numbers of wealthy Eritreans were created after the Federation, one would be hard pressed to name or identify wealthy Ethiopians or Amharas who enriched themselves in Eritrea and exploited or impoverished Eritreans. This writer and, no doubt, many other serious observers of Northeast Africa would like to read about "Amharas who enriched themselves in Eritrea at the expense of Eritreans." In short, there were none.

By contrast, there were tens of thousands of Eritreans who were educated and enriched by the willful or induced sacrifices of other Ethiopians. They had unqualified and unrestricted opportunities afforded to them to roam around anywhere in the wide Ethiopian pastureland. Even the few Eritrean products like matches, shoes, beer, sweaters, spaghetti and so on were sold almost exclusively in the wider Ethiopia while Eritreans had, for the most part, access to everything they needed grown or produced in Ethiopia just as any Ethiopian. As mentioned above, it was mostly capital from the central government that encouraged and financed Eritrean enterprises. For the most part **Eritreans became a privileged class more than any other ethnic or regional group of Ethiopians**. This was not because, one on one, Eritreans were more intelligent or more industrious than other Ethiopians. Nor, for that matter, were they more modern because of Italian colonialism as contrasted with Ethiopians who resisted colonialism. The Italians had stunted Eritreans with a school system whose ceiling was only 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Furthermore, the Italians began building roads, bridges and highways after mid-1930 when they thought that at last they would secure an Italian East Africa in which the jewel of the Crown was going to be Ethiopia. Besides, the Italians had a poor colonial record not only in Eritrea but also in Somalia and in Libya. The indomitable anti-Fascist Sylvia Pankhurst has, in her 1952 booklet, Why Are We Destroying The Ethiopian Ports?, documented how the British either demolished or removed whole communications infrastructures and naval installations, the Italians had started building in Eritrea in the twilight of their colonial tenure, to Sudan, India, Yemen, Pakistan, Egypt and other destinations. She pointed out also that it was official British policy that none of the materials were to be moved or sold to Ethiopia<sup>11</sup>. Despite such phenomena that are well-known to them, EPLF-Eritreans are just about the only ex-colonial entity in Africa to openly sing the praises of colonial and Fascist Italy and express pride in the colonial heritage left behind in Eritrea. Some even claim that Eritrea is part and parcel of the Roman "civilization." They destroy all vestiges of Ethiopian/Eritrean history and all traces of cultural and other Ethiopian symbols of anti-colonial struggles in the region like that of Ras Alula

Aba Nega, the legendary founder of Asmera and his heroic struggles against Italian encroachments along the Red Sea, even as they protect cemeteries of Italian colonialists.

Perhaps one critical area of public life that crystallizes the privileged status of Eritreans vis-à-vis all other Ethiopians is the realm of education. The education of Eritrean Ethiopians began way back in the 1920's when the Emperor picked and sent a number of young Eritreans along with others to Europe and elsewhere for higher education. Ever since, educational opportunities have been available in Ethiopia for Eritrean Ethiopians. In fact, in per capita terms, **Eritreans had the lion's share of the Ethiopian educational pie than any other group, region or ethnicity including Amharas.** A recent comprehensive Amharic book on the life and times of Emperor Haile Sellassie by Ato Berihun Kebede cites figures on the spread of schools in Ethiopian regions. It shows that between 1942 and 1974 Eritrea, which comprised an average of 7% of the Ethiopian population, had the highest number of schools at 14% of elementary and 10.44% high schools in Ethiopia. One has to note also that in addition to these figures Eritreans also were highly represented in Addis Ababa schools as well. Professor Teshome Wagaw, one of the leading authorities on education in Ethiopia, has also given readers a statistical snapshot of the state of educational development in Ethiopia/Eritrea in the last years of the Federation. His research shows that in 1956-57, for example, the percentage of school classroom units in the whole of Ethiopia outside Addis Abeba was 10.05% while for Eritrea it was 10.15%. Likewise, the percentage of share of teachers for the whole country save Addis Abeba was 15.33 % while for Eritrea it was 27.31%<sup>12</sup>. It is also to be noted that with regard to health care the same lopsided partiality in favor of Eritrea obtains. On the eve of the 1974 Revolution in Ethiopia figures show that Eritrea had 20% of the hospitals and more than 18% of physicians in Ethiopia for a population that at the time was estimated at 7% of the country's population. When such figures are viewed in terms of population per capita the percentages are astounding. If this is colonialism, what is freedom?

Apropos to the Ethiopian saying “ብልጥ ልጅ እየበላ ያለቅሳል,” meaning “a clever kid cries for more even as he gobbles up what is on his plate,” EPLF-Eritreans deny such stark privileges and monopoly of resources and services as Ethiopians. Eritreans were getting such unprecedented privileges **not** because they were better or worse than other fellow Ethiopians. It was rather because of the Emperor's predilections to make them entitled to such privileges. As a matter of fact, even Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, the *bete noire* of Isayass-EPLF, had virtually moved his government to Asmera in 1982 and launched his comprehensive “Red Star Campaign.” At the time, he had publicly declared that he was prepared to do everything to defeat the secessionists and to achieve the total economic and social development of Eritrea even if it meant “the down scaling or abandoning the development of the rest of Ethiopia.” Despite such bravado, however, the campaign did not attain anything positive on the military or the civil economic front.

Haile Sellassie University, later named Addis Ababa University, administered the annual Ethiopian School Leaving or Matriculation Exams for high school seniors nationwide. Over the years some University faculty members had been observing certain disturbing and unchanging patterns in the results of the exams. Virtually 90% or more of those that took the exams and eventually qualified for higher education came mostly from Eritrea and some large towns like Harer, Dessie and especially Addis Ababa. It also turns out that a large portion of those taking the exam in Addis Ababa and in some of the other towns were from Eritrea, Tigray, Gonder and a few other northern towns. As a result, the vast majority of University entrants were Eritreans, Tigreans and Shewans. In per capita terms, the highest numbers of University entrants for much of this period were Eritreans. Besides, during the years preceding the popular revolution of 1974, student protests and disruptions led to campus closures. However, more often than not, schools remained open in Eritrea while they were closed elsewhere thus disrupting the School Leaving exams for others in the rest of the country. Sometimes it was argued that Eritrean schools should not interrupt their studies

because others in the rest of Ethiopia decided to boycott. At other occasions lying Eritreans would say that the government authorities would take harsher measures against Eritrean students disrupting school than would be the case elsewhere. In some instances, Eritrean students at the University who were instigators of boycotts petitioned to resume and finish their classes while other students had gone to the countryside because they had no support base in Addis Ababa. Such were some of the schemes used to insure higher numbers of Eritreans not only from Eritrea *per se* but also from the bigger towns mostly in northern Ethiopia and, of course, Addis Ababa. It is also important to add that virtually every University graduate was then sent abroad for post graduate studies subsidized by the Ethiopian people. So, when EPLF, enabled by Meles Zenawi and his TPLF severed Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1991, virtually all of the leading operatives were the products of Ethiopian education from primary to high school and especially University education at home and abroad.<sup>13</sup> As this writer noted in a 1988 paper, "*On the Determinants of Prospects for Peace on the Horn of Africa: The Other Side of the Coin*"<sup>14</sup> EPLF-Eritreans remind us of the Greek tragedy figure who killed his parents and then pleaded for sympathy for him because he was now an orphan. The siblings of **lying, denial, and betrayal** of the truth are prejudice and hatred as depicted in the slogan **Death to Ethiopia**. In time, the EPLF elements passed on these treacherous traits to the TPLF which was nurtured on prejudice and hatred for Ethiopia and together the two capos and their organizations have been playing havoc in the territories they have occupied since 1991.

One recalls a modest effort in the early 1970's some educators undertook to introduce a mild form of what one might call "affirmative action" to redress the situation. At a regular meeting of the Faculty Council—the University's highest decision making body—proposed to set aside a small number of University space to students coming from less privileged schools in the south, west and other regions without infringing on other students' chances of attending the University systems when qualified. Even this tepid measure to redress the glaring and long standing inequity of opportunities for all Ethiopians was opposed viscerally by Faculty Senate members from Eritrea flanked by their disciples from Tigray. They interpreted this measure as a way to curtail their lopsided privilege, monopoly and entitlement in the Ethiopian system of higher education. The Ethiopian people have spent scores of millions of dollars on the education of the very Eritreans who have denied their historic Ethiopian identity, betrayed the care and nurture of the Ethiopian people and perpetrated the two-decade secession war in the region that has claimed the lives of at least a million Ethiopians. When all is said and done, however, it is important to bear in mind that not all Ethiopians of Eritrean descent are liars or EPLF acolytes who subscribed to such lies and denials as outlined above or supported secession. Isayass-EPLF undertook a campaign, with the cooperation of TPLF, to root out any surviving unionists and pro-Ethiopia Eritreans not only in Eritrea but all over Ethiopia as well. It is important to remind readers that what has been narrated in the foregoing pages about the culture of lies, deceit, and betrayal and historical distortion that became the hallmark of Isayass/EPLF does not represent all Eritreans. There are Eritreans with integrity who still identify themselves as Ethiopians and not as step-children of Italian colonialism or victims of Amhara mistreatment. The only fresh air of freedom Eritreans started to smell since 1990 was in 1952 and after. This does not mean that there were no problems seeking solution. There is no perfect society and life is sustained via communication, tolerance, compromise and common commitment to improve situations for the good of the community at large. By all acceptable criteria, the peoples of Ethiopia-Eritrea region have shared language, culture, values, territory, common struggle against foreign and regional invaders and ways of life for thousands of years in the region. All of this has been denied by EPLF and TPLF to the common detriment of the people under the brutal dictatorship of Isayass and Meles. It should also be pointed out that since 1974 there were several peace overtures and initiatives on the Ethiopian side as well as peace talks under external auspices—all of which became exercises in futility.

### **Factors That Account for the Emergence of Meles-TPLF**

The above paragraphs sketch the pattern of lies, deceit and betrayal perpetrated on Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people by EPLF Eritreans. Relatively more space is allotted to the Eritrean phase of the lie and fraud syndrome in the political struggles in the region because Isayass-EPLF is the guru who first taught and trained his Tigrayan protégés, Meles and his TPLF. The template for lies, denials and treachery was set by Isayass-EPLF at a time when, at least initially, he was seen as the omniscient idol beneath whose feet Meles and his cronies prostrated and readied themselves to indulge his whims and wishes. The template has not only served Meles and Isayass to emerge as the warlords in Ethiopia/Eritrea but also to continue to wreak untold death and destruction, suppression of human rights and unleash a reign of terror in the land. Accordingly, the 1987 TPLF manifesto or “mein kampf” to make the case for Eritrea’s rise and Ethiopia’s demise was not penned or even ghost written by somebody else on behalf of Isayass. It was written by his half-Eritrean crony, Meles Zenawi in the form of the 331 pp. polemic titled Ye Eritrea Hizb Tegel:Keyet Wedet (The Eritrean peoples Struggle: From Where To Where).<sup>15</sup> Among other things, this propaganda trash says that ‘Ethiopia and Eritrea are both only 100 years old’ and that to say Eritrea was ever part of Ethiopia ‘is nothing but a fairy tale.’ Furthermore, it was because of American ‘imperialist machinations’ that Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia. As the Ethiopian saying ክመሜህሩ የደቀመዝሙሩ “kememeheru yedeqemezmu” (the disciple gets even better/worse than his tutor) has it, Meles and his TPLF in some respects became even more professional with lying than their teachers. The upshot is the allegation that Eritrea has been colonized, repressed and exploited by a form of black (Ethiopian) colonialism. As such, it has a right to self-determination and, before and above any other cause, Tigrayans under the control of TPLF will do everything and make any and all sacrifices to achieve Eritrean secession from Ethiopia. No wonder Eritreans call other Habeshas (Abyssinians) below the Mereb, principally Tigreans, Adgi (asses). The rest is history. In effect, what has happened is the fact that Meles and his TPLF have swallowed whole the lies and fraud of Isayass/EPLF with respect to the history and relationship of Ethiopia/Eritrea and repeated and expanded it worldwide. It then applied the same lies and chicanery to the history and relationship of Tigray—minus the technicality of the “colonial” status. The Meles/TPLF action is a double whammy against Ethiopia. At least, Isayass/EPLF confined themselves to the rendition of their Eritrean syndrome, even if they used willing and obsequious fodder like Meles/TPLF supplied. The two culprits also manipulated and confounded some Ethiopian radicals and disgruntled military elements to assist their cause of secession. Even after 1991, Meles and his TPLF continue to swear their slavish commitment to this day to defend **not** Ethiopian sovereignty but EPLF-Eritrean sovereignty even more loudly than Isayass himself does. In the process of fighting for Eritrean secession first and foremost, Meles and his TPLF also toyed with the idea of secession of Tigray and creation of Greater Tigray Republic with its own seacoast centered in the Assab Afar region of the Red Sea as well—even if Isayass would frown at that because of his position that Eritrea is the only case qualified for secession and state formation. In February 1976, barely a year of its formation, TPLF’s Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray” (MLLT) issued a Manifesto stating “the first task of this national struggle will be the establishment of an independent democratic republic of Tigray.” Mr. Gebremedhin Araya, the former financial officer of TPLF cites the operative lines of the Manifesto as follows.

*“The People of Tigray will exercise self-determination by establishing a Republic of Tigray Nationalities within Tigray. They have to exercise their respective self-determination and establish their own republics. Inasmuch as the Eritrean question is one of colonialism we shall shed our blood until the current struggle for independence is attained. Since these three goals are integral to our strategic program our struggle will continue until we have achieved all of them.”* (Personal Translation).

As adumbrated in earlier sections of this series, TPLF managed not only to help Eritrea to secede from Ethiopia but Tigray today is virtually an expanded independent unit with the exception of having its own flag at the United Nations. Like Eritrea—at least until 1998 when the two thieves fought over their Ethiopian spoils—Tigray has sucked the resources of Ethiopia at large. For all intents and purposes Tigray is run as an independent area with little or no meaningful relationship with the rest of Ethiopia. To Meles and his TPLF the Tigrayan **ወርቅማ** (golden) people are the ruling class empowered by the gun to rule over all the minions who call themselves Ethiopians, symbolized by the mere **ጠርቅ** (the rag) they call their hallowed tricolor rainbow flag. Consequently, although the rhetoric of the Manifesto may be muted or repackaged it is being realized methodically. Not to be outdone, nowadays Isayass also swears that he is committed to defending Ethiopia's territorial "sovereignty." Apropos the time tested saying—"no honor/honesty among thieves"—Meles's guru, Isayass recently spilt the beans on his loyal crony in an interview published in magazine format in which, inter alia, he said that the "Meles/TPLF clique started out to achieve an independent Tigray; it had no program with regard to Ethiopian unity or an Ethiopian agenda..."<sup>16</sup>

### **Meles/TPLF: Lies, Deceit and Betrayal**

(I) This brings us to the syndrome of **Lies, Deceit and Betrayal** of Meles and his TPLF as political vehicles for occupation of Ethiopia. To be sure, Isayass and Meles did not invent lying. They are merely the latest liars who perfected the technique and applied it successfully. Lying is an endemic and pervasive human activity especially in politics. As in the case of EPLF-Eritrea, Meles/TPLF also claims that Amharas/Shewans not only dominated but also impoverished Tigray and this problem has to be redressed. They also charge that Tigray was deliberately made vulnerable to famine in 1973-74 period. To begin with, of all the regions in Ethiopia Tigray is a unit with a centuries old history of autonomous self-government. With the minor exception of the early 1940's when Ras Abebe Aregay was dispatched to the region to quell Weyane rebellion in the wake of the defeat of Fascist forces in Ethiopia, Tigray has never been governed by an Amhara, Oromo, Gurage, Hareri, or Somali, etc. It has always had its own indigenous kings, princes, rases or dejazmachs who often fought with one another for supremacy and to that end also developed alliances with Shewa, Gonder, Wello as well as some groups north of the Mereb--aka Eritreans--and at times even with Italians there. Meanwhile, it is to be recalled that Tigrayan Emperor Yohannes IV ruled the whole of Ethiopia from his base in Adwa from 1872 to 1889, and Amharic was his official court language. For much of recent history, in the view of many Ethiopians and some foreigners the Ethiopian ruling class was perceived to be an Amhara-Tigray alliance, despite occasional sibling rivalries. The two groups generally shared a common religious cultural values and a common history of warding off external threats to Ethiopian sovereignty. The two groups also collaborated in the territorial expansion and consolidation of the Ethiopian Empire. All that notwithstanding, the specious allegation that Amharas or the Ethiopian government exploited or impoverished Tigray is baseless. There were no Amhara rulers, landlords or business magnates in Tigray who exploited and impoverished. Dr. Kasahun Weldemariam recently published Myths and Realities in the Distribution of Socioeconomic Resources and Political Power in Ethiopia<sup>17</sup> covering the time span of 1950 to 2005 in which he examined the perception of the relationship between political power and socioeconomic resource allocation under different regimes. He points out that the facile correlation between political ascendancy and resource asymmetry and cautions observers and critics of the Ethiopian scene thusly: Many scholars accord a privileged status to the Amhara as a super-ordinate group in the Ethiopian socioeconomic and political stratification. Members of the alleged "ruling ethnic group" proudly accepted scholars' classifications, a mythology that placed them at the apex of Ethiopia's socioeconomic and political pyramid. The Amharas may have remained content with the seemingly prestigious but patently meaningless position for a number of reasons. Usually, most Ethiopians who believe in divination and revere their leaders appeal to the

Creator rather than engage in a combative confrontation with their leaders and other ethnic groups to bring about favorable changes in their living conditions.

The last statement applies to Tigrayans as it does to Amharas because the vast majority of **both peoples chafed under the exploitation of their own minority kith and kin that hold political power over them.** To a large extent, the same is true in other nationalities in the country with the important exception that in their cases the people are subjected to the exploitation not only by their own ruling classes but also by the national ruling classes who often alienate their lands and resources as well. Many of the impoverished Ethiopians were in Tigray and in Shewa, in Gojjam and Harerge, in Wello and Gonder and many other parts of the country while at various levels feudal and semi feudal ruling minorities abound. The repeated manifestations of famine in Ethiopia mostly in the so-called Amhara-Tigray regions of Wello, Shewa, Tigray and other parts of northern Ethiopia had more to do with class dynamics than ethnic tensions or rivalries. That reality was the fundamental cause and catalyst that generated the 1974 social revolution in the country that aroused to action the Ethiopian people and swept the Imperial throne and the bureaucracy without a shot being fired. **As in the Eritrean case, there are or were no Amhara/Shewa landlords or business owners of any consequence in Tigray or, as indicated earlier, political wheelers and dealers.** As it happens, Tigray is not much endowed with agricultural or mineral resources to begin with. Besides, Tigray was not the only region which became vulnerable to the 1973-74 famine. Northern Shewa and Wello were also vulnerable to famine. Still, Amharas were singled out as the be-all and end-all culprits to almost anything bad that happened in the country. It is not true to allege, as Meles/TPLF have done, that Amharas impoverished Tigray and/or caused the famine in the region, unless deliberate lying on the matter was needed to trigger ethnic hatred, indignation and sense of revenge and retribution against Amharas. Indeed, this was manifest in the form of pogroms against Amharas in various parts of the country after Meles and Isayass occupied and butchered Ethiopia in 1991. Lying and betrayal have also been the hallmark of the Meles/TPLF regime in the past eighteen years tenure often punctuated with willful assassinations, incarcerations, tortures and exiles of untold numbers of innocent Ethiopians as has been witnessed after the regime stole the democratic election of May 2005. This behavior indicates that lying and stealing go together.<sup>18</sup> When all is said and done, however, nothing in the preceding paragraphs about Meles/TPLF lies, deceit and betrayal about Ethiopia or Ethiopianity, *a la* Isayass/EPLF, should be interpreted as a behavior syndrome of all Tigrayans. To be sure, there still are Tigrayans with Ethiopian integrity and identity.

## **II. Col. Mengistu HM and Ethiopian Military Implosion**

Next to the syndrome of lies, deceit and betrayal that underlie the program and political/propaganda discourse of Meles and his TPLF, the other factor is Derg military self-destruction. History may be less harsh on the political, economic and social policy or leadership failures of Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam's 17 years rule, but not on his military/security leadership and ultimately on his abandoning and fleeing his country while his whole military edifice imploded and disintegrated like a house of cards. This syndrome is perhaps the single most decisive reason for the ultimate success of the ragtag TPLF and the relatively more sophisticated EPLF secessionists in occupying Ethiopia in May 1991. This writer is not unmindful that some may be of the view that one who does not have any military background has no business analyzing military affairs and consequences thereof. However, the discussion in this essay delves into the matter because the interest of Ethiopia and Ethiopians is bigger than the interest of the military or the Derg and dealing with that overriding concern is everyone's business—not the exclusive domain of the

military. The focus here is to come to terms with the colossal military debacle that resulted in Ethiopia's occupation by EPLF and TPLF and its aftermath.

To be sure, the Derg and Col. Mengistu (who was a major then) did not seize power in Ethiopia through a military coup or insurrection. He and other lower rank and noncommissioned officers simply took advantage of the power vacuum created following the popular revolution in the country in February 1974. Civilians, including young activists could not agree among themselves and were not ready to form a transitional or caretaker government even when they were invited to do so by military groups, especially by elements in the Ethiopian Air Force. It is said that some senior civil servants, including the venerable Ato Haddis Alemayehu, were also approached to assume at least temporary leadership but declined. It was then that the military council known as the Derg, comprising over one hundred persons from various services including also the police, was formed. The Derg assumed power quietly, with apparent blessings from the public that offered flowers to troops showing off in tanks and jeeps in Addis Ababa. The Derg peeled off as one would do to onion and arrested layers of last minute potential or suspected elements of resistance or refusal to submit to it until early September. By then the Emperor was virtually all but disrobed and alone and it was a cinch to dethrone him with minimal violence.<sup>19</sup> At that time no powers abroad, including the United States—his most formidable supporter up to that point—or his continental OAU heads of state in Africa, who had enshrined him as “Father of Africa” did not lift a finger to help him or cry foul.<sup>20</sup> Everyone seemed mesmerized by the whole event and so, the Derg formed its regime with the eventual support and cooperation of some radical Marxist young activists mostly from abroad, while eventually another batch of mostly home bred activists opposed the newly formed military government and vowed to fight it—and did. At the same time, the regional, ethnic or downright tribal EPLF and the OLF and shortly thereafter (1975) the TPLF made clear their intention to intensify their armed struggles against the Derg to consummate secessionist goals.

Tadesse Tele Salvano, himself a soldier, has been writing on military affairs, especially on the highlights and twilights of the Derg and its military engagements as well as on the rise and demise of Col. Mengistu Hailemariam. One of his recent works in Amharic, entitled የአናብሳ ምድር Ye Anabist Meder (roughly translated as The Turf of Lions)<sup>21</sup> is laced with a lot of data, documents, tables and photographs on the subject matter. The author tells his readers the gist of what he aims to narrate in the hefty book:

Due to change of government in the Derg era (1974-91) a change was made from alliance with and reliance on the United States and American support and military gear towards alliance with and reliance on socialist countries. As a result Ethiopia built a large military establishment with supplies of modern military hardware including jets, tanks, artillery, anti aircraft guns which were obtained partially as aid and partially by purchase. And, at its height Ethiopia was poised as a major military force in the region.

.....During the Derg era far too many deadly internal military conflicts (with EPLF and TPLF secessionists) have been undertaken. The Ethiopian side has sustained an estimated 192,000 dead, more than 281,000 injured, more than 10,000 members of the military have defected and more than 80,000 have been captured (Personal Translation).

Ethiopia has had persistent internal armed rebellions and cross-border irredentist threats. Consequently, the operative question in evaluating a military or militarized government or regime such as the Derg during its tenure (1974-1991) is how did the military do with regard to the country's military challenges. By definition, training and indoctrination a military establishment, especially its leadership, is unavoidably primarily accountable in matters of defense and security of the nation vis-à-vis internal and/or external military or militarized threats. This becomes doubly

relevant when the military establishment had also assumed political/governmental control in decision-making—which means that there was no one above it to scapegoat.

During the 1974 Ethiopian popular revolution the rank and file military elements also rebelled autonomously and joined the youth, the peasants, workers and clergy in calling for, among others causes, land to the tiller, dismantling the monarchy and establishing a democratic/egalitarian system, dealing with the chronic rebellions in the Somali, Eritrean and Oromo inhabited regions and reforming the rigid military system which exploited the lower rank and enlisted members for the benefit of the high ranking officers and the exploitation of the rank and file soldier. And, **when all was said and done, Col. Mengistu Hailemariam's colossal failure and fall was first and foremost in the military realm—namely in the spheres of leadership, strategy and performance.** It was the military's implosion internally in the late 1980's that facilitated and accelerated the occupation of Ethiopia and the secession of Eritrea by the forces of Meles and Isayass in 1991. Perhaps, military historians may find some negative lessons from the Ethiopian experience on, among other things, the sensibility and efficacy of lower rank military elements turning the tables and commanding superior rank officers. These general prefatory thematic statements are not meant to overlook or belittle complex factors and contexts involved that have relevance to the issue. Some of them will be broached hence.

The Derg's relatively peaceful emergence to power in September 1974 with the slogan **ያለምንም ደም አትዮጵያ ትቅደም**--“Let Ethiopia Go Forward Without Bloodshed”—turned out to be too good to be true as it was stained with blood in late November when it executed 60 political prisoners including members of the Emperor's last cabinet ministers, governors, 19 retired and active generals, 2 Derg members as well as other military personnel. In the course of the following years, there was an increasing rate of bloodshed involving the Derg and its opponents throughout the country, described in gory Russian Revolution nomenclature as struggles between ‘red terrorists’ (Marxist power holders) and ‘white terrorists’ (opponents/challengers).’ For a number of years the public witnessed almost several times a week, military funeral processions for Derg or government supporters or “red”—as they classified themselves--killed by “white” terrorists. No one was safe whatever their standing, age or gender and even whole families were not immune from elimination. Assassinations could happen at home, workplace, school, restaurants, markets, kiosks, recreation spots, waiting in the car for someone, at shoe shines--by the shoe shiner who would pull out a pistol instead of a brush from the footstall. In the cases of opponents, the “white terrorists,” many times their bodies were strewn by the roadside or even in front of doors or gates of private homes, but funerals were very private and subdued. There were also charges that families were asked to pay money for the bullets used to kill the “anti revolutionaries” if they wanted to recover their corpses from morgues. This culture of internal violence ebbed and flowed but did not cease for seventeen years when seen over the span of the whole country, especially in the context of the larger armed struggles by organized guerrilla forces such as OLF, SALF, EPLF, ALF, SNLF, EPLF and TPLF, among others. In addition, the two edged—perhaps it may be appropriate to say four edged--sword of violent bloodletting in Ethiopia every which way in the latter half of the 1970's and throughout the 1980's, was not limited to the battles between the Derg and its opponents. The Derg was also chopping its own head and limbs constantly during its tenure. No wonder that one of the oft-repeated warning (or, was it intended to be “comforting?”) statement for the faint of heart on the nature of the revolution--was **አብዮት ልጆችዋን ትበላለች**--‘revolution consumes its own children.’ And that certainly is what happened for seventeen years without regard to class, ethnicity, age, gender, professional or confessional status or “party” affiliation.

The first head of the Derg--whom the Derg itself appointed--to be shot to death in November 1974 was its first chairman, General Aman Andom, when it executed the 60 officials mentioned earlier. The process continued in February 1977 again when some Derg members tried to sideline

first vice-chairman Mengistu in a quasi-democratic and at any rate peaceful manner, and reform the way the Derg did business and open a dialogue with opponents, a position supported by then Chairman of the Derg, General Teferi Bente. That effort did not last very long as Col. Mengistu and his security henchman, Col. Daniel Asfaw, succeeded in rounding up Chairman General Teferi and six of his “allies” in the Derg and mowed them down in the Derg’s Secretariat premises of Menelik Palace. Shortly thereafter, a prominent academic turned militant ally of Col. Mengistu—at least on the surface—Dr. Sennay Likke and executor Daniel Asfaw himself were cut down by his own deputy Captain Yohannes, who was himself killed in the process. So, killing and dying were virtually more commonplace than living and working in the military-political complex of Ethiopia.

Later in the year, another prominent member from the very nascence of the Derg and, in fact the initial leader of the group also met the same fate. He was never comfortable with the Marxist, or socialist orientation. A story has it that at one of the interminable political meetings between radical civilians and Derg members, he watched Col. Mengistu mixing it up arguing with the relatively well-read Marxist civilians even citing some Marxist/Leninist verses. Col. Atnafu then stared at Col. Mengistu and said: “I can’t help commenting that at least they (the civilian Marxist-Leninist cadres) have absorbed their knowledge from years of reading and studying their Marxism. But you have only heard about the subject matter to be so animated.” At any rate, Col. Atnafu was sent by the Derg to go to Eritrea for an extended time to study the military situation carefully and come back and report on what is to be done there. Col. Atnafu took his time in Eritrea, and he came back exhausted, disheveled and disillusioned. He had a lot on his mind to unload including his fervent opposition to what had happened to General Teferi and others, as well as doing away with Marxist ideology and the need to revamp the way the war was being waged in Eritrea or else all would be lost. But his consistent stand was against socialist experimentation in Ethiopia. Indications are that he knew he would be executed. It seems that he was ready for it after he articulated what he believed in all along—for posterity. Among the political “crimes” he was charged with was the following.<sup>22</sup>

We have deprived the country of friends in the name of socialism. I do not believe that Ethiopia alone can build socialism in Africa. We have to be friendly to the East and West and this means mixed economy. In the name of socialism and class struggle, the entire people are today deprived of justice, peace and democracy. How many have fled the country? We must release prisoners and find a way to reconcile with our opponents.

And Col. Atnafu was summarily executed by the Derg.

Although the correct lesson was not drawn by the military leadership of the Derg, it had countenanced its first and almost fatal military challenge barely four years of its coming to power. Predictably, Siad Barre’s Somalian regime—with initial support by the then Soviet Union—launched a full-scale military assault against Ethiopia in late July 1977. In due course, his forces had penetrated nearly seven hundred kilometers into Ethiopia and, Col. Mengistu’s army and newly mobilized militia could not stop them as they roamed and held sway in the region for nearly seven months. The Somalian regime and its military were being supported by the Soviet Union then and to some extent by Cubans because the time, before the 1974 revolution, Ethiopia was locked in the American camp of the Cold War era. Besides, Siad Barre was also humoring the Soviets by swearing that he was Africa’s real Muslim Marxist, and posted his portrait everywhere in Mogadishu alongside socialist icons Marx and Lenin, thereby unilaterally displacing Engels. Meanwhile, relations between Addis Ababa and Washington were strained and then snapped by 1977 as the United States closed its Kagnew Communications base in Asmera and was evacuating from the country. Far from objecting that action, the Derg in fact asked that the US close more of its presence in the country. In short order, the new Jimmy Carter administration proscribed shipment to

Ethiopia of some \$300 million dollars worth of military hardware earlier and paid for in advance. The President began to pursue a policy of actively seeking to woo Somalia to be in the US camp and thereby displace the Soviets and Cubans there.<sup>23</sup> Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski in fact hyped the Cold War rhetoric in the "Horn of Africa" by linking the future of nuclear Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the United States and the Soviet Union to the unwelcome presence of the Soviets in the region. To wit, he said "SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden" (in Ethiopia)<sup>24</sup>. The Soviets were also quietly displacing the Americans, and it appeared as though a new "Socialist block on the Horn of Africa" (Ethiopia and Somalia) will be under their sphere of influence. At the same time, reactionary regimes in the region were supporting Somalia's invasion materially and logistically. Certain domestic elements opposed to the Derg were also doing what they could to sabotage the war effort against Siad Barre's Somalia.

With the Soviet Union deep in the quagmire of Somalia and the Americans knocking on his door, Siad Barre thought that it was the perfect time to launch a military offensive against Ethiopia to sever the Ogaden and paste it to Somalia. But, at the height of Siad Barre's Soviet backed military success a new element developed that had a major impact on the politics and military balance of the region. The small island of Cuba, beleaguered and virtually quarantined by the United States for nearly half a century was fast becoming a force to reckon with in southern Africa, particularly in Angola and South Africa. Its indefatigable leader, Fidel Castro, whose pedigree of commitment to African independence goes back to the early 1960's when he declared that as Cubans "*African blood flows freely in our veins.*" Fidel Castro had decided to intervene on the side of African freedom fighters against Portuguese colonialists, Apartheid elements and even confront American neocolonialist machinations in Africa. And, in the early nineteen sixties the well-known revolutionary, Che Guevarra, had gone to Africa "incognito" with a small band of Cubans to train African guerrilla forces. In this vein, it appears that Castro was enamored of the Ethiopian revolution and mesmerized by his meeting with Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam. He is quoted as saying that Mengistu "is calm, intelligent, bold and brave, and I believe that he has exceptional qualities as a revolutionary leader."<sup>25</sup> Such views by a resolute revolutionary who has survived a near nuclear war catastrophe and whose umbilical cord with the Soviet Union was then still intact, must have had an impact on Soviet commitment to Mengistu's Ethiopia as well. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian military was not able to reverse Somalian onslaught on its own and sought immediate and large-scale Soviet military support and Cuban support. The only relative advantage Ethiopia had was in air combat because, for reasons that should be studied, Somali "air force" pilots could not perform even simple tasks. Ethiopian pilots therefore, had the air to themselves, although they only had small numbers of leftover American F5-E fighter planes and diminishing ammunition. There were pictures at the time of Ethiopian air force pilots standing by their F5-E American planes with signs "Thank God for the F5-E plane."<sup>26</sup>

Without going into the reasons why at this point, it appears that Siad Barre had been drunk with his unbelievable success and frictions and tensions surfaced in his relations with the Soviet military brass and Cubans in the country. Since he had achieved the virtual occupation of nearly one third of Ethiopia, he can hold on to the territory and, perhaps, the Americans or their surrogates from somewhere will come to help him maintain his loot. He then asked the Soviets and the Cubans to leave Somalia forthwith. The civilian elements left for Moscow, but the ranking Soviet officers and some of the Cubans simply crossed the border, as it were, to Ethiopia and joined the Ethiopian counteroffensive campaigns. The Soviets, smarting from the affront of Siad Barre, fielded Marshall Petrov, the very commanding general behind the success of the Somali offensive. The Soviet general was said to be mercurial and at times openly insulting to his Ethiopian counterparts in the theatre. Needless to say, the Soviet officers had intelligence documents with regard to manpower, plans, maps, tactics and strategy deployed by Siad Barre's forces. When Fidel Castro went to Moscow on his way home after his African visits, the Soviets toasted him with the tantalizing

expression that they had all followed his African visit with “comradely interest” In short order, the Soviets and the Cubans quickly put their act together to respond to Col. Mengistu’s SOS request. The Soviets operated in the larger domains of transport of troops and military materiel as well as overall coordination of Ethiopian military operations. The Soviet flew scores of Antonov planes non-stop carrying military supplies from USSR and Cubans from Havana and Angola to Ethiopia. The Cubans are said to have supplied nearly 25,000 soldiers to the Ethiopian cause but with operational autonomy from the Soviet camp. Contrary to the hackneyed Western views that Cubans are nothing but surrogates of the Soviet Union, the Cubans maintained their own autonomy of command headed by the colorful General Arnaldo Ochoa.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the Cubans even went further apprising their Ethiopian comrades to be wary of the Soviets—a theme that they have pursued in other parts of Africa also. With all its surveillance resources, the United States was cognizant of the fact that Siad Barre’s forces were taking a bad whipping and running helter skelter. Although the US had not objected to Somalia’s violation of Ethiopia’s territorial sovereignty, all of a sudden President Carter, invoking Organization of African Unity’s 1964 resolution on the inviolability of Africa’s borders, sent a stern message to Col. Mengistu and to the Soviets that the counteroffensive should not cross the Somalian borders in hot pursuit. In effect, he saved Siad Barre from retaliation against his war of aggression and the two countries slowly normalized relations.

It was external Cuban and Soviet intervention that helped yank the Ethiopian military out of the jaws of Barre’s juggernaut and, more importantly, save the country from complete collapse. Did Col. Mengistu and his associates in the Derg learn anything from the experience of being beaten by the Somali armed forces in 1977-78? They had nearly a decade to turn things around so that another calamitous military defeat will not befall the country. And here we should be aware of the difference between country and government or regime. When a country is secure and at peace, so is its government. However, for varying periods a government can appear to be safe or at peace while the country in whole or in part is not necessarily secure or at peace. The choice as to which is of fundamental importance or which is the end and which is the means to the end, is clear. As this writer noted in a presentation in Ethiopia in 1971 on the topic “*Ethiopia and Ethiopianity, a Patriotic Perspective*.”<sup>28</sup> “መንግስት ለአገር ይኖራል አገጃጂ፡ አገር ለመንግስት አይኖርም”—“*Government exists for the sake of the nation; the nation does not exist for the government.*” So, when we refer to military failure our criterion is what a given policy or decision does or does not do for the nation’s stability, security, peace, development, integrity and sovereignty. Government comes and goes while the nation is expected to endure and progress.

The Derg tried to capitalize on the way the war ended as Ethiopian victory, despite the early Somalian successes and downplayed the pivotal roles of the Cubans and Soviets. Col. Mengistu then declared that what was achieved in the eastern (Somalian) front will be repeated in the northern (Eritrean) front.<sup>29</sup> The Derg’s military *cum* political campaigns in Eritrea, however, continued to fizzle at the cost of thousands of lives on both sides, destruction of property and environmental degradation, and internal displacements of people. As they did elsewhere in their involvements in Africa, the Cuban contingents also extended medical aid to Ethiopians. In the decade following the Somalian war, the Derg military establishment was showing signs of self-destruction under the determined pressures of its internal EPLF and TPLF challengers as well as the external malign machinations from near and far. With the increasing levels of interaction and coordination of guerilla activities by the EPLF and TPLF in the latter half of the 1980’s, the Derg sustained frequent demoralizing setbacks. Through the fog of war certain alarming and seemingly inexorable patterns were emerging. The Ethiopian military manhandled by Col. Mengistu and his Derg was slowly but surely cracking at the seams because of self-inflicting measures. EPLF and TPLF, on the other hand, were increasingly waxing with confidence accrued from stunning battle successes in Tigray and Massawa as prelude to their occupation of Addis Ababa and Asmera in May 1991.

Given the lopsided superiority in manpower and hardware resources for Air, Ground and Naval forces with absolute decision making power enjoyed by the Derg, (i.e. military) since 1974, fighting a bunch of mostly ragtag hit-and-run guerrilla rebel groups in parts of the country, it is hard to predict or countenance the ultimate total collapse of the Derg led military campaigns. After all, these guerrilla activities have been going on in Ethiopia for nearly three decades during which time the guerrillas were contained, even if not totally defeated. How then was it possible for the Isayass-EPLF and Meles-TPLF to occupy Ethiopia/Eritrea in May 1991? Slowly but surely more and more informative memoirs and contemporary historical writings are appearing in Amharic lately. One of these is an autobiography by one of the most decorated officers in Ethiopia, Brigadier General Kasaye Chemed, who served gallantly for more than 30 years on many fronts.<sup>30</sup> His considered conclusion in a recent Autobiography is:

“The Derg was a government that overthrew itself. It did not try to ascertain truth but instead was influenced by rumor and canard. Its members were people who were obsessed with retaining their power rather than securing the national interests of the country. The system was based on the relationship of master (themselves) and servant (everybody else). While they say they were poised to fight autocratic and unequal relations, they were in fact immersed in that very rotten system.”

The writer goes on to note the cumbersome and macabre Derg organization of the military structure that was doomed to failure from the start because of intersecting and interlocking functionaries set to spy on, trip and undermine one another thereby confusing the rank and file and facilitating penetration by the guerilla elements. Besides the nominal military officer in charge in a unit or brigade, for instance, there is also the political cadre who often has the ear of the higher ups more than the military officer no matter what his high rank, competence or professional experience. Then there is the security man from Internal Security presumably checking on everyone. There could also be clandestine elements that represent foreign interests.<sup>31</sup> More often than not the EPLF and to a lesser extent TPLF also had their representatives and their sympathizers within the Ethiopian military establishment. In fact, their infiltration into almost every level of the military hierarchy is so pervasive that at times when a highly “classified” or secret decision with respect to a given engagement is made to be transmitted, the guerillas get it first and become poised to interdict and cause heavy casualties and loss of military gear. He adds that “secrecy is crucial to military engagement. If secrecy is maintained by one’s side victory can be achieved by a small elite force rather than by fielding a thousand soldiers. This is an established verity in the annals of military science.”<sup>32</sup> It appears also that while EPLF had successfully penetrated the Derg military and political establishment, the latter had nothing much to speak of for its effort to spy behind EPLF lines. Every now and then, some disgruntled EPLF operative would defect to the Ethiopian side with some information. Occasionally, such defectors turned out to have been planted as double agents and at certain points they slip back to their EPLF fold with whatever they scooped. He notes that the militia, for instance, were not even paid at first and served for meals and sustained very high casualty rate. Even the rank and file soldiers did not fare much better, with very low pay.

“Soldiers, including generals like him, says General Kassaye, did not have any leave during decades of service as they were shuttled from region to region at a moment’s notice. Despite all these and other extenuating circumstances, the Ethiopian soldier, especially the rank and file gave all their best for Ethiopia and its people whose unity and security they believed they were defending. Many officers of all ranks were also dedicated and effective soldiers and they have, more often than not, defeated the rebels—all for naught. The switches from American military training and arms to Russian military doctrine and gear had their destabilizing periods. But the monkey wrench in the case of the latter is the ideological indoctrination and its litmus tests which

threw high ranking Ethiopian military personnel in favorable or unfavorable baskets. This was tied to the party and the political decision making system which was all remote controlled by the Derg Chairman, Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam and his close confidants. In civilian life, this party-security-politics-profession-ideology web was a nuisance and at times lethal. But in the military it was all fatal including the highest—for the generals and the colonels--and of course the lowest, the cannon fodder—rank and file privates. To take Tadesse's figures, nearly 400,000 Ethiopians died on both sides of the Mereb river divide. One has to remember that the figure does not include the casualties from the 1960's to 1975—albeit admittedly comparatively low.

And now we come to the crux of the matter by honing in on where the buck stops, as the expression goes. After three decades of war against Eritrean secessionists, their TPLF clones, other self-determination proponents as well as the sacrifices and losses of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian soldiers, how did the Derg establishment botch its career by “overthrowing itself” and make it possible and easy for Meles/TPLF and Isayass/EPLF to coast to victory and occupy Asmera and Addis Ababa in May 1991? There will be a discussion on the external factor and the “victory” of the anti-Derg forces in subsequent sections. The point in this section is to conclude the military drama in Ethiopia orchestrated by the Derg. Author Tadesse documents the numerous internal wars and the losses in human and material assets during the 17-year tenure of the Derg. He notes that during the period of hostilities the Derg sustained 192,180 lives lost, 281,000 wounded, 80,854 captured, 10,989 defected for a total of 565,398.<sup>33</sup> These statistics should also be assessed along with the casualties on the other side of the conflict as they were also Ethiopians, as well as the lives lost in the general civilian population as a result of collateral damages by 30 years of internal and external (Somalian) wars.<sup>34</sup> Needless to say, for every loss of life and limb in wars, there is the cataclysmic, traumatizing and destabilizing effect on families who become widows and orphans. Having lost their bread winners these victims become economically devastated permanently and at times displaced. The environmental effect of the wars including the catastrophic degradation and desiccation of the land has been catastrophic for all concerned.

Who can come forward and claim or acknowledge responsibility for having “Derg soldiers herded like cows” by the TPLF in 1991? If no one volunteers, that leaves the Chairman of the Derg, Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam to take the stand. He had supreme power in the Derg and he exercised that power with relish and ruthlessness—thanks to the connivance of his confidants and sycophants. The flip side to this is: “Why did these soldiers oppose him and, did he himself always think of the good of the country above his own survival in dealing with them?” By September 1987 Col. Mengistu H.M. had assumed the top positions of Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (subsuming the Derg), President of the Peoples Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Secretary-General of the Workers Party of Ethiopia as well as—in effect--the real Prime Minister of the Council of Ministers. Besides, all top military and civilian positions in the country were directly appointed by him or with his express approval. With such absolute powers what and how did strongman Col. Mengistu do in the subsequent critical years of his turbulent tenure?

In the preface to his first book, The Demoralizing Action, Tadesse Tele Salvano notes that in Ethiopia's 17 years of “unpopular ideological orientation and unwanted “civil” wars, the Ethiopian people have lost more than a million of their precious sons and daughters and forced to pay more than 35 billion birr” for the wars. Why so much sacrifice and what was attained for it? Even if we may not answer such crucial questions exhaustively here and now, pointing to their relevance is vital. He elaborates on the single most demoralizing action that Commander-in-Chief Mengistu Haile Mariam took in early February 1988 that triggered the irreversible downward military spiral for the Ethiopian military and culminated in the disappearance of Col. Mengistu and the takeover of the country by EPLF and TPLF in 1991. Addressing Mengistu face-to-face, Tadesse tells him:

After your visit of war zones in Tigray and Eritrea in early February 1988 you came to a locality in Asmera called Adiguaded and you gave the formal written court order to execute on the spot Brigadier General Tariku Ayne, the commanding officer of the Nadew Command in Afabet, in the presence of military officers. You also stripped General Kebede Gashe, Commander of the Meket Division, his Brigadier General rank reducing him to private and without pension. These were shocking and demoralizing steps, and from that moment on the revolutionary army has never recovered its composure. Coupled with the subsequent court martial of so many generals who had implacable hate for you and tried a coup d'etat against you, the military's downward spiral could not be reversed as it abandoned its military space and materiel to the other side in the wars.<sup>35</sup>

In his Reminiscences, Col. Mengistu goes into an elaborate detail about General Tariku Ayne in which he admitted the fact that he had known him from his cadet days before 1974 and followed his military career and then handled all his promotions and postings. He says that Gen. Tariku was "controversial;" still, the commander-in-chief promoted him and posted him as the commanding general of the strategic Nadew command and to hold fast the town of Afabet, which was the strategic base controlling communications and supply lines to and from Asmera, Massawa and other critical locales in the region. What emerges from the above renditions of the Afabet syndrome is that Col. Mengistu knew what was going on and made the command decisions with regard not only in Afabet but earlier on in Shire and Endasellasie in Tigray (1989) and then in Massawa in Eritrea (1990), all of which battles ended up in spectacular "victories" by TPLF and EPLF. How does Commander-in-Chief Mengistu explain the military implosion over which he presided until he barely squeezed out of the country in the last minute? He does not take an iota of personal responsibility in the tragedy, loss of lives, defeat and ruin of the country. Instead, he puts all of the blame on others.<sup>36</sup>

The main reason for our defeat is attributable to betrayal by internal enemies who conspired with the rebels (EPLF/TPLF). As a result of their conspiracy to do away the government and the party they have given victory on a silver platter to the rebels. They have paralyzed the military from the inside. They called for withdrawals and retreats from strategically vital positions thereby demeaning, demoralizing and confusing the soldiers at all levels. Soldiers were not getting paid on time....While the Ethiopian people did everything and gave everything for the war front, food supplies for the fighting forces was plundered by the higher-ups. The same was true with regard to military gear and wear, salary and so on all of which were part of major corruption schemes maintained by certain elements. They falsified papers by claiming certain items as missing or burned due to skirmishes or captured by the rebels.

If the 1988 Afabet episode was the "alpha" that opened the book of "demoralizing action" or self-demolition, the 1990 attempted coup d'etat against Col. Mengistu and his military/political supremacy and its aftermath, has to be the "omega" that closed the book on how the military defeated itself. The failed coup d'etat enables an observer to better assess the problem and sift through the mutual blame game. Our litmus test is to determine to what extent, if at all, the actions of concerned military decision makers were made premised on the best interests of the Ethiopian people at large and/or on the consequences of their decisions on Ethiopia. Just as the plane taking Col. Mengistu to a visit to then East Germany (16 May 1990) had just been out of Ethiopian airspace, a motley of high-ranking and mostly well-known and highly regarded senior generals from different services held a meeting in the Ministry of Defence in Addis Ababa. People were curious and tried to see what was happening at safe distance since there was no radio transmission about a coup. There is a claim that the coup apprentices toyed with the idea of blowing up Col. Mengistu's plane while still in Ethiopian airspace, but decided against it because there were too many other people in the plane. The Defence Minister, General Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam was sent by an

impromptu Council of State to dissuade the coup plotters to forget it. Following a few exchanges of words between the Minister and the coup bunch, General Abera Abebe one of the coup figures, shot him dead right then and there. Later on, it was said that another member of the coup was expected to fly from Asmera with airborne troops to provide muscle and presumably take over the broadcasting media—but to no avail. Meanwhile, other officials of the government including the Minister of Security (who was said to have more than wind of the affair) had made their way to the scene quickly and before long had begun negotiating with the coup auditioners. Several hours had passed and no public mention of what was going on was made.

Apparently, this might have been the first time the group was meeting to get better acquainted and figure out the leadership totem pole. Very soon, folks could observe Air Force jets dry run flying overhead back and forth. After a period of few hours of musical chairs, trying to determine, among other things, which one of them should sit at their chairman's seat, it became evident that the coup was stillborn. Subsequently, two of the members, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and the Commander of the Ethiopian Air Force, committed suicide forthwith. The coup attempt was unprofessional and sloppy. It is not known what manual they read or if they read too many manuals. So far, no foreign hands had been implicated in the mess—the CIA which had motive or the KGB which had means at the time. However, what was of consequential deadly importance was its aftermath following the prompt and unhindered return of Col. Mengistu from East Germany.

If the tragi-comedy in Addis Ababa was not enough, the Asmera wing of the coup continued where some of the generals of the Second Revolutionary Armed Forces in Eritrea continued anti-Mengistu activities, uninformed that it was all over in Addis Abeba and that Col. Mengistu was already perched on his power stool. It is said that the generals in Asmera had cut a separate “peace” deal with EPLF to “end” the war there. Needless to say, for Isayass specifically and for his understudy Meles, the occasion was god sent as he gloated over the Ethiopian fratricide via which the military was cutting off its head in both Asmera and Addis Abeba. This was a case of Latin/Italian style *divide et impera* having dividends for EPLF and TPLF that Isayass had been investing in throughout his secessionist war in Ethiopia. In fact, it was in Asmera that 11 of the 28 generals “associated” with the coup were mowed down by a lower rank local officer without waiting for orders or nods from any higher ups, including Col. Mengistu.<sup>37</sup> For what it was worth, the people could not be a part of the coup attempt as no public mention of it was made. By the time Col. Mengistu returned the public media went into full swing to condemn the plotters as ungrateful traitors and sing the praises of the invincible “revolutionary leader.”

History witnesses that following Col. Mengistu's return from East Germany represents the final willful crippling and demoralizing homicide of the Ethiopian military by its vindictive and sadistic commander-in-chief Col. Mengistu HM. This statement does not emanate from deduction from bits and pieces of data on the matter. Tragically, it comes from Col. Mengistu's own admission and bravado on what happened and how with respect to the “trial” and slaughter of **the last batch of Ethiopia's generals and high rank officers** rounded up as suspects in the attempted coup. He had made his decision to send the hapless generals to the gallows even before the perfunctory “conviction” and expected death sentence by the kangaroo military court. In response to Genet Ayele's probing questions in the Reminiscences<sup>38</sup>, He said “pardon for them is out of the question; they not only conspired to kill me but kill the nation” He betrayed his motive for his position by adding **“My hatred for the accused (Ethiopian generals and other ranks) is visceral. I cannot hide this feeling.”** He betrays the fact that his stand on their fate had nothing to do with the interest of the country but with his own personal vindictiveness in his admission of the circumstances of the “trial.” He then goes to relate that the court martial procedure requires that the accused are to be judged by a panel of “judges” of higher ranks than they are. It turned out that *the ranks of Ethiopian*

generals had been so much depleted that he could only count three or four alive who could qualify to sit in judgment.<sup>39</sup> That is an astounding admission. Right then and there, as he faced the likelihood of presiding over the elimination of the last few living generals, there should have been red flashes in his firmament. Presumably, it can be granted that he might have felt his sense of security to be better served with them no more than otherwise. But, **as Commander-in-Chief of Ethiopia's armed forces**, could he have asked himself whether the priority of the moment was to consummate his personal vengeance or take a risk on his own security in order to better serve the interest of the country. He used the "court" as a screen and brutally ordered their slaughter.

Could he have done otherwise, knowing all he did about the state of the nation as well as comporting to his high responsibilities as not only military head but "head of state" as well? Yes, he could have. That option would have gone like this: "*Thank\_ I am still alive. I hereby pardon and commute your death sentence for your treason against my person. I ask you now to earn the pardon of the Ethiopian people and the soldiers in the field in this critical period. Perhaps, by so doing you may attain their respect and possibly their gratitude.*" He could have done that. As gruesome as the events adumbrated in the foregoing paragraphs remain, we need to look at the other side of the drama's coin before the curtain is closed on the Greek tragedy--for now. What about the coup generals? Do they share some responsibility for the Ethiopian military debacle and ultimate occupation of the country by the very forces they fought against for decades? Using the same litmus test as before, how can we assess the main or primary motive for their coup was the national interest or animosity to Col. Mengistu coupled with ambition for power? It is not an easy task to deal with these questions for, unlike the case numero uno Mengistu HM, who is alive and tries to defend his actions for what it is worth, the coup generals are not with us nor left behind some authentic document about what they tried to do and why. So, we can use deductive logic based on our general profiles of their persona, services and whatever testimonials have surfaced about them.

It should be noted here that focusing on the generals that were killed in this essay, is not in any way meant to belittle or ignore other Ethiopian military or civilians killed regardless of title or rank. In military affairs, however, generals are at the apex of the system and represent soldiers that have been better educated, have served longer and therefore more experienced, evoke respect and devotion of the rank and file, especially protected, trained to lead and the martial class on whom society has invested much. Normally, generals are not exposed to be killed first or easily by the enemy in wars. **What makes the Ethiopian case tragically exceptional is that the fratricidal killing has concentrated proportionally on its own generals while the enemy did the rest of the killing.** That said, we should also state that the traditional as well as the modern Ethiopian armed forces at all levels have always acquitted themselves for the cause of national dignity and integrity of the country. Although the end of the long series of battles against internal foes shows a loss, what should not be forgotten is that the Ethiopian military has scored many victories until it was made anemic and crippled internally. Furthermore, one can not say enough about the rank and file soldiers who sacrificed immensely through all this bundling by Colonel Mengistu.

To begin with, taken individually the coup generals have long and solid professional military service to their country. There is no question that under normal circumstances each of them had in mind the national interest of the country. What is at stake herein is how much did they think through their coup intent as a *group* in terms of the national interest including the ongoing critical war effort, primarily and relegating any other obsession as secondary? The coup attempt took only a few hours and ended up claiming more than a score of generals in Addis and Asmera before the survivors were rounded up to eventually face the firing squad. The handling or mishandling of their coup was amateurish. One does not know what manual they read or if each read different manuals. They had no umbilical cord linked to the people or to the rank and file soldiery. They did not even

capture the mass media to reach the people. They were still jockeying for position of chairperson even as they met in the Ministry of Defence. A coup d'etat is a serious deadly affair whether it succeeds or fails and it is the people who bear the brunt. It is not a card game. Did they ask themselves if the Ethiopian people were yearning or ready to be thrown from the frying pan of the Mengistu/Derg military rule to an old fashioned brass military rule? The timing of the coup betrays groupthink modality rather than a deliberate well digested decision-making consensus weighing all the pros and cons. It does not appear that they considered what the consequences to the country and to the people would be if they fail. These and related issues lead us to state that the coup generals also share in the blame of the Ethiopian military implosion and the consequent occupation and breakup of the country by EPLF and TPLF in May 1991. It may be an unprecedented syndrome in military history for so many generals--in per capita or absolute terms--to be eliminated by their own commander in chief. **The single most critical factor that caused the implosion of the Ethiopian military was this phenomenon willfully executed by Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam.** The implosion facilitated and accelerated the "victory" and occupation of Ethiopia/Eritrea by EPLF and TPLF in May 1991. General Kasaye, one of the few generals who survived all the tumults of war, in fact, was on duty in Eritrea at the time had this to say about the attempted coup.<sup>40</sup>

Our armed forces in Eritrea were at the highest level of readiness at that time. That was a moment when we could have recovered Afabet and Nakfa. Without finalizing our victory against the determined enemy facing us was not salutary timing for a coup attempt. I knew that under the prevailing muddled situation the sovereignty of our country was sacrificed. Had the enemy itself not been weakened, it had plenty of opportunities to strike.

A fitting epitaph to the dizzying drama in the foregoing paragraphs is one of the contemporary couplets Ethiopians churn out in times of angst in transition that has the TPLF gloating while coasting to Addis Ababa/Asmera:

ሰጣችን ወያኔ ስድባችን ቆጣላም  
የደርግን ወታደር ነዳነው አንደላም

Our name is Weyane (TPLF), our derogation--'full of lice'  
Still, we herded the Derg soldiers like cows.

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**August 12, 2008.** Professor Negussay teaches at UCLA. His recent books are [Ethiopia & the United States, the Season of Courtship, Volume 1](#) and [In Search of the DNA of the Ethiopia/Eritrean Problem](#).

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<sup>1</sup> A poignant statement attributed to Dr. Berhanu Negga --one of the 131 best and brightest innocent Ethiopian prisoners of conscience who chafed in Kaliti jail for more than 20 months--on the fate of Ethiopians at-large under the Meles/TPLF regime. Dr. Berhanu is an accomplished economist and one of the leading democratic challengers who swept the May 2005 elections in Addis Ababa. Subsequently, his party (CUD) had elected him to be the new Mayor of the Capital City. He had published a hefty (614 pp.)

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Amharic book entitled *When the Dawn of Freedom Breaks: the Attempt to Abort Ethiopian Democracy* (2006) while still in jail. [The English rendition of the book title is this writer's]. It comprises an analytic narration of the events leading to the aborted May 2005 election, its violent repressive aftermath and eventual incarceration of him and 130 other elected democrats as well as many other innocent individuals under bogus charges. For more on these matters, see the Report "Ethiopia: The Situation of Human Rights Defenders from Bad to Worse" by The OBSERVATORY for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders 12/2006. See also Amnesty International "Ethiopia: Prisoners of Conscience On Trial For Treason: Opposition Party Leaders, Human Rights Defenders and Journalists" 05/2006; cf. also the detailed and systematic documentations via its Annual, Regular and Special Reports on the state of human rights in Ethiopia by Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) since 1991; consult also the reports of Anuak Justice Council and the writings and speeches of Ethiopian human rights activist Obang Metho. Even though as these lines are being written, the 131 Kaliti prisoners are out of jail, the fundamental point that must not be obscured or forgotten is the fact that **these and countless other Ethiopian prisoners of conscience should never have been jailed in the first place**. This represents the new sick sport for tyrant Meles and his TPLF to round up a number of high profile Ethiopian personalities, lie right and left through the forked tongue by throwing around patently false charges and deflect the attention of some concerned international human rights activists from focusing on his stealing the election. After nearly two years, he pompously proclaims that he has "magnanimously pardoned" the prisoners. So, now the focus is on his "pardon" rather than on the unwarranted incarceration in the first place and the misery visited on the prisoners, their families, their friends and compatriots for so long. If he stays, the mendacious and sadist tyrant will continue to come up with other distracting gimmicks.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to point out that while the focus herein has been spurred by the circumstances surrounding the Kaliti group of prisoners, the Meles/TPLF regime is responsible for tens of thousands of Ethiopians murdered and untold scores of thousands incarcerated, tortured and disappeared all over the country since 1991, including scores of political prisoners old and dying one by one. Names, faces, dates, places, modalities and ID's of victims can be found especially in the systematic and reliable EHRCO Report.

<sup>3</sup> One is not unmindful here that the *shifta* movement in the Eritrean region has its roots in the late 1950's and early 1960's under the aegis of Jebha or Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) representing initially mostly Moslem leadership. By the early 1970's infiltrators from the Christian highlands such as Isayass Afewerqi carried on pitched battles against the ELF, sidelining it and then forming EPLF in 1972. For more on the background to the Eritrean problem, see the definitive book (in Amharic) Ye Eritrea Guday (1941-1963) by Ambassador Zewde Retta. It is hoped that this important book will be issued in English. I have characterized this seminal and comprehensive history of the period as the nearest thing approximating the scientific term **DNA** (deoxyribonucleic acid) representing the unique irreducible and indestructible molecule, which ultimately characterizes the ID of a given organism and only that organism. The term is here used in a metaphoric sense as an approach to accessing discernible and reliable historical truth. For more on the Ethiopia-Eritrea syndrome, see also my In Search of the Historical DNA of the Eritrean Problem, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> On aspects of Eritrea's colonial background see Trevaskis, G. K. N. Eritrea: A Colony In Transition, 1960; Tekeste N. Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1987; Tesfatsion, M. Eritrea: The Dynamics of A National Question, 1986; Negussay A. "Review Article: The Eritrean Problem Revisited" Journal of Ethiopian Studies Vol. XXII, November 1989. Cf also Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea, General Assembly Official Records, Seventh Session, Supplement No. 15(A/2188) New York, 1952

<sup>5</sup> For more on these matters, see for instance, Tekeste Negash, Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882-1941 (1987); Cf. also N. Ayele, "On the Determinants of Prospects for Peace on the Horn of Africa: The Other Side of the Coin," (1988).

<sup>6</sup> See Africa, LXI, 2, 2006 pp. 159-188. Cf also *mutates mutandis*, Eritrea Information, issued by Research and Information Center of EPLF since the late 1970's.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*. While there are a good number of Eritrean born Ethiopians who were principled and consistent nationalists, the two individuals cited above—Dejach Bahta Hagos and Weldeab Weldemariam—were

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among those Eritreans who flip-flopped opportunistically either in terms of loyalty to Italy and to Ethiopia or being unionist (pro-Ethiopia) and secessionist, at different moments in their lifetimes. Another contemporary Eritrean born Ethiopian, Dr. Tesfaye Gebre Egzi, also stated, "I am an Ethiopian; if I am not an Ethiopian, then nobody is." See "On the Determinants of Prospects of Peace... above. It is also important to note here that such resolute expressions of Ethiopian identity represent all walks of life, including Muslim Eritreans. Both at the UN and throughout the 1948-52 years of debates and preparations to determine the future of Eritrea, a broad spectrum of representatives with varying views and objectives had ample time and opportunity to express themselves and then participate in decision making in reasonably free atmosphere. At the same time, it is also equally important to remember that other alien elements, including the Italians, the British and even the Pakistanis were very much involved pushing for their own agenda on the future of Eritrea.

<sup>8</sup> For a complete dossier on UN deliberations, Fact finding Field Reports and documents related to Eritrea, see Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea, GA Official Records, Seventeenth Session Supplement No. 15 (A/2188) New York, 1952. Cf also Ambassador Zewde Retta's The Eritrean Affair , *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Bereket Habte Sellassie, who liked to have H.S. as his last name to confuse and lure foreign readers into thinking of H. S. as initials that stand for Haile Sellassie, represents the classic example of a Janus-faced character whose father, Qes (priest) Habte Sellasie Gulbet, was a well-known cleric and unionist in Italian colonized Eritrea who struggled for the cause of "**Ethiopia or Death.**" The son, who does not even publicly acknowledge this important persona of his father, took advantage of everything Ethiopia offered, especially in education and career building reaching the higher pinnacles of power in pre-1974 Ethiopia **as an Ethiopian**, not as a "colonized" person or an East African Indian migrant. He was the virtual attorney general in the Commission that examined the charges against government officials and their roles in the 1973-74 famine. He even coached some of the Eritrean bureaucrats to allege discrimination because they were Eritreans. Eventually, 60 Ethiopian officials were summarily executed which was part of the real mission of Bereket and his kind to set in motion their desideratum of "**Death to Ethiopia.**" For more on this see my "In Search of the Historical DNA of the Eritrean Problem" in: In Search of the DNA of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Problem (2003). The citation "*Although history itself does not lie, it has the misfortune of attracting lying historians*" came to my attention by way of Hagos Gebre Yesus's paper "A Requiem for History," a penetrating critique of Bereket Habte Sellassie's lies and distortions with respect to Ethiopia and the region in his writings and propaganda fulminations. Hagos's paper was presented at the 1982 Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Sweden.

<sup>10</sup> "Class Struggle and the Problem in Eritrea" Addis Ababa, 1979. Cf. also the comprehensive history/biography of Emperor Haile Sellassie in Amharic by Berihun Kebede, 1992 (Eth. Calendar).

<sup>11</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, Why Are We Destroying The Ethiopian Ports? New Times and Ethiopia News, London, 1952.

<sup>12</sup> See Berihun Kebede Ye Atse Haile Sellassie Tarik, 1992 (Eth. Cal.) Addis Ababa. Teshome Wagaw, "Education in Eritrea, 1941-1962", Ethiopian Journal of Education, Vol. VI/2. The figures for health establishments and services are cited in a recent book in Amharic by Tekle Yeshaw titled Tigrayan Scramblers for Power And Ethiopian Unity, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Early Eritrean beneficiaries of Ethiopian scholarship in the 1920's and 30's include respected personages such as Dawit Oqubagzi, Lorenzo Tazaz, Sereqe Berhan Gebregzi, Efraim Teweldemedhin, among others, all of whom played crucial roles in the Emperor's period and in his cabinets. And then there are less savory examples of Eritrean characters who also shared in the largesse of the Ethiopian people. One is the Janus-faced Bereket Habte Sellassie who did his high school education in Addis Ababa and was then sent to London as an Ethiopian where he studied law. He spent more than half of his life in Addis Abeba circling around the corridors of power, then feigning to be a loyal Ethiopian among high ranking Ethiopians, an anti-monarchy activist around militant Ethiopians, finally toiled as a wannabe EPLF propagandist for Eritrean

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secession. After some time serving in the Eritrean system and then discarded, he became persona non grata both in Ethiopia and in Eritrea under Isayass. Another is Isayass Afewerki himself who completed his secondary education in Prince Mekonnen Secondary School in Asmera and then started his higher education in Addis Ababa. Interestingly, in his 1965 English language application form for admission to Haile Sellassie I University, he spelt his father's name voluntarily as Afewerk instead of Afewerki. Both renditions mean the same thing, i.e. 'golden mouthed'; the difference being the former is Amharic and the latter Tigrign. He also rendered his mother's first name as Adanech instead of Adhanet and described **his nationality as Ethiopian**. There is no indication that he did these changes under duress because othe applicants from Eritrea did not bother to make such changes. In the event, he did not finish his freshman year, as he left the University to join the ELF (Eritrean liberation front) guerrilla fighters and later formed his own EPLF and with the help of Meles and his TPLF sideline the ELF, fight against the Derg and control Addis Ababa and Asmera. A photocopy of the Application is in the Amharic book Qeyay Terraroch (Reddish Mountains) by Getachew Hailu 1993 (Eth. Cal.).

<sup>14</sup> See Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on the Horn of Africa, (City College of CUNY, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> For a passionate and trenchant discussion of betrayal/treachery and its fatal consequences in the Ethiopian context, see Professor Mesfin Weldemariam's volume (in Amharic) የክህደት ቁልቁልት--The Downward Spiral of Betrayal, published about a year before the May 2005 and the subsequent incarceration of the author and 130 other political prisoners for two years, is a penetrating expose of the evolution of betrayal and its devastating consequences.

<sup>16</sup> Gebre Medhin's treatment of the Manifesto and its importance in understanding Meles and his TPLF can be perused in the 1990 Amharic booklet Talaqu Sera (The Big Conspiracy). In his 1997 book, Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia, John Young also discusses the Manifesto on Tigray Republic and notes: "Whether a transitional strategy, a tactical consideration or a genuine principle, the notion of Ethiopian nations and nationalities, including Tigray, having the right to independence remained a key element in the TPLF lexicon." Interestingly, Isayass/EPLF did everything in its power to discourage any other peoples in Ethiopia, including Tigrayans and Oromos from either defining their cause to be "colonial" or to qualify for the right to independence. To the EPLF, Eritrea is first class and all other Ethiopians are second class. Also, tactically, if some or many groups in Ethiopia join the fray for secession rather than isolating Eritrea as a separate problem, the precedence will have a negative domino effect in Africa, and the OAU and the United Nations may not join the Eritrean secession bandwagon as easily as both did later. In a June 2007 special magazine issue (Amharic, Tigrigna and English) titled One Ethiopia, Isayass gave a wide ranging interview swearing that he is the one committed to maintaining the unity of Ethiopia."

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Kasahun's book was published in 2006.

<sup>18</sup> The pervasiveness of lying in politics is well documented in the literature from Plato's Republic, through Machiavelli's The Prince and Discourses and then Hitler's Mein Kampf as well as the propaganda of Goebbels to present day politics in the United States, one of the more advanced democratic election process in which the people agonize over the question of whether the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the consequences thereof were premised on a false claim of the existence of 'weapons of mass destruction.' But in all cases decisions, actions and policies based on lies have dire, deadly and deleterious consequences, even if the liars may seem to reap short term "success." For more on the syndrome of lying see David L. Smith Why We Lie: The Evolutionary Roots of Deception and the Unconscious Mind. 2004. Cf. also Friedrich Meinecke (trans. By D. Stark) Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and its Place in Modern History 1957.

<sup>19</sup> His relative and childhood friend, Ras Imru was with the Emperor during these sad heady days as he faced Derg members who beguiled the aging Emperor into thinking that their salutes and relatively courteous way of talking to him were still his soldiers. They tried but failed to get confirmation from him that he has millions of dollars stashed in foreign (Swiss) bank and asked for the secret number to the account. While he was under house arrest in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Army Headquarters in Addis Ababa which was the operating base of the Derg, a story is told that as the Emperor was in the compound for some fresh air, he asked the soldier guarding him to give him an Ethiopian Birr (the local dollar) note. The soldier obliged and the Emperor glanced at it and returned it saying something like "I see that We (the royal we) are still in charge." The Emperor did not say I or my or me in public. Likewise, despite his short stature (5' 4") the Emperor did raise his chin above its normal position to look up at someone or something; he merely rolls up his laser sharp eyes for such purpose.

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<sup>20</sup> For a perspective on the Revolution and Western reaction see my “The Horn of Africa: Revolutionary Developments and Western Reactions,” Journal of Northeast African Studies, Vol.2, 3, 1980-81. Cf. also Teferra Haile-Selassie, The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1991, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> One of three books second Lieutenant Tadesse has published this 504 page tome contains a lot of valuable material on the formation and growth of the Ethiopian military from 1935 to 1991 with the lion's share (more than 400 pages) to the Derg era. One cannot help but wonder how author Tadesse has managed to access and/or saved so much documentary material including pictures, statistics, and facsimiles of official Derg communications.

<sup>22</sup> A footnote to history here is that in 1990-91, as he was scrambling to survive, Col. Mengistu did what Col. Atnafu was executed for—he launched mixed economy and tried to woo America and the West. Well, at least, though not exactly for this reason, the United States helped him to escape to Zimbabwe in 1991. In the context of Ethiopian culture and core values the contrast between Col. Atnafu's execution and Col. Mengistu's saving his individual skin as a soldier while Ethiopia was being occupied by EPLF and TPLF speaks volumes. What makes the latter's action even more perplexing to Ethiopians is the fact that he used metaphors in his speeches harking to the memory of Emperor Tewodros who committed suicide in 1868, with the very pistol that Queen Victoria had sent to him as a gift, rather than be captured by the British. Col Mengistu also often said that “even if only one man (himself) was left standing to defend mother Ethiopia, he would die defending her...”

<sup>23</sup> See Tadesse Salvano, Turf of Lions, *loc. cit.* p.156

<sup>24</sup> For more on this see Bzezinski's memoir, Power and Principle 1985

<sup>25</sup> See Richard Gott, Cuba: A New History 2004. In fact, upon his return from his 1977 visit to Africa including Ethiopia Castro declared that “Africa is imperialism's weakest link today. Perfect opportunities exist there for the transformation from quasi-tribalism to socialism, without having to go through the various stages that were necessary in other parts of the world.” Those interested in systematic coverage of the Cuban role in rolling back Siad Barre's forces out of Ethiopian territory in less than 20% of the time it took the Somali army to roam into Ethiopian territory. Scores of Cubans lost their lives and were buried in a special cemetery in the environs of Harer.

<sup>26</sup> The leading Ethiopian hero of that Somalian war, General Legesse Teferra, and one who survived several years of incarceration in Somalia was recently feted by Ethiopians in Washington D.C. on 8 July 2008. He was also recognized by There were a few personnel from South Yemen on the Ethiopian side out numbered by scores of elements from Middle East and other Islamic countries on the Somalian side during the Siad Barre invasion.

<sup>27</sup> Tragically, some years after his Angolan and Ethiopian military exploits, General Ochoa was executed having been implicated in some shady “drug running” activities.

<sup>28</sup> The presentation was in Amharic. For the text, see University Alumni Association Periodical (Number 1-1963 Eth. Cal.).

<sup>29</sup> For the record, Col. Mengistu did go to Havana after the war to thank and pay homage to Fidel Castro. However, one has yet to see a substantial rendition by Ethiopians on the Cuban role in the 1978 war and victory against the forces of Siad Barre. In his otherwise quite impressive array of useful and relevant data on the subject matter of his book, The Turf of Lions, his coverage of the Siad Barre invasion and its aftermath (pp. 121-161, 163-250) Tadesse Salvano has one picture of Col. Mengistu pinning medals on Cubans but no narrative on the Cuban or Soviet role.

<sup>30</sup> See his የጦር ውሎዎች ከምስራቅ እስከ ሰሜን (Battle Field Days from East to North) Addis Ababa 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> The Turf of Lions, *op.cit.*

<sup>34</sup> To be sure, Tadesse also gives figures of “enemy” casualties without, however, indicating the source/s for his figures. One is better poised to take his statistics on Derg casualties from Ministry of Defense and other files which he cites. His figures are 150,755 dead, 211,313 wounded, 5,974 captured and 20,093 defected in wars throughout Ethiopia between 1975 and 1990. In wars, it seems that each side is more disposed to cite figures of how many it killed, etc. than count its own dead or reveal its

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casualty figures after engagements. As a result it takes time for the dust to settle for scholars to determine such figures using a number of techniques and methods to ascertain facts at least to a certain tolerable margin of error level.

<sup>35</sup> This small Amharic book, published in 1993, is an interesting one in that Tadesse is being interviewed by Col. Mengistu about the wars and the military on issues including the May 1989 attempted coup d'etat, Afabet, Massawa. In effect, the Tadesse was doubling up as a psychologist—some may even interpret his role as a veritable psychiatrist to Col. Mengistu. The figure \$35 million birr to about \$18 US dollars at the contemporary exchange rate. See p. 50

<sup>36</sup> Reminiscences of Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam 2004, p. 264. The interviewer, Mrs. Genet, left no stone unturned in her questioning on this and other aspects of his public life, even if some of his answers were either evasive, defensive or blatantly off course. After complaining about “treachery” and deliberate support for the other side by his officers in order to do away with him at any cost Col. Mengistu then scoffed at the fate of his old comrades: “What did these officers achieve? They were herded to jail by female TPLF staff in the very town that they had lived with a high degree of respect.” In Turf of Lions author Tadesse offers a list of causes for the Derg military’s self-immolation. p. 424 and ff.

<sup>37</sup> For a list of the slaughtered and court martialled coup generals see Tekle Yeshaw, Tigrean Scramblers for Power and Ethiopian Unity, op. cit. pp.248-249 and Tadesse’s Turf of Lions. Tekle lists the total dead as 35 while Tadesse’s list is 40. Cf also Col. Germa Gofu **ጸና ገር ታ ሪ ኩ** (Let History Speak) 2003 for brief historical profiles of militarized episodes in Ethiopia from 1960s to 1991.

<sup>38</sup> The quoted statements by Col. Mengistu are my translations from the text in Reminiscences pp.285-300.

<sup>39</sup> The three qualified generals were said to be Tesfaye Gebre Kidan, Asrat Birru and Kefelegn Yibza. Because of the murky love-hate relationship Mengistu and Tesfaye G.K. had at the time (including suspicion that the latter might have been part of the coup or a sympathizer), the former says that he replaced him in the court martial panel by another general, Asrat Birru. But there is a problem here. Gen. Asrat Birru was already named to the panel. Reminiscences pp.296-297. But then, who cares! He might as well name a dead person. Every now and then dead people or dogs are elected for offices in the United States and no doubt elsewhere as well.

<sup>40</sup> Battle Field Days p.293